



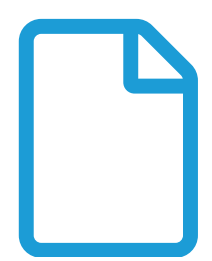
SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES



EVANGELISTIC
PRAYER
TEAMS

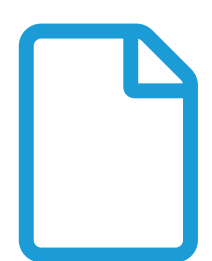


SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES



Course Summary

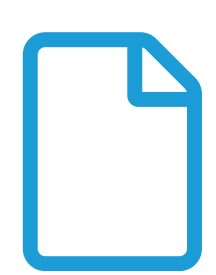
These studies help Christian navigate responding to two pressing issues in contemporary society. They examine engaging with environmental issues, and sexual orientation and gender identity.



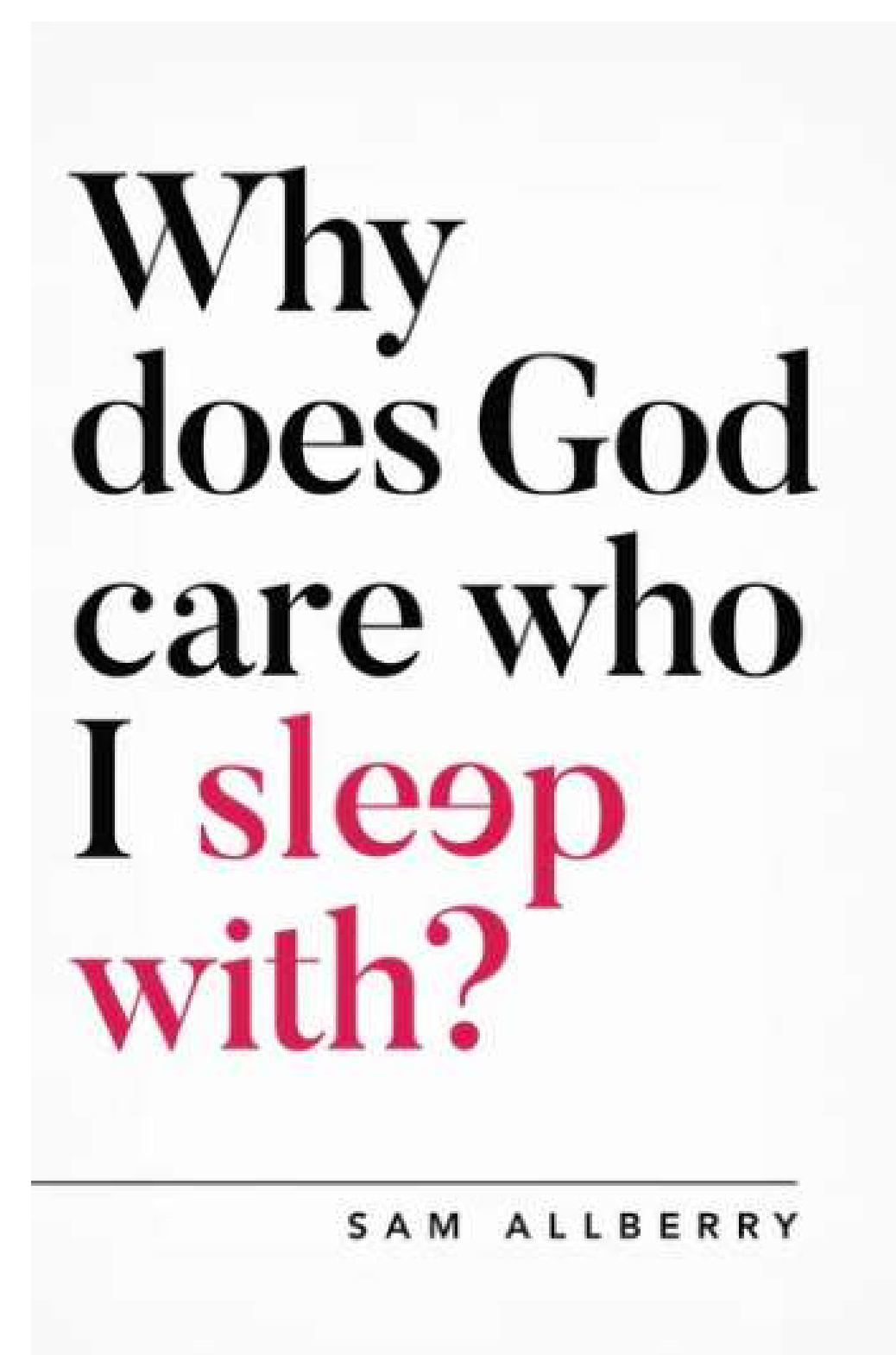
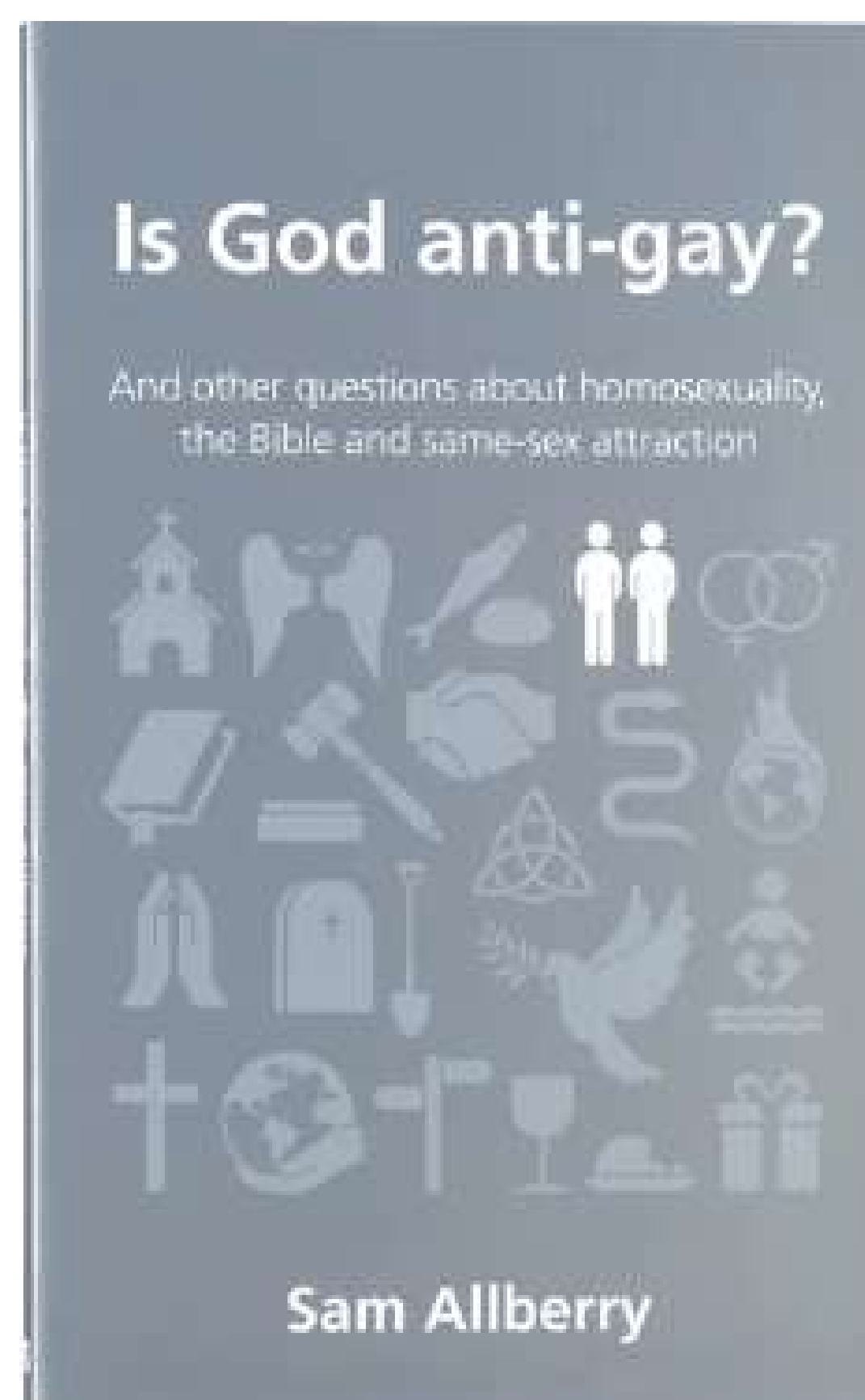
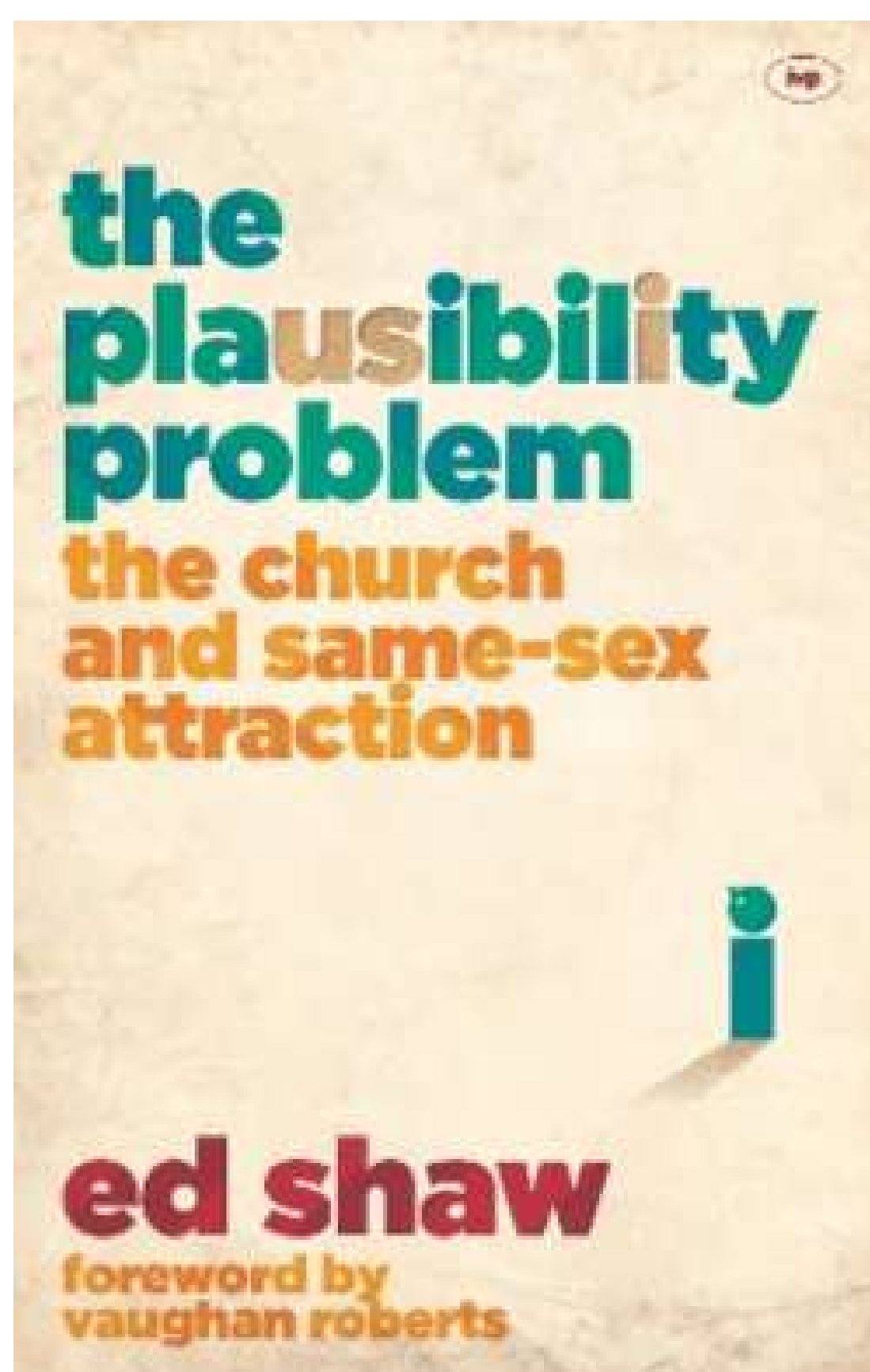
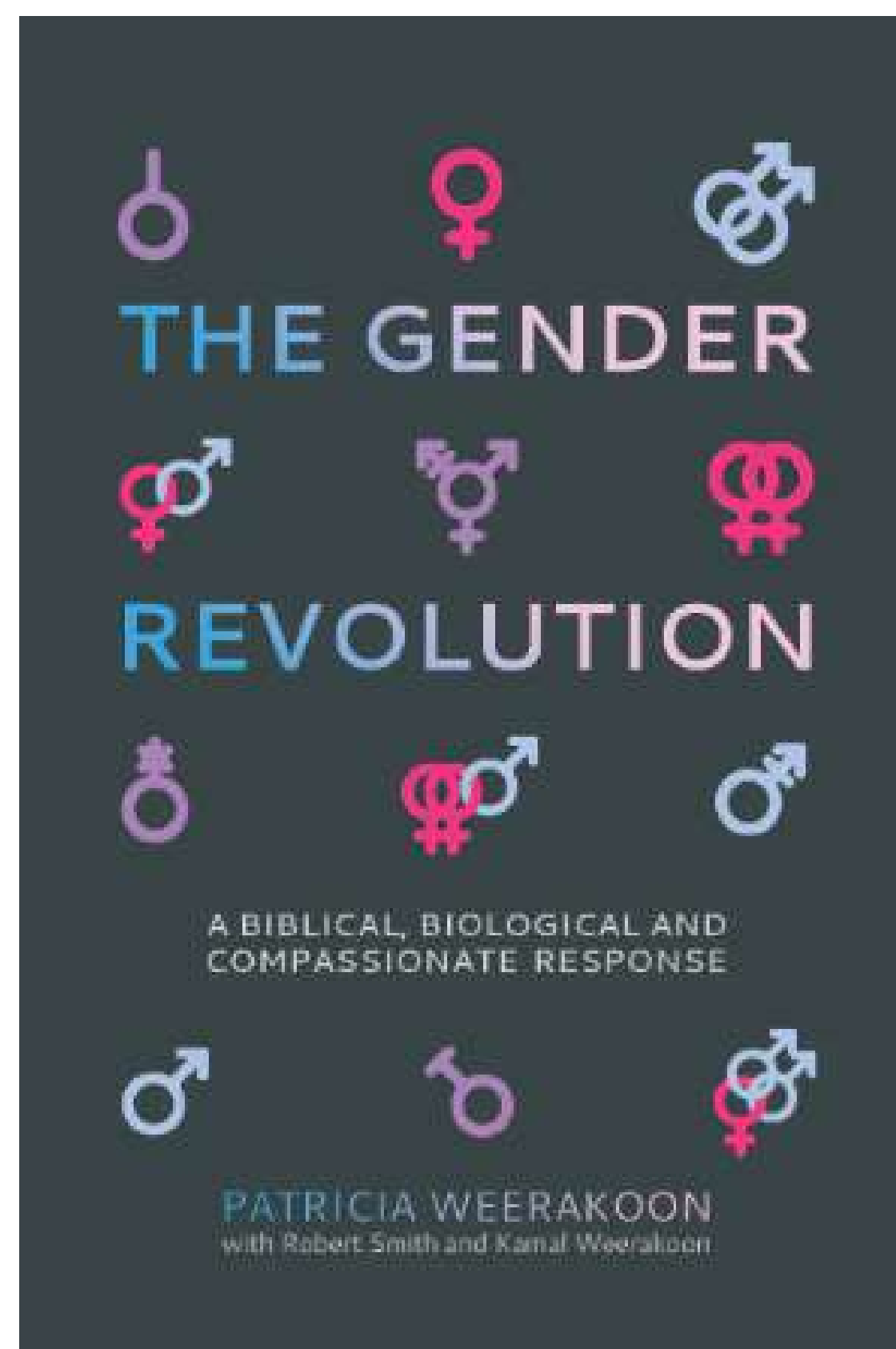
Course Structure

- 1: IS GOD GREEN? CHRISTIAN RESPONSE**
- 2: IS GOD GREEN? ENGAGING WITH UNBELIEVERS**
- 3: BEYOND YUK OR YES! SEXUAL ORIENTATION**
- 4: BEYOND YUK OR YES! GENDER IDENTITY**

SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES



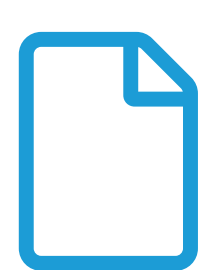
Recommended Reading





SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES

1. IS GOD GREEN? CHRISTIAN RESPONSE



Introduction

According to the World Meteorological Organisation, 2023 was the warmest year on record. Whatever you think about climate change, everyone is talking about it. How should we react as Christians and how should we engage with unbelievers about the environment?



Big Picture

As God's image-bearers God calls us to live as servant-rulers of the world by upholding the creation mandate. He calls his followers to put greed to death.



Bible Passage

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.... Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Genesis 1:26, 29-31



Bible Passage (cont)

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things... Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry...Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

Colossians 3:1-2, 5, 10



Key Truths

1. As God's image-bearers, our special role in the world is to be the servant-rulers. God created mankind to rule his creation which he believes is 'good'. We are to rule his good creation as faithful stewards.
2. The spiritual reality of us being raised with Christ involves putting to death earthly things including greed.
3. Christians love and worship the creator rather than what we can get out of the world because we have been clothed with the renewed image of God.

Thoughts? Questions?



Application

What does it look like to be a faithful servant-ruler of God's good creation here and now?

Lionel Windsor writes in his book, 'Is God green?':

"If you know Christ, then every day, in the little things, you should be putting greed to death. As you get up, switch on lights, turn on heaters or the air conditioner, decide to buy a new phone, use your car or get busy at work, it is right to think about how your actions will affect other people and the world they live in... As someone who bears the image of God, you have been made to rule God's creation. And you are waiting for Jesus to appear, longing for the new heavens and the new earth. And in the meantime you are putting greed to death. You are living in love for others. You are thinking and acting not for yourself, but for the people around you... You can't save the world – that's Jesus' job. But you can make a difference, because you can live as an heir of this world, rescued from death, renewed in God's image, ruling under God."

What does putting greed to death look like for you in caring for God's good creation?



Prayer

Pray that you would put greed to death by loving the creator rather than what you can get out of his created world.

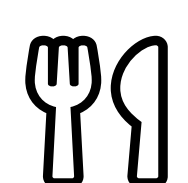
Pray that you would live in love for others as God's faithful stewards for his good creation.

Remember

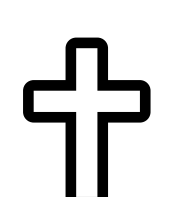
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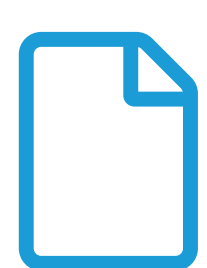
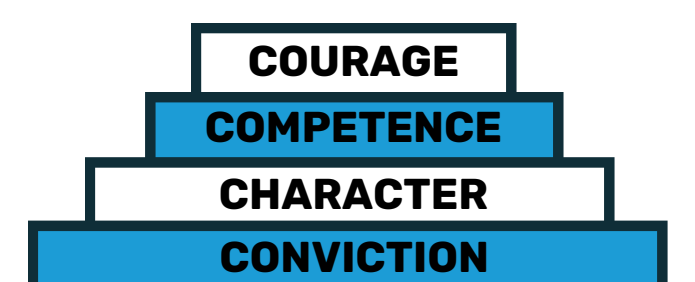
GOSPEL





SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES

2. IS GOD GREEN? ENGAGING WITH UNBELIEVERS



Introduction

How can we speak of the hope we have in Jesus with unbelievers who care about the environment?



Big Picture

Our world is in mourning because of sin. It is only through Jesus' death that all things can be reconciled to God. Anyone who comes to trust Jesus will rule God's new creation forever with him.



Bible Passage

Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed. Because of this the land dries up, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the fish in the sea are swept away.

Hosea 4:1-3



Bible Passage (cont)

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Colossians 1:15-20



Key Truths

1. Our world is in mourning, because we, its rulers, have sinned by rejecting the creator. The pattern is clear: rejection of God -> humans hurting each other -> environment ruined. Ultimately environmental friendly acts can't fix the root problem of sin.
2. Jesus' death reconciles all things to God, not just you and me. Only his death can reconcile (ie. make it right) everything into their proper place. Trees and chickens won't have their sins forgiven and be saved like humans who trust in Jesus, but Jesus' death has cosmic implications for all things - whether things on earth or things in heaven - being restored into its proper relationship with God.

Thoughts? Questions?



Application

In 'Is God green?', Lionel Windsor writes:

"Al Gore's 'inconvenient truth' is basically this: There is a global catastrophe coming. It might be bad and we might be able to do something about it if we're not too late. But God's truth is this: There's a definite day of judgment fixed for our world. If you don't trust in Christ, it will be very, very bad for you. But if you do trust in Christ, it will be wonderful beyond your wildest imaginings. You will live as a ruler in God's new world, and he will wipe every tear away from your eyes. And there's nothing you have to do to bring it about; you simply need to trust him. Trust in Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, now and always. In the meantime, share this good news with others, and live a life putting greed to death and seeking to love your neighbours, in whatever way you can."

Can you think of any enquirer who is passionate about climate change?

The Bible's claim is that anyone who trusts in Jesus will rule God's new creation forever with him.

How does this shape your conversation with your enquirer friend?



Prayer

Pray for non-believing colleagues and friends with whom you can share Jesus through discussions on the environment.

Pray for the opportunity to share your views on sin and the cosmic implications of Jesus' death.

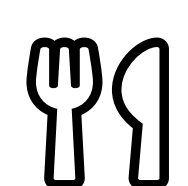
Pray that you would be bold in warning them of judgment, explain the offer of forgiveness in Jesus and share your hope of the renewal of the world.

Remember

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GOSPEL

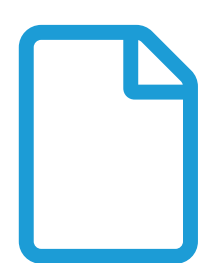
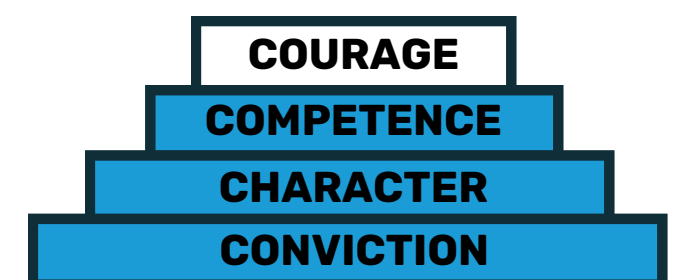


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BEYOND YUK! OR YES!

1. SEXUAL ORIENTATION



Introduction

How has your workplace expressed diversity and inclusion regarding LGBTI+?
How has this impacted you?



Big Picture

The power of the gospel of Jesus can change the lives of anyone, including the same-sex attracted. How we respond can testify to this power.



Bible Passage

...God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Romans 1:26-27, 32



Bible Passage (cont)

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment: about sin, because people do not believe in me; about righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and about judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

John 16:7-11



Key Truths

1. Homosexual lust and sex is a sign of God's judgement, along with greed, envy, arrogance, gossip, disobeying parents (look at v28-31). Those who approve of those who practise them are likewise condemned.
2. Homosexual lust and sex was a shocking example of rejection of God - but Paul puts it side-by-side with greed, disobeying parents, etc. All sin needs to be repented of when someone becomes a Christian - but at its base all sin is a fundamental rejection of God.
3. The Holy Spirit's job is to prove to the world they are wrong about sin, righteousness and judgement. We would do well to remember it is the Spirit's job to bring conviction, not ours.
4. It is not same sex attraction that is sinful, but homosexual lust and sex. The homosexual attraction is a sign of the affects of sin, but is not sin itself. Hetreosexual sex is not the cure - but being in proper relationship with God.

Thoughts? Questions?



Application

Vaughan Roberts recommends us moving beyond our visceral response to sexual sin of “Yuk!” or the equally unthought-out “Yes!”

Rather, as Christians we need to do better - we need to be well thought through:

Relating to Homosexual people

Sometimes Christians can assume they need to take the role of the Holy Spirit and expose the wickedness of homosexuality. But we wouldn't expect a greedy person to change their ways simply because we pointed it out, why a homosexual person?

Instead, much like a greedy person, we can befriend them and seek to help them meet Jesus.

If a homosexual person confides in us that they are homosexual, we need to care for and love this person - chances are they are feeling vulnerable. A good start is thanking them for sharing, if you haven't already shared, it might be a good chance to share that you are a Christian. Now, how we love this person as being in the image of God and a person for whom Christ died becomes essential. We want them to meet Jesus, to read the word and let the Spirit do his work. Chances are that if you can show you respect and care for this person eventually they may trust you enough to start looking at the Bible with you.

When our friend becomes a Christian, they can be encouraged to find their identity in Christ, rather than their sexual orientation. They can learn that submitting to Christ means saying no to our sinful desires, and trusting him that his way is better than the fleeting pleasures of sin - following Jesus can mean suffering for righteousness sake - including in the area of sexual fulfillment.



Application

Responding to sexual inclusivity at work

Rainbow lanyards, Wear-it-Purple day, Pride events, logo changes; LGBTQ+ diversity and inclusion is much more prominent at work these days. And the intention to make the Queer community feel comfortable and welcome at work is one Christians can get behind. However, it is very hard to differentiate between the people we want to love, and the practices we have no desire to celebrate. So what do we do about those rainbow lanyards?

Here are a number of options:

Ignore - if you have determined that wearing something represents a meaningless symbol, just as false idols hold no real power over us.

Reclaim - you can take the power out of something if you adopt it and reclaim it for your own purposes. Some have tried to do this by reclaiming the rainbow for God's promise to Noah (probably unsuccessfully)

Withdraw - Jesus would often withdraw to keep on mission and avoid attacks. This could mean working from home on Wear it Purple day, avoiding Pride week, wearing a lanyard that supports a different marginalised group - indigenous, asylum seeker etc.

Cooperate - perhaps you see the good intention behind wearing a rainbow lanyard and it's worth supporting.

Subvert - 'A gentle tongue can break a bone' (Proverbs 25:15) Daniel cooperated with a pagan empire, but refused to bend on matters of faith. His faithfulness rocked the leadership to their core time and again. Wearing the lanyard is less important than how agreement or refusal is done.



Application

Expose - This is the whistleblowing strategy. Is this practice an example of endemic evil within the company? Is the company virtue signalling to cover up poor treatment of LGBTQ+ people otherwise? This high-risk strategy should always be a last resort.

Separate - The time comes when we must go our separate ways. The moral foundation of the rainbow lanyard are so against who we are as Christians that there must be a parting of the ways. This could mean refusing to participate and accepting the consequences, or quitting your job. This is not an easy option.

Which of these strategies feels most appropriate to you?



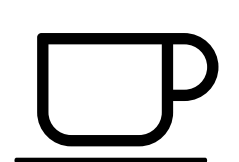
Prayer

Pray for wisdom about how to best respond.

Pray for compassion for those who really need Jesus if there is to be real change.

Remember

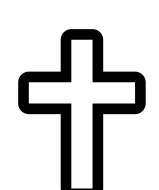
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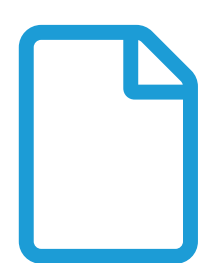
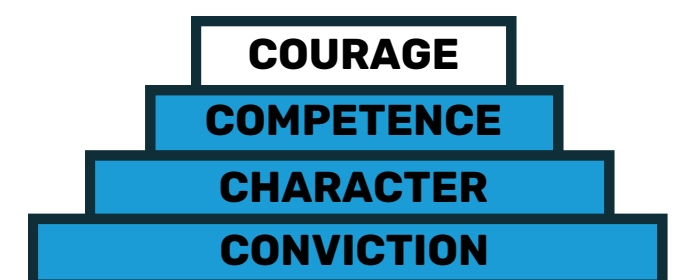
GOSPEL





BEYOND YUK! OR YES!

2. GENDER IDENTITY



Introduction

Our culture says your psychology is your sexual identity – let your body be conformed to it. The Bible says your body is your sexual identity – let your mind be conformed to it.

Sam Allbery

What do you think?



Big Picture

Trans ideology is mistaken and promises something it can't deliver.

Trans people have believed this error, they need to be loved and heard – true identity is found only in Jesus



Bible Passage

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Romans 12:1-2

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:26-28



Key Truths

Key terms

Sex - our biological bodies have a specific chromosomal composition (XX for females and XY for males) with corresponding genitals. People speak about being assigned a gender at birth - they usually mean

Gender - our self-realisation and representation as male or female, or neither, a mixture of the two, or something else entirely (one website outlines 107!)

4 components of our sexual and gendered embodied selves:

1. *Biological sex* - Our objective sex chromosomally encoded into our DNA which impacts our genitals and sex characteristics.
2. *Gendered behaviours* - Our way of expressing our sex in behaviour, dress, or how we present ourselves. These are guided by cultural norms and expectations, which are fluid and differ over time and in different cultures.
3. *Sexual orientation* - Concerns the type of people to whom we are sexual and romantically attracted. This is currently being described as fluid.
4. *Gender identity* - how we feel about ourselves, male, female, neither, something in between or something else.

What does the Bible teach?

- We are made by God to be embodied people - we will one day be resurrected and our bodies will be glorified and perfected. Our bodies matter to God.
- We are sexual creatures, made male and female to foster human flourishing. Our biological sex is a good gift from God.
- Total depravity tells us that sin impacts every aspect of our humanity - including all four aspects of our sexual and gender identities.
 - *Biological sex* - When someone is born or develops issues in our chromosomes or genitalia, we describe them as *intersex*.
 - *Gendered behaviour* - Those who behave or present contrary to their biological sex used to be called names (tomboy, mama's boy etc).
 - *Sexual orientation* - The LGB of the LGBTQI+ See previous study



Key Truths (cont)

- *Gender Identity* - When someone feels that their gender does not align with their biological sex and are distressed by this feeling, we call this *gender dysphoria*. Those who seek to realign their behaviour or body to match their gender identity, we call transgender or simply trans. It is worth noting that those who suffer from gender dysphoria, it can be a distressing experience.

Emerging Trans Ideology

Traditionally, we regarded biological sex as the immutable ground of our sexual being, but Western culture has become suspicious of claims of objective truth - including scientific truth. **Expressive individualism** dominates our culture, with slogans like 'alternative facts', and 'my truth'. How individuals feel is all they can truly know - anyone who seeks to contradict our feelings by appealing to some objective truth - that person is trying to oppress us.

Now, trans ideology teaches that the core of our sexual and gendered being is how we feel, and so all other aspects of my identity need to be brought into line. (This is beginning to introduce conflict between the LGB and the T in the LGBTQI+)

Trans ideology offers a false narrative, and a flawed solution. The gospel of Jesus offers hope. We who trust in Christ have been raised with him and await our bodily redemption - the ultimate realisation of our new identity in Christ. That means true reality is not the fleeting pleasure offered by indulging our sin affected desires - no matter how strongly they impose themselves upon us.

Thoughts? Questions?



Application

It is worth recognising that there are broadly two kinds of trans people we may meet.

Traditionally, Trans people were largely middle-aged men experiencing gender dysphoria who may have experimented with cross-dressing and who desired to identify as a woman - that is, there was a clear binary definition of gender.

More recently there has been a broadening of what it means to be trans - and of what gender could mean. The second group is more common with teenage girls, who identify as many different genders. There is a high correlation of trans identifying people who also suffer from poor mental health, self-esteem, or autism. Such people feel disconnected from people and desire acceptance. If they attribute their feelings to a gender identity - they find they are accepted by a new community - and increasingly by society who observe wear it purple days, pride cupcake events etc to celebrate their difference. There has also been a growth in people who are same-sex attracted who seek to transition to match their attraction.

How should we respond to trans people at work?

Whether they suffer from gender dysmorphia, or have been caught up in the ideology, each individual trans person is seeking acceptance as a person. They have been sold a pup by their community, society, and even medical advice, but they need the gospel of Jesus.



Application (cont)

Once they become a Christian, you may be able to convince them to leave the transitioning path as the Spirit convinces them of their identity in Christ. You are unlikely to convince anyone to change by 'dead-naming' them or mis-gendering them or by trying to convince them of the logical error of their desperate desires to feel right in their body and accepted by a community.

How could you best show love to a trans person at work?

How should we respond to trans ideology at work?

Trans people often change their name to better express their felt gender identity. We often oblige people who ask that we call them by a variant of their name ('Please call me Rob'), or by their middle name, by a nickname, or even by a pseudonym. It is polite to oblige a trans person by calling them by their preferred name.

Often Trans people can choose new pronouns that they feel express their gender identity.

Trans ideology recommends that we also share our pronouns - you may have been asked to share your pronouns to normalise the practice.

Patricia Weerakoon recommends that voalising your pronouns gives too much power to the trans ideology, suggesting it is better to politely decline and instead of using someone's pronouns to instead refer to them consistently by their preferred name. This is a subversion strategy (see last week), that maintains respect for the person, without buying into the excesses of the pronoun rabbit hole.

What do you think of this strategy?



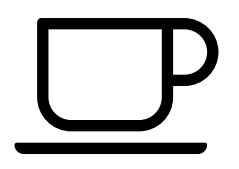
Prayer

Pray for wisdom in dealing with trans ideology at work

Pray for compassion for relating with trans people.

Remember

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