

EXCERPT



Love All our Neighbors

How Churches That Hold a Traditional Sexual Ethic Can Care for LGBTQ People

May 19, 2026 | \$21.99, 224 pages, paperback | 978-1-5140-1087-7

How the Church Can Better Care for LGBTQ People

“So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.” (2 Corinthians 5:16-20)

Paul’s admonition that we are to “regard no one from a worldly point of view” implies that we are to regard everyone from a heavenly point of view. When we interact with our LGBTQ+ neighbors we are not interacting with an ideology, political movement, social media post, movie caricature, or bill being debated in Congress. We are interacting with people, made in the image of God, whom our Savior bled and died to redeem. We are interacting with people God loved literally to the point of his own death. When we regard people from a worldly point of view, that is a surefire sign our muddy biases and ideologies have eclipsed the redeeming radiance of the cross.

These verses also state that Christ has given us the “ministry of reconciliation.” This task of reconciling God with his children, inaugurated by Jesus, is now given to believers. Christ the King wants to be reconciled to a world severed from him, and he has appointed us as ambassadors for the task. God’s preferential method for reconciling humanity back to him is you, and me, and the rest of the body of Christ. This means that for followers of Jesus, one of our primary postures toward the world is that of reconciler.

When I was younger and first joining the ministry, I believed God wanted soldiers in his army to defend him against postmodern secularists. I had a zealous fire to defend God and shoot down untruth wherever I came across it. After fifteen years of ministry and twenty years of reading and rereading Scripture, I now know God is not looking for soldiers to defend him. He does not need defending; he defends us. He is looking for beloved partnership in the ministry of reconciliation.

The church is more than a gathering; it is meant to be a people whose lives have been caught up in the way of Jesus. We are a colony of heaven planted in the soil of earth, leaning toward the dawn of new creation—with the risen Christ the first fruits of its harvest. We stand as his ambassadors, carrying resurrection in our bones. Reconciled by grace, we are sent as reconcilers. And through this fragile, radiant community, the God of the universe whispers and thunders his appeal: behold my beauty, taste my goodness, know my love. And yet sometimes we actively harm vulnerable people while trying to be a reconciler. LGBTQ+ people have been consistent casualties of this unintended harm. And it can feel as if there is no way to reconcile without more hurt. Or if there is a way, it feels to many that there is no turning the tide on the harm already done.

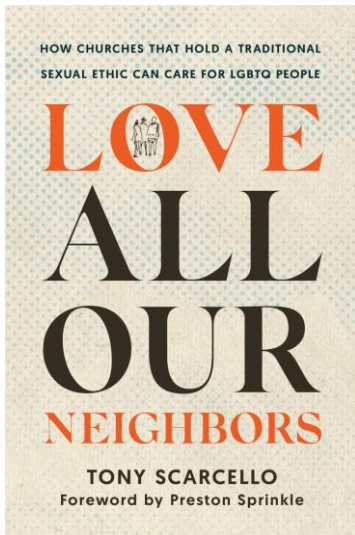
In a world where culture wars have created casualties on both sides of the political aisle, where political tribalism threatens to tear the



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church apart, where secular sexual ethics are not just accepted but considered the only moral option, where postmodern gender theory is widely embraced, where many wonder if the church has anything meaningful to offer the world anymore, where disagreement is grounds for terminating relationships, where some states seek to restrict parental rights if they refuse to grant children gender reassignment care and other states seek to restrict their rights if they do . . . in this world, is it possible for orthodox Christian churches to become places where LGBTQ+ people don't just show up but thrive?

Some may dismiss this as a naive dream. But I am convinced it is not only possible, it is necessary. It is a holy imperative. And I see a new imagination rising: followers of Jesus stirred with longing to live out the holy imperative. Captivated by his love, his embrace, his radical welcome, they ache to see the church mirror Christ's love—wide enough, deep enough, fierce enough—for everyone.

My concern is not culture war, but Christ. Not slogans, but the gospel. Not ideology, but the way of Jesus—full of grace and full of truth. Christ started and ended his incarnated ministry with magnificent proclamations such as “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news” and “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses” (Mark 1:15; Acts 1:8). When it comes to heeding these words for our LGBTQ+ neighbors, the church has often fallen tragically short. We need churches to remove the significant and harmful barriers that are keeping LGBTQ+ people at bay.

These barriers range from subtle to overt, and they have been baked into the fabric of many faith communities thanks to culture wars, tribalism, troubling ideas about God, and our own fear of “the other.” Time and again I have seen church leaders change their language in the pulpit when discussing LGBTQ+ people but fail to address the barriers in the community that result in deep pain for LGBTQ+ people. The pastor may actively discourage homophobic slurs and avoid “Adam-and-Eve-not-Adam-and-Steve” hackneyed clichés, but many in the congregation have been disciplined for decades by other voices to treat LGBTQ+ people with fear and suspicion, even those committed to the Bible's vision for sex, marriage, and gender.

In fact, this fear and suspicion of our LGBTQ+ neighbors has kept many church people from acknowledging that there are LGBTQ+ people in theological alignment with the historic perspective on these things. There are gay or same-sex-attracted Christians who actively resist their sexual desires out of obedience to Jesus. There are Christians who experience incongruence between their inner sense of self and their physical bodies (gender dysphoria) but who press forward in faithful discipleship.

There are many, many unheard and unseen LGBTQ+ Christians.

It is the core conviction of this book that many followers of Jesus want to see LGBTQ+ people embraced by the radical love of God. The intention of God revealed in Scripture is that this embrace would happen in our churches. It can be this way. We just need a little help getting there.

- adapted from the introduction



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**Love All our Neighbors***How Churches That Hold a Traditional Sexual Ethic Can Care for LGBTQ People*

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Tony Scarcello has served in pastoral ministry since 2011 and is currently the pastor of discipleship at Red Hills Church just outside Portland, Oregon. He is the author of *Regenerate: Following Jesus After Deconstruction* and has written articles for The Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender and Theology in the Raw. Tony speaks all over the country helping leaders, churches, and believers navigate the complex intersection of historic Christian theology, pastoral care, and their LGBTQ+ neighbors. He holds a MA in Biblical Leadership from Western Seminary in Portland, and lives in the Pacific Northwest with the girl of his dreams, his wife Kelsey.

The Church Can Hold a Traditional Sexual Ethic AND Truly Care for LGBTQ People

What experiences or observations led you to write *Love All Our Neighbors*?

Tony Scarcello: This book was ultimately born out of my own experience being a man who experiences same-sex attraction growing up in the church and then leading in the church as a pastor. My experience at this complex intersection positions me well to see the tensions and foibles that often dwell here. I have seen how ugly, harsh, cruel, unfair, and blatantly abusive church can be for people who experience same-sex attraction and gender dysphoria. I have seen how culture wars have propagated the harm rather than properly addressed it. I have seen well-meaning Christians and leaders try to address the harm by capitulating to the pressures of secularization; and on the other side well-meaning Christians refuse to address the harm out of fear of compromising orthodoxy.

This book is born out of the deep conviction that historic theology on sex, marriage, and gender is good and beautiful, and out of deep pain for ways Christians and churches have inflicted harm on LGBTQ+ people in the name of orthodoxy. Between compromise and cruelty, there is the love of Christ. *Love All Our Neighbors* is chasing that love.

The topic of churches caring for LGBTQ people, particularly those churches that hold a traditional sexual ethic, has undoubtedly been a divisive one. What, from your experience with this issue, is at the heart of that division?

Tony: There are numerous ill-advised dynamics at work here. One would be embracing a vision for Christian faith that is more concerned with partisan politics and graceless culture wars than with the mission of Christ to redeem the world. Political polarization has so polluted our categories that holy surrender to the mission of Christ looks like surrounding ground on the battlefield. The right might view care as compromise, and the left might view care as insufficient.

The second dynamic is a malformed vision of God, humanity, sin, and restoration. When our beliefs about God are off-course, everything about us is off-course. *Love All Our Neighbors* seeks to reiterate the everlasting love of God who makes everyone in his image. That eternal truth necessitates dignifying everyone. But it also seeks to reiterate that God has standards and an agenda of his own, which are transcultural. We ignore or redefine his agenda and standards at great harm to ourselves.

In what ways have churches missed the mark in caring for LGBTQ people?

Tony: We have responded with fear and suspicion over love and curiosity. We have allowed talking heads on the internet, TV, and radio to poison our vision for the *imago Dei*. We have failed to take ownership for the ways our behavior towards LGBTQ+ people was harmful and devoid of Christ's love. We have lost a vision of Christian identity that prioritizes bearing witness and making peace. We have failed to cast a vision of family that is bigger than the nuclear family. We have capitulated to cultures assertion that one cannot have a flourishing life without flourishing sex lives, casting a vision of abundant life that has no room for celibacy and surrendered sexual longings.



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Why do you think the Church needs to think missionally about our LGBTQ neighbors?

Tony: The first reason is out of obedience to Christ. He sent us out to bear witness to him (Acts 1:8), not to be prosecutors or defense attorneys on his behalf, but witnesses and peacemakers. The second is that LGBTQ+ people need Christ as much as anyone, Christ loves them and wants them, and that message has been lost in the noise of fear and polarization.

How would you respond to someone who argues that churches cannot truly love their LGBTQ neighbors if they are not affirming?

Tony: A lack of affirmation for one part of a person's life is not a lack of affirmation of the person as a whole. Jesus dining with sinners and tax collectors reveals his high priority for inclusion and embrace. The Scripture going out of its way to define his friends as "sinners and tax collectors" reveals Christ included without dismissing our brokenness and frailty. Love is not synonymous with agreement over every aspect of a person's life. Love is making space for people even when they come with a mess of their own.

What are three ways a church can become a safe place for LGBTQ people?

Tony: The first is by taking ownership over our failure to love, also known as repentance. The second is to allow our hearts to be moved by the stories and pain of LGBTQ+, to be willing to offer presence, not just theological positions. The third is to step into our calling to bear witness and make peace.

What are the five main things you want readers to take away from *Love All Our Neighbors*?

Tony:

1. Jesus loves our LGBTQ+ neighbors and aches to be in union with them.
2. The church has often presented unbiblical barriers between LGBTQ+ people and Jesus.
3. It's possible to remove these harmful barriers and pick up the ministry of reconciliation with our LGBTQ+ neighbors.
4. We do not have to change orthodox theology surrounding sex, gender, and marriage to do it.
5. We should not change orthodox theology to do it.

