

## Link to the Recording of Fireside Chat #3

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXvXKEqBLb8>

## Resources for Thinking about LGBTQ Matters

- A. UM Books to Inform the LGBTQ Conversation
- B. Thoughts by Adam Hamilton on How to Approach Scriptures Re LGBTQ
- C. Summary of the book, *Changing Our Mind*, by David Gushee

### **A. UM books to inform the LGBTQ conversation**

Source: United Methodist Communications, June, 2021

Educating ourselves with a variety of viewpoints and seeking to create a space for understanding is key to loving one another. A collection of books written by United Methodist leaders and laypersons seeks to inform the LGBTQ conversation.

Caring for and loving one another as we live into our diversity as a denomination are pillars of The United Methodist Church. The long-running conversation about sexuality often has created dissension and pain, so how we show Christ's love to each other in the midst of the conversation is significant. For those interested in educating themselves with a variety of viewpoints and seeking to create a space for understanding, we offer this collection of books written by United Methodist leaders and laypersons.

1. "Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and The United Methodist Church"  
Published by Abingdon Press from the Faultlines collection, this book examines the deep disagreement about what The United Methodist Church should teach about homosexuality, same gender marriage, and the ordination of LGBTQ persons.

In this revised edition updated following the 2019 Special Session, the book is designed to help readers understand the debate and what it means for the present and the future. The book, which includes a leader guide, can be used as a four-part small group study.

## 2. “Into the Light: Healing Sexuality in Today’s Church”

In this book, Dr. Mark Ongley, United Methodist minister and author, seeks to begin a biblically grounded and theologically informed discussion of the gift of sexuality, addressing sexual brokenness in many forms and the path to true healing.

Proverbs 18:15. Canva design by Crystal Caviness

## 3. “Homosexuality and the Church”

Howard A. Snyder, seminary professor, pastor and author, addresses a variety of questions about homosexuality in the context of scripture. The book also addresses how Christians and the church should respond to the topic of homosexuality.

## 4. “God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships”

United Methodist Matthew Vines shares his story as a young gay man navigating relationships with his family, his hometown church, and the Christian church at large as he expresses what it means to be a faithful gay Christian. In addition to sharing his experiences, the book is the result of years of intensive research into what the Bible says about homosexuality.

## 5. “Holy Love: A Biblical Theology for Human Sexuality”

Steve Harper, United Methodist pastor, seminary professor and author, examines the teaching of the Bible and Wesleyan tradition on human sexuality, making a constructive case that biblical, Christian teaching is compatible with faithful, covenantal love and intimacy amid all sexual orientations.

## 6. “Science, Scripture and Same-Sex Love”

Author Michael B. Regele challenges the premise of some church leaders who assert that same-sex practices are incompatible with Christian teaching.

Regele explores current scientific findings in biological brain research, psychology, and sociology, which he compares with scriptural teaching from the Bible, to show that a faithful reading of the Scriptures is consistent with Christian teaching that affirms same-sex love leading to same-sex marriage and full participation of LGBT people in church leadership.

#### 7. "Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology"

Pamela R. Lightsey, United Methodist clergy and author, explores the impact of multiple oppressions experienced by Black Queer women. The book explores liberation theologies to reflect on LGBTQIA+ issues in the Church such as marriage and ordination rights.

#### 8. "For the Body"

Timothy Tennent, president of Asbury Theological Seminary and author, looks at what it means to be created in the image of God and how our bodies serve as icons that illuminate God's purposes. Tennent examines topics like marriage, family, singleness, and friendship, and he looks at how the human body has been objectified in art and media today. He also offers a framework for discipling people today in a Christian theology of the body.

#### 9. "Our Strangely Warmed Hearts: Coming Out Into God's Call"

As John Wesley discovered his true spiritual identity, he experienced a strangely warmed heart. Karen P. Oliveto, United Methodist bishop and author, shares poignant stories and well-reasoned principles to disclose why and how spiritual renewal and a personal call to ministry emerge in the strangely warmed hearts of lesbian and gay Christians.

#### 10. "Reclaiming Church: A Call to Action for Religious Rejects"

United Methodist J.J. Warren, a seminary student, continues his call to reaffirm that the Church be welcoming to all, including young queer people. The book focuses on practical and positive steps for joining voices, being heard, building bridges, and working together for young people to reclaim Church in their lives.

#### 11. "When Christians Get It Wrong"

Adam Hamilton, United Methodist pastor and author, examines why young adults increasingly are opting out of Christianity and the church. Christians are the reason, Hamilton writes. When young adults talk about the problems they have with Christianity and the church, they often name certain attitudes and behaviors they believe are practiced too often by Christians: judging others, condemning people of other faiths, rejecting science, injecting politics into faith, and being anti-homosexual. Hamilton addresses the issues and how and why Christians can get it right when it comes to being Christ in the world.

The books were compiled by United Methodist Communications staff. Media contact is Joe Iovino.

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## B. How To Approach Scriptures Re LGBTQ

Thoughts from Adam Hamilton

1. Are all Scriptures “God-breathed” as suggested in 2 Timothy 3:16? The word is *theopneustos*, often translated “inspired”. Paul made up the word, and it occurs only once in the Bible. Perhaps a better understanding of the verse would be “All Scriptures are influenced by God”.
2. We don’t have an inerrant, infallible Bible. It’s easy to demonstrate that by finding passages about the same things that disagree with each other. Therefore, we cannot say (as some do), “We believe in the inerrancy of Scripture”.
3. The acid test when reading Scripture is, “All we say and do as Christians should line up with “God is Love””. So, for example, we **should not** take from many verses in the book of Joshua that the Bible is telling us to kill large numbers of people, or large numbers of boys and women, to the last person. But we **should** take, from the Gospel

accounts, that God is telling us to “Love our neighbor, and love even our enemy”?

4. Adam Hamilton suggests we can assign Scripture to three buckets:

- The smallest bucket – Scriptural verses that are **not** right, but are rather descriptions of horrible things humans have done in the name of religion.
- A medium-sized bucket – Scriptural advice that was relevant at a certain time, or in a certain place, but is no longer so e.g. circumcision.
- A large bucket – all the awesome stuff.

5. In interpreting and following Scripture, we should question anything that might hurt someone else. The sieve or collander should always be “Love God with all your heart, mind, and strength; and your neighbor as yourself”.

6. Regarding Human Sexuality – there are approx. six or eight verses; plus stories of God making Adam and Eve for each other, where what mattered most in the stories was **companionship**. We need to understand the context of these verses, and interpret correctly what they meant in their time and place, and how we interpret them today.

7. Regarding Slavery – there are approx. 700 verses, many neutral towards slavery, or equivocal or even accepting of slavery. Yet we have consensus that slavery is not right, and must not be practiced. And some verses we agree are especially repugnant; e.g. beating slaves with iron rods and not being condemned as long as they don’t die within 2 days (Exodus 21:20-21). It’s right that we have changed our mind about these many verses over the centuries, and it’s okay if we change our minds about the very small number of verses about human sexuality.

8. We need to ask about every Scripture:

- What did it mean when it was written?
- What's the character of God like in that Scripture?

N.B. It's important not to try to escape by saying, "Everyone picks and chooses what Scriptures they follow – it's important to choose aright". We don't "pick and choose"; we "interpret".

9. When talking about subjects like "should women be allowed to be preachers?" some leaders (like Albert Moller of the Southern Baptist Seminary) say it's all about the **authority** of Scripture. They say, "since we believe in the authority of Scripture, we must follow it". For us United Methodists, by contrast, **Scripture is the primary source of our life and faith**. But we're helped in our understanding it by tradition, reason, and experience (the three other parts of the so-called 'Wesley Quadrilateral').

10. Adam Hamilton says, "In all the debates in the United Methodist Church, I've never heard anyone say they want to take anything away from the faith statements." In other words our debates are not about the faith statements. He also says, "The UMC **will hold** to the orthodox tenets of the Christian faith. But it's okay to have questions. You shouldn't check your brain at the church door. **We are people who engage heart, mind, and hand.**" He says, "I like to hold on to "heretics", and help them find their way back. I was converted to Christ when I was a student at Oral Roberts University, sitting in the university library, reading the UMC Book of Discipline".

11. Adam Hamilton says, "We in the UMC believe in both the evangelical and the social gospel. I don't want to give up either the liberal or the conservative label, but retain both.

- Liberal means being generous of spirit, and open to change.

- Conservative means conserving the things that are important, and not just fashionable.

The Church is like Moms standing up for, fighting for, and supporting their children, proud of all they do. Imagine if the world could see what a Mom sees. That's the kind of church I want to see."

The above thoughts are drawn from the Adam Hamilton lecture, "A Thinking Person's Guide to the Christian Faith" in Birmingham, AL, in early November, 2021. The thoughts on Scripture are drawn from about the 1 H 14 Minutes point of the lecture: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89ziGc0tWkQ>

Here's a link to an interview with Adam Hamilton (posted on the blog page of the Institute of Religion and Democracy on Nov. 1, 2021):

[https://juicyecumenism.com/2021/11/01/adam-hamilton-on-methodist-future/?fbclid=IwAR3\\_QoRrqCwea1GwFZoZxH4vz47sqQ54h71R2b8pyWYdpFZBsoEG6sG0S3o](https://juicyecumenism.com/2021/11/01/adam-hamilton-on-methodist-future/?fbclid=IwAR3_QoRrqCwea1GwFZoZxH4vz47sqQ54h71R2b8pyWYdpFZBsoEG6sG0S3o)

**C. David P. Gushee (2014), *Changing Our Mind*, (Canton, MI: Read The Spirit Books, David Crumm Media, LLC): 131 pp.**

Gushee, a Baptist, is one of the leading evangelical ethicists in America. He has, in the past, authored publications that criticized homosexuality, and refused to accept homosexual practice as compatible with Christian doctrine. He has changed his mind on this matter, and now embraces full acceptance of LGBT persons into the church. This book describes how his change of mind came largely through transformative friendships with gay Christians, many of them conservative and evangelical in their religious beliefs, and of consequent reinterpretation of the Biblical passages most commonly used to condemn homosexual behavior and exclude gays from the church.

He emphasizes at the outset that he is not rejecting the Bible itself, but changing traditionalist readings of some of the texts.

He emphasizes changes of his mind coming from transformational encounters.

What is at stake, he says, is “the Church’s effort to discern what it means to follow Jesus in every area of life, including in our sexual ethics and the way we treat sexual minorities in the Body of Christ.”

He notes that the Church never had a category called “sexual orientation” in its ancient tradition; just rejection of same-sex acts as a small part of an elaborate sexual and family morality, other parts of which – for example the status and roles of women – have been re-thought in the past century.

He regrets that the Church’s stance on gays and lesbians has set back its mission among large numbers of people.

He notes there are millions of LGBT Christians; and estimates at least 5 million in the U.S. alone. There is a human suffering problem at the very heart of the Church, he says. It’s not only individual Christians that need to change their minds, but the collective Church.

He argues that the Church has dealt with many ‘hot-button’ issues in many generations – slavery, segregation, apartheid, Nazism, abortion, temperance, Sabbath, tongue-speaking, women’s roles. It’s odd, he thinks, to make a huge divisive issue out of how 5% of people handle their sexuality. Three different responses to LGBT issues are exemplified by *traditionalists*, *revisionists*, and *avoiders*. He clearly now advocates revisionism.

We need to re-evaluate, he says, because of evidence offered in the lives of those who do not fit the historic hetero-sexual norm, together with associated scientific research into homosexuality, and evidence accumulated from mental health efforts. The research suggests an LGBT population between 3.4% and 5% of the total. The movement in religious and psychiatric therapy to try to change homosexual orientation has totally failed, and needs to be abandoned. Sexual orientation, like left-handedness, endures. Gay people should not be slurred, criminalized, discriminated against, bullied, have to live in fear of



violence, be blamed for societal ills, stigmatized, treated with contempt, dehumanized, or mistreated.

***“It says something really terrible when the least safe place to deal with sexual orientation and identity issues is the Christian family and church.”***

**“If someone is gay, who searches for the Lord and has goodwill, who am I to judge?” - Pope Francis, 2013.**

Among other things, Gushee notes, advocating celibacy for LGBT people who want to be Christians is a non-starter. Celibacy has always been an exceptional and rare calling the Christian Church. Most LGBT Christians are no more committed to celibacy than straight Christians.

He discusses six possible responses:

- Ask no questions.
- “Who are we to judge?”
- Dialogue for discernment.
- Pastoral accommodation.
- Exclusionism.
- Normative reconsideration. (He clearly favors this, calling it “the ultimate fork in the road”).

Gushee notes that the Bible has 66 books, with 1,189 chapters and 31,273 verses. He implies that the passages of Scripture used to condemn homosexuality and exclude LGBT persons from full acceptance and participation in the Christian church are minuscule in number within the opus of the Bible. Skeptics ask how Christians “know” what portions should be assembled for authoritative citation with respect to any modern issue, and how do they “know” how to interpret the verses that are selected. He cautions that a long history of such selection and interpretation on important issues (like Calvinism vs Arminianism, torture, morality of war, slavery, child labor, etc. etc.) has led to “oft-bloody historic interpretive battlegrounds” and

quite wrong interpretation. He thinks that key passages traditionally related to homosexuality have been wrongly interpreted.

He argues that the traditionalist reading of scriptures on LGBT issues follows the formula:

***Genesis 1-2 + Genesis 19 + Leviticus 18:22-20:13 + Judges 19 + Matthew 19:1-12/Mark 10: 2-12 + Romans 1:26-27 + 1 Corinthians 6:9/1 Timothy 1:10 [+Ephesians 5:22-33 and all other biblical references to sex and marriage assuming or depicting male + female] = a clear biblical ban on same-sex relationships. They are derived from 11 of the 1,189 chapters of the Bible.***

He warns, however, that Progressives engaging Traditionalists on these must not simply point to broad themes of liberation, justice or inclusion of the marginalized, make claims of being “prophetic,” or argue for “catching up with the culture,” or not falling “behind the times.” That is to be fundamentally unserious about Scripture, theology, ethics or Christian discipleship. With that warning, he proceeds to interpret differently the Scripture passages summarized in his ‘formula’.

**Genesis 19/Judges 19** These passages introduce the city of Sodom, and the concept of ‘Sodom’, as an evil that is commented upon under this name elsewhere in Scripture. He argues that the events described in Genesis 19, and the concept of ‘Sodom’ itself, are not about homosexuality at all, but about lust for violence that grossly violated traditions of hospitality, and have “nothing to do with the morality of loving, covenantal same-sex relationships.”

**Leviticus 18 and 20** are about many kinds of “abominations” (*toevah*) which have to do with Israel’s call to be set apart from practices of its Canaanite and Egyptian neighbors. They are not about ethics but about “boundary marking.” The death penalty is prescribed for most of them in the Levitical passages. Do Christians seriously support the death penalty for all these “abominations”? Gushee notes that the Jewish tradition itself has considered these Hebrew texts not at their face value but “through a highly sophisticated mediating body of rabbinic tradition, questioning and argumentation.” He is adamant

that we cannot simply quote a passage from Leviticus to settle a matter of Christian morality.

**1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10** use 'vice lists' containing the Greek words *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi* (the former apparently coined by Paul himself and used nowhere else in the New Testament), whose meanings are widely disputed. They have been unfortunately translated as 'homosexual' in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Maybe "sex trafficking" might have caught their sense better. They cannot be conclusive for resolving the LGBT issue.

Of the remaining four passages, the three from **Genesis (two) and Matthew** refer to male/female sexual complementarity, and in traditionalist interpretations are often used to claim that God's designs in creation, marriage, procreation, nurture of children, and construction of family life are immutably confined to male/female pairings. But they are of debatable relevance for the LGBT issue. For example, the core practices outlined in Genesis – mutual care for children, helper-partner companionship and total self-giving - can and do occur among covenanted gay and lesbian couples, and are not confined to heterosexual couples.

**Romans 1:26-27** is "the most widely-cited passage in the entire LGBT debate." Gushee sifts through four major approaches to the passage that question the traditional interpretation of what Paul means, and his purpose in writing it. Drawing on James Brownson's description of "the cruel licentiousness" of the Roman imperial court, Gushee notes a plausible possibility is to suggest the two verses are "a highly evocative, deeply contextual, thinly veiled depiction of the Roman imperial court as a macabre worst-case symbol of Gentile depravity," connected to "Paul's defiance of the Roman Empire in the name of the one Lord, Jesus Christ." Again, our context is so different from this interpretation of Paul's context, that the words are of little relevance to the question of covenanted same-sex relations among devoted Christians.

Does God's design in creation rule out any legitimate same-sex relationships? This is the ultimate 'fork in the road' related to the LGBT issue, and Gushee discusses the following three approaches:

- Treat Old Testament creation accounts (and New Testament allusions thereto) as theological accounts rather than scientific descriptions, making them into a faith/science integration issue, similar to many other such issues with which we have had to deal. On such issues, Christian responses have included treating the biblical story as an ancient fable, throwing out the stubborn facts as godless or impossible, or finding some way to integrate both kinds of knowledge. Gushee clearly advocates the latter.
- Cease relying on ‘God’s purported design for creation’ for sexual ethics, especially in view of the fact that this purported design has been readily misused for other bad things like Nazi-influenced blood/soil/nation ideas, prohibition of racial mixing etc. Gushee notes that Dietrich Bonhoeffer changed his own ideas on this as his confrontation with Nazism in Germany influenced his theological writings.
- Ponder the Genesis 3 account instead, where all are recognized as sinful and depraved, to which Gushee’s preferred response is covenantal relationships for both hetero- and homo- sexuals [he is, by his own description, a “**covenantal-marital sexual ethics guy.**”]

Gushee notes that early Jewish and then Gentile Christians experienced a “**transformative encounter with Jesus**” that led them to make a **huge paradigm leap**. Their old paradigm did not survive their transformative encounter with Jesus. He asks us to consider the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), and their sharp mind-change when the ‘stranger’ they encountered demonstrated in ‘all the scriptures’ the truth concerning Jesus. He considers Peter and his vision of God calling him to no longer relate to Jews and Gentiles as ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’, as his religion had long taught (Acts 10:9-18). He considers the shattering of old ways of reading the Scriptures that readers of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* experience as they have transformative encounters with actual slaves in the narrative of the novel, and see these juxtaposed with traditionalist interpretations of Scripture justifying slavery. He considers God’s transformative Spirit’s action when some early Iberian

Scripture-quoting enslavers and conquistadors had transformative encounters with actual, affected, suffering human beings [e.g. Bartolomé de las Casas]. He considers changes in attitudes to the Jews after the transformative experience of the Holocaust. **In all these examples, “an older or inadequate way of connecting the biblical dots gets shredded by transformative encounters with real human beings.”**

**It is important to note, he says: “Paradigm leaps divide,** at least in their first stages, and those who make them are often accused of abandoning sacred Scripture.”

In concluding, Gushee includes – among other things – the following personal observations:

“The absurdly wonderful Good News that a crucified Jewish carpenter is the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the entire world, and has come to rescue us, was the first such paradigm leap in the history of Christianity. I believe we Christians actually call it “the Gospel.” It transformed the world.”

Drawing on an observation by theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, the first question of ethics is not “What should I do?” but “What is going on here?” In the LGBT debate, Gushee argues **what is going on is “not a narrative of cultural, ecclesial and moral decline, but a narrative of marginalization, resistance and equality, which has “everything to do with treating people the way Christ did.”**

**“The fact that traditionalist Christian teaching produces despair in just about every gay or lesbian person who must endure it is surely very relevant information for the LGBT debate.”**

The challenge is to “stop being a bystander when it [comes] to the suffering of gay and lesbian people.” “I can certainly understand and respect the traditionalist position. But I cannot understand heartless and loveless Christianity.” We need a “constructive justice agenda and not a destructive culture wars agenda.” “It says something that secular folks, unhindered by centuries of destructive Christian interpretations of the Bible, have so often reached full acceptance of their LGBT neighbors more easily than have

Christians.” “I end up apologizing to those who have been hurt by my prior teaching and writing on the LGBT issue.”