

## Speaker - Neal & Patience Dreyer Wordsmith - Jeremy Davies

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### PATIENCE:

A wise minister once said - deepen your connection to God, in you and around you, do not be afraid to feel the love, the joy, and the pain that is present. Don't be afraid to have a heart and to risk breaking your heart. Feel into it all.

We come from a devout Christian background which has meant a lot to us, though our religious belief were formed in conservative evangelical theology

The Bible was taught to us in a literal way. And the application of that, at the time when we were growing up in South Africa, was applied in narrow ways.

### NEAL:

We lived in South Africa during Apartheid. During this time, scripture was interpreted to justify the oppression of people, people who were not white.

Some interpreted the Bible in a way that made us feel less than, we were seen no more than 'a hewer of wood and drawer of water'.

It was the ruling party at the time, the apartheid government lens applied to scripture that served a political purpose, to reinforce separatism so that races wouldn't mix.

Their big slogan was separate but equal. We lived it and through this it made people less than but certainly not equal.

This informs our journey that we share with you today.

### PATIENCE:

We moved from Cape Town to Shaftesbury 26 years ago, with our boys aged 9 and 10. For the last 10 years we have lived in Salisbury. We weren't planning on coming to Salisbury, but it was a place that felt familiar. We have lived here 10 years, and have connected to community, church, family, and friends.



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Salisbury is the first place that we experienced racial abuse, but also a place we have shared one of the most joyous days of our life. But more about that later...

We are proud Christian parents to our beautiful, joyous gay son. Today we honor him. We love him with all our hearts, and he brings us JOY. A joy we never could have imagined.

Our son knew our stated beliefs. He heard it in Church. He heard it from us. He heard it in conversation with our Church leaders and often that was negative and non-affirming. Members of our family found it difficult. We struggled. Our son was raised in a very conservative environment.

We remember having conversations with him. About things we couldn't admit to ourselves, although we knew it, we couldn't admit it to each other. We knew it as parents.

NEAL:

In retrospect, something we've had to forgive ourselves for, was not realizing that our beliefs had caused him suffering.

We learnt during that time; he was planning to leave home without us knowing, should we not to accept him. And that was just not going to happen. He is our son, our child. He belongs. We love him.

When our son came out to us, the three of us celebrated. And in that moment, there was a freedom and joy that filled us all.

We recognized that we were loved and that we in turn should love others. Being faithful to scripture and obedient to God did not forbid dissent. Accepting our son as gay was a lesson in how to love - we realized the limitations and unchristian character of literalist interpretations of the Bible.



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Around that time, we recall a particular Baptist Church leaders coming out in support of LGBTIQ+ people. He was immediately removed from all Church engagements. We remember him saying "I'm a pastor first, forget about the theology. I'm a pastor first. Gay kids arrive with suitcases because their Christian parents have thrown them out. Suitcases! What do I do with them? Here I am, my doors open".

It was affirming to discover other people of faith who saw the scripture differently, who read the Bible differently.

### PATIENCE:

The 9th of October 2021 was one of the most joyous days of our lives. Our son married his partner then in Salisbury at the Registry Office. We prayed and prayed to ensure it was nothing but a celebration.

Here in Salisbury, our son and his then partner (now our song-in law) have experienced discrimination on one occasion. And we wanted nothing to take away from the joy of their day, the joy they share in their relationship. They are fabulous together. That day and today, we celebrate them.

All those who came to the wedding were deeply moved. Some had come from a place of hurt and disappointment and for the first time, their experience was held across sexuality, gender, religious and spiritual belief.

Nowadays, we are active members of the local Christian LGBTIQ+ Group and at our local Church, and we have met so many amazing people. We live our lives alongside people who have similar beliefs to us. The Bible is our guide, understood through a prism of inclusive love.

There are many LGBTIQ+ people here in Salisbury. And we stand here proudly in recognition that accepting our son has been the greatest gift in our lives, it opened our eyes and our understanding. We learned to accept them for whom they were, human beings who fill each other with joy.



## Speaker - Neal & Patience Dreyer Wordsmith - Clare Christopher

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NEAL:

We thank God for our son and son-in law. Our journey of loving them has been liberating. We know that God loves us all unconditionally, whoever we are. We know that true love is courageous. It has led us here to share with you all tonight.

This is not a political tirade or Anti Church or Anti Bible, it is simply two parents sharing their joyous journey of discovery with a beloved son and now his husband of just over a year.

Thank you.

