

Set Free from the Gender Deception

People have often called my story a miracle, but that word only scratches the surface of the supernatural work Jesus has done in my life. For years, I rejected Christ and ran away from the faith as fast and hard as I could. I told God I would never serve Him again. I hated Him, and I hated Christians.

I was raised in a Christian home where my parents faithfully took me to church, taught me God's Word and enrolled me in Christian school. Though I understand now how much my parents loved me, as a young child, I believed the lie that my mom loved my brother more than me.

At that age, I could not have seen things from her point of view. I did not realize she was plagued by a performance-driven Christianity. She felt as though she were on a treadmill for God, always running harder and harder but never earning His favor and never fixing the sin in her heart. She would do more and more works until she was exhausted, frustrated and burned out.

Fortunately for the devil, I interpreted her stress as a lack of love. I remember often hearing comments such as "I don't have time," "Go away," "Get off of me" and "Leave me alone." I felt unwanted, rejected and jealous of my brother.

The bitterness and resentment were growing, and a wedge was being driven deeper between my mom and me. As I held on to my anger, I despised her and overidentified with my dad. Eventually, I wanted nothing to do with my mom and cut off the desire to be like her or even to be a woman. The lie was reinforced over and over, and I would hear the enemy whisper, "See, she doesn't love you!"

Becoming Jake

Night after night, I would write stories about my fantasy life as a boy. I became obsessed with video games in which I could live vicariously through male characters on the screen. The more I imagined myself as a boy, the harder it was to relate to the girls at school. I tried to play with them at times, but I always felt as if I were outside the group. They tried to include me, but I felt different, as though I didn't belong. Most of the time, I ended up playing sports with the boys.

When I was eight, my friend's brother molested me. This sexual experience changed my life, opening a door I was not mature enough to walk through. It awakened a sexual desire and curiosity. I knew it was wrong, but it felt good, and my body responded. I liked feeling wanted by a boy. I returned to his house to play with his sister a few days later and asked him if we could do that again.

He was angry and scolded me for even bringing it up, saying we would get in trouble. Another lie took root in my soul: *Boys have all the power. I don't have any say in the relationship.* I felt used and discarded.

I found myself desperate for affirmation through sex. I began experimenting with my own friends and engaging them in sexual play. The guilt and shame of what I was doing ate away at me, but I couldn't admit to my sin. By the time I was in high school, my craving for sex was insatiable. I was willing to sleep with anyone who paid attention to me, doing anything they wanted for a moment of affirmation. But the more I gave away sexually, the more I was rejected, dumped, used and abused. I lost all my self-worth and value.

By now, I despised being a woman. I wanted so desperately to be like the men who, in my mind, held all the sexual power. I fantasized about being a man. Eventually, I joined an adult dating website where people offer themselves for no-strings-attached sexual encounters, thinking this was the answer to my

problems. If I wasn't good enough to date, perhaps I was at least good enough for a one-night stand.

I could not have imagined the heartache and brokenness that ensued. Many men rejected me because of my weight, and those who accepted my offer wanted nothing to do with me afterward. I kept thinking, *If I'm good enough, one will want to keep me.* I left each encounter feeling empty, rejected, dirty, used and worthless, with no hope of truly being loved. *The reason this never works out, the reason I'm never happy, is because I was supposed to be a man,* I thought. If I were a man, I'd know how to treat a woman.

At age 25, I made the decision to transition to a man named Jake. I soon took testosterone injections and had my name legally changed. I eventually had a double mastectomy and a hysterectomy to get rid of my female organs.

But in horror, I realized I was still not a man. Still painfully aware of the reality of my female body, I was further demoralized when I realized that the genital-reassignment surgeries were artificial, had many risks and complications, and were far out of my budget.

Seeking Peace

For years I drifted through life, searching for meaning and significance. I often thought, *there's got to be more to life than this! It can't be Christianity. I tried that. I was raised in that. It never did anything for me.*

I didn't know what I didn't know. I had never experienced the Spirit of God coming into my heart and transforming my life. I couldn't understand it. My parents couldn't give it to me.

Yet behind the scenes, a miraculous work was unfolding. My parents had surrendered me into the Lord's hands and were praying for my salvation, bringing those in their Bible studies alongside to pray with them. As my parents focused

less on me and my sin and more on their relationship with Jesus, the Lord opened my eyes to His transforming power. My parents were changing! They were filled with peace and faith I had never seen or known before. Jesus spilled out of them.

I desired what they had. My mother especially had been so transformed that she was a completely different person from the mother I grew up with. As I worked on the website for her Bible study (only because I needed the money), God revealed Himself to me. Psalm 107:20 says, "He sent His word and healed them and delivered them from their destruction."

That is what the Lord did. He gave me a hunger for His Word and, for the first time in my life, opened my eyes to His goodness, faithfulness and trustworthiness. The more I saw God's holiness, the more I was crushed under the weight of my sin.

I went home and poured out my heart to God, thinking, *Why would He want me? I've spit in His face. I've prayed to Satan, asking the devil to keep people from coming to know Jesus.*

I confessed everything I could think of. For two days, I was miserable and tormented. I felt swept clean and empty. I did not know how to get the peace my parents had, so I cried out to God with all my heart, and through a divine encounter, He proved He was not done with me yet.

I was elated as I realized there was hope for this sinner. I gave my life to Him—as best I knew at the moment—with all my heart. I said, "Oh, Lord, I'm Yours! You can have my life!"

In that moment, I was so radically transformed that I could feel the Holy Spirit come in and breathe life into me. I could feel the resurrecting power, and as my mind and desires changed, I had sudden understanding that I couldn't explain. I shouted, "This is what it's like to be born again!"

I called my mom to tell her what had happened. From that phone

call alone, she knew I had been changed. But it wasn't just a feeling; Jesus began changing my heart and my desires. For the first time in my life, I didn't want to go my own way.

Responding to Conviction

Over the next year and a half, God patiently built my faith, giving me an intense hunger and thirst for His Word. The more I absorbed Scripture, the more the Holy Spirit convicted me of my sin. However, I was convinced there was no way to change. I couldn't make myself feel like a girl again, and even if I could, I had a much lower voice, I had a beard, I didn't have breasts, my jaw line had masculinized, my hips had narrowed, and I had hair all over my body. I was convinced I would never look like a woman even if I wanted to.

After months under heavy, growing conviction, I threw myself on the floor and cried out with all my heart, "God, I want to hear, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' What do You want from me?"

"If you stood before Me tonight, what name would I call?" God asked.

Stunned and disappointed, I ignored the fact that He had been calling me "Laura" in my prayers for weeks. He reminded me of John 1, which says Jesus Christ Himself is the Creator. "You cannot claim to love Me and yet reject My creation," He said.

My heart sank, thinking God was condemning me. If He did not accept me as Jake, I had no hope at all. But in the most loving voice I have ever heard, He whispered, "Let Me tell you who you are."

The thought of returning to a female identity tortured me with unimaginable grief. I saw no way out, and I begged God to take my life. Finally, I saw myself in a deep, dark pit I couldn't escape. I could see the light at the top, but there was no way out. I scooped up the mess I had made of my life and offered

it to Jesus.

"Lord, if You can do anything with my life, You can have it," I said. "I've destroyed it, and I can't fix it."

God reminded me of the passage in Matthew 16:24b-26a (NIV) that says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?"

I knew then that He was asking me to walk away from it all. I didn't know how. I wanted Jesus more than my next breath. He gave me a vision of Himself getting down on one knee. "Do you trust Me?" He asked.

I wanted to say no, to run. But I knew I could trust Him even if I didn't *feel* as if I could. I left my transgender identity behind to follow Christ and forsook everything that had to do with that lifestyle.

Embracing Womanhood

I thought my story would end there. I had no hope of transformation, no hope of healing. I had no idea the spiritual riches He had in store for me and the beauty He would bring forth.

But over the years, a miracle unfolded, a little at a time. As I forgave my mother and reconciled with her, as I forgave the men who hurt me, as I began to embrace relationships with other women, He stripped away the false masculine identity. As the masculine faded away, the true feminine person God had created emerged. Everyone around me, including me, could not believe the transformation we were witnessing.

I didn't figure out how to fix myself. Rather, God healed me through the power of His Holy Spirit. "But if the Spirit of

Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit that lives in you" (Rom. 8:11).

He gave life where there had been death. I had been slowly killing Laura, but He raised me from the dead. What seemed impossible to all those who knew me had not only been done but had far exceeded everyone's expectations.

I not only identify as a woman again, but I have truly embraced my gender. I love being a woman; I feel accepted as a woman. I work full time for First Stone Ministries in Oklahoma City, where we help those seeking freedom and healing from sexual and relational brokenness. I travel, speak and share my story of God's redemptive and transforming power to heal and embrace who He created us to be.

God has reconciled me with my parents and has completely redeemed and restored our relationship. Today I love both my mom and dad and enjoy talking with and spending time with them. I never thought I would love my parents so much, and I am so thankful to Jesus for changing my heart.

God has also continued to transform me in ways I had never dreamed possible. In 2021, God brought an amazing man named Perry into my life. I had never believed I would get married, not only because I had lived as transgender and maimed my body, but also because I had never been wanted as a wife. I had always felt as if I weren't good enough for a man to marry.

When God put it on my heart that He had a husband for me, I found it hard to believe. But Perry and I were married in May 2022. I have never felt so loved, cherished and treasured in all my life. A relationship like this is worth waiting on God and doing it His way!

"Now to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or imagine, according to the power that works

in us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen," (Eph. 3:20-21, MEV).

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