

Sex, Gender, and the Transgender Community Small Group Guide

Warm-up Question: (Choose one, make up your own, or skip this part all together, depending upon the nature of your group.)

1. What was one of your favorite toys as a child?
2. Do you like dressing up for formal events?

Read the following passage: Matthew 19:3-12.

Divorce was a significant issue in the first century. A major debate turned on the permissible grounds for divorce covered by the phrase “something indecent” in Deuteronomy 24:1. Most Jews in Jesus’ day wanted an “escape clause” that would permit them to escape an unhappy marriage. They didn’t want to feel stuck for life. Jesus’ response to this issue provides helpful direction on another subject in which people often feel stuck: gender dysphoria.

Gender dysphoria refers to an experience of distress or anguish because of a perceived conflict between one’s gender identity and one’s biological sex. An experience of gender dysphoria has led a number of people to express a gender identity that does not match their biological sex. Such individuals often refer to themselves as transgender.

In this passage, Jesus reaffirms God’s intention for human beings to express the image of God and to express their identity as one of two genders: male or female. At the same time, Jesus is fully aware that some people are born eunuchs; that is, their biological sex has been compromised in some way. Although being born intersex is not the same thing as experiencing gender dysphoria, Jesus’ awareness of such individuals alerts us to the reality that Jesus, even in making statements about male and female, knows that some people will experience unique challenges in living in alignment with their biological sex. For this reason, followers of Jesus should have deep compassion toward those struggling with gender dysphoria.

Questions for Discussion (Choose several that are relevant for your group):

1. Can you think of any times in your life when you were negatively influenced by an overly rigid stereotype of “normal” male or female behavior or desires? Explain.
2. In a debate about divorce, Jesus bypasses Deuteronomy and focuses on God’s intention for gender and marriage articulated in Genesis 1 and 2. Jesus’ example suggests that when we are confused or feel stuck, we should likewise return to the most fundamental questions of God’s intention for his creation and purpose for our lives. How might rediscovering purpose help us when we feel stuck? Do you have a strong sense of purpose in your life right now? What helps you rediscover God’s purpose?

3. Consider the following quote from the book *Making Sense of God* by Timothy Keller. How might we connect it to our discussion on gender and identity? How has the idolization of personal autonomy and self-determination affected how we approach discussions concerning gender?

...it's an illusion to think identity is simply an expression of inward desires and feelings. You have many strong feelings, and in one sense they are all part of "you," but just because they are there does not mean you must or can express them all. No one identifies with all strong inward desires. Rather, we use some kind of filter—a set of beliefs and values—to sift through our hearts and determine which emotions and sensibilities we will value and incorporate into our core identity and which we will not. It is this value-laden filter that forms our identity, rather than our feelings themselves. And where do we get this filter? We get it from some community, some people whom we trust. Then we take this set of values into ourselves and we make sense of our insides. We prioritize some things we find there and reject others. It is misleading to the point of dishonesty to say, "I just have to be myself, no matter what anyone else says." Your "self" is defined by what one set of "anyones" has to say. Our inner depths on their own are insufficient to guide us. To put it another way, identity is determined not by our feelings and desires but rather by our beliefs about our varied, contradictory, changing feelings and desires.

4. Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. How can the grace of God redeem the brokenness and evil we experience in this life? Do you think we can regularly experience joy in the midst of painful circumstances? If so, how?
5. Read Isaiah 56:3-5. How can our reflection on eternal life help us persevere in the present?
6. What do you think Jesus would say to those experiencing gender dysphoria today?

Pray