

Foreword by
JUSTIN LEE, AUTHOR OF "TORN"

*"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."*

-Justin Lee



"MOM, I'M GAY"

LOVING YOUR LGBTQ CHILD
WITHOUT SACRIFICING YOUR FAITH

SUSAN COTTRELL

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING

“You are helping build bridges and that is a unique, God-given talent. God bless you and thank you for everything you do to help bridge the gap between communities.” —*Charles*

“Thank you for the love you show toward all people—it is so refreshing. I find this kind of love (‘love no matter what’) to bring me more peace and a closer walk with Christ. Less friends, but more peace and more of a heart towards others than I ever thought possible. You, my friend are a breath of fresh air!” —*Niki*

“Susan, I love how you always nail it in truth and love!!!! I am sure this has come from numerous hours of studying the Scriptures. Thank you!!” —*Carol*

“I have been praying for a group like this. I don’t know who to talk to anymore. I have been in the closet with my Christian family. I am scared of their reactions.” —*Donna*

“Thank you for your blog, Susan. I so appreciate your candidness and thoughtful presentation of difficult topics!” —*Cheryl*

“The world and especially the LGBT community needs more Christians like you!” —*Dennis*

“I can’t stop reading! There are a lot of us parents on the same journey.” —*Melissa*

“In one post, you’ve managed to describe the thought process that took me more than 10 years to get through on my own! I wish I’d had this to give my deeply conservative non-denominational Christian parents when I came out to them at age 21. But better late than never!” —*Laura*

MOM, I'M GAY

*...loving your LGBTQ child
without sacrificing your faith*

Susan Cottrell

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Sacrificing Your Faith* by Susan Cottrell

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DEDICATION

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!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, wonderful God, for flinging me far from my comfort zone into a great and wild adventure. Thank you for the amazing LGBTQ friends you've given me on this journey. Thank you for families who have shown Christ's love to their gay kids, actively fighting through a homophobic culture to do it. Thank you for the many allies who have thrown off their own reputations in favor of loving as Christ loves. Thank you for inviting me to follow Christ, not an ideology.

I lift this work in my hands and say, "Here, this is for you. Because you love me so."



Thank you also to Linda Robertson and our moms' group, Debbie King, as well as Brad Modlin, Justin Lee, Susan Shopland, and the rest of the GCN Board.

Thank you to my beautiful children for your authenticity, endless love, and profound courage.

And finally, thank you to my wonderful lifelong partner, Rob, who has made this whole journey beautiful. I will love you always and forever.

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Foreword

JUSTIN LEE

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*

Preface

A WORD OF HOPE

When our adult child told us they had same-sex attraction, we were shocked. The usual questions flooded us: what would this mean for their life? Would they be safe? Would they ever have children? We truly had no idea what lay ahead.

But here's the realization that smacked us: we were now the "others." Whether we shared this information or not (we thought we would not), the church was no longer our home. In our twenty-plus years at some great, "grace-based" churches, we had not seen one out gay person, nor one family standing in support of their gay family member.

So here we were with our beloved gay child on one hand, and the church teaching conditional acceptance on the other. We dearly love our Jesus who retrieved us from more perils than we can articulate. We also knew we would give our child only the unconditional, all-embracing love Jesus showed to the very farthest outcast—like us. If the church would make us

believe that unconditional love was somehow a compromise of our faith, it was that teaching that needed to be examined. Not Jesus, and certainly not our parental love.

The church veneer had begun to crack prior to our child's revelation. Pastor worship, sin management, attention to rules, even the disproportionate application of rules—all this had eroded our faith, not in the Jesus who'd dramatically saved us years before, but in a church system becoming increasingly irrelevant to a world seeking life. Although much good work was being done, most of our experience was of the church's overriding focus on behavior modification; we'd already experienced this (during some marital challenges) when our church was startlingly unequipped to offer anything usable in our time of crisis.

Over the three years following our child's revelation, we met many Christian parents of gay kids, and realized we were not the only ones to see that the emperor had no clothes. I believe God is shaking the church until what's left is the unshakable: God. I believe he is shifting the attention from behavior modification to the profound, transformative, *life* in Christ. That is where our hope lies.

Our primary job is to love God and love others, and let God take care of everything else. We can have more peace than we ever knew possible, and joy beyond our wildest dreams, as our children flourish in God's inexhaustible love for them. I hope you will join me on this quest.

—Susan

Chapter 1

THE OUTING

“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 22) 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 contemporary 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 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 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.

To many parents, this "outing" is not good news, and you may find yourself searching your soul for answers. We'll get to all of that. But you want to understand how to deal with this now.

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 the church and the community.

So I write 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.

I invite you to sit down, relax, get a cup of tea, and soak this in. My hope is to guide you through this maze of confusion, past some of the biggest dangers, to help you find your way to wholeness.

Faith Thoughts

If you are a Christian, now more than ever, you need God’s personal revelation. I encourage you to set aside what you already know (or think you know) on this topic and ask God to show you afresh what He has in store for you. Whether you end up on what we will call Side A (supporting same-sex marriage and relationships) or on Side B (promoting celibacy for Christians with same-sex attractions), 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.

Thoughts from a Parent

“I’ve watched my own son and I know our children do not choose to be gay. How we respond, however, is a choice. Even if we think they choose it, or even if we think they’re wrong—it’s still our job to love them.” —Dan

***What is FreedHearts?**

Let me introduce you to FreedHearts, my ministry to the Christian LGBTQ community, Christian parents, and Christians willing to engage in meaningful conversation. It began as a blog, where I wrestled with 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. Is homosexuality a sin anyway? Given all the interpretation and lived experience involved, it's an important question.

The blog grew as I continued not only to share my heart but to engage with parents and their gay children through the blog, by email and in person.

Since then, I have developed relationships with other moms who have come through the fire in dealing with this issue on their families and churches. Many of these moms are now in a FaceBook group I co-administrate.

At each chapter's end I've added *Thoughts from a Parent*: quotes from various parents on my blog or Facebook group.

Feel free to stop by FreedHearts to read and comment. I read them all and answer most.

www.FreedHearts.org

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Cottrell graduated from the University of Texas in 1982, and is a national speaker, teacher, and counselor. She is the author of *How Not To Lose Your Teen*, a unique and powerful book on parenting, and *Marriage Renovation*, a book that offers a unique insight into marriage.



She is the Vice President of PFLAG Austin. She has years of Biblical study, discipleship, and counseling experience, and is passionate about bringing the love of Christ to *all* people, helping them find healing, wholeness, acceptance, and freedom in Him.

Susan champions the LGBTQ community and their families, with her characteristic tender-heartedness, and she zealously challenges Christians who reject them—with her wise insight into scripture, especially Jesus' challenge to love each other.

She and her husband Rob have been married more than 25 years and are parents of five children—one of whom is in the LGBTQ community. Susan and Rob live in Austin, Texas.

A WORD FROM THE AUTHOR

When my child came out to me, I prayed it was not true, that God would change it. Instead, he changed me! God generously showed me the flaw in my understanding about same-sex attraction and helped me let go of my expectations for my child and their future.

Christian parents often find themselves in a crisis of faith when their LGBTQ children come out. They see their faith in God in conflict with unconditionally embracing their child. It's not. My heart is to come alongside parents to show that their faith in God empowers them to love, accept, and affirm their child.

My passion is to share the love and acceptance of Christ with those crushed by religion and church standards.

I have led retreats and seminars for many years. I am available on a limited basis to lead conferences and retreats for LGBTQ individuals, their families, and willing Christians. I also speak on marriage and parenting (especially teens), showing that the great, big God we read about is not stuck in our Bibles but offers life on the edge!

I am also available for other speaking engagements and teaching opportunities at your church, Bible study or small group.

I speak to LGBTQ individuals and their loved ones about unconditional acceptance in Christ, using *Mom, I'm Gay* and other biblical wisdom.

I teach from my book, *How Not to Lose Your Teen*, based not only on our own five children, but other teens my family

has welcomed to live in our home when their own Christians families rejected them.

I also teach from *The Marriage Renovation*, based on observation, as well as my own 27-year marriage.

Individually and in groups, I counsel LGBTQ individuals, moms, teens, and families, to provide hope and encouragement.

You can reach me directly via email at:

FreedHearts@gmail.com

Follow my blog, and get answers to FAQs,
as well as extensive resources at:

FreedHearts.org

Also, please follow me on social media:

Twitter: **@FreedHearts**

Facebook: **FreedHearts Ministries**

"I often get asked by parents for resources that can address the struggles of raising LGBT sons and daughters without having to leave faith behind. Susan Cottrell's book, Mom, I'm Gay, does just that. This is the kind of book that parents will love. No one should ever have to choose between who they are, whom they love and what they believe. Sadly, though, many parents feel caught between their faith and love for their LGBT child. Cottrell helps parents find a way to see their faith as a means of helping them to love better, including loving their children better, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation.

I am very grateful for this book."

-Sharon Groves, PhD, Director, Religion and Faith Program,
The Human Rights Campaign

Susan Cottrell is a national speaker, teacher, and counselor, with years of Biblical study and discipleship experience. Her books include: ***How Not To Lose Your Teen*** and ***The Marriage Renovation***. Susan champions the LGBTQ community and families with her characteristic tender-heartedness, and she zealously challenges Christians who reject them with her wise insistence that "loving God and loving others" are the foundation of the rest of scripture, just as Jesus said. She is the Vice President of PFLAG Austin.

She and her husband Rob have been married more than 25 years and have five children-one of whom is in the LGBTQ community. Susan and Rob live in Austin, Texas.



"Susan's book captures the essence of what Christian parents struggle with when their child comes out. It challenges parents as they navigate the minefield of what they've heard in church and what think they understand from the Bible. What's unique is this book doesn't go the typical route of challenging verse-interpretation. The writing comes from Susan's heart as a personal experience of her faith and love for God and her family. We will definitely be adding several copies to our PFLAG library and recommend it to Christian parents of LGBTQ children."

- Conal Charles, Co-President, PFLAG Atlanta

www.freedhearts.org

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