

A Guide For LGBTQ+ Christian Teens

Are you a Christian teen struggling with or feeling confused by LGBTQ+ and gender identity issues? Then this is a conversation we need to have...

First of all, know this. You are loved.

The God of all the Universe, the One in whose image you're made loves *you*. He knows you; your innermost fears, your deepest insecurities, and your hopes and dreams for the future. He has counted every hair on your head.

This is the same God who can count the stars by name, who has caused worlds to come into being, and who has decided that no two snowflakes should be the same.

This God is interested in *knowing* and *being known* by you.

There's a beautiful little verse in the gospel of Matthew that tells us just how much God cares for us. In Matthew 6, Jesus says to the listening crowds:

"Look at the birds in the sky! They don't plant or harvest. They don't even store grain in barns. Yet your Father in heaven takes care of them. Aren't you worth much more than birds?" | Matthew 6:26 CEV

God cares *for* us and He cares *about* us.

You are of infinite worth to God.

Know this too, He is not astonished by your mistakes. He's not surprised by your fears or doubts and He isn't shocked by the things you've done wrong. There's nothing you've done that He hasn't already seen coming, that He hasn't accounted for, or

that He hasn't already prepared a way through. Your best moments and your worst moments are all known to him.

In fact, he knows exactly how it feels to be human because His Son Jesus became human, just like us. He experienced all that we do; the pressure to conform, the criticism of peers, the rejection of friends, the pull of temptation, the pain of betrayal. He knows and he understands.

You are not alone.

You Might Be Wondering...

Why am I here? What on earth is the point of humanity?

This is a great question and it's really one of life's most basic questions: what is the purpose of human existence?

Well, we're all here for a reason and it starts with God.

God has a plan. I know it sounds a bit cliched but, He really does.

He intends to fill the earth with His glory, with all the amazing attributes and characteristics of Who He is; love, kindness, justice, peace, holiness, beauty... Basically, a perfect, incredible, amazing space, probably better than anything we can really get our heads around! And humanity was created to be a part of this plan; not just as a minor detail but as major character.

Humanity was created to rule over this world and all the creatures that live in it wisely and well, as God's image-bearers. Being an image bearer of God means that when you look at a person, you see God. And, in a collective sense, when you look at humanity, you see God. You see His character, His values, His glory, His holiness; everything about Him. He's the king of everything and we get to represent Him in this good, good world!

Part of this plan specifically involved the creation of male and female, [a gender binary](#) that many people today are rejecting. Yet this is exactly how God designed humanity, it is a foundational part of each of our identities, and, collectively, it's how humanity reflects the completeness of God's image. When men and women (male and female) come together in one, extraordinary collective, we are the complete image of all that God Himself is. Isn't that incredible?

LGBTQ+, The Gender Binary + More...

You might be struggling with the idea of [a gender binary of male and female](#). You may feel at odds with your body; unhappy or discomforted by your physical appearance, or challenged by how your body is changing, without your 'agreement' or 'permission'. You might be surprised at what you look like or sound like, or maybe at how differently people start to treat you. You might feel like you don't even recognise yourself when you look in the mirror.

All this is normal, and ok, *and you will be ok.*

You are transitioning, *as you have been designed to do*, from a child to an adult to becoming a functional and fully-formed man or woman. This is one of life's great crossings, a time of new discovery and development, but also of great upheaval and emotional angst, and it can be a really tough space.

It's ok to feel a bit out of your depth, super cranky with your parents or siblings, or all jumbled up and unsure of *who.you.really.are.*

Think about this for a minute; when a caterpillar changes into a butterfly, it's totally mushed up, taken apart, and reorganised into the beautiful insect that finally emerges. It shouldn't really surprise us that moving from young, dependent children to fully independent adults can feel a bit like this process.

You will feel *a lot of feels*. And while our feelings are real, and they often provide important signals about what is going on in our world, we need to know that *they're not always reliable*. Feelings *alone* are not adequate markers of what might be true.

So it's really important to not rely on *our feelings alone* but to take other things into account as well. These might be things like wise guidance or advice from people we know and trust, and who we know love us, applying a healthy dose of critical thinking to our decision-making and the values we want for our life, and, most importantly, the truths found in God's word and what He has to say about us.

It's really important, particularly during times of transition and change, to remind yourself that you are deeply known and loved by God, even when you feel like you don't know yourself. You have been created with intention and purpose, and God has a hope and a future planned for you. He has taken care of you and he will continue to take care of you, through your good times and (especially) in your bad times. You can take anything to Him and you can ask Him for guidance and help, through prayer and through reading His word. You can trust Him.

Remind yourself, if you are a female, that you have been gifted with unique and diverse qualities, specific to your sex. This is intentional, beautiful, and life-affirming. You are on your way to becoming a woman, with all the inherent and amazing attributes that God has designed for you. It might feel a little scary, a lot unknown, but you can trust that God knows what He's doing.

If you are a male, remind yourself that you have been gifted with unique and diverse qualities, specific to your sex. This is intentional, incredible, and life-affirming. You're becoming a man, with the opportunity to contribute your incredible characteristics and attributes to the purpose of

God, as He has intended for you. You might feel overwhelmed, and more than a bit nervous but you, too, can trust that God knows what He's doing.

(And, just a little note here: one gender isn't better than the other, and neither is complete without the other. We need both men and women to truly image God in this world, as He intended!)

"It is out of the diversity and distinctive separateness of male and female that we humans are called to not only reflect the image and likeness of God, but we also represent God in the stewardship of His good and wonderful creation." (Genesis 1:28-29). | [Focus On The Family](#)

Let's Talk About Sex

You, or somebody you know, might be baffled by a (sudden and new) attraction to someone of the same sex, attraction to people of both sexes, or maybe just confused and overwhelmed by sexuality in general. This is often new and surprising territory for us all when we arrive here.

I want you to know that it's normal to feel these struggles and perhaps even experience confusion and emotional overwhelm. It's actually very common for teens to be attracted to or have sexual thoughts about people of the same sex and/or the opposite sex; it's often part of the emotional and physical changes that humans go through as they mature into adulthood.

The Bible tells us that sex is amazing, that it's been designed by God for the flourishing of humanity, and that it's part of His good creation. You only have to read the [Song of Solomon](#) to realise the Bible isn't shy about talking about sex (some of those passages are certainly blush-inducing!) But, as with everything, sex has been designed for a purpose and to be experienced within boundaries, with our good in mind.

What you need to know is that God has designed sex to be experienced by a man and woman, within the boundaries of a committed, life-long relationship (marriage). This kind of committed sex with a life-long partner provides physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy, and is the foundation for a secure and stable family unit, into which children may be born.

Part of the original intention for humanity in Genesis was 'to be fruitful and multiply' (to have children) and to fill the earth with humans who will all bear God's image. To this end, God created one man for one woman (Adam and Eve) and they were brought together in the union of marriage, giving us the blueprint for healthy and flourishing sexual intimacy.

The bond that is created between a man and a woman in marriage and, particularly, in their physical unity, is a mirror of the character of God, in all its completeness. (The Bible also tells us in the New Testament that marriage is a symbol of Jesus and the church, who is called 'his bride').

God never intended for sex to be experienced by two women together, or by two men together, or outside of the committed, life-long relationship of marriage. Again, this is very counter-cultural to what you might hear around you, what you think your feelings are telling you, or even what your friends might believe. But this is the Bible's truth about sex, and this is God's will for humanity, in order that we (humanity) will flourish.

If you're a teen struggling with your sexuality or a teen trying to maintain God's will in relation to sex (abstinence), please know you are not alone! It's really important that you find people you can trust, who can pray with you, who can encourage you in pursuing God's will for you, for your good and for your flourishing, and that you understand, too, that even when we mess up, God can still forgive us and help us get back on track (more on this in a minute).

You might find [this online message](#) by Ps Mark Lohman, from [The Bridge Church \(in the Chino Valley, California\)](#), on 'The Gospel & Sex' super helpful, and, if this is an area you're struggling in and would like some Christian advice and guidance on, I'd really encourage you to have a watch.

Getting Back On Track (Why We Need Jesus)

Being an image bearer of God means that when you look at a person, you see God. And, in a collective sense, when you look at humanity, you see God.

Well, at least, that's what was meant to happen.

Adam and Eve really put a spanner in the works on that one. You've probably heard the story; a garden, a snake, 'don't eat from a certain tree', a lie, disobedience, sin, punishment, death... It all gets pretty grim, right from the get-go.

And so even though we're made to image God, to be a significant part of His plan, and even though we were created with all the capability and purpose to do this, it gets messed up pretty quickly. The introduction of sin into the world brings about terrible consequences for not just Adama and Eve but for all creation. We live in a fallen world, with the echoes of our intended greatness all around us, but now subject to decay, death, and, in a lot of cases, hopelessness and despair.

But this is how much God loves you, how much He loves me, how much He loves *us*, His creation. *While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

God sent His son to die for us! To fix up the issue of sin, to make a way for us to be forgiven for our mistakes, and to show us the way to live in right relationship with Him. He sent Jesus to save us, to redirect our lives towards His good and abundant way of living, and to help us see that our true reality, who we *really are*, is *one beloved of God*, intended

for glory and greatness.

Every other identity – and the world around us has plenty of ‘identities’ on offer – are false and shallow copies of our true identity; a human made in God’s image, intended to reveal His character and glory, and who, in Jesus, can find forgiveness and restoration and become empowered to live this purpose fully.

“God loved the people of this world so much that he gave His only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent him to save them!” | John 3:16-17, CEV

God already knew how messed up we all are, He already knew the kinds of bad things we’d do, in fact, He’s already seen all the bad things you’ll ever *do*...and yet He still sent Jesus to die for you!

We all need Jesus. There’s not a single person who hasn’t done something wrong, who hasn’t made a choice or taken an action that wasn’t outside of God’s ideal, who doesn’t need Jesus to get back on track. Jesus gives us hope and a future, belonging, homecoming, and the opportunity *to be fully known and truly loved*.

An Invitation And A Challenge

One of the first things Jesus told people when he began his preaching ministry was *“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

It was both an invitation and a challenge to the people then, and it’s no less an invitation and challenge for you today, a 21st-century teen.

Will you turn away from your willfulness, from governing your

own life without God's guidance, your persistence in trying to find identity in shallow and dissatisfying deceptions, and will you turn to the maker and creator of all things, the One in whose image you're created and with whom you have been intended to experience eternal and satisfying relationship?

God's story – the one written in the stars and carried on the wind – is the story of who each one of us was intended to be. It's a story that confirms we *were* made for more than just this life, that we're meant to be part of something greater, something eternal.

It's a story of promise; of *knowing and being known*, of being *fully and completely alive*, and this is what following Jesus is all about.

Maybe you've never thought about following Jesus? Or maybe you *have* been thinking about following him and becoming a Christian, but just aren't sure how to take that step. That's a topic I intend to talk about more in my [next article](#) in this series (Letters To My Kids) so look out for that soon!

In the meantime, I'd love to hear from you. Let me know your thoughts on this topic (you can message me publicly or privately here or on my socials), or any questions you'd like answers to on this topic (or anything else) in upcoming articles!

"Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield." Psalm 5:12, NIV

Lord, I ask that You will rescue, guide, and protect our teens today. Answer them when they call on You, and be with them in times of trouble. I know that Your plans for them are good, and not for their harm. Guard and protect them with Your favor as with a shield (Psalm 5:12). Amen." | [Prayers For Teens](#)

Sex + Gender

The world is not the same place it once was.

Certainty has given way to subjective reality. Truth can no longer be pinned down. Common sense doesn't seem quite so common after all.

At times, it feels like the whole world has gone mad.

And perhaps we have...

One of the biggest conversations of our time is the gender/sexuality* debate. It used to be that gender, now a contested term, and sex were largely synonymous. If your sex or gender was 'male' then you were a man. If your sex or gender was 'female', then you were a woman.

Certainly, more is perhaps encompassed in the use of the descriptor 'man' rather than just 'male' (or 'woman' rather than just 'female'), binary terms which refer to a human's sexuality (gender, not 'orientation'), but these terms are nonetheless indelibly connected to one another, two aspects of the same reality.

Historically, most societies have recognised only two distinct genders, a binary of masculine and feminine largely corresponding to the biological sexes of male and female. Simply put, if you had an X and a Y chromosome, you were a male human. Two XXs and you were a female human. Immature undeveloped humans were called boys and girls, respectively. Mature, fully developed humans, were called men and women.

The discovery of sex differentiation chromosomes is a relatively new science but its discovery in 1905 only

confirmed what humans [had believed and understood for millennia.1](#)

“During the first decade of the 20th century, it was established that the sex of almost all many-celled biological organisms is determined at the moment of fertilisation by the combination of two kinds of microscopic entities, the X and Y chromosomes. This discovery was the culmination of more than two thousand years of speculation and experiment of how an animal, plant, or human becomes male or female.” | [Nettie N Stevens And The Discovery Of Sex Determination By Chromosomes.](#)

The Human Genome

This XY sex-determination system is shared by humans, many mammals, insects, and other animals. The perpetuation and reproduction of many species, humans included, is a result of the combining of the chromosomes from one X individual and one Y individual. Humans have forty-six chromosomes (including the two sex chromosomes, XX in females and XY in males), 23 of which are inherited from an individual's father (a male), with the other 23 inherited from an individual's mother (a female).

Our sex chromosomes form only part of the approximately three billion base pairs of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) that make up the entire set of chromosomes of the human organism. One of the most significant and ambitious scientific endeavours of our time has been the sequencing of this entire set of chromosomes – the human genome, a project which was begun in 1990 and which, by 2022, had produced the first truly complete human genome sequence.

The [objective2 of this project](#) was ‘to decode the human hereditary information (human blueprint) that determines all individual traits inherited from parents.’ Dr Francis Collins, head of the Human Genome Project, and one of the

world's leading scientists, has long worked at the cutting edge of the science of DNA, which he describes as 'the language of God'. He argues that science and God are in harmony – that, indeed, science is of God, and that the sequencing of the human genome 'was both a stunning scientific achievement and an occasion of worship'.

The sequencing of the human genome only confirmed what many have long believed; that we are *'fearfully and wonderfully made'* (Psalm 139:14). Humanity has been created and brought into being by an intelligent designer, who has carefully constructed the complex genetic material that makes up a complete human, with the ability for that human to replicate and reproduce *in his or her own likeness*. We are not an accident, a vague collection of random cells which have collided together, but a highly complex sequence of chromosomes that have formed a complete human, with a soul, intellect, morals, capability, and purpose.

In fact, the Bible comments in its earliest chapters that we are *made in God's image*. We are unique in all of creation because *we are made like God*. *Who we are* is directly connected to *the One who created us*.

The Emperor Has No Clothes On

Post-modern ideology would try to tell us that there are (currently) 57 genders. Gender, it's claimed, is not something we *are* but something that we *feel*. Not only that, gender is something that is fluid, an experience that can remain static or be in constant flux. Today we may *feel* female. Tomorrow we may *feel* male. Next week, we may *feel somewhere in the middle* or possibly *both at the same time*.

But, we're also told, gender is somehow some kind of social construct, that our gender *is expressed through the roles we take on*, the *expectations placed on us*, our *relationship with*

others, and the complex ways that gender is institutionalised in society. Gender – how we feel and who we know ourselves to be – is unrelated to our biological and physical realities, that is, our sex and our gender are not the same thing.

The historical recognition of two genders – male and female (called the gender binary) is usually based on someone's anatomy (the genitals they were born with), but, we're being told, these markers are unreliable as to the *true person's self* (or gender) which emerges with time (or is forced upon them by society), and which may or may not *match [the gender they were assigned at birth](#)*.³

(At this point, I'm looking around, wondering, *when is someone going to tell the Emperor he has no clothes on?*)

We are more than just our genitals, this is true. But these outward markers are only part of a complex series of chemical reactions that were set in motion the moment that fertilisation took place, the moment that *we began*, and the unique individual that would eventually become *us* sparked into reality. This sex determination, which will include all the physical, emotional, and psychological traits we will uniquely possess happens during fertilisation, and *it doesn't change during the pregnancy*.

“All human individuals—whether they have an XX, an XY, or an atypical sex chromosome combination—begin development from the same starting point. During early development the gonads of the fetus remain undifferentiated; that is, all fetal genitalia are the same and are phenotypically female. After approximately 6 to 7 weeks of gestation, however, the expression of a gene on the Y chromosome induces changes that result in the development of the testes. Thus, this gene is singularly important in inducing testis development. The production of testosterone at about 9 weeks of gestation results in the development of the reproductive tract and the masculinisation (the normal development of male sex

characteristics) of the brain and genitalia. In contrast to the role of the fetal testis in differentiation of a male genital tract and external genitalia in utero, fetal ovarian secretions are not required for female sex differentiation. As these details point out, the basic differences between the sexes begin in the womb.” | [National Library Of Medicine](#)

We are not merely male or female because our bodies say so, we are male or female because our brains also say so; neurochemically distinct from one another as either ‘male’ or ‘female’ brains. While similar in many basic ways, male and female brains show consistent differences that have important implications for each sex. Our sex (most commonly observed and confirmed by our exterior genitalia at birth) and our gender – whether we are male or female – are one and the same, and this differentiation shows up time and time again in the way we think and behave.

Diane Halpern, PhD, and past president of the American Psychological Association, comments that *“there is simply too much data pointing to the biological basis of sex-based cognitive differences to ignore.”* She references a catalogue of human behavioural differences that have been [studied and observed](#)⁴:

“Women excel in several measures of verbal ability – pretty much all of them, except for verbal analogies. Women’s reading comprehension and writing ability consistently exceed that of men, on average. They outperform men in tests of fine-motor coordination and perceptual speed. They’re more adept at retrieving information from long-term memory. Men, on average, can more easily juggle items in working memory. They have superior visuospatial skills: They’re better at visualising what happens when a complicated two- or three-dimensional shape is rotated in space, at correctly determining angles from the horizontal, at tracking moving objects and at aiming projectiles.” | [Stanford Medicine](#)

Magazine

Halpen concludes; *“new technologies have generated a growing pile of evidence that there are inherent differences in how men’s and women’s brains are wired and how they work and many of these cognitive differences appear quite early in life.”*

This process of sex differentiation, begun at fertilisation, continues throughout our life, influencing our physical and mental growth and development (bone structure, weight, height, genitalia, brain, and characteristics). The complex process encoded in our DNA resolutely follows the invisible instructions given at fertilisation, and, barring abnormality or mutation, results, without fail, in a *gender or sex that matches our physicality.*

*The **gender/sex of a person** is the final result of unique genetic, hormonal, and morphologic sex-differentiation at fertilisation. It is fixed and it is binary, either male or female.*

Your shy sensitive son isn’t *a girl trapped in a boy’s body*, he’s simply a shy, sensitive *boy*. Your boisterous, energetic, sandpit-loving daughter isn’t *a boy trapped in a girl’s body*, she’s simply an energetic, outdoor-loving *girl*.

While our sex/gender may be fixed and binary, our unique personalities and characteristics are not. Our identity is not the same as any other person on the earth. Even identical twins are not truly 100% identical, with a complex interaction between our genes, our environment, and our epigenetic markers uniquely shaping who we are.

We are truly, each one of us, one-of-a-kind.

Historical gender roles may have played a large part in the troubling place where we now find ourselves as a culture, insisting that all men must behave in certain ways and perform

certain roles (outdoorsy, tough, adventurous..) and, conversely, that all women must behave in certain ways (deferring and submissive, domestic, delicate) (another day, another blog, although I tackle some of this in relation to healthy church function in my article '[Stop Promoting Gendered Hierarchy!](#)').

However, I think a large part of what has contributed to the madness surrounding sex and gender conversations today is the abandonment of the idea of *God*, an intelligent, thoughtful designer who *insists we were created for a purpose*.

What Is A Woman?

One of the most startling, and troubling documentaries in recent times is a project undertaken by Matt Walsh, an American Christian conservative and political commentator. In his documentary, "[What Is A Woman](#)"⁵, Walsh asks questions that many people no longer seem willing to answer.

Can a *woman* be defined? (historically, a woman was defined as *an adult human female*). Is being a woman simply *a feeling* or *behaving a certain way*? Can a woman be *trapped in a man's body*? Does *being a woman* mean anything at all?

In the documentary, Walsh visits a women's march, where placards are lifted high, campaigning *for the rights of women*. Unfortunately, nobody seems able to define what a woman actually is, reducing the impetus of the march to nothing more than a ridiculous farce. Implausibly, many of those he interviews in his documentary seem 'uncomfortable with his line of questioning', deeming his tone 'malignant and harmful'.

The prevailing (or, at least, the most vocal) narrative at play is built on a serious and disturbing detachment from subjective reality. If being a woman is *simply how one feels on any given day*, then being a woman can include everyone and

no one. It's no kind of definition at all.

Gender and sex are no longer something that people are willing to define. Forget science, forget biology; how any one person *feels* is the prevailing truth of the day. And if you have a difference of opinion in relation to the gender + sex conversation, if you even dare to ask questions, you are deemed hateful, phobic, violent, or discriminatory.

As one person interviewed in the documentary comments, "*If you speak up about it ... your life will be over in some way*". Defy the trans groupthink and face profound consequences.

Walsh's long-ranging interview with a gender studies professor finds the star drilling down on a basic principle. Truth. [emphasis mine] One therapist asks, with a straight face, "whose truth are we talking about?" | [Hollywood Into To](#)

What Is Truth?

Truth.

A hot-button topic, to say the least.

And *truth*, it seems, is at the core of the issues we are facing in relation to gender, sexuality, and identity.

Most human activities depend upon the concept of 'truth' as an objective reality, including most of the sciences, law, journalism, and, indeed, elements of everyday life. As Sir Isaac Newton discovered, if you throw an apple up in the air, it (or anything else) will invariably come down. The old adage, '*what goes up must come down*' is attributed to his discovery of this undeniable truth. The science behind this, is, of course, the law of gravity, one of three 'laws of motion' that Sir Isaac Newton formulated.

I have deliberately avoided overly referencing the Bible up until this point, endeavoring instead to defer firstly to

science and reason (who are, in reality, both friends of faith) in my initial comments. But humanity has been long discussing the question, "*what is truth?*" and Jesus himself gave an answer to this question when it was put to him, circa AD33. He replied, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life*" (John 14:6)

Jesus claimed (and the Bible is in agreement) that truth is not subjective, just some abstract exchanging of philosophical ideas, but rather objective, rooted in the person of God, who has been revealed to us in Christ. Paul the Apostle comments in his letter to the church at Colosse in the early first century that every truthful thing in the universe is found in Christ as the Word, Wisdom and Knowledge belonging to God Himself. Everything that was created was through and for him, he existed before anything else and he holds all things together. (Colossians 1:16-17, Colossians 2:3)

For many, the Bible may seem outdated, irrelevant, out of touch, or even downright dangerous. And I can understand this. The Bible has been misused, misinterpreted, and misunderstood throughout history, often used to control and harm rather than heal and liberate.

The reality, however, is that the Bible is the divinely inspired word of God Himself, whereby He has revealed Himself to His creation and through which we are able to understand His intentions. It offers life-giving wisdom, leads humanity to salvation, and provides meaning and purpose for our human existence. In fact, the Bible is the expression of God Himself, who is *all about justice, redemption, and liberation* (and who is utterly opposed to injustice and evil).

As such, the implication is that it is entirely sufficient to answer all our tricky and troubling questions, and, because its author is God, those answers can be relied upon to be true. (I've written more about the accuracy, authority, and authenticity of the Bible [here](#)).

Let's suppose for a minute that the Bible really does have the answers to all our human problems, issues, doubts, and questions. Does the Bible have anything to say about gender and sex? What truths does God communicate to us about these issues?

Made In God's Image | Imago Dei

God is The Subject Of Life. The Centre Of Everything. The story of humanity starts with Him and ends with Him.

As I commented earlier in this article, we (humanity) are unique in all of creation because *we are made like God. Who we are is directly connected to the One who created us.* This belief formed one of the key cornerstones of the early Christian faith and, in many respects, set Christianity apart from other religions of its time; that is, the belief in the intrinsic value and worth of every human *because they're made in God's image.*

Science tells us *how* we're (uniquely and intricately) made (and I've talked about that earlier in this article) but faith tells us *why* (what we're here for and what life is all about). Scripture intends us to understand that we were created intentionally and with a specific purpose in mind; to be God's image-bearers – *imago dei* – on the earth, and to rule it wisely and well on His behalf. Nothing about our creation was accidental, and nothing was left to chance.

One of the first things that the book of Genesis confirms, alongside the commission for which we were created, is the binary nature of our humanity:

*So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; **male** and **female** He created them. Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the*

ground.” Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.” | Genesis 1:27-30, NLT

The narrative of humanity’s creation is further fleshed out in Genesis chapter 2 with our gender binary of male and female being connected to our naming as ‘man’ and ‘woman’. (Genesis 2:18-25) (Interestingly, we are also given the blueprint for marriage in this chapter; that is, a committed and exclusive relationship between a man and a woman).

Jesus himself confirms his belief in and understanding of the creation narrative (when discussing the legality of divorce) in Matthew 19: 4-8, where he says, *“Haven’t you read the Scriptures? They record that from the beginning ‘God made them male and female. This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.’”*

The differences between the two genders are unique and distinctive, both designed by God with a purpose in mind. Both genders are intrinsically valuable and precious to God, and we see His characteristics displayed by the perfect merging of both masculine and feminine traits. These distinct genders are the fundamental building blocks of God’s creation and are part of God’s plan for His creation.

God’s original design for humanity was built on equality, cooperation, respect, commitment, and support, with both genders bringing unique and valued differences to the partnership. This mutuality, this joint responsibility, forms part of the great narrative of restoration and redemption that Jesus himself came to inaugurate when he ushered in *the kingdom of God*. Part of this reality includes the binary of

our respective genders, that of male and female (man and woman); deeply embedded into our DNA, the very building blocks that make us *us*.

The Bible insists that we were created for a purpose. It insists that there are two genders; male and female. And it names these genders; man and woman.

“The physical, human body has great significance within Christian understanding, from creation through incarnation to the resurrection and ascension. The Bible recognises and celebrates two sexes. The text does not seem to allow for, and actually on occasion prohibits, identifying as different from your biological birth sex. That said, we need to understand what the Bible means when it says we are made “male and female” and not unwittingly accept society’s stereotypes about sex and gender.” | [Premier Christianity](#)

Responding Pastorally

Unfortunately, for some individuals, gender identity disorder is very real. People with gender dysphoria genuinely have a deep sense of unease and distress at the perception their biological sex/gender does not match who they *feel* they are.

Sensitivity and compassion are crucial in engaging with and in these conversations.

(Additionally, there *are* individuals born with genetic anomalies (sex chromosomes, gonads, and genitalia) which don’t conform to the usual binary of male/female. Known as [intersex**](#), the prevalence of such occurrences is thought to be about 0.018% of the population. People with abnormalities of development should be helped to find their place as they see it best, and it’s not the intention of this article to discuss those particular cases in any detail.)⁶

Yet the statistics would suggest that the reportable numbers

of those suffering from gender dysphoria are between 0.002% and 0.005% of the population, actually a very small number. It goes no way towards explaining the absolute explosion that seems to have happened in recent years, as young children and teens are diagnosed as transgender, rushed into hormone treatments, and, more drastically, undergoing life-altering surgeries.

This is such a difficult issue for families to navigate today. Many of us can feel out of our depth engaging in conversations that use terms and language that have shifted so dramatically from historically accepted definitions.

More seriously, parents are being told that failure to affirm a child who may be suffering from gender dysphoria could result in, worst case scenario, suicide and, in a recent amendment to the Family Violence Protection Act 2008 in Victoria, Australia, non-endorsement by parents of a child who wishes to transition [is considered emotional and psychological abuse \(ie family violence\)](#).⁷

Yet the reality is that affirming a person's belief (they are the opposite gender to that which they were "assigned" at birth), or advocating the use of hormonal or surgical intervention actually does nothing to truly resolve the issue. As Ryan T Anderson, PhD [comments](#), "Sex "reassignment" doesn't work. It's impossible to "reassign" someone's sex physically [because sex isn't something that is "assigned at birth"], and attempting to do so doesn't produce good outcomes psychosocially."

"Cosmetic surgery and cross-sex hormones can't change us into the opposite sex. They can affect appearances. They can stunt or damage some outward expressions of our reproductive organisation. But they can't transform it. They can't turn us from one sex into the other. Transgendered men do not become women, nor do transgendered women become men. All become feminised men or masculinized women, counterfeits or

impersonators of the sex with which they 'identify.' In that lies their problematic future." | [The Heritage Foundation](#)

Carving up bodies and dishing out synthetic hormones is not the answer. Speaking hope and truth into people's lives is.

"Our minds and senses function properly when they reveal reality to us and lead us to knowledge of truth. And we flourish as human beings when we embrace the truth and live in accordance with it. A person might find some emotional relief in embracing a falsehood, but doing so would not make him or her objectively better off. Living by a falsehood keeps us from flourishing fully, whether or not it also causes distress." (The Heritage Foundation)

John Whitehall, Professor of Paediatrics at Western Sydney University, comments, "People are not interested in discussing the science. We've all got to believe that there's no such thing as a boy or a girl, that we're all somewhere in between. I don't believe that. The good news is that in all the major articles, these children (who may be confused about their gender) will revert to the natal sex through puberty. What we should do then is have confidence in the statistics ***and not mess the child up along the way.***"

A Final Word

Truth. The final word in all of this is truth.

Truth spoken with compassion and care, with sensitivity and love, but truth nonetheless. Encouraging a false narrative will do no one any favours.

We need to confidentially speak what is true in relation to sex and gender, affirming reality, and encouraging acceptance of our physical being, understanding our embodied selves as male or female. Narratives that disguise or distort reality are misguided and do not actually result in human flourishing

or wholeness.

It's not only untruthful to affirm these distortions, it's unloving and harmful to the individual. The most beneficial therapies focus on helping people accept themselves and live in harmony with their bodies.

And I would argue that nothing is more healing than being able to define yourself as one beloved of God, created with purpose (holistically male or female), and that this reality – that you are a child of God – is your true identity. This is the truth that the world needs to hear, the hope that it needs for whole and healthy flourishing, and the reality that we need to be affirming, with love and compassion.

“You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed.” Psalm 139:13-16, NLT

1 .

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/230427#:~:text=According%20to%20most%20biologists%20and,Wilson%20\(1856%2D1939\).](https://www.jstor.org/stable/230427#:~:text=According%20to%20most%20biologists%20and,Wilson%20(1856%2D1939).)

2 .

<https://www.genome.gov/about-genomics/educational-resources/fact-sheets/human-genome-project>

3 .

<https://teentalk.ca/learn-about/gender-identity/#:~:text=There%20are%20many%20different%20gender,or%20a%20combination%20of%20these.>

4.

<https://stanmed.stanford.edu/how-mens-and-womens-brains-are-different/>

5. <https://whatisawoman.com>

6. <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001669.htm>

7.

<https://www.hrla.org.au/not-affirming-transgender-children-is-family-violence-in-victoria>

8.

<https://www.heritage.org/gender/commentary/sex-reassignment-doesnt-work-here-the-evidence>

***Historically, 'gender' and 'sex' are words used to describe and define the anatomical and physiological differences between men and women. Modern terminology uses 'sex' to refer to biological characteristics and 'gender' to refer to the individual's and society's perceptions of sexuality, identity, and the concepts of masculinity and femininity. This article is using 'gender' and 'sex', as defined in the historical sense.**

This article is not intended to be offensive or divisive in nature, but rather to open a channel of respectful conversation about a subject that is deeply important to many people. I do not encourage discrimination, hate-speech, or sexism towards anyone, at any time, but, particularly in this instance, towards anyone who does not share this point of view.

****This article also purposely does not address or discuss the issues surrounding chromosomal abnormalities or intersex conditions.**

Beyond The Pale

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

“By the 14th century, the Norman invasion of Ireland was struggling. Too many Normans had “gone native”, assimilated into Irish life. The remaining settlers had retreated to just four eastern counties: Louth, Meath, Dublin, and Kildare. These four “obedient shires” were the only part of Ireland still under the control of the English crown. The king’s perimeter was marked with wooden fence posts pounded into the Irish turf. These were called “pales,” from the Latin palus, meaning “stake.”

Over the following centuries, the English settlement fortified its boundaries by turning the fenceline into an impressive barrier: a ten-foot-deep ditch surrounded by eight-foot banks on each side and ringed by a thorny hedge. These ramparts were never meant to be an impregnable wall, but they did provide a daunting obstacle to raiders stealing across the borders for English cattle. Within the Pale ditch, settlers lived under the protection of the crown. But once you passed “the Pale,” you were outside the authority and safety of English law, and subject to all the savageries of [rural Ireland](#). “Beyond the pale” then became a colloquial phrase meaning “outside the limits of acceptable behaviour or judgment.” | [C N Traveler](#)

I [recently wrote about my separation from](#) the religious community I grew up in and the overwhelming response to my article was both encouraging and thought-provoking.

Many people wrote to me, both publicly and privately, to let me know that the article had deeply resonated with them. They expressed that they, too, have had many questions over the years, wrestling with inconsistencies while attempting to find

their place in a system they secretly suspected they didn't fit.

Not many people feel free to speak publicly of their reservations or doubts and I understand this fear and hesitancy. They want to avoid similar censure and they know the penalty for dissenting is potentially severe; loss of relationship, rejection, and ostracisation.

Many also wrote expressing their distress at my experience (regardless of whether it had been theirs or not) and offering their blessing on my continued journey. I deeply appreciated their warmth, kindness, and understanding.

Others expressed dismay that I was no longer part of the community; how would I receive *nurture and support*? With whom would I now *fellowship*? Couldn't I have just stayed to *change the culture*? Beneath their words there seemed the suggestion of a more serious question; wasn't this just the beginning of a descent into loss of faith and the inevitable and eventual drift from God?

Others were less complimentary with their feedback. My article was deemed to be slanderous and inaccurate, and I, the author, simply a narcissistic, bitter ex-member, obsessed, while I was "in", about my 'rights' being impinged upon or 'the (annoying) call of true discipleship interfering with my personal life'.

Now that I was "out", I was simply an aggressive and confrontational vandal, looking to break something with whatever stones I could throw.

My 'questions' were excuses, and, they implied, I ought to be cancelled.

While I thought a lot about the people for whom this article resonated, and I deeply appreciated that they had shared their thoughts with me, I thought more about the other two kinds of responses.

Firstly, I wondered about those who had simply dismissed me and what I had to say. I pondered the mentality that refused to acknowledge any part of my experience as valid, believable, or worthy of discussion.

I wondered at the psychology that would paint me as the intolerant troublemaker rather than the wounded truth-teller.

And I wondered at such blind certainty of their supposed privileged position and their categorical dismissal that God could legitimately be found anywhere outside their own walls. Their confirmation bias was on full display by the way in which they chose to interpret and respond to my narrative.

I thought, secondly, about those who now considered me beyond the pale, out beyond the protection and comfort of the only community that was able to provide such things. Blessings and opportunities galore had been mine for the taking, had I only just remained within the palisade walls. No such blessings or opportunities (or if there were some to be found, they would be few and far between), awaited me outside those walls.

No one survives out there, they seemed to be whispering to one another. She'll die, for sure.

Well, I didn't die.

It hasn't been an easy journey, I'll not pretend otherwise, but outside those walls is not the wilderness you might imagine it to be. I'd been told that there was nothing worthwhile out there, but I discovered those are simply the words of fearful men, hemmed in by their own definitions and not living free in the Spirit of Christ.

God is out there. He is everywhere, and the more you listen for Him, the clearer He speaks. He is with us always, even when it feels like we're wandering through a wilderness, even if we're walking through the valley of the shadow of death.

Beyond the pale, I found men and women, fellow Christians, who deeply love Jesus and are committed to following him. I found people who are not afraid of difference but are compelled by the love of Christ to listen, to reason together, and sharpen iron one with another. To my astonishment, I discovered that *they knew the names of the faithful; Abraham, David, Deborah, Isaiah, Mary of Magdala, Paul, and many more.*

I discovered my place in the history of the church and learned the names of people from long, long ago – *Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Polycarp, Junia, Prisca, and Quintilla*, brothers and sisters in the great family of God.

I became reacquainted with Scripture in new ways, seeing the Bible as a book to marvel at and pore over, the spirit-breathed and living words of Heaven's Creator, active and able to deeply transform our hearts and lives, shaping us for His purpose. I learned to loosen my grip on needing *to know and understand everything* right now, and learned instead to say, "God, show me more of *You*."

My way of thinking about the Christian life shifted dramatically. It became very simple (note that I use the word *simple*, not *easy*): *Confess Jesus is Lord and Saviour (believe the story of Jesus as told us in the gospel) and then take up your cross and follow him, bearing the fruit of a life of repentance.* All else is just noise.

I discovered the messy but vital reality of the local church; filled with sinning and flawed humans who are being renewed daily by the grace of God, asking their questions and voicing their doubts along the way.

I learned what it felt like to be pastored to and personally prayed over, concepts that, bizarrely for a Christian, felt foreign and strange to me.

I discovered some churches that weren't for me and found others that were. The Christian world is nothing if not

perfectly imperfect and there's a lot of diversity out there. It's not for me to judge the legitimacy of their place as one of the Lord's lampstands (Revelation 2:5), but it is my responsibility to use discernment when choosing a church home (1 John 4:1-5).

I found myself asking: what am I responsible to *bring* and what am I responsible to *nurture*? *In this sea of Christianity, how do I best serve and represent Jesus in the place where I now find myself?*

Let me now answer some of the questions that have been put to me. It may be that these are questions on your mind too.

Who Do I Fellowship With?

Well, other Christians of course. A Christian is someone who has "*confessed that Jesus is Lord and believes in their heart that God raised him from the dead.*" (Romans 10:9). They've demonstrated their belief by repenting of their former way of life and by being baptised into the saving name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). They've been transferred out of the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of the Son of God's love, [a kingdom of life and light](#).

The first letter of John puts it this way:

"What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have observed and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life – that life was revealed, and we have seen it and we testify and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us – what we have seen and heard we also declare to you, so that you may also have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to

you: God is light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Him. If we say, "We have fellowship with Him," and yet we walk in darkness, we are lying and are not practicing the truth. If we [walk in the light](#) as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." | 1 John 1:1-7, CSB

If we abide in Jesus, then we are in common union – community – with all those who are also abiding in him, both in our present time and throughout the ages, a great cloud of faithful witnesses of the risen King, [the people of the kingdom](#) (1 John 2:28, John 15:1-27, Hebrews 12:1-2). We are connected to one another by the precious blood of the lamb and nothing can separate us from the love of God, apart from us choosing to leave the light and walk again in darkness (Romans 8:31-39).

The [ordinance of communion](#) – taking bread and wine together – is an important part of our Christian life, as members of Jesus' body and God's family. It is a key element of Jesus' covenant with each one of us individually and collectively as his church, the price of which was his own blood.

Written about 300 years after the birth of Christ, [the Apostles' Creed](#) summarises the foundational Christian beliefs taught by the early church and is a bold declaration of Christian faith in Jesus Christ. It particularly affirms the teachings regarding Jesus, that of his virgin birth, his crucifixion, his death, and his subsequent resurrection; core elements of the gospel of good news.

It is a primary statement of faith shared by Christians around the world, uniting them in common with the work achieved in and through Jesus. No Christian worth their salt denies this creed.

The church, the universal church, exists outside denominational walls and extends beyond historical boundaries.

There is only *one body* of Jesus Christ, and holding to this spiritual reality means holding to the reality that *fellowship with the body happens when we abide in the body*.

Why Couldn't I Stay And Change The Culture?

Cultures don't happen overnight. Made up of an interconnecting set of goals, roles, processes, values, practices, attitudes, and assumptions, the culture of an organisation is practically its DNA.

Changing a culture takes committed leadership, and often requires years of concerted and consistent effort, including intensive work to communicate and reinforce new ways of thinking, desired values, and changed behaviours. In fact, in the case of organisational transformation (such as church), it can take a minimum of seven to 10 years to change the culture.

But we humans are very resistant to change in general and attempting to change the culture of an organisation is particularly difficult as it's deeply embedded in the system. When people believe that their culture is superior to other cultures, they tend to resist any influence other cultures may bring (you can read more about this [here](#)).

I came to realise that I didn't have 15 years, or 10 years or even seven years up my sleeve. My children had reached their formative and impressionable years and there were many aspects of this culture that I didn't want them to absorb or be absorbed into. I also realised that while I had been hopeful of the possibility of a shift in culture, I had not fully understood how deeply embedded it was in the heart of a system so strongly resistant to change.

This was a culture that has existed for years and years, unchanged and unchallenged. It did not want to change and it saw no need for change. I began to understand it would take

many years of sustained and concentrated effort by many more persons than myself, to see any kind of tangible difference.

I felt I had more hope of reaching the moon than I did of changing this culture by staying.

Have I Lost My Faith?

I said that this journey hasn't been easy. And it hasn't.

When a person experiences loss of community, they also have to contend with what can feel like loss of identity. While we would all agree in theory that our identity rests, or should rest, in Jesus, in practice we are also deeply shaped by our place within community, in knowing and being known by the people who surround us.

Beyond the pale is initially daunting and lonely. Everyone you ever knew is on the other side of that fence.

I was [reminded during this time](#) of the story of Hagar, who had been driven into the wilderness by the harsh treatment of her mistress Sarah (Genesis 16:6-13).

Miserable, lonely, and afraid, the Lord found Hagar beside a spring in the wilderness and spoke words of comfort and hope to her. She names God in that place as 'El Roi', meaning, "You are the God who sees me."

I have repeated this to myself many times in the past few years when doubt and discomfort has crept in. Not doubt *in* God, but doubt that He still had His hand over my life, that He was the God who looks after me, that I was still seen and known.

Having faith is firstly a posture of the heart, an orientation of trust in or towards something or someone. My faith was placed in Jesus at 16 years old and my trust in God remains firm. I remain confident that the Spirit will lead me in all

truth and that the important things God wishes me to know, He will make known.

I trust Him, even when I am confused about His plans for me, even when I don't understand the lessons He's teaching me, even when I can't see what the future holds.

I trust Him even when I'm wracked with anxiety and overwhelmed by uncertainty. I trust Him even when life is challenging and change is necessary. I trust Him because I believe that the same Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead *lives in me*. If God is for me, who can be against me?

This journey has challenged me in ways I never imagined and I've wondered many, many times, *how did I get here?* But I know, for sure, He is still the God who sees me and takes care of me.

I have not lost my faith.

Where Would I Find Nurture And Support?

The wilderness is an unforgiving landscape, where all reliance on self is brutally highlighted for what it is, inadequate, insufficient, a lie. To my dismay, I initially found myself echoing the murmurs of the children of Israel in the wilderness. I wondered, had God brought me out here to die?

This was the first lesson I had to learn: Jesus never promised this Christian life would be easy.

The second was this: God always provides.

It was not the wilderness I imagined it to be. God sent people into my life during this time: good, loving, solid, Jesus-loving people, who prayed with me, ate with me, opened their homes and shared their lives with me.

They personally testified to God's goodness in both good times and bad. They encouraged me to persevere in faith, nurture

forgiveness, run after grace, and ground myself in God's love. *"Love bears all things",* they reminded me, *"believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."*

Like the children of Israel who had wandered in the wilderness, God had ensured I was still provided for.

***"There's honey in the rock
Water in the stone
Manna on the ground
No matter where I go
I don't need to worry now that I know
Everything I need You've got"***

Honey In The Rock | Brooke Ligertwood

Where To From Here?

I am a Christian for the rest of my days. *I believe in Jesus Christ, descended from David, risen from the dead. This is my gospel.*

But as to the next step? *I don't know* what God has in store for my future.

I hope to be a part of a flourishing and vibrant church. I hope to serve and witness alongside people whom I get to love and know deeply, and by whom I feel seen and loved in return.

I hope to be a worthy example of faith for my children and a trusted companion and woman of valour to my husband.

I hope that God uses me in many small, indiscernible ways to help grow His kingdom here on earth. If He has larger, more visible plans in mind, I hope I have the courage to step into His calling for me.

I hope to avoid pain and difficulty and loss, but I know these will inevitably come my way, so I hope to be brave and true when they do.

And in all these things, I recognise that I will be flawed, always flawed, but I continue to give thanks for the grace of God and the blood of Jesus, which cleanses us from all sin.

Most of all, I hope to hear the words of the king on that final day: *“Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your Lord.”*

Searching For Identity

“If I find in myself desires nothing in this world will satisfy. I can only conclude that I was not made for here.” | C S Lewis

Searching For Identity

I want to confess, at the outset, that as I was attempting to put down some of the thoughts I wanted to share relating to identity, my mind ran an internal commentary about myself. Thoughts such as, *“what will people think of me?”*, *“how will I be perceived?”*, *“I wonder if they’ll think ‘this’ thing or ‘that’ thing ”* ran on loop in my brain. I felt overwhelmed at the thought of showing up, convinced that I’m extremely flawed (and therefore inadequate to be sharing anything of value), anxious about my capacity to sufficiently convey and do justice to God’s truths, and wondering, perhaps, at whether I’m even the most articulate person in the world to be attempting to do so!

It struck me as really quite ironic that I was wrestling with my identity **as I prepared to write and share about identity!** I guess it seemed to prove, at least to me, that our identity,

[our true identity](#) is something that we have to work hard at reminding ourselves of and something we all have struggled with or will struggle with throughout our lives.

I want to refer to a particular quote which I love – Colossians 1:13

“For He [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves.” | Colossians 1:13 (ESV)

How truly life-changing! In becoming [disciples of Jesus](#), we’ve also become subjects of his kingdom – living in the sphere where Jesus rules!

We Are Kingdom People!

I think this is the first important truth we need to know, believe and establish at our core when we start to think about our identity and who we are. Before we relate ourselves to anyone (or anything) else in our lives, we are first and foremost [kingdom people](#) and **Jesus is our king!**

Choosing to be a Christian has its origins in believing the things about Jesus, in an intellectual sense – who he is and what he came for – but there’s more to it than that. We are also choosing to surrender to his guidance and leadership in our life as a willing subject of God’s [designated king](#). Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and earth, he has first claim on our affections, he is the motivating force in our decisions and the final judge of our soul (Matthew 28:18-20, Isaiah 9:6, Luke 1:33, Acts 10:36, 1 Corinthians 15:27, Colossians 1:27, Romans 8:10, Ephesians 3:16, Acts 10:42, John 5:22, 2 Timothy 4:8, James 1:21, 1 Peter 2:25).

Perhaps we need to take a step back and consider the powerful force that enacted this transfer from the dominion of darkness. The motivating force in all of this was love – the

love of an eternal God and the love of a righteous king, [who willingly died](#) for those who were still his enemies. While we were still in darkness, Jesus died for us. This is the meaning of '[saving grace](#)' – undeserved, unmerited and entirely outworked without our help or contribution.

“Christianity is not about our disciplined pursuit of God but about God’s relentless pursuit of us – to the point of Jesus dying on a cross for us that we might become His friends. The inexhaustible God loves us so intensely that every time we turn to Him after wandering from His love for us, all heaven breaks out in a thunderous celebration (Luke 15:7)

Most of us believe this intellectually. This is the message of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Experiencing this infinite love in our hearts, however, is another matter. The sinister voices of the surrounding world and our pasts are powerful. They repeat the deeply-held, negative beliefs we may have learned in our families and cultures growing up:

- *I am a mistake*
- *I am a burden*
- *I am stupid*
- *I am worthless*
- *I am not allowed to make mistakes*
- *I must be approved of by certain people to feel ok*
- *I don’t have the right to experience joy and pleasure*
- *I don’t have the right to assert myself and say what I think and feel*
- *I don’t have a right to feel*
- *I am value-based on my intelligence, wealth, and what I do, not for who I am.*

It is astounding how many deeply committed followers of Jesus would affirm that the preceding statements articulate how they truly feel about themselves. Like the prodigal son, they are content to relate to God as hired servants, rather than enjoy the full privileges of sons and daughters of our heavenly

Father (Luke 15: 11-21)" – Peter Scazzero

"Whom the Son sets free is free indeed!" | John 8:36 (ESV)

Perhaps we are also more willing at times to relate to God as slaves still chained in the dominion of darkness than of kingdom people, set free and redeemed by the Son and the king!

The Process Of Discipleship

Discipleship – being people of the kingdom – is a process that moves us from being spiritually and emotionally immature children to being fully mature and developed adults – *"people dedicated to God, and capable and equipped for every good work."* (2 Timothy 3:17, NET).

This process of discipleship is a principle-centered, character-based, "inside out" approach to developing our authentic self in Christ. It means to start first with ourselves; even more fundamentally, to start with the most inside part of self – our core – and to honestly analyse our paradigms, our character, and our motives and to realign those with the king we are serving, with the master we are following.

I think a lot of us struggle with having a clear sense of who we are, and our Christian life is often theory rather than practice, layering over our core, rather than challenging ourselves to examine what lies at the heart of us. This process of layering – creating and developing a false self over the top of core emotional truths – ensures that we remain entrapped and enslaved to 'the old man', rather than liberated in Jesus as a [new creation](#).

It takes courage to decide to live differently, to follow Jesus into the unknown and to be committed to emotional and spiritual reality. It takes courage to define ourselves by how God sees us – deeply loved, despite our flaws and to live from

that basis of [grace](#) in our Christian discipleship.

“Define yourself radically as one beloved by God. This is the true self. Every other identity is an illusion.” | Brennan Manning

I'd really like to encourage us all, but especially those of you who might be really struggling with identity right now in your life, to give real attention to developing your authentic self in Jesus.

1. Pay attention to your interior (the “heart of you”) in silence and solitude.
2. Find trusted companions to help you along the way.
3. Move out of your comfort zone.
4. Pray for courage.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are God's children. Our existence is now framed by Christ's life – who is [a life-giving Spirit](#) (Romans 8:16).

Here are some core, emotional truths that we can believe and take deep into our hearts, as much-loved children of God: We are created in God's own image (Genesis 1:27), the crowning glory of His creative work (Psalm 8:5). We are incredibly unique and known intimately by God (Psalm 139:13-16) and we are more valuable to Him than many sparrows (Matthew 10:31). Even when we have travelled far from His spirituality (Romans 3:23), He loved the world so much He sent His son to die for us (John 3:16). While we were still ‘at enmity’ with Him, He reached out to reconcile us back to Him (Romans 5:8-10). His grace, not our sin, has the final word in our position before Him (Romans 5:20). Those who step into His grace are saved (Romans 10:13), we are born-again (1 Peter 1:3), adopted as God's children and positioned as His heirs (Ephesians 1:5, 1 John 3:2, Romans 8:16-17). **We belong to God and He loves us with the love of a perfect Father** (John 14:18, 1 John 3:1).

“...This is my [Paul’s] prayer. That God, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and the all-glorious Father, will give you spiritual wisdom and the insight to know more of Him: that you may receive that inner illumination of the Spirit which will make you realise how great is the hope to which He is calling you—the magnificence and splendour of the inheritance promised to Christians—and how tremendous is the power available to us who believe in God. That power is the same divine power which was demonstrated in Christ when He raised him from the dead and gave him the place of supreme honour in Heaven—a place that is infinitely superior to any conceivable command, authority, power or control, and which carries with it a name far beyond any name that could ever be used in this world or the world to come.” | Ephesians 1:18-21, JB Phillips

If you are struggling with your identity as a disciple or want to understand more about God’s work of grace in your life (and how that causes radical transformation), I would highly recommend reading the following two books: “What’s So Amazing About Grace” by Phillip Yancey and “Emotionally Healthy Spirituality” by Peter Scazzero.

The Christian life isn’t always easy and the next step isn’t always clear. Sometimes we need courage to take that step and sometimes we just need to stand still and watch God go to work for us.

This article was first published on 27 April 2020