Reclaiming Scripture:

Reading the Bible with Context, Courage, and Compassion

Welcome

This learning resource was created for people who care deeply about Scripture - and who also care deeply about the lives and dignity of Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people.
You may be:

- queer, and carrying wounds from how the Bible has been used against you
- an ally, wanting clearer language and confidence
- a skeptic, curious but cautious
- clergy or church leaders, navigating pastoral responsibility
- or someone who has simply heard *"the Bible says…"* and wants to understand what that really means

Wherever you are coming from, you are welcome here.
This is not a debate space.
It is a learning space - grounded in honesty, care, and a desire for faith that is life-giving rather than harmful.

Why This Course Exists

A small number of biblical passages have been repeatedly used to shame, exclude, and harm Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people. These verses are often called "clobber passages."
They have been:

- taken out of historical and cultural context
- reduced to proof-texts
- treated as timeless verdicts rather than ancient writings
- used to silence real human stories

For many, this misuse of Scripture has caused:

- spiritual trauma
- family rejection
- loss of faith or community
- fear, shame, and isolation

This course exists to say clearly: the harm did not come from Scripture itself - it came from how Scripture was **used and read.**

What This Course Is (and Is Not)

This course *is*:

- an exploration of how we read the Bible
- grounded in historical context and careful scholarship
- attentive to real human lives and lived experience
- shaped by Jesus' call to love, justice, and mercy
- committed to healing and repair

This course is *not*:

- an attack on the Bible
- a rejection of faith
- a demand that everyone agree
- a space for shaming or debating identities

You do not need to arrive with all the answers. You only need to arrive willing to learn.

How We Will Read the Bible Together

Throughout this resource, we will practice what we'll call faithful reading - that is:

- reading passages in their historical and cultural context
- paying attention to language, audience, and purpose
- resisting proof-texting and oversimplification
- asking what a text *meant then* before deciding what it might mean *now*
- listening for interpretations that bear good fruit: love, dignity, justice, and freedom

Scholars often call this ***hermeneutics***.
Here, we'll simply call it how we read the Bible - and why it matters.

A Trauma-Aware Invitation

For some learners, this material may stir:

- grief
- anger
- relief
- confusion
- or long-buried pain

If that happens, please know:

- your responses are valid
- you are not alone
- you are free to pause, step away, or return later

This resource honours both learning and healing.

How to Use This Resource

Each session includes:

- a short teaching section
- clear explanations of context
- sidebars that highlight key ideas or common misuses
- reflection questions
- and brief, one-sentence responses to help you speak clearly when these passages come up

You may move through this material:

- on your own
- with a small group

- or as part of a facilitated course

Go at the pace that feels right for you.

🧭 How to Read the Symbols

Throughout this resource, you'll notice portions with small symbols in the margin. These sidebars are designed to support different kinds of learning and reflection.
They are not distractions - they are guides.
Here's what each symbol means:

🔎 **Look Closer**

These sidebars highlight:

- key ideas
- interpretive tools
- common misunderstandings

They invite you to slow down and notice something important about how a text is being read.

⚠️ **Use with Care**

These sidebars name:

- common misuses of Scripture
- patterns that have caused harm
- places where the Bible has been weaponized

They signal moments where extra care, context, and humility are needed.

🌱 **Why This Matters**

These sidebars connect Scripture to:

- real human lives
- pastoral and emotional impact
- experiences of harm, healing, or hope

They acknowledge that interpretation is never abstract - it always affects people.

✨ **Remember This**

These sidebars offer:

- short, memorable insights
- one-sentence truths
- language you can carry into conversations

They are anchors - ideas worth holding onto as you move through the course.
You don't need to read every sidebar all at once.
You're invited to engage with them at your own pace, returning to them as needed.
They are here to support learning, not to overwhelm it.

What This Series Covers

This learning resource is organized into six sessions.
Each session builds on the one before it, but you are welcome to move through them at your own pace.

Session 1 - How Scripture Gets Used (and Misused)

Why the way we read the Bible matters
We begin by exploring:

- how Scripture has been used both to heal and to harm
- the difference between careful reading and proof-texting
- why context, humility, and lived experience matter
- and how harmful readings have shaped Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ lives

This session lays the foundation for everything that follows.

Session 2 - Genesis 19: Sodom, Violence, and Inhospitality

What the story actually condemns - and what it does not
We look closely at:

- the story of Sodom as a narrative about violence and power
- ancient understandings of hospitality
- how Scripture itself interprets the sin of Sodom
- and how this passage became wrongly associated with homosexuality

Session 3 - Leviticus 18 & 20: Holiness, Purity, and Context

Why ancient purity laws are not modern sexual ethics
This session explores:

- the Holiness Code and its cultural world
- ancient ideas about gender, purity, and boundaries
- why Christians no longer live under these laws
- and how selective literalism has caused harm

Session 4 - Romans 1: Paul, Idolatry, and Exploitation

What Paul is critiquing - and what he is not
We examine:

- Paul's rhetorical strategy in Romans
- first-century sexual practices and power dynamics
- how Romans 1 must be read alongside Romans 2
- and why this passage does not describe loving same-sex relationships

Session 5 - 1 Corinthians 6 & 1 Timothy 1: Translation Matters

What the Greek actually says - and why it matters
This session focuses on:

- the meaning of the Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*
- how mistranslations entered modern Bibles
- the historical impact of the 1946 RSV translation
- and how accurate translation restores dignity and clarity

Session 6 - Reading Scripture Through Love and Justice

Moving beyond defense into faithful affirmation
We conclude by:

- gathering the insights from all sessions
- centring Jesus' ethic of love and justice
- reflecting on the fruits of interpretation
- and offering language for compassionate, confident conversations

🌱 A Note on Pace

You don't need to complete this series quickly.
Some sessions may feel easier; others may stir strong emotions.
You are invited to:

- pause when needed
- return to sections that feel important
- and take what is helpful for your own journey

A Guiding Principle

We offer this resource in the spirit of humility and hope, trusting that Scripture, when read with care and compassion, can become a place of truth, freedom, and life.

Session 1 - How Scripture Gets Used (and Misused)

Why the Way We Read the Bible Matters

Session Purpose

Before we look at any specific passages, we need to pause and ask a more foundational question:
How do we read the Bible - and what happens when it's read poorly?
Many of the harms done to Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people have not come from *what* the Bible says, but from *how* it has been read, quoted, and applied.
This session gives us shared tools and language so that we can move through the rest of the course with clarity and care.

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1. The Bible Is Not a Rulebook

The Bible is:

- a library, not a single book
- written over centuries
- shaped by multiple cultures, languages, and social systems
- full of poetry, law, letters, stories, parables, and argument

Treating the Bible as a flat list of rules:

- ignores genre
- erases context
- oversimplifies complex texts
- and often turns Scripture into a weapon

Faithful reading begins by respecting the Bible for what it actually is.

🔎 Look Closer

This session helps us to notice how interpretation shapes meaning. When verses are lifted out of context and treated as final verdicts, Scripture becomes a tool of control rather than a source of wisdom.

"The Bible is clear."

Every reading of Scripture involves:

- choices
- assumptions
- interpretation

There is no such thing as a "plain" reading - **only unexamined readings**.

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2. Why Certain Verses Get Used Against Certain People

Across history, Scripture has been selectively used to control or exclude groups seen as "different" or "threatening."

This has included:

- enslaved people
- women
- Indigenous peoples
- interracial couples
- and Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ communities

In each case:

- a small number of verses were isolated
- context was ignored
- lived experience was dismissed
- and harm was justified as "faithfulness"

This pattern matters, because it helps us recognize that what we are examining is not new - and **not unique to Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people**.

⚠️ Use with Care

When Scripture is used primarily to:

- police bodies
- enforce conformity
- or silence lived experience

…it is often being read in service of power, not faith.

These patterns of reading have often been used to justify exclusion and shame – especially toward Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people. When interpretation ignores context and lived experience, it can cause real spiritual harm.

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3. Two Ways of Reading the Bible

There are many ways to describe this, but for our purposes we'll name two:

Reading *Into* the Text

This happens when:

- we begin with a belief or fear
- search Scripture to support it
- quote verses without context
- and treat them as final verdicts

This approach often shows up as proof-texting.

Reading *Out of* the Text

This happens when we:

- ask what the text meant in its own time
- consider language, culture, and audience
- read passages in conversation with the rest of Scripture
- and test interpretations by their fruit

This approach requires patience and humility - but it leads to deeper understanding.

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4. Proof-Texting and Shame

Proof-texting may feel confident, but its impact is often destructive.

When used against Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people, proof-texting has:

- reduced whole lives to a verse
- treated identity as disobedience
- framed people as problems to be solved
- and cut off curiosity, compassion, and relationship

This is not neutral interpretation.

It is a form of spiritual harm.

Naming this clearly is part of the healing work.

🌱 Why This Matters

For many queer people, Scripture was not merely discussed – it was used to silence, define, or erase them. Naming this honestly opens space for healing and for safer, more truthful engagement with the Bible.

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5. A Different Invitation

This course invites us into a different posture:

- to slow down
- to ask better questions
- to notice where interpretation has caused harm
- and to learn how Scripture can be read in ways that bring life

We are not here to “win arguments.”

We are here to practice faithful reading - reading that is:

- honest
- contextual
- compassionate

- and attentive to real human lives

✨ Remember This

"Proof-texting ends conversations; careful reading opens them."

Reflection Questions

- When have you encountered Scripture used as a conversation-ender rather than an invitation to learn?
- What emotions arise when you think about how certain verses have been used against Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people?
- What would it look like for Scripture to feel safer, not scarier?

You may want to jot down notes or simply sit with these questions.

🌱 Something to Take Away

One of the most important insights from this session is this:
Scripture itself is not the source of harm - harmful reading practices are.
As you move forward, you might:

- notice when a verse is used as a conversation-ender
- gently ask what context has been left out
- remember that faithful reading creates space for dignity and learning

Take what is helpful.
Leave what is not.

Looking Ahead

Now that we've named:

- how Scripture can be misused
- why proof-texting is harmful
- and why context matters

We're ready to begin examining specific passages.
In Session 2, we'll look at Genesis 19 - one of the most frequently misused stories in the Bible - and discover what the text actually addresses when read with care.

Session 2 - Genesis 19

Sodom, Violence, and the Cost of Misreading Scripture

Session Purpose

Genesis 19 is one of the most frequently cited passages used to condemn Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people - and one of the most consistently misread.
In this session, we will:

- read the story carefully, not selectively

- examine its historical and cultural world
- listen to how Scripture itself interprets the story
- and name how and why this text became weaponized

Our goal is not to sanitize the story - it is violent and disturbing - **but to tell the truth about what it is actually about.**

"The two messengers arrived at Sodom in the evening and found Lot sitting by the city gate. When he saw them, he rose to meet them, then bowed so deeply that he touched the ground, saying, "Please, honorable travelers, come to your faithful one's house. Wash your feet, and refresh yourselves and spend the night. You can continue your journey in the morning."
"No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."
But Lot urged them so strongly that they agreed to come to his house. Lot prepared a meal for them, baking unleavened bread, which they ate
Before they had retired to the sleeping quarters, the men of Sodom surrounded the house, young and old, down to the last man in town, yelling to Lot, "Where are these travelers who entered your house today? Bring them out to us, and let us 'know' them too!"
Lot went out before the crowd, closing the door behind him, and pleaded with them, saying, "No friends, don't do such a wicked thing. Look, I have two young daughters who are virgins – take them and do whatever you want with them, but do nothing to these travelers, for they are enjoying the protection of my hospitality."
But the crowd yelled, "Stand aside!" They said, "This fellow Lot came into our community as a foreigner, and now he would play the judge. We will treat him worse than his visitors!" They crowded around Lot and pressed close in order to break down the door. But the travelers reached out and pulled Lot inside, shutting the door behind him.
Then all the men who were at the door, great and small, were blinded by a dazzling light so that they were unable to find the entrance.
Then the two travelers asked Lot, "Do you have anyone else here – daughters, sons, their spouses, or anyone else in the city? Get out of this place, for we are about to destroy it. The clamor against its people is terrible before YHWH, who sent us to destroy it."
So Lot went to his future sons-in-law, who were betrothed to his daughters, and said, "Get out of the city, for YHWH is about to destroy it!" But the young men treated the warning as a jest.
When the dawn broke, the travelers urged Lot, "Come, flee with your spouse and your two daughters, or you will be swept away in the punishment of Sodom." Lot hesitated, but because YHWH was merciful, the travelers took Lot, his spouse, and their two daughters by the hand and led them out and left then outside the city.
When they were safely away from the city, the travelers told them, "Now, run for your lives! Don't look back or stop anywhere on the plain. Head for the hills, or you will all be swept away."
"No, please," Lot rejoined, "you have already shown us, your faithful ones, great kindness by intervening to save our lives. But we cannot flee to the hills in time to keep disaster from overtaking us, and so we will die. Look, this town ahead is near enough to escape to, and it's so tiny. Let us take refuge there – see how tiny it is? – so that our lives can be spared."
The travelers replied, "This favor is granted. The town you speak of will be spared. Now hurry! Nothing can happen until all of you are safe." This is why the town is known as Zoar – "Tiny".
The sun was rising over the land by the time Lot's family reached Zoar. Then YHWH rained brimstone and fire down from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah, destroying those cities and the whole plain, with all the inhabitants of the towns, and everything that grew on the land.
Lot's spouse was behind him, and she stopped and looked back – and became a pillar of salt.
Early the next morning Abraham went out to the place where he had stood in YHWH's presence. As he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and the whole region of the plain, he saw dense smoke over the land, rising like smoke from a furnace.
And so it was that God, in destroying the cities of the plain, was yet mindful of Sarah and Abraham by rescuing Lot and his family from the destruction of the place where Lot's family had lived.
GENESIS 19: 1-29

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1. Reading the Story as a Story

Genesis 19 is a narrative, not a law or teaching on sexual ethics.
It tells us:

- who is present
- what happens
- how characters behave
- and how God responds

Before asking what the story "means," we begin by asking:

- what is happening here?

A brief narrative summary

Two visitors arrive in Sodom.
Lot insists they stay under his roof.
A mob surrounds the house and demands the visitors be handed over to be assaulted.
Lot refuses and attempts to protect them.
The situation escalates into violence.
This is not a story about desire or attraction.
It is a story about threat, power, and domination.

🔎 Look Closer

This story reflects an ancient world where sexual violence communicated dominance and humiliation. Recognizing this helps us to see that the concern here is power and injustice – not sexual orientation.

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2. Hospitality as a Sacred Obligation

To understand this story, we must understand hospitality in the ancient Near East.
Hospitality was not politeness.
It was a moral obligation - especially toward strangers.
To violate hospitality was to:

- reject communal responsibility
- dishonour God
- and place the vulnerable at risk

Lot's insistence on sheltering the visitors reflects this cultural value, even though the story portrays him as deeply flawed.

⚠️ Use with Care

Modern readers often recoil at Lot's actions - and rightly so.
But this passage has often been misread as a condemnation of Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people. When separated from its historical context and from Ezekial's interpretation, it becomes a weapon rather than a witness to justice.

3. The Sin of Sodom: Scripture Interprets Scripture

One of the most important interpretive principles in this course is this:
When the Bible explains itself, we listen.
Later biblical texts explicitly name the sin of Sodom.

Ezekiel 16:49

"This was the sin of your sister Sodom: pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy."

Notably absent:

- any reference to same-sex relationships
- any reference to consensual sexual behavior

Instead, the prophet names:

- arrogance
- injustice
- neglect of the vulnerable

🔎 Look Closer

If Genesis 19 were about homosexuality, Ezekiel's interpretation would make no sense.
Instead, Ezekiel confirms what the story already shows: systemic injustice and violence.

4. A Parallel Story: Judges 19

Judges 19 repeats the same narrative pattern:

- strangers
- hospitality
- a violent mob
- sexual threat
- communal collapse

The purpose of this parallel is clear: **this is a story type, not a sexual morality lesson**.
Judges 19 is universally recognized as **a condemnation of social breakdown - not sexuality.**

⚠️ Use with Care

When interpreters label Genesis 19 as "about homosexuality" but do not apply the same reading to Judges 19, they are not being consistent - they are being selective.

5. How This Passage Became a Weapon

The association of Sodom with homosexuality:

- did not originate in Genesis
- developed later through cultural, legal, and theological shifts
- was reinforced by medieval moral codes
- eventually hardened into modern prejudice

By the time "sodomy" became a legal term, it no longer reflected the biblical story at all.

🌱 Why This Matters

Queer people have been blamed for societal collapse because this story was turned against them – **even though the text condemns abuse of power and neglect of the vulnerable, not queer identity or love.**
This reversal has caused profound harm.

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6. A Faithful Reading

When Genesis 19 is read carefully:

- the central sin is violence, not orientation
- the issue is inhospitality, not love
- the concern is collective injustice, not private identity

The story challenges communities - not individuals - to ask:

- How do we treat the vulnerable?
- How do we respond to outsiders?
- What happens when fear turns into violence?

✨ Remember This

Genesis 19 condemns violence, injustice and inhospitality - not Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people.

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7. Clobber Counterpoint

"Sodom was destroyed for violence and inhospitality, not homosexuality - Scripture itself says so in Ezekiel 16:49."

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8. Reflection Questions

- What changes when you read Genesis 19 as a story about violence rather than sexuality?
- How does Ezekiel's interpretation challenge what you may have been taught?
- Where do you see echoes of Sodom's real sin - pride, neglect, abuse of power - in the modern world?

🌱 Something to Take Away

Genesis 19 has often been used to shame Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people.
But when read carefully, it does something very different.
It warns communities about what happens when fear, power, and neglect of the vulnerable are allowed to grow unchecked.
As you move forward, you might carry this question with you:

Who is this text really challenging - and who has it been wrongly used against?
You are invited to hold this insight gently and return to it when needed.

Looking Ahead

In Session 3, we turn to Leviticus 18 and 20, exploring purity laws, ancient understandings of holiness, and why these verses cannot be applied to modern Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ lives

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Session 3 - Leviticus 18 & 20

Holiness, Purity, and Why These Verses Don't Speak About Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ Lives

Session Purpose

Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are two of the most commonly quoted verses used against Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people. For many, they were the first verses ever used to shame or condemn them.
In this session, we will:

- explore what **holiness and purity** meant in the ancient Israelite world
- distinguish **ritual boundaries** from **moral ethics**
- examine why these verses cannot be applied to modern understandings of sex, gender, or orientation
- and name how selective literalism has caused deep harm

Our goal is not to dismiss Leviticus - but to **respect it enough to read it in its own world**.

"Do not lie with a person of the same sex in the same way you as you would lie with a person of the opposite sex; this is detestable."
LEVITICUS 18: 22

"If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have done a detestable thing; they must be put to death, and their blood will be on their own heads."
LEVITICUS 20: 13

1. What Is the Holiness Code?

Leviticus 17 - 26 is often called the **Holiness Code**.
It was written to shape Israel into a distinct community, set apart from neighbouring cultures.
Holiness in this context meant:

- separation
- community identity
- ritual order
- symbolic boundaries

These laws functioned as **identity markers**, not universal moral statements for all people in all times.

🔎 Look Closer - Different Kinds of Laws

These verses come from an ancient purity system concerned with ritual order, symbolic boundaries, and community identity. They were never written as universal sexual ethics for all times and cultures.
Leviticus contains:

- ritual / purity laws (food, fabric, bodily fluids, sacrifice)
- social boundary laws (agriculture, hair, grooming, tattoos)
- ethical teachings (care for the poor, justice, honesty)

Christians already do not follow most ritual and boundary laws - and we don't believe that means we are disobedient or impure.

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2. Purity, Gender, and Ancient Worldviews

The ancient Israelite worldview assumed:

- **rigid gender hierarchy**
- a symbolic order in which men occupied higher social status
- male bodies were associated with honour and dominance
- female bodies were associated with vulnerability and household space

Acts that "blurred" gender status were seen as ritual disorder - not sexual identity.
The language in Leviticus 18:22 ("as with a woman") reflects **this symbolic system**, not modern ideas of orientation, love, or relationship.

⚠️ Use with Care

These laws have often been applied selectively to Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people, while other purity rules from the same section are ignored. To read these verses as condemning Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people is to **drag an ancient purity worldview into a modern context** where it no longer applies.
This is not consistency.
It is **selective enforcement** and it reinforces shame rather than truth.

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3. What These Verses Do - and Do Not - Address

These verses address:

- ritual boundaries
- symbolic gender hierarchy
- Israel's separation from surrounding nations

They do **not** address:

- sexual orientation
- mutual, loving same-sex relationships
- identity, dignity, or covenant partnership

- modern understandings of gender or embodiment

To apply them to Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people requires **reading something into the text that is not there**.

🔎 Look Closer - Orientation Did Not Exist as a Concept

Ancient cultures did not understand sexuality in terms of:

- identity
- lifelong orientation
- relational mutuality

Sex was primarily about:

- power
- status
- reproduction
- inheritance

Reading modern categories back into Leviticus is a form of **eisegesis**, not faithful interpretation.

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4. Why Christians Don't Live Under These Laws

Within the New Testament and early Church, followers of Jesus came to understand that **Gentile Christians were not bound by Torah purity laws** (Acts 10–15).

Jesus himself reframed holiness:

- from ritual boundary
- to justice, compassion, and love (see Mark 7, Matthew 22)

Holiness becomes **ethical and relational**, not ritual and restrictive.

We do not return to purity codes selectively to discipline one group of people.

🌱 Why This Matters

Many Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people were taught that **one or two verses from Leviticus applied uniquely to them**, defining their worth and morality, while dozens of other purity rules were quietly ignored.

This double-standard has created shame, confusion, and deep spiritual harm.

Understanding the cultural world of Leviticus restores dignity, clarity, and honesty to the conversation. **Naming inconsistency opens space for healing.**

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5. How These Verses Became Clobber Texts

Over centuries:

- purity logic merged with patriarchal moral systems
- later interpreters sexualized the text beyond its original scope
- colonial and legal systems hardened these readings into **punitive doctrine**

Modern homophobia is not emerging from Leviticus - it has been **read into Leviticus**.

⚠️ Use with Care - A Common Pattern

When Scripture is used to control bodies and enforce conformity - especially for marginalized people - it is often serving **power, not love**.

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6. A Faithful Reading

A careful, contextual reading reveals:

- The Holiness Code belongs to a **specific time, place, and symbolic world**
- These verses cannot be lifted out and turned into universal moral law
- They do not speak to Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ identity or loving relationships

Christian ethics are shaped by **Jesus, justice, and compassion - not ritual purity**
This interpretation does not weaken Scripture.
It **honours it truthfully**.

✨ Remember This

Leviticus 18 and 20 reflect an ancient purity system - not modern sexual ethics, and not Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ lives.

Clobber Counterpoint

“These Leviticus verses come from an ancient purity code - and Christians already don’t live under those laws. **They aren’t about sexual orientation or loving relationships.”**

Reflection Questions

- What assumptions about Leviticus did you grow up with?
- How does understanding purity and symbolism change how you read these verses?
- Where have you seen these verses applied selectively? How did that affect people?

You may choose to journal, discuss, or simply sit with what arises.

🌱 Something to Take Away

One of the most important insights from this session is this:
Purity codes were never meant to define identity or condemn love.
They belonged to a symbolic world that Christians no longer inhabit.
As you move forward, you might notice:

- when these verses are quoted without context
- how easily ritual language becomes moral judgment
- and how freeing it is to read Scripture with honesty and compassion

Take what is helpful.
Leave what harms.
You are allowed to come back to this when you need to.

Looking Ahead

In **Session 4**, we turn to **Romans 1** - exploring Paul's world, power dynamics in Greco-Roman sexuality, and why this passage critiques **idolatry and exploitation**, not queer love.

Session 4 - Romans 1:26–27

Paul, Idolatry, Power, and Why This Passage Does Not Describe Queer Love

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Session Purpose

Romans 1:26–27 is one of the most frequently quoted New Testament passages used against Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people. For many, it has carried deep spiritual fear and shame.
In this session, we will:

- place Romans 1 back inside Paul's full argument
- explore Greco-Roman understandings of sexuality, power, and status
- distinguish lust, excess, and exploitation from mutual, loving relationships
- and show how Romans 1 has been misused when read in isolation

Our goal is not to "explain away" the text, but to read it honestly in the world Paul knew.

"That is why God turned them over to their demeaning passions. Their women went from having sexual relations that were natural for them to relations that were contrary to their own natures. And their men who would have naturally had sexual relations with women abandoned those ways and became consumed with burning passions for one another. Thus both sexes acted against their nature and received in their own personalities the consequences of their error."
ROMANS 1: 26 – 27

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1. Romans 1 Is Part of a Larger Argument

Romans is not a list of moral statements - it is a carefully structured theological argument.
In Romans 1, Paul describes a world he sees as turned inward on itself:

- people abandon gratitude
- idolatry takes root
- desire becomes distorted by self-indulgence and status

His language is deliberately dramatic - and then he does something surprising.
At the start of Romans 2, Paul turns the mirror around:
"Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others." (Romans 2:1)
Romans 1 sets up a rhetorical trap.
Romans 2 reveals its purpose: **to confront judgmentalism and moral superiority.**

🔎 Look Closer - Read 1 and 2 Together

Romans 1 is not Paul's "final word" on morality.
It functions as part of a larger rhetorical movement that turns in Romans 2. Paul is describing idolatry, excess, and exploitative desire in his own cultural world – not modern queer

relationships - a setup, preparing the ground for his declaration that all people stand on equal ground before God, and no one may boast over others.

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2. What Paul Knew - and Didn't Know - About Sexuality

Paul did not have access to modern concepts such as:

- sexual orientation
- lifelong mutual same-sex partnership
- identity language around sexuality or gender

In the Greco-Roman world, same-sex activity was commonly associated with:

- status hierarchy
- older men and adolescent boys
- masters and enslaved persons
- ritual and elite excess

Sex was frequently about power, dominance, display, and social rank - **not mutual relationship or covenantal love.**

⚠️ Use with Care

If we assume Paul was describing modern queer relationships, we are projecting something onto the text that did not exist in his cultural world. When this passage is read in isolation or applied to Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people without context, it strengthens judgement and fear, rather than humility and compassion – the opposite of Paul's intention.
This is not faithful reading - it is historical distortion.

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3. "Against Nature" - What Does That Mean?

Paul describes people who "exchanged natural relations."
In Paul's world, "natural" did not mean:

- "heterosexual only"
- a universal biological rule
- a timeless moral category

It meant in keeping with one's place, role, or customary behaviour in society.
For Paul, "unnatural" behaviour pointed to excess, status-display, or self-indulgent desire - **not orientation**.

🔎 Look Closer - Ethics of Excess

The acts Paul names are bound to a critique of:

- idolatry
- indulgence without restraint
- pleasure sought through hierarchy and exploitation

This is a very different reality from mutual, loving, adult same-sex relationships.

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4. The Real Focus: Idolatry, Exploitation, and Dehumanizing Desire

Romans 1 links distorted desire with idolatry - not with identity.
Paul is describing a world where:

- desire is disconnected from responsibility
- pleasure is pursued through dominance
- people are treated as objects

The sin here is not that people love differently.
The sin is that people use one another.

🌱 Why This Matters

Many Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people have been told that Paul was condemning them - their love, their relationships, their very capacity for intimacy.
A careful reading shows that **Paul is condemning exploitation, excess, and idolatry - not queer identity or covenantal love**.

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5. How This Passage Became a Clobber Text

Over time:

- later interpreters collapsed all same-sex behaviour into one category
- modern concepts of "orientation" were read backward into the text
- translations and sermons simplified Paul's rhetoric into a universal rule
- the passage was separated from Romans 2

This flattening turned Romans 1 from a critique of pride and injustice into a weapon used to shame and exclude.

⚠️ Use with Care - A Pattern to Notice

When Scripture is used to elevate one group as morally righteous while condemning another - especially those already marginalized - we have likely stepped outside Paul's intent.

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6. A Faithful Reading

A contextual, responsible reading reveals that:

- Romans 1 describes idolatry, excess, and exploitative sexuality tied to status and power
- Paul is not talking about loving, mutual same-sex relationships - he did not know such a framework
- The rhetorical turning point is Romans 2:1, where judgment itself is exposed as sin
- The passage invites humility, not condemnation

This reading does not weaken Paul - it takes him seriously on his own terms.

✨ Remember This

Romans 1 critiques idolatry, exploitation, and dehumanizing desire - not loving queer relationships.

Clobber Counterpoint

"Romans 1 isn't about sexual orientation - it's about idolatry, excess, and exploitative sexuality in Paul's world. And Paul's real point lands in Romans 2: **'You who judge have no excuse.'"**

Reflection Questions

- How does reading Romans 1 alongside Romans 2 change how you understand the passage?
- What differences do you notice between Paul's world and modern understandings of sexuality and relationship?
- Where have you seen this passage used to shame people instead of inviting humility and compassion?

You may wish to reflect silently, write, or discuss with others.

🌱 Something to Take Away

One of the most important insights from this session is this:
Romans 1 is not a verdict on Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ identity.
It is a warning about what happens when desire disconnects from love, responsibility, and human dignity - and when judgment replaces humility.
As you move forward, you might notice:

- when this passage is quoted without Romans 2
- when "difference" is treated as moral failure
- and how much more freeing it is to read Scripture with honesty and compassion

Hold what is helpful.
Set down what harms.
You are welcome to return to this insight whenever you need to.

Looking Ahead

In Session 5, we turn to 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 - exploring the Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, how mistranslation shaped modern belief, and how careful language can restore clarity and dignity.

Session 5 - 1 Corinthians 6 & 1 Timothy 1

Translation, Power, and What the Words malakoi and arsenokoitai Actually Mean

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Session Purpose

Two New Testament passages - 1 Corinthians 6:9 - 10 and 1 Timothy 1:10 - are often quoted to claim that "the Bible condemns homosexuals."
But those English words come from complex, uncertain Greek terms that do not neatly map onto modern concepts of sexuality or orientation.
In this session, we will:

- explore what the Greek words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* likely meant in their original context
- see how translation and interpretation became entangled
- trace how a 1946 translation decision reshaped modern theology
- and consider how mistranslation has caused deep and lasting harm

Our goal is not to manipulate language - but to honour it carefully and truthfully.

"Don't you realize that the unholy will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit God's kingdom."
1 CORINTHIANS 6: 9 – 10

We know that the law is good if it is used properly. 9 We also know that the law isn't made for godly people. It is made for those who break the law. It is for those who refuse to obey. It is for ungodly and sinful people. It is for those who aren't holy and who don't believe. It is for those who kill their fathers or mothers. It is for murderers. 10 It is for those who commit sexual sins. It is for those who commit homosexual acts. It is for people who buy and sell slaves. It is for liars. It is for people who tell lies in court. It is for those who are a witness to things that aren't true. And it is for anything else that is the opposite of true teaching. 11 True teaching agrees with the good news about the glory of the blessed God. He trusted me with that good news.
1 TIMOTHY 1: 8 – 11

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1. Why Language Matters in Scripture

The New Testament was written in Koine Greek - a language with meanings shaped by culture, metaphor, social structure, and lived experience.
When words are translated:

- choices are made
- assumptions are introduced
- meanings shift across languages and centuries

Faithful reading means asking:
"What might this word have meant in its original world?" before deciding what it might mean now.

🔎 Look Closer

The words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* come from complex ancient moral and economic contexts. They describe forms of exploitation and misuse of others, not modern categories and understandings of sexual orientation.

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2. The Word *malakoi* - "Soft"

The Greek word *malakoi* literally means soft, pliable, delicate.
In ancient moral discourse, it was used to describe:

- people seen as undisciplined or self-indulgent
- men perceived as lacking social restraint
- sometimes male sex workers (especially those economically exploited)

It did not mean:

- "gay men"
- "homosexuals"
- or people in loving same-sex relationships

It was a term of moral judgment tied to gender expectations and social respectability, not identity.

⚠️ Use with Care

When *malakoi* is translated simply as "homosexuals," a modern identity label was imposed onto an ancient text. This mistranslation has shaped doctrine and cause widespread harm.

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3. The Word *arsenokoitai* - Rare, Ambiguous, and Power-Loaded

The second word, *arsenokoitai*, is even more complex.
It does not appear in Greek literature before Paul
It is used very rarely after him
Context suggests it refers to some form of economic or sexual exploitation
The word is likely linked to:

- men who use others sexually in ways tied to power, status, or money
- possibly exploitative relationships involving coercion, hierarchy, or purchase

It does not clearly refer to orientation or mutual same-sex partnership.

🔎 Look Closer — Language of Exploitation

Many scholars now understand *arsenokoitai* as naming:

- those who benefit from unjust sexual systems
- or who inflict harm through domination or commodification of others

In other words - the problem is power, not identity.

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4. How "Homosexual" Entered the Bible in 1946

In 1946, the Revised Standard Version (RSV) translation committee rendered these two Greek words together as "homosexuals."
This was:

- a new modern category applied backward
- influenced by cultural attitudes of the time

- a shift that dramatically shaped sermons, doctrine, and public policy

Later translators and scholars have since questioned and corrected this decision - but its impact remains deeply embedded in churches and communities.

⚠️ Use with Care - Translation Is Never Neutral

When translation choices reinforce cultural prejudice, Scripture can become a tool of exclusion rather than a witness to justice.
Naming this does not weaken the Bible - it exposes the human lens through which we read it.

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5. What These Texts *Are* Concerned With

Across both passages, Paul is addressing:

- exploitation
- greed
- abuse of power
- participation in unjust social systems

The concern is harmful behaviour, especially where desire, money, and status intersect.
These texts **confront those who misuse others** - not people seeking mutual, loving relationship.

🌱 Why This Matters

Many queer people grew up believing these verses named them among the wicked.
But the text is not naming queer people - it is naming those who exploit, dominate, or harm.
Recovering the meaning restores:

- dignity
- agency
- and truth

It also holds accountable those who actually exploit or cause harm.

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6. A Faithful Reading

A careful, contextual reading shows that:

- *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* do not translate cleanly into modern identity categories
- both terms most likely refer to exploitation, economic injustice, and abuse of power
- the 1946 “homosexual” translation misled generations of readers
- these passages do not condemn Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ identity or loving relationships

This approach does not bend Scripture - it listens to it more honestly.

✨ Remember This

These passages do not condemn queer people - they confront exploitation, coercion, and the misuse of power.

Clobber Counterpoint

"The words *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai* never meant 'homosexuals.' They point to exploitation and abuse - not loving same-sex relationships. The 1946 translation changed how people read these verses."

Reflection Questions

- How does learning about translation and language shift your understanding of these passages?
- Where have you seen these verses used without any reference to their complexity?
- What feelings - grief, relief, anger, curiosity - arise as you revisit them with new context?

You may wish to pause, reflect, or discuss with others.

🌱 Something to Take Away

One of the most important insights from this session is this:
Words shape lives - and when Scripture is mistranslated, people can be harmed.
Recovering meaning is an act of truth-telling and repair.
As you move forward, you might notice:

- when modern identity labels are read backward into ancient texts
- when translation is presented as certainty rather than interpretation
- and how freeing it is to read Scripture with honesty, care, and humility

Carry what supports your dignity and the dignity of others.
Set aside what causes harm.

Looking Ahead

In Session 6, we move beyond defense into a broader vision - exploring how Scripture can be read through love, justice, and the fruits of the Spirit, and how affirming interpretation leads to life-giving faith and community.

Session 6 - Reading Scripture Through Love and Justice

Moving From Survival to Flourishing: Toward Life-Giving, Affirming Faith

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Session Purpose

Throughout this series, we have revisited passages that have been used to harm Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people, reading them with honesty, context, and compassion.
In this final session, we ask a deeper question:

How do we read Scripture in ways that lead to love, justice, dignity, and flourishing - for all people?
This session is about moving:

- from fear to trust
- from defense to wholeness
- from argument to life-giving faith

It is about reading the Bible not to survive, but to live fully.

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1. What We Have Learned Together

Across previous sessions, a pattern has emerged:
harmful interpretations often came from proof-texting and cultural bias; context revealed very different meanings than what people were told the real concerns of Scripture were about:

- violence
- injustice
- power
- exploitation
- social harm

Again and again we discovered:
the problem was never Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ identity - the problem was misreading, misuse, and misapplication of Scripture.
This is not about "re-interpreting to fit modern culture."
It is about reading faithfully, truthfully, and responsibly.

🔎 Look Closer - What Makes an Interpretation Faithful?

Faithful interpretation is measured not only by historical insight but by the fruit it produces. Readings that bear love, dignity and justice align with the gospel; readings that cause harm do not.
Jesus says:
"You will know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:16)
Faithful interpretation bears fruit such as:

- love
- justice
- compassion
- dignity
- truth
- healing

Interpretation that produces:

- fear
- shame
- cruelty
- exclusion

- despair

is out of alignment with the Gospel, **no matter how confidently it is preached**.

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2. Love as the Center of Christian Ethics

When Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment, he responds:

- Love God
- Love your neighbour
- "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Love is not a sentimental add-on.
It is the organizing center of Christian ethics.
Paul echoes this:

- "The greatest of these is love."
  "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Any interpretation of Scripture that harms people is already failing the command of love.

🌱 Why This Matters

For many Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people, faith has been framed as something they must survive.
This session reframes faith as something that can:

- nourish
- ground
- restore
- and uplift

Reading Scripture through love is not weakness - **it is the heart of Christian discipleship**.

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3. Justice as the Shape of Love in Public Life

Biblical love is not passive empathy.
It becomes justice when expressed in community.
Scripture calls God's people to:

- defend the vulnerable
- challenge systems that harm
- lift burdens, not add to them
- build communities where all may flourish

When interpretation is used to:

- marginalize
- exclude
- shame
- or control

it is acting against the justice-shaped love of God.

⚠️ Use with Care - When Theology Becomes Harm

Theology can cause deep injury when it claims to be "loving" while still excluding or diminishing people's lives and relationships. Love without justice becomes spiritual harm.
When churches claim:
"We are loving while excluding"
or "We reject identity but welcome the person"
the result is often:

- psychological harm
- spiritual fracture
- loss of belonging and safety

Language without justice is not love - **it is spiritual dissonance**.
This naming is not about accusation - **it is about truth-telling for the sake of healing.**

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4. From Defensive Theology to Affirming Theology

Defensive theology asks:

- "How do we prove we aren't condemned?"

Affirming theology asks:

- "How does God call Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people into life, dignity, relationship, vocation, and joy?"

Affirmation does not mean:

- ignoring Scripture
- dismissing complexity
- forcing agreement

Affirmation means:

- recognizing the Image of God in queer lives
- honoring queer love as capable of covenant, fidelity, tenderness, and self-giving care
- trusting that God is already present in Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ experience

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🔎 Look Closer - Signs of Affirming Faith

Affirming communities demonstrate:

- belonging without condition
- leadership without caveat
- blessing without hesitation
- pastoral care free of fear or suspicion

Affirmation is not a policy shift - **it is a spiritual posture of trust, justice, and love.**

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5. Healing, Repair, and the Work Ahead

This course cannot undo all the harm that has been caused by Scripture misuse.
But it can:

- name the harm
- restore truth
- recover dignity

- reopen spiritual imagination

Healing also requires:

- listening
- accountability
- reparative action
- ongoing learning

Affirming interpretation **is not the end of the journey** - it is the doorway back into life-giving faith.

🌱 Why This Matters

For many Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people, reclaiming Scripture is not about debate - it is about recovering a sense of belonging in their own story of faith; reclaiming belonging, identity and a spiritual voice. Affirming interpretation makes space for healing and flourishing – not merely survival.

Some will return to churches.

Some will not.

Both choices can be holy.

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6. A Faithful, Affirming Vision

Reading Scripture through love and justice leads us to affirm that:

- Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people are fully beloved image-bearers of God
- Queer love and relationship can be holy, ethical, committed, and life-giving
- Harmful interpretations must be named and left behind
- The Church is called not to tolerate queer lives - but to celebrate them

This is not cultural accommodation.

It is discipleship shaped by Christlike love.

✨ Remember This

Scripture read through love and justice does not diminish faith - it sets people free to live fully in the truth of who God created them to be.

Clobber Counterpoint

“The Bible simply does not condemn Two Spirit & LGBTQIA+ people. When read with context, humility, and love, Scripture calls us away from harm and toward justice, dignity, and flourishing for all.”

Reflection Questions

- What does it mean for *you* to move from defense into affirmation?
- Where do you see the fruits of love and justice emerging in your own story?
- What forms of healing or next steps feel important for your life, faith, or community?

- How might this learning shape the way you speak, lead, or advocate?

You are free to move gently here.
There is no expectation to resolve everything at once.

🌱 Something to Take Away

One of the most important insights from this entire journey is this:
God does not call us into fear, shame, or erasure.
God calls us into truth, freedom, belonging, and love.
As you leave this series, you might carry:

- a renewed trust in your own worth and dignity
- compassion for the harm that has been done
- courage to speak truth with gentleness and clarity
- hope that faith can still be a place of life

Take what supports your flourishing.
Set down what harms you.
You are not alone on this path.

Closing Blessing

May the God who created you in love
call you ever deeper into joy and truth.
May Scripture become a place of freedom rather than fear,
of courage rather than shame,
and of justice rooted in compassion.
Go in dignity, beloved and whole. Amen.