

"The Cross in the Closet is a gift to us all."

—Archbishop Emeritus **Desmond Tutu**

The Cross in the Closet



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Timothy Kurek

The Cross in the Closet

One man's abominable
quest to find Jesus
in the margins

Timothy Kurek

中华女子学院



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The Cross in the Closet is a work of nonfiction. Nonetheless, some names and personal characteristics of individuals, places or events have been changed in order to disguise identities. Any resulting resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places or events is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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The
Cross
in
the
Closet

For Beth.

I'm so thankful I finally found you.

endorsements

“Tim’s personal journey and awakening is evidence of the path being taken increasingly today by Christianity and other religions everywhere. This manifestation of respect for God’s great diversity allows us to better see the world through the eyes of Christ. *The Cross in the Closet* is a gift to us all.”

—Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu

“Tim Kurek has written a book that could be described as ‘spiritual espionage.’ As a young fundamentalist, he goes undercover—accepting all the attendant moral and personal ambiguities—and gathers ‘intelligence’ that few heterosexual people have ever had access to. He tells his story with skill and grace, revealing secrets that need to be heard from where he began (Liberty University) to wherever you are. A one-of-a-kind book with unforgettable moral impact.”

—Brian D. McLaren, Author, *Speaker: A New Kind of Christianity, Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?*

“It took great courage and serious commitment for Timothy Kurek to begin his year long journey into our world, the world of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans. I’m delighted that readers of *The Cross in the Closet* will gain a whole new understanding of the stereotypes and untruths that cause my sisters and brothers so much suffering. I hope many will standby this straight ally and support the message found in his book, the message that says God truly does love us all. I encouraged him to take this journey and now that it’s over I will stand

by him still. I admire Timothy's courage and creativity, and his journey into our world will make a difference! You go, Tim!"

—Mel White, Author, *Stranger at the Gate*

"I hope Tim's voice echoes through the halls of every McMansion church until Christian hubris is humbled. Fundamentalist arrogance is today threatening a religion founded foremost on empathy and love. *The Cross in the Closet* serves as a blunt reminder and should be a wake up call to every closeted bigot that dares to thump a bible."

—Greg Barrett, Author, *The Gospel of Rutba: Christians, Muslims, and the Good Samaritan Story in Iraq*

"*The Cross in the Closet* is the book I've been waiting for. Now—at last—I have the book to give to every person I know (and there are many) struggling to understand how and why so-called Christians hate gay men and women and what to do about changing their minds. Kurek writes movingly and well. This is the best book I've read that opens the door to understanding what it is like to be labeled gay and trapped in a community that dismisses your very self before even hearing you out. Brilliant!"

—Frank Schaeffer, Author, *Crazy For God*

about my title

I believe everyone has a calling in their life. A purpose. A cause. Something unique that gives the mundane, meaning. During my two decades in the conservative church every pastor of every church I attended spoke about finding that purpose. They referred to our callings as our cross to bear. The image conjured was a gruesome sight to behold: bloody flesh nailed to slick timber, stained red. Finding your cross isn't about finding happiness, they said. It's about our search for meaning.

I too believe we all have our crosses to bear...

I just never realized I would find my cross in the closet.

foreword

It has taken me a lifetime to come out of the closet. And I'm gay. I have witnessed first hand the positive and negative responses some have expressed toward my friend Tim for his "coming out" experiment—I for one think him to be a hero.

He is a hero because he sought to understand the thing he once loathed. How many of us are big enough to even consider that possibility, much less spend a year of our lives, our reputations and emotional capital living the role of our former foe—in an effort to understand.

The *Cross in the Closet* has great potential to help many followers of Jesus who are concerned by the thought of appearing to condone "the lifestyle" of the homosexual person. Many fear that it will put their gay friend's soul in eternal peril, or moreover, put their own soul in hell for not having stood for righteousness.

Jesus asked us to follow the greatest commands of all: To love; to love our God and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Jesus' story of the Good Samaritan makes it very clear what he would think of the religious and pious, who would have nothing to do with the enemy outcast left bleeding and dying by the road. Jesus gave us permission to love the outcast. His story compels us to care for the outsider—in point of fact, the one who did so was the hero of the story.

If you are struggling with the "gay thing" this book is for you. Look through the eyes of one who has learned to love those he hated—those "fags" who are God's beloved sons and daughters. They are the one's we will one day need to give an account for—an explanation for our decision to leave them bleeding and dying along side the road.

This could be your year of living and loving dangerously. Just like Timothy did. Just like Jesus did.

—James Alexander Langteaux, Author, *Gay Conversations with God*

author's note

If I have learned anything in my brief time on this planet, it is that people are imperfect. No one has it all figured out. In the same way people aren't perfect, books aren't perfect. This book isn't. It is messy and limited, as I am messy and limited. So before you begin this book, let me clarify a few points of imperfection, if for no other reason than so you might read past its flaws to the heart of the message I am sharing.

I am speaking about a very sensitive issue. I would even wager to say that it is the most heated social issue of our day. I want to make clear that I am not an expert in lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender issues. I haven't spent years with my nose buried in books, studying every nuance of LGBT culture, history, or community. I am not a professor, a theologian, or an expert in anything other than my own personal journey...but I have learned a lot from my experiences. If you are looking for highly detailed answers to the intellectual questions you may have regarding LGBT issues, there are many people more qualified than me out there you could ask instead.

I frequently use terminology that is technically incorrect. To refer to the "gay community," for instance, is to relegate that populace to a monolithic entity. It is as technically incorrect as the "straight community." People are diverse and communities are diverse, so when I use that term, don't shudder. I also sometimes use the word gay instead of LGBT, for the same reason. The LGBT spectrum is as diverse as any other, including the "Christian community," so read this book with that diversity in mind.

I also want to stress that this is not a book about being gay. I am fundamentally unqualified to write that book. Instead this

book is about the label of gay and how the consequences of that label shaped and changed my life.

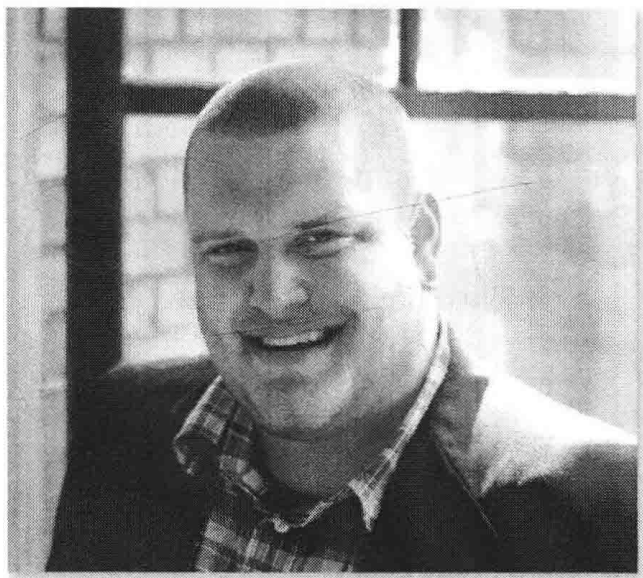
What this book is really about is prejudice: specifically, *my* prejudice. In traditional orthodox Christianity, one repents before salvation becomes possible. To repent means to turn away. In order to repent of my past sins, I had to acknowledge what my sins ultimately were, and I have done my best not to hold back, not to try to whitewash who I used to be to make myself look better than I was. An author friend once told me to write what scares me; this book is a result of that sage advice.

I hope this book speaks to you. Thank you for picking it up and reading it. No matter what you believe, know that I love you.

Your friend,

Timothy Kurek

about the author



Timothy Kurek, a Portland, Oregon based author and speaker is tackling some of the front burner issues of our day. His unrestrained style of immersion lends a uniquely empathetic perspective, engaging his audiences with empathy, humor, and refreshing candor.

contact info

For information about Timothy Kurek, or to book him for speaking engagements, please visit:

timothy-kurek.com

If your book club of ten or more would like to speak with Timothy free of charge, please contact:

info@timothy-kurek.com



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table of contents

Part I: Genesis 1

0 in the beginning3

1 coming out, into the closet17

2 not in kansas.....29

3 shawn39

4 will.....49

5 church street.....57

6 the mirror65

7 revive café73

Part II: The Old Testament.....83

8 difficult truth85

9 it's hard to be gay in spring.....93

10 recruited99

11 what david felt.....107

12 living in the tension119

13 activist like me131

14 sticks and stones139

15 my first prom.....147

16 outed153

| | |
|--|---------|
| Part III: The New Testament | 165 |
| 17 jesus in drag..... | 167 |
| 18 becoming invisible..... | 173 |
| 19 the descent..... | 179 |
| 20 happy endings | 185 |
| 21 pride and prejudice | 193 |
| 22 rescued | 199 |
| 23 don't tread on me..... | 207 |
| 24 new bridge..... | 215 |
| 25 another season ends | 223 |
| Part IV: Revelations..... | 227 |
| 26 the other side of the rainbow | 229 |
| 27 the walk | 241 |
| 28 i kissed a boy and i didn't like it | 249 |
| 29 angela | 255 |
| 30 a reunion | 269 |
| 31 baby human | 281 |
| 32 love never fails..... | 289 |
| 33 freddy, please | 295 |
| 34 the ball drops..... | 305 |
| 35 the beginning..... | 313 |