



A BETTER LOVE

A NOTE ON DIFFERENCE AND LANGUAGE

The people sharing their stories in this book are united by God's love for us in Christ, and our shared commitment to the sexual ethics Jesus himself taught and lived.

But as you'll read, our stories are very different, and the language we use to describe ourselves and our experiences differs too. You may struggle with some of what we share, and perhaps with the labels we use, but we hope that won't stop you from enjoying the different perspectives we bring.

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FOREWORD

BY DAVID BENNETT

This book contains a message I was never told as a gay agnostic/atheist: the good news that God loved and came to save every human being in Jesus Christ.

The stories of LGBTQI+/SSA Christians, who had chosen a historically orthodox path for their lives in response to this love, have often been obscured by both the Church and society, either as a matter of repression—or worse, internalised homophobia. But the deadlock of prejudice against those who, like me, have made such a choice out of love for God is finally breaking. This book is an important contribution to that end.

It is not just a joy to commend this book to you, the reader, but an honour to add my own story to its pages. I hated God and the Christian faith because I was told it rejected LGBTQI+/SSA people, but I was found by Jesus through an experience of his love in a pub in the gay quarter of Sydney. In a culture and Church that feels it has largely decided what it thinks about sexuality and gender, I understand from my own story that it takes a particularly brave kind of person not just to live against the tide because they have seen a greater vision of being human, but to speak of that wonderfully good news in a costly and public way.

G. K. Chesterton once wrote: “chastity does not mean abstention from sexual wrong; it means something flaming, like Joan of Arc”.¹ This book arrives as “something flaming” like Joan of Arc, or the prophets, or Martin Luther King—stories of choosing faithfulness and chastity to God over the worship of self and desire, so that we might see the Kingdom of God come in the Church and the world. As David Foster Wallace wrote:

*In the day-to-day trenches of ... life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships.*²

We all have to go on a journey to decide what we will worship.

Throughout history, there have always been those who chose to go against the tide to worship what was true, good and above all, what was beautiful. The pages of this book display the great courage of people who live against the tide of the mainstream because they have found a greater treasure than anything this world can offer. Each story involves profound difficulty, because it involves a choice to love the One who gave everything to love us, the most beautiful One, the

way, the truth and the life—Jesus Christ. Jesus radically gave himself to God by becoming human, dying on a cross and rising from the dead. He chose to trust God in the thickest darkness and deeply mysterious terrain of being human, praying before the cross in Gethsemane, “not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22 v 42). Jesus, like the authors of this book, prayed these words from the weakness of his humanity. He showed us, as fellow human beings, what it means to know our Heavenly Father through the Holy Spirit and to seek to model our lives and choices around this reality.

In this book, we find more than just personal experiences that display a fascinating oddity challenging today’s secular landscape. These experiences point to something far greater. Augustine wrote, “Realities signified are to be valued more highly than their signs”.³ As I discovered in my Oxford doctorate on sexuality, what each person in this book has done is to value the signified reality of the new world that is to come above the sign of it found in marriage and sexuality.

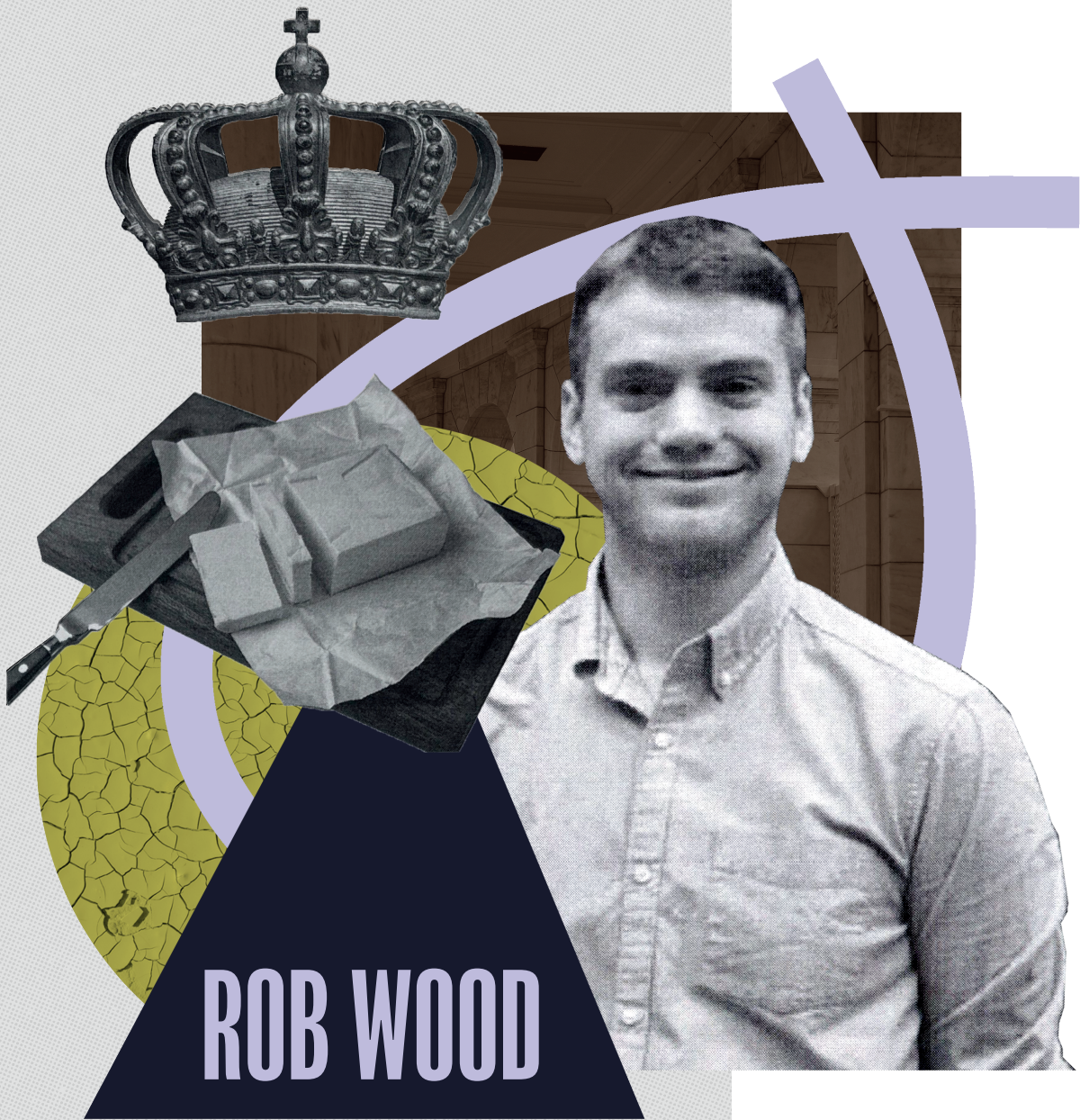
We are met with a mosaic of prophetic testimonies to the reality of the Kingdom of God: the bold and ornate colours of those who have

chosen to model their lives radically around Jesus, who gave up his sexuality for God.

Each journey of how an LGBTQI+/SSA person comes to respond faithfully to God’s salvation and grace in Jesus Christ is a refined and costly gift, like the stones that will decorate the future City to come:

The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst (Revelation 21 v 9–20).

This book contains such precious stones. Each story of loving God first will be honoured in the future City where God and humanity will finally be one, and our restless hearts will finally find eternal rest. May you, the reader, find your thirst for such a reality sparked and refreshed in the pages of this book.



TRUE, GOOD AND BEAUTIFUL

There is something different about these people”, I remember thinking.

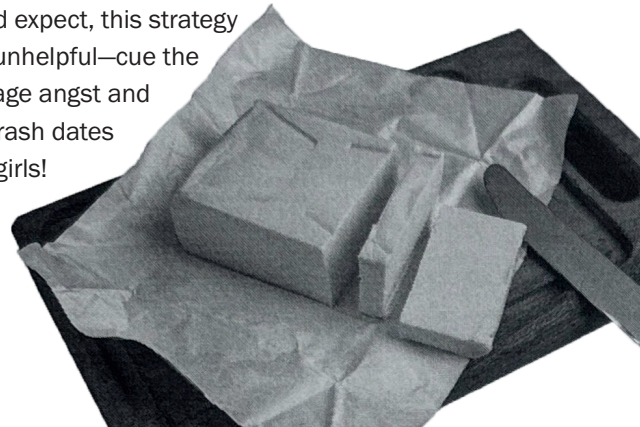
Different in a good way, I hasten to add! There seemed to be a love about them that was distinctive. I was around nine or ten years old when I had just walked into that newly-launched church to look around with a friend. I grew up in a loving and church-going family. We hadn’t attended for a while, and I understood little about Jesus.

I started going to this church and heard the objective truth claims that went along with the subjective tugs on my heart. It seemed clear to me that Jesus claimed to be God’s Son. So, in the words of the author C.S. Lewis, was he a liar, lunatic, or Lord? ⁴ If he is Lord—and I was now convinced he was—it changes everything.

Back then, I didn’t realise that the Lordship of Christ would shape every area of life, including my sexuality. However, having put my trust in Jesus, it wasn’t long before the journey of seeking to reconcile my faith and sexuality began.

At an early age, I remember hearing the word “gay” at school. I didn’t know what it meant, but it was a word used negatively. Whatever that word means, I thought, I don’t want it to be true of me. However, there was no way to escape the daunting realisation that it was. Same-sex attraction was a persistent, uninvited guest in my heart. Like a block of butter trying to resist a freshly-sharpened knife, the desire I had to not have these feelings offered little resistance to the same-sex attraction I experienced.

It was a long process to accept that I had these desires. The unhelpful ways people in the church sometimes spoke about sexuality and gay people did not help. Possibly as a result, I sought to do what I assumed psychologists would say is unhealthy: I tried to ignore my feelings. As you would expect, this strategy was unhelpful—cue the teenage angst and car-crash dates with girls!



**“EXPERIENCING SAME-
SEX ATTRACTION NEVER
DISQUALIFIED ME FROM
RECEIVING GOD’S LOVE.”**

As I grew up, the Bible's message seemed clear to me: sexual intimacy is to be reserved for marriage, which is to be the exclusive, lifelong union of a man and woman. However, believing that and living it out were two different matters.

Indeed, there was a time in my early twenties when I tried to convince myself that the Bible said something different. Even as a Christian, there were times I'd act on my sexual desire. I also entered into a short-lived same-sex relationship. It got to the point, however, when I thought that the news about Jesus is such good news that I need to respond by following him wherever that leads. I concluded that the Scriptures were consistent and clear on the topic.

I trusted more and more that the God who created me knows what's best for me. It didn't always feel like that, of course. But I suppose if every one of my desires chimed perfectly with what I thought God desired for me, then something would seem a little suspect. Rather than creating a Jesus in my image—"diet" Jesus, if you like—I desired the original version.

Of course, there were times I wanted to dictate the terms of my life; to be the captain of my fate and the master of my soul, so to speak. At the same time, I knew that's not what it means to trust and follow another. Despite the clash

between the desire to follow Jesus' teaching and my desire to live differently, it was my experience of Jesus' greater love that formed and shaped my life and response to sexuality.

I had trusted Jesus to bring forgiveness and a relationship with God. Now, it was time to trust him to provide what I needed to follow him. Of course, a life of potential singleness seemed daunting. However, to my surprise, not being in same-sex relationships did not limit my experience of love—far from it. The loving intimacy within friendships that I experienced with other Christians had more depth than I had ever experienced before.

I was encouraged by the truth that knowing Jesus is more precious and valuable than anything else this world can offer. Yes, there is a cost to responding to Jesus' love. But to say that cost is worth it would be an understatement. No-one else died on the cross and rose again to bring me forgiveness and a joy-filled abundant life. No-one else gives a more precious and secure identity, or a more immense and unrelenting love.

Experiencing same-sex attraction never disqualified me from receiving God's love. I hope I learn more and more what I have been privileged to experience in part: the good news of Jesus is what is true, good, and beautiful.