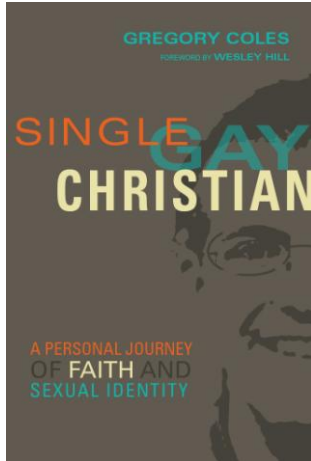




# BOOK DETAILS



*Single, Gay, Christian: A Personal Journey of Faith and Sexual Identity*

Available August 22, 2017  
\$15, 128 pages, paperback  
978-0-8308-4512-5

*"Endearing, raw, and honest. A heartfelt contribution to the growing literature on openly gay lives of fruitful obedience in the traditional churches."*

— Eve Tushnet, author of *Gay and Catholic*

## "I'll tell you what it's like to belong nowhere."

Is it possible to be gay and still follow Jesus? And if so, what happens next? *Single, Gay, Christian* is the story of one person's journey through these questions. It's about acting like your own alter ego, about getting epiphanies from mosquitoes, about singing happy birthday to yourself while literally hiding in a closet.

In an age where neither society nor the church knows what to do with gay Christians, Gregory Coles shares his story — a story about a boy in love with Jesus who, at the fateful onset of puberty, realized his sexual attractions were persistently and exclusively for other guys. This honest, hopeful account shows life through one man's eyes and assures all people: "You are not a mistake."

Coles writes: "I'll show you the world through my eyes. I'll tell you what it's like to belong nowhere. To know that much of my Christian family will forever consider me unnatural, dangerous, because of something that feels as involuntary as my eye color. And to know that much of the LGBTQ community that shares my experience as a sexual minority will disagree with the way I've chosen to interpret the call of Jesus, believing I've bought into a tragic, archaic ritual of self-hatred.

"But I promise my story won't all be sadness and loneliness and struggle. I'll tell you good things too, hopeful things, funny things, like the time I accidentally came out to my best friend during his bachelor party. I'll tell you what it felt like the first time someone looked me in the eyes and said, 'You are not a mistake.' I'll tell you that joy and sorrow are not opposites, that my life has never been more beautiful than when it was most brokenhearted."

D. A. Carson, president of The Gospel Coalition, said, "To say this book is important is a painful understatement. It is the candid, moving, intensely personal story of a gay young man who wants to live his life under the authority of King Jesus and who refuses to accept the comforting answers proffered by different parts of the culture. Superbly written, this book stands athwart the shibboleths of our day and reminds us what submission to King Jesus looks like, what it feels like. This book needs to be thoughtfully read by straight people and by gay people, by unbelievers and by Christians. It is not to be read with a condescending smirk, but with humility."



Gregory Coles, author of  
*Single, Gay, Christian*

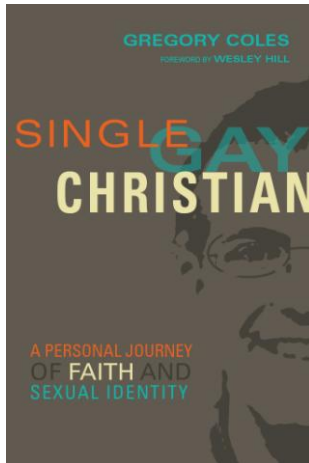
## *Single, Gay, Christian*

**Gregory Coles** is a tangle of identities: born in upstate New York, raised on the Indonesian island of Java, and now a PhD candidate studying English in central Pennsylvania. He has been in love with language since age eight, when he started learning his older brother's SAT vocabulary words and reading Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Greg's fiction and expository writing have been published by Penguin Random House and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and he writes regularly for Crosswalk.com about his obsession with Jesus. His academic research on rhetorics of marginality (how language works in society for disadvantaged groups) has appeared in *College English*.

When he isn't writing or teaching, Greg can usually be found playing piano at a local church, dabbling in songwriting, jogging, or whipping up eleven-pound batches of buttercream icing at his favorite bakery.

[gregcoles.com](http://gregcoles.com)



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*"When Greg first contacted me about writing an endorsement, I tried to decline. I had plenty of other requests that I turned down due to other commitments. But I happened to take a peek at the manuscript to see if Greg's memoir was any different from the hundreds of other memoirs out there. Instantly, I was hooked. . . . Thank you, Greg, for challenging so much of what I thought I knew about the topic (and people!) of faith and sexuality."*

– Preston Sprinkle, president of The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender, author of *People to Be Loved*

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## A Story About Being Gay and Celibate

**How was this book a bit of a surprise for you?**

**Gregory Coles:** I didn't initially intend for this book to be a book at all. I started writing out of a sense of personal compulsion, as if I were writing a journal, trying to make sense of my own experiences and beliefs about sexuality. But as I wrote, I began to believe that the story I was telling might be helpful for others. People who identify as gay and celibate often feel that we are all alone – and others who study the theology of sexuality often talk about us in generalities and abstractions. For both groups (and many others), I think there's value in telling an individual story that is more about self-disclosure than persuasion, a story that deals in concrete, human specifics.

**What will readers find in your story?**

**Greg:** This book is about my journey of realizing that I was gay, attempting (and failing) to pray myself into heterosexuality, attempting (and failing again) to reread the Bible in a way that left room for me to pursue same-sex marriage, and finally choosing to follow Jesus as a single gay Christian. And even more, it's about all the joys and sorrows I've encountered since making that decision: it's about the ways the church has served and wounded me and the ways I've learned to find intimacy and vocation and hope within a calling of celibacy.

**Sexuality is a big topic of discussion these days. What makes this book different from the others?**

**Greg:** Unlike most books on faith and sexuality, I'm focused on story-telling rather than theological argumentation. I also try to envision the possibility of a positive view of single gay Christian sexuality – as if gay celibacy is not simply a second-best for which I must settle because of my faulty wiring, but a dream which God has purposefully dreamed for me.

**How do you hope *Single, Gay, Christian* impacts readers?**

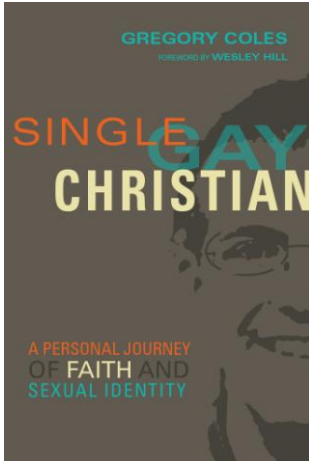
**Greg:** I hope that readers will be

- encouraged to follow Jesus in costly obedience, regardless of sexual orientation;
- sensitive to the unique challenges, sorrows, and joys of sexual minorities in the church;
- equipped with a few ideas about how to live as a celibate gay Christian, or how to show love to those who choose this path; and
- able to show compassion and respect to people who hold differing theologies of sexuality, including those who pursue same-sex relationships.

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– Ronald J. Sider, Palmer Seminary at Eastern University

## "I think I'm gay."

For a minute my brother didn't say anything. Then he said, "No you're not. You're not gay."

Homosexuality, he said, was something fluid, an open door you didn't have to walk through. It was an idea your adolescent mind played with when it was flooded with sexual tension, when you were so aroused you could have lusted after a mop bucket. "Just because you have those thoughts," he said, "it doesn't make you gay. You're just like the rest of us."

"Okay," I said, and I wanted so badly to believe him.

Perhaps my brother had been wrong – and yet, I thought, he was right, wasn't he? I couldn't be gay. Because being gay was supposed to be a choice, a lifestyle, a sin. And I hadn't chosen anything, not that I remembered. I hadn't meant to sin. Was it possible to sin just by existing? Was it possible to inadvertently defy God with every breath you breathed?

Most of the books and articles I read mentioned people like me as an afterthought, a footnote, three sentences buried in the middle of chapter five. "If you're gay," they said, "it's because of your rebellion against God." "If you're gay, it's because you had a distant father and an overbearing mother." "If you're gay, you were probably abused as a child." "If you're gay, you obviously lack close male friendships." Worst of all was when they said, "If you're afraid you might be gay, don't worry about it. It's extremely rare. It can't possibly happen to you."

Nothing fit. I wasn't in rebellion against God, except in the sense that any sinner caught in the grip of grace might be. I loved God. I had two loving parents, three loving older siblings, a host of dear friends both male and female, and (national upheaval aside) a remarkably untroubled childhood. I couldn't read into my past some trauma that hadn't happened.

I prayed harder than ever to change, to become straight, so that if I ever was forced to tell my story, it would be in retrospect. My gay orientation would be the story of who I used to be, before God fixed me. Not the story of who I was.

Change never came.

It wasn't just that God seemed silent when I prayed. It was worse than that. He spoke, and he said no. So I asked again, again, again. Petition after petition and refusal after refusal wore my prayer life thin.

Around the same time, the father of a close friend challenged me to memorize a whole chapter of the Bible. I was a nerd, and a competitive nerd at that, so I did. In a matter of

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weeks I had memorized Philippians chapter four, and in a few weeks more I had tacked chapter three onto the front. As I rehearsed Paul's words, I began to wonder what they might mean for me:

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. . . . Rejoice in the Lord always. . . . The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . . I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (3:8; 4:4, 7, 12)

I had heard the verses before, but never had I needed them so desperately. In a time when I had almost given up on answers, they felt like the faint beginning of an answer. Perhaps, I thought, this was a request God would grant even when he denied me everything else.

So I stopped praying to be straight. I stopped thinking about my orientation at all, which turned out to be surprisingly easy when all my friends were still unmarried and most of them believed sex before marriage was wrong. Except for my perpetual singleness and my evasive answers in Bible studies whenever the conversation turned to lust, I was no different from anyone else. I was nearly normal. It felt good to be normal.

Instead of praying to like women and to stop liking men, I prayed for joy. I prayed for contentment. I plunged myself so deeply into ministry opportunities, into biblical study, into the lives of others, that I almost managed to forget myself entirely. I became one of the happiest people I knew – happy not just on the surface but all the way through, in love with the world because I was desperately in love with the God who had created it.

I wrote stories and won awards and even got published once or twice. I led worship at my tiny Christian international school, my youth group, my church. I passed my high school classes with flying colors and gave a moving valedictory speech. I had a deep faith, strong friendships, a college scholarship, and a plane ticket to the United States. The future looked bright. It was a wealth, an embarrassment of riches. To the untrained eye, it looked almost perfect.

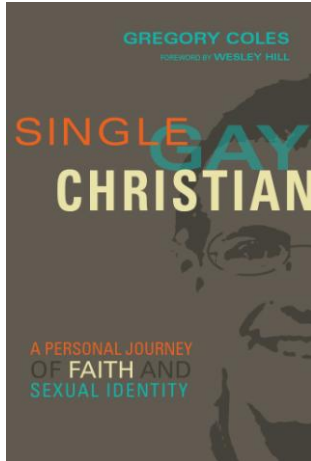
But I knew better.

There were still nights of anguish, nights I thought the fault lines between who I was and who I longed to be were sure to erupt and shatter me. I felt dirty, worthless, irredeemable. I would cry, and I would pray, and nothing would change. But in those moments there was always a thread of grace woven into the darkness, and it was always just enough to get me through the night.

– Adapted from chapter one, "Revelation"



# BOOK EXCERPT



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*“Greg Coles has poured himself out beautifully in this transparent account of his life with Christ as a young gay man. He asks whether the Bible leaves room for monogamous same-sex relationships and agonizes over how the church will treat singleness and sexual minorities. His answers are not easy. Especially for him. . . . If you or someone you love is a follower of Jesus who happens to be gay, this is a must-read.”*

—Carolyn Carney, director of spiritual formation prayer,  
 InterVarsity Christian Fellowship

## I had a right to be straight, didn't I?

Wasn't that implied by the Bible's mandates against homosexuality? Most of the Christians I knew seemed to think so: that there was no such thing as being born gay; that God was just waiting to spring heterosexuality onto anyone who asked; that if you stayed gay, it was probably your own fault. Not that they said as much. But it was written into their voices as they declared God's stance on the issue, as they painted "the homosexuals" with a wide-bristle brush of condemnation.

Could they have been wrong?

And if they were wrong about that, what else might they have been wrong about?

Since those fateful puberty days when I first began to come to terms with my sexuality, there were two assumptions I had never spent much time questioning. The first was that Jesus was real, loved me, died for me, left words in the Bible for me to live by. The second was that the Bible declared homosexual behavior a sin.

For a few dark days, I haggled with the first assumption. But in the end I couldn't let it go. Too much of my experience had proved my faith to be true. Too much of my life made sense only through the lens of the gospel story. To throw away everything I believed and understood—to plunge the rest of my world into darkness in order to make sense of one shadow—I could think of no fate worse than that.

Then came the second assumption.

I had inspected the Bible's assessment of homosexuality before—how could I not have, being what I was?—but until now it had only been a cursory inspection, to confirm what I already thought was true. I had never deconstructed my own assumptions, started from scratch, read with fresh eyes.

Did I dare to open that door? For most of the evangelical community I was steeped in, acknowledging the sinfulness of homosexuality was a litmus test of biblical belief, and therefore a test of true faith. Affirming gay marriage was synonymous with discarding the Bible. It felt like a sin even to ask the question.

But I couldn't help asking it. I needed to know, and not just to take for granted what someone else had told me. I needed to see it for myself.

So I ordered books and watched YouTube videos and dusted off my Greek New Testament, and I dared to think the unthinkable.

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University

Those of us who come from an evangelical background and adhere to traditional interpretations of the Bible usually don’t like to admit that we’re interpreting at all. We’re simply reading and understanding. It’s all the other people – the people we disagree with – who are interpreting. “God said it,” runs our bumper-sticker-friendly mantra. “I believe it. That settles it.” Our hermeneutic lens, the framework through which we approach and analyze Scripture, is so straightforward it becomes almost flippant.

I’m not faulting the heart behind this hermeneutic lens – I think the people who invoke it are usually sincere and want more than anything to follow Jesus. I don’t even disagree with many of the stances they adopt via this attitude. The pervasiveness of sin. The divinity and supremacy of Christ. The urgency of evangelism. I affirm these truths. I celebrate whenever and however people come to believe them. But even so, the bumper-sticker hermeneutic worries me for two reasons.

First, reading the Bible this way reveals the shallowness of our love for God’s Word. Sometimes we’re so in love with easy answers and calendar-sized sound bites that we fall out of love with the Bible itself. We overlook the messy, the nuanced, the complicated. Or we try to read the Bible like a systematic theology, smoothing over the lumps with a rolling pin, forgetting that God could have given us a systematic theology if he wanted to, and he instead chose to give us something unsystematic, something dangerous.

Second, the bumper-sticker hermeneutic leaves us helpless where the Bible seems to contradict itself. How do we respond when the order of creation changes between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2? When kidnapping and enslaving people is condemned, but slaves are told to obey their masters? When Paul appears to forbid women from filling leadership roles in the church and then speaks highly of women who have taken on leadership roles? The logic of surface meaning forces us to read dismissively, to overlook or explain away whatever doesn’t seem to fit. We miss the opportunity to read holistically because we’re too busy regrouping, cutting our losses, trying to protect the Bible from itself.

I say this not to defend revisionary readings of the Bible’s approach to homosexuality but to defend the instinct that makes us bold enough to raise the question. If we truly love Scripture, we have to love it enough to let it prove us wrong.

And at the same time, we have to love it enough to let it tell us what we don’t want to hear.

– Taken from chapter three, “Debating the Divine”