

Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Being

Episode 45 – Jarell Wilson

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 one dollar 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 Mathias Roberts and you're listening to Queerology, a podcast on belief and being. This is episode 45.

Jarell: I didn't want to begin my career in ministry hiding something from people, because Jesus didn't hide things from people.

Matthias: Jarell Wilson is a graduate of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, a social media addict and a blogger. He attended Baylor University and graduated from the University of North Texas. He's proud Austenite reconciling ministry's board member and a scented candle aficionado. Besides meeting Beyonce, his life goal is to get the Queen of the UK to use "Ya'll" in a sentence.

Oh my gosh, I am so excited to have Jarell on the podcast today. He keynoted at The Reformation Project last fall, with like in absolutely incredible keynote. If you haven't watched that, it's on YouTube, definitely go check it out. It may be one of the best sermons that I've ever heard in my life. Before we dive in, a couple things.

First like I said last week, if you are in the Lethbridge/ Calgary area in Southern Alberta, Canada, I'm going to be leading a couple workshops on May 5th at The Unabridged Lethbridge conference. It's a free event for LGBT people, kind of about these intersections of faith and queer identities. If you're in Lethbridge, come say hi.

Also, last week I released my brand new LGBTQ plus Christian Reading Guide. It's meant to be kind of like the perfect starting out guide for anyone who's just kind of diving into this world or maybe you're just wanting to learn more. It has sections on theology, has sections for parents, has sections for faith leaders, it has sections on history, for both gender and sexual minorities. There's kind of two different sections to it, as well as a section on just general further reading.

It has kind of all of my favorite books in there and the books that I have found most helpful on my journey, and I hope that it will be helpful for you all too. Just head over to

my website matthiasroberts.com and download your copy of that today, right now. We're kind of talking about Jarell's story today and in his story of what it has been like to go into ministry.

You'll notice in the middle of the episode things get a little bit windy with the audio, you'll hear the wind. Things clear up after about two or three minutes, so just like a little heads up there. Yeah, let's just go ahead and dive in. Jarell, hi, welcome.

Jarell: Hi, how are you?

Matthias: I am doing well how are you doing?

Jarell: I'm still kicking by the grace of God.

Matthias: Glad to hear that.

Jarell: I don't know what happened. I'm just back to Texas, I'm like, I just all of my southern colloquialisms just pop right back.

Matthias: I love it. That's for the best, so to start, the question I ask everyone, how do you identify and then how would you say that your faith has helped form that identity?

Jarell: Oh Lord, I identify as a queer black Christian, and the way my faith is informed that, it's allowed me to put other identities before the identity of Christian. It used to be, when I was in my more Calvary chapel, none denominational evangelical setting, that like Christian came first at the expense of the rest of my life. Everything I did, had to center Jesus or be somehow holier than the person next to me.

I've learnt through my faith, that it's okay to respect the queer person that is Jarell Wilson, and respect the black person that is Jarell Wilson. See God in these identities, not just in the identity of being a Christian.

Matthias: I love that, like seeing God in these identities. What have you found about that? Like as you've gone through that process of kind of diving into those other identities, seeing God in them, like what does that look like?

Jarell: I find that God frustrates me in these other identities, just as much as God frustrates me with Christianity.

Matthias: Yes.

Jarell: I feel like, when I was a four year old child, I was sold this vision that we would come up to this altar, say a prayer and then God would make our lives the best things that they could possibly be. All you have to do is say this prayer, "Lord, I know I'm a sinner, Jesus died for my sins, he rose from the dead," blah, blah, blah, "I give my life to Christ." You

say this prayer, you mean it and then God washes you in the blood of Jesus, because blood is necessary for some reason.

You have your life made easy, and that is not at all what happened. The same thing is true coming out. They have this giant series of, "It gets better." Please tell me you remember like the cheesy videos.

Matthias: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Jarell: Then it was like now straight allies are going to do them too. "It gets better, I'm a straight person," I certainly know more about being gay than you do. It's just like ridiculous and in some cases, yes it does get better. You come out and you become an Olympian, and you get to go on talk shows or Ellen brings you on her show and gives you a scholarship.

For other people, it's like, sorry, you don't get to afford to be trans-invisible in the same way that Janet Mock and Laverne Cox are trans-invisible. Sorry you don't get to be as out and proud and loud as Dan Savage demands other queer people be. I find that like just as much as I had to fight for my space of the Christian faith, I'm still fighting for my space as a queer person, both in queer spaces and just in the world at large. I'm still fighting as a black person, because being black, while it might look fun and enjoyable in music videos, is a little bit more complicated in real life.

Matthias: Yeah, I mean, so I was like kind of in preparation for this, I was kind of watching your keynote for Reformation Project last spring, fall, it was in the fall.

Jarell: Yes.

Matthias: You talk about it, I feel like this kind of ties directly into what you're just talking about. You talk about in that, like how Jesus comes to bring us abundant life, not barely make it through life. I feel like that ties in, like so directly with what you just said, and then I'm curious about that. Looking at, especially like as a black man, what does that look like for you?

Jarell: The way my parents presented blackness is very complicated. My parents simultaneously wanted us, me and my younger brother to be proud of being black. To love being black, to love other black people, but at the same time my parents grew up in an environment where being black meant to be other. It meant, they were in the generation that got bused.

Finally, in the 80s the state of Louisiana started integrating schools, and my parents are in like that first group of kids from Kenner Louisiana right outside of the New Orleans airport. They were bused to this very nice wealthy white school, and they were in some ways treated like the mascots and in other ways treated like the villains. My dad hated his experience there, so he left the state of Louisiana at like as a teenager and packed up

everything, moved to California, where he didn't know anybody and just started a new life.

Then somehow tricked my mother into joining him. She wasn't barely 20. Then they had me and my mum found Jesus and she's like, "Lord, if this man doesn't marry me, I'm going to leave him," and my dad just married her. There wasn't a proposal there, like she overheard. The way they have different stories about this, but she overheard him talking to my grandmother saying, "Yeah, we're going to get married so you should probably buy a ticket and come on out."

They got married the summer after my birth and deliberately raised me and my younger brother in neighborhoods where black people weren't present. Their fear was, if we stayed around other black people, we would be perceived as criminals too. This shift was brought on by their move to a more evangelical, predominantly white expression of Christianity. Then they sent us to private Christian schools in southern California.

I was really indoctrinated in a lot of ways, to view being black as something that you only do at home, and you don't bring out into the world. It's okay to talk this way and to say these things when it's with the family or when you go back to Louisiana, you can stop pronouncing words correct. Like the way that the dominant group pronounces words, and you can finally like let your hair down. You can reveal that you have nappy hair.

It was a really interesting way to perceive race, and as I got older, it made me feel as if I have lost so much of my life. I had to box away part of who I am, and the expectation was, if you box it away well enough, you get to move forward. You get to have access to things that you wouldn't have access to, and living a life that is abundant, is saying, "I don't have to box away the God in me. God made my blackness, just as much as she made my ability to read really long boring passages, and then condense them and make them understandable to regular people."

Just as much as God gave me a deep yearning to be Beyonce or just as much as God has made the sun and the moon, God made black people. It is okay to love being black and to see the amazing beauty that came out of such awful circumstances.

Matthias: Yeah, like speaking of taking long scripture passages, you, in that keynote again, you took the story of the Ethiopian eunuch from the book of Acts. Kind of applied that to the lives of queer Christians, minority people, and you focus in on this question and you call it like the hunting question of how, like the eunuch asks, how can I understand these scriptures if there's no one there to teach me?

You tie that into our faith communities and I'm wondering like if you could maybe share a little bit about that passage and then kind of unpack that a little bit more, because you made some incredible points there.

Jarell: Oh darn, I wish I had my serpent notes abundantly. This passage is very special to me, this is also the first passage I preached on in seminary. Intro to preaching, we had, basically we've stuck our hands into a hat and pulled out one of three letters. I got the letter that assigned me this passage, and so I got to like go through and pretend like I knew Greek for a second. To see what God was trying to say [inaudible 00:13:38], and one of the things that came up, I was reading a study bible in preparation for the intro to bridging sermon, and there's like one of those little letters.

I followed the letter that followed the word eunuch, and it took me to Leviticus, everyone's favorite book of the bible. It showed that eunuchs weren't allowed to come into the temple. They weren't allowed to worship where other Jews and people who were of faith that were allowed into the temple got to worship God. They were considered to be permanently unclean by virtue of being eunuchs, an abomination if you will.

This eunuch is out in the middle of nowhere, on his way from Jerusalem, where he wasn't allowed to worship with the rest of his faith community. He's not just any old eunuch, this is like the assistant to the queen. He oversees an empire and Philip stops, because the Holy Spirit leads him to. He sees this man, well dressed, this eunuch reading Isaiah and saying, "How can I understand this if there is no one to teach me? I can't go to the Scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees. I can't go speak to a Rabi, I'm considered unclean, they're not going to sit in my presence, where can I go to seek God?"

Philip gets into the chariot with him. Philip is a good upstanding Jewish person, has now exposed himself to that which is unclean, so that he could explain the scriptures to someone who was seeking God. I just find that to be so relevant to today. Not just as LGBT people coming to the doors of the church and saying, "Who can teach us or how can I understand if no one will teach us?" Not just like people of color who are coming to predominantly white institutions, but even just thinking about regular students.

Oklahoma right now has teachers going on strike, because they have textbooks so outdated, some students just inherited Blake Shelton's textbook from when he was in elementary school years ago. They're posting pictures of this. One of the people from Oklahoma, who I listen to on the podcast. This is 'The Read' which is incredible, everyone needs to listen to it, she's talking about how her cousin in order to get her homework done in Oklahoma, has to take pictures with her Smartphone of someone else's text book, because they're so short on textbooks that are visible, like legible.

It's an incredible that there are students on all walks of life saying, "How can we understand if there's no one teach us?" This lack of desire to teach groups that aren't considered desirable is, it's anti-Christ. It's antithetical to the gospel. It's a rejection of the image of God and heaven. I have a lot of feelings about this passage.

Matthias: Yeah, and I think in that keynote and what you're saying right now, you draw a stark contrast, not contrast, comparison between like the church then and the church now

and how things really haven't changed a whole lot in the way that we treat people that we deem as different or not being worthy enough or whatever we want to put on it. It's kind of the same pattern.

Jarell: Right, and what's really funny is, so this is another Christian school thing. We had to track the way that the bible was written, and one of the things that every student would realize after like half way through first Chronicles, is why do the people of Israel keep doing this? God keeps blessing them and then they reject God. Then they get punished and then they cry out to God for help, and God blesses them. Then they get comfortable, then they reject God so on and so forth.

What we fail to do is see that as Christians, we follow the exact same cycle of, "Oh well, we're comfortable, we don't need God. Let's create our own version of christian dom, let's create our own empire, because although God promised that God would create this, if we do it for her, maybe God will be more pleased with us. God will be pleased with the way that we have subjugated the world to our will." When that fell apart, we did it again with our sub culture and we did it again in the 90s. We're going to find a new way with these neo-Calvinist, and we have the emergent movement. We keep doing different ways of trying to earn God's favor, rather than basking in the goodness of the gift of God's grace.

Saying, "We don't need to strive to be more or to do more than we have to do. All we have to really do and be is faithful to what Jesus has laid out for us. Follow the examples of Jesus Christ, and then all of these things will be added onto us." The kingdom of this world is not about conquering people or by saying that like prayer, but by living our lives in the way that we shine our light as a city on a hill so to speak. We draw people in, willing them so to speak with the love of God.

Matthias: I mean as you talk about that, this is work that you've kind of committed your life to. You're a minister, you're a reverend. Tell me about that. I mean, I'm always curious as for queer people who decided to go into being like pastors, being faith leaders, church leaders, that is such a journey for so many people. I'd love to maybe hear a little bit more about that and what has led you into this work?

Jarell: Well I've always known that I wanted to work in the church. When I was like in elementary school, I would line up the neighborhood kids with my children's bible. I would give them little sermons and then we'd try and get them all to say the sinner's prayer. I was literally like trying to save the world one door at a time. Those poor neighbors, and our small little suburban southern California neighborhood just would see me going up and down the street with my children's bible. I'm like, "Do you know where you're going when you die?"

Going into ministry was literally just like a natural step. I just didn't know how I was going to do it. In high school I had this really powerful moment, where I was at the summer camp of course in Dallas Texas, this adult leader decided to come and lay hands on me and pray for me. They're praying for me and of course they're people speaking in

tongues, it's great. The spirit is moving, and then they look me in the eye and they're like, "I think you're going to make a good preacher." I hear this voice from heaven in my mind just saying, "Serve my sheep."

I'm like I don't know what I'm supposed to do with this. I go home and I'm so excited, I'm like, "God has called me to do something," and I tell my parents, "I think I'm going to be a pastor." My parents response is, wouldn't you rather be like a lawyer or a doctor and make money? You're so good at memorizing facts, memorize some of these here bones and send you as [inaudible 00:21:36] and make money."

It's funny that you even identify me as reverend, because I'm not ordained, so technically I am not a reverend. I just have a Masters in divinity and have all of the credentials to be ordained, just not ordination itself. I've not made it that far in the process, but I am by my denomination considered a faith leader. It's a really weird place to be, yeah that's where I'm going to leave that.

Matthias: Yeah, so I'm wondering, you're talking about where you are now. I mean it sounds like talking about growing up, it sounds like you grew up in a pretty, white evangelical culture at least. Your theology seems so different than that now. I'm curious what that journey was like for you of stepping into a theology that does affirm LGBT people. What was that like? Was it a struggle or was it just kind of natural for you?

Jarell: It took a long time, but at the same time, it really didn't. I don't know, when I came out to myself, I was like 19 years old, and that was a weird time of my life. I had started school at Baylor University, and I loved my time at Baylor so much, but was challenged. This is where I met Shane Claiborne, one of my friends in life group at [inaudible 00:23:17] telling me about how great he was and that I needed to read one of his books.

I go to a Christian book store to find one of his books, and lo and behold the top sales for a dollar. I buy this book and I read the entire thing in one, almost like in one weekend. By the time I'm finished, Shane Claiborne's there. I get to meet him and he signs my book. I told him, I was like, "This is really fascinating." The book is 'Jesus for President' by the way, I should have said that. "This is really fascinating, my problem is that right, I don't think that the church is changing fast enough to adapt to our times."

His response was, "Be the change that you want to see in the church," which at the moment felt really brilliant until I realized like, "Oh my God, he just stole that quote from Gandhi." To me at the time I was 18, I was like, "This is so radical, so I'm just going to do it." My thought was, I need to challenge people like Brian McLaren for being too liberal. I need to challenge even Shane Claiborne on some issues. I still feel the need to challenge Shane Claiborne, but [crosstalk 00:24:28].

Matthias: Fair enough.

Jarell: We can't get homie to say that he affirms LGBT people, but he'll drop names left and right. Anyhow, where was I, and so Greg Boyd, a lot of like these big white queer

progressive leaning, but we're not really progressive people. I was like these people are tainting the church and they are trying to lead us to liberal doctrine. That spring I wrote this article for the Baylor Lariat, which people can still, if they Google my name and Google Baylor, this will pop up.

It's this viscous article about, with really terrible typos, about proposition eight, and that the students on Baylor's campus that were like anti-Ken Starr, who was announced to be our president or really just anti-the bible, because the bible is clear about homosexuality as clearly as [inaudible 00:25:33] that it is. I said this protest is a sign that they just reject the Christian culture at Baylor University and they should leave. It was really interesting for me that spring.

I started reading all of these more progressive writers with the attempt of like, how does their mind work so I can like fight them more effectively? It was a research strategy, you know. My problem was, is they were making a lot of sense and I was like no, this can't be right, let me go back and check the scripture. I'm like, "Oh wait, they're right, this actually is in the bible."

Then I was like, well let me see what other people have to say and somehow stumbled onto some work by James Cone and stumbled onto like other black liberation theologians and to feminist theologians. I'm like what the heck is going on? Ended up leaving Baylor, because Baylor costs a lot of money as most Christian schools do. I ended up going to the University of North Texas.

I was studying sociology, because I liked my intro to sociology class at Baylor. The more I learnt about the disparities of wealth distribution and how difficult it is for people to get decent education and decent healthcare, the more I realized that this was something that God wanted the church to be engaged in. It's not even, the book of James is clear. It's not good enough to say, "Be fed brother," and then send someone away hungry. It's not enough to say, "Be well," and then send someone off, if you're not there to heal them or to walk with them through their struggle with whatever it is they're going through.

If you're not there to feed them, if you're not there to cloth them, then all you're doing is just like spewing hot air. Anybody can say something on Twitter, but it takes a real friend to show up physically or in some other way that's tangible in the midst of trouble. That is what the faith is calling us to, and so I went on like this mini- I'm going to be a salt of the earth Bohemian, and we're all going to just like purchase a giant ranch out in Montana.

Every Christian will just sell their property and we'll all live together just like they did in Acts. Then I realized how completely enslaved by capitalism I really am, because I couldn't give up my iPhone. I just can't imagine life without WiFi, and who knows, maybe one day we will figure out this Christian commune that has Netflix still. The moment we do, I will be the Chaplin or whatever they need in the community.

Matthias: I'm there too, it's, yes.

Jarell: Yeah. Baylor University oddly is really responsible for wanting me into my more progressively values. I should have said this from the get go, Baylor invited Shane Claiborne. He was already going to be in town, because he does an annual fundraiser with the church under the bridge. Baylor chapel just like piggy backs and makes a whole thing out of it.

I got to meet Shane Claiborne that way. Then I, there I also got meet Brian McLaren and get to like butt heads with him and go watch. It is really like just a fun life, all of these like big names in faith just came to where I was living at the time. How useful was Baylor at that point in my life?

Matthias: Yeah, so I'm thinking about that. That story of going to a Christian institution and fairly conservative Christian institution and having that be the gateway to, into this more progressive world. I feel like, I mean that's my story. I went to John Brown University, which is, I mean a pretty conservative Christian school in the middle of Arkansas. That was my gateway, opening up those doors into like, wait a second, the bible doesn't speak to these issues the way that I thought it did.

Realizing that we've gotten it wrong, like just wrong. Yeah, and so that lead you to, I mean remind me what denomination you're in, you're in UMC?

Jarell: Yes, United Methodist oh lord.

Matthias: Yeah, so that led you to the UMC church?

Jarell: I got tricked into the Methodist church. This is a story that I will tell until I die. I thought that I was going into a none denominational church. It was called Servant Church, and it just happened to be inside of an old United Methodist Church. I was like, "Oh how nice, these kind Methodist are welcoming in these young people."

I go on in and I meet people and here's, the plug was, it was a Shane Claiborne book release. The book was 'Common Prayer', and so I go there with the intention of like just meeting other Christians who lean, who are leaning in the direction that I was leaning. I was coming from this place that was so different faith wise than where I thought I needed to be in order to be faithful to what God was calling me to. I thought that this would be a good way to meet new people and it was.

I am still at Servant Church. I'm right back where I started in 2010, that's when I showed up there. I met with the pastor, Eric Vogt at the time, and I asked him about the church and what was going on and then he revealed, "surprise, it's Methodist." He's like, "But don't be afraid, I know you're not a denomination person, but don't be afraid, I think that you would make a really good addition to this denomination. You should give it some thought and do some research."

I'm like the nerd I am, I did some research and read a bunch of books about Methodism and picked up the book of discipline, which is our book of church law, which no one should ever have to read. It is very lengthy, and I ended up loving the idea that holiness is something that we need to work on both as individuals and together as a society. That God's vision for the world isn't just that we say a prayer and get to heaven, but that God's vision is really a transformation of the world, and a re-writing of the way that our structures have been formed. Making things that, making things just and equitable for everybody is something that is holy and it's required for Christians.

I thought that was a brilliant presentation of the gospel, and I loved that the United Methodist Church was global. I love that people in Sub-Saharan African and people in the Philippines and people in Western and Eastern Europe all got to come together every four years with a bunch of people from the United States and from all over the western hemisphere. Together we voted on what were the biggest issues facing our church, and how to pay clergy and standards for ordination that are important to us all, because everyone's voice matters.

Unfortunately, right after I decided to jump on in to this Methodist ship, I then came out to myself or had this revelation, divine revelation one could say, that yes lo and behold, I am queer. I'm attracted to people that the denomination would not be happy about me being attracted to. I remember I waited until I had left and gone to UNT, which is like, for people who aren't from Texas, Texas miles are different than the miles that you all know. I hear in Washington that like driving 30 miles is considered like a journey.

Matthias: Oh my gosh, yes.

Jarell: You all would consider it a long drive.

Matthias: It's a huge trip.

Jarell: Driving 30 miles in Texas could be like your trip to, in some places, your trip to the store. In other places it's like, "Oh, I'm going to go visit my friend," and they live on the other side of Dallas. That's a 30 minute drive. Texas is much bigger than other states, but the distance from Austin to Denton, which is where UNT is, is three and a half hours of driving. It's well over 200 miles of distance.

I waited until I had made the drive and settled in, and then I was like, I'm going to send this email to my pastor and to the deacon at my church. Tell them that I am LGBT and I came out as bi. At the time it felt right, but it really wasn't right and so then, it came out later as gay. Now, gay still doesn't even feel right to say. I don't feel like and then later through queer studies in college, queer became the term that felt most like home for me.

Yeah, that's pretty much how I ended up in the Methodist Church and how I ended up wrestling in the Methodist Church, because like once you come out, you have this choice. Do you go through, or I didn't come out publicly, it came out in an email. I was

like I could go through this process and pretend and say all of the things that I need to say about how I'm going to find my perfect heterosexual wife. Somehow everything will be okay, but my problem was, I didn't think that it was possible to do ministry in an effective and meaningful way without being honest.

My problem with so many of the churches I had been a part of in the past, had been dishonesty, a lack of transparency, a lack of being able to see the ways into which money was spent and ways, the ways in which power is distributed, and how decisions are made about people's salaries. I left these places, because I felt like they were hiding things. I didn't want to begin my career in ministry hiding something from people, because Jesus didn't hide things from people.

Even just like in that passage, the revelation of what that passage meant was hidden. The only ways for him to get to the root of what that story was, is for someone who already knows the secret to tell him. I didn't want to be the secret that was being kept, and I didn't want to be the heart like the bearer of secrecy. Part of my call as a black person who has gone to college, as a black person who has a Masters degree, as a queer person who has survived suicidal ideation, it's my job to be visible for other people that are coming after me. I need to be in a place where I can engage with younger people who might be thinking, "I should just give up, because there's no hope for me."

Like I need to be honest, so that they don't have to struggle the way that I struggled, so that they don't feel worthless the way I felt worthless. That they see now how great God was that created them, so that they see now how beautiful their queerness and their blackness and their everything otherness really is. It gave the opportunity for a lot of really great allies to show up and to walk alongside me.

It gave an opportunity for the denomination to show how committed it was to excluding LGBT people. Like I said, I went to Austin seminary and one of my predecessors was also a Methodist in process in the same manual conference as me. Barkley suffered greatly because of being helped and going through this process, and I followed them, followed in their footsteps. Although, the conference did not violate the book of law to kick me out as they did with them, my process and the board of ordain ministry meeting specifically was very hostile.

I've never in an interview been accused of sexual promiscuity. I had never been accused of sexual promiscuity before in my life. I was raised in this evangelical world. I still have my true love waits ring, it's in my bathroom. Here is a grown man sitting across the table from me, accusing me of being sexually promiscuous. Next to him is another grown man, old enough to be my father, calling me perverted. I'm like sitting in this room with a bunch of ordained ministers and people who have sworn that they are going to resist evil and injustice and oppression and whatever forms they present themselves.

These people sat in this room with me and watched me be accused of sexual promiscuity and be called a pervert and they said nothing. For me, that spoke volumes about the state that the church is in.

Matthias: Yeah, like to be in those spaces of where you are quite literally being attacked simply for existing and seeing, I mean you're saying like you're seeing how committed the church is to exclusion. I can't even imagine the impact that that had on your sense of "calling". I mean, I would imagine, I mean what did that do? Did that, did you dig in further to that sense of being called or did it throw you for like, what was that experience like?

Jarell: Well, it was really interesting, especially the day of, because I came in there ready for a fight. I had literally left deliberate Easter eggs in my paper work. We have to write, we have to answer a large number of questions to get ordained as Methodists. I think it was like 23 or 22 pages or something ended up being the final amount of paper work of question and answers that I sent to him on top of sermon, the written sermon, the outline for our bible study. All of these things are needed in order to prove that you have done your, enough of your homework to be a minister.

Then the final bit before they vote on you, on whether or not to commission you, is this interview. The interview last for three hours. It's broken up into three sections and you have one hour per section. At the first section is where I was accused of sexual promiscuity and called a pervert. Then the next section was the one that I thought was going to be the real battle, the theology section, and they didn't ask me any difficult question. In fact, they like signed off on the paper work, it was like this was so well written we appreciate how thorough it is. I love footnotes it's one of the things that seminary has.

Matthias: Yes.

Jarell: Placed in my mind IEM notes, so I would write something and I'm like, "Oh that sounded a lot like a hymn, I better quote just to be safe." I look in the hymn and all, so I'm using every book of authority I can find, and none of like my paper work got challenged. I felt as I was leaving all the more vindicated, like they couldn't find in 23 pages something that they were going to pick apart. I wonder if that really mattered, because I was like, it didn't make me doubt whether or not I was called. It made me doubt whether or not the United Methodist Church had space for me, and I got really fortunate.

I got a great job anyway at Urban Village Church in Chicago, and it was an incredible opportunity to get to do hands on ministry. It was really incredible to go from like learning about how important theology was and learning about how important it is to let people know that, "Hey, it's okay to have doubts about this, it's okay to question this aspect of your faith." To actually like standing behind the pulpit and doing it, and like going week after week after week just being in the midst of people's lives. Watching them plan their families and decide to baptize their infants or their children, making these decisions or couples deciding how they're going to inform their kids about faith.

It was really the most affirming time for my ministry, because I got to actually just be a minister. In Chicago there wasn't really any sort of straight police following me around. My supervisor in Chicago was out and married to this beautiful lesbian couple, and they

had this precious baby. Not really baby, I'd say she's a toddler. Not even a toddler, small child and they are just like living their best queer lives.

I got to, like how many out people in ministry get to be supervised by other out queer people? It's just like so rare, and I got this opportunity. It was great, so I don't think that the interview itself made me doubt my call. It made me doubt the ability of the church to fulfill its call.

Matthias: Maybe to close then, like for people who ... I feel like I hear from people all the time who are in a spot of, kind of similar spot of, I feel called to ministry and yet I don't know that I can do ministry. What advice as someone who's kind of been along this journey for a little while, what advice or words would you have for people in those spaces who are just maybe starting out or even feel that desire to go into ministry?

Jarell: I would start by saying you don't need to be ordained to do ministry. You don't need to go to seminary to do ministry. You don't need to fit into a particular model in order to be doing ministry. I wrestle with this a lot myself, because here I am literally fighting for this opportunity to be ordained.

Really, what ordination is, is just like a validation of what you know God has told you. A validation by your community and by your peers and colleagues. I think we can get so focused on that validation, it becomes an idolization, and it gets in the way of also doing what God has called us to do. The fear of not getting that validation stops us from being who God has called us to be.

My advice is like, first not to get hang up on the how you're going to do it, but the why? Why I'm I feeling called to do this? Why I'm I motivated to move in this way? Then when you have your why, the next question should be who? Who I'm I called to do this ministry with, do this ministry for? Who is going to continue this work, if I'm no longer able to do it? Then after you get your why and your who, then it's the what. Like what is this purpose? Then you go into the how.

I just went straight in. Well the Methodist Church requires seminary, so I'm going to start seminary right after graduation and I'm like, I made the decision I think the way most people should make decisions about higher education. I went to the school that gave me the most financial aid plan. Austin seminary has a great financial aid plan for those of you who are searching. Thank God it had incredible faculty as well.

I think that like because we're so focused on doing ministry in one particular way, it can stop us from even starting the process. Don't get hang up on that.

Matthias: Yeah. Well Jarell, thank you so very much for joining me. This has been a pleasure.

Jarell: Thanks for having me.

Matthias: Yeah, yeah how can people find your work?

Jarell: Well I have a website that may or may not still be up, depending on how bad I am at editing it. You can find me at jarellwilson.com, I'm also always tweeting, so @TheJarell on Twitter or Instagram, so you can see cute pictures of my dog.

Matthias: Yes.

Jarell: Which she is the queen. I also do some work for SKEW which is an online magazine, a publication of Level Ground, so you can see my latest article about radio head for SKEW. I just love there in their sadness it just makes me happy. I'm an angiotensin II antagonist for work you can tell.

Matthias: I was just going to ask, I'm like you must be a four.

Jarell: Their melancholy just speaks to me.

Matthias: Yes.

Jarell: No, read the article, you'll love it. It's great.

Matthias: Yeah. Perfect.

Jarell: Yeah, that's pretty much where I can be found online.

Matthias: Okay cool, yeah.

Jarell: Often in the streets matching in my Chacos.

Matthias: Yeah, well thank you, thank you, thank you.

Jarell: Thank you, this has been great.

Matthias: You can find Jarell's blog over at jarellwilson.wordpress.com, that's Jarell with one R. He's on Twitter and Instagram @TheJarell. Queerology is on Twitter and Instagram @Queerologypod or you can tweet me directly @mathiasroberts. Queerology is produced with support from Natalie England, Tim Shraeder, Christian Hayes and other patrons supporters.

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As always I'd like to hear from you. If you have ideas of what you want to hear in the podcast or just want to say hi, reach out, I'll get back to you. Until next week ya'll bye.