Grace and Truth in LGBT Engagement - Classic
with Darrell L. Bock and Caleb Kaltenbach
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Welcome to The Table. We discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Darrell Bock, Executive Director of Cultural Engagement at the Hendricks Center at Dallas Theological Seminary. And my guest today is Caleb Kaltenbach, a new author.

Yeah.

First book, right?

First book.

First book. And Caleb is a pastor in California. You've kind of roamed around, haven't you?

I have. I was in L.A., first full-time job for 11 years. And came to Dallas, Texas. Then I figured people in California needed to hear about Jesus, too. So, I went back there.

Okay, very good. And you're in Simi Valley now at Discovery Church?

At Discovery Church in Simi Valley.

Okay. Well, the book that we're going to discuss is actually about Caleb's life if we can say it that way, and it's entitled Messy Grace. Here it is. And the subtitle is How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others without Sacrificing Conviction. So, kind of the good combination. You've got a nice endorsement here from the top, I see, from Jack Graham of Prestonwood Baptist Church.

And this is – our – my relationship with Caleb goes back to times when I was teaching in the summers out at Talbot-Biola. And I remember you telling me your story in the car, as we were driving, going to lunch one day and just talking about the future in ministry and that kind of thing.

So, let's start at the beginning. It says you had gay parents. So, tell us your story.
Caleb Kaltenbach: Yeah, well, both my parents were professors at a university. My dad taught philosophy, law, and rhetoric. My mom taught English literature in Columbia, Missouri. So, I'm a Tigers fan. I'm also a Chiefs fan. We don't talk about that much.

Darrell Bock: Okay, yeah.

Caleb Kaltenbach: Well, we are proud of the Royals, though.

Darrell Bock: Okay.

Caleb Kaltenbach: Are proud of the Royals.

Darrell Bock: Congratulations, yeah.

Caleb Kaltenbach: That's right, yeah.

Darrell Bock: I'm a Houston Nationals fan, so that was painful. But we did give them the best series of any of the teams.

Caleb Kaltenbach: There you go, man, there you go. So, when I was two, my parents divorced, and both of them came out of the closet. My dad was a bit more in the closet with me. I didn't find out till around college graduation, maybe a little bit after. But my mom was very loud and proud. My dad was in the closet with, as I said, myself, had different relationships.

But my mom had a 22-year relationship with a woman named Vera, who had just graduated with her Ph.D. in psychology. They moved to Kansas City. Whereas my dad was very quiet, didn't have a lot of friends, my mom had a ton of friends. She practically, for all purposes of the word, became an activist. She joined the local chapter, board of directors for GLAAD in Kansas City.

And growing up, in elementary school and preschool, she took me with her to gay parties and clubs and campouts and events. And I even marched in gay pride parades. I remember at the end of one of these pride parades – and again, this is in the 1980s – there were all these Christians holding up signs saying, "God hates you. Go away. Turn or burn." And if that wasn't offensive enough, they were spraying water and urine on people.
And I remember looking at my mom, and I said, "Mom, why are they acting like that?"

She said, "Well, Caleb, they're Christians. And Christians hate gay people. Christians don't like people that are not like them."

And so, I just saw this reinforced in so many different ways that I describe in the book and ways that I don't even describe in the book, where families ended up alienating their sons who had AIDS. We watched people in my mom's community die of that. We watched their Christian parents alienate them. And it just really hardened my heart – so much to the point to, when I was 16 years old, I just really wanted to go on a rampage to disprove Christianity. My worldview was out of control. My hair was all the way down to my shoulders, which –

**Darrell Bock** So, it's changed.

**Caleb Kaltenbach** It has. The Lord has – taketh away and added other places –

**Darrell Bock** Yeah, we know what that's like.

**Caleb Kaltenbach** That's right. So, we – I was invited to this Bible study led by a high schooler, made up of high schoolers. And I went to this Bible study. And my plan was to be a ninja Christian and to pretend to be a Christian. And then I would dismantle their arguments.

And I still remember we were all reading from 1 Corinthians, and I had never owned a Bible before. And I grabbed one of my dad's old Bibles, and I was in 1 Chronicles. And when I read 1 Chronicles, they said, "Where are you?"

And I said, "1 Chronicles."

And they said, "Oh. Well, you're in the Old Testament."

And I said, "So, is there a new one?" I guess there's updated 2.0.

**Darrell Bock** That's right, exactly.
And I just kept on going back, and I just found that Jesus was not like the people on the street corners. The Apostle Paul was not like the people on the street corners holding up the signs. And I became convicted about who Jesus was. I still remember, when I came to Christ, I told my parents that I had been baptized. That was a secret operation, too. And they both basically grounded me and were so upset.

A week later, I was at a youth camp, CIY Christian Youth Conference and gave my life to the ministry. And I had also reached a conclusion, the conclusion I still hold today, that God designed sexual intimacy to be expressed in the context of marriage between one man and one woman. And I told my parents I was going to go in the ministry and that this is what I believe about sexuality. And they basically disowned me.

I spent a lot of nights over at friends' houses until the tension died down. My mom and her partner, I went over and saw them once after all this had happened. And I didn't go back for two or three, maybe four months even, but God slowly rebuilt that relationship.

I went to Bible college in southern Missouri, preached at several churches. But again, I saw this negative attitude within the church towards people who identified as LGBT. I remember in this one country church I preached at, in a small town in Missouri – I preached there on the weekends while I was in Bible college for 18 months. It was probably the largest church per capita in the entire world. There were 50 people in the town, and we had 25 of 'em in church. So, we had half the town won to Christ.

I kept on trying to convince my mom to come, and she came one Sunday. And our church attendance spiked to 26. It was a huge one for the books. And the next Sunday when I showed up, two elders were waiting for me and took me in the back room and said – this is all before the sermon – "If you want to keep preaching here, don't ever bring somebody like that again. We don't like those people."

Well, as you can imagine, that was my last Sunday there, 'cause I quit. And I just said, "I don't want to be a part of a church like that." And I ended up going out to Los Angeles for 11 years, a church called Shepherd of the Hills or Shepherd Church. That's where I met you. I was in involved there and I got married, went to Talbot. I had two kids, eight and six. Moved to Dallas, Texas, for three-and-a-half years, started working on that D.Min. at DTS.
Started preaching, and my parents, separate of each other, moved down to Dallas, Texas, to be closer to our family. My mother's partner had died of cancer a few years earlier, and she was depressed. And so, what was really amazing was they started attending the church that I was preaching at. And we left the summer of 2013 to go back to California to pastor and lead Discovery Church.

Two weeks before we left, both my parents gave their lives to the Lord. And it was an incredible journey. And it's still incredible. They believe in Jesus. I really believe that completely. They have different theological perspectives, and they lived in quote-unquote same-sex relationships in some way, shape, or form for over 30 years of their life. It's not something that turns off.

I think you and I have talked before about hardwired versus softwired. And how does that all go together? I don't know. God has never called me to change someone's sexual orientation or to resolve the tension. God has called me to point people to Jesus and walk in the tension of grace and truth.

**Darrell Bock**  
Mm-hmm. Now, let's deal with the timeline a little bit. You're parents got divorced when you were what age?

**Caleb Kaltenbach**  
Two.

**Darrell Bock**  
Two. Okay, so, you literally did grow up in a situation in which at least one of your parents was openly gay as you were growing up.

**Caleb Kaltenbach**  
Yes.

**Darrell Bock**  
And there's – you don't even remember a time when that was not the case.

**Caleb Kaltenbach**  
No, I don't.

**Darrell Bock**  
Yeah.
Caleb Kaltenbach: And it's funny, when I got older, I had my wonderings about my dad. But then I thought, "Come on. Who's gonna have three gay parents?" I guess this guy does. Me.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, yeah, hmm. So, and when did your – so, you knew about your mom all the way through. When did you – you said you found out about your dad in your teenage years. Did I get that right? Or later?

Caleb Kaltenbach: No, probably around college graduation, if not a little after, I found out. And that was a very difficult time, as I'm sure you can imagine. There was a lot to process there.

Darrell Bock: Mm-hmm. So, what I'm hearing in your story are really several things. One is just the experience of being on the other end – on the receiving end from Christians who, let's say, are hostile towards the gay lifestyle. And then you're learning to work through that and then your approach, as you think about interacting with the LGBT people, given the nature of your own experience.

So, let's kind of go at those one at a time. You felt real hostility. And you saw what we might, in some cases, call the worst of people. Your subtitle here says that How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others without Sacrificing Conviction. So, the last phrase is the interesting part of this – without Sacrificing Conviction.

So, you look at this, and you go, "All right, so, how do you maintain this balance between loving others and having conviction?" How does that work for you?

Caleb Kaltenbach: You know, I think there are so many different components. First of all, one of the points I make in the book is I believe that there is a difference between acceptance and approval; that I believe that we are called to accept everybody as an individual. That does not mean we approve of every life choice that somebody makes.

I think that especially parents of teenagers who come out to them, Christian parents – or really any parents who may not agree with the choice to be in a same-sex relationship would have a problem with that. And so, they believe, "Okay, if I accept my child, that means that I'm approving."
And my point is, "No." Every Sunday, anybody should be able to walk through my church doors when I preach and attend our church. But I already know that I shake hands every Sunday with people that have made life choices that week that I wouldn't approve of. But that doesn't mean that I accept them any less.

And so, our church really focuses on trying to be a church where you can belong before you believe for lack of a better word, not saying that we integrate people into the body of Christ without salvation. But we give people a chance to be a part of our community. And that's where we really try to live out that acceptance versus approval.

We give people a chance to be a part of our community, because if we are going to call people, eventually when they follow Christ, to primarily identify with the church community and not the LGBT community, we had better have them comfortable and ready to primarily identify. Because I don't think many people will leave one community if they don't have another one to walk into.

And so, I think there's a real tension between acceptance and approval. I think that there's a tension between grace and truth. I think that we have to own the fact that it isn't our job to change somebody's sexual orientation. It is our job to speak the truth into people's lives.

And I think also, at the same time, Darrell, I think that we need to understand people from their perspective. If a missionary goes overseas and is gonna share the Gospel with a particular culture, they have to do contextualization. They have to learn culture. They have to engage culture – not as a means to water down the Gospel, but as a means to use culture as a vessel to share the Gospel, to communicate it.

And I think that a lot of Christians are not, for one reason or another, willing to do that when it comes to certain people, including the LGBT community. I remember a conversation that I had with my mom one time. And this is awkward; nobody wants to have this conversation with their mom. But somehow she told me, "You know, Caleb, Vera and I, we were not intimate the last several years of our relationship."

And that blew me away. I said, "Well, then why do you still call yourself a lesbian? You're not a lesbian."
And she said, "Well, sure I am. That's my community. Those are my people. I have acceptance; I have relationships. I'm part of a cause and a movement."

And I said, "Well, Mom, you just described the church."

And she said, "No, I didn't. Why would I go somewhere that would make me feel less about myself?" And it really dawned on me then that the biggest issue – and I think the biggest cultural issue that we have in our society today – and maybe we always have had – is the issue of identity. That's why we have Bruce Jenner to Caitlyn Jenner, and that's why we have the leader of the Northwest NAACP who was Caucasian, but she still says she identifies as African-American.

And you see this play out when conservative or evangelical Christians deal with the LGBT community. So, let's say that there's a guy named Joe, and Joe is in his workplace, and he knows that somebody he works with is gay. He thinks it's his job to share the Leviticus, the clobber passages, the Romans, the 1 Corinthians – which I believe. I believe all that is truth. But he believes that he needs to share that with that individual.

And the person on the receiving end, who's gay, says, "You just reduced me to my sexual orientation. That which you tell me I shouldn't do, you've just done. And you think that this is all that I'm about, when maybe intimacy is really the smallest, if not one of the smaller ways I identify as LGBT. You haven't taken time to get to know me, my experiences, my hurts, my pains." And they walk away hurt.

And I think that a better way to do it is Jesus' way, spending time with people, having deep convictions about theology, but also having deep relationships, getting to know the whole person and helping them to primarily identify with Jesus. And as Jesus starts driving all the domains of their life, I believe that it's within the context of trust and relationship that we can have difficult conversations about holy living.

*Darrell Bock*  
Mm-hmm, okay. So, that kind of deals with the sequence. Talk about the process of deciding to write the book. What led you to write the book?
Caleb Kaltenbach

I had had several people tell me that I needed to put something down when I would tell them my story. I have a friend who actually did the forward. His name is Kyle Idleman, and he's the teaching pastor in Louisville at Southeast Christian Church. He wrote a book called Not a Fan.

Another guy named Jud Wilhite – I think even when I told you my story. I don't think you necessarily said, "Write a book," but you said, "Wow, you need – somehow that needs to be known." I remember – it was just this consistent theme.

But I thought, "Man, I don't want to do that." And I had my friend, Kyle – his literary agent – his name is Don Gates – he got a hold of me and said, "This would really be a fascinating story. And I think it's for such a time as this."

And so, I wrote a couple of chapters, and we signed a deal with WaterBrook Multnomah. And turned in my first draft and felt so good about my first draft for my first book, until I got my first draft back. And so, it was definitely an emotional process. And I'm glad that they have a good editorial team.

We didn't use a ghostwriter, but at the same time, because I'm so emotionally attached to it, I had other people around me that would say, "This is sounding a little harsh; you need to tone this down." My mother's partner and I, for instance, we really never got along. And it was not – sometimes it was fun, but a lot of the times it was very tense with her. And we're talking about most of my childhood.

And so, I remember at one point the editor said, "Is her family still alive?"

"Yeah.

"Do you have a good relationship with them?

"Yeah."

"Do you want to keep a good relationship with them?"
And so, it was definitely emotional. I don't think a lot of people realize how emotional writing your first book – I know you understand, but much less putting your whole story down on paper. You get attached. It's almost like it's your baby, and here it is.

**Darrell Bock**  
Mm-hmm. So, you're dealing with the background of your experience, having experienced some of this hostility. How do you interact with people and tell them how they should interact with the gay community? 'Cause you obviously had experience of that's probably what not to do. So, what's your take on how to engage? What's the best way to think about this?

And let me go back to something that you said earlier, and it goes like this: the difference between acceptance and approval. I like to make the distinction between – we respect every person because every person's made in the image of God. That's the acceptance part. Approval has to do with signing off on everything that they do or say. That's distinct. So, being able to keep that in place is important.

And then the other way I like to talk about this tension that we're talking about is – is that on the one hand there's a moral challenge for the way God calls people to live in the standards that he reflects which is a way of saying, "The most efficient, effective, authentic way to live is to live this way." Okay?

But you've got people who live differently. And the problem is that the very people who you want to challenge with those standards are the very people you want to invite into a new experience with God which is the solution.

So, if you wall them off from going there, you've actually cut yourself off from the solution. So, how do you – how do you deal with that balance?

**Caleb Kaltenbach**  
I would say, going back to something I alluded to earlier, look at the whole person. I think, when it comes down to it, we need to understand that people – each person we encounter are made in the image of God. But we also carry with us a sin nature.
We've carried with us hurts and pains done to us and things that we've done. And we have joys and experiences and upbringings. We're really a mosaic of experiences that brought us to the point where are today, including our story of redemption if we're in Christ.

But I think we need to quit treating people like pet projects, like an opportunity to unleash our new evangelistic ninja moves on 'em. And we really just need to treat them like people and get to know the whole person.

I believe that when we authentically build a relationship with people, when we don't label people, I believe that God can use that. And again, that's what Jesus did. Unfortunately, again, in the Christian community, what we do is when we refer to the gay community or the LGBT community, most of the time we're – I mean most leaders that I know are referring to the extremists, the political side of the machine of that community.

But I'm sure, as you would agree, a lot of the people I know who are in same-sex relationships or pursuing them, they're really not part of that political machine. They want to live their lives, and they're not – they're as frustrated as you and I are with American politics. They're not interested in it. But unfortunately, the extremists make the most noise.

And I think we need to understand, too, that people are complex, and they have depth. And is having sex with somebody of the same gender a sin? Yes, it is. But I believe that – this is an identity issue; that there are some people that have no idea of why they are attracted to people the same gender.

I've had people cry and ask me, "I prayed to God to take this away, and he hasn't; why hasn't he?"

And I give them the best theological answer I can. I say, "I don't know." I say, "But I know that I have a lot of unanswered prayers, too."

And I know that my feelings can be deceptive, that my feelings lie to us. And that's why Proverbs 4:23 in the NCV version says, "Be careful what you think, because your thoughts run your life."
"And so, that's why I put my trust in the Bible," I tell them. "And am I gonna slip up? Yes, but I'm gonna struggle."

And so, I think that when we realize that people have depth, and when we seek to build an authentic relationship with them, I believe that God gives us margin to be able to have influence in their lives.

Darrell Bock

So, we're gonna come back on the other side and talk some more about the applications of all this, 'cause the story is a fascinating one. And I think you have kind of an inside look at all the facets of this.

And I do think that the Church is really struggling, in many ways, to figure out how to negotiate this tension between grace and the invitation into experiencing God's power and transformation with the idea of we need to stand up for certain convictions in the public square and in the way our society is oriented, and how to keep that balance.

Here's a question that I have, and that is how did you learn to process the hostility that you were feeling, as a child, watching this? Because you, yourself, were not gay, and so – and yet you were watching people react to gay people around you who you knew and cared about. What was that process like? Obviously you had one reaction before you became a Christian and another reaction afterwards. But how did you work through that?

Caleb Kaltenbach

It was difficult. I think about it, and I really wrestled with trying to understand how somebody could treat somebody else like that. And you gotta remember my mom and her partner were very justice oriented. I mean I knew who Harvey Milk was before anybody else in my school obviously knew who Harvey Milk was. A lot of kids in California now do. And so –

Darrell Bock

You might explain who that is for people who don't know who Harvey Milk is.
Yeah. He was a politician in San Francisco who was shot by his opponent during – I think it was election night, if not close to election night. But he was an activist for gay rights. And so, I was raised in that environment. But I made a big mistake as a kid. And again, I didn't have any way to process this. I didn't – I had a warped worldview because my mom, as an extremist, would allow me to watch things and do things that a lot of other kids wouldn't – even other probably lesbian mothers wouldn't allow their kids to do.

But I made sweeping generalizations of the Christian community. And I saw the extremism. And I thought, "Okay, this is how all Christians are." And now I realize, especially in the '80s, extremism from the LGBT community attracted extremism from the Christian community. I mean I think that's still true today, but I think that there's a lot more sitting back and listening from the Christian community.

But I made that mistake, and I went on a warpath. And I guess some of my mother's justice qualities and activism reared itself in my heart as well.

Mm-hmm. And so you came to the Lord, as you said. Were you in college when you came to the Lord or in high school?

I was 16 years old in high school.

Sixteen, okay. And obviously this engendered a transformation of the way you were thinking. And now, there's lots of irony in your story, because on the one hand, you're experience hostility as the child of gay parents from Christians.

You come to the Lord, and now, all of a sudden, all the hostility shifts, and the hostility is now coming from your parents and people, I'm assuming, that you knew in the gay community for having, if I can say it this way, defected or betrayed your previous responsibilities. So, how did that transition work?

The best way I can describe it is we all have heard stories, seen videos on YouTube, or we can imagine the tension of a teenager coming out as a gay or lesbian to his Christian parents. Well, for me, Darrell, it was the opposite. I was a teenager coming out as a Christian to my three parents.
And the rejection that they feared from the Christian community, and the rejection that they feared from me, now that I was quote-unquote "one of them – they – those – those people," that's the same rejection they gave to me, the same rejection they were fighting to say that we need to not exhibit they were exhibiting, because this is such an emotionally charged topic.

And that's why this is a huge issue. I remember somebody told me one time, "Well, two percent or less people in our country identify as LGBT, as gay, or lesbian, or transgender." And honestly, in our conversation that we have had about softwired and hardwired, that number's probably even smaller.

But the real problem is is that all of those people intersect with probably five to ten other people. And so, you multiple that in our nation, and that's why this is such a cultural issue right now. It's a huge issue for our country right now, big time.

So, let me – we're using terminology some people may not understand when we talk about hardwired and softwired. Hardwired is the person who is – has gay attraction and has tried to shed it and is having difficulty doing so. And in fact, they question whether they can ever change.

The softwired person is really the person who's made a choice into a gay lifestyle. They can, in some ways, take it or leave it. And so, you use that terminology – people use that terminology – it's my terminology, but people will use that terminology to describe the range that exists among the gay community in terms of gay orientation.

Some people will make distinctions – different kinds of distinctions. Mark Yarhouse talks about a distinction in which he talks about the person who is drawn to a gay lifestyle but hasn't done anything with it yet and is just kind of hovering on the edge.

And there's the person who contemplates or steps in, but steps in hesitantly or out of curiosity or whatever. That's the next step. And then there's the person who really identifies with it and kind of locks in.
And so, one of the things that happens – and this is ironic – another irony of your story it strikes me is just as the gay person can generalize about Christians and think that every Christian is just this staunch person who doesn't want anything to do with gay people and is hostile towards them, that kind of thing – and then there are other people who are actually very sensitive towards the gay community – Christians who are sensitive towards the gay community, work hard to understand where people are coming from and interact with them.

So, also, on the gay side, there's this range that you have to deal with, which explains why it's important to actually get to know the person, the individual that you're interacting with, because they may not be in the same place as the person sitting next to them.

Absolutely. I don't think that there is agreement within the LGBT community even. There's no way that you can generalize or do a litmus test. The one thing that I know is that the Bible – and I believe this – says that same-sex intimacy is a sin. But again, as you would agree, this is a deep, emotional issue for many people, especially those who identify as LGBT. There's so many different types of people.

Right now I have a group of people that I meet with every Tuesday night, from 8:00 to 10:00 PM, that attend our church, that even though they know that we in our church believes that God designed sexuality to be expressed in marriage between a man and a woman, they still attend our church, because they also know that we believe that a theological conviction should never be a catalyst to treat someone less, to devalue someone.

So, despite what we believe theologically, they still attend our church. And even within this group of 11 to 15 people, you have some that are single because of biblical conviction; you have some that are just confused. You have two couples in there, but one couple is even questioning whether or not they should stay together because of their Christian conviction.

We have people – and I know people who are in same-sex relationships who are not intimate at all, but they've been together so long that that's not even something that they do. Their connection is deeper. And so, there's no way we can do a broad, sweeping generalization.
And that's why one of the advice is – the advice that I give to churches, when I talk to their leadership or staff about this issue and about how to handle it, which I've been doing a lot, is, "Hey, it's great to have policies."

We have a staff policy book; we have an elder policy manual at our church. But especially with policies like this, we don't advertise 'em because you can't lump everybody under that. And policies, if they're advertised and promoted throughout the church, they can hinder conversations that need to happen.

Darrell Bock

Mm-hmm. So, let's talk about where you find yourself, 'cause this – you've obviously made an effort to speak into this community. You actually have a church that's drawn some people into your community. You say you've got people in your community who are in different places.

Let's work through that a little bit. And I think you said early on something like belong first or open door, and then I forgot exactly how you phrased it, but it's an important principle. So, how do you –

Caleb Kaltenbach

The phrase I used was belong before you believe.

Darrell Bock

Belong before you believe, that's right. And so – and so – and, of course, there's the issue of then how do you deal with the people who then believe and then come into part of the community? So, let's talk about that a little bit.

You've got – you say some people who've made the choice to be – they recognize that they're gay, but they've made the choice to be celibate. I'm taking that that's one of the groups that you have. They've made a conscious choice, and they've – have the come into that in the midst of the transition from belonging to belief, or were they there before they – before you came, and they just have happened to land in your church? What's the –

Caleb Kaltenbach

Both. We've had both.

Darrell Bock

Both, okay.
Both.

And, of course, this is the – this is the approach Mark Yarhouse has talked about, among others. And, of course, we've done several podcasts with him in which the person says in effect, "This is who I am. I understand this is who I am." Usually this is – we're talking about the hardwire on the spectrum. "And for you to tell me I shouldn't say I'm gay is to ask me to deny something about who I am that I recognize as something I have to deal with before the Lord." So, that's – that doesn't entirely work.

But what they are saying is is that, "My identity in Christ and my commitment to Christ trumps my sexual identity in some ways, and I am committed to that approach to things." It seems to me that person should be very affirmed and supported in just about every way possible that the church can support them.

Absolutely, absolutely. I remember watching a YouTube video awhile ago between a guy named Justin Lee, who wrote a book called Torn, which I know you're familiar with, who's very much affirming, and a non-affirming, conservative, seminary professor.

And I remember watching them go back and forth. And Justin Lee asked a question at the end that, unfortunately, the seminary professor glossed over. But I thought it was an important question for the Church, especially with people, who are single, because of conviction are celibate.

And he said, "Let's just say, for sake of argument," and this is my paraphrase, "Let's just say, for the sake of argument, that you're right and I'm wrong. What do I do now? Is the Church going to walk with me? Is the Church going to journey with me? Is the Church prepared to be there for me when I get older and so on and so forth?"

And some people might dismiss it and say, "Well, I know a lot of married people who their spouses die, and now they're alone and they're widowed." Well, I get that. But there's a difference between being single because of conviction in this issue and being a heterosexual single.
If you're heterosexual and you're celibate, there's always a chance that you'll find somebody. But if you're same-sex attracted and you're celibate, you know that's not gonna happen unless you find somebody of the opposite sex that you really develop deep emotional connections with.

**Darrell Bock** Unless something changes – something really changes.

**Caleb Kaltenbach** Which we have seen that, right?

**Darrell Bock** Yeah, right, exactly.

**Caleb Kaltenbach** We have seen that.

**Darrell Bock** Right. And it can happen; it does happen. It may take time. You don't want to preclude that from happening. But the reality is that where the person finds themselves right now is – the best way for me to cope with and understand where I am is really to submit this inclination to the Lord and let them – let them – let His way be the way I proceed. And that needs the support of the Church.

**Caleb Kaltenbach** Absolutely. I mean this, as we talked about before, is really an issue of tension between grace and truth. And I love how Andy Stanley said, at one time, between theology and ministry. It's a real tension. And our faith is already filled with tension. Right?

**Darrell Bock** Right.

**Caleb Kaltenbach** Sovereignty and responsibility –

**Darrell Bock** Life in the fallen world.

**Caleb Kaltenbach** Yeah, Trinity, one God – and so, if we're comfortable – and we have become comfortable with tension in our systematic theology and thinking. Why can we not be comfortable and realize that there's gonna be tension when we deal with people who are fallen?
Darrell Bock: Mm-hmm. And I think that the interesting thing here is figuring out how to develop an environment in which people can be challenged, but they're challenged in a way in which people know that the people challenging them care. There's an expression I use, when I speak about this regularly – I use the expression regularly, and it goes, "People will not care about your critique until they know you care."

And so, being able to create the environment where healthy confrontation can take place, and healthy reflection can take place, and, to some degree, mutual learning, 'cause there are things the Church needs to learn about interacting with LGBT people as well as in the midst of the moral challenge that's important.

And you're distinction between the pastoral element and your Andy Stanley quote's important, because I think that on the one hand we've got the biblical standard that says, "This is the way God calls us to live," but we have the pastoral problem in reality that when a mother comes in with a child, who says, "My child just came out as gay, what do I do," you aren't – the pastoral problem isn't simply to, "Well, the Bible says –"

The Bible doesn't say, "Have nothing to do with them;" the Bible says to them, "Challenge them like you would any person who's in need of being restored by God; challenge them to be restored by God. Challenge them to be reconciled with God," those kinds of things.

So, I would say that doing evangelism, it doesn't matter what it's about, has built within it the tension of drawing people out of where they are, to a place where God can take them.

Darrell Bock: Absolutely. And I think we try to do that in our church. And I know a lot of churches, where I have friends who are leading there, they try to do it, too. And this is how I put it: we try to give God margin. That when somebody walks through our doors, I don't care who they are, what they've done, or what they are in the midst of doing, I want them in there to hear the Gospel, to have influence in their lives. And we need to give God margin to work.
Some churches, when they find out somebody who is visiting or somebody – one of their members has just come out this way or is doing something, sometimes we'll overreact, and we'll act harshly. And sometimes we'll even alienate them. And I know that every situation is different, but I've just seen this so much.

And I'm thinking to myself, "What about giving God margin? What about allowing people not to be perfect? What about understanding that God is the best at changing lives, not us? What about the fact that it's always taken God time and a process to break down pride around our heart?"

And I think that part of the principle of belong before you believe is not pronouncing salvation on people. But when somebody comes to our church, we give them margin; we don't expect them to be perfect. And we know that God, as long as they're there, is in the process of drawing them to himself.

**Darrell Bock**

And so, you're approach is to really challenge them to let God go to work, but to do it in a way that also wraps around them support that says that, "We care about you; we love you. We love you enough to challenge you on the one hand, but we love you also enough to be there for you."

**Caleb Kaltenbach**

Absolutely. And all of this is to say that there are times – not necessarily with this issue we've had to do this yet, but in other issues, we've had to do church discipline. I mean every church does to some degree. We just don't announce it to everybody, but we've had to do that.

And, unfortunately, some people eventually get to the point where they run up to a barrier. And our barrier is our theological belief on sexual identity, on sexual gender, and the expression of sexual intimacy. And some people, when they run up to that barrier, they don't like it. And other people, when they run up to that barrier, they understand it, and they stay there. And some people will leave. But even the people that leave, I praise God that at least they were there for a time being, and who knows, maybe God will bring them back, or maybe we planted a seed and hopefully we haven't hurt them.
Darrell Bock

Now, you say there are other groups – that we've got another group that we've got to talk about, which is the people who are in the midst of trying to put this all together. And the couple that has me fascinated is the couple that's together that's debating whether they should stay together or not. That's a fascinating category.

Tell us a little bit about kind of how you are walking with them in the midst of that process.

Caleb Kaltenbach

It's through very slow conversation. It is not through reciting Leviticus, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 1 Timothy, Genesis 19, and so on and so forth. I think there's a time and a place to talk about holy living and the expression of sanctification, wherever somebody is, especially on the other side of the cross.

But that is difficult because there are such deep, emotional ties. Some pastors, leaders, and Christians believe that you can just tell somebody to stop being gay – quote-unquote – stop smoking, stop drinking, stop dating girls that do. And you just need to stop. Well, for them, it's a relationship. It's emotional. It's somebody that you actually love and you have feelings for. And you don't primarily identify as having intimacy with this person sexually.

And so, for us to say that and not take our time walking with them through it is a difficult thing. And so, I would say move slow, be intentional, always point them back to Jesus. Everybody loves Jesus. Point them back to Jesus. Point them back to Paul. Paul's the one that says in Romans 2:4, "It's God's kindness that leads us to repentance." And I think that God blesses that.

But then there's even another category within that, Dr. Bock, where you – you know, I've met couples before that have been together for several years. They live in the same house, but they're not sexually active, and they sleep in separate bedrooms, but yet they still call themselves – quote-unquote – lesbian or gay. So, what do you do with that?

I've had those conversations, where I've said, "Okay, your primary identity should be Christ. And I don't know why you – I mean I understand why you're identifying yourself as a lesbian, 'cause that's part of how you are; you're SSA. But at the same time, why not just say, "I'm the daughter of the King"? Why not say, "I'm a Christian; I'm a believer"?
So, I think there are so many different categories within this community that we need to take time to understand.

**Darrell Bock**
Okay. Well, we're about out of time here. Let me ask you, if you could summarize in about a minute – it's a terrible question – the – a couple of main things that you would hope people would take to heart as they think about interacting with LGBT people, what would those –

**Caleb Kaltenbach**
I would say that all of us side either on grace or truth. And either we want everybody to know that God loves them, or we want everybody to know what the Bible says. There are two types of people. And when we choose to live in the tension, people on the grace side get drawn closer to the truth, and people on the truth side get closer to grace.

And one of the biggest takeaways is that tension that we feel is love. Love is the tension of grace and truth is one takeaway. Another takeaway is love has no exception clause. And the third takeaway is that a theological conviction should never be a catalyst to treat someone less, to devalue somebody, to treat someone poorly. That we should be people who share the truth, build relationships, and point people to Jesus. And sometimes we have to have tough conversations, but it always needs to be done in love.

**Darrell Bock**
So, Caleb, I really do appreciate you taking the time to come in and talk to us about this. This is an area the Church is wrestling with. And the interesting thing about your church is is that you've actually managed to balance this tension in a way that people are walking into it and saying, "Okay, I'm willing to walk through this experience by the grace of God, in front of God, and wrestle realistically with where I am as a result."

You've seen change; you've seen transformation, and you've learned a lot in the process. And I really do appreciate you taking the time to come in and share kind of your story with us, to help people who are just trying to get located and how to go about this.

**Caleb Kaltenbach** It's great to be with you, sir.

**Darrell Bock** Well, thanks again, Caleb.
And we thank you for being a part of The Table. We hope you'll be with us again soon.