



Engaging with what the Bible says, and doesn't say, about sexual intimacy within committed same-sex relationships

When seeking to hear the voice of God, the Bible holds central place. The quote in the green box, from the *Living in Love and Faith* book published by the Church of England in 2020, reminds us that **whenever we read the Bible we interpret it through the lens of our own experience, whether we realise we are doing so, or not.**

The Bible is a collection of books gathered together over many centuries. It contains laws, poems, stories, letters, wisdom sayings, and prophetic pronouncements. Whenever you read it, every word you read has a human history. Every one of them was written by a human hand, in a particular place and time. Every one was touched by many other hands before it ended up in this collection we call the Bible. The Bible therefore rings with the voices of all kinds of people. It is shaped by their differing backgrounds, their cultures, their assumptions and their experiences – including their affections and desires, their intimate relationships, and their sense of their own identity.

Our own reading of the Bible is no less shaped by history. Our backgrounds, our experience and our assumptions influence how we read it – and so do the backgrounds, experiences and assumptions of all the people who taught us how to read it. When we read, we are as entangled in the tapestry of history as is the Bible.

At the same time, Anglicans believe that the Bible is, in a classic phrase, 'God's Word written', and that God works through our reading of it. We believe these humans' words are words inspired by God (2 Tim 3.16) and that we can hear God speak to us through them.

Living in Love and Faith book, pages 274-

As with many subjects, a range of perspectives are held by Christians regarding **how to interpret the biblical passages which refer to same-sex sexual intimacy, and how to apply those verses, in the context of the rest of the Bible, to the committed same-sex relationships which exist today.**

When engaging deeply with this subject, in order to form or shape your perspective, it may be helpful to bear in mind the following definitions.

LGBTQI+

This term references a very wide range of people, some of whom appreciate this 'catch all' term, and others who do not. It's important to remember that people who identify as LGBTQI+ are not a community in and of themselves, they are individuals and should be treated as such. At St Mary's we sought to discern how God is inviting us to respond as Christians to a particular behaviour (sexual intimacy within committed same-sex relationships), as opposed to how we should respond to individuals. It is an absolute given that all people are deserving of love and welcome within a church context, even though (in a tiny minority of cases and for reasons of safeguarding) there will sometimes need to be appropriate boundaries in place regarding this.

Casual sex

Sexual promiscuity is widespread within our culture amongst heterosexuals and within same-sex relationships. The teaching at St Mary's begins from a premise that God intends sexual activity to be within the context of committed relationships. The question to wrestle with for yourself is whether these faithful relationships might also be same-sex Civil Partnerships / Civil Marriage, as well as opposite-sex marriage.

Marriage

The Church of England's doctrine of marriage has not changed, and it remains that marriage is between one man and one woman. However, Civil Marriage now also exists, and this is open to people in same-sex relationships. If the Church of England were, at some point, to revise the doctrine of marriage to include same-sex marriage, this would be significant, but any such decision is likely to be a long way off.

Traditional View

We are using this as a shorthand way of describing the perspective held by some Christians that the Bible teaches that any kind of same-sex sexual intimacy is sinful, and therefore same-sex attracted individuals should commit to living celibately.

Affirming View

We are using this as a shorthand way of describing the perspective held by some Christians that there is sufficient biblical evidence to suggest that sexual intimacy within the context of committed same-sex relationships is a godly expression of love and faithfulness.

Orthodox / Orthodoxy

Sometimes the word orthodox is used as a shorthand to describe the Traditional View. However, the word orthodox actually refers to the collection of doctrines that were accepted by the early Christians, as summarised by the various Creeds (statements of belief). Most Christians feel able, with confidence, to affirm the theological statements within the approved Creeds, and yet there is variation in people's perspectives concerning same-sex sexual intimacy. It's important to note that none of the Creeds authorised for use by the Church of England reference any human behaviours. The Creeds summarise who God is, not how humans should conduct themselves.

Dig deeper

A huge amount has been written in recent times in relation to this subject. It can feel overwhelming to know where to begin if you want to dig deeper into the different perspectives held by Christians, in order to work out your own view about what the Bible teaches.

With that in mind, **one book, one article and one video** have been shared for each perspective (the traditional and the affirming). If you would like signposting to other resources, please speak to the Vicar.

Traditional perspectives

Longer read: ***Is God anti-gay? Sam Allberry***

Shorter read: [Article by Ed Shaw](#)

What's wrong with a permanent, faithful, stable same-sex sexual relationship?

Video: [A War of Loves](#)
Conversation with David Bennett

Affirming perspectives

Longer read: ***The possibility of difference, Marcus Green***

Shorter read: [How to be biblical responsibly](#)
David Runcorn

Video: [The Bible and Homosexuality](#)
Jonathan Tallon

For a very long, but helpful read, the ***Living in Love and Faith book*** published by the Church of England, is an excellent resource in an accessible format.

We could loan you a copy, or you can [read it for free as a pdf](#). Chapter 13, The Bible, is a good place to begin if you don't want

