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STUDY GUIDE

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AN INTRODUCTION TO KNOWN FOR LOVE

“Biblical convictions about sexuality” and “demonstrating the love of Christ.” More and more, we have less and less understanding about how to weave these two things together in today’s world.

Children are confused about what it means to be a man or a woman. Grieving parents watch their sons and daughters renounce their faith and morph into new, almost unrecognizable persons. Language and definitions are changing. Freedom of speech and religious liberty are undermined and overrun. Sexuality and gender identity have interrupted and overtaken the conversations of life.

As Christians, we’re told to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength while loving our neighbors as ourselves (Matthew 22:37–40). This includes loving our neighbors who believe Christian sexual ethics are antiquated and oppressive. And this includes our neighbors who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, nonbinary, or asexual.

We do not need the world to be on our side to be faithful Christians. But we will never be faithful Christians *known for love* without God’s grace in Christ through the Holy Spirit. This book aims to equip us to be *known for love* in a world that is “no friend of grace.” We’ll explore a biblical foundation from which we can develop principles of engagement for a faithful Christian life of love.

In *Known for Love*, we’ll grapple with a graceful and loving response to the practical issues of our day regarding sexuality. We’ll build a biblical-theological framework that will be a foundation for our responses. This framework will examine Creation, Crisis, Christ, Creation Regained, and, finally, Our Place in God’s Redemptive Plan.

The practical chapters woven among the framework chapters are intended to give concrete examples of how we might understand, obey, and apply God’s Word in our present world.

As we read and study together, let’s do our best not to allow sentiment or public opinion to define what is true and loving. Let’s open God’s Word and “taste and see” for ourselves.

As you read and discuss...

In *Known for Love*, Pastor Casey Hough provides a biblical and theological framework for thinking through the hard situations and difficult discussions about sexuality and gender that we’ll encounter with family and friends. Opinions and perspectives will differ. Experiences and emotions will vary. But a few ground rules will keep interactions healthy, informative, and wise:

1. Begin each session with prayer.
2. Use respectful dialogue and language.
3. Listen to others without interruption.
4. Recognize and rein in emotions and debate that overpower discussions and progress.
5. As the Bereans did in Acts 17, “examine the Scriptures to see if these things are true.”

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CHAPTER 1—CREATION: “AND IT WAS VERY GOOD”

In Matthew 19, when the Pharisees questioned Him about divorce, Jesus referred back to creation. The Pharisees asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?” Jesus responded, “Haven’t you read that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female’ . . . ?” His response reveals that He understood the Creator’s work as a divine revelation about God’s purpose for human sexuality, gender, and marriage. (p16)

The opening chapter of *Known for Love* draws us to examine the first chapters of the Bible that reveal a Creator God who not only brings the world into existence but also orders that world for a purpose. We read in Genesis 1:26 that we humans were created in the image and likeness of God. Male and female are both created in God’s image, having equal dignity and playing important roles in God’s plan. (p18)

Christians have debated what it means to be God’s image bearers, but they have not doubted the fact that humans possess a special relationship to God. Humanity enjoys a relationship with God that no other created thing enjoys. Humans are tasked with a special role in creation—to glorify God. (pp17-18)

Sadly, however, our ability to perceive and reflect God’s image has been significantly impacted by sin. If we get the significance of the beginning wrong, we will get everything else wrong too. (p 19) God’s created order, before sin’s entrance into the world, was “very good.” This “very good” order, as the ideal of creation, does not get erased when humanity rebels against God. (p21)

God is the one who first utters the declaration, “and it was good.” To do so, He must not only know what goodness is but also be the source of the definition of goodness. (p22) God’s statement presupposes that His creation conforms to His intention for creation. (p23)

In Genesis we see that humanity did not trust God’s definition of the good. Instead, we sought to define our own good, which ended very badly. But, as Jesus taught, we can know “the good” if we return to God, the source of all good. (p25) As Christians, while we acknowledge that sin has corrupted the whole world, we also recognize that such corruption has not erased the ideals embedded within creation. (p26)

Digging Deeper

- What does it mean that God called the creation of male and female “very good”?
- Does it matter how the words male and female are defined? Why or why not?
- When we question our identity, how does revisiting the story creation help?
- In what ways do humans reflect the image of God? How do YOU reflect the image of God?

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CHAPTER 2—CRISIS: NOT THE WAY IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE

If you believe that human life has a purpose and is not simply “the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms,” then you likely perceive that something is wrong in the world. (2) Most people have categories of right and wrong, good and evil, wholeness and brokenness. One can hardly look at the world and think, “This is perfect.” So, what went wrong in this world that God described as “very good”? (p29)

While Adam and Eve could enjoy everything else that God provided them, they were told not to eat the fruit of one particular tree. Yet, Adam and Eve did not obey. Instead of trusting God and His will for their lives, they listened to that ancient liar, the serpent, who told them that “they would not surely die” if they disobeyed God. The serpent promised that their rebellion would lead to humanity’s progress in the world. No need to listen to or obey God. (p29)

It does not take us long to observe the catastrophic results of sin in the story of Scripture and our own lives. First, humanity’s relationship of fellowship with God is broken. Then, humanity’s relationship with one another is broken. (p30)

Almost everywhere we turn, we find sin and its impact on the world. Admittedly, we go through seasons when there is not much of a national conscience regarding sin, but occasionally we see glimpses of outrage over injustice that remind everyone that something is desperately wrong. But few people seem to wrestle with why it is wrong. (p32)

When we do not consider God in our recognition of sin, we basically end up with something like a community consensus. But the might of the majority doesn’t make the will of the majority right or good. Just because a large group of people agree that something is right or something is wrong doesn’t make it so. We need a transcendent standard outside of us to show us what is right and wrong. And that transcendent standard comes from God. (p33) When we take what God has given us and use it for something contrary to His purpose, we desire it and use it for evil, and this is what God calls “sin.” (p34)

Sin and the devastation that it has brought do not get the final word. When we are navigating the world, we must give due attention to the fact that it is a broken world full of broken people in need of God’s grace and mercy. If we do not adequately acknowledge the brokenness that sin has introduced into the world, we will misunderstand what is at stake and how to approach the world. (p35)

Digging Deeper

- How does this chapter define “sin”? How would you define it?
- When was the last time you had a conversation with someone about sin—whether in a broad sense or in a way that addressed a current situation? How did the conversation begin? How did it resolve? (What conclusion or plan of action was reached?)
- Chapter 2 discusses the problems that arise when sin is defined solely by the majority of the group/population. Would these problems be eliminated if the majority of the group/population were Christians? Why or why not?
- How often do your personal prayers address sin, your own or the sins of others? Do you find yourself avoiding prayer because of sin?

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CHAPTER 3—IS HOMOSEXUALITY REALLY IN THE BIBLE?

In the 2023 documentary titled “1946: The Mistranslation That Shifted Culture,” the writers argue that the release of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible in 1946 “mistranslated” arsenokoitai and malakoi as “homosexual” instead of representing the actual Greco-Roman background. (p39) When critical scholars say that entire generations of translation teams have “mistranslated” the Bible, we must be able to get into the weeds a little to see if the argument holds up. And to get into the weeds, we must know how Bible translation works. Not every original text has a word that corresponds exactly to a word in a modern language. All translation work will involve some degree of discretion and decision-making by the translation committees. (p41)

As the argument typically goes, people will say that there is nothing within the era of the New Testament that even remotely approximates the idea of sexual orientation that we currently maintain within our society. Another way this has been stated is that “the ancient tradition of historic Christianity appears never to have had a moral category to describe homosexual persons.” Thus, the conclusion is that because these categories were not available or known at the time, the Bible could not have spoken to them. (p43)

When scholars say concepts like “sexual orientation” were unknown to the biblical authors and thus their works do not address the issues inherent in such a modern concept, they are making generalizations that are not actually supported by the ancient evidence. (p47)

This chapter begins by considering two Greek words: *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi*. While the first word, *arsenokoitai*, is only used in two places in the New Testament (1 Cor. 6:9; 1 Tim. 1:10), both words are only used together in 1 Corinthians 6:9 to denote the active and passive participants in the sexual act. (pp48-49) Whereas the NIV 2011 states, “men who have sex with men,” the ESV categorizes that sexual act as “homosexuality.” Then, whereas the NASB separates the “effeminate” from the “homosexual,” the ESV combines the men addressed here and defines their act as the “practice of homosexuality.” (p50)

Arsenokoitai is the plural form of *arsenokoites*. As mentioned earlier, this is a compound word that combines Greek words for “man” and “bed.” Translated rigidly, it would mean something like “man-bedder.” (p50) Several scholars note that the apostle Paul is likely drawing on Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament, when he uses the word *arsenokotai*. In Leviticus 18:22, we read, “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.” Leviticus 20:13 essentially restates the prohibition with its legal penalty. (p50)

Paul is not just dealing with a narrow situation in Corinth when he uses the terms *arsenokotai* and *malakoi*. He is drawing upon his understanding of God’s ideal for sexual relations as revealed in creation and taught in God’s Word. Given what we understand about the Old Testament context that Paul draws upon, we should affirm that God’s Word prohibits all same-sex behavior. (p51)

It’s probably best to retire the term “homosexuals” or “homosexuality” as a modern translation of the words *arsenokoitai* and *malakoi*, since our society’s understanding (or misunderstanding) of those terms appears to be constantly in flux. This, however, is not to say that we have “no idea” what *arsenokoitai* or *malakoi* meant in their original context. Paul, in no uncertain terms, believed and taught that same-sex sexual relations were contrary to God’s will for His creation. (p54)

In Romans 1:24-27, Paul describes what is happening when people abandon God’s design for sex. When people desire and engage in unnatural sexual behaviors, which is best understood as abandoning God’s design for the male-female sexual relationship, they are guilty

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before God for exchanging the truth that He has embedded within our bodies and revealed in His Word for a lie. At the core of this lie is the deceptive belief that God as Creator has no say over what is right for His creation to think or how His creation is to behave. (pp55-56) Paul points to homosexuality as an example of violating God's created order by exchanging the natural order of male-female sexual relations for the unnatural order of same-sex sexual relations. As such, Paul unequivocally condemns these relations. (p56)

Without ever using the terms that are often a key focus in the whole modern debate about homosexuality in the Bible, we know that, as did all Jews and the Jewish believers in his time, Paul condemned homosexual behavior. We have to move beyond the question of Bible translations and consider what the whole of Scripture teaches us about God's will for both our sexual behaviors and desires. (p57) We must give greater attention to all that Scripture teaches about sexuality, our desires, and our identity in Christ. We must allow the totality of God's Word to inform our understanding of His will for our lives as followers of Christ. (p58)

We should love sinners, being aware of our own sin, knowing that talking about (sin) and telling others is not an act of hate, but love, even if those who initially hear it do not perceive it at the time. Don't allow the culture's definition of what it means to be loving keep you from actually loving others in the truth. As Paul taught us in 1 Corinthians 13:6, "Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth." (p59)

Digging Deeper

- On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being the highest level, what level of study do you think should be given to investigating the context and meanings of Hebrew and Greek words in the Bible? Is it possible to "over-think" or "over-study" context and meanings? Give an example of your answer.
- If a modern term or action is *not* found in the Bible, does that mean that there is no Christian perspective or instruction on it? For instance, the term "sex trafficking" is not found in the Bible. How can a Christian form a spiritual opinion or argument about sex trafficking?
- When you see a rainbow-colored sign with the word "Love is love" on it, what is meant by that? Do you agree?
- After reading this chapter, do you believe that the Bible does address homosexuality? Why or why not?

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CHAPTER 4—JESUS NEVER SPOKE ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

When someone claims, “Jesus never spoke about homosexuality,” the assumption is that Jesus held no beliefs or convictions about homosexuality. Such an assumption fails on at least two points. (p62)

First, the assumption that Jesus held no beliefs or convictions about homosexuality because there is no written record of Jesus speaking about these issues in Scripture fails to understand the nature of Scripture. (p62) They were not written to be exhaustive accounts but to communicate essential truths about Jesus so that different audiences would trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. It would be more accurate to say that the gospel writers recorded nothing about Jesus speaking on homosexuality. (p63)

But does this mean that we cannot know anything about Jesus’ view of sexuality? This is where we come to the second place, where the assumption about Jesus’ apparent silence fails again. (p63) A careful reader of the Gospels will notice how often Jesus uses Scripture and draws upon all the sections of the Old Testament, which are referred to by the shorthand expression “the Law and the Prophets.” And when He does so, He affirms them. (p64)

First, Jesus affirmed the Old Testament as God’s Word. (p64) He treated the Old Testament as true. Jesus also affirmed the Old Testament as God’s Word by appealing to the Old Testament as authoritative. Jesus also regarded the Old Testament as inspired. The Bible that Jesus affirmed as true, authoritative, and inspired also makes exceedingly clear statements about homosexuality. (p65)

Considering what Jesus consistently taught about sexual desires and marriage (Matthew 5:27-32; 19:1-12), it’s hard to imagine that anyone could conclude that Jesus would have approved of homosexuality. Jesus not only warned us about the dangers of any sexual desire outside of the context of marriage, but He also conceived marriage as between one man and one woman for a lifetime. (p75)

Digging Deeper

- Casey Hough states that the gospel accounts were written **not** “to be exhaustive accounts but to communicate essential truths about Jesus so that different audiences would trust Jesus as Lord and Savior.” (p63) Do you agree? How would you answer the question, “Why were the gospel accounts written?”
- Have you ever been silent about an issue that you actually had strong opinions about? Why are/were you silent? Why do you think Jesus might not have addressed a particular issue?
- The first few chapters of Genesis use words like “male,” “female,” “joined to” or “becoming one flesh.” Jesus quotes these verses. Why is His affirmation of these passages important?
- After reading this chapter, how would you respond to someone saying, “Jesus never spoke about homosexuality”? Share at least two possible responses.

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CHAPTER 5—CHRIST: TO SEEK AND SAVE THE LOST

The good news is that there is hope. While sin has left the world devastated, God did not turn His back on His creation. Instead, even before the foundation of the world was laid, God had a plan to redeem His creation and magnify His grace and mercy. (p78)

We see the first glimpse of this plan in Genesis 3:15 when God pronounces a curse on the serpent who had deceived the first humans. This led early church leaders like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus to dub Genesis 3:15 as the “protoevangelium,” which is Latin for “first gospel.” Christian interpreters of Genesis 3:15 throughout the history of the church have taken this passage to be a glimpse of hope in an awful situation. (p78)

Sacrifice and atonement for sin emerge as we read the Old Testament. The first sacrifice is performed by God Himself in Genesis 3:21, where God provides clothing for Adam and Eve from the animal skins. (p79) In Genesis 4, the idea of sacrifice comes up again. This time it is in the context of Cain and Abel, the offspring of Adam and Eve. All sorts of sacrifices appear repeatedly until we reach Exodus 12, where the Lord will deliver the people of Israel from Egyptian captivity. (p80)

With each step forward in the story of Scripture, we witness God moving closer and closer to His people who had become estranged from Him due to their sin and rebellion until we reach the fulfillment of the promise made regarding the “Seed.” (p81) As Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 1:15, the Son of God came into the world as a man to deal with sin. Theologians call this event the incarnation, which speaks of the Son of God taking on flesh to become a human like us. (p84)

By faith, we are united to Christ in His death and resurrection, which conquers the power of sin and death for us (1 Cor. 15:50–57). Though we are all sinners by nature and by choice, through faith in Christ we can stand righteous, accepted before God, because of what He has done to save us. And unlike the sacrifices of the atonement in the Old Testament that had to be repeated with great regularity, Christ’s sacrifice was “once for all” (Heb. 10:10). (p87)

Digging Deeper

- Have you ever thought of Genesis chapter three as being the “first gospel?” Would you agree with that description? Explain your answer.
- Casey Hough talked about a basic need that God provided for Adam and Eve and referred to it as the first sacrifice recorded in the book of Genesis. What was it? (p80) Before this study, had you ever considered that provision by God to be a sacrifice?
- Does it matter if Christians don’t agree about why Christ came? Why or why not?
- How does Jesus’ sacrifice for us differ from all other sacrifices in the Scriptures? (Give at least two examples.)

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CHAPTER 6—GAY CHRISTIANS: MORAL IDENTITY AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Of all the identities that I have possessed in my life, the most essential and life-shaping identity that I have is this: “I am a Christian.” (p92) When I was united to Jesus by faith, my identity fundamentally changed forever. All the other identities that I possess have now been brought under His lordship, His rule over me. I was bought with a price; therefore, everything that I do must aim to honor Him. (p93)

What Christ has done for us is not just a matter of forgiving our sins, but also a matter of granting us a new identity in Him. And this new identity comes with moral implications that Christ Himself is at work to accomplish His will in us. In other words, when we exclude Christ from our understanding of who we are, things will not go well. (p94) What we need as the bedrock of our identity is the immovable foundation of Christ Jesus as our Lord and Savior. (p95)

Many Christians who describe themselves as gay would affirm that God’s Word clearly prohibits same-sex behavior. The debate, then, is not so much about behavior but rather how to make sense of the desires that these Christians wrestle with as they seek to live faithfully to Christ. The question for us is whether Christians should think in such terms about their identity. Should this struggle with same-sex attraction be considered part of who they are? (pp98-99)

If, as many have argued, “same-sex attraction” is innate, that is, involuntary for some people, how could a person be culpable for something that appears to be outside of their control? (p101) When assessing the morality of our desires, the question is not ultimately about whether the desires were voluntary or involuntary, but rather, how those desires reflect God’s will. This is the fundamental question, not “Do I or do I not want to do this or that?” (p104) Yes, the desires may persist, just as we know that many other sinful desires (e.g., anger, jealousy, gluttony) persist until the day of our full redemption in Christ. But that does not mean that we should be apathetic to such desires or that we should believe that there is no hope for escape from these desires. (p106)

In God’s wisdom and sovereignty, He knows what’s best for shaping our identity in greater conformity to Christ. While all sorts of struggles with sin will persist until the day when we are completely free, we can trust that God is at work by His Spirit to make us more like Jesus. There is peace here. May the Lord give us eyes to see it, ears to hear it, and the faith to receive it, as Christ, the hope of glory, is formed in us. (p113)

Digging Deeper

- In the opening lines of chapter six, Casey Hough uses eight identifiers to answer the question, “Who am I?” (p91) If you had to ‘identify’ yourself using only four descriptors, what would they be?
- Of the current gender, ethnicity, and sexuality descriptors that society uses to define people, which ones will last forever? (Which ones will we still be known by in Heaven?)
- Casey Hough comes to the conclusion that it isn’t just the practice of physical same-sex behaviors that are a sin but same-sex attraction itself. (p102). Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer.
- Through the power of the Holy Spirit constantly working in us, we can be made more and more like Jesus. How does that make you feel? (Give two or three responses.)

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CHAPTER 7—“WILL WE SEE YOU AT THE WEDDING?”—GAY MARRIAGE

What are Christians to do when the wedding that they have been invited to does not align with what God’s Word teaches about marriage? For instance, what should a Christian do if they are invited to a gay wedding? (p116)

Marriage from beginning to end is God’s idea. It is an important idea for understanding God’s design not only for humanity but also for the end goal of our redemption in Christ. Jesus will receive His bride, the church. And, while there is no need to extrapolate undue parallels between the marriage supper of the Lamb and His bride and our earthly marriages, it is also not without warrant to see that our marriages point to an even greater reality. (pp117-118)

When we attend a wedding, we are not just simply celebrating; we are also lending our endorsement, our approval to the marriage itself. A Christian must conform to God’s intent for marriage—after all, it was His idea, not ours—rather than to what the culture or state declares is a marriage. We are not free to redefine marriage, nor are we free to celebrate that which God Himself does not recognize. Not only should Christians not lend their support to a same-sex wedding, but they should not support any wedding that violates God’s design for marriage. (p119)

At this point, some may object and say that “such an action will irreparably harm my relationships and keep me from being able to share Christ with people in the future.” Before we ever tackle the question of how best to relate to others, we must remember that our first priority is how we relate to God. (p121) Once we have settled the matter of prioritizing our love for God above all, then, and only then, can we begin to work through what it would mean to love others well. (p121) In this case, loving others well would mean loving them in at least five different ways: boldly, compassionately, truthfully, redemptively, and patiently. (pp122-123)

In all of this, we must see that loving others does not mean allowing the world to define what it means to “love,” but rather, looking to God for our understanding of love as He has revealed it in His Word. In the case of refusing to attend or support any wedding that undermines God’s ideal of marriage, we are demonstrating that we will trust God with the impact that our decision makes to those who might not accept it. We can and must communicate that our decision is not rooted in hatred but rather love—love for God and love for them, which ultimately desires their good and God’s glory. Yet, we recognize that it is impossible as a Christian to endorse a lifestyle or a decision that clearly contradicts God’s desire for marriage. It would be unloving to do so. (p124)

Digging Deeper

- Have you ever been invited to a same-sex wedding? Did you attend? What influenced your decision?
- Casey Hough states that when we attend a wedding, we are lending our endorsement and approval to the marriage. Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Was/is there someone in your life whom you would describe as a Christian who prioritized their love for God above all else? Tell the group about that person.
- If you chose not to attend a same-sex wedding and needed to defend your position, what would you say?

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CHAPTER 8—WHAT'S IN A MEAL? WELCOMING MY GAY CHILD AND PARTNER

My child is gay and wants to bring their partner to Thanksgiving dinner. My child professes to be a Christian, but it is clear from their lifestyle that they are not following Christ. I love my child and do not want to estrange them from our family. At the same time, I do not approve of their lifestyle and am worried about how their presence at Thanksgiving could confuse my younger children. What should I do?” (P125)

We live and minister in a world full of brokenness, which has resulted in moral confusion. Those asking such questions are grieving. They love their children dearly. They want to be good parents. But most of all, they want to honor God. They know that when they chose to follow Jesus, it might lead to conflict with some of their loved ones. (pp125-126)

We must maintain two truths about Jesus: Jesus was an inclusive Savior who welcomed everyone to come to Him, and yet, He was also an exclusive Savior who maintained certain expectations for those who decided to come to Him. He made a free offer to all (any could come), but the free offer was not cheap. The call to follow Jesus was open to anyone who would receive it, but it came with expectations. How can we reconcile Jesus’ willingness to associate with sinners with the teaching that we find in Matthew 18, 1 Corinthians 5, and 2 Thessalonians 3? Should it be practiced in the case of our scenario? (p130)

When relating to those who were outside of the church, those who had not professed faith in Him, Jesus did not shrink back. Jesus did not separate Himself from sinners. (p132) Jesus is concerned, like Paul, with sinners who claim to be following Him but who refuse to repent of their sins and live in obedience to God’s will for disciples. By definition, these are unrepentant sinners in the church of Jesus Christ. Such sinners needed to be warned, not welcomed. (p133)

Jesus commands His followers to take their concerns directly to the person who has wandered away. This is an expression of love, not judgment. The aim is restoration, not condemnation. If we suspend, for the moment, that “correction” is a “bad thing” or “judgmental thing,” then it is easy to see how such a practice is an act of love. As a parent, if my child is constantly playing in the road, it would be unloving for me not to correct them. The same goes for our brothers and sisters in Christ’s church who are playing with sin. (pp127-128)

Digging Deeper

- Casey Hough begins this chapter by making a distinction between our response to the Christian living in a same-sex relationship versus our response to the unbeliever living in a same-sex relationship. Why does he believe these responses should be different? Do you?
- Has your dedication to following the commands of Scripture ever cost you a meaningful relationship with someone? What happened? Is there hope for restoration?
- The words of Jesus in John 3:16 are some of the best-known in the Bible. How is John 3:16 inclusive? How is it exclusive?
- Do you have any friends who are actively involved in a same-sex relationship and also claim to be followers of Christ? Would you invite them to your home for dinner? Why or why not?

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CHAPTER 9—CREATION REGAINED: A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

At this point in my pastoral ministry, I have officiated far more funerals than weddings. (p143) So as I pointed to the graves around us, I would tell the family and friends who gathered with us that one day, this field of death and loss would burst forth with resurrection life when Christ returned. I believe this is one of the reasons why so many churches used to maintain their own graveyards on their grounds. It wasn't just because it provided a service to their congregation; it was also an image of hope that we would all be gathered to Him together at the same time. (p144)

Over the last decade of serving as a lead pastor, the sermons that I have received the most (by far) positive responses to are sermons about God's new creation. Sometimes these sermons deal with the topic of heaven, or the intermediate state between death and the resurrection, or the hope of the resurrection at Jesus' return. People are hungry for hope on the other side of this life, and Christians have every reason to be filled with such hope when we consider what Christ has done for us. (p144)

According to Revelation 20–22, when Christ returns, those who had placed their trust in Him while living on this earth will be resurrected to meet Him in the air as He descends to rule over the earth. The apostle Paul speaks of this in I Thessalonians 4:13-18. (p145) Paul explains that these believers, though dead, will still conquer death. Death doesn't get the final word. For, just as Jesus was raised from the dead, so also everyone who has placed their trust in Him in this life will also be raised when He returns. (p146)

Imagine (...) a world with no more death, no more tears, no more cancer diagnoses, no more abuse, no more pain, no more sin. Creation itself is regained as God deals with rebellion through judgment and welcomes His people into His presence forever. This is how God makes everything right. He decrees judgments for those who did not accept Christ's work on their behalf as the atoning sacrifice for sin, and He welcomes those who did accept Christ's work, having their sins atoned for by the blood of Jesus. (p147)

Digging Deeper

- Some people think of cemeteries as beautiful and peaceful. Others think of them as creepy and morbid. What 2 or 3 words would you use to describe a cemetery?
- Do you sense that people “are hungry for hope on the other side of this life”? Give an example to support your observation or experience.
- Casey Hough references Revelation chapters 20 through 22 several times in this chapter, noting that “God will decree judgments for those who did not accept Christ's work on their behalf.” (p147) Is it just (fair) for God to bring judgment against those who did not believe in Him? Why or why not?
- This short chapter revisits the book's five pillars of a biblical framework. (p10) How does a reminder of the believer's hope of eternal life with Christ fit into a study that focuses on loving our LGBTQ friends without compromising biblical truth?

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CHAPTER 10—"MY DAUGHTER BELIEVES SHE'S MY SON"

Gender dysphoria refers to a "deep sense of unease and distress that may occur when your biological sex does not match your gender identity." If you are not familiar with what I'm referring to here, imagine a biological male experiencing a "deep sense of unease and distress" about being male and feeling as though he should be a female. Sometimes this unease and distress is captured in the phrase "born in the wrong body." For people who experience gender dysphoria, something feels out of sorts with who they believe they are (gender identity) and their physical embodiment biological sex). (p150)

How should parents respond when their child expresses such feelings to them? First, parents should listen closely to their children. Do not be dismissive or angry at them for being willing to speak to you about their struggle. As parents, we want our children to know that they are speaking with someone who regards them and their struggles with seriousness and love. (p150)

As we walk with our children through these struggles about gender and sexuality, we need to be sure that we listen well to what has prompted their crisis. (p152) After listening to your child, you may find that their struggle with gender dysphoria is more related to confusion about what it means to be a boy or a girl in the world. (p153) (...) we need to be careful to not allow narrow or strict stereotypes of what it means to be a male or female to sway our children from embracing who God has made them to be in the world.

I believe that under no circumstance should a parent allow their child to "transition" either socially, hormonally, or surgically. Any professional advocating such action to "treat" gender dysphoria should be rejected. Such "transitions" cause far more harm than allowing time and physical maturing to work itself out in their children. Making life-altering, irreversible decisions to a child struggling with gender dysphoria is not healthcare, nor is it consistent with a Christian view of humanity created in God's image. (p154)

While activists will tell us that our children's struggles are their destinies, we must remember who our God is! In remembering who our God is, we must not forget the power of the gospel to transform our children. (p156) Our God can change and deliver us and our children from every struggle we face. I am not dismissing the struggle, nor suggesting that there are simple fixes. But the gospel deals with our root issues, whatever they might be in our lives or our children's lives. You might be tempted to lose hope, but look to Christ. Our hope is a living hope: Christ crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. (p157)

Digging Deeper

- Do you have a child or grandchild who has experienced gender confusion and wants to socially or medically transition? How are you dealing with the situation?
- Why do you think gender confusion and gender transitioning seem so prevalent in today's society?
- Pastor Hough says, "I believe that under no circumstance should a parent allow their child to transition either socially, hormonally, or surgically." Do you agree? Explain your perspective.

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CHAPTER 11—THE TRANSGENDER MAN SITTING IN THE THIRD PEW

If the church is going to glorify God, then it must welcome those who are sincerely searching, even if their life is a complete mess when we meet them. And, if we are being honest with ourselves, this is how we all were before God changed our lives by the power of His gospel! But what would welcoming a transgender guest look like practically in a local church? What about things like bathrooms or gender-organized ministries (men's ministry, women's ministry)? How can a church do this well in love without compromising truth? (p163)

Namely, the church exists to glorify God, which would entail not only equipping church members with a biblical view of sexuality and gender but also forming and enforcing policies and procedures in the church that reflect biblical truth. Churches are forming the spirituality of their members not only through what they say but also through what they do. Churches have expectations for everyone, not just their guests. (p164)

One of the best ways churches can prepare for such situations is by organizing hospitality or security teams to help direct guests based on their needs. Obviously, this will require that hospitality and security teams be trained to deal with different situations that might arise in the church. The training should be clear, compassionate, and convictional. Furthermore, the training should be aimed at helping guests while not minimizing the reality of threats that may present themselves. We should have no desire to cause undue offense to anyone we encounter, but we also must recognize our obligation to care for those that God has entrusted to us. (p165)

How should church leadership respond and advise a transgender individual who is biologically male wishing to partake in a women's Bible study? If a group of women in a Bible study chose to include the transgender person in their study for the sake of sharing the gospel or helping the person work through what it looks like to repent and follow Jesus, it would seem like such scenarios would be biblically permissible but not biblically mandated. If, however, the transgender individual is a professed believer with no interest in submitting to Christ's lordship over their gender and biological sex, such a scenario would undermine the clarity of gospel repentance and risk affirming them in a lifestyle that is contrary to God's will for disciples of Christ. (p166)

Imagine a scenario when a new student is visiting the church's youth ministry. (p167) Our aim in ministering to lost students is not first and foremost to win them to our side on matters of sexuality and gender, but rather to see them won to Christ. We need not shrink back from speaking the truth in love and kindness, though, nor should we actively accommodate with falsehoods. (p168) When Christ ministered to sinners, He neither affirmed nor ignored their sin. His ministry aimed to glorify God through the redemption of sinners. His aim was not to reveal sin and then leave people without hope. Jesus revealed sin to draw people to Himself for salvation. (p169)

Digging Deeper

- Have transgender people visited your church? What happened? How was it handled?
- Casey Hough says, "Love of one's neighbor does not include affirming another person's self-perception." (p167) Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Do you think you could speak the truth in love and kindness to someone caught in the falsehoods of transgenderism? Practice having that conversation.

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CHAPTER 12—YOU ARE HERE: OUR PLACE IN GOD’S REDEPTIVE PLAN

In this brief chapter, I hope to provide you with something like a “You are here” indicator for where we are in this grand story of Creation, Crisis, Christ, and Creation Regained. Knowing where we are located in God’s redemptive plan provides us with a valuable perspective about how to navigate a sexually broken world without losing hope or becoming loveless. (p172)

The idea of “already, not yet” describes how we, as Christians, are living in the “in-between” of Christ’s first coming and second coming. Through union with Christ by faith, we are already enjoying some of the benefits of eternal life, like hope, forgiveness, peace, and joy. The paradox is that while we might die before Christ’s second coming, we will certainly be raised to a fully consummated life with God in the new heaven and new earth. (p172) In other words, we are living in a tension, a time in between what God has already accomplished in and through Jesus Christ on our behalf and what God will bring to completion on the day of Christ Jesus. (p173)

What this means for us now as we navigate a sexually broken world is that God is with and for His people, regardless of how the world perceives us. As we seek to love others while living faithfully to Christ, we should not be surprised when people do not receive our message of the hope and forgiveness that is offered to sinners in the gospel. Following Jesus doesn’t mean that everyone is going to agree with us, but we need to be very careful not to take such rejection personally. While it may feel personal at times, ultimately those who reject the message of the gospel are rejecting Christ and His genuine offer of salvation to all who would turn away from their sins in repentance and place their trust in Him as their Savior and Lord. (p174) The gospel’s message does not originate with us, nor do we have the authority to change it to suit our context better. We are messengers of the gospel, not editors, which is to say that we are tasked with simply delivering His message to others so that they might come to know Him and join us in this tension of living in the “already, not yet.” (pp174-175)

While some sins (...) may cease to be the primary battleground for your sanctification after your conversion, there may be other “besetting sins” that you must continue to deal with and address until the time when the work of our redemption that has “already” begun is fully realized at Christ’s return. We need this category of the “already, not yet” if we are going to fight our own sins well while helping others to do the same. We should not let our present struggle with sin define who we are in Christ. (pp177-178)

Digging Deeper

- One page 173, Pastor Casey lists 5 biblical examples of the “already, not yet” of the Christian life. Were any of these examples new concepts for you? Which ones?
- What do you think it means to be a “messenger of the gospel, not an editor of it”? (p174)
- Have you ever shared the gospel with someone only to have it rejected? How did you respond to the rejection? Did the rejection feel personal on any level?
- If there were a “You are here” pin in the map of your life right now, where would it be?

KNOWN FOR



CHAPTER 13—BIRTHDAYS AND BATHROOMS: LIVING AS CHRISTIANS IN PUBLIC

We show our love for God by trusting Him enough to obey what He has said, even when it conflicts with the values of the society that we live in. We hold fast to the belief that there is only one true God, the Lord, who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ for our salvation, even while the world says that there are multiple ways to God. We hold fast to the belief that God is the Creator and Sustainer of all life and that when He created humanity, He made humanity in His image and designated them male and female. (p188)

Imagine that your daughter is invited to a classmate's birthday party. As you reread the birthday invitation, you notice the use of male pronouns in reference to Sam and the request from Sam's parents to purchase toys and clothing that would stereotypically be for a male child. You ask your daughter for clarification and learn that her friend Samantha/Sam believes she is now a "he." What do you do as a parent in this type of situation? (p181)

Let's say that you are a church leader, and a member of your church comes up to ask you about a situation he is facing at work. His company has just passed a new email signature policy requiring all employees to include their preferred pronouns. The church member feels uncomfortable with this new policy because he feels like it forces him to affirm a specific ideology that is contrary to his understanding of biblical gender and sexuality. At the same time, he's the breadwinner to a family of four children. He's worried that if he does not conform to the new policy, he will lose his job and the family will suffer. How do you counsel this concerned church member? (p182)

What we need in these situations is a biblical-theological framework from which we not only view the world but also our role in the world as parents. We must seek to cultivate a vision of faith in and obedience to God that will serve generations of Christians who will continue to wrestle with difficult questions like these and those we are yet even to imagine. (p190) Simply put, following Jesus will come with a cost, but that cost should not deter our obedience to Him. (p191) If God's Word is clear on a matter, then we can trust that He will take care of us and our family as we seek to conform and submit to His revealed will in Scripture. We can trust Him! We must trust Him. He is faithful. He will take care of His people. He will take care of you. (pp191-192)

Digging Deeper

- This chapter opens with a scenario of a young girl being invited to a birthday party for a friend who is "socially transitioning" from female to male. If this were your daughter, would you allow her to attend the party? Why or why not?
 - The second scenario in chapter 13 is of a businessman whose company has issued a policy that employees must acknowledge and use the "preferred pronouns" of other employees. How would you advise this businessman? Would you leave/lose a job over this issue?
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- Looking back over the chapters in this book, which has been the most helpful to you? Why?
 - If someone asked you to briefly explain what this book is about and to share two or three concepts that you learned from it, what would you say?