

Queerology 66

2018 in Review - Part 1

Episode 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 Matthias Roberts and you're listening to Queerology. A podcast on belief and being. This is episode 66. I can't quite believe it, but we are at the end of the year. And so it's time for the end of the year episode, so this is part one. We are going through the entire last year, all of 2018, sharing some of my favorite moments from the show.

So today's the first half of the season and next week we'll cover the second half of the season and then go on break for the holidays. And what a year it has been. Queerology has just taken off. It's been so cool to see and to hear from all of you who listen all around the world. It's really encouraging to know that this podcast is helping people and creating space for these conversations of being a person of faith and a queer person. That is so cool.

Before we jump back to the very beginning of 2018, really quickly, I just announced that the people that I'm gonna be interviewing for our live episode of Queerology at the Q Christian Fellowship Conference in Chicago is gonna be Dave and Tino Khalaf. You may remember them from season one. They're releasing their new book, literally just like a day before our interview. Their new book, *Modern Kinship: A Queer Guide To Christian Marriage*. And we're gonna be talking about the book, we're gonna be talking about marriage, we're gonna be talking singleness. Like all of those things, live at the Q Christian Fellowship Conference.

And here's something fun, if you haven't registered for the conference yet, you can use the promo code Podcast 19 P.O.D.C.A.S.T. 19 for \$10.00 off your registration. That's Podcast 19 over at qchristian.org. Come see Queerology live, there's a whole podcast stage this year actually, so Kevin Garcia's doing a podcast. Crystal Cheatham doing a podcast. I think Debra Jian Lee is doing her podcast as well. And then, like so many other things. The keynoters are amazing. I'm doing a workshop on building sustainable resiliency practices. It's just gonna be a lot of fun in downtown Chicago. Again, use the promo code Podcast 19 over at qchristian.org. And come join us.

So let's jump into the review. This first clip is from one of the very first episodes of the year. I think it's the second episode that we released. I don't know why I say we. The second episode I released with Rae Ingram, who's podcast QueerVotion is just incredible. In that episode, she talks a lot about the power of connection and choosing to invest in relationships even when they're hard. I, re-listening to this episode, pulled out this reminder I think to all of us about what love looks like even when it gets hard.

Rae: When people see that being displayed. When they see Christ being displayed in us and outward towards them, it draws them to where, "Oh, I do have to recognize." Because at some point, it's past the "Oh that's a choice that she's doing, that's a choice that he's making." It's literally like, no, this is, in the words of Lady Gaga, "I was born this way. I absolutely cannot change this and have really no desire to change."

And so when people start to recognize that, okay that is a whole person and I can talk to them and they are okay. There is nothing wrong with them. And more importantly, when we walk in confidence in who we are, it doesn't really matter what the other folks have going on, because there's always gonna be haters. I mean, Jesus had haters every day. So you just have to remember who you are and who you belong to and just keep it moving.

Matthias: Yeah, and you kind of mentioned earlier how you see divine and God in connection.

Rae: Yeah.

Matthias: And it sounds like, by keeping the connection with your friend and not automatically writing her off because she wouldn't come to your wedding, which would be a valid response.

Rae: Sure. Sure. Absolutely.

Matthias: But in not doing that and keeping that connection and staying grounded in your particularity, something really beautiful and divine emerged out of that.

Rae: Yeah. I mean, we talk on a weekly basis, me and her. And I think about if I would have did that right? If I would have just said, "Okay, I'm not gonna deal with it. I'm not gonna ..." I did take a step back in a sense of like, okay, I won't speak about it, but I'm not going to not talk about it if she's around and someone asks me.

Matthias: Totally.

Rae: Because I'm not ashamed.

Matthias: Right.

Rae: But I wanted to also be respectful, but over time she has come around, because I've remained the same. I think sometimes people just, they forget that when it

comes to ... That they have no heaven or hell to put us in. Nobody does. So how can someone tell me that I can't be who I am and I can't belong to who I belong to?

If I would have just written her off and not did anything with her and just ignored her, that would've did more harm than good to her. And just had another reason for her to have another chip on her shoulder when it came to our community. And that's the last thing that I wanna do. That's not what I'm here for. I'm not here for that, I'm here to love you, love you through it and be there with you when you get to it. I'm not here for that. There's already enough of that going on.

Matthias: Yeah, and it can be such a difficult decision to make, to choose that kind of love.

Rae: Yeah. It's hard. It's hard, because instantly self preservation comes first right?

Matthias: Of course. Yeah.

Rae: That's what we think. You know that's important and I'm not saying that you go out here and you get beat up verbally or emotionally by friends or so-called friends or the church even.

Matthias: Right.

Rae: But there are some people who are worth the investment. And if you just remain consistent with them and you remain faithful, you remain faithful to them, they will see God in you. And if they choose not to, the faithfulness was not in vain, because there's something beautiful, like you said, to come out of it.

But that's not the reason why we do it. We do it because ... Because, I say that I love you and we know that love is a verb. That love is not something that writes people off. You gotta make sure that you are showing that person that you love them and that may be in different forms. It's in different forms. That's a whole nother conversation.

Matthias: Yes. That's easier said than done right? Goodness, what a call and reminder to us of what it means to love those people that are especially hard to love. Rae goes into some more detail about the complexity of that in the rest of that episode. That is episode 32 with Rae Ingram, all the way back at the beginning of 2018.

Oh, one thing that this year brought was a couple straight voices to the podcast. Three of them. Three straight people joined me this year. We're hearing from one of them next. Dr. R. Marie Griffith. This is one of my favorite episodes. It could just be because it's a really nerdy episode, but Dr. R. Marie Griffith is a distinguished scholar at Washington University in St. Louis. And she joined me to talk about her new book, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics*.

I love this episode, because she kind of tells us how we got to the political atmosphere that we're in today and argues that it's all about sex and gender and

LGBTQ issues and women's rights. This is kind of a big chunk, but it covers a lot of ground around the state of the church and queer people today. And then she ends this little section, talking about how queer people of faith have been a core part of the fight for LGBTQ justice from the very beginning.

Dr. Griffith: Some leaders I think, have galvanized ordinary people in the pews and just across the country with fear. And one of the greatest fears that's been repeated over and over again, is the decline of American. This vision that America once was great and was the chosen nation of God. And now, because of sin and specifically because of sexual sin, America is falling into a decline from which she will never recover.

So the blame for that gets put on feminists, it gets put on gay people, it gets put on you know again, folks outside of the traditional monogamous, heterosexual marriage model. And just to give you some examples, you may know that after 911, Jerry Falwell was on Pat Robertson's television show, a couple days later and he said, "I blame ..."

He basically said, "The feminists, the pagans, the gays and the lesbians, all of those people. I point the finger in your face and say you helped this happen." I mean 911, the terrorist attacks. And his point was there is so much sin and America's allowing all of this sexual sin. God has turned his back on us and He will no longer protect us from terrorists like we see there. So we must repent and turn around.

And more recently, the shootings in Aurora, Colorado, even the Newtown, Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings, leaders like James Dobson and Mike Huckabee and others have stood up and said, "We can look at our own sexual sin and our toleration for that as the reason why God is not protecting us from these mass slaughters." I mean, it's astonishing.

Matthias: Yeah, it is so astonishing because I think ... I just keeping thinking about how all of those claims, and I think we see those things flying everywhere. It seems like anytime something catastrophic happens in the world, people love to blame gay people for that. And I think those of us who are gay or queer and just kind of like sit around and look at them like, how is it our fault?

Dr. Griffith: Right. I know. I know. Yeah. Well and you know, you all get blamed and then a tolerant nation, those who might be straight, might not be gay, but who are allies or who are inclusive, who want to be open to people of all kinds get blamed too, because they're tolerating sin.

So yeah, you're absolutely right. I think that theme has sort of recurred over and over again through what we call the religious right, older figures like Tim and Beverly LaHaye from the 1970s. Of course, Anita Bryant, who was the major anti-gay celebrity activist of the 1970s, on up through today.

Matthias: You have a sentence here about, around LGBT rights that you write, "This was not just a justice issue or an equal rights issue or a compassion issue. The matter

was far deeper and far greater than those human interventions. The issue was obedience to core teachings that have been passed down for thousands of years. Humble compliance with the will of God."

Dr. Griffith: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Matthias: I think that highlights ... I mean those are the stakes I think that we're dealing with of a group of people, well, both groups of people thinking they're following the teaching of God, but one of them saying, "This is what God require and it doesn't matter, nothing else matters."

Dr. Griffith: Absolutely. You know, I say in the book, it's almost like we have two completely separate Christianities at this point. You've really got the one that is convinced that the bible condemned homosexuality and other things, but that in particular. And they've got all their ways of interpreting particular passages and to say this is central thing, that it really matters to God.

And then you've got folks on the other side saying, "What are you talking about? Jesus never talked about this. Jesus emphasized caring for the poor, loving the neighbor, caring about people in prison and who are hungry." This was not a big theme, you know who was in love with whom. So you just really have this deep divide in what people think the core of Christianity really is.

Matthias: I'm thinking about the particular context that this podcast sits in, which is people who identify as being of faith and who identify as queer or ally or questioning or whatever, but that kind of locus.

And I think, sometimes, I know I kind of got this idea when I first came out and was kind of realizing that I was gay and wanted to hold on to my faith, that there were no other people in the world who were doing this kind of work.

And that this kind of Queer Christina Movement, that I think, has risen up in the last ten years, kind of like what I said in my first question, is a new thing. But you, in your last chapter, talk about people who've been doing this work for so long. I would love if you could kind of talk about that intersection of faith and like minority sexuality and how those have been wedded together for quite some time.

Dr. Griffith: Absolutely. Yeah, one thing I want your listeners to really know is that queer people ... Let me say that again, queer people of faith were instrumental to the larger LGBTQ Rights Movement, from the very beginning. They've always been there. And let me just recommend two books to you and to anyone who's interested in looking at that.

One is by Heather White called, Reforming Sodom, and it's really looking back at the Protestant, the real Christian movements for gay rights and their activism in the public square, in going back to the 1950s. And another is by Anthony Petro, whose sort of writing about Christians in the Aids epidemic and people of faith

who were so instrumental in that movement and as part of the larger gay rights movement around that.

So there's a few famous people, you know kind of like the head of the Metropolitan Community Church or folks like that, that everybody seems to remember, but there's a lot of forgotten names too, of pastors but also just ordinary people in the pews who were ... and most of whom remained Christian, but often times had to find new congregations when they felt unwelcome in their own. So queer people of faith have a part of the larger gay rights movement from the very beginning.

Matthias:

I had recorded that episode right after getting my voice back. I lost my voice for an entire week and had to cancel that recording two times before we actually got to it. And I believe you can hear that in my voice. That was from episode 35 with Dr. R. Marie Griffith. Again, if you wanna understand how we got to where we're at and why a lot of people in faith communities dislike queer people so much. Her book, *Moral Combat* is a really good primer to that.

Next we have from episode 39, Reverend Emmy Kegler, talking about her complicated relationship with scripture, especially as a queer person and how she has learned to love scripture again. A little bit of an update on Emmy, her new book, *One Coin Found: How God's Love Stretches to the Margins* is releasing on April 2nd of 2019. It's available for pre-order. If you like this episode and if you like Emmy, I know I do, just go pre-order that book right now.

Emmy:

Yeah, so when I was primarily identifying as gay, when I was younger, teenage and early 20s, I was really concerned with how to defend myself against the bible. I think that's an almost necessary process for everyone, especially people who don't grow up in affirming families. I was fortunate enough that I did grow up in an affirming family and an affirming church, which is miraculous really, and I am so deeply grateful.

But even so, I was not sheltered from the conversations that were happening, both at higher denominational levels, you know, just those things that were going out in the news, things that I was encountering online as we were getting AOL in the house, and I was dialing into chat rooms.

I was learning that there were other Christians for whom those scriptures that I was being taught in confirmation were not applicable, were. And they used them quite mightily against me and when I came out, I actually lost friends at school, because they said, "Well God says it's not okay." And I'm looking at them going, "Well what ... what ... No, I was specifically taught that that part doesn't apply. Like that part's the same as the not eating pork part. I don't understand where you're getting this."

And so I went through this process of really developing all of these different ... Theologians call them hermeneutics and that's a fancy way of saying lenses for reading the bible. What are the different ways that we come to scripture and

understand it and read it? And I still felt very captivated by the church and by the Jesus story, despite my really tenuous relationship with scripture.

And so I pursued my call to ministry, and it was, in my mid-twenties, I was at some lecture that Nadia Bolz Weber, out in Denver, was giving. She was here in the cities for something. And she talked about how her understanding of her job as a pastor was that she was supposed to be in love with scripture in public. And I remember just thinking, well shit. That is not something that I think I can do. I don't think I can be in love with scripture in public. Like how can I be in love with this text that has been used to abuse me and to abuse my queer family? I don't know how to reconcile myself with this story.

And the further that I pursued my call to ministry, because I was pursuing it within a Lutheran church, which has a deep and long history of intentional engagement with scripture and taking scripture very seriously, I had to come to terms with how I was going to love scripture. It really does feel like ... It's not an appropriate metaphor to use because I'm not from a culture that uses arranged marriages, but this is what I imagine an arranged marriage is like. Is that I really wanted to pursue my call to ministry, and I ended up stuck with a bible.

And I had to sit down with it and just go like, "What am I gonna do with you? I have to live with you for the rest of my life and not just in a like, I wanna be part of a church community, so I have to do it on a Sunday morning. Like I want this to be my life." And what I ended up doing, I was actually in seminary or finishing seminary at the time, with some friends out in Madison, Wisconsin. We were doing this, through the bible in 90 days.

So you read like 16 chapters a day. It's really only a project that pastors or seminarians can have the time to take on, and they were doing it with some college kids who were off school for the summer. So that's what I did, is I churned through 16 to 20 chapters in a day and just really forced myself to say, "If my whole life is gonna be a testimony to the fact that there's some sort of truth, some sort of reality in this scripture, despite the fact that I don't believe its literal word for word King James perfection. What does that mean for me?"

And what I found was, the more I took seriously my call to ministry and my call to serving as a pastor, the more I deliberately engaged with the bible and tried to find ways to put my walls down around it. And I was doing this within a community that was very supportive, so that was a huge blessing. That was what changed me, was that direct and constant engagement for 90 days and just saying, "I'm going to sit with this text until something good comes out of it." Phyllis Tickle talked about ...

In about 2013, 2014, she gave an interview, and she talked about understanding the bible as the stranger who wrestles with Israel, Jacob. He's Jacob when the stranger comes to him and wrestles with him until daybreak. And Jacob gets the upper hand and pins this messenger, who's either a messenger of God or is literally God, and says, "I will not let you go until you bless me."

And the messenger strikes him on the hip and makes him lame, changes the way he walks for the rest of his life, but also gives him a new name and says, "You will no longer be Jacob, heal-grabber, sub-planter, one who steals from others, one who takes what is not his, you will be Israel, for you have striven with God and with humanity."

And Phyllis Tickle talked about that as a metaphor for understanding scripture. Like I will sit on top of you like a big brother with his little sibling until you give me a blessing. I will not let you go. And sometimes that means we are wrestling all night and yet, that metaphor has remained very true for me since then. I call it the hermeneutic of the hip, in that it's an understanding that you might walk away and in fact, often when we engage with scripture we do walk away wounded, because of the way others have used it against us. And yet, we also walk away blessed and that blessing passes on not just to us, but to our family, whether that's family of origin or family of choice and to a faith community that's around us.

Matthias:

Emmy goes on in that episode to talk about what her struggles with scripture, what blessing that has produced. And then we go into a really, really good conversation about the power of blessing. That's episode 39 with Reverend Emmy Kegler. Next we have Austen Hartke. Austen joined me to talk about his new book, *Transforming The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians*.

And in this clip, Austen talks about the importance of sitting in our bodies, especially when things hurt, especially when things are hard and what that can mean for trans-bodies. And some of the distinguishments that need to be made when we're talking about sitting in pain.

Austen:

For anybody who has, like you said, been told that their body is bad or wrong or lessor or any sort of negative connotation. The experience of connecting to your body can be really powerful, but also really painful. So there's this sort of narrative out there that trans-folks hate their bodies right? It's really a myth, I think. But I thought like it's a myth because ... Well okay, to explain this I guess in the simplest ways, the medicalization of trans-identities that says you have a thing called gender dysphoria.

In order to have any sort of like hormone therapy or any sort of gender confirmation surgery or gender affirmation surgery, however you wanna call it. In order to have that, you have to be diagnosed with gender dysphoria. So what that means is that trans-folks who want to transition in some way, medically, or even that want to change their documents, even if they don't want to change anything about their body. You have to essentially prove that you have such a hard time with your body, you have to prove that to a mental health practitioner.

And so it ends up boosting this narrative of trans people hate their bodies. Even when that's not necessarily true, but that's what we have set up the healthcare model to do, is you have to prove that you have it bad enough in order to be seen as really trans.

So yeah, it's brought this narrative of trans people hate their bodies, but most of the trans folks I know do not hate their bodies. In fact, I think I would say all, now that I think about it. They don't hate their bodies. Like for me, I'll speak for me personally. I love my body. I think my body's great. There were things that I had to change about my body, in order to deal with the anxiety or deal with the dissonance that I was feeling, that was getting in the way of me being able to live my everyday life.

But it's very similar to the idea of getting glasses. The feeling was in some ways very similar, because if you need glasses and you're like, "Man, I really can't see stuff around me very well. I can't read the stop signs and I can't read my book and I get headaches." That's a problem that's affecting your everyday life and what do you do? Well you get glasses or maybe you get LASIK eye surgery or something, but that doesn't mean you hate your body. It just means that you had to change something so that you could live a healthy life. And that's very much how I experienced my body and dealing with gender dysphoria.

So for me, and coming back to yoga, part of what yoga forced me to do was to sit with discomfort that I feel. Part of what you do in yoga is sometimes hold positions for a really long time, or at least it feels like a really long time when you're in it. But to hold a position and just breathe there and not move away from the discomfort. And I think as human beings with bodies, we want to move away from discomfort. We want to ... You know, that hurts, you take your hand off a hot thing. It hurts. You know, that's meant to keep us safe, but there are lots of ways that we can move away from discomfort that would actually be really good for us to sit in.

So for me as a trans person, it's not like I'm on this endless quest to perfect things about my body, that's not the way that works. For me, it's that there are some things about my body that I need to change for my health, but there are other things about my body that I'm just like, "Oh man, that's kind of a bummer." Like everybody has things about their body that they're like, "Oh, I wish that was a little bit different." But being able to sit with that and be like, "This is where we are, and we're just gonna sit with it and not try to run away from pain or discomfort." That was really helpful for me in my transition journey.

Matthias: Yeah, I think about that in my own practice. Like how ... I mean I have a yoga instructor who would always say the yoga practice is like what happens in this room is how you kind of respond to the rest of your life. It's like life put into an hour.

She's like, "The more we practice in here, the more we're able to move out into the world in different ways." And that makes so much sense to me. Like what you're saying, that learning to sit in discomfort and then maybe even learning to kind of bless that discomfort and in the ways that are very transformative.

Austen: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Matthias: Yeah. It's good stuff.

Austen: It is. It's really ... It's something that I still have a hard time with, especially when it feels like your body wants to do something that you don't wanna do or you wanna do something that your body can't do. Like that feeling of discomfort can be hard, but it ... Yeah, like you said, I like the terminology you used there, of like blessing that discomfort. Because I think it really just helps you realize that you can stay in that place and not be destroyed, which is like a really powerful thing to realize because ...

Especially if you are somebody who has faced, I don't know, like any sort of physical violence in your life. Or if you have faced any sort of spiritual or mental violence in your life. For me, I'm like super conflict avoidant and that's something that I have to deal with all the time is like, I don't want to be in this conversation. I don't wanna be in this fight. I don't wanna like ... And so for me to realize that I can stand in places of discomfort and that I will survive it is a really powerful thing to remind yourself.

Matthias: A powerful thing indeed. That was from episode 43 with Austen Hartke. If you haven't read his book, *Transforming The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians*, go pick up a copy. It is so good. We're wrapping up, this is the last clip for part one of 2018 in review of *Queerology*. This is from episode 45 with Jarell Wilson.

In this episode, Jarell shares his story and what brought him to want to go in to ministry pursuing his ordination. In this clip, Jarell answers my question and you'll hear my question about queer people who want to go into ministry but don't feel like they can.

I feel like I hear from people all the time who are in a kind of similar spot of like, I feel called to ministry and yet I don't know that I can do ministry. As someone whose 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 a lot with this 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.

But I think we can get so focused on that validation, it becomes an idolization I guess in the way of us doing what God has called us to do and the fear of not getting that validation stops us from being who God has called us to be. So my advice is like, first not to get hung up on the how you're going to do it, but the why. Why am I feeling called to do this? Why am I motivated to move in this way? And then when you have your why, the next question should be, who? Who am I called to do this ministry with, do this ministry for? And who is going to continue this work if I'm no longer able to do it?

And then after you get your why and your who, then it's the what. Like what is this purpose? And then you go into the how. I just went straight in. Well the Methodist church requires seminary, so I'm gonna start seminary right after graduation. 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.

Matthias: Yes.

Jarell: Austin Seminary has a great financial aid plan for those of you who are searching. And thank God, it just has incredible faculty as well. But 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. So don't get hung up on that.

Matthias: And that was from episode 45 with Jarell Wilson. All of these episodes are episodes that you should go back and listen to or re-listen to over the break that's coming up over the holidays. That's it. That's the end of part one of our year in review of Queerology.

Come back next week, we're gonna be reviewing the second half of this year. A lot of really good stuff in there. I'm going to leave you with this moment from Kevin Garcia's episode. Episode 41. This little clip is just ... I mean it brought me to tears when he said it. We were recording it in a hotel room together and I know from so many of you who have emailed me about this episode, that these are words that we all need to hear again and again and again.

So until next week y'all. Bye.

Kevin: How lucky are we to be watching history unfold in front of us?

Matthias: Yeah.

Kevin: I am so glad I'm still here. I'm so glad that when I was depressed and suicidal that God saved me from that.

Matthias: Yeah.

Kevin: Because I get to witness so much beauty and I get to see God in so many different people. And I also get to see them hold up a mirror and say, "I see God in you. Do you see God in you?" I want so badly for ... If you're listening to this, I just wanna let you know that God is in you and God is for you and you have a purpose in this world. You have a gospel story that God wants to tell through you and if you're struggling because you don't have this proximal community, that's totally real.

And it's really hard, but if you just keep holding on, it can get better. It will get better, and that is like the thing I wish that I could just like say to every single queer human in the world. It's like, yeah, if you just keep holding on, if you just keep pushing through, your story can change somebody else's world.