

Friday night lights

By [Ed Sunday-Winters](#)

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You meet interesting people at high school football games. When the game is delayed for two hours because of thunder and lightening you can really get to know them. At least, that was my experience last Friday night at South-Doyle High School.

The rain had stopped, but the lightening would not go away. The game could not resume until thirty minutes after the last lightening strike. He was standing just outside the door to the home team's locker room when I noticed him. Since lightening was still in the area, what better way to pass the time than talking football? So, the conversation began.

We talked about games that we had played in ourselves that involved bad weather. I recalled a game that I had played in rain that was just a degree or two away from turning to sleet. He told me about the time that he played in a game that started in the rain and finished in the snow. Between the rain and the snow, there was sleet, and frozen jerseys. In Michigan, where he played high school football, such weather was evidently not that uncommon.

Having spent my high school years in the temperate climate of East Tennessee, I did not have a weather story to top that one. Therefore, the conversation progressed to family and work, as conversations do. When he learned that I was a pastor he began to give me the religious history of his life. It was fascinating, and he was very religious. However, since we were the same age, it could only last for so long (since I am not that old).

Finally, the announcer's voice came over the public address system saying that the game was going to resume. We began putting some closure to our time together. We were both glad that we had met and talked. It had been a pleasant way to pass the time.

I thought we were done, but then something changed in his eyes. Later, I would realize that at this moment we were just getting started. We had crossed the threshold into that place where he felt comfortable asking me the one question that he carried with him every moment of every day.

Earlier he had told me that he had seven daughters. Now he told me about his one son that he did not mention when we were talking about family. He had not talked to his son in three years. It was three years ago that he learned that his son was gay.

Now his son is forbidden to contact anyone in the family. He is so repulsed by who his son is that he does not want to speak to him. He cannot stand to look at him. In his mind, there was no way he could do anything less, given what the Bible says and what the church teaches about homosexuality.

His question for me was whether or not he was right in cutting off all contact with his son. We talked for a while, but in the end I told him that he was the only father that his son had, and that his son needed him now more than ever. I could not tell if this man wanted a relationship with his son or not. Was he looking for permission to love his son, or justification for hating him?

There was a game to watch and so our conversation really did conclude this time. As I drifted back toward the field, I felt a deep sense of grief for this man and his lack of a relationship with his son. Something he thought would always be there was not. Would this man's relationship with his son be different if he had responded to him with love instead of hate, compassion instead repulsion, mercy instead of banishment?

On another level, I grieved for him because of the years he had spent in church. What did he learn there? Did he learn that it is O.K. to talk about love, sing about love, receive the love of Christ, and then withhold it from people that do not conform to his standard of what is loveable? Why didn't someone tell him that sharing the love of Christ is just that — sharing the love of Christ? There are no disclaimers, no

qualifiers and no escape clauses, just love. No, it is not always easy; but it is what Jesus calls us to do, because it is what he has done for us. While we were that which we would not love, he loved us and died for us. Without love, Christianity is something other than God intended for it to be.

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