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THE BIBLE AND A TOOLKIT "HOMOSEXUALITY"

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2nd Edition

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Word of Encouragement

My dear [Beloveds] in Christ,

Today, all churches grapple with questions and challenges around human sexuality, [sex and gender]. These matters will not go away, and we must respond to them prayerfully and with loving hearts.

There are devout members in all congregations who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) and who belong to the Body of Christ and want to be supported and affirmed in their relationships. This poses a genuine challenge to traditional understandings and assumptions about the Scriptures' true meaning and message. Thus, we are all required to return afresh to the question: how does God intend us to approach and interpret the Bible to discern God's will in this matter?

We do not have all the answers to all the questions surrounding right or wrong. While there is considerable literature on "homosexuality" and the Bible, there is a lack of material that expresses the biblical exegesis and hermeneutics of LGBTIQ+ Christians themselves in an easily accessible and readable way. This [Toolkit] fills this gap admirably and offers an opportunity for the rest of the Body of Christ to hear their fellow [Christians] journey with the Bible and their witness to what the Holy Spirit is saying.

I trust that you will read [and work through this Toolkit] with a mind and heart open to the Holy Spirit, in the knowledge that the issues around [LGBTIQ+ peoples sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)] and biblical interpretation are not merely academic, but touch us all in a profoundly personal way. It is time for healing. Too many of our people have been hurt and traumatised – treated as outcasts – because of the way the Bible has been interpreted – misinterpreted!

Hostile and rejecting attitudes towards [LGBTIQ+] can have no place in our congregations, let alone in the community. Such prejudice is akin to racism, and we need to struggle against this with the same dedication and enthusiasm we fought against the injustices of apartheid. In this way, we will witness the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be a means of healing and reconciliation.

I commend this booklet for your prayerful and thoughtful reflection.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

About the toolkit

On the African continent, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) persons visibility contest heteronormative binaries that construct life as an oppressive reality. LGBTIQ+ visibility is continuously counteracted by homophobic violence.¹ Actors that counter LGBTIQ+ visibility are often family, religion and culture. Through complex forms of hostility, family, religion and culture foster stigma and discrimination that spills into the larger society that becomes a life-denying space for LGBTIQ+ people.

The multiple and complex realities that deny the LGBTIQ+ community life are often based on literal readings and uncontested interpretations of Biblical texts that are supported by the unquestioning allegiance and beliefs from “African tradition and culture”. Unfortunately, the interwovenness of literal readings of Biblical texts and culture often culminates into toxic and violent realities for LGBTIQ+ people.

Over 25 years, Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) countered these life-denying realities. The Bible and Homosexuality first appeared in *Men and masculinities in South Africa Volume 3, Faith-based and Community Resources for Change*, edited by Daniela Gennrich and published by Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action (PACSA) and Sonke Gender Justice Network in 2008. After 2008 IAM published *The Bible and Homosexuality* booklet. This booklet was made available for free through the generous funding support of our donors.

Through evidence and participatory-action-based research methodologies, IAM develops resources to open minds through diversity awareness and open hearts through anti-bias and dialogue training to move faith and civil society communities towards recognising and celebrating LGBTIQ+ people. For example, in 2021 IAM has redesigned *The Bible and Homosexuality booklet* into a toolkit that employs a participatory reader approach. Through this approach, IAM wants to accompany LGBTIQ+ people, activists, faith leaders, family, and civil and faith communities through our approach to sexuality, gender and faith diversity.

The process invites readers to move from a literal reading that implies condemnation towards the realisation that the texts that are used are about sexual exploitation and inhospitality.

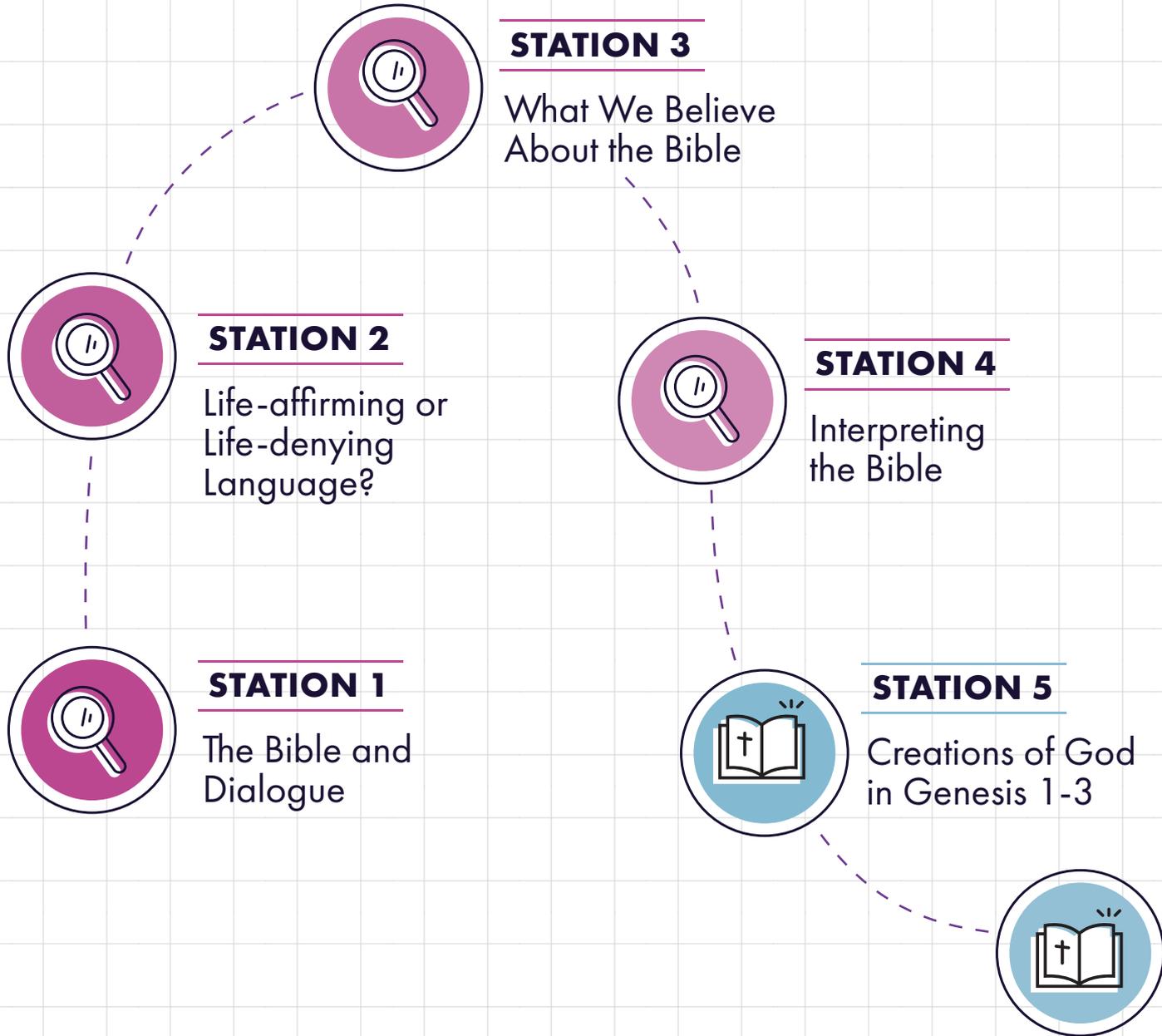
Participatory readers should note that the words “LGBTIQ+ person” or “homosexuality” did not exist in the original languages of the Bible. The term “homosexuality” originated only late in the nineteenth century. The Old Testament word “*qadesh*”, translated in the modern Bible as homosexual, had very little in common with the contemporary understanding of what being LGBTIQ+ is all about. It is generally accepted that it referred to specific homosexual behaviour, associated with heathen temple prostitution’s idolatry as it was practised in Biblical times. All these facts should remind the reader that even the seemingly harmless Bible translation process is not exempt from human error, prejudice, or lack of knowledge. Readers should note that the acronym “homosexuality” and LGBTIQ+ will be used interchangeably in this toolkit.

Furthermore, *The Bible and “Homosexuality”: A Toolkit* is essential in IAM’s resource hub. This introductory toolkit wants to equip individuals or groups with a basic understanding of biblical interpretation to combat religious fundamentalism. When completing this toolkit, readers are urged to use IAM’s *Reading Together: A Bible study method* toolkit. The Bible study method integrates IAM’s theory of change and insights gained from Contextual Bible Study and Intercultural Bible reading, with the specific focus to engage with issues of gender and sexuality.

These resources aim to equip readers who are LGBTIQ+ people to know that their sexuality and gender diversity is not an “abomination”, and to help family and friends become aware that the Bible does not condemn LGBTIQ+ people, and that therefore any form of violence sanctioned by religious beliefs is inhumane.

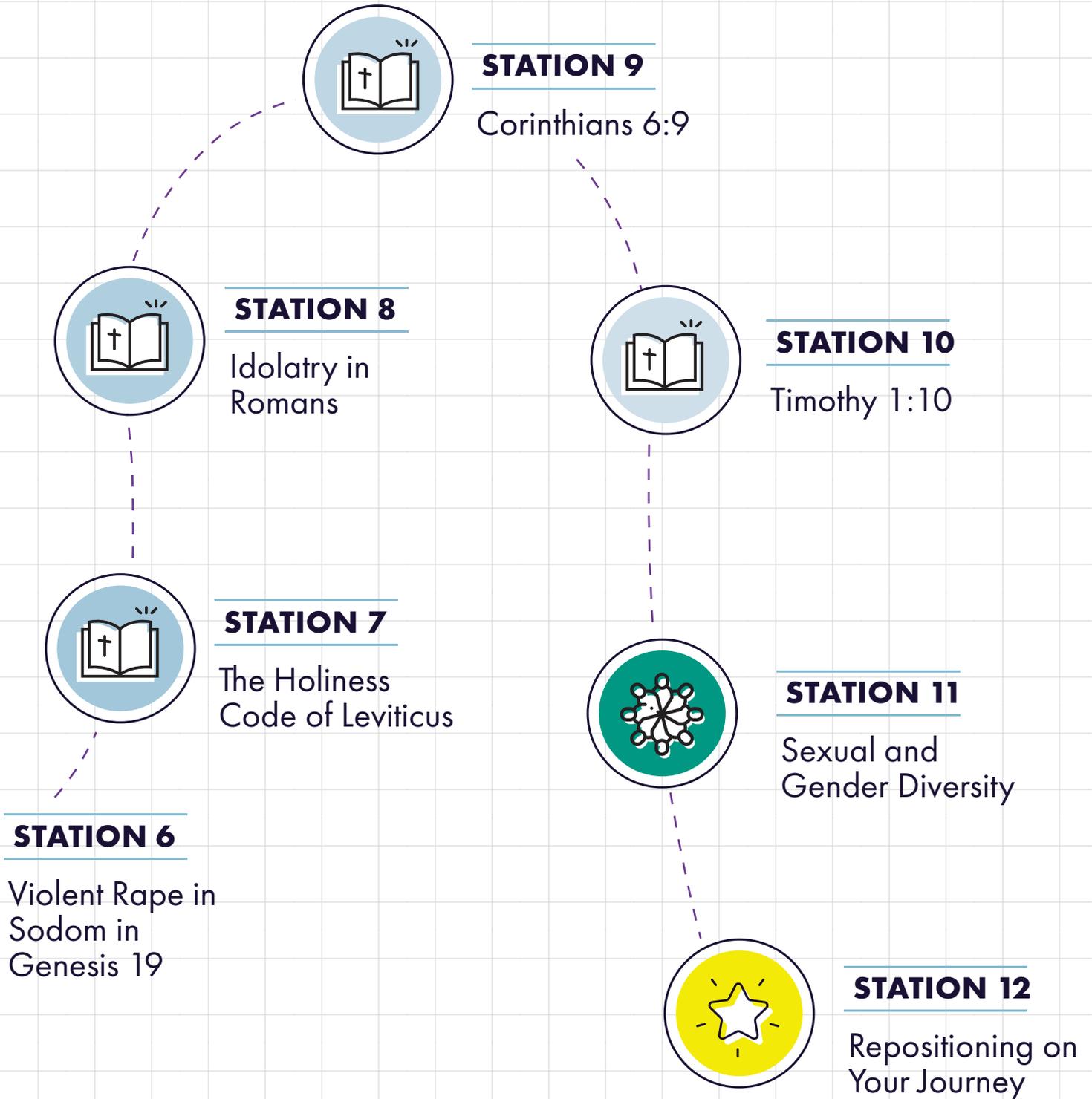
This toolkit consists of twelve stations that include various exercises to assist readers in reflecting on how we read the Bible and apply what has been read.

¹ The term ‘homophobia’ is used as an umbrella term describing the irrational hatred of all forms of sexual or gender diversity, including homophobia, transphobia and biphobia.



12 STATIONS OF EXPLORATION

These 12 stations lead you through a journey of learning and discovery, helping readers reflect on how we read the Bible and apply what we've read.



The Bible and Dialogue



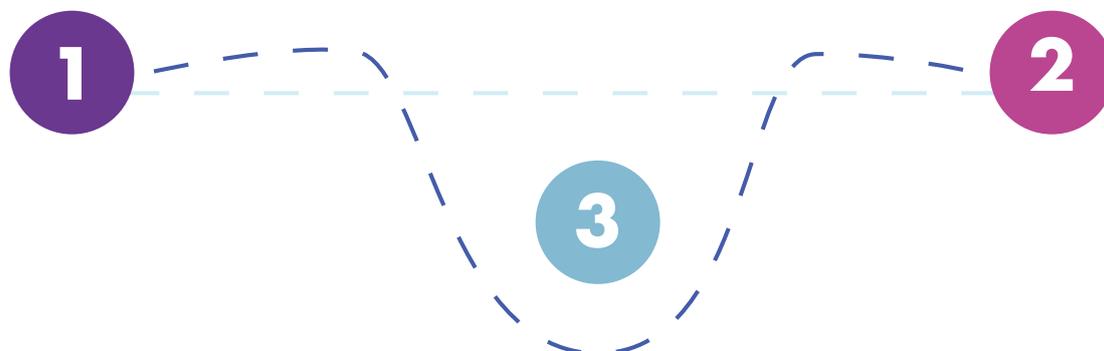
EXERCISE:

Take a moment to reflect on what you currently know about dialogue, answering the questions:

What is dialogue?

What are the benefits of dialogue?

At the core of our work at Inclusive and Affirming Ministries is dialogue. In our *Dialogue for Transformation: A toolkit*, we acknowledge that dialogue goes through various phases. We want to make you aware that engaging with the Bible and “homosexuality” is often a long and painful process. The figure below is a helpful diagram to guide this process. A journey towards transformation is rarely a mere few steps from point 1 to point 2 along a straight line.



Point 1 on our diagram suggests a starting place on your journey to think about the Bible and “homosexuality.” You might come with a particular view or understanding of human sexuality, faith, gender, and the Bible. However, as you work through this toolkit on your own or with a group, you might encounter diverse voices that challenge your views of human sexuality, faith, gender, and the Bible. You may feel uncertain about the truths you hold. During the process, you may be left feeling that the ground beneath you is shaking and that you are left with no answers and more questions. This is when an unavoidable curve in the process occurs. We want to invite you to sit with the discomfort of this new position. In this space, we want to invite you into an area of un-learning, learning, and re-learning.

Point 3 on our diagram is both the space of discomfort and the creative space of learning. It is a space where we want to encourage you on your process not to seek easy and comfortable answers. Instead, we invite you to grapple with previous understandings of human sexuality, faith, gender, and the Bible. In the process of learning, re-learning, and unlearning, we acquire new skills in deep dialogue with diverse stories as we journey towards transformation, **point 2** on our diagram.



EXERCISE:

Locate yourself on the dialogue diagram. Record your number here: 1 2 3

Life-affirming or Life-denying Language?

The language we use creates realities that are life-affirming or life-denying. Life-affirming realities celebrate the human dignity and diversity of all people. Life-denying realities are based on our biases and stereotypes.

PHRASES TO “UNPACK”

Bias – personal preference to dislike or like, without being impartial.

Stereotype – reduce individuals to a preconceived idea of a single characteristic.



EXERCISE:

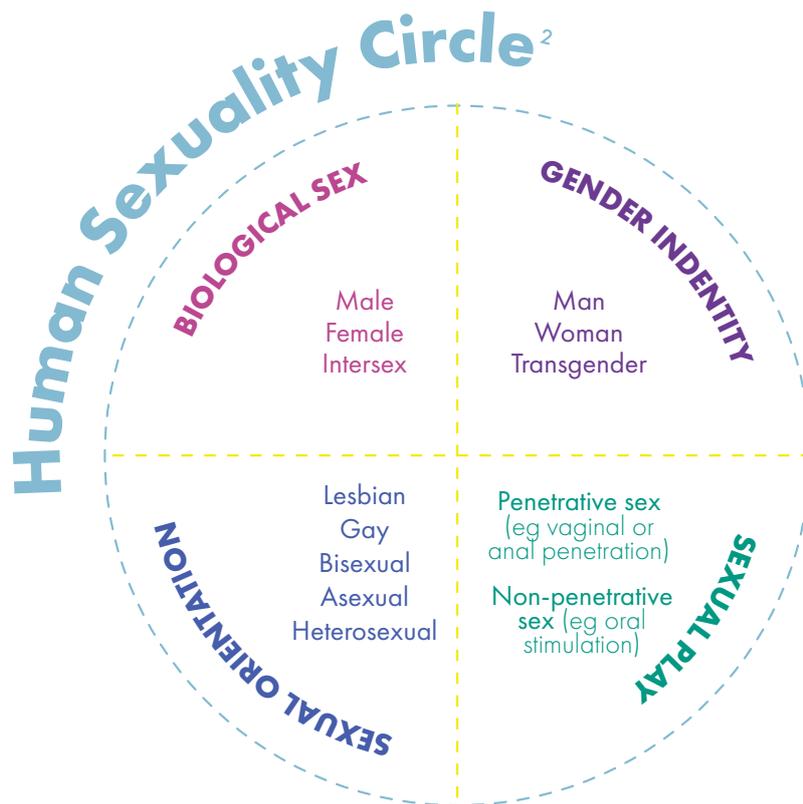
Grab a pencil and paper. Divide your page into three columns.

In column one, write down all the names that you know people use to refer to LGBTQ+ people in your own language and other languages you might know.

In column two, write “bias”, and in column 3 write “stereotype”.

Take the time to discern whether the words in column 1 belong under bias or a stereotype.

LGBTIQ+ people use language to self-identify their Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics (SOGIE SC). These terminologies are continuously evolving; therefore, we recommend that you always ask an LGBTQ+ person how they self-identify. These terminologies are life-affirming and move away from bias and stereotypes. The following diagram provides a basic overview:



PHRASES TO “UNPACK”

Homosexual – attracted to people of the same sex (gay)

Heterosexual – attracted to people of the opposite sex

Lesbian – a woman attracted to another woman

Gay – a man attracted to another man

Bisexual – attracted to men and women

Biological sex – physical characteristics people are born with and develop. This includes genitalia, body shape, body hair, hormones, chromosomes, etc.

Gender Identity – ways in which people are socialized based on family, world view, culture and religion in performing as masculine or feminine

Gender expression – ways in which people present gender through actions, dress and demeanour

Sexual orientation – who people are attracted to physically, spiritually and emotionally economically

Sexual play – the way(s) in which people have consensual sex.

TIP: When discussing these terms, also indicate what they are in your mother tongue.

² The Institute of Justice and Reconciliation developed a gender justice toolkit please access this toolkit: www.ijr.org.za/portfolio-items/a-gender-conversation-toolkit/. This is a step-by-step process of how to facilitate a discussion around sex, gender, sexual orientation and sexual play. See for reference pages 26-34. IAM adapted the Human Sexuality Circle from Designed & updated by Dalene van Dyk in conjunction with OUT LGBT Wellbeing, Pretoria, South Africa, Jan 2015.



EXERCISE

We cannot talk about other people's sexuality and gender without knowing our own. Below you can self-identify by using the diagram above.

Biological sex:

Gender:

Sexual Orientation:



What we believe about the Bible



EXERCISE

Read the statement and unpack the words below.

"We believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God, without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men, and the divine and final authority for all Christian faith and life. When we say inspired and without error, we mean we believe this to be verbal, infallible, and inerrant throughout."

Inspiration

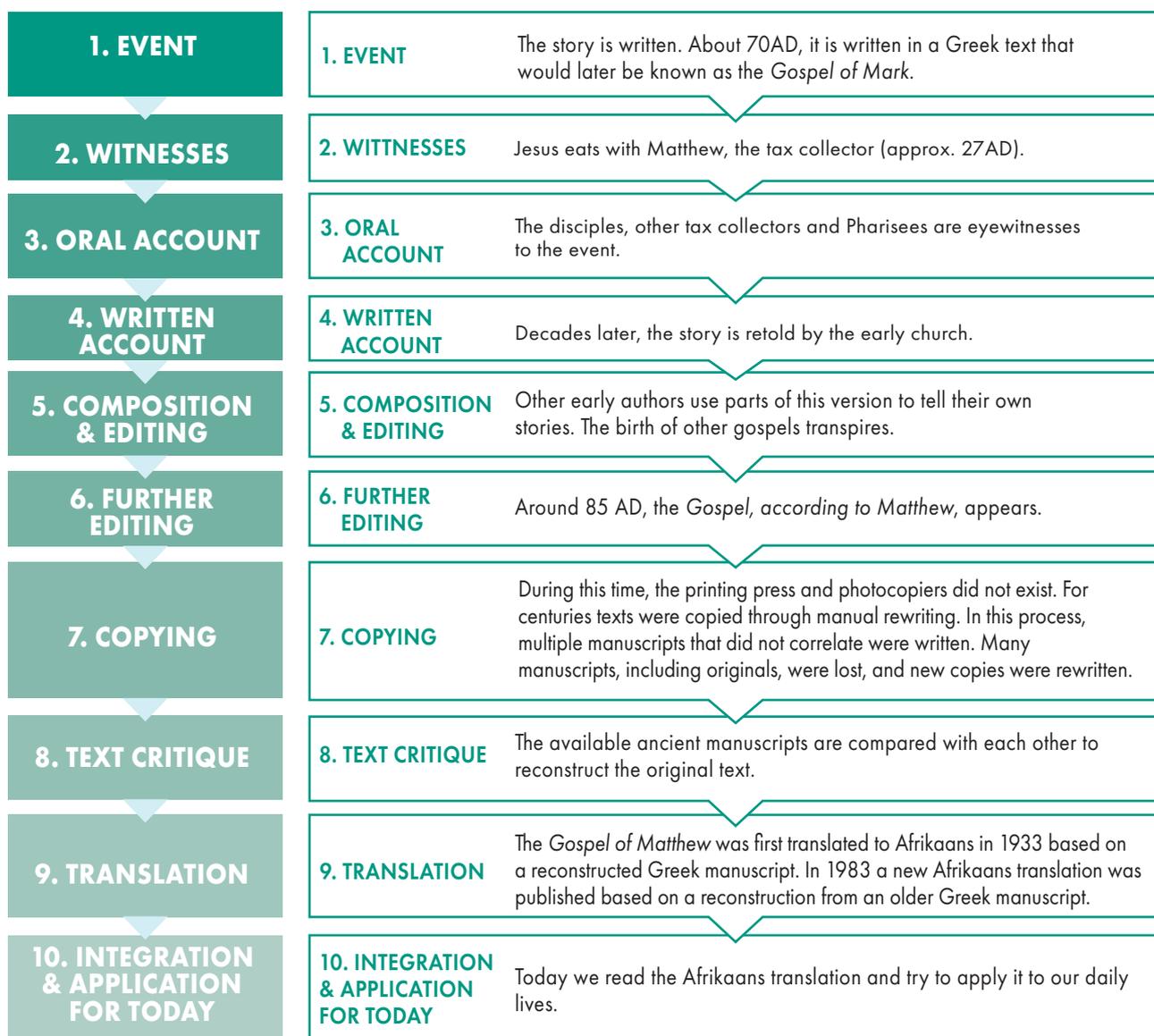
Inerrant

Complete testimony for salvation

Final

Authoritative

The written text of the Bible developed long after events that transpired. The diagram³ below offers us a process that may have been followed from the event to the Biblical story that we read today. Matthew 9:9-13 serves as an example of this process.



Some people read and understand the Bible literally. For them, the Bible is “God’s Word”, personally dictated by God, with the Biblical author writing every letter and word on behalf of God. Others believe that the Holy Spirit inspired Biblical authors to write about God’s marvellous deeds in their own language, culture, idiom, and experiences.

A responsible interpretation of the Bible requires us to honour the first audience. The diagram and description above make us aware of the complexities of composition and translation. When reading and interpreting the Biblical text, God and human beings collaborate, requiring us to use deep discernment in our interpretation and application of the Bible.

In the next station, we will focus on interpreting the Bible while becoming aware of our biases and stereotypes.

³ *Die Bybel in Fokus: Leesgids vir ’n nuwe tyd.*

Interpreting the Bible



EXERCISE

The Bible is a collection of many books that are made up of various genres. Match the genres on the right with the Biblical text on the right.

Stories

Laws and regulations

Genealogical registers

Songs, poems, and proverbs

History stories

Wisdom writings

Prophetic writings

Apocalyptic writings

Leviticus

Jeremiah

When reading the Bible, we need to keep in mind that there are three worlds of the Biblical texts.

WORLD BEHIND THE TEXT:

A responsible interpretation of the Bible demands that we do everything possible to *understand the author's original intention* and the meaning of the words they used. In addition, we need to understand the religious and cultural context of the individual authors' times. In this way, we will understand the unique circumstances they lived and wrote about their relationship with God.

WORLD IN THE TEXT:

Authors adopted different literary styles in addressing their audiences. Therefore, we need to determine and evaluate the meaning and place of specific verses within the context of Scripture's broader meaning. This is the context of the text. In other words, where and how does a particular verse fit into a more significant passage or chapter, and more specifically, into the overall message of the Bible.

WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT

Biblical verses should also be read in today's context (the reader's contemporary context). This principle asks of the interpreter that the text be understandable, credible, actual, prophetic and bear witness to the situation at hand. To achieve this, the reader should know and understand their own context and its importance. Thus, reading about "homosexuality" calls for conversations with LGBTIQ+ people, knowledge of recent scientific research, awareness of the ongoing debate within church and society, and courage to discern.



EXERCISE:

What number on the [dialogue diagram \(page 9\)](#) are you now?

Record your number here: 1 2 3

Creations of God in Genesis 1-3



EXERCISE

Read Genesis 1 – 3. Review the two different readings below and answer the questions.

Literal Reading

God dictated every word in the Bible.

What is written in the Bible is clear, relevant, and universally applicable and should be obeyed word for word forever.

God wrote the Bible without any “mistakes”, and what is written may not be changed because God is unchanged for all time.

Contextual Reading

God inspired Biblical writers to bear witness in their historical contexts.

What is written in the Bible is difficult to understand because of the diverse contexts.

Bible writers were ordinary human beings with flaws.

What do you conclude after reading Genesis 1 – 3 if you read it literally?

What do you conclude from reading Genesis 1- 3 if you read it contextually?

DID YOU KNOW?

It is generally accepted that there are two creation narrative accounts in Genesis 1–3. The first (Gen 1:1–2:4) is theological-pastoral. It is addressed to Jewish exiles of the 6th century B.C. and is intended to comfort the people in a situation of significant disruption and despair. The second story (Gen 2:5–3:24) deals with humanity’s crises and God’s gracious redemption after the fall. The general context of both narrative accounts refers to communities – in this case, Israel – who are at a low point in their collective history. Because of this, they are seeking security and order. They are also struggling to survive in a fragile and hostile world.

The Bible was compiled over hundreds of years. The first Bible books, e.g. Genesis, were shared orally from generation to generation before it was written down.

Within this context, the author praises God’s greatness, God’s good and orderly work in creation, God’s trustworthy compassion for the people that God created. Contrary to Babylon’s gods, it is clear that the God of Israel is still the Creator and in control of everything. Human beings have a place, a calling and destiny within this created order. Human beings are the pinnacle of God’s creation (Gen 1:26) and stand the centre of everything that has been created (Gen 2:15). Human beings are created in the Image of God, and as such, represent God and reign over everything (Gen 1:26). Human beings are called to be productive, procreate, inhabit and cultivate the earth (Gen 1:27-28 and 2:24–25).

In Genesis 2, a different picture emerges. In this passage, we find a greater emphasis on friendship and companionship characterised by equality and mutuality. Procreation is not all-important, and neither is the difference between the sexes. In many relationships, loyalty and friendship between human beings are more important than procreation. Many heterosexual couples do not have children, and no one calls their relationship “unnatural”. Many people are unable to produce children, while others remain single. We can conclude that the procreation model of Genesis 1–3, in which males and females are the primary role-players, can hardly claim to be the final definition of what constitutes “natural” sexuality.

In Genesis 1, we read how God created opposites - day and night, land and sea, flying birds and swimming fish. Humans, then, are also created in an opposite pair--male and female. But the problem with a literal reading of this text is that even though Genesis 1 sets up these binaries, God’s creation exists in a spectrum (In station 11, we continue the conversation about sexual and gender diversity).



EXERCISE

What are your thoughts at this moment? Write them down below.

Reading the Biblical text contextually contests our knowledge of “what the Bible says.” A contextual reading means questioning our own understanding that we hold dear. Honour the space that you find yourself in. In the next station, we will focus on Genesis 19.

Violent Rape in Sodom in Genesis 19



EXERCISE

Read Genesis 18-19. Read through the column below and answer the questions.

Literal Reading

God dictated every word in the Bible.

What is written in the Bible is clear, relevant, and universally applicable and should be obeyed word for word forever.

God wrote the Bible without any "mistakes", and what is written may not be changed because God is unchanged for all time.

Contextual Reading

God inspired Biblical writers to bear witness in their historical contexts.

What is written in the Bible is difficult to understand because of the diverse contexts.

Bible writers were ordinary human beings with flaws.

What do you conclude from Genesis 19 if you read it literally?

What do you conclude from Genesis 19 if you read it contextually?

DID YOU KNOW?

In Genesis 18, God sends two angels to Sodom and Gomorrah to announce God's judgement over the people. Lot, the cousin of Abraham, persuades the angels to stay the night with him and his family in his home in Sodom. In Genesis 19, we are told how "all the people from the whole town" circled Lot's house and demanded that he deliver the angels to them so that they may have sex with them.

This is a perfect example of an attempt at gang rape. Disturbed by this defiling of the ancient custom of hospitality, Lot tries to protect his guests by offering his two daughters to the crowd – a deed which is immoral by our standards. The men of Sodom decline his offer, and the angels strike the men with blindness. The angels rescue Lot and his family while the two cities are destroyed.



EXERCISE

Throughout the ages, the church identified "homosexuality" as to why Sodom was destroyed. What is the reason for Sodom's destruction according to the following texts?

Ezekiel 16:48 – 50

Luke 10:10 – 12

Matthew 10:14 – 15

What do you say is Genesis 19 about, and how has it been used to discriminate against LGBTQI+ people?

The next text that we will read is Leviticus 18-20. Bear in mind that as we journey from Genesis to Leviticus, Israel is developing, and so is their religion.

The Holiness Code of Leviticus



EXERCISE

Read Leviticus 18 - 20. Read the column below and answer the questions.

Literal Reading

God dictated every word in the Bible.

What is written in the Bible is clear, relevant, and universally applicable and should be obeyed word for word forever.

God wrote the Bible without any "mistakes", and what is written may not be changed because God is unchanged for all time.

Contextual Reading

God inspired Biblical writers to bear witness in their historical contexts.

What is written in the Bible is difficult to understand because of the diverse contexts.

Bible writers were ordinary human beings with flaws.

What do you conclude from Leviticus 18:22 if you read it literally?

What do you conclude from Leviticus 18:22 if you read it contextually?

What do you conclude from Leviticus 20:13 if you read it literally?

What do you conclude from Leviticus 20:13 if you read it contextually?

DID YOU KNOW?

The meaning of purity laws in Leviticus can only fully be understood against the historical and cultural background of the Israelites of Biblical times. Israel occupied a unique position as the chosen people of God. Therefore, they had to distinguish themselves from the other tribes by not submitting to their customs and idolatry. Thus, the prescriptive Holiness Codes promoted two things.

Firstly, that Israel would lead a holy and pure life to enter the presence of God. A pure person came before God to participate in public worship, religious occasions, and community life. An impure person was not allowed to go before God, enter God's presence, or participate in public worship, religious events, or community life. Therefore, the Holiness Codes prescribed purity action, go through a time of purification, and make a prescribed sacrifice to become pure again. Secondly, Israel's behaviour and life would show God's chosen people, unlike the other nations.



EXERCISE

What rituals and customs do you practice in your faith tradition and culture? Write your answers below.

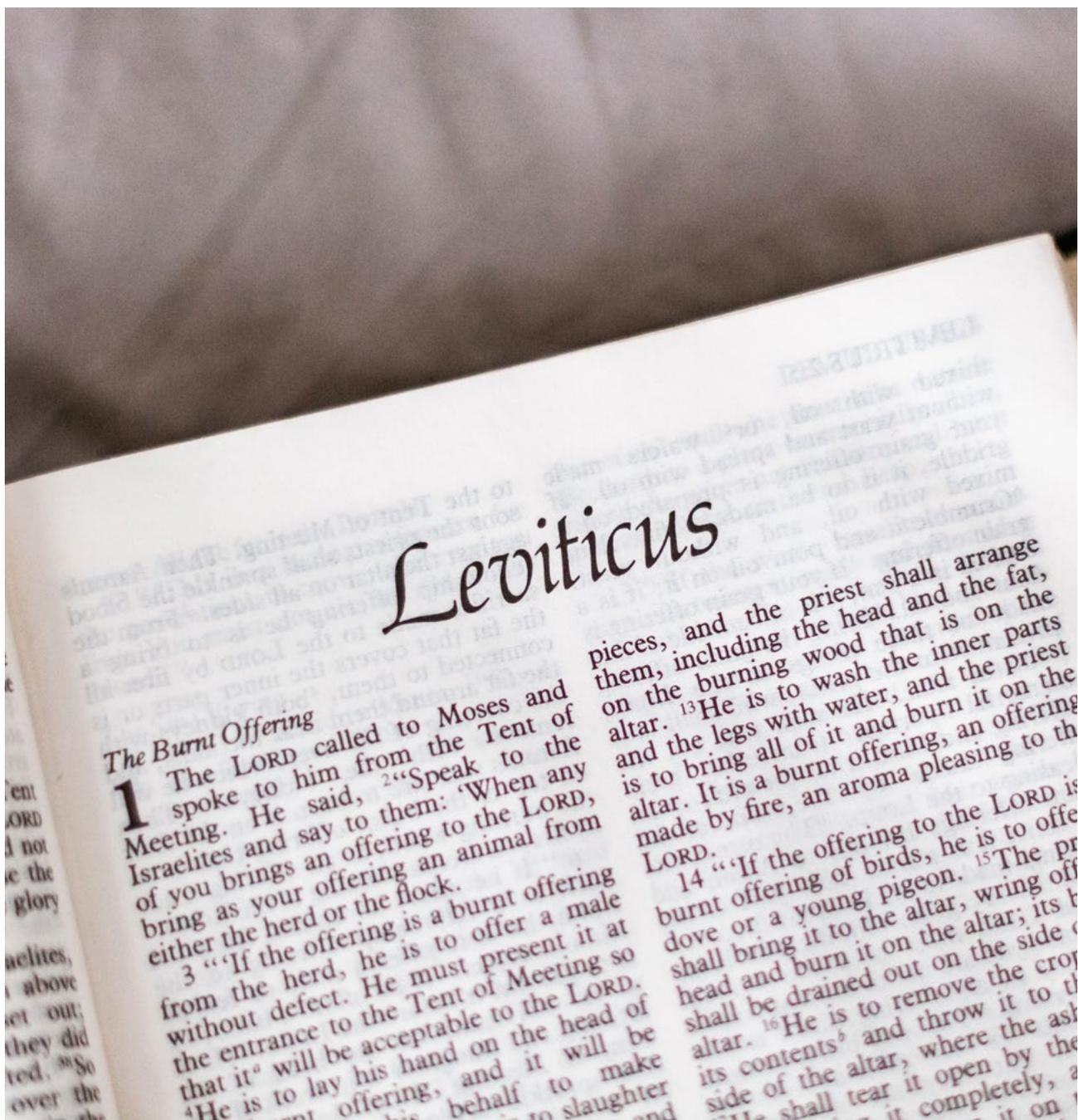
Which Biblical rituals and customs do you still follow? Why?

Which Biblical rituals and customs do you not follow? Why not?

The Israelites had their own culture and religious rituals and customs. In [Station 3: Interpreting the Bible](#), we read that we stand in front of the Biblical text in our own world(s). We also come with our own rituals and customs as we engage the Biblical text. We meet the apostle Paul and many other Christians who come from the Jewish faith or other faiths in the next station. The new Church community is diverse. Some follow the rituals and customs of Leviticus and other sacred texts. Others follow rituals and customs of different faiths and traditions. This creates contestation and an invitation to make a life together as diverse people of God.

In the Old Testament, Israel was exposed to the cultic practices of other faith traditions using sex within worship. Exercising of holiness was challenged by these practices. The Apostle Paul addresses these cultic sexual practices when foreign gods are worshipped using sex.

The individuals and communities in Rome, Corinth and Ephesus are diverse in their context. Nevertheless, cultic sex is common to all of them, and Paul addresses this in all his letters to these varied communities.



Idolatry in Romans



EXERCISE

Read Romans 1:18 – 32 and Romans 3: 9 – 31. Read the column below and answer the questions.

Literal Reading

God dictated every word in the Bible.

What is written in the Bible is clear, relevant, and universally applicable and should be obeyed word for word forever.

God wrote the Bible without any “mistakes”, and what is written may not be changed because God is unchanged for all time.

Contextual Reading

God inspired Biblical writers to bear witness in their historical contexts.

What is written in the Bible is difficult to understand because of the diverse contexts.

Bible writers were ordinary human beings with flaws.

What do you conclude from Romans 1:18 – 32 if you read it literally?

What do you conclude from Romans 1:18 – 32 if you read it contextually?

What do you conclude from Romans 3: 9 – 31 if you read it literally?

What do you conclude from Romans 3: 9 – 31 if you read it contextually?

DID YOU KNOW?

Paul wrote this letter in the city of Corinth that was known as an immoral city where cultic sexual practices were widespread, and a variety of idols and foreign gods were served through this practice. There was also a practice called pederasty, where an older man, usually a prominent political figure, would “take pity” on a boy, aged 12 – 16, to “educate” him to become an ideal citizen. This included sexual contact.

In Romans 1, Paul’s concern is for the purity of Christ’s followers from Gentile backgrounds (converted from other faiths). He wants them to avoid the cultic sexual practices of their past. In Romans 1:26–28, the Apostle Paul condemns heterosexual people who participate in “homosexual” cultic sex as a form of worship to foreign gods, which goes against their “nature”.



1 Corinthians 6:9



EXERCISE

Read 1 Corinthians 3 – 6. Re-read 1 Corinthians 6: 9. Then, read through the column below and answer the questions based on 1 Corinthians 6:9.

Literal Reading

God dictated every word in the Bible.

What is written in the Bible is clear, relevant, and universally applicable and should be obeyed word for word forever.

God wrote the Bible without any “mistakes”, and what is written may not be changed because God is unchanged for all time.

Contextual Reading

God inspired Biblical writers to bear witness in their historical contexts.

What is written in the Bible is difficult to understand because of the diverse contexts.

Bible writers were ordinary human beings with flaws.

What do you conclude from 1 Corinthians 6: 9 if you read it literally?

What do you conclude from 1 Corinthians 6:9 you read it contextually?

DID YOU KNOW?

From the seaport-town of Ephesus, Paul writes this letter to the congregation in Corinth, which he founded. Ephesus and Corinth were port cities that were in regular contact with each other. The news was sent and received by a ship. Paul had lived in Ephesus for two years. Here, he received a letter from the congregation in Corinth in which they asked for his advice regarding a variety of problems in the new congregation. Paul writes back to the congregation and gives them advice. He also responds to things he had heard about them, which he was concerned about and did not agree with.

The congregation in Corinth was about two to three years old and still busy establishing how to live as Christians. Before they became Christians, some lived as Greeks and Romans who served foreign gods through cultic sex. Temple prostitution and regular fights in court were standard practices. Others lived as Jews who followed their religious laws strictly. Many Christians still had family members who lived in the old ways, making it difficult to determine how to live as Christians. Because of this, the congregation in Corinth became divided into different groups and followed various leaders, which gave rise to arrogance and superiority grew within the congregation.

Paul uses lists to determine everyday moral conduct, widely employed to maintain order in ancient cities. Writers do not attempt to write a complete list of transgressions but to make an impression on the person that reads or hears the list. The list tries to modify behaviour and to convince the members of the congregation of Corinth that if they keep making themselves guilty of these types of transgressions, they will not inherit the kingdom of God. Members of the community must live as Christians, different from the way they used to live. Again, Paul's message is directed to heterosexual people whose practice of cultic sex goes against nature.

Paul assumes that his readers understand the practice where heterosexual people have cultic sex with other heterosexual people. Modern-day readers have to be aware that "homosexuality" was only coined in the nineteenth century. Through their own bias and stereotype, translators use "homosexuality" to describe this cultic sexual practice (See introduction).



EXERCISE

Biblical scholars have concluded that there is a difference between sexual behaviour and sexual orientation in the Biblical text. Do you think differentiating between sexual behaviour and sexual orientation assists you to read 1 Corinthians 6:9 contextually and more inclusively?

1 Timothy 1:10



EXERCISE

Read 1 Timothy 1 – 2. Re-read 1 Timothy 1: 10. Read through the column below and answer the questions.

Literal Reading

God dictated every word in the Bible.

What is written in the Bible is clear, relevant, and universally applicable and should be obeyed word for word forever.

God wrote the Bible without any “mistakes”, and what is written may not be changed because God is unchanged for all time.

Contextual Reading

God inspired Biblical writers to bear witness in their historical contexts.

What is written in the Bible is difficult to understand because of the diverse contexts.

Bible writers were ordinary human beings with flaws.

What do you conclude from 1 Timothy 1: 10 if you read it literally?

What do you conclude from 1 Timothy 1: 10 if you read it contextually?

DID YOU KNOW?

We meet Paul again. Previously we encountered him in Romans as he wrote what he understood to be the heart of the gospel. Hereafter, he wrote in Corinthians, as the founder of the congregation of Corinth, guiding this congregation to live as Christians. It is uncertain if Paul himself wrote 1 Timothy or if a follower of Paul compiled this letter after his death from several letters that he had written. Whoever wrote this letter adopted the common practise to write in the name and style of Paul, a revered religious leader, so that it would be taken seriously by the readers. We want to read the letter as if Paul was the writer because we want to understand the letter as it was intended at the time.

Paul experienced a lonely and challenging time. Co-workers disappointed him or differed so much from him that they did not want to work with him anymore on his missionary travels. During this challenging time, Paul met Timothy, a young man of about 20 years old, in the city of Listra. Timothy became one of Paul's most loved co-workers. He was the son of a Greek father and a Jewish mother and was converted to Christianity by Paul during his first missionary travels. Timothy even let himself be circumcised, the Jewish custom required of all males. Paul laid hands on Timothy to affirm and bless him as a co-worker. He then asked Timothy to stay behind in the congregation of Ephesus to sort out a difficult situation, similar to what happened in Corinth, in the congregation.

Paul writes from Macedonia to encourage Timothy and give him instructions on how to conduct himself as a pastor in the congregation of Ephesus. Paul gives Timothy advice on managing the congregation, opposing false doctrine, and protecting and preaching Jesus Christ's gospel.

Ephesus was a vital port-city and the principal place of several other religions, worshipping the emperor. The congregation in Ephesus was surrounded by foreign religions, and because of that, some Christians started preaching false doctrines. These false preachers are not mentioned by name, but Paul wanted to encourage Timothy with his letter to take a strong stance against false preachers in the congregation. Although Timothy was young, he had to command them with strictness and authority to end false doctrines.



EXERCISE

What practices do you employ in your context to manage the diversity of doctrine?

Does 1 Timothy 1:10 shed new light on managing diversity in your context?

LGBTIQ+ people have challenged translators to honour the world behind the text and the world in the text to discern the interpretation and application for our time.

Sexual and gender diversity



EXERCISE

Return to [Station 2](#) and the human sexuality circle on page 11. Review the descriptions of biological sex and gender identity, noting that intersex and transgender people are diverse.



EXERCISE

Listen to the voices of intersex and transgender people. Click on these links:

-  More about intersex people www.youtube.com/watch?v=of8UetAo_J4
-  More about Transgender people www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKdfBGZCPcQ

Write down your thoughts on the videos.

We noted earlier that the church uses “homosexuality” as a blanket term to refer to LGBTIQ+ people. However, today we know that there are many variations of sex, gender, and sexuality. Therefore, it is essential to affirm LGBTIQ+ people whose SOGIESC is different and adopt their self-identifying language. Because of this difference, sexual and gender diverse people are vulnerable. In the Bible, Israelites and the new community of faith, the Church creatively cares for vulnerable sexual and diverse people and affirms them, which we can build on as an example today.

Israel journey through Old Testament texts about holiness to New Testament texts about understanding purity and cultic sex. It shifted their religious identity from purity to diversity and inclusion, with the Apostle Paul as their guide. This offers us, as modern-day readers, the opportunity to use our interpretative and application skills. In the same way that Romans, Corinthians and Ephesians had to address complex problems, we can use the text in life-affirming ways. In this way, we collaborate with sexual and gender diverse people in re-reading the Biblical text.

DID YOU KNOW?

In the Bible, we encounter the figures of the eunuchs. In this Toolkit, we want to use the figure of the eunuch as an example of sexual and gender diverse people. Eunuchs lived on the margins, excluded from religious or cultural practices according to culture and religion.

Eunuchs were usually appointed as court officials. Amongst other things, they were tasked with serving and protecting women in the palace. They were seen as “safe” because they would not be sexually attracted to women that they guarded (the term eunuch is derived from “bed guards”).



EXERCISE

Read the following texts and write down what you hear about eunuchs.

Isaiah 56

Deuteronomy 21:1

DID YOU KNOW?

The purity laws of Leviticus prohibit eunuchs from entering the temple. During Israel's captivity by neighbouring tribes like Assyria, Babylon and Persia, they castrated people while enslaved. On returning home, Israelite eunuchs' bodies challenged the purity laws of Deuteronomy 22: 5 and 23:1, which expressly excluded eunuchs.

Isaiah 56:3 -8 is an example of how the community of Israel discerned the reality of Israelite eunuchs contextually. Today, the church stands before the same discernment process with sexual and gender diverse persons in faith communities as we interpret and apply Biblical text the same way Israel did.



EXERCISE

Read Matthew 19:12. What does Jesus say about eunuch's

DID YOU KNOW?

Traditionally the second and third eunuchs referenced by Jesus were encouraged for the sake of the kingdom and celibacy. People who were born eunuchs were not usually commented on. Neither were their sex characteristics broadly or narrowly defined. Through biblical scholarship, we know that eunuchs did not fit into the male and female binary model.

Here we can learn from Jesus' thoughts that were undeniable also Jesus' actions towards eunuchs. Ridiculing eunuchs was absent from Jesus' words; instead, eunuchs are held up as examples of discipleship.

Today parents of many sexual and gender diverse babies are forced to choose life-threatening surgeries for their young children. These "corrective" surgeries are used to place infants in the binary (male or female). Jesus words and actions pave the way towards being inclusive and affirming towards sexual and gender diverse people.

Jesus' comment in Matthew 19:12 that "some are born eunuchs" is an acknowledgement that he was aware of intersex people and passed no judgement on those who don't fit traditional male-female sex categories. In this passage, Jesus both affirms heterosexual marriage as well as intersex and asexual persons.



EXERCISE

Read Acts 8:26-40. What does the text say about eunuchs?

DID YOU KNOW?

The eunuch is curious to know who the prophet Isaiah is talking about. Philip reinterprets the passage, considering his audience of one and tells him about Jesus – the one that the prophet speaks about, which has suffered brutality at the hands of men. After listening, the eunuch clearly identifies with this man and his experience of suffering at the hands of his own people. He identifies so strongly that he wants to be a follower of this suffering leader and requests to be baptised in a stream of water close by. Philip obliges. The eunuch rides away, satisfied, supposedly on his way back home to Ethiopia.

For modern readers to understand the text, we have to understand something about who Philip was and the status of eunuchs in cultural and religious/cultic practices of the Israelite followers of Jesus at the time.

Philip is a Greek-speaking Jew and, in some respects, ahead of his faith community. Philip is already convinced that Christ has come for ALL people, not only a select group of followers, while many still widely debated whether Gentiles were included in his message, let alone eunuchs.

In this text, the eunuch's faith status is not clear. Even though we know from the text that he was devout, we also know that he could not be converted to become a follower of Jesus because, as a eunuch, he would not have been able to be circumcised, which was necessary for conversion. He would also not have been allowed into the temple but would have had to join the other "heathens" in the forecourt.

When we think about it, the narrator could probably have quickly found out this particular eunuch's name since he was in service of the Ethiopian queen. But, instead, he wanted to point out the Finance Minister's status as a eunuch that has nothing to do with his name but his status as an outsider.

Even though Philip is aware of the Ethiopian's status as a eunuch, he has no issue with reinterpreting a text for him that, for the followers of Jesus, is central to their faith of origin. Likewise, he has no problem baptising the eunuch, regardless of his status as a foreigner or a eunuch. However, some of his fellow believers would not have done so. As a matter of fact, some of them would have actively worked to exclude him from the community of faith since he was unable to be circumcised.

When the two meet, the eunuch is in on his way from Jerusalem down to Gaza. His religious needs have obviously not been satisfied in Jerusalem, the centre of Christianity at the time. He finds himself somewhere on a deserted road – neither here nor there – when he meets up with Philip. In this space – neither here nor there – Philip affirms the nameless eunuch's status through baptism, something that was only reserved for a specific group until this point.

The eunuch returns to Ethiopia as probably the first baptised follower of Jesus on the African continent – contrary to perceptions that only White colonisers brought the Christian faith to Africa.

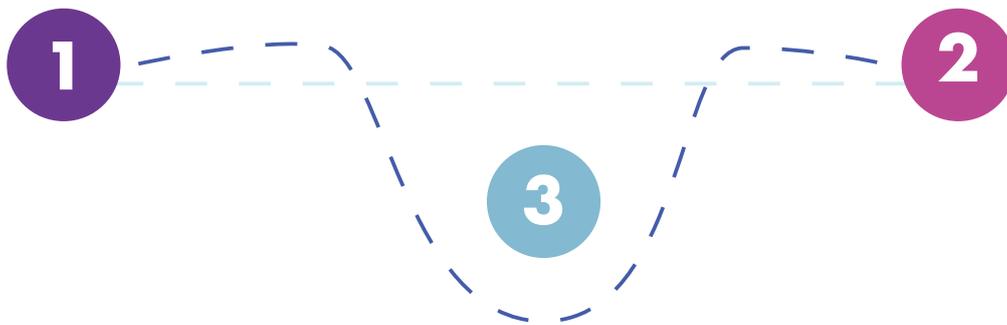


EXERCISE

Have you been excluded because of your sexuality and/or gender identity? Does this story of the Eunuch offer you any hope to be included in your faith community?

Repositioning on your journey

We would like to acknowledge that this process can bring with it anxiety that comes with uncertainty. When new knowledge is introduced into our lives, the process of letting go of the truths that have shaped us can be frightening.



At this station, we invite you to reflect on the complexity of reading the Bible. In the diagram below, locate yourself in your journey now. What are your thoughts now?



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