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DO ASK, DO TELL, LET'S TALK

WHY AND HOW CHRISTIANS

SHOULD HAVE GAY FRIENDS

Brad Hambrick

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— Danny Akin, President,
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Theological Seminary

"An important next step for Christian literature on same-sex attraction."

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Why and How Christians Should Have Gay Friends

Brad Hambrick

Cruciform Press | March 2016

This book is dedicated to those who have felt that their experience of same-sex attraction has left them isolated within or from the Body of Christ.

May this book help the church better embody the gospel we proclaim and be the family of God.

– Brad Hambrick

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“This is a book the church has desperately needed for some time. It is simply excellent. It will challenge you and guide you in navigating in a more Christlike manner the host of questions surrounding same-sex attraction and the local church.”

Danny Akin, President, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“To stand on what we believe is clear in Scripture, and to be a friend, at the same time – this book is an important next step for Christian literature on same-sex attraction. It doesn’t simply guide us in wise engagement; it guides us in friendships where there is mutual enjoyment and appreciation. And Brad does this in such a way that he doesn’t cut any theological corners but makes such friendships a necessary expression of our theology.”

Ed Welch, counselor and faculty member, Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation

“Whenever Jesus encountered a sexual minority, he responded with love and friendship instead of shame. Only there, in the safety of a non-condemning presence, were these image bearers able to engage their wounds, sins and regrets. In *Do Ask, Do Tell, Let’s Talk*, Brad Hambrick helps us see how we, too, can create safe space and belonging for our LGBTQ friends. And why would we do this? So that these friends, too, can encounter the grace and truth of Jesus. I highly recommend this book.”

Scott Sauls, senior pastor, Christ Presbyterian Church, Nashville; author, *Jesus Outside the Lines: A Way Forward for Those Who Are Tired of Taking Sides*

“Finally, a practical book that helps us engage people as Jesus would! Brad Hambrick captures the heart of what it means to invite into dialogue and relationship people who you might otherwise see as so unlike you that you may not know how to begin a substantive conversation. *Do Ask, Do Tell, Let’s Talk* teaches the lost art of how to talk with people, draw them out,

get to know their story and, therefore, know their heart . . . all of which makes fertile soil for the gospel to take root and flourish!”

John Freeman, President, Harvest USA; author, *Hide or Seek, When Men Get Real with God about Sex*

“Let’s face it, in this area the church has at best missed an opportunity and at worst grieved God through our ignorance, fear, or condemnation of not just the sin, but the person struggling. Brad Hambrick has written a much-needed response to the question, how does a Christian interact with love and help someone struggling with same-sex attraction? His book gives us an opportunity to try again, but this time we will be equipped with compassion, biblical helps, and hope. If you struggle with SSA or know someone who does, this book could start a journey toward the light of God’s truth and love that will humble the helper and encourage the struggler.”

Garrett Higbee, author, *The Uncommon Community: Biblical Soul Care for Small Groups*; Board Member, Biblical Counseling Coalition

“*Do Ask, Do Tell, Let’s Talk* comes forth with impeccable timing to the evangelical Christian church and modern day culture by providing a pathway for engagement in safe, healing, and equipping conversations. This brief, yet comprehensive and biblically robust book gently confronts the “elephant in the room” while answering questions about friendship, homosexuality, gender identity, and same-sex attraction. I highly recommend it to men, women, students, youth workers, pastors, churches, educators, and leaders as well as anyone looking for answers to this vital topic.”

Dr. Dwayne R. Bond, Lead Pastor, Wellspring Church; CEO and Founder, Proximus Group

“Few people have the ability to pack as much content into a book as my friend, Brad Hambrick. The message and content of this book is one which the church desperately needs. All of us need to be better equipped in the area of ministering and befriending those who struggle with same-sex attraction. Brad’s work is not only comprehensive and biblical, it comes from the heart of a pastor-counselor whose admirable humility in approaching a potentially polarizing topic shines through. This is the book I needed to read, and I trust it will become a go-to resource for you as well.”

Jonathan Holmes, author, *The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship*; Biblical Counseling Coalition Council Member

“If you are looking for a book that simply equips you to make a friend, love a neighbor, and if God and your friend are willing, see somebody you care about come to Christ, this is it. Winsome it is.”

Sam R. Williams, Ph.D., Professor of Counseling,
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Introduction

PLEASE DON'T SKIP ME

I love air travel.

Okay, not long TSA lines and screening. Not the part where I cram my bloated carry-on into an overhead compartment because I'm too cheap to pay the baggage fee. Not overbooked flights or weather cancellations or the mysteries of lost luggage. But the rest of it, all things considered, is pretty amazing.

My favorite part is actually the people-watching. Long layover? I got this. I'll pick up my Starbucks and a local newspaper, find a good place to sit, and enjoy the parade of humanity. Is there another public place in our society that brings together such a wide cross-section of people? In any major airport on just about any day, you'll see every imaginable ethnic, social, relational, and economic group. For introverts like me, the whole spectacle is intriguing and fascinating.

At the same time, as much as I love people-watching, I can barely imagine a scenario where I would step outside my safe personal bubble and actually go talk to a stranger. Why? Because moving toward people whom I don't

know and may have little in common with makes me uncomfortable. You too?

Let's face it, not only are most of us uncomfortable around new people, we usually avoid unfamiliar situations. To one degree or another we are all creatures of comfort and familiarity. Which brings me to the subject matter of this book.

Of all the issues in the church, the one that creates the greatest amount of discomfort and diversity of opinion may be homosexuality and same-sex attraction (SSA). No doubt partly because of this, the church has yet to articulate a wise and biblical way to move toward those in our churches and communities who struggle with same-sex attraction.

Churches have articulated their position on a conservative sexual ethic. Churches have re-examined the key biblical texts that are challenged in defense of a progressive sexual ethic. As important as these things are, however, they do not equip everyday Christians to develop meaningful friendships with people who experience same-sex attraction or have embraced a gay identity.

In the absence of relationship, our theology becomes theory.

Christians are no different than anyone else in this respect: most of us don't do well with otherness. It scares us. We don't know how to relate well to people with different backgrounds and life stories. You want to have a conversation about everyday challenges like pride, being a good parent, or listening better to your spouse? We can do that. That's safe territory. But struggles with SSA? If we're brave enough to consider even having such a conversation, SSA issues can seem significantly different from

our own experience. As a result, those conversations with friends and family members can become brief, awkward, and unhelpful. If they happen at all.

The sad human tendency is to see otherness—in this case, people with SSA struggles—as one-dimensional. Rather than thinking of people first as fellow image-bearers of God, we¹ essentially reduce them to their particular orientation or sexual identity. If you ask any friends and family members who struggle with SSA (and I hope you will), most will tell you their same-sex orientation encompasses something far wider than just who they are romantically interested in.

From personal observation, it seems to me that in the church we typically have one of three reactions to any sin that is markedly different from our own experience:

- A. Judge/condemn it
- B. Move away/isolate from it
- C. Reduce/re-categorize it

Here's an example: someone in your small group brings up a wedding invitation they recently received from a gay relative. Should they attend?

- A. As they're asking and seeking prayer to make a wise and biblically informed decision, one person is thinking, *Why are we even having this conversation? The Bible is clear—homosexuality is wrong! Attending this wedding would mean you support their decision to do something unbiblical.* This approach assumes that if you have the right position on sexual ethics, you automatically know how best to approach

a relationship with a nephew you see twice a year or a sister you don't want to alienate.

- B. Perhaps someone else in the group is having another internal dialogue along the lines of, *Phew, I'm so glad this isn't me! Sounds very complicated. I think they should just go! I want to ask more questions, because this doesn't feel so clear, but I don't want to be seen as a 'bad Christian.'* *Can't we just move on to another prayer request? Is it getting hot in here?* This approach assumes that not taking a position is the best way for the prospective wedding attendee to love others and facilitate that relationship.
- C. For those who are inclined to reduce or re-categorize, the internal dialogue might sound like this, *Some people struggle with SSA. I experience OSA (opposite-sex attraction). I'm no better than them and they are no worse than me. We're all sinners and the good news is that Jesus died to set us both free. I don't understand what the fuss is about. Let's all repent and enjoy our lives for the glory of God.*

I suspect we have all had at least one of these reactions, and have probably struggled with what to say. The fact that you're reading this book suggests you're already aware that conversations about how to befriend and help those who experience SSA are inherently difficult for many of us.

When these kinds of conversations do happen, one side can easily get weighted towards truth-telling—*homosexuality is wrong, and is not God's design for human sexuality*. The other side of the conversation can easily get weighted toward sympathy and compassion—*it has to be*

hard to experience SSA, isn't there some accommodation we can make as Christians to ease their struggle?

Unfortunately, truth apart from love is harsh and unlivable. Similarly, love apart from truth is sentimental and unhelpful. So is there another way? Can we join together truth and love in our conversations and interactions with friends who struggle and suffer differently from us? Can we honor the word of God, but also incarnate the Son of God, who was criticized for befriending the big sinners of his day (Matthew 9:11).² After all, big sinners—which is all of us (1 Timothy 1:15)—are exactly whom the Bible was given to.

I believe we can; I believe we should; I believe the church must. This book is an attempt to prepare God's people for rich, biblically-informed, gospel-saturated engagement that is both practical and realistic.

One

BEYOND THE US-THEM DIVIDE

Conversations on controversial issues do not go well when the dialogue happens community-to-community or figurehead-to-figurehead. Whether it's race, religion, or politics, groups don't talk well with other groups. Too much is at stake when we feel like our words and actions speak for the collective whole.

Two individuals from those respective groups are much more likely to forge a good relationship, influencing one another in various ways. Unfortunately, someone who listens well is often viewed by his or her compatriots as engaging in compromise; at the group level, representing each side fairly feels too much like agreement.

That is why the aim of this book is friendship. Friendship is the level at which influence can be had, because the dialogue does not seek to represent an agenda but to understand a person. Friendship is what protects good points from becoming gotcha moments.

I think it's important for you to know two things about how this book is written and who is writing it.

First, this is not a book about the Christian church

reaching the gay community. Instead, it is a book about individual Christians learning to form better friendships with classmates, colleagues, and family members who experience same-sex attraction or embrace a gay identity (we will clarify those terms shortly).

How much influence will these friendships have? That will vary widely based on many factors, some of which we'll consider in the pages ahead. My encouragement to you is to seek to be a good friend (i.e., an ambassador of Christ) because influence grows best out of a flourishing friendship, not as the reason for a friendship. In fact, here's one principle that lies at the heart of this book: *Relationships always have influence, but when influence becomes the primary objective it deteriorates friendship.*

This begs the question: what is a “win” in these relationships? Is it convincing the other person to embrace a conservative sexual ethic and repent of homosexuality? Is it growing in our ability to appreciate each other's differences and refusing to judge people for things they perhaps didn't choose? (Yes, we'll talk about the matter of “choosing” homosexuality soon, as well.)

If we see these relationships as a competition—a moral or theological debate where there must be a winner and a loser—that says something. It says we believe that from the Christian perspective the only two possible outcomes in such a relationship are conversion on the other person's part or compromise on our part. That attitude will make it very hard for us to develop an authentic relationship of trust. Instead, we'll have truth wars that feel more like political debates than personal conversations.

Second, I do not consider homosexuality my hill to die on. I don't believe that the probability of experiencing the Third Great Awakening or whether America remains a geopolitical superpower hinges on the moral-political issues surrounding homosexuality. Neither do I believe that gay rights as a cause is the logical extension of women's suffrage or racial-equality efforts.

When someone holds either of these views, the rightness of their position seems so obvious that anyone taking a different view is often seen as stupid or evil. So if your position on homosexuality is approximated in the paragraph above, you may be a little uncomfortable with this book. Even if you are, I hope you'll keep reading.

With that said, in this book I have tried to recognize my "heterosexual privilege" and weigh my words accordingly. That is, because I don't experience SSA, there are many emotional and relational challenges I have simply not had to face in life. This has left me free to invest my energies in and benefit from other pursuits. Any member of a majority culture—whether the variable in question is sexual attraction, race, language barriers, economics, or something else—will tend to have a similar built-in advantage. I know this is true of me, so I hope my writing reflects that.

My experience in this subject, therefore, has primarily been as a pastoral counselor who has heard many individuals say, "I feel safe talking about SSA with you. I want to feel that way with the rest of the church." Most of these individuals have been male, so the experience I bring to this book may omit some factors that would apply more to male-female or female-female friendships. If you find yourself in one of those categories I pray you will be able to

use what I have presented as a launching point and arrive at guidance that will benefit your particular friendships.

To the two challenges posed above, I would say:

1. *I believe* Christians can have and should seek meaningful friendships with those who experience same-sex attraction (SSA). The church cannot have a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy and, at the same time, extend Christian love to members and neighbors who experience SSA.
2. *I recognize* the personal and theological challenges this presents. This book will not be as neat as I would like. Many tensions will be navigated; maybe not all contradictions will be avoided. When it comes to being salt and light for the sake of the gospel, it seems far better to choose possible messiness over guaranteed ineffectiveness.
3. *I acknowledge* that this is something Christians have frequently not done well with, and that even when Christians have made good attempts their efforts have not always been received well by members of the gay community. While both sides need to consider their response, I will speak to the church because that is the community to which I belong.

So let’s return to the earlier question. I would consider any of the following outcomes a “win.”

- An individual who embraces a gay identity could say, “I have friends who are Christians and disagree with my chosen lifestyle but love me well. I believe they would gladly help me if I had a need.”

- A teenager who is beginning to experience SSA could say, “I have Christian friends who understand what I’m facing and care enough to help me think through this confusing experience.”
- Parents of a child who is experimenting with homosexual behaviors could say, “Our small group cared for us well and helped us think through how to love our son. It was surprising how safe we felt to wrestle with the questions we were facing.”
- An individual who was considering leaving the gay lifestyle could say, “The Christians who I knew while I was openly gay were a big part of the reason I may choose to pursue what I now believe to be God’s design for sexuality.”

This book will seek to equip you to help make these statements an increasing reality in the life of your church. In this chapter, we will consider two social dynamics that impede these responses:

- The role of language
- The unintended consequences of a “don’t ask, don’t tell” climate in the church

The Value of a Shared Vocabulary

I face a problem every time I take my car to the mechanic. I don’t know what words to use. How should I describe the sound my car makes? The absence of useful language immediately makes me feel like an idiot. The confused look on my mechanic’s face confirms it.

Something similar happens when we try to discuss

subjects like depression or compulsiveness. What is the difference between normal sadness and clinical depression, or between having strong pet peeves and experiencing Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder? When we're unsure what words to use—or what the words we *could* use might communicate to others—we usually become highly self-conscious...so we say nothing.

This often happens around the subject of homosexuality. Whatever words we might use can feel presumptuous, inflammatory, too condemning, too accepting, or something else. So what do we do? Usually we either avoid the subject or bulldoze through the awkwardness.

In an effort to chip away at this problem, I'm going to suggest that within the church we adopt a shared vocabulary. I believe the following three terms both correspond to reality and align with Scripture. These terms are not neutral—all distinctions have consequences. But I believe these categories give us accurate ways to think and talk about some of the key issues surrounding homosexuality, and are therefore helpful both for a) individuals confused about their sexuality³ and b) Christians who want to have a constructive conversation on the subject.

- **Same-Sex Attraction (SSA)** – This is simply the experience of realizing that you find members of the same gender attractive to the point that you are aroused and romantically captivated. This experience is usually not chosen. Think about it: if you experience opposite-sex attraction, when did you choose this preference?

For this reason, I believe that the best theological category for the experience of unwanted SSA is *suffering*—something for which we should not

feel a perpetual sense of condemnation, because it is primarily the result of living in a broken world which adversely impacts our lives. True suffering is not sin.⁴ In response to suffering, God offers comfort, not forgiveness. At the same time, suffering is always *a context for temptation*, and we are responsible for our response to suffering.

The primary benefit of the *suffering* category is that it gives the person who experiences unwanted SSA the grace to recognize that Romans 8:1 (“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”) can be true for him or her. It allows for the possibility of stewarding temptation in a way that pleases God, rather than feeling like a perpetual abomination. Indeed, the “abomination passages” (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13) refer to homosexual *behaviors*, not people struggling against temptation. The SSA, GI, and HB distinctions help us reconcile the fact that God is indeed the holy judge of sin yet still desires to be the loving redeemer of people who struggle with sin until we reach heaven.

- **Gay Identity (GI)** – GI occurs when an individual who experiences SSA travels down a path that leads him or her to an “I am” statement. Where SSA is about “what I feel,” GI is about “who I am.”

This transition is where much of our cultural conversation breaks down. In any other area of life, if one aspect of personhood (such as ethnicity, financial status, gender, etc.) is believed to necessarily define a person, we call that belief prejudicial. But with sexuality, there is a cultural push to call it virtuous.

It is not necessary to turn verbs into nouns. Not everyone who runs is a runner. Not everyone who fails is a failure. Not everyone who experiences SSA has to identify as gay. Identity is a choice, one that should be made based on more factors than the persistence of a particular attraction.

- **Homosexual Behavior (HB)** – This is the choice to engage in sexual practices with or stimulated by a member of the same gender. Like assuming a gay identity, homosexual behavior is a matter of choice and, therefore, the moral responsibility of the chooser.

A different kind of stigma enters the conversation here. We must realize that looking at gay porn is not “dirtier” than straight porn, and is far less consequential than looking at child porn. Extra-marital sex is equally wrong regardless of the gender-pairing. We’ll consider these kinds of internal emotional obstacles in chapter two.

Categories are sterile. By themselves, they’re lifeless. We must realize that we never interact with a category (e.g., homosexuality) but only a person (e.g., individuals who experience SSA). Consider the following case study.⁵

* * *

Grayson was a fun kid whose interests didn't fit in a box well. Sports were fine, but he enjoyed art and conversation more. Grayson was also an “old soul;” the banter of boys his age was not as interesting to him as the more personal conversations girls or adults were having.

When Grayson wouldn't engage the banter of his peers, they picked on him and, as elementary school progressed, he felt like more of an outsider with boys. He found interests and friendships that were satisfying, but the sense of being different marked his early school experience.

In middle school, when the other boys started talking about liking girls, this seemed odd to him. He couldn't remember disliking girls. Girls made sense to him. It was boys who were strange. A similar change occurred in him as was happening in his peers; he began to be attracted to those who he viewed as different from him. But instead of it being the opposite gender, it was the same sex.

This was unsettling. But it made exploring his interest easier. When there was a boy who was mature enough to have a meaningful conversation, he could talk with him without everyone else asking if they "liked" each other. For Grayson, it became difficult to tell the difference between friendship and romantic interest.

One thing Grayson did know is that he should not talk about this. But he did ponder it. What did this mean? Why did his body respond this way? What did this mean about who he was? How much of his life did this explain?

Grayson's family attended church regularly, so he knew that homosexuality was a sin. In sermons, homosexuals were either the bad guys in an illustration or the punch line of a joke. In high school, some of the youth leaders would talk about lust and say they were available to talk. How unfair that his sexual questions and struggles seemed off limits because they were never mentioned as a possibility?!?

When he heard friends talking about internet pornography he was curious. Soon the internet became a source

of safe exploration. He discovered he did find the male body more arousing than the female body. Through blogs and on-line forums he found people who understood him. Finally there was an outlet for his questions, and people to give language to his experience.

During his first semester at college he got connected with an LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) group on campus. It was the first time he had had real community (not online conversations) with real people who accepted him. He felt known, loved, and free like never before. He learned that October 11 was National Coming Out Day,⁶ and he decided it was time to face whatever consequences came as he was finally honest with the world.

* * *

To help assimilate what you're learning, go back and write SSA, GI, and HB in the margin next to particular sentences in this account to help you see where the transitions took place for Grayson. Make notes of any pet theories you have used to explain why these things happen to people, or what you think should be done for Grayson at this point. Don't assume your theories are accurate or your solutions helpful. Merely allow this exercise to make your assumptions more overt, so they can be evaluated as you go through the rest of the book.

Take a moment and reflect on your reaction to reading this case study. What made you sad, angry, uncomfortable, or the like? What kinds of additions, clarifications, or qualifications did you want to see in this account?

If you feel suspicious toward or upset with Grayson

because of this brief description of his life, I submit to you that this is a sign of prejudice. Prejudice calls for repentance, so I would encourage you to seek God both for repentance and freedom from this sin. *We will never befriend those whose stories we cannot bear hearing.*

Now let's ask, "How does having a shared vocabulary (SSA, GI, and HB) allow us to foster meaningful friendship with Grayson? How does seeing his experience in its different aspects, instead of as an all-or-nothing proposition, create the opportunity for better interaction?"

For Grayson, clear language makes the church a safe place to talk. When a church is uncomfortable with how to talk about a subject redemptively, we typically ignore it. For a high-school age Grayson, for example, completely ignoring SSA would say, "You don't belong here," a message nearly as stigmatizing and ostracizing as offensive language. But the church should be a safe place for him to talk about his experience and learn how to think about it.

How can we facilitate this? In our sermons and lessons, we should include SSA in the list of things someone might be struggling with—just like lust, pride, loneliness, anger, or any other common sin. Just as importantly, our tone of voice when speaking of SSA should not communicate disgust, condescension, or perplexity.

For the church at large, clear language facilitates relatability. The categories of SSA, GI, and HB also help by allowing those who do not experience SSA to identify in certain respects with those who do. Hopefully, when you read Grayson's story, you liked him. Whether we realize it or not, we all have struggles that tend to follow a predictable progression: we go from disposition (e.g., a

desire for orderliness), to identity (e.g., “I’m compulsive”), to lifestyle (e.g., living by a set of routines).

While the parallel between SSA and dispositions in general is not absolute, it can help you identify with how the experience of SSA develops into a homosexual lifestyle. See if you can fill in the chart below with any of your own experiences.

Disposition	Identity	Lifestyle
Orderliness	“I am a compulsive person.”	Security rooted in following daily routines
Extroversion	“I am a people person.”	Being ruled by the acceptance of others
Same-Sex Attraction	“I am gay.”	Selecting a community to belong to and dating

Clear language helps us all think more clearly. A third way these categories help is that they prevent us from getting ahead of ourselves or Grayson in the conversation. In middle school, Grayson doesn’t need to be deciding the trajectory for his lifelong romantic relation-

ships any more than a student needs a lecture about being homeless under a bridge the first time she experiments with alcohol.

But Grayson does need to be able to talk about the sense of attraction he feels and begin to explore how to reconcile those attractions with his faith and other core values. Christian mentors and friends should absolutely be part of this journey. You could say something like this when Grayson initially shares what he's going through:

“Grayson, you're showing a lot of courage, and I admire that. You're trusting me with something precious, and I am honored. I can understand why this feels like the biggest thing in your world right now, but I don't want you to feel like your sense of attraction has to define who you are. You've probably got more questions than I have answers: me too. I'm glad I get to be your friend and don't want you to feel alone as you consider these things.”

Clear language helps to keep the conversation focused on personhood. A fourth way these categories help is that they allow Grayson to see that he is larger than his experience of SSA. Grayson *might* make SSA a more central part of his life by engaging in homosexual behavior and embracing a gay identity, but those are not inevitable choices.

A primary implication of this for Grayson's friends is that they should spend as much time getting to know other aspects of his life and interests as they do discussing his experience of SSA. Fixating on overcoming a struggle in any particular area can almost make that area as much a core part of your identity as if you were to stop struggling and embrace it. (Because this book focuses on understanding the experience of SSA and navigating the

moral-theological challenges that surround SSA, it would be easy to see this book as contributing to this imbalance. By knowing that danger exists, however, we can help avoid it.)

What would it be like if there were a widespread habit in your church of thinking about people one-dimensionally, focusing primarily on a principal area of struggle in their lives?

- *Oh, Margaret? Isn't she that perfectionist?*
- *Maybe you've met Carlos. He's an insecure people-pleaser.*
- *Eric is a pretty good guy, for a lazy person.*

What if, in talking with others in your church, you realized that one particular area of your life dominated the conversations that people had with you or about you? At the opposite extreme, what if that area were seen as too shameful or alien even to mention?

It doesn't matter what the issue is. To effectively reduce someone to a primary area of struggle in his or her life is neither fair, accurate, nor helpful. Thus, one of the most redemptive things Christian friendships can bring to the experience of SSA is the lived experience that sexuality does not have to be either personally defining or, on the other hand, socially ignored.

Silence Leads Nowhere Good

As stigmatizing and offensive as a church's silence can be when it comes to SSA, much of evangelicalism has adopted an unspoken "don't ask, don't tell" policy. The result has been decades of silence in untold thousands of

churches; silence compounded by confusion, isolation, and alienation.

It's as if we believe that having a biblical position on SSA is *the same as* providing Christian care. We don't believe this about other life struggles. We have moral positions on pornography, but we encourage accountability relationships. We have moral positions on cohabitation, but we'll offer a couple a way to live separately until they get married.

Consider this from the perspective of an individual in a local church who experiences SSA. For years this person has seen personal struggles of many kinds being addressed in the church, and care offered to those who struggle. Yet the only time his or her greatest area of struggle is mentioned is in jokes or as an example of an adversarial cultural agenda. Eventually he concludes, "This is not a safe place for me."

(Is it? Should it be? Does God want the local church be a safe place for people to be honest about their struggles?)

Then, should this person find in the gay community the voice that the church community never gave him (or her) room to express, he gets very excited and feels liberated—and we get offended by his celebratory tone. It's true: to the extent he is openly celebrating sin, that's wrong. But at one level how can we blame him for shouting? He had been silenced for years, and now he isn't. It's a bit like blaming a lame person for dancing when one day he can finally walk.

To provide a tangible example, many Christians and cultural conservatives were upset when Michael Sam, the first openly gay player to be drafted into the NFL, kissed

his boyfriend on national television when he signed his contract. My son saw his kiss on Sports Center the next morning. It made him uncomfortable. I don't like it when culture forces conversations about sexuality, not just homosexuality, on kids at early ages. It eats away at their innocence at younger and younger ages, which is not good.

At the same time, I'm not surprised that Sam *wanted* to celebrate openly in that way. If we assume his SSA experience began around puberty, then by the time he came out at age 23 he had been silent for 10+ years. Yes, the kiss introduced questions of sexuality to a younger audience than would be ideal, but I don't blame Michael Sam for that any more (and much less) than I blame Hannah-Montana-turned-Miley-Cyrus for her antics.

But here's a far more important issue for us, as ambassadors of Christ. Had Michael Sam attended our church as a boy, what would we have been able to offer him when he was beginning to experience SSA? And what kind of friendships could we offer him now if he were curious about exploring Christianity?

The answer cannot begin with, "Let's get him into counseling or a recovery group." Either may be beneficial, as they are for any identity-based struggle. But if this is the church's answer, it communicates, "Stick with *your people* and we'll relate to you when you're *better*."

The best and most helpful thing the church could and must provide is *friendship*. Yes, church membership may be a delicate subject if someone is engaging HB or embracing a GI, but welcomed church participation should not be. The church, if it is to represent Christ accurately, must offer a quality of friendship that allows those who experience SSA to be more fully known and more

fully loved in the church than they could find in the gay community. We should want to offer our gay friends such meaningful friendship that the memory of it can be used by God to draw them to himself (Romans 2:4).

I realize the church is not there yet. In fact, many Christians are seeing that the church's unwillingness to befriend people who experience SSA has blocked us from engaging with the subject of homosexuality on any level closer than the political. Indeed, in some respects the church as a whole is quite bad at real, biblical friendship.

That said, this book is not about friendship *per se*—it is an examination of the unique challenges SSA can present to friendship in Christian circles. For a solid understanding of what constitutes real friendship and how to get there, let me recommend Jonathan Holmes' book, *The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship*. The fact is that friendship is a more meaningful, less casual relationship than is commonly thought, and most of us are far less equipped to be good friends than we probably have assumed. Jonathan's book is an excellent introduction to what God meant friendship to be. In fact, I hope that the more you read this book, the more compelled you'll be to read that one.

Ultimately, though, I hope this book will be a tool God uses to grow his people into excellent ambassador-friends to their classmates, colleagues, and family members who experience SSA. I trust that if this is what you want to do and be, then God will be faithful to complete this work in you regardless of the strengths and weaknesses, insights and oversights of this book (Philippians 1:6). Thank you for taking this journey with me.



[The Company We Keep](#)

In Search of Biblical Friendship

by Jonathan Holmes

Foreword by Ed Welch

**Biblical friendship is deep, honest,
pure, transparent, and liberating.**

It is also attainable.

112 pages

bit.ly/B-Friend

“Jonathan Holmes has the enviable ability to say a great deal in a few words. Here is a wonderful primer on the nature of biblical friendship—what it means and why it matters.”

Alistair Begg, Truth for Life, Senior Pastor, Parkside Church

“Jonathan has succeeded in giving us a picture of how normal, daily, biblical friendships can be used by God to mold us into the likeness of Christ. If you want a solid, fresh way of re-thinking all of your relationships, read this book.”

Dr. Tim S. Lane, co-author, How People Change

“A robust and relevant GPS for intentional and vulnerable gospel-centered friendships...a great book not only for individuals, but also for small groups...a significant contribution to the Kingdom.”

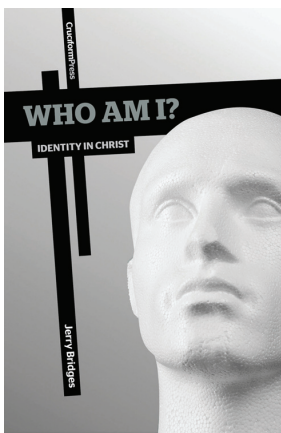
Robert W. Kellemen, Exec. Dir., Biblical Counseling Coalition

“Short. Thoughtful. Biblical. Practical. I’m planning to get my friends to read this book so we can transform our friendships.”

Deepak Reju, Pastor of Biblical Counseling, Capitol Hill Baptist

“Filled with answers that are equally down-to-earth, nitty-gritty, and specific...taking us where we need to go with warmth and wisdom.”

Wesley Hill, author, Washed and Waiting



Who Am I?

Identity in Christ

by Jerry Bridges

Jerry Bridges unpacks Scripture to give the Christian eight clear, simple, interlocking answers to one of the most essential questions of life.

91 pages bit.ly/WHOAMI

“Jerry Bridges’ gift for simple but deep spiritual communication is fully displayed in this warm-hearted, biblical spelling out of the Christian’s true identity in Christ.”

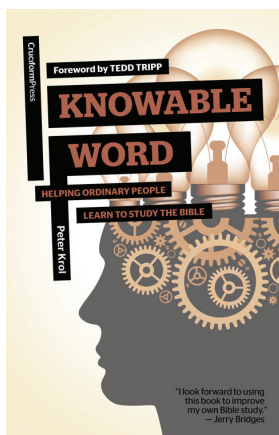
J.I. Packer, Theological Editor, ESV Study Bible; author, Knowing God, A Quest for Godliness, Concise Theology

“I know of no one better prepared than Jerry Bridges to write *Who Am I?* He is a man who knows who he is in Christ and he helps us to see succinctly and clearly who we are to be. Thank you for another gift to the Church of your wisdom and insight in this book.”

R.C. Sproul, founder, chairman, president, Ligonier Ministries; executive editor, Tabletalk magazine; general editor, The Reformation Study Bible

“*Who Am I?* answers one of the most pressing questions of our time in clear gospel categories straight from the Bible. This little book is a great resource to ground new believers and remind all of us of what God has made us through faith in Jesus. Thank the Lord for Jerry Bridges, who continues to provide the warm, clear, and biblically balanced teaching that has made him so beloved to this generation of Christians.”

Richard D. Phillips, Senior Minister, Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC



Knowable Word

Helping Ordinary People Learn to Study the Bible

by Peter Krol

Foreword by Tedd Tripp

Observe...Interpret...Apply

Simple concepts at the heart of good Bible study. Learn the basics in a few minutes—gain skills for a lifetime. The spiritual payoff is huge...ready?

108 pp. bit.ly/Knowable

“Peter Krol has done us a great service by writing the book *Knowable Word*. It is valuable for those who have never done in-depth Bible study and a good review for those who have. I look forward to using this book to improve my own Bible study.”

Jerry Bridges, author, The Pursuit of Holiness, and many more

“It is hard to over-estimate the value of this tidy volume. It is clear and uncomplicated. No one will be off-put by this book. It will engage the novice and the serious student of Scripture. It works as a solid read for individuals or as an exciting study for a small group.”

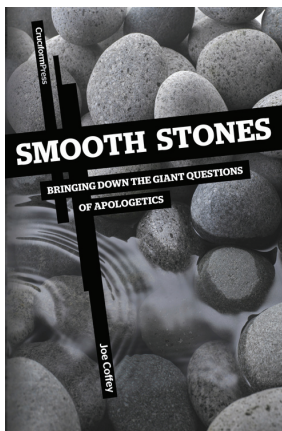
Tedd Tripp, pastor and author (from the Foreword)

“At the heart of *Knowable Word* is a glorious and crucial conviction: that understanding the Bible is not the preserve of a few, but the privilege and joy of all God’s people. Peter Krol’s book demystifies the process of reading God’s Word and in so doing enfranchises the people of God. I warmly encourage you to read it.”

Dr. Tim Chester, The Porterbrook Network

“Here is an excellent practical guide to interpreting the Bible. Krol has thought through, tested, and illustrated in a clear, accessible way basic steps in interpreting the Bible, and made everything available in a way that will encourage ordinary people to deepen their own study.”

Vern Poythress, Westminster Theological Seminary



Smooth Stones

Bringing Down the Giant Questions of Apologetics

by Joe Coffey

Street-level apologetics for everyday Christians.

Because faith in Jesus makes sense. And you don't need an advanced degree to understand why.

bit.ly/CPStones

“What a thrill for me to see Joe Coffey, a graduate of our first Centurions Program class, apply the biblical worldview principles we teach at BreakPoint and the Colson Center. In this marvelous little book, Joe simply and succinctly lays out the tenets of the Christian faith within the context of the four key life and worldview questions. This is an excellent resource for Christians and non-Christians alike who are seeking the Truth.”

Chuck Colson, Founder of Prison Fellowship and the Colson Center for Christian Worldview

“This book may be the best resource I've seen to answer common objections in everyday language.”

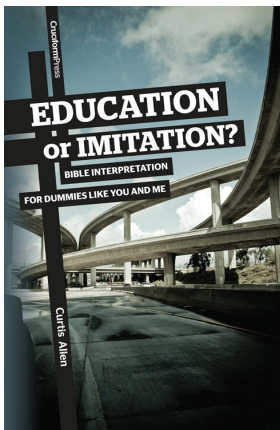
Jared Totten, Critical Thinking Blog

“A quick read that packs a punch.... I'm always on the lookout for something like this. *Smooth Stones* is a winner.”

Mike del Rosario, ApologeticsGuy.Com

“Most books on apologetics are too long, too deep, and too complicated. This book has none of these defects. Like its title, it is like a smooth stone from David's apologetic sling directed right to the mind of an enquiring reader”

Norman L. Geisler, Distinguished Professor of Apologetics, Veritas Evangelical Seminary, Murrieta, CA



[Education or Imitation?](#)

Bible Interpretation for Dummies
Like You and Me

by Curtis Allen

**How can we interpret Scripture
rightly?**

**It's less about education
and more about imitation.**

Imitate Jesus.

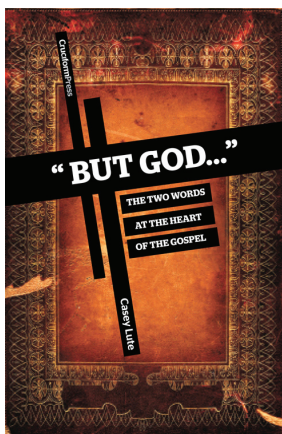
bit.ly/IMITATE

“Gritty. Real. Straight. That’s what you’ll find in Curt Allen’s treatment of Bible interpretation, *Education or Imitation?* And that’s what we need because airy, heady, abstract works on Bible interpretation fail to do the one thing they’re written for—to teach and inspire us to read, interpret, and apply the Bible. If you want it straight, read this book.”

***Thabiti Anyabwile, Author; Senior Pastor, First Baptist Church,
Grand Cayman; Council Member, The Gospel Coalition***

“Curt Allen’s book on interpreting the Bible is wonderfully practical and clear, giving believers basic principles for understanding God’s Word. He rightly emphasizes that every believer can understand the Bible. It isn’t necessary to be a scholar or preacher or to know Greek and Hebrew to grasp the Scriptures. Certainly, we are helped by teachers and scholars, but we can understand the Bible ourselves and need to test whatever others say by the Scriptures. Allen also shows that the Bible is Christ-centered. We are only reading the Bible rightly if we are seeing Jesus Christ, our crucified and risen Lord, in its pages. At the same time, the Bible is not just meant to be understood but to be lived out in our everyday lives. I recommend gladly such an accessible, Christ-centered, and practical book on interpreting the Scriptures..”

***Thomas R. Schreiner, Professor of New Testament Interpretation,
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary***



[“But God...”](#)

The Two Words at the Heart of the Gospel

by Casey Lute

Just two words.

**Understand their use in Scripture,
and you will never be the same.**

100 pages bit.ly/ButGOD

“Keying off of nine occurrences of “But God” in the English Bible, Casey Lute ably opens up Scripture in a manner that is instructive, edifying, encouraging, and convicting. This little book would be useful in family or personal reading, or as a gift to a friend. You will enjoy Casey’s style, you will have a fresh view of some critical Scripture, and your appreciation for God’s mighty grace will be deepened.”

Dan Phillips, Pyromaniacs blog, author of The World-Tilting Gospel (forthcoming from Kregel)

“A refreshingly concise, yet comprehensive biblical theology of grace that left this reader more in awe of the grace of God.”

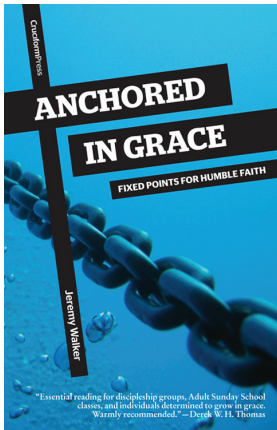
Aaron Armstrong, BloggingTheologically.com

“Casey Lute reminds us that nothing is impossible with God, that we must always reckon with God, and that God brings life out of death and joy out of sorrow.”

Thomas R. Schreiner, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“A mini-theology that will speak to the needs of every reader of this small but powerful book. Read it yourself and you will be blessed. Give it to a friend and you will be a blessing.”

William Varner, Prof. of Biblical Studies, The Master’s College



[Anchored in Grace](#)

Fixed Truths for Humble Faith

by Jeremy Walker

Clear truths from Scripture...

**Central. Humbling. Saving.
Comforting. God-glorifying.**

Get Anchored.

86 pages

bit.ly/ANCHRD

“Rarely does the title of a book so clearly represent its contents as does this one. With brevity and precision, Jeremy Walker sets forth God’s work of salvation in the believer from beginning to end. In a day when there is so much confusion regarding even the most fundamental truths of redemption, this concise yet comprehensive work is a clear beacon of light to guide the seeker and to instruct and comfort the believer.”

Paul David Washer, Director, HeartCry Missionary Society

“As a pastor, I am always looking for a book that is brief, simple, and biblical in its presentation of the God-exalting doctrines of grace to put into the hands of believers. I think my search is now over!”

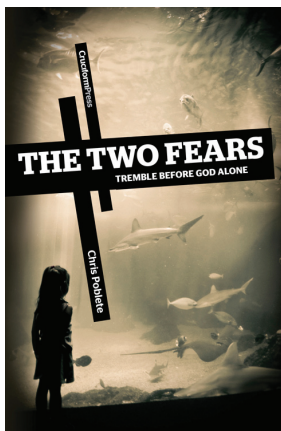
Conrad Mbewe, African Christian University, Lusaka, Zambia

“Crisp, clear, concise, and biblical, Walker’s book offers up the doctrines of God’s grace in a manner persuasive to the mind and powerful to the heart.”

Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Pres., Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

“A sure-footed journey...a trusted guide. Reading this book will both thrill and convict, challenge and confirm. Essential reading for discipleship groups, Adult Sunday School classes, and individuals determined to grow in grace. Warmly recommended.”

Derek W.H. Thomas, Professor, Reformed Theological Seminary



[The Two Fears](#)

Tremble Before God Alone

by Chris Poblete

**You can fear God...
or everything else.**

**Only one fear brings life and hope,
wisdom and joy.**

Fear wisely.

92 pages bit.ly/2Fears

“We are too scared. And we aren’t scared enough. Reading this book will prompt you to seek in your own life the biblical tension between ‘fear not’ and ‘fear God.’”

Russell D. Moore, Dean, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“An importantly counter-cultural book, moving us beyond a homeboy God we could fist-bump to a holy God we can worship. *The Two Fears* helps us recover a biblical fear of God and all the awe, repentance, and freedom from self-centered fears that go with it. An awesome resource!”

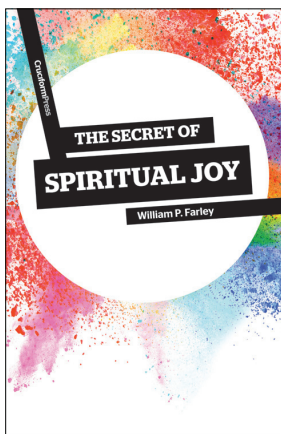
Dr. Thaddeus Williams, professor, Biola University

“In this practical and very readable book, Chris Poblete shows how both the absence of true fear and the presence of ‘unholy [false] fear’ stem from an absence of a knowledge of the awesome God of the Bible, and that, in meeting him, we discover the real dimensions of creational existence and the wonderful benefits of living in fear and deep respect before him, freed from the [false] fear of men.”

Peter Jones, PhD, TruthXchange, Scholar-in-Residence and Adjunct Professor, Westminster Seminary in California

“I commend this book to you: it will fuel your worship and empower your discipleship.”

Gabe Tribbett, Christ’s Covenant Church, Winona Lake, IA



[The Secret of Spiritual Joy](#)

by William P. Farley

There really is a guaranteed path to greater joy.

The secret is gratitude.

To strengthen your confidence in this truth, read this book.

93 pages

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“Is there really one thing, above all else, that can be demonstrated to be the secret? Bill Farley has made his case and it is compelling. Oh, what biblical wisdom is contained in this brief book. Reading it has given me greater earnestness to pursue the path of joy Farley has here mapped so skillfully. May God be pleased to use this book to do the same for innumerable other Christian pilgrims.”

Bruce A. Ware, author; Chairman, Department of Christian Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

“Continuing his explorations of how the biblical gospel both fuels and shapes the cultivation of Christ-like virtues, Bill Farley turns his attention to the joy that sadly seems to elude so many believers. He interweaves solid theology with practical illustrations so that all who read this short but powerful book can emerge with a trustworthy and clear understanding of how to recognize and experience this gracious blessing from the Lord.”

Randal Roberts, President, Western Seminary

“Bill Farley wants to obliterate our propensities for grumbling and self-pity. This may prove to be a dangerous book for those who wallow in dispositions that are antithetical to the Christian gospel.”

Art Azurdia, Senior Minister, Trinity Church (Portland, OR); Director, Doctor of Ministry Program, Western Seminary



[Tom to Heal](#)

God's Good Purpose in Suffering

by Mike Leake

Receive comfort for today.

Be prepared for tomorrow.

87 pages

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Dr. David Murray, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

"Mike Leake has taken the ugliness of suffering, turned it over in his capable hands, and shown God's goodness and faithfulness in the midst. More than simple encouragement, it is a handbook of scriptural truths about Who God is and how He sustains."

Lore Ferguson writes for Gospel Coalition, CBMW, and more

"A gospel-driven path between dualism that acts as if God has lost control of his world and fatalism/stoicism that tries to bury pain beneath emotionless acceptance of whatever happens. The result is a brief but potent primer on the purpose of suffering."

Timothy Paul Jones, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

"Explores God's redemptive purposes in human suffering in a concise, biblical and authentic way. Mike shuns cliches and platitudes to help the reader put life's hardships into divine perspective and to endure in Christ's strength. It is a must-read for Christians in distress."

Dave Miller, Second Vice-President, Southern Baptist Convention