

# Why?

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Kids love to learn. When I was a kid, I would repeatedly ask “Why?” over and over again. The first response was not good enough. I would ask to the point where my dad would lose patience and say, “Because I said so”.

The year was 1986. I was 11. Puberty began. I started having both romantic and sexual feelings for other boys. I knew that it was out of the ordinary but I didn’t think much about it. It seemed completely natural to me. But I knew enough to keep it secret.

Then one day in science class, we learned about AIDS, and how gay people were mostly the ones who got it. And I got scared. What had I done to deserve AIDS? I was 11. It seemed incongruent with my internal feelings. And I started to ask myself “Why?” Why do gay people get AIDS?

When I was 12, we had a guest preacher at church, the hellfire and damnation kind. And he told us why – in his opinion – gay people got AIDS. They were evil sinners and this was God’s punishment. Not only would they die of AIDS but they would live the rest of eternity in hell. As I sat in the church pew, I again became afraid. And I asked myself “Why?”.

I went home that evening and opened up our 1979 encyclopedia set and it had an entry on homosexuality. Being printed in 1979, the encyclopedia was a product of its time. It said homosexuality was a mental disorder. None of this made any sense. I didn’t have a mental disorder and I saw no reason why I should be damned to hell for all eternity just because I had an innate attraction to the same sex. I had not asked to be gay. I just was.

Deep down I knew that both the bible and the encyclopedia were wrong. I knew 100% that I was just as I had been born.

I trusted my own inner knowing, and this was key. My innocent childhood years were over. I knew there was something wrong with the church I was raised in and something wrong with the world.

And I would ask over and over again “Why?”.

And one day, it became clear to me.

Where I was raised and how I was raised, I was taught that some “others” were less than: women, gays, black people, transgender people. I was one of these “others”. I was an outsider, not just to the world, but to my community, and to my family.

But this was not a bad thing. It was the greatest gift I could have been given. It was my superpower. By being an outsider, I gained a first-hand experiential perspective on life that I could not have gained otherwise. I developed an empathy for anyone labeled an outsider. Rather than follow racist, sexist, homophobic, and transphobic tendencies of my upbringing, I overcame them.

Can you imagine had I been straight? I might have fallen into the same tendencies that the church was teaching me. Without the feeling of being an outcast, how could I have related to others in the same position? How would I have been aware that the teachings I was hearing in church were completely opposite to the highest of all teachings of Jesus: Love.

I was so fortunate to see through the falsehood of the religion I had been born into. I developed unconditional love for people. I gained a curiosity for knowing others, especially anyone seemingly different. Funny enough, that is what Jesus did. He befriended the outcast. And I’m certainly not perfect at that unconditional love. It’s work, but I’ve made a lot of progress.

And I learned something that that church and certainly that hellfire and damnation preacher seems to have missed. They taught fear and hate.

But it’s not about that at all. It’s all about love. This has been the greatest lesson of my life.

And that’s why I am gay.