



Daily Devotionals: Dear Church | September 11, 2022

Week 3 | Gender

Dear Church,

In this most recent sermon, we talked about Jesus and the transgender community. This is a highly contested topic that brings about many opinions and feelings and is undergirded by many differences in worldview.

But like was mentioned in the sermon, I believe it's important to emphasize that this topic isn't just about "transgenderism" as an "issue." **This is about people.**

- You may have heard in the sermon that according to Hedegaard, Curtin, & Warner, in a 2018 study, it was found that suicide is the second leading cause of death among young people aged 10 to 24 and that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are at significantly increased risk.
- You may also have heard that according to two 2019 and 2020 studies, LGBTQ youth are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide than their peers.
- And you may also have heard that The Trevor Project estimates that more than 1.8 million LGBTQ youth (13-24) seriously consider suicide each year in the U.S. — and at least one attempts suicide every 45 seconds.

I don't share those statistics to create a sense of panic, but rather to help us come to the conversation with a posture of compassion and love.

Looking around us, it feels like there's a "Gender Revolution" taking place. Some people are here for it, others not so much. Once firmly held beliefs about sex and gender are changing. And again, some people praise the change while others oppose it.

As followers of Jesus, we follow the word of God. It's our authority for how we view right and wrong, what the good life is, what it means to be human, and more. And so, when it comes to conversations about the transgender community, that's our starting point as well.



I have, quite literally, spent the entire summer reading up on this topic. I'm still far from an expert, but from what I've learned, one of the key themes of this conversation revolves around *identity*.

I mean, what makes us who we *actually* are? Is it our embodiment? Is it our internal sense of self? Who are we, *really*? Are we our bodies? Or are we more than our bodies? And if there's an incongruence between those two identity players, which one gets prioritized?

Answering this question becomes confusing when you consider unhelpful gender stereotypes. Our culture has created confusion by perpetuating the lie that if people feel like they don't fit a typical gender role, then they must not be that gender.

For example, if a biological male is drawn to music, art, fashion, or whatever else might be characterized as more stereotypically feminine...does that mean that *he* is actually a *she*...or neither? Vice versa, if a biological female is drawn to roughhousing with her brothers, dislikes pink, would rather wear jeans instead of a dress...does that mean that *she* is actually a *he*?

I'd argue NO.

As I've read the Scriptures, I've realized that the word of God has a high view of our bodies. We are not just our bodies, but our bodies make up a significant part of our identity. And because of that reality, we should honor them by aligning with them.

Specifically, from **Genesis 2:7**, I've learned that our identities are comprised of *both* what's inside of us *and* our physical bodies. Ultimately, one shouldn't be prioritized over the other. In **Genesis 3:6-7**, we learn the reason for the alienation, or incongruence, we have with our bodies is based in sin. And here, with Paul in **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**, we see that God calls us to honor our bodies and glorify Him with them.

That being said, **I view living in accordance with your God-given biology as a process of discipleship.**

Emphasis on "process." It's no easy thing to walk through life with any amount of gender confusion and/or gender dysphoria. You feel alienated from your body. And the intensity can be suffocating.



That's why, as Christians, we must lay aside any fear, anxiety, disrespect, hostility, annoyance, or any threatened disposition that we may come to this conversation with.

Instead, we must replace fear with confidence in the Gospel, anxiety with safety in the sovereignty of our God, hostility with sacrificial love, annoyance with boundless patience, and a feeling of being threatened with deep compassion.

This means that our tone of voice, body posture, willingness to listen, enthusiasm to step into the midst of what seems messy must increase. Anything antithetical to the fruits of the Spirit must decrease.

As I've wrestled with this topic, here are some things I've found...

1. Like last week, I always want to start with Scripture. I'd encourage you to read the above passages: **Genesis 2:7**, **Genesis 3:6-7**, and **1 Corinthians 6:19-20** and notice what they say about our identities as humans, what sin does to make us feel out of place in this world, and how Paul would have us live with our bodies. Additionally, I'd encourage you to revisit **John 4:1-26** and simply ask yourself, "What from Jesus can I learn about love?"
2. Prayerfully – emphasis on *prayerfully* (i.e. do this *with* God) – Google search Rembrandt's painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son* and think about the following questions:
 - What is the posture you find yourself coming into this sermon discussion on Jesus and the transgender community like? Do you sense openness in yourself like the father in the painting or do you feel closed-off like the older brother standing to the right in the painting? Explain.
 - What elements of "welcome" do you sense in this painting from the father? Where have you experienced that welcome in your own life from God?
 - In what ways do you need to grow in developing a welcoming posture from those different than you on this topic?



Jot down any significant elements that come to mind. Then, write a prayer to God for anything you feel needs resolved.

3. Lastly, if you'd like some additional resources on this, here are a few I'd recommend:

- I'd recommend *Embodied: Transgender Identities, the Church, and What the Bible Has to Say* by Preston Sprinkle (available on Sundays for purchase at a discounted rate!). He talks all about this topic from a loving, grace-filled, but also truthful posture.
- Additionally, I loved a conversation between Preston Sprinkle and Abigail Favale on sex and gender. Find it on YouTube by searching for Sex, Gender, and the Anthropology of Trans* Identities: Dr. Abigail Favale.
- I also found a sermon on Jesus and the transgender community by Jon Tyson helpful. Find it on YouTube by searching The Controversial Jesus - Jesus, Gender, and the Trans Community - Jon Tyson.

I hope this message and these resources are helpful to you. The writer Fyodor Dostoevsky once said, "Love in action is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams." May we be a church that can love in action, even when it's hard.

Grace and peace,
Emerson