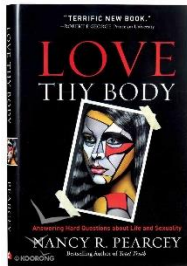




Theology Conversation #3: Living In The Tension Of Grace And Truth

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...full of grace and truth...The law was given by Moses. Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” – John 1:14, 17

Overview Of Our First Two Workshops



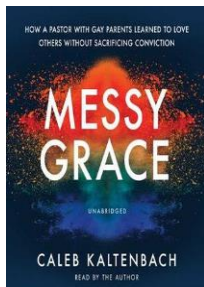
Why Is This Topic So Important To Study Today?

What Does The Bible Have To Say About Sex and Sexuality?

The Collapse Of The Christian Worldview

How Christianity Transformed The Way We Viewed The Body

A Biblical Analysis Of Homosexuality & Transgenderism



Current Understanding of Sexual Orientation & Sexual Fluidity

The Harm Of Pressing Forward With Progressive & Pagan Sexual Practices & Ideology

How Followers Of Christ Can Effectively Engage Culture With The Biblical Worldview

Part 1: Pastor Caleb Kaltenbach

Part 2: Quotes & Notes From “*Messy Grace*”

CHAPTER 1: A COLLISION OF COMMUNITIES

“Jesus’ command to love your neighbor as yourself does not have an exception clause for a gay neighbor...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 should desire. Sometimes relationships start at a low point and go down from there...Messiness is what happens when you try to live our God’s perfect grace as a flawed person in a flawed world.” (5)

“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.” (14)

CHAPTER 2: SAYING YES TO THE MESS

“God has a lot of grace. He has been tremendously gracious to you and me over and over again. In ways we know and in ways we can barely guess at. Without our deserving a single bit of it. The problem is, despite being the recipients of so much grace, most of us still don’t understand much about passing on that grace to others.” (18)

He lists some in Scripture who also had huge problems with grace: Jonah, James & John, David.

He tells the story of his two lesbian moms and his gay dad.

Then he tells the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (in John 8:1-11). The way Jesus treated this woman is the model we are to follow of simultaneously offering *grace and truth*.

“It’s a good thing Jesus didn’t decided that we were too messy to get involved with. The Bible tells us, ‘*While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*’ (Rom.5:8). While we were still sinners...not when we had it all together. Not when we were moral and clean-cut and smelled good. Not when we started attending church. Not when we started acting the way Christians act... (31)

CHAPTER 3: THE RIGHT KIND OF PURSUIT

“We should be pursuing relationships with members of the LGBT community the same way God pursues us. In love, not hate.” (37)

He describes Christians yelling angrily at Gay Pride parades his mother and Vera took him to as a child.

Through Jesus’ example and teaching, the lost “...now learned that God was chasing after them. God was aware of them. God loved them. As helpless as they were in their spiritual state, God was there to guide them into a better life.” (43)

“Spend time with people who are different from you. Befriend people who have different political beliefs. Go out to lunch with people who have different values than you. Invite people from different religious backgrounds to your house for dinner. Go to parties attended by gay men and lesbians who don’t believe in God. In other words, get out of your comfort zone and pursue others.” (48-49)

CHAPTER 4: US VERSUS THEM?

“Some Christians are completely against mingling faith and politics. I’m not necessarily opposed to it. After all, the Bible says God sent many of his messengers to kings and governmental authorities. God also put his people in positions of power dash people such as Joseph, Esther, Daniel, and others.” (55)

“I understand that while we don't have physical persecution, there is a sense in which religious liberty is being challenged more and more...I think we can expect more of the same...Yet this kind of opposition is nothing new...From the days of Paul, the principles of the gospel have always stood in stark contrast to culture. This is something we have to expect in our culture.” (58)

“I believe strongly in standing up for and teaching Christ-centered values. However it seems that while many of us are teaching Christ-centered values, we are quick to turn our backs on those who disagree with us. If Jesus called the people of his day to love and be kind to an army that literally could kill them, how much more should we have a loving attitude toward people today? The gospel isn't about who God is against. It's about who God is for.” (58)

“Did you know there are actually several traits that the LGBT community and Christian community have in common? Such as:

Creative / A love for people / A strong sense of justice / Strongly committed to their cause / Staging events focused on their cause / Vocal about defending what they believe / Intentional about sharing views with others / Committed to community and doing life together / Unashamed to be recognized for what they believe in / Joining groups that help them better understand what and why they believe / Developing their own resources around their community: books, movies, music, etc.

“Please get this: People are not the enemy. They are the mission. I’m not saying they are objects or pet projects. Rather, we need to value people and let them know how much God loves them. No matter what kinds of people you are talking about, regardless of anything (gender, ethnicity, sexuality, work, and so forth), people are always the mission. We need to figure out how to find connecting links with them.” (69)

CHAPTER 5: THE POWER OF TOUCH

A chapter that explores Jesus’ example of personal, compassionate ministry to the broken lives he encountered, and how we might imitate his example.

CHAPTER 6: NO COMPROMISE

The chapter where Caleb now focuses on the “truth” side of the equation, by clearly outlining in detail his “theology of sexual ethics” (i.e. the biblical view of sexuality).

“We live in a time when we will be called bigots and narrow-minded for holding onto what we believe the Bible says. I say, so be it. Remember that when we live in the tension of grace and truth, there will be times when we side with grace and seem overly gracious. Then when we side with the truth of an issue, those same people who thought we were too gracious may now think we're too strict. If that seems confusing and maybe even a bit uncomfortable, that means you're starting to understand how the tension is necessary to walk in, and harder than simply always siding with grace or truth. I believe the tension proves that you can't have real grace without truth, and you can't have real truth without grace.” (95)

CHAPTER 7: THE MARRIAGE OF GRACE AND TRUTH

“Is it possible to hold on to one's beliefs in regard to a biblical view of sexuality and still love a person who is actively in a same-sex relationship? Yes! Look at the people Jesus loved even while they were still living a life contrary to what God said... Jesus was able to love these people and yet still hold on to his beliefs. Nowhere in the Bible do I notice Jesus trying to align his beliefs with what the world believes. That's what made him stand out from culture. Dare I say that's what made him so interesting to people?” (97)

“Knowing and embracing biblical truth about same-sex issues should make us more loving toward the LGBT community than ever.” (98)

He examines the love of the father in the story of the Prodigal Son.

“Christians need to have this same kind of love...that is patient and allows people to be themselves as they begin to discover who they are (or can be) in Jesus Christ. This love is founded in the messy marriage of grace and truth.” (106)

“We can *accept* others as friends or family without *approving* of their life choice... To approve of something means that you're throwing your support behind an action, a lifestyle, or a thing. It's possible to accept people without approving of their decisions or how they live life. Jesus did it all the time.” (107)

CHAPTER 8: CHOOSE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

“It's much easier to get along with someone in the LGBT community if you agree that sexuality doesn't have to be expressed just between a man and a woman. Believe me, I know how tempting it is to avoid the conflict and just go along with whatever the culture is promoting...What really hurts is when gay individuals you care about don't want anything more to do with you once they find out you believe that sexual intimacy is to be only between a man and a woman... But if a gay man or lesbian in your life essentially says, “*Either you accept this part of my life or you leave me alone,*” then there can be only

one right choice for you as a follower of Christ. You have to hold fast to what Scripture teaches on sexuality, regardless of the cost to your relationship with another person. (115)

He shares the story of his conversion and how he spoke to his Mom and Dad about it.

“When I think back on it, the reaction my parents had toward me “coming out” to them as a Christian and wanting to be a pastor was similar to what most heterosexual parents do when they discover their child is gay. It was the same amount of outrage and rejection...The hostility over the subject lasted for more than 20 years.” (124)

“Sometimes when you are dedicated to God and you follow him, you lose relationships. Sometimes when you share the truth with people and it doesn't go over well, the relationship is never the same... Jesus promises that if we choose him over any other relationship, he will bless us with persecutions (opportunities to stand up for him), but also we will have more relationships.” (125).

CHAPTER 9: ANOTHER WAY

In this chapter, Caleb makes the case why celibacy is the appropriate path for a Christian who is gay.

CHAPTER 10: A MESSY CHURCH

Think about your church and ask yourself if it's a place where it's OK for people to say things like:

- I'm an addict and I want to know my next step.
- I can't handle my finances.
- I'm struggling with porn.
- I'm not doing well in my marriage.
- I gossip and feel better when I run people down.
- I'm having issues with my kids.
- I'm struggling with my sexuality.
- I'm gay. (151)

“Hear me on this. The church should be the first place someone would go for conversations like these. Yet for many it's the last place. Why in the world would anyone go to a group of people who would make them feel guilty and worse for what they are struggling with? Instead of going to church, they will go to other places to share their struggles and feelings – and a lot of those places are not good. Or if they go to church and just keep their secret to themselves, they don't heal, because nobody can heal from something they don't own. It's a sad state.” (152)

In a messy church, Christians “...won't expect you to be perfect. They will give you room to work out the struggles between you and God. They don't view themselves as God's moral security team but instead are more than happy to walk alongside you in the journey. If it gets confusing sometimes when they try to show both grace and truth, well, that's the way it goes. You have to live in the tension.” (152)

“If our churches are places where people can't be honest, we are creating sanctuaries for fake people. Ultimately, our churches become Pharisee factories.” (153)

In the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:10-14, Caleb observes these traits in the tax collector:

He loves God. / He acknowledges that he fails God. / He calls himself a sinner. / He owns his junk. / His sin is causing him emotional and physical pain. / He admits to doing things that God says not to. / He struggles with sadness over his sin. / He understands that his life depends on God's mercy. / He is so humble that he doesn't make a show of his prayer. / He doesn't feel worthy on his own to approach God.

“I believe all of us have to fight a legalistic, insider spiritual gravitational pull so that we do not become the Pharisee. We need to hold on to the traits of the tax collector.” (159-161)

“I believe the gospel of Jesus Christ is messy...The gospel looks messy because it can lead the lives becoming harder, not easier. We are called to love and reach the same kinds of people Jesus did – and that will always be met with criticism... The gospel of Jesus Christ is worth whatever mass it may seem to cause, because it changes lives. It is the only source in existence that changes lives for the better and keeps them better.” (162)

“In my view, a good church is one that is willing to talk about any and every scenario. In our culture, churches need to know where they stand and the leadership needs to be unified...Here are some questions for you and your church to answer:

- Would you allow a same-sex couple to attend your church?
- What would your reaction be if two men were holding hands in the lobby?
- Could a lesbian couple who attend your church also attend a parenting class?
- Could an LGBT couple attend a community group or Bible study?
- Could an LGBT couple serve anywhere in your church? If so, where? Why or why not?
- What if a lesbian wanted to be baptized?

He gives a dozen more examples of questions like this. Of this he says:

“My point is not to suggest an answer to any of these questions. Rather my question is: Have churches sat down to have these conversations? If church leadership is willing to have these discussions, they are thinking on a different level than the leaders of most churches in America...

“Churches that ignore the issues of our current culture and stay in their safe bubble will eventually die – and they probably should...Pray. Model the change you want to see. Respectfully but firmly keep pushing for holy messiness where you worship. You just might see your church become a body of people God uses to transform others for his glory.” (167)

CHAPTER 11: TRUTH TO TELL

“It's funny that so many of us Christians say we want friends who are different from us so we can share Christ with them, but when we get them in our lives, we end up sending them away because we're too uncomfortable around them. Come to think of it, that's not funny at all. It's tragic. A lot of Christians, especially Christian men, are uncomfortable around people from the LGBT community. And so they shun them. Or even worse. In cases like this, the label homophobia – fear of homosexuals – is justified.” (169)

“The most effective evangelism with people who make you feel uncomfortable takes place within the context of a relationship. This may be even more important for the LGBT community than for most others, since this is a community that is felt unheard, misunderstood, mistreated, and falsely characterized for years. I think that many Christians have some apologizing to do to the LGBT community...” (170)

On pp. 177-182 he gives advice for how to share God's truth with others, first studying how Jesus approached the Samaritan woman in John 4, and then secondly, talking about the need to see others as people, not projects. About the woman at the well:

This is a great example of grace and truth...Notice a few things. First, there is such a thing as good theology and bad theology...Jesus upheld good theology...I believe he was saying all of this to entice the woman to dive deeper into the conversation. He wasn't put off by what she done. Jesus didn't take a moment to chew her out as he was talking to her. He definitely wanted her to own her past, but her past did not have to keep her from him. He was drawing her in...When he saw this woman, he did not see her as somebody who made him feel uncomfortable. He did not identify her as somebody he had to work on. He did not view her as somebody who might take up too much of his time. He looked at her as a person – a person who needed to know God's love.

CHAPTER 12: A NEW ID

“I've hinted at it before in the book, and now it's time to come out and say it: Christians need to stop trying to convert people's sexuality. It isn't our job to change someone's sexual orientation. You and I are not called by God to make gay people straight. It is our job to lead anyone and everyone to Christ. I believe God is big enough to deal with a person's sexuality.” (185)

“We make the mistake of thinking that being gay is something we can tell people to just stop doing. We can tell people to stop stealing things, to stop cheating on their spouse, to stop looking at porn, to stop gossiping, and much more... Homosexuality is different. It is more of an identity for the person than anything else. The person identifies as gay or lesbian and identifies with the LGBT community. So we shouldn't try to make gay people straight. Instead we should try to help people whose overriding identity is LGBT to become people whose overriding identity is disciple. They can replace a false identity with a true identity in Christ.” (186)

“When most Christians tell someone in the gay community, ‘Stop being gay,’ what they really mean is, ‘Stop having sex with someone of the same gender.’ Yet here's what the person who is gay might think: *You want me to give up my feelings, partner, friends, cause, movement, community, and more.* Being gay is so much more than just who they have sex with – it's about friends, community, a cause, and deep feelings. It's about identity.” (191)

“We are disciples. Before anything else, we follow Jesus. Our identity is in no one and nothing else. So our mission is to help people trade the identity they have created for Christ's identity... God never created sexuality to define us. God never intended family, work, politics, sports teams, hobbies, and the like to define us. God created us for himself, to be defined by himself.” (193, 194)

“I get asked a lot: Can someone be LGBT and go to heaven? The answer: Yes!... I think if we're going to ask that question, then we have to ask if someone can be an alcoholic and go to heaven. Can someone be addicted to drugs and go to heaven? Can someone be a gossip and go to heaven? Can someone be a worrier and go to heaven? Can someone be jealous of others and go to heaven? Can someone be an arrogant know-it-all Christian and go to heaven? Most Christians I know wouldn't have an issue with saying that any one of those people could go to heaven, but for some reason, when it comes to homosexuality, some think that is too tall an order for God.” (195, 196)

“There is a difference between someone who identifies as LGBT and is sold out to Jesus and someone who is LGBT and isn't following Christ. There's a difference between someone who's honestly struggling to understand and accept what the Bible says about the issue of homosexuality and someone who doesn't care what the Bible has to say. There's a difference between a Christian who is trying to be sexually pure but slips up occasionally and someone who is freely indulging her same-sex passions.” (196)

“What about those who say they love Jesus, claim to believe in the Bible, and attend church regularly and meanwhile are in a loving gay relationship? Are they saved? What should our reaction be? I'm not sure where you are supposed to be the judges of other's salvation. That matter is between them and God. I do think, however, that we can be discerning of the fruit that others are bearing. Consistent resistance to living for God, whether in regard to sexual morality or something else, should be concerning. We don't need to judge. But if conversations on sexuality come up and we have the standing with the person to talk about it, then we should graciously stand for what God's Word says. That's not because we're busybodies but because we want what's best for the other.” (196-197)

“We need to know that for some people it will be a lifelong journey that will be messy, but they need people to walk with them... There's a big difference between someone...who says, “I have these feelings but I choose to live for Christ” and someone who says, “I have these feelings and I'm going to live my life the way I want, no matter what God's word says.” (198, 200)

He shares the story of Carlton, a man in his church, who said to him, “I don't know if I'll ever be able to change. I believe that the answer for me is celibacy. God will give me the strength to live for him. When I die, I may still have gay feelings and I may still be attracted to men. But because I believe what scripture says about homosexuality, giving up my sexual activity is a small price to pay compared to what Jesus did for me on the cross.”

Part 3: Questions To Ponder And Discuss

1. Why would followers of Christ struggle to give grace to others? We're followers of the most gracious man ever, says Caleb. On pp.7-10, Caleb offers 4 reasons of his own. What are your thoughts?

2. In John 8:1-11 is the story of Jesus facing the woman caught in adultery. What lessons do we find in this story about offering *grace and truth* to others?

3. *"Spend time with people who are different from you."* How do you react to Caleb's admonition? If you struggle with this, what changes could you make in your life so that this would happen more often?

4. In chapter 4, Kaltenbach lists several similarities between Christians and the LGBT community. What are some of those things? And what point is he trying to make here?

5. Caleb writes in chapter 7, *"Knowing and embracing biblical truth about same-sex issues should make us more loving toward the LGBT community than ever."* Why would this be true?

6. How does a person hold on to their beliefs in regards to a biblical view of sexuality and still love a person who is actively in a same-sex relationship? What ideas have you thought of in reading this book?

7. Are we the kind of church where people can admit their brokenness in the way that Caleb describes on p.151?

8. What should a “messy church” look like? And how do we keep our church from becoming a “Pharisee factory”?

9. How is the gospel “messy”? And what examples come to mind in Scripture of messy people whom the gospel changed?

10. What does Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4 have to teach us about our own conversations with sexually broken people?

11. Caleb writes, *“The most effective evangelism with people who make you feel uncomfortable takes place within the context of a relationship.”* What advice would he give for how to start and strengthen those relationships?

12. In our interactions with LGBT people, and in our church interactions with those who come through our doors, how exactly do we have these conversations? Do we “hide away” our convictions early on for fear of chasing them away before a relationship has been established? Or do we bring it up every time we talk, for fear of dishonoring the gospel?

13. What would you say to a person who says that any thought of homosexuality being inappropriate or sinful is 'homophobic' or 'hateful'?

14. Here we are in what's been become known as "Pride" month where it seems everyone and everything around us is promoting the LGBT lifestyle as deserving of support and celebration. How should a follower of Christ react to this cultural sea change?

15. We've been making the point in our earlier workshops that there is a difference between official LGBT leaders, lawyers and lobbyists who are actively working across the board to advance their agenda in government halls, media, schools, corporations, etc. and the person who cares little for that, but walks into our churches and lives struggling with their sexuality. Do you agree with that distinction? Is it possible to push back at the agenda, without pushing away the struggling person?

16. What is your assessment of the Equality Act? What are your thoughts on followers of Christ being involved in the political arena?

17. Our church recently amended its bylaws. With the recommendation of a number of Christian legal organizations, we inserted a "Religious Liberty" clause into it, identifying our belief in the classical and biblical view of sexuality and marriage. How would you advise churches struggling to know how to protect themselves from this growing cultural pressure?

18. Chapter 12 is loaded with thought-provoking, soul-stretching ideas! Caleb says that homosexuality is more an identity for a person than anything else. What do you think he is saying? Is this any different from someone who is an addict or alcoholic or prone to any other habitual sin?

19. Caleb also says in chapter 12 that Christians shouldn't try to convert people's sexuality. It's not our job to make gay people straight, but to lead them to Christ, who will take care of their sexuality. But how do we call a person to repentance and to Christ without also calling out the sins they are practicing (as did John the Baptist, and Jesus, and Paul)?

20. How do youth leaders talk about these areas in their area of ministry? How do parents talk with their children about these topics?

21. How do we respond to LGBT members who say they are Christians but reject biblical sexual teaching and are "all-in" with embracing their LGBT identity?

22. While seeking to build and maintain relational credibility with trans friends, how should I think about the use or not of their preferred pronouns when I feel that not using them will damage my credibility, but using them makes me party to the delusion that they are stuck in which is likely to kill them or at least significantly damage their lives?