

Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Being

Episode 33 – Alicia Johnston

Transcript

Matthias: If you enjoy listening to Queerology, then I need your help. Here's why, I create Queerology by myself, on a shoestring budget, recording and editing every episode in my tiny closet. How's that for irony? That's where you come in. Will you help keep Queerology on the air by supporting it financially? By tipping as little as \$1 a month, you can help me improve and keep making Queerology every week. All you have to do is jump over to matthiasroberts.com/support, to make a pledge and listen away.

Hey, friends, this is Matthias Roberts, and you're listening to Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Being. This is episode 33.

Alicia: You're just told like, "Do what you're supposed to do and you'll be happy, and that's the best life." There's just something inside me that's like, "But it's not working."

Matthias: Alicia Johnston was a pastor in a Seventh-day Adventist church, until she announced via viral video that she is bisexual and fully inclusive and affirming of LGBT sexuality and gender. That sparked a media storm and her story was picked up by NBC, LGBT Nation, Auto Straddle, and Religion News. Now, she speaks and writes about her story, her queer insights on faith, and the intersection of Christianity and sexuality. Alicia has her Masters of Divinity from Andrews University, and a Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology, from Argosy University.

Before we get into my conversation with Alicia, I wanted to share with you all about a new resource from the folks up at Generous Space Ministries, in Canada. They just released, this last week, a new film called *Belonging in the Body, Transgender Journeys of Faith*. It features the stories and wisdom of 11 transgender folks, transgender Christians. It's an incredible resource for both trans and cis folks.

If you want to go check it out, it's available via donation, by heading over to their website, generousspace.ca, because they're Canadian, [/shop. generousspace.ca/shop](https://shop.generousspace.ca/shop). Share it with your churches, your friends. It really will help change hearts. I watched it this last week, it is a beautiful, beautiful film.

I'm talking with Alicia, today, about her journey of reconciling her faith with her sexuality as a pastor, and then what it was like to come out. So, let's go ahead and dive in. Alicia, hi!

Alicia: Hi.

Matthias: How are you doing today?

Alicia: I am doing pretty good.

Matthias: Yeah?

Alicia: Got my coffee-

Matthias: Yes, good.

Alicia: ... enjoying a beautiful day in Arizona.

Matthias: That sounds lovely. I just got out of bed, I haven't even made coffee yet and haven't looked outside. Yeah, you're much further along in your day than I am.

Alicia: I needed the coffee.

Matthias: Fair enough. To start, is the question I start every episode with, how do you identify and then how would you say that your faith has helped form that identity?

Alicia: Yeah. I identify as bisexual Christian, from the Seventh-day Adventists tradition. Like so many of your guests, it's a really complex question, that's had different impacts to different places in my life. At first, for the major part of my life, my faith caused me to totally ignore my sexual identity. Not even think about it, just assume I must be straight, like that's the only option. Good Christian, Adventist girl. I think, when it became apparent that I had attraction to women as well as men, it was ... I think, what a lot of conservative Christians experience, which is, one part of yourself has to go in the closet. Either the faith or the sexuality, until you can figure out how to reconcile the two.

When I finally got to that tipping point where it had to be reconciled, I had to figure things out and I just went through this just really period of reflection and study and prayer. I would say that my sexuality, at that point, in many ways redeemed my faith. Because it helped me to come to an understanding of faith. To help my faith to grow in a way that I really, really needed to grow. I'm not even just talking about LGBT affirmation or inclusion, but in a lot of different ways. It helped me to see the Gospel in Christ and faith in a new way.

But then I would be dishonest if I didn't also say that this ... I mean, I feel, sometimes, like in the middle of a battle or a fight over this issue. Sometimes, that makes me want to walk away from faith entirely, and be like, "Why does religion cause people to do such horrible things?" So, yes, I mean, sometimes it tempts me or makes me want to throw in the towel as well, but I don't think I'm ultimately going to do that.

Matthias: Yeah, I think that's such a normal struggle. Because I know that's happening all the time, where I'm like, "Why do I put up with this faith?"

Alicia: Oh my God, that's true.

Matthias: There's something about it that is such a part of my life too, and I can't get away from it.

Alicia: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, so there's that positive side, like, "How could I ever walk away from centering my life around Jesus?" Then there's a negative side of, "How am I going to let them win?"

Matthias: Oh, yeah.

Alicia: I mean, quite honestly, I really think a lot about queer kids who are growing up in these homes and the suicide rates and the things that they experience. The truth is, if I walk away from religion, if I walk away from this conversation, religion in this conversation isn't just going to magically, poof, disappear. It's going to keep going, but it's going to keep going without the benefit of the voice of LGBT people like myself and you. I don't want that either.

Matthias: Yeah, because I think we're in a place where we can see the damage and the harm in ways that people who haven't had our life experiences can't, or just throw away. I think about that, too, often. Like the kids, the people who are in those spots. I know where I was in high school and how devastating and difficult life was. Things need to change.

Alicia: Yeah, it made it, I think, a fundamental shift for me too. Because of the work I've done, I've gotten a lot of people's stories. Just tragedy after tragedy, people reaching out, sometimes kids reaching out. You hear enough of those stories and you see what's happening, not only in your own life but other people's lives. It fundamentally shifts the way you look at this issue, in a way that I never experienced before coming out.

Because when you're in these environments, you just don't ... your life doesn't intersect with the lives of LGBT people. Especially LGBT people who have reconciled their faith, right? Yeah, that makes a difference. It's been a fundamental shift in my life, in the way I think about these things.

Matthias: Because, I mean, you came out in a church that is ... I mean, I think we often think of our church denominations as being very tight-knit families. The Adventist church is very tight-knit, and you came out in a very public way. I would imagine that that caused ripples, or even waves. What was that experience like for you, coming out so publicly?

Alicia: Oh my gosh, how do I even describe it? It was something that I never questions, never had a moment of doubt or bias remorse about. And so, that was huge, it was the right thing for me to do. For a lot of people, it isn't. It was just, especially those first few weeks, an overwhelming experience. It would be like, if you're out in the ocean and you're trying to jump from one boat to another, and you're not sure if you're going to land. But you've already left the security of the place you were in. You're just like, "I don't know what this new world is going to be like. The bridge is burning behind me," to mix my metaphors. It was very incredibly de-centering and disconnecting and just feeling like everything that had been solid ground to me was just gone.

Just not knowing how things were going to shake out, where I was going to land. Just watching people struggle, people who I had known and cared about. Watching people struggle with the reality of my sexual identity, that they sometimes didn't even have a clue about. Watching them struggle with that and not know what to do about that. I know I caused a lot of people pain, it was probably pain they needed to experience. And yet, people who loved me cared about me, supported me, believed in me. I had to cause those people pain and sever those relationships. At the same time, it did so much good. This just massive amount of good for so many people. It was incredibly necessary and good and important.

While I was experiencing all of that, at the same time, for the first time in my life, I'm like, "In a period of hours, I went from being out to just very, very few people, to being out to everyone I know." Not only that, but everyone I probably would have conceivably met within the Adventist church. People who I knew through a friend, through a friend, the extended circle. All of a sudden, I'm just out in this crazy way, just in a matter of hours. It was so liberating. I was so ready for that. I was like, "After all these years, here I am."

There was just this underlying joy and strength that came from that, that got me through all the rest. I mean, I like to call it the rainbow face. Like when you're just out and just everything just seems amazing. I mean, it was really incredible to be able to say out loud who I am. Yeah, that really carried me through, but it was really intense in every way. Intensely good, intensely hard. Yeah, it was pretty crazy but well worth it. Well worth it.

Matthias: Because you were a pastor, right?

Alicia: Yeah.

Matthias: Yeah. And you stepped away from that position in this process as well, is that right?

Alicia: Yeah, yeah, you're exactly right. Yeah. The Adventist church has a really strong education system. I'd been up through the education system, elementary school, high school. I did go to a graduate program that wasn't Adventist, but then I went. Yeah, I went to college in an Adventist college, I went to the seminary at the Adventist seminary. I mean, it was so much my life. Going to Bible studies, going to churches, and I became a pastor. Which is not easy to do when you're a woman. In some denominations, it's not even a possibility so I was grateful for that. It wasn't easy to do. It was hard and it was scary even to become a pastor. And then it was really hard to walk away from that, to tell you that. A great church, a good situation, now, it's not.

Matthias: Yeah, what a shift, from life before and life after. Such a major, major shift there.

Alicia: At the time, when I was going through the process of accepting my sexuality, reconciling my faith, getting ready to come out, coming out. Learning, reading, eventually going to the PFLAG and getting connected with Kinship International, the Adventist Support Group and other people. It was like gradually going through all this process, it felt like a

snail's pace. It felt so slow but then as I got to know more people in the LGBT community, I realized I did this really fast. Really fast. I was tapping my fingers, but, really, it was August when I came to really affirm myself after some intensive study. I came out the following March, it was crazy.

Matthias: Yeah. Tell me about that process of what that reconciliation process looked like for you. Because there's something that I feel like so many of us have gone through, but I don't think I've ever really talked with anyone on this podcast about that actual process of reconciling their faith and their sexuality, through whatever they did to do that. I'd love to hear about that.

Alicia: So, for me, there was a cognitive dissonance that was always there. Of, I'm in the church, I'm involved in the church. I know I'm attracted to women but I wanted to manage it, ignore it, tamp it down, whatever. It wasn't this overwhelming thing in my life. Though I didn't realize at the time and I realize now, I did have this underlying depression as a result of all this. Which is gone now, which is awesome. I was there but there was this cognitive dissonance. It didn't seem quite right.

The Gospel is supposed to be ... Jesus said, "I haven't just come to give you life, but to give you life abundant." All these promises of peace, joy, love, hope, and everything is supposed to be centered around love. I think we've almost wrecked that word with how carelessly we've used it. 1st Corinthians 13, kind of love you know. Real, deep, love, commitment, care, concern for the other person.

I was aware of the statistics. I was aware of suicide rates and depression and it just didn't ... there was something that didn't sit right with me. In the idea that a religion centered around love would say like, "This love isn't okay. This self-sacrificial fidelity, that would last a lifetime, that would involve wedding vows, it's still not okay with us. Even though it's between adults ..." It's love, why is it not love?

One of the things that I really had a hard time with is, I don't think that God's law's arbitrary. It's not like, "I'm just going to make these rules." I think that God's law's truly rooted and founded in love. I mean, Jesus said as much himself, "Love the Lord with all your heart, mind, and soul, and your neighbor as yourself." And this hangs all the law and the prophets. All the laws are written on love.

It just didn't really make sense to me. I would see people trying ... I think this is actually one of the most destructive things that conservative theology does. Is trying to find a way to make it so that love between two people of the same gender is actually not love at all. And trying to pathologize it, and trying to say like, "Actually, you're just loving yourself, because it's just someone who's like you. And so, it's really selfishness and self-love." Which is the most foolish thing I've ever heard. Anyways, yeah, it's just ... It's because you're anatomically similar, it must be loving yourself. I mean, by that logic, if you kiss someone who also has lips, you're kissing yourself. It's crazy. It's just crazy abstract weird stuff. It's weird.

I mean, I've heard people say stuff like that, and people will be like, "Oh, yeah. Yeah." It's something about that environment that just ... Yeah, so, I was living with this kind of dissonance. But I was just, I don't know, living with it. Then the shooting in Orlando happened, and I couldn't live with it anymore. I was intensely aware of the suffering caused to LGBT people by Christianity. Which has been the main influence in America for hate towards LGBT people. I was just, I couldn't deal with it anymore.

I've thought and thought and thought about this. I think my mind shifted from this being a peripheral issue, which I know sounds crazy when it was my own issue, I think it went from this being almost peripheral issue. Because LGBT people are so erased in conservative churches, that people aren't even aware of our existence on an emotional, relational level, for the most part. It just feels like an issue, it doesn't feel like people who are suffering.

And so, I think I shifted from it being a peripheral issue, to it being something that must be addressed. A very deeply human issue of pain and suffering, the kind of issue that you can't be Christian and just ignore. And so, I think it shifted in my mind, at that point. At that point, I just said, "There's an answer to this." God is a God of love and mercy and grace, and following God is affirming of love. It doesn't cause hate and it doesn't cause people to hate the parts of themselves that love, especially, right? And so, there has to be a better way, this has to be good news for everybody. I just started really reading and studying in-depth, of the issue.

I read all the affirming books, and those were helpful. But what was really helpful to me, was to read the non-affirming books. With a theological background and being trained in these conservative ways of thinking, and realize there's little places that these leaps would be made. None of these verses that are applied to us are about anything remotely in the neighborhood of a committed relationship. They're about things like shrine prostitution, gang rape for political reasons, Roman orgies which were steeped in power dynamics and exploitation and just all kinds of things. That's what was being spoken about in these passages. To then apply that to us, there's a leap that's being made.

I began to ask myself, "Why are people willing to make that leap? Why does it seem like an okay thing for them to do? To apply verses that are about these things to us." Then, I think one of the craziest things is, when Jesus is asked about divorce. He says, "In the beginning, God created man and woman," and goes on to say, "basically, it's not really okay to get divorced for almost any reasons." And so, people then go and use that, even though they're permitting divorce, and say that he's talking about LGBT people.

Because he says, "In the beginning, people were created man and woman." Which, they're ignoring the explicit topic that the passage was actually about. And then they're applying it to something that we have no reason to believe was even on Jesus's mind when he said. We know what the context was, and that context it's ignored. The explicit meaning is ignored. It's things like that that I just ... I don't know, I started to realize that people were really asking, "Is there a way that I cannot believe that same sex relationships are okay?" Instead of, "Is there a way that I can believe that they're okay?"

Because they were not and are not close enough to LGBT people, especially LGBT Christians to understand the issue, really. When you're at a conservative seminary like I was, usually, when you talk about justice issues throughout history, slavery is obviously a big one. One, maybe not talked about as much. But, formerly, the idea of the divine right of kings. Kings can do anything they want because God has given them that authority. That was something the church eventually moved past. Slavery, women not being able to vote or not being able to, I don't know, report when they're getting abused, to the police, things like that. Things that the church has often stood in opposition to.

What seminaries often lift up as the solution to that problem is hermeneutics. Hermeneutics is the way that we study and interpret scripture. So, the problem is the hermeneutics aren't right, the hermeneutics are bad, "We need to fix the hermeneutic and it'll solve the problem." And so, you go dive into this hermeneutics and understand like, "Oh, and all this stuff." Eventually, I've started to realize, "Wait a second, hermeneutics have not changed that dramatically," and there's plenty of people who hold to really old school hermeneutics, plenty of them. And yet, none of those people ... despite the fact that they're using the same hermeneutic they were using 150, 200 years ago. None of those people are sincerely struggling with whether Scripture teaches that slavery is okay. But they were, 150 years ago.

The hermeneutics didn't actually change. The problem with like my confederate ancestors, was not their hermeneutics. They didn't buy this, it wasn't that the North had better hermeneutics than the South. I mean, come on. When you really step back and look at this, the problem is not the hermeneutical lens that is being used. The hermeneutics has never driven that change. Martin Luther King didn't stand up one day and say, "Oh my gosh, I got a better hermeneutic. And now, we need civil rights." No. It was born from a relationship and a reality of the struggle, and the people who are experiencing the struggle.

There's there's one group that never gets talked about during the whole theological debate about slavery. There's one group of Christians that got it right. Every time in every way, they'd understood that it was an issue of racism. They'd understood that slavery was wrong all the time, and that's Black Christians. But because of the racism, they were never heard and never listened to. And because the Confederates thought they were superior and had no respect for Black people. And no concern for their lives, and no real love in their hearts for them, their theology never changed. It was never about hermeneutics.

Like one of my professors ... I always have to make myself say this, because I think it's important to say this. This is an individual who is a loving caring humble person, and yet, I need to say the reality of the fact that he wrote the book, literally, on Old Testament sexuality. He's outspoken and speaking against LGBT people. And yet, he doesn't ... I take in a classroom him, I've heard him speak on these things. I know that he doesn't understand the first thing about human sexuality.

He thinks of things in terms of the gay lifestyle of drugs and risky sexual behavior. That's his idea of what ... I know this because I've heard it from his mouth. It's not because he's

malicious or he chooses it, it's because he doesn't know any better. He doesn't know any better, because the entire scholarly approach to biblical studies allows someone to literally write the book on Old Testament sexuality without ever getting to know and respect and care and learn about the people whose lives your theology is impacting. The hermeneutic doesn't require that.

I've read book after book after book, of conservative theology and hermeneutics. They always start with talking about, "Really, behind all this is the Holy Spirit and we need to have the Holy Spirit involved in our process of understanding Scripture." Then they move on and never talk about it again, for the rest of the book. I mean, I remember being frustrated about this in college and thinking, "Well, if it's so important, why is it just something you say at the beginning to get out of the way?" I've come to realize, if we're truly going to bathe our hermeneutic and our theology in the Holy Spirit, then that's going to require love. It's going to require us to do the kind of things that characterize God and the divine and the Holy. It's going to require us to get close enough to people who are hurting, to understand them and know them.

And it's going to require ... The word love, I've come to have so much problem with the word love. Because of how it's been used against me, over and over again, since I came out. Like, "How dare you say I don't love you?" How is that even a sentence that's okay to say? I'm telling you that I'm hurting, and you're coming back being defensive about how much you love me. So, seriously, over and over again, it's horrible. It's like Princess Bride, "I don't think you know what that word means." Yeah, it's rough. So, let's put the word love aside for a second and let's instead use the word respect.

I started to realize that that's what I'm actually wanting from people. Enough respect for them to listen, long enough to hear what my life and my experience is and what the life and experience of LGBT people are, and what our viewpoints really are. What we actually have considered and what we actually do know that maybe they need to learn. So, I think that if someone is truly going to bathe their theology in the Holy Spirit, it's going to be necessary for them to get close enough to learn to have that kind of respect for the people who are impacted by their theology. Just like my confederate ancestors were too racist, frankly, to get close to their slaves. There was no way they were going to listen to the theology of Black people. Because they believed themselves to be so superior, that they thought slavery was an institution that was helpful for them. Very self-serving way of thinking.

And so, a painful realization for me, since coming out, is that the community that once loved me and cared for me, the community that once just helped me to thrive and believed in me, now that I'm out as an LGBT person, I'm part of the category and the group that they don't have enough respect to deeply listen to. That they don't have enough respect to even learn the most basic things about the language we use to describe ourselves, or the basic things we have about human sexuality. They're constantly just trying to spin. Constantly trying to spin.

Some of the rhetoric around transgender people, for example, that they're trying to erase gender and they're on some campaign to get rid of categories of male and female. That's not a view you can hold if you know trans people. You just can't. It's impossible, it

doesn't work. I know that they're more trying to defend their theology, because it feels to them like an existential threat. That, "If we would shift our theology on this, we would lose so many conservatives, we would lose so much of our tithe base." I mean, that's in the back of people's minds somewhere. I know it, as I've been a conservative pastor, I know it was in the back of my mind. These are the kinds of things that are front and center.

Ultimately, if the Holy Spirit is to be involved in our theology, we've got to have that kind of love and respect for people. If the church is going to stop getting these human rights issues wrong, over and over and over again, as it has historically, there needs to be a fundamental change. Why do we keep using an approach to Scripture and why do we keep using this kind of ivory tower, we're going to be separate and not listen to the reality of what's happening in the world? Why you keep using this approach, when again and again and again, it's caused the faith of Jesus to be on the wrong side of Jesus, you know? Yeah, it's hard.

Matthias: Yeah, yeah. You mentioned, I heard this, trying to defend the Holy Spirit throughout there. I was thinking, the Holy Spirit, I feel, often, works in the spaces of community. I think I've said this before in the podcast, it's my view of pneumatology, if we want to call it that. If we're going to let the Holy Spirit work, we have to be in community with people who are different than us and not just the same. If we don't listen to those people, we don't listen to people who are different than us, then the Holy Spirit isn't working in the community.

Alicia: Right, right. Right. That comes back to the omnipresence of God, right? Do we think God is only where we are, or do we really truly believe that God is everywhere? And if God is everywhere, we should be listening to everyone, everywhere, yeah. Oh, and see, I remember the first ... It was a GCN event that I went to, that was a West Coast Connection. It's just a small group on the West Coast. I drove out there, not even knowing that I would know anybody and I ended up knowing a couple of people, which was awesome. And so, I drove out there and I remember sitting there in this tiny little room that was packed. Someone was up front, playing ... Forgive me for saying this, but cheesy camp music. Just cheesy camp music, and it's a room full of adults.

Everyone is singing at the top of their lungs. People are crying, this is passion for singing to God. That, I mean, I'm sorry, I've been in a lot of rooms of straight Christians, and I've never heard this kind of passion for God. Again, it's one of those moments that you can't go back from when you feel the spirit moving and when you worship with a group of LGBT Christians, and see the love for God that are in those spaces. The Reformation project was the same. It's just the love and the hunger for God that you see in those spaces. It's something that, I guarantee, my seminary professors have never experienced, and so many of them struggle with.

Matthias: Yes, yes. Because the energy in those spaces ... Let me refresh back to the first time. It was a GCN event, a GCN Conference in Portland. I was in a room, worshiping with co-Christians. The chills and the tears and the overwhelming experience was just like being in that room.

Alicia: Yeah, I mean, I just cried with everybody else.

Matthias: Yeah, yeah. And even if the music is cheesy.

Alicia: It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter, yeah. It doesn't matter. Yeah, I mean, it's incredible, it's the work of God and the moving of the Holy Spirit. That's not to say like, "Oh, just throw theology up for the Holy Spirit," I hope you hear the rest of what I said, of the context of all these things. Yeah, we get blinded. I've had so many people tell me how deceived I am, it's now a favorite track for certain groups of people who talk to me. It just makes me wonder, why do they ever think, what if I'm the one who's deceived? Maybe I should try to figure it out and question, maybe I'm wrong, anyway.

Matthias: That's so good. I'm sitting here like, "Where do we go next?"

Alicia: I don't know. Oh, well, I'll just going to say this, because I've been wanting to work it in somewhere. I listen to your podcast, I'm a big fan. I love Queerology so much.

Matthias: Oh, thank you.

Alicia: Being on Queerology is super cool for me.

Matthias: Thanks.

Alicia: It's awesome. Okay, I don't think I told you this, but when I was listening to the podcast, I was like, "This Matthias guy, he's just so warm and kind." I was like, "Is he this way in real life? Is this a thing he does for the podcast, because it's so perfect? Is he really genuinely like that? That, awesome and enthusiastic and smiley all the time." Because you can always hear the smile in your voice. I met you at the Reformation project, and I was like, "Oh, he really is that guy." Like, "Wow, yeah, he's very cool."

Matthias: Oh, thank you. I'm sitting here blushing, like, "Aww." It's kind and-

Alicia: It's hard to take a compliment, I know.

Matthias: It is, yes.

Alicia: It's hard.

Matthias: It is. It is.

Alicia: You'll be like, "What do I say?"

Matthias: So, you talk about, you mentioned how you had realized that you had a low-key depression. That made me wonder, how have you noticed your life change for the better, since coming out? I mean, I'm sure it's probably in every way.

Alicia: Yeah, obvious. Yeah. I think, for a lot of LGBT Christians, the experience of being in conservative churches feels a lot like gaslighting. That idea where you're being told You don't feel what you feel. That there's something weird or wrong or crazy about you. And so, it's just ... I don't know, I just realized in so many little ways, a lot of them relating to my sexuality. You're just told, "Do what you're supposed to do and you'll be happy, and that's the best life." There's just something inside me that's like, "But it's not working." Then, "Well, you need to pray more and you need to study more." And they'll just feel like there's something wrong with you if it's not working. And so many things I just knew intuitively that I tried to ignore.

Especially for being a pastor in a conservative church, the best analogy I've ever come up with, for what it's like, it's like being a press secretary. You're there with the president and then the cabinet, but you have zero say in any of the decisions. Your job is just to justify all the decisions, right? Your job is to stand there in front of the press and make all this stuff sound good, that you didn't necessarily come up with. You're trying to believe it, and you're trying to think it's the right thing. But you're having to ignore intuitions that you have. You're having to ignore things in scripture that don't add up, you're having to ignore things you see that don't seem to be working. It's a lot to carry around, you know?

And so, I think, in many ways, the best thing is that I'm free to live an honest life. To have that kind of freedom when you haven't had it before, or you haven't given it to yourself before ... I denied it myself, nobody made me. It's like an endless source of joy, it's amazing. You know about my sexuality, about anything. It's just wonderful to be able to pursue God and faith and life in a way that's unfettered and free. I love it, I'm addicted to it. To being myself and genuine.

Yeah, one other things I've talked about, and I've spoken about a couple of times and written about is, thinking about coming out as a spiritual discipline. So, we know, as LGBT people, how difficult it is to come out. We know how hard it is to be honest about who we are. It's not that we do it perfectly, but one of the things I think that our community understands very well is that there's a cost to authenticity. That it's something that's really difficult to do and that it's complicated, and that it's hard. One other things that the Christian church needs desperately, desperately, desperately, and everybody knows it, is to be authentic.

And to stop with this facade of everyone pulling it together for Sunday morning or Saturday morning, whatever your worship services is. Just pulling it together and looking good, and hiding so much of themselves. There's parts of your life that are private, it's not to say that you'll share everything, but to not present yourself in a way that's not genuine. It's a really difficult costly things to do. And as I've been in communities of queer Christians, I realize it's a community that's been judged so much. That, I mean, not perfectly either, unfortunately, exceptions to this. But it's a community that's been judged so much that we don't want to judge other people.

There's more room and more margin for people to seek God in a genuine way, and less fear that the thing we really need to do is make sure everyone lines up on the right beliefs and behaviors. Not centering faith communities around that anymore. Which,

this might sound weird, but it was a revelation to me to realize, after all those years in a space where you have to believe all these things and do all these things or you're on the outs, it was really a revelation to me, a very pleasant one. To realize that if we stop micromanaging people's beliefs and behaviors, church still works. It still works. It really does work, to just talk about Jesus. And pursue love and the divine and goodness and holiness and justice, it works. It's a relief.

Matthias: Yeah, imagine that.

Alicia: Yeah.

Matthias: Gosh!

Alicia: Turns out we don't need to be micromanaging each other's sexual behavior, yeah. It's not a good thing to do.

Matthias: Yeah. Alicia, this has been such a pleasure, thank you.

Alicia: Thank you so much

Matthias: Yeah, thank you so much for this. How can people connect with you, if they want to?

Alicia: Sure. Pretty much three ways. I have my website, aliciajohnston.com. I blog there and you can contact me through that, or get on my mailing list. Or if you want me to speak somewhere, you can request that as well. I'm @aliciaannej, with an E, j, on Twitter, yeah. I use most probably Facebook, so you can connect with me there. Yeah, just find me, I don't know, Alicia Johnston.

Matthias: Awesome. Awesome. Thank you so much.

Alicia: Thank you so much for having me.

Matthias: Alicia's on Twitter, @aliciaannej. That's aliciaanne, with an E, j. Her blog is at aliciajohnston.com. It's a Johnston, with a T, don't forget the T. It sounds like Johnson, but there's a T, Johnston. That was sufficiently clear. Queerology's on Twitter, @queerologypod, we're also on Instagram, @queerologypod. Queerology is produced with support from Natalie England and other Patreon supporters.

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