

# APPROACHING EACH DAY ANEW

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As the director of an after school program, I begin anew every day.

Yesterday, a student came to program after a tough day. He'd been sent to the principal's office and grounded from his toys at home. His behavior caused him to get in trouble at program, too. During our recess time, a worker sent him to the wall to think about his behavior. Predictably, this did not improve his attitude.

"I hate this," he said while kicking the wall.

Since wall time wasn't working, I tried something else: playing football with him. As program continued, his mood steadily improved. By the time his mother picked him up, we were building Play-doh snails together. But I know that every day will start poorly for him---he's constantly in trouble and harbors great negativity towards school. Every day, we will need to rebuild our relationship. Some days, this won't happen.

Those of us addressing change-averse congregations face a similar challenge. We're fighting against years of learned behaviors, of theology weaponized against LGBTQIA+ folks. Unfortunately, I offer no foolproof advice for culture change. In fact, many of us risk our jobs simply by affirming queer identities.

Blessedly, changing the culture of a place is not an all-or-nothing task. It can happen incrementally, by living out the phrase, "All are welcome." By creating small, inner-church networks of affirming congregants. By replacing needlessly-gendered language in our liturgy, one word at a time. Some days, these changes might influence others to explore their preconceived notions. Other days, they won't. But we must approach each day anew. As a part of the body of Christ at work in the world, we invest and continually reinvest in relationships with others, listening to and caring for our neighbor in need.

No easy path exists for turning the tide of unacceptance. But we have never expected the Christian life to be easy. We are neither overwhelmed by failure or overjoyed by success. We simply push on, day by day, trusting in Jesus who shows us the way of radical love and welcome.

