

# FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO

A STUDY GUIDE AND ADVOCACY TRAINING CURRICULUM

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# { INSTRUCTIONS }

## HOW TO PURCHASE THE FILM

Normally, the cost to show videos in public settings (including congregations) is quite high. However, small congregations interested in hosting a screening and discussion of *For the Bible Tells Me So* – for an event of 50 people or less – are able to obtain an educational screening license\* for the film in addition to a copy of the DVD and the study guide for a special discounted rate of \$50 (for one screening). To apply for and order this package deal, please call the HRC store in Washington, DC to make arrangements with the store manager: 202-232-8621.

If you are planning to host a film showing for more than 50 people, please contact Paul Marchant at First Run Features - the exclusive distributor of *For the Bible Tells Me So in North America* - to make purchase arrangements for the DVD and educational license: (212) 243-0600 x22 or [paul@firstrunfeatures.com](mailto:paul@firstrunfeatures.com).

Copies of the *For the Bible Tells Me So* DVD for home viewing only can be purchased online through the HRC store ([link to regular \\$19.50 DVD only order site](#))

*\*Please note: It is illegal to show this film in any public setting (including a congregation) without an educational license*

## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

Feel free to select how much and which parts of this curriculum suit your timeframe and audience. Do not feel obliged to cover everything! You may even edit as you lead the study. This guide is to assist you, not burden you!

See parts 3 and 4 of the Introduction for tips on how to focus on parts most necessary to your group, given the timing of your study. At the end of each part are further background materials for your use in preparation and handouts for the workshop. Please duplicate on white paper, encouraging participants to copy and use handouts in other settings.

**Determine in advance which handouts you will print for participants.** (Fast links to all of these are on the [Table of Contents](#).) Make sure to include among these HRC's Religion and Faith Program sign up sheet ([Handout 3-E](#)).

## CHECKLIST OF MATERIALS

- Film and educational license (purchased through the [HRC Store](#))

- Paper (for you and participants)
- Tape
- Pens or pencils
- Optional: flipchart, chalkboard or placard
- Optional: water, refreshments
- Optional: List of denomination and religious advocacy groups and resources on [page 10](#).
- Materials for creating [Handout 3-D](#) (list of names, offices and contact information of your local government leaders and representatives).
- Optional: List of leaders of the denomination or tradition represented by your group.
- Requested HRC material, e.g., *Living Openly in Your Place of Worship* Guide, *Out In Scripture* brochure, etc.

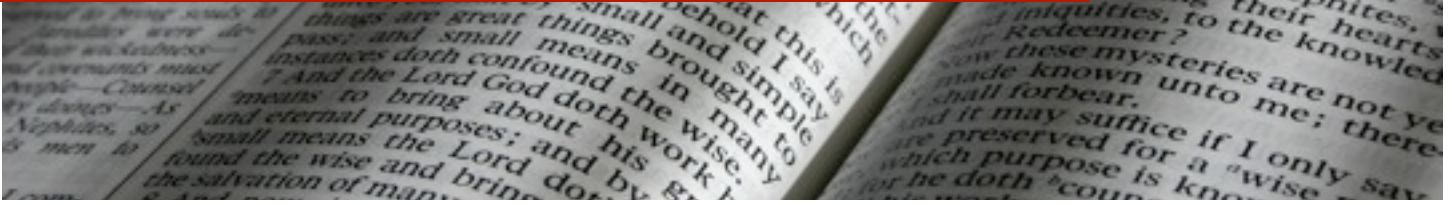
## REMINDERS ONCE EVENT ENDS

- Collect and return sign up sheets ([Handout 3-E](#)) to HRC's Religion and Faith Program.
- Let us know your questions and concerns and those of participants. Our contact information is below.
- Please report on the event and encourage participants to do so as well on our "[Share Your Story](#)" webpage.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Please contact the Human Rights Campaign's Religion and Faith Program with questions, comments, concerns, or just to let us know that you are using this curriculum. We are always open to suggestions and warmly invite continued dialogue.

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## INTRODUCTION IN BRIEF

EACH HEADER LINKS TO THE RELEVANT PAGES

### **1. Who should lead the conversation?**

*Someone who is local, a peer or colleague, and who is transparent about her or his own process of learning and understanding.*

### **2. What is the purpose of the conversation?**

*To transform those already open or supportive into advocates for LGBT rights.*

### **3. Why doesn't one format fit all?**

*Use the parts of this study guide that match your audience, intentions and timeframe.*

### **4. What is the best way to use this guide, given time limitations?**

*Various scheduling and timing options will need the leader's considerations well beforehand.*

### **5. How can this study supplement the film?**

*Additional resources and information are supplied.*

### **6. How can dialogue help people take the film to heart?**

*Conversation about the film with others in a strategic dialogue will help viewers connect the film to their own experience and encourage them to recall important information.*

## 1. WHO SHOULD LEAD THE CONVERSATION?

“**All politics is local,**” then U.S. House Speaker “Tip” O’Neill famously said. In other words, what gets done in Washington must come from the heart of the people—our family homes and our houses of worship, our neighborhoods and our communities.

**All learning is local** is an underlying assumption of this study guide. Each group and every constituency viewing *For the Bible Tells Me So* will have a different way of responding to the film. A wide range of feelings, issues and questions will come up for diverse viewers, and any guide to this film or anyone who teaches it does best to anticipate multiple directions to transformative dialogue.

### **The most effective teachers know their students to some degree.**

Outside experts may be effective to a point, but **a peer** with ongoing collegial relationships with “students” may serve better, **not only as a trustworthy bearer of information, but as a model of transformation. And a member of the group to be reached will better hold a “student” accountable.**

For example, parents can often best talk with parents, women with women, youth with youth, Catholics with Catholics, Baptists with Baptists, Jews with Jews, Muslims with Muslims, and so on. However, having said that, it can also prove enriching to have cross-fertilization of different faiths, traditions, denominations, and those of no faith tradition (including agnostics and atheists), and a good leader can help *all* participants feel that their perspectives are valuable.

### **The most effective teachers are also learners.**

Roman Catholic author Henri Nouwen wrote that those who touch us most deeply are not the moralists, advice-givers or academics, but those who reveal their own vulnerability, their own healing, and their own self-discoveries. Presbyterian pastor, author and activist William Sloane Coffin declared himself a recovering racist, sexist and homophobe, making all the more persuasive his opinion piece supporting New Hampshire’s recognition of same-gender unions.

Supporters of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights are sometimes surprised to learn that **LGBT people must also unlearn the very same prejudices** about themselves held by the dominant culture and by their own religious communities. Therefore, LGBT people who have come to a place of self-acceptance may be helpful consultants in the process of transformation, while not expecting all LGBT people to have finally “arrived.” Living openly as a beloved child of God is a lifelong process of transformation for everyone, including those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

## 2. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE CONVERSATION?

**This study guide is designed to reach those already supportive or on the road to being supportive.** “Preaching to the choir” is vital because no choir is fully converted.

*Everyone on a spiritual path has a way to go.*

Not many of us fully practice what we preach. **We are all “in recovery” regarding our own prejudices** and we are all also in need of transformation and empowerment as advocates for LGBT rights. Few of us can say we have done enough, said enough, written enough, demonstrated enough and resisted enough “the powers that be” as long as religious and civil institutions and authorities continue to exclude, attack, and deny basic equality to the LGBT community.

**The purpose of this study guide is to transform supporters into advocates.** Holocaust survivor Elie Weisel has said to hear a witness of the Holocaust is to be a witness. Everyone who sees *For the Bible Tells Me So* can make witness to its stirring contents and helpful lessons, and find ways of showing it to others. **Everyone who participates in this workshop can become a teacher, a leader, one who shows the way of compassion and justice to others.**

If those who disagree become supportive along the way, all the better! Yet too much time taken with opponents may compromise the purpose of this study. It’s important to remember that how a study leader responds to hostility informs and affects the people we are trying to motivate. It will also be important to distinguish between comments intended to be disruptive and those that stem from an honest wrestling with complex issues raised by the film and the study guide.

**A leader may not effect change within an opponent, but may effect change in bystanders regarding an opponent’s point of view.** The following proverb is helpful:

*“A gentle answer turns away wrath.”* (Proverbs 15:1)

**The best advocate is a well-informed advocate.** For too long we have let the Radical Right claim religious and traditional values as theirs. **Advocates for LGBT rights have the same right to claim religious and traditional values as motivating factors in their advocacy.** The same Bible that is a weapon in the hands of our opposition may become an instrument of healing as we discover its deeper and truer meaning when applied to political questions. The biblical prophecy of “beating swords into plowshares” is fulfilled as we deepen our understanding of scripture.

As we root ourselves firmly within our own spiritual traditions, **we will amplify our own voice, so to speak, voicing our opinions with assurance, authority and authenticity.** Henri Nouwen warned, “People will constantly try to hook your wounded self. They will

point out your needs, your character defects, your limitations and sins. That is how they attempt to dismiss what God, through you, is saying to them.”

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared of the Civil Rights Movement that those who are not part of the solution are part of the problem, and that we will remember the silence of our friends longer than the arguments of our opponents.

Mahatma Gandhi admonished:

**“Be the change you seek.”**

### **3. WHY DOESN'T ONE FORMAT FIT ALL?**

Given prevailing conditions, sailors use different tacks to move their vessel to their destination. **Identifying or creating the characteristics of a given audience** for the film will facilitate accomplishing what is intended, suggesting what tacks to take.

**A study leader does best to read through this entire study guide and select exercises and sections that would work best with a given group who has viewed the film.**

For example, random participants in a movie theater with a range of faiths or of no particular faith tradition at all will be very different from participants gathering at a denominational meeting where members share the same faith, and either will be very different from a group of church members meeting in their own congregation. A random or interfaith audience may be strangers to one another, and safety will be a concern. Members of the same faith will at least share a common language, while having different “takes” on common beliefs. Members of a congregation will know one another and take some things for granted, but the intimacy may also give rise again to safety concerns—such as, “I didn’t know your son is gay, and he’s my child’s Sunday school teacher.”

**Creating an audience may help but not guarantee a certain homogeneity** that proves easier sailing, not in terms of having less dangerous waters, but at least in terms of knowing what lies beneath the surface that could interfere with the process. Again, it’s important for the teacher to know the audience. For example, an outsider might think that a primarily LGBT audience would be automatically sympathetic to the purpose of the film, but a peer might know that there may be hidden currents of opposition, whether animosity or indifference toward religion, or resistance to the view of the “hard wired” biological nature of homosexuality presented in the animated segment of the film.

Given the desired outcome of this study, turning friends into advocates, **try to include in your gathering representatives of government officials and/or the officials themselves as well as leaders of LGBT advocacy groups and other local human rights organizations.**



This would give the representatives and leaders insight into this constituency and the spiritual issues involved. If unable to devote that much time, they would be particularly useful in the **final half-hour** as we encourage making political and community connections.

## 4. HOW SHOULD ONE USE THIS GUIDE, GIVEN TIME LIMITATIONS?

**To complete this study, two hours of relatively fresh energy is required. That means it is best done when an entire morning or an entire afternoon is devoted to watching the film and completing the study—all the better if the group can afford a full day.** In the latter case, you might want to describe it as a day-long workshop and retreat and provide a lunch break.

**An evening showing of the film is best followed by a briefer conversation about the film,** and the recommended way of doing that would be to shorten [Part One](#) and [Part Three](#) and to eliminate [Part Two: Joining the Bible’s Conversation](#), or to schedule that segment at another time, or to substitute a briefer conversation, such as, “What did you learn about the Bible from the film, or about the Bible and homosexuality?”

**Because finding enough time for everything may be a problem, we offer suggestions throughout this study guide for reducing the time required to complete it.**

### GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR SHORTENING THE TIME COMMITMENT

- ➔ **Substitute** the seated alternative exercises for those requiring movement.
- ➔ **Eliminate exercises** or sections marked as “suggested.”
- ➔ **Select and focus** on two or three “negative” scriptures and two or three “positive” scriptures from [Part Two: Joining the Bible’s Conversation](#).
- ➔ **Use the background material** on [each family](#) and [each scripture](#) not for presentation but to give the leader familiarity should questions arise. Share such material on a “need to know” basis. This material may also be distributed in written form or announced as available on the HRC website.
- ➔ **Move briskly** through the material without rushing the participants.
- ➔ **Eliminate sections** as you go if necessary.
- ➔ [Part Three: What Do We Do Now?](#) is the part to **keep intact as much as possible**, as building advocates is a primary purpose of the study guide.

## 5. HOW CAN THIS STUDY SUPPLEMENT THE FILM?

The film's genius lies in its ability to cogently and concisely present varied information in creative juxtaposition and in a visually intriguing way. Needed facts and biblical scholarship are interwoven into the stories of five families and are explained by a diversity of interesting people, many of them notable in other fields of endeavor. Naturally, **some details are left out and may be introduced in the conversation** that follows the film.

The film attempts to present fairly the full spectrum of opinions on lesbian and gay people and the Bible, mentioning but not directly addressing bisexual and transgender people. However, almost every one of the 100+ conservative religious leaders approached to be part of the project declined because they perceived it to be promoting a more progressive view. Consequently, the director had to rely primarily on archival footage to represent their views.

**Even though the film profiles five families who once held or still hold conservative views on the topic, mainstream religious people who disagree with homosexual practice on religious grounds may not feel themselves fairly represented in the film.** When discussing the film it is important to avoid creating an “other” that is not capable or worthy of engagement. This is a phenomenon the film decries. As Right Reverend Richard Holloway observes in the film, “So you don't become equally prejudiced against the prejudiced. What you do is get them to see that their fear is groundless.”

**It will also be useful to offer participants a list of denominational and religious affinity and advocacy groups.**

HRC's Religion and Faith Program has an updated [Living Openly in Your Place of Worship](#) guide that provides an extensive list of welcoming religious organizations and websites.

Participants may also go to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's [Institute for Welcoming Resources](#) for a state-by-state listing of welcoming churches. It is important to remind participants that most religious traditions have Welcoming movements consisting of LGBT-affirming congregations.

HRC's e-newsletter is a good way for participants to keep up to date on new resources and [HRC's Religion and Faith Program website](#) contains LGBT faith-based materials. The [Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry at the Pacific School of Religion](#) also provides an extensive library with direct links to relevant material.

For historical material on LGBT people and faith go to the [LGBT Religious Archive Network](#), a project of [Chicago Theological Seminary](#). For a weekly preaching and devotional guide to scripture and the issues facing LGBT people, participants will want to sign up to receive HRC's [Out In Scripture](#).

For specific transgender issues related to faith, see the handouts about [Gender Identity and the Bible](#) and [Gender Identity and Jewish Tradition](#).

Forthcoming, in August of 2008, is an [HRC Study Guide on Transgender Resources](#) that will supplement the brief affirmations of gender identity referenced by a few of the film's speakers.

## 6. HOW CAN DIALOGUE HELP PEOPLE TAKE THE FILM TO HEART?

This study is designed to be **highly interactive, based on the assumption that people remember what they discover for themselves**. The leader will be supplied with background information, exercises and questions to keep people moving through the material by interacting with their memories of the film.

**Announce, post and/or distribute the following guidelines:**

*Please:*

**Dialogue rather than debate**

**Use “I” language**

**Listen with your heart**

**Address ideas**

**No personal attacks**

**Use the thumb and fingers of your hand to count out the five guidelines as you read them aloud at the beginning. Clarify that these are *guidelines*, not “The Five Commandments.”**

**Confidentiality is not listed as a guideline, as it cannot be guaranteed, and it is not appropriate to give someone a false sense of security. Still, encourage people to keep personal information anonymous beyond this setting.**

Emphasize that the conversation will be best served if participants think of it as a **dialogue rather than a debate.**

Generally when it comes to difficult issues people like to have a *discussion*, derived from a word meaning *to shake apart* or *to scatter*. Discussion alone can be noisy or hurtful, because its sibling words are *percussion* and *concussion*.

In contrast, *dialogue* is derived from words meaning *through* (dia) *the word* (logos). Dialogue can be calmer and healing as we come together through our words.

**What religious groups have discovered in addressing complex or controversial issues is that dialogue can bring us together.** Dialogue is about coming together through the word, finding common ground and shared meaning. That is what is hoped for in the dialogue that follows any showing of *For the Bible Tells Me So*.

**Encourage participants to use “I” language:** “I think that,” “I feel that,” “I believe that,” and speak from their own experience as much as possible. Generalizations, such as “We believe this...” or “Don’t we all agree...” imply a consensus that may not be real.

**Pronouncements about what God thinks, believes, says, does or will do are debatable, if not presumptuous, if not prefaced with “I believe” or “I think.”**

## **PROCEED TO PART ONE: OPENING THE CONVERSATION**



*All three parts of the study guide are intended to be used for a single two-hour format. Part One should be **35 minutes**. That means what follows in this first section must be moved through briskly. This will suit the audience, which has been sitting for a long time and now has an opportunity to get up and move.*

*Following the film, announce that before starting the curriculum:*

- Participants are requested to watch the credits roll *in silence* to honor the stories and insights presented.
- A 10-15 minute break (choose a definite length) will follow for participants to stretch, visit restrooms, grab refreshments if available, take a walk outside, or, for those who choose not to stay, exit gracefully.

## **PART ONE IN BRIEF**

EACH HEADER LINKS TO THE RELEVANT PAGES

### **Step 1. Song and prayer after the break (5 minutes)**

*Begin the study guide session with a song and a prayer mindful of the constituencies present. This will help re-gather and re-focus the group. Welcome congressional members or staff who may be there, as well as religious, civic, community and LGBT leaders.*

### **Step 2. What touched you personally? (10 minutes)**

*Participants will be invited to consider and share in pairs which part, person or story touched them personally.*

### **Step 3. Which family in the film resembles yours? (10 minutes)**

*Participants will review the five families featured in the film and will be invited to share which family best represents their family of origin in terms of their level of acceptance of LGBT people or if their family is “none of the above.”*

### **Step 4. Where do you stand on the Bible? (10 minutes)**

*Participants will explore the spectrum of opinion on scripture in the group through an exercise that explores first, how members of the group were raised, second, what they believe now, and finally, whether they view the Bible as a rulebook or a guidebook.*

### **Background Material and Posters for Part One**

*These can be found in the **back** of the study guide.*

- ➔ [Background: The Families of For the Bible Tells Me So](#)
- ➔ [Posters: The Families of For the Bible Tells Me So](#)

## PURPOSE OF THE FOLLOWING EXERCISES

The exercises that follow are intended to get participants **talking** about the film **with each other** in pairs or small groupings. They also help participants know that there are others who **share** their experience or their **opinions**, creating a safer environment for **dialogue** and possible connections for mutual **support** and advocacy in the future.

## GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR THE EXERCISES

**The activities that follow anticipate movement**, something needed after sitting through a long film.

**Each activity will provide a seated alternative**, if movement is not possible or desirable, or if attempting to save time.

- ➔ Explain that those who wish to remain in place may do so, and during the conversation of pairs or small groupings suggested in each exercise, the leader or leaders may visit with those who remain seated to keep them engaged.
- ➔ When you invite people to “move,” avoid instructions such as “get up” and “walk,” as some may be in wheelchairs. Use “please move toward” or “please go to,” or “please wheel or walk toward,” etc.
- ➔ Even when there is fixed seating, such as in a movie theater or a church with fixed pews, the suggested movements are possible (perhaps using the center aisle). They just may take a little longer.

## STEP 1. SONG AND PRAYER AFTER THE BREAK (5 minutes)

**Before the film begins**, ask for silence as the credits roll at the end of the film.

### **Explain there will be a 10-15 minute break when the credits finish.**

This break is not included as part of the expected two hours of conversation. This break will allow participants to use restrooms, grab some fresh air or refreshments. It also allows some to leave discretely, if they choose.

**Many people will have strong, emotional reactions to the film.** It is helpful to have on hand **boxes of tissues and watchful attendants** prepared to move close enough to be present if they witness people having a difficult time. The break will give people a chance to recover themselves before having to engage in dialogue.

Feelings will be aroused by sad or difficult situations presented in the film. But equally challenging may be the happy or successful situations presented, because audience members will compare their own experiences to them. For example, when the Reitan parents so thoroughly accept their gay son and even demonstrate for LGBT rights, some LGBT people in the gathering will wish their parents could be so supportive. The elevation of Gene Robinson as an openly gay bishop in the Episcopal Church will awaken feelings among those whose denominations won't even welcome LGBT people as members or as ministers. Families with LGBT members may identify with the families portrayed in the film.

### **Encourage people to return to their seats toward the end of the break by leading them in a song.**

Choose a song that people know without having to distribute words. For Christians, this might be **“Jesus Loves Me”** or **“Amazing Grace.”** A *niggun* (wordless melody) could work for Jewish groups or interfaith groups. **“Kum-bay-yah,” “We Shall Overcome,” “Alleluia,”** or a Gregorian or Taize chant, might also work for interfaith groups.

### **Once the group has gathered again, say a brief prayer.**

Choose one that is appropriate to the gathering's mix, whether of a particular faith, ecumenical, interfaith, or a mix of people that includes atheists, agnostics and others.

Here is a model for what the prayer might include:

*Please pray with me: In the presence of **all that is holy**, we give thanks for the **blessing** and challenge of this film, for those who created it, for those who were portrayed, for the **families who gave so generously of themselves**, for those clergy and teachers and leaders who offered perspective, for those in the film who were doubtful or resistant or angry or unwelcoming.*

*Bless us now, as we share our own feelings and insights that we might grow in our **ability to love and to act** on behalf of justice.*

***Amen***



## STEP 2. WHAT TOUCHED YOU PERSONALLY? (10 minutes)

**Invite everyone to turn to their neighbor, introduce themselves and share one thing that touched them personally while watching the film.** Give each person in the dyads two minutes, and let them know when the first two minutes have passed so they switch and hear from the second of the pair. At the end of four minutes, call their attention back to the full group. Give two or three minutes in plenary for a sampling of phrases about what touched people.

## STEP 3. WHICH FAMILY RESEMBLES YOURS? (10 minutes)

**Invite participants to reflect on which of the five families depicted in the film most closely resembles the family in which they grew up in terms of their level of acceptance of LGBT people.** Remind them of the choices, highlighting one or two things from the description of the families at the end of this section ([Background Material to Part One](#)) just to help them remember which family is which. Please note that there are no Hispanic, Asian or Native American families represented. It is advised not to rehearse all the family's information, as it will take time away from the exercise.

Some participants may have grown up in a secular household or have had very different experiences than those reflected in this film. If this is the case, ask them to think about how their family experiences were different from those in the film and what challenges, if any, might surface in their families around acceptance of LGBT people.

## STEP 3 EXERCISE

*[A seated alternative follows.]*

**Print out our [pre-made posters](#) with the name of each family** from the film and place them in the far corners of the room, with one in the forward middle (closest to you) **and a blank one** in the far middle (furthest from you). **These posters can be found at the end of the study guide.**

**Invite people to move** to the corner or poster with the name of the family most reminiscent of the family in which they grew up. Those who cannot identify their families with any of the families should be invited to go to the blank poster.

**Invite those in the various groups to share** in a sentence or two, with the person next to them in the grouping, what it would have been like for an LGBT person in their family.

**While people are still in place, move on to Step 4 - “Where do you stand on the Bible?”**

### **ALTERNATIVE/SEATED EXERCISE**

**To save time, you may ask people to raise hands in response to the following questions. Explain you are asking about their families of origin, not necessarily their present families.**

- ➔ Whose families resemble where Mary Lou Wallner was at first, condemning homosexuality as a sin?
- ➔ Whose families reflect levels of acceptance that are similar to where the Poteats are by the end of the film—supportive of LGBT individuals but not of their marriage?
- ➔ Whose families reflect levels of acceptance similar to where the Robinsons are—quietly supportive of LGBT individuals?
- ➔ Whose families are where the Gephards are in their level of acceptance of LGBT people—“unconditionally loving”?
- ➔ Whose families are doing what the Reitans are doing as activists for LGBT rights?

**Ask if there are any comments participants might like to make about their families.**

**When you are finished, move on to Step 4.**

## **STEP 4. WHERE DO YOU STAND ON THE BIBLE?**

(10 minutes)

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate **Desmond Tutu** says in the film:

*The Bible is the word of God through the words of human beings speaking in the idiom of their time. And the richness of the Bible comes from the fact that we don't take it as literally so, that it was dictated by God.*

## STEP 4 EXERCISE

[A seated alternative follows.]

**Explain that not everyone present will agree with Bishop Tutu. Ask people to imagine a line cutting across the room (however it works, given the seating). Ask them to conceive of the line as a spectrum of belief bracketed by these two poles:**

- ➔ The Bible was dictated by God
- ➔ The Bible was written by human beings

**First ask participants to align themselves along the spectrum in the place that best represents how they were raised.** For example, some people were raised to think of the Bible as more the word of God than the words of human beings and so would place themselves a little closer to one pole than the other, and vice versa.

**Then invite participants to align themselves along the spectrum in the place that best represents what they believe about the Bible today.** For example, they might have shifted more or completely toward the understanding that the Bible was written by human beings. Alternatively, they might not have changed their opinion at all. **Ask participants to explain to nearby people why they have or have not shifted their understanding of the Bible.**

*This supplement is “Suggested,” and can be eliminated for reasons of time:*

Invite participants to align themselves between these two poles according to how they view the Bible today:

The Bible is a rulebook

The Bible is a guidebook

**While people are still along the spectrum, ask a few to say why they choose their locations along the spectrum.** Some, for example, will find themselves in the middle, as they believe it does offer some rules alongside guidance.

**Now invite them to return to their places.**

**ALTERNATIVE/SEATED EXERCISE**

**As an alternative to moving people into a spectrum across the room, you could ask people to raise hands in response to the following questions:**

- ➔ How many people were raised on the belief that the Bible was in some sense dictated by God?
- ➔ How many people were taught that the Bible was written by inspired human beings who were nonetheless limited and fallible?
- ➔ How many of you learned that the Bible was somewhere in between?

**Now ask them to respond to one of these three requests:**

- ➔ Please raise your hand if you believe presently that the Bible was in some sense dictated by God.
- ➔ Please lift a hand if you believe the Bible was written by human beings, perhaps limited by their own culture and experience.
- ➔ Raise your hand if you believe the Bible, though written by human beings, is somehow inspired by God.

**Finally, invite some responses to the following:** If you shifted in your opinion of scripture, please state in a phrase or sentence what prompted the change?

*The following exercise is “Suggested,” and can be eliminated for reasons of time:*

**Now ask whether they presently think of the Bible as a “rulebook” or a “guidebook” or somewhere in between. Let them know all three possibilities before “voting,” by raising hands.**

- ➔ How many of you consider the Bible as a rulebook for your life?
- ➔ How many think of the Bible as a guidebook for your life?
- ➔ How many of you are somewhere in between?

**Invite a few of those who think of themselves as somewhere in between to offer brief explanations of their choices.**

**PROCEED TO PART TWO: JOINING THE BIBLE’S CONVERSATION**



## PART TWO IN BRIEF

EACH HEADER LINKS TO THE RELEVANT PAGES

[55 minutes total]

### [Preface to Part Two](#)

*Guidance about the interactive, fast-paced nature of this section, as well as its “monastic moments,” and a reminder to read the study guide’s introduction.*

### [Conversation 1. What does the Bible say to me? \(10 min\)](#)

*An opportunity to get personal, considering the overall message of the Bible to each viewer of the film.*

### [Conversation 2. What does the Bible say about homosexuality? \(35 min\)](#)

*Reviewing the scriptures covered in the film and one not included:*

- ➔ [Creation](#) (Genesis, chapters 1 & 2)
- ➔ [Sodom and Gomorrah](#) (Genesis, chapters 18 & 19)
- ➔ [Holiness Code](#) (Leviticus, chapters 18 & 20)
- ➔ [Sin of Onan](#) (Genesis 38:1-10)
- ➔ [Jesus and Homosexuality](#) (The film references that he did not comment on it — see page 27.)
- ➔ [Against Nature](#) (Romans, chapters 1 & 2)
- ➔ [Excluded from the Kingdom](#) (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

### [Conversation 3. A Biblical Foundation for Advocacy \(10 min\)](#)

*Reviewing the larger biblical issues presented in the film alongside their foundations in scriptures.*

### [Background and Handouts for Part Two](#)

*These can be found in the **back** of the study guide.*

Handout 2-A: [Things to Remember as You Approach the Bible](#)

Handout 2-B: [The Scriptures Cited in For The Bible Tells Me So](#)

Handout 2-C: [Scriptures on Which to Base the Welcome and Rights of LGBT People](#)

Handout 2-D: [The Bible and Homosexuality, A Christian View](#)

Handout 2-E: [Gender Identity and the Bible, Jewish and Christian Perspectives](#)

Handout 2-F: [Gender Identity and Jewish Tradition](#)

## PREFACE

*References are taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise specified. Please read the [Introduction](#) to understand the purpose of this study guide, its underlying assumptions, who should lead it, and how it is most effectively led.*

*A note on handouts: This section makes use of **six** optional handouts found at the end of the study guide. These are intended to serve as background material for the leader and as handouts for the group to be printed at the leader's discretion.*

**This study guide is designed to be highly interactive**, based on the assumption that people remember what they discover for themselves.

The group can easily get bogged down in any of the following parts of this proposed review of the Bible. **You will keep them interested if you keep things moving and encourage brief responses.** So more voices can be heard, encourage those who haven't spoken yet to do so as you lead them through this material. Be careful to avoid "punishing" anyone who may be overly responsive.

**Unless otherwise directed, when you invite people to list things, don't take time to write them down.** If you want this material recorded, ask a scribe in advance to keep a record.

With some of the questions or issues to be addressed, you will be encouraged to offer "**monastic moments**," a kind of mini-retreat opportunity for individuals to consult their own wisdom or feelings. Explain that at times participants may be quick to answer while others are still thinking. A monastic moment of **30 seconds** or so gives an opportunity for us to get in touch with our own answers to a given question.

# { CONVERSATION 1 }

## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY TO ME? (10min)

*The following reading of quotes is "Suggested," which means it may be eliminated for reasons of time.*

**Prepare four volunteers in advance to read aloud the following quotes from the film.**

**Leader:**

One way of reading the Bible is to understand it as a dialogue or a conversation, among people of different times, places and circumstances. Instead of “The Bible says it. I believe it. That settles it,” the Bible welcomes us into a conversation about God, life and love.

**Reader #1:**

Right Reverend Richard Holloway, noting that biblical literalism is a “modern invention” dating to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, says literalists tend to resist the conversation. He says in the film:

*Biblical literalists are people who “know” the truth absolutely. So they’re not able to engage in a conversation—they’re only able to engage in a pronouncement.*

Reverend Dr. Joan Brown Campbell notes that biblical literalism does not extend to following Jesus’ admonition to give all you have to the poor, to which Rev. Holloway adds,

*“Most of the literalists in America are also capitalists. You know, they’re making money being a biblical literalist. You don’t take interest; you couldn’t possibly have investments because usury is condemned in the Bible.”*

**Reader #2:**

And everyone—literalist or not—brings their own perspectives and biases to scripture. As Rev. Irene Monroe says in the film,

*There are many readings to any passage. You and I can read the same passage and get a different interpretation, and the reason for that—it has to do with our social location. I’m going to read the passage very differently than someone who might be white, male and straight and upper class. I am going to read it as an African American who’s had a history of how the Bible has been used to denigrate black people; I’m going to read it as a woman—the Bible has been used to subordinate women. I’m going to read it as a lesbian—another, okay, use of the Bible to denigrate another group of people.*

**cont’d on next page...**

**Reader #3:**

Even a biblical literalist would probably agree with evangelical preacher Brenda Poteat when she says,

*As I grow in Christ, he opens up the Bible more and more to me.*

**Reader #4:**

Rev. Laurence Keene provides a helpful distinction between “what the Bible says” and “what the Bible reads”:

*I have a soft spot in my heart for literalists because I used to be one. However, when someone says to me, “This is what the Bible says,” my response to them is, “No, that’s what the Bible reads.” It is the struggle to understand context and language and culture and custom that helps us to understand the meaning of what it is saying.*

*This ends the “Suggested” readings, which may be eliminated for reasons of time.*

**The leader resumes (or begins, if the preceding readings are not used):**

**Say:** “The title of the film is *For the Bible Tells Me So*. Take a monastic moment—a moment of silence to look inward—to consider the question:

**“What does the Bible say to me? What is its central message to me personally?”**

Give *thirty seconds* of silence. **Then, say:** “Now pair up with the person sitting next to you and share briefly your response to this question. You will each have two minutes.”

**Give them two minutes, then say:** “If the other person has not shared their answer to the question, it’s time to switch.” Give them another two minutes.

**Then ask the group:** “Where does the title of the movie come from?”

**The answer:** “For the Bible tells me so” is a phrase of the **children’s song, “Jesus Loves Me.”**



If the gathering is largely Christian, lead those who know the song to sing:

**Jesus loves me, this I know,**  
 For the Bible tells me so;  
 Little ones to him belong,  
 They are weak, but **he is strong.**  
**Yes, Jesus loves me,**  
 Yes, Jesus loves me,  
 Yes, Jesus loves me—  
**The Bible tells me so.**

If the group is largely other than Christian, simply recite or sing the lyrics for the group.

## ASK & ANSWER

**Ask:** “Where in the movie is there a reference to this song?”

**Answer:**

- ➔ Gene Robinson’s mother, Imogene Robinson, mentions that he sang the song in front of their congregation at two years of age.
- ➔ Mary Lou Wallner speaks of her daughter Anna’s ability at 10 months of age to hum “Jesus Loves Me” even before she could talk.

**Ask:** “For Anna, what got in the way of the message, ‘Jesus loves me’ or, more broadly, ‘God loves me?’”

**Answer:** Invite the group to name the obstacles that got in the way of the message of love for Anna in the Bible. This will go quicker if you do **not** list in writing (though an option) or repeat them unless they are not audible.

**Sample answers:**

- ➔ The church’s opposition to homosexuality
- ➔ Misuse of scriptures
- ➔ Ancient misunderstandings of sexuality
- ➔ A parent convinced that homosexuality is wrong

**Ask:** “What could be done about each obstacle listed in the last answer?”

**Sample answers:**

- ➔ A church could change its position
- ➔ The Bible could be taught better
- ➔ Current information about sexuality is needed
- ➔ Parents could be better supported

# { CONVERSATION 2 }

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY? (10min)

**Ask: “What scriptures were discussed in the film that might be cited to oppose LGBT people?”**

List the stories and references on paper or chalkboard as they are named. The specific texts themselves (in the order they appear in the Bible, with the exception of Onan) are provided for the leader in [The Scriptures Cited in \*For the Bible Tells Me So\*](#), along with “Background not in the film” for each text. The leader may familiarize himself or herself with the fuller texts listed below, not just the applicable verses, as well as the background material, which may be presented as needed. See also the following handouts: [Scriptures on Which to Base the Welcome, Acceptance and Rights of LGBT People](#), [The Bible and Homosexuality, A Christian View](#), [Gender Identity and the Bible: Jewish and Christian Perspectives](#), and [Gender Identity and Jewish Tradition](#).

- ➔ [Creation](#) (Genesis, chapters 1 & 2)
- ➔ [Sodom and Gomorrah](#) (Genesis, chapters 18 & 19)
- ➔ [Holiness Code](#) (Leviticus, chapters 18 & 20)
- ➔ [Sin of Onan](#) (Genesis 38:1-10)
- ➔ [Jesus and Homosexuality](#) (No reference cited in the film)
- ➔ [Against Nature](#) (Romans, chapters 1 & 2)

**Ask: “What scripture that is often used against LGBT people was not listed in the film?”**

Explain that this is a “bonus scripture,” and then add it to the list:

- ➔ [Excluded from the Kingdom](#) (1 Corinthians 6)

The leader should assess how he or she is doing with time and the concerns of the group attending. Rather than going through all the passages, the leader may prefer to focus on only a few, negative and positive. Ask participants to think about which scriptural arguments used against LGBT people they personally struggle with most or are called upon to discuss most often. Go directly to the discussion of those passages in this section. (If you are doing the briefest version, and not using the material below, simply ask what participants learned from the film about the Bible and about the Bible and homosexuality. This is not recommended if you have two hours to do the full study. It is still recommended that the leader review for themselves the material below and in [Handout 2-B](#).)

Before the leader engages in each of the following conversations about scripture, he or she should review the actual text and its background in [Handout 2-B: Scriptures Cited in \*For the Bible Tells Me So\*](#).

## CREATION

Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18, 21-25

**“Procreation is one of the reasons God put Adam and Eve together. Adam and Steve and Eve and Jane can’t procreate.”** - Brenda Poteat, mother of Tonia Poteat.

## ASK & ANSWER

**Ask:** “What did Brenda Poteat, Tonia’s mother, say is the purpose of marriage?”

**Answer:** Procreation. God said, “Be fruitful and multiply.”

**Explain:** That’s in the first creation story in Genesis, chapter one. There is a **second, more ancient creation story** in Chapter 2, where Adam and Eve appear. “Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve or Eve and Jane,” Mary Poteat clarifies.

**Ask:** “What is the purpose of marriage in this second story?”

**Answer:** In the second creation story, God says, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” (Genesis 2:18)

**Ask:** “What does Jesus say about marriage?”

**Answer:** That a man leaves mother and father and becomes one flesh with his wife.

**Explain:** Yes, that’s in the second Creation story. In the film, it is correctly said by a man on the street that Jesus said nothing about homosexuality. If the group includes Christians, remind them of this.

**Ask:** “Does Jesus say anything about procreation?”

**Answer:** No. In the same passage in which he talks about divorce, however, he does uplift eunuchs, who were despised because they could not procreate and because their bodies were altered.

**Ask:** “What is the context for Jesus’ pronouncement on marriage?”

**The answer:** He is asked about whether divorce is permissible.

**Ask:** “What does Jesus say about divorce?”

**The answer:** That it had been permitted because men “were so hardhearted.”

**Ask:** “What does Jesus say about family in the Gospels?”

**The answer:** “Who are my mother and brothers? Those who do the will of God are my mother and brothers and sisters.”

## SODOM AND GOMORRAH

Genesis 18 & 19

In the film, a man carries a sign that reads, **“In Genesis 19, God burned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of homosexuality.”** Rev. Keene talks about Sodom and Gomorrah, accompanied by quaint old movie footage of the story.

## ASK & ANSWER

**Ask:** “Just for fun—what did the narrator get wrong about the story of Sodom, at least as we have it in Genesis?”

**Answer:** Abraham did not accompany the strangers to his nephew’s home in Sodom. Give extra credit to anybody who gets this bit of trivia!

**Ask:** “What is said about hospitality in the film?”

**Answer:** Inhospitality was a serious social breach and hospitality was an obligation.

**Ask:** “How does Rev. Keene interpret the story of the men of Sodom wanting ‘to know’ the strangers?”

**Answer:** He argues that the men wanted to humiliate the guests by raping them.

**Ask:** “In the eyes of the law today, and in our own customary understanding, is rape considered an expression of sexuality?”

**Answer:** No. It is an expression of power and dominance.

**Ask:** “What does this scene of intended gang rape remind you of?”

**Potential answers:** Rape in prison, rape in warfare, etc.

**Conclude:** “So, this has no resemblance to same-gender relationships between consenting adults.”

**Remind the group, in your own words:** Orthodox Rabbi Steven Greenberg explains this was a common form of humiliation. When victors won a battle, they raped not only the women and children, but also the men. He says that...

**“Sodom, according to the rabbis, is about cruelty; it's about inhospitality.”**

He cites an ancient re-telling of Sodom's inhospitality to demonstrate that it was not simply an act of omission, but an act of commission. The city's greedy citizens, fearing strangers might steal their wealth, made hospitality against the law—think of the comparable attitudes of countries that build literal or legal walls to protect their economic interests from undocumented workers.

**Ask:** “What current examples can you think of in which a government or a religious body has made hospitality against the law?”

**Potential answers:**

- ➔ Prohibitive immigration laws
- ➔ The persecution of the Sanctuary movement of years past that gave refuge to undocumented immigrants seeking asylum from repressive regimes
- ➔ The deportation of undocumented immigrants seeking economic opportunities for themselves and their families; the prosecution of those who hire them
- ➔ The persecution of LGBT ministers who live openly
- ➔ Trial, censure, or removal of congregations or ministers who have ordained LGBT people or who have married same-gender couples, etc.

**Read Rev. Irene Monroe's statement** in the film about feeling the inhospitality of Sodom in many New England towns:

*I know a lot of towns that are like Sodom and Gomorrah, that you can walk into these towns and they don't show any sign of hospitality simply because you're black; or simply because you're gay or lesbian; or just because you're an*

*outsider. We have many towns here, in New England, that are like that. That's the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah. And when I walk through those towns, because I'm a black woman or a lesbian woman, that's when I think of Sodom and Gomorrah.*

**Encourage a monastic moment to consider:**

**“What are some of the ways the film depicts LGBT people being or feeling unwelcome?”**

**Ask them to list these aloud. Remember, not all of the following need to be listed aloud, and don't take time to write them on paper or chalkboard.**

**Obvious examples might be:**

- ➔ Rev. Jimmy Swaggert's remarks that he would kill any man who looked at him “that way” and calling same-gender marriage “abom-nation”
- ➔ Man carrying “God hates America” sign because of supposed U.S. “toleration” of homosexuality
- ➔ Anita Bryant praying that the man who threw a pie in her face “be delivered from his sin” of homosexuality
- ➔ Mary Lou Wallner's letter to her daughter
- ➔ James Dobson comparing gay people to Hitler
- ➔ Someone writing “FAG” on the Reitan's driveway
- ➔ Gay-basher describing his motivations in “Hate, Lies, and Videotape” clip
- ➔ Death threats to Gene Robinson and his partner

**Encourage them to list less obvious examples:**

- ➔ Minister preaching about “family values” and “Christian America”
- ➔ James Dobson's teaching how to prevent and treat homosexuality
- ➔ Comment that Gene Robinson's elevation as Episcopal bishop would be “a source of disunity”
- ➔ Boy sitting in pew hearing a pastor preaching homosexuality as sin
- ➔ Resistance of Tonia Poteat's mother to thinking of Tonia and her partner as a couple; her initial association of lesbians and gay men with stereotypes
- ➔ Jake Reitan's year-long delay coming out to his parents after telling his sister
- ➔ False allegations against Gene Robinson of sexual misconduct and link to a porn-site

# HOLINESS CODE

Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13

## ASK & ANSWER

**Ask:** “What did you learn about the verses in Leviticus calling a man lying with a man an ‘abomination?’”

**Answer:** The Hebrew word translated “abomination” actually means “not customary” and implies a ritual breach rather than a moral one.

**Remind them:** These verses are part of a Holiness Code.

**Ask:** “What are some of the other prohibitions that people in the film list as part of the Holiness Code?”

**Potential answers:** Wearing linen and wool together, eating pork or shrimp or rabbit, sowing two kinds of seed together

**If it hasn't come up already, remind them of the clip from “The West Wing” and ask:** “What were some of the president's rejoinders to the journalist who believed the Bible says that homosexuality is an abomination?”

**Potential answers:**

- He wanted to know a fair price for his daughter, because Exodus 21:7 sanctions selling her into slavery.
- His chief of staff works on the Sabbath, in violation of Exodus 35:2, which says he should be put to death. The president, played by Martin Sheen, asks if he should kill him himself or call the police to do it.

**Explain:** “The literal translation of Leviticus declares that a man should not ‘do the lying of a woman’ with another man. This passage was one of the reservations of Brenda Poteat in imagining gay and lesbian relationships.”

**Ask:** “What made her change her mind?”

**Answer:** Seeing body builders Rod Jackson and Bob Paris on the Phil Donahue show. They explain that neither “takes on the female role . . . we are attracted to men—if we were attracted to women, we would be with women.”

**Ask:** “What does the film say about the ancient Hebrew understanding of a man’s seed?”

**Answer:** American Baptist Rev. Susan Sparks explains that the Hebrews thought of the man’s seed as akin to what we think of as an embryo (her exact words: “all of nascent life”) and that the woman’s role was no more than incubation.

**Ask:** “Why is procreation so important to the Hebrews?”

**Answer:** Rev. Sparks argues “it is about a nation trying to grow.”

**And there could be several other “right” answers. For example:**

- High infant mortality rate
- Untreatable diseases or conditions disabling or killing Hebrews
- Short average lifespan
- Need for men to compensate for soldiers lost in battle
- Need for adults to provide for and care for the tribes of Israel

## SIN OF ONAN

Genesis 38:9 -10

It is at this point of the film that Rev. Keene cites the story of Onan, paraphrasing the King James Version of the Bible: **“Onan spills his seed upon the ground and God strikes him dead.”** [Incidentally, historians agree that King James was homosexual!]

## ASK & ANSWER

**Ask:** “Does anybody know more details of the story of Onan?”

Fill out any necessary details from the background provided in [Handout 2-B](#).

**cont’d...**



**Ask: “How does our knowledge of sexuality and reproduction change the dynamics of this story? What present-day practices question what happens in this story?”**

**Potential answers:**

- ➔ A man's seed must fertilize a woman's egg to produce “nascent life,” an embryo.
- ➔ Masturbation can be a healthy means of sexual expression.
- ➔ Interrupting or containing the flow of semen, as well as anal intercourse, are used as a means of preventing unwanted pregnancies.
- ➔ Women are no longer viewed as men's “property.”
- ➔ A man having sexual intercourse with his dead brother's wife, especially without benefit of marriage, “feels” like incest (though not technically so).
- ➔ Today we have other means of determining inheritance and providing social security for the aging.

**Then apply the same questions to the prohibition against same-gender intercourse: “What modern understandings of sexuality and reproduction might change the underlying principles of the prohibition of same-gender intercourse? What present-day practices call into question this prohibition?”**

**Answer:** There is now an understanding of sexual orientation that runs the spectrum from heterosexual to homosexual. (Even the archival footage of a priest espousing Catholic doctrine acknowledges an inclination toward homosexuality is not itself a sin. And in the segment on “change” ministries, their “products” still have the same inclination. Only their behavior may change.)

**Remind participants, once again, that:**

- ➔ Healthy, loving relationships are possible no matter the gender of the persons involved.
- ➔ The death penalty is questioned even for the most heinous of crimes in today's society. (Remember Rev. Dr. Mel White's exchange with a Presbyterian pastor about the Leviticus requirement of execution: “Who should do the killing? The church people?” And the pastor replies, “No, that's the civil authority's job. That's why we have to get more good men of God in government.”)
- ➔ Overpopulation is a greater concern now than growing our nation.
- ➔ Ritual obligations are no longer considered equal to moral obligations.

It's not necessary for the gathering to list every one of these points, though the leader may feel the need to add a few from this list. There may be still other points made by the audience that are not here. **Do not take the time to write out the lists—simply have them voiced.**

# JESUS AND HOMOSEXUALITY

*Because there is no cited reference, this does not appear in [Handout 2-B](#).*

## ASK & ANSWER

**Ask:** “What did the film say Jesus said about homosexuality?”

**Answer:** An unnamed person on the street said he didn't think Jesus said anything about homosexuality.

**Ask:** “What do you make of Jesus not mentioning homosexuality?”

**Possible responses, but not exhaustive (some of the responses below may not be desirable, but be open):**

- ➔ Jesus didn't consider it an issue.
- ➔ As one person in the film said, the word was not invented.
- ➔ Jesus didn't consider it a sin.
- ➔ Jesus thought it was so obviously a sin he didn't need to mention it.
- ➔ Jesus wasn't homophobic.
- ➔ Maybe this is a clue for preachers who feel compelled to single out homosexuality.

**Ask:** “Can you think of any stories or sayings in the Bible that might help us understand how Jesus might view LGBT people today?”

**Obvious listings:**

- ➔ Jesus' welcome of the marginalized, such as religious outcasts and lepers.
- ➔ Jesus' summary of the law in the Great Commandments: Love God, love neighbor (“Love thy neighbor” is mentioned in the film.)
- ➔ Jesus' defense of the woman taken in adultery.
- ➔ Jesus' intimacy with “the beloved disciple” at the Last Supper.

**Less obvious listings:**

- ➔ Jesus' willingness to heal the centurion's beloved servant (It can be argued that the term for servant used in this story—pais—was sometimes a euphemism for same-gender partner.)
- ➔ Jesus' defense of eunuchs, who were outcast along with “barren” women because they could not procreate, and were outcast alongside people with disabilities because their genitals were considered “mutilated.” (Interestingly this comes in a context in which Jesus is asked about divorce, and he explains marriage not as a means to procreation but as a means to permanent bonding. When the disciples comment on his opposition to divorce, Jesus replies, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only to those whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs...” Matthew 19:3-12.)

**Ask: “What are some of the sins that Jesus condemned?”**

**Possible answers:**

- ➔ **Judgmentalism:** “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged.” Matthew 7:1
- ➔ **Spiritual showmanship:** “Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them...” Matthew 6:1
- ➔ **Pride:** Story of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Luke 18:9-14
- ➔ **Hate:** “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy,’ but I say to you, ‘Love your enemies...’” Matthew 5:43
- ➔ **Exclusion:** “But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 5:13
- ➔ **Excessive demands:** “[Religious authorities] tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.” Matthew 23:4
- ➔ **Following ritual law to the neglect of justice and mercy and faith:** “Woe to you, scribes and [religious leaders], hypocrites! For you tithe mint, dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith.” Matthew 23:23

The scriptural references above are provided in case anyone doubts any one of the sins listed above. As they are listed, hopefully largely by the group, you may quote them.

## AGAINST NATURE

Romans 1:26-27

### ASK & ANSWER

**Ask: “Who is it that brings up the apostle Paul’s Letter to the Romans? What does he say about it?” [Earlier in the film, a woman states that the Bible describes homosexuality as unnatural.]**

A little over fifty minutes into the film, Dr. Richard J. Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, declares: *“I really do think that Sodom and Gomorrah is about homosexuality. A lot of people today want to say it was really about hospitality, but if all we have is the Sodom and Gomorrah story, there’s not a lot in the Old Testament that settles the question; we have to turn to the New Testament.”*

Rev. Laurence Keene quotes the actual text: **“For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another.”** From this Dr. Mouw concludes “that God disapproves of same sex genital intimacy” because it denies “natural use.”

**Ask: “What is pointed out about the word ‘natural’ in this verse?”**

**The answer:** Rev. Jimmy Creech of Faith in America says that Paul uses natural or unnatural to mean customary and unc customary. *[Interestingly, later in Romans 11:24, Paul uses the same words to describe God as behaving “unnaturally” in grafting Gentiles onto the tree of Israel: “...you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree...”]*

**Ask: “What else did you learn about the Romans passage from the film?”**

**Potential answers:**

- ➔ Paul saw homosexuality as a Greek and not a Jewish “thing,” so it was idolatrous (Rev. Jimmy Creech)
- ➔ Paul refers to “exploitive same sex relationships among pagan Romans and Greeks” and had no idea of committed same-gender relationships (Dr. Peter Gomes)
- ➔ The Bible has no concept of homosexuality—there were no Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew words for it. (Rev. Jimmy Creech) [Explanation not in the film: Greek is the language in which Christian scriptures were written; Jesus spoke Aramaic, from which his sayings were translated into Greek by the Gospel writers; and Hebrew is the language in which Hebrew scriptures were written.]

## EXCLUDED FROM THE KINGDOM

### 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

The leader should review the actual text and its background in [Handout 2-B](#) and present it in his or her own words.

# { CONVERSATION 3 }

**A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR ADVOCACY** (10min)

## ASK & ANSWER

**Ask:** “Most of the scriptures we’ve just reviewed give a basis for *supporting* LGBT people. How is this so?”

You will have to draw people out to find the following connections. Supply the ones the group doesn't name.

**Potential answers:**

- ➔ The **Creation** story speaks of the importance of having a **companion in marriage**.
- ➔ **Sodom and Gomorrah** is a lesson about extending **hospitality** to strangers.
- ➔ The **Holiness Code** stresses **personal integrity** and **social harmony**.
- ➔ **Jesus welcomed the marginalized** and those judged by others, **repeatedly challenging** those who would **exclude or judge** others.
- ➔ The Epistle to the **Romans** urges Christians to live **by grace not by the law**, resisting temptations to put stumbling blocks in one another's way, because Paul is convinced that “Nothing is unclean of itself” (Romans 14:13-14 a).

**conversation continued on next page...**

**Ask: “What other biblical themes or references are mentioned in the film that favor LGBT people?”**

Here you are looking for words or phrases, highlighted in the following quotes, which you may wish to read as each word or phrase is given. Feel free to supply those missed by the audience.

- ➔ Andrew Sullivan uses the commandment “**Thou shalt not bear false witness**” to say he cannot bear false witness about who he is as a gay man.
- ➔ Rev. Susan Sparks says we must “be clear that [the Bible] is about **compassion and love.**”
- ➔ Rev. Laurence Keene declares the Bible does not speak “against loving committed homosexual relationships,” believing “**all loving relationships are honored by God.**”
- ➔ Rev. Irene Monroe states that “The **core principal** of the Bible **is** about **love**. It is about **inclusion**, it’s about **justice**—for all people, not just some people. Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell believes, “We are **never to be exclusive**. God’s world is **always inclusive.**”
- ➔ A woman on the street said, “Jesus, he always **embraced the outcast.**”
- ➔ Another woman on the street says, “He **loves everybody just the way they are**—gay or not gay.”
- ➔ A man on the street observes, “Isn’t that what we’re here to do? ‘**Love thy neighbor?**’”
- ➔ Rabbi Brian Meyer explains, “In the Bible a man acquired his wife... We don’t do that anymore. ... **Just because it’s written in the Bible, doesn’t mean that’s how we do it today.**”
- ➔ Robert Strauss says about the elevation of Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire, “**We don’t judge who’s a sinner. You know, we leave that up to God.**”

**Finally, ask: “What stories in the Bible may serve as paradigms or parallel experiences to the full welcome and affirmation of LGBT people?”**

Supply those the audience misses, found on [Handout 2-C: Scriptures on Which to Base the Welcome, Rights and Acceptance of LGBT People](#).

## FINAL COMMENTS

A preacher declares in the film, “**God has set a standard to which we are obligated. The issue is, always has been and always will be the authority of scripture.**” To take “the authority of scripture” seriously is to understand its broadest themes and essential intentions instead of missing the forest for the trees. The whole trajectory of the Bible moves toward a broader understanding of God and a more inclusive understanding of spiritual community.

**In Hebrew scriptures**, prophets envisioned the God of Israel as the God of *all nations*. That same God proclaims through the prophet Jeremiah that the law once written in stone will be written on the human heart. And through Isaiah God declares the Temple of Jerusalem as “a house of prayer for *all* peoples.”

**In Christian scriptures**, Jesus welcomed even religious outcasts to his table, declaring the kingdom of God was among and within all those who call on the name of God. Peter baptized believing Gentiles without circumcision in Acts 10 and 11 because he witnessed God's Spirit within them. Paul wrote of how we were to live “as if” the kingdom or commonwealth of God were here, boldly declaring we were all children of God and thus heirs of a rich spiritual inheritance and citizens of a commonly held spiritual wealth.

Both Jewish and Christian traditions urged not only love of God, but love of neighbor that resulted in ethics of justice and compassion, mercy and grace. Both traditions welcomed the stranger. Both revered Micah's admonition:

***“To do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.”***

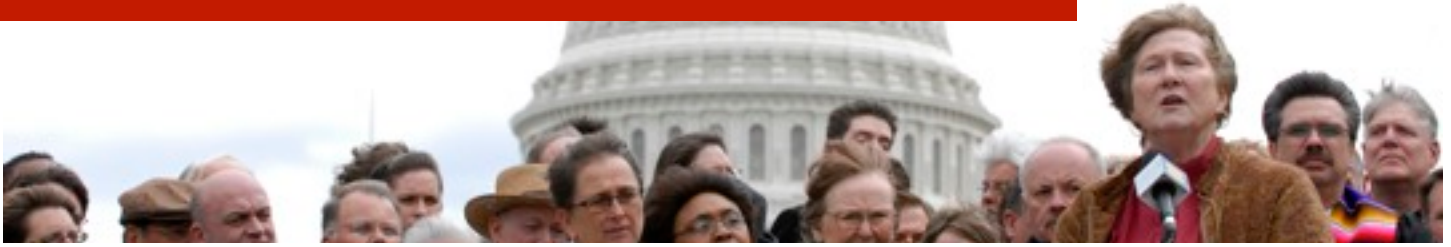
Thus welcoming and seeking justice for LGBT people are traditional values. Rev. Laurence Keene says in the film, “There's nothing wrong with a fifth grade understanding of the Bible, as long as you're in the fifth grade.”

*For the Bible Tells Me So* broadens our understanding, not only of five families with a gay or lesbian child, not only of the science behind sexual orientation, not just of religious prejudice and resistance, but also of the Bible itself.

In *The Meaning of Prayer*, a book published in 1925 by the YMCA, noted Baptist preacher Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote, “The central trouble in the religious thinking of many people lies here: *the new knowledge of the universe has made their childish thoughts of God inadequate, and instead of getting a worthier and larger idea of God to meet the new need, they give up all vital thought about God whatsoever.*” (Italics his.)

Many people of faith have found in the Bible “a worthier and larger idea of God to meet the new need” of welcoming lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people into their families, congregations and communities. They advocate their rights “for the Bible tells them so.”

**[PROCEED TO PART THREE: WHAT DO WE DO NOW?](#)**



As you move into this final section, circulate [Handout 3-E](#), which is a sign-up sheet for those who would like to receive e-mails or mail from HRC's Religion and Faith Program, such as the e-newsletter and preaching and devotional guide, [Out In Scripture](#). Have volunteers keep the sheets moving and collect them once circulated. Be clear they do not have to become a member of HRC to receive these resources. Send completed sign-up sheets to the [HRC Religion and Faith Program](#).

## PART THREE IN BRIEF

EACH HEADER LINKS TO THE RELEVANT PAGE(S)

[30 minutes total]

**Preface: [What does the film teach us about advocacy?](#)** (Optional; 5 min)

*Nine reasons to become an advocate, based on quotes from the film*

**Step 1. [Who else should see this film?](#)** (10 min)

*Remembering Elie Weisel's concept that to hear a witness of the Holocaust is to be a witness, participants are encouraged to name people with whom they'd like to share For the Bible Tells Me So and commit themselves to doing so, a first step of advocacy.*

**Step 2. [How do I get started as an advocate?](#)** (10 min)

*An opportunity to consider personal ways to affect change, committing ourselves to specific strategies and specific LGBT issues.*

**Step 3. [Blessing those who go out to serve!](#)** (5 min)

*A brief blessing for all who have participated and a song to conclude the time together.*

**Handout 3-A:** [Meeting with a Government or Religious Leader or Committee](#)

**Handout 3-B:** [Making a Commitment](#)

**Handout 3-C:** [Issues Facing LGBT People](#)

**Handout 3-D:** [Creating a Local Strategy](#)

**Handout 3-E:** [HRC Religion and Faith Program signup sheet](#)



**PREFACE:****WHAT DOES THE FILM TEACH US ABOUT ADVOCACY?** (optional, 5min)

Given the time, an optional way of beginning this third section is to highlight what may be learned from the film about the need for advocacy. Prepare readers beforehand to read the following quotes linked to each bullet point. *(This will need to be duplicated beforehand and distributed to the readers.)* As each bullet point is read, simply point to it for emphasis.

Prepare a poster board, flipchart, chalkboard, overhead projector, or Power Point list with the following bullet points:

- ➔ **Civil rights are not special rights.**
- ➔ **LGBT people face discrimination.**
- ➔ **There is a real and present danger for LGBT people.**
- ➔ **All religious bodies have a unique responsibility to advocate for protections and rights for LGBT people.**
- ➔ **The time to act is NOW: lives depend on it.**
- ➔ **Negative positions of religious groups must be changed.**
- ➔ **Living openly is the first step toward advocacy.**
- ➔ **How we vote matters.**
- ➔ **Advocacy fosters community and meaning.**

*The reading of the following quotes is “Suggested” and can be eliminated for reasons of time:*

### Reader 1:

Anita Bryant commented early in the film:

*If homosexuals are allowed their civil rights, then so would prostitutes or thieves or anyone else.*

Prostitutes and thieves already are “allowed their civil rights.”

➔ **Civil rights are not special rights.**

### Reader 2:

Dick Gephardt expresses a parent’s fear:

*As I walked out of the restaurant, the one worry I had was that Chrissy was going to face horrible discrimination now.*

➔ **LGBT people face discrimination.**

### Reader 3:

Remember the words of the gay-basher:

*But see, also gay bashing is kind of fun, you know, ‘cause um, when they come out of their gay bars and stuff and they’re walking, and you beat ‘em up and they’re like “Oh, leave me alone,” they’re so fag- ew. You know, they’re like faggots.*

➔ **There is a real and present danger for LGBT people.**

### Reader 4:

Statistically most gay bashers cite religious reasons for their behavior. As Jimmy Creech is quoted in the film:

*We have been conditioned to hold these beliefs by the church; and it really has been the church. It is the place where the prejudice was born and was nurtured and has been promoted.*

➔ **All religious bodies have a unique responsibility to advocate protections and rights for LGBT people.**

**cont’d...**

**Reader 5:**

LGBT people face violence at their own hands as well, especially young people. Jorge Valencia explains:

*It's estimated that every five hours an LGBT teen takes his life, and for every teen that takes his or her life there are twenty more who try.*

➔ **The time to act is NOW: lives depend on it!**

**Reader 6:**

Jorge Valencia continues:

*One of the top five reasons why teenagers call us is for religious reasons. They're feeling there isn't a place for them and God.*

➔ **Negative positions of religious groups must be changed.**

**Reader 7:**

Rev. Dr. Mel White, founder of Soulforce, points out:

*Closets are a place of death. So many gay people are forced to live in two different realities—the world where they're pretending and then that closet world where they have all these fears and feelings of guilt and anger and shame. I think that's why "Don't ask, don't tell" is so important to the military and to the church. They'll let you serve as church organist or pastor or teacher as long as you don't tell. So, once you don't tell—then you're cut off from all that confessing, all of that conversation, all of that interplay with others that makes you healthy.*

Mrs. Jane Gephardt adds:

*What we found once we were talking about it, so many people came up to us, "You know, my son is gay and I'm just so happy that you came out and you said it."*

➔ **Living openly is the first step toward advocacy.**

**cont'd...**

**Reader 8:**

A preacher opposing LGBT equality notes:

*I told folks when you go in that voting booth and you pull that curtain, remember God's still watching.*

➔ **How we vote matters.**

**Reader 9:**

Randi Reitan says:

*There's something about doing justice, and doing it with your son who's gay that is just so empowering.*

Phil Reitan adds:

*In that journey we've met the most wonderful people: gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender people that are a talented, sweet, caring, loving segment of society.*

Mary Lou Wallner:

*Now, I feel thankful that God has changed my heart... And I'm thankful to have hundreds of surrogate gay and lesbian Annas...*

Jake Reitan:

*This is no longer about just their gay son, this is where my mom and my dad have found meaning.*

➔ **Advocacy fosters community and meaning.**

*End of "Suggested" preface, which may be cut for time.*

**STEP 1. WHO ELSE SHOULD SEE THIS FILM?**

(10 minutes)

*"I know people who should see this film!"* viewers often declare after watching *For The Bible Tells Me So*. Capitalize on this feeling by **asking the audience, "Who do you think should see this film?"** List the responses on a flipchart or chalkboard, but only if there's time. Do not edit, censor, or "be realistic"—let the audience brainstorm. The list could be endless, so be mindful of the time and what needs to be accomplished in Step One.

A sample list might include:

- ➔ **My parents**
- ➔ **My class**
- ➔ **My clergy; my religious leaders**
- ➔ **My church; my synagogue**
- ➔ **My coworkers**
- ➔ **Government officials**
- ➔ **My civic club or organization**
- ➔ **LGBT groups**
- ➔ **Religious groups**
- ➔ **Straight supporters**
- ➔ **The pope**
- ➔ **The president**

**Sharing *For the Bible Tells Me So* is a first and easy step toward advocacy.**

The **central purpose of the following exercise** is to persuade participants **to commit themselves** to showing *For the Bible Tells Me So* to other persons, groups, religious bodies and representatives as well as **to build relationships around advocacy**. Give pairs or teams a moment to huddle, exchange contact information, and plan when and how they can meet to devise their strategy and arrangements (perhaps directly after this section is completed). Make clear there is not time to develop the plan in this time period.

**Remember: You can get the film and educational license from the [HRC Store](https://www.hrc.org/store).**

## Request the following commitments

- ➔ Ask participants to raise their hands if they will commit to showing this film or giving it to their own parents, family or other relatives.
- ➔ Ask participants to raise their hands if they will commit to showing this film or giving it to their clergy and other religious leaders.
- ➔ Ask participants to raise their hands if they will arrange a showing of the film to a particular group, including religious groups—ask them each to name the group; if several name the same one, encourage them to work together.
- ➔ Ask participants to raise their hands if they will commit to showing the film to their coworkers. If the company is large enough, suggest running it through HR or its diversity trainers. If small enough, suggest hosting your coworkers at home or the equivalent of a worker's lounge.
- ➔ For the less accessible people, from government officials to the pope, invite participants to volunteer to strategize with others (who may be present or not) as to how to get it before them, or at least their representatives or liaisons.

## STEP 2. HOW DO I GET STARTED AS AN ADVOCATE? (10 minutes)

**Give them a “monastic moment” to consider:** “What opened your mind on LGBT issues?”  
Give them a minute to consider this question individually.

**Lead a “quickie” plenary, asking participants to summarize their answers in a word or phrase. Do not take time to list these individually.**

Most will respond with some version of “**people’s stories**” as their “conversion experience,” such as meeting, knowing or hearing someone who is LGBT or a friend or relative of an LGBT person.

Others might say some version of “**new understandings**” of the Bible, God or the sciences.

Still others will respond with their general “**concerns for justice or fairness**” with equal protections and rights for all or “**a desire to be inclusive.**”

List these four general categories (or more, if all don't fit into these):

- ➔ People's stories
- ➔ New understandings
- ➔ Concerns for justice and fairness
- ➔ A desire to be inclusive

**Explain:** “This is how you get started. Identify why *you* are open to LGBT issues. Then find ways to share your own reasons for change or openness. **You will be most persuasive using your own reasons rather than those of others.**”

## THE PROCESS

**Ask:** “How many of you have contacted one of your elected representatives, for any reason, either by visit, phone call, letter, postcard or e-mail?”

Invite them to give a show of hands.

**Ask:** “Who here has contacted your religious leaders, for any reason, either locally or regionally, about your views?”

Those of you who have, what made your meeting or communication effective. Or, in hindsight, what might have made them more effective?

Distribute [Handout 3-A](#). Reinforce all good ideas and discuss a few that are particularly relevant to you or your community.

**Ask:** “How many have testified or given written testimony at a committee hearing?”

**Again, request a show of hands and say:** “All of the above points hold for testifying to a committee of elected or appointed officials or religious leaders, except you will have less time. You may be given as little as a minute to speak, but much can be said in a minute.

**cont'd...**

**Then highlight the following on [Handout 3-A](#):**

- ➔ Bring a one-page summary of what you intend to say, with your name, address, contact information and faith affiliation. (Explain that they can opt to bring a written testimony rather than speaking, if uncomfortable or out of time.)
- ➔ Explain who you are, especially your religion: “I am a constituent, a voter and a person of faith” or more specifically “a Christian” or “a Baptist” or “a Hindu.”
- ➔ Clearly state the purpose for your visit (“I favor” or “I oppose”).
- ➔ Briefly tell one personal story that led you to your position. The story will have greater impact if you are able to bring in your faith perspective.

**Add:** “If there’s time, you might also be able to offer one or two talking points. Be prepared with a dozen talking points to avoid repeating a previous speaker’s points.”

**Remind them:** “Merely your presence at a hearing registers the importance of the issue being considered. You may be given the option of signing an attendance card and indicating your position without having to testify.”

**Ask:** “Which of the three do you give greater weight when you’re the receiver: a letter, an e-mail, or a phone call?”

Hopefully someone will say “a letter.”

“Absolutely—letters sent through the U.S. mail still have the greatest influence on officials and religious leaders. And letters or postcards or e-mails that are personally written rather than following a form are more likely to touch them.”

“Remember, too, that if you write to a chair of a committee, send copies to all members of the committee. If you write to an elected or appointed official or religious leader, send copies to all members of her or his staff.”

**Say:** “Here’s a little homework assignment. Take this home and review it and make a personal pledge to do at least three of the things on the list. This is for your reference only—it is not to be turned in.”

**Distribute and review [Handout 3-B: Making a Commitment](#).**



## Conclude by describing HRC's Clergy Call for Justice and Equality, May 4-5 2009.

You can find more information at <http://www.hrc.org/clergycall>. Explain that the Clergy Call is intended to give clergy a chance to advocate for LGBT equality with their local representatives and senators and to talk with other clergy from around the country about the mobilizing work they have done in their communities. Pass out a sign-up sheet for those who are interested in going or who are willing to commit to help finance their clergy representatives. Plan to be available afterwards to talk with people further about the event.

Then distribute and review [Handout 3-C](#) (which may be on the reverse of [Handout 3-B](#)). Be sure to add Handout 3-C any local and current issues.

**Explain:** “This is a list of some of the issues that LGBT people face. Consider which particular LGBT issues are close to your heart and circle ones that you may want to follow in the coming year. If you're part of a group, you may want to meet later to focus on one or two specific issues, or divide them up with each member of your group reporting back any news on that item.”

### STEP 3. BLESSING THOSE WHO GO OUT TO SERVE! (5 minutes)

**Remind them:** “No less than the Anglican Archbishop Emeritus of South Africa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu, compares his nation's own terrible suffering of apartheid with the spiritual apartheid of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, saying:

*I equate homophobia to the injustice of apartheid, and that's so contrary to the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. ... I can't for the life of me imagine that God would say, 'I'm going to punish you because you are black, you should have been white. I will punish you because you are a woman, you should have been a man. I punish you because you are homosexual, you ought to have been heterosexual.' I can't, I can't for the life of me believe that that is how God sees things.*

Then, being mindful of the constituency of the audience in your word choices, invite all to raise their hands in blessing of one another and offer them a blessing such as:

*Go with the blessing of all that is holy as advocates for welcome and inclusion, peace and justice, hope and love. May you not grow weary, but may God lift you up on the wings of truth to be a witness of all that you have heard and seen and felt in our time together. May it be so!*

**To conclude the workshop, lead everyone in a reprise of the song you selected to begin [Part One](#).** Good song choices include “Jesus Loves Me” or “Amazing Grace” for Christians, perhaps a *niggun* (wordless melody) for Jews or some other song appropriate but known to a mixed gathering, such as “We Shall Overcome” or “Alleluia.”



## { BACKGROUND MATERIAL for PART ONE }

### THE FAMILIES of FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO

(For use with [Part One: Step 3 - "Which Family Resembles Yours?"](#))

#### The Robinsons – Quietly Supportive Nicholasville, Kentucky

The parents, Victor and Imogene, are faithful members of their Disciples of Christ Church. Their son, Gene, was confirmed in the Episcopal Church in college, became a priest, married Boo, had children, divorced with Boo's support, and now has a partner, Mark. His parents had difficulties at first, but now believe he was born for this purpose. Gene Robinson was elected and confirmed as the first openly gay bishop in the worldwide Anglican Communion.



#### The Poteats – Partly Supportive Haw River, North Carolina

The Poteats are the only family of color portrayed in the film. Both parents, Brenda and David, are preachers in their evangelical church. Both believe marriage is for procreation, but love their lesbian daughter, Tonia, a graduate of Yale and partnered. The mother is glad her daughter has someone special in her life but can't think of them as married. There is unfinished business.

#### The Reitans – Advocates for LGBT rights Eden Prairie, Minnesota

The Reitan family is multi-generational Lutheran. The parents, Randi and Phil, and sister, Britta, are very supportive of their gay son and brother Jake. The parents initially were told by a pastor





that their son could change. The parents feared for their son's safety in coming out as gay. Now the parents and son are united in their activism, shown in the film being arrested in a non-violent protest at the headquarters of conservative radio personality James Dobson's organization, Focus on the Family.

### **The Gephards – Unconditional Love Washington, D.C.**



A political family, the Gephards had to deal with many expectations of being the all-American family. Dick and Jane's daughter, Chrissy, raised Catholic, married her "best bud"—a man named Mark—because that seemed the next logical step in their relationship. In a friendship with a woman who dated both women and men, Chrissy realized that she herself had a crush on her friend. The mother

had guessed it, and the father spoke of a parent's unconditional love of a child. He invited his daughter to help represent him in his presidential campaign.

### **Mary Lou Wallner – Very Unsupportive (initially) Cabot, Arkansas**

The mother, Mary Lou, was raised as a conservative Christian, an active part of her church, and one who followed James Dobson's teachings on child-rearing. When her daughter Anna wrote to her about her love for women, the mother responded that she "hated" that part of her while signing the letter "Love, Mom." When contact between them ceased, the mother wrote Anna asking "What have I done?" The daughter's response was devastating; accusing her mom of damaging her with her unaccepting attitudes. Anna's subsequent suicide led the mother into a re-evaluation of everything she believed.





## { HANDOUT 2-A }

### THINGS TO REMEMBER AS YOU APPROACH THE BIBLE

- ➔ Biblical writers did not share our contemporary understanding of sexual orientation as distinct from sexual behavior. They judged behaviors based on the assumption that heterosexuality was common to everyone.
- ➔ What homosexual behavior the biblical writers may have witnessed was either outside the bonds of marriage (thus adulterous, as all were expected to marry heterosexually) or outside the community of faith (thus the association with idolatry or “pagan” faiths).
- ➔ Same-gender sexual expression was condemned largely for crossing boundaries of gender: specifically, men viewed as abandoning their active role in intercourse to be passive with other men (as in Leviticus) and women perceived as abandoning their passive role to be active with women (as in Romans, where the word for “marriage” literally means “under a man”).
- ➔ Homosexuality was frequently confused with pederasty, the practice of men using boys for sexual pleasure.
- ➔ The King James Version (KJV) of the Bible has frequent references to “sodomites” which more recent translations avoid, because the word so translated refers to male pagan priests. Similarly, the word for pagan priestesses was incorrectly translated “prostitutes.” Ironically, historians have much evidence that King James, who first authorized the translation of the Bible into English, was himself homosexual!
- ➔ Jesus never condemned homosexuality, but challenged divorce, wealth, spiritual pride and exclusion.



## { HANDOUT 2-B }

# THE SCRIPTURES CITED IN FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO

### **Creation: Genesis 1:27-28; 2:18, 21-25**

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner. [Animals are created as possible companions, but none are equal to the task.] So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.” Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

[Jesus quotes the next-to-last sentence above to refute divorce in Matthew 19:3-12, in which he also uplifts eunuchs, who were despised because their bodies were altered and they could not procreate.]

***Background not in the film:*** There are two creation stories, one in Genesis 1, and the other in Genesis 2. Although “be fruitful and multiply” is the first commandment in the Torah and very important, Jewish tradition recognized that companionship was an important part of marriage and relationship. Jewish tradition has always had divorce. The point of creation for Jews is the seventh day—Shabbat—the Sabbath. The first story is about the creation of the cosmos, the second about the first human beings: their curiosity, frailties, and relationship to earth. The second also explains humanity’s relationship to God and each other—it is not just about marriage.

Similarly, Christian tradition holds that there is much more in these two creation stories than marriage. But because of the film’s focus, it’s important to note that Christian tradition derives a two-fold purpose of marriage from these stories. In the first the purpose is “to be fruitful and multiply”—in other words, the purpose of marriage is procreation. Roman Catholic tradition emphasizes this, though in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century canon law was changed to acknowledge marriage may exist between persons who cannot have children. In the second story, the more ancient of the two, the purpose of marriage is companionship—to find a suitable partner for the first human creature. This is the story that Jesus quotes to refute divorce: the two become one in marriage. Protestant tradition recognizes both procreation and companionship as equal validations of marriage. Today, same-gender couples



are capable of having and rearing children. Same-gender couples have always been capable of companionship and mutuality, which is the purpose of marriage that Jesus highlighted in Matthew 19:3-12.

### **Sodom and Gomorrah: Genesis 19:4-5**

But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house, and they called to Lot, “Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, so that we may know them.”

*Background not in the film:* Taken together (in context), the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> chapters of Genesis serve as contrasting stories about hospitality. Jews do not separate these stories. In Genesis 18, Abraham and Sarah “entertain angels unawares” when they invite three strangers to join them for food and drink, one of whom turns out to be God and the other two angels. Hospitality in the wilderness was not merely a courtesy; it was a moral requirement to offer food, drink and shelter. By extending such hospitality, Abraham and Sarah learn that they would have a son in their old age, and, after the two angels depart for Sodom, God confides in Abraham the plan to destroy Sodom for its wickedness. Abraham bargains God down from fifty righteous *men* needed to prevent the disaster down to ten. When *all* the men of the city surround Lot’s house demanding to gang rape the two strangers, refusing Lot’s offer of his own daughters to protect them (!), it is clear there are *not* ten righteous men in the city, sealing its fate. As Lot’s reward, he is forewarned so he and his family may escape. (For biblical interpretations of Sodom’s sin see also Ezekiel 16:49; Amos 4:1, 11; Isaiah 1:10-17; Matthew 10:14-15.)

### **Holiness Code: Leviticus 18:22 & 20:13**

You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination.

If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.

*Background not in the film:* The Holiness Code serves as an example of how helpful spiritual principles can underlie dated applications in the Bible. “Holy” means “set apart.” Just as we might “set apart” items that we use only on special occasions, so things or people may be “set apart” for a special, godly purpose. The Hebrews understood themselves as “set apart” from their surrounding culture to declare the uniqueness of their deity. Keeping kosher is an example of this difference. Pork was considered unclean (ritually impure) because, though it had cloven hooves and was cleft-footed, it did not chew the cud—all requirements to be eaten (Leviticus 11:3, 7-8).

Holiness was not simply a separation from the surrounding culture. Holiness required wholeness: personal integrity and social harmony, both worthwhile spiritual goals in and of themselves. The Ten Commandments are revered because they have stood the test of time in achieving personal integrity and social harmony. But some applications of the Holiness Code do not carry the same weight today. Because mixing things up was thought to destroy integrity and harmony, fibers or seeds were not to be blended (common practices today), a



man was to conform to gender expectations, and certain foods were not to be mixed with other foods.

It is said by some in Jewish tradition that all the laws of Moses are derived from the Ten Commandments. If there is time, it might be fun to explain this and then ask which of the Ten Commandments might underlie the prohibition of a male literally “doing the lying of a woman” with another man? Some might guess the law against adultery, but tradition holds that it comes from the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” because of their misunderstanding of reproduction.

[An interesting but related side note: The commandment against adultery is immediately followed by “Thou shalt not steal.” Adultery was viewed as a sin because it involved stealing a man’s property. The Law was addressed to the men, as they were the “citizens” of Israel, not the women, who were their property.]

### **Sin of Onan: Genesis 38:9-10**

But since Onan knew that the offspring would not be his, he spilled his semen on the ground whenever he went in to his brother’s wife, so that he would not give offspring to his brother. What he did was displeasing in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also.

*Background not in the film:* If unfamiliar with the story, your audience might be shocked to know that God and Hebrew law required Onan, after his childless brother’s death, to go in to his brother’s wife and have sexual intercourse with her to produce a child, a child who would be both an heir to his brother’s property and an ancient form of “social security,” a child who would care for the mother in old age. Scriptural translations say that Onan “spilled his seed” outside the woman rather than obey God’s command, and so God killed him for disobedience. But the Hebrew words behind the translations actually read that Onan “destroyed his seed,” killing its “nascent life,” an “abomination”—in other words, a ritual impurity. From this story, some have derived a prohibition against masturbation. The spilling of seed anywhere other than inside a woman was against ritual law. (By contrast, in Islam, this is an acceptable method of contraception.) You’ll notice there is not a similar prohibition of a woman lying as a male with a woman, thus confirming this reason for the Levitical prohibitions against a man lying as a woman with a man.

### **Against Nature: Romans 1:26-27**

For this reason God gave them [idolatrous Gentiles] up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

*Background not in the film:* Surprisingly those who quote Romans 1:26-27 as a prohibition of homosexuality often fail to point out the central point of Paul’s letter to the church at Rome: that a Christian is saved not by obeying the Law of Moses but by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the source of righteousness and eternal life for Christians. The church at Rome





was divided on this point between members who felt Christians had to follow the Law and those who didn't believe that was necessary.

Paul repeatedly emphasizes in his letters that Christians are “saved by grace through faith” (Ephesians 2:8a). In the first Chapter of Romans, he sets up his legalist opponent by pointing out the sins of the idolatrous Gentiles, working his presumably Jewish-Christian opponent into a self-righteous frenzy, only to turn the tables on him in the second chapter, “Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things” (Romans 2:1). Paul ultimately concludes in Romans 14:13-14 a, “Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself...” Instead of judging, he calls the Christians at Rome to “love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. ... extend hospitality to strangers” (Romans 12:10, 13c).

### **Excluded from the Kingdom: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

*Background not in the film:* There is no reference to this scripture in the film, but it is included here because it is often cited in reference to homosexuality. The apostle Paul here employs a “laundry list” of sins that was standard for the time. Within that list are two words, “arsenokoitai,” which literally means “males who go to bed,” and “malakoi,” which literally means “soft” and implies moral softness. The NRSV translates the first as “male prostitutes.” Whatever the Greek word originally means, the word appears in heterosexual contexts in other ancient texts. The NRSV translates “malakoi” as “sodomites,” an inaccurate translation, as the term “sodomite” was a later invention, appearing frequently in the King James Version as an inaccurate translation of “male pagan priest.” Ironically, the KJV translation of “malakoi” as “effeminate” is more “accurate” for its time, given their sexist notion that women were morally soft!



## { HANDOUT 2-C }

# SCRIPTURES ON WHICH TO BASE THE WELCOME, ACCEPTANCE AND RIGHTS OF LGBT PEOPLE

- ➔ **Isaiah 56.** God's welcome of foreigners and eunuchs into God's "house of prayer for all peoples."
- ➔ **Book of Ruth** and **1 Samuel 18 through 2 Samuel 1.** The modeling for same-gender couples in the love relationship heralded in scripture in the stories of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth) and Jonathan and David (Samuel).
- ➔ **Micah 6:8.** The emphasis of justice in the prophets: "God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"
- ➔ **Deuteronomy 6:4-5, Leviticus 19:18** and **Luke 10:25-28.** As other rabbis of his time would have, Jesus blended Deuteronomy 6:4-5 ("Love God") and Leviticus 19:18 ("Love your neighbor as yourself"—note this comes between Leviticus 18 and 20!) in Matthew 22:34-40 as the greatest commandments, and the lens through which to interpret all of the law and the prophets. To confirm this was a common pairing, see Luke 10:25-28, in which Jesus solicits the same conclusion from an expert in religious law.
- ➔ **John 9.** Jesus dissociates a human condition from a sinful cause when he declares a man was not born blind because of his sin or that of his parents, but so that the glory of God may be made manifest.
- ➔ **John 4.** Jesus reveals his messianic identity to the outcast Samaritan woman at the well who had had five husbands and was living with a man unmarried. She becomes the first evangelist, bringing others from her village to meet Jesus.
- ➔ **Luke 10:25-37.** The parable of the Good Samaritan, in which the most hated person to Jesus' listeners "loved his neighbor as himself" in helping a victim of robbers—what a priest and a lay priest failed to do.
- ➔ **Acts 10** and **11.** The full welcome of uncircumcised Gentiles into the church, whose lifestyles were repugnant to Jews.
- ➔ **Galatians 5:1, etc.** The many letters of Paul that assert freedom from law and custom in Christ, such as Galatians 5:1, "For freedom Christ has set us free."
- ➔ **1 John 4:16b.** "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them." What follows repeats the theme emphasized throughout scripture to not be afraid, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. ... We love because God first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars..."



## { HANDOUT 2-D }

# THE BIBLE AND HOMOSEXUALITY: A CHRISTIAN VIEW

Rev. Chris Glaser, M.Div.

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Many of us were raised that the Bible is the Word of God. The Bible itself talks about God's revelation through the inspired experiences and words of its characters and writers. Christians see Jesus Christ as the ultimate revelation of scripture, "the Word made flesh." So Christians ultimately affirm that Jesus Christ is the Word of God.

This understanding frees us to ask, in a given situation, "What would Jesus do?" If Jesus perfectly reveals God's identity, then to ask what Jesus would do is to ask what God would do. Would Jesus create homosexual people and then condemn them? Would Jesus require celibacy of all homosexual people and not of all heterosexual people? Would Jesus encourage Christians to exclude or attack the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people? Would Jesus deny ongoing loving relationships between people of the same-gender, when not denying such relationships to people of the opposite gender?

We know Jesus better than that. Jesus was and is always fair-minded and even-handed. He would never impose a different set of standards on one particular group. In addition, Jesus repeatedly chose to be with the religious outcasts of his time. The only people he heartily criticized were the self-righteous religious leaders who excluded lepers, women, eunuchs, people with disabilities, and others from God's house.

Taking the clue from Jesus' own inclusive ministry, the early Jewish church opened its doors to Gentiles, an enormous shift in the religious thinking of the time. Gentiles were thought of as unclean, disgusting, perverse idolaters practicing immoral lifestyles, the way some people today think of LGBT people.

But the Holy Spirit, which Jesus promised his disciples, led the early church to welcome Gentiles without requiring them to become Jewish first, just as many churches today are welcoming lesbian and gay people without requiring them to become straight first, as if that were even possible.

The apostle Paul refers to this negative attitude toward Gentiles in the first chapter of Romans. He wants to get the self-righteous members of the church at Rome worked into a frothing-at-the-mouth frenzy over those idolatrous Gentiles who practice all sorts of nasty things, from gossip to "unnatural" lust. But Paul's purpose is revealed in the second chapter,



when he turns the tables on the self-righteous Christians at Rome and questions how they can judge others when they themselves are doing many of the things they accuse the Gentiles of doing.

If this sounds familiar, like heterosexual Christians who have a 50% divorce rate attacking gay people who wish to marry, that's because the nature of Holy Scripture is that it is able to speak to us in modern times, across cultural differences.

Paul's argument in Romans is that Christians are saved by the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, not by following the Law of Moses, not by conforming to some external standard.

The Law of Moses included the Holiness Code of Leviticus, where there are two verses that condemn men literally "acting like a woman" with other men. The Holiness Code, much like our own culture, required men to act like men and women to act like women. Mixing up gender expectations was forbidden, thought of as a ritual error rather than a moral mistake. Not conforming to gender expectations also prompts today's religious and social discomfort around transgender or intersex people, or men who are gentle rather than tough, or women who are strong rather than weak.

But, "In Christ there is no longer male and female." These words of Paul suggest that gender differences are irrelevant for the Christian.

Underlying the Holiness Code of Leviticus, though, is a spiritual truth. The Holiness Code encouraged individual integrity and social harmony. To apply this spiritual truth to the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, as well as straight people is to challenge all of us to affirm and practice spiritual-sexual integrity and spiritual-gender integrity. It also challenges churches and governments to welcome and integrate diversity and foster justice and equal rights.

A case in point is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. All the men of Sodom gathered to abuse the strangers visiting their city through a common practice of ancient days: gang rape. Like such rape in prisons, this act has nothing to do with sex and everything to do with humiliation.

Jesus himself viewed the sin of Sodom as inhospitality, declaring that it would be better in the day of judgment for Sodom than for those towns that prove inhospitable to his disciples.

The irony is that churches that use this story to exclude and abuse lesbian and gay people are actually practicing the sin of Sodom: inhospitality.

All are welcome in the new reign of God, Jesus said. Repentance is expected, but not repentance of how God made us. However, some Christians look to a list of those who will not enter the kingdom of heaven in 1 Corinthians and claim gay people are on it.



But on that list, two Greek words are sometimes translated as one, a sure sign that their meaning is uncertain. “Malakoi” literally means “softness” and implies moral looseness. “Arsenkoitai” literally means “males who go to bed” and is a word universally used at the time in heterosexual contexts, and probably refers to sexual exploitation. Neither of these words was used to imply homosexuality.

What’s important for Christians to know is that Jesus never condemned homosexuality. And he defended eunuchs who could not procreate, and eunuchs had the same status as homosexuals in religious law. Jesus implied that eunuchs shall be welcomed in the kingdom of heaven, just as God said through the prophet Isaiah that eunuchs shall be welcomed in God’s “house of prayer for all peoples.”

What’s also important is that no opposite gender pair received so much attention on the pages of the Bible as Ruth and Naomi and David and Jonathan. Though same-gender sexuality may not be modeled in scripture, same-gender love is honored and respected.

For Christians, Jesus is not dead, a mere artifact of history. Jesus continues to inspire us to do new things not even thought possible in his time. Many Christians across denominations and traditions have realized that one of those new things we learn through his Spirit is that we are called to welcome lesbians, gay men, and transgender and bisexual people.

*For further reading, see What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality by Daniel Helminiak and Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality by Jack Rogers.*



## { HANDOUT 2-E }

# GENDER IDENTITY AND THE BIBLE: JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVES

Rev. Chris Glaser, M.Div.

*Scripture is so often used against a new idea or experience that progressive people often feel forced to take a defensive posture toward it. But the Bible records the reflections of people across millennia applying their faith to a myriad of new ideas and experiences. These faithful people model for us how we may respond with justice, compassion and welcome to transgender people. This brief paper suggests possible ways to begin the conversation in the context of biblical themes.*

### “No Longer Male and Female”

“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, **there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus**” (Galatians 3:27-28).

The writer of this passage, the apostle Paul—himself a Jewish Christian free male—neither denies nor diminishes various identities, but affirms here that unity in spiritual community trumps cultural, ethnic, economic and gender divisions—for all are one.

**Those in our own time who do not fit absolutely into the categories of male and female remind their congregations to practice what they proclaim: that our spiritual unity with one another and with God transcends matters of gender identity and expression.**

Those who know themselves as transgender reveal that there is a spectrum that stretches between the experiences of male and female, **a spectrum of gender identity.**

Positive references to “eunuchs” in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures may be said to resemble this experience, but, more explicitly, the Mishna and Talmud (the earliest Jewish law and folklore) have terms for differently gendered individuals between male and female.

### “Male and Female God Created Them”

In the Genesis creation stories, not even in the Hebrew is “male” and “female” an either/or. In fact, Bereshit Rabah, a midrashic text, suggests that the first human creature (“adam”) was androgynous and the reference to taking a rib is more accurately understood as taking a side of the first to create the second human creature. Remembering that **“male and female” are complementary features in the *imago dei*** (the “image of God” in which human beings were created), may help us accept gender as a spectrum of experience as well as **complementary features in an individual human being.**



**Male and female “become one flesh”** in Genesis 2:24, a view of marriage apparently shared by Jesus when questioned about divorce in Matthew 19:3-12. Thus male and female blend into a single unit in marriage. This suggests that, **just as binary distinctions between male and female are transcended in spiritual community, so they are transcended by the spiritual union of marriage.**

**Jesus suggests that the distinctions of male, female, and marriage do not exist in heaven.** When asked about marriage in the resurrection, Jesus says in Luke 20:35-36, “Those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage...because they are like angels and are children of God.” **Thus, in spiritual union with God, distinctions of male and female are also overcome.**

### “Be Fruitful and Multiply”

Sometimes opposition to transgender people comes from God’s mandate, also in Genesis, “to be fruitful and multiply”—procreation. Sex reassignment surgery (not always a part of transitioning) may disable procreation in the sense of bearing children, but not in other ways of creating family. At the same time, the Bible contains **positive references to eunuchs**, who were castrated and unable to procreate, and thus considered unacceptable spiritually.

Through the prophet Isaiah, **God defends eunuchs** and welcomes all such outcasts to the temple: “**For thus says the Lord**, ‘To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; **I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off**’” (Isaiah 56:4-5). Jesus quotes this same chapter of Isaiah when he clears the temple, saying, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isaiah 56:7; Mark 11:17).

**Jesus also defends eunuchs** in his teaching on marriage, clarifying it doesn’t apply to everyone: “For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:12). And in the eighth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the account of the early church, **Philip baptizes an Ethiopian eunuch** who is reading *Isaiah*.

**All these references portend a welcome to those who could not procreate and whose bodies were surgically altered** in a way that would exclude them from the temple at Jerusalem. Another surgical procedure, circumcision, was even *required* for males to enter the temple.



## “The Lord Looks on the Heart”

It is in this context—a broader understanding of gender *and* of an inclusive and welcoming spiritual community—that two other verses of the Bible about gender expectations need to be interpreted. Deuteronomy 22:5 says, “A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for whoever does such things is abhorrent [against custom] to the Lord your God.” And Deuteronomy 23:1 says, “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.”

**These ritual laws appear alongside other applications of a Holiness Code that are no longer followed by even the most religious.** The spiritual goals of the Holiness Code were *separation* (“holy” means “set apart”) as well as *wholeness*, manifest in *personal integrity* and *social harmony*. The latter goal of wholeness may be achieved by transgender persons seeking *gender integrity* and by a community that supports and protects their rights and dignity to achieve *social harmony*.

Consider when God charged the prophet Samuel to find a new king. All the sons of Jesse were brought forward, and all appeared to Samuel more like a king than the small ruddy youngster named David. But God declares to Samuel, “**The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart**” (1 Samuel 16:7). **The sex of a person may be culturally determined by externals, but gender is a matter of the heart.**

**What allowed the early church to become more inclusive was witnessing the Spirit at work in the lives not only of circumcised Jews but also of uncircumcised Gentiles.** In Acts 10 and 11, Peter, “the rock on which [Christ] would build [his] church,” explains to the first church council that he could not refuse the welcome of baptism to those that God had given “the same gift that God gave us when we believed” (Acts 11:14). For Christian congregations, this may serve as a model for the inclusion of transgender people.

In the view of many Jews and Christians alike, **what mattered to God was not the externals such as circumcision, but rather, “real circumcision is a matter of the heart”** (Romans 2:29, but a concept also in Lev. 26:41; Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:4, 9:29; Acts 7:51). This too may guide congregations as they welcome transgender members and work for their equality before the law.





## { HANDOUT 2-F }

# GENDER IDENTITY AND JEWISH TRADITION

Rabbi Elliot Rose Kukla

The first time I met the *tumtum* I was 20 years old and studying in an orthodox yeshiva. In a class on the Mishna, the earliest layer of Jewish oral tradition, I found a startling text buried in a sheaf of handouts. The topic was the rules governing someone who takes an ascetic vow. The rabbis said this vow will be valid if, and *only if*, a son is born to him. However, if the baby turns out to be a daughter, a *tumtum* or an *androgynos*, he is not bound by this vow (Mishna Nazir 2:7).

As soon as I read this perplexing text I called over my teacher and excitedly asked her: “Who is this *tumtum*?” “Oh,” she answered, “The *tumtum* is a mythical beast that is neither male nor female—kind of like a unicorn—that our Sages invented in order to explore the limits of the law.”

The rabbis of the Mishna, who lived in the first two centuries of the Common Era, identify at least four possible genders/sexes: the *zakhar* (male) and the *nekevah* (female), as well as two sexes that are neither male nor female: the *tumtum* and the *androgynos*. They also had two other categories for gender identity that don’t appear at birth, but develop later in life. The *saris* is born male but later develops female traits; the *ayloni* is born female, but later develops male traits.

All these genders appear frequently in classical Jewish texts. The *tumtum* appears 17 times in the Mishna; 23 times in the Tosefta; 119 times in the Babylonian Talmud; 22 times in the Jerusalem Talmud and hundreds of times in midrash, commentaries and halacha. The *androgynos* appears 21 times in the Mishna; 19 times in the Tosefta; 109 times in the Babylonina Talmud and countless times in midrash and halacha.

And yet gender diversity is seldom discussed as an integral part of Jewish sacred texts or as a spiritual resource of our tradition.

### **Ambiguity as a Holy Place**

Differently gendered individuals play leading roles in our spiritual history and already are integrated into the world of Jewish sacred texts. We only have to look for them.

The midrash, for example, teaches that Adam, the first human being, was an *androgynos* (Bereshit Rabah 8). In the Babylonian Talmud (Yevamot 64a) the radical claim is made that both the first Jews, Abraham and Sarah, were actually *tumtumim* who later transitioned genders to become male and female. According to some of the most influential texts of our tradition, the first human being and the first Jews were gender nonconforming people!



The reason that my first Mishna teacher told me that the *tumtum* was a mythical creature is because most modern readers approach Jewish sacred texts with the presumption of finding a system of binary gender that is virtually identical to today's mainstream understanding that there are two (and only two) *opposite* sexes. According to this view the *tumtum* must be either a mythical creature or a statistical aberration.

Judaism speaks in a different voice. Although Jewish Sages often tried to sort the world into binaries, they also acknowledged that not all parts of God's creation can be contained in orderly boxes. Distinctions between Jews and non-Jews, Shabbat and the days of the week, purity and impurity, are crucial to Jewish tradition.

However, it was the parts of the universe that defied binaries that interested the rabbis of the Mishna and the Talmud the most. Pages and pages of sacred texts are occupied with the minute details of the moment between fruit and bud, wildness and domestication, innocence and maturity, the twilight hour between day and night. We read in the Babylonian Talmud: "Our sages taught: As to twilight, it is doubtful whether it is part day and part night, or whether all of it is day or all of it is night... Rabbi Yosi said: Twilight is like the twinkling of an eye as night enters and the day departs, and it is impossible to determine its length." (Shabbat 34b)

We might have thought that the ambiguity of twilight would have made it dangerous or forbidden within Jewish tradition, since twilight marks the end of one day and start of the next. But, in fact, our Sages determined that dawn and dusk, the in-between moments, are the best times for prayer (Babylonian Talmud Brachot 29b). Jewish tradition acknowledges that some parts of God's creation defy categories and that these liminal people, places and things are often the sites of the most intense holiness. After all, the word for holiness in Hebrew, *kedusha*, literally means set aside or out of the ordinary.

### **Created Beings of Our Own**

Chapter 4 of Mishna *Bikkurim* offers a long discussion of the ways in which the *androgynos* is "in some ways equivalent to men, in some ways equivalent to women, in some ways equivalent to both men and women and in some ways equivalent to neither men nor women" (Mishna Bikkurim 4:1). Throughout this discussion our Sages take care to define the ways that the *androgynos* deserves protection and the ways in which life is holy for the *androgynos*.

Reuben Zellman, a transgender activist and rabbinical student writes: "Twilight cannot be defined; it can only be sanctified and appreciated. People can't always be defined; they can only be seen and respected, and their lives made holy. This Jewish approach allows for genders beyond male and female. It opens space in society. And it protects those who live in the places in between" (From a sermon at Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, San Francisco, CA, Rosh Hashana 2006).

## FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO A STUDY GUIDE AND ADVOCACY TRAINING CURRICULUM



At the end of Mishna *Bikkurim*, Rabbi Yosi makes the radical statement that the *androgynos* is actually: “*bria bi’fnei atzmah hoo*” (he is a created being of her own). In the Tosefta and in other places this phrase appears in the masculine form: “B’ria hi ‘finei atzmo” (a created being of his own). This Hebrew phrase blends male and female pronouns to poetically express the complexity of the *androgynos* identity. The term “*Bri’a b’ifnei atzmah*” is a classical Jewish legal term for exceptionality. The *koi*, an animal that is neither wild nor domesticated, is referred to by the same phrase (Tosefta *Bikkurim* 2). This term is an acknowledgement that not all of creation can be understood within binary systems. It is recognition of the possibility that uniqueness can burst through the walls that demarcate our society. It is also a theological statement—it is a proclamation that God creates diversity that is far too complex for human beings to understand. There are parts of each of us that are uncontainable. Every one of us must be appreciated as a “created being of our own.”



## { HANDOUT 3-A }

# MEETING WITH GOVERNMENT OR RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP OR A COMMITTEE

Pay special attention to highlighted points:

- ➔ Arrange an appointment to meet (or talk by phone).
- ➔ Arrive early (or call 30 seconds early).
- ➔ Prepare adequately (familiarity with issue, representative's position on it, rehearsal of "talking points," practice on a friend).
- ➔ **Prepare a one page summary of what you intend to say, with your name, address, contact information and faith affiliation.**
- ➔ Clothe yourself appropriately (or if a phone meeting, be in a place where you will not be interrupted or lose the connection).
- ➔ Be friendly (even "chatting the person up" about something else first, like "great coffee" or "nice office").
- ➔ Avoid being defensive, argumentative or arrogant.
- ➔ Address the person(s) and refer to the person(s) by title and name.
- ➔ **Explain who you are, especially your religion: "I am a constituent, a voter and a person of faith" or more specifically "a Christian" or "a Baptist" or "a Hindu."**
- ➔ **Clearly state the purpose for your visit or call ("I favor" or "I oppose").**
- ➔ **Briefly tell one personal story that led you to your position. The story will have greater impact if you are able to bring in your faith perspective.**
- ➔ Add two to three other points that support your position. (If there are several of you working together, decide beforehand which talking points each will take; avoid presenting the same talking point as someone else.)
- ➔ Invite questions or responses.
- ➔ Listen! Then respond thoughtfully, without disregarding or disrespecting another's point of view.
- ➔ Ask what the individual intends to do in relation to the issue you are addressing.
- ➔ Leave the one page written summary of what you said (or send, if a phone meeting).
- ➔ Thank the person(s) for the time and consideration.



## { HANDOUT 3-B }

### MAKING A COMMITMENT

*Please check what you are willing to commit to do.*

- Write to friends, church boards and elected officials.
- Write a “Letter to the Editor” or post a statement on a blog.
- Preach a sermon (clergy or lay).
- Write a congregational newsletter article.
- Teach a class for your congregation on this concern.
- Meet with your minister, priest, rabbi or imam either alone or with a group who share your views.
- Meet with a church board or committee or denominational representatives.
- Discover your denomination’s stances on LGBT inclusion and justice. Some denominations that may not recognize clergy may indeed support LGBT civil rights, for example. Urge your congregation to become officially “Welcoming.”  
*Note:* Different denominations use different designations to describe Welcoming Congregations in their tradition, such as “Reconciling” for United Methodists, “More Light” for the Presbyterian Church U.S.A, “Open and Affirming” for United Church of Christ.
- Meet with your local Congressional representative or an aide.
- Speak to groups, classes or congregations.
- Organize or join Pride events, carrying your congregation’s banner.
- Organize groups to work on HRC’s Study Guide and Advocacy Training
- Post stickers or decals that suggest you, your space and your congregation are LGBT friendly, such as a rainbow flag, a pink triangle or the HRC logo of an equal sign.
- Attend or encourage your clergy to attend the “Clergy Call for Justice and Equality” May 4-5, 2009 in Washington, D.C. (See below for details.)
- Organize a group to do the *For the Bible Tells Me So* Study Guide.
- Share your experience using this study guide and other ways you are advocating for LGBT equality on HRC’s “Share Your Story” page at [www.hrc.org/religion](http://www.hrc.org/religion).

### **HRC CLERGY CALL FOR JUSTICE & EQUALITY IS MAY 4-5, 2009**

The Clergy Call is intended to give clergy a chance to advocate for LGBT equality with their local representatives and senators and to talk with other clergy from around the country about the mobilizing work they have done in their communities. Find out more at [www.hrc.org/clergycall](http://www.hrc.org/clergycall).

## { HANDOUT 3-C }



## ISSUES FACING LGBT PEOPLE

*Add local current issues after first bullet.*

- ➔ Local or current issues: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ➔ ENDA – Employment Non-Discrimination Act
- ➔ Hate crimes legislation (local, state or federal)
- ➔ Marriage equality, civil unions, domestic partnerships
- ➔ Child custody, foster care and/or rights of adoption
- ➔ Family and medical leave for LGBT partners and families
- ➔ “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” military policy
- ➔ House of worship membership, marriage and ministry of LGBT people
- ➔ Immigration rights for LGBT partners and families
- ➔ Programs for LGBTQ (questioning) youth
- ➔ Workplace issues
- ➔ Transgender self-determination, including medical access, easing restrictions for name and gender change on legal documents, etc.
- ➔ Services for people living with HIV/AIDS
- ➔ Cancer awareness and health services for lesbians
- ➔ Counseling and legal services for same-gender couples
- ➔ Other?

### { HANDOUT 3-D }



## CREATING A LOCAL STRATEGY

*Please list the names, offices held and contact information of your area's government leaders and representatives.*

NAME	OFFICE HELD	CONTACT INFO