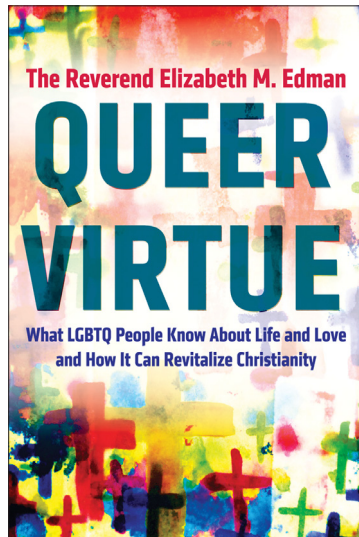


Study Guide



QUEER VIRTUE

What LGBTQ People Know About Life and Love
and How It Can Revitalize Christianity

The Reverend Elizabeth M. Edman

Welcome!

Queer Virtue asks you to see things you might not have seen before.

First, the book argues that there is a kind of virtue at work in LGBTQ community. Once you think about queer community this way, it's not difficult to see this virtue. But thinking about queerness and virtue in this way is sometimes new for people.

Second, the book argues that the virtue demanded by LGBTQ experience bears a striking resemblance to the virtue demanded by Christian faith. This idea often takes people by surprise.

Third, *Queer Virtue* asserts that Christian communities could learn a lot about how to live our faith by looking to queer experience as a model. It is common for people to think that faith perspectives should tell us whether queerness is okay or not. By turning the lens around to ask what queerness can tell us about faith—even using queerness to assess the relative health of Christian community—*Queer Virtue* is asking you to come at all of these questions from an entirely new angle.

In this book, the term “queer” has two meanings. First, “queerness” has to do with the identities, experiences, and perspectives of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, or some other iteration of queer. Second, “queer” is used as a verb, describing the activity of rupturing—or disrupting—false, oppositional categories (not all oppositional categories, but false ones). As a priest, I see Jesus constantly asking us to queer black and white thinking

that too often pits human beings against each other.

The sessions in this book will ask you to develop a lens of queerness, and to look through that lens to consider dynamics at work in your personal life and in the life of your community. By doing so, I hope that you'll have fresh insight about what your faith means to you, and how to live it with even greater health. This is a journey that can take courage to walk well. Your presence is a blessing, and I hope God will bless you richly while you are here.

Rev. Elizabeth M. Edman

How to Use This Guide

One of the first things you may notice about this guide is that the chapters are not read in order. *Queer Virtue* is written in two parts. **Part I** explores the path of Queer and Christian Virtue. **Part II** considers specific lessons that Christian communities can take from queer experience. Each chapter in Part II corresponds to a chapter in Part I. This guide asks you to read those corresponding chapters together. So, for instance, the first session asks participants to read together the chapters on Identity and on Pride. Participants will best understand the argument in *Queer Virtue* by reading the book start to finish, then reviewing the chapters assigned for each session.

For a brief overview of ideas in the book, participants can listen to “Queer Virtue 101” at www.waterwomensalliance.org/watertalk-notes-elizabeth-edman.

How the Sessions Are Structured

Please feel free to adapt this structure as will work best for your group.

Each session begins with a simple opening prayer that can be read aloud by a single person or by the entire group.

Participants will then watch a short film on the topic of the week, and be invited to share their initial impressions with someone sitting close to them.

The second segment is designed to get people talking about ideas in the book. Participants will be offered a selection of excerpts from *Queer Virtue*. Each person will be asked to choose one of the excerpts to discuss. People will gather into small groups (those who want to discuss quote 1 in this corner, quote 2 in that corner, etc). In these small groups, someone will read the quote aloud, and people will be invited to respond to the questions posed in the guide.

The third segment of each session asks participants to apply these ideas to their own lives, personal and communal. Questions will be posed for people to discuss one on one, then in small group, then with the full group. Some of these questions are preceded by an excerpt from the book, designed to help frame the discussion. The excerpt can be read aloud.

Each session ends with a closing prayer, to be led by a participant. The study guide does not include a closing prayer. Please pray as feels appropriate to your discussion, offering either a spontaneous prayer or one from your tradition.

A few additional notes

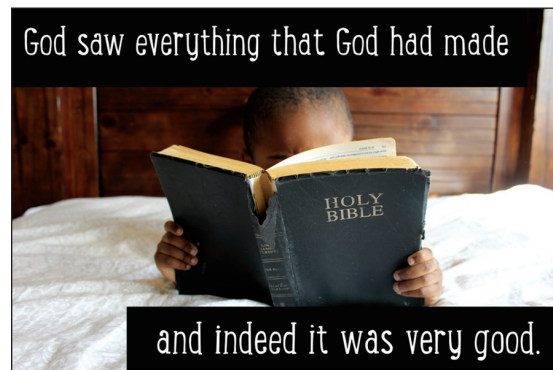
It may be desirable to have a facilitator who helps organize movement, keeps time, etc.

The timing of each segment is designed for sessions that will run for an hour. The content will easily expand to fill more time if your group prefers a longer session.

Finally, in the second segment of each session, participants are asked, “If the author were here, what would you ask her about this?” Groups are invited and welcome to submit questions to the author via email at queervirtue@gmail.com. Your questions will help inform future trajectories for work and study.

Week 1

IDENTITY/PRIDE



Opening Prayer

(silence)

Lord, you have made us. You know us, each of us, and you call us by name. Help us to know ourselves. Guide us as we seek to know you, together. Amen.

Part I: Watch film short “Identity” (<https://youtu.be/mZgPCfbj4E>)

Each person is invited to pair off with a person sitting next to them and discuss: What image or idea most struck you in the film? Why do you think it struck you? (5 min)

Part II: Small Group Discussion of Excerpts from *Queer Virtue* (20 min)

Below are three brief sections from the chapters on Identity and Pride. Break up into three small groups, giving one quote to each group. Allow participants to choose which quote they want to discuss. After the groups are settled, have someone read your selected quote aloud, and then respond to the following questions:

- Why were you drawn to this quote?
- What do you understand by it, and/or what do you learn from it?
- How does it articulate something new or different for you?
- How does it challenge you?

- How would you like to challenge it?
- If the author were here, what would you ask her about this?

Excerpts

1 I am not saying that queer people are or must be Christian. I am saying that authentic Christianity is and must be queer. ... I mean “queer” as something that has at its center an impulse to disrupt any and all efforts to reduce into simplistic dualisms our experience of life, of God. Queer theory is historically rooted in the urgent need to rupture, or disrupt, binary thinking about gender and sexual identity—and very specifically, to dismantle rigid attachment to male and female as definitive poles.

Queering as an impulse and lens has been applied to countless human perceptions and academic disciplines, from architecture to biology to linguistics to theology. It is not a stretch to see how Jesus ruptured simplistic dualisms all the time: life and death, human and divine, sacred and profane. Paul’s insistence that in Christ there is neither male nor female is the essence of queering, set in the midst of a passage that also queers the lines between Jew and Greek, slave and free. (pp. 3–4)

2 I found myself pondering the question that had so many times been posed to me by religious conservatives: “How do you know God doesn’t condemn you as a lesbian?” Okay, I didn’t actually ponder that question. I find that question to be a colossal waste of time. What I found myself pondering was my answer: “I know, because it’s who I am.” This is an answer that “moves in two directions, expressing two truths simultaneously: I am gay, and I am caught up in this fantastic, passionate relationship with God—which I know, absolutely, to be reciprocal. These are not opinions, or postulates to a logical argument. They are truths, truths I perceive because both of them express something about me, about my soul, about my existence. Seeing myself so clearly—or more accurately, looking out at the world and feeling so unequivocally the ground of my perspective, I understand the power of identity. Pondering this, I recognized that this was also the answer to any challenge to my faith: “I believe, because it’s who I am.”

What I comprehended in that moment was much more than an answer to the question, “How do I explain my faith to others?” What I understood, more clearly than I ever had before, was what my faith meant to me.... Queerness, Christianity, priestliness—these exist inside of me, and I spend my daily life, my work, my relationships, finding ways to express what they reveal to me.

Suddenly I saw with fresh eyes the essence of what I have long known Jesus was trying to communicate to his contemporaries: “Put God first in your life. Orient your entire being toward the sacred. Not because I’m telling you that you should, not because it’s what scripture tells you to do. Do it because it’s who you are. It is who God made you to be.” My lecture flowed easily from that point, as has every profession of faith I’ve made since. (pp. 40–41)

3 If you were to try to sum up in a single word the difficulty of being both queer and Christian, the word “pride” would pretty much do it. There may be no concept more sacred to queers than “Pride.” But look in Christian scripture and hymnody, and you’ll see “pride” condemned as a glaring and destructive human sin. ...Conventionally, pride can refer to the valuing of the self over and against the other. When defined this way, pride is a manifestation of a deeply imbalanced relationship between Self and Other. Calling people to account for harboring this kind of pride is one of the ways that Christianity pays attention to this imbalance, which in a way is a good thing. Aggressive, hubristic self-aggrandizement absolutely can and does come at God’s expense, resulting in a stubborn refusal to participate in God’s vision for humanity or even to recognize God’s transcendent power.

But we need to be careful with our language. Defined like this “pride” becomes the exact opposite of queer Pride. The two concepts are not only definitionally opposed, but also energetically opposed. Hubristic pride is the antithesis of healthy relationship. That’s why in Christian theology pride is in no small way the essence of sin: hubristic pride makes relationship with Self, Other, and God nearly impossible.

By contrast, queer Pride is all about a healthy relationship with Self, Other, and for many of us, transcendent reality. Awareness and celebration of Pride thus involves a complex understanding of Self, of Self-in-Community, of Self-and-Community, and of Community itself. The complexity of these dynamics makes many of us queers keenly aware that our Pride is born of something deep within that connects us to one another, and also to something bigger than all of us. For some of us that ‘bigger than all of us’ points to God; for some of us it points to big-picture truth and meaning that is authentic if not divine; for a great many of us it suggests and at times demands moral decisions, speech, and activism. (pp. 113-114)

4 Optional: Was there something in these chapters—a passage or an idea—that stayed with you and that you’d like to discuss? Feel free to organize a fourth group to discuss that idea.

Part III: Questions for Reflection and Discussion (30 min)

Stay seated in the same configuration.

Yet somehow it was my queerness that first taught me the clear connection between identity and ethics. It was in discerning my lesbianism, and my need of queer community, that I first perceived an identity that offered guidance, created obligations, helped push me out into the world to do work that I knew was important and necessary. (p. 39)

Pair off and discuss (5 min)

- What identity or experience has been defining for you in some way? The point isn’t whether something has been overall positive or negative, but simply central for you.

- If you think of that identity or experience as a lens, how does it shape how you see the world?

Turn to your small group and discuss (10 min)

- Does that identity ask things of you?
- Does it ask things of you that feel healthy, that have helped you navigate your life?

Full group discussion (15 min)

- Has that identity or its ethical mandates taught you anything about God—such as, who God is, how God treats us, what God demands?
- If so, what could the church take from that lesson that would help us all live our faith better?

Closing Prayer

Week 2

RISK/COMING OUT



Opening Prayer

(silence)

Holy One, open our hearts to perceive the risks that you take for us. Give us courage. Help us to trust you. Help us to risk for you, for the sake of your love, for the world you have created. Amen.

Part I: Watch film short “Risk” (<https://youtu.be/FEK15wHrHio>)

Each person is invited to pair off with a person sitting next to them and discuss: What image or idea most struck you in the film? Why do you think it struck you? (5 min)

Part II: Small Group Discussion of Excerpts from *Queer Virtue* (20 min)

Below are three brief sections from the chapters on Risk and Coming Out. Break up into three small groups, giving one quote to each group. Allow participants to choose which quote they want to discuss. After the groups are settled, have someone read your selected quote aloud, and then respond to the following questions:

- Why were you drawn to this quote?
- What do you understand by it, and/or what do you learn from it?
- How does it articulate something new or different for you?
- How does it challenge you?
- How would you like to challenge it?
- If the author were here, what would you ask her about this?

Excerpts

1 Queer people have a particular relationship to risk. Our need to be honest about our identities is not merely an ethical exercise. In order to find deep, intimate connection—which is to say, in order to love and be loved deeply, intimately—we have to reveal ourselves. This means that the stakes are high before we have even said a word.

...To live a queer life is to put oneself at risk—among family members, at work, on the street, and even in our homes. Telling the truth about queer identity takes courage. Embarking on the quest to find other queer people can be frightening, even perilous. If Christians understand and respect nothing else about queer experience, they should recognize this: proclaiming what you know to be true—especially in the face of hostility and ridicule—takes guts. Many queer people have a visceral understanding of Jesus’s words, “Those who try to make their life secure will lose it. . . . For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?” (p. 46)

2 Risk taking can be a form of thrill seeking, but that’s not the kind of risk I’m talking about now. I’m not talking about recklessness, either. I’m talking about the kind of risk you take because you are caught up in truth, and you simply have to trust it, tell it, live into it. That’s the essence of faith—trusting in something that you know to be true. Solidly true. True in a way that is both inside you and bigger than you. You see, faith isn’t trust in the idea that you will be safe (that “safety is normal”). It is trust in the idea that some part of you—the truth in you—will survive no matter what death-dealing violence is directed at you.

This kind of risk is the verb form of faith. It is the lived iteration of trust in something bigger than your immediate security, bigger than whatever threat exists to your security. Risk isn’t just a by-product, an inevitable consequence of actions that push you out of a comfortable zone. It is the means itself, the requisite stuff, the fuel, the essence.

Queer people may not always understand risk this way, but Christians must. For queer people it can be as much a source of terror as of joy. But for Christians, this kind of risk is part and parcel of love, which is the primary impulse, purpose, and mission of our tradition; of the God whom we worship. It is where we locate our hope, a hope that ‘does not disappoint us,’ as Paul says, a hope that never fails. (p. 56)

3 The most important thing that progressive Christians can do to advance an accurate understanding of our faith is to come out as Christian. And specifically, to come out as the kind of Christian you truly are.

The necessity of coming out is one of those basic things that progressive Christians should be learning from queer people. When you know who you are and what you are about, it matters to tell people about it. But listen up, all you shy Christians out there: queer people know something that you may not know. We know how to do that.

Begin by getting in touch with your own identity, with Pride. Coming out is first and foremost a conversation that is about you. This matters to understand: you aren’t coming out to people in order to change them. Hopefully you are coming out because your life matters to you, and this other person matters to you, and you want that other person to know who you really are. (pp. 129-130)

4 Optional: Was there something in these chapters—a passage or an idea—that stayed with you and that you’d like to discuss? Feel free to organize a fourth group to discuss that idea.

Part III: Questions for Reflection and Discussion (30 min)

Stay seated in the same configuration.

Pair off and discuss:

- When is the last time your faith demanded something of you that felt risky?
- How steep was the risk?

Turn to small group and discuss:

- If you were making a major life decision, how likely is it that the content of your faith life would inform that decision?
- If you were talking with friends or family members about that decision, would the faith issues at stake come up in conversation? How might you raise them?

Full group discussion:

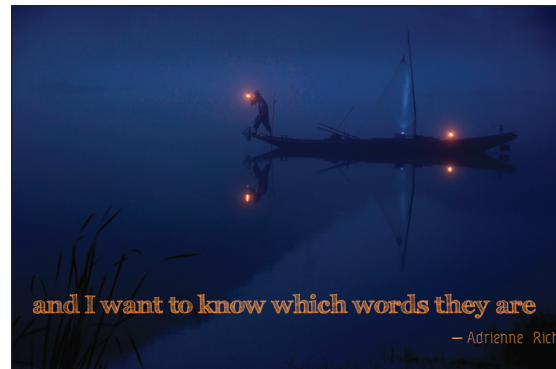
Declaring your faith in this God is precisely how you witness to the truth that Jesus is Lord and not Caesar—that is, that God is a God of love and not of coercive violence. Your trust in God so defined is its own energetic refusal to bow down to violence, and proclaiming your trust in such a God is one of the most important ways

you can actively resist forces of violent control and invest in the powers of love and faith, fueling their capacity to shape our world. (p. 134)

- If you are part of a faith community, how do you witness the content of your faith to the larger community (your city, town, neighborhood, etc)?
- In your witness, do you talk, explicitly, about the nature of the God you trust? How do you do this?

Closing Prayer

Week 3 TOUCH



Opening Prayer

(silence)

Eternal and Incarnate God, these bodies of ours are both a gift and a challenge. Our bodies make it possible for us to touch one another, and demand vulnerability when we do so. Help us to learn what our bodies teach us about ourselves, about you, and about whom you have created us to be. Amen.

Part II: Watch film short “Touch” (<https://youtu.be/M8bYvcAd0Ew>)

Each person is invited to pair off with a person sitting next to them and discuss: What image or idea most struck you in the film? Why do you think it struck you? (5 min)

Part II: Small Group Discussion of Excerpts from *Queer Virtue* (20 min)

Below are three brief sections from the chapter on Touch. Break up into three small groups, giving one quote to each group. Allow participants to choose which quote they want to discuss. After the groups are settled, have someone read your selected quote aloud, and then respond to the following questions:

- Why were you drawn to this quote?
- What do you understand by it, and/or what do you learn from it?
- How does it articulate something new or different for you?
- How does it challenge you?

- How would you like to challenge it?
- If the author were here, what would you ask her about this?

Excerpts

1 Sex as metaphor for communion with God makes a lot of sense. Imagine what it would really be like to encounter God. Not from a distance, but up close. Such a spiritual union would have to be mind-blowingly intense. Could you put it into words? If so, what words would you use? What experience would you draw on for comparison? Would you talk about a really good meal? A gorgeous sunrise? Those can be amazing, sublime. But if you are talking about physically interacting with God, what human experience could possibly approach it except sexual union? (pp. 68–69)

2 Many Gospel stories portray Jesus as being Mr. Compassion. You see this a lot in the healing narratives. Some leper gets up in Jesus’s face to ask to be healed, and Jesus is filled with compassion and heals him. The Greek word often translated as “compassion” is *splagchnizomai*. It literally means “a yearning in the bowels.” Just try to pronounce it. It sounds like a yearning in the bowels.

Well, imagine if Jesus’s compassion was like the word’s literal meaning—a yearning that snuck up on him. In him, I mean. What if *splagchnizomai* was something that he didn’t control or choose in some moment of remote divine objectivity? Maybe Jesus wasn’t standing around all the time being pious and sounding Godlike: “Ah, here is a leper. I feel such compassion for this poor soul.” Maybe his experience was a lot more like what happens when you’re walking next to somebody who trips on the sidewalk, and even though you’re late for work and you totally don’t have time to stop, you just instinctively reach out to help right the person. And while you digest what just happened, somewhere deep inside, you get that yearning in the gut thing that makes you take an extra moment to look the person in the eye and ask, sincerely, “Are you okay?”

It is such a normal human instinct to reach out to someone next to you who needs a hand. If it really is a human instinct, then maybe that impulse isn’t just a spiritual one. Maybe there is something carnal at work in it—something both carnal and spiritual. (pp. 70)

3 Naga tells us that God’s touch is a chaotic mixture of extraordinary blessing and extraordinary danger. Touching the sacred is risky—the opportunity to feel love like no other, and destruction like no other. It is thus exciting—and terrifying. Doesn’t it make sense to be afraid?

How could one not be afraid of the risk, aware of the danger? Such awareness, such fear is what makes the risk of faith all the more valuable, all the more visibly courageous. But this is not the same thing as being afraid that God is filled with wrath, and that God continually directs wrath at us (us humans in general, us queers in particular). Perhaps when scripture advises us to ‘fear God,’ the idea is not that we are supposed to be cowering on the floor, whim-

pering for our lives. Perhaps it's just the opposite. "Fearing God" may be a matter of acknowledging the full truth of God's touch, and taking up the steep challenge to love fiercely, passionately, openly, courageously—despite all the risks that such love entails. (pp. 74–75)

4 Optional: Was there something in this chapter—a passage or an idea—that stayed with you and that you'd like to discuss? Feel free to organize a fourth group to discuss that idea.

Part III: Questions for Reflection and Discussion (30 min)

Stay seated in the same configuration.

Pair off and discuss (5 min)

- Where have you experienced the paradox of naga—the touch of God, of love—in your personal life?
- Can you hold both the pain you experienced and whatever gift you received, without diminishing either?

Turn to your small group and discuss (10 min)

- Do you experience Christian faith to be true—actually true, in the world as we actually, physically experience it? If so, where do you experience it to be true?

Full group discussion (15 min)

Every community has its messes. And honestly, it is in putting on your waders, pulling out the mops, and working together in the muck that some of the most important work of our lives gets done. This is the work of touching and being touched. This is how any one of us puts ourselves in the path of naga, God's exquisite touch that wounds and heals, that destroys and saves. (p. 145)

- Have you had the experience in your community of pulling out your waders and mops, and milling around in the muck with others?
- Was it a good experience, a bad experience, or both?
- How did it affect your relationships with others, or with the community as a whole?
- Did you feel you had power in the situation? If so or if not, how did that affect your experience?

Closing Prayer

Week 4

ADOPTION / AUTHENTICITY

So you are no longer a slave but a child

And if a child then also an heir, through God

Opening Prayer

(silence)

Eternal God, we are relational beings, made in your image. You have placed us in families that take so many forms. Sometimes these families nurture us. Sometimes they cause us pain. Sometimes they do both at the same time. Help us to live into this challenge with integrity and love. Help us to grow with one another, toward you. Amen.

Part II: Watch film short “Adoption” (https://youtu.be/QH-eQPZ3_a0)

Each person is invited to pair off with a person sitting next to them and discuss: What image or idea most struck you in the film? Why do you think it struck you? (5 min)

Part II: Small Group Discussion of Excerpts from *Queer Virtue* (20 min)

Below are three brief sections from the chapters on Adoption and Authenticity. Break up into three small groups, giving one quote to each group. Allow participants to choose which quote they want to discuss. After the groups are settled, have someone read your selected quote aloud, and then respond to the following questions:

- Why were you drawn to this quote?
- What do you understand by it, and/or what do you learn from it?
- How does it articulate something new or different for you?
- How does it challenge you?
- How would you like to challenge it?
- If the author were here, what would you ask her about this?

Excerpts

1 You and I could come up with hundreds of daily, mundane situations in which clarity about Self and Other is something that you have to figure out, with outcomes that affect your well-being or the well-being of another person. Understanding and negotiating one’s sense of self and one’s connec-

tion to others, drawing appropriate boundaries while maintaining necessary interconnection, is of vital importance. Getting it right may be the core ethical challenge of the human condition. ...Christianity worships a God who disrupts any glib or easy notion of what Self and Other are, constantly challenging us to hit a “reset” button in our efforts to comprehend how we are supposed to relate to ourselves, to one another, and to this God. (pp. 22-23)

2 So what can be said about LGBTQ community that is true? What can be said that Christians can appreciate? We know our need of each other. Not all the time, or in every single circumstance, but overall. We need to have access to other queer people, to queer spaces, to queer thought. We need it for safety, but not just for safety. We also need it to know ourselves. We need it to know love. We need each other for basically the “same reasons that people need family. And in the same way that people need family, we don’t just need each other a little. We need each other deeply. We need each other to our core. Some people feel this need more strongly than others; but I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone who was fully content to be an orphan.

For queer people, community is the crucible of our ethical lives. Precisely because we need each other so much, we set high standards for our behavior vis-à-vis ourselves and one another. Deliberation about the most pressing ethical issues that a queer person confronts is often informed not just by how the ethical decision affects that person or the people closest to that person, but also by how it affects the community and other queer people more broadly... We need community; it needs us; it is us. (pp. 95-96)

3 This is what we are called to as a church. This level of honesty and work—this is what you are called to be and do as someone on the Christian path. ...Every community has its messes. And honestly, it is in putting on your waders, pulling out the mops, and working together in the muck that some of the most important work of our lives gets done. This is the work of touching and being touched. This is how any one of us puts ourselves in the path of naga, God’s exquisite touch that wounds and heals, that destroys and saves. (p. 145)

4 **Optional:** Was there something in these chapters—a passage or an idea—that stayed with you and that you’d like to discuss? Feel free to organize a fourth group to discuss that idea.

Part III: Questions for Reflection and Discussion (30 min)

Stay seated in the same configuration.

Pair off and discuss (5 min)

- Where do you see Self/Other dynamics operating most visibly in your life right now? (if helpful, re-read Quote 1 above).

Turn to your small group and discuss (10 min)

The author asserts that in queer community, “We know our need of each other.” She says

that this would have been true of members of the early church, too.

- Whom in your life can you say this about?
- How does your awareness of this need impact how you interact with this person/family/community?

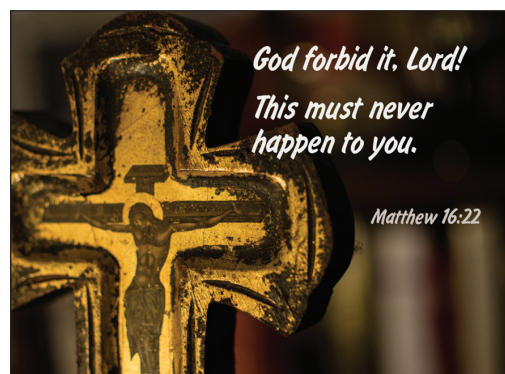
Full group discussion (15 min)

Authenticity in church requires courage. It is hard work to talk openly when you are afraid of losing something you value or need. It can be hard to trust, hard to be honest, hard to put yourself at risk of attack. You know all of this. But the fact that it is hard does not excuse churches from doing the work. In fact, church should be the place where we take most seriously the need to do this and to do it well. The challenge inherent in the relationship between Self and Other exists in every sphere of our lives. Church should be the place where we get to work it out. Church should be the place where our priesthood shows forth, where we make ourselves vulnerable—as individuals and as communities—to invite both individuals and other kinds of communities to enter the sacred. (pp. 151–152)

- What big issues are playing out right now where Self/Other issues are part of the conversation, either among your members, or in your relationships with your local neighbors/town/city?
- Are you able to talk openly about those Self/Other dynamics?
- How are those issues affecting your decision-making, or your ministry?

Closing Prayer

Week 5 SCANDAL / HOSPITALITY



Opening Prayer

(silence)

Holy One, you call us to the margins, where you promise to heal what is broken in us. Help us to be with you in this scandalous place. Give us courage to receive your scandalous hospitality, and offer it to others, and find healing together. Amen.

Part II: Watch film short “Scandal” (<https://youtu.be/IGpeuzszYRk>)

Each person is invited to pair off with a person sitting next to them and discuss: What image or idea most struck you in the film? Why do you think it struck you? (5 min)

Part III: Small Group Discussion of Excerpts from *Queer Virtue* (20 min)

Below are three brief sections from the chapters on Scandal and Hospitality. Break up into three small groups, giving one quote to each group. Allow participants to choose which quote they want to discuss. After the groups are settled, have someone read your selected quote aloud, and then respond to the following questions:

- Why were you drawn to this quote?
- What do you understand by it, and/or what do you learn from it?
- How does it articulate something new or different for you?
- How does it challenge you?
- How would you like to challenge it?
- If the author were here, what would you ask her about this?

Excerpts

1 The facts of queer life demand a lived response of high moral caliber. Some queer friends gave me pushback on this idea. They feared that the words “high moral caliber” could be construed as an appeal to respectability, and they anticipated that many self-identified queers would resist such a call. I would resist such a call. The notion of respectability is itself a trap. It is a trap because our scandalous nature—and our courage in confronting convention—is at the heart of what we bring to larger society that is of such value. This is a paradox of huge ethical import. (p. 80)

2 Jesus has just told the disciples that he is heading for Jerusalem where he is going to suffer and be killed. Peter wigs out. The text says that Peter pulls Jesus aside and begins to “rebuke” him. Can you imagine rebuking Jesus? Peter says, “God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you.” Does Jesus place his hand compassionately on Peter’s shoulder and help him process this difficult truth? No. Jesus is pissed. He assaults Peter with perhaps the most withering statement in the entire gospel: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”

In all of Christian scripture, this is the only time when the word “skandalon” is used to refer to an individual person. And here is something else. This little drama unfolds just two verses after the scene in which Jesus renames Peter, and in a famous wordplay, makes Peter the founder of his church on earth: “And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock [petra] I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven . . .”

One minute Jesus is identifying Peter as the guy who is going to lead his movement on earth. The next minute Peter goes all establishment and begins reprimanding Jesus for the scandal of his fate. Jesus is astonished. “You are going to be scandalized by me?” Jesus understands how powerfully human society is drawn to safety, to respectability. He sees clearly that the church’s need to be respectable, to be safe, will lead it inexorably to struggle with the scandal he is about to become.

This is a cautionary tale extraordinaire for those with religious authority, and mother church specifically: You are not above being scandalized by the very message you proclaim. Beware just how easily you can become a tool of Satan, a scandal to Jesus himself, even as you stand there jangling those keys to heaven. (pp. 82–83)

3 Eschatology speaks of our destiny, and our destination. How do we know where we are going if we have given up dreaming about what it will be like when we get there?

Eschatology is deeply embedded in early church understandings of what Christianity is all about. It is woven through our scripture. And, as Stuart suggests, it has practical impact on the work that we do. Revealing both our understanding of ourselves and our dreams, eschatology should inform our decisions about the actions we take that are designed to make the world a better place, a place that somehow manifests God’s realm on earth.

We have been talking about the relationship between theology and ethics. We have observed that theology and ethics work together, that in a sense, they make each other possible. Eschatology asks us foundational questions about why we do justice work at all. Are we building a better world simply to demonstrate our faith, because Jesus told us to do it? Or does something in all that action actually accomplish something that is important to God, and to us? To put it another way: Are we simply walking this path, or are we paving it as we go? (pp. 156–157)

4 **Optional:** Was there something in these chapters—a passage or an idea—that stayed with you and that you’d like to discuss? Feel free to organize a fifth group to discuss that idea.

Part III: Questions for Reflection and Discussion (30 min)

Stay seated in the same configuration.

Pair off and discuss: (5 min)

Think about what it means to be “a respectable member of society.” What images come to mind? When have you found yourself aspiring to be respectable? Have you ever had an opportunity to be “respectable” and turned it down? Why?

Turn to your small group and discuss: (10 min)

The author talks about scandal upsetting people's conventional ideas about "the way things are supposed to be." Have you ever intentionally done something that challenged what other people thought was right or wrong? Did it put you at risk? Do you regret it? What did you learn from the experience?

Full group discussion: (15 min)

Facing down scandal means rupturing binaries that do violence to people, both conceptually and in practical life. Right in line with what queer people comprehend, it means understanding the scandal that you, as a Christian, already are. (p. 161)

- Imagine that your community has come together for an annual meeting or some other community-wide discussion. Someone stands up and says, "I just don't think we are being as scandalous as Jesus would want us to be." Would folks have any idea what to do with that statement? How might that conversation play out?
- Think about some kind of outreach or hospitality that your community provides. Is there anything about it that is scandalous? Does it disrupt false binaries, or upend conventional ideas about power?

Closing Prayer