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THE HERALD

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Letting Jesus Love Through You

Don't let fear cause you to mistreat those who are different from you.

By: Caleb Kaltenbach

*Editor's note: Caleb Kaltenbach was raised by lesbian parents and saw firsthand how some Christians treated the LGBT community. But he surprised his family by becoming a Christian himself, and then a pastor. He has a unique perspective of the LGBT issues, and in his book *Messy Grace* he writes about holding on to the truth of God's Word while being filled with grace.*

When my mom and her partner, Vera, would take me to parties for people in the local gay and lesbian community, I usually was the only child present. So for me these events could get boring. My mom knew this, and that's why she would let me go into another room and play video games.

One evening when I was a grade-schooler, I was sitting on the floor of a bedroom in a house where one of these parties was taking place, and I was playing Nintendo by

myself. Then someone poked his head around the corner. It was Louis, a young man I had met before who hadn't spoken too much. He asked me what I was doing.

"Playing video games," I said without taking my eyes off the screen.

Coming further into the room, he asked, "What game are you playing?"

"*Duck Hunt*," I replied. I tell you, those ducks *feared* me.

Louis said, "I get bored with these parties. Do you mind if I play video games with you?"

And that's how I got to know Louis.

He traveled in the same circles that my mother and her partner did, and he was at most of the same parties they were. After that first time, he'd often play video games with me and we'd talk. It turned out we liked the same movies, played the same video games, and followed the exploits of some of the same superheroes. He was always smiling and kind to me.

Louis was one of the few friends I had when I was growing up, even though he was an adult. I was about to see my friend face something I could barely comprehend.

News no one wants

One day when I was about 11, my mom took me to my doctor's office for a routine checkup. And there, sitting in the waiting room, was Louis—he had the same doctor I did. I lit up at the sight of Louis. But I noticed something right away: he looked different. I hadn't seen him in about six months, and now a lot of his muscle was gone and he was thinner. He had a smile on his face, as usual, but it had faded.

I also noticed that Louis had marks on his forehead that looked like bruises. Maybe he even had a couple of open sores on his skin. These marks hadn't been there before, or at least I hadn't noticed them. I tried to ignore them as I walked up to him and gave him a hug.

"Are you feeling okay?" I asked.

Louis looked at me and tears began to well up in his eyes. At that young age, I knew something was wrong, but I had no idea what he was getting ready to unload on me. He kept a smile on his face, wiped some of his tears away and said, "Caleb, I don't know if you know what this means, but I have AIDS."

This revelation meant nothing to me, but before I could ask what this disease was, a

nurse called his name to go in and see our doctor. Louis gave me a thumbs-up as he disappeared behind the door.

I looked over at my mom. She sat there with a stunned look on her face, tears spilling from her eyes. I asked her, "Mom, what's going on?"

"Not now, Caleb. I'll talk to you about it in the car."

At first I thought Louis had something serious but that he would eventually get over it. On our way home from the doctor's office, however, my mother told me what his sickness would do to him. I began crying and asked my mom why there was nothing anyone could do to save Louis's life.

She said, "There is no cure. However, there's one thing we can give him: our support."

At the other end of the room

I didn't see Louis for quite a while. When I did, it was the beginning of the next summer, and I had recently arrived in Kansas City for my usual summertime stay with my mom.

I was sitting in my room at Mom's house, playing video games, when I heard a knock on the door. My mother walked into the room and informed me that Louis had only a few days left to live. That very day, we got in the car and headed over to the hospital to visit him.

What I saw in Louis's hospital room that day I will never forget. It shocked me. Louis was lying in a bed, and he had obviously lost even more weight than he had the last time I saw him. He was shivering, and no matter how many blankets the nurses piled on top of him, he could not get warm.

But none of this was the shocking part.

What shocked me was his family.

Louis was in a huge room. He lay in a bed at one end of the room, and at the other end were five members of his family. They were about as far away from him as they could possibly be and still share the same room. It was almost as if they were pressed up against the wall, waiting for a firing squad to come. They had their big Bibles out, reading them and discussing what they were reading, but none of them were even paying attention to Louis.

I asked my mom, "Why are they treating him like this? Why aren't they loving him? Why aren't they hugging him?"

My mom replied, "Well, Caleb, they're Christians. You remember what I told you about Christians, right? Christians hate gay people."

Walking over to the bed, I noticed that Louis had no smile on his face. I told him what he meant to me, then threw my arms around him, gave him a kiss on the cheek,

and said, "Goodbye, my friend."

The usual smile returned to his face and he said, "I'll see you later, little brother."

As best I can remember, his family never said one word to us. During our time there, they didn't say one word to Louis either. My mom's words rang through my head:

Christians hate gay people.

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Jesus touched

Louis's parents and siblings were afraid to touch him.

Jesus was different.

We read in Mathew 8:2 "A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

What Jesus did next was socially taboo. Actually, if Jesus wanted to be a good rabbi by His culture's standards, what He did next could have been career suicide: "Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. 'I am willing,' he said. 'Be clean!'" (Mathew 8:3).

Did you see that word? *Touched*.

He *touched* the leper! How in the world could that be? Wasn't Jesus unclean now? Shouldn't Jesus have gone outside the city gates for a few days?

The thing is, it wasn't just a man who touched this leper. It was God Himself. And nothing can make God unclean. God is the one who makes the unclean clean.

But why did Jesus have to touch this man at all? Jesus performed many miracles in different ways, and in some cases Jesus healed without even being around the person. Why in the world did Jesus choose to touch this leper?

I think it was because Jesus knew the man needed it.

Get your hands dirty

While the Old Testament laws that placed the lepers away from the community were for protection, the Pharisees used these laws to treat people poorly. God's Word should never be a catalyst for us to mistreat those who are different from us.

Sometimes we underestimate the power of touch. Don't believe me? Go to a nursing home and give a resident a hug. Go up to your crying child and wrap your arms around her. Put an arm around a person who has experienced emotional trauma and see how he reacts. There's great power in touch. Jesus knew that.

The point of the story of the leper is simple: Love those who are outcast or different from you. Don't fear, avoid, or push away those who aren't like you. Love people as God has loved you.

Excerpted from *Messy Grace: How a Pastor With Gay Parents Learned to Love Others Without Sacrificing Conviction*. Copyright © 2015 by Caleb Kaltenbach. Published by Water-Brook, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC.

FUNNIES

I've always thought my neighbors were quite nice people. But then they put a password on their Wi-Fi.

"Mom, don't get alarmed, but I'm at the hospital."

"Son, please. You've been a surgeon there for 8 years now. Can we start our phone calls differently?"

One Sunday morning, a pastor announced to his congregation: 'Friends, I have here in my hands three sermons: a \$10,000 sermon that lasts five minutes, a \$5,000 sermon that lasts fifteen minutes and a \$1,000 sermon that lasts a full hour. 'Now, we'll take the offering and see which one I'll deliver.'

A Spanish magician opened a grand magical show and at the end he said that he would disappear after counting to three. He starts to count, "Uno, dos..."

Kazaam! He vanished without a tres.