

Letter from Youth Pastor to Student struggling with gender identity:

I am so thankful I know you. It is an honor that you would share this struggle with me. I know it was not easy, nor does sharing resolve everything. As you shared, I could not help but think of how deeply I desire to be truly known. God designed us for this—to know Him and be **known by Him**. He not only made us for Himself, but He also made us for community—to know others and be known by them.

My heart groans with yours to be truly known as God intended from the beginning. But my heart also groans because I know the church has not always felt like a place you could talk **about this struggle**. As a result, you have felt disconnected and not truly known yourself. Along the way, you have been disappointed, hurt and isolated by the actions and words of Christians. I grieve over the pain and loneliness you have experienced. **Before I say anything else, I want you to know that I am here for you and I love you.**

I have to admit that I have not always been careful in speaking about **transgender issues**. I have too easily settled for a shallow understanding of the issues. Please forgive me if I have ever done this in our conversations. I want you to know that your willingness to share with me has driven me to learn more and seek **God's wisdom**. I cannot pretend that I know all the answers. Nor do I share any of this from a position of moral superiority. As you shared with me, I heard you saying that things just don't seem as they should be. I was born one way but feel the exact opposite. My gender expression seems disconnected from my physical body. **Did God make a mistake? Why do I feel this way? Does God want me to embrace these feelings? These questions—your questions—should not be dismissed but patiently and prayerfully answered.** I cannot do that fully in a letter, but I hope we can still continue getting together to talk through these things.

In the meantime, I want to share a few things with you. Our world promotes a story of expressive individualism. Self-expression and self-identification are its supreme virtues. **But God tells a different story. He tells a better story and holds out a better promise.** In the Bible, we find that God made us in His image—we are of inestimable value. We were made by Him and for Him. He made us both male and female. We are made with this intended distinction and not as interchangeable pieces. He made us male and female to complement one another and fulfill His purpose in and through us. God calls this design very good! But why doesn't it feel this way? In short, the answer is sin. Since our first parents' sinful rebellion, we are broken people living according to broken desires in a broken world. And this brokenness is just as true of our relationships with God and others as it is of our relationship with ourselves.

However, I want to make something especially clear at this point. **Your feeling as if your gender does not align with your biological sex is not sin. It is evidence that we live in a sin-stained world. What would be sin would be to reject your God-given sex and gender in favor of your own feelings. Struggling with your gender identity while trying to live in obedience to God is different than embracing a transgender identity.** By embracing a transgender identity you would be choosing to define yourself by and act upon your feelings rather than God's design.

We do this same thing when we act on desires of lust, same-sex attraction, anger or lying. Regardless of how we sin, we are always rejecting God's design and trusting in ourselves to be our own god, to determine what is right and wrong and to define ourselves according to our own liking rather than according to His image.

But God does not leave us in our sin and brokenness. He sent Jesus Christ to bear in His body on the cross the judgment we deserve for our sin. Jesus not only bore the weight of our sin, but He defeated death and rose from the grave. He now offers new life to all who turn from their sin and trust Him. He forgives, cleanses and restores. He gives us His Spirit that we might be transformed in both our desires and actions. He adopts us into His family and we enjoy fellowship alongside other equally broken but restored brothers and sisters in Christ. The life that Jesus offers us is good because He Himself is good. He provides soul-satisfying rest and life-giving peace even as we walk through trials and suffering. **When we come to Him, He does not always take away our struggles or remove our circumstances. But He does give us Himself in the midst of them.** I long that your testimony would be that through your struggle with gender identity you come to rest in your identity in Christ. **Not feeling like your gender matches your biological sex does not cut you off from God. Rather it provides an opportunity to trust Him through the struggle and testify of His goodness in the midst of our broken world.**

I cannot pretend that I know that deep struggles of wrestling with my gender identity. I feel the deep sorrow, confusion and doubt you have faced on this journey. I saw and heard this as you shared with me. And I cannot promise that it disappears the moment you embrace Christ and choose to align yourself according to His design for your life. Nor does it mean this struggle invalidates your faith in Christ. **Your struggle with gender identity may describe how you feel right now, but it does not have to define who you are.** Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. This will mean submitting your gender to Him and choosing to see yourself according to how He made you. This is a hard path. Yet, along the hard path of following Christ is the good life—the life of knowing Him and being known by Him, of belonging to Him and His church and of finding yourself by losing yourself. And at the end of this path, there is the certain hope that God will restore our broken bodies and desires.

In between now and then, God intends for us to live out our identity in Christ in community with His people and before a watching world. In community with other believers, we bear one another's burdens, we welcome one another into our homes and everyday lives, we weep together, we rejoice together and we remind one another of God's promise and we point one another to Christ through whatever **struggles or trials** we face. **You do not have to do this alone. Let's walk through this together that we may testify that God's grace is sufficient, and His plan is good.**