

Discussion Guide

Goals

By the end of the discussion series, we hope that:

- You will gain a thoughtful understanding behind affirming and non-affirming theologies in regards to LGBT inclusion in churches, and marriages for same-sex couples
- You will be familiar with principles of bible interpretation (i.e. hermeneutics)
- You will gain a greater appreciation for the complexity that comes with turning to Scripture for controversial questions
- You will be able to have deep and nuanced conversations with other Christians on other controversial topics, even beyond the discussion series
- You will understand how to love your LGBT neighbors better

Discussion Table Group Structure

Toward achieving the outcomes listed above, we've structured the conversation considering many factors. Our structure has:

- **In Person Conversation:** In video conversations, **body language can be lost**. By leaning into face-to-face communication we can help lessen such impediments.
- **Table Groups in Diversity:** Everyone approaches big questions with their own lenses. By sharing and interpreting Scripture in the diversity of opinions and experiences, we can help everyone to **avoid blindspots** while seeking God's will.
- **Consistent Small Groups:** Sharing **can be scary**, especially in large groups of people you may not know. Therefore, you'll be meeting with the same people weekly so that you can get to know them, and develop a trust to express your thoughts.
- **Real Life Stories:** We've set aside large group time to hear stories from LGBT people and/or family members, because hearing about lived experiences can bring greater understanding and empathy, when otherwise **context may not be known**.
- **Advanced Discussion Questions:** We want participants to **avoid thinking about their own answers while others are speaking**, or feel a "**put on the spot**" pressure when answering discussion questions. Therefore you will receive the discussion questions 7-days in advance, so that you have time to process and write down your answers before the Sunday discussions.
- **Table Group Lunch Week:** Toward helping **build trust** with your table group, one of the weeks will be without homework and only focused on enjoying lunch and building relationships.

Healthier Conversation Tips

Toward achieving the outcomes listed above, we recommend:

- **Start with Grace:** Expect that your table group mates will occasionally make mistakes, or not fully understand, especially at first. Remember, if your table group is afraid of being judged, they are much less likely to engage with you. So, before the discussion starts, be prepared to give the grace you wish to receive from your table group.
- **Listening:** Practice active listening and understand first before speaking. While it's normal to be thinking about what you want to say while others are speaking, we hope that, having already answered the discussion questions in your paper notebooks, you can calmly listen with lower distraction.
- **Curiosity:** Approach table conversations and large group times with curiosity, such that if you want to learn something, you have the courage to respectfully ask (e.g. *"If my understanding is right, you didn't choose your sexual attractions, is that right?"*).
- **Encouraging Feedback:** Approach the conversations desiring thoughtful feedback from your table group, such that you may ask for it (e.g. *"... So that's how I arrived at my conclusion. What are your thoughts about it?"*).
- **Humility:** Approach table conversations with the awareness that everyone is on their own journey, resist the temptation to take control of someone else's journey, and refrain from judging where their journey leads them. Please read Romans 14:1-12.
- **Honesty in Uncertainty:** If you don't know the answer, or you're uncertain about something you're saying, then consider letting the group know (e.g. *"I'm not certain, though I think..."*, or *"I don't know, I haven't thought of that before."*)
- **Starting with Observations:** Separate your thoughts between facts and interpretations. The facts will be indisputable, however your interpretations will be the meaning you draw from the facts. By separating them, you can share your facts (i.e. observations) first to provide increased clarity to your interpretations.
- **Thoughtful Challenging:** If someone says something that sounds *incomplete* to you or *logically inconsistent*, then to deepen the conversation, respectfully inquire deeper with a thoughtful followup question or gently reveal the inconsistency. While thoughtful challenges can be useful, first focus on clarification and asking good questions.

Tips For Reducing Tension

During the conversation you may observe unhealthy behaviors that may cause harm to table group relationships. Here are some scenario based tips:

- **Be An Upstander:** If you observe that the desired respectful, loving, and deepening tone of the conversation may be getting violated, consider raising two fingers in a peace-sign to express something may be going “off the rails”. It’s a way to express that a health boundary may be crossed with low effort, and move you from being a bystander to an upstander. You may use it if you're engaging yourself too.
- **Checking In:** Frequently check-in with each other, especially if a table mate is not engaging. Consider inquiring about how they feel at that moment.
- **Address Offensive Remarks:** It’s possible that someone may say something that sounds **offensive** to you.
 - If the **language is offensive**, consider offering a more appropriate word or phrase.
 - If the **conclusion is offensive**, consider asking how they arrived at said conclusion. In addition, after the person is done speaking, you may say that you have arrived at a different conclusion, and explain how you got there. Lastly, you may also explain the negative impact of the conclusion you found offensive.
- **Address Your Own Anger:** If you notice you feel angry, then consider moving toward silence for a period. A goal during these conversations is to remain relationally healthy and empathic toward each other, and expressing unchecked anger at each other may cause harm to relationships at your table. Also consider sharing that you are angry.
- **Address Your Own Fear:** If you notice that you are feeling fear, then consider leaning into curiosity by asking deeper good-faith questions. Sometimes fear is lessened by asking questions about what you're concerned about.
- **Apologize When Appropriate:** When you harm someone, admit your mistake and express your regret. Aim to rebuild trust without getting defensive.
- **Contrast to Fix Misunderstandings:** If a misunderstanding occurs, simply bring clarity by saying what you mean and do not mean together in a contrasting statement (e.g. *“When I said ‘homosexuality’, I meant having sex; I did not mean gay people’s attractions.”*).

Vocabulary

Gay / Homosexual

Someone attracted to the same sex and not to the opposite sex. Most often this word is used for men, but can be used for women too. In itself, gay doesn't mean "having gay sex" or "married to a person of the same sex." It refers to romantic or sexual attraction.

The term "homosexual" is seen as cold, offensive and a pejorative. This term should generally not be used.

Lesbian

A woman attracted to the same sex, and not to the opposite sex (i.e. men).

Bisexual

Someone attracted to both the opposite sex and the same sex.

Transgender (Trans)

Someone whose gender identity (their innate knowledge of who they are) is *different* from the biological sex they were thought to be at birth.

Cisgender

Someone whose gender identity (their innate knowledge of who they are) is the *same* as the gender they were thought to be at birth.

Queer

An umbrella term for someone who is not heterosexual or cisgender.

Originally meaning "strange" or "peculiar", queer came to be used pejoratively against those with same-sex desires or relationships in the late 19th century. In the late 1980s, queer activists began to reclaim the word, and recently, *queer* became increasingly used to describe a broad spectrum of non-**normative** sexual and/or gender identities.

Intersex

An umbrella term that describes bodies (i.e. reproductive or sexual anatomy) that fall outside the strict male/female binary.

Straight / Heterosexual

Someone attracted to the opposite sex, and not the same sex.

Mixed Orientation Marriage

A marriage between partners of differing sexual orientations (e.g. a marriage between a straight man and a lesbian, or a marriage between a straight woman and a bisexual man).

Asexual (Ace)

Someone who has little interest in having sex, even though they desire emotionally intimate relationships. In itself it doesn't mean "celibate", nor "sexually abstinent".

Side A

A biblical perspective that believes that God affirms same-sex marriages.

Side B

A biblical perspective that believes that God does not affirm same sex marriages, and therefore, gay Christians are called to lifelong celibacy.

Sexually Abstinent

A person who's made a conscious choice not to have sex for a time. It's typically limited to a specific period of time, such as until marriage.

Celibate

A person who's made a vow to remain abstinent over an extended period of time. For some, this may mean their entire life.

Ambiguous Vocabulary

The following terms are ambiguous and may be interpreted as offensive, and are thus unhelpful. In general they should be avoided, due to their unclarity:

- Homosexuality
- Same-sex relations
- Same-sex behaviors
- Gay lifestyle

From these terms, it's not clear what is being addressed, it could be: a) attraction between two people of the same sex, b) sexual intercourse between two people of the same sex, c) romantic love between two people of the same sex, d) expressing care between two people of the same sex.