

***FAITHFUL AND INCLUSIVE: THE BIBLE, SEXUALITY
AND THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH***

PARTICIPANT GUIDE

Session 1: How United Methodists Interpret Scripture

The goal of this session is to better understand what the Bible says regarding non-heterosexual practices and why, and to consider how Christians committed to upholding Biblical authority can take a non-literal approach to these passages.

Discussion: How people interpret scripture

Question - How do you read the Bible?

- Literally, with authority;
- Serious with authority, but not literal; or,
- Non-authoritatively, like a history book

Discussion: The United Methodist Church and biblical interpretation

United Methodist Book of Discipline (2016):

“The Christian witness, even when grounded in Scripture and mediated by tradition, is ineffectual unless understood and appropriated by the individual. To become our witness, it must make sense in terms of our own reason and experience.” (Paragraph 105. Section 4. Our Theological Task. Under “Theological Guidelines, Sources and Criteria. Page 83.)

“We interpret individual texts in light of their place in the Bible as a whole...as we work with each text, we take into account what we have been able to learn about the original context and intention of that text.” (Paragraph 105. Section 4- Our Theological Task. Under “Theological Guidelines, Sources and Criteria. Page 84.)

“In the name of Jesus Christ we are called to work within our diversity while exercising patience and forbearance with one another. Such patience stems neither from indifference toward truth nor from an indulgent tolerance of error but from an awareness that we know only in part and that none of us is able to search the mysteries of God except by the Spirit of God. We proceed with our theological task, trusting that the Spirit will grant us wisdom to continue our journey with the whole people of God.” (Paragraph 105. Section 4- Our Theological Task. Under “Theological Guidelines, Sources and Criteria.” Subheading: The Present Challenge to Theology in the Church. Page 89.)

Discussion of II Timothy 3:16

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness...” (NRSV)

Question: What do you think Paul meant in saying, “All scripture is inspired by God...?”

Discussion: Prescriptive and descriptive passages of scripture

Deuteronomy 13:6-10 (NRSV)

“If anyone secretly entices you—even if it is your brother, your father’s son or your mother’s son, or your own son or daughter, or the wife you embrace, or your most intimate friend—saying, “Let us go worship other gods,” whom neither you nor your ancestors have known, any of the gods of the peoples that are around you, whether near you or far away from you, from one end of the earth to the other, you must not yield to or heed any such persons. Show them no pity or compassion and do not shield them. But you shall surely kill them; your own hand shall be first against them to execute them, and afterwards the hand of all the people. Stone them to death for trying to turn you away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Leviticus 19:18 (NRSV)

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”

Ephesians 6:5 (NRSV)

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as you obey Christ;”

Proverbs 31:8-9 (NRSV)

“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute.
Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

I Corinthians 14:34 Version (NRSV)

“Women should be silent in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, as the law also says.”

Romans 12:18 (NRSV)

“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”

Questions:

- If you didn’t answer the same way for all of the previous verses, why is that?
- What has gone into forming whether you believe a passage is prescriptive or descriptive?

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Session 2: Old Testament Scriptures

The goal of this session is to study the passages of scripture found in the Old Testament that are commonly used in discussions on homosexuality, and to gain a better understanding of The Holiness Code in Leviticus.

Discussion: Coining of word “homosexual”

Discussion: Genesis passages

Genesis 1:27-28 (NRSV)

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Genesis 19:1-13 (NRSV)

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them, and bowed down with his face to the ground. He said, “Please, my lords, turn aside to your servant’s house and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you can rise early and go on your way.” They said, “No; we will spend the night in the square.” But he urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate. But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house; and they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.” Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. Look, I have two daughters who have not known a man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof.” But they replied, “Stand back!” And they said, “This fellow came here as an alien, and he would play the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them.” Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and came near the door to break it down. But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, both small and great, so that they were unable to find the door. Then the men said to Lot, “Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city—bring them out of the place. For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the LORD, and the LORD has sent us to destroy it.”

Questions:

- What details did you notice in the story?
- Why do you think these details are in the story?

Leviticus 19:33-34 (NRSV)

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

Jeremiah 23:14 (NRSV)

“But in the prophets of Jerusalem I have seen a more shocking thing: they commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one turns from wickedness; all of them have become like Sodom to me and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.”

Ezekiel 16:49 (NRSV)

“This was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.”

Luke 10:8-12 (NRSV)

“Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘the kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.”

Questions:

- After reading the story and learning the context, what do you believe the sin of Sodom was?
- How do you see this story now in comparison to what we view today as a same-sex relationship that is respectful, loving and monogamous?

Discussion: The Holiness Code**Leviticus 11:9-10 (NRSV)**

“These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the rivers, you may eat. But anything in the seas or the rivers that has not fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and of the living creatures that are in the waters, is an abomination to you.”

Leviticus 19:19 (NRSV)

“You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials.”

Leviticus 17-26 offer lengthy and specific descriptions of what purity looks like, none with more weight than the next. Only two verses address homosexual behavior:

Leviticus 18:22 (NRSV)

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.”

Leviticus 20:13 (NRSV)

“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.”

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (NRSV)

“If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. They shall say to the elders of his town, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.” Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. So you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel will hear, and be afraid.”

Exodus 31:14 (NRSV)

“You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people.”

Questions:

- What new understandings are you finding as you listen to these ancient laws?
- How does putting the two verses about homosexuality into the mix of all the laws from 3000 years ago influence your understanding of homosexuality today?

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Session 3: The Influence of Culture on How We Read the Bible

The goal of this session is to understand the influence of culture on how United Methodists read and interpret scripture.

Discussion: How we read and understand the Bible

Question: What religious taboos were a part of your culture growing up?

Question: What were the religious emphases you experienced growing up?

Discussion: The impact and influence of culture on how we read the Bible

Leviticus 20:13 (NIV)

“If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.”

Exodus 20:13 (NRSV)

“You shall not murder.”

John 8:1-11 (NRSV)

“While Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

Discussion: Culture of the time or a command to be followed today?

I Corinthians 11:4-5 (NRSV)

“Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head.”

II Corinthians 9:7 (NRSV)

“Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

I Timothy 5:23 (NRSV)

“Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.”

I Corinthians 11:24-25 (NRSV)

“And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Acts 15:1-31 (NRSV)

“Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders. So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they reported the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the believers. When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all that God had done with them. But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, “It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the Law of Moses.”

The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter. After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “My brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that I should be the one through whom the Gentiles would hear the message of the good news and become believers. And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.

The whole assembly kept silence, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. After they finished speaking, James replied, “My brothers, listen to me. (Peter) has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles, to take from among them a people for his name. This agrees with the words of the prophets, as it is written, ‘After this I will return, and I will rebuild the dwelling of David, which has fallen; from its ruins I will rebuild it, and I will set it up, so that all other peoples may seek the Lord—even all the Gentiles over whom my name has been called. Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago.’ Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every Sabbath in the synagogues.

Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, with the following letter: “The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no

instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, we have decided unanimously to choose representatives and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell. So they were sent off and went down to Antioch. When they gathered the congregation together, they delivered the letter. When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation.”

Questions:

- What issue did the council decide in Acts 15:1-3?
- How did the council come to their decision?
- What were some of the arguments to include the Gentiles without requiring circumcision?
- How did an understanding of culture factor into their thinking?
- How do you think this story relates to the church’s current debate over homosexuality?

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Session 4: New Testament Scriptures

The goal of this session is to gain a better understanding of the context of the time the Apostle Paul lived and to study the passages of scripture found in the New Testament that are commonly used in discussions on homosexuality.

Discussion: Context of the time and life of the Apostle Paul

I Corinthians Chapter 6:9 (NRSV)

“Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers — none of these will inherit the kingdom of God.”

I Corinthians 6:1-11 (NRSV)

“When any of you has a grievance against another, do you dare to take it to court before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters? If you have ordinary cases, then, do you appoint as judges those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another, but a believer goes to court against a believer—and before unbelievers at that?

In fact, to have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud—and believers at that. Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.”

Questions:

- What do you think is Paul’s primary concern in this passage?
- How does a concept of homosexuality that is an orientation or identity, not a choice, fit with the other wrong doings described? (fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers)

Romans 1:26-27 (NRSV)

“For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.”

Romans 1:18-32 (NRSV)

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools; and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree that those who practice such things deserve to die—yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.”

Question: What do you think Paul’s primary concern is in this passage, Romans 1:18-32?

Question: After carefully studying what the apostle Paul says in these passages and thinking about the understandings of this time period, how do you feel about the verses Paul wrote concerning homosexuality?

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Session 5: The Jesus Ethic: What did Christ say?

The goal of this session is to Jesus' life and teachings as an interpretive measure by which we read scripture.

Discussion: How did Jesus encounter scripture?

Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (NRSV)

“If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. ²⁰ They shall say to the elders of his town, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.” ²¹ Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. So you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel will hear, and be afraid.”

Luke 15: 11-32 (NRSV)

Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

Questions:

- Why do you think Jesus tells this story?
- What, if anything, is radical about it?
- What does this story say about Jesus' values?

Exodus 31:14 (NRSV)

“You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people.”

Mark 2:23-28 (NRSV)

“One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields; and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, “Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?” And he said to them, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food? He entered the house of God, when Abiathar was high priest, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions.” Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath; so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.”

Questions:

- How do you interpret Jesus’ last two sentences “The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”?
- What does this say about Jesus’ values?

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 (NRSV)

“Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man’s wife. Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the Lord, and you shall not bring guilt on the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession.”

Mark 10:1-12 (NRSV)

“He left that place and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan. And crowds again gathered around him; and, as was his custom, he again taught them. Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, ‘Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?’ He answered them, ‘What did Moses command you?’ They said, ‘Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.’ But Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.’ Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, ‘Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.’”

Questions:

- What do you think was Jesus’ main concern in this passage?
- What does this passage show us about Jesus’ values?

Leviticus 20:10 (NRSV)

“If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.”

John 8:3-11 (NRSV)

“The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” They

said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Question: What do you think Jesus would say about using scripture to support the unfair treatment of women?

Question: What is Jesus most concerned about?

Instructions:

- Make a list of Jesus values.
- Discuss what you think concerns Jesus the most.

Mark 7:18b-23 (NRSV)

"Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile, since it enters, not the heart but the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) And he said, "It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Discussion: Peter's Vision in Joppa

Acts 10 (NRSV)

"In Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion of the Italian Cohort, as it was called. He was a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people and prayed constantly to God. One afternoon at about three o'clock he had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him, "Cornelius." He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it, Lord?" He answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God. Now send men to Joppa for a certain Simon who is called Peter; he is lodging with Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the seaside." When the angel who spoke to him had left, he called two of his slaves and a devout soldier from the ranks of those who served him, and after telling them everything, he sent them to Joppa.

About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon's house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was

still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Look, three men are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.” So Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for; what is the reason for your coming?” They answered, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” So Peter invited them in and gave them lodging.

The next day he got up and went with them, and some of the believers from Joppa accompanied him. The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. On Peter’s arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, “Get up, Peter; kill and eat.” But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.” The voice said to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not call profane.” This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven.

Now while Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision that he had seen, suddenly the men sent by Cornelius appeared. They were asking for Simon’s house and were standing by the gate. They called out to ask whether Simon, who was called Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Look, threemen are searching for you. Now get up, go down, and go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them.” So Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for; what is the. But Peter made him get up, saying, “Stand up; I am only a mortal.” And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them, “You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?”

Cornelius replied, “Four days ago at this very hour, at three o’clock, I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling clothes stood before me. He said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon, who is called Peter; he is staying in the home of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ Therefore I sent for you immediately, and you have been kind enough to come. So now all of us are here in the presence of God to listen to all that the Lord has commanded you to say.”

Then Peter began to speak to them: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.”

***FAITHFUL AND INCLUSIVE: THE BIBLE, SEXUALITY
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Session 6: Where Does the United Methodist Church Go from Here?

The goal of this session is to understand the current crisis in the United Methodist Church and to determine how we might choose to respond.

Book of Discipline:

Paragraph 161.G (excerpt):

The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.

Paragraph 304.3 (excerpt):

While persons set apart by the Church for ordained ministry are subject to all the frailties of the human condition and the pressures of society, they are required to maintain the highest standards of holy living in the world. The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church

Paragraph 341.6 (excerpt):

Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches.

Paragraph 161.G (excerpt)

“All persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status, or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured and to be protected against violence.”

Question: What comes to mind when you hear these statements?

Instruction: Discuss your positions as you are comfortable in your group.

- **Traditional, and not compatible:** “No” to gay clergy, same-sex weddings for the entire denomination.
- **Traditional and compatible:** “No” to gay clergy and same-sex weddings for your congregation but “ok” for other UM churches to have them.
- **Progressive and compatible:** “Yes” to gay clergy and same-sex weddings for your church but “ok” for other UM churches to say “No” to them.
- **Progressive, and not compatible:** “Yes” to gay clergy and same-sex weddings for the entire denomination.

Instruction: Discuss the following ideas and how you are feeling toward these choices:

1. Stay in the denomination and work toward unanimity, either around the current Traditional Plan or toward a more inclusive, open church so that every United Methodist Church practices are the same.
2. If you are a Traditionalist, start a new denomination and let the centrists and progressives keep the denomination.
3. If you are more progressive, start a new denomination and let the Traditionalists keep the denomination.
4. Fold up the United Methodist Church and start new branches of Methodism.

Final Discussion: How can you make a difference?

- Pray for your congregation, the delegates and for the entire United Methodist Church.
- If you would be willing to be sort of a “market group” to respond to ideas, send your name, address, email, and cell phone information to faithful@stlukesumc.com
- For additional resources: <http://www.umc.org/resources/umns-subscription-form>

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Additional Resources

Below are links to important resources you might wish to consider as you continue your learning on this topic.

Comparison of Proposals to General Conference 2020

This summary compares proposals from various groups, in alphabetical order, about the structure of The UMC. It does not include proposals from individuals. Further details are in the documents and legislation. All proposals will be open for amendments at General Conference and may be subject to Judicial Council review. Updated on 12/6/19. This chart includes The Indianapolis Plan, the UMForward Plan, the UMCNext Plan and the Connectional Table proposal for a U.S. Regional Conference. – United Methodist News Service

<https://cdnsc.umc.org/-/media/umc-media/2019/12/06/18/37/General-Conference-UMC-Plans-Chart-V4>

Here are online documents for the various plans coming to General Conference:

The Indianapolis Plan for Amicable Separation

<https://indyplanumc.org>

UMForward Plan

www.um-forward.org/the-new-plan

UMC Next Generation Legislative Overview

<https://umcnext.com/legislation/>

PowerPoint Presentation to share the UMCNext Mission and Commitments

<https://umcnext.com/tools-to-share-the-umcnext-mission-and-commitments/>

U.S. Regional Conference proposal from the United Methodist Connectional Table

<https://www.umc.org/en/content/connectional-tables-us-regional-conference-legislation-now-available>

Official UMC General Conference 2020 website

<https://resourceumc.org/en/churchwide/general-conference-2020>

Questions to guide further discussion:

1. Which plan do you feel would be most appropriate for The United Methodist Church at this time in its history? Why?
2. How would each of these plans impact your congregation?
3. Would any of these plans strengthen your congregation? What are your thoughts?