



# GOD AND THE GAY CHRISTIAN

## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

*The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships*



Author Matthew Vines

The single most frequent request I've received from readers since the release of my book has been for a study guide to go with it. Here, with an assist from my editors David Kopp and Derek Reed, are questions we hope will stimulate further conversation and thought. Whether you use this tool for personal or group use, we hope it will help you to find clarity on your own views about same-sex relationships.

For each chapter, you'll find a key statement that summarizes or at least highlights the main premise of the chapter, followed by several questions. If you are a group leader or facilitator, feel free to recast or replace the questions to your liking.

Sexual orientation and same-sex relationships for Christians might be the most challenging conversation facing believers today—and one of the most critical. I encourage you to welcome and honor every person, story, and perspective. What we're after is an enlightening, respectful, and helpful exchange for all comers, whether you agree or disagree with my conclusions.

Thanks, and God bless,  
Matthew

## Introduction, Reclaiming Our Light, and Chapter 1: A Tree and Its Fruit

Key statement: "My core argument is not simply that some Bible passages have been misinterpreted and others have been given undue weight. My larger argument is this: Christians who affirm the full authority of Scripture can also affirm committed, monogamous same-sex relationships." (p. 3)

1. Matthew sets out to make a biblical case in support of same-sex relationship, and to do so from a theologically conservative viewpoint of Scripture. How have pastors or teachers closest to you most commonly applied the Bible to their understanding of same-sex relationships?

2. To what degree have you, or people you are close to, been affected personally by how the traditional "Bible-believing" view has been applied by a person, company, or church? When has it been a positive experience? When, a negative?

3. Matthew's approach is both

biblical and personal. Clearly, he intends to treat Scripture as authoritative, yet his personal experience is important, too. Were you concerned by his willingness to consider personal experience as part of a guide to truth? What, if any, is your religious or philosophical upbringing in this regard? What is your perspective now? (p. 13 ff)

4. Matthew's father says the day Matthew came out was the worst day of his life. Has a family member or friend of yours come out to you? How did you respond? What kinds of thoughts/emotions did you find it difficult to express? (p. 9)

# Introduction, Reclaiming Our Light, and Chapter 1: A Tree and Its Fruit

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5. Can you identify attitudes or beliefs of yours that have significantly shifted over time? If so, try to identify what factors played the most important roles in that shift. For example, was it facts, emotion, logic, Scripture, a relationship, personal experience—or some combination of these?

6. In pages 14-16, we encounter the test of outcomes, based on Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7, “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.” Most of us have applied this test in our lives many times. Write

down or share some personal experiences that come to mind.

7. Do you agree with Matthew that experience can play a role in causing Christians to rethink their interpretation of Scripture? How does the rethinking of slavery compare to the rethinking that’s happening on LGBT people today? (p. 15)

8. The story of Matthew’s dad adds an important element to the impact of chapter 1. How?

## Chapter 2: Telescopes, Tradition, and Sexual Orientation

**Key statement:** “The telescope didn’t lead Christians to reject Scripture. It simply led them to clarify their understanding of Scripture.” (p. 24)

1. Economist John Maynard Keynes famously said, “When the facts change, I change my mind, sir. What do you do?” What was your initial response to Matthew’s question: “Does new information we have about homosexuality also warrant a reinterpretation of Scripture?” (p. 25)

2. Why might a reinterpretation of Scripture be more difficult for some Christians than for others?

3. Talking about sex and sexual orientation is uncomfortable for most of us. How have derogatory slang, stereotyping, labeling, and judgmental language made thinking helpfully about sexual orientation and same-sex relationships even more challenging? (p. 25)

4. Matthew traces the understanding of same-sex relations from ancient times to the present. He notes that not until the mid-20th century did some experts begin

to think of same-sex attraction as an exclusive, fixed orientation. How important is this change in understanding to our reading of Scripture, in your view? (pp. 31-40)

5. The whole premise of so-called reparative therapy was that same-sex attraction was an aberration that could be fixed. Do you believe that sexual orientation is a choice? Why, or why not?

6. Over the years, Christians have shifted their views on Gentiles, the relation of the earth to the sun, and slavery. To what degree have biblical understandings helped or hindered this process? Do you see other “Bible-based” understandings or attitudes that are in need of reinterpretation? (p. 41)

## Chapter 3: The Gift of Celibacy

**Key statement:** “Christians throughout history have affirmed that lifelong celibacy is a spiritual gift and calling, not a path that should be forced on someone.” (p. 44)

1. If you have known people who chose lifelong celibacy for religious reasons, talk about their example and influence on you. How did you react to their choice? Did it seem appealing to you, or otherwise? Explain.
2. Do you agree with Matthew that the story of Adam and Eve affirms sameness, not differences, as part of the basis of marriage? How does your conclusion shape your view of marriage? (pp. 45-47)
3. Matthew writes, “Jesus’s teaching does not support mandatory celibacy for people to whom celibacy has not been given.” How do you think you might react if you were required to reject even the possibility of romantic relationships for your whole life, but did not believe you had been given the gift of celibacy? (p. 49)
4. Through history, Christians have often struggled with whether the human body and sexuality are to be seen as essentially good or essentially broken. How has this struggle affected your own thinking, or the teachings and expectations of your church community? (pp. 52-55)
5. John Paul II taught that celibate Christians can live out the true meaning of marriage, affirming its goodness. Express in your own words how this could be so. (p. 56)
6. Matthew contends that mandatory celibacy sends the message to gay Christians that their sexual selves are inherently shameful. Consider to what degree shaming from religious teachers and others has shaped, or would shape, your sexual attitudes and choices. (p. 57)

## Chapter 4: The Real Sin of Sodom

**Key statement:** “Decades ago, biblical scholars on both sides of the issue dismissed the idea that homosexuality was the sin of Sodom. Yet that belief still pervades our broader cultural consciousness, fueling negative attitudes toward gay people among Christians, and negative attitudes toward the Bible among gay people.” (p. 60)

1. The Genesis story of the events at Lot’s house in Sodom is horrific in so many ways. Let’s start with Lot: what is your reaction to his offer to the men at his door as it related to his daughters? (pp. 60-62)
2. Matthew argues that attributing the divine judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah to same-sex relations didn’t arise from biblical texts, and first appeared in Jewish writings only in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD. Does that change how you view the traditional reading?
3. The actions of the men of Sodom, Matthew states, have more to do with hostility and dominance than sexual desire. In our era, we have seen rape used as a weapon of war. Have you tended to consider rape in war more about sex, or more about dominance? How might your view of the act influence your emotional reaction? (pp. 65-66)
4. Do you agree with Matthew’s assertion that the real sin of Sodom was oppression and inhospitality to strangers? (pp. 66-68)
5. When later Christians came to read same-sex behavior as the sin of Sodom, writes Matthew, “their concept of same-sex behavior still differed greatly from the modern concepts of sexual orientation and gay Christians.” If you agree with Matthew, why could this distinction be significant? (p. 75)

## Chapter 5: The Abominations of Leviticus

**Key statement:** “I’d like us to consider the reason why Christians don’t follow all the laws we see in the Old Testament, from its restrictions on food to its rules about clothing—and much more, including the death sentence for rebellious children. And then I’d like to look at the Old Testament prohibitions of male same-sex intercourse, as we seek to discern whether and why Christians should follow them today.” (p. 78)

1. The abominations of the book of Leviticus relating to diet, fabrics, male circumcision, sex during a woman’s menstrual period, charging interest on loans, and hair-cuts have been largely discarded by Christians through the centuries. Why? (pp. 78-81)
2. By contrast, the abominations relating to sexual conduct have largely been retained. On what basis?
3. “While abomination is a negative word, it doesn’t necessarily correspond to Christian views of sin,” states Matthew. Along with numerous biblical scholars, he sees it not as an ethical term, but “a term of boundary marking,” with “a basic sense of taboo.” By the end of the chapter, were you persuaded? What questions, if any, remained? (p. 85)
4. According to Matthew, how did the patriarchal society of Bible times, and the accompanying subordinate status of women, influence views on male same-sex relations? (pp. 86-90)
5. If you feel you have let go, or are letting go, of the “taboo” of same-sex relationships, what emotions accompanied that choice? Did you feel relief or freedom? Resistance? A prick to the conscience? Anxiety that, having crossed one boundary, you may not know how to think about the next one that comes your way? Talk about it.

## Chapter 6: Excess Passion and Unnatural Acts in Romans

**Key Statement:** “Romans 1:26-27 is the most significant biblical passage in this debate. It is the longest reference to same-sex behavior in Scripture, and it appears in the New Testament. So was Bobby Griffith’s mother right when she cited this passage as a reason to reject his sexual orientation? What was Paul saying here? Was his intent to teach that gay Christians should be celibate for life, because their sexual orientation is broken and falls outside of God’s natural design?” (pp. 96-97)

1. Have you or a close friend or family member felt permanently separated from your church and God because of a life choice (e.g., marrying the ‘wrong’ person, divorce, abortion, affair, crime, or addiction)? Have you or a close friend or family member felt that kind of separation because of a reality that did not seem in your power to change? Write or talk about the experience—what happened, how it felt, who was ‘for’ or ‘against’ you, how you or others responded and changed.
2. In describing the importance of the book of Romans, Matthew draws a sharp contrast between how it has brought so many to faith, while at the same time driving so many LGBT Christians away from their faith. If part of your faith journey is defined by Romans, describe how it has shaped you. (pp. 95-96)

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3. This chapter attempts to show readers a way forward—from the “path of despair” (p. 96) that has sabotaged so many LGBT believers to a biblically supported path of hope for loving, committed same-sex relationships for gay Christians. In your own words, and as carefully as you can, restate the biblical and logical case that Matthew makes in this chapter.

4. Do you see other “unbridled passions” that you

suspect Paul would address if he were writing to the Western church today?

5. In Romans 1:21, Paul says of Gentile idol worshipers, “Although they knew God, they did not worship him as God.” What is the difference, would you say, between honoring your sexuality and letting it become an idol? (pp. 97-99)

## Chapter 7: Will Gay People Inherit the Kingdom of God?

**Key Statement:** “In this chapter, we will go to the heart of a message that damages the witness of Christians and gives LGBT people a damaged perception of God. We will explore the original meanings of terms that are used to tell gay people they will be excluded from God’s kingdom. And it involves just two words.” (p. 117)

1. In this chapter, we encounter several lists from Paul’s letters that identify kinds of people whose conduct will keep them out of God’s kingdom. Have you at any time in your life feared that a choice, thought, or behavior of yours would send you to hell? If so, talk about it. (pp. 117-118)

2. When you were reading the lists of qualities that were considered natural for men and women (p. 120), what was your instinctive reaction? a] I’d agree on most points. b] I don’t agree, but beliefs haven’t really changed much. c] I’m glad times have changed! Talk about it.

3. What kind(s) of economic exploitation and abuses of power related to sexuality do you see still afflicting our society? Do you see similar issues inside the church? Discuss.

4. The exposition of this chapter is built on a word

study. Matthew acknowledges he is not a textual scholar. How did you respond to the argument he lays out for both words? Was there something he could have done to make his case more persuasive for you?

5. Don’t miss Matthew’s summary of the first eight chapters of the book on pages 129-130. As you look back on what you’ve read, how would you describe your mental, emotional, and spiritual response to what he’s presented?

a] I feel biblically affirmed in my views, and set free from misconceptions that have burdened me.

b] I find myself arguing at nearly every turn. I think the basis of this disagreement is probably \_\_\_\_\_.

c] I have experienced a significant shift from what I used to believe to what I believe now. d] I’m still deciding.

I don’t know what I believe yet. If you’re comfortable sharing your answers, see how your response compares with others in your group.

## Chapter 8: The Biblical Argument for Marriage Equality

**Key Statement:** “In keeping with the focus of Ephesians 5, the essence of Christian marriage involves keeping covenant with one’s spouse in a relationship of mutual self-giving, which does not exclude same-sex couples.” (p. 143)

1. “Christian marriage is holy,” states Matthew, “an institution ordained by God.” In your own words, how would you explain and apply to marriage the words “holy,” and, “an institution ordained by God”? (p. 136)

2. A marriage covenant is intended to mirror Christ’s unbreakable covenant with the church. For this reason, writes Matthew, “Marriage isn’t, at its deepest level, just about our happiness and fulfillment... [It’s] also about displaying the nature and glory of God through the covenant we make—and keep—with our spouse.” (p. 136) Have you been in, or a close witness of, a marriage relationship that revealed God’s covenantal love to you in some way? Describe what was so compelling about that relationship.

3. Were you brought up to believe that procreation is a theological must for Christians? What do you believe now? (pp. 137-141)

4. In a discussion of the differences that matter in a marriage, Matthew writes: “If marriage is viewed primarily as a path to completing oneself, then it risks becoming self-absorbed. Marriage is designed to be a human reflection of the only love that offers true completion: God’s love for us in Christ.” (p. 147) In your view, what is the inherent potential of personal differences for showing God’s love in a marriage?

5. Have your views about same-sex marriage changed as a result of reading *God and the Gay Christian*? A lot or a little? Or not changed at all? Talk about your beliefs now.

## Chapter 9, What the Image of God Teaches Us about Gay Christians

**Key Statement:** “In what ways are we made in God’s image, and what does that mean for all of us, and for gay Christians in particular? If same-sex orientation can be shown to be consistent with the image of God, how would that affect our bigger discussion of lifelong, committed, same-sex relationships?” (p. 150)

1. The Bible teaches that men and women are made in God’s image (Genesis 1:27; James 3:9). What is your personal take on the phrase “made in the image of God”? And how much does that idea affect how you value and treat yourself and others? (pp. 150-154)

2. What about God’s nature and ways, as you understand them, do you find yourself drawn to the most? What about God’s nature or ways do you tend to fear

the most? Where did these understandings of God originate, and how much do you trust that they are true?

3. On pages 157-158, Matthew shares the story of the Robertson family. If you have ever struggled with self-hate, in what area(s), and why? Write about how that emotional experience felt, and how it affected the rest of your life, including your openness to God. Share your experience with others if you choose.

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4. If the majority of traditional Christian churches would decide to affirm same-sex marriage for gay Christians, what outcomes—positive or negative—would you expect to see in the public at large?
5. Do you agree with Matthew that “if the church were to bless committed same-sex unions for gay Christians, we would advance God’s sanctifying purposes for their lives”? (p. 162) Talk about it.

## Chapter 10, Seeds of a Modern Reformation

**Key Statement:** “What can affirming Christians do to be agents of transformation on this central issue of our time?” (p. 165)

1. If you are part of a church fellowship, what is its official position on LGBT issues? How does this play out in terms of clergy, lay leadership, membership, sermon content, and engagement in the community? Does the congregation as a whole agree with the church’s official position, or would you say that a range of views are present in the membership?
2. If you are an LGBT person who has come out, what were some of the most compelling factors that led you to do so? As you’ve shared your personal story, how has it affected others, beginning with those closest to you?
3. Would you like to see change in how your church engages with LGBT people? If so, what would be your best scenario?
4. “Ultimately, the most powerful case gay Christians can offer is the witness of their own lives,” writes Matthew. Then he quotes John Boswell: “It is much harder for most people to remain hostile to and unmoved by a living brother than it is to rail against an abstraction” (pp. 177-178). If you are an affirming Christian, what more do you think could be done by affirming churches to take the LGBT conversation out of the abstract and make it more personal for the church at large?
5. What was your reaction to the stories of Kathy, James, and Justin, and to them as change agents in their spheres of influence? (pp. 165-172) Did their examples—along with Matthew’s suggested action steps—spark new ideas for you? If so, share them with the group.



**Advancing the Kingdom, Advancing Equality**

In 2013, Matthew Vines founded The Reformation Project to train Christians to support and affirm lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in the church. Sign up at [www.reformationproject.org](http://www.reformationproject.org) to learn how you can get involved with The Reformation Project and advance LGBT inclusion in your faith community.