

# INSIDE EX-GAY: THE NAKED TRUTH

*JOY's Dean Beck explores the naked truth behind the evangelical ex-gay movement.*

Motivated by rigid interpretations of the bible, sponsored by certain evangelical churches, and often funded by its victims, the ex-gay movement has spread throughout the world. It aims to convert homosexuals into heterosexuals and, sadly, has left a trail of suicides and broken relationships in its wake.

For some evangelicals, ex-gay seems like an attractive solution to the clash between evangelical culture and same-sex attraction. Rather than label LGBTI people as sinful and depraved, the ex-gay theory tells LGBTI people that their same-sex attraction is a sign of damage and dysfunction and that they need healing. Of course if they choose to embrace their sexuality, the message of healing becomes a message of condemnation. This enticing but devastatingly misguided ex-gay theory has spawned a movement, a sub-culture and even a political arm.

Despite the wild growth of ex-gay, traditionally conservative church leaders are increasingly recognising that the ideas behind ex-gay are at odds with Christian ethics and the central themes of Christian tradition. When a former ex-gay participant – Melbourne man Damien Christie – took his life in 2013, the producers of the Inside Ex-gay project decided to look at the movement in a fresh light and with some new voices.

What resulted was the coming together of eight ex-gay survivors, Christian leaders and counsellors for four extraordinary radio interviews. Their message: Whether you are progressive, conservative, evangelical or non-religious, the ex-gay movement is damaging and misguided. This series exposes the ex-gay phenomenon and brings hope to the many young Australians of faith who believe they are damaged, dysfunctional or defective because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI).

*Executive Producer and Presenter: Dean Beck  
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## 1. The Emperor has no Clothes

With the recent shutdown of large ex-gay organisations like Exodus International and Living Waters Australia, you'd think the evangelical gay-to-straight movement was on its last legs. However, apart from celibacy or inclusion, ex-gay therapy is still the only response to same-sex attraction that some evangelical churches have. Motivated by out-dated interpretations of theology and psychology – and often funded by its participants – the ex-gay movement is based on the seductive but toxic idea that same-sex attraction can be removed. Ex-gay has produced double lives, false success stories, broken families and a trail of suicides.

David Lograsso is an ex-gay survivor who has had enough of the lies and double standards of the ex-gay movement. He is joined by Rachel Goff, a researcher and counsellor who has helped many ex-gay survivors journey towards self-acceptance and wholeness.

Three years after David left ex-gay, a close friend and former ex-gay buddy Damien took his life. Through the grief, David's community supported him to heal, forgive and speak out. His story is similar to those of other ex-gay survivors that Rachel encounters in her work as an expert counsellor and researcher. Rachel herself comes from a background of faith and has some valuable insights concerning the evangelical ex-gay movement and the prevalence of experiences like David's.

## 2. Control and Authenticity

Most of Australia's evangelical leaders still preach that homosexuality is an abomination and a sign of depravity. There is a culture of fear surrounding the many secretly pro-LGBTI leaders working in some Australian evangelical churches. Standing up and speaking out against homophobia can cost people their livelihood, their community and family. Yet while quotes from Leviticus and archaic interpretations of the New Testament text continue to emanate from the pulpit, many of the theologians who teach these pastors are themselves shifting their stance and renouncing homophobia.

Two such theologians came forward in early 2014 to offer a new perspective and to reach out to their fellow evangelical leaders. Sadly, one of these two tremendous men, Bishop John McIntyre, passed away two months after the show was recorded. Bishop McIntyre was the Anglican bishop of Gippsland and one of Victoria's most respected theological educators. The Bishop was joined by Reverend Dr John Capper, a highly regarded theologian who has educated many of Melbourne's Christian ministers in Anglican, Evangelical and even Pentecostal environments. Both had worked in disadvantaged communities, studied widely, and educated evangelical church leaders. Both had come to embrace LGBTI-affirming theological positions and both had engaged pastorally and biblically with Christians who were gay.

Why and how did they make the decision to come forward? How have they been treated as a result of their views despite being clear experts in biblical scholarship, theology and pastoral care? Their interview leaves no doubt as to why a painful divide still remains within the Church.

## 3. Breaking Free

Though Jason Tuazon-McCheyne is now a prominent LGBTI activist and a 2016 Senate candidate for the Australian Equality Party, he was once a theology student and evangelical church minister. While many of his gay friends chose to suppress their homosexuality, Jason chose to leave ministry behind and embrace a committed long term relationship with his now husband of 14 years. Unfortunately, he feels his many gifts of Christian leadership are not wanted in the church.

Though having had a wildly different journey, Cath McKinney is a church minister who has experienced the suffering and rejection known by Jason in her interaction with many of Melbourne's ex-gay survivors and LGBTI Christian leaders. She is a close friend to many evangelical leaders who are not ready to come forward with their LGBTI-affirming views and was a close friend to Damien Christie – an ex-gay survivor who took his life in 2013.

Despite the differing stories, both Cath and Jason have experienced a profound common truth. To be stuck in a place of confusion about sexuality in the middle of an exclusive Christian world can be a deadly thing.

It's a raw and honest look at life as a gay person of faith in Australia.

#### 4. Reparative History

Reverend Matt Glover was removed from his ministry role at a suburban Baptist church due to his support for same-sex marriage. Much of his world imploded as a result. However, in the years since, Matt has become a steadfast voice of hope and equality in the LGBTI community. He is a vital member of Freedom2Be – a social and support community for LGBTI people from faith backgrounds – and runs a counselling practice that specialises in diverse sexuality and gender. Matt has a great deal of insight into the biblical and theological ideas that cause so many evangelicals to reject LGBTI people. He has counselled many ex-gay survivors and has an insider's view of ex-gay practices that proliferate across Australian evangelical churches. He is well aware of their origins, motivations and practices.

Together, Matt and cultural historian Dr Timothy Jones create a picture of the history of the reparative therapy movement in Australia – including its misguided appropriation of psychotherapy, its past broad support, its secular influences and its religious agenda. Through understanding its history, as well as its recent incarnations, Matt and Tim outline a strategy for a future free from ex-gay.

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*For more information, podcasts and multimedia visit <http://insideexgay.org>*

*Inside Ex-gay and beyondblue developed a fact-sheet for phone counsellors. It is available at the Inside Ex-gay site here:*

*<https://insideexgay.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/bbss-advice-on-exgay-16-june-2014-final.pdf>*