

**Discussion Questions for Space at the Table:
Conversations Between an Evangelical Theologian and His Gay Son
by Brad and Drew Harper**

Chapter 1

- Brad writes, “As we find common ground, we expect everyone facing issues like ours to move toward each other not by going around their conflicting worldviews, but by going through them.” (p.3) What do you think “going through” vs. “going around” conflicting worldviews looks like?
- Drew writes, “ The important thing is that everyone comes ready to listen. Our table is set for the ones who thought nobody could see them, who have struggled to speak their experience because of crippling fear, anger, pain, and uncertainty. Here at the table, I want us to have a conversation. No one needs to come away from this table changed in what they believe or how they identify for us to have been successful. What my dad and I hope--and pray---is that we all come away more full of love and understanding for others than when we arrived. That we will find ways to keep the songs of our heritage alive while staying true to who we are.” (p. 8) Do you believe this is possible for you personally? For us as a church? What will that require of you? Of all of us?

Chapter 2

- Brad reveals that his wife found an entry in Drew’s 2nd grade journal expressing a desire to kill himself. The 2023 Youth Risk Behavior Study by the CDC found that 41% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide in the previous year and one in five – 20% -- did attempt suicide. What role could the church play in disrupting these statistics?
- In this chapter, Brad shared the struggle he and his wife faced in “imagining, praying for, and counting on a future for their children” and then having one of their children turn out to be gay. (p. 25) Drew shares his admiration for his parents’ marriage and the grief he felt when he realized that he would never have “the storybook heterosexual Christian marriage.” (p.19) But Drew also describes the comfort he found in believing Jesus was “ever at my side, sharing in my fantasies of a different kind of future.” (p. 27) How might we, as parents and as a

church, learn to imagine with Jesus a different kind of future for our LGBTQ+ children?

Chapter 3

- As a child, Drew used the word “outcluded” to describe his sense of being on the margins. (p.35) Tell about a time when you felt “outcluded.” What might have helped you feel a sense of inclusion or belonging in that situation?
- An insert in this chapter from Drew’s Christian high school drama teacher tells of her struggle to respond to Drew when he opened up about his sexuality and her regret over the hurtful things she said to him out of her own confusion and anxiety. (pp. 57-60) Do you have similar regrets over things you’ve said to those you love and disagree with? How could you move toward repentance and restoration?

Chapter 4

- In this chapter, Drew describes the profound lasting trauma caused by the ex-gay therapy he participated in as a child, and then confesses his inner turmoil about Alex--his mentor whose chosen path of heterosexual marriage and parenthood turned Drew’s admiration, gratitude, and love for him to resentment, judgment, and even vindictive contempt. Drew writes, “This internal battle is the kind of thing that happens when hated systems intersect with cherished individuals.” (p. 76) How can we combat destructive systems while not losing sight of the people we love who may be part of those systems?
- Has anything you’ve read in the book so far provoked a strong emotional response for you such as grief, anger, or disgust, or on the other hand, joy, hope or compassion? What was it? Why do you think your emotional response was so strong?

Chapter 5

- Brad observes that “It is often safer for a young person to be honest at the public school than it is at church, a place that is meant to be driven by love and grace.” (p. 84) Why do you think this is? What would it take to change this?

- Drew describes many positive things about his relationship with the church he grew up in and the people he knew there. But when he visits the church as an adult, he is broken by “an overwhelming sense of loss, whose sadness I have never allowed myself to feel because anger and resentment are much safer.” (p. 90) Why do you think Drew feels this way despite the many positive memories he relates?

Chapter 6

- Drew’s prescription to ease difficult disagreements about faith and sexuality is living out the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Which of these do you most seek to cultivate in these conversations? Are there some that are harder for you than others?
- The authors are honest about the bitterness of the conflict between them that even led to a period of separation. But Drew writes that “the situation with my parents taught me the value of seeking a working relationship with those closest to us rather than always seeking to win arguments or alter others’ core beliefs.” (p. 117) Have you found this to be true in your own relationships?

Chapter 7

- Brad addresses the common phrase, “Love the sinner, hate the sin” that many Christians use about LGBTQ+ people. He writes, “For many gay people, to condemn their behavior simply communicates condemnation of them. Christians can argue all day long that that is not what we are doing, but it will still feel that way to gay folks. So if we want conversations to be productive, we should stay away from this line of reasoning.” (p. 146) Why do you think this is?
- In one of his classes at NYU, Drew experienced what he felt was “permission to love myself exactly as I was, the privilege of dignity unsullied by the ever-present label of ‘brokenness.’ I felt like I was breathing clean air or drinking clean water for the first time. It’s the kind of humanizing experience I wish upon every queer kid who grows up learning how to hate themselves for what they feel. I think it’s what grace feels like.” Do you think it’s possible for an LGBTQ+ person to experience this kind of humanizing grace in the church? What would that require of you?

Chapter 8

- Through the writing of this book, Brad confesses to Drew, “I have to face the fact that I am one of the reasons that you experienced trauma, Drew.” (p. 171) Drew also confesses the fallout of his self-destructive spiral into drug addiction and the pain and damage it caused to his family, particularly his younger brother. How is forgiveness possible in the wake of such devastating relational damage? Have you been faced with forgiving the unforgivable in your closest relationships? How have you made sense of what it looks like to forgive?
- Drew writes of characters in a movie, “These two characters come together not around their worldviews, but through them--not in spite of them, but by way of them....Neither party should stop being who they are to accommodate the other--doing so could squelch those opportunities to find common ground between you in places you would have never allowed yourself to look.” (pp. 188-189) Have you been able to find common ground with someone of a drastically different worldview? How do you do this while being true to your own beliefs and identity?