Caleb Testimony

Part 2 of 2: Ministering to the LGBT Community
with Darrell L. Bock and Caleb Kaltenbach
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Dr. Bock: How did the story move from the point where you’re a Christian pursuing ministry, I take it you get married during this time as well, and you come to the point where their interest and openness to the church changes, and do you have any sense about how and if the way you were relating to them was a part of that story?

Caleb: When I was in Bible College, I preached at a lot of different churches. That’s one great thing, Dr. Bock, about going to a small Bible college in southern Missouri; you have all these like really small churches you can go learn how to preach in. The first church I preached at had six people, the youngest one was 60, and they wanted to start a youth group, so it was going to be an amazing –

Dr. Bock: That’s exactly right. I preached in a church in Scotland that you’re reminding of where the organ player was probably in her 80’s and she did this wonderful introduction, flying through the keys, and all of the sudden when she hit the hymn, everything slowed down and I thought I had gone to a funeral. You know, I’m going man, I wish she’d just kept playing the way you were playing, what is it about a hymn that makes you slow things down, and you know, there were probably 20 people in the audience, and I don’t think there was anyone under 65, so I know what you’re talking about.
Caleb

Yeah, so the second church I preached at, I preached at for 18 months and moved up in the world. We had 25 people in the church, and it was a church in – it was in a small town in Missouri, 50 people in the town, 25 of those people were in the church, we were the largest church per capita in the entire world at that time. And so I preached there for a year and a half and I kept on trying to get my mom to come with me to church, and finally she came one day, came and worshiped with us, and I preached, and it was a weird experience. We had a lady that got up and played on the keyboard, and she had never had a music lesson in her life, Dr. Bock, she just banged the keys, whatever key she felt like, and that was okay with everybody. And so I got up and I preached and asked my mom to come back, and she said no, I don’t think so, and so I really didn’t blame her, but I understood. So the next Sunday I show up at this church and a couple of the elders are waiting for me out on the door step when I get there, and they say Caleb we’d like to talk to you, and I said okay. And so they took me to the back room, which our church only had two rooms, the sanctuary and the back room, so we went into the back room and they say Caleb, if you want to keep preaching here, don’t you ever bring somebody like your mom again. And they said we don’t like those kind of people, that’s not what we’re about. And I quit on that day. I said I’m not going to be a part of that, I don’t want to have anything to do with that, and I walked out of there, and I just said this is not what Christianity is supposed to be all about. And so my mom’s impact with the church, or relationship with the Church was just up and down. I mean, you know, she went from being a Quaker to Wicca, trying out Methodist, going back to Quaker, going back to Wicca, Vera was a Buddhist for a while, so she tried that. And then she came with me this one time to church and she didn’t go at all after that. When I got married, she went with me to church because that’s where I got married at, and she and Vera didn’t go again after that. The next time they attended church, or my mom attended church, I believe, was probably February, 2011, February, 2011. The whole church incident, the last time she went to church with me when I quit my church was sometime in 1999 – no, 1998. And so the next time she set foot in church was 13 years later.

Dr. Bock

Do you have any idea what caused her to do it?

Caleb

Well, yeah, we had moved to Dallas and she wanted to be close with our family and she knew that church was a big part of our life, and so she said, “Do you mind if I start coming to church with you?”
Dr. Bock

So she was just being supportive of you in some ways?

Caleb

Um hum, and I said, “Sure. You know what I preach?” “Yeah.” “You know that I don’t agree with your lifestyle?” “Yeah.” “All right. Come on, love to have you.” And so she started attending. And then my dad moved, later on in November 2011, and he started attending, and they were there every single Sunday, they hardly ever missed a Sunday. Many times I’d go pick up my mom and take her to church with me. And so that was just kind of the environment that I was in in Dallas was my parents all of the sudden who were so against church were now begging me to take them with me to my church. And God did something in their lives. And my relationship, I’m not going to lie Dr. Bock, especially with my mother, is incredibly, incredibly complicated. There were a lot of issues in the past. I’m not going to pretend that it’s not. But to see what God did in their life and to see how God could take this whole mess of a divorce in 1980 and then flip it upside down some 33 years later astounds me; you know? It just shows the power of God and sovereignty of God and everything working out in his plan the way that he wants it to happen.

Dr. Bock

So they now are attending church on their own, because you’re out there in California and they’re still here in Texas; have I got that right?

Caleb

Yeah, my mom gets out of the house some of the times, she goes to bible study in her retirement community. I think she may have been to church a couple times. My dad when he goes, he goes to Stonebriar Community Church in Frisco, Texas, and so they, you know, enjoy it. And what’s so funny is here’s Chuck Swindoll, somebody that they used to listen to on the radio and make fun of, and now when my dad goes to church, he goes to his church. I’m just thinking wow, God, that’s – you’ve definitely got irony as a gift from you. I don’t know what else to say.
**Dr. Bock**

Well, that’s quite a story. The way I want to kind of pull this together as we’re moving towards wrapping up is what lessons would you or things would you say to people – I mean, obviously, the story, your story is a very unique kind of story in some ways, although it’s becoming more common, and for most people to have lived in that world and to have had that kind of way of being raised would just – it’s a different plant in some ways. So, what would you say to Christian people who are concerned about reaching out and ministering and having a mission to and engaging and getting to know people from the LBGT community?

**Caleb**

Here are some lessons that I would say that I’ve learned that I’ve taken away from this. Number one, don’t treat people like projects. Everybody knows when they’re being treated like a project and they don’t like it, and I know that we learn all these new fancy evangelistic moves from all these training, you know, seminars and DVDs that we have, but just treat a person like a person, you’ll be amazed to see what happens. So that’s the first thing I would say. Number two, I would say learn that there’s a difference between acceptance and approval. We’re called to accept everybody. Here at Discovery Church, we want to be a church that unchurched people love to attend. We want to be a church that is for everybody. As Jud Wilhite says at Central Christian Church, a church where it’s okay not to be okay. And so we accept everybody, doesn’t matter who you are or what you’ve done. It might matter if you’re a Cowboys fan, but other than that, you can come to church here. But there’s a difference between acceptance and approval. I can accept anybody, that doesn’t mean I have to approve of their lifestyle. I mean, I accept a lot of people in my family, but I don’t approve of what they do. And so I think that sometimes Christians – some Christians that I’ve talked to at least think okay, if I’m loving towards somebody who’s in the LBGT community, does that mean that, you know, I’m saying that everything they’re doing is okay. No, it means you’re treating them like a human being, it means that you’re loving them, it means that you’re treating them like God would want you to treat them, it means that you’re accepting them. That doesn’t mean you have to approve of them. So that’s the second thing I would say. Another thing that I would say, which is really, really huge, and we might need to talk this one out just briefly.

**Dr. Bock**

Okay.
And hear me out on this. I believe that the lifestyle is a sin, I do, I totally believe in Romans 1 and First Corinthians 6, and you go down the list, I believe it all; okay? However, we’ve got to quit focusing so much on behavior. Christians focus so much on behavior and behavior modification that we think okay, we need to make them straight before we give them to Jesus. I don’t know, and again, I understand the theology of it, I’m not sure that I understand all the ministry of it yet. And I think all of us are still learning that together; right? That’s what Northpoint said. Northpoint said it very well. We understand where we are theologically, but we’re still wondering where we are ministry-wise, we’re trying to figure that out. And so when I say what I say about behavior modification, when we tell somebody in that community, when we say okay, we want you to stop being gay, quit being gay, here’s what the Christian is saying, “Quit having sex with somebody of the same gender. God says not to.” Here’s what the person that you’re talking to in the LGBT community hears, “Okay you want me to give up a relationship with somebody I love. You want me to give up my friends. You want me to give up a movement that I believe in. You want me to give up a community and my home. You want me to give all that up.” You see, and most Christians are just thinking okay, just give up having sex with somebody of the same gender, and it’s more than that. I mean, my mother and her partner, don’t ask me how I know this, because I really don’t want to go into that, but my mother said that she and her partner were not sexually active the last several years of their relationship, and yet they still identified themselves as lesbian. And so that tells me something, that identifying with the LGBT community is maybe about 10% about sex and the rest of it is about a whole lot of other things, and all of it is wrapped into identity. And so I think the key here is not to focus so much on hey, we need – you need to stop having sex with people of the same gender. I mean, do I believe there’s a place for that conversation? Absolutely I do; right? I mean eventually there will be, you know, talk about that, but we need to focus on helping people switch their identity from this to Jesus. And so instead of saying hey, like my mom would always say, “My name is Mary Lou and I’m a lesbian, my name is Mary Lou and I’m a lesbian, my name is Mary Lou.” Okay, first and foremost, you’re a follower of Jesus Christ. First and foremost, you’re a follower of Jesus, that’s your identity. Your identity is not wrapped up in your sexuality; it’s not wrapped up in your work; it’s not wrapped up in your accomplishments or your sports; it’s not wrapped up in what you like to do to have fun; you know? And so many of us, this is not just an LGBT thing, we wrap our identity up in everything else other than Jesus. And so when I look at the LGBT community and especially those who don’t believe in Jesus, they have wrapped up their identity within that community. The problem is, as you know, Dr. Bock, that’s going to fail, it’s going to fail eventually. The only one that doesn’t fail us is Jesus. So I think that part of what we need to do, and I think this is probably different for every single person we encounter because people are different, help people switch their identity from whatever false...
Dr. Bock: Yeah, it does, and it raises a question, something we’ve discussed on several podcasts, we’ve discussed same sex issues, and it kind of goes like this, and I’d like to hear your take on this because really what we see are people who say you’re identity has got to change, that’s one thing. There’s a whole other discussion that involves a group that says I’ve tried to go there and I can’t. I like to make this distinction, that some people are hard-wired for attraction and other people are soft-wired for attraction. Those are not the same; those are not the same places to be. The person who is soft-wired, if you will, can change and say all right, I have this attraction, but I can relate to women or I can relate to men, I can relate heterosexually. A person who is hard-wired is there, and they make the effort to change and the attraction is still there, etc. So then the question becomes how does there movement towards a Christian identity, if they’re moving in that direction, interact with their – the hard-wired nature of their relationship and their proclivities, if I can say it that way? And I like to make analogies. I like to make analogies with, you know, there are lots of men who wrestle with lust, I mean we know this, but just because they’re hard-wired that way doesn’t mean they necessarily act on it. There are certain people who are hard-wired that if they drink alcohol, they’re going to drink a lot of alcohol, they’re going to have a proclivity to get drunk, but it doesn’t mean they act on that hard-wire that’s a part of who they are. So how do you help people to think through those kinds of differences, even within the LGBT community?
Caleb

Yeah, so we have people at our church who attend our church and they are open and practicing, they are not members – not in places of leadership, but they’re welcome, you know, we want everybody here, so we welcome everybody to come. There are times when we do have to have tough conversations, and we do have those. But to me, to kind of start to answer the question that you asked, to kind of take the analogies that you were talking about a little bit further, there’s a big difference between somebody who says, “Hey, you know, this is how I feel and I’m going to engage in this sin and I’m going to engage in this lifestyle, and I know what God’s word has to say about it, but I don’t care, I’m just going to do it anyway and hopefully God is not going to have a problem with it, I’m just going to keep on going.” There’s a difference between this person over here versus this person over here who says, “Hey, I love God, I love Jesus and I have these feelings and I struggle with them and I don’t know what to do with that; I don’t know how to give it over.” There’s a difference between a person who continues to struggle with God and who continues to seek God’s word and who continues to seek what God has to say, because you cannot ignore the way that God set up the family, the way God set up marriage between one woman and one man, you can’t ignore New Testament passages or even some of the application and relevancy of Old Testament passages, you can’t ignore this. And so people who struggle realize that there’s such a big difference between those people and the people over here who just say this is how I feel so I’m just going to act on it.

Dr. Bock

So the point I think I’m hearing in what you’re saying is that it’s important to be aware of the different kinds of people that you’re going to meet that come out of this community and where they’re coming from?
Absolutely, I mean, you know, because let’s be honest, I mean I try to be grace-filled as much as I can because God’s word talks about being grace-filled, but if we’re going to be honest, Dr. Bock, there comes a point to where listen, I don’t agree with engaging in this lifestyle because of what God’s word says. I mean, trust me, I have looked all over and I’ve read books over and over again to try to find something that would say that it would be okay to be in this lifestyle, but I don’t see it scripturally or exegetically, I don’t think anything proves it. And so because of that, I’ve got to hold onto God’s word. Now, you know, the bigger question is okay, what about somebody who genuinely loves God, right, and who loves the Bible and goes to church on a regular basis but they’re in a monogamous open relationship with somebody of the same gender, you know, what about that person? That one is rough, because the Bible is still very clear on what it says about homosexuality; right? I mean, you cannot get away from that. But also you see that the love that they have for Jesus in their heart, I see these people, I know some of these people, and I know, you know, how they feel, and yet that they feel like it’s okay, and I don’t believe it’s okay, but I wonder how God handles that in their lives? I don’t know if there’s some kind of discipline in their life that he enacts or what, but – I don’t know if anything I’m saying makes sense, but it’s a difficult – that’s a difficult avenue because I’m not justifying it. It’s still absolutely a sinful lifestyle, but at the same time, you have somebody who loves Jesus, you know, I’m not saying that Jesus blesses it and makes it okay. Again, here I am trying to –
Dr. Bock

No, I think you’re articulating a tension that a lot of people feel in thinking through this, and you know, I actually had a conversation with a – if I said the name of this person, most people would know who it is, a well-known national reporter who covers religion – has covered religion all her life was at a conference this week, and we were discussing this particular issue, and she was dealing with people in offices, journalistic offices, that she knew, you know, she said the boss of a friend of hers was in a committed relationship for 10 years. It was a same sex relationship, and she says I just don’t have the heart to tell him that it’s wrong and that he can’t have that relationship. And my response was, I said I get that, I get the tension that you feel in that situation, particularly since the two people have been, you know, faithful to one another in one sense of the term, but I said the other thing is that there are different ways to love people. People aren’t saying – people are not saying we are preventing you from loving this person who you’ve learned to care about, but there are different ways to love people, and just because I’m able to do it doesn’t mean that it’s good or healthy for me to do it. And I think that the church wrestles with how to send that kind of a message. And even though there is in one sense from one perspective a sacrifice that’s involved in stepping back in that relationship to a certain degree, in the long run, if you step back from a behavior that the scripture has said isn’t a healthy behavior, you’ve done a positive thing. Another discussion I’ve had with someone else involves well, why are these people – some of these people will say they’re – you know, they’ll still talk about themselves as gay people, even though they’re believers. And what I said to this person was well, you’ve got to understand that part of what you’re getting here is actually an incredible level of honesty. What they are saying is this is who I am, this is my identity, this is the way I’m wired – I’m talking about a hard-wired situation here – and I’m not going back and deny that that’s the way I’m wired because that’s what I am going through. But I also know, and these are people who are gay but have chosen to live celibate lifestyles because they believe what the Bible says and they’ve decided to honor the Lord, and so I’m gay on the one hand, I can’t deny that’s where I’m coming from, but I have learned through the grace of God that honoring God is the greater priority, and that’s the way I’ve oriented my life. And so that’s a whole different way of thinking about this kind of area. So I was saying to this person don’t give that person a hard time for saying that they’re gay. They’re actually trying to make a very important honest statement, and then they are prioritizing that sense of who they are with their commitment to God. And as long as they’ve got ordered properly, they’re no different than the alcoholic who says I’m never going to take another drink, because what they’ve done is they have ordered the way they have to live because they understand who they are without God, and if they don’t live in a way that honors Him, they will be in a place that they really don’t need to be.
Yeah, so I think it was Senator Rob Portman of Ohio, I’m not sure, so if it’s not, forgive me, but it was senator in Ohio whose son actually came out as a gay man to him just not too long ago. And so before Senator Portman’s son came out, he was, you know, all the way over here, he was, you know, I’m traditional family values, going to vote traditional family values, but when his son came out, something happened. There was a switch at that point. And so, you know, he always identified as somebody who believed in Jesus and the Christian and traditional family values, but when all of the sudden, you know, this whole community was right over here into his personal experience, here he was, and he felt like okay, I have to choose one or the other. And so now, he’s not a traditional family values mindset, you know, he’s still a senator, but has changed his views on a lot of that. And that’s what a lot of people do; right? Somebody they know and love comes out to them and they say okay, either I love them or I hold onto my Christian beliefs, and I can’t do both. And I think what you and I are trying to say is yes you can do both. That’s part of the tension of grace and truth. And it’s easy to talk about this and it’s easy to talk about, you know, a nameless community out there and the theology of it and the sin in between seminary classes or even with other pastors and have conversations like this, but when it’s somebody that you know and love in your family, or when it’s somebody that you know and love in your congregation and they come out to you, all of the sudden it gets real, in that moment.
Dr. Bock And that’s actually why we did this particular podcast, because we’ve done several podcasts talking with counselors and people who spent their lives studying this area, ministry leaders, that kind of thing, about how this works, almost as a kind of abstract exercise in theology, even though it wasn’t that because these people who we’re talking to have spent hours ministering in these areas and working with people out of these communities and in fact trying – we’ve tried hard to personalize the conversation so that people get it. And the reason I’m so thrilled that you’re willing to talk about this is because it kind of vividly puts a very concrete example in front of someone that we can kind of take a hard long look at, and you can feel the story. I mean, just imagine, I’m talking to people now who are listening, just imagine your being in that house with Caleb, just image what that is like and what you’re facing, and you can put yourself in the position of any one of the people that we’ve been describing, whether it’s Caleb or Vera or Mary Lou or his dad, you know, the dynamics there, and these are real, real choices people are constantly facing and having to deal with. And making it very real, very vivid, putting flesh and blood, really, on what we’ve been talking about from a slightly greater distance, but still trying to work through the tensions in the same kind of way. My sense is that the church has wrestled with this and is wrestling and will continue to wrestle with it; it’s not an easy issue; it’s not something that has very clean and easy answers. It’s an exercise of knowing where your standards and moral view are, where your commitment to God put you on the one hand, but kind of feeling your way on how to negotiate it at a personal level when you know it’s a walk that is filled with an element of tension in virtually every step.

Caleb Absolutely, and that tension of grace and truth and, you know, holding up exactly what God’s word says but saying I can still love a person, I can still treat a person like an actual person and I can still share Christ with that person and live life with that person.
Dr. Bock  Yeah, our hope is that a conversation like this on this kind of a sensitive topic really will help all of us think through the many choices that many of us are going to be facing really on a more regular basis because as this becomes more and more an element of our culture, and that’s definitely what’s happening and where we’re going, these kinds of choices and these kinds of relationships, these kinds of contacts are going to build. And you know, it may not happen in your family, but it may be quite likely that your child grows up in a situation where they have a friend who comes out of this context or some variation like that. That’s going to happen more commonly, and we’re going to have to wrestle with how to do these relationships and engage them and do them in ways that honor God on the one hand, extend the invitation to gospel on the other. Stand up for some sense of what is healthy in terms of human flourishing and the human condition on the other; love well; know how to even have that challenging conversation, those moments where you say I don’t think this is right, but I’m going to distinguish between engaging you and accepting you as a person and approving of what you do, those kinds of distinctions, all are going to be a very important part of the conversation. So I really do thank you, Caleb, for taking the time to kind of walk us through your life and what it’s been like. And of course, yours is but one story, you know, I imagine if we had two, three, four, five other people who had been through experiences in kind like yours, they’d all be a little different and they’d all have different kinds of elements and little tensions to them. This is not, you know, a one size fits all thing. Part of what we’ve been trying to show here is the variety of circumstances people walk into because some people are here, wired in that orientation, others have fallen into the lifestyle for one reason or another and may not be as hard-wired into it, but part of the reason I thought your story was so interesting is you are someone who found themselves in this situation. You didn’t choose to be here, this wasn’t the kind of parents you chose to have, this was the kind of parents you had, and in the midst of that, had to negotiate your way through it, and to hear how God has taken that and worked in your own life and now even in the life of your parents is really – I think there’s an encouraging element in the story, as well. No Matter What is what’s called the book, right, is the title of the book; is that right?

Caleb  Yeah, I think it will be the final title, but No Matter What comes out fall of 2015.
Dr. Bock

Well, again, thank you for taking the time to be with us. I won’t commend you for being out there in California where you enjoy great weather all the time, but it’s a pleasure to have had you on and we wish you well in your ministry. We thank you for taking the time to be with us, and we thank you all for joining us on The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture, and hope you’ll join us again soon.