

## Bloomsbury Central Baptist Church's Story

*It still comes as something of a surprise to me to find myself involved so intimately in discussions around LGBTQ+ inclusion in church life; this, after all, is not 'my' issue (I'm a straight cis-gendered man). However, involved I have been, and the invitation to share some of my reflections is gladly accepted. So I'd like to share my experiences of a) listening, b) the Bible, and c) relationships.*

Firstly, listening. As a pastor, I long ago came to the conclusion that I needed to listen carefully to others whose experience of life was not the same as mine. After all, how can a child-free person minister to those with children? By listening to them. How can a younger person minister to those who are older? By listening to them. How can a straight cis-gendered person minister to those who are LGBTQ+? By listening to them: by taking seriously their experience of themselves, and realising that what is 'normal' for one person (me) may not be 'normal' for another. I am convinced that any theology which is not rooted in listening to those who are 'not like me' is inadequate.

Which brings me to my second point: the Bible. I take the Bible seriously, as the revelation of God's Word, and as such have never been satisfied with approaches that ignore the 'difficult passages'. However, I firmly hold the conviction that the Bible can be read faithfully (even evangelically) to fully include within the people of God those who are LGBTQ+. This brief reflection is not the place for a Bible study, but I want to clearly assert that my perspective on full inclusion is firmly grounded in my prayerful engagement with scripture.

And then, thirdly, I want to emphasise the importance of relationships. The final turning point in my own conviction (yes, it's true, I have not always thought the same on this issue as I do now) was when I formed friendships with those who were LGBTQ+. Theology is not an abstract that we impose on life; it is rather the discipline of learning how to speak of God in the midst of life. So when I found that my life now included those whose sexuality and gender were different to my own, and when I realised through the relationships I was forming that the lives of those who are LGBTQ+ gave witness to the saving, redeeming activity of God every bit as much (if not more so) as my own; I simply had to recognise that the blessing of God was not mine to withhold. God is already at work in lives beyond mine, drawing the world to love and wholeness, and my task is to join in that calling.

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