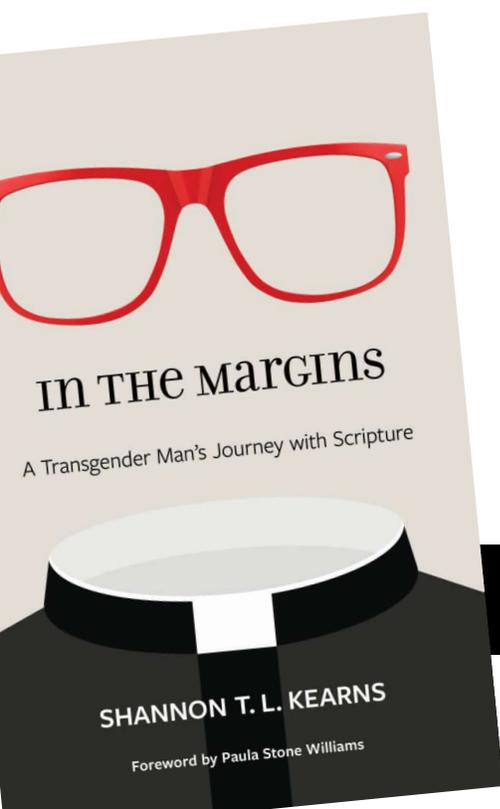


In the Margins: A Transgender Man's Journey With Scripture Study Guide



By Shannon T.L. Kearns

How To Use This Guide:

In the Margins: A Transgender Man's Journey With Scripture by Shannon T.L. Kearns seeks to invite readers into a conversation about what it means to read Scripture with transgender eyes. This study guide, designed for use with groups, will provide you a jumping off point to discuss the book. There are discussion questions for each chapter, some action steps, and a prayer.

If you're discussing more than one chapter per session, you can choose a few of the questions and just one of the prayers. Some of the action steps are designed to be done as a group, while others are for people to do on their own. You might want to have a check in or space to share at the following session so people can report on how their action steps went or reach out if they need help or support.

Introduction

In the introduction, Kearns lays out why he wrote the book, the intended audience, and his hopes for the book.

Questions:

- What books about LGBTQ+ issues and theology have you read? What did you learn from them?
- When Kearns says “All theology comes from a specific context” what does that bring up in you?
- Kearns says he was “swaddled in pink blankets and evangelical theology”? What kind of blankets were you swaddled in? What expectations did you grow up with?

Action Steps:

- Commit to reading the entire book.
- Journal through your answers to the questions in each chapter.
- Find a friend to discuss the book with.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, give me the courage to listen well, to examine my own assumptions, and to have an open heart to learn. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, help me to see myself reflected in these pages and stories. May they open in me new ways to read Scripture and understand myself. Amen.

Chapter 1.

In chapter one, Kearns talks about Eunuchs and how they give us a window into better understanding God's heart for transgender and nonbinary people.

Questions:

- Were you taught about Eunuchs in your religious tradition? If so, what were you taught?
- Kearns asks: "What does it cost us to honor another person's experience and identity?" What do you think about that?
- He also asks "What does our lack of honoring others cost?" What do you think it costs?
- How does the gender binary impact your life?
- What would happen if we had more "ungendered" spaces?
- As you think about the spaces you inhabit (church, school, family, neighborhood, etc.) who is not welcome?

Action Steps:

- If you belong to a church, make a gender neutral bathroom in your church building if you don't have one already.
- Think about one thing you can do to make your neighbors know who is welcome in your house.
- Donate clothing or makeup to a trans clothing drive.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to love my trans and nonbinary friends well. Help me to exemplify to others what it means to have a sense of extravagant welcome. Help me to be willing to think deeply about my own experience of gender and how I might live into a more expansive understanding of it. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, help me to find ways to feel at home; in my body, in the world, in religious spaces. Help me to be courageous in living out my truth. Help my truth to be held with love and care by others. Amen.

Chapter 2.

In chapter two, Kearns shares the story of Joseph and asks how we might celebrate those who “shimmy and shine”.

Questions:

- “Queer and trans people move through the world as screens for other’s projections”? What do you think Kearns means by this? Is this something you’ve experienced?
- Have there ever been times when you felt like you were set up to fail? Or where you were unable to live up to the expectations other people placed on you? What happened? How did that make you feel?
- What do you think about the interpretation of Joseph as a violator of gender norms? What does that open up in the story for you?
- As you think about the communities you belong to, whose gifts are continuing to be ignored in your communities? Who is being asked to dim their light so as not to make other people uncomfortable?

Action Steps:

- Donate books to your church library (for all ages) that celebrate gender diversity.
- Donate to a support group that nurtures trans and gender expansive children.
- Speak up and vote against any laws that try to diminish the dignity and safety of trans and gender nonconforming children.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God who delighted in Joseph, who gave them visions that led other people to freedom, we ask for the courage to listen to the dreamers in our midst. We ask you to help us to have the courage to follow bold ideas that might lead us to abundance. We ask forgiveness for all of the times we’ve tried to dim people’s lights or ask them to tone down their extravagance. Help us to honor the light in others. Help us to reflect that light outward into the world, so we can all shine brighter. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God who delighted in Joseph, help me to know how much you delight in me. Help me to find spaces that celebrate and accentuate my light. Let me shine brilliantly and point the way forward for others. Amen.

Chapter 3.

In chapter three, Kearns shares the power of wrestling with God.

Questions:

- Have you experienced having your faith feel like a “house of cards”? How did you handle that?
- What beliefs that used to be super important to now you no longer believe? What was the process like of changing your mind?
- What experiences have you had with “the wounding, the blessing, and the release”?
- What experiences have you had of wrestling with God?

Action Steps:

- Make a donation to an organization that helps people to heal from religious trauma.
- Seek out a therapist to help you as you move from one belief system to another.
- Listen well (and don't offer advice) to a friend who needs to process something they are thinking through.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to wrestle faithfully with you. Open my eyes to new ways of seeing and help me have the courage to let go of beliefs that no longer serve me. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, please bless my wrestling and the living out of my truth. Help my new name and way of moving through the world to feel like home to me. Bless the struggle and the coming home. Amen.

Chapter 4.

In this chapter, Kearns talks about the story of Rahab and what sexual outsiders might have to teach us.

Questions:

- What were you taught about queer/trans folks growing up? What lessons about this community did you need to unlearn?
- How was your life shaped by purity culture?
- What about the story of Rahab stands out to you?
- What might you have to learn from the sexual outsiders in the world?
- Where else do you see an emphasis on “respectability” come into play? (Think about protest movements and acceptable tactics for one.)

Action Steps:

- Donate to a Black Lives Matter chapter in your town.
- Listen to the stories of sex workers, polyamorous people, and others who challenge your notions of sexual ethics.
- Get educated about laws that criminalize certain sexual activity and work to overturn those laws.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to unlearn unhealthy messages about queer/trans sexuality. Help me to celebrate sexual diversity and learn from those who are different from me. Help me to advocate for those whose sexuality is still under attack. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, bless me in my body. Help me to use my outsider status for good. Heal me from notions of respectability and instead let me live in freedom and peace. Amen.

Chapter 5.

Tackling the story of Ezekiel and the Dry Bones, in this chapter Kearns talks about bodies and how to honor them.

Questions:

- What were the first messages you received about your body?
- When was the first time you felt shame in your body? What happened?
- What messages did you learn about your body in church?
- What might a message of bodily hope look like?

Action Steps:

- Donate food or money to a food shelf in your area.
- Cook dinner and invite a group of friends over to share it with you.
- Take an inventory of the places you frequent: Which ones are inaccessible to people who use wheelchairs or have trouble with stairs?

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to learn how to love my body. Help me to learn to love other peoples' bodies. Be with me as I work to create a world where all bodies have what they need to thrive. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, help me to love my body. Help me to know my body as holy and good, just as it is right now. Bless this body. Amen.

Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 is all about the wilderness.

Questions:

- Have you ever had what you would consider “wilderness times”? When? What happened?
- When you left the wilderness, what was your experience? Did people grow with you? Or did you have to leave communities behind?
- What do you think Jesus learned in the wilderness?
- What are you being called to next?

Action Steps:

- Take one small step toward what you’re being called to next: maybe it’s connecting with a group already doing the work, learning from a mentor, signing up for some emails.
- Start a journaling practice to help you pay attention to your inner thoughts and the stirrings of your spirit.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to learn patience with the wilderness times in my life. Help me to be gentle with myself as I wait to figure out what’s next. Then help me to be bold in following your call for my life that I, too, may proclaim liberation and work for justice. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, help me to be gentle with myself as I learn and grow into my identity. Help me to be patient with my shifting body and identity. I pray that my time in the wilderness leads me to liberation. Amen.

Chapter 7.

In the Transfiguration we see a model of Jesus inviting people into a fuller understanding of who he is.

Questions:

- What do you think about the Transfiguration as a “coming out” moment for Jesus?
- Have you had moments in your life where you needed to invite people into a new part of your identity? How did that feel? How did it go?
- Has someone ever come out to you? How did it go? How did you respond?
- What might need to change in the world so that people don’t have to “come out” anymore?
- How might you prepare now so either you’re ready to come out OR you’re ready for someone to come out to you?

Action Steps:

- Connect with your local PFLAG group or a support group for parents of trans kids and make a donation.
- Learn about LGBTQ+ identities so you can be a safe person for people to come out to.
- Put in place a safety plan for yourself so you’re ready to come out.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to be generous and gracious with people who come out to me. Help me to love them well in that moment. Let me be a safe space for people to reveal their whole selves and let me learn from their vulnerability. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, grant me safety as I move through the world deciding how and when to be out. Let me find safe harbors who welcome all of me. Let me be inspired by Jesus’s example. Amen.

Chapter 8.

So many times we rush to Easter, but what happens when we sit in the silence of Easter Saturday?

Questions:

- Have you ever had a moment where it felt like everything in your life was falling apart and ending? What happened?
- What do you think the disciples were feeling on Easter Saturday?
- When you've had experiences of grief or feeling like things are ending, what has helped you?
- What does it do to your conception of God to believe in a "God who needs to be resurrected"?

Action Steps:

- Donate to an organization that helps house LGBTQ+ people experiencing homelessness.
- Give supplies or clothing to an organization that helps people fleeing domestic violence get a new start.
- Start a meditation practice to help you learn to sit with hard feelings.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to not rush past crucifixion to resurrection. Be with me as I sit in the pain of Easter Saturday. Help me to have hope even in the midst of the struggle. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, thank you for being a God who knows what it's like to sit through Easter Saturday. Help me to find a way through the struggle even if I don't yet see resurrection on the other side. Be with me especially now. Amen.

Chapter 9.

What does it look like to find the courage to be yourself? How might we learn, even from non-canonical texts?

Questions:

- What were you taught about your intuition growing up? Were you taught to trust it or distrust it?
- Were you taught to trust your body or to fear it?
- What if you could believe there was another way to live, one that would bring freedom and abundance instead of shame and captivity?
- What are the things within you begging to be brought forth?
- What do you think of the sayings from the Gospel of Thomas? What do they bring up in you?

Action Steps:

- Donate to a trans or nonbinary person's GoFundMe for surgery or medical support.
- Encourage your church to create liturgies for trans people (re-naming ceremonies, blessings for transition, etc.). If your church has them, make sure your minister is aware.
- Do something good for yourself and that brings out a part of you that you haven't shared before.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to learn courage from the trans and nonbinary people in my life. Help me to learn from them what it means to be fully yourself. And help me to bring forth the best of myself. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, help me to continue to bring forth that which is within me knowing it will save me. Help me to have the courage to be fully myself and help that self to be me with love and acceptance. Amen.

Chapter 10.

Finally we come to the resurrection.

Questions:

- What experiences of resurrection have you had in your life?
- Have there been moments where the future you thought would happen was different? How did that feel?
- What do you think of the statement “resurrection is not a moment, it’s a process”?

Action Steps:

- Get involved in organizations in your community that lead to liberation for transgender folks.
- Support a trans or nonbinary person who’s been impacted by the criminal justice system. (Go to BlackAndPink.org to find out more).
- Create something that reminds you of the process of resurrection.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to experience resurrection today. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, help me to experience resurrection today. Amen.

Conclusion.

What's next?

Questions:

- How do you feel about Christianity? If you choose to stay, why do you stay?
- What's the next part of your faith you want to learn more about?
- Which of the chapters of this book was the most meaningful to you?
- Which of the chapters was the most challenging?
- Which of the action steps were most meaningful?
- Which were the most challenging?

Action Steps:

- Pick an organization to make an ongoing donation to.
- Continue to stay up on legislation being introduced that impact trans/nonbinary people.
- Continue to educate yourself about trans/nonbinary identities.

Closing prayer for cisgender folks:

God, help me to continue my journey and work to be in solidarity with transgender and nonbinary people. May I learn from them, let them lead, and do whatever I can to work for their liberation. Amen.

Closing prayer for trans/nonbinary folks:

God, help me to feel at home in my body and in my faith. Help me to have everything I need. Help me to know I am loved. Amen.