

Queerology Episode 101

#QYFDay

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- Matthias: 00:03 Hey, friends! This is Matthias Roberts, and you're listening to Queerology: A Podcast on Belief and Being. This is Episode 101.
- Daniel: 00:14 You don't have to give up everything you believe in and everyone you love, in order to live as your true self.
- Matthias: 00:25 It's a special day today, because—at least if you're listening to this the day it releases—today is the first ever National Queer Youth of Faith Day. For this episode, I sat down with four queer youth from several different faith traditions.
- Matthias: 00:41 I'm so excited to share that with you, but before we do that, I wanted to give a huge "thank you" to Kashif Graham for taking over Queerology last episode. If you haven't had a chance to listen to that episode yet, Kashif sat down with Broderick Greer, and they had an incredible conversation about performative allyship and Black joy. I learned so much from that episode, and I am super grateful to Kashif and Broderick for recording that conversation and for sharing it here for all of us to listen to.
- Matthias: 01:12 Today, we have another really special episode! Queer Youth of Faith Day, or QYF Day. A little bit of the backstory: a few months ago, I joined the board of this great new organization called Beloved Arise. It's a nonprofit committed to celebrating and empowering queer youth of faith. They had a big launch party on Valentine's Day, actually, this year, February 14th, but one of the big first national things that we're doing is this Queer Youth of Faith Day. So we've partnered with a ton of organizations—I'm going to read you a list because it's really impressive—organizations like The Trevor Project; The Human Rights Campaign; PFLAG; Muslims for Progressive Values; Many Voices; Keshet; Jewish Queer Youth; The Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity; The Center for Buddhist Education; Free Mom Hugs; The Interfaith Alliance; The Gay and Lesbian Vaishnava Association; and so many others to bring this day celebrating the life, creativity, and gifts of queer youth of faith.
- Matthias: 02:18 So to celebrate on Queerology, we've put a panel together of four queer youth, who I'm going to introduce in a second. But first, if you want to help celebrate QYF Day, just head over to qyfd.com for a

bunch of ideas.

- Matthias: 02:32 I'm so excited about this panel. You're going to be hearing from Ameera, a trans Bengali-American Muslim; Taline, a bisexual Armenian Christian; Daniel, a gay Jew; and Sebastian, a trans Christian. I'm going to let them tell you more about themselves as we get into the conversation.
- Matthias: 02:51 So for now, I want to say Happy Queer Youth of Faith Day, and let's go ahead and dive in.
- Matthias: 02:56 Hey, everyone! Welcome to Queerology!
- Sebastian: 02:58 Hello!
- Taline: 02:59 Hi!
- Daniel: 03:00 Hi!
- Ameera: 03:01 Hey!
- Matthias: 03:03 It's a little bit weird to have four or five of us quote-unquote "in a room together," but it's good to have you all here!
- Matthias: 03:13 The first question I have for all of you—and I'll just go down the list that I have here—how do you identify, and how would you say that faith has helped form that identity? Let's start with Sebastian.
- Sebastian: 03:24 I identify as a nondenominational Christian. I feel that being in the LGBTQ+ community, my faith has shaped it in the way I see God's love through it even though at first I really... because of my church background—which, I was raised in the church and went to private school—it was really toned into you that being queer equals a sin. However, I've learned that isn't the case at all, and that God really does love you as you are, no matter who you are.
- Ameera: 04:09 As-salaam alaikum, that's "peace be upon you." I'm Ameera, and I'm from St. Louis, Missouri, and I identify firstly as a Brown trans woman of Bengali descent—my parents are immigrants to this country—and I am a trans woman who identifies as pansexual. I realized the trans part around 2017—using she/her pronouns is the only resolution I have ever kept! My faith has really been the lens through which I see the whole world, in terms of... my mother is a very spiritually strong individual, and whenever we were young and poor and growing up, she would always, for example, take us out to nature and be like, "Look at this beautiful tree," or something. "This is the magnificence and the work of God." Even when we were poor, she would pray so much that my sister and I used to joke

growing up that our cars ran on prayers and gas. It's informed, really... the Islamic view has informed my sense of self, my sense of place within the 21st century in American suburbia. It has informed my views of justice and how to seek that and what utopia looks like. It has informed my approach to everything.

Matthias: 05:50 How about you, Daniel?

Daniel: 05:51 I identify as a Jew. I grew up in a Modern Orthodox Jewish community, which means that I grew up observing a lot of ritual laws, so that includes things like kosher and refraining from a lot of activities on the Sabbath. While I'm no longer religious or a believer, I do still identify as a Jew and have a very strong Jewish identity. A lot of people don't understand that. It has to do with... Judaism is kind of interesting in that it's both an ideology and an ethnic group. So that's how that works out. As to the other parts of my identity, I'm also a gay man. When I was younger, I was really instilled with the belief that being gay was wrong. I have a really distinct memory of—I was probably about 10—I was lying down on my mother's lap and crying and asking what if I was gay, "What if I'm gay?" Later, as I came out to myself and came to terms with who I am, it became important for me to identify as gay and to reclaim that identity that I had previously feared.

Matthias: 06:58 I am already wanting to ask each of you follow-up questions, but Taline, how about you?

Taline: 07:01 Hi! I'm Taline. I identify as Christian. I grew up... I'm Armenian. My mom's side is from Western Armenia. After the genocide, they came to America, so they have been here a while. But on my dad's side, they're Palestinian-Armenian, so they've been in Palestine for a while. So my dad is actually an immigrant, while my mom... so I'm first-generation on my dad's side, while on my mom's side, I'm fourth-generation. So I have those two different viewpoints where I come from.

Taline: 07:28 I grew up in the Armenian Apostolic Church, but I currently go to a nondenominational church, and I identify as bisexual, and I go by she/her. I actually recently came out, so it's something that I'm still discovering and going through that coming-out process, but it was definitely... the way my faith as definitely shaped my identity is that not only did it give me a strong sense of my culture, it also had me really face my bisexuality in a way I don't think I would have otherwise because on one hand, I was getting this, "Oh, hate the sin, love the sinner, but we don't talk about that," and on the other hand, in a nondenominational church, it was very much the evangelical approach of "Well, look at this Bible verse! It's so bad!"

One time my high school group had a debate on whether or not it was okay as a Christian to go to an LGBTQ wedding. So it was really... I really had to face myself. I had to research theology and be like, "Is this something I'm comfortable with? My uncle is gay, but this is *me* I'm talking about. Is this... how does this affect my relationship with God? Can I accept this? Can I own this?" And I think doing that—especially recently, in quarantine—really solidified me in both my faith and in my bisexuality and owning that those are both parts of me that can definitely coexist and, in fact, work together to form the person that I am.

Matthias: 08:56 The whole reason we're doing this episode is 'cause today—the day that this episode is releasing—is Queer Youth of Faith Day, which is the first-ever day to honor the experiences of queer youth of faith. So I'd be curious, from each of you... even as we think about this idea of "Queer Youth of Faith Day," does that feel important to you? A day to celebrate this. What does it mean to you? Let's start with Ameera.

Ameera: 09:26 So as was touched upon by some of us earlier here, being a queer person, a young person, and a person of faith all together... it has its own unique experience that needs to be honored and celebrated and centered. So I think it's very important to uplift that and center that for a day. There are many, many queer youth who are alienated from their faith because of their queerness. And we have high rates of homelessness in queer youth because their families don't accept them, whether they be faith or not faith, but unfortunately, the way that colonialism and white supremacy has influenced religion today has made a lot of people justify that unkindness using faith. So I think it's really important to center those who have survived that and those who have had the fortune and privilege to not have to endure that.

Ameera: 10:27 For me personally, my experience has been that around high school or early college—so 2014-2015—is when I was first realizing my queer identity, and because I was so, so plugged into the Muslim community in St. Louis... in fact, I finished memorizing the Qur'an—the entire Qur'an, cover-to-cover—on March 3rd, 2009, receiving the title of hafiza, or "guardian," literally, but it's colloquially used to refer to someone who's memorized the Qur'an, and that's a title, like "Father Murphy." So I was very, very plugged into my community and rooted in my faith. So finding out I was queer was a world-shifter, game-changer. I was like, "Oh no, what am I going to do?" And I had suicidal thoughts for a couple of months. And I had a friend, luckily, one friend who was able to hear me out—in fact, he just got married last week, so I'm very proud of him. But I'm very grateful to the fact that I had a listening ear, because if I didn't, I

don't think I would be alive today to proudly be both Muslim and queer and not feel like I have to reconcile those two.

- Matthias: 11:44 How about you, Daniel?
- Daniel: 11:45 So I completely agree that this day is very meaningful. I think that it's especially important because, at least in Orthodox Judaism, I am from the first generation in which being gay and being an Orthodox Jew are possible to coexist. In 1999, or around that time, the first Orthodox rabbi came out as gay. He was shunned and told that that's an oxymoron—"You can't be an Orthodox rabbi and gay"—and I think that that shaped a lot of my outlook on whether I could be gay and Jewish, or an Orthodox Jew. I came to the conclusion that I would not fit in. And at least for kids growing up now, it definitely is becoming somewhat easier, and there are role models and organizations that try to facilitate that and make the community a more welcoming place.
- Matthias: 12:49 Taline, what about your experience?
- Taline: 12:51 I think Queer Youth of Faith Day... when I found out that it was going to be a thing, I was so, so happy because I recently did come to terms with my bisexuality, and it felt really affirming, because that was something that I had been denying for so long. I look back, and I'm like, "How did you not know, Taline? It's right there!" But it was something that seemed so scary, and I didn't want to add extra stress and extra issues to my family. My brother has autism, and my parents are divorced. Those are already things that we have had to deal with. So I was like, "I don't want to add this extra thing to it." But it was just... I remember when I... just two months ago, I was really having to face this for the first time, truly, because it was in quarantine, and I had absolutely nothing to do. And I was like, "One girl crush too many! You can't be having crushes on girls and not be attracted to them! Something's—*Taline!*" But I had to face that.
- Taline: 13:59 I remember there were many nights where I was just crying. And, a while, I was actually scared to pray about it, because I was angry at God. I was like, "Why would you make me feel this way? But is it wrong? If I pray to you, will you tell me that I can't feel this way? I don't hate it, though! Why can't I?" I remember being mad and scared for a while. I looked into affirming theology, and eventually I did pray again. And when I did pray, I just felt like this was the most natural thing in the world. That for me, this was just who I was. And when I came out for the first time to my mom, I didn't feel that sense of shame when you do something wrong. I just felt this relief just pour out of me. And it was so good. I was like, "Okay, so God

doesn't hate me. I'm not going to hell. This is something that I can accept."

Taline: 14:54 And I think that that message is something that so many queer youth, especially those that grow up in faith communities, are missing, so spreading awareness to that is so important. Because so often, it's treated as something either... in certain cultural traditions, it's something that you just brush under the rug. I know I'll definitely not come out to my dad's side in a while because they still live in Palestine, and they won't get it unless I do end up being with a girl. Do you know what I mean? But on the other hand, it's also something that's so blatantly... not hated, but so blatantly talked against as something that you cannot stand for as a Christian and something that you can't possibly be as a Christian, either.

Matthias: 15:39 Mm-hmm. [affirmative]

Taline: 15:39 So I think that the Queer Youth of Faith Day, spreading awareness of that, is really important, because I feel like so many youth draw away from God and their communities that could have offered them hope and solace, but instead they're drawn away from it because it feels like they can't be safe there. That's honestly how I felt. I can't come out to my Bible study, because one of my leaders basically dropped a friend because she was "engaging in a homosexual lifestyle and wasn't gonna stop." And that just hurt. So I can't come out to them, but I did have to find somewhere else to go to feel affirmed in both my faith and my sexuality. So I found Beloved Arise and their REBEL Seattle youth group, which I joined on Zoom, and that's been really amazing in helping me. So I think that definitely, organizations like that and Queer Youth of Faith Day need to be spread more, because I feel like there's a lot of people that hurt, but we don't see them.

Matthias: 16:37 Sebastian.

Sebastian: 16:38 I just feel that the day, Queer Youth of Faith Day—that's so inspiring. It's meant to be celebrated when fear is cast on so many youth, whether it's any faith that goes against, directly, the queer community—belittling, and society's negative mentality against it... this brings a chance for anyone to just come together and be themselves. Being a trans gay man, I feel that... I've been in the church where "Hate the sin, love the sinner!" But I had a long time struggling with my identity and a bunch of self-hate. Especially... I started to realize my identity my senior year in high school, and that was hard—just coming to grip with it—because I couldn't do anything about it. I was just understanding it. I didn't know where to go. I had never even heard of the word "transgender" except for the

media. Coming to terms with that, I was just like, “How am I supposed to love myself again? How is God supposed to love me?” And knowing that there’s communities out there and reaching out to find different areas of support, whether it was through friends or... even now, I’m so thrilled to be a part of REBEL and Beloved Arise. They’re so inspiring and loving to kids and youth in general to discover their identity and be able to love themselves in the image that they were created in instead of all the self-hate and... having an area where they can be themselves. I felt like when I did come out—at least to friends; that’s where I started from—my friend was in tears. She was so happy that I was able to come to grasp with who I am as a person.

[break]

Matthias: 19:02 Have you heard something on Queerology that’s made a big impact on your life? Do you now follow one of my guests because you’ve met them here? Because of the format of Queerology, you get to meet people in a way that lets you relate and connect. There’s something uniquely personal and intimate about the conversations that happen here. If this is something you’ve experienced, then help me keep these conversations going by making a financial gift and becoming a Queerology Active Listener. You’ll get access to the Active Listeners Facebook group right away: a place for all of us to continue these conversations throughout the week. All you need to do is jump over to patreon.com/matthiasroberts, choose your gift amount, and you’ll be an Active Listener! It’s really easy. That’s patreon.com/matthiasroberts. I really look forward to meeting you in the Facebook group!

[interview resumes]

Matthias: 19:56 I feel like each of you touched on this a little bit in the last question, but I would love to hear a little bit more about what it was like for you to realize that you were queer, and then holding that alongside your faith identity—that struggle. But also, I would love to hear, what’s giving you hope as we look forward? There’s a lot of things happening in the world right now. As you look forward, do you find hope, specifically in faith communities, or queer communities, or around these kind of conversations—especially for other youth? If that question makes sense. Let’s start with Daniel.

Daniel: 20:33 I’ll start with the struggle. I can remember when I was probably around 12, it just hit me like a ton of bricks: realization that all of those curiosities and compulsions to be around guys, it wasn’t just a normal thing—I mean, it is normal, but it’s not just a normal thing that every person will go through—but it was something that I was

unique from most of my peers. That was really hard for me to deal with. I tried to deny it for a while to myself—I remember crying and begging God to change me or to make it not true—but then eventually I accepted it. And it's a continual struggle.

Daniel: 21:20 But to the question of what gives me hope, it's that progress is being made in the Orthodox Jewish community. There are organizations like one that I'm a part of, Jewish Queer Youth, that popped up to really help provide a community and role models to Jews who are from these backgrounds that aren't accepting—and even if they are accepting, just to give you a community and role models. Also, different rabbinic leadership are starting to recognize the importance of making sure LGBTQ people feel safe. I go to a Modern Orthodox private school, and they added to their handbook a statement drafted with local Jewish leaders about how bullying of LGBTQ students will not be tolerated. That's something that could never have happened, even 20 years ago, even 10 years ago. Even something like that, which seems symbolic—it's representative of a really big change, and these things make a difference.

Matthias: 22:26 Taline, how about you?

Taline: 22:27 Struggle-wise... I remember one time—two years ago, maybe—I was watching this music video, and I was absolutely in love with the girl. Like, I was *in love* with her. I had the hugest crush on her. And I remember thinking to myself, "I can't ever tell anyone about this. I can't tell anyone! This is... you're not..." For a while, it was a lot of "You're not bi! You're just bored because there's no cute guys to like. You're just bored." Or, "You're just open-minded! You're accepting of other people, so you just thought of it, but you're not actually..." It was a lot of weird forms of denial that I went through, just because I didn't really grow up... my uncle was out as gay for 20 years, so my mom wasn't homophobic. My dad's made jokes, but he wasn't outwardly super homophobic. So it was just kind of... I didn't grow up, necessarily, in a homophobic household, but it was just a lot of internal "This is something that I can't be" or "something that I don't want to be because it just adds extra complexities to my life," and "I just thought of it. She's just pretty. It's whatever." It took a lot of self-reflection to really come to terms with it. And when I did, it felt great. I wasn't necessarily... it felt natural. It felt good to finally have that label that I could hold onto. But then I started realizing, "Okay, what about my faith aspect? What about that?"

Taline: 24:06 I'm a research kid. I love researching. I was on the debate team. I'm one of *those* kids, you know? So I did a lot of research, and I just got really angry because... the way that the Bible has been misconstrued and reconstructed to exclude people in the LGBTQ

community from really connecting with their faith made me upset because I was like, “This isn’t the whole story. Why are we only looking at everything at a base value?” And it was upsetting, too, because there are a lot of things in the Bible where people... we take a greater look into the historical context, and “how do we apply this to modern-day times”, like the way women are treated or slavery in the Bible—which isn’t actually outwardly condemned, but there’s some change towards being more like, “Don’t hit your slave” trend in the Bible—and I was like, “Why don’t we do the same for homosexuality? This doesn’t make sense.” And I was mad for a while.

Taline: 25:07 I remember before I came out to my mom, too, there was a point where I was really upset that... I have a trans friend, and I was really angry that the church was... you know, how people can say “It’s a sin!” Because I was like, “This is how they’re born! Why won’t people get that?” And I was so angry, and I remember crying and hugging my mom—and that was actually two days before I came out to her—because I was upset for those members of my community that I had just found. And I was also upset for myself, because I was like, “I love my friends. If I tell them, will they try to pray it away? What if I get married to a girl? I want them to be there, but I know they probably won’t be.” And that was one of the scariest things about it, was just realizing that a place... my friends in the church that I currently go to—that was my safe space for so long. And something that I was discovering about myself and excited about and passionate about wasn’t something I could share. And that, I think, is something that hurt the most. And it’s something that I still struggle with that thought.

Taline: 26:14 But in terms of hope... I don’t know if I necessarily see it within the church I go to. I do think that, at least in the Armenian church, there is a trend where they are starting to talk about it more, which is really great because it’s one of those things... it’s just pushed under the rug or forget about. So I’m glad that, at least, it’s starting to be more of a topic. But I think that just the fact that things like Queer Youth of Faith Day and Beloved Arise exist... I think that is something that really gives me hope because I didn’t have any examples of people who were in the faith and their sexuality—except for maybe my uncle, but he never really talked about his faith either, so that was something that I didn’t really see among kids. One time I even told a friend that I had recently met. I was like, “Yeah, I’m bi, but I have a Bible verse in my bio. We exist!” Because it just felt something that was so contradictory, but I think that these organizations are popping up—Queer Youth of Faith Day and things like that—that gives me hope because it shows that there is a community of us that exist and are owning who we are.

And I think that's beautiful, and I think that as we move on, that will become more prominent. That's what makes me really excited: that people can start to use their voices.

- Matthias: 27:38 Sebastian.
- Sebastian: 27:39 So I felt for a very long time in the closet—just constantly hiding, whether it was with my family, at school—but at the same time, I was combatting dysphoria and playing this game of superhero, especially, “Oh, at home, I have to do this persona. I have to be this person. Expectations are set. I can’t be who I am the way I was created and the way I want to identify as.” My freshman year in college, I was able to explore that more. I was able to be myself in that environment, even though I still felt that I was hiding and that my identity and being a Christian wasn’t possible. I constantly... I looked everywhere for answers—if it was a sin, if I was going to hell. Like, “Oh, the immediate you know that you’re part of the LGBTQ community, that’s when you go to hell. It’s a straight ticket.” I felt that fear looming over me, and it was a constant battlefield for me. I was scared that I could get kicked out at home, being in such a Christian environment that it’s set into you that you can’t be a Christian again.
- Sebastian: 29:08 But I started looking up different things. I was like, “This can’t be right. How can I do this?” I was just trying to hide myself as best as I can, not only from people around me but from God, too. I was like, “How can I embrace who I am?” But I started to realize... I listened to Kevin Garcia on YouTube, and he really inspired me, and he was what I was trying to stick to. I could barely find any resources that showed, “Oh, here’s someone being Christian and part of the community.” I was just in such a rut where I couldn’t find any hope or inspiration, and now that I see organizations popping up and coming up to unite Christian youth, I’m so excited for this positive turnout for people who were just like me or coming from any kind of background, that they can have a safe space where they just feel loved. Even as Taline stated before, through research, there’s so much more that the Bible has inside of it that’s deeper. It shows roots where the concepts that are chosen within the church and taken out of context, whereas there’s much richer and overall value where it shows love constantly. It shows that you can be who you are, even if you’re a Christian.
- Matthias: 30:46 Ameera.
- Ameera: 30:47 Yeah. Oof. So many pearls of wisdom so far. I would say when I’m thinking about the struggles and the hopes of faith communities in general, my first, most primal experience is that with the Muslim

community. And the Muslim community that I grew up in... this is a very suburban, affluent, South Asian-predominant and Arab-dominant community. So it was weird to be surrounded by rich people while not being rich going to school and going to Mosque and going to prayer and everything. So for me, talking about Islam as a racialized body in the United States is so, so important because I can't really tear away my experience of Islam from my experience of growing up poor and growing up Brown and growing up as a minority in a white county, in a white school. So there was always undertones of almost aspirational whiteness, if that makes sense. So a lot of these more affluent South Asians would have parents—parents who were doctors, sure, which is fine, but—for example, skin-whitening cream is an actual thing, a product that is sold and marketed to many South Asian peoples because we are taught that dark skin is bad. So you can't really... when I think of this, I think of all of the struggles of marginalized people being tied together. That's the core tenet of intersectionality, that the struggles that people of minority faiths face and that queer people face and that people and color and Black folks face in this country are all tied up together in a collective liberation.

- Ameera: 32:51 So I've learned a lot in challenging this very affluent theology that I've been taught and replacing it with a much more gritty liberation theology—a theology of the people. And I see that being a lot more talked about as I grow up. It's like I sprinted ten years in front of everyone else, waited, and now I'm seeing the rest of the Muslim community talk about these things that I've already gone through in my head. So that's kind of where the hope comes from, right, after the struggle, the hope being seeing my communities talk about why Black lives matter and why, even if you are a non-Black Muslim, A) Black Muslims exist and they need to be supported, but then B) whether or not they're Muslim doesn't matter because our theology, our connection to God, our connection to divinity is tied up intricately with our connection to justice.
- Matthias: 33:54 So to end, last question, speaking specifically to other queer youth who may or may not be out of the closet, specifically within your own faith community, your own faith tradition. What advice or words would you want to say to them? And let's start with Taline.
- Taline: 34:17 I think I would say that... do your own research, because you don't have to believe everything that you're blindly fed by the church, because, ultimately, religious institutions have corrupt elements because they're from people, and people aren't perfect, and we interpret things wrong, and we spread the wrong messages sometimes. So it's important for you to research yourself and assess your relationship with God on an individual basis. Because

no one can tell you how you should feel about your own relationship with God. That's not how it works. So you need to do your own research and be able to pray to God on your own and just take it on an individual basis, because a lot of times the LGBTQ community is condemned on such a holistic level that we ignore... at least in religion, the individual stories are often ignored. So you have to really take it and personalize it for yourself, if that makes sense.

Taline: 35:21 Also, to not be scared of your culture because... while I was dealing with my own sexuality, there was a cultural aspect to it because I was supposed to be the good Armenian girl who gets married to a nice Armenian boy and we make little Armenian babies, then we carry on the bloodline while being good and going to the Orthodox church every Sunday kind of vibe. And you don't have to be separated from your culture—you don't have to be separated from your faith. I think a lot of times, when we take those aspects of our person, our identity, we categorize it a lot in our brains, but there's a lot of mixture and it's all interwoven. So I think, really, just taking time to be by yourself and pray, and just accepting that "I can coexist with my culture and I can coexist with my religion *and* my individual relationship with God *and* my new sexuality that I'm discovering"—that that's okay, and you're not alone in that feeling that they somehow have to be divided. We all go through that, but you're not alone, and you can discover it for yourself, and that's okay, because you are a whole person and you are beautiful. And no matter what faith you're in, God loves you, and we love you, and there's a space for you. You can make your own space, and you can join other people that are like you. It's a journey, and it hurts, and it's hard, but you will be okay. I think it's a continual journey that we all go through in life, especially with so many different aspects to identity. So you're not going to wake up one day and feel like it's all over, but it's something that you can continually discover and embrace, and one day you'll be able to feel free even if you feel trapped right now. And I love you! And you'll be okay.

Matthias: 37:16 I'm feeling myself getting emotional over here. I love that. Daniel.

Daniel: 37:20 I think it's really important to state that whatever you're feeling as an LGBTQ person of faith, you are not alone, and you will eventually find solace and community. There are other people who share your values, and you don't have to give up everything you believe in and everyone you love in order to live as your true self. I think that it's really important to keep that in mind—as hard as things get, you will find people who love you and who will appreciate you for who you are, and you should never compromise any aspect of your identity to fit somebody else's mold.

Matthias: 38:00 Daniel, if I could ask a little bit of a follow-up question—you had mentioned earlier that you no longer identify as religious, so I would love to hear even a little bit of what you would say in that space, of leaving a faith community. It sounds like that was an act of integrity on your behalf.

Daniel: 38:18 Yeah. It was an act of self-care. I think it's also... it was for the best. And even there, there are so many people who share my experience, and I would never have otherwise realized that but for community resources and the internet helping me find other people like me. There are so many people, and it's so unbelievable when you realize that. There are nearly eight billion people on this earth, and there are so many people who go through and have gone through the same exact experience. For me, finding that out and finding that community—it really changed my life. I just can't state how amazing it feels to have friends, to have these communities that, really, you can be a part of, and you don't have to change who you are.

Matthias: 39:12 Ameera.

Ameera: 39:13 Yeah. So I'm going to start off with quoting one of my role models, Sayer Johnson. Sayer Johnson is a trans man, and he is a cofounder of MTUG, the Metro Trans Umbrella Group, which is a nonprofit here in St. Louis that is by trans people, for trans people, and provides mutual aid and meals and other disinfectant toiletry items during the coronavirus crisis but also provides housing to trans people who are in need of housing. So he is one of my role models. He has two sons, and when one of them, the older one, came out as trans, he celebrated. The first words that he told him were, "Find. Your. People." And I have taken that advice to heart, and I have really went on a long and hard journey to find other queer Muslims. It started off with a Facebook group called Radical Muslims—tongue-in-cheek. It's, like, a Saudi person wearing a shemagh on a skateboard with a rainbow background. So Radical Muslims was my first space where I was like, "Oh, there are other queer Muslims that exist! Oh my gosh! I'm not the only one!" I was able to connect with other queer Muslims there, and I was able to challenge my idea of theology, of this mainstream, heteronormative, gender-binary theology, and question that, and couch that within historical contexts of European colonization, which imposed a gender binary and heteronormativity on Muslim communities that were not that way. So knowing your history has really... I was able to connect with people, and after finding my people, I was able to find my history—the history that has been systematically hidden and covered over and marginalized by the dominant narratives. Those, I would say, are my two biggest pieces of advice.

- Ameera: 41:20 On top of that, also, don't ever feel alienated from the faith. Because that's real easy to do, to give up hope and to lose hope in all of the diversity, the many different, myriad ways of connecting with the divine and connecting with God that are presented to us via the *vastly* rich tradition of Islam. I would say that is not something you should feel alienated from because of who you are. God said... in fact, I was reading Qur'an just a little bit right before this interview, and the last verse that I read, the very last verse of Surah Baqarah—that my current mosque, El-Tawhid Juma Circle—it's a completely online mosque; we're doing everything by Zoom, which is why I can join, because they're based in Toronto and I've never been to Toronto—they end every khutbah, every Friday sermon, with this verse. And this verse says, “Laa yukalliful-laahu nafsan illaa wus'ahaa,” which, “God does not place a burden on any soul that is greater than it can bear.” So there is no burden, no task that you cannot do without the power of God or without God wanting that for you, knowing that you can grow stronger through that. So I say: put your faith in God, find your people, and know your history.
- Matthias: 42:49 Let's go to Sebastian.
- Sebastian: 42:50 So for anyone in general, whether it is in the Christian community or just coming to terms with yourself, give yourself time to love yourself—who you are—and to live authentically. One day that will happen if you are in the closet. If you're not, it's a time to be celebrated. It's a time to find joy, both within the LGBT community and your Christian... your relationship with God. You will be able to find a community you need to express yourself, to be able to not feel alone anymore. Don't be afraid to question the Scriptures you're taught. That's something that you need to be able to discover and to figure out on your own. Christianity is a relationship with God, and the Bible being used right now has been formed into a weapon of hate to convict, and that just isn't true. The Bible is to bring life. Jesus came for the Gentiles, and he welcomes anyone into his kingdom, no matter who you are, no matter what your background is—if you're Black, if you're Hispanic, if you're Asian—anyone. He came for you, and he's not going to leave you alone.
- Matthias: 44:16 That's all the questions I have. I think that's all the space we have time for. So I just wanted to say to each of you—Daniel, Taline, Sebastian, Ameera—thank you so much for joining me. This has been a delight. So much fun. So thank you!
- Sebastian: 44:32 Of course!
- Daniel: 44:32 Sure! Thank you for having me.
- Sebastian: 44:34 So happy to be here. It was great.

- Matthias: 44:36 To find out more about Queer Youth of Faith Day and Beloved Arise, head over to belovedarise.org or qyfday.com.
- Matthias: 44:46 Queerology is on Twitter and Instagram @queerologypod or you can tweet me directly @matthiasroberts.
- Matthias: 44:52 Queerology is made possible through the support of its listeners. To find out how you can become a Queerology Active Listener, head over to patreon.com/matthiasroberts. Another really easy way to support the show is by leaving a rating and a review. You can do that right in your podcast app.
- Matthias: 45:09 As always, I'd love to hear if you have ideas for the show or just want to say hi! Reach out—I'll get back to you.
- Matthias: 45:15 And until next time, y'all: byeeee!

Links and Resources:

[QYF Day](#)

[Beloved Arise](#)

[Keshet](#)

[Muslim Alliance for Sexual and Gender Diversity](#)

[Rebel & Divine](#)

[Kevin Garcia on YouTube](#)

[Beyond Shame by Matthias Roberts](#)

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