

HOW A PASTOR WITH GAY PARENTS
LEARNED TO LOVE OTHERS
WITHOUT SACRIFICING CONVICTION



MESSY GRACE

CALEB KALTENBACH

Praise for
Messy Grace

“Caleb Kaltenbach cuts through the confusion and talks about what it really means to love people and what it really means to follow God—and how they’re not mutually exclusive ideas. The answer the world is looking for is messy, and it’s full of grace.”

—REGGIE JOINER, CEO and founder of Orange

“There is no shortage of conversation on how Christians can lovingly and meaningfully engage their gay family members and friends. Caleb Kaltenbach has an important message for everyone who shares a commitment to both grace and truth.”

—JIM DALY, president of Focus on the Family

“No matter what your opinion is on the Bible and sexuality, this book provides a very worthwhile and refreshing look into a very amazing grace-filled story threaded with compassionate truth.”

—DAN KIMBALL, pastor of Vintage Faith Church and author of
They Like Jesus but Not the Church

“Caleb’s story crushes stereotypes and will make you think differently than you thought before—regardless of your convictions. Anyone who loves Jesus and loves friends and family members who are LGBT is going to want to read this fascinating book. Okay, scratch the conditions. I think *anyone* is going to want to read this book.”

—CAREY NIEUWHOF, author of *Leading Change Without Losing It*, blogger and lead pastor of Connexus Church

“There may be no greater mess for the church than the question of how to engage with the LGBT community. *Messy Grace* shows how grace can enter into the mess of life and draw people to the love and goodness of God.”

—DARRELL L. BOCK, executive director of cultural engagement
and senior research professor of New Testament at Dallas
Theological Seminary

“A story that will move you. A spirit that will inspire you. A pastor’s wisdom that will teach you. Questions that will challenge you. Kaltenbach’s

exhortation both to treat gay people lovingly and to hold true to one's convictions is winsome and challenging. His wisdom flows from life, being raised by two gay parents, coming to Christ, and sharing Christ's love with his parents and loved ones."

—JENELL PARIS, PHD, professor of anthropology, Messiah College, and author of *The End of Sexual Identity*

"This is an important conversation for the church today and no one's story makes them better suited for it than Caleb Kaltenbach. In a world that tries to force everyone to take sides, Caleb speaks from the inside of both worlds. Gay or straight, Christian or non-Christian, everyone can learn from and be impacted by *Messy Grace*."

—LANE JONES, director of Strategic Partners at North Point Ministries and co-author of *Communicating for a Change*

"*Messy Grace* is a wonderful, well-written, and highly readable account of the author's remarkable journey being raised in the gay community and how he came to faith. Caleb provides insightful guidance to churches and families dealing with LGBT issues that goes beyond the worn-out platitudes that have characterized this discussion for some time."

—SCOTT B. RAE, PHD, dean of faculty and professor of Christian ethics at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University

"With uncompromising conviction, Kaltenbach teaches each one of us to hear the heart of God and to be the face of Christ in a broken world. The call for mercy, love, grace, and compassion are written on every page and are both highly courageous and poignantly raw."

—MICHELLE ANTHONY, author of *Spiritual Parenting* and *Becoming a Spiritually Healthy Family*

"Pastor Kaltenbach gives his readers much help on what to do and what not to do among LGBT people. At the same time, he recognizes and emphasizes that this is a messy world, and that God calls us to affirm Jesus in the midst of the messiness, rather than to expect a precise answer to every question."

—Dr. JOHN FRAME, J. D. Trimble professor of systematic theology and philosophy at Reformed Theological Seminary

“I loved *Messy Grace*! These pages are filled with humility, compassion, and powerful insights as Caleb’s story profoundly demonstrates that grace is both messy and beautiful.”

—MIKE FOSTER, People of the Second Chance

“Whether you are straight or part of the LGBT community, a Christian or not a follower of Jesus, it will benefit you to read this book. Prepare to be challenged. Prepare to repent. Prepare to be changed. It will transform the way you look at and treat others. I couldn’t put it down.”

—DANIEL AKIN, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Real, relevant, and relational—*Messy Grace* steps right into the existing chasm between the Christian community and the gay community and provides the sound biblical direction about how the gospel is the grounds for how we can mend and connect in a Christ-honoring way.”

—BRYAN CARTER, senior pastor of Concord Church, Dallas, Texas

“Caleb Kaltenbach has seen both sides of this controversial and complex topic . . . from his parents and from his pulpit. While it’s tough for everyone to agree on such delicate issues, Caleb takes us back to Scripture.”

—DAVE STONE, senior pastor of Southeast Christian Church, Louisville, Kentucky

“The church needs to get this issue right. *Messy Grace* is an outstanding book that every Christian needs to read. Not only will you enjoy Caleb’s casual and humorous writing style, you will be challenged to live in grace and truth, just like Jesus.”

—SEAN MCDOWELL, PHD, professor at Biola University, popular speaker, and the co-author of over fifteen books including *Same-Sex Marriage*

“Caleb shares his story with a leader’s wisdom, a preacher’s convictions, and a pastor’s tender heart. When I talk with families (and churches) wrestling with how to love someone who is gay, I will put this book in their hands.”

—MATT PROCTOR, president of Ozark Christian College

“I have known Caleb for many years and know of no one more imminently qualified to address the single most controversial subject of our day and to do so with love and grace. Sharing his challenges as a son of gay parents and his convictions as a servant of Christ will keep you engaged to the very last page.”

—BARRY CAMERON, senior pastor of Crossroads Christian Church

“Caleb fluently speaks both the language and the emotion of both sides of the issue. And he desperately wants to help us stop picking sides and learn to love like Jesus. He is a great leader, writer, and friend—as well as a walking example of how messy grace works.”

—Dr. TIM HARLOW, senior pastor of Parkview Christian Church

“Finally a book on a divisive issue that is handled with grace and truth. Caleb has seen both sides of the issue firsthand, and his counsel is something the church today needs to hear. This is a must-read for pastors and church leaders.”

—DON WILSON, senior pastor of Christ’s Church of the Valley

“Pastor Caleb Kaltenbach’s story is one of pain and alienation, pride and determination, brokenness and eventually the healing love of Jesus Christ. This powerful book is a must-read for both Christians and non-Christians alike.”

—FRANK SONTAG, host of *The Frank Sontag Show* on 99.5 KKLA

“Few books will challenge your head and your heart like *Messy Grace*. It embodies a rare combination of grace and truth and serves as a beautiful reminder that Jesus died for all people. It is poignant, practical, and personal.”

—JON WEECE, author of *Jesus Prom*

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CALEB KALTENBACH

FOREWORD BY KYLE IDLEMAN



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To my wife—

I love you so much. Not only are you God's great treasure to me, but you're the best person I know.

To my son and daughter—

You will be ten times the disciples for Jesus that I am. I'm proud of you. I love you.

To my parents—

I would not be who I am without you. This conversation wouldn't be happening without you. I'm thankful to be your son.

To Larry and Norma—

Thank you for loving me. Your support and love is so encouraging.

To Sean and Jonina—

I'm no longer an only child. I love you both and love being your brother.

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Foreword

I first met Caleb in college. He was a freshman, and I was a junior. He came with very little knowledge of the Bible (he was a new Christian), but he possessed a huge love for God and people. I saw Caleb as someone eager to learn about God and to make a difference in the world.

One day we were both sitting outside a professor's office, waiting to talk to him about a class. I asked Caleb how he came to Bible college and sat in disbelief as he told me about himself. I had never heard a story like that before.

After graduation, Caleb and I were on staff together at a church in Los Angeles. There we started an alternative worship service for young adults. During that time, I watched Caleb deepen his love for God and people. Because of his childhood experiences, he was able to relate with those who disdained Christians. He understood what it was like to be angry at God for the way believers treated others. God certainly used Caleb's experiences to touch the hearts of many people. Now, after knowing him for twenty years, I'm still blown away by how God continues to write this story.

Throughout the years I've encouraged Caleb to share his story with as many people as he can. Many of us have told him again and again to write it down. Today, I'm proud that you're holding it in your hands. Such messy grace takes great courage to share.

Some authors have inspirational stories to tell, while others have insightful points to make. What makes Caleb's writing so powerful

is that God has given him both. You'll read about a boy who was raised in the LGBT community, who later followed Jesus. You'll read about how some Christians hated people he loved, and how his coming to faith wrecked his own relationships. You'll read about how Christians can hold true to what God says about sexuality while being gracious and loving.

If you think this story is just about a kid from the LGBT community, then you've missed the bigger point. It's about how we love people who are different from us. It's about how any story can be redeemed by God. It's about the messiness of grace and truth.

When you read this book, you may not agree with everything Caleb says, but you'll see his heart for people on both sides of the issue. I've been personally impacted by what God has done through Caleb and his family. I know you will be too.

—KYLE IDLEMAN, author of *Not a Fan*
and teaching pastor at Southeast
Christian Church, Louisville, Kentucky

A Collision of Communities

For a couple of minutes after I pulled into the church parking lot, I continued to sit in my Ford Escape, my hands gripping the steering wheel as if I were still driving. I hadn't turned the car off yet. Maybe I could back up and attend church down the road. I mean, did I really have to preach a sermon today?

I closed my eyes and tried to imagine I was somewhere else, maybe the beach or Disneyland. I wished it were some other time than now. But wishing did no good. I was actually here, in the parking lot of the church in Dallas that I was pastor of at the time. This was the Sunday morning in September 2012 I had been dreading for weeks.

After a while, I turned off the ignition, but I stayed seated in the car. People were pulling into the parking lot around me and heading into the building. Everyone in the church was expecting me to come in and deliver a sermon. What they didn't know was that I was feeling nervous about preaching this day. *Really* nervous. Generally, I'm very comfortable with preaching, but I was having an anxiety attack about this particular message.

Most Sundays, after the sermon, I was bound to hear comments like "That was a good one, Pastor," or "You sure let 'em have it," or "I

never thought of those passages in that light.” Today, none of those comments would mean anything. Regardless of what I said this morning, someone was bound to get hurt.

I got out of the car, grabbed my bag, and hurried toward the church.

After entering the building through the front doors, I had to slow down because I was greeted by a group of church members in the lobby. I put on my church face and shook hands, hugged people, and told them what a great day it was going to be. I laughed at jokes and reminisced about when the Cowboys were a good team.

As soon as I could politely break away from the crowd, I jogged down the hallway toward my office door. I unlocked it, turned on the light, and collapsed in a chair. A small part of the morning was past me, but the worst was still to come.

Immediately, thoughts began swirling in my head: *How did I get into this? How can I be sure God led me to this day? What kind of a moron would plan a Sunday like this?*

Oh yeah, me.

Every August I plan the sermon calendar for the following twelve months. During the most recent planning period, I knew that a presidential election was coming up in November. So I thought that for the fall it would be a good idea to do a sermon series dealing with some political issues from a biblical standpoint. We called the series “For or Against.” The idea was to communicate to the congregation that our church should be known for what we are for, not what we’re against.

When autumn rolled around, many people loved the series, but there were also critics. The funniest criticism I got was from a woman who complained about the series poster. One side of the poster had a red background with a thumbs-up image on it, and the other side

had a blue background with a thumbs-down. Her complaint was that because we had a thumbs-down on the blue side, we were taking a stand against the Democrats. I assured her that I and the guys who designed the poster had no political bashing in mind. She grudgingly accepted my assurance—I think.

Today's sermon, however, would bring a whole new set of critics to the table. The title of this day's sermon was "For or Against Different Lifestyles."

I was preaching about homosexuality.

Yeah, let me say it one more time: that was *my* idea. Back in August, it had seemed perfect. Today I wanted to go back and punch Caleb-from-a-month-ago and yell "What in the world were you thinking?!" because he was forcing me to preach on a subject that was not only difficult in general but also hard for me on a personal level.

As I sat in my office, I could hear the worship music start in the auditorium. I waited through the first two songs. They seemed to be going by too quickly. Was the worship pastor intentionally speeding up the songs? At the beginning of the third song, I got up from the chair, grabbed a water bottle and my Bible, and headed toward the door.

Backstage, I put on my mic and stood there, trying to return the smiles of those around me, until I heard the last song.

It was time.

I felt my heart pounding, my stomach jumping, and sweat forming. So I closed my eyes and prayed: *Lord, you're the one who called me into ministry and to this place. You're the one who allowed me to have the experiences I did. You've been forming me and shaping me, and now I am so nervous to proclaim what I know I need to. Give me the confidence and power to do what I must.*

Why was I so nervous? Partly because some of the church members might object to what I was about to say. Partly because church elders tend to get nervous when sermons are too controversial. Partly because it was an election year and almost every sermon could be criticized for being too political. But even more than any of that, I was nervous because my parents were in the congregation on this day.

And both of my parents are gay.

The Invitation

Later in the book, I will tell you the outcome of the sermon I preached to my parents and all the others in attendance at church that Sunday in 2012. But to put it in perspective, I first need to tell you about some of the formative events I experienced over the many years leading up to one of the most nerve-racking sermons of my life. In this book I'm going to tell you my story of having a mom who was a lesbian and a dad who was gay, of growing up in the LGBT community with my mom and her partner, and of finding Christ and eventually becoming a pastor.¹ I'm also going to describe the path I took in coming to grips with what the Bible says about homosexuality and figuring out how to love and honor my parents in light of that teaching.

I'd like to say at the outset that I don't claim to be a great biblical scholar or brilliant theologian. I don't think my opinions are always right and everyone else's are wrong. I'm not writing this book to tell you what to think, but rather I hope that this book will spur you on to think more deeply on this issue for yourself, using the Bible as your chief guide. I'm sharing my experience as an insider to both the LGBT community and the Christian community, as well as giving you the insights I've gained.

Even though my personal story will make up a big part of this book, it really isn't about me at all. *It is about you.* I wrote this book for anyone who wants to know how to relate with grace and truth toward members of the LGBT community.

I'll give you a hint of what I said in my sermon that Sunday in September a few years ago: being unloving to gay people in your life is a sin. Also, it's a crying shame because it puts a barrier between people and the gospel. It's the opposite of being Christlike. I don't see Jesus acting like that anywhere in the Gospels.

Jesus's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" does not have an exception clause for a gay "neighbor"—or, for that matter, any other "neighbor" we might find it hard to relate to.

Jesus's command to "love your neighbor as yourself" does not have an exception clause for a gay "neighbor"—or, for that matter, any other "neighbor" we might find it hard to relate to.

Followers of Jesus have got to learn how to treat people in the LGBT community with love that has no limits and makes no compromises. We have to love people as Jesus does.

Is it easy? Will we always know what to say and do? Will we never be uncomfortable? Of course not. Even when Christians want to be gracious and kind to members of the LGBT community, we're not necessarily very good at it. Even when we do our best, others don't always react in a way we would desire. Sometimes relationships start at a low point and go down from there.

So let's admit it—it's going to be messy at times. Messiness is what happens when you try to live out God's perfect grace as a flawed person in a flawed world. Yet God has a way of working through us

when we keep on trying to share his grace, regardless of how messy our situations get. That's why this book is titled *Messy Grace*—not

Messiness is what happens when you try to live out God's perfect grace as a flawed person in a flawed world.

because God is messy or a certain community is messy, but because *all* people are messy!

I'll be dealing much more with the mess and the glory of grace as we go on in this book. Right now, let me assure you . . .

This book is for you if you experience same-sex attraction, opposite-sex attraction, or some of both.

It's for you if you're sure the Bible condemns same-sex relationships, convinced the Bible permits it, or just plain confused on the point.

It is for you if you love Jesus, want to follow in his way, and want to know how to relate to people in the LGBT community in a way that honors him.

It's even for you if you just don't see what the big deal is. You may be thinking, *Why can't some Christians just leave the LGBT community alone and direct their energies toward bigger issues?* You'll find out.

If any of these categories describe you, then read on.

Why We're Grace Failures

The more Christians engage the LGBT community in a gracious way, the more genuine relationships will come from it. So, why aren't Christians better at getting along with the LGBT community?

I've often pondered why this might be. After all, we're followers of the most gracious man ever—Jesus. We've been the recipients of astounding, radical grace ourselves. We can hardly help reading about grace every time we open our favorite book. Yet all too often our reputation among the LGBT community for being ungracious is well deserved. Why?

I'm sure there are many reasons. Here are four of the most common ones.

Fear of the LGBT Community

Some Christians have different kinds of fears when they think about the LGBT community. For example, some fear that gay activism will wind up taking away Christians' rights. They believe that gay-favoring politics is becoming a means to limit how they can live, how they can do business, and even what they'll be allowed to legally say on the issue of homosexuality.

Will the worst predictions of religious restriction come to pass someday? I don't know. But even if they do, I know that God will be with us then just as he is now. He works strongly when his people come under different types of attacks. I also know that threats to our rights, whether real or merely dreaded, should not prevent us from showing the love and kindness that Jesus says we owe to all.

On a more personal level, some Christians are afraid because they think that those who are LGBT will be attracted to them. Now, this one has always cracked me up. Listen to me on this: if you're not attractive to the opposite sex, you're probably not attractive to the same sex. (I kid! I kid!) Seriously, we shouldn't worry about gay people making a move on us. Let's relax.

Lack of Biblical Understanding

A dirty little secret is that most Christians don't know the Bible very well. I would dare to say that most American Christians keep their Bible reading to about five minutes every month. They're familiar with a few favorite passages. The rest of the biblical landscape remains a vast unexplored territory to them.

Because of this lack of biblical understanding, Christians sense that they are not well prepared to have conversations about homosexuality and related issues. They're afraid they won't have the answers to hard questions that might be put to them. Or they're afraid they won't be able to back up their positions biblically, even if they're pretty sure they're right. They might get backed into a corner, make a mistake, or be made to look foolish.

Better not to engage the LGBT community at all, they figure, than do it badly. The result is that the Christian community is over here and some from the LGBT community are over there, and Christians look cold and distant.

I want to ask you this: If you're in this position, wouldn't it be better to learn your Bible and prepare yourself for this or any conversation that would arise?

And there is still another kind of lack of biblical understanding. Some Christians know the Bible inside and out; their lack of understanding comes not from absence of knowledge but from not knowing how to use their knowledge. Unfortunately, some Christians have used the Bible as a weapon to bludgeon those who disagree. This, too, is a lack of biblical understanding, as it shows no love toward those with differing worldviews.

Some Christians need to understand that we can be right in our beliefs but wrong in how we communicate them.

Absence of Empathy

Many Christians, I'm sorry to say, have never bothered to place themselves in the shoes of someone who is LGBT. What are the lives of gay people like? What are their needs and concerns? What are their dreams? How do others treat them? How do they feel about God and the church?

Let me tell you about one misconception that comes from not taking the time to understand gay people: many Christians think that homosexuality is mainly about sex. They believe that you're in the LGBT community because you want to have sex with people of the same gender. This isn't totally true. Sex is only a part of the equation (and probably a small part for some). Most Christians haven't thought this issue through enough to realize that there is more to someone who identifies as LGBT than sexuality—a lot more.

All people have experiences, history, beliefs, friends, family, and more that make them into the people they are. Or as I like to say, all people have *depth*. So when we reduce homosexuality to just sex, we are thinking in a way that is far too shallow. People are just not that simple. We ought to get to know them as they are.

Closed-Door Attitude

Then there are some Christians who know their stuff. These Christians understand a lot of the Bible, have attended numerous Bible studies or Sunday school classes, lead their own groups, attend conferences, go to marriage retreats, and more. They are full-on Christians. First, let me say that I love Christians who fit this description. I love them even more when they don't just go to events or classes to learn more but also put that learning into action by serving others. I

want people in my church to do all of these things and to grow in their knowledge of the Bible—and it's even better when they use what they've learned to lead others to Jesus.

Unfortunately, some of these Christians (not all, but some) are the kind of Christians who tend to shut people out of their lives if they don't fit their brand of Christianity.

Having the mind-set that you've got it together and everyone else is lacking is a fast track to being a grace failure.

As I'll share in the book, I've run into this type of Christian a lot in my life (even in churches that I've served in). There are times when these Christians can be so concerned about holiness that they end up keeping away those who are less than perfect. They

create a church culture that allows only a narrow few to participate in the community. I don't think the majority of these Christians mean to do this or even know they are doing this to others. It comes from putting a huge emphasis on knowledge without loving those whom Jesus loved. Having the mind-set that you've got it together and everyone else is lacking is a fast track to being a grace failure.

Because of these reasons and more, not all Christians know how to think critically or talk comfortably about the issue of homosexuality. And because of our failure to approach this issue on a deeper level, we often miss opportunities to dialogue with others. Worse, we end up hurting other people.

Now I want to tell you about a young man named Hector and an encounter he had with some Christians that deeply affected his views of himself and God.² As you read his story, try to imagine how

he felt, because it's likely that someone you know has felt very much the same way.

What It's Like to Be Hector

"Guys, I've got something I want to tell you," Hector spoke up. A twenty-year-old Hispanic man attending Cal State Northridge in the Los Angeles area, Hector was with three other college-aged men, new friends of his, in the home belonging to the mom of one of the other guys. It was late on a Wednesday evening. They had finished watching a movie and were sitting in the family room, eating the last of the popcorn and talking and laughing together. A lot of the conversation had to do with girls in the college group at the church where these four friends had met.

Hector hoped the others didn't notice the slight tremor in his voice. They would never know how hard it was for him to bring up what he was about to say.

"What is it?" said Ryan. "Shoot."

"I don't know what you're going to think about this," Hector said, "but I'm actually into dudes."

Chewed bits of popcorn shot out of VJ's mouth as he started to laugh. Ryan and James both laughed too. They all thought Hector was kidding.

When Hector sat there looking serious and embarrassed, the laughing faltered. VJ coughed and then took a swallow of soda.

In the awkward silence that ensued, Ryan said to Hector, "Are you serious?"

"Yeah, man," Hector replied. "Is that so hard to believe?"

The other three guys glanced nervously at each other, and then

each tried to put on a concerned, attentive face. They started asking Hector questions.

How long had Hector known this about himself?

Since a young age. He'd worked hard to keep it from his family, but he'd never been able to deny it to himself.

Had Hector been molested or mistreated?

No. He'd been raised just like his older and younger brothers, both of whom were straight. He'd never been babied by his mother or bullied by his father. No one had ever laid a hand on him in the wrong way when he was a kid.

Had he ever, you know . . . done stuff with a guy?

Ryan whacked VJ over the head with a sofa pillow for asking this question, and Hector didn't deign to answer it.

How did he think God felt about his same-sex attraction?

Hector had been an altar boy in the Catholic church his family attended when he was growing up, and whenever the priest talked about "the sin of homosexuality," he had felt ashamed and fearful of God's punishment. For a long time, he'd prayed almost daily for God to remove his attraction to other males, but it had never happened. When he went to college, he tried to forget about God and joined a partying crowd, many of whom were either LGBT or questioning their sexuality. When all the partying made him feel empty, he'd started attending the evangelical church where he'd met Ryan, James, and VJ. He wasn't sure if his sexual orientation was all right in God's eyes or not. He knew, though, that he was interested in Jesus again.

Why had Hector told the other guys this about himself?

Hector just thought they ought to know, if they were going to be friends.

At this point in the conversation, Hector was thinking that things had gone decently well. He was beginning to relax.

But then things fell apart.

James, who hadn't said much up to this point, started firing Bible verse after Bible verse at him. At first Hector tried to listen and take it as if James were genuinely trying to educate him on the Bible's view of marriage and intimacy. But quickly it began to feel like an attack, and Hector got mad.

Ryan said to James, "Cut it out! He doesn't need that right now."

Then Ryan turned to Hector and said, "Look, Hec, we can help. Do you want us to pray for God to release you from the demons of homosexuality?"

It was Hector's turn to laugh out loud before realizing Ryan was serious. "I don't think I can do this anymore right now," he suddenly said. "See you guys later." He grabbed his jacket and was out of there the next instant.

Hector went back to his dorm that night feeling defeated and unsure of whether he had made the right decision to tell his friends about being gay.

Over the next few days, no one from the church college group called him. That Sunday, when he went to church, the guys he usually hung out with were strangely cold toward him. He caught a couple of weird glances from other members of the college group too. The pastor of the group pulled him aside and said that he'd like to talk with him sometime that week. Hector knew. The rumors had spread.

That was Hector's last day at that church.

In fact, it was Hector's last day at any church for quite a while.

Living in the Tension

Unfortunately, as a pastor, I am all too familiar with stories like Hector's—stories where Christians had the chance to be gracious

and loving but instead (often not meaning to) hurt and exiled someone like Hector. This pattern is exactly what should *not* happen in your church or mine. It definitely shouldn't happen in our personal relationships.

As you read Hector's story, were you thinking of someone you know in the LGBT community?

Maybe a good friend just confided in you that he is attracted to people of the same gender. The news caught you off guard, and now you're confused about how to respond or what to do. You know some of the things you should probably say, but you are unsure whether or not you could do it well, and if you could, when and how you should proceed.

Perhaps a daughter came out to you as a lesbian. You were shocked, horrified. You immediately became concerned about her relationship with God. There were harsh words on both sides. The rift hasn't closed to this day, but now that you've had some time to think about it, you're reminded of how much you love her, you want to know what's going on in her life, and you want to be of genuine help to her.

Or possibly you met someone at work. He's exactly the kind of person you would like to be friends with—same sense of humor, same interests, a lot of deep things to say. Also, you consider yourself an evangelistic sort of Christian, wanting to share Jesus with people who are not believers—people like this guy. But there's this one little thing: he's gay. Actually, it's not so little to you. You wonder if you can form a relationship with this person. Or would it be better to skip it and move on to find another friend?

I want to invite you to live in the tension of grace and truth. I'm not asking you to do something that you're not already doing. Christianity is filled with tension. We believe in one God, but he is Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus was fully God and fully human. The Bible was written by human authors but inspired of God. The tension of predestination and free will has brought lively debate throughout the years. Even the whole discussion of faith and works is filled with tension. You may not have ever thought of your faith in this way, but you're already living in the tension. So when it comes to homosexuality, I want you to consider living in the tension of grace and truth. Why? Because your relationship with your family member, friend, or co-worker is totally worth it.

I hope you're ready to consider your gay friend or loved one as a whole person and to try to think about the issues of homosexuality and faith from his or her perspective. I hope you're ready to learn how to be gracious to people in the LGBT community even if it makes you nervous or unsure of the ground you're standing on. Because if you are, then you're ready to read the rest of this book.

You're about to get a glimpse of the LGBT community from the inside, to see what some think of Christians so that you can think about what kind of Christian you are going to be to them. If you're like most Christians I know, you can do better in this area.

I'm not suggesting you have been the kind of person who has actually told people in the gay community that God hates them. Quite possibly, however, at times you have been like Hector's friends. That is, you may have been un-Christlike to gay people in subtle ways—for example, acting rude or cold, making bigoted jokes or using offensive terms, imagining the worst about them, not taking them seriously, or having holier-than-thou spiritual arrogance. If so, then you're about to get some strong encouragement to make a change in your life. And beyond avoiding mistakes, you're going to learn how to have positive, Christlike interactions with people in the gay community.

As a result, I believe that you'll feel more comfortable around people in your life who identify as LGBT. You'll probably be more confident in building authentic relationships and more certain of what you believe. You'll have the joy of knowing that God is using you to love people into a relationship with him through Christ. The ultimate goal is not to get another "evangelism trophy"; rather, it is to love people the way that God has loved you. The win in all of this is showing God's love.

And by the way, the lessons you learn here aren't just for dealing with the LGBT community. With a little adapting, they can apply to your relationships with people from every sort of community or category that is different from you. I'll be referring to some of those people from time to time as we consider the tension of grace and truth.

I want to warn you ahead of time about something: whichever side of the tension you feel most comfortable with (grace or truth), there will be times during your reading of this book when you may not agree with what I say. You may find yourself agreeing wholeheartedly with one statement and then disagreeing two statements down. One chapter might be in line with everything you believe, while another chapter might frustrate you to no end. This book is messy. It may feel like a roller coaster as we ride the tension between grace and truth. But I hope you'll stick with me to the end, because I believe this book can change you—permanently.

On that Sunday when I was about to preach the "For or Against" sermon about homosexuality in front of my parents, I was living in the tension between grace and truth, between biblical theology and homosexuality, between courage and fear. This is the kind of tension we all need to accept again and again. My word of encouragement is

this: we don't have to walk through such tension alone, and it *is* possible to come through it with good results for everyone involved.

It's time for Christians to think differently about the issue of homosexuality. It's time for Christians to own this issue.

To start getting messy, turn the page to chapter 2.

REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Has there ever been a time when you had to share a tough truth with a friend? Describe how this happened.
2. Why do you think some Christians have had such a hard time building bridges with the LGBT community?
3. What are some things the Christian community can do to better dialogue with the LGBT community?
4. Have you ever known someone like Hector? Can you relate to him?
5. Do you have a difficult time relating with people who are different from you? Why or why not?



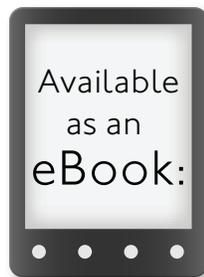
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