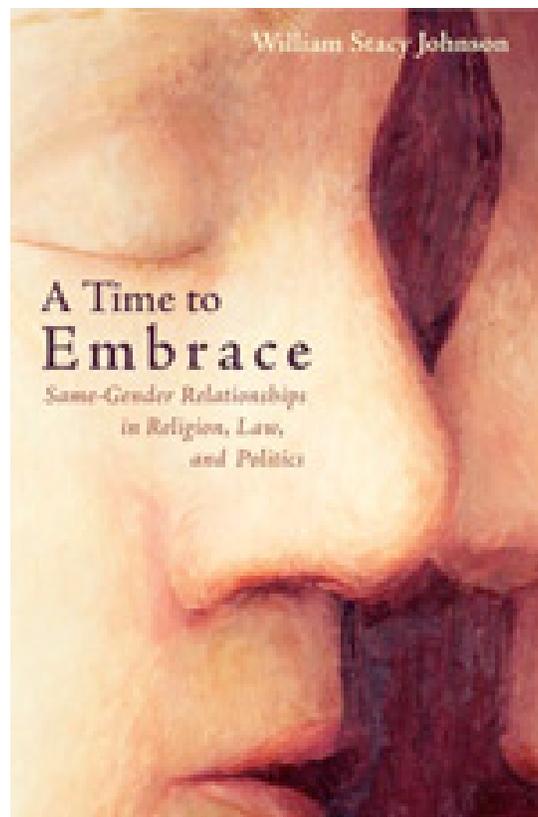


A Time to Embrace:
Same-Gender Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics

by William Stacy Johnson

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www.atimetoembrace.com



Study Guide

by Louise Lawson Johnson and Tricia Dykers Koenig

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To the Leader:

- ❖ This study is planned for 6 sessions, each a minimum of 45 minutes long. These plans can easily be expanded for more sessions and/or longer classes. For instance, the 6 sessions can be expanded into 12 by allowing more time for discussion and activities. Covering supplemental questions can expand each session to fit either an hour or an hour and a half time period.
- ❖ Each participant should have his/her own copy of the book. This guide assumes that participants have read the assigned chapter prior to the class session. As leader, it would be helpful if you would read the whole book prior to the course, and then re-read the appropriate chapter in preparation for each session. You might encourage participants to do the same.
- ❖ Sexuality is a controversial, often emotional topic that is difficult for many to discuss. Because this is so, the group will need to agree on ground rules for respectful dialogue and confidentiality. Be aware that there may be members who tend to dominate the group. Find ways to provide opportunities for all to participate while respecting those who are not comfortable speaking.
- ❖ Use nametags at every session until it is clear that all participants know each other's names.
- ❖ Arrange the seating so that participants are facing one another as much as possible. Chairs can be re-arranged to accommodate small groups, or if you have multiple tables, each table can function as a small group for discussion purposes.
- ❖ Have a white board or newsprint with appropriate markers available. Newsprint allows for easier reviewing of thoughts from session to session.
- ❖ Opening and closing each session with prayer or a hymn is appropriate for faith-based groups.

The Central Question that the Book Seeks to Address:

Where do gay, lesbian, or other gender-varied persons, whose sexual orientation is firmly established, and who desire to enter into exclusively committed, lifelong same-gender relationships, find their place within the fellowship of our religious communities, within the structures of our legal system, and within the framework of our democratic polity? (p. 3)

SESSION ONE
INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS ISSUE AND WHY NOW?

Preparation for the Session

- Assign pages 1-36.
- Ask participants to clip several newspaper or magazine articles having to do with a variety of gay and lesbian issues and bring them to the first session. (Make sure that you bring some yourself.)
- Bring tape or thumbtacks and find a prominent place to post these articles.
- Duplicate guidelines such as “Seeking to be Faithful Together: Guidelines for Presbyterians During Times of Disagreement,” <http://www.pcusa.org/peacemaking/guidelines.pdf>; or Eric Law’s “Respectful Communications Guidelines,” <http://vancouver.anglican.ca/Portals/0/GetFit/PDF%20files/Respectful%20Communications%20Guidelines.pdf>. It will save time in the session if you distribute these to participants and ask them to read them ahead of time.

Lesson Plan

1. Welcome participants as they arrive. Ask them to post the articles they brought in a visible place in the room and to scan those brought by others.
2. Share self-introductions.
3. Discuss a group covenant for the class, either brainstorming ground rules as a group, or presenting ready-made guidelines such as those noted above. In order to create safe space for open discussion, the group may also wish to agree upon principles of confidentiality.
4. Gays and lesbians are in the news daily. Get the group to make a list of the issues that are featured in the posted articles. Looking at that list, ask the group whether each issue is related to the central question of the book: *Where do gay, lesbian, or other gender-varied persons, whose sexual orientation is firmly established, and who desire to enter into **exclusively committed, lifelong same-gender relationships**, find their place within the fellowship of our religious communities, within the structures of our legal system, and within the framework of our democratic polity?* (p. 3)
5. What are the differences between the three forms of same-gender eroticism that Johnson mentions: age-differentiated, status-defined, and egalitarian (p. 17f)? Why is it important to understand these distinctions?
6. If you accept the premise that sexual orientation is not an active choice, but is instead a “given,” how does this affect the way that you view gay and lesbian people? (p. 28)
7. Why do couples marry? What do they gain by being legally married? (p. 29f)

Supplemental questions

1. How does one's sexual "orientation" differ from a sexual "preference" or "choice"? (p. 19)
2. On pages 18-19, Johnson makes the statement that "...there is not a single, monolithic homosexuality throughout history." What does he mean by this? Does this observation change the way you think about gays and lesbians?

Preparation for the Next Session

- Assign pages 39-69.

SESSION TWO
RELIGION: THE NON-AFFIRMING CHURCH
Part One, Chapter One

Preparation for the Session

- Read pages 39-69.
- Make a copy of the Seven Theological Viewpoints (p. 108) and the Creation, Reconciliation and Redemption Chart below for each participant.

	Creation	Reconciliation in Christ	Redemption in the Spirit
<i>God's Act</i>	God's gracious act of bringing the world into being.	God's gracious act in Jesus Christ reuniting us with God and one another.	God's gracious work by the power of the Spirit enabling us to live a life of holiness.
<i>Human Response</i>	Human beings are created in God's image and called to reflect that image.	Human beings have sinned and need to be restored through repentance to right relationship with God and one another.	Human beings are in the process of being renewed in the image of Christ now and are enabled to enter into the joy of salvation fully in the future.
	God Loves Us	Christ Saves us	The Spirit Empowers Us

Lesson Plan

1. Welcome any new participants and make sure they are aware of the group covenant.
2. Hand out a copy of the Seven Theological Viewpoints (p. 108) and the Creation, Reconciliation and Redemption Chart. Refer to the list of Seven Viewpoints and point out that today's session will focus only on the first three, known as the Non-Affirming Viewpoints. (The next session will deal with the Welcoming, Affirming Viewpoints.) It is critically important to set these viewpoints in the context of God's relationship to the world. Johnson does this by talking in terms of creation, reconciliation and redemption. What he intends is to ask how each viewpoint regards the place of gays and lesbians in terms of their being a part of a world created by God (creation); their experience of the grace and reconciliation promised in Christ

(reconciliation); and their ability to live out the wholeness of reconciliation in their present lives as they anticipate the fullness of redemption in the future (redemption). These theological concepts – creation, reconciliation and redemption – deserve some attention at the beginning of this session; they will appear again in the next session as well. The chart simplifies each concept.

3. Divide your group into three: Prohibitionist viewpoint, Toleration viewpoint, and Accommodation viewpoint. Randomly assign people to each group so that each group contains people who hold views outside that particular one. Ask each group to review the section in the book dealing with their particular viewpoint:
 - Prohibition – pages 43-52
 - Toleration – pages 53-61
 - Accommodation – pages 62-69

Allow 20 minutes for each group to formulate answers to the following questions.

- What is the problem that this viewpoint recognizes and seeks to address?
- What core values or beliefs does this viewpoint seek to preserve or promote?
- What is the solution that this viewpoint offers to the problem?
- What view of God does this viewpoint presuppose?

Then allow 5 minutes each for the sub-groups to report back to the whole group.

Ask the whole group to identify some strengths of each viewpoint. If time allows, ask the whole group to name some weaknesses of each viewpoint.

Preparation for the Next Session

- Assign pages 71-108.

SESSION THREE
RELIGION: TOWARD A WELCOMING, AFFIRMING CHURCH
Part One, Chapter Two

Preparation for the Session

- Read pages 71-108.
- Make sure participants have the handout of the Seven Theological Viewpoints (p. 108) and the Creation, Reconciliation and Redemption Chart used in the previous session.

Lesson Plan

1. Welcome participants and remind them of the group covenant.
2. Have additional copies of the Seven Theological Viewpoints (p.108) and the Creation, Reconciliation and Redemption Chart used in the previous session. Refer to the list of Seven Viewpoints and point out that today's session will focus on the last four, known as Welcoming, Affirming Viewpoints.
3. Divide your group into four: Legitimation viewpoint, Celebration viewpoint, Liberation viewpoint and Consecration viewpoint. Randomly assign people to each group so that each group contains people who hold views outside that particular one. Ask each group to review the section in the book dealing with their particular viewpoint:
 - Legitimation – pages 72-79
 - Celebration – pages 79-86
 - Liberation – pages 86-95
 - Consecration – pages 95-105

Allow 20 minutes for each group to formulate answers to the following questions:

- What is the problem that this viewpoint recognizes and seeks to address?
- What core values or beliefs does this viewpoint seek to preserve or promote?
- What is the solution that this viewpoint offers to the problem?
- What view of God does this viewpoint presuppose?

Then allow 5 minutes each for the sub-groups to report back to the whole group.

Ask the whole group to identify some strengths of each viewpoint. If time allows, ask the whole group to name some weaknesses of each viewpoint.

Preparation for the Next Session

- Assign pages 109-155.
- Assign at least one person (or more than one if you have enough willing volunteers) to read each of the following biblical passages and its treatment in the book using the worksheet below. The extra "homework" will greatly enhance your next session and will allow you to cover much more material than you could otherwise.

Scripture Study Worksheet

SESSION FOUR
RELIGION: BECOMING FAMILY
THE CONSECRATION OF SAME-GENDER LOVE
Part One, Chapter Three

Read one of the following biblical passages and its treatment in the book, as marked.

- Genesis 1-2 – pages 114-120
- Leviticus 18-20 – pages 124-129
- Paul: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6 – pages 129-135
- Romans 1-2 – pages 135-136 (see also references on pages 55-57; 64-65; 75-76; 82; 89-90; 98-100)
- Ruth – pages 143-147
- Galatians 3:23-28 – pages 147-152

The use of Holy Scripture for guidance and direction requires the interpretation of its texts. Interpretation... usually asks two related kinds of questions. The first asks what the text says and is concerned with understanding its language. The second asks about the use or value of the text for some questions with which one is confronted. Consequently, the use of Scripture as a norm for our belief and obedience involves two types of judgment. The first is that employed in reaching a correct understanding of what texts say. The second is that employed in selecting and using texts for some specific purpose at hand. [an excerpt from **Presbyterian Understanding and Use of Holy Scripture**, a position statement adopted by the 123rd General Assembly (1983) of the Presbyterian Church in the United States – now the Presbyterian Church (USA)]

Answer the following questions in reference to each passage:

- a) Are there questions surrounding the translation or meaning of key words in this passage? If so, what are they?

- b) What was this text trying to say to people in its own day?

- c) How can we apply these insights today, remembering that our focal issue is exclusively committed, lifelong same-gender relationships?

SESSION FOUR
RELIGION: BECOMING FAMILY
THE CONSECRATION OF SAME-GENDER LOVE
Part One, Chapter Three

Preparation for the Session

- Read pages 109-155.
- Make sure you have a person who can report on each of the scripture passages listed in the worksheet.

Lesson Plan

1. Welcome participants and remind them of the group covenant.
2. Invite those who have prepared scripture studies to report briefly (3 minutes maximum) to the whole group. Ask the group to hold their questions and comments until the end of the presentations, otherwise time may run out before everyone who prepared a report has a chance to give it. Following the last presenter's report, allow discussion. Or ask: what new insights about scripture or this issue have you gained?
3. Questions for further discussion:
 - What do the ministry and teachings of Jesus tell us about marriage and family – including same-gender families? (see pages 138-143)
 - On page 155, Johnson indicates that in debates on gay and lesbian issues traditionalists often claim that the burden of proof should rest on those who advocate for change. He claims that his "...arguments in favor of consecrating same-gender unions are steeped in the traditions of Western Christianity; they take seriously the objections of traditionalists; and they provide reasoned responses cast within the terms honored by the tradition itself. Once a good-faith argument of this kind has been put forward, the burden of proof should shift back to the other side." Discuss this assertion that the burden of proof now rests with those who would deny gays and lesbians full consecration of exclusively committed same-gender love.

Supplemental Question

1. On page 110, Johnson writes, "marriage is primarily about transformation: it functions as a 'means of grace.'" How does each of the traditional purposes of marriage – companionship, commitment and community – relate to this assertion? (see especially the summary on pages 153-155)

Preparation for the Next Session

- Assign pages 159-189.

SESSION FIVE
LAW AND POLITICS: FREEDOM AND EQUALITY UNDER THE LAW
Part Two, Chapter Four

Preparation for the Session

- Read pages 159-189.
- Make enough copies of the handout (following) for each participant.

Lesson Plan

1. Welcome participants and remind them of the group covenant.
2. The author's aim in this chapter is stated on page 160: "to demonstrate that (1) from a legal point of view, extending basic civil rights to gay and lesbian individuals is the right thing to do, and (2) that there are also good reasons for going a step further and extending some form of relationship rights to exclusively committed same-gender couples." Since both of these goals have to do with the notion of basic "rights," review the discussion of human rights found in the first full paragraph on page 11. Brainstorm a list of rights that we each claim for ourselves as citizens. Which of these would you be willing to forfeit? Which do gay and lesbians share or not share?
3. Two important principles that undergird our legal system in the US are those of individual "liberty" and "equality under the law." These principles are designed to insure that no citizen will be treated unfairly or be targeted for special treatment based on who they are. Liberty arguments presuppose that all people have a right to personal self-determination protected by law. Ask the group to name some things that fall into the self-determination category (*notable ones in legal history are whether one may use contraception, whether one may obtain an abortion, whether one is free to marry whomever he or she wants, whether one can vote*). Equality arguments assume that all people in our society should receive the same legal benefits (legal protections and accountabilities). Often there are tensions between balancing the rights of individuals against the welfare of society as a whole. Ask the group to name some instances where these tensions are in evidence.
4. Based on an understanding of these principles, ask the group to respond to the statements on the following worksheet. If your group is large, divide into smaller groups for discussion and assign different statements to each, allowing time at the end for reflections in the whole group. [The source of each statement is included below for the leader's use but is omitted from participant's worksheets.]
 - Times can blind us to certain truths and later generations can see that laws once thought necessary and proper in fact serve only to oppress. (Justice Anthony Kennedy, p. 159)
 - Homosexual rape is a worse offense than heterosexual rape. (*United States v Smith*, p. 295, note 4)

- If we are to be a nation governed by law, the law must be fair and impartial in its administration. Singling out one group for special legal disfavor is a violation of our deepest constitutional principles. (Justice Anthony Kennedy, pp. 164-165)
- Many Americans do not want persons who openly engage in homosexual conduct as partners in their business, as scout masters for their children, as teachers in their children's schools, or as boarders in their home. They view this as protecting themselves and their families from a lifestyle that they believe to be immoral and destructive. (Justice Antonin Scalia, pp. 213-214)
- Moral disapproval of gay and lesbian people is not a rational basis on which to treat them unequally under the law. (Justice Sandra Day O'Conner, p. 175)
- When homosexual conduct is made criminal by the law of the State, that declaration in and of itself is an invitation to subject homosexual persons to discrimination both in the public and in the private spheres. (Justice Anthony Kennedy, p. 176)
- Congress has the power to decide to support only "households" that match the traditional family structure. (Justice William Rehnquist, pp. 300-301, note 42)
- The laudable goal of promoting a commitment between married couples to promote the security of their children and the community as a whole provides no reasonable basis for denying the legal benefits and protections of marriage to same-sex couples, who are no differently situated with respect to this goal than their opposite-sex counterparts. (Chief Justice Amestoy, Supreme Court of Vermont, p.179)
- Preserving the traditional institution of marriage constitutes a legitimate state interest. (Justice Sandra Day O'Conner, p. 304, note 84)
- Dr. A and Dr. B both want to marry Ms. C, an X-ray technician. Dr. A may do so because Dr. A is a man. Dr. B may not because Dr. B is a woman. Dr. A and Dr. B are people of opposite sexes who are similarly situated in the sense that they both want to marry a person of their choice. The (marriage) statute disqualifies Dr. B from marriage solely on the basis of her sex and treats her differently from Dr. A, a man. This is sex discrimination. (Justice Denise Johnson, p. 180)
- We wonder what the fuss was all about. Civil unions were never an issue in Vermont in the 2002 election and will not be (in 2004). The intensity of anger and hate has disappeared, replaced by an understanding that equal rights for groups previously denied them has no negative effect on those of us who have always enjoyed those rights. My marriage has not become weaker. (Howard Dean, p. 181)

- We do not believe that a right to same sex marriage is so rooted in the traditions and collective conscience of our people that failure to recognize it would violate the fundamental principles of liberty and justice which lie at the base of all our civil and political institutions. (Hawaii Supreme Court, p. 182)
- It is not enough to say that “marriage is marriage” and accept without any scrutiny the law before the court. It is the duty of the court to do more than merely assume that marriage is only, and must only be, what most are familiar with. In some parts of our nation mere acceptance of the familiar would have left segregation in place. (Judge Peter A. Michalski, p. 183)
- Only marriage between a man and a woman shall be valid or recognized in Nebraska. The uniting of two persons of the same sex in a civil union, domestic partnership, or other similar same-sex relationship shall not be valid or recognized in Nebraska. (Nebraska Constitution, art. I, sec. 29, 2000, p. 201)
- Resorting to civil unions would create a regime of second-class citizens, and this the Massachusetts Constitution will not tolerate...this inferior and discriminatory second-class status obtains even if same-gender couples are provided the same tangible benefits as married couples. Tangible benefits, though important, are not enough, for there are also “intangible,” or symbolic, benefits to marriage. (Massachusetts Supreme Court, p. 187)

Preparation for the Next Session

- Assign pages 191-221.

DISCUSSION STARTER WORKSHEET

SESSION FIVE
LAW AND POLITICS: FREEDOM AND EQUALITY UNDER THE LAW
Part Two, Chapter Four

Statements Regarding the Place of Gays and Lesbians Under the Law

Use these statements as springboards for discussion. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- Times can blind us to certain truths and later generations can see that laws once thought necessary and proper in fact serve only to oppress.
- Homosexual rape is a worse offense than heterosexual rape.
- If we are to be a nation governed by law, the law must be fair and impartial in its administration. Singling out one group for special legal disfavor is a violation of our deepest constitutional principles.
- Many Americans do not want persons who openly engage in homosexual conduct as partners in their business, as scout masters for their children, as teachers in their children's schools, or as boarders in their home. They view this as protecting themselves and their families from a lifestyle that they believe to be immoral and destructive.
- Moral disapproval of gay and lesbian people is not a rational basis on which to treat them unequally under the law.
- When homosexual conduct is made criminal by the law of the State, that declaration in and of itself is an invitation to subject homosexual persons to discrimination both in the public and in the private spheres.
- Congress has the power to decide to support only "households" that match the traditional family structure.
- The laudable goal of promoting a commitment between married couples to promote the security of their children and the community as a whole provides no reasonable basis for denying the legal benefits and protections of marriage to same-sex couples, who are no differently situated with respect to this goal than their opposite-sex counterparts.
- Preserving the traditional institution of marriage constitutes a legitimate state interest.
- Dr. A and Dr. B both want to marry Ms. C, an X-ray technician. Dr. A may do so because Dr. A is a man. Dr. B may not because Dr. B is a woman. Dr. A and Dr. B are people of opposite sexes who are similarly situated in the sense that they

both want to marry a person of their choice. The (marriage) statute disqualifies Dr. B from marriage solely on the basis of her sex and treats her differently from Dr. A, a man. This is sex discrimination.

- We wonder what the fuss was all about. Civil unions were never an issue in Vermont in the 2002 election and will not be (in 2004). The intensity of anger and hate has disappeared, replaced by an understanding that equal rights for groups previously denied them has no negative effect on those of us who have always enjoyed those rights. My marriage has not become weaker.
- We do not believe that a right to same sex marriage is so rooted in the traditions and collective conscience of our people that failure to recognize it would violate the fundamental principles of liberty and justice which lie at the base of all our civil and political institutions.
- It is not enough to say that “marriage is marriage” and accept without any scrutiny the law before the court. It is the duty of the court to do more than merely assume that marriage is only, and must only be, what most are familiar with. In some parts of our nation mere acceptance of the familiar would have left segregation in place.
- Only marriage between a man and a woman shall be valid or recognized in Nebraska. The uniting of two persons of the same sex in a civil union, domestic partnership, or other similar same-sex relationship shall not be valid or recognized in Nebraska.
- Resorting to civil unions would create a regime of second-class citizens, and this the Massachusetts Constitution will not tolerate...this inferior and discriminatory second-class status obtains even if same-gender couples are provided the same tangible benefits as married couples. Tangible benefits, though important, are not enough, for there are also “intangible,” or symbolic, benefits to marriage.

SESSION SIX
LAW AND POLITICS: TOWARD A WELCOMING DEMOCRACY
MARRIAGE EQUALITY IN THE CIVIL POLITY
Part Two, Chapter Five

Preparation for the Session

- Read pages 191-227.
- Prepare enough slips of paper for each participant with the following descriptions or those of your own choice:
 - Female, age 90, White, heterosexual, Mainline Protestant, excellent health, fixed income
 - Male, age 68, Black, heterosexual, Jehovah's Witness, stroke survivor, \$50K income
 - Male, age 50, White, heterosexual, Jewish, living with cancer, \$250K income
 - Female, age 45, Asian, lesbian, Buddhist, exceptionally high IQ, \$125K income
 - Transgender, age 36, White, Pentecostal, gift for music, \$120K income
 - Female, age 27, White, heterosexual, no religious affiliation, deaf, \$60K income
 - Male, age 21, Black, gay, no religious affiliation, gifted athlete, student
 - Male, age 19, White, heterosexual, Evangelical Protestant, Down Syndrome, dependent in family with \$75K income
 - Intersex, age 10, Middle Eastern descent, Muslim, math whiz, immigrant, large family with \$90K income
 - Female, age 3, Latina, Roman Catholic, undocumented alien, single parent family with \$20K income

Lesson Plan

1. Welcome participants and remind them of the group covenant.
2. Working in small groups of two to four persons, ask participants – operating behind a “veil of ignorance” (that is, you don't know your gender, age, race, sexual orientation, religion, IQ, economic status, etc.) as in John Rawls's exercise in *A Theory of Justice* (p. 161) – to brainstorm the basic structure of a society.
 - Do you have a bill of rights, and if so what does it include?
 - What economic system would you choose: capitalism, socialism, communism, etc.?
 - What form of government would you choose: direct or representative democracy, monarchy, theocracy, oligarchy, feudalism, etc.?
 - What family structures are allowed? Privileged?
 - What are the most important laws?

Capture the ideas on newsprint. Discuss:

- Does your society reflect the characteristics of a welcoming and deliberative democracy? (see especially page 208)
- How does your society balance tensions such as that between freedom and order, community versus individual well-being, majority rule versus protection of the minority? (pp. 192-194)
- Compare your society with current American reality.

Have each participant draw a slip of paper with an identity and reflect on how s/he fares in the society the group has just created. Discuss briefly in the whole group.

3. In laws such as the “Defense of Marriage Act” (p. 199), what about “marriage” is being “defended”? Why is the issue so emotionally freighted?
4. Johnson asserts in his *Conclusion* that marriage equality “is not a matter of if, but when.” (p. 224) He believes that change will take time (see page 206), and that the most politically feasible course toward marriage equality is through the “compromise” of civil unions. (pp. 218-221) What do you think?
5. Reflect on how/whether your thinking has changed over the course of this study.

Supplemental Question

1. What are the primary characteristics of liberals, conservatives, and communitarians? What core values are they trying to uphold? (pp. 212-218)