

Blessed Are the Binary Breakers

Episode 4:

Derek loves his family

Transcribed by Annie

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[Acoustic guitar intro music]

Introducing Derek: from Atlanta to Louisville (0:00 - 3:35)

Avery:

Hey listeners, and welcome to another episode of Blessed are the Binary Breakers. This is your host, Avery Smith, and today I am interviewing Derek Guy, who is a pretty awesome guy. I met Derek at the same time that I met Willow, whom I interviewed a few weeks ago, which was for the trans workshop that three of us co-led at my seminary. I haven't really seen Derek in person since that workshop, but I love getting to keep up with him on social media, specially on Facebook, where he posts a lot about his wife and his son, and it's just so clear from his Facebook messages how much he loves them. So it was really cool for me to hear in person more about that love he has for them and his whole family.

It also quickly became clear over the course of our conversation how much having community spaces where Derek can feel comforted and welcomed means to Derek. While it's clear that the church he attends in Louisville has been a space where he has found such community, it's also fair that Derek should be allowed to voice his complaints with that community. Every church, even the great ones, have so much work to do when it comes to the full inclusion and affirmation of trans and nonbinary people. So I hope that when you hear Derek's concerns and frustrations with his church that you'll listen with an open heart, especially if you are the leader of a faith community yourself, that you will listen and think about how you can help be the change in your faith community towards making spaces where trans people feel safe and fully welcomed and listened to.

But yeah, anyway, we had a great time, and so did my cat. I hope you all like cats as much as Derek and I do, because my cat Nerise has some cameo appearances in this recording. And now without further ado, let's dive into the interview.

[audio change as it shifts from just Avery speaking to their conversation with Derek]

Avery:

Is there anything, Derek, that you would like the listeners to know about you right off the bat?

Derek:

I like long walks on the beach.

Avery:

[laughing]

Derek:

No, I'm just joking. I actually really hate the beach. Well, I have been in Louisville for about six, seven years now. I'm originally from Atlanta, Georgia, so the hub of LGBT African-Americanism, and then I moved to Kentucky for some reason. [laughing] I am a social worker. I work currently at the Center for Women and Families doing domestic violence, family advocate, specialising in serious mental illness and drug use and awareness and harm reduction. Been there for - since December. It's a new job for me. I normally work with kids, so it's definitely a change working with adults.

Church: goes to Bible studies, not worship services; work to do regarding trans inclusion (3:36 - 5:17)

I go to Highland Baptist Church. I say that with the weird phrasing I just did because I only go to Bible study.

Avery:

Oh, ok.

Derek:

I don't go to big church. Big church is really awkward. I'm, like, one of five Black people that go there, so it always reminds me of a scene of *Get Out*. I'm like, "Oh, all the old white people. This is just - lovely."

Avery:

Yeah. And I've heard - like, I've never visited, but I've heard Highland Baptist is really progressive and great, but it's still one of those things where if you're only one of a group of, it's --

Derek:

Yeah. And they're working on trans things.

Avery:

[Gasp]

Derek:

I was right there in the beginning of Highland becoming trans-aware, and a lot of uncomfortable conversations were had, so I think that kind of turned me off to being as active in Highland as I could be. I started going to Highland because Bojangles, a openly gay man there, invited me and said it was a church that was trying to become more trans-progressive, and I came along to do my testimony at one of the trans 101 classes.

Avery:

Oh cool.

Derek:

And decided to keep coming. My wife goes there, and she had already been a member there, so I met her - not there, specifically, but through there. So it was - it was a good change. They still have work to do. I think Christianity as a whole still has work to do.

Avery:

Yeah. I don't know any church that's perfect about trans stuff.

Derek:

Y'know, I've heard of them, they're just not in Kentucky! It's a struggle bus sometimes.

Identifies as spiritual; thoughts on the Bible; raised Christian (5:18 - 8:08)

I guess I identify as spiritual more than Christian, just kind of knowing there's a higher power but not entirely sure that Christianity has it right. I know something's out there, I'm just not sure if Christianity is the right interpretation of everything, just because I err on the side of caution when it comes to, like, the Bible and how it was written and who wrote it and all these men giving their interpretation of what happened, and every single interpretation is a little different, so you're like, the truth is somewhere in there. May not be exactly as they described it, but it's somewhere in this weird world of, you know, when you hear two sides of a story, you always say it's somewhere in the middle.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

That's kind of how I feel about the Bible and Christianity and kind of what we've been told as --

Avery:

Yeah. That makes a lot of sense.

Derek:

Yeah. What we've been told as a society and what I've been raised to focus in on.

Avery:

So you were raised Christian?

Derek:

Yes. My grandfather's actually a Southern Baptist preacher.

Avery:

Cool. Okay.

Derek:

And all of my cousins are preachers as well. My dad was the cliché preacher's kid, so he rebelled and just wasn't about church life, so I didn't really get raised in the church as much as - like, Sundays, we would go on, like, Easter and things like that, or if I was with my big mama, my great-great grandmother, she would take me because my grandfather preached, but yeah, so I kind of grew up in a roundabout way in the church, so yeah.

Avery:

And, like what was sort of your feeling around all that growing up? Were you questioning it the way you are now, or did you just kind of go with it?

Derek:

I never really paid much attention to it, to be honest.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

Church was more like school for me, so I went to, like, get through it, not really to - I always think it's funny, because when you get to college you get more out of what you're learning because you're invested. I kind of take that view on religion. So when I was younger, I wasn't really trying to get much out of it except, like, Bible study classes, and I knew we had Easter, and lots of candy. [laughing] I knew that, you know, every once in a while we would have Christmas, and Christmas was about Jesus, I think, in a way. That's really all I got out of it when I was younger.

Conversion camp - "voluntarily" went so he could be a youth mentor -- church hurt and love, trauma and strength (8:09 - 12:59)

Avery:

So when did you start getting more invested or at least sort of thinking more critically?

Derek:

I think when I was in college. In college, I joined a coed Christian service fraternity called Kappa Chi, and I remember there were LGBT people in Kappa Chi - well, more LGB people in Kappa Chi, and I felt like, "oh, ok, so how are we interpreting the Bible now?" Because when I was younger, when I was back in high school, I voluntarily went to conversion camp.

Avery:

Wow.

Derek:

So I had already had - like, I knew I had, like, an LGB part of me. I didn't even know T existed at that point. So I spent a whole summer trying not to be a lesbian and praying the gay away, as they call it. So when I got to college it was really interesting to see all these openly gay lesbians and gay men and bisexual individuals, and I was like, "what is this world?"

Avery:

Wait, you don't have to pray the gay away?

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

Yeah. Wow.

Derek:

So I definitely had a lot of questions. I started reading a lot more, interpreting things differently. Yeah, it was definitely college when I got to that point.

Avery:

What were - when you decided to go to the conversion camp, what were your emotions around that? Like, what motivated you?

Derek:

I was a youth leader in my church, First Presbyterian Church in Marietta Georgia. I had a youth leader tell me I couldn't mentor to the younger kids because I identified as bisexual at that point, and really urged me to kind of go to this camp and figure it out. So I worked really hard to - I told my dad I was just going to a summer camp. So he thought I was

just going to a church camp for a week. But I worked really hard there to, like, deal with not being gay and fighting those “homosexual tendencies”, as they put it.

Avery:

Gosh.

Derek:

[laughing] It was really traumatising to wilfully put yourself in that situation, but for me, I did it because I knew that my kids deserved a mentor like me, because I am really good with kids, and all the other kids who were mentoring were just doing it to have something on their resumés for college, and I was doing it because I genuinely cared about these kids and I loved them and I wanted them to have a mentor who was truly invested in their life. So if I had to go to conversion camp to do that, then I'd do that, you know?

Avery:

Wow. So you willingly went, but at the same time it was sort of coerced, because --

Derek:

Yeah. It was definitely coerced.

Avery:

-- in order to do this thing you wanted to do.

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

That's rough.

Derek:

It was, but I think it made me a very strong individual. It made me very critical of how we influence kids.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

I think now that I'm older I really hold strong to some of my convictions because of what I've gone through, and I think that had I not gone through those experiences, I wouldn't be as strong of a social worker, (1), but also as strong as an advocate, because I truly believe that there are a lot of kids who are much like me and go to these churches to find themselves and then get told, you know, “hey, your identity is not valid.”

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

And if it's coming from your church, someone - like, people that you consider really wise and kind and loving, why wouldn't you believe them as a child?

Derek:

Exactly. And you're super impressionable, and teenage years are awful, so --

Avery:

You're full of this, like, self-hate and confusion anyway.

Derek:

Exactly. And I was such a circa emo kid so I had the swoop and My Chemical Romance and life is meaningless, so for me, I really found a lot of solace in the Christian world, and I think that's why I worked so hard to go to this camp and I volunteered to go to this camp, just because my youth group was my friends. I identified as a member of First Pres, and as a member, that was my identity for a while.

The church that sent him to conversion camp is affirming now --
the consequences of ignorance (13:00 - 15:25)

Avery:

Can I ask was that PCA or PCUSA?

Derek:

I think they're PCUSA.

Avery:

That makes me so mad.

Derek:

Yeah. I think that - this is - god, we're talking circa 2007, so I think that was right at the height of PCUSA having all of the debates about everything LGBT, so I think that my church had - my church won - it was like, 400 youth and I was like one of -

Avery:

Oh, so it's a big church.

Derek:

Yeah, it's a big church. I was, like, one of three Black people there, too. So like, it's a huge church, it's culturally not really diverse, so I didn't expect them to be entirely open and loving and caring about it. But there are some people that I did meet at that church who have continued to walk with me as I've grown --

Avery:

Good to hear that.

Derek:

-- and like, been a single parent and gotten married and transitioned. I think that I do - I did find some people from that church that have really walked with me through that journey and been really supportive. And like, I think that that church needed to grow, because now they're very affirming.

Avery:

Wow. They've gotten that push --

Derek:

So I think that it's - yeah. Like, they've gone through that change. I think I was one of the first people that ever had any, like, LGBT concerns.

Avery:

And they didn't know - they're just like, "oh well, you can go to this camp, then work it out."

Derek:

I was like, "heard of this church - I heard of this camp in South Georgia somewhere, good luck."

Avery:

"We're just going to send you over there and then come back and it's all fixed and we don't have to worry about it." Yeah.

Derek:

I think that that's definitely the approach they took. But now --

Avery:

And when churches don't have resources it's kind of what they do. They don't know what else to do. They're like, "someone else can solve it for you."

Derek:

And now that I'm older, I - it makes me laugh that some of the kids that I was in youth group with have slowly but surely come out.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

I'm like, "you were so mean when I came out in high school!" Oh, that self-hatred thing is a big thing in our community. I definitely appreciate that I kind of opened people's eyes to it a little bit.

Coming out - to his dad 4 times, to his mom, to his family (15:26 - 21:45)

My dad always laughs because I've come out to him like four times at this point. He laughs because he's like, "I've spent my entire life trying to get you to fit in and you have spent your entire life purposely trying to stand out. Like, you just - you were never meant to be a kid that blends into the background." And I was like "Nope. That's never been me, so here we are."

Avery:

That's always a fun talk with parents --

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

-- having them go on that journey with you.

Derek:

My dad has learned so much. Like, he still struggles when it comes to my name, and I think that's hard for --

Avery:

Sure.

Derek:

-- parents of trans kids who transition as adults. He spent his whole life calling me something else. So I think that he'll get there at some point. He uses the right pronouns. I think the name just forever will be a battle with him, but outside of that, he's really done a lot of internal work himself, which I appreciate.

Avery:

So - yeah, so you've talked about coming out to your dad. Was that in high school or in college?

Derek:

Gosh, which time?

Avery:

Right. Right.

Derek:

Like, I came out in high school as bi, and my dad was like, "ok, cool." Then I went to college and came out as a lesbian, and he was like, "okay, whatever." And then I got pregnant and he was like, "I'm so confused."

Avery:

"How does that work?"

Derek:

And then I came out - coming out as trans was entirely different. I - me and my dad are not super - like we're close, but we're not super close, so we're not - we'll talk maybe

once or twice a month, if that, just because we're all - we're living our lives. But I remember I distinctly came out on my birthday, and I'd been calling him for weeks, and he hadn't been returning my calls. So then I just texted him, was like, "hey, I'm about to make a status. I'm trans, just so you know." And I think - now that I look back on it, I kind of wish I would have had a conversation with him first, but we just don't converse like that. We're not emotional.

Avery:

That's how I am with my parents.

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

I, like, texted my mom once and was like, "by the way, I'm queer, and you just gotta deal with it."

Derek:

Yeah. Like, and my dad was just like, "ok. I'm going to process this." I found out later his ex-girlfriend and him, he processed it really hard for a while, and then he was like, "you know what, as long as he's healthy and he is safe and he takes care of my grandchild, whatever at this point."

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

So I think my dad really has been very supportive in the sense of, I still get to go home, I still talk to him, he uses the correct pronouns. He was never going to be the dad that came to Pride with me. He just - he wouldn't come to Pride just in general. He does not like festivals like that. But he will always say, you know, like, "that's my kid, I'm never going to deny who my kid is." It's been a interesting transition. My mom, when I came out as a lesbian, my mom took it very hard, and she was very upset, because my sister, my elder sister's a lesbian, she's like, "your sister's made you think this is okay", and like, she said some really harmful things, and we didn't talk for, like, a year, and then we finally started talking again around my 20th birthday. It was my 20th birthday. We started talking again in July. And then that September she died, so I'm glad that we kind of mended before she passed away, but I am kind of sad that I wasn't able to, like, show her who I was truly, but I don't think I actually had words for who I was until, like, I met a trans person, and like, I started - I knew I was trans when I started doing drag, because I felt more comfortable as a drag king than I ever had felt in my entire life.

Avery:

Cool.

Derek:

Like, I got a glimpse of it growing up, because I always got cast to play boy roles when I did theatre, and I always felt more comfortable being masculine on stage and doing male roles, but I - once again, I didn't have the language for what it was. I didn't know who or what that meant. So when I started doing drag, I met a bunch of trans people, and realised that, like, this was something that you could do. So I'm kind of sad that she wasn't able to see me as I transitioned. I don't know - she was really religious, so I don't know how she would have handled it. I think at some point she just would have been like, "you know what, you're my kid, it is what it is", and that's kind of how my whole family has taken it. Yeah. I think that's pretty how much everyone's taken it.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

I think - I haven't had any super hard opposition in my family. But my family loves from a distance, so I am blessed in the fact that we don't have to interact very often [laughing]

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

So they don't really care what's happening.

Avery:

Yeah. There's not the opportunity for big conflicts to arise.

Derek:

Yeah. Like, I see them every once in a while, maybe every - once every two or three years, if that.

Avery:

And I mean, nowadays with social media and texting and stuff, you can still be in contact with people without seeing them super often.

Derek:

Exactly. So my family is on my Facebook. They know how Aiden's doing. They'll comment on his pictures or comment on wedding pictures. So they know that I'm around and I'm doing okay, so there's no need to really be at home in Atlanta, because I don't really see myself as an Atlanta person anymore.

The power of community: the Black Trans Conference of America;
advocating for trans kids at work (21:46 - 24:49)

Avery:

Even though you mentioned that it's sort of the center of --

Derek:

It is. It is, like, the hub for LGBT African-Americans, um, which is interesting. I always tell Hannah it's funny, before *Get Out*, I didn't feel less uncomfortable around a bunch of white people, but then *Get Out* was like, uhh ---

Avery:

It kind of explained for you --

Derek:

Yeah! I was like, now I'm like, "I got a little bit of PTSD, let me just work through that." But it's interesting being around a bunch of African-American LGBTQ individuals. It's like - huh, there's more of us around here. Like, the Black Trans Conference of America is coming up, and they do it in Dallas, but they also have done it in Atlanta, and it's been this amazing - like, I have a lot of trans Black friends on Facebook that I've never met in life, but we talk all the time.

Avery:

Oh, yeah.

Derek:

Seeing them at his conference was like wow - there's so many of us! Whereas in Louisville I literally feel like there's five of us some days, or maybe ten on a good day. In Kentucky I'm like, "there's 12 of us, there's only 12 Black trans people, we need to get out of this state."

Avery:

Yeah. And it's one of those things where if there are more, there's a need to sort of be hidden --

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

Not to be as open about it, and therefore it makes forming community more difficult.

Derek:

So difficult. I have - I have struggled often with thinking about going stealth, which has been an interesting internal battle of, hmm, do I go stealth? And then I - just for me, it's not for me, just because I use my identity as advocacy a lot, so at work. And I work with kids. And there are a lot of trans kids that come in and out of our residential. Being able to have one-on-ones with them and be like, "you know, it gets better, like, I am a trans man, you will find - you will find your community, you will find your identity, don't worry", and having my coworkers reach out to me and say, "hey, we have a trans kid coming in, I

really want you to be able to sit down and have a one-on-one with them because I want to make sure I'm giving them the right services." That means something, because that can change a kid's life.

Avery:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

That's so powerful. You mentioned you just - you didn't even know trans was a thing. And I was the same way. I never heard of the concept even "nonbinary" until college. So you being able to be that for kids - to me it sounds like a ministry type thing where, like, you really have this place where you're making a big difference.

Giving his son the resources to make his own choices -- gender and religion (24:50 - 32:25)

Derek:

That's what I try to do. I think that even at home with our kid, we give him the language for everything in case he ever decides that he no longer wants to be binary or he wants to transition to a female or anything like that, we always give him the language, because I've learned now that there's so many late transitioners because of the fact that they did not have that language growing up.

Avery:

Yeah!

Derek:

So my kid - and my kid uses our teaching to teach his classmates -

Avery:

Oh, that's cool.

Derek:

- and sometimes he - [laughing] sometimes he interprets things a little bit wrong. Like, I remember gosh, what was it, about a year ago, he was explaining "trans" to his friends, and he was like, "everyone's trans!"

Avery:

Oh my gosh.

Derek:

I'm like, "Aiden, no, that's not how that works."

Avery:

No.

Derek:

He was like, "And it's okay, Mommy, you're a late bloomer, but you'll be a boy someday."

Avery:

Oh my gosh.

Derek:

I was like, "bub, that - wait, let's go back. Sit down, come back." He was like, "no, everybody's trans, Dad," and I was like, "no..."

Avery:

That's so funny. That's like the opposite of what most of us are steeped in where we assume that everyone is cis.

Derek:

Yes!

Avery:

He's just like, "Oh, so everyone's trans, okay." Yeah.

Derek:

Yeah. Like, he took it and ran with it, and his classmates were like "uhh", so we had to have a whole conversation about, "Aiden, not everyone is trans. I appreciate that you think it's the coolest thing in the world, but you don't *have* to be trans." And he's like, "Oh! So you *choose* it?" And I'm like --

Avery:

Kind of?

Derek:

"... kind of? But .. no?" Poor little baby. So we --

Avery:

It's hard to explain it.

Derek:

Yeah, it's hard to explain to him, but we give him that option of knowing that there - that language is out there.

Avery:

Yeah. Kind of run with it, and his imagination has gone really wild. It's so important to be able to imagine different things for yourself and for the world.

Derek:

Exactly. Yeah.

Avery:

That's cool.

Derek:

He has a very - we are lucky and blessed in the fact that we have a very loving, kind kid, so he is forever wanting to be the change of the world. He hates the way the world is right now, and we've taken him to marches and protests with us, so he has that understanding of what the world looks like, and he is very adamant, the fact that, "I want the world to be a better place, the world sucks right now." And I'm like, "Yeah, bub, I wish I could tell you no, but yeah." I love that he is always about changing the future and being accepting and loving of everyone. He loves church. I - like, I've never seen a kid love church so much. Every Sunday, whether it's our church, or his mentor takes him to - god, I'm going to butcher this, but I think it's like - it's E L I M. So Elim Baptist Church on the West End.

Avery:

Okay.

Derek:

They just had their 50th anniversary and they sung and Aiden sung in the choir and sang all these, like, Negro Spirituals, and he's been singing them all month. And I kid you not, like, in the middle of the night I hear Negro Spirituals, and I'm like, "Aiden, you're bringing back a whole lot of slave-time things right now, kid." And he's like, "Daddy, I'm just singing to our ancestors, calm down." Because that's what they told the kids, to like, "Sing loud, sing to your ancestors!"

Avery:

Yeah. Interesting.

Derek:

So he - he loves it, though, like, he loves our church. He loves being a part of godly play. He loves his friends in church. So we've been good about giving him the foundation. I always said, "I'm never going to force him to go to church."

Avery:

For sure.

Derek:

"Or force him into any type of religion." So we've taken him to all types of churches.

Avery:

Cool.

Derek:

Just so he can see the foundation of what it looks like cross the board. I don't want him to think that you have to be Christian. We've done a really good job of giving our kid a lot of options.

Avery:

That's really cool and so different from most kids kind of grow up with where you go to one church, and you kind of - you have to go. It's like a chore. You were saying before for your child to –

Derek:

Exactly

Avery:

It's really cool that you're showing him there's so many different ways to be religious or spiritual.

Derek:

Mm-hmm. And there's so many types of ways to worship.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

And him being able to see that is really important to us.

Avery:

Yeah. It's cool that he has found connection in two different churches.

Derek:

They - and they are two foundationally very different churches. So they are two Baptist churches, but Black Baptist and white Baptist looks very different.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

So I appreciate that he has been able to get so many different kind of teachings. He loves them both, ironically. He loves them both equally, and he enjoys both of them equally. He says that Highland is a little bit - he says, "Daddy, our church is a little bit more strict than Aunt Carey's church. Aunt Carey's church, they just sort of hoop and holler, and they fall out." And I was like, "Okay, bud." He's like, "I'm going to fall out at Highland." I was like, "Aiden, don't fall out!"

Avery:

They might not - they'd be like "what is happening?"

Derek:

"They will call the ambulance. Don't fall out in the aisle at our church." And he's like, "Okay. I'm going to do it."

Avery:

Guess I can do it. It's almost like code switching.

Derek:

Yeah!

Avery:

Yeah. Yeah. Like, we stand very still, we don't – we don't –

Derek:

Like the hymns. And he's like, "Let's break out the drums!" and I'm like, "Don't you dare. That is not this kind of church, son." He's had his fair share of different churches, and he likes it. So I'm excited for him. I'm excited to watch his spirituality grow and him figure out everything for himself. Me and Hannah worked very hard to make sure that we give him the foundation, but we never force anything on him, because she also grew up in a very forced religion world, like, she grew up in across the bridge in New Albany, and there's a church over there called Graceland. And it's a cult.

Avery:

I've heard of it.

Derek:

[whispering] It's a cult. I said it. You can take it out, but I said it. She had this, like, indoctrinated in her, and, like, they taught those, like, harsh, divisive Christianity mentality things, so, like, "homosexuality is wrong, adultery is wrong, divorce is wrong", all of these things, and so Hannah had a very hard time leaving that church and kind of figuring out religion for herself, because it was so indoctrinated to her. So we try very hard to do the opposite with Aiden.

Avery:

That's good. It's like you mentioned before with some of the trauma you had in high school around conversion camp - while it sucks you went through it, it allows you to do better by your child.

Derek:

Exactly.

Avery:

And, like, you've been through this hard stuff, and you know that there's - there are better ways out there that a child doesn't have to go through that.

Derek:

Exactly.

Thoughts on theology - hard to find accessible queer theology;
politics of church structure (32:26 - 36:59)

Avery:

What else do you want to talk about? Whether it's more about faith stuff, your thoughts on certain theology or the Bible.

Derek:

I don't know - I have a hard time when it comes to theology, just because it's so book-heavy.

Avery:

Yeah. Yeah.

Derek:

I am not a very good reader, so I get lost in all the pages, and I'm like, what did I just read?

Avery:

Yes. Yeah, that's - like, one of my goals where I feel called is to make theology, especially queer theology - trans theology and disability theology are like, my two main passions - more accessible to - like, it shouldn't be something where you have to read a million books and understand all this jargon.

Derek:

It's so hard to find foundational literature around queer theology. It is.

Avery:

Oh my gosh, yes

Derek:

Because I've looked for - I think we have the majority of queer theology books, and even those sometimes are heavy. I'm like, "What are they talking about?" and Hannah's like, "Let me give you the background, and I'm like, "Good, because I don't know what's happening!" I even have the hardest time with - just our church in general where we talk about - god, I'm going to butcher this too - CBF, Collaborative Baptist Fellowship? They're the big Baptist people.

Avery:

Okay.

Derek:

And like, how our church separated from the Southern Baptist Convention and went to CBF, and CBF is a little bit homophobic too, and now there's, like, uproar in our church - and I'm like, "**God**."

Avery:

It's a lot.

Derek:

It is. It's so - I think I get lost with how much of church and organisations like churches function a lot like politics.

Avery:

Me too!

Derek:

And it gets obnoxious. Hannah laughs at me when we have to go to, like, what we call our - we have quarterly meetings at church, and I'm like, "What are we voting on? We're on votes to vote for the votes of votes. Like, what is happening?" And, like, there are times I have literally been in meetings where we're voting on the committee for the committee to find the committee to find a pastor, and I'm like, "*What?*"

Avery:

So much.

Derek:

At what point do we have too many committees and too many votes? What is happening?! And I guess for me I - that's where I struggle with church, because it's like, who's on what committee has all the power, the deacons or the pastor or - what is happening here? When did we just fundamentally become this political organization versus just a place to come to learn about God and to fellowship.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

I think that's where theology is for me. I try to just find places to fellowship.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

And find places of comfort, and I think when we take - so many churches forget what the church is for. I think Highland struggles with that too. We did this whole vision 2020, like, a year ago, and it was our new revamp of our church, and they spent months upon months upon months surveying every Bible study, surveying all the congregations, and then we have all this information and we don't do anything with it.

Avery:

Oh my gosh.

Derek:

You're like, "What - what was the point of doing this survey if we're going to sit on it for a year, two years?"

Avery:

Yeah. That's - for me, that's the most frustrating thing is when churches will be like, "All right, after years of researching, we have determined that yes, we do have a racism

issue” or a homophobia issue or whatever it is, and then nothing happens. [strained laughter]

Derek:

Yeah. Highland has had a trans issue for a long time.

Slow-going trans inclusion - the bathroom issue (37:00 - 40:20)

Avery:

Yeah. And they’re like, “Yeah, we know it,” and that’s the end of the conversation.

Derek:

They’re like, “We’re working on it. Trans Women National meets here.” And I’m like –

Avery:

Which is cool.

Derek:

– “Okay, that’s cool, but” -

Avery:

Then what?

Derek:

“What else?”

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

Like, I have foundationally trying been trying to get HighlandS to change their bathroom forever, and it’s never going to happen, because, like –

Avery:

That’s me at the seminary. It’s so frustrating.

Derek:

And they’re like, “But there’s a family bathroom”, and I’m like, “I don’t want to go to the family bathroom where people go to change their child.”

Avery:

That’s, like –

Derek:

That’s creepy too.

Avery:

Yeah. Like, the bathroom issue just drives me wild because it is the most basic simple way to be a decent human being.

Derek:

Change the sign! That is all you have to do.

Avery:

Yeah. It is the tiniest thing and yet it takes forever to get it to happen. That's where the seminary is at right now. It took, like, a whole year to get a proposal passed by the council, then our president, who he retired, like, this past summer, he vetoed it as one of his last acts as our school president.

Derek:

[whispered] Asshole.

Avery:

And then we've been trying to get it - like, this fall we got the new president to sort of be like, oh yeah, you can do the thing that the council approved, but the signs that they've put out - they're not what we wanted. They're not the signs we did the proposal for. They're just on single stall bathrooms to have a gender neutral sign, and they have, like, that stick figure that's like, half a dress and half not a dress.

Derek:

Half - oh. I hate that.

Avery:

And I'm just like, "This is not what we were asking for." I wrote this 10 page proposal with photos of different signs they might consider using, and we also wanted stuff done with the gendered bathrooms to - but yeah. And it's just frustrating that it takes forever.

Derek:

And it is one of the basic cheapest things you can do as an organization to affirm so many people.

Avery:

Yes! And it's the first thing people see when you walk in. I don't know about you, but as a trans person that's what I'm looking whenever I enter a new public space, is bathrooms.

Derek:

Oh, yeah. So It's interesting, I spoke at - I went to Holland Michigan and spoke at her church and - talking about being a Black man and a Black trans man and how to be more affirming of Black trans individuals, and it was the first church I had ever been to that had gender-neutral bathrooms, and the gendered bathrooms were all the way in the back, so --

Avery:

Wow.

Derek:

They made it where they were like, “if you want the gendered bathrooms, you have to go out of the way” –

Avery:

You’re the one that has to - mm.

Derek:

And the bathrooms up front were all gender-neutral, and I remember being like, asking them how much did that cost? And they were like, “It literally cost us maybe \$400 to get new signs.” That’s nothing.

Avery:

Wow. Wow.

Derek:

And I was like, “are -” my church frustrates me now, because this is the most simple, easy change.

Avery:

Well, especially at a place like Highland Baptist where it’s full of, like, progressive liberals, mostly white, who are like those kinds that are like, “we’re good allies”, something people will be, like, “okay, cool, so you said –” But I don’t know what to do, do you have sort of concrete examples of what signage is good for bathrooms in churches, like, what they should do?

Derek's specific advice for churches on bathroom signs, inclusive language, gendered groups, etc. (40:21 - 47:17)

Derek:

I literally verbatim just like having “bathroom”.

Avery:

Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. On the sign.

Derek:

Like, just “bathroom”. Like, I don’t - port-o-potties just say “bathroom”. Like, I’m just saying.

Avery:

Yeah. It’s not gendered.

Derek:

Like, I just don’t understand why - I think people sometimes make it more difficult than it has to be.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

So, like, just saying “bathroom” or, like, I appreciate Jo’s ability to preach without using gendered language.

Avery:

Oh, nice.

Derek:

And Lauren does a good job of that as well, of making sure that we’re not calling the father, the son, the holy spirit, like, there’s alternative language. And there’s also inclusive language, so I think that we need to be aware of that, and there are whole podcasts and books about how to be inclusive in the way that you preach. I think that’s important for churches, and I think that’s simple, easy change. Highland is forever, like, “Derek, what is it going to take for trans people to feel comfortable here?” Literally those two things –

Avery:

Yeah. Are the most basic –

Derek:

Are the most basic, accepting things. And also not doing weird awkward things like, “You’re visiting, you’re trans? Here’s Derek, *he’s* trans.” No, that’s weird. Don’t do things like that. That’s so awkward. “Do y’all know each other?” No. Do all black people know each other? No!

Avery:

But white people might be like, “... do you?”

Derek:

Exactly. They’re like, “well, do you?”

Avery:

“Do you?”

Derek:

No! What is wrong with you!? Like, I - I think I’m so open about my transness because I wear - like, I wear my blackness. So don’t be awkward about me being black, don’t be awkward about me being trans. It is –

Avery:

Yeah. Just be chill. Everyone, just be chill.

Derek:

Just errybody chill out. It is not that complicated. But people make it far more complicated than it has to be.

Avery:

It's true. A lot of it is just simple habit changes, like using - it might take you a little bit. Like, as a preacher, you might catch yourself in your sermon draft, or whatever, like, fix stuff up, but if you do it for a month, you're going to get so used to it that it becomes second nature.

Derek:

Exactly.

Avery:

And same with ushers and stuff, whoever your greeters are in your church, instead of when people walk in being like "hey ladies", just be like, "hey friend", you know, instead of immediately gendering people as they walk in the door, because that for me is the other thing. If I walk in a church and I'm immediately getting called "ma'am" and stuff - I'm just like, you mean so well, but you're doing so bad.

Derek:

Or even - for a while there we were trying to get our ushers to have their pronouns on their badge.

Avery:

I like that.

Derek:

And introducing themselves with pronouns. And Highland had the hardest time figuring out how to do that. And I was like, "You figure out how to say your name. All you have to do is, 'Hi, my name is Derek, I use he/him pronouns, how about you?' "

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

That is the easiest way to introduce yourself. But it's so mind-blowing to people.

Avery:

And that's such - that's another one. Just get in the habit of it. It might feel kind of weird at first, you might forget a few times, but if you do it a month, you'll get there.

Derek:

Exactly. It's not rocket science to be an inclusive church.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

It just means making yourself more uncomfortable to make the minority comfortable.

Avery:

Yeah. That's a good way of putting it.

Derek:

I just - I don't know how to - like, there's no way for me to make people get that. There's no way for people to feel like it's a priority for that, which is struggling, but it's very simple. It's so simple. It's the basic of things that are like, we have a ladies group, we have a mens group - why do we have gendered groups, y'all? What are we talking about in those gendered groups that make it where we wouldn't want the other sex there or nonbinary people there?

Avery:

Yeah. [laughing]

Derek:

What weird stuff is happening behind these closed doors?

Avery:

What is going on in there?

Derek:

I'm like - and I know that we have included whatever gender identity you identify as, you can go to whatever group you want -

Avery:

Which is a nice addition.

Derek:

It's a nice addition, but what about people who don't identify in your gender box?

Avery:

Just don't go to any group. It's fine.

Derek:

They don't go to group?

Avery:

I'll just have a little nonbinary group by myself.

Derek:

Yeah! And they're like, "Well, we can have a nonbinary group." And I was like, "So you want to put them by themselves? Can we have a Black people group too? No, that sounds weird? Exactly."

Avery:

Yes. Sounds pretty - yeah. Yeah. And every now and then I think there is a good reason for gendered groups, for instance, if the mens group is talking about toxic masculinity, by all means, make it a mens group, because women probably don't want to go to that anyway. You guys work through your sexist stuff by yourself - that's totally cool. But if you're just talking about the Bible, why does it got to be only men, like, a mens club in there?

Derek:

Exactly. Why do we all have to read *Just Like Jesus* and have gendered groups about it? It don't make no sense.

Avery:

Yeah. Especially because the more diverse your group is, whatever that diversity is, like, age, or gender, or race, anything, the more voices you have contributing to "here's what I think the Bible is saying", the more everyone's mind is going to be opened, so it's not just a matter of being, like, more inclusive of trans people, which should be enough by itself, but in case it's not, it'll also help the cis people in the room.

Derek:

Exactly. Mm-hmm. And I have felt probably the most uncomfortable at the mens group because it is so much toxic masculinity –

Avery:

Yeah, like, manly men.

Derek:

– cisgender ridiculousness. I'm like, I don't care if I identify as male or not, I don't even want to come to your group.

Avery:

[laughing] This is *not* relatable.

Derek:

This is not relatable and really awkward. I'm good.

Avery:

[aside] I'll let you go soon. I'm sorry.

Derek:

Nerise said, "This is ridiculous, okay."

Avery:

Nerise is like, "Just let the people go in the groups they want and let me out of the bathroom."

Why trans inclusion NEEDS to be a priority: we are an "endangered" group (47:18 - 52:20)

Derek:

I think I struggle the most with Highland because Highland prioritizes everything else but trans issues. Like, I struggle with churches a lot with that because of the fact that they either lump us with the LGB individuals –

Avery:

Yeah. And think that if they do something for LGB they're doing stuff for us, and they're not.

Derek:

Or just forget about us in general, and I'm like, Highland, you have to do better. Churches in general just have to do better, because although we are not the majority, there's so few of us that our minority - it's like - it feels like almost dealing with extinction.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

Like polar bears or something. I'm like, if you keep forgetting us and we keep dying or killing ourselves, then there's not going to be any more of us, and then you're going to look up and be like, well, what happened?

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

And it was because you were not affirming of those minorities that you had there or who were coming through, because you're like, oh, well, that's not a priority issue for us because –

Avery:

There's hardly any of them.

Derek:

Yeah. There's hardly any of them, so why would we change our bathrooms for four or five people when the vast majority of the other 1200 people at Highland are going to the gendered bathrooms as they are, why would we change our bathroom for those four or five individuals? And I get so frustrated with things like that because I always - I think I'm lucky in the fact that I can bring things back to simplicity when it comes to talking to my church. So whereas they'll be like, "well, we have the family neutral bathroom." I was like, "oh, is that also the black bathroom to you?"

Avery:

Oh, shoot. Yeah.

Derek:

And they're, "no, you can use whatever bathroom you want." And I was like, "but do you see how that fundamentally sounds?" So when you say, "Well, they have their own bathroom", yeah, Black people had their own bathrooms too. It didn't work well. Separate but equal is not a thing. So you may only be changing it for the minority amount of people, but if that's the case, then just bring back your colored bathrooms, because there's only three of us here, so.

Avery:

Sure. Yeah.

Derek:

No? That makes you uncomfortable? It makes me uncomfortable as well. So I think that

—

Avery:

Highlighting for them the similarities —

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

— in this discrimination - this sort of push - literally marginalisation, pushing people to the side.

Derek:

Mm-hmm.

Avery:

And, like, yeah, the - I'm so with you with churches being, like, "Well, we don't have any trans people", or "we have one or two trans people, so that's not going to be something we care about." You're never going to have more than one or two trans people until you have a space where trans people who visit can be like, "okay, this is a place that truly welcomes." They're going to just keep walking away. They're going to keep feeling pushed out.

Derek:

Yeah. I definitely 100% agree. I think that I struggle with our church because our church fundamentally will - you guys will go overseas to Africa to build houses and give out shoes and food, but you can't change your bathroom for the people that you have here who are struggling?

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

Like, you want to become a refugee church right now and bring in immigrants and be this safe haven, but you can't be a safe haven for trans people? Like, I struggle so hard with it. And it's not just my church.

Avery:

Yeah. Yeah.

Derek:

There's thousands of churches that have the same battle every single day. And I think it only becomes apparent to my church and most of those churches when it's, like, Trans Visibility Day or Trans –

Avery:

Trans Day of Remembrance.

Derek:

Remembrance. Like, that's –

Avery:

When they're remembering to grieve for those of us who have died because our society is so hostile to us.

Derek:

Mm-hmm. And like, ironically, not this year, this past year, because it was at Douglas this past year, but the year before, the first Trans Day of Remembrance service was at Highland.

Avery:

Yeah. I remember that.

Derek:

I was like, so you brought a bunch of trans people into this place without a bathroom for them? Do you understand how absolutely ridiculous that sounds?

Avery:

Yeah. Yeah. It's messed up.

LGBT groups have this issue too -- LGB needs to remember the T (and POC); Derek had to step down as Mr. KPF (52:21 - 55:40)

Derek:

So, like, I just - gosh. Or during Pride Week, the pride service is at Highland. It makes no sense to me. It's baffling to me.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

But it also reiterates to me that often the LGB community forgets the T community as well, and they marginalise us as well, and they don't pay attention to us, and they do things that are really harmful to us, and they don't really care because, they're like, "well, the majority of us are happy and living our lives, so why would we be concerned?" Like, I was Mr KPF 2017/18.

Avery:

KPF?

Derek:

Kentucky Pride Foundation.

Avery:

Okay. Just –

Derek:

So they are the people who do our large Pride, and they have long, long had a race issue and a trans issue, and that's how Louisville Pride started, because the large funders for KPF figured that they had a race issue and separated and that's why Ford no longer - Ford no longer puts money in KPF. They put money in Louisville Pride.

Avery:

Oh! Okay.

Derek:

And they sponsor Louisville Pride, and Louisville Pride, their entire board members are all people of color.

Avery:

That is great.

Derek:

Whereas KPF has one bi-racial Asian and Black individual. He is the only person of color that has ever been on their board.

Avery:

So anyway, you were the reigning KPF.

Derek:

And I stepped down because when I did the pageant, I refused to wear the rainbow because I didn't find that to be Pride for me. I wore the trans flag.

Avery:

Nice!

Derek:

And a lot of people had an issue with that, a lot of people were like, "Where's your rainbow? You have to wear rainbow."

Avery:

Wow.

Derek:

"It's Pride." And I was like, Pride is whatever you wanted it to be.

Avery:

Yes.

Derek:

It does not have to be this rainbow.

Avery:

Yes.

Derek:

And that rainbow is drenched in Black trans women's blood, so no, I'm good. Then - I thought the board was fine. All of a sudden, during my reign, they had the audacity to change their rules for the first time ever and say that the rainbow flag had to be the majority represented when doing your pridewear.

Avery:

And they just *happened* to do that while you were refusing –

Derek:

And they were like, "it had nothing to do with you."

Avery:

Oh, of *course* not.

Derek:

And I was like, oh, because I didn't forcefully break this rule last year because you didn't have the rule, so I interpreted it with - I interpreted it the way I wanted to interpret it, which is fair game.

Avery:

Yes.

Derek:

Pride is however you envision Pride.

Avery:

Yeah. A pride flag doesn't have to be the rainbow flag. It can be the trans flag.

Derek:

It could be the asexual flag. It could be –

Avery:

Bisexual. Anything. Yeah.

Derek:

Any flag you want it to be! As long as it is your identity.

Avery:

Yeah. And so they literally pushed you out.

"people only care about trans people when we're dying, not when we're trying to live;" we are forceful because this is an urgent situation (55:41 - 59:45)

Derek:

So I struggle so much with that and how - then you look at all these people who end up going to churches, and they kind of have the same mentality at church. It almost feels like people only care about trans people when we're dying, not when we're trying to live. Like - and I always struggle with that, because I'm like, you guys only care when we're dead. Like, that is the only time you ever want to grieve for us or pay attention to us or pay attention to the things that we struggle with on a day-to-day basis or make things accepting and equal for us.

Avery:

If you're gonna be sad when we die, you got to keep us from dying.

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

Because we are a small group. We can't do it by ourselves.

Derek:

Exactly. So I think that especially in Louisville, I've seen that there are huge amount of LGB allies who don't know how to be allies, who don't know what that means and who don't know how to advocate for people who are trans and who are nonbinary and who are the minority of the minority of the minority.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

So instead of advocating for us, they just ignore us, and that's frustrating, especially in the church world where it's supposed to be come one, come all, you know?

Avery:

Yeah. And there's this - there's this idea in scripture, both the Old Testament and the New Testament, that God sort of pays the most attention to the people that the world is pushing out. The marginalized and oppressed are the ones that God listens to when they cry out. Put that aside, who the church pays attention to.

Derek:

Exactly. My previous pastor once told me, like, while we - first off, me and Joe, Joe Phelps, who used to be the pastor of Highland - me and Joe had to have mediation. We had to have a therapist in the room to talk with us because our conversations had gotten so hostile. At one point, he was like, "Derek, you can't be so forceful to get people to change." And I was like, "Joe, we are *dying*. Like, we are *dying*."

Avery:

Yeah. And it's not like they listen to us when we're nice.

Derek:

Yeah. And I was like –

Avery:

I've tried that.

Derek:

[splutters] Oh, trust me –

Avery:

I'm sure you have too.

Derek:

– I've been the most accommodating person!

Avery:

Like, especially when you bring race into it, for you. Like, when I, as a white person, am a little forceful, it's not seen in - I'm sure, like, for you, it's even worse.

Derek:

Oh, Highland thinks I'm the most aggressive angry Black man.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

And I think it's hilarious, because I am the opposite of –

Avery:

Like, this entire conversation you've been so calm! Like –

Derek:

I'm just - I'm not aggressive.

Avery:

You're a nice person! Yeah. [laughing]

Derek:

But I'm forceful with my beliefs –

Avery:

You have to be.

Derek:

– and I am forceful about equality, and - Joe has a mentality of, “We have to walk people along with us,” and I was like, “If people aren’t walking, you need to leave them behind.”

Avery:

Yeah. There’s a point.

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

Like, by all means, if people are willing to walk along, we can be gentle with them, we will be, you know, patient with them, but if they’re not willing to walk along, we’re gonna to have to get forceful in trying to get them to move along.

Derek:

And Highland - Highland gives people decades. Like, a little bit about Highland - Highland was the first church in Kentucky, Baptist church, to do a gay marriage.

Avery:

Okay.

Derek:

And it was two of my friends - well, two of my acquaintances. They - the deacons in the church ministry discussed this for five years before they got married. Five years. They discussed whether their marriage was worth it, whether it would last. All of - like, two white gay men, they discussed them as individuals, these people, if they were committed into church, if they were tithing - all of these things –

Avery:

Things that a straight couple would not get asked.

Derek:

Yeah. And it took them five years to finally agree to marry them.

Avery:

Like, “oh, I guess they are good Christians who deserve marriage.”

Pain around baptism; "It made me feel rejected That's when I did stop going to church" (59:46 - 1:04:20)

Derek:

So when I started fighting the church because the church - the tradition is that only someone on staff can baptize you. I’m from a Black Baptist church where anybody can baptize, and I wanted Bojangles to baptize me as - because it meant something special for me as my authentic self to be baptized. I’ve been baptized myself, but not as my - like, not as my authentic self. And the deacons discussed it, and there was all types of

fights, and I straight up told Highland, "I'm not waiting five years for you to figure this out. I'm not." They had all kind of accommodations. They were like, "Well, what if Jo does it, but Bojangles is also in the water with you? What if Bojangles holds your hand while you're getting baptized? What if he's the one who says the prayer?" I was like, "You guys ordained him as a pastor—"

Avery:

Wow. Yeah.

Derek:

"--and you won't let him do my baptism? Do you know how ridiculous you're sounding?"

Avery:

Wow. Like, he's ordained as a pastor and they still wouldn't?

Derek:

Yeah. By this church. By Jo. Jo ordained him.

Avery:

That's just –

Derek:

Is that not the mind-blowing thing?

Avery:

That's one of those cases where - I'm taking a class right now on Presbyterian polity, so all the, like, government stuff. And like, it confuses me. It baffles me. It frustrates me. But I get it to an extent. You need some order. You need - like, it's not a *bad* thing. But when it's getting in the way of people connecting with God and connecting with each other the way you wanted to do with your baptism, we're putting these rules over that worship and connection and it's a problem, and that's a big problem.

Derek:

And it, like, (1) I never got baptized, (2) –

Avery:

Oh, so it never worked out. Okay.

Derek:

They're still to this day discussing this damn issue.

Avery:

So it may take five years.

Derek:

And - it may. And then (2) it now makes me not even want to be baptized at Highland.

Avery:

Because when they finally agree, if they finally agree, it's going to feel like –

Derek:

It's going to feel like, oh, now I'm worthy of being baptized by Bojangles in your church? Like, I'd rather go outside with a water bottle. Like, I just - I don't want this full show. And it made me feel very - it made me feel very rejected by the church, rejected for (1) wanting someone with the closest identity to mine who I had the most connection with to baptize me, because that's where it was, like, I felt a connection with Bojangles. Bojangles is someone that I adamantly adore. I think that he is an amazing person, I think that he is an amazing Christian, and he has done a lot of work to get Highland to where it is. And I don't think it's fair that Highland sometimes treats Bojangles like the gay uncle. So though, like, he can - he even preaches Friday night churches, so you won't put him on staff and pay him, he can't baptize me, but you ordained him, and when you ever need anything LGBT-orientated -

Avery:

Then he -

Derek:

- he is more than willing to do it. So it felt very demeaning of not only myself but of him and his place in the church and my place in the church. It really made me very frustrated, to the point where that's when I did stop going to church and just started going to Bible study, because I don't feel like I'm a part of my church. I feel like I'm, like, a visitor every Sunday versus I've joined this church and I don't have a place in this church.

Avery:

I'm so sorry that that happened to you. Another example of being pushed out.

Derek:

Yeah.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

And it's one of those things where I think that's why I work through church, because I have a lot of harsh feelings about church, and then it keeps getting reaffirmed when things like that happen. So I think that - but I feel like I would do myself a disservice if I just up and left the church.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

Because I do find solace and comfort in a higher power, and I have made a community where I can in my church.

Still he stays - still has found community in this church, and so has his son (1:04:21 - 1:07:05)

Avery:

Yeah. Do you want to talk more about that sort of - because for me, that's always one of the big questions, why do we stay, you know?

Derek:

I have made a community in my Bible studies. I love my Bible study groups. They are amazing individuals, especially my 11 o'clock group. We're called progressive parenting. And (1), I've found solace in other parents, because me and Hannah struggle because we're in this weird - we're in this weird age group. Like, Hannah's 25, I'm 27, and we have a six-year-old, so all the other people with six-year-olds are, like, 35, and they're all buying houses, and we're like - "mm, are ya now?"

Avery:

Yeah. [laughing]

Derek:

"That's cool. Ima go pay my rent now." [laughing] So it's fun being a part of this world. We dissect everything in our Bible study group. We dissect politics a lot, we dissect identity a lot, we dissect sexual orientation, we dissect how to talk to our kids about sex, like, just everything, just because we have such a closeknit community.

Avery:

Yeah. That's wonderful.

Derek:

So I love that we have found our own community, and I think that's why I keep staying. I stay because I found community, and I stay because Aiden's found community, more than anything. As a parent, I would sacrifice anything for him, so if that means - like, right now he goes to Lowe Elementary. It is one of the whitest schools, but, like, he has a great education there, so, like, if I have to sacrifice being uncomfortable and wear this paisley purple and pink monogrammed shirt for PTA, then Ima wear this paisley pink and purple monogrammed shirt for PTA, because my son has a great education, and that's - that's kind of what church is. He has a great foundation there, and I don't ever want to disrupt that.

Avery:

Yeah.

Derek:

I would feel like we weren't being our best parents if we didn't give him the foundation of something. That's why we give him the foundation of a little bit of everything, just so he can figure it out himself.

Avery:

That's really cool.

"Find your people" (1:07:06 - end)

Avery:

So it seems like we're getting ready to wrap up.

Derek:

Mm.

Avery:

My - I like to ask people as sort of a last question if you have one last piece of advice for trans and nonbinary people of faith or just in general.

Derek:

Of faith? Find your people. They're out there. There is - there is room for you to be your true, authentic self and still have your faith, and there are people out there who will affirm that and who will support that and advocate for that and advocate for you. You just have to find them and hold on til you can find them. That's pretty much my advice just in general for trans people. I know it's hard. It's tough. It's rough. There are days where the most trans of trans people are like, "Did I make a mistake? Did I - maybe life was easier the other way, maybe I could just go back into whatever box I was put in in the beginning." But I think that there's so much strength and so much bravery in living your true, authentic self, because some people live their whole life and never have that.

Avery:

Yeah. Thank you so much for coming and being on here today. It's been really great.

Derek:

No problem. Thank you for having me. I appreciated it.

[Shift in audio to only Avery speaking]

Avery:

So many thanks to Derek for sitting down with me and sharing some of his story, and so many thanks to all of you listeners who took time out of your day to hear his story. Next episode should be up in two weeks, and in the meantime, go break some binaries, and bless the world with your life.

[acoustic music]