



The
Children
are **Free**

Reexamining the Biblical Evidence
on Same-sex Relationships

Study Guide

a companion to the book by
Rev. Jeff Miner and Rev. John Tyler Connoley

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Introduction to this study guide

Purpose of this guide

The following guide was developed as a companion to *The Children Are Free: Reexamining the Biblical Evidence on Same-Sex Relationships*. It is meant as a starting place for discussion on the topics covered in the book. Whether you use this guide for individual or group study, the hope is that the questions and exercises will help you delve deeper into the truths of scripture, and that by delving deeply you will better apply the scriptures to your life.

How to use this guide

Each section consists of a short reading from the book (often with additional readings from scripture to provide context). Begin by reading the listed texts, then move to the questions in the guide. If you're in a group, you might want to have members write down notes to the questions before coming together. If you're alone, try thinking about the questions and then jotting down thoughts as they come to you.

We have intentionally avoided asking the direct question, "Do you agree or disagree with the authors?" We tried, instead, to ask questions that would help readers think about *why* they agree or disagree, while avoiding a quick yes-or-no response. Of course, the facilitator should feel free to ask this question if she or he thinks it appropriate.

We have also deliberately included more questions than you will need. We know that not every question will be beneficial to every person. If a question doesn't yield fruit, move on to another question.

The point of this guide is not to get through all the questions, or even to discuss every section of the book, but to spark deeper thought. The key is to trust God to guide your thoughts, and try to keep yourself open to what the Spirit would have you learn from this dialogue.

Timeline

Although *The Children Are Free* can be read in a short amount of time, we've found that groups often require several weeks to work through the book. To allow for a thorough discussion, we recommend an eight-week study, with two weeks for each chapter.

Chapter One

The Clobber Passages

Dedication and Preface

Read: Pages v-xiii.

- According to the dedication and preface, this book was written for gay people and their loved ones. Who in your life do you think would be receptive to a discussion on this topic? Who in your life would not? What's your own comfort level with this discussion? What factors do you think affect your comfort level with this topic?
- Do Jeff and Tyler seem similar to or different from you? How do you think their lives affected what they wrote in this book?
- In the preface, the authors state that they're addressing a specific question in this book. Why do you think they chose that particular question? Does it seem like an appropriate question to you, or would you rather they had focused on something else? If you're single, do you feel excluded by this question? Why or why not?

Introduction

Read: Pages 1-2a

- The authors use the term "clobber passages." Do you feel this is fair or representative of the scriptures they refer to? Explain your answer.
- Are there more or fewer clobber passages than you expected? Do you think the number matters? What if there were seventy-five (or just one), would that change the way you thought about them?

Sodom and Gomorrah

Read: Pages 2b-6a, Genesis 17-19

- Prior to reading *The Children Are Free*, what was your understanding of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah?
- How does Ezekiel's interpretation of the Sodom story affect your own interpretation?

- When in your life have you felt like the strangers/angels in this story? When have you acted like the people of Sodom toward a stranger?

Going after strange flesh

Read: Pages 6b-7a, Jude 5-7, and Genesis 6:1-4

- The authors' interpretation relies on the historical context of the writing of Jude. Do you think this is a useful method for interpreting scripture? Why or why not?
- Without thoroughly researching all the footnotes, we have to accept the authors' historical interpretation. Who do you rely on for information about the Bible? How do you decide if a source is trustworthy?

How language is interpreted

Read: Pages 7b-10a

- How does this section affect the way you answer the question about historical context above?
- How does reading the Bible with an historical perspective affect the truth that the Bible is the word of God? Do you believe someone should be able to understand the Bible without any outside help? Why or why not?

Do not lie with men as you would with women

Read: Pages 10b-12a, Leviticus 18:19-23

- Imagine you lived in a culture where the only visible form of homosexuality was men having sex with men in the context of idol worship. How would that affect your opinions about gay people and their ability to form relationships?
- What has been your experience with gay people today? What assumptions do you have about same-sex relationships?

Trading natural relations for unnatural

Read: Pages 12b-16a, Romans 1:16-2:3

- If Paul doesn't condemn all same-sex relationships in this passage, what behaviors *does* he condemn? Reading the whole passage in context, what do you think is the most important principle we can draw from it?
- In this section, you read about Tyler's spiritual journey. Take some time to reflect on your own spiritual journey. What are the benchmark moments in your personal story?

Chapter Two

Finding Affirmation in Scripture

Introduction

Read: Pages 27-29a, Isaiah 43:18-21, Matthew 13:52

- Have there been times in your own life when your interpretation of scripture was affected by your prejudices or preconceptions? What caused you to rethink your position?
- Isaiah and Jesus both reminded us to be ready for the “new things” God is doing. Think of a time when God surprised you. How can you prepare yourself for God’s surprises?

Ruth’s covenant with Naomi

Read: Pages 27b-33a, and Ruth 1-4

- If you had been in Ruth’s situation, living in ancient Moab, would you have been willing to make the same covenant with Naomi that she did, or would you have gone home like Orpah? What would have been the factors in your decision?
- According to the authors, the Bible does not state whether Ruth and Naomi were sexually intimate. If you could know for certain that Ruth and Naomi were or were not lovers, would this affect your interpretation of the story? Why or why not?
- Ruth 3:1-4:13 tells us that Ruth married an older man named Boaz for the sake of security. Discuss some ways modern people seek security through marriage.

What was the nature of Jonathan and David’s relationship?

Read: Pages 33b-39a, 1 Samuel 17:50-20:42, 2 Samuel 1:1-27 and 9:1-13

- Which of the four “Exhibits” presented in this section was most compelling to you? Which was least compelling? How does your own experience affect the way you view these Exhibits?

- In 1 Samuel 18, we find out that David married Jonathan's sister Michal, and later he married several other women. Jonathan also had a wife, who bore him the son Mephibosheth. How are their marriages similar to or different from Ruth's marriage to Boaz? If either Jonathan or David was bisexual, does this affect your feelings about them? Why or why not?
- In what, if any, ways does the story of Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:1-13) add to your interpretation of the story of Jonathan and David?

The Ethiopian eunuch: Despised and rejected, but not by God

Read: Pages 39b-44a, Acts 8:4-40, Isaiah 56:3-5

- If you had been Phillip in this story, what do you think would have been your first thought upon meeting the Ethiopian eunuch? What questions would you have had for the Ethiopian eunuch before you baptized him? Did you find Phillip's response surprising? Do you think the Ethiopian eunuch found it surprising? What clues from the Bible support your answers?
- The authors suggest that the Ethiopian eunuch was probably excluded from religious worship in Jerusalem because of people's interpretation of Deuteronomy 23:1. How have you been excluded from worship in the past? Who have you excluded, and why?

Diversity in creation

Read: Pages 44b-46a, Matthew 19:3-11

- In what ways is the concept of "born eunuchs," found in the Babylonian Talmud (see page 41 in the book), similar to or different from modern ideas of innately homosexual people? What do you think Jesus meant when he said "there are eunuchs who have been so from birth?"
- Does whether or not people are gay from birth affect how you view same-sex relationships? Why or why not?
- Considering all the connotations associated with eunuchs, what do you think of Jesus' use of the word eunuch in referring to "eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven?" At a time when eunuchs were excluded from Jewish worship, how do you think Jesus' Jewish followers would have responded to this phrase?

Chapter Three

How Jesus Applied Scripture

Introduction

Read: Pages 57-60a

- Do the exercise on pages 58 and 59. How many of the five rules on those pages does your conservative person follow? How many do you follow? Why do you discard the ones you do?
- What are some of the ways you've heard for deciding which biblical rules to follow? Is there a standard you generally use in your own life? What draws you to that standard? Do you feel you are consistent in its use?

The common-sense approach to scripture

Read: Pages 60b-64a, Mark 7:1-22

- Before reading this section, what did you think Jesus meant when he said that what goes into the mouth does not defile? Has your understanding changed after reading this section? If so, what has changed?
- In this section, the authors take a saying of Jesus and look for the principle behind it. Do you think this a legitimate way of applying Jesus' words? As a follower of Jesus, what do you do when confronted with a modern issue he could not have addressed, such as what kind of car to buy?
- In what ways have you acted as if externalities matter more than souls? Can you think of a time when you let physical appearances get in the way of Christian charity?

The standard of compassion

Read: Pages 64b-69a, Matthew 12:1-8

- Imagine you were one of the Pharisees in this story, and Jesus told you his disciples were innocent, even though they were clearly breaking one of the Ten Commandments. How do you think you would have reacted? Do you think they were justified in their indignation? Why or why not?

- On pages 66-69, the authors give several examples of people who they believe deserve compassion, and not sacrifice. Which of these examples seems most compelling to you? Which seems least compelling? Can you think of other examples of people who deserved compassion instead of sacrifice?

The responsibility of Jesus' followers

Read: Pages 69b-71a, Matthew 17:24-27, and John 16:5-15

- Jesus asked Peter, "What do you think?" How does it make you feel to imagine taking on the responsibility of thinking through biblical rules yourself? Can you think of ways to make this responsibility less daunting? What role does the Holy Spirit play in your decision-making processes?
- Jesus told Peter to pay the temple tax "so that we do not give offense to them" (Matthew 17:27), even though he made it clear that he and Peter were not bound by the tax law. How might this part of the story apply to issues surrounding same-sex relationships? In what situations might compassion accommodate a legalist's sensibilities? In what situations might compassion require confronting legalism?

Taking the Bible seriously

Read: Pages 71b-73

- Read the first paragraph of this section again. How would you define the Bible for yourself? What does scripture mean to you? How is your view of scripture different from or similar to the authors' view?
- Are there places in your life where you resist the Holy Spirit's leading? What keeps you from embracing "the new?"

Freedom in Christ

Read: Page 73

- Has your perspective changed as a result of studying the scriptures in this section? Has your attitude toward biblical rules been affected by this chapter? How do you see the relationship between common sense, compassion, and biblical rule keeping? What idea(s) do you feel you still need to think about more?

Chapter Four

Relearning an Ancient Lesson

The early Church's response to Gentiles

Read: Pages 75-80, Acts 10:1-11:18 and 15:1-35

- Why do you think Peter required a vision to understand that no food was unclean, even though he was with Jesus at the time of the speech in Mark 7?
Was there ever a time in your life when God had to take drastic measures to get you to listen? What was the issue, and how did God get your attention?
- Historically, what other groups besides Gentiles have struggled for acceptance within the Church? What, if any, parallels do you see between the struggle over Gentile acceptance in the early church and the struggle over gay and lesbian acceptance today? Do you think this is a fair analogy? Why or why not?

You will know them by their fruits

Read: Pages 81-85a

- Think of a time when a person's fruits told you the nature of his or her heart. Is the "fruit test" always accurate? Are there other tests that you consider more accurate? Can you think of a time when someone's fruit was at odds with his or her heart?
- Which of the examples of Christian witness on pages 81 through 84 is most compelling to you? Which is least compelling? Are there details you wish you knew, to better judge these stories? For you, what is the most important evidence of a right relationship with God?

Two steps forward, one step back

Read: Pages 85b-87a

- As you read through the examples in this section, are there any that seem particularly troubling to you — either because you wish the Church had never held that position, or because you wish the Church still held it? What about the position troubles you?

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