

A hiker wearing a red jacket and a large orange backpack is seen from behind, walking on a mountain trail. The trail is partially covered in snow, and the background features rugged, rocky mountain peaks under a blue sky with light clouds. The hiker's backpack has the brand name 'Aether 60' visible on the bottom. The overall scene conveys a sense of physical burden and outdoor adventure.

KNOX

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Heavy Burdens

Book Study - Group Guide

Compiled by Natasha Chandler, Pastor of Congregational Life, Knox Presbyterian Church

Week 1
Introduction

Our Hopes For This Study:

1. Reflect on the themes of the book
2. Ask honest questions
3. Answer challenging questions
4. Engage with new perspectives
5. Identify 1-2 personal/communal action steps

Our Covenant:

- We acknowledge that the full range of issues of human sexuality exists within the church.
- We acknowledge that gay and lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer persons (as well as members of other sexual minorities*) are full and faithful members of the Church.
- We will always assume that gay or lesbian persons (or members of other sexual minorities*) are present.
- While we may disagree on issues, we will use language which respects the dignity and worth of others and the truth of their lives.
- We will respect the right of people to 'name' themselves and their experience.
- We will only ask questions that we would be prepared to respond to ourselves.
- We will respect people's privacy.
- We will practice confidentiality.
- We will respect people's integrity as followers of Jesus.
- We will be mindful and respectful of time.

01 Introduction

Commitment and Structure

We'll break Heavy Burdens into 5 sections (each around 50 pages), and discuss one each week.

- Week 1: Introduction (page 11)
- Week 2: Burdens 1/2 (page 21)
- Week 3: Burdens 3/4 (Page 67)
- Week 4: Burdens 5/6 (Page 113)
- Week 5: Burden 7 (page 161)
- Week 6: A Better Way (Page 181)

We ask that you make a commitment to read each section before that week's discussion. We know that it's a lot - and in our busy lives, it can be hard to find the time. However, this is worth making time for! Your voice is so important to this group and the conversations we'll be having, and so we want you to be able to participate fully in the conversation.

If you need to miss a week or two, try to stay on track with the readings and share any key thoughts when you're able to join us.



Discussion Questions

- What do you hope to gain from this study? Why did you join?
- What is your background or history with the Christian church?
 - Did you grow up attending church, or did you come as an adult?
 - Have you attended other churches, or only the one you're currently at?

“I’ll be asking us to put a magnifying lens to the church, and together, we’ll consider how Christians have contributed to lasting trauma for LGBTQ people, many of whom are siblings in Christ.” (Page 17)

- What reaction do you have to the line above?



02 Burdens 1 and 2

Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you in this section? (Share a new or surprising insight!)
2. How have you seen these burdens placed on LGBTQ people in your experience of church?
3. “Protestant Christianity is a Christianity that is deeply in love with sex.” (Page 36). That’s a bold statement! How do you feel about it?
4. Does the fact that homosexuality didn’t appear in the Bible until 1946 change your understanding of scripture?
5. What language have you heard in the church to describe LGBTQ people? Has that changed in recent years? How is it different than the language used outside the church?
6. What rewards were you taught to expect if you followed God’s laws?

03 Burdens 3 and 4

Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you in this section? (Share a new or surprising insight)
2. How have you seen these burdens placed on LGBTQ people in your experience of church?
3. What is a folk devil? Are there other folk devils that the Church needs to confront?
4. How can Christians go beyond the “perfectly clear” answers at the surface of complex theological issues? What tools or practices can help an average person to examine scripture with nuance and complexity?
5. Put yourself in the shoes of an LGBTQ person - what double standards do they experience? How do double standards impact their experience of the church?



04 Burdens 5 and 6

Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you in this section? (Share a new or surprising insight)
2. How have you seen these burdens placed on LGBTQ people in your experience of church?
3. Can you think of any sexual/gender expectations that are a product of Anglo-Saxon norms? (Page 132)
4. Have you ever felt pressure to fit within the cultural norms for your gender? Has that happened within the church?
5. Did this section challenge your assumptions about gender, gender essentialism, or your beliefs about trans* people?
6. *“Christians need to consider the ways they diminish the imago Dei by attempting to universalise the cisgender, heterosexual experience of sexual biology.”* Practically speaking, how can Christians right this wrong?





Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you in this section? (Share a new or surprising insight)
2. How have you seen this burden placed on LGBTQ people in your experience of church?
3. “Countless LGBTQ people...pursue celibacy, opposite-sex marriage, or gender conformity for no other reason than because they might go to hell if they don’t.” (166) What consequences does this have for LGBTQ people, and for church communities?
4. Are there areas in your life where you expect more grace than you’re willing to extend to others? (170)
5. How should straight Christians approach discussions of sexuality and gender?
6. What do the queer Christians you know believe about gender, sexuality, and marriage?

Discussion Questions

1. What stood out to you in this section? (Share a new or surprising insight)
2. What signs of “living in diversity without living in animosity” do you see in our church right now? Where do we need to improve?
3. How can a church celebrate queerness?
4. Share a quote from this section that impacted you.
5. What key learnings or steps for action are you taking away from this study?
6. Are there any action steps that you can encourage your church or community to take? Are there other actionable items you’re taking with you?

