

Andrew Marin

Foreword by **Brian McLaren**

Love Is an Orientation

**Elevating the Conversation
with the Gay Community**

 IVP Books

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Foreword

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread, the old saying goes. But the same is true for heroes. Heroes rush into burning buildings to save complete strangers. Heroes rush to places of famine and war and epidemic to bring food and shelter and medicine. Heroes rush into brewing conflicts to take the risk of making peace. They aren't fools: they know about the danger, disease, crossfire and conflict that will surround them. But they have the courage to throw themselves in anyway, risking their own safety for the common good.

Today we are blessed with some spiritual heroes who also refuse to keep their distance and protect themselves until engagement becomes less risky, or maybe even respectable. Fully aware of the risks, they rush in—to groups that are aflame with hot and spreading conflict, to enclaves of wounded people who have been excluded and rejected, to communities torn by contention and dissension. These heroes seek to be agents of healing, understanding, reconciliation and peace. They don't worry about the criticism they will receive. (Well, they may worry, but they don't let it stop them.) They know they'll be misunderstood and vilified. They know that some of the meanest people on earth are sincere, well-intentioned religious people who believe in their religion so fervently they would die for it but also would kill for it—literally or metaphorically. Yet these heroes still step forward, not shrinking back, driven by a force that is greater than self-preservation.

In so doing, they are following the same Leader, Jesus Christ, who did not seek his own interests, but those of others. He knew what it would mean to give himself—to live and die not just for others but for *sinner*s—yet he endured the cross, counted its shame as nothing, all for the joy set before him: the joy of reconciling humanity with itself and with God. I have had the great honor to know many of these kinds of heroes in my life. Most of them have been older than me, but it's a great joy now to meet more and more who are younger. One of them is Andrew Marin. You're about to read his first book. I'd like to introduce it through this parable.



I don't want to be closed-minded or judgmental, but in good conscience I simply can't approve of the lifestyle. I personally believe it's a choice, not something predestined or forced upon anyone by anyone. I understand that parental upbringing is undoubtedly a big factor and that some people believe genes play a role in predisposing people to this orientation, but I also know that adults are responsible for their behavior, and the behaviors associated with this lifestyle are no exception.

On the one hand, I believe that we live in a free country, and people should be free to do what they think is right. But on the other hand, I believe freedom has limits—one limit being where others are hurt by the chosen lifestyle. And this lifestyle, there can be no mistake, is hurting a lot of people. Families are being torn apart by it, and churches and denominations too.

Everybody has an opinion on this controversial lifestyle, but I believe God's opinion is the one that matters most, and there is absolutely no question what God's opinion is according to the Bible. This orientation and the behaviors associated with it are thoroughly condemned, especially by Jesus. He was very compassionate toward many groups of people, but there is one group he had an absolute and uncompromising commitment to confront and expose, and it was those who dishonor themselves and others as humans made in

the image of God by engaging in this lifestyle and its practices.

When people choose this lifestyle, they often cut themselves off from everyone who doesn't agree with them. They end up being assimilated and absorbed into closed communities where only their own voices and views are heard, and everyone who disagrees is mocked and condemned, often with very strong language. They often see their community as superior and become incapable of speaking respectfully to or of those of us who cannot in good conscience agree with them. Some of them go so far as to claim that God made them the way they are, pushing onto God the responsibility for their own choices and behaviors.

Some, after giving themselves over completely to the lifestyle, have a crisis of conscience. But when they want to leave, their leaders and peers depict their changing perspective as a betrayal and pressure them to stay, often using fear tactics to intimidate them and keep them in their community. Special ministries have formed to help people exit the lifestyle, recover from the abuse and pain the community has been known to impose, and be reoriented to a healthier life and perspective. But even with professional therapy, many people feel they have been wounded for life by what they've experienced, and many, looking back on their years "inside," compare the lifestyle to an addiction.

Spokespeople for the lifestyle can seem very educated and scholarly. They claim that their position has a long history behind it. They often quote scientific studies and back up their assertions with emotional anecdotes. Sometimes they seek to gain sympathy by claiming they are being mistreated and persecuted for being outspoken about their views. But they tend to ignore other strands of history and scientific research that contradict their position, and they ignore anecdotes that don't fit with their predetermined conclusions, and they minimize the persecution they inflict on others.

Advocates are eager to recruit others into their "love" as they call it. Many organizations raise huge sums of money to recruit youth and children into their chosen way of life, and they have been ex-

tremely adept at using media—radio, TV and now the Internet—to gain an aura of credibility and legitimacy. They organize huge events and mass rallies to celebrate their growing clout and demonstrate that they are proud of who they are and what they stand for. Everyone knows how much influence they have in our political system, and how one political party in particular panders for their votes. But look at the countries where this lifestyle runs rampant, and you'll get an idea what our nation will be like if some of us don't have the courage to stand up and speak up. Wherever this lifestyle spreads, a whole host of social problems inevitably follows.

Yes, activists may use the word *love* to justify their behavior, but those who disagree with them are seldom treated with love. Many of us have already faced the scorn of the activists who promote this chosen lifestyle and defend it as legitimate and even godly. For doing so we have received hate mail peppered with a wide range of threats and abusive speech, with many calling for our damnation. But even so, we have learned that we must not respond to hate with hate; we must love these people and seek to help them, even though we do not approve of their behavior.



You've probably realized by now that this parable isn't talking about "the gay lifestyle" but rather "the judgmental lifestyle," the kind of "take-the-splinter-out-of-your-brother's-eye" religiosity that Jesus talked about in the Sermon on the Mount. (If you didn't realize it, try going back and rereading it in that light.) As someone born and raised in a strict, conservative church—actually, the term *fundamentalist* would have fit us perfectly—I've seen a good bit of judging and condemning and dividing and excluding in my lifetime, and I know how good and holy and utterly righteous it can feel to indulge in. Having served as a pastor most of my adult life, I've seen the judgmental lifestyle at work in quite a few parishioners too, and I was more than once on the receiving end of their attempts at splinter removal. But more personally, I must admit I've practiced more

than my share of the judging lifestyle too—although I have generally been careful to call it “discerning” when I’ve been the one doing it. I guess I could say, with songwriter Joni Mitchell, that I’ve known judgment “from both sides now.”

And that’s one reason Andrew Marin’s book seems to me to be so important, and why I’m so glad this emerging leader has been given the courage to write it. As you’ve probably heard (note *UnChristian*), among young adults in the United States, the terms *evangelical* and *born again* are now most strongly associated with the characteristics of being anti-gay and judgmental. Whatever your opinion on same-sex orientation, you have to admit that Jesus didn’t say, “They’ll know you are my disciples by your firm stance on divisive social issues.” No, he said we’ll be known as his disciples for another reason . . . and that’s what Andrew is pursuing in these pages.

When you come to the last page, Andrew won’t ask you to agree with his opinions about the gay orientation or lifestyle. In fact, he won’t indulge in a lot of opinion polemics. Instead he will try to help you understand what he has learned by listening with an open and compassionate heart to gay women and men. And he will try to help you respond to gay people in your world in a more mature and compassionate way too. And in the end, he’ll ask you to agree with him on one main thing: that the orientation and lifestyle of love is the right and only way for true followers of Jesus.

He’ll do so because he has surrendered himself wholeheartedly to that orientation of love. It’s not just superficial tolerance he’s after, and it’s not just the ever-popular “love in word only” that uses the word but doesn’t suffer the consequences. No, the love to which Andrew has surrendered himself is the amazing, unfathomable, give-your-all love of God. That love could never be captured in a word or even in ten thousand words. Ultimately, it was best shown in a life, and in a death, and in a resurrection.

This love reaches out to all of us—those who experience rejection and those who reject, those who react and those who are reacted against, those who are stereotyped and those who stereotype, those

who fear and those who are feared. It isn't elicited by the loveability of its object, but rather it flows from the all-generous and holy, holy, holy orientation of its Subject, God. And it is into this generous, holy orientation that we are about to be invited in a new and deep way, in the nitty-gritty of one of today's most vexing and contentious subjects. May the Spirit of the living, loving God use the words of this courageous young writer to draw us deeper into the orientation and lifestyle of divine love. May we, each in our own way, become heroes in the cause of love.

Brian McLaren

Christmas, 2008

P.S. I'd like to ask you to do Andrew a favor, OK? When you turn the last page, some of you will be disappointed that Andrew didn't go further. And others of you will be concerned that Andrew went too far. Between here and the last page, you'll have your checklists in mind, waiting to see if he says and doesn't say the things you want him to. If Andrew simply fulfilled your script, or someone else's, this book would hardly be worth reading; it would just say things that have been said before. So why not let Andrew share what's uniquely on his heart? Why not listen, and appreciate, and learn?