

Segment 4:

Creating a Safe Place in the Christian Community

In 2007, the Barna group published “unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters”, and found that 91% of 16 – 29 year olds perceive Christians to be “anti-gay”. With this research, we see the stark reality of how unwelcoming the church appears to be when it comes to our gay neighbors.

In the ministry of Jesus we see him touch the untouchables, befriend those on the margins and fringe, and associate with those the religious leaders did not associate with. Jesus himself said, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Here is a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and “sinners.”’ (Luke 7: 34)

The interviews on the DVD segment, “Creating a Safe Place in the Christian Community” share insights that point the way forward for a healthy church that welcomes and enfolds those who seek to journey with Christ in the midst of personal realities of sexuality. They impart hope for a community that reflects the lavish love of God. The church, that is the gathering of God’s people, is to be a safe place for **anyone** to engage the presence of God.

Acts 10: 34-36 the Message

“God plays no favorites! It makes no difference who you are or where you're from—if you want God and are ready to do as he says, the door is open.”

Reflection Questions within the screening:

1. *Vulnerability & Authenticity:*
 - a. How can the church become a safe place to be real?
 - b. How can we build trust and share more vulnerably in the church?
 - c. How can we break down an “us & them” dichotomy?
2. *Relating Graciously*
 - a. How do we encourage maturity and grace in the church?
 - b. In what ways can the freedom to accept others be threatening to Christians?
3. *Relating Graciously*
 - a. How can the church be a place of connection for the lonely?
 - b. What assumptions about gay people need to be challenged in the church?
 - c. What would change in the church if Christians built friendships with their gay neighbours?

Segment 4: *continued*

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BIBLICAL ENGAGEMENT:

I Corinthians 6: 9-11: *“Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

Consider what kind of church the church of Corinth must have been to have welcomed those who were sexually immoral, thieves, drunkards, slanderers and swindlers into their midst. The text doesn't indicate to us what kind of process this “washing and sanctifying and justifying” was. But it is unlikely that every single sexually immoral person, every thief, every slanderer and swindler who walked through the doors was instantly and permanently changed. God designed healing and growth to occur in community through the power and presence of the Spirit within us both individually and corporately. Therefore, at any given time, the church in Corinth was welcoming and relating to some pretty messed up people who were in the process of encountering the presence of Jesus and being washed, sanctified and justified by him.

Content:

1. The church community in Corinth was part of the fabric of their neighborhoods. It attracted those with diverse sexual preferences and practices and involved them in their community. What do you think being part of the community was like?
2. What other New Testament examples demonstrate that the early church attracted and welcomed diverse people, people who weren't accepted by Jewish religious leaders?
3. Describe how you have experienced being “washed, sanctified and justified” in the name of Jesus by the Spirit? Did it happen all at once? Is it still happening?
4. What is the most challenging aspect of imitating the kind of risk-taking, engaging community of the Corinthian church? What are some of the cautions we see in Paul's ongoing engagement with the Corinthian church?

Segment 4: *continued*

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Connect with DVD:

1. Would you feel comfortable navigating conversation with someone who is questioning matters of faith and sexuality? What steps might you need to take to feel more prepared?
2. Would a gay person find a safe place to discuss and dialogue matters of sexuality and faith in your small group / church community?
3. BTG profiles 6 different people who whom same-gender attraction has been part of their reality – Brian, David, Sonia, Johanna, Ron and Justin. As you've heard them share stories and insights, what are some of the ways you think they have experienced being "washed, sanctified and justified"?

Application:

1. Why should the church be a safe place for same-gender attracted people?
2. What are some of the risks / challenges of being a safe and welcoming place for our gay neighbors?
3. Engaging with those who challenge us in our beliefs can be threatening and tiring. What can be redemptive about being willing to go to that place in relationship?
4. What are some of the potential rewards a community can experience as they engage gay people?
5. As you look at your own lives, what potential is there to be more intentional with your gay neighbors? What is a first step you can take to discern how God would want you to engage?

Optional Activity 1

Think about conversations you have had where there was a sense of vulnerability and transparency.

- Were these conversations a positive experience?
- Did the conversations cause you to feel listened to? Judged? Understood? Supported?