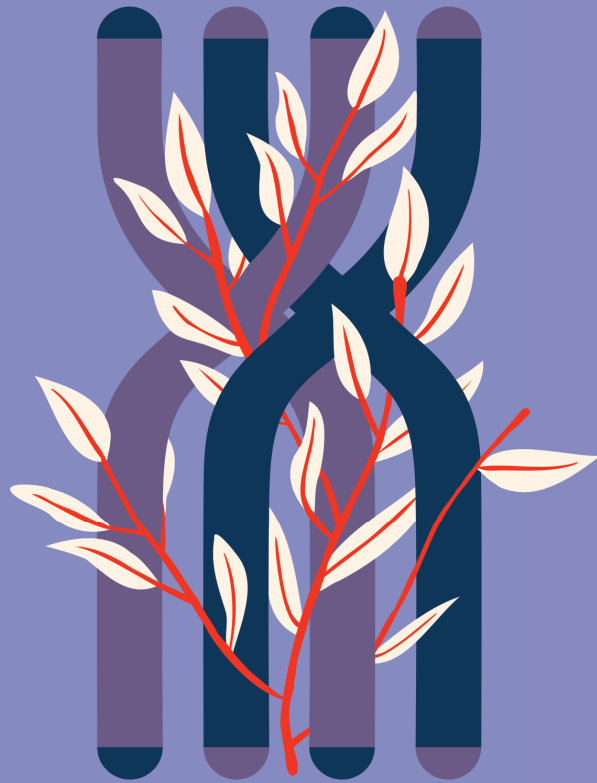


GENDER DYSPHORIA *and the* Christian Worldview

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We live in a cultural moment where one's biological sex and one's gender are divorced, where the meaning of gender itself constantly changes, and where girls and women, especially, struggle to know who they are. Be reminded of what Scripture says about sex and gender and discover how Jesus—who gave His own body to recover and restore those who feel alienated from their bodies—ultimately brings healing and hope.

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DAY ONE

The Theological Meaning Of Female Identity

In Jesus' time, being sick or disabled came with stigma and shame. You may have been forbidden from going into the Temple, which signified the ceremonial purity God required of His people to approach Him. In many cases, you'd be prevented from working, marrying, or having a family, which was essential to social relationships and economic security in an ancient, agrarian society. You were an outsider, marginalized, cut off from the community. In an honor/shame culture like the Bible's, this was devastating.

Jesus dropped everything when He met people with these kinds of needs. He broke religious traditions and drew the ire of the social elite to help them. To be physically healed meant more than recovery from a condition. It meant being restored and included. Those whom Jesus restored didn't remain marginalized. They were brought from isolation to connection. From alienation to acceptance.

The affliction of gender confusion or dysphoria may not be outwardly visible. But overwhelmingly, the women and girls who suffer from it feel every bit as alienated. Not only from others. From themselves. Were Jesus walking among us today, I can't help but wonder how He would respond to the lonely little girl who feels like she doesn't fit, or to the broken woman trying to heal herself of a soul-deep wound.

He would be as He always has been – infinitely kind, tenderhearted, patient, understanding and deeply moved by her pain. He would love her enough to tell her the truth in a spirit of gentleness and grace.

The created harmony between male and female runs from the first to the last moments of human history. The Christian worldview offers a fully integrated identity, one in which our sexed body has an intrinsic purpose and worth, and our gendered self has transcendent significance.

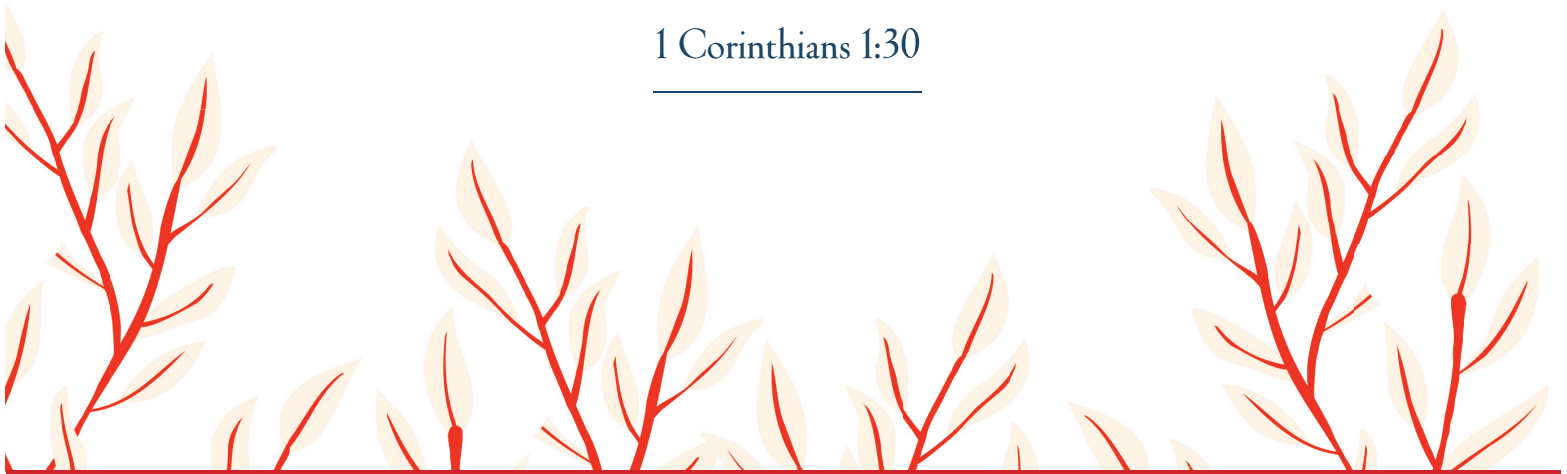
In all the factors that influence female identity, only one ascribes meaning. Female identity is theologically bestowed, a gift from the God who created it to reflect the wonder and depth of Himself. Apart from a reconciled relationship with our Creator, we will never comprehend, much less fulfill, the significance of our sexed bodies or our gendered selves.

In this five-day devotional, we'll walk through the theological meaning of female identity. As we journey together through the truths of Scripture, you'll be better equipped as Jesus' ambassadors to share His very good news: Women and girls who struggle with gender dysphoria don't have to settle for their brokenness. Jesus offers them wholeness. He gave His own body to recover and restore those who feel alienated from their bodies. Better still, He unites them to the Body of Christ.

——— Read: ———

Matthew 4:23-25

1 Corinthians 1:30



DAY TWO

The Self-Giving Aspects Of Sex And Gender

Contrary to the prevailing assumptions of our day, the meaning of sex and gender identity isn't found within one's self, but in relationship to another.

The nature of sex and gender is self-giving and expressed relationally outside of ourselves. In other words, the significance of biological sex is discovered in our gendered relationships, and those gendered relationships are directed by our biological sex. Our sexed bodies indicate and inform our intended gender identities.

Take away the fixed contrast between male and female, and we have no foundation to understand man or woman, and even lose part of our understanding of God.

Male and female were created to depend upon each other. Each was made to harmonize with the other, and neither can fully reflect God in isolation. The world needs both men and women to reflect what God is like. God created them to tell His story better together.

Throughout the Creation story, God arranges the physical world in a series of binaries: Day and Night. Earth and Sky. Water and Land. Sun and Moon. And Male and Female. "God establishes these binaries with boundaries that separate them, rulers who rule over them, and moral injunctions about what is to be done or avoided," explains Timothy Tennent in his work, *For the Body*. Like the rest of God's creation, human beings have two forms. Yet unlike the rest of God's creation, they are "a little lower than the angels" (Psalm 8).

Humanity bears God's image. The theological term for this unique attribute of human beings is the *imago Dei*. There are many definitions for what it means to be the *imago Dei*. Some emphasize humanity's ability to be rational, others that humans are relational. John Kilner's defines it as "reflection and connection." Mankind was created to reflect God and have a special connection with God. We bear God's image. And as bearers of God's image, we belong to God Himself (Mark 12:16-17).

Male and female differences also reflect the complementary relationship between the two sexes.

Part of what makes the Christian sexual ethic so compelling is that it ascribes great meaning and significance to human sexuality, and that this meaning and significance is not ultimate. Rather, it points to and reflects something even more transcendent than sexuality itself.

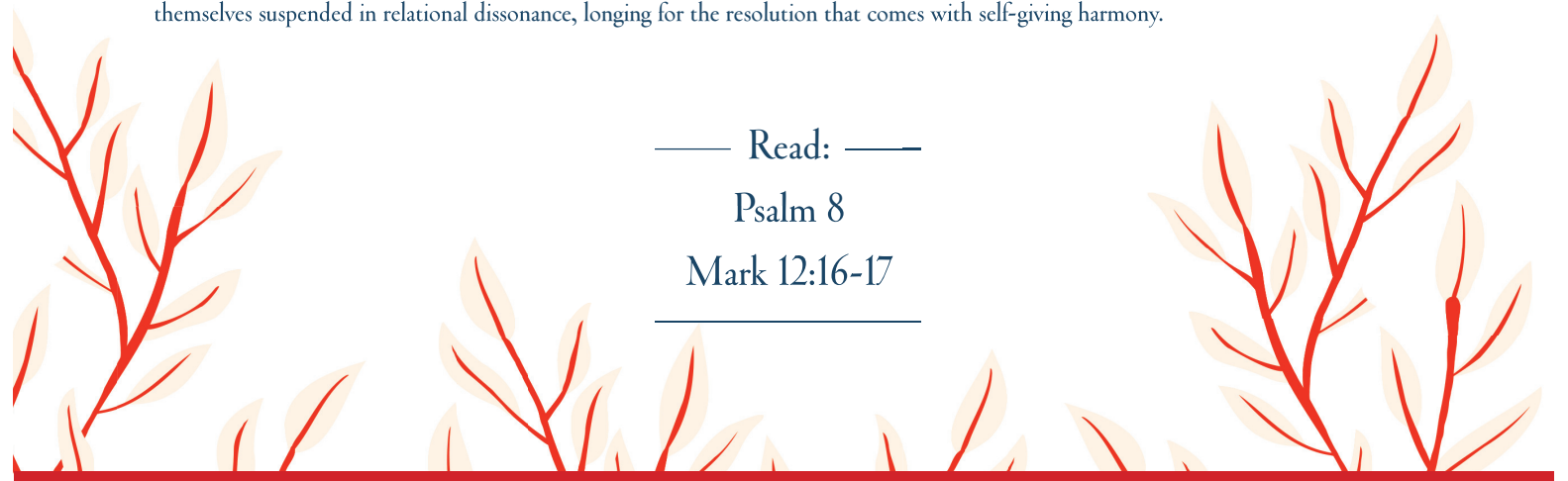
Contrast ideas like "self-giving" and "communion of persons" and "otherness" with the way we usually hear gender identity described today. Terms like "my truth," "my authentic self," or "who I really am" characterize our culture's understanding of gender and its significance. The source of our identity and fulfillment is found almost exclusively in self, meaning the relationships in our lives ultimately exist to serve self.

It's little wonder our society is so confused as to whether sex and gender have any deeper meaning. And it's little wonder so many find themselves suspended in relational dissonance, longing for the resolution that comes with self-giving harmony.

—— Read: ——

Psalm 8

Mark 12:16-17



DAY THREE

Sex Differences Are Good

Sex differences are not accidental or incidental to our humanity. They are deeply embedded in our physical bodies. And this, like all of God's creation, is good.

Genesis 1 emphasizes the commonality between male and female. They are both in God's image and both personally created by Him. They are both commanded to rule and reign over creation, and are both part of the Creation Mandate to fill the earth with offspring. Verses 26-29 identify the first human beings with the Hebrew words *zakar* (male) and *nequeba* (female). These terms depict their biological categories, specifically the sexual difference between male and female. Like the rest of creation, biological sex identity is determined by how an organism is constructed for sexual reproduction. Males donate genetic material (impregnate); females receive and gestate genetic material (pregnancy). The organization of male and female bodies reveals their respective reproductive contributions.

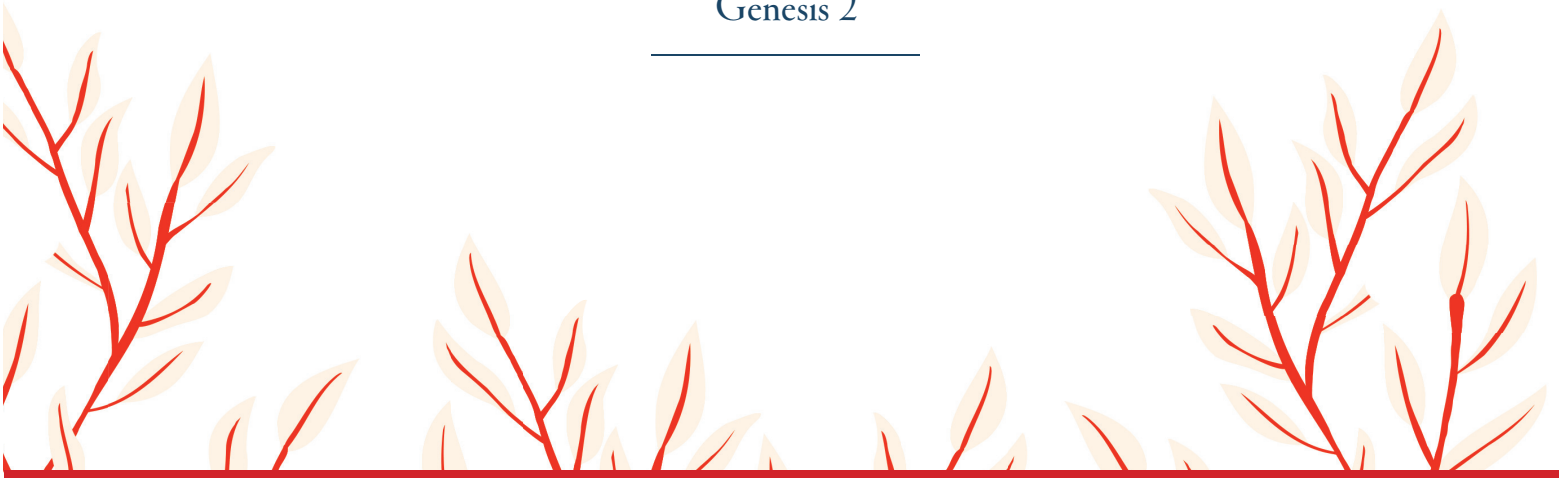
Genesis 1 reveals that sex difference is binary. Genesis 2 reveals that gender is also binary. Genesis 1 places male and female in relationship to the rest of God's creation. They are His image-bearing stewards of the physical world. Genesis 2 places male and female in relationship to each other. They have a unique relationship with Him and with each other. In this poetic re-telling of the Creation story, God is not called *Elohim*, but by His personal name: *Yahweh*. He personally forms the man and fashions the woman (*yatsar* and *banah*, respectively). Here, humanity is no longer called *zakar* (male) and *nequbah* (female). Instead, they are *ish* and *ishah* – man and woman. This pair of terms reflects how male and female relate to each other. Just as the woman came from the man, so *ishah* comes from *ish*; the word's origin reflects their relationship. In other words, *ish* and *ishah* describe their gender identity.

The language of Genesis reveals another correlation, a new layer of harmony. This time not between the man and the woman relationally but within themselves personally. The pairs of terms in Genesis 1 and 2 correspond, confirming that both sex differences and gender differences were created to be binary. If a human being is a male (*zakar*), God created him to be a man (*ish*). If a human being is a female (*nequeba*), then God created her to be a woman (*ishah*). The sexed body was designed to correlate with the gendered self. By design, sex indicates and informs gender. Someone with a male anatomy is a man and someone with a female anatomy is a woman. Biology indicates and informs identity. We can trust our bodies to tell us who we are. Our gender is indeed more than our biology (a woman is a woman even after a hysterectomy, for example) – but it isn't less. The sexed body is a created gift. God designed and bestowed it upon humanity in goodness and love.

—— Read: ——

Genesis 1

Genesis 2



DAY FOUR

The Meaning Of The Body

The opening words of Scripture reveal a Creator who is separate from, yet intimately involved in, His creation. This Creator God, Elohim, is infinite, but His creation is finite; He is self-sustaining, but His creation is contingent. Everything He makes – material and immaterial – is good. And everything He makes has order, design, and purpose.

Being made in the imago Dei encompasses our entire being. The image of God includes not only our immaterial selves (our minds, our souls, our relationships) but also our material selves. Various aspects of our humanity may be distinct (heart, conscience, flesh, etc.), but they are not divisible. We are complex, whole beings. Our physical selves reflect things about God. They are part of the imago Dei. They are essential and very good (Gen 1:26-29). The human body has theological significance, revealing God's nature and design. Every part of the body has a function; every cell is complex. Like all of God's creation, our bodies have order, purpose, and design. They reveal His nature, His attributes, and His covenantal love (Romans 1). Scripture places a high value on the human body.

In the early days of the Church, Christianity's view of the body stood out among the pagan religions. To the Greco-Roman world, it would have been foolish, even scandalous. Ancient society was brimming with philosophies that despised the body. Philosophical systems like Platonism, Gnosticism, and Manicheanism all held that the physical world was evil. Living in a body was like a descent of the soul from the "higher spiritual realm into the corrupt material realm;" it was a place "death, decay, and destruction." The point of your body was to be a "container" for the soul.

The physical world was evil. The goal of your soul – your inner self, your true self – was to escape it.

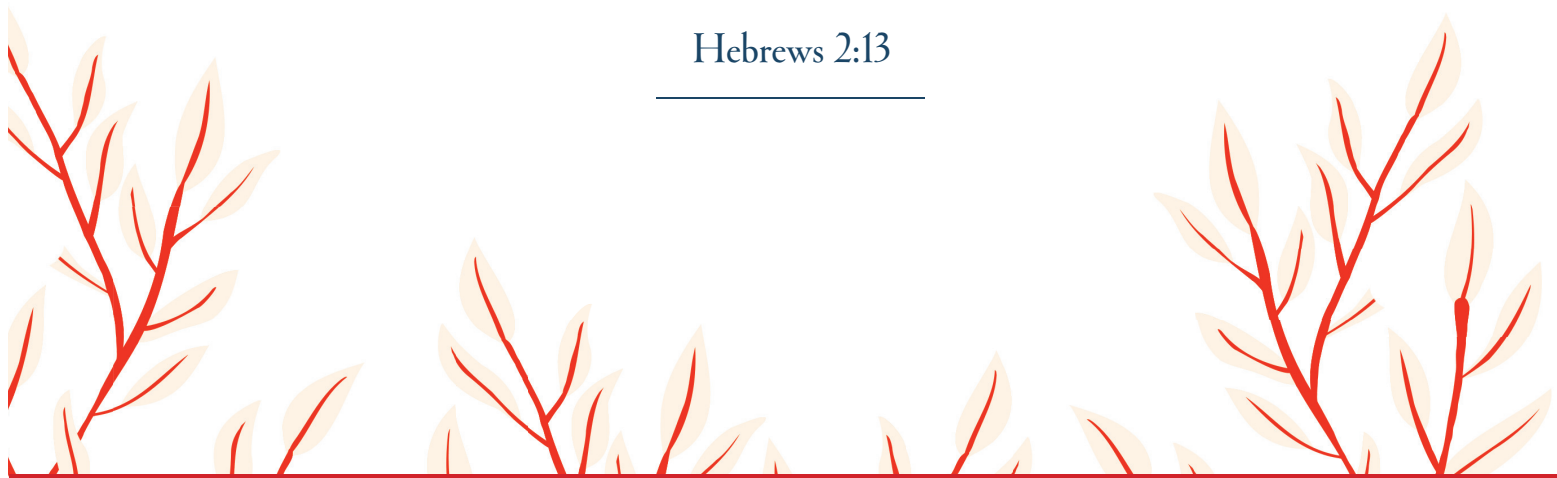
Into this cultural environment, where the material world is belittled and the immaterial world is exalted, Christianity bursts with the proclamation that the one true God created the physical world and that it was good (Gen 1). The Creator Himself came to His creation in bodily form (Heb 2:13). As God Incarnate, He willingly involved Himself in the physical world. Not only that, but the God-Man, Jesus, was bodily resurrected. He wasn't "psychologically resurrected" in the hearts and minds of His disciples. He was physically raised. And, Jesus didn't try to escape the material world after His death so he could float on a cloud somewhere; He returned to it (1 Cor 15:3; Rev. 22:20).

This Bible gives our bodies profound dignity and inherent worth – we cannot regard the imago Dei and disregard our physical, embodied selves.

—— Read: ——

Romans 1

Hebrews 2:13



DAY FIVE

How To Respond To Those Who Struggle With Gender Dysphoria

Considering all we've read during this devotional, how should we theologically respond to someone struggling with gender dysphoria or someone who has undergone a gender transition? When we consider gender identity through the Christian perspectives of Creation, Fall, and Redemption, we'll discover a framework that enables us to understand and respond with both truth and love.

CREATION

God created humanity to be either male or female. Sex and gender are aspects of our human nature that He sovereignly gives. The purpose of sex and gender is to reflect and image God Himself in a manner unique to the rest of creation. The human body is good. Since we are God's creations, and sexuality is a gift from Him, God alone has the authority to define how we should live and use His gifts.

Since we are immersed in a cultural mindset that separates the sexed body from the gendered self, it's all the more important that we are clear and consistent. We will never understand the meaning and significance of our sexed bodies or our gendered selves apart from acknowledging the reality of our Creator. Following God's design for our lives, specifically, our genders and sexualities, is for our good and to protect us from the self-inflicted damage that disobedience brings.

THE FALL

Because of human sinfulness, the beauty, order, and design of sexuality have been distorted. God's good gift is misused as a source and cause of pain, brokenness, and depravity. Our culture's view of gender may be new to us, but it's as old as Genesis 3.

Underneath the psychological, sociological, and philosophical explanations for the transgender epidemic, lies a spiritual deception. And we are living in a spiritual battle, one in which Satan - the enemy of God and all God loves - seeks to kill, steal, and destroy. He has one strategy and a thousand different tactics to fulfill it: He lies. He deceives. He blinds us to the truth.

God calls His children to be different, separate, and set apart from the surrounding world, what Scripture calls holiness. The call to holiness transforms every aspect and season of life. The Christian sexual ethic runs counter to every other worldview's claims about human dignity and sexuality.

REDEMPTION

Gender dysphoria is not a sin. It is also a form of suffering. This suffering can be a result of someone's choices, or how someone else's choices affect us, or simply because we live in a broken world. In one way, that might not sound very hopeful. Until we remember what God says about suffering. God never wastes our pain, including the pain of gender dysphoria.

Our hopeful expectation in suffering goes beyond the question of whether it will go away; our fallen, post-Genesis 3 world is full of pain. Rather, our hope is that the God who Himself suffered on our behalf will, one day, redeem and restore everything this fallen world affects and - in the meantime - He will cause every trial to work for our eternal good. The Suffering Servant transforms our sufferings into our servants.

— Read: —

Isaiah 53

Eph 4:15

Thank you for reading this devotional plan, which is based on *To Be a Woman: The Confusion Over Female Identity and How Christians Can Respond* (B&H Books, 2023) by Katie J. McCoy PhD. Get more information at tobeawomanbook.com

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