

“As a same-sex married couple co-pastoring a Baptist church, let’s just say that once or twice now we’ve been on the receiving end of the very arguments Jim addresses in this book. For Christians who are serious about the Bible, serious about morality, and serious about loving their neighbor, addressing long held biases and beliefs about LGBTQ+ people is an imperative place to start. And thanks to this concise, clear and engaging read by Rev. Dr. Jim Dant, you can! The future of the Church will always rest in its ability to respond to God like Peter in Acts 10. As God made whole what had long been understood as profane, Peter was first incredulous, then, curious, and finally and most importantly, converted. Dant’s pastoral and prophetic analysis invites us all to our own joyful conversion toward affirmation and inclusion.”

Revs. Maria Swearingen and Sally Sarratt,
Senior Co-Pastors, Calvary Baptist Church,
Washington, D.C.

“For those of us who encounter well-meaning family and community members seeking to correct the error of our welcome of the LGBTQ community into the full life and ministry of the church, a brief and Biblically grounded response is found here. I needed this in the ’80s when I was a young pastor, and I need it now as the debate over who’s ‘in’ continues to divide people of faith. Could you print mine in a pocket version please?”

Paula Dempsey,
Director of Partnership Relations,
Alliance of Baptists

“Jim Dant offers a gift to LGBTQ people and their friends, families, and fellow congregants who need easily-accessible tools to ‘guard their souls’ against one-liner putdowns and bumper-sticker degradation. This is truly ‘a survival manual for those on the firing line’ in which Dant shares many of his own confrontational encounters with Christians who haven’t yet gotten the message that LGBTQ people are beloved of God.”

The Rev. Cody J. Sanders, PhD,
Pastor of Old Cambridge Baptist Church in
Harvard Square and author of *A Brief Guide to
Ministry with LGBTQIA Youth*

This I Know

**A Simple Biblical Defense
for LGBTQ Christians**

JIM DANT

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For Dave and Danny
Rest in peace. Live in peace.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My biological father was a veteran of the Vietnam War. I was quite young when he was a soldier, and I have few memories of him. One memory among this limited collection is the night he shared his greatest fear. He was home on leave. The family was gathered around my grandmother's Formica-top dining room table. My five-year-old feet were dangling above the patterned linoleum floor. Completely enamored by his stories of war and guns and napalm and airplanes, I finally asked, "Daddy, are you ever scared?" He paused for a moment, stared thoughtfully out the kitchen window, and said, "Only when we are at the edge of a jungle and the sergeant looks at me and says, 'You go first.' That's when I'm most scared."

I need to thank some people who have dared to go first. Joy Yee, Jennifer Craig, and Judy Snyder

were the first to step into this jungle of grammatical errors, misspelled words, and structural puzzles to help clear and clean a path for others to walk. I'm indebted to their command of the English language, their sensitivity to the reader's eye, their demand for theological consistency, and their respect for my particular style. Thanks for editing.

I am grateful to the membership of First Baptist Church, Greenville, South Carolina. This congregation has consistently been on the front-lines of shaping Baptist faith throughout the decades. They take seriously their commitment to follow Christ. They do not tolerate a shallow reading of the Bible but intentionally struggle with the depth of God's love, the mystery of the Spirit's work, the abundance of Christ's grace, and the inherent fallacies of human insight. It is not always easy to find the truth, and it is much harder to live it. Some have endured the insult and challenge of those who disagree. They step into the jungle bravely.

I am humbled by the faith and courage of the LGBTQ Christians who have allowed me to be their pastor and have trusted First Baptist Greenville to be their spiritual home. It was with trepidation that many stepped into our sanctuary. They wondered if our welcome was a trick and if our love would last. I can't imagine what we have provided these brothers and sisters, but what they have given us is immeasurable.

Finally, thank you for purchasing this book. You are in my prayers. You may be stepping into a jungle.

FOREWORD

The phone call came as a shock. It had to be a practical joke. We were planning a choir tour to the southern United States and were seeking large performing arts venues to rent. The caller said, “The First Baptist Church of Greenville, South Carolina, would like to host the concert.” I chuckled. Do you wonder why I thought this was a joke? After all, we’re just a choir singing in a church.

I am the artistic director of the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus. It is the granddaddy of the LGBTQ choral movement that now spans the globe—and one of the largest of its kind. I was bringing 250 singers on tour. We were traveling with the sole purpose of lifting up LGBTQ folks and their allies; we were standing up against discrimination and bigotry. If I know anything

from experience, gays and Baptists are two things that do not go together—or so I thought.

Afraid to call Dr. Dant, the church's senior minister, and hear the rejection firsthand, I took the easy way out and emailed him. He responded immediately and said the invitation was indeed genuine. I still did not believe it would actually happen. I have seen far too many church folk in my life offer the hand of friendship only to have their hand (and mine) slapped with Scripture. I did not want to play these kinds of games with my singers' hearts, many of whom have been there all too often. I was skeptical at best and for good reason.

Short version of a long story: In 1986 I was the associate minister of music at First Baptist Church, Houston, and on the faculty of Houston Baptist University. I had a beautiful wife and two children—the “perfect” life—but I was living a lie. I came out. It did not go well; I lost everything.

Now, here I was, 30-plus years later, with a Baptist church welcoming me and mine with no caveats. It was an unconditional welcome

and embrace. Amid local criticism—even threats—the church was allowing us to perform.

We had no idea if anyone would attend. At 7:30 on that October Friday night, we entered a sanctuary filled to the rafters, standing room only, chairs brought in for the overflow. As the first singer entered the hall, the congregation stood to its feet and applauded. The applause continued until the last man reached the front of the sanctuary. The chorus wept as they took their places. Never in our wildest dreams did we imagine the wall would come tumbling down before our very eyes. It was a life-changing, healing moment for me and for the singers.

And now there is this beautiful book. I love it so much. I love the seriousness of it and, even more, the humor in it. It is who we are. It explains in very clear messages how we got to this impasse. And it gives us the bricks each of us needs to start building a bridge to one another.

Jim, thank you for writing this amazing book. Thank you for believing. Thank you for having the courage to do what you are doing and for leading

the way against overwhelming odds. You are my hero.

Dr. Tim Seelig
Artistic Director
San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus loves me, this I know.

For the Bible tells me so.

The words to “Jesus Loves Me” are among our earliest musical memories of faith and church. For most of us, they are words of assurance and comfort. We rest into them when life is complex. We hold to them when faith feels unmoored. We trust them when we cannot wrap our minds or our prayers around anything else. The simple tune and lyrics remind us we are accepted and our acceptance is confirmed in sacred text.

These same words may ring hollow in the ears of a member of the LGBTQ community. They learned the tune as children. They memorized the words. They delighted in the idea of being

cherished by God and guarded by Scripture. But somewhere along the way, someone in the church turned the Bible into a weapon and Jesus into an inaccessible friend. Many of the LGBTQ people I've come to know have had to learn to trust this song again. They've had to be reintroduced to the Jesus who loves them and to the Bible that guards them. I want my LGBTQ brothers and sisters to know Jesus loves them and the Bible says no different.

There is no valid, Christian, biblical argument against same-sex relationships between consenting adults. If you believe this but struggle to explain it to others, read on. If you do not believe this but truly wonder how LGBTQ supportive Christians read the Bible differently than you, read on.

I receive multiple voicemails, emails, and social media messages each week from other Christians—conservative, angry, uncomfortably inquisitive—wanting to know how I can be welcoming and affirming of LGBTQ Christians when the Bible is *clearly* against homosexuality.

They always ask, “Haven’t you read the Bible?” I rarely answer or return these calls and messages. There isn’t time. But in my mind I have rehearsed the speech a hundred times: “I’ve been reading the Bible all my life. Really. I’ve been in love with the Bible my whole life. I’m a Bible geek. I read it at home, in Sunday school, in Vacation Bible School, in youth Bible studies, in college, in seminary, and in decades of sermon preparation. I’ve taught biblical studies in churches, universities, seminaries, retreats, camps, and conferences.”

I’m not into competitively comparing, but I’m certain I’ve read the Bible more often and more thoroughly than almost all my callers and critics. I wish I could take the time to share with each of them—and I wish they were truly receptive to—what I’ve found regarding LGBTQ Christians in biblical text. But they cling tightly to the English rendering of an ancient text from a culture that existed 2,000 years ago. Ironically, the Bible is clear on the subject, but clearly not in the way they think. There is no valid, Christian, biblical

argument against same-sex relationships between consenting adults. Persons may argue against LGBTQ identities, relationships, and rights based upon economic, political, or personal perspectives. But the Bible cannot credibly be used as a weapon in these fights.

So allow me to say it again—over and over again: There is no valid, Christian, biblical argument against same-sex relationships between consenting adults. However, average LGBTQ Christians (and in fact, the average straight Christian who loves and supports them) do not have the biblical savvy to defend themselves against the barrage of assaults and/or kind, well-meaning sermons spoken against them. These assaults and sermons are characterized by Bible verses lifted from their historical and theological contexts and used to bludgeon the listener. Most books presenting an LGBTQ-favorable interpretation of biblical texts are so complex and theologically deep that the average reader gets lost in the academia. The majority of progressives and liberals tend to

... speak in paragraphs rather than sound bites... long paragraphs...with footnotes. These type volumes are necessary in legitimizing biblical interpretations, however, our friends and loved ones are living in a culture that confronts them with single lines and single verses. The victims of these visceral attacks need simple verbiage with which they can respond or at least guard their souls.

Hence, this small volume is not intended to be a thorough theological discussion of sexuality in the biblical text. Rather, it is a survival manual for those on the firing line. I've laid aside the paragraphs and adopted the 'bumper sticker/sound bite methodology' of the opposition. The first section will provide simple responses to the typical verses and theologies unfairly imposed upon LGBTQ persons. The second section will provide the church with broad theological 'hand holds' for welcoming and affirming the faith, worth, contributions, and journey of LGBTQ Christians. I've chosen a simple format in which I will present a

challenge, an appropriate response, and a brief explanation. And just for fun (in order to keep the reading lite and shed some light on the insanity I deal with on a regular basis), I'll share a few stories and thoughts from actual conversations.

If you find these words and arguments overstated and/or oversimplified, good. Mission accomplished. Again, this is not an exhaustive theological explanation. It is a simple biblical defense for those whom Jesus loves.