

How Your Church Can Love Transgender People

[Andrew T. Walker](#) August 24, 2017

A church should be the safest place to talk about, be open about, and struggle with gender dysphoria. Yet too often, our churches have been anything but safe—and that’s something that Christians, including me, need to apologize for.

The Bible challenges churches to reflect Jesus by embracing gender-dysphoric members, and by reaching out to gender-dysphoric and transgender neighbors with loving truth and truth-based hope.

What would that kind of church community be like?

1. Compassionate Community

If a popular local politician and a self-identified transgender individual walked into your church, whom would be greeted first? Whom would be warmly invited back the following Sunday?

If the politician would receive the warmest welcome, the Bible says your church would be showing partiality—which is a sin ([James 2:1](#)).

The church’s response to those who identify as transgender—and to those who struggle with gender dysphoria but aren’t actively identifying as transgender—must be, immediately and with integrity, “You are welcome here. You are loved here.”

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people, not the lost.

Of course, this requires us to be open about our own struggles and failings and worries. Too often our churches give the impression that the Son of Man came to seek and save good people, not the lost. The antidote to this impression is to embrace the compassion that the Lord extends to each of us—and extend it to others in turn.

2. Listening Community

Often churches committed to the Bible as God’s Word honestly want to love others but fail to listen. Why? Because we have our theology zipped up and our apologetics charted, so we think we can just tell people the right answers. But God made us with both heads and hearts—with thoughts, feelings, and desires. In order to affect someone’s heart, we need to first listen to their heart.

Real people live in our neighborhoods, sit in our church buildings, and talk with us after our services, and they have real struggles. Do they hear their struggles spoken about kindly and carefully by someone who has tried to understand them? Or quickly and dismissively, by someone who has never stopped to consider how they feel? Would someone secretly struggling with gender dysphoria in your church hear it talked about in a way that assumes “people like that” aren’t present?

If you don’t know much about gender-identity issues and don’t know what it’s like to struggle with them, learn to listen. If someone says, “You don’t understand,” rather than telling them they’re wrong, answer, “Very possibly not. Please tell me.”

3. Convictional Community

How sad it would be if the church lost the conviction that to trust Jesus is to understand truth and experience freedom. “If you abide in my word,” he

says, “you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” ([John 8:31–32](#)).

I don’t have space here to set out the biblical underpinning for the truth that gender is fundamentally linked to biological sex, and that our feelings or self-perception shouldn’t be given greater authority than God’s Word (although I do this in depth in my book [God and the Transgender Debate](#)). But we do need to underline that if a church community is to be a lifeline of hope to those struggling with gender dysphoria, it must be committed to biblical truth. Why? Not because it feels good to be right, but because it allows us to offer a word of hope and reconciliation. We can only offer this message if we believe it’s true.

We must not shy away from holding out truth. But equally, if we use truth as a weapon against those coming to grips with what discipleship means, woe to us. Woe to us if we demand conformity from those struggling but are unwilling to walk alongside them as they struggle. Neither love nor truth is an optional bolt-on to our Christianity ([Eph. 4:15](#)).

Most of us, depending on our particular character, tend to bend toward love or truth. The struggle is to showcase the one we bend away from. If you or your church tends to listen and love but bend the truth in your attempt to love, the challenge is this: Hold to the truth, even as you love. Remember that loving someone isn’t the same as agreeing with them, and sometimes loving someone requires you to disagree. But for those of us tempted to teach truth without love, the challenge is this: Don’t neglect love. After all, love wins a hearing for the truth.

4. Gracious Community

It’s easy to miss, but Paul’s letters to the churches always begin and end, one way or another, with the word “grace.”

What does grace tell me? It tells me I fall short, and so do you. Grace tells me

I'm still loved, and so are you. Grace is there for me in my repentance, and it's there for you in yours. Grace says forgiveness is always available. Grace never lets us be proud, for our salvation isn't of our own doing; but grace also prevents us from despair, for by grace we've been saved and are being remade.

If our churches are marked by one thing, let it be grace—the grace that always welcomes, always goes the extra mile, always forgives, and never says “enough.”

How wonderfully odd it is to consider that Jesus saves us not by removing us or our challenges from this world, but by giving us the strength to face those challenges together. Your church is meant to be a place of grace—a place where everyone, no matter background or struggles, finds homes open and family offered; a place where the door is open rather than the drawbridge drawn up; a place where people are listened to and loved rather than stereotyped and lectured. If you're a church member, God is calling you to serve that end.

Of course, this makes your church costlier to be a part of. But it also makes your church the one you need—and those around you need—as you live with grace while you speak of grace.

Editors' note: This is an adapted excerpt from Andrew T. Walker's new book, [*God and the Transgender Debate: What Does the Bible Actually Say About Gender Identity?*](#) (The Good Book Company). Read how [writing on transgenderism changed him](#).