

# We're Not Weird About It

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**W**e go to church, but it's like pizza and video games and cool music and guys with piercings and a youth pastor who skateboards. You should totally come sometime. If you don't have your own Bible, they'll give you one for free. During youth group, we doodle in our Bibles with sparkly gel pens. Sometimes we like to pray and then open our Bibles to whatever page and underline the verses Jesus must have led us to. We like it when Jesus leads us to something in Song of Solomon, because then we're reminded that the desires of our hearts are there for a reason, and if we stay virgins and focus on God, then one day we'll be loved just like we want. We like the way the loud praise music makes our bones shake. We stand as close to the praise band as we can and stretch our arms in the air and scream-sing until our throats break and nonsense spills from our lips, and people at church say that's the Holy Spirit and we like that. At our church everyone cries, especially us, but it's dark enough so no one can see our puffed-up blotchy faces. None of us are pretty and it's better that way. Pretty makes sin come easy; pretty saves you, then gives you away. But we're ugly and we're sinful and we don't know what we want and we don't know why we're crying and we're holy. At the end of the night, we ask for prayers from the college girls who help lead youth group. Our favorite is Liv, and at sleepovers

we talk about her sweet-smelling hair and strong hugs and smooth voice, and once, we started talking about her chest, how good it feels to be held against her big, soft breasts, and then we stopped and never talked about that again. Sometimes we get jealous when one of us gets to pray with Liv and the rest of us don't, and sometimes at sleepovers we talk about our jealousy and we have to remind each other that church isn't about us or Liv but about God and Jesus and Heaven and Hell and salvation, and we wonder: Are we saved or are we fooling ourselves? Does Jesus really live in our hearts or are we just pretending? This is too scary to think about, so we try to stop, but we keep wondering how to be sure if we're saved, and some of us cry because we're afraid of going to Hell and when the radiator roars on we think it's the rapture, Christ returned to separate wheat from chaff, and we're sure, at this point, we're the chaff. Then we realize it's the radiator, but our hearts are pounding in our necks and in our ears and we try to go to sleep but we can't. We're riled up and our feet are cold and our armpits smell bad and, between you and me, sometimes the only way I can get to sleep is to think of Song of Solomon and Liv's soft breasts and to touch myself privately in my sleeping bag. In the morning we have orange juice and cinnamon rolls and we can almost forget how afraid we were in the night and we can try not to think about how soon we'll be afraid again. Our parents pick us up and we drive past the soothing familiar shapes of big-box stores and playgrounds, and maybe for a few hours we won't think about Hell at all. When we see each other at church the next week we'll be clean faced with jeans belted and gel-pen patterns swirling across the white soles of our sneakers, shapeshifting from our school-day selves into whatever we become here. We go to church, but we're not weird about it. You should totally come sometime.

