

“Mom, I’m Gay”



*Loving Your LGBTQ Child
and Strengthening Your Faith*

Revised and Expanded Edition

SUSAN COTTRELL

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*To all of you in the LGBTQ community who strive to be true to yourselves,
and to the family and friends who love, defend, and encourage you.
We shall overcome!*

*“How many more gay people must God create
until we realize that he wants them here?”*

—Hawaii Representative Kaniela Ing

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FOREWORD



In my years of Christian ministry work, I have heard from countless parents struggling with how to respond to their child's coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

Many of these parents are suffering from guilt, doubt, and confusion. They are committed to their faith and want to stand for what's right in God's eyes. They also love their children and would do anything to shield them from harm. But if their children make decisions they feel they can't support or if they find themselves trapped in a conflict between their church and their child, how do they strike the right balance? How do they show unconditional love without betraying their convictions?

In my own writings and ministry, I have sought to help parents grapple with these questions as Christians—but I am not a parent.

Other books have been written specifically for parents from a parent's perspective—but without a Christian focus.

Now, Susan Cottrell offers us a book from a Christian parent's perspective, in what will surely be an oasis in the desert for so many parents.

In this book, Susan avoids focusing on the polarizing

politics of homosexuality. This is not a book about same-sex marriage or Bible debates on sexual morality, though Susan does offer some thoughts of her own along the way. Instead, this is a book about how you can respond as a parent or loved one—knowing what you can change and what you can't and recognizing the ways your own response has the power to mend a damaged relationship or push your child away forever.

You may find, as you read, that Susan draws some conclusions you don't agree with. That's okay; I encourage you to keep reading anyway. Ultimately, even if you don't come to the same conclusions Susan has come to, I think you'll find much to appreciate in her approach, along with many important reminders about God's supremacy in all things.

Whoever you are, whatever you are going through right now, know that you are not alone. Many others have been down this road before, and many others are going through it alongside you.

I pray that this one mother's words offer you peace, courage, and a renewed sense of hope in an otherwise turbulent time. And I pray that God will guide and comfort you in your journey, bringing blessings you never expected out of even the darkest nights of your soul.

Justin Lee,
Executive Director,
The Gay Christian Network

PART 1



COPING WITH THE SHOCK

CHAPTER 1



THE OUTING

Easter Sunday night, we sat down to watch a movie. Anthony said, "Mom, I have to tell you something." I thought, "He got a girl pregnant; he asked a girl to marry him." . . . Ha ha. He said, "Mom, I am gay." I looked at him and said, "What?" He said, "I am gay." I thought someone stopped my world and tore my guts out and handed them to me. Instantly I thought, "You ruined MY Easter weekend . . . how dare you." I asked him, "Are you sure?" Now I realize how stupid that question was. I realized it was wrong as soon as I said it. It was a nightmare. He went to bed. Needless to say, I didn't sleep. I threw up all night."

—Patricia

"Mom, I'm gay."

You want to shove those words back in the box and put the lid on. Your child is gay. Or bisexual. Or questioning. You never saw this coming (or maybe you did). It was not what you had in mind, and it may go against everything you believe. You instantly wonder where you went wrong.

This book is a primer to help you through the process when your child (niece, grandson, sibling, or any other loved one) comes out.

Texas couple Amy and Jen (age twenty-two) had already professed their love for each other before they told their families. Amy had grown up Southern Baptist, with all its admonitions against homosexuality. She was working in a national Christian ministry, and her job agreement included an undefined clause about “moral behavior” expected of all employees.

Jen’s parents were liberal, agnostic ex-hippies. Naturally, Jen and Amy told Jen’s parents first, to gain the support needed to face Amy’s parents.

But Jen’s liberal parents went ballistic. Jen’s mom called Amy’s workplace and got her fired. She called friends and relatives. Then she told Jen she never wanted to see her again.

Amy’s parents turned out to be kind and loving, and they actually worked to restore the damage Jen’s parents had caused with others.

Parents (aunts, uncles, grandparents) have a choice of how to respond to their loved one’s coming out. I write this book to show you that you have a choice and the enormous impact your choice can make on your relationship with your child, as well as on your child’s future. I use “parent” and “child” throughout for easier reading, but this book is for anyone with an LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, or Questioning) loved one. Certainly when it’s possible, a parent’s acceptance is without equal. But when it’s not, another caring relative or friend can make a great difference as well.

My heart breaks for the many families in turmoil, trying to reconcile their faith with their love for the child—especially as that despair is unnecessary. Jesus’ response to humanity is completely different from the fracturing response we see in too much of the church and the community.

To many parents, Christian or not, a child’s “outing” is

not good news, and you may find yourself searching your soul for answers. You want to know how to deal with this revelation. My husband and I were in your shoes six years ago. As we wrestled with all our questions and fears, I started FreedHearts, a blog to help reconcile the love of Christ with the LGBTQ community, families, and friends. Because this terrible chasm simply does not have to be.

FreedHearts (www.freedhearts.org) has grown into a ministry to the Christian LGBTQ community, Christian parents, and all Christians willing to engage in meaningful conversation about two great issues:

1. The great disparity between the call of Christ to love and embrace in contrast to Christians' generally unloving response to the LGBTQ community.
2. The question, is homosexuality a sin? Given all the interpretation and lived experience involved, it's an important question.

These are not questions you need to wrestle with immediately. Our focus right now is helping you deal with the shock you may be feeling and guide you in a loving response to your child. I encourage you to set aside what you already know (or think you know) on the moral and cultural issues surrounding homosexuality and ask God to show you afresh what is in store for you. If you are a Christian, you need God's personal revelation now more than ever. Whether you end up supporting same-sex marriage and relationships (what is known as "Side A" in the gay Christian community) or continue to believe those relationships are sinful ("Side B"), something much bigger and more foundational is at stake here: *How are you called to respond to your beloved son or daughter?* That is the essence of this journey.

FreedHearts Work

This section at each chapter's end offers questions to ponder along the way. My hope is to guide you through this maze of confusion, past some of the biggest dangers, to help you find your way to freedom and wholeness.

Describe what happened when your child came out. Did they tell you or did you find out? What were the circumstances? Were you shocked, or did you have an idea? What was your response?

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