



A Monthly E-Newsletter For CenterPeace Parents Volume 14 Aug 2022

LEFT BEHIND: A SIBLING'S PERSPECTIVE

By Averi Bates

In one conversation, everything changed. Our family had always been taught that being gay was a sin, so when my brother came out eight years ago, our world was in a tailspin. My parents were worried about my brother – his salvation, his emotional state, his mental health. And we all were desperate to make sure my brother knew he was deeply loved and valued by our family and by Jesus.

The dynamic in our house changed overnight. My parents and I were stuck between two worlds: the LGBTQ+ and ally communities and our traditional, non-affirming faith community. Homosexuality became the hyper-focus of every conversation that summer as we tried to process this massive life change together. Our nuclear family grew closer than ever before, yet we were each experiencing our own crisis of faith.

I had so many spiritual questions I was struggling with. Was what I had been taught about homosexuality wrong? What else that I've been taught could be wrong? What about women's roles in the church? What about baptism? And on and on. These were heavy faith topics that I couldn't process on my own. But I knew my



parents were overwhelmed with their research on homosexuality and with trying to help my brother through his coming out process. I understood that what he was going through was huge, truly life changing, and my faith questions seemed so small in comparison. Plus, every time I tried to bring up one of my faith questions to my parents, somehow the conversation would circle back around to the LGBTQ+ community. After a few attempts, I realized my parents were just using the research I had done on my own to process through their own questions instead of helping me with mine.

(cont'd on page 3)

EDITOR'S NOTE



Dena A Edwards

This month, we are focusing on what siblings of LGBTQ+ kids experience. As parents, it's easy to obsess over the impact of having a gay or gender-non-conforming kid, and what that means to them and to our own nuclear, extended and church families. In the process, we can forget the massive impact it has on our other kids. The article above was written by our daughter Averi and addresses what it was like for her when her brother came out in high school, and how it has affected her since. This month's issue also includes a Q & A that shares some thoughtful responses from two other siblings, who each had different experiences when their own brothers came out.

It's our hope that hearing the perspective from LGBTQ+ siblings might make us as parents more intentional with helping them through their journey.

Q & A: TWO SISTERS DISCUSS THEIR OWN JOURNEYS



Abigail Junek with her brother, Allen. Abigail was 14 when Allen came out as a gay man.

What was it like for you when you found out your brother is gay?

Abigail Junek: I'm not going to lie it was hard for me to wrap my head around it. My world came crashing down to millions of tiny little pieces. I just remember crying and screaming to my parents "Why?!" I felt deceived and began questioning everything I'd been taught and believed.

Megan Vollmering: For me, I didn't realize my brother being gay was even an "issue" until I started to notice a disconnect between my parents and my brother. Then, I was constantly staying at my cousin's or friends' houses so my parents and brother could talk. I was kept in the dark for a lot of the "bad parts," mostly because I was so young, but also, my opinion was already made up (supportive).

What is the hardest part of having an LGBTQ+ sibling?

Abigail: There are a lot of hard parts, from the fear of them being discriminated against or physically attacked, to trying to find a boyfriend who is "ok" with my brother being gay.

Megan: Having to hear people slander him and his community is never fun, especially from those who know my situation. I have also been rejected from leadership opportunities because of it, even though it has nothing to do with the task at hand. So that has been difficult, but I also wouldn't want to be a part of a team that treats people like that.

What is the best part of having a gay sibling?

Abigail: The best part is seeing him live his life to the fullest and seeing everything he has overcome. Also, our relationship as siblings has grown so much since he came out. Knowing that he will support me in all things, and I will support him in all things.

Megan: Having another brother to love (Connor is married)! And being a safe space in a generation where the LGBTQ+ community is so evident.

What would you say to others who recently have had a sibling come out?

Abigail: It's not going to be easy in the beginning - you are used to seeing their "closeted" self, not their true self. But the more you support and love your sibling and understand their life journey, the easier it will get. It might take weeks, months, and even years to truly come to terms with everything. Just remember it's just as scary for them as it is for you because everyone is in new territory.

Megan: Your relationship with your sibling doesn't have to change because they identify in the LGBTQ+ community. Stand strong in your opinion and don't feel ashamed!

What is one thing you've learned since your sibling came out?

Abigail: No matter what happens in life, I will always love and support my brother through his journey of life and he will do the same for me. I feel that our faith has gotten stronger because we know that no matter what happens in this life's journey, God will always have our backs and God's love is unconditional.

Megan: I have learned how to truly love how Jesus did/does! Unconditionally and unwavering.

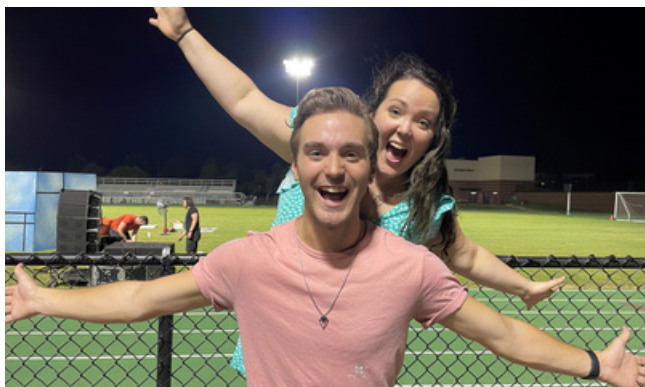


Connor Vollmering and sister Megan, who was 11 when she learned Connor is gay.

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So I stopped participating in our conversations and just became a sounding board instead.

Then they stopped asking what was going on in my life. I started to feel like I was being left behind. I felt selfish wanting or asking for attention. I wanted to be the safe child. I didn't want to cause any additional stress or worry to my parents. So I carried the weight of my faith crisis on my own.



Then our extended family started leaving. After months of going back and forth with my parents, they decided to "no longer be in fellowship" with any of us. Suddenly, I lost half of my extended

family and no one asked me. Again, I was lost in the conversation and no one seemed to care. I finally had enough. I was tired of being a spectator in my own family. I was tired of minimizing myself so I wouldn't rock the boat. I had to speak up.

So, I had the hard conversation. I was so scared I would look selfish or that I would hurt my parents' feelings. But I didn't. They just didn't know. They didn't realize I felt unimportant and small. We talked and talked and talked some more. About me. About my feelings. About all of the uncertainty that had been swirling around my head for so long. And the weight on my shoulders lightened for the first time in years.

We slowly began to heal the divide. Speaking out and having hard, honest conversations changed everything. Now, we talk about it all. Sometimes we still make mistakes, we get wrapped up in our own worlds or misspeak and hurt each others' feelings. The difference is we have learned the value in open communication. It has made our family so much stronger and I feel confident knowing I am never alone.

SIBLING LOVE: OTHER CENTERPEACE FAMILY SIBLING GROUPS



Jordan Altrock with her brother Jacob.



Miranda (left) Lindsay with her two siblings Morgan (center) and Mallory (right).



Jenna Bennet and her brother Joey Harbert.

Register now

Featuring:



Jeff
Chu



Sally
Gary



Candace
Hardnett



Matthew
Vines



Joel
Hollier



Justin
Lee

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post- conference workshop for parents

of lgbtq individuals

 Saturday, November 5

 Following the main
conference from
1:30-5 pm

FEATURING
SONGWRITER/AUTHOR/MOM
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\$50
\$85 per couple

Wilshire Baptist Church
Dallas, TX



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