

Editorial: Can Orlando's horror yield grace?

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Millions of Americans have changed our perspectives regarding gays and lesbians for a very simple reason. We know them.



Marv Knox When practically every gay American endured a closeted life, nothing impeded the rest of us from making snap judgments. About their orientation. Their morality. Their character. Even their faith. Especially their faith.

Ironically, we lived in the dark on either side of that closet door. Inside, gays and lesbians lived in the darkness of fear. Outside, most of the rest of us lived in the darkness of ignorance.

Then we got to know them.

Often, we finally “met” someone we had called friend, sister, brother, cousin or colleague for years. Maybe we suspected something we feared to call out, to question. But then we really knew that person, the whole person. At last, light shone onto our relationship and into our hearts and minds.

Out spilled honesty

He, or she, sat down at a lunch table and spoke the truth. “There’s

something I've been needing to tell you ...," the conversation began. And out spilled honesty so piercing, so riveting, so courageous it changed both of us forever.

Suddenly, homosexuality transformed before our eyes. We couldn't reduce it to a set of Bible verses. We couldn't objectify it as a battleground for the culture wars.

We looked into the eyes of someone we enjoy. We heard the familiar voice of someone we respect. We watched tears stream down a face we cherish. Our hearts broke as we reflected on how many of those tears we caused. The courage and honesty of those moments transformed homosexuality from a theoretical biblical/cultural issue into the living, breathing, tangible, often-suffering body of someone we love.

Alongside these personal relationships, a struggle rages. Inside congregations and denominations, Christians contend for discerning the will of God regarding homosexuality and their relationships to lesbians and gays. They discuss and debate Scripture, theology, ethics, science, history, psychology, sociology and politics. Some seek to learn truth. Some believe they already know truth and only wish to defend it.

Three truths

Of course, Christians will continue to wrestle with their response to homosexuality. Meanwhile, however, here are three incontrovertible truths:

- Fervent, devout, Bible-believe Christians and congregations take both sides of the biblical/theological argument. This is hard for traditionalists to acknowledge, because their reading of the Bible seems obvious and, in their interpretation, supports their conclusions. But their belief does not negate the serious study of Scripture by others who believe they should welcome and affirm gays and lesbians.

- Many Christians on both sides care for lesbians and gays. This is hard for welcoming and affirming Christians to believe, because they hear vilification in many preachers' proclamations. Some of those sermons do sound gleeful in their condemnation. But others feel bound by their straightforward reading of Bible passages and believe their warnings for repentance are sacred acts of love.
- All gays and lesbians have been created in God's image, and God loves them just as much as God loves straights. Countless gays and lesbians believe in God, love Jesus, revere the Bible and passionately seek to follow God and honor Jesus in their lives.

Churches and denominations could set a remarkable example of reconciliation and redemption if they would decide not to make their response to homosexuality and ministry to the LGBT community a test of fellowship. If they could acknowledge the faithfulness and fervency of those on the other side, perhaps they could give each other space to work and show love and respect within dissent. Such a model is needed badly in a world that seems more inclined to fight than to live peaceably within disagreement.

Is grace possible?

Finally, let us focus on the operative word in the headline—"grace."

Longing for grace has felt like hoping for a miracle as we have pondered the horrific massacre that took place inside a gay nightclub in Orlando early Sunday morning. Millions of us have wept as we have read and heard the stories of the 49 people who were slaughtered and 53 others who were injured in a place they believed to be safe.

Millions of Americans will not have the opportunity to meet a gay friend for lunch or sit on a sofa beside a lesbian cousin and hear their stories. But [they will see the faces](#) of these [victims of massacre](#)—many of them gays

and lesbians, apparently killed because of their sexual orientation. Perhaps the openness of their faces and the utter ordinariness of their occupations will help more Americans to see how much all of us have in common with each other. May the stories told by those who adored them convey the lovability of individuals often viewed as objects by so many others in the world.

Nothing will bring Orlando's victims back to life. But may their deaths cause all of us to see our common humanity. May their loss help many Christians stop seeing gays and lesbians as objects. And may Christians who see others as God's beloved creation express the love of Jesus to all people around us.

Marv now is on Twitter. Follow him [@marvknoxbs](https://twitter.com/marvknoxbs)