



## Space at the Table: Conversations Between an Evangelical Theologian and His Gay Son

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***Love does not begin with condemnation.***

Can an evangelical theologian and his gay son overcome the differences in belief that threaten to destroy their relationship? For Brad and Drew Harper, that question wasn't theoretical and neither was the resounding yes they found after years of struggle. Writing to each other with compassion, grit, and humor, Brad and Drew take us on their journey as parent and child from the churches of Middle America to the penthouses of New York's party scenes, through a pastor's-kid childhood and painful conversion therapy to the hard-won victories of their adult relationship.

But *Space at the Table* is more than just a memoir. It is a guide, showing us a way through the roadblocks that threaten to devastate both families and the broader evangelical and LBGTQ communities. Speaking from their own experience, Brad and Drew offer an invitation to join them at a place where love is stronger than the beliefs that divide us.

## Space at the Table: Conversations Between an Evangelical Theologian and His Gay Son Details

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## **From Reader Review Space at the Table: Conversations Between an Evangelical Theologian and His Gay Son for online ebook**

### **Nathan says**

I think the book was perfect for audible. Hearing both the father and son read their sections really added to the feeling that you were sitting at the table with them. Their story is well told and engaging.

I found that I struggled throughout the book. Intellectually, I felt that many of the presuppositions of the son's lifestyle were accepted out of hand by the father. I had hope that the book would have engaged more on a worldview or even a theological level. Perhaps they have and didn't include it. Emotionally, their story led me to the cynicism of Ecclesiastes. As a Christian father, I want my kids to know and love Jesus. I want to be the example that my father wasn't to me (just like the father in the story). Yet, even being the good, loving, faithful, Christian father has no guarantees that I won't have similar heartbreak with my own kids. And I don't mean that they will be gay, I mean that they will walk away from the God I love so much. This is a hard reality that never really goes away in the book and in life.

The encouragement is that their example shows it is possible to have a relationship with your kids even when they completely oppose your worldview. The lingering sadness, for the Christian, is that the son still rejects Jesus. Still, I am thankful that they shared their story.

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### **John Lussier says**

I wish I had this book years ago. Much of my twenties was spent as a youth intern at my church. Sunday morning youth worship, sitting with kids during "adult service", Wednesday night youth group, Bible study, mission trips, rock concerts-- it was impossible to spend so much time with students and not become friends. With friendship came honesty, and advice seeking. When one of our students came out, I needed this book. I needed the encouragement that "Love doesn't start with condemnation" and that at the end of anything relationships are what matter most. But I didn't have this book so I went with what seemed best at the time, and what the rest of our little church decided on: trying to speak the truth in love, but with ultimatums that would ultimately break the relationship. Had we as a church leaned into the best of us, the love of Christ, who knows what would have been.

With "Space at the Table" Brad and Drew Harper have given us one of the greatest gifts someone can give us: their story. Take and read it. At points you're going to find yourself crying, at other times laughing, and most definitely stretched. "Space at the Table" isn't just a story though. It's an invitation to the table, to committed relationship despite differences. I'm so thankful that Brad and Drew Harper have given us this gift and invitation. Their experience, story, and guidance is absolutely needed today.

This book won't save your relationship with your parents or your child. Only the commitment to love can do that. But here is the story of two men that have made that commitment and continue to work for it. They've opened up a space at their table to read, learn, and grow in love. I hope you'll accept the invitation.

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## **Laura says**

This was quite the interesting read. The book moves back and forth between gay son and evangelical father. Both have their own solid opinions on the matter, of course. The father clearly had to wrestle with his belief, his Bible, and his love for his son. His son, on the other hand, describes a childhood full of love, but one in which he felt he was wrong for being gay. It works out, thankfully, and father and son have found a way to live and love one another. I imagine it is still difficult for them both, but the book does give one hope.

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## **Vanessa says**

It is painful to read about how faith communities can hurt the LGBTQ+ community on such a personal level. Parts of this book broke my heart while reading. But it is important to read accounts like this one and it does give hope for ways of reconciliation. Read it. Especially if you are Christian. Even more so if you're a Christian who doesn't have much contact with the LGBTQ+ community.

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## **Gail Welborn says**

\*\*\*A raw & honest dialogue between a theologian father & his gay son\*\*\*

Brad Harper, loving father, author and professor of Theology at Portland, Oregon's Multnomah University penned "Space at the Table" with his son Drew Harper, subtitled, "Conversations between an Evangelical Theologian and His Gay Son." Together they provide a narrative style memoir of family struggles bridged by time, patience and their love for their family and one another.

Their thought-provoking narratives begin with Drew's birth in 1989 where Brad writes, "I loved him the moment I set eyes on him." Yet, Brad didn't know that over time their loving relationship would be tested with irreconcilable mine fields "of conflict over sexuality and morality" caused by deep religious beliefs.

While for Drew, he was always "much happier doing things girls typically did." He was also drawn to music, art and anything theatrical very early, illustrated by an incident on his first birthday when he buried his face in cake frosting and "discovered what an audience was." However, by the time Drew turned seven, other children viewed him as a freak, neither boy nor girl. He endured his isolation supported by his family and "there was always Jesus to talk to," he writes. It would be years before Drew understood he would never "experience what he idolized as a child: the storybook heterosexual Christian marriage."

Brad, Drew and their family share with vulnerability, raw honesty and humor, their grief and struggles living out, to the best of their ability, the second commandment found in Mark 12:31, "Love your neighbor as you love yourself."

They have learned to listen to one another and invite you to do the same in these conversations in spite of the challenging polarization and division between the LBTGQ and conservative Christian Evangelical communities. Although they don't see the world in the same way they both can say, "I can't imagine my world without you in it."

'Space At The Table,' by Brad Harper & Drew Stafford Harper, Zeal Books, 2016, 224 Pages, 978-0997066906, \$15.99

Midwest Book Reviews: "Gail's Bookshelf" August 2016

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### **Marietta Stechmeyer says**

My favorite quote from this book is from the authors' daughter/sister: "Deciding whether living an LGBTQ lifestyle is right or wrong is not on my agenda. I have better things to do than skirmish over this one issue... My opinion on this issue is shaped and reshaped both by people I know and love and the scriptures I know and study to experience God. Sure, I may have an opinion, but as a Christian, my call to love people trumps everything else. My job is to love whole people as a whole person. To listen to the stories of people who have been marginalized, and respond with the kindness, love, and acceptance I know Jesus would."

This is a legit book that contains no cheesiness or "happy ending." There's no breakdown of bible verses/essays on damaging religious dogma/etc. The book is one father/son story told from two wildly different world views, but saturated with mutual love and respect for one another. Who woulda thunk it?

I read this book from a Christian perspective and I would recommend it to all Christians. Time to get informed y'all.

I'd also recommend this book to gay people who feel any distance from their family or community because of their sexuality, both for religious and non-religious reasons.

My purpose in writing this review is not to start a debate, but to encourage believers and non believers, gay and straight people, to make space for each other at the table. Like the cover says, this book can save lives.

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### **Jessica says**

I loved the opportunity to hear the dialogue between this dad and son on the issue of homosexuality. Very honest conversation back and forth. Highly recommend!

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### **Jeff says**

Amazing story. This tale of a father and son finding each other even despite major differences is particularly poignant as I drive to my parents' house for Father's Day. Great book regardless, made even more special by the timing.

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## **Maddie says**

"I can't say I know how you feel, but I can say here is love."

I've now read multiple books over this topic and this is by far my favorite. One because I appreciate the honesty and humility that went into, but also because you get to hear from both perspectives and what it was like navigating their relationship, emotions and all, from both sides. I think all Christians need to read this book.

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## **Lori says**

I thought this book did a good job of presenting two people with very different core beliefs who still found a way to love and appreciate each other for who they were. It actually brought me to tears a couple times because I could feel that the pain was very real for both of them. I think you can have very strong opinions on either side of this topic and still come away from this book with something of value. I think the world needs this type of open dialogue, love, respect and commitment in the face of "there is no way in the world we are ever going to see this the same way" situations.

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## **Leslie Zehr says**

"Space at the Table" is not just a book about the conflicts between a gay son and his evangelical Christian father—those are merely labels. It would be unfortunate to limit this book to that theme. In fact I don't see these men as being very different at all—but very similar. They both have the courage of their convictions. This is not a book about resolving difference—but learning to live with them. It is about embracing "other". It is about being challenged and rising to the occasion with grace. "Space at the Table" is a book about unconditional love, compassion and community. This is a book about how to have and maintain significant, often difficult, relationships in our lives.

Through their story, Brad and Drew offer us real life examples of how to deal with these conflicts. It's through challenges that we grow—through reflection that we gain wisdom. They have walked the talk. They choose to live in this dynamic because they believe it is important to be able to do so. This book offers not only a glimpse into their journey but also the wisdom they have acquired along the way.

I hope that everyone will read this book because whether you are gay, Christian, Muslim, an artist...our views will always be "other" to someone. We can all see similar pieces of ourselves in the relationships within our own families and we can all benefit from the wisdom on these pages.

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## **Joel Warnock says**

What an incredible privilege to sit at the table with this father and son through their journey of real struggle and real love. This book will be a great tool for me as a youth pastor for students and parents alike who struggle with homosexuality and differing views.

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### **Christina says**

An achingly transparent and challenging book for evangelical Christians who are not sure what to do about gay people. Brad Harper has practical advice for what it ACTUALLY means to love an LGBT person while holding a traditional perspective. While the book is also aimed at gay children of evangelicals, I'm not sure I would recommend it to them -- Drew's close relationship to his evangelical dad is unusual in general and especially for an LGBT person, so his advice to kids is colored by that.

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### **Dale Grauman says**

It's a memoir with call-out boxes containing straightforward advice interspersed liberally throughout. So it's both a story that shows readers how to navigate their conflict and a discourse that recommends how they should proceed. Highly recommended for its intended audience: evangelical parents of gay children, and gay people with evangelical parents. It would also be a worthwhile read for members of other cultures or religious traditions that traditionally reject homosexuality.

The narrative is a little uneven. Some parts are over-developed; others are underdeveloped.

Over-development: They tend to belabor unimportant details. The most tedious examples are the numerous self-congratulatory passages that describe how cool their family's musical tastes are.

Under-development: The most crucial portion of the narrative--the part where son and father learn to relate to each other as adults--is surprisingly short and underdeveloped. At the climax, Drew's life falls apart quickly, and then it is quickly put back together again. Once his life is back together, he and his parents seem to get along better than they have for years. It's a sudden shift that merits a more detailed exposition and more analysis.

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### **Matt says**

"Space at the Table" is a rare and important book on the intersection of Christianity and homosexuality, for two reasons: 1) part of the book is a gay man's personal account and perspective, valuable for Christians who truly want to listen to and understand their gay child, family member or friend, and 2) Drew Harper urges gays to love their evangelical Christian parents and not demand they change their deeply held convictions -- in essence, to do unto them as you would have them do unto you. This is written as a conversation, alternating between the father's thoughts and the son's; they're not concerned about persuading readers to take a side or providing grist for an argument, just opening their ears. For Christians, there are things to consider here, like the wisdom in not forcing a young child into a mold (e.g., he prefers the arts over sports), the psychological and spiritual ramifications of conversion therapy, consistency in setting rules at home, candid talk about the very real possibility that a gay son or daughter will walk away from the Christian faith, and more. For non-Christians, there is much to think about too, because the Harpers' story destroys the myth that all evangelical Christians, that all churches, are instruments of repression and hate. What we get here is an honest picture of a somewhat average Christian family experiencing their son's "coming out," and the hard work done by each person to stay in relationship. Some readers may be unsatisfied that Drew has not

returned to the Christian faith of his youth; they also might feel his parents err too much on the side of love. I'd disagree on that, as they appear rooted in a traditional understanding of Scripture and the Christian sexual ethic. No doubt this was a cathartic book to write, and occasionally painful. For families going through similar situations (and there are many, whether the church wants to admit it or not), there are rich lessons and insights here.

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