
Study Guide for Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church

by Jack Rogers

Study Guide by Freda Gardner and David Maxwell

Introduction

This study guide for *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality: Explode the Myths, Heal the Church* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, www.wjkbooks.com) provides plans for six units of approximately one-hour duration. Participants should have a copy of the book or easy access to one. The study guide assumes that all participants have read the material before each session.

By clarifying the facts relating to the topic at hand, the author attempts to explode many of the myths and distorted historical and biblical perceptions dominant in our society and many of our churches. For many participants, this book offers a reminder of information they have heard in bits and pieces throughout their lives. For others, this information may be new. Therefore, having a copy of the book is advisable so that participants can easily refer to what they have read. They should feel free to write in the book, underlining or highlighting places they wish to remember. Writing notes in the margins is okay too.

With this book, Jack Rogers gives a gift to the church and a challenge to all who consider themselves disciples of Jesus Christ. The gift comes from a fellow Christian who is, among other things, a minister, a scholar, and a teacher. He makes available to his readers his own faith journey, his careful study of Scripture and theology, and the results of careful research that most of us could not do for ourselves.

As mentioned, this guide is for six sessions:

Session 1: Preface and chapter 1

Session 2: Chapter 2

Session 3: Chapter 3

Session 4: Chapter 4

Session 5: Chapter 5

Session 6: Chapters 6 and 7

General Guidelines

1. Encourage people to buy the book. If cost or habit makes this unlikely, then as you prepare, be alert to information that might be put on newsprint/chalkboard/handout.
2. Acknowledge at the beginning what is in the paragraph above about the author. People don't have to agree, but they cannot argue about another person's telling of her or his own life experience. Likewise, historical documentation should be accepted and not debated. Rogers is a recognized scholar and has done painstaking research.
3. Assurances should be given that expressions of feelings about what is read or heard or about one's own fear of exposing oneself and one's thoughts will not be rejected or ridiculed. Learning something new or making a confession can be frightening, and people need to know that they can share their thoughts and feelings without fear of being ridiculed or labeled, or becoming the subject of gossip.
4. Acknowledge that the topic of the book is a large one. Encourage people to talk with each other and help each other stay open to God's presence and leading. If the group is large, consider encouraging people to chat via e-mail or phone during the days between sessions (as an attempt to clarify what they have heard or to share their perspectives) or even to meet during the week for further discussion.
5. It is important to pay close attention to language and assumptions in this debate. One's choice of terms often reflects an entire worldview. For example, Rogers never uses the word "homosexuals" in the book. Rather he always uses the term "people who are homosexual" or "people who are gay and lesbian"—to highlight the humanity of every person and to reflect the fact that everyone is more than just their sexuality. The terms "queer," "fag," or "dyke" are often considered terms of empowerment when used by people who are LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgendered) but are considered pejorative

when used against people who are LGBT. See Note 1 page 127 for a more complete discussion of the challenge of finding appropriate terms. It is recommended that leaders follow Rogers's model and use the phrase, "people who are LGBT" in referring to this population. Generalizations, unquestioned assumptions, unsupported suppositions, or stereotypes should be identified as inappropriate. Participants should be instructed to speak to their own direct experience and avoid generalizations that fall outside of their direct experience (i.e. "these people," "of course," "it's obvious that," etc....) If any participant is unable to speak respectfully it may even be necessary to suggest that a person should excuse himself or herself from the series. Leaders should strive to create a safe space for dialogue and every participant should agree to strict confidentiality as to who is in the group and what is said in the group. In talking with others outside of the group, participants should be directed to speak only about their own experience.

6. Encourage careful listening and discourage the habit of trying to create a rebuttal or counterargument while someone else is speaking.
7. People will receive a great deal of information, and you should stop every time you are ready to go on to new information to ask questions that will help people articulate what they are learning or wondering about. Try not to ask questions that can be answered with just a yes or no. Questions such as the following may encourage participants to ask their own questions or claim their own new ideas or insights:
 - What new thoughts came to you in this section of our conversation?
 - What do you think about this recounting of historical events?
 - If any of this makes you feel uneasy or bewildered, would you like to tell the rest of us about that?
 - Can you imagine how people felt when they realized there was another way to look at this issue?
 - Often when we change our belief about something, we not only learn to swim in new waters, but we also feel we're abandoning others with whom we formerly agreed. If you change your belief, what are you risking?

8. Opening the session with prayer helps people to know that their hopes and fears are put into God's hands as you pray for the Spirit to guide the group and to help everyone see more clearly what is God's will for the church and for themselves. If you are not comfortable praying aloud, you may find suitable prayers in the *Book of Common Worship* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) or you may compose them yourself. If praying in public is difficult for you, some people, when asked ahead of time, may be willing to lead the group in prayer.

So often, we are unwilling to open ourselves to the possibility that what we think or even believe might benefit from a more thorough examination. Even reading or considering ideas other than those upon which we have built our positions and shaped our convictions seems to be too threatening or a waste of time. This approach to a subject, of course, contradicts our beliefs that God still acts in history and that the Spirit continues to reveal to us that which may have previously been hidden from us.

In your role as leader of a study of this book, you should ask yourself if openness to revelation and to facts not known before is experienced as threat or possibility. Coming to grips with one's own answers to those questions should make all leaders more sensitive and responsive to the learners' reactions to the book. Those we teach need to be assured that honest responses, expressed without accompanied derision of what others say and think, are essential to learning and to the work of the Spirit in and among the participants. Encouraging people to name and explore their fears and their reluctance to entertain new possibilities will make the time together more supportive of new insights and understandings of both God's will and the church's life as a community of faith. You might ask the participants a question like this: In this situation, where you may be confronted by ideas that are contrary to your own, what fears or discomforts might you have? Following their responses, assure them that no one's thoughts will be dismissed or ridiculed. Disagreeing with someone opens a possibility for growth in both people. Language that is considerate of others' viewpoints can be heard far more easily than language that condemns or accuses.

Each session is designed to fill an hour. You may easily stretch this to a longer period of time if you choose. In fact, you will need to choose the questions you most want the group to discuss before the

session begins as well as decide how much time to give to each of them. The structure of each session is as follows:

- Session Theme
- Opening
- Key Ideas and Questions
- Responding Activity
- Closing Prayer

Most of the time in each session is spent discussing the Key Ideas and Questions. The ideal size for a group discussion is five to eight persons. Groups larger than eight persons make it difficult for everyone to have a chance to speak. Consider alternatives, such as breaking the group into smaller groups for part of the sessions. Reporting back to the larger group can be helpful during some discussions and not necessary in others.

A first and second reading of this book seems essential for all leaders. In the first reading, marginal comments or question marks will capture what has struck you in positive or negative ways. In the second reading two (or more) things may emerge that will be helpful as you lead a session. First, you may see more clearly what was murky before and recognize the critical moves the author makes that you want to address in the sessions. Second, you may become aware of places in the text that confront you with the possibility that you have been wrong in your thinking or with other feelings that make you concerned for how others in the group may hear and respond to them. An outline of key ideas (those items that brought insight to you) in each chapter enable you to make your own outline for the sessions if you prefer. Be sure to include time for questions or comments from the participants.

Finally, I encourage you to take the material that is most useful for your group. Some groups that are already in agreement with Jack Rogers's position will study this book. Others will study this book out of a desire to understand someone with whom they disagree. The questions you select to discuss obviously need to reflect the context of your own situation.

1

Preface and Chapter 1: Studying Homosexuality for the First Time

Session Theme

Jack Rogers shares his personal journey as a Christian, scholar, and minister in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). While he did not seek to be involved in advocating ordination of people who are homosexual, through his experiences and study he has come to this position. The first chapter also shares some of the history of the movement for ordaining people who are homosexual in the PC(USA).

Opening

1. Open with the following prayer:

Almighty God, as we join together to study this book, we thank you for the gifts of healthy minds that enable us to grasp ideas; the company of others who teach us, console us, and struggle through life with us; and your Holy Spirit who moves through us and guides us. Open our hearts and minds as we begin this conversation remembering that you are the giver of all knowledge and wisdom. Amen.

2. Welcome participants. If members of the group do not know each other, consider spending some time having people introduce themselves and sharing their reasons for participating in this study. Beginning to feel comfortable in the group will make this study much more satisfying for everyone.

Depending on your group, you may need to set some ground rules. Congratulate participants for being willing to discuss a topic that is so controversial in our society and churches. Suggest spending some time to agree on rules for how to discuss sensitive issues in a respectful manner. Invite participants to list some rules they would like the group to follow when the conversation gets heated. You may want to have handy a helpful list found at <http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/guidelines.pdf>. Whatever rules you create or use, make sure they are visible during the entire time of studying this book. That way, if someone gets out of line, you can always gently remind him or her of the ground rules that the group sets.

Key Ideas and Questions

1. In the Preface, page ix, paragraph 4, Rogers says that the issue of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people (LGBT) is “a defining issue of our time. For some it is an issue of maintaining traditions and customs that have given order to our society. For others, it is an issue of justice—all citizens should be entitled to equal rights under the law. For me, it is a moral and spiritual issue. How can the church live up to the highest ideals of Jesus Christ? How can we most faithfully act according to the central principles of the Bible? How can we most honestly and equitably share the love of God with all people?”
 - Do you agree that this is a defining issue of our time? Should it be? If not, what should be the defining issue?
 - Rogers gives three concerns people state in the issue. For some it is an issue of maintaining traditions and customs. For others, it is justice. For him, it is a moral and spiritual issue. Which concern do you believe is the most important issue? Why?
 - Discuss briefly his three moral and spiritual questions. Can you think of other moral and spiritual questions he did not mention?
2. On page x, paragraph 4 of the Preface, Rogers shares his reason for writing this book. Ask participants to read that paragraph aloud. No matter if they end up agreeing or disagreeing with Rogers, can they agree with his purpose? Does everyone have the same desire?
3. In chapter 1, Rogers describes his unwillingness to become involved in his local church’s discussion of inclusion of LGBT people. Invite a participant to summarize Rogers’s experience to remind the group of his journey. Jack says, “It was not a problem that I wanted to take on.” Allow time for comments.
4. The experience in his church leading to the decisions by the session to not become a More Light Church (one that welcomes LGBT persons) and the gay member to leave the church surely affected Rogers. Many find that when we get to know people who are LGBT, what was once an “issue” becomes personal. What has your experience been personally and as a church?

5. In the end Rogers believes the church grew in its comfortable-ness with the issue. Do you agree that the process was a help-ful one in the long run even though some people felt hurt?
6. Invite someone to summarize the section beginning on page 3 titled “My Formation as an American Evangelical Christian.” Allow time for comments regarding anything people find important to note.
7. The section on pages 6–8 titled “Teaching at Fuller Theologi-cal Seminary” is full of information regarding evangelicals, fundamentalists, and the doctrine of inerrancy. Make sure participants understand the definitions of and differences between each of these terms. Many mainline Protestants grow-ing up in more liberal congregations tend to stereotype Fuller seminary as well as evangelicals in ways that are not totally accurate. Many evangelicals are on the front lines of social jus-tice issues.
8. Pages 9–15 describe some of the recent history in the Presby-terian Church (U.S.A.) regarding ordination of people who are homosexual. Depending on time and interest, invite partici-pants to summarize and discuss items of interest in this section.
9. Give participants a chance to reread the final section, “How My Mind Changed.” At this point the goal of the group is to understand the author’s process and not argue with it. Make sure participants understand where Rogers is coming from and have an appreciation of his journey.

Responding Activity

1. Allow participants a few minutes of silence to either think quietly or write in a journal (that they can bring to other sessions) the main points they wish to remember about today’s session. They can also finish these sentences:
 - I didn’t know that . . .
 - I hope in future sessions we discuss . . .
 - My goal from this study is . . .
2. If there is time, invite a few people to share anything they wish about the three sentences.

Closing Prayer

Invite the group to pray for the church and pray that God will lead everyone to the truth that has been promised to set us free. If it is customary to close with prayer, do that in accord with what is expected and include the hope that God's truth will be revealed.

2

Chapter 2: A Pattern of Misusing the Bible to Justify Oppression

Session Theme

This session traces some of the ways the Bible has historically been used to justify slavery and the subordination of women. Rogers shows how leading theologians from a previous era used Scottish Common Sense philosophy, the theology of Francis Turretin, and appeals to “natural law” to justify their own cultural prejudices. Rogers makes an analogy between the way the Bible was misused to justify slavery and the subordination of women and the way that it is being used today to deny equal rights to people who are LGBT.

Opening

1. Welcome any newcomers and open the session with prayer for illumination and for the ability to hear what the author is saying and also what members will say to each other.
2. Briefly summarize the last session either verbally or by outline on newsprint or chalkboard.
3. Prepare a listing of the various names by which the former Presbyterian churches were known and the dates of their mergers or splits. (You can download a chart showing all the many changes of name among Presbyterians throughout history. Go to www.history.pcusa.org/pres_hist/. The chart is more extensive than is needed for this discussion. However, if you enlarge it, a greater perspective is provided. Whenever the church has faced serious issues about what it stood for or against, the threat of split was often present. But at other times, separate churches discovered that they could be more faithful to God’s expectations by joining forces and working together in witness and mission.

Key Ideas and Questions

1. This chapter may trigger some strong emotions from the participants. First, give some time for people to summarize what

- the chapter says and what they learned. You may find the entire session is taken by this first activity!
2. Rogers begins the chapter saying that homosexuality is not the first social issue with which the Presbyterian Church has wrestled. Sabbath observance, prohibition, use of tobacco, slavery, segregation, the role of women, divorce, and remarriage are others. What is his point?
 3. Rogers argues (page 18) that the issue is what American Christians thought about slavery and the subordination of women *at the time* when slavery was an active institution and women were still barred from leadership in the church and voting in society. “How could Christians for more than 200 years accept slavery and the subordination of women with not a hint that there was any other view in the Bible? Why did good, intelligent, devout Christian people not see what we now recognize as mitigating factors in the biblical record? Why did we change our minds?” Allow time for discussion.
 4. How was the Bible used to justify slavery? The goal here is partly to recap some of the history, but just as importantly, you are trying to understand the method of interpretation that Rogers later argues is being used against people who are homosexual today. You might divide the group into two and assign one group James Henley Thornwell (pages 20–22) and the other group Robert Lewis Dabney (page 22–25). Ask each group to reread the section and summarize the steps in the thinking of the influential theologian and pastor.
 5. How was the Bible used to justify the subordination of women? (Depending on time available, you may need to choose either the slavery issue or women’s subordination. You can use the same process for each as they are similar.)
 6. How did church and society get it wrong (pp. 29–32)? If time permits, allow participants to review and summarize these pages. Try to create a short list of phrases or one-liners that demonstrate the mistakes people made.
 7. How did abolitionists come away with such a different interpretation of Scripture?
 8. Read out loud or allow time for participants to reread the conclusion of this chapter beginning on page 33. Can participants see Rogers’s logic in comparing the biblical interpretation methods (now considered erroneous) used to justify slavery and the

subordination of women with those used for excluding people who are homosexual from ministry? People in the class may or may not agree, but it is important to understand Rogers's logic at this point.

Responding Activity

Distribute paper and pens and ask people to write out their responses to the following questions:

- Describe an experience where you had a change of heart and mind (in any area of your personal or professional life):
- What did you initially believe?
- What challenged that belief?
- How did your views begin to shift?
- What do you believe now?
- How did you feel at each stage of the process?
- How did you feel after the fact—looking back on your experience and former belief?
- What are the emotional risks and benefits involved in the process?

Ask participants to share and discuss what they wrote.

Closing Prayer

*O God,
Light of the minds that know you,
Life of the souls that love you,
Strength of the thoughts that seek you:
Help us so to know you
That we may truly love you,
So to love you
That we may fully serve you,
Whose service is perfect freedom;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(Book of Common Worship, p. 19)*

Chapter 3: A Breakthrough in Understanding the Word of God

Session Theme

The church went through some radical changes due to a couple of historical events in the twentieth century and a theological movement from Europe that opened a new understanding of Scripture that was both Christ-centered and open to scholarly study of the texts. These factors impacted the church as it looked anew at issues such as slavery, women's role in the church, divorce, and so on.

Opening

1. Welcoming and prayer. Welcome all participants and allow a few minutes for introduction of any new members. You may offer a prayer of your own or use the one that follows:

Gracious Creator, we are such creatures of habit, resistant to change. New thoughts challenge us to question what we've always known to be true. Yet of course we want to do what's right in your eyes and seek the courage to follow your Spirit, wherever it leads us. Lead us, give us an inner calm so that we might follow Christ's footsteps more faithfully. Amen.

2. Provide an opportunity for feedback from the previous session and comments on what they have read this week in chapter 3. Since much of this session will be reviewing the content, don't spend too much time in the opening on this. One way to review last week is to read the first paragraph of chapter 3 on page 35.

Key Ideas and Questions

1. How did the church change its mind (pages 35–39)? Depending on your group, simply raising this question and allowing participants to reply may be enough. If you need some leading questions, consider the following:

- What were the two crucial events that occurred by the middle of the nineteenth century and divided the mainstream Protestant churches into two camps? (the Civil War and the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*)
 - What did the modernists believe?
 - What did the fundamentalists believe?
 - What were the five "essential and necessary doctrines" and what is a "scruple"?
 - What happened in the 1927 General Assembly?
2. What was neo-orthodoxy, and how did it change the conversation? (This discussion begins on page 37 and continues through the chapter.) The main point to make is that the new approach turned people's attention to Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture and didn't shy away from biblical research but rather encouraged it.
 3. The section on "Social Change" beginning on page 39 discusses the influence of neo-orthodoxy on the church as it looked at oppressive social institutions. Most of the participants in your group grew up after the 1927 General Assembly and so may not be too impressed with the radical changes that occurred as a result of neo-orthodoxy. Review the new looks at race, women, and divorce and remarriage found on pages 40–44.
 4. Read aloud paragraphs 3–5 on page 44. This is a key argument. How does it resonate with you? Allow plenty of time for discussion.
 5. If you have time and there is interest, summarize Rogers's "Personal Note" on pages 44 and 45. How would the church be different now if the same standards for divorced people were still used as those for people who are homosexual? How many of our excellent ministers who have suffered through divorce would be ineligible for leadership?
 6. In the final section Rogers tells the story of the Confession of 1967 and the Brief Statement of Faith in 1991. What is important about the church putting into writing what it believes about certain issues?

Responding Activity

Invite the participants to think in silence for a minute or two about the future. What groups of people continue to be excluded or treated

unjustly in our world who may at some time (perhaps now) merit the church writing a special Confession to clarify its position regarding their role or rights? Some possible suggestions will probably include immigrants, minority religious groups, the position of the Christian church toward other religions, the rights of Native Americans or other tribal groups, the use of torture on people considered enemies, and so on.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for continuing to shed light on your people, making your Word known more fully and for all those who follow you, spreading your love to all your children. May we continue to learn to share the grace you so freely have given us. Amen.

4

Chapter 4: Interpreting the Bible in Times of Controversy

Session Theme

Rogers reviews the seven guidelines for interpreting the Bible that are commonly agreed upon by mainline Protestants today. After tracing their roots in various Confessions, he discusses how each principle might help us in our current discussion regarding homosexuality and the church.

Opening

1. Welcome participants and provide time to introduce any new people. Provide your own prayer or use this one:

O Lord our God, you are always more ready to bestow your good gifts upon us than we are to seek them. You are more willing to give than we desire or deserve. Help us so to seek that we may truly find, so to ask that we may joyfully receive, so to knock that the door of your mercy may be opened for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Book of Common Worship, p. 18)

2. Allow a few minutes to review last week and see if any questions are left over that people wish to discuss.

Key Ideas and Questions

1. Both the northern and southern Presbyterian churches adopted guidelines for the interpretation of Scripture (in 1982 and 1983). The guidelines are similar to those used by most mainstream Christian denominations today. Consider providing a copy of the seven guidelines to participants.
2. Use most of your time to go through each guideline. Ask the participants to say what they believe it means and then focus on a question or two, such as those that are suggested here. There may be several interpretations. Accept them and then have the participants reread and decide together their meaning.

- *Guideline #1.* Read the third paragraph of the Commentary section on page 56 to sum up what the Bible is and, after comments from the group, read the next two paragraphs. Allow discussion.
- *Guideline #2.* Read the first sentence of the Commentary on page 57 and then the three directions for reading the plain text on page 58. Use the second paragraph after that to explain “plain.”
- *Guideline #3.* Go to the first paragraph of the Commentary following the guideline and then the second paragraph beginning with the sentences after footnote 27. Ask for reactions to this guideline. Do people see that changes in interpreting Scripture have led us to the understandings that most of us have today? They may recall earlier discussions about the changes of mind regarding slavery and women’s place in the church. If not, you can remind them.
- *Guideline #4.* The Commentary can help us understand the importance of its meaning. Use the second paragraph to evoke questions or comments from group members.
- *Guideline #5.* This guideline is also deceptively simple, but reading the first two paragraphs of the Commentary will flesh out its importance. As always, allow for comments and questions as these guidelines are presented. Be sure that the participants know that the book contains significant material from biblical scholars and from the Confessions of our church to support the meaning of the guidelines.
- *Guideline #6.* Read the third paragraph of the Commentary on page 64 and welcome questions.
- *Guideline #7.* This can best be understood by reading the two paragraphs of the Commentary.

Responding Activity

Invite a general discussion around the following questions. Depending on time you may choose:

- Which of the guidelines is the most helpful and why?
- Which are unclear?
- Does the church really need to establish guidelines and rules? Why or why not?

- Can you think of an erroneous interpretation you previously held that has been changed in light of these guidelines?

Closing Prayer

Before closing in prayer, remind people that for the next session they are to read chapter 5, a very dense chapter, filled with much information. In order to make the best use of time next session, it is imperative that people come having read the chapter.

A closing prayer might express thanks for the help that has been given by these guidelines to the church and to our better understanding of what God is saying to us in Scripture.

Chapter 5: What the Bible Says and Doesn't Say about Homosexuality

Session Theme

Rogers reviews the eight passages in the Bible that have been used to condemn homosexuality, especially Romans 1. He then explores non-biblical theories that have been imposed on Romans 1. He concludes by discussing Acts 10–15 in which the early church decided to admit Gentiles and argues that it provides a helpful model for resolving the current debate over the role of people who are LGBT in the church.

Opening

1. Welcome participants and spend just a few minutes reviewing any questions from last session.
2. Either invite a participant to pray or offer a prayer yourself to open the session. A possible prayer follows.

*Lord, open unto me
 Open unto me—light for my darkness.
 Open unto me—courage for my fear.
 Open unto me—hope for my despair.
 Open unto me—peace for my turmoil.
 Open unto me—joy for my sorrow.
 Open unto me—strength for my weakness.
 Open unto me—wisdom for my confusion.
 Open unto me—forgiveness for my sins.
 Open unto me—love for my hates.
 Open unto me—thy Self for my self.
 Lord, Lord, open unto me! Amen.*

(Book of Common Worship, p. 23)

Key Ideas and Questions

In preparation for this session, it would be helpful for the participants to have before them a list of the eight texts you will be examining.

Have a few Bibles available, and write the text citations on newsprint or chalkboard. Also post the seven guidelines studied last week. In preparation you should underline in your book the sentences that have made it clear to you how biblical scholars have understood the passages.

1. Read the opening four paragraphs of the chapter aloud and then ask a question such as, "How does hearing this make you feel?" If some people seem angry or put off by what was read, accept their reactions and simply say that whenever something questions a belief we have held, it is natural for us to be upset or to feel that we must defend ourselves. Invite the participants to remain open to a closer look at the texts that have been used to condemn homosexuality.
2. Assign passages to small groups of two to four persons, and invite them to read the texts and then use the guidelines discussed last week to understand them. Follow the book's grouping of the texts. After about ten minutes, bring the groups back together and ask for a brief recounting of what they were assigned to consider. Following each group's report, read from the book what biblical scholars have said about the texts. Allow some time for people to say what they don't understand and work together to clarify. Save the largest amount of time for dealing with the Romans passage. This is the centerpiece of most people's understanding and misunderstanding.
3. Begin by asking how, prior to reading this book, most people understood the Romans 1 passage with regards to homosexuality. Read the two paragraphs under the title "Romans 1" on page 76. Ask for participants' thoughts and reflections. There will be more time later to discuss this in detail. First, we want to make sure we understand Rogers's argument.
4. Review each subsection under the Romans 1 heading and make sure people understand Rogers's point.
5. Allow a few minutes for people to review the section on "Non-biblical Theories Imposed upon Romans 1" (pp. 80–89). In this section Rogers is challenging some of his academic colleagues who he believes are making some basic mistakes by imposing their cultural prejudices on biblical interpretation. If there is interest, you may choose to have an additional session just to talk about this section. If so, some participants could

volunteer to find articles or other items on the Web that fall under the different categories.

But you probably will not have time. Therefore, allow participants to review this section and either allow a free discussion on sections that struck them most or use some of the following questions to provoke discussion:

- What is natural law, and how does Rogers say people opposed to people who are homosexual are misusing it in their biblical interpretation?
- Scientists have shown that part of the nonhuman animal population in the world is indeed homosexual. Most people who are LGBT do not view their sexuality as a choice. A growing number of scientists are convinced that homosexuality in humans is also genetic. What would this do to the argument against homosexuality if it is found to be true? That is, should people condemn something God has created?
- On page 80-89 the author examines several non-biblical theories that get imposed upon the Biblical texts. What are those theories? How are they read back into the Biblical texts?
- The Genesis creation story is often used to argue that monogamous, heterosexual marriage is God's intention for humanity. Yet, as Rogers shows, that was not the intention of the passages. Indeed, the earliest generations mentioned in Genesis practiced polygamy. How do you think this argument started?
- Rogers argues that Acts 10-15 provides a helpful analogy to our current debate. What happens in Acts 10-15? Why was it such a big deal at the time? How do you think the Pharisees responded to the interpretation given by the Apostle James? How did the events described in Acts 10-15 change the world?

Responding Activity

Invite participants to spend a few minutes in silence thinking about all that has been said today. Then allow them five minutes to write down some notes in their journals about what they will take with them from today's session. These will not be shared but may be helpful when they

later wish to discuss the book with friends or family. If you have a talkative group that doesn't need or want a quiet activity, you can invite people to simply call out in brief phrases or sentences what they wish to remember from today's session. No response is needed from other participants.

Closing Prayer

*O loving God,
To turn away from you is to fall,
To turn toward you is to rise,
And to stand before you is to abide forever.
Grant us, dear God,
In all our duties your help;
In all our uncertainties your guidance;
In all our dangers your protection;
And in all our sorrows your peace;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*
(*Book of Common Worship*, p. 23)

Chapter 6: Real People and Real Marriage

Chapter 7: Recommendations for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Session Theme

Chapter 6 discusses and refutes many of the arguments made against people who are homosexual and their relationships and shares Rogers's own experience with gay and lesbian persons. Chapter 7 includes his suggestions for his denomination, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

Opening

If there is time you can certainly spread this session into two sessions, treating chapter 6 in one and chapter 7 and wrapping up in another. Enough questions are provided to do that. However, if you have just one session make sure you pick the questions below that are most pertinent to your group. It is assumed everyone has read the two chapters before the session.

1. Welcome the participants and provide a few minutes for anyone to share briefly any thoughts or questions they have had since the last session. Part of the responding time today provides room to discuss where the group might go from here.
2. Provide a prayer of your choice, or say the following:

*God of grace,
You have given us minds to know you,
Hearts to love you,
And voices to sing your praise.
Fill us with your Spirit,
That we may celebrate your glory
And worship you in spirit and in truth;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Key Ideas and Questions

1. Rogers criticizes stereotyping groups of people, especially with negative images and moral values when they are not necessarily true. If your group is made up of heterosexual persons, allow a few minutes for people to talk about people they know who are homosexual and whether or not they fit the stereotypes.
2. In the section on “Clergy Sexual Misconduct” found on page 92, Rogers mentions the fact that clergy abuse has been unmasked and the Roman Catholic Church and many main-line churches are facing increasing lawsuits for heterosexual and homosexual sexual misconduct. While he encourages the steps the denomination has taken to crack down on sexual misconduct, he questions the blanket law that people who are LGBT are all unworthy of ordination simply for their sexual orientation. What do you think of that? Is it fair?
3. As we see in “The Evolution of the Purpose of Marriage” (pp. 93–94), marriage has not been a stagnant institution by any means. What do you think about more and more states passing amendments banning gay marriage? Is this a case of a Christian nation finally flexing its moral muscle, or is it a case of politicians using ignorance and fear of the unknown to gain votes? What should the church’s role in this struggle be?
4. Allow a few minutes to review “Male Gender Superiority and Opposition to Same-Sex Marriage” on pages 95–98. Rogers states that many religious fundamentalists view a patriarchal family structure as the key to the health of the church and the nation. This view usually includes the submission of women to men. Rogers talks about the strong link between opposition to equality between men and women and opposition to homosexuality. Is allowing people who are homosexual the right to marry and raise children really a threat to our society? Why or why not? Is this really about male heterosexual privilege and dominance?
5. In the “Opposition to Science” section on pages 98–101, Rogers cites the growing number of professional medical organizations which have declared that homosexuality is not a mental illness or gender-identity disorder. In fact, they have found that same-sex couples or families do not vary significantly from heterosexual families. Yet some religious leaders are

- the most vocal about refusing to see people who are homosexual as whole persons. What do you think?
6. Read aloud paragraphs 4 and 5 of “Violent Rhetoric” on pages 101–2. Do you believe religion is provoking some to violence against LGBT people? How would you respond to Coretta Scott King or Lewis B. Smedes?
 7. What is the irony in the debate over marriage found on pages 102–3?
 8. Rogers shares his experience of knowing gay and lesbian people and says, (pp. 107) “In my experience they are just human beings with the normal hopes and fears, struggles and challenges of others in the population.” How does that compare to your own experience? How do you think people who are LGBT feel watching this debate in the church?
 9. In the final chapter Rogers shares his recommendations for the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). He begins by stating that the first step for the church is to apologize—institutionally, collectively, and personally. Much harm has been caused on LGBT persons for centuries that was unnecessary and sinful. Do you think an apology to people who are LGBT would help to heal the church? There is precedent for this, and if we come to believe our interpretation and policies are indeed wrong isn’t the next step to apologize?
 10. On pages 114-119 Rogers shows that the Heidelberg Catechism was mistranslated in 1962 and that the words “homosexual perversion” were inserted even though they are not in the original Catechism. How did that happen? Why hasn’t it been corrected?
 11. He believes that full participation begins with the Presbyterian Constitution. What are the two flaws in the Constitution that need to be corrected? The answer is on the bottom of page 112 through the beginning of page 113. (It would be helpful to have the *Book of Confessions* and the *Book of Order* available for those unfamiliar with them.)
 12. If your group has not followed the history of the Amendment B controversy, you will want to spend some time reviewing that section. Would your group change Amendment B? How would they word it? Or would they simply remove it?
 13. Read aloud the final section on page 126 and allow a few minutes for participants to comment.

Responding Activity

1. Since this is the last session, you might want to make a list of things people still find unclear or wish to discuss. If there is enough to merit an additional session, see if the group wants to do so. If not, perhaps a few people who so desire can agree to meet and finish the discussion.
2. Spend a few minutes evaluating the book as a whole. Even if people don't come out where Rogers does, do they understand and appreciate his position? What are the strengths of his argument? What are the weaknesses? This can be a helpful time for clarification and does not need to cause tension in the group if everyone doesn't agree.
3. What should be done next? The Presbyterian Church created a task force a few years ago to study a number of issues tearing the church apart. It was called the Task Force on the Peace, Unity and Purity of the Church. Their materials can be found on the PC(USA) Web site at www.pcusa.org. Perhaps your group will wish to discuss it. A study on the report is available from the Thoughtful Christian at www.TheThoughtfulChristian.com under Contemporary Issues.
4. Invite participants to share one thing they will take from this experience and book. No response is needed from other participants, except to listen attentively to one another.

Closing Prayer

Close with a prayer that gives thanks to God for the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit. Acknowledgment of discomfort and of being stretched, of feelings of repentance and of discomfort, of hope and of despair should be made. The struggles that may have been felt by participants—the struggle to understand, or their weariness of waiting for liberation from the restraints that keep some from full recognition and participation in the life of the church—can be committed to God's mercy and care.

Feel free to invite group members to voice their own prayers and conclude with the following sentence:

*May our prayers be pleasing to you, God, our Rock and our Redeemer.
Amen.*