



AFFIRMATION GUIDE FOR

# LGBTQ+ COLLEGE STUDENTS

Lorae V. Bonamy

designed and edited by  
Q Christian Fellowship



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## Lorae V. Bonamy

Lorae V. Bonamy (she/her) is a dreamer, a communicator, and a writer who uses her voice to build peace, fight injustice and create opportunities for reconciliation. A Black, Lesbian, Christian, neurodivergent, cisgender woman, she received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Strategic Communication from Temple University and her Master of Science degree in Higher Education Counseling/Student Affairs from West Chester University of Pennsylvania. Lorae is currently a doctoral student studying Higher Education, Student Affairs, and International Education Policy at the University of Maryland, where she also works as a Student Affairs educator. Her research interests include critical peace pedagogy, inclusive campus environments, liberation theology, and institutional memory. The goal of Lorae's work is for queer people of color and faith to be fully loved in families, faith communities and institutions of higher education. Lorae comes to this work understanding both the elitism and oppression that are built into the structure of higher education and the real economic benefit of a college degree.



# Overview

For many, college is an incredible season of self-reflection, personal development, and academic growth. College can also be emotionally, spiritually, and physically challenging, as students transition from their teens into adulthood. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ+) college students often face additional challenges as they discover or further develop their sexual and gender identities in a new environment. Often, these challenges are more difficult when an LGBTQ+ student has grown up in a conservative Christian environment that at best ignores, and at worst condemns, LGBTQ+ “lifestyles.”<sup>1</sup>

Many students wrestle with their interpretation of Scripture, as well as expectations from family members, friends, and faith communities, as they begin to question who they are and who they ultimately want to be. The purpose of this guide is to support LGBTQ+ Christian college students in exploring and/or developing their sexual identity, gender identity, and personal sexual ethic by offering an inclusive and affirming interpretation of the Christian scriptures. This guide also includes practical steps for tough conversations and additional resources for further theological and personal study.

1 Pew Research Center. ( July 15). Where Major Religions Stand on Same-Sex Marriage. Retrieved from [https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/21/where-christian-churches-stand-on-gay-marriage/ft\\_15-07-01\\_religionsssm/](https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/21/where-christian-churches-stand-on-gay-marriage/ft_15-07-01_religionsssm/)



# Introduction

Growing up, I could have been described as a “goody-two-shoes.” To me, Christianity was about what I abstained from—I prided myself on not smoking, not drinking, and not having sex. At eighteen years old, I was focused on the idea of perfection, and I believed that was pleasing to God. Before I arrived on campus at Temple University, I sought out community in the campus gospel ministry. I went to two meetings during my first week on campus, and that student organization quickly went from being just a co-curricular activity to becoming my faith family and my home away from home.

My college experience was marked by a secret relationship with another girl from choir. At the time, we both identified as heterosexual, and believed that Christian and queer identities could not coexist. For my entire time as an undergraduate, I considered myself to be “wrestling” or “struggling” with homosexuality. I prayed alone, with friends, and at the altar, and I asked people to pray for me. I “confessed” to everyone around me with a hope that they would “hold me accountable.” I connected with older mentors who were “ex-gay”<sup>1</sup> and tried to learn from their experiences. I wrote in-depth blog posts about what I thought was sexual brokenness, and shared my journey with the world to “help” others. I went to so many Christian counselors, hoping they would give me the secret to not being gay; once they told me it was simply my decision, I would leave. Choir Girl and I never made our relationship official, because I believed that a future with her would mean moving across the country, giving up everything I ever knew and starting over. Eventually, our friendship (and secret relationship) violently crumbled under the pressure to not be gay. We went back to the facade of casual friendship, but after all that had transpired, it was much more difficult to maintain.

Two years later, I moved back home to live with my mother and sister during my senior year of college, because I was burnt out from years of overcompensating for what I believed was an inherent flaw. I listened to the testimonies of other college students who “used to be gay” and those of deeply admired, famous “ex-gay” Christian leaders. I accepted at last that, based on their experiences, this would be something I struggled with forever. I applied to a master’s program at a Christian university, hoping that the strict anti-LGBTQ+ theology would fix me, and I committed to attend. But on May 6th, 2016, sitting in my cap and gown at the Liacouras Center in Philadelphia, PA, it was like a light turned on in my heart. I knew I wanted to attend a different program. I now know that this was God leading me down a path of love and light. Through the master’s program in counseling I chose that day, I would learn to fully accept other people, so I could one day accept myself.

I did not affirm my own identity during college or graduate school. It took a broken engagement, a

job-related relocation, severe anxiety, and an amazing therapist to help me get to where I am. It was the hand of God that stopped me from studying at one of the least affirming campuses for LGBTQ+ students,<sup>1</sup> and led me to work full-time at one of the top 25 campuses for LGBTQ+ students.<sup>2</sup> My hope is that through self-acceptance this guide would bring us one step closer to a world where LGBTQ+ people of faith are fully loved in their families, communities and institutions of higher education.

- 1 Campus Pride. "Worst List: The Absolute Worst Campuses for LGBTQ Youth." Campuspride.org, 2020. <https://www.campuspride.org/worstlist/>.
- 2 Campus Pride. "Campus Pride's 2018 Best of the Best LGBTQ-Friendly Colleges & Universities." Campuspride.org, 2018. <https://www.campuspride.org/2018bestofthebest/>.





# Am I LGBTQ+?

The fact that you are reading this guide shows that you have some interest in how LGBTQ+ and Christian identities converge. You might also have questions about your personal identities. Maybe you have found yourself “liking” a friend who has the same gender identity as you, or feeling discomfort when someone refers to you as a “guy” or “girl.” You may believe there is absolutely no way that you are LGBTQ+, but still find yourself googling something like “What does the Bible say about homosexuality?” or “How do I know if I am trans?” There are many ways to live out an LGBTQ+ identity as a Christian, but the first step is to be honest with yourself. I remember talking with my best friend during college about how I would live my life “if the Bible did not say it was wrong.” My answer was that I would date women, with the intention of marriage. In the five years since that conversation, I have gained an understanding of the Biblical scriptures that decenters the rigid rules and binaries that kept me from reconciling my beliefs and my identity, and emphasizes instead inclusion, love, and justice for all people.

Go into the following sections with an open mind. The goal of this guide is to offer additional perspectives to support you as you explore and develop your identity and ethics for yourself. You may finish this guide with more questions than conclusions; that is okay. May you find joy and peace in the posture you assume before the Lord, acknowledging that God is big enough to love you right where you are. While you read, remind yourself that it is okay to imagine, question, dream, and critique. Take this journey for yourself and see what you find.

**Affirmation:** *There is more than one way to be human.*

## Exercise for Identity Development

When I thought about how I would live my life if the Bible “didn’t say it was wrong,” it was purely hypothetical, but I was certain of my answer. At that time, I believed anything outside of “struggling” and “wrestling” with homosexuality was impossible, but I also recognized that I would be with a woman if it was not wrong. Take some time to answer the following questions for yourself. Use the method that best suits your learning style, and make sure you can refer to your answers later.

- If I told you that God affirmed LGBTQ+ identities, and all of your worries about that affirmation miraculously melted away, what would be different?
- If you were fully living out your LGBTQ+ identity, what would your life look like?



# LGBTQ+ Definitions & Identities

Now that you have given some thought to what your life may look like if you had a different understanding of the Bible, you may be imagining who you would date, how you would dress, how you would feel, or how your body would change. The definitions below illuminate how those concepts relate to sexual and gender identity. This language will be beneficial as you continue to research, explore, and converse with the people in your life.

## Gender

### SEX

The assignment and classification of people as male, female, intersex, or another sex based on a combination of anatomy, hormones, and chromosomes. It is important we don't simply use "sex" to describe people's identity, because gendered characteristics in humans occur along a spectrum and because of its role in transphobia (sex doesn't always equal gender).<sup>1</sup>

### GENDER IDENTITY

One's innermost concept of self as man, woman, a blend of both or neither – how individuals perceive themselves and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be aligned with or different from their so-called 'sex' assigned at birth.<sup>2</sup>

### GENDER EXPANSIVENESS

**1. *Transgender person:*** An umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the 'sex' they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc.<sup>3</sup> (Note: Transgender identity does not depend on medically transitioning through either hormone therapy or surgical interventions.)

- ***Trans man:*** a person who was assigned female at birth but now embraces a male identity

1 Trans Student Educational Resources. "Definitions." <http://www.transstudent.org/>, n.d.

<http://transstudent.org/gender/>

2 Human Rights Campaign. "Glossary of Terms." HRC.org, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

3 Ibid.

- **FTM:** acronym for female to male<sup>4</sup>
  - **Transmasculine/transmasc:** an adjective that can refer to a trans man, or an adjective that can describe a non-binary person’s masculine gender experience/expression
  - **Trans woman:** a person who was assigned male at birth but now embraces a female identity
  - **MTF:** acronym for male to female<sup>5</sup>
  - **Transfeminine/trans femme:** an adjective that can refer to a trans woman, or an adjective that can refer to a non-binary person’s feminine gender experience/expression
  - **AFAB/AMAB:** Acronyms meaning “assigned female/male at birth” (or DFAB/DMAB, “designated female/male at birth”). No one, whether cis or trans, gets to choose what sex they’re assigned at birth. At the time of publication, this term is preferred to “biological male/female”, “male/female bodied”, “natal male/female”, and “born male/female”, all of which may be defamatory and/or inaccurate.<sup>6</sup>
  - **Transition:** Altering one’s birth sex is not a one-step procedure; it is a complex process that occurs over a long period of time. Transition includes some or all of the following personal, medical, and legal steps: telling one’s family, friends, and co-workers; using a different name and new pronouns; dressing differently; changing one’s name and/or designated “sex” on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) one or more types of surgery. The exact steps involved in transition vary from person to person. Some people will only complete some steps while others may complete more. Some who identify as trans may not transition. Please avoid the phrase “sex change.”<sup>7</sup>
- 2. Cisgender person:** A term used to describe a person whose gender identity aligns with the social and cultural expectations typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth. The abbreviation cis may also be used. Cis-hetero or cishet refers to a straight cisgender person.
- 3. Nonbinary person:** Someone whose gender identity blends elements of being a man or a woman, or a gender that is different than either male or female.<sup>8</sup>

4 dictionary.com

5 dictionary.com

6 <https://standwithtrans.org/glossary-of-terms/>

7 <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>

8 Definition from <https://transequality.org/issues/resources/understanding-non-binary-people-how-to-be-respectful-and-supportive>



- **FTX:** A way to describe someone who is assigned female at birth and identifies as nonbinary/ genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/etc., and who may also be medically transitioning and/or presenting their gender in a way that is not in congruence with their assigned sex at birth. It is in the same family as the FTM and MTF labels, but provides nonbinary/ genderqueer/GNC/etc. folks space to identify themselves (and their transition) outside the aforementioned binary options.<sup>9</sup>
- **MTX:** A way to describe someone who is assigned male at birth and identifies as nonbinary/ genderqueer/ gender non-conforming/etc., and who may also be medically transitioning and/or presenting their gender in a way that is not in congruence with their assigned sex at birth.<sup>10</sup>
- **Agender:** Having no specific gender identity or having a gender identity that is neutral. Sometimes used interchangeably with gender neutral, genderless, or neutrois.<sup>11</sup>
- **Bigender:** Having two distinct gender identities or expressions, either simultaneously, at different times, or in different situations.<sup>12</sup>
- **Genderfluid:** Moving between two or more gender identities or expressions.<sup>13</sup>
- **Genderqueer:** A catch-all term for individuals with non-binary gender identities.<sup>14</sup>

**4. Gender Expression:** External presentation of one’s gender identity, usually expressed through behavior, clothing, haircut, or voice, and which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviors and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.<sup>15</sup>

- **Femme:** Feminine identified person of any gender/sex.<sup>16</sup>
- **Boi:** A person assigned female at birth who expresses or presents themselves in a culturally/ stereotypically masculine, particularly boyish way. Also, one who enjoys being perceived as a young man and intentionally identifies with being perceived as a “boy”<sup>17</sup>
- **Masculine of Center:** A term originating within communities of color describing people whose

9 <https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/lgbtq-definitions-gender-sexuality-terms>

10 Ibid.

11 Definition from <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-non-binary-or-have-non-binary-gender-4172702#types-of-non-binary-gender>

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Human Rights Campaign. “Glossary of Terms.” HRC.org, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

16 Definition from [https://www.mvc.edu/files/Allies\\_Terminology.pdf](https://www.mvc.edu/files/Allies_Terminology.pdf)

17 <https://lgbt.williams.edu/resources/terms/>

gender identity or expression falls towards the masculine end of the gender spectrum; includes a wide range of terms such as butch, stud, aggressive/AG, dom, macha, tomboi, trans masculine, etc.<sup>18</sup>

- **Butch/Stud:** A person who identifies themselves as masculine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. ‘Butch’ is sometimes used as a derogatory term for lesbians, but it can also be claimed as an affirmative identity label.<sup>19</sup>

**5. Intersex person:** A person born with sex organs, genetic coding and/or secondary sex characteristics which are a blend of typically male and female physical traits (historically referred to as a hermaphrodite). “Intersex” refers to people who are born with any of a range of sex characteristics that may not fit a doctor’s notions of binary “male” or “female” bodies. Variations may appear in a person’s chromosomes, genitals, or internal organs such as testes or ovaries. Some intersex traits are identified at birth, while others may not be discovered until puberty or later in life.<sup>20</sup> An intersex person may or may not personally identify with their assigned gender. “The most thorough existing research finds intersex people to constitute an estimated 1.7% of the population.”<sup>21</sup>

## SEXUALITY

**1. Sexual Identity:** This term is not widely used, but it refers to the socially influenced self-understanding/labeling<sup>22</sup> of one’s self.

**2. Sexual Orientation:** The presence or absence of an inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.<sup>23</sup> There are several types of orientations:

- **Asexual:** describes a person who experiences little or no sexual attraction or desire for other people
- **Lesbian:** describes a woman or woman-aligned person who is emotionally, romantically and/or sexually attracted to other women.
- **Gay:** describes a person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to members of the same gender OR a man/male-aligned person who is emotionally, romantically or sexually attracted to other men

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 <https://interactadvocates.org/intersex-definitions/>

21 <https://www.intersexequality.com/how-common-is-intersex-in-humans/>

22 David G. Myers, *Psychology*, 10th Edition (New York: Worth Publishers, 2013)

23 Human Rights Campaign. “Glossary of Terms.” HRC.org, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

- **Bisexual:** describes a person who is emotionally, romantically, or sexually attracted to more than one sex, gender or gender identity though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree.
- **Pansexual:** describes someone who has the potential for emotional, romantic, or sexual attraction to people of any gender though not necessarily simultaneously, in the same way, or to the same degree. Overlaps with bisexuality.
- **Demisexual:** describes a person who only experiences sexual attraction to people with whom a close emotional connection has been formed. Considered to be along the spectrum of asexuality.
- **Queer:** describes a person who is not straight and/or cisgender. The term began as a slur, but has been partially reclaimed and it used as a catch-all identifier by some in the LGBTQ+ community. Others find it offensive.<sup>24</sup> Note: Should only ever be used as an adjective, never as a noun.

## Activity for Identity Development

The Gender Unicorn infographic created by Trans Student Educational Resources may help you to further understand your personal identity/identities. This graphic included on page 12 highlights the understanding that components of our identities exist along a spectrum, and that multiple identities can intersect and exist simultaneously. Plot points on the rays reflect how you understand yourself; there are no wrong answers. Below are guiding questions you might ask yourself for each section.

- **Gender Identity:** How do I understand my gender internally? How strongly do I perceive myself as a woman? How strongly do I perceive myself as genderqueer, nonbinary or another gender identity? How strongly do I perceive myself as a man?
- **Gender Expression:** How do I present my gender externally? How strongly does my gender presentation align with social and cultural expectations traditionally associated with men (masculine)? Women (feminine)? Both? Neither?
- **Sex Assigned at Birth:** What sex was assigned to my body when I was born?
- **Physically Attracted to:** Am I physically/sexually attracted to people? Who am I physically attracted to, based on their gender identity, gender expression/presentation, and sex assigned at birth? Who do I want to be physically intimate with?

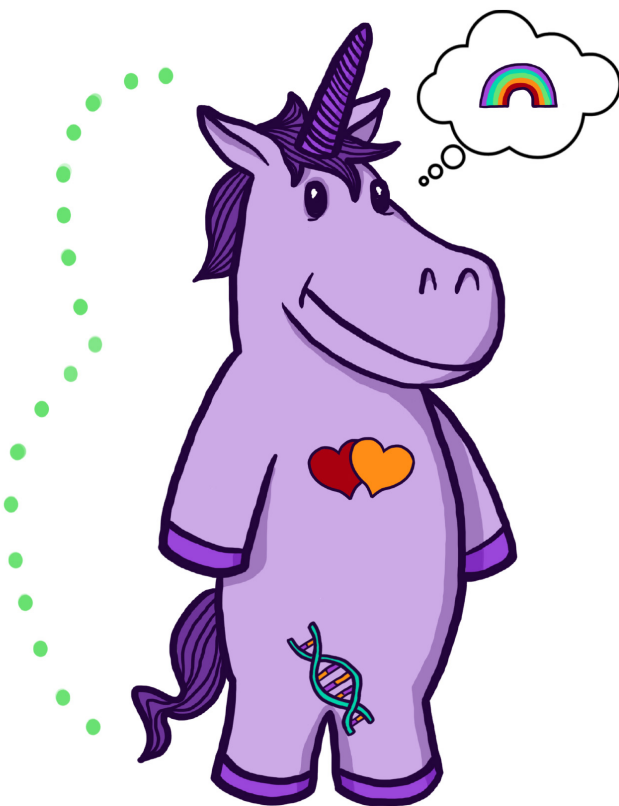
24 Harman, B.T. "Relational Guide Parents of Newly Out LGBTQ+ People." Q Christian Fellowship, n.d. <https://www.qchristian.org/guides/parents>.

- **Emotionally Attracted to:** Am I emotionally/romantically attracted to people? Who am I romantically attracted to based on their gender identity, gender expression/presentation, and sex assigned at birth? Who do I want to be emotionally intimate with?

Fill out the infographic below honestly and completely, so that you are able to understand and further develop your identities.

# The Gender Unicorn

Graphic by:  
**TSER**  
Trans Student Educational Resources



 Gender Identity

Female/Woman/Girl

Male/Man/Boy

Other Gender(s)

Gender Expression/Presentation

Feminine

Masculine

Other

 Sex Assigned at Birth

Female

Male

Other/Intersex

 Sexually Attracted To

Women

Men

Other Gender(s)

 Romantically/Emotionally Attracted To

Women

Men

Other Gender(s)

To learn more go to:  
[www.transstudent.org/gender](http://www.transstudent.org/gender)

Design by Landyn Pan



# What Does the Bible Say About Being LGBTQ+?

Now that we have a shared understanding of different components of sexual and gender identity, let us look to the Bible for guidance. You may be at a crossroads right now between what you have been taught the Bible says, and the deeply personal experiences you are having. I have been there. Approximately a year before I came out publicly, I began to look at my life against the backdrop of biblical literalism and to understand that I saw the world as black or white, right or wrong, decision after decision that either led to Heaven or Hell. To me, the central idea of Christianity was abstinence and perfectionism; it was not until I unlearned and re-conceptualized my faith that I began to develop my queer identity and sexual ethic.

Many people arrive at college simply believing what family or religious authorities have taught them. This is a normal part of identity development, and it is essential to acknowledge these external influences as you begin to sift through the teachings you have believed in the past, and to decide which teachings you will keep, discard, or re-imagine for the future.

## We Were Created for Relationships

The Bible is a story about relationships. Traditional Christian orthodoxy teaches that God exists in an eternal, triune relationship between three persons with distinct purposes: the “loving parent,”<sup>1</sup> “beloved child,”<sup>2</sup> and the “helper/advocate.”<sup>3</sup> In Genesis, after God made Heaven and Earth, God made humankind in the image of the Trinity. After creating one person, God realized it was not good for humankind to be alone, and created another person, giving us an example of a relationship between humans. From this example, we learn that interpersonal relationships help people to fulfill their purpose, protect each other from danger, and carry each other’s burdens in life.

The relationships of the Trinity and the first two people are some of the earliest biblical examples of unconditional love in the Christian faith tradition. Scripture tells us that God is love, and that anyone who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in them.<sup>4</sup> God cannot be separated from love, because

1 Genesis 1:1  
2 John 3:16-17  
3 John 14:26  
4 I John 4:16

God is love. And we cannot be separated from God, therefore we cannot be separated from love.<sup>5</sup> Some traditions teach that this love compelled God to sacrifice God's very own child to atone for the sin of humanity and reconcile humankind back to God.

## The Root of Sin

I remember as a young child in Sunday school memorizing and reciting Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." This verse teaches us that there is not one person in the world who is without sin, no matter what people may believe to be true about themselves. Later in Romans, we learn that sin yields death, but God offers us a free gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

**WE CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM GOD, THEREFORE  
WE CANNOT BE SEPARATED FROM LOVE.**

More recently, I learned the perspective that sin is a falling away from creation's purpose, forgetting who we are, and salvation is being restored to living life in remembrance of who we are. We are people, made from the dust of the ground<sup>7</sup> to take care of the earth and make sure the land will bloom.<sup>8</sup> Anything that does not produce life or bear the fruit of the Spirit is sin,<sup>9</sup> whether it is depriving other people of the basic needs of their survival, wellbeing, identity, and freedom, or destroying the natural environment; these decreation processes highlight a disconnect between God's purposes and humankind's choices. Galatians 5:22-23 teaches that there is no law against love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity or faithfulness: this is central to a biblical understanding of sin.

We were created to take care of each other and of the earth, but so many parts of our world show the evidence of the opposite. Through genocide, systemic and structural oppression, bullying, deforestation, cancel culture, and innumerable other decisions, we stopped caring for each other and make decisions that bring death more often than life. Remember, the Bible says that sin yields death, but Jesus brings life abundant.

5 Romans 8:38  
6 Romans 6:23  
7 Genesis 2:7  
8 Genesis 1:28  
9 Galatians 5:22

# The Bible on Homosexuality

One definition of the word clobber is “to pound mercilessly.”<sup>10</sup> It seems fitting, then, that the six verses typically used by Christians to condemn homosexuality are collectively called the “clobber passages.” When reading the Bible, many people come away with some binary conclusions about relationships, gender, sex, and marriage, and weaponize these conclusions against others. The six clobber passages are Genesis 9:13, Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:26-27, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, and 1 Timothy 1:9-10. These scriptures are the foundation of the anti-gay beliefs that “homosexuality is an unnatural abomination,” “gay people will not inherit the Kingdom of God and God will punish societies that tolerate LGBTQ+ activity.” A deeper study of the ancient languages and cultures reveals that these passages of Scripture were actually speaking to issues of pride, lack of hospitality, prejudice, and exploitation in times of decreation, when God’s people had forgotten their calling and started to destroy others.<sup>11</sup> Rather than give these important verses a cursory overview here, take time to complete the activity at the end of this section that gives these verses the proper attention they require.

## The Bible on Being Trans & Gender-Expansive

The pervasive idea that God-ordained romantic and sexual relationships can only exist between a cisgender man and cisgender woman is violent and destructive to the LGB community, but our trans and gender-expansive siblings are also forced to defend themselves against the belief that there are only two genders. Many Christians combine the clobber passages with other scriptures like Genesis 1:26-27 and Deuteronomy 22:5 to legitimize all manner of anti-trans violence. The queer community is not immune to these pervasive anti-trans attitudes, and trans folk are among the most marginalized within the LGBTQ+ community.

Taj Smith, a queer, binary-identified, transgender man of color, shared in [Q Christian Fellowship’s Affirmation Guide for Trans & Gender-Expansive Identities](#) about the experiences of transgender people, as well as a re-imagined perspective on Scripture and a call to live in community with others. If you are interested in learning more about trans/gender-expansive theology specifically, take time to read that Affirmation Guide alongside or after completing this guide. After identifying some of the passages most commonly used to reject queer people, the importance of knowing the true meaning of these scriptures cannot be overstated. As we seek to reconcile our sexual and gender identities with our Christian faith, we must read the Bible with an accurate understanding of the surrounding circumstances of its writing.

## Activity for Identity Development

10 *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. “clobber,” accessed July 2, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clobber>.

11 Martin, Colby. *UnClobber: Rethinking Our Misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.

After reading at least one resource from the following list, come up with an alternate perspective or “better story”<sup>12</sup> for some of the passages that you have seen weaponized against LGBTQ+ people.

[Reading Scripture with the Mind of Christ \(Center for Action and Contemplation\)](#)

[UnClobber: One Page Cheat Sheets \(Colby Martin\)](#)

[LGBTQ+ Theology 101 \(Q Christian Fellowship\)](#)

[Affirmation Guide for Trans & Gender-Expansive Identities \(Q Christian Fellowship\)](#)

12 Landis-Aina, Tonetta. “Affirmation Guide for Spirituality and Sexuality.” Q Christian Fellowship, n.d.







# Sexual Ethics

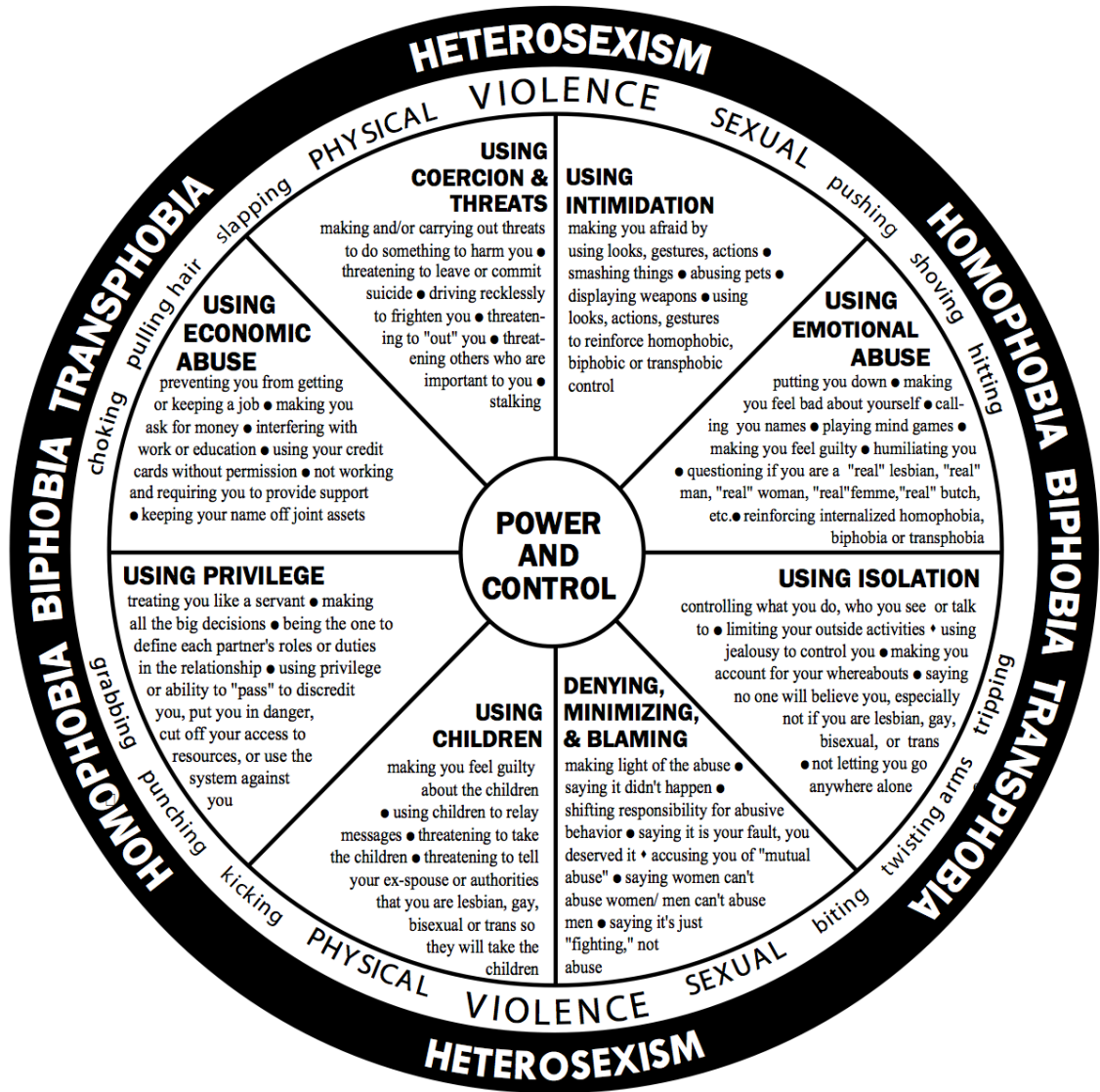
It is important that, as we spend personal time reflecting on how deeply our lives are impacted by violent interpretations of Scripture, we show ourselves grace and patience as we begin to believe the better story. For many, growing to accept the better story of the Bible influences the development of a new sexual ethic, which is a set of principles that we use to guide our decision making regarding sexual relationships. Since college students are often inundated with messaging about hookup culture and sex in general, developing your personal ethic is admittedly more difficult, but arguably more important. Your sexual ethic should flow from your understanding of God's purposes for sexual pleasure.

Reverend Tonetta Landis-Aina beautifully illustrates the considerations and criteria for developing a sexual ethic in [Q Christian Fellowship's Affirmation Guide on Sexuality & Spirituality](#). I use this framework, and include some of Rev. Landis-Aina's language, but I encourage you to read the full guide for yourself when you have the time and mental capacity to dig deep.

- **Witness:** As Christians on a college campus, it is important that your actions and choices bear witness to Christ. John 13:35 tells us that the world will know that we are disciples by the way we love one another. As you determine your sexual ethic, prayerfully consider if it bears witness to the Christ that you claim.
- **Embodied humanity:** Too often, college professors, leaders, and administrators reduce students to their minds and what knowledge they can produce and absorb. While there is a gradual move toward holistic education in classrooms, many of these practices (exercise, meditation, mindful eating) are still not seen as central to the academic mission. As Christians, we acknowledge the importance of both our bodily and spiritual selves and have an opportunity to bring that understanding onto the campus. Remembering the connection between your body and spirit is crucial for determining your sexual ethic so that you remain holistically healthy.
- **Rules and Principles:** Determining your sexual ethic is largely personal, and taking the time to develop your own personal guidelines can help you to be more responsible. College is a place where you have a lot of individual freedom, but the code of student conduct or academic integrity policies will tell you which lines not to cross. Outside of college, there are still rules and laws that tell us which lines not to cross, yet most daily decisions will be based only on our principles.

As LGBTQ+ Christian college students, you can see some of the necessary principles beginning to come

to light if you look at the hiring practices, student activism, and student programming on campus. For example, sexual health and sexual violence prevention are big topics on many college campuses today.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the LGBTQ+ Power and Control Wheel below can serve as a point of reference and offer examples of behaviors that may manifest themselves when we do not live out a faithful sexual ethic. In the “Sexuality and Spirituality Guide,” Rev. Landis-Aina goes in-depth about nine criteria that we can use to evaluate a faithful sexual ethic. From this Guide, I have formulated brief overviews and questions that we can ask ourselves to determine if our sexual ethic is a faithful one.



- **Vulnerability:** A faithful sexual ethic will help you to replace shame and invite vulnerability into your life. *Does your sexual ethic help you to let down the emotional walls and defenses in your heart?*

1 Dills, Jenny, Dawn Fowler, and Gayle Payne. “Sexual Violence on Campus: Strategies for Prevention.” Atlanta, Georgia: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, November 2016. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/campusvprevention.pdf>.

- **Do No Unjust Harm:** A faithful sexual ethic will not cause unjust harm to your partner(s). *Does your sexual ethic actively work to eliminate violence between intimate partners?*
- **Free consent:** A faithful sexual ethic is one where all people involved are enthusiastically consenting to sex. *Does your sexual ethic require continuous consent from all parties at all times?*
- **Mutuality:** A faithful sexual ethic does not cement people into default roles, but allows you the space to offer what you have to give and to receive from others at various times and in various ways based on the unique relationship(s). *Does your sexual ethic default you into prescribed roles based on gender or gender expression without regard for the personhood and needs of those involved?*
- **Equality:** A faithful sexual ethic prioritizes and reinforces equality as a requirement for ethical intimacy and sex. Imbalances of power and privilege are eliminated or discussed to prevent abuse. *Does your sexual ethic reduce risks of abuses of power and exploitation?*
- **Commitment:** A faithful sexual ethic requires some level of commitment and mutually agreed-upon boundaries. *Does your sexual ethic prioritize intentional intimacy for the purposes of kinship and community?*
- **Fruitfulness:** A faithful sexual ethic produces goodness in the relationship that can be reproduced outside of it. *What fruit does your sexual ethic produce? How does your sexual ethic benefit others beyond you and your partners?*
- **Social Justice:** A faithful sexual ethic requires us to actively fight systems that are emotionally and physically harmful to people. *Does your sexual ethic help you to reject and resist oppression and violence in your everyday interactions?*
- **Concern:** A faithful sexual ethic requires us to care for those we are intimate with and reject the notion that they are simply bodies or willing participants. *How does your sexual ethic help you to see your partner as a whole person with feelings, thoughts, needs, and fears?*

“  
Your sexual ethic  
should flow from  
your understanding  
of God’s purposes  
for sexual pleasure.

As you reflect on the answers to these questions, you may find that your sexual ethic is not meeting certain criteria. This is an opportunity for you to integrate what you understand about God's purposes for sexual pleasure as you re-evaluate what a faithful sexual ethic can look like for you.



# Putting Principles Into Action: LGBTQ+ Theology

With a greater understanding of the considerations and criteria for developing a personal sexual ethic, we can analyze some of the common postures that LGBTQ+ Christians assume. As we go through the differing postures, remember that there is room for everyone at God’s table, and we are all on our individual journeys to living righteously. The eunuchs described in the Bible may serve as a helpful example—eunuchs were servants who had their testicles removed so to prevent them from being a sexual interest or threat to the royal women. In Deuteronomy, it is written, “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose male organ is cut off shall enter the assembly of the Lord.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, in Jeremiah, God speaks to a eunuch and says, “For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war because you have put your trust in me.”<sup>2</sup> Here we see that eunuchs went from being rejected and condemned to welcomed and affirmed. In the same way, we can reevaluate our rejection and condemnation of LGBTQ+ people in the church. God may be unchanging, but we can grow in our understanding of God. Today, there are several theological perspectives on LGBTQ+ issues. These viewpoints can be broadly described as Side A, Side B, and Side X, although many may find that their theology fits somewhere in-between or beyond these definitions.

## Ex-Gay/Once Gay (Side X)<sup>3</sup>

Ex-gay theology is used to describe any theology that compels or encourages individuals to renounce their affections or their view of their own personhood in order to appease God or be more like Jesus. This includes, but is not limited to, encouraging individuals with what is often termed “same-sex attraction” to pursue pastoral counseling, “talk therapy” or clinical therapy to help diminish or extinguish attraction towards individuals of the same gender. This is most often coupled with the belief that only heterosexual relationships are righteous in the eyes of God and that “same-sex attracted” individuals should desire and pursue a heterosexual marriage.

1 Deuteronomy 23:1

2 Jeremiah 39:15-18

3 In 2009, the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (with the involvement of Mark Yarhouse, professor at Regent University) concluded that efforts to change sexual orientation and gender identity are unlikely to produce anticipated outcomes and can pose unintended harmful side effects to participants, such as a sense of having wasted time and resources, confusion, shame, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, loss of faith, decreased self-esteem and authenticity towards others, increased self-hatred and negative perceptions, social withdrawal, a feeling of being dehumanized and untrue to self, depression, increased substance abuse and high-risk sexual behaviors, and suicidality (The Trevor Project).

Individuals who are trans, nonbinary or gender nonconforming are encouraged to pursue traditionally “masculine” or “feminine” gender roles that align with the social gender assigned to them at birth. Views on “Christian” gender expression, in terms of what is and is not acceptable clothing or aesthetic presentation for men or women, may vary. Those with gender dysphoria are also encouraged to seek out pastoral counseling or clinical therapy to alienate themselves from their innate gender experience and conform to the socially expected gendered self-perception. Proponents of ex-gay theology would typically say that God’s will and natural design is for “men to be men” (Adam) and “women to be women” (Eve).

Within the medical, psychiatric and QCF communities, along with many affirming Christian communities, Ex-gay, Once-gay or Side X theology is considered to be fundamentally detrimental to the spiritual, emotional and physical well being of LGBTQ+ people. More about the impact of conversion therapy practices on the LGBTQ+ Christian community can be found through Q Christian’s advocacy ministry, [UNCHANGED](#).

**EX-GAY, ONCE-GAY, AND SIDE X THEOLOGY  
IS FUNDAMENTALLY DETRIMENTAL TO THE  
SPIRITUAL, EMOTIONAL, AND PHYSICAL WELL-  
BEING OF LGBTQ+ PEOPLE.**

## Celibacy-Affirming (Side B)

“Side B” describes any theology which affirms LGBTQ+ identities, yet maintains that Christians should refrain from same-gender sex for a variety of personal and/or theological reasons. This includes single, celibate LGBTQ+ Christians, as well as those in celibate partnerships with other side B Christians, and mixed-orientation marriages with straight partners.

A person may recognize, and even celebrate, that they are and may always be gay, lesbian or bisexual, or same-sex attracted, and still adhere to a “traditional” view of marriage, and of sex as designed only for one man and one woman within marriage. Some Side B people also advocate for same-sex partnerships and marriage as a civil right, while choosing not to exercise that right themselves. Often, Side B LGBTQ+ people do not consider celibacy to be a universal mandate for all queer people, but believe it to be a personal conviction or calling from God.

Side B theology does not assert that LGBTQ+ people should strive to become heterosexual or seek out a heterosexual marriage to become a Christian or appease God. Most of those with Side B theology also allow for acceptance of the identity language of gay, lesbian and bisexual, although some prefer to use the term same-sex attracted. Within the QCF community, “celibacy-affirming” or “Side B” theology are positions reserved for LGBTQ+ identifying people.<sup>4</sup>

## Same-Gender Sex-Affirming (Side A)

“Side A” describes any theology which fully affirms both LGBTQ+ identities and same-gender sex and marriage. Side A theology affirms same-gender romantic relationships, marriage and sex as good and acceptable to God. Side A theology also recognizes that celibacy may be freely chosen for many reasons, including by individuals who identify along the spectrum of asexuality. Individuals within this theological framework may hold a broad range of sexual ethics, as described below:

- **Reserving sex for marriage:** Many Christians ascribe to the belief that sex, as a powerful force that unites people, was designed by God to be experienced only in the lifelong commitment of marriage. Though non-affirming Christians only believe this applies to a marriage between a man and a woman, LGBTQ+ Christians who reserve sex for marriage believe that Scripture affirms this posture for all people.
- **Sex apart from marriage:** Many Christians who embrace sexual relationships apart from marriage believe that sexual intimacy is part of a holistically healthy life. Prioritizing the criteria of commitment, these Christians believe that extended intimacy and exclusivity are the appropriate conditions for sex.<sup>5</sup>
- **Nonmonogamy:** Christians whose sexual ethic leads them to nonmonogamy reject the belief that sex has to occur within an exclusive relationship between two people, on the principle that this implies sex entitles one to control over another.<sup>6</sup> These Christians define intimacy, mutuality and partnerships in various personal ways, and do not believe that monogamy is a requirement for relationships, or the people in them, to flourish.

4 The theology of straight, cisgender individuals who affirm the existence of LGBTQ+ identities, but adhere to a “traditional” view of marriage and sex as designed for one man and one woman, is better described as “non-affirming.” Non-affirming theology may functionally be Ex-Gay/Once-Gay or Side X in practice.

5 QCF Affirmation Guide Spirituality and Sexuality.

6 Franklin Veaux and Eve Rickert, *More Than Two: A Practical Guide to Ethical Polyamory* (Portland: Thorntree Press, 2014).



# Shame, Sexuality, & Self-Care

Shame is the feeling or belief that you—not your behavior or action—are wrong,<sup>1</sup> and it is a common experience for queer folks who grew up hearing that it was wrong to be LGBTQ+. Shame researcher Brene Brown writes, “I don’t believe shame is helpful or productive. In fact, I think shame is much more likely to be the source of destructive, hurtful behavior than the solution or cure. I think the fear of disconnection can make us dangerous.”<sup>2</sup> Shame is highly correlated with addiction, depression, eating disorders, violence, bullying, and aggression.<sup>3</sup> It is easier to mask these behaviors in college when anxiety, depression, relationships, and substance use are the top issues for all students.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the destructive and hurtful ways that shame manifests can have serious consequences beyond college, but identifying and uprooting shame will make a lasting change in your relationship with yourself and your relationships with others. The campus resources included on page 36 can be useful as you begin to unpack shame in your life.

- **Therapy and Counseling:** Most colleges and universities provide counseling services to enrolled students navigating difficult life experiences without additional cost. Discovering, embracing, or developing an LGBTQ+ identity and sexual ethic within the context of Christianity is a difficult life experience, and a supportive mental health professional can help you to navigate your path. Some campuses even have walk-in hours and support groups exclusively for LGBTQ+ people, so that you can feel safe and respected during the process. If your college/university does not affirm LGBTQ+ identities,<sup>5</sup> you may have to find a therapist outside of the campus counseling center. Some mental health professionals practice (implicitly or explicitly) violent forms of therapy such as conversion or reparative therapy which are statistically and empirically proven to be unsuccessful.<sup>6</sup> Other resources to be aware of are a local LGBTQ Center and Trevor Project’s Suicide Prevention Hotline. Never hesitate to reach out for help from safe, affirming medical and

1 Good Therapy. “Shame.” Good Therapy, September 27, 2019.

<https://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/shame>.

2 Brown, Brene. “Blog.” shame v. guilt, January 14, 2013. <https://brenbrown.com/blog/2013/01/14/shame-v-guilt/>.

3 Winfrey, Oprah, and Brene Brown. *Oprah’s Super Soul Conversations*. Daring Greatly, n.d. Accessed July 2, 2020.

4 Mistler, Bryan, David Reetz, Brian Krylowicz, and Victor Barr. “The Association for University and College Center Directors Annual Survey.” Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors, 2012.

[http://files.cmcglobal.com/Monograph\\_2012\\_AUCCCD\\_Public.pdf](http://files.cmcglobal.com/Monograph_2012_AUCCCD_Public.pdf).

5 Campus Pride publishes the Campus Pride Index and Worst List that can help you understand how your school does or does not affirm LGBTQ+ students.

6 Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. “Report of the American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation.” American Psychological Association, 2009. <http://www.apa.org/pi/lgbcc/publications/therapeutic-resp.html>.



mental health professionals, especially if you are experiencing thoughts of self-harm or suicidal ideation. [Crisis Resources can be found on the Q Christian website if you need immediate help.](#)

- **Spiritual Practices:** Reclaiming and reimagining your spirituality is a big part of combating shame, since religious misinformation may be the basis for much of the condemnation and rejection you have experienced. Your campus may have a chapel, religious student center, or interfaith service that you can attend; but corporate worship is only part of the reclamation process. Reading the Scriptures, journaling, praying, meditating, and listening to worship or gospel music are several ways to reconnect with God’s love for you. You can even post affirmations on your bathroom mirror, reminding yourself that you are loved, worthy, and chosen by God.
- **Daily Routines:** A daily routine is an important part of uprooting shame, because a lack of supportive structure can result in our outer world matching our internal dialogue’s chaos.<sup>7</sup> In a season of self-discovery that can feel like relearning everything you ever knew and rebuilding yourself from the ground up, basic routines can go a long way. Your routine may be to wake up, shower, exercise, eat and go to class, and though it may sound simple, doing those five things consistently can help you to maintain normalcy and a sense of certainty when everything else feels uncertain. Create a routine that is as consistent and flexible as you need it to be for your life on and off campus, and stick to it. On your difficult and low-energy days, your routine will help you to maintain self-care.

There may also be days when you are not able to maintain your routine, and it is important to give yourself grace and reserve harsh judgment. It takes a lot of energy to tend to your inner life, and it is wise to listen when your body tells you it needs a break.



**Reclaiming and reimagining your spirituality is a big part of combating shame.**

7 Cherry, Kendra. “The Importance of Maintaining Structure and Routine During Stressful Times.” Verywell Mind, April 21, 2020. <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-importance-of-keeping-a-routine-during-stressful-times-4802638>.



# Navigating Tough Conversations

For many, coming out as LGBTQ+ can bring a sense of mental relief and emotional peace. At a community level, each time an LGBTQ+ person comes out, it increases visible representation and lessens anti-gay and anti-trans attitudes.<sup>1</sup> While coming out has many positive benefits, not everyone has the privilege to do so. As a college student, relying on your family for housing, food, tuition, transportation, or your cell phone bill may impede your ability to come out, and that is a completely valid reason to remain closeted. Many people do not engage in this conversation until they are certain that they can provide for themselves and establish love and belonging outside of the relationships they might lose. If you are debating how you will continue in college because coming out will cost your survival, safety, or love and belonging, take a breath, and remember that this journey is your own. But your primary responsibility at this time is your survival, health, and education. Though you cannot prevent resistance from the people in your life, the following pages and activities are designed to help you prepare for potential outcomes during the coming out process with non-affirming family members and friends.

## Establishing Healthy Boundaries

Lack of support or rejection from our loved ones can be a painful experience that makes us feel unworthy and powerless. Many LGBTQ+ Christians may experience additional pressure to “honor your parents” and “turn the other cheek.” These common Christian instructions become violent when they are used to coerce LGBTQ+ people to sustain active relationships with people who reject all or part of our humanity. Even if our non-affirming loved ones are “tolerant” or “accepting,” it can be self-injurious to maintain such a relationship without adequate boundaries.

When establishing my own boundaries, I use a tool that I developed six years ago after a conversation with my therapist. The foundation of the tool is the tabernacle that God instructed Moses to build at Mount Sinai. The tabernacle was a sanctuary created for God, and God’s Spirit appeared and dwelled in the innermost part. The innermost part of the tabernacle was called the Holy of Holies, and only the High Priest could enter this space, once per year. There was also an inner court or Holy Place where the regular priests could go, and an outer court where the common people gathered.

I use this framework to place the people in my life into one of three categories, the Holy of Holies, the

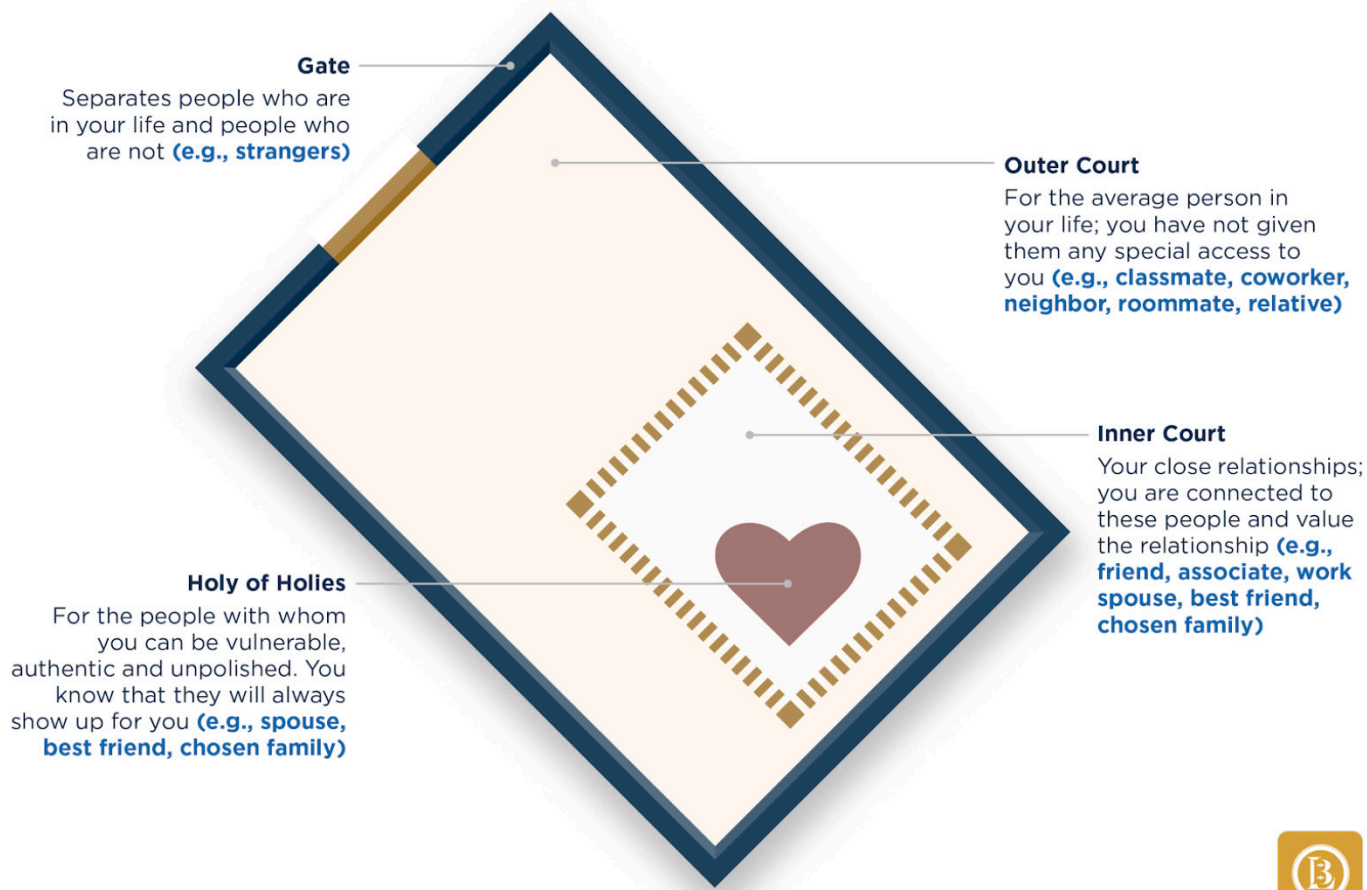
1 Human Rights Campaign. “Celebrate National Coming Out Day with HRC!” HRC.org, 2016.  
<https://www.hrc.org/resources/national-coming-out-day>.

Inner Court or the Outer Court. Categorizing them in this way helps me to moderate their access to my heart, time, and personal information—everyone does not get access to all of me. I define the Holy of Holies as the place I keep my deepest and most personal thoughts, feelings, dreams, goals, fears, pains and sensitivities; very few people have access to this part of me. The Inner Court is a place where I express my current goals, life lessons, joys, plans, stressors and hurt—only people I have close, affirming relationships with have access. The outer court is where people see the highlights and lowlights of my life—a large number of people have this level of access to me. The determining factors for who gets what level of access have changed quite drastically over the last six years that I have been using this tool. When I first started, I remember only having the Holy of Holies and the Inner Court, and well over 120 people listed. As I have learned more about myself, the list has gotten much shorter, and I place people in each of the three categories as well as outside of the gate.

As a queer Christian, I have experienced emotional and psychological violence from people in my life, and my boundaries have helped me to prioritize my peace. Today, when I experience hate or violence from an individual, I decide my response based on how important and intentional my relationship with that person is. I complete the tabernacle exercise at least once per year, and I cross out, rearrange and delete as necessary.

## Personal Tabernacle by Lorae Bonamy

Clear boundaries are essential to healthy interpersonal relationships. Use this worksheet to define and visualize boundaries with people in your life.



# Activity for Identity Development

To help you begin working on your own boundaries, a blank version of the Tabernacle framework is included below. Use this tool to create a visual representation of the people in your life, how close they are to you, and the criteria for the various levels of access.

## Understanding Rejection and Relational Change

As you continue to engage with the development of your sexual and gender identities, your relationships will inevitably change. While dynamics may shift in hurtful ways with some people in your life, you could also find yourself developing deep and fulfilling relationships that you never knew could exist. Something that is incredibly important to remember during this season is that you are worthy and deserving of deep, mutually-beneficial relationships. There are some LGBTQ+ Christians who are estranged from their families, others who have separated from decades-long friendships, and others who experienced little to no loss when coming out. How you navigate relationships to protect yourself is specific to you and will not occur on a set schedule, so it is important to be prepared.

## Emergency Plan

As LGBTQ+ people, we often have to come out again and again in different spaces, because we are sometimes situated in both safe and affirming spaces and unsafe and violent spaces. Creating a plan to follow if you are accidentally or intentionally outed can help to reduce your anxiety and bring you peace. Consider this simple emergency plan, built on a five-step framework created by Minus18<sup>2</sup> below.

- ***Come out (again):*** Using a social media status or quick comment or text message, you can show confidence (even if it is not 100% comfortable) in your identity. This shows people that you are not ashamed.
- ***Talk to the people who matter:*** Talk to the close people in your life about what your identity means to you, and what your relationship with them means to you. This is a chance to get clarity and support or begin practicing boundaries. Do not defend yourself to those who are not close to you.
- ***Keep active:*** Just like self-care is important to uproot shame, it is especially important to prioritize your holistic health when experiencing being outed.
- ***Make new friends or networks:*** Understanding that we are created for relationships and

2 <https://www.minus18.org.au/articles/what-to-do-if-you've-been-outed-before-you're-ready>

community, leaning on people for support is crucial. If the people around you are not supportive, find friends and networks who will be. Consider joining one of [Q Christian Fellowship's Community Groups](#) which center radical belonging for LGBTQ+ people.

- **Recognize if things get too hard and seek help:** Remember, you do not have to go through this alone. Reach out to the counseling center or affirming community mental health professionals if you are at a non-affirming school. There are people whose jobs are to help you get through tough times; make sure you connect with them.

## Navigating Difficult Conversations

The difficulty of re-imagining Scripture with an affirming perspective is increased when you feel responsible for educating the people in your life. Living in healthy communities is paramount, not only for your faith journey, but for your psychological and cognitive health.<sup>3</sup> This section offers conversation strategies for your reference as you prepare to begin or revisit these conversations in your life.

**YOU ARE WORTHY AND DESERVING OF DEEP,  
MUTUALLY-BENEFICIAL RELATIONSHIPS.**

## Conversation Tools

Effective communication is the answer to many of our relational issues today, but few of us understand how to communicate effectively. As I write this, I am looking at a post-it note on my workstation that says, “Ask the question you really have,” which is advice my fiancée’s therapist gave me to be a better communicator. As Paul was the worst of sinners, sometimes I feel I am the worst of communicators.<sup>4</sup> There are, however, opportunities for improvement in communicating with others in ways that still protect your own emotional well-being.

- **Indisputability of Feelings:** In conversations full of oppositional ideas, it is important that we center on what cannot be argued; otherwise, it will turn into a debate. How you feel cannot be argued, and this is a good place to begin in difficult conversations with the people around you. A tool that I use to lead conversations with my feelings is an emotions list my therapist gave me;

3 Novotney, Amy. “The Risks of Social Isolation.” *Monitor on Psychology*, 2019.  
<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/05/ce-corner-isolation>.

4 I Timothy 1:12-17

some people prefer a feelings wheel, and others prefer card decks; you should use whatever works for you. Before you begin a difficult conversation, identify what you are feeling and how you will communicate that. For example, “I feel rejected when I talk to you about my partner and you do not respond.” Instead of telling the person that they are wrong for not responding to you and putting them on the defensive, you are simply telling them how you feel. From here, you can come up with a healthier communication dynamic together.

- ***Appropriately Directed Anger:*** In the example above, the issue is not the person who does not respond; it is either the lack of a response or the feelings of rejection. Misdirected anger occurs when we begin to lose sight of the specific relational issue, and position ourselves against the person as a whole. Our conversations about sexuality and spirituality are occurring against the backdrop of a religion centered on the idea of a parent sacrificing their perfect child as an act of love. It is likely that our relative, friend, or faith community leader is negotiating questions like, “Is it wrong to ask about my LGBTQ+ loved one’s relationship?”, “Is it bad to tell my LGBTQ+ loved one not to talk to me about their relationship?”, or even “Is giving my LGBTQ+ loved one relationship advice equivalent to supporting homosexuality?” Some of my loved ones have told me that they are negotiating these very questions, and I have to remind myself that this is about their walk with God and their own belief framework, and often their entire world view; it is not about their love for me. It is hard to show grace in the face of violent and inflammatory words and actions, but identifying the root cause of our conflict can save us time and energy.
- ***Unity of Means and Ends:*** “The ends justify the means” is a common English proverb, but it is often proved untrue in difficult communication. The understanding that God loves and affirms us wholly as LGBTQ+ people brings a call to radical acceptance of others. We are still called to love because God first loved us, and just as we do not want to be ridiculed or torn down for who we are, who we love or what we believe, we do not have a license to tear down others’ humanity. If our end goal is a world where all people are fully loved and reconciled to Christ, we have to choose methods that bring life and bear fruit.<sup>5</sup>
- ***Boundaries Around Topics:*** Not every conversation is ready to be discussed. Sometimes loved ones demand answers but are unwilling to truly listen. Do not shout into the void. Tell them when you are not willing to continue a given conversation at that time or without a group counselor present.

5 Galtung, Johan. “Cultural Violence.” *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 3 (August 1990): 290–305.  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/423472>.



# Navigating LGBTQ+ Policies at Non-Affirming Universities

Though many colleges and universities are becoming more inclusive, there is still a high level of exclusion, particularly in athletics, residence life and fraternity/sorority life. Many of these functional areas are built on binary ideas of bodies, romance and friendship, and so their policies, while often not intentionally exclusive, are harmful to queer students. In addition to policies that officially sanction exclusion of LGBTQ+ students, there are also unsanctioned, informal institutional practices and programs that produce the same outcome of exclusion.

LGBTQ+ student activism has proven to be effective,<sup>1</sup> but at Christian universities it can be extremely complicated. While it is unlikely that you chose to attend your school to be an activist, as an LGBTQ+ student, you may find yourself desiring change. Whether advocating for gender-neutral restrooms, self-selecting pronouns or inclusive housing, it often comes down to public image and economic impact. Institutions of higher education are unlikely to uproot the white, heteronormative, Christian supremacy woven into their founding until there is enough external pressure.<sup>2</sup>

For students at schools with anti-LGBTQ+ policies, finding a therapist that affirms your LGBTQ+ identity is essential for your mental health and overall college experience. Some schools require students to sign community contracts that forbid homosexual relationships and behavior; this sends a severely damaging message. Since transferring to a more LGBTQ+-affirming school is not always an option, it is critical that you have a network of supportive people around you while you are enrolled.

Another way to navigate this experience is to try to increase LGBTQ+ equity and inclusion on your campus. Consider the following strategies, based on SoulForce's campus organizing toolkit:<sup>3</sup>

- **Research your school's values and policies:** The mission, vision and strategic plan of a school can tell you what the school leadership believes, and help you to point out values incongruence. Sometimes, the campus community creates a hostile and unwelcoming environment that is far from the university vision. Once you know what your school stands for, you can hold them

1 Wheatle, Katherine, and Felecia Commodore. "Reaching Back to Move Forward: The Historic and Contemporary of Student Activism in the Development and Implementation of Higher Policy." *The Review of Higher Education* 42, no. Special Issue 2019 (n.d.): 5–35. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2019.0043>.

2 Ibid.

3 Soulforce Campus Organizing Toolkit, page 2, Downloaded August 8th, 2020, <https://www.soulforce.org/about-us>.

accountable.

- **File incidents of discrimination:** Holding your school accountable might look like filing reports of discrimination with any campus or local entities as well as the Department of Education. Your school may have a team to work on hate/bias incidents or issues of civil rights and sexual misconduct; make sure you are reporting all incidents you are aware of so that there is an official record.
- **File complaints with accreditation agencies:** Your school has to meet the legal and ethical codes of conduct with the agencies that approve them to grant degrees. Knowing the expectations of these agencies and filing complaints for unmet expectations can provide a major source of support to students.
- **Organize:** Use your voice and your network to share what is happening on campus and get others to support you. Lambda Legal, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) are three nonprofit organizations that lobby and advocate for LGBTQ+ issues; organizations like this can be a great resource and inspiration to student activists. Social media campaigns, fundraisers, sit-ins, marches, walk-outs and protests are other methods of direct action that can influence change on campus.

Navigating your LGBTQ+ identity at a Christian college is a very complex process, especially if your school has anti-LGBTQ+ policies. Connecting with other people is essential to your ability to thrive.







# Finding Community in College

C.S. Lewis said “Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival.”<sup>1</sup> This definition of friendship speaks to the way community adds to our lived experience, and makes the difficult journey of life a little bit sweeter. As relational beings, we are created not only for the vertical relationship with God, but also for horizontal relationships with our fellow humans: friendships, romantic relationships, mentoring relationships and more. As LGBTQ+ people, living authentically in our sexual and gender identities may have cost us some of our most treasured relationships, but take heart: God places the lonely in families.<sup>2</sup> When our earthly parents forsake us, God will take us in.<sup>3</sup>

It is a blessing to know that we are never alone in Christ, but it would be irresponsible not to acknowledge the pain of loneliness that LGBTQ+ people sometimes experience. As far back as I can remember, I have been fascinated by the idea of close friendship. This innate interest led me down a winding road to my current job, which is all about helping college students create communities that are safe, inclusive, transformative, and sustainable—you may know them as fraternities and sororities. There are several prerequisites to successful communities, and some of the following suggestions may help you to find your community and chosen family during college.

- **Know your values:** College is a place where you can recreate yourself time and time again and be whoever you want to be. There is something for everyone, and if you do not know what you are looking for, you may find yourself going along with the activities your roommates or classmates want to do. The next activity is designed to help you develop, further solidify or rethink your personal values.

## Activity for Identity Development

You may have seen a crest on your state flag, or any Harry Potter merchandise; or maybe your family has their crest proudly displayed above the mantle. In this activity, you will reflect on the things that are of the utmost importance to you and that give your life meaning. As always, feel free to use the method that works best for you. If you are a visual learner, a blank graphic of a crest is available on the following page to draw/write something that represents your expression of your values. Think about the following

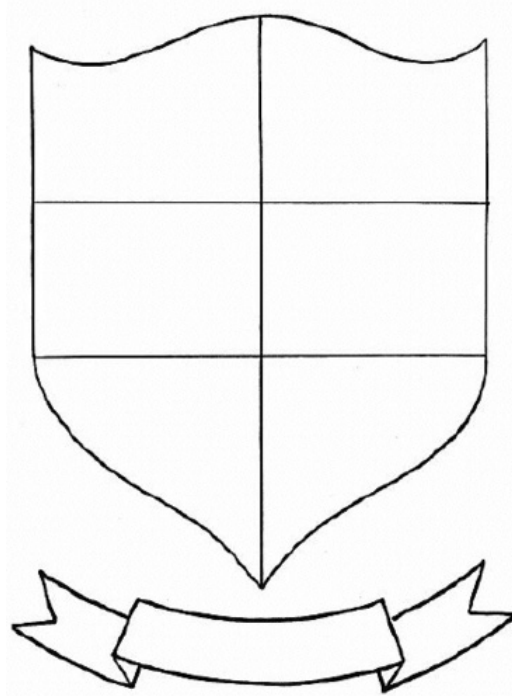
1 Lewis, C.S. *The Four Loves*. 1st ed. Harvest Book. Harvest Books, 1971.

2 Psalm 68:6

3 Psalm 27:10

questions as you create your crest:

- What is something important to you?
- What kind of person do you want to be?
- Who are you to your loved ones?
- What motto or quote do you live by?
- How will you change the world?



- **Seek out your people:** After you have gained more clarity about who you are and who you want to be, it will be helpful for you to have people to go along the journey with you. Colleges and universities have several built-in ways for you to find community, but you have to do the work and show up. Whether your school is operating in-person or virtually, you can:
  - Attend programs that interest you (in a residence hall, outside, at the student union or via video-conferencing).
  - Sign up for volunteer events.
  - Attend the student organization fair.

- Search your interests on the student activities/student organizations website.
- Follow the organizations you are interested in on social media.

If you are interested in campus ministries, gospel choirs, or bible studies, it would be beneficial for you to look into Christian student organizations affiliated with denominations that affirm LGBTQ+ folks. If your campus has a chapel or chaplaincy program, you can email the staff members for more information on groups that would be a good fit for you.

Lastly, many campuses have some variation of a Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity with trained staff who are your go-to people for LGBTQ+ resources, issues, and support on campus.

- **Join an affirming church:** Though I never had the privilege of a faith community that affirmed my queer identity in college, the community I found in my adulthood changed my life tremendously. I could not have fathomed how it would feel to walk into a church and see the radical love of Christ on display. When we entered the sanctuary, my partner and I were greeted by ushers who smiled at us. During the welcome, the Reverend came down from the pulpit to greet us by name and shake our hands. The church members recited the vision statement, which talked about building an inclusive community full of love, service, and fellowship. I held hands with my partner while a young teenager stood at the pulpit and prayed for our LGBTQ+ siblings who were at the World Pride Parade. These were all starkly different from my experiences at non-affirming churches, where people stared and all of my energy was spent thinking about what others were thinking about me.



**Look into Christian student organizations affiliated with denominations that affirm LGBTQ+ folks.**

The affirmation of a faith community allows you to be fully present for everything else. Your physiological and safety needs are met, which enables you to pursue love and belonging (community) at church.<sup>4</sup> As you pursue these relationships, you will receive help learning about God, positive influences and accountability partners, and people who care about you when you are not there. Joining an affirming church will also give you the opportunity to serve God's people and grow as a follower of Christ.<sup>5</sup> You will begin to experience your chosen family and faith family

<sup>4</sup> Maslow, Abraham. *Motivation and Personality*. 3rd ed. Delhi, India: Pearson Education, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Bonamy, Lorae. "Servant/Queen." Why You Need a Church Home in (and after) College, August 22, 2015.

all at once.

- ***Join or create an online community:*** If you are at a school that does not have safe spaces for LGBTQ+ people, you can also find online communities through organizations like Q Christian Fellowship, chat rooms through the OurBible app, and groups on Facebook. Online communities serve as powerful counter-spaces for marginalized people, and can curb some of the effects of isolation.

Social media is also a good way to experience a virtual community and feel more hopeful, understood and known. It may be beneficial for you to curate your social media to follow pages that affirm your identity and edify you spiritually. Even if your favorite artists, celebrities or pastors only post anti-gay messages 10% of the time, that experience of rejection is violent and can make you feel unsafe. Unfollow people and pages that condemn, reject, or ridicule your identity; your mental and spiritual health is worth it. You can find suggestions of pages to follow in the Christianity and LGBTQ+ Resource List in Section 11.

<http://www.loraebonamy.com/servantqueen/church>.



# The Beginning of Wisdom

You made it to the end of the guide! While you have likely learned more about your identities, theology, and next steps, recognize that you are a life-long learner. Be hungry for more, and take time to read the additional resources mentioned in this guide and seek out community opportunities with other LGBTQ+ Christians. The process of forming an LGBTQ+ Christian identity is all about learning, unlearning and re-imagining until we figure out how we best glorify God in our individual lives.

Reading this guide may have been your very first encounter with certain concepts, and that is wonderful. You get to decide how to incorporate that into what you already knew or believed. This guide is not a formula, and the flow of the sections may not be how your process goes; allow yourself to be guided by what you know of God and your journey with Them.

**THE PROCESS OF FORMING AN LGBTQ+ CHRISTIAN IDENTITY IS ALL ABOUT LEARNING, UNLEARNING, AND RE-IMAGINING.**

In the following pages you will find resources for further study, contemplation, identity development and community building. As you engage with the resources that speak to you, your personal process will continue to take shape and bring you love, peace, clarity and gratitude.

“The beginning of wisdom is this: get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.”<sup>1</sup>

1 Proverbs 4:7 NIV



# Resources

The original list was curated by Stephanie Linquist (@sjlinquist on twitter/instagram), and updated by Jo Luehmann (@joluehmann on twitter/instagram). Additional resources have been added that have been beneficial to me in my journey (@loraevb on twitter/instagram) and to others within the Q Christian Fellowship community (along with some additional edits by the team).

## Theological Books

*God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Marriages* (Matthew Vines)  
*Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* (Austen Hartke)  
*Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate in Same-Sex Relationships* (James V. Brownson)  
*The Bible's Yes to Same-Sex Marriage: An Evangelical's Change of Heart* (Mark Achtemeier)  
*UnClobber: Rethinking Our Misuse of the Bible on Homosexuality* (Colby Martin)

## Academic Books

*Liberating Sexuality* (Miguel A. De la Torre)  
*Our Lives Matter* (Pamela Lightsey)  
*Radical Love: Introduction to Queer Theology* (Patrick Cheng)  
*Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Bernadette J. Brooten)  
*Activist Theology* (Dr. Robyn Henderson-Espinoza)  
*Visions of Sodom: Religion, Homoerotic Desire, and the End of the World in England, c. 1550-1850* (H. G. Cocks)  
*Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Heather R. White)  
*The Invention of Sodomy in Christian Theology* (Mark D. Jordan)  
*Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (C. Riley Snorton)

## Christian Living

*One Coin Found: How God's Love Stretches to the Margins* (Rev. Emmy Kegler)  
*Walking the Bridgeless Canyon: Repairing the Breach Between the Church and the LGBT Community* (Kathy Baldock)  
*Queer Virtue: What LGBTQ People Know about Life and Love and How it Can Revitalize Christianity*

(Elizabeth M. Edman)

*God's Beloved Queer: Identity, Spirituality, and Practice* (Rolf Nolasco)

*Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity* (Fr. James Martin)

*Rescuing Jesus: How People of Color, Women and Queer Christians are Reclaiming Evangelicalism* (Deborah Jian Lee)

*Outside the Lines: How Embracing Queerness Will Transform Your Faith* (Rev. Mihee Kim-Kort)

*Solus Jesus* (Emily Swan and Ken Wilso)

*Modern Kinship: A Queer Guide to Christian Marriage* (Constantino and David Khalaf)

*Unashamed: A Coming Out Guide for LGBTQ Christians* (Amber Cantorna)

## Memoirs

*Embracing the Journey* (Greg And Lynn McDonald)

*Undivided: Coming Out, Becoming Whole, Living Free From Shame* (Vicky Beeching)

*Kenyan, Christian, Queer: Religion, LGBT Activism, and Arts of Resistance in Africa* (Adriaan van Klinken)

*Bayard and Martin: A Historical Novel About Friendship and the Civil Rights Movement* (Frederick Williams, Lane Denton, and Sterling Zinsmeyer)

*Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate* (Justin Lee)

*Does Jesus Really Love Me? A Gay Christian's Pilgrimage in Search of God in America* (Rev. Jeff Chu)

*Filled with the Spirit: Sexuality, Gender, and Radical Inclusivity in a Black Pentecostal Church Coalition* (Ellen Lewin)

## YouTube & Podcasts

["On Being Gay and Christian"](#) (Jo Luehmann)

["A Womanist Queer Theology"](#) (Wipf and Stock Publishers)

["Are you Taking the Bible Seriously?"](#) (Austen Hartke)

[Episode 20 - "LGBTQ"](#) (The Liturgists)

[Danny & Drew Cortez - "Love is a Choice"](#) (Kaleidoscope)

[Queerology podcast](#)

[A Tiny Revolution with Kevin Garcia](#)

Ask Science Mike - LGBTQIA+ topics:

["The Science of Intersex"](#) (9:03)

["Gay Stereotypes"](#) (23:05)

["Supreme Court, Same-Sex Marriage and What Happens Next"](#)

["Parents of Gay Teens"](#) (31:31)

[“Gay Parents”](#) (39:54)

[“Transgender Brains”](#) (35:50)

[“An Interview with Sara Cunningham”](#) (Free Mom Hugs with Jen Hatmaker)

[Dirty Rotten Church Kids Podcast](#)

[“The Life Threatening Dangers of Gay Conversion Therapy”](#) (Refinery29)

## Articles

[“It’s Not About Chicken”](#) (Science Mike on why he doesn’t think it’s sinful to be gay)

[“Has ‘homosexual’ always been on the Bible?”](#) (Ed Oxford)

[“How Biology \(and the Bible\) Breaks the Binary of Human Sexuality”](#) (Erin S. Lane)

[“Is it okay to ‘hate the sin but love the sinner?’”](#)

[“The Great Debate”](#) (Justin Lee’s view that God blesses same-gender marriage)

[“The Queerness of David and Jonathan”](#) (Queer Bible Hermeneutics)

[“The Bible, Christianity and Homosexuality”](#) (Rev. Justin Cannon of Inclusive Orthodoxy)

[Brandi Burgess, bisexual daughter of Rick & Bubba host: “I am praying for my father”](#)

[“Homophobia”](#)

[“Modern Translations From Ideology — Malakoi & Arsenokoitai”](#) (ReligiousTolerance.org)

[“On Arsenokoites”](#) (GayChristian101.com)

[“The Best Case for the Bible Not Condemning Homosexuality”](#) (John and Catherine Shore)

## Videos/TV/Film

[“The Gay Debate”](#) (Matthew Vines – [Transcript](#))

[“Romans 1”](#) (Dr. James Brownson)

[“Lifeboats”](#) (B.T. Harmon; a message to parents on National Coming Out Day)

*Bridegroom* (2013 documentary)

*Fish Out of Water* (2009 documentary)

*Normal* (2003 film)

*For the Bible Tells Me So* (2007 documentary)

## Apps

[Our Bible](#) (LGBTQ-affirming Bible app)

## Twitter Accounts

@qchristianorg - Q Christian Fellowship’s Twitter feed



@unchangedmvmnt - UNCHANGED Movement's Twitter feed  
@VinesMatthew - Founder of The Reformation Project and author of "God and the Gay Christian"  
@emmykegler - Social justice cleric and founder of queergrace.org  
@heyDarren - Speaker, photographer, advocate and worship leader  
@theKevinGarcia - Speaker, host of "A Tiny Revolution" podcast  
@emilyjoypoetry - Poet, yoga teacher, embodied justice enthusiast  
@jonah\_ven - Queer, demi Asian writer  
@sueannshiah - Taiwanese American multidisciplinary artist  
@ReformationP - Bible-based Christian grassroots organization that envisions a global church that fully affirms LGBTQ people  
@faithfullyLGBT - Affirming space for queer people of all faith traditions  
@JoLuehmann - Writer and pastor committed to deconstructing and decolonizing faith  
@CandiceBenbow - Writer and theologian giving voice to Black women's shared experiences of healing and journey toward wholeness

## Instagram Accounts

@qchristianorg - Cultivating radical belonging for LGBTQ+ Christians and allies.  
@beloved\_arise - A movement to celebrate and empower queer youth of faith.  
@unchangedmvmnt - An affirmative counter to the damage wrought in the name of God through ex-gay theologies and philosophies.  
@queertheology - Uncovering and celebrating the gifts that LGBTQ people bring to the Church and the world and the ways in which Christianity has always been queer  
@queer.prayers - Religion from a queer Lutheran POV  
@traditionalchristian - Trans Christian, cult survivor, social justice warrior  
@faithfullyLGBTQ - Online space for queer people of all traditions.  
@theReformationProject - Bible based approach to LGBTQ inclusion

## Social Media Hashtags

#FaithfullyLGBT  
#UnchangedLGBTQ  
#Queertheology  
#QueerlyBeloved  
#BelovedArise  
#QueerChristian

## Organizations/Databases/Websites

[QueerGrace](#) - An online encyclopedia for LGBTQ and Christian life

[The Reformation Project](#) - A bible-based, gospel-centered approach to LGBTQ inclusion

[FaithfullyLGBT](#) - #FaithfullyLGBT is a collection of stories from people living at the intersection of faith, gender, and sexuality.

[My Kid Is Gay](#) - Resources, dedicated exclusively toward helping parents understand their lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual children.

[Q Christian Fellowship](#) - Cultivating radical belonging for LGBTQ+ Christians and allies.

[GayChurch.org](#) - Find an affirming church

[Believe Out Loud](#) - Welcoming church map

[Church Clarity](#) - Crowd-sourced list of churches that are affirming, non-affirming, or unclear on their stances.

[Beloved Arise](#) - A movement to celebrate and empower queer youth of faith.

For national and international crisis resources, visit Q Christian Fellowship's [Crisis Resources](#) page.



Q Christian Fellowship