

Family Chat: The Friendships that Survive

from a [blog post](#) by Julie Rogers

Hi Julie! I have followed your blog for many years and have stayed with you through the change from Side B theology (which does not believe the Bible supports same-sex marriage) to Side A theology (which affirms same-sex marriage for Christians). I am attracted to women too, I identify as side B. When I first started telling people about my orientation I was terrified and filled with shame and your blogs made me feel known and not alone, and even welcome into ministry. I am a missionary now. I know we now have differing opinions on the subject, but I trust you and I'd love your opinion on a question: I really want to radically love people like Jesus, all people. But I am curious about if you think I can still love and be friends with side A Christians and invite them into my story as a side B gay Christian, or if I forfeit that that right by being side B? I have encountered some feedback that my stance alone on the subject is hurtful to Christians on side A and so I should either change my position or stay away, but that doesn't seem right at all. I feel pretty strongly about my personal conviction to be side B, but more than anything I want to love people of the LGBT community. I so badly want to be in community with and love my side A friends. How would you feel cared for by side B people? If you have guidance, I'd love to hear it. Thanks for your time. I really appreciate you.

-Steph

Hi Steph,

I can't tell you how refreshing it is to hear you wrestling with how to love people better. On an internet where self-assured people try to out-wit each other every day, where people slam those with different beliefs to gain credibility with their own tribe, it's encouraging to see someone humbly trying to love people with different beliefs.

My inner circle has always consisted of LGBTQ people who land in a different place than I do. When I believed same-sex relationships were sinful, some of my best friends were happily gay-dating and getting gay-married. Since I became affirming, many of the dearest queers in my life are pursuing lifelong celibacy. We have walked with each other through transitions in our beliefs and some are still caught in the middle of the questions. Regardless of where we locate ourselves in the debate about same-sex relationships, we've gone out of our way to make sure the others in our circle of friends know that, more than anything else, we want each other to flourish.

We encourage each other to live with conviction, honesty, integrity, and vulnerability. We trust that the others in our circle of friends have also prayed for thousands of hours and cried the particular tears of shame that only queer kids cry. We understand that our queer Christian friends, regardless of what they believe, have known loneliness, rejection, loss, and disappointment, and we want them to know we're here to support them without qualification or condition. We want each other to know that this friendship is a safe place for them to be

confused, and it's a safe place for them to have convictions that rub us the wrong way because this is a safe place.

Here are a few things that help people in my community navigate relationships with people who have different convictions about same-sex relationships. (I should add that I'm mainly speaking of other LGBTQ Christians here, though these principles likely apply to straight Christians asking the same question.)

We honor the sincerity in the other person's beliefs and path. You demonstrate this kind of humility, Steph, when you acknowledge that the Side A Christians in your life are actually Christians. If people on either side start from a place that says, "Those people aren't real Christians," or "Those people are responsible for all the shame LGBTQ Christians feel," then it's hard to form a solid foundation in the friendship. We have to acknowledge the complexity of the story in which we find ourselves and respect the reasons others land in a different place. We have to be humble enough to believe the best about each other.

We sincerely want to see the other person flourish within their theological framework. I'm not sure our friendships would survive if we spent our time trying to convince the other people to believe differently—it's exhausting. We respect each other enough to know they've done the studying, praying, and agonizing, and we are glad they've finally found a sense of peace about which path to take. Us affirming folks want to see the celibate gays find deep, rich, intimate friendships, and we want to be a part of their extended family. The celibate gays want those of us in relationships to have joyful, life-giving, sanctifying relationships and marriages. We are less concerned about which side of the debate a friend falls on and more focused on helping each other grow in love for Christ, other people, and often ourselves (since most of us grew up on a steady diet of shame and self-hatred). We understand that no matter where you land in this debate, it's hard as hell to grow up gay or bi or trans in the church and it's an actual miracle that we're all still in the faith, so we're in each other's fan sections for life.

We realize there's more to each other (and our friendship) than our theology about same-sex relationships. This debate can take up a lot of space in the church. Denominations have divided over it, families are torn apart because of it, and people turn to all kinds of destructive behaviors to cope with the anxiety they feel as a result of it. But we are also whole human beings. My friend Brent has a heart the size of Texas and, when a friend who loves to quilt was going through a divorce, he learned how to quilt so he would have a consistent point of connection with her as she grieved. My friend Casey can make anyone feel seen and at ease in a crowd (she's also the first to show up with a toolbox and a willing spirit when you move into a new place). My friend Zach is the kind of person who, without fail, will stand up for someone who's being bad-mouthed, whether they're present or not (whether he particularly likes them or not). He's the kind of person who believes the best about everyone, and he urges the rest of us to see people in all their complicated humanity when we want to highlight their flaws instead. When my LGBTQ friends and I look at each other, we do not see a Side A person or a Side B person; we see a human being that we treasure, a person that brings joy to our lives simply because they show up as their precious selves.

You are not a bigot, Steph. You can believe God intends marriage to be between a man and a woman and you can be a force for good in this world. You can fiercely love the queer people in your life even if you're not convinced their relationships are God's best for them. I don't want

to minimize the seriousness of the debate—we all know there are real consequences that flow from our positions. But I also don't want to boil the entirety of someone down to their beliefs about the Bible and same-sex relationships. Love the people around you in the unique way you're wired to love them. Love the people they love. Eat leftovers together while you watch your favorite shows (and sob together if that show is *This Is Us*). Text them to remind them their existence in this world feels like a personal gift to you from God.

When you love people extravagantly—with humility, joy, and respect—your friendship is a blessing, whether the people in your life can receive it or not. If some LGBTQ Christians are unable to accept the love you have to offer them, I imagine it's the result of a lot of pain they've endured from Christians over the years. Perhaps the best way to love those people is to empathize with that pain and honor them by giving them the space they need. There are plenty of people out there in need of a friend like you, so find those people and bless them with your presence.

Cheers,

Julie