



IN THE TRENCHES THE RECOVERING CHRISTIAN'S GUIDE TO OVERCOMING GODLESSNESS

Having gone through an incredibly traumatic spiritual crisis centered around the very core of my identity as a young man, I spent many years dismissing all people and things which I perceived to be related to God. I escaped the fundamentalist Christian cult I was raised in around age twelve and any brand of faith practice I may have once engaged in (or longed for) stayed there on those pews when I left.

Pretty early on in my journey away from the church I figured out that there are a million different ways one can push away the heartbreaking feeling of being lost and the promise of being alone for all eternity. Drugs worked for me for many years, as did distance, and then closeness, then money, then sex, and anything else I could use to fill the empty space in my chest where faith and God used to be. This is the experience many queer kids growing up in conservative Christian homes are facing now, and that experience of Godlessness is something that many of us are still struggling to overcome as adults.

After intentionally not stepping foot in a church building for two decades, some recent community work led me straight into the doors of one of them. There have been times before where I have had to really look at the experience I had with organized religion years ago and work hard to develop a new relationship with those old walls in order to heal, but this new work unearthed ghosts and feelings which I had forgotten about. Occasionally it's difficult for me to separate the believers who have caused suffering in my life from the believers who haven't. I tend to size Christians up before they even have a chance to show themselves, and I have recently come to the conclusion that this is a flaw in my character.

The idea that all Christians are bad, based on my experience with bad Christians as a child, is false. Not all of Christ's followers are evil and clearly not all of them hate gay people, as there is an entire thriving population of gay Christians who attend welcoming, LGBT-affirming churches. My reducing the entire religious community to one particular thing is as offensive as when people reduce the entire queer community to one particular thing. Am I really that closed-minded?

The answer is yes. I actually AM that closed-minded. The more I sit with

people who represent that which I am most afraid of, the more I see my own panic around the space they hold in the world. It becomes clear as time goes by that it is also me who is shut down and unwilling to budge. On the side of Christian opposition, I don't want to hear that I am a bad person for being gay, and on the side of Christian affirmation, I don't want to feel like I am broken because I do not believe. Within both communities, I am cast in the role of "other."

The pain of losing family and friends and the dream of life which was collectively constructed for me by said family and friends was unbearable at the time of its passing, and the memory of losing that dream can be just as painful as living it was. I'm guessing for LGBT-identified Christians, finding a welcoming congregation full of other queer believers and allies makes the journey into their adult spirituality easier, but what about those of us who don't believe in Jesus? How are we supposed to fill the space created by the removal of community, doctrine, and belief?

After years of searching, I've concluded that the only thing that actually matters is love. I'm not talking about God's love when I say that, but if someone chooses to believe that God IS love, then I guess I am. The word "love" has been hidden under years of biblical misrepresentation and human judgment, buried in pages of ancient rhetoric which has been used as a weapon against our people for centuries. It's no wonder some of us have a hard time receiving that "God is love" message from the teachings therein.

I am truly happy for those who are enriched by the church and fully support the work that groups like the Community of Welcoming Congregations and Metropolitan Community Church do for queer Christians and our allies. For the rest of us, I hope we can always remember that there is never just one way to go about enlightenment. You don't have to be Christian to be spiritual, and you don't have to be spiritual to know love. If God is love, then you are not Godless. None of us are. Don't ever let anyone ever tell you otherwise. That's just the devil talking.

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