

Inspired Bible Reading
Session 4: Positive Images

How we talk is important. We must remember that we are not only discussing texts and ideas, we are also discussing people and a matter very central to their identity as personhood. *Whether you know it or not, those people are in this room and represented by people in this room. We will conduct our conversations accordingly.*

Is there a positive message about homosexuality in the Bible?

While it is not fair to read our modern notion of homosexuality into the Bible, there are passages and stories which show us glimpses of relationships that would not have been “average.” Furthermore, there are examples of what is unique, different, and even “queer” in the original sense of that word bringing delight to God.

1. The Power to Choose – Adam and Eve, Genesis 2: 4b-7, 18-25
 - a) Meant for community – verse 18: “It is not good that the [earth creature – *adam*] should be alone; I will make [him/her/it – *low*] a helper [as his/her/its partner – *kenegdow* = suitable].”
 - b) Power to name and choose – verses 19-20: “So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal. . . and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. . . but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.”
 - c) Power to name and choose – verse 23: “Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman (*ishshah*), for out of Man (*ish*) this one was taken.’”

To what extent is *adam* an individual, and to what extent does *adam* represent all of us? If *adam* represents all of us, do all of us get to choose who is our best partner, or only some of us?

2. Sexual Minorities – The Ethiopian Eunuch, Acts 8: 26-39:
 - a) Eunuchs were the clearest form of sexual minority during Biblical times. Although they often held high offices in royal courts, as this eunuch did in Ethiopia, they were slaves who were disfigured to make them eunuchs.
 - b) There were physical differences caused when eunuchs were castrated before puberty, which made it easy to visibly tell them apart from a male who had gone through normal puberty.
 - c) Eunuchs were often looked upon with contempt. They were incapable of procreation at a time when it was regarded as the means of immortality.

They were prohibited from entering the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23: 1). Yet, when the eunuch asks Philip if anything would prevent him from being Baptized, from partaking fully in the promises God brought to earth through Jesus, Philip does not hesitate. Philip baptizes him.

3. Imago Dei, Genesis 1:26-27
 - a) “Let us make *adam* in our image...” male and female he created them. What does it say about gender for God to “make *adam* in our (plural) image,” and for that image to include both male and female?

4. Healing for the Centurion, Matthew 8:5-13 & Luke 7:1-10
 - a) Two terms used here: *παῖς* translated as *servant* and *δούλω* translated as *slave* (NRSV).
 - b) The word *παῖς* can be another term for *ἐρώμενος* which is the passive, or subordinate, participant in a Greek pederasty relationship.

Jesus has no comment on the kind of relationship the Centurion and his *παῖς* have, yet certainly gives tacit approval to the relationship by healing the *παῖς*.

5. God’s delight in the odd and queer, Job 39:13-18
 - a) According to Leviticus 11:13-19, the ostrich is included in a list of birds that are detestable and shall not be eaten because they are an abomination.
 - b) When God shows up in response to Job’s challenge about how he has been treated unfairly, part of God’s response is to lift up the ostrich as a creature which is strange to the point of being silly – yet is a creature in which God seems to delight.

To what extent does God truly delight in the strange, that which breaks the mold... the queer?

6. David and Jonathan, 1 and 2 Samuel:
 - a) 1 Samuel 18: 1-5
 - b) 1 Samuel 20: 41
 - c) 2 Samuel 1: 25-26
 - d) 1 Samuel 20: 30

With both the descriptions of their love and the mention of Jonathan’s shame (a reference to disobeying Leviticus 18: 22?) the possibility of a romantic relationship is hard to rule out. This relationship is of particular interest due to David’s position as one of the most important kings in the Jewish tradition.

7. Ruth and Naomi:
 - e) Ruth 1: 8-9
 - f) Ruth 1: 14-17

Women in those times had no job, no money, and had to be provided for by a man (their father, brother, or husband). For two women to live their life together in this arrangement is extremely unusual. (Consider places like modern day Afghanistan)