

Being In Relationship

A New Way to Talk with Black and White Theologically Conservative Christians about the Place of Lesbian and Gay People in Our Families, Our Churches and Society.



A MESSAGING GUIDE

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Auburn is a leadership development and research institute, working to build the field of the multifaith movement for justice. From local to global, Auburn equips leaders of faith and moral courage and brings together unlikely partners to address today's seemingly intractable challenges, strengthen communities and inspire hope. Macky Alston, Sharon Groves, Sharon Miller, Rev. Dr. Christian Scharen and Auburn board member Rev. Janet Edwards, in partnership with Rev. Brandan Robertson and Rev. Cedric Harmon, were the core Auburn team members for Being in Relationship.

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Goodwin Simon Strategic Research (GSSR) is a national public opinion research firm with special expertise in conducting research on emotionally complex, socially controversial issues. GSSR's cutting-edge approach is built on decades of experience in polling, social and political marketing, policy analysis and communications, and rooted in the latest research on neuroscience, emotion, psychology, cognitive linguistics and narrative theory. This unique methodology is used to unpack underlying attitudes and emotional reactions that impact behavior and decision-making and to develop effective message frameworks that have a proven track record of enabling deep attitudinal change. Amy Simon and Rebekah Orr of GSSR contributed their thought leadership to this research and strategy guide.

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Founded in 1980 as the first community foundation dedicated to the LGBTQ community, Horizons Foundation has awarded more than \$40 million dollars in grants to organizations working in the area of arts and culture, health and human services, community building and leadership, and advocacy and civil rights. The work of Horizons Foundation strengthens community organizations and their leaders, mobilizes donors and funders, and actively secures our LGBTQ community's future for generations to come.

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For Consideration As You Navigate This Guide

Before you dive into the content of this guide, we thought it would be helpful to answer some questions that may logically arise as you read through it. By answering these questions, our hope is to better prepare you and allow you to more fully take in the guide as a whole.

WHO SHOULD USE THIS MESSAGING GUIDE?

This toolkit was designed with two specific audiences in mind:

- **Pro-LGBTQ Christians** who seek a better way to communicate with evangelical and theologically conservative Christians about the place of lesbian and gay people in our families, our congregations and our society, and;
- **Advocates** who want to better understand, spark a dialogue with, and move evangelical and theologically conservative Christians along a spectrum of support for LGBTQ people in their life.

At the same time, we aimed to write this toolkit so that — no matter your background, affiliation, orientation or identity — everyone who cares about LGBTQ equality can find value and utility in it. In other words, if you or your organization believes in or is working toward religious inclusion or civil equality for LGBTQ people, this toolkit is for you.

WHAT DOES BEING IN RELATIONSHIP MEAN?

In our research, we learned that it is possible to get theologically conservative Christians to change the nature of their relationship with the lesbian and gay people in their lives. We found that conservative Christians can move from ongoing condemnation to engaging in genuinely caring and understanding relationships

— from exclusion of lesbian and gay people in faith life toward inclusion. Being in Relationship is a model for how conservative Christians can deepen and strengthen their relationships with lesbian and gay people in ways that still aligns with their values, beliefs and how they see themselves.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY “THEOLOGICALLY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS”?

Throughout this toolkit we use the term “theologically conservative Christians.” This is intended as a shorthand to reference the broad categorization of people who may call themselves evangelical, born again, Pentecostal, Charismatic, non-denominational Christian or simply Christian. Regardless of how they identify, a common denominator amongst those we engaged in this study is that they all hold a theologically conservative understanding of Scripture. The audiences that we have focused on with this particular project are Black and white theologically conservative Christians. While we have distinguished Black theological and white theological responses for testing purposes, we fully understand that church experience is often more diverse. For more, see page 25.

WHY IS THE FOCUS OF THIS RESEARCH AND GUIDE LIMITED TO BLACK AND WHITE COMMUNITIES?

The nature of our research methodology requires us to look deeply into the cultural and religious backgrounds of the communities we are exploring. For this initial study, we focused on predominately Black and white communities. We are hopeful to further our research by engaging Latinx, Asian American and other communities in the future.

WHY DO WE CAPITALIZE “BLACK”?

We capitalize “Black” throughout this toolkit as a matter of respect. As noted by the Columbia Journalism Review, “Language can reflect and foster bias and even invite violence, so respectfulness should always trump style or linguistic ambiguities. There may be contexts where bias is appropriately intentional, but absent that, equality should rule.” More here: https://www.cjr.org/analysis/language_corner_1.php.

WHY DO WE USE “LGBTQ,” “LESBIAN AND GAY” AND “HOMOSEXUALITY” IN DIFFERENT INSTANCES?

Throughout this document we use the terms “LGBTQ” (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer) or “lesbian and gay” in the way that most accurately describes our research while still remaining faithful to our inclusive vision of equality. We use “LGBTQ” when speaking of the greater movement for celebration and affirmation and we use “lesbian and gay” when our research and findings specifically apply to lesbian and gay people. Finally, we use “homosexuality” when channeling the mindset or words of theologically conservative Christians.

WHY IS THE FOCUS OF THIS RESEARCH ON LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE?

This research focuses on attitudes and behaviors of theologically conservative Christians toward lesbian and gay people. We decided to target the research in this way because earlier research has shown that audiences understand and relate to lesbian and gay people in ways that are distinct to how they relate to transgender people. In the very near future, we are excited to release new research on messaging strategies to talk to Christians about transgender people.

Listening with Empathy

It can be very difficult to listen to someone with whom we disagree — especially when some of their words are hurtful about us or the people we love. Yet it is critical that our movements hear directly from our target audiences in order to develop an understanding of the barriers that are preventing them from feeling, thinking and acting differently as well as the potential pathways to progress.

As you read through this guide, you will come across direct quotes from theologically conservative Christians, which we have not censored in any way. In some cases, their words might be hurtful. In doing this work, we have come to understand the role that empathy plays in fostering genuinely caring relationships between LGBTQ people and theologically conservative Christians. We found this excerpt helpful from *Heartwired: Human Behavior, Strategic Opinion Research and the Audacious Pursuit of Social Change*:

“Advocates often disagree with the deeply held values and beliefs of target audiences, and may dismiss or try to counter their opinions. Being asked to understand an opposing point of view can feel like you are validating it.

Disagree or not, that person’s belief remains true for them. To effectively engage audiences, we have to understand and integrate those beliefs into our communications — or those beliefs remain roadblocks to change.

Empathy doesn’t require that you agree with a perspective — only that you can genuinely understand it.

In audience research, you’re listening for the Venn diagram — the places where your audience’s values overlap with yours. [...] This listening process also helps root out troubling beliefs — like racist or sexist views — which you would not use to advance your goals.”

Some things to consider for those traumatized by conservative Christians or other anti-LGBTQ aggression:

- ✓ If you have had a recent negative experience with anti-LGBTQ aggression, this may not be the time to engage conservative Christians.
- ✓ Give this guide time. You are not alone — in the process of conducting this research, all of us have been triggered in some way by either an experience or by something we have heard and we all need time to process.
- ✓ If you find yourself getting triggered, stop reading and perhaps come back later.
- ✓ Consider reading the guide with someone else or in a group.
- ✓ Remember to honor your own experience of faith, love and humanity. Many in this study speak in absolutes and hold opinions of religion and sexuality that can at times feel crushing. You neither need to agree or debate. The invitation is to try to understand.

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Letter of Welcome

Dear friends,

We love the title of this messaging guide. Being in relationship is the thing that has made this guide possible. It is the thing that gives us hope — and it sometimes feels like the hardest assignment in life.

How do we love our neighbor as the Bible mandates, when their views and actions may harm us and those we love? And why would we ever do such a thing? The answer, we believe, can only come about through relationship. While change rarely happens on our personal timetables, our experiences have taught us — and this research reinforces — that when we are in relationship, genuine and surprising transformation can happen.

For Macky, being in relationship with his Southern Baptist cousins in Georgia, claiming kinship even across political, ideological and theological difference, has led generations of family to reconcile their Christian convictions with counter-cultural support of LGBTQ equality. For Sharon, observing up-close places like Salt Lake City where deep friendships across theological and ideological divides are blossoming because LGBTQ leaders build long-term, behind-the-scenes relationships with conservative Mormon leaders has shown her that change is not only possible but contagious.

Being in Relationship advocates for curiosity, compassion and deep engagement over an extended period of time with those with whom we disagree. It is rarely the most politically expedient work one can do to win an election or defeat an anti-LGBTQ ballot initiative and it is not a substitute for base building and community organizing. We believe it is, however, necessary for long term cultural change and nurturing communities where we can see each other's full humanity.

While this guide asks that we stretch our capacity to understand those who are not affirming of LGBTQ people, it is important to point out what it does not ask of you:

- ☑ **It does not ask that you change who you are.** The intent is to help you have more understanding but not to force you to modify your own beauty or source of inspiration in any way.
- ☑ **It does not ask you to stop being an advocate for LGBTQ liberation.** Working for justice in the streets, electorally, and in congregations is sacred work. Doing it with an understanding of how those who disagree with you may come to their disagreements will make your work stronger.
- ☑ **It does not ask you to avoid conflict.** As you will see in the guide, we actually see constructive conflict and internal conflicted feelings as essential opportunities for moving people toward a more inclusive spirit.
- ☑ **It does not ask you to be results-driven in an all-or-nothing way.** It is, in fact, not likely that we will move most theologically conservative Christians in the near term to full acceptance and celebration of LGBTQ people. What this research does show is that it is possible to shift hearts in important, meaningful, but subtle ways. Such seemingly modest shifts can make the difference in whether someone is bullied, plagued by suicidal thoughts, or publicly shamed.

Should you choose to move into relationship with a non-affirming conservative Christian, we believe this guide will help you do so with eyes wide open. The process of doing this research has been extensive. To get to this point, we spent nearly two and a half years talking with conservative Christians. Before that, we spent two years trying to understand how conflicted Christians, largely in Protestant congregations, could move toward supporting LGBTQ people and then two years after that beginning to roll out the research and testing its findings. With each conversation we have, we learn more. All of this research builds on the deep work that came before it and of those engaging adjacently in conservative spaces, in many cases for decades.

Nonetheless, as with any research project, this guide reflects its moment and time. It is not the one-time-only definitive report on the state of evangelical and conservative Christian thinking on LGBTQ people. It is rather a snapshot for a moment that will inevitably change as our relationships change.

We are inspired to partner with you as you consider incorporating these findings into your work. There is so much analysis and unpacking of nuance, power, complexity of cultural identity and difference that can help us understand why the people we interviewed experience the world as they do. We are conscious of the limits of this research and excited to learn beyond its bounds.

It is in relationship with many of you that we came to this work, that we grew and continue to grow in this work and it is many of you who we had in mind as we did the work, wondering every step of the way what you might think.

May we remain in relationship as we continue to discern how to bring into being the world for which we long where all may flourish and be celebrated for their particular and full humanity.

Yours,

Sharon Groves, Macky Alston and the folks at Auburn



Introduction

BEING IN RELATIONSHIP: TWO FAMILIES' JOURNEYS

"Throughout our journey, there was a lot of yelling — weeks, maybe, sometimes months, without even talking to each other," recounts Daniel in describing his tense relationship with his father after Daniel finally told his father he was gay.

"I grew up in a traditional church," said Daniel's father, the Rev. Chris Perkins, who now leads a congregation outside Jackson, Mississippi. "Even after I became a minister, I remember the teaching of the church, which was very anti-homosexual."

"I felt like my dad's displeasure or disappointment in me, or who I was, mirrored God's disappointment of who I was," said Daniel.

"Ever since I could remember, I just knew I felt different. I prayed for God to take it away. Because if I could've chosen anything to be in the world, a Black gay man is not one of them." said Daniel.

Another Mississippi family was also struggling. In Brandon, about 15 miles from Jackson, Mary Jane Kennedy was teaching Sunday school at a Southern Baptist church. She had three sons — 25, 22 and 19 — all of whom had been raised and saved in the Southern Baptist tradition.

Her middle son was a senior at Mississippi State.

"He made up his mind that he was going to tell me his secret," Mary Jane recalls. "He told me that he was gay. Nothing prepared me for this. My world just collapsed around me."

"I went and talked to my pastor about it as soon as we got home," said Mary Jane. "He said, 'You keep on teaching your Sunday school class, but don't talk about this.' My son came out of the closet to me, and in central Mississippi, I went into the closet, because you can't talk about this."

People in Mary Jane's church eventually found out about her son. One day her phone rang.

“It was a person that had known me — watched me raise my children. She told me that I ought to be ashamed of myself — that nothing I’ve ever said or taught will be believed now.”

Many LGBTQ people growing up in theologically conservative Christian families and congregations have experienced similar challenges and pain.

We are, however, seeing some signs of change in spaces where relationships between conservative Christians and the LGBTQ community have had a chance to develop over time.

Rev. Chris Perkins and his wife Sandra have a strong relationship with Daniel today.

“God had to put me in check,” said Rev. Perkins. “If I love the Lord, and if I want to see all people saved, then how can I not embrace you, even if I think you’re wrong?”

“If I think you’re wrong, and I don’t embrace you,” he adds, “then I’m part of the problem and not the solution. I’m living less like Christ than you are.”

While Rev. and Mrs. Perkins still believe that homosexuality is a sin, they continue to deepen their relationship with Daniel without trying to change who he is.

“It boils down to l-o-v-e, love,” said Sandra Perkins. “You know, we’re messed up from the floor up, but He loves us where we are.”

These families are modeling how to live in an important in-between space for many theologically conservative Christians who have been able to grow close to the lesbian and gay people in their lives without letting go of their deep belief that homosexuality is a sin.

For advocates and activists of LGBTQ equality, this can feel problematic and hurtful.

Mary Jane Kennedy has also developed a genuinely caring relationship with her gay son.

“Being a teacher of the Scripture, I knew all the answers — who’s in, who’s out, what’s right, what’s wrong,” said Mary Jane. “Sometimes God sends you a curve. He says, ‘I want you to use your heart a little bit more.’ So, do I have all the answers now? No, I don’t. I used to know everything, but I don’t anymore. But you know what? Jesus Christ is Lord, and that’s enough. That’s enough.”

The stories above show that Christians can hold conflicting views and feelings and still forge deep and genuinely caring relationships with lesbian and gay people. They have come to realize that rejection and condemnation is not in step with who they view themselves to be as Christians and what God expects of them.

The story of this research, told in the coming pages, is that change is possible — even among a group of Christians that many LGBTQ advocates and activists never thought were possible to reach. By sharing the journey stories of people like Rev. Chris and Sandra Perkins and Mary Jane Kennedy, we are modeling the behavior that we hope that other theologically conservative Christians will follow.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING IN RELATIONSHIP WITH EVANGELICAL AND THEOLOGICALLY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS

In 2011, Auburn Seminary released *My Mind Was Changed* — a research-based messaging guide that put forward a new communications approach focused on shifting the hearts and minds of moderate Catholics and mainline Protestants on the place of lesbian and gay people in church and society.

LGBTQ activists and those within communities of faith were already working with conservative Christians when *My Mind Was Changed* was released, but many did not have a clear sense of the types of messages that would move these Christians.

Following the release of *My Mind Was Changed*, both secular and faith-based LGBTQ supporters had a deeper understanding of the messages that would help conflicted Christians manage their conflict.

That approach contributed to significant victories that have reshaped religious and civic life for LGBTQ people.

The new messaging contributed to a string of ballot victories in 2012 in Maine, Maryland, Minnesota and Washington State, which signaled to the United States Supreme Court that there had been a culture shift on support for the freedom to marry.

When we first began the work for *My Mind Was Changed*, we decided to focus our research on moderate Catholics and mainline Protestants — rather than evangelical and conservative Christians. Publicly available opinion research suggested that moderate Catholics and mainline Protestants were not only more likely to have close LGBTQ friends and relatives in their lives, they were less likely to subscribe to a literal interpretation of Scripture that would make it difficult for conservative Christians to reconsider their relationships with LGBTQ people.

Seven years later, many things have changed — while other things have stayed the same. Both argue for engaging conservative Christians.

Some of the changes that suggest that it is time to engage with theologically conservative Christians include:

- ✓ More LGBTQ people are coming out in theologically conservative families and congregations.
- ✓ Pro-LGBTQ people of faith activists and organizers have made inroads with conservative Christian audiences.
- ✓ More theologically conservative Christians are coming out as supportive of LGBTQ people.
- ✓ Research shows that conservative Christians are able to reflect on and even take steps to engage in genuinely caring and understanding relationships with LGBTQ people in ways that they were not in the past.

Some factors have also remained the same — which, to us, suggests a powerful moral argument for communicating with theologically conservative Christians. They are:

- ✓ At the individual level, those theologically conservative Christians with the most reactionary, anti-LGBTQ attitudes do harm to the LGBTQ people in their lives, including rejection of their children and support of conversion therapy.
- ✓ At the societal level, many theologically conservative Christians still exercise an outsized role in shaping culture, policy and politics in America in ways that are detrimental to the lives of LGBTQ people.

This research has confirmed for us the importance of engaging theologically conservative Christians in an ongoing way on the place of lesbian and gay people in their families, in church and in society. While it is not possible to move most theologically conservative Christians in the near term to full acceptance and celebration of LGBTQ people, it is possible to shift their hearts in important and meaningful ways.

Some LGBTQ activists and advocates who read this guide may feel resistant to engaging with conservative Christians (and certainly it isn't everyone's calling to do this work). That's understandable. After all, many conservative Christians have caused LGBTQ people great harm, including many who are reading this guide.

Among those LGBTQ advocates doing this work, some feel that we need to strengthen our work to appeal to those who don't share our perspective. Others feel, that with limited resources available, it is most critical to mobilize the silent supporters

An in-depth
explanation
of our
methodology
can be found
on page 51.



who are with us but have not acted on their convictions. Wherever you fall on this debate or if you reject the dichotomy altogether, we believe this resource has something to offer you.

As you read through our research findings and proposed communication strategies in the coming pages, we hope you will do so with an open heart and that you too are able to see paths to continued progress for LGBTQ people in the United States and to prevent harm to future generations of LGBTQ people.





Being in Relationship: The Goals of This Work

At the core of all research is a simple goal: understanding. When researching how people understand or process emotionally charged or complex issues, building an empathic understanding — one that takes into account people's feelings, thoughts, emotions and their background — is essential. This kind of understanding can help one to see beyond where a person stands on an issue and toward the reasons why they hold their position and how they got there.

On emotionally complex social issues, people lean on flawed mental templates¹ — sets of negative or undesirable images and associations they have with something or someone they encounter out in the world. Once developed, these flawed mental templates unconsciously impact their emotional reactions to others. Built into the foundation of their understanding, they influence how a person navigates their world and how they engage with the people in it.

¹Special thanks to Dr. Phyllis Watts for developing and introducing us to the concept of mental templates and how they operate.

The focus of the research we present here has been to explore how theologically conservative Christians understand lesbian and gay people, what flawed mental templates may be influencing their views and thinking of them, and how our communications can disrupt these flawed mental templates to hopefully move these Christians to be more open.

Ultimately, our goal is to help accelerate change that is possible by developing effective ways of communicating with this audience that help move them away from rejecting, condemning, and shunning and toward being in relationship with lesbian and gay people — even if they do not agree with, understand, or fully accept “homosexuality.”

While we believe that change is possible among theologically conservative Christians, we know through our research across many different social issues that moving any audience from a place of rejection to a place of affirmation in a short period

of time is nearly impossible. If this audience believes that being lesbian or gay is not in line with their understanding of what it means to be Christian, having them open up to engaging in dialogue with lesbian and gay people or even possibly coming to see LGBTQ Christians as people who share their devotion to God and scripture is no minor success — it’s a critical first step down a long path toward celebration and affirmation.

We also know that for change to be effective, it needs to be about the identity of the audience we are trying to reach — about encouraging them to be a better version of who they are rather than about changing their core values and beliefs. Change has to come from within, not be experienced as a threat from the outside; change also needs to be recognized as being about a person’s Christian beliefs and their conduct, not solely about meeting the needs of lesbian and gay people or about responding to broader cultural pressure.

Our goal in developing this toolkit therefore is threefold:



To share the insights we have uncovered

on the views and feelings of evangelical and theologically conservative Christians about LGBTQ people



To provide ways of communicating

with theologically conservative Christians about being in relationship with people who are lesbian and gay



To provide communication strategies

that counter the negative, Christian-framed messaging that is so often employed against LGBTQ people and issues

IMPORTANT CONCEPTS:

Heartwired

In 2017, with support from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Goodwin Simon Strategic Research and Wonder: Strategies for Good released a strategy guide called *Heartwired* that outlined a new, integrated approach to audience research, storytelling and persuasion communication. This is the approach that was used in conducting the research for *Being in Relationship*.

As Robert Pérez and Amy Simon wrote in the *Heartwired* guide: “Heartwired is based on the simple premise that, on emotionally complex social issues that our audiences need to understand and are grappling with, their decision-making is influenced by how they are heartwired. And that simply means that their emotions, their identity, their values, their beliefs and their lived experiences combine and also collide to shape how they think about the pressing issues of the day. [...] We actually have to understand how they see themselves, what values and beliefs they hold in their heart, what is in their lived experiences and how this all comes together to shape how they are heartwired on an issue. This is fundamental to the way we do this work.”

FIVE HEARTWIRED FACTORS

Human decision-making is influenced by how people are heartwired — the mind circuits and connections that tie together their emotions, identity, values, beliefs and lived experiences.

HEARTWIRED FACTOR

THEOLOGICALLY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS



EMOTIONS

The feelings that human beings have in response to the stimuli both within and around us are complex. Our emotions typically drive our behavior and work to prioritize different concerns — especially when we feel threatened and need to make a split-second decision.

- Many theologically conservative Christians feel fear and anxiety about the danger of eternal damnation for the LGBTQ people in their lives — and even for themselves. When we feel this level of fear and anxiety, it can shut off a part of our mind that allows us to feel empathy.
- Over time, many of these Christians have established more relationships and friendships with LGBTQ people, some of whom are their relatives. They often personally like the LGBTQ people in their lives (in some cases because they are sons/daughters) and this creates a deep internal emotional conflict. This conflict is an open door, a way to engage them in genuine dialogue.



IDENTITY

Self-identity is how a person sees himself or herself in relation to the world around them. We are all driven to make decisions that align with our sense of self and when we don't, we experience uncomfortable cognitive dissonance. While each of us has a single identity, that identity incorporates many facets (e.g. gender, race, faith) and traits (e.g. being hard-working, fair-minded, educated). Internal conflict on social issues is often the result of a moral tug of war between different facets of a person's identity.

- This audience has multiple facets to their identity as evangelical or conservative Christians. On one hand, they see themselves as someone who believes in the infallible word of God and endeavors to live up to Christian ideals. On the other hand, some of them have friends, family, or coworkers who are lesbian or gay — and they care about them and do not want to see themselves as someone who would be hurtful. This can create an internal conflict between these aspects of their identity.
- For theologically conservative Christians who have children that are lesbian or gay, identifying as a “good Christian parent” is an example of such conflict. As a parent, they see their role as a protector. As a Christian, they see their role as following what they perceive to be a good moral path. As a “good Christian parent” these roles come into conflict.



LIVED EXPERIENCES

The events and relationships a person experiences in their life combine with the meaning that they assign to those experiences to shape how they think about social issues. The way we interpret and remember events — the narrative we construct around them — is just as important as what actually happened. Exploring and understanding those lived experiences is key to effective messaging strategies.

- Many do not know, or do not realize they know, people who are lesbian or gay. Others have just begun to get to know people who are lesbian or gay. This lack of personal relationships means their perceptions and associations are often limited and incorrect. This includes when they witness LGBTQ people leaving their church — they assume this means they are not Christians and do not want to be included in church life.
- They see the desire to have the LGBTQ people in their lives renounce their sinful ways as an act of love — as saving them. And yet, some have experienced good relationships with LGBTQ people and have witnessed how hard it is for LGBTQ people to change.



VALUES

Values are ideals that individuals hold about what is good or bad, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate. Values influence emotional reactions, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors and are often shared broadly within a culture or community. A person's values help them to make meaning in their lives and if those values are contradicted, people experience a sense of dissonance and incongruence, which interferes with their capacity to support that issue position.

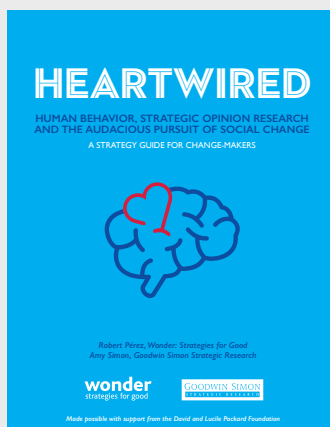
- Christian values are centered around their understanding of the word of God.
- They also value what it means to be a good parent, a good neighbor and a good friend — and how it informs the way you act and treat each other.
- With LGBTQ people in their lives, they often live in a space where their values feel in conflict with each other.



BELIEFS

Beliefs are ideas that people hold to be true. When we have a lot of experience with something, our beliefs are deeper and more nuanced. When we have little to no experience with something, we tend to fill in the knowledge gaps. Whether we have deep or scant knowledge, our beliefs are further shaped by our identity, our lived experience and our values. In other words, facts alone do not shape beliefs.

- Many within this audience hold the belief that being lesbian or gay is about conduct — even if they believe people are born lesbian or gay — and that that conduct can be changed and controlled.
- Some currently hold the belief that a person simply cannot be lesbian or gay and be a Christian.
- At the same time, many believe you should let God take care of this — that it is a sin to think you know God's plan.



You can learn much more at www.heartwiredforchange.com. In the guide, Amy Simon from Goodwin Simon Strategic Research and Robert Pérez from Wonder: Strategies for Good share stories, tools and lessons learned from their own work and from other leaders in the field.

What do we mean by theologically conservative Christians

— AND IS IT POSSIBLE FOR THEM TO HAVE A CHANGE OF HEART?

Throughout this toolkit we use the term “theologically conservative Christians.” This is intended as a shorthand to reference the broad categorization of people who may call themselves evangelical, born again, Pentecostal, Charismatic, non-denominational Christian or simply Christian. Regardless of how they identify, a common denominator amongst those we engaged in this study is that they all hold a theologically conservative understanding of Scripture. The audiences that we have focused on with this particular project are Black and white theologically conservative Christians.

Theologically conservative Christians — evangelicals in particular — are an important and powerful group

in the United States. One in four people in the United States identify as evangelical protestants. In addition there are mainline protestants and those who are affiliated with historically Black churches who identify as conservative, but not evangelical per se. Together this adds up to roughly 32% of Americans — close to one in three — in terms of overall population.²

We believe that being able to reach, connect with and hopefully move the hearts of these Christians is critical to advancing LGBTQ affirmation and celebration in the Church and in broader society. We will go into far more depth about theologically conservative Christian audiences in upcoming sections of this toolkit.

Change is possible because our hearts are not set in stone.

THE CHANGE HYPOTHESES THAT GUIDE HOW TO MAKE PROGRESS WITH THEOLOGICALLY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS.

“Have your opinions about gay people changed in the last 10 years?” our focus group moderator asked the group of African-American Christian men in Omaha, Nebraska.

“Oh, yes!” came back the chorus in response.

“How so?” the moderator asked.

“Oh, 10 years ago, I wouldn’t even want to be in the same room with someone who is homosexual.”

To hear from the men in Omaha that their attitudes toward lesbian and gay people had shifted in the last

10 years indicates that progress is possible. In this research, we learned that the conservative Christian men we engaged had made less progress on how to be in relationship with lesbian and gay people than conservative Christian women. This is due, in part, to the fact that conservative Christian women have more personal relationships with lesbian and gay people.

Human beings have a tremendous capacity to change — and yet the status quo is also powerful. Our task is to understand how the right messages, stories and messengers can help to keep theologically conservative Christians on a continued journey toward love and reconciliation with LGBTQ people.

²Pew <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/#beliefs-and-practices>

There are examples of theologically conservative Christians evolving on other issues where positions once seemed rigid or fixed. There's been a great deal of research about evangelicals and climate change, including those that show how to make progress with this group of Christians. In the two studies we describe below, the factors that have facilitated those changes reinforce our own findings in this research.

Belief that climate change is human-caused is far lower among white evangelicals than it is among other people of faith. Yet, there is also promising evidence that it is possible to shift their attitudes about climate change.

In their article, "How to Get Evangelicals to Care About Climate Change," sociologists Elaine Howard Ecklund and Christopher P. Scheitle write that it's about aligning messaging with evangelical values rather than the values of conservationists.

They quote a conservative Christian youth minister, one of 300 in-depth interviews they conducted with evangelicals, to make the case:

If we have the opportunity we should help take care of this planet that we've been given. Having said that, I also believe that the value of human life is higher than the value of a whale, or a species of monkey."

Evangelicals are more likely to care about and believe in climate change if it aligns with their priorities as evangelical Christians. They go on to write:

It's not that evangelicals don't care about the environment. It's that they care about people more. [...] we think a different and more effective angle may be to redirect the conversation about environmental care to caring for people, social justice, and human flourishing..."

In a second study, conservative evangelicals were able to be persuaded to believe that climate change is human-caused when they hear from Katharine Hayhoe, a climate scientist who also happens to be evangelical. In Hayhoe's 33-minute lecture on

climate science, she devotes six minutes to theology. For evangelical students who participated in her lectures, "acceptance that global warming is happening increased for 48% of participants, and that humans are causing it for 39%," according to an August 28, 2017 article in *The Guardian*.

The takeaway? Trusted messengers, who communicate in ways that align with the target audience's values and identity (rather than the values and identities of outside secular forces pushing a change), matter.

Again, this strongly aligns with what our own research shows. To change the hearts and minds of theologically conservative Christians, we must:

ELEVATE THE VOICES OF CHRISTIAN MESSENGERS, INCLUDING LESBIAN AND GAY CHRISTIANS, WHO EXPRESS SHARED CHRISTIAN VALUES.

Conservative Christians are moved when they hear directly from conservative Christian messengers with shared Christian values including parents, family members, pastors and friends. The ability to identify and relate to a messenger aligns strongly with whether people are likely to be persuaded by what that messenger has to say.

They are also moved by theologically conservative lesbian and gay Christians. We learned during our research that many conservative Christians have what Dr. Phyllis Watts calls a "flawed mental template" of lesbian and gay people (see callout on page 18 to learn more about flawed mental templates).

Theologically conservative Christians have fewer relationships with lesbian and gay people, which leads them to lean on myths to fill in their gaps of knowledge. Therefore, they judge lesbian and gay people based on stereotypes. Lesbian and gay Christians who speak movingly about their faith disrupt those flawed mental templates in positive and important ways.

SPOTLIGHT MESSAGING THAT COMES FROM INSIDE FAITH COMMUNITIES.

In our research, conservative Christians worry about an approaching cultural tsunami that threatens their families, their congregations, their faith and their country. The solution is to push the threat away rather than reflect on the need for conservative Christians to change their conduct.

Stories that spotlight friends, families and congregations struggling to be in relationship with a lesbian or gay person lessen the likelihood that conservative Christians will reject the story because of a perception that outside secular forces are pushing for change. That is because these stories reflect the identity, values, beliefs and lived experiences of conservative Christians, which makes it more likely that Christians reading or hearing these stories will trust the messenger.

MESSAGES SHOULD COMMUNICATE THE VALUES AND BELIEFS OF CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS.

To succeed at deepening understanding and connection with conservative Christians, messaging must meet their emotional needs. Messages that solely focus on discrimination that lesbian and gay people face are not enough to move conservative Christians to think differently. What works? Stories that focus on the hurt that is done to Christian families and congregations when lesbian or gay people are rejected.

For example, the following framing can work: When you reject a lesbian or gay person outright — or when your actions, even your well-intentioned actions, cause the lesbian and gay people in your

Important Concepts to Know: Flawed Mental Templates

A mental template is a set of images and associations that people have with something — or someone — they encounter out in the world. The idea was developed by Dr. Phyllis Watts, a social and clinical psychologist who advises change-makers on the psychological dynamics that prevent progress on tough social issues. According to Dr. Watts, people develop flawed mental templates when they are not deeply familiar with something or someone. People who don't know a lot of lesbian and gay people are likely to have developed a flawed mental template of lesbian and gay people, which unconsciously impacts their emotional reactions to them.



life to end their relationships with you — you are not meeting the obligation of your calling to bring people to Christ. That framing emphasizes what conservative Christians care about: being an evangelist for Christ.

We also heard from many of the conservative Christians who participated in our research that they worry about the stigma that is associated with being a conservative Christian — that they and their churches are viewed as “haters.” For some, this is a reason to find a new path forward — to find a way to be in relationship with the lesbian and gay people in their lives.

STARTING WITH INDIVIDUAL CHANGE LEADS THE WAY TO INSTITUTIONAL AND DENOMINATIONAL CHANGE.

The change theory outlined in this guide focuses our near-term efforts on igniting change at the individual level rather than the institutional or denominational level. By starting at the individual level, we are making it possible to make space for broader cultural and institutional change to come later or alongside. However, if our target audiences reject the changes we are asking them to consider, then progress can easily be stymied. Individual change is a critical step in the ongoing effort to impact cultural and denominational change.

PROGRESS MEANS MOVING CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS ALONG A TRAJECTORY OF SUPPORT.

Most conservative Christians are not ready to affirm or celebrate LGBTQ identity. As we noted earlier, many will maintain that being in a gay relationship is a sin. Our research shows that conservative Christians can hold that homosexuality is a sin and still work to deepen their relationships with lesbian and gay

people. Yet, for those of us who spend our days and nights fighting to affirm and celebrate LGBTQ people, this understandably may feel disappointing.

Our work is guided by a theory that our researchers call “the adjacent possible.” Like the story of the African-American Christian men who declared that their attitudes about gay people had changed in the last 10 years, change is possible. While change is possible, transformative change takes time. Someone who currently believes that a gay person should seek counseling to change is not someone who is ready to affirm or celebrate LGBTQ identity — at least not yet.

It is possible to get that person to change the nature of their relationship with the lesbian and gay people in their lives from ongoing condemnation and lecturing to engaging in genuinely caring and understanding relationships with the lesbian and gay people in their lives and from exclusion of lesbian and gay people in faith life toward inclusion. By engaging conservative Christians, we also help to prevent their relationships with lesbian and gay people from going from bad to worse. For more information on the adjacent possible, see the feature on page 20.



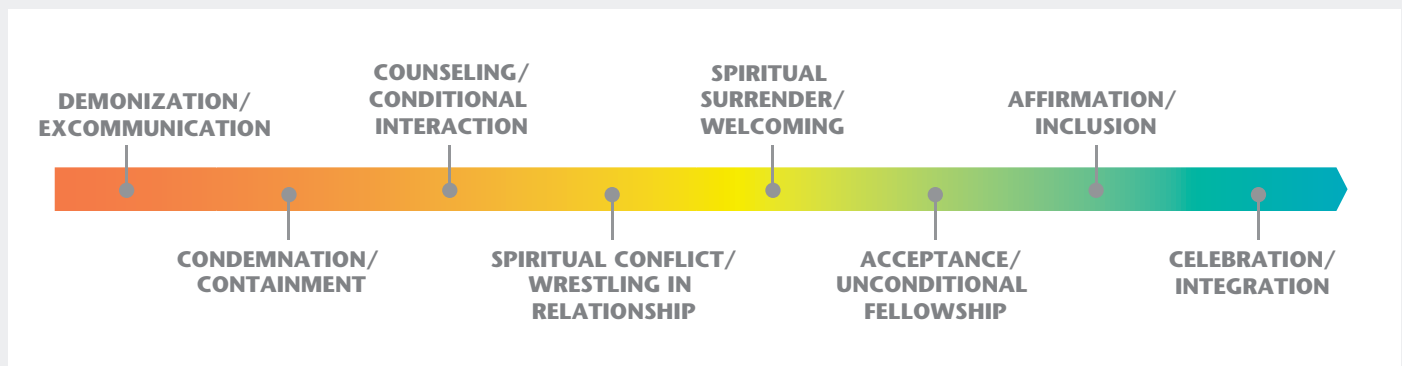
IMPORTANT CONCEPTS TO KNOW:

The Adjacent Possible

In popular science author Steven Johnson's book, *Where Good Ideas Come From*, he notes that while “we have a natural tendency to romanticize breakthrough innovations... [ideas] are, almost inevitably, networks of other ideas” that must evolve gradually, with each new innovation or insight opening up new possibilities that did not exist before.

In essence, an innovation like the iPhone doesn't simply happen overnight — breakthroughs in data storage, file sharing, GPS technology, battery power, along with many others paved a slow path forward for the iPhone to be conceptualized, then built, then adopted by users. And throughout the process each of these individual breakthroughs created a cascade of other innovations that may have been previously inconceivable. This step-by-step process is a concept Johnson calls “the adjacent possible,” which he adapts from evolutionary biologist Stuart Kauffman.

The adjacent possible also represents a helpful way for us to consider and explore the pathways forward on emotionally complex social issues. Through our work we have developed a recognition that there is a continuum of support for LGBTQ people. On one far end — the most oppositional end — there exists a level of violence, or at minimum disgust, toward LGBTQ people. On the other far end — the most supportive end — we see affirmation and celebration.



As advocates of LGBTQ equality and inclusion, our work is squarely focused on moving people to affirmation and celebration — and we have learned that it is quite possible to move people along this spectrum. However, it's quite difficult to get someone who is at the violent, disgust and rejection end of the spectrum to jump all the way to welcoming, affirmation, and celebration. Reaching and moving people along this spectrum takes deliberate and purposeful work. And most importantly, it takes time.

Understanding our audience's current attitudes and the circle of adjacent possibilities they may be open to and ready for (e.g. moving from conditional interactions to being in relationship with LGBTQ people) gives us an opportunity to help them take one step — of many — towards the supportive end of the spectrum.

An important thing to note about evangelical and theologically conservative Christians on this spectrum is that few at the demonization or excommunication phase are available to support us. While we can potentially get them to move to the next phase, they're going to be the hardest to move. Therefore, this guide focuses on those further along the spectrum — people we're more likely to reach and move toward forging genuinely caring relationships with the lesbian and gay people in their lives.



The Current Landscape

HOW VALUES, BELIEFS AND LIVED EXPERIENCES SHAPE THE WAY THAT THEOLOGICALLY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS RELATE TO LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE.

Earlier in this guide, we introduced you to how human beings are heartwired in relation to how they relate to tough social issues. As Robert Pérez and Amy Simon write in *Heartwired: Human Behavior, Public Opinion Research and the Audacious Pursuit of Social Change*, “the heartwired approach to research focuses on the ways that emotion, values, beliefs, identity and lived experiences combine, and often collide, to shape people’s attitudes and behaviors.”

Before we began testing message strategies to understand what would open the hearts of our

target audiences to reconsider the place of lesbian and gay people in their families, congregations and society, we conducted research to better understand the existing landscape, including in-depth interviews with theologically conservative clergy and a literature review on how theologically conservative Christians and congregations are managing relationships with lesbian and gay people. For a more in-depth description of our landscape research, see the research methodology section on page 51 at the back of this guide.

Here's what we learned:

SILENCE, SILOS AND INVISIBILITY CHARACTERIZE MANY OF THESE CHRISTIANS' EXPERIENCES WITH LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE.

Their relationships with lesbian and gay people are siloed because many are more likely to have coworkers or acquaintances who are lesbian and gay, rather than family or friends. Those who do have LGBTQ friends and family are more likely to keep emotional and physical distance in these relationships. That means that their personal relationships with lesbian or gay people involve less interaction and far less emotional intimacy. Because their relationships with lesbian and gay people are far less personal, LGBTQ identity is far less present in their relationships or interactions.

Most report that the topic of LGBTQ people rarely, if ever, comes up in their church. When it does surface, the topic is typically only around political issues such as marriage for same-sex couples or access to bathrooms for transgender people. Many believe the topic is a reality in today's world and the church cannot bury its head in the sand while families suffer in silence and experience stigmatization in their churches. Finally, a significant portion report having no real reason to give the topic any significant thought.

THERE IS LITTLE FAMILIARITY WITH OR AWARENESS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN AND GAY CHRISTIANS.

Theologically conservative Christians tend to be unaware or unsure whether lesbian and gay people are Christian or want to be part of Christian congregations. They also question whether one can be gay and be a genuine, committed Christian at the same time. Many largely see issues involving lesbian and gay people as a secular issue — one that is happening outside of the church, not within it. That view is also held by many of those who have lesbian or gay family members.

Some conservative Christians see labeling others or oneself as lesbian or gay as both embracing an

identity tied to sin and one that eclipses their full humanity, including their identity as a Christian. Finally, many conservative Christians have little real understanding of what makes someone lesbian or gay. Some feel people are born lesbian or gay, yet make a choice to engage in what they see as sinful behavior. Others believe that being gay results from life experiences like abuse.

MANY EXPRESS GENUINE CARE, EMPATHY AND LOVE FOR LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES.

For those of us who have been hurt by the teachings and actions of conservative Christians, this assertion may seem outrageous. Many Christian people who participated in our research express sincere empathy for the struggles and pain of lesbian and gay people and their families. They also want lesbian and gay people and their families to feel supported and embraced by the Church.

At the same time, they worry deeply about the salvation and spiritual health of lesbian and gay people. They believe that the expression of their concern is a deep demonstration of Christian love. They also see themselves and their own congregations as welcoming and loving toward people who are lesbian and gay — while living their values by not accepting same-gender sexual behavior.

CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS OFTEN FAIL TO SEE THE GAP BETWEEN THEIR INTENDED BEHAVIOR TOWARD LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE AND THE ACTUAL IMPACT OF THEIR WORDS AND ACTIONS.

Conservative Christians believe that speaking “truth” about lesbian and gay people to be an act of deep love — a way to ensure eternal salvation for lesbian and gay people. Therefore, they do not see it as hateful. They genuinely believe in the message to *love the sinner, hate the sin*. That is one of the ways they are able to reconcile their beliefs in Christian love with their actions to reject unrepentant sinners.

Since many do not have deep personal relationships with lesbian and gay people, they do not believe

there is a significant problem with lesbian and gay people or their families being or feeling rejected or shunned at church. They are also not intuitively aware of the impact of their rejection or the harm it causes.

THESE CHRISTIANS ARE VERY SENSITIVE TO THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL CHANGE ON THE CHURCH, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AND PERCEPTIONS OF CHRISTIANS.

Many conservative Christians believe that they can no longer speak their mind or preach what they believe to be the Word of God without being persecuted or labeled a hater or bigot. This may seem highly ironic to LGBTQ people who have felt deeply persecuted by conservative Christians. Yet as we noted above, most conservative Christians see their actions toward LGBTQ people to be a genuine expression of Christian love.

They do worry, however, that the Church is being pressured to change based on a range of social trends, cultural pressure and what they see as political correctness. As a result, these Christians are often defensive about any suggestion that they need to change. They also are concerned about children and young people being exposed to ideas that conflict with the values that they are taught at home and in church. At the same time, some believe the Church's behavior and rhetoric has been too harsh, which has alienated LGBTQ people from the Church and fostered the portrayal of Christians as hateful.

THE IDEA OF QUESTIONING OR RETHINKING YOUR FAITH IS IN CONFLICT WITH CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY.

Christians who are theologically conservative have shaped their identity around moral and religious certainty. Asking them to rethink or reconsider their firmly held religious beliefs is a direct threat to how they see themselves. There is also considerable social pressure within their communities not to question what they understand as accepted doctrine on homosexuality.

For many, questioning or rejecting these beliefs

is seen as a faithless act, which opens the door for Christians to question everything. Doing so risks a breakdown in social order and the ability of the Church to set and enforce moral and Biblical standards. To these Christians, that only invites other unwanted change.

Those pastors who have a change of heart are not seen as leaders to follow. Rather, they may be viewed as wishy-washy, weak in their faith or bowing to social pressure and political correctness. Our target audiences have a distrust of those Christians who do not clearly and unequivocally condemn homosexuality. They not only appear to be too tolerant or accepting of lesbian and gay people, they are seen as falling down on their duty as Christians.

FOR CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS, THE PROBLEM, AND NEED FOR CHANGE, IS NOT THEIR RESPONSIBILITY.

To make progress on a social issue, people must first believe there is actually a problem — and that problem must create an internal conflict for them. Change is made possible when the internal conflict is significant enough that they are able to reflect on their own actions. Most conservative Christians believe, however, that the conflict around this issue is coming from outside the Church — LGBTQ people and society pushing the Church to change. Therefore, they tend to push the threat away rather than reflect on how they might change their own conduct.

Furthermore, lesbian and gay people who come out later in life can be seen as dishonest for having hid their homosexuality for so many years. It is hard for many heterosexual evangelical Christians to understand that an evangelical Christian who is lesbian or gay may spend decades grappling with their sexual orientation, trying to live a heterosexual life rather than acknowledge their homosexuality. By the time they finally acknowledge their sexual orientation and try to engage their family and friends, they may be viewed as having been deceptive rather than having finally emerged authentically from their deep internal struggle.

If their relationship with lesbian or gay people is broken, the problem is the lesbian and gay person's lack of tolerance — or lack of adherence to Christian doctrine, not the fault of the person speaking *the truth* to them. Conservative Christians are not giving up on these relationships. Lesbian and gay Christians are seen as giving up on God's ability to change them.

CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS MAKE DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN WILLFUL, UNREPENTANT SINNING AND UNINTENTIONAL OR ISOLATED SINFUL ACTS.

Many of the conservative Christians who we interviewed say that no sin is greater than another. They do, however, draw a distinction between what they see as unintentional or isolated sinful acts for which you repent and work to cease versus those they see as intentional, repeated sins.

Conservative Christians see lesbian and gay people who pursue same-gender relationships as not only committing a sin, but doing so repeatedly and intentionally. In other words, living openly as a lesbian or gay person is viewed as willful, unrepentant sinning. Because conservative Christians see this as a choice to defy God and biblical authority, some suggest that openly lesbian and gay people cannot be *real* Christians.

For some, the opportunity to create dialogue and facilitate discernment is further impeded by the belief that simply being in relationship with Christians who are actively committing the sin of sexual immorality is a sin itself, which poses a risk to their own spiritual health and salvation.

How conservative Christians relate to the story of Jesus telling the adulterous woman at the well to “go and sin no more” exemplifies how they relate to openly lesbian and gay people. Consider the conservative Christian website, [Got Questions Ministries](#). In answering the question, “Why did Jesus tell people to ‘go and sin no more’ if sinlessness is impossible,” *Got Questions Ministries* offers:

“In saying, ‘Go and sin no more,’ Jesus was not speaking of sinless perfection. He was warning against a return to sinful lifestyle choices. His words both extended mercy and demanded holiness. Jesus was always the perfect balance of ‘grace and truth’ (John 1:14). With forgiveness comes the expectation that we will not continue in the same path of rebelliousness. Those who know God’s love will naturally want to obey Him (John 14:15).”

Conservative Christians appreciate Jesus for both offering forgiveness while also demanding repentance and holiness.

THERE ARE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES IN THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL READINESS FOR CHANGE AMONG CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS.

Effective messaging requires nuance that allows conservative Christians to make progress in their relationships with lesbian and gay people, but doesn't push them too far, too fast. Yet, many conservative Christians experience messaging about the need to be in relationship with lesbian and gay people as a call for Christians and churches to accept and affirm homosexuality, to allow lesbian and gay people to have leadership roles or to open the door to “gay marriage” in their congregations.

For many of these Christians, it's not that they *won't change*, it's that they *can't change* — yet. Certainly, they can't begin the journey toward change without messaging that reflects their values, beliefs, lived experiences and identity. As you'll learn in the coming pages, we will need different strategies for different conservative Christian audience segments. Without this nuanced and segmented approach to messaging, we risk cementing deeply problematic attitudes rather than transforming them.



Theologically Conservative Christians, and Their Attitudes toward Lesbian and Gay People

CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS DO NOT FIT NEATLY INTO ONE BOX

In the previous landscape analysis, we outlined the characteristics and attitudes that many theologically conservative Christians share with one another. What we also see through this research is that there is diversity among theologically conservative Christians and their attitudes toward lesbian and gay people.

To some degree, gender and race are correlated with conservative Christian attitudes toward lesbian and gay people. Our research showed that white women and Black women, respectively, are generally more open to being in relationship with lesbian and gay people than white men and Black men, respectively.

We saw other racial dynamics in our research. Among white conservative Christians, there is a Republican ideological overlay that we do not see among Black participants. That means that for white conservative Christians, two facets of their identity reinforce negative perceptions of lesbian and gay people: the part of their identity as a conservative Christian and the part of their identity as a political conservative. For some white conservative Christians, these two facets of their identity seem to have been solidified after the election of Donald Trump causing some theologically conservative [Black Christians to leave majority white evangelical Churches](#) as the New York Times reported. For white conservative Christians, the church is seen as a place to draw a line against the broader culture wars, which means that change poses an even greater risk to the identity of white conservative Christians.

In contrast, for Black conservative Christians, there appears to be more room for human, moral failing, even among church leadership. Black conservative Christians are also more likely to report having LGBTQ people in church — like the choir director. Because of the presence and participation of LGBTQ people in the Black church, LGBTQ people are less likely to be seen as outsiders. Because there is also more of a tradition in the Black church of serving others outside of the church community (providing social services, HIV/AIDS counseling, prison ministry, etc.), there is more openness to inviting in those perceived as “the other.”

Findings from our survey of Black and white theologically conservative Christians spotlight some of these differences based on race and gender. For instance, we asked Black and white theologically conservative Christians how comfortable they are personally around lesbian and gay people. In our survey, 49 percent of Black Christians said they were *very comfortable* being around lesbian and gay people in contrast to 30 percent of white conservative Christians.

In the same survey of Black and white theologically conservative Christians, respondents also placed themselves on a continuum between two different beliefs: *“It’s more important to be in relationship with other Christians, including those who are lesbian or*

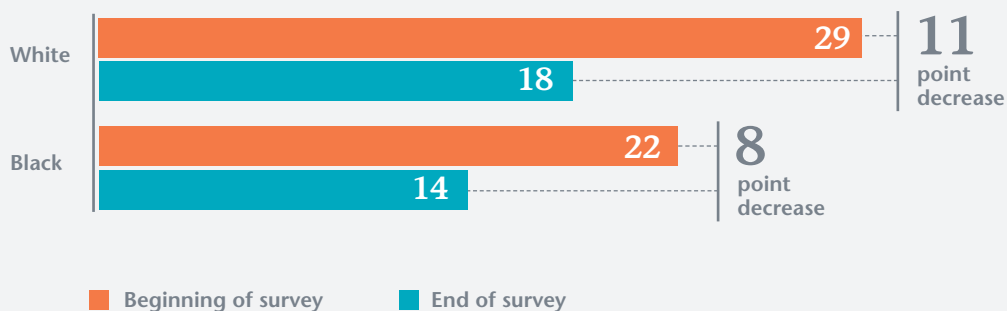
gay” or “It’s more important to take a moral stand against homosexuality and not allow Christians to be led astray from Biblical teachings.”

At the start of the survey, before respondents had seen or heard any messaging narratives, 29 percent of white respondents and 22 percent of Black respondents were a 10 on the zero to 10 scale, meaning they fully embraced that “it’s more important to take a moral stand against homosexuality” — the farthest position possible away from “being in relationship.” By the end of the survey, complete support for this position dropped from 29 percent to 18 percent among whites (11 point decrease), and from 22 percent to 14 points among Black respondents (8 point decrease). These data show that with messaging that reflects their values, beliefs, identity and lived experiences, theologically conservative Black and white respondents moved to being more open to being in relationship with Christians, including those who are lesbian or gay.

In the coming pages, we’ll walk through the messaging interventions that we tested and why they worked. We’ll also talk about how psychographic factors among conservative Christians, like their values and beliefs, shape their attitudes and behaviors toward lesbian and gay people.

Messaging that reflects their values, beliefs, identity and lived experiences moved respondents to being more open to being in relationship with Christians, including those who are gay or lesbian.

Completely support the statement: *“It’s more important to take a moral stand against homosexuality and not allow Christians to be led astray from Biblical teachings.”*



Homosexuality as a Sin

Throughout this guide, we have discussed what it looks like to make progress with theologically conservative Christians. We have talked about change theories like the adjacent possible — moving people along a spectrum of support toward affirmation and celebration of lesbian and gay people.

To move conservative Christians on a journey to be in relationship with lesbian and gay people, they must remain engaged and willing to listen. We learned in this research that directly challenging their beliefs about homosexuality or requiring them to reconsider their belief that homosexuality is a sin generates defensiveness that can end the conversation and the possibility of further progress with this target audience. In fact, even when we featured characters who had this type of change of heart or those who didn't infer that they believed homosexuality is a sin, our audiences filled in the blanks to assume that our messengers had reinterpreted or abandoned the Word of God — which undermined their ability to credibly connect with our audience.

Our research shows that conservative Christians do not have to resolve the conflict that comes from believing that homosexuality is a sin in order to foster and strengthen deeper and genuinely more caring relationships with lesbian and gay people. It also takes great care to thread this rhetorical needle in a way that ensures that the messenger isn't rejected while also not reinforcing this belief as a moral truth. For example, in one story we tested — after reflecting on the news that a friend is gay — a conservative Christian man says:

I don't pretend to know what you are going through, but I do know this. I don't go to church because I am a perfect man. I go to church because I am a work in progress. Every one of us has some issue.

This was just enough to show conservative Christians how to live in the gray space — to care for the lesbian and gay people in your life without completely changing your deeply held beliefs.

We recognize that this is one of the most difficult recommendations for some in this guide. What we have attempted to do is model how conservative Christians can live in the gray space. It requires a nuanced approach so that we are not affirming the idea that homosexuality is a sin, but allowing conservative Christians to acknowledge that this is their perspective.

It might seem counterintuitive, but our research showed that this nuanced approach did not further entrench this belief about sin and homosexuality or leave it unexamined. It actually helped conservative Christians to put less weight on their beliefs about the “sin of homosexuality” and the seriousness of that “sin” when considering how to treat and be in relationship with lesbian and gay people.

Modeling how conservative Christians can live in this gray space, we believe it is possible to still make important progress and to get our audience started on a journey toward even deeper change. That's because when conservative Christians are in relationship with LGBTQ people, they encounter the authentic reality of LGBTQ lives, which challenges their myths and misconceptions. That makes it more likely that they will move in the direction of inclusion, affirmation and eventually celebration.

THEOLOGICALLY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS: FOUR DISTINCT SEGMENTS

There are some notable variations among theologically conservative Christians in how they relate to lesbian and gay people. We found that these variations primarily exist in two distinct moral dimensions. The first is their moral view of homosexuality. The second is how they understand their responsibility to other Christians.

Here are two sets of values and beliefs that shape how theologically conservative Christians relate to lesbian and gay people.

What is the moral weight that conservative Christians place on what they perceive to be the sin of homosexuality? Which of the following two statements do conservative Christians believe to be more true?

Homosexuality is one of the worst sins, for which one will be judged harshly, and against which Christians must take a hard line.

Homosexuality is sin, but not better or worse than any other sin.

THE MORAL WEIGHT OF HOMOSEXUALITY

Spiritual Reformers



Spiritual Warriors



Spiritual Nurturers



Spiritual Protectors



THE RESPONSIBILITY OF CHRISTIANS TO OTHERS

What responsibility do Christians have to be in relationships to others? Which of the following two statements do conservative Christians believe to be more true?

Christians must actively seek out and welcome all — Christians and non-Christians — in order to bring them to Christ.

Christians must avoid relationships with non-Christians and active sinners who are corrupting influences on one's faith.

Based on how conservative Christians respond and reflect on these questions, they fall into one of the following four distinct audience segments that we have categorized (as noted by the image on page 28): Spiritual Warriors, Spiritual Protectors, Spiritual Reformers or Spiritual Nurturers.

Just consider two segments and their differences: the Spiritual Nurturer versus the Spiritual Warrior.

The Spiritual Warrior is the most difficult-to-persuade audience segment because they see their identity as aggressively defending against threats to salvation and the ability of Satan to spread disinformation. Spiritual Warriors believe that homosexuality is a sin far more serious than other sins and — because they worry that lesbian and gay people are infiltrators and corruptors — that it must be aggressively defended against.

Spiritual Nurturers, on the other hand, believe that God judges everyone equally and that all sins are equal before the eyes of God. They also believe that it's *God's job* to lead a person away from sin and onto the moral path. Because they see their identity as Christians who bring people to God, they foster relationships with LGBTQ people based on love,

respect, and mutual caring — not aggressive and hostile preaching or repeated condemnation. This type of segmentation analysis allows us to understand who is available to be persuaded and moved with the right messaging strategies.

There are some important considerations to note about this audience segmentation analysis. It's a tool to better understand how to create nuanced messages rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to messaging.

THESE ARE NOT FIXED CATEGORIES

They are fluid categories depending on the environment that conservative Christians find themselves in or what is coming up for them at any given moment in time. For instance, people may fall into different categories when it comes to individual versus institutional action — what they should do versus what their church should do. It's also possible that positive or negative priming — using scripture, stories or other moral messages to elicit or trigger emotions, identity, values, beliefs or lived experiences — could move audiences from one segment toward another.





Spiritual Warriors

This segment believes that homosexuality is one of the worst sins — a sin for which one will be judged harshly and against which Christians must take a hard line. They also feel that Christians must actively reject relationships with non-Christians and active sinners who are corrupting influences on one's faith — and that they must guard against these people and their ideas. This segment is the most difficult to move.

WHAT THEY BELIEVE	FACTORS THAT MAY HINDER JOURNEY TOWARD SUPPORT	POTENTIAL ENTRY POINTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ They must be aggressive in preaching the truth. ✓ God will judge and will judge harshly. ✓ False prophets are leading the Church and must be rooted out. ✓ The Church and Christian principles are under attack. ✓ Lesbian and gay people are infiltrators and corruptors that must be aggressively defended against. ✓ The purpose of being in relationship is to reinforce Christian morality. ✓ Pastors and church leadership should be uncompromising moral enforcers and exemplars beyond rebuke. 	<p><i>"The Bible is very clear that we aren't supposed to associate with people who actively participate in sexual immorality."</i></p> <p>– white man, Richmond</p> <p><i>"These days and times as a Christian you have to take a stand."</i></p> <p>– Black man, Richmond</p> <p><i>"...He said it is our job as prayerful Christians to pray and to create roadblocks to slow the enemy down."</i></p> <p>– white woman, Omaha</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ease concerns about perceived threats to the Church and/or Christians. ✓ Focus on relationships within existing congregations and families. ✓ Reassure them of strength of their own faith. ✓ Reflect back congruent anger, upset, discomfort they feel. ✓ Do not question authority of the Bible on this topic.



Spiritual Protectors

This segment believes homosexuality is a sin, but that it is no better or worse than any other sin. At the same time they feel Christians must limit or be cautious in relationships with non-Christians and active sinners who are potentially corrupting influences on one's faith.

WHAT THEY BELIEVE	FACTORS THAT MAY HINDER JOURNEY TOWARD SUPPORT	POTENTIAL ENTRY POINTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ God judges and judges everyone equally — all sins are equal in the eyes of God. ✓ Christians must bring sinners to Christ, but only to the extent that the Church/Christians are not threatened with “contamination” and/or led astray. ✓ Cultural and social changes are putting pressure on churches and Christians to compromise biblical teachings. ✓ Being in relationship with Christians who are actively committing the sin of sexual immorality is a sin itself, a risk to one's own spiritual health and salvation. 	<p><i>“We are supposed to treat everybody right but yet we are still supposed to follow what the Bible says.”</i></p> <p>– Black woman, Omaha</p> <p><i>“There may come a time when Christians who are living in sin do need to be approached and there may come a time when you have to cut off relationship.”</i></p> <p>– white man, Omaha</p> <p><i>“If you consider those actively living, pursuing a gay relationship or lifestyle, I wouldn't want to associate with them. I am told not to in Scripture.”</i></p> <p>– white man, Omaha</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Help to elevate lesbian and gay people within church and Christian families. ✓ Show that shutting people out interferes with their duty to bring people into the church. ✓ Appeal to an internal motivation to be more Christ-like and not external, social/cultural pressure to change. ✓ Emphasize truth, grace, and love.



Spiritual Reformers

This segment believes that homosexuality is one of the worst sins — a sin for which one will be judged harshly and against which Christians must take a hard line. However, they also believe that Christians must actively seek out and welcome all — Christians and non-Christians — in order to bring them to Christ.

WHAT THEY BELIEVE	FACTORS THAT MAY HINDER JOURNEY TOWARD SUPPORT	POTENTIAL ENTRY POINTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Homosexuality is an unforgivable sin and Christians have to take a stand. ✓ Christians have a duty to be in relationship to put others on the right/moral path and to help lesbian and gay people correct and eliminate sinful behavior and same-sex attraction through prayer, therapy, and loving rebuke. ✓ Lesbian and gay people should be welcomed in church/Christian fellowship only if they are actively working to avoid/reject the sin of homosexuality. ✓ Role of pastor and leadership is to actively encourage lesbian and gay people to change, reject homosexuality. 	<p><i>“It is our job as Christians to still show him love, still be there in his corner for him but at the same time let him know ‘HEY man, you’ve got to get that together because that is damnation.’”</i></p> <p>– Black man, Omaha</p> <p><i>“If you are a parent, you are a parent and it says your number one duty as a Christian parent is to keep your children close to your heart, but it is also to teach them the right way to live like Christ.”</i></p> <p>– Black woman, Richmond</p> <p><i>“It is our commission to love people the way that God loves us. But it is also our commission to check our brother and sister when they are involved as well.”</i></p> <p>– Black man, Omaha</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Show that condemnation creates emotional and/or spiritual distance — that there is a mutual responsibility for maintaining a relationship. ✓ Give them an opportunity to reflect on past judgement and potential harm caused. ✓ Give them an opportunity to judge someone other than a lesbian or gay person. ✓ Remind that God works in His own time and own way.



Spiritual Nurturers

This segment believes that homosexuality is a sin — but no better or worse than any other sin. In the near term, this is the most moveable segment.

WHAT THEY BELIEVE	FACTORS THAT MAY HINDER JOURNEY TOWARD SUPPORT	POTENTIAL ENTRY POINTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ God judges and judges everyone equally — all sins are equal in the eyes of God. ✓ The path out of sin requires love, respect, and mutual caring, not aggressive and hostile preaching or repeated condemnation. ✓ Goal is to bring people to Christ, and let God work on people's hearts in His time and in His way. ✓ Concerned about reputational damage to Christians and the Church, perceptions that they are “haters.” 	<p><i>“I’m here as a friend and to encourage you to seek His Word and seek His forgiveness. You know what you need to do with your relationship with Christ. That is between you and Him, not me. I’m just called to — right there, you know — not condemn them or shame them. It is not my place. Just to be there for them and support and encourage and accountability. Just love them.”</i></p> <p>– white man, Omaha</p> <p><i>“Being in the right relationship is more important. Wrap them in love and trust God to work out her heart because God is the only one that can.”</i></p> <p>– Black woman, Richmond</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Elevate the motivation to repair the reputation of the Church and Christians as “haters.” ✓ Show there is a responsibility of Christians to “be in the mess” with others. ✓ Ease discomfort they may have with uncertainty.

What does change look like among these four audience segments?

HOW DO WE PUT AUDIENCE SEGMENTATION ANALYSIS TO WORK TO MAKE PROGRESS WITH THEOLOGICALLY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS?

Audience segmentation helps us to understand where different theologically conservative Christians fall along a spectrum of support for lesbian and gay people.

On page 20, we introduced you to the theory of adjacent possibilities. Although our ultimate goal is to move people to fully affirm and celebrate LGBTQ people, there are many steps along the way to get there. However, it's quite difficult to get someone who is at the demonization/excommunication end of the spectrum to jump all the way to celebration and full integration of lesbian and gay people into their families and congregations.

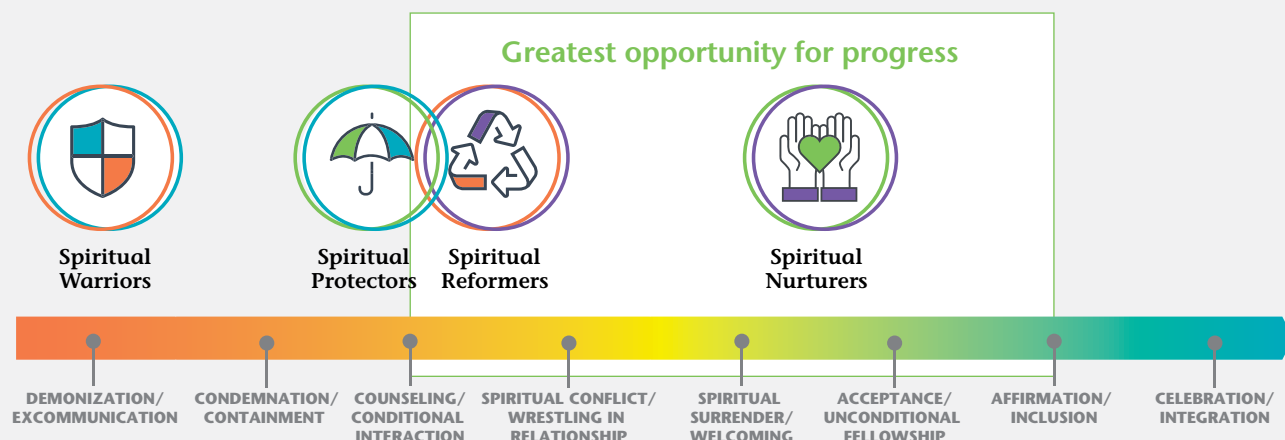
The different segments we introduced to you in the last section are starting in different places. In the spectrum of adjacent possibilities, most segments fall between condemnation and spiritual conflict. Very few of those at the demonization/excommunication phase are available to be persuaded at this time, while some are stuck at the condemnation/containment

phase, but potentially moveable with the right messaging. Many are now in the counseling/conditional interaction or spiritual conflict/wrestling in relationship phase.

Spiritual Nurturers are the farthest along the spectrum of support followed by Spiritual Reformers. Based on our research, we have the greatest opportunity to make progress with these two audience segments in the near term. In contrast, Spiritual Protectors, and especially Spiritual Warriors, will be more difficult to move in the near term. Here's the good news: by making progress with Spiritual Nurturers and Spiritual Reformers, we will nurture the type of social and cultural pressure that will ultimately move the more conservative of these four audience segments.

Reaching and moving people along this spectrum takes deliberate and purposeful work. And most importantly — it takes time. Without targeted messaging, it is possible that people will stay stuck at the most rejecting end of the spectrum — along with all the negative cultural, social and religious challenges that brings. The goal for this work is to get them unstuck and move them to the next stage of the adjacent possible.

Audience Segments Fall Along a Spectrum of Support



Recommendations: A Pathway to Progress

A NEW NARRATIVE APPROACH TO COMMUNICATING WITH THEOLOGICALLY CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS ABOUT LESBIAN AND GAY PEOPLE

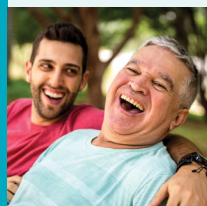
Through our research, we have identified a narrative pathway that will move our target audiences, especially the Spiritual Nurturers and Spiritual Reformers (page 28), along a journey toward being in relationship with lesbian and gay people.

By narrative, we mean the kind of meta-story that a group of related people tell about themselves. Groups have different narratives that define how we think about ourselves as Americans, as Christians, as LGBTQ people, as progressives, as conservatives, and

as other communities. Narratives not only help to reinforce identity, values and beliefs, they shape how people think and act because they define for us what is right, wrong and how we should respond to given situations.

We found that the approach to messaging we developed and tested and present to you here can shift the narrative that conservative Christians tell themselves about how they can and should relate to lesbian and gay people. Shifting narratives is not easy. It requires that we construct a narrative methodology that aligns with how people are heartwired — how their emotions, identity, values, beliefs and lived experiences come together to shape their attitudes and their behaviors.

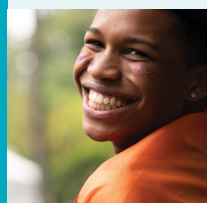
A Sequence Approach to Narrative Change



NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #1
Establish Christian credibility



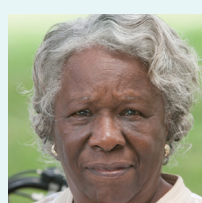
NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #2
Shift the focus of judgement



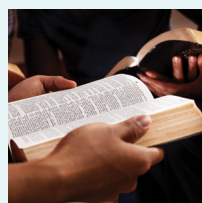
NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #3
Foster wholesome spiritual conflict



NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #4
Elevate Christian motivations for change



NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #5
Show God-inspired change



NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #6
Model living in the gray space



The Unique Power of Storytelling

Stories from real people featuring compelling, identifiable protagonists are an especially effective mode of communication when attempting to persuade a conflicted audience. Storytelling has been an important tradition in American Christianity, especially as it relates to elevating the Church's moral voice in the great struggles for social justice — from ending slavery to today's Sanctuary movement.

People who listen to or read a story — a story that aligns with how they are heartwired — are more likely to have an ability to empathize and be self-reflective. That's because there's something about the narrative form of communication that transports us to the empathic part of our brains where we are likely to process information through the eyes of the protagonist. Stories not only engage the audience, the emotions of the audience become inextricably linked to those of the characters, especially the story's protagonist.

Conversely, when simply sharing facts or information outside of a narrative, the listener or reader is more likely to process information in the critical-thinking part of the brain — and therefore, is more likely to raise objections to the “change” you are asking them to consider.

Elevating Lesbian and Gay Christians

There's an important role for lesbian and gay Christians to play in changing the hearts and minds of conservative Christians. It is very important to elevate lesbian and gay Christians in the stories we tell. Our research found that by doing so it:

1

Disrupts the flawed mental template of lesbian and gay people as “outside” the Church, as “not Christian,” or as abandoning their faith.

2

Fosters connection with the lesbian or gay person through shared Christian values.

3

Portrays lesbian and gay Christians as courageous and as tenacious, holding on to faith in the face of unwelcoming actions by a congregation or certain Christians.

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Here's an excerpt from a first-person print story we tested in focus groups — a story from the perspective of a gay Christian:

“As word spread, I was no longer invited to the usual get-togethers. Folks I had known forever seemed to avoid me. I wondered if there could still be a place for me in my congregation. But the Lord kept calling me back. For months, my pastor and I continued to meet and pray. He was convinced I could change. I had tried for so long to change myself, and failed, that I had come to feel this is how God created me to be. It was difficult for both of us, but we kept on.”



NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #1

Establish Christian credibility

“Is this someone I can trust? Or is this someone that is so different from me that I don’t really care

about their opinion?” These are legitimate questions that most of us ask when we interact with someone new. The answers often determine whether we lean in to learn more or tune out.

When sharing stories with evangelical and theologically conservative Christians, we found it was incredibly important to establish Christian credibility — that the person in your story is “a Christian like me” — very early on. This was done by talking about what the person in the story believes, the values that they hold dear, the type of congregation that they oversee if they are a pastor, their own spiritual journey, etc. These storytelling elements at the beginning of the storytelling strategy are essential.

Time and time again, our research has shown that peer-to-peer messengers are crucial to create a connection with the audiences you are trying to reach. In this case, including theologically conservative Christian parents, family members, pastors, and/or youth ministers can help your audience see themselves and step inside your story. Witnessing the struggle, the emotions, the conflict, or the overwhelming love for one’s child through a story helps create connection by mirroring your audience’s own inner struggle.

Also, elevating lesbian and gay Christians within your story — showing how they share similar Christian values and beliefs — can create an opportunity to connect and empathize with them. We found that by showing lesbian and gay people who demonstrated a genuine devotion to God and held shared Christian values being judged, condemned and shunned in a way that puts other Christians out of step with how they should be conducting themselves — it

disrupted the flawed mental template (see page 18) of lesbian and gay Christians as a threat from outside. It allowed conservative Christians to see that there is a problem that needs to be solved.

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Here’s an excerpt from a first-person print story we tested in focus groups — a story from the perspective of a grandparent that establishes Christian credibility:

“I am a proud grandpa to three grown grandchildren. Family and faith have always been the foundation of our lives. A few years back, we found ourselves in a situation where both were tested. My grandson, Mike, told his mother and father that after years of wrestling, he finally had to tell them that he was gay.

This was very difficult for our family. None of us knew what to do. We did a lot of praying. Our first concern was for his soul; for as long as I can remember the Church has taught that homosexuality is a sin. But when it was our child — who had always been a devout Christian — it led our family to reflect on our understanding of scripture and Church teachings about our responsibilities as Christian parents and grandparents.”



NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #2:

Shift the Focus of Judgement

One of the insights we gained through the research behind *My Mind Was Changed*, was that theologically

conservative Christians are more likely to see God as a “God who judges” rather than God as a “God who loves.” This means that theologically conservative Christians have a moral impulse to judge the conduct of others, including lesbian and gay people.

Through our research we had the most success reaching and connecting with theologically conservative Christians when we gave them someone else other than lesbian and gay people to judge. When testing our materials, we found that focusing on a theologically conservative Christian who was not behaving in the best Christian way to the lesbian and gay people in their lives created an opportunity to connect with this audience. It reminded theologically conservative Christians of something they already know — that churches have not always been as welcoming as they could be. And by providing empathically-attuned alternatives to their initial impulse to judge, shun or condemn lesbian and gay people, it allowed them to move their focus of judgment away from them to the conservative Christian — to say: “I want to be better than that person was.”

Also, playing out the difference between intent and impact — showing our audience how Christians may cause severe harm despite even the best intentions — helped to elevate a desire to live up to Christian ideals and not harm others. Importantly, all of the storytelling had to be done in a nuanced way.

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Here’s an excerpt from a print story we tested in focus groups — a story from the perspective of a woman who judged her younger sister when she came out to her — until she witnessed the same behavior in her parents:

“My parents’ response did not surprise me. They were clear and unequivocal that homosexuality is out of step with a Godly path. [...] They weren’t wrong. I didn’t disagree. But as I sat there, I was suddenly able to listen and reflect in a new way. The months of certainty I felt about the righteousness of my own actions began to wash away as I saw how every well-intentioned refrain from my parents hit Mary like an emotional blow. They thought, as I did, that they were speaking truth in love. But I could see now that it came across more like angry condemnation. For weeks after, my and Mary’s painful conversations replayed over and over in my mind. I submitted my struggle to God. Through prayer, I realized in my sister’s moment of need, I was more focused on being right and staking out the moral high ground to satisfy my own pride than on loving her through her struggle and trusting in Him to guide her.”

Here’s an excerpt from a print story we tested in focus groups — a story from the perspective of a woman whose friend was rejected by her church after her son came out as gay:

“What shocked her, she told me, was the way her family and her child were treated in their church community. Instead of support, they encountered judgment and, increasingly, alienation. They worried that their son might disengage from his faith altogether if they didn’t act. [...]”

I’ll confess, it has been painful for me to come to the realization that in the name of Christ’s truth, we have sometimes caused others great pain. We have not always followed up our truth-telling with a Christ-like embrace. We haven’t defended the gay community from abuse, as we should have. Sadly, while professing our love for the sinner, the church has far more often condemned and alienated those in the gay community than embraced them in love.”



NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #3:

Foster Wholesome Spiritual Conflict

Our research found that in order to connect with and move people, we must welcome and

foster spiritual conflict. One of the primary reasons that mainline Christians were the first to become accepting and welcoming of LGBTQ people was in part due to the fact that LGBTQ people were coming out in mainline Christian families and congregations more often than in more conservative ones. It created the conflict and people worked through it together.

Today, however, more and more LGBTQ people are coming out in theologically conservative Christian families, communities and congregations and, as a result, it is creating conflict — for example the conflict between one's duty as a Christian to speak against sin and one's responsibility as a Christian parent to protect their child. And that conflict is good, as long as there is a wholesome way in which to wrestle with and work to resolve it.

We found that stories showing conflict that was rooted in a person's genuine faith, allowed theologically conservative Christians to see how they might be more supportive and empathetic to the lesbian and gay people in their lives in a way that is consistent with their identity as a conservative Christian. It allowed them to see themselves in the story, because it mirrored the genuine conflict they experience in feeling the need to balance preaching the Word of God, while also staying in relationship with family and others. These stories were not about needing to fully resolve people's conflict, but rather to model for them how they can hold that conflict and still be in relationship with lesbian and gay people. It put more weight on the values that allow them to be supportive rather than the conflicting values that might lead them to be opposed. Journey stories — ones that created self-identification, highlighted a genuine conflict,

and demonstrated how a person managed that conflict — were particularly successful in reaching and engaging theologically conservative Christian audiences.

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Here's an excerpt from a video story we tested in focus groups. Rev. Chris Perkins and his wife of 27 years Sandra, talk about the spiritual conflict they faced when their oldest of five children, Daniel, opened up about being gay. Their story demonstrates how wrestling with conflict can be very difficult, but at the same time it helps them to continue to be in relationship with their son:

CHRIS: I grew up in a traditional church. The teaching of the church was the Word of God says that it's a sin. I still believe it's a sin. I was confronted with the fact that my own son looked me in the eyes and said, "Daddy, I'm gay." [...]

SANDRA: I could see him struggling. But in my mind, I guess my prayer was, "Lord, touch his heart and change it." [...]

CHRIS: It was a situation to where God had to put me in check. God had to remind me if I love the Lord, and if have a desire to see all people saved, then how can I not embrace you if I think you're wrong? Paul said, "I become all things to all men, that by all means, I might win some." Paul said, "What's most important for me is that I'm not concentrating on the differences, but that I find commonalities."

CHRIS: There is a notion that you can't be committed to the Lord and you can't believe the Word of God and yet still embrace a gay son or a gay neighbor or somebody. And that's not the case. I still believe it's a sin. But I thank God, because I asked, He taught me what it was like to really love somebody whom I may not agree with everything he does, but that's the way God loves me.

SANDRA: The Word of God is truth, and you can do both. With love is what it's going to take. He said in His Word, "With loving kindness have I drawn thee." So that's what we have to do.



NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #4:

Elevate Christian Motivations for Change

It is of utmost importance to be clear that when we talk about “change” for conservative Christians,

we are talking about a change of heart. Focusing on a change of their values or Christian understanding is not an entry point to help move them towards being in relationship with lesbian and gay people. When focusing on the change of heart, it is also important to recognize that the motivations for that change cannot be secular. They have to be conservative Christian motivations, including the desire to see themselves as good Christians who live up to Christ’s example — even when it is difficult to do so.

We found that stories were successful when change was centered around reflections to live up to Christian ideals — especially the idea that our actions should not harm others — and when the change allowed the Church and the individual to live up to the mission to be in relationship with all people, including lesbian and gay people. These stories helped to reaffirm Christian theology, while showing how a Christian can be changed in ways that deepen (rather than threaten) their faith.

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Here’s an excerpt from a story tested in focus groups — a story about a group of lifelong friends struggling with the news that one of them is gay. It emphasizes the concept “we are all a work-in-progress” and demonstrates how a change of heart can come from seeking a deeper understanding of one’s faith:

Christ opened my eyes recently in the most unexpected way. For 9 years, my three best friends and I have belonged to a weekly men’s Bible study. I’ve known these guys for almost 20 years. We’ve all made Christ

the foundation of our lives. James, Lewis, and I are married with kids in grade school and we’ve been praying for years for Kevin to find the same. But, a year ago, Kevin confided in us that he is gay. I knew he’d been going through something he hadn’t wanted to talk about, but hearing that was a shock — especially because we knew him to be a devoted Christian.

“Hey Kev, bro,” Lewis said. “We’re still gonna grab our regular dinner — right?” Kevin nodded, visibly relieved. I still remember that dinner conversation like it was yesterday — four dudes at Denny’s — not talking about basketball or raising kids, but about Jesus and homosexuality.

Kevin shared with us that he wasn’t dating. “But I’m not ruling it out,” he said. “I’m still praying about what it means for me to be a Christian man who is also gay.” Kevin also shared his fears that he may be asked to leave the church. “I hope not,” James responded. “Dude, I can honestly say that I see the Holy Spirit working in your life.”

I agreed and told him, “Kev, brother, I don’t pretend to know what you are going through, but I do know this. I don’t go to church because I am a perfect man. I go to church because I am a work-in-progress. Every one of us has some issue. Some just aren’t as visible as others.” Lewis added, “That’s right — you are no less deserving of God’s love than anyone at this table, Kevin.”



NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #5:

Show God-inspired Change

Our research and testing found that, to be successful, stories must show how a Christian is being

changed by God — the Holy Spirit — and not changing one's self or not changing the Word of God. On their journey, the person in the story must demonstrate that they are being moved by the Holy Spirit — they're being moved through prayer, they're being moved by God, they are being moved through readings of Scripture. They are not changing their own mind.

Most importantly, the Christians featured in these journey stories cannot attempt to change the Word of God. Any attempts to try to "queer" or "gay" the Bible with a new understanding about what it means to be Christian will likely shut down any ability to connect with theologically conservative Christians. Change comes from God, not from ourselves.

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Here's an excerpt from a print piece we tested in focus groups — a first-person story from a grandmother who retells how her granddaughter, Shanelle, opened up about being gay and the impact it had on their family. This piece emphasizes

the concept of God-inspired change, demonstrating how leaving things in God's hands and focusing on love as part of their parental role, instead of focusing on being right, can allow families to continue to be in relationship with one another:

"Concerned, I spoke with my close friend and our pastor's wife, Virginia. Together we talked and prayed and then Virginia shared a verse with me from Lamentations:

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; They are new every morning; Great is your faithfulness."

"We're not here," Virginia said, "to judge your family or your child. That's up to God. God's mercy and love never end. Share how you feel with Shanelle, but then wrap her in love and trust God to work on her heart in His time and in His way."

That night I shared the verse with Shanelle's parents.

"Your duty as a parent — as a Christian parent — is to keep your children close to your heart," I let them know. I was afraid they might push Shanelle away. "Protect the relationship with your child. Being in relationship is more important than being right."

Messages & Stories that Focus on Meeting the Emotional Needs of Christians

Messages that solely focus on discrimination that lesbian and gay people face are not enough to move conservative Christians to think differently. For messaging to be effective, it needs to show how Christian communities are being harmed by not being inclusive — how conservative Christians are not able to fully live into their calling to be evangelical if they are pushing people away.

This may feel counterintuitive or even contrary to our broader goals. However, this approach actually allows us to connect more successfully with conservative Christian audiences and ultimately provides us with greater opportunities to make progress.





NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATION #6:

Model Living in the Gray Space

Internal conflict is an important part of every human's life — we often feel confused or conflicted about

a situation or an issue. We can see one person's point of view — and we can see the other person's opposing perspective as well.

When narratives portray situations with conflict and they are resolved too easily or portrayed in a simplistic way, it pulls us out of the story and makes us skeptical of its entirety. It just doesn't feel believable, which interferes with the capacity of a narrative to be persuasive.

Serious internal conflict means serious reflection, debate, and internal struggle. So when we show examples of people moving too quickly on their journey from being opposed or conflicted, to being in relationship with lesbian and gay people, it doesn't feel believable to conservative Christians wrestling with their own conflicts. However, working to model what it is like to live in "the gray space" — that place of deep reflection and deep conflict where conservative Christians seek spiritual guidance to resolve their desire to be both good Christians and good neighbors — can have a positive impact and make a narrative feel more relatable and emotionally credible.

While stories that model living in the gray space may not immediately move theologically conservative Christian audiences toward affirmation of lesbian and gay people's identities or resolve all the conflicts they may experience, these narratives facilitated important progress in allowing them to be in relationship with lesbian and gay people. In essence, these stories were believable and helped move these Christians along the spectrum towards support for

lesbian and gay people instead of keeping them where they are currently — stuck in the status quo.

RESEARCH IN ACTION

Here's an excerpt from a print story we tested in focus groups where one member of a Bible study group, Kevin, opens up about his "struggle with same-sex attraction." In the excerpt you can see how the person telling the story has slowly evolved when it comes to his interactions with gay people and how that evolution continues as he wrestles with his conflicted feelings and emotions and as he reflects on his roles as a Christian, a good neighbor and a friend. This models living in the gray space:

"Kevin, thanks for sharing that, man," he started. "That can't have been easy and I'm glad you are bringing your whole self to church. If we can't bring our full selves and our struggles to Christ, what's the point — right?"

In the moment, I couldn't have jumped in like Rick did, but I was glad he did. There was a time, I didn't want to even be around gay people. I've matured since then, though it's still uncomfortable. But when it's someone you know, it really makes you step back and think. Kevin is nothing like the stereotypes of gay people I had in my mind. I mean, I didn't even think it was possible to be gay and Christian.

After the Bible study ended that night, we noticed Kevin standing alone while others were huddled in conversation. I realized at that moment, we couldn't let this be a dividing line between us. I could tell Daniel thought the same thing.

Use Scripture to Reinforce Christian Values — Not to Proof-Text

What we have learned in this and other research is that Scripture should be used to reinforce our narrative, stories, or simple moral truths that the audience already believes. That doesn't mean quoting one-off Bible verses, which can backfire as a persuasion tool, especially with theologically conservative Christians.

In fact, you'll notice that we do not include a list of recommended Scripture passages because doing so might encourage those reading this guide to engage in proof-texting debates. Through our research, we discovered that using a debate "tit-for-tat" style to argue about the meaning of Scripture actually shuts down conversation. Talking about one's unique experience and insight about the Bible — especially as illuminated in a story — allows for a more open and productive dialogue on the issue.

Instead, Scripture should be used in stories — where its meaning is intertwined with the moral of the story — and the more widely cherished the texts, the better.

Our research showed that the use of Scripture worked best when it was seen to help define a character's values and moral worldview — especially for protagonists who were working through their own emotional and religious conflict on their way to being in relationship with lesbian and gay people.



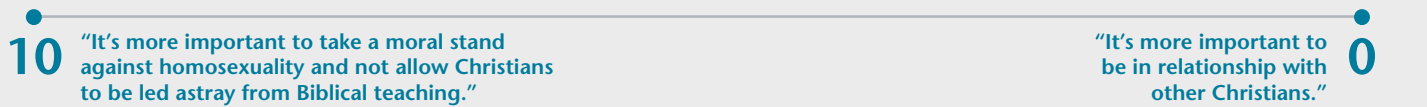
What is Proof Texting?

Proof texting is the practice of using short passages or individual Bible verses (often out of context) to make or justify a point.

Messages that Move

At the beginning of our online survey, we asked people the following:

Based on your personal point of view, place yourself on the continuum below, using a scale from zero to ten, where ZERO means it's more important to be in relationship with other Christians, including those who are gay or lesbian and TEN means it's more important to take a moral stand against homosexuality and not allow Christians to be led



astray from Biblical teachings. You can choose any number from zero to ten. We then tested our messaging strategies on why theologically conservative Christians should work to strengthen their relationships with lesbian and gay people. We also tested messages from conservative Christians about why it's more important to take a moral stand against homosexuality in order to replicate a real-world environment in which conservative Christians hear reasons for and against being in relationship with lesbian and gay people. The messaging strategies we tested were effective at moving conservative Christians from being more rejecting to being more accepting of lesbian and gay people.

Here's what conservative Christians said motivated their change of heart:

	INITIAL REASONS TO TAKE A MORAL STAND	FINAL REASONS TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP
<p>White woman, age 65</p> <p>10 initial 2 final</p>	<p>"The Bible speaks in very strong terms against homosexuality. This abnormal and immoral behavior is wrong; nothing will ever make it right. 1) The Bible describes it as a sin. 2) This behavior strongly undermines the family, which is the core of any society. 3) These people often, maybe always, display other types of behaviors that are dysfunctional, immoral, or antisocial."</p>	<p>"It is more important to be in a relationship with other Christians, because when we take a stand, this can be hurtful to the person, and this can easily alienate them."</p>
<p>Black man, age 20</p> <p>10 initial 0 final</p>	<p>"Christ told us to flee from immorality like homosexuality. Not to avoid them but tell them that God doesn't want them living this way."</p>	<p>"I don't want to push these people away but "Like Jesus" draw them closer to salvation, and having a close bond with them makes it easier."</p>
<p>Black woman, age 60</p> <p>10 initial 6 final</p>	<p>"I believe in what the Bible says, that same sex relations and same sex marriage are immoral."</p>	<p>"As Christians we need to remember life itself is a process and it's up to us to share the gospel with all who will listen, but it's up to the Lord how and when He will do the changing."</p>
<p>White woman, age 24</p> <p>8 initial 3 final</p>	<p>"I feel a Christian's duty is to serve God and spread the news in order to help save more souls. Christians have to take a stand for what is right, even if it is not the popular opinion. It's more important to spread the gospel than to love others. Our duty is to God not our fellow man."</p>	<p>"Gay and lesbians deserve love too. I didn't realize the impact the other viewpoint would have unintentionally. It's more important to show love to your fellow man than to turn them off to Christianity by being too much of a stickler for the gospel. Everyone sins and their sin shouldn't be treated any more significant than others."</p>



Empathy for Theologically Conservative Christians

Earlier in this guide, we have referenced *Heartwired: Human Behavior, Public Opinion Research and the Audacious Pursuit of Social Change*, a strategy guide for change-makers from our research partners at Goodwin Simon Strategic Research and Wonder: Strategies for Good. In *Heartwired*, Robert Pérez and Amy Simon write:

Empathy is a core concept for change-makers: having the capacity to listen to and seek understanding through the prism of your audience's good intentions is vital to persuasive communications.

That's because nearly all humans have a deep psychological need to see themselves as good, and very few want to see themselves as harming others.

Our own research confirmed this wisdom. Furthermore, it's important to note that psychological research shows that empathy is an important precursor to the type of altruistic behavior that will change the hearts and minds of conservative Christians.

It is important to note that conservative Christians do not see themselves as bigots. They believe that they are acting in love. While our messages and stories can show the harmful impact of their actions, the messages must also acknowledge conservative Christians' intent in order to allow them to manage their own sense of self as good people.

This is what listening with empathy has taught us in this research. We also know that can be extremely difficult to do, given the hurt that conservative Christians have caused many of us. We take comfort in this perspective from *Heartwired*:

Being asked to understand an opposing point of view can feel like you are validating it.

Disagree or not, that person's belief remains true for them. To effectively engage audiences, we have to understand and integrate those beliefs into our communications — or those beliefs remain roadblocks to change.

Empathy doesn't require that you agree with a perspective — only that you can genuinely understand it.

Through our research we are learning that to be in relationship with theologically conservative Christians, we must first practice empathy.

How to Be in Relationship with Conservative Christians

We hope that you have found useful insights as you consider ways to be in relationship with the conservative Christians in your life and to make progress in your advocacy efforts. We have learned a great deal in this research project. Given everything that we have shared in this messaging guide, it might feel overwhelming to know where to get

started. Below, we have outlined some ideas on where you might get started. You might also be inspired by the practical advice and reflections from Rev. Cedric Harmon and Rev. Brandon Robertson, two long-time advocates with a long history of fostering dialogue in conservative Christian communities about the place of LGBTQ people.



Reflections from LGBT+ Christian Activist: Cedric Harmon

“As a child spiritually formed in and working with leaders who are steeped in the Black religious tradition, I understand the significance of faith to our lives. *Being in Relationship* has a healthy respect for the identity of those we work with. Frequently, I’ve been told it is a waste of time or too hard to work with conservative Christians. In fact, some say change is not possible.

The conversations we engage in start with respect and an appreciation for the full humanity of all people — values shared across wide gaps of difference — combined with a clear-eyed focus on the fact that relationships alter and increase understanding. *Being In Relationship* is a means to tackle injustice.

In a recent conversation with a pastor of a fairly conservative membership about the work of *Being In Relationship*, he shared with me his experience of keeping the focus on loving all whom God loves and not slipping into the “activist, politically-correct” pastor. It was helpful for me to hear this perspective. Those of us doing this work feel certain about the full humanity of LGBTQ people as beloved and made in the image of God and believe in the necessity of prophetic preaching when it has the capacity to advance God’s kingdom on earth. This pastor senses the latter identity would divide his congregation and offend some who would otherwise be open to the discussion. I applaud his sensitivity and that is what remaining in the relationship is, in a practical sense.

The truth of individual experiences, allowing space for theological distinctions, and extending the invitation to examine often unexamined ideas about LGBTQ people opens a way of reducing conflict and moving toward deeper relationship.”

Reflections from LGBT+ Christian Activist: Brandan Robertson

“The information contained in *Being In Relationship* reflects, almost perfectly, the experience that I have had time and time again working with religious leaders and conservative Christian individuals alike. When I began my work as an LGBT+ Christian activist, seeking to make the white evangelical church a more inclusive place for sexual and gender minorities, I bought in to the narrative that one could debate a non-affirming Christian into an inclusive stance. I believed that by using the robust biblical theology that I had discovered, along with basic moral arguments about the need for equality for all people, that I would change the minds of conservative Christians. After about a year of making such arguments, I discovered that not *one* mind had been changed, even incrementally. In the white evangelical paradigm, there is a singular interpretation of the Bible that is held as authoritative and any attempt to change someone’s position on that is simply rejected as heresy.

When I began to shift my work from debating theology and policy to sharing stories and cultivating environments of empathic understanding, I began to see major shifts in the posture of non-affirming Christians. It’s one thing to believe something with conviction — it’s wholly another to learn that the very thing you’re dogmatically preaching is causing severe psychological and spiritual trauma to many in your community. When relationships are formed across our divides, when trust is built, and when life experiences are shared, we are able to put down our doctrinal guards and begin to consider the real-world impact of our theology — and substantial (albeit incremental) change begins to happen. I have seen this work with the most dogmatic leaders of influential churches, as well as with evangelical parents of LGBT+ children who finally begin to listen without ensuring their theological boxes are checked before validating their children’s experience.

If we’re going to see change in the white evangelical church, we need the strategies and findings of *Being In Relationship* to be implemented in our work for LGBT+ inclusion and acceptance in the church.”



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1

BECOME FAMILIAR WITH HOW CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS ARE HEARTWIRED.

Before communicating with conservative Christians, it's helpful to reflect on the ways that conservative Christians are heartwired. This will allow you to practice empathy as you consider both the heartwired barriers that prevent conservative Christians from being supportive as well as the potential pathways to greater support for LGBTQ people. As our research shows, conservative Christians have the potential to strengthen their relationships with lesbian and gay people — if we communicate in a heartwired way. For a refresher on how conservative Christians are heartwired, review “Five Heartwired Factors,” on pages 14 and 15. Also, consider sharing this guide with LGBTQ activists and allies who are doing work to communicate with conservative Christians and encourage them to become more familiar with how conservative Christians are heartwired.

2

START CONVERSATIONS THAT BEGIN WITH LISTENING.

When you are ready to have a conversation with conservative Christians, it's helpful to start conversations by listening and learning more about their relationships with LGBTQ people. Some questions you might ask include: What have been your relationships with LGBTQ people? What are the strengths of those relationships? What have been some of the challenges? By asking a few open-ended questions, you can learn more about the person you're having a conversation with. You might come to learn how they align with the segmentation chart (see “Theologically Conservative Christians: Four Distinct Segments” on page 28). Are they like a Spiritual Nurturer that has the potential to make progress in the near-term? Or are they more like a Spiritual Warrior that is more likely to resist change? You'll also get a sense of whether they feel any conflict about their relationships with LGBTQ people, which is a door of opportunity for growth and change.

3

SEEK OUT THOSE WHO HAVE STARTED ON THEIR JOURNEY.

As we have noted, we are more likely to make progress in the near-term with those who more closely align with the characteristics of Spiritual Nurturers and Spiritual Reformers than those who are Spiritual Protectors and Spiritual Warriors. While these are not fixed categories, you can probably review this set of characteristics and have a sense of conservative Christians and congregations that match up with these respective characteristics. While the greatest source of conflict may come from those who are most conservative and adamant in their moral worldview, the greatest opportunity for progress are those who see the world with greater nuance. As you consider your outreach efforts, consider making a list of individual Christians and congregations who have already started on a journey toward being in relationship with LGBTQ people.

4

ELEVATE THE VOICES OF CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANS AND LESBIAN AND GAY CHRISTIANS.

When it comes to moving theologically conservative Christians, the messenger is in some ways more important than the message. We value everyone

who is able and willing to share their stories and experiences. Our research also shows that conservative Christians, in particular, need to hear from conservative Christians who have made progress in their relationships with lesbian and gay people. They also need to hear from lesbian and gay Christians with whom they can identify through shared Christian values. As you think about putting this research into practice, consider developing a messenger list of the people and families who can lead these conversations or whose stories you can spotlight in your communications.

5

TELL THE STORIES OF PEOPLE BEING IN RELATIONSHIP.

Finally, we saw the transformative power of stories that align with how conservative Christians are heartwired. Those stories model how conservative Christians can strengthen their relationships with lesbian and gay people. As you consider the types of messages and stories featured in this guide, you can begin to develop or update your own story bank of theologically conservative Christians whose stories reflect the same qualities and characteristics that proved most effective at sparking reflection and a change of heart among conservative Christians.





Conclusion: Toward a Better Tomorrow

In partnership with Goodwin Simon Strategic Research and Wonder: Strategies for Good, who researched and developed this messaging guide, we have learned a great deal about how theologically conservative Christians can forge genuinely caring relationships with the lesbian and gay people in their lives.

We are hopeful.

WE ARE HOPEFUL BECAUSE OF STORIES LIKE THE PERKINS FAMILY.

Rev. and Mrs. Perkins found a way to strengthen their relationship with their gay son, Daniel, without trying to

change who he is. In this research, we saw how their story — and others like theirs — inspired conservative Christians to reflect and reconsider how they could be in relationship with lesbian and gay people.

Consider this response from a 48-year old Black woman who watched a short video on the Perkins family:

"It's impossible not to feel affected emotionally as this family talks about their struggle both to accept the gay son and to reconcile this with their faith. I felt saddened by the pain the gay son went through and gratified to see he and his parents were able to reconcile."

In sharing their story, the Perkins family has modeled a new possibility for conservative Christians and lesbian and gay people to be in relationship with one another.

**WE ARE HOPEFUL AND EXCITED TO
MAKE IMPORTANT PROGRESS AMONG
CHRISTIANS ABOUT THE AUTHENTIC LIVES OF
TRANSGENDER PEOPLE.**

In the coming months, we plan to release important new message research on ways to foster greater understanding among Christians about what it means to be transgender. Like this research, this new guide will include storytelling and messaging strategies that were tested among Christians. The strategies show that it is possible to make progress among Catholics and mainline Christians, including those who have never met a transgender person.

**WE ARE HOPEFUL BECAUSE OF OUR
BELOVED COMMUNITY OF RESILIENT AND
RESOURCEFUL ACTIVISTS AND ADVOCATES
WHO SURROUND US.**

Some of you reading this guide are long-time LGBTQ rights activists working to advance public policies to protect LGBTQ people in civil society or make your churches, mosques, synagogues or temples reflect the aspiration of your faith tradition. Others are allies working behind the scenes in your denominations to make progress on behalf of LGBTQ people. It is your passion, history and wisdom that makes progress possible.

We look forward to being in relationship with you in the coming months and years as we work to put these recommendations into practice.

If you have any questions about this guide, please do not hesitate to get in touch. We look forward to being in relationship with you as the strategies outlined in this guide are put out into the world.



Methodology



Our process consisted of five phases: a literature review, in-depth interviews, in-person focus groups, online focus groups and an online survey. As with the research we conducted to inform *My Mind Was Changed*, we involved and were guided by both secular and religious stakeholders at the national and local

levels throughout this process. Our research efforts were focused on theologically conservative Christians in Plains and Midwest States, along with Southern States.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A 2015 literature review, led by the Rev. Janet Edwards of Pittsburgh Presbytery and the Rev. Dr. Christian Scharen of Auburn Seminary, examined key writings by prominent theologically conservative and evangelical thought leaders. This allowed us to look at how issues around LGBTQ identity and equality are being framed in the Church, what Scripture is drawn upon to support this thinking, and potential opportunities for contextualizing positive messaging in existing Christian framing.

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

Fourteen in-depth interviews were conducted with Black and with white evangelical and theologically conservative Christians and clergy. These interviews explored whether and how LGBTQ issues were coming up in congregations and helped us to better understand how stakeholders were feeling and talking about these issues. These interviews occurred across late 2015 and early 2016.

IN-PERSON FOCUS GROUPS

Eight in-person focus groups, with eight to ten participants each, were conducted among Black and white evangelical and theologically conservative Christians, with four focus groups taking place in Richmond, Virginia and four in Omaha, Nebraska. At each location, participants were separated by race (two focus groups) and gender (two focus groups) to ensure neither racial nor gender dynamics interfered with people sharing their thoughts and opinions. These focus groups explored — in an open-ended way — attitudes, associations and experiences with lesbian and gay people in their lives and church, while also exploring effective messengers and approaches to storytelling. These in-person focus groups took place in November and December of 2016.

ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS

In 2017, two separate online focus groups, with about 30 participants each, were conducted — one among Black and one among white evangelical and theologically conservative Christians between the ages of 25 and 55. All participants logged in to take the survey from Plains-West, Midwest and Southern States. We separated out the online focus groups by race, because in the past we have experienced that people will tend to censor themselves if they are in a mixed-race setting. Online focus groups allow us to continue to refine our exploration, digging in to areas that are particularly sticky or difficult so we can understand more about them. Because they take place over time, we also have the opportunity to see how people's thinking evolves when they have time to think, reflect, and talk to other people in their lives about what they are seeing and hearing.

ONLINE SURVEY

In 2017, we conducted an online survey of 607 adults, ages 18 to 75. The online survey was conducted to quantify the findings of the qualitative research to date, help us to understand specifically which messages work

most effectively with specific subgroups and to segment audiences. The survey is also helpful to further refine messages through dial-testing technology that allows us to see how people are responding to materials overall, but also in real time, and to gather open-ended responses in respondents' own words about what works for them or not in shaping their thinking.

To qualify for the survey, respondents had to be white or African-American/Black, identify as Protestant or another kind of Christian (not Catholic), attend church a few times a month or more and had to describe religion as somewhat important, very important, or the most important thing in their life. White respondents had to consider themselves born again/evangelical (or if not, had to identify their denomination as Pentecostal/Charismatic or Holiness). This survey excluded respondents from the following states: CA, CT, DE, DC, ME, MD, MA, NH, NJ, NY, RI, and VT, where the proportion of evangelicals is less than 20 percent of the total population.



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