

Love, Then Listen is the right advice for all parents of LGBTQ kids. Daphne Reiley's heartwarming book about her journey to "love, then listen" with her own child is essential reading for all parents who find themselves on a journey they never expected. Highly recommended!

Rev. Dr. David P. Gushee
Distinguished University Professor of
Christian Ethics
Director, Center for Theology & Public Life,
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President, American Academy of Religion
Former President, Society of Christian Ethics

An extremely important book for parents struggling to reconcile their faith and their child's transgender identity. When religious beliefs are at odds with the child's gender identity it can be painful for the entire family. Parents often find themselves confused and grieving. During this time, finding strength in one's faith is vital. Author Daphne Reiley lights the way in this incredibly powerful, personal, and inspiring spiritual journey.

Kristine Medea, LPC, BCETS
Executive Director and Founder, TransThriving:
Therapeutic Wellness Program for
Gender Diverse Youth & Families

What delights me most about this book is what it does not contain. Daphne Reiley, Felix, and the rest of their family did not experience rejection by their church. Ministers, elders, and other church leaders—read this book! Read it because the graciousness, honesty, vulnerability, and love this mother shares should be your model when a family in your church faces this reality. Be ready to love and listen.

Rev. Chuck Jones
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Love, Then Listen



Sharing My Son's Journey
Toward His True Gender

DAPHNE C. REILEY

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Reiley, Daphne C.

Love, Then Listen:

Sharing My Son's Journey Toward His True Gender

First Edition

Categories: Transgenderism, Religion/Spirituality

In gratitude for the grace, love, and compassion of God
on a journey such as this.

To Ralph for his steadfast love, support, and companionship on this trek, without which I would have been lost.

To Thomas for his quiet understanding.

To Felix, with much love and with deep admiration of the man he is revealing.

DCR

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Acknowledgments

This book could not have been written without my faith; my husband, Ralph; our children, Thomas and Felix; our therapist, Kristine Medea, MA, LPC, BCETS; my employer, Victoria L. Collier, CELA; our circle of support, including friends, extended family, pastors, school administrators, teachers, doctors—this list could go on for quite a while!

My acknowledgments would be remiss if I didn't give immense credit to the editors who have helped me sculpt this memoir, affirmed my storytelling, and encouraged me to keep at it. Thank you to Victoria L. Collier, the Rev. Dr. James Brewer-Calvert, and the Rev. Dr. Joseph V. LaGuardia for your editorial expertise!

Simple thanks cannot express how our family experiences this support. Each of us, I am sure, experiences the support in different ways, to different depths. Yet, without this support, none of us would be where we are on this path.

The simple truth is that our child could very well not be here with us. That truth is the reason for this book.

Foreword

For all the good they accomplished, in 1611 the translators of the Authorized King James Version of the Bible did the parents of the world a great disservice—a disservice that has continued for over four centuries. Somewhere along the translation path, one of the forty-seven scholars from the Church of England perused the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the Old Testament and decided the best rendering of Proverbs 22:6 was, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Thus, the guilt-ridden parent was born.

Training became our primary activity as parents. We taught—in a calm, patient, instructive, loving voice at first, but one that quickly escalated into screaming if rational decibel levels were ineffective. We disciplined and pushed and pulled and punished. We put our kids in a corner, across our laps for a spanking, in all the right schools, sometimes in reform schools, in therapy, and of course in church. We knew the way they “should go,” and we were determined to do it right.

But, alas, our children grew. And more often than not, some portion of their life—if not all of their life—went contrary to where we thought they should go and who we thought they should be. The inevitable guilt of having parented poorly flooded upon us because our child “departed from the way he should go.” Prayers followed. We prayed God would somehow correct what we had done wrong. We prayed God would usher our child back to the way we thought he should go. Those damn translators of the Authorized King James Version of the Bible—if they had gotten this one verse right, they might have saved us a ton of grief and guilt.

Daphne Reiley gets it right. The Hebrew phrase embedded in Proverbs 22:6 can be transliterated *al pi darkow*. The best understanding of this phrase is not “the way he should go,” but “the way he is bent.” If we train up our children in the way they are naturally bent, they will not depart from it. Why? Because this is who they are! This is who they are created to be! Children are not bonsai trees to be twisted and wired and stunted into unintended shapes and forms. They are creations of God. And when we nurture their natural bends, they do not depart from it. The

only way to do this well is to do more listening than yelling.

The only thing harder than parenting is processing theology while you parent. Again, Daphne Reiley gets it right. Daphne—more from necessity than scholarly curiosity—brings her keen theological training and insight to these chapters of her life. She not only learns to listen to her child and allow that child to become the blessed creation God intended, but she also learns to listen to God. Her gift to us is her story. Her holy attentiveness through this journey provides a treasure trove for the rest of us. She helps us learn to listen. And in our listening we come to love our children, as well as all of God's children, for who they are created to be.

Dr. Jim Dant
Senior Minister, First Baptist Church,
Greenville, South Carolina

Change can bring your life into focus.

Seen on the FOCUS Insurance street sign,
Lawrenceville Highway, Decatur, Georgia

Introduction

This book is as much a product of what I have perceived as my failures as that of my successes. Of course, that's all relative. I want to share both failures and successes in hopes of putting a human as well as a divine face on someone doing her best to love and support a child moving through such a transition.

The thoughts that flooded into my heart and head when our son first shared his reality with us could not have been counted. After the initial shock, I immediately began wondering just how long he had known this about himself and how I could have missed it!

So many questions, so few answers.

As we have traveled this path with our child since the Fall of 2014, some of those questions have been answered—they've had to be, because there were new questions waiting.

I will be sharing my experience of this transition as the mother who gave birth to this beautiful, brave, and wondrous child.

My hope is that by sharing my experience, the door will be opened to many other mothers to

accept and not fear accompanying their child on this journey with love, grace, and respect. As mothers we are purveyors of grace for our children. We are conduits of God's grace and mercy. Through our unconditional love we can move with our children as they find and reveal themselves, all the while easing their fears.

I share my experiences with this transition because I know there are others out there who might be needing some hope, some understanding, and some way of finding their faith in the midst of such a transition.

It is important at this point to make my belief clear on the subject of sin as it may relate to matters of transgenderism. This book is not in any way about "loving the sinner, hating the sin." This book is all about allowing the mothering, nurturing love of God to support our child and ourselves as our child moves through the phases of transitioning. There is no sin here.

Throughout the book I will refer to my child by his correct name—Felix. Part of my story revolves around setting aside my expectations for a daughter, which Felix bore with grace. Now that I am aware Felix was there all along, I can more easily think

of and refer to him all the time—even in sharing memories—as Felix. I realize this may be confusing at times when I am sharing memories from his youth.

One final note: you will find at the beginning of each chapter a verse of Scripture or a quotation (or perhaps both) that has spoken to me as I have moved through this process. I may or may not address the connection within the chapter; I feel safe in allowing you, the reader, to draw those conclusions.