

Why Trans Women Are a Threat to Women's Rights

Gavin Hubbard got involved in weightlifting as a young man in his native New Zealand because he hoped it would make him feel more masculine. But after much success in the sport, Gavin decided to change his gender. In 2012, he transitioned to female and began extensive hormone therapy. Gavin Hubbard became Laurel Hubbard.

As a woman, Hubbard won gold medals at the 2019 Pacific Games and the Roma World Cup in 2020. Then during the 2020 Olympics, Hubbard was the first openly transgender woman to compete in the games. Hubbard is 6-foot-1 and 287 pounds and was billed as “the oldest woman” to compete in the Olympics—at age 43.

But Hubbard is not alone. All over the world today, males are “transitioning” to females and then competing against biological women in sports.

– Canadian cyclist Veronica Ivy became a champion in world track cycling in 2018. Also an activist and professor, Ivy argues that testosterone (something that trans women have in abundant supply) has nothing to do with performance levels in sports.

– Adraya Yearwood is a transgender student athlete from Connecticut who won first place in 2017 in the girls' 100- and 200-meter dashes, competing against biological females. The families of three female athletes who competed against Yearwood sued to stop transgender students from competing unfairly but the lawsuit was dismissed.

– Fallon Fox was born a man and served in the U.S. Navy before he changed his gender. Today he's known as the world's first transgender fighter in Mixed Martial Arts. After MMA fighter Tamikka Brents suffered severe injuries during a competition

with Fox in 2014, she told reporters: "I've fought a lot of women and have never felt the strength that I felt in a fight as I did that night. ... I've never felt so overpowered ever in my life and I am an abnormally strong female in my own right."

Multiple states have passed laws to stop transgender women from competing with biological women in sports but politicians and media leaders have jumped on the transgender bandwagon. They insist that "science" is on their side and that we should affirm a person's gender "choice," regardless of how much testosterone is in their bodies.

The transgender debate went all the way to the White House when President Biden selected Rachel Levine, 63, to serve as U.S. assistant secretary for health. This week, Levine—who was a married man with two children before he transitioned to female in 2011—was appointed a four-star admiral in the U.S. Public Health Service.

As the first transgender person to be installed as a four-star admiral, Levine has publicly promised to expand the rights of transgender teenagers—which most likely means the government will end up helping underage children to get hormone therapy, puberty blockers and transgender surgeries without parental consent.

The world has gone insane. But if you dare to question the science or the fairness of the trans agenda, you will be canceled by the social media mob. Just ask author J.K. Rowling, famous for the Harry Potter series. In 2019, she dared to call out trans women for trampling on the rights of biological women. Rowling was virtually crucified because of her political incorrectness.

Rowling wrote: "When you throw open the doors of bathrooms and changing rooms to any man who believes or feels he's a woman ... then you open the door to any and all men who wish to come inside." She also said: "I know and love trans people, but

erasing the concept of sex removes the ability of many to meaningfully discuss their lives.”

For defending the rights of biological women, Rowling was labeled “transphobic”—along with a lot of other slurs that I can’t print here. The same words will be pinned on you and me if we refuse to bow down to our culture’s idols.

It is time for all of us to stand up for truth and defy the insanity. I believe every person—male or female, black or white, poor or rich, gay or straight, trans or cis—deserves dignity and human rights. But when an effort to empower trans people ends up trampling the rights of others, that agenda has become selfish, entitled and tyrannical. I will continue to stand for common sense:

- Trans women should not be allowed to compete with biological women in sports because they have an unfair advantage;
- A man who transitions to female and then accomplishes some level of success in a certain field should not be applauded as the “first woman” to make the achievement. This is offensive and unfair to women who worked hard to succeed;
- Trans women cannot know the unique pains, struggles and challenges of biological women, and they should never claim to understand this.

Jesus elevated women and He opposed the chauvinistic men who brutalized them. Now, there are men who “become” women and attempt to lay claim to femininity itself. It doesn’t work that way and our society shouldn’t tolerate this madness.
{eoa}

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Don't Let "Church Hurt" Isolate You from Your Christian Family

Everywhere I go, I meet Christians who were hurt in church or wounded by the words and actions of other believers. Some people become bitter because of these experiences. Others throw up their hands and give up on church altogether. And a few even leave the faith.

The typical scenarios of "church hurt" might include these:

- A pastor may have demanded too much from you as a staff member or a volunteer and you felt unappreciated or even abused;
- An immature church member was put in a leadership position and ended up hurting you or others;
- A Christian you trusted betrayed your confidence by sharing your personal secrets with others;
- A pastor or leader you admired had a serious moral failure and you felt betrayed by his or her sinful choices;
- A church you attended experienced a serious split because of doctrinal differences or denominational politics.

When church hurt happens, the devil has a field day. He loves to divide and conquer by sowing discord. His ultimate goal is to keep Christians angry at each other so we can't join hearts in a common purpose.

Have you given up on church because of betrayal,

disappointment, mistreatment or offence? If you or someone you love has been hurt in church, I recommend taking these steps:

1. Forgive from your heart. The first step is always forgiveness. Don't fall into the trap of justifying your right to be offended. You may be tempted to scream, "But you don't understand what they did to me!" God understands – but He requires you to let go of the pain. The Word is clear: "Even as Christ forgave you, so you must do" (Col. 3:13b, MEV).

2. Learn from the other person's mistakes. I have mentors who taught me much about God, leadership and ministry. But I also have learned a lot from watching the mistakes leaders make. If someone in ministry hurts you, make a mental note: "That is not the way I want to treat people." You can actually turn your disappointments into blessings if you learn from them.

3. Remain humble. Pride thrives in bitter soil. If you allow anger or resentment to lodge in your heart, it won't be long before your character is completely poisoned. Your desire to prove your point will inflate your ego – and God will resist you. Paul told the Galatians: "For if someone thinks himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself" (Gal. 6:3). Don't let someone else's mistake turn you into a monster.

4. Try to make peace. Never let an offense destroy a relationship. It's childish just to walk away. Does the leader know how he or she hurt you? Make an appointment and share your heart. Give the other person a chance to apologize or give an explanation. Our tendency is always to magnify the other person's mistakes while we excuse our own behavior. It's never wise to break a relationship without making every effort at reconciliation. If you feel you can't talk to the person because of intimidation, write a letter and explain the situation.

5. Stay in fellowship. The devil is like a wolf – he isolates

his victims before he attacks. Many people who are hurt by leaders leave church altogether. It's OK to take a short break to recover. But if you go two months, then six months, then a year without being in close fellowship with other Christians, you are making yourself vulnerable. You may be tempted to believe that there are no healthy pastors or churches in your area – but I dare you to disprove that.

6. Get godly counsel. It is never wise to walk through a relationship breakup without getting an outside perspective. You may think you are the victim – until a friend points out your own blind spots. Share what happened with trusted, spiritually mature people and ask them how you should respond. If what a leader did to you was criminal (like sexual abuse or financial exploitation), you may have to consult a lawyer. But in most cases, you will simply need to forgive and renounce any desire for revenge. Practice Romans 12:17a: “Repay no one evil for evil.”

7. Move on. I've met Christians who still nurse the same grudges after 30 years. They keep their pain alive by reliving the offense over and over. As a result, they are stuck in a time warp and no one wants to be around them because their sarcasm is so toxic. You must let go. Say what Jesus said on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

8. Reconnect. In this pandemic season, many people have pulled away from regular fellowship. Don't let the virus keep you from building healthy relationships and don't let the enemy whisper lies to you about your pastor or your church. You cannot thrive in perpetual quarantine. Leave your offenses at the cross and don't let anyone's mistakes prevent you from being a part of a healthy church. {eoa}

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The World Just Became More Confusing With “Furries”

Sexual confusion is now being followed by a new trend – “species confusion.”

In the 1970s, people began talking openly about the gay and lesbian culture. That changed in the 1990s to the “LGBT” culture, which stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” Within a few years, the gay community added the letter “Q” to make room for people who identify as “queer” or “questioning.”

Today, there are new variants of the term, including “LGBTQIA+,” which adds “asexual,” “intersex” and a plus sign to include people who identify as “pansexual” or “non-binary.” Things got even more complicated in Canada when a gay rights group introduced the acronym “LGBTTIQ2SA.” (The number “2” refers to indigenous people who identify as having “two spirits.”)

Then Facebook expanded its gender choices. In 2014, the social media platform gave users a list of 56 gender options to choose from. But the next year, a “custom gender” option was added so people wouldn’t be limited by the original list.

If you are scratching your head, prepare to be more confused. Gender is not the only thing that has become “fluid” in today’s culture. People are now questioning their species.

You may never have heard of “therians” but it probably won’t be long before you meet one. Therians don’t believe they are humans, and they celebrate their animal identities on their Instagram pages and YouTube channels. One Norwegian woman

named Nano said she realized at age 16 that she has been a cat all her life. She walks on all fours and claims she can see in the dark and hear things humans can't.

Dennis Avner, a famous therian who committed suicide in 2012, was so convinced he was a cat that he had his ears reshaped, got whiskers implanted and had cat stripes tattooed on his body. Today there are also "polytherians" who identify as more than one animal.

When I was traveling in Michigan a few weeks ago, I learned that there are students in public schools there who identify as "furies." Some of them are simply fans of cartoon characters and they enjoy collecting art related to these animals. But a segment of furies actually identify as the dogs, wolves, foxes or cats they admire.

A recent study showed that 38 to 53 percent of furies don't want to be human and 14 percent of them believe they are not human. They also use the word "otherkin" to describe themselves and they enjoy dressing in costumes because they feel more comfortable as animals. They have their own online communities, their own conventions, their favorite fan fiction and comics and even their own pornography.

And while the largest segment of furies are men in their 20s, there are women who also question their humanness.

Psychologists created the term "species identity disorder" to describe this mental and emotional problem. But there is increasing pressure to avoid such a term. After all, it has become politically incorrect to label anyone with "gender identity disorder" these days, since transgender people now work in business, government and even the military.

I won't be surprised if we will soon be under pressure to accept therians or furies as the new normal.

What do we make of all this? For centuries, people have

assumed that things like gender, age and race are set realities based on science. Yet today all absolutes are being questioned.

More and more, in this selfie age, the self has become the standard. The new mantra is: "I can choose who I am. I am what I 'feel.' If I 'feel' I am a girl, I can be a girl. If I 'feel' like I am a dog, I am a dog. I determine reality."

I'm not shocked when I see this demonic trend in our culture; the Bible warned us this would happen. The apostle Paul told the Romans that when man rejects the authority of God, we become "fools" who exchange "the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures" (Rom. 1:23, NASB1995).

We are seeing Scripture fulfilled right in front of our eyes. When we reject God and focus on ourselves, we actually lose our true identities. He created us to be men and women who identify as the children of God. But we cannot possibly know who we really are if we cut ourselves off from the Creator.

Without a connection to the true God, we become hopelessly disoriented and confused. The only hope for this growing confusion in our culture is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is not a time to judge furries or therians or transgender people. Don't get angry at those who identify as something else. Love them anyway – and introduce them to the one who can restore their true identities. In the midst of today's selfishness, sexual confusion and family breakdown, Jesus has given us a chance to show His love to people who don't know who they are. {eoa}

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In This Crisis, Desperate People Are Searching for God

Have you noticed people are becoming more open to God's answers?

This past Sunday, I was speaking at a charismatic church in northern Michigan called New Life Christian Fellowship. At the conclusion of the service, while I was praying for the congregation, the Lord showed me someone in the room was struggling with a strong addiction. I shared this with the people and invited the unidentified person to reach out to Jesus for help.

Immediately, a young man made his way to the front of the room. He was already crying and he knelt near the stage without any prompting. My friend Cliff, a leader in the church, quickly got up and knelt beside the guy and began to pray with him.

Within a few minutes, the young man gave his life to Jesus, along with a friend who came with him. They had never been to the church before. In fact they had just recently moved to the area and they found the church by going online and typing in the word "church."

They were desperate to find help from God. They found salvation, along with a loving, spiritual family to support them.

I'm starting to see this kind of spiritual hunger everywhere I go. Last week when I was speaking at a church in Syracuse, New York, a guy named John attended a men's breakfast that the church sponsored on a Saturday morning. I didn't give any kind

of altar call after I shared because I assumed everyone there was already saved.

I assumed John was a member of the church when he came up to talk to me after the message. But then after I began to share with him about the love of the heavenly Father, his eyes got moist and his voice cracked. When I offered to pray for him, he fell into my arms and began to sob.

In that moment, he surrendered his life to Jesus.

I found out later that two of John's brothers had prayed for 30 years that he would give his life to Christ. Later that same day, during a special renewal service, I mentioned John's decision from the podium and I welcomed him to the meeting. Immediately, his two brothers jumped up out of their seats and began to celebrate their brother's salvation – and everyone in the auditorium began to cheer. I couldn't help but imagine that angels were also partying because John had decided to repent and return to God.

Do you feel the same thing I'm sensing? There's a growing openness to the Lord right now. People are overwhelmed by fear, anxiety and depression. The pandemic has not only taken lives; it has also triggered all kinds of mental and emotional anguish. Racial tension, political polarization and a pervasive negativity in the media have pushed people to the brink. Murder rates have skyrocketed and suicide is pervasive.

But all of this darkness has created a perfect storm. The chaos, the financial uncertainty and the fear of an invisible virus has driven people to seek alternatives.

Wherever I go these days, pastors tell me the same thing when I ask what they are seeing in their churches and communities: 1. They say a certain percentage of their congregation has either dropped out of church completely or they are not ready to come back to in-person meetings; and 2. They say a new group of people have showed up, seemingly out of nowhere,

because they are looking for spiritual reality.

I think we will begin to see a third trend over the course of the next year: We are going to see more and more desperate people showing up in our church services and small group meetings who have never been in church before. Some may Google the word “church” to find you; others may simply ask you a probing question at a restaurant or at your child’s school. People are looking for spiritual reality.

Not everyone, however, is going to show up at church. Last week, I got into a conversation with a man in Michigan (I’ll call him Nate) who told me he’s almost ready to give his heart to the Lord. We chatted in a hotel lobby. When I invited him to church, he told me, “I could never go there. Those people know my past and they would ask me to leave.”

I assured Nate that everyone there would welcome him warmly and that God would forgive him. He wasn’t yet convinced. It may take several more conversations with genuine Christians before Nate realizes that God can remove the stain of his sin.

Please prepare your heart to share the love of Jesus with people like Nate who are desperate. I know we live in challenging times, but God uses crisis moments to push people to Him. Instead of complaining about the darkness, open your eyes and realize that the harvest is ripe all around you.
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Instead of Fighting About COVID, Let's Mourn for Its Victims

Some people deny that this pandemic is real. I have friends who died from it.

Last month I attended the funeral of a true Christian hero, Beatríz López. She was a brave evangelist and church-planter who preached the gospel in her native Cuba in spite of opposition from the government. She became the first woman to serve as a bishop in her denomination, the International Pentecostal Holiness Church.

Beatríz was only 58. She died in a Florida hospital on Aug. 18 after battling COVID for more than two weeks. Her two sons, ages 25 and 36, are still in mourning – along with multiple congregations in Cuba who miss their beloved spiritual mother.

This week another pastor I know, Vaughn Allen Clark from Dublin, Georgia, died after fighting the virus. And a few months ago, I lost two other friends to COVID – Moisés Gonzalez and Claudia Cupido, both pastors in Mexico.

As of this week, more than 4.7 million people have died from COVID. An estimated 676,000 of those have been in the United States. Yet from the beginning of this pandemic, I've listened to Christians argue about the virus from every angle:

- Some believe the virus was cooked up in a Chinese lab as a biological weapon;
- Some say health experts are exaggerating the numbers;

- Some say the virus is a hoax and that it's really not deadly;
- Some believe the COVID vaccine is a sinister plot to kill us all.

I usually keep my mouth shut when people share their conspiracy theories and political views. None of us really know what is behind the curtain. I certainly don't trust all the "experts" because: 1) they don't agree with each other, and 2) the "science" of this virus is not conclusive.

Meanwhile, COVID-19 seems to have a mind of its own as it morphs into different strains. And while some people have little reaction to it (my 93-year-old mother got it and had no symptoms), other people get very sick and die after they are infected, even if they wore masks and stayed in isolation.

What bothers me most is when people deny the virus is real. Maybe they don't know anyone who got sick? I do. I've seen families, as well as churches, devastated by the loss the pandemic has caused.

Consider the Church of God in Christ, one of the largest African-American denominations in this country. The numbers of COGIC leaders who have died since March 2020 is beyond astounding. Those deaths include Bishop Phillip A. Brooks (who was second in command in the church), Michigan bishops Robert E. Smith Sr. and Robert L. Harris and countless other pastors. Observers wonder how COGIC will navigate its future with so many of its leaders gone.

The same is true all over the world. In countries such as Malawi, India or the Philippines, huge numbers of ministry leaders died from COVID, even when their churches were in quarantine. In January of this year, evangelist Stephen Lungu succumbed to the disease at age 79; he was known as "the Billy Graham of Africa."

In Nepal, where Christianity is a minority faith, 130 pastors had died of COVID by July 2021. One Nepali leader told *Christianity Today* in June: "In the month of May, pastors were dying almost every day. I have never seen something like that."

My plea is that we would show some kindness, especially to the families of loved ones who died from the virus. If someone you know was a casualty of this disease, now is not the time to share your opinions about mask mandates, antibodies, vaccines, Dr. Fauci or the greedy motives of pharmaceutical companies.

Nor is it the time to ask, "Were they vaccinated?" Instead, offer your heartfelt condolences. Say a kind word. Share the family's pain instead of causing more pain with your insensitivity.

The world is experiencing a global tragedy. Thankfully this is not as bad as the Black Death or the Spanish Flu. But millions of people in 2020 and 2021 have buried parents, children, spouses, brothers, sisters, friends and pastors.

Ratna Sajja, pastor of Messiah Fellowship in Vijaywada, India, says it has been difficult to watch so many Christians die of COVID during the past 20 months. "We are grieving for the countless believers and pastors who have lost their lives," Sajja says. "I believe COVID has tested the commitment of our faith."

We must trust the Lord in the midst of this crisis. We have been stressed out because of ventilators, fevers, inflamed lungs, quarantines, socially distanced funerals and endless political arguments. Yet we have also been reminded that there is an eternity on the other side of this broken, disease-filled world.

Let's embrace this moment, even though we don't understand it. While we mourn the deaths of our brothers and sisters in Christ, let's hold on to faith, knowing that God can cause all

things – even a pandemic – to work together for our good.
{eoa}

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Dr. Cho's Greatest Gift to the Global Church

The world mourned this week after learning that Dr. David Yonggi Cho – pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea – died on September 14. Known as a visionary leader who taught his followers to change the world through prayer, Dr. Cho was hospitalized for more than a year because of a brain hemorrhage. He was 85 when he died.

For decades, Cho was admired as the quintessential megachurch pastor at a time when megachurches were just beginning to spring up in the United States in the 1980s. He started his church in 1958 with a handful of people meeting in a small tent. Cho's church grew from five to fifty; then from fifty to 3,000. After embracing a "cell church" strategy, the church grew to 8,000 members – quite a feat in 1968 when few Christian leaders could imagine a church that size.

The Yoido church grew to 400,000 by 1984 and then expanded to 700,000 by 1992. It was then that Cho made the decision to

plant satellite churches in other parts of Seoul instead of expanding the main campus. He became a global spokesman on church growth.

Hundreds of church leaders began to flock to South Korea during the 1970s and 1980s to observe the remarkable success of Yoido. Pastors from the United States, Europe, Africa and South America wanted to know Cho's secret.

When the Americans returned from their trips, they announced that the Pentecostal pastor's secret was two-fold: First, Cho heavily relied on prayer and motivated his massive congregation to pray corporately two hours a week. Second, American pastors said Cho's church grew fast because he divided his congregation into small cell groups that met in homes, giving converts an effective outlet for personal discipleship.

So in typical American fashion, churches in the United States adopted prayer programs and experimented with various cell church models. The goal was to build American churches as big as Yoido.

But so far, the largest churches in the United States have barely broken the 20,000-member threshold. Obviously we missed something when we tried to copy the Korean formula.

While prayer certainly was a key ingredient in the spreading of the gospel in Seoul, Cho revealed in 1999 during a meeting with pastors and missionaries in Italy that experts had overlooked a major factor in his success. Cho went on to inform the audience that women played a key role in his ministry – even from the beginning when he began his church with Choi Ja-shil, a female colleague who eventually became his mother-in-law.

Cho explained to the attendees at the Italy event that he collapsed from exhaustion in 1964 when he was ministering to his 3,000-member congregation. When he told his male leaders

that he wanted to divide the church into home cells, they resisted the idea. They didn't want him to delegate his work to them. "We are not trained to do that and we are not paid to do that," the men told Cho.

But when Cho presented his idea to Yoido's female leaders, they eagerly embraced the concept and asked him to teach them how to lead. "Teach us, pastor," the women told Cho. "We will do anything for you."

Cho admitted that he had to step out of the pastorate briefly in the 1960s because of stress. He crashed emotionally and physically because of exhaustion. But during those five years, when mostly women led the cell groups at Yoido, the church grew from 3,000 to 18,000.

When Yoido hit the 700,000 mark, with 50,000 cell groups meeting in homes, the church had 600 associate pastors – and 400 of them were women.

When Dr. Cho addressed the leaders in Italy, he brought a stinging indictment against the Western church. He said:

"For 5,000 years in Korea, women had no voice at all. They were only to cater to the needs of the men. Then Christianity came and set women free. Especially in the church, women are free in Korea. In the ministry, they are equal with men. They are licensed. They are ordained. And they become the cell leaders ... Without women, I don't think I could have build up this big church.

"If you ever train the women, and delegate your ministry to them, they will become tremendous messengers for the Lord. Some of you are going to quote 1 Corinthians 14:34 (MOUNCE), 'Women are to be silent in the church.' I'll tell you one thing, brothers and sisters. Once women are called into the ministry, they no longer belong to the category of women. They are messengers of the Lord.

“So I’m not afraid of having women workers, because by empowering women we are evangelizing all of Korea. I’m encouraging American churches to use women. European churches are very slow to learn this. I come and encourage them to use women.”

Dr. Cho was not perfect. Like all leaders, he had feet of clay and he made unfortunate mistakes – particularly near the end of this ministry when he got in trouble with Korean authorities for promoting a questionable financial scheme. But in spite of his flaws, Cho taught us to believe God for the impossible and to empower every Christian – both male and female – to preach the gospel with the Holy Spirit’s power. I pray we never forget Dr. Cho’s legacy. {eoa}

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Why Are So Many Christian Men on Emotional Lockdown?

Mental health experts say the COVID-19 pandemic has taken an enormous toll on people emotionally. A huge number of Americans struggle with depression, anxiety, sleeplessness and suicidal thoughts because of prolonged isolation.

Psychologists have known for a long time that women tend to

suffer from depression more than men. Is that really true – or is it possible that men simply do better jobs of hiding their feelings? After all, while women admit they are depressed, more than 77% of suicides are committed by men, and more than 80% of violent crimes are committed by men.

It would seem that women are more in touch with their painful emotions, while men hold their feelings inside until they explode.

This is not just true out there in the world. Even in the church, men have mastered the art of masking their pain. They are less likely to engage in small groups, build meaningful friendships or seek help for their marriage problems. And the pandemic hasn't helped. I know of several men who have pulled away from church, using the virus as an excuse to retreat into perpetual isolation.

That means as we slowly return to “normal” after the pandemic is over, the church must do a better job of understanding men and how to minister to their emotional needs.

I've identified four main reasons men tend to hide:

1. We lack supportive relationships. When I was a boy, everyone was familiar with the Marlboro Man, one of the most recognized icons in American advertising. This rugged cowboy was always with his horse in a Western setting, and he was always smoking a cigarette. His tough-guy image carried a powerful, subliminal message: Real men are always alone.

Those cigarette ads are no longer permitted in magazines today, but the idea that men should be isolated is still a common belief. In fact, young American guys in 2021 are even more isolated than men were 50 years ago because of divorce, lower marriage rates, technology, pornography and video games. We are witnessing an epidemic of loneliness in today's culture, and it's evident in churches too.

David Smith, author of the book *The Friendless American Male*, says of Christian men today: "The fragmentation of community life; corporate pressures; the breakdown of the extended and nuclear family; the drive for success and the rate of mobility have all taken a tremendous toll on the numbers of intimate friendships we acquire and sustain."

2. We have deep father wounds. The very word "father" hits a raw nerve for a lot of guys. Many men suffer from what we could call a "father ache." A lot of guys have a deep void in their hearts because their dads were either absent entirely when they were young, emotionally distant, abusive or addicted. That's a big reason they struggle to understand the unconditional love of the heavenly Father.

The best way to overcome this is for strong, healthy father figures to step in and provide mentoring. But where are these mentors in the church today?

3. We struggle with our identities as men. Many men today have something to prove. They are frustrated and insecure because they didn't get the affirmation they needed from parents, especially fathers. So they are driven and performance-oriented. Christian men who are bent in this direction base their identities on what they do, not who they are.

Performance orientation leads to all kinds of dysfunction. It drives some men to keep insane work schedules. It fuels a competitive atmosphere in the workplace. It pushes men to climb the ladder of success so they can buy the latest toys. It also instills in some men a deep sense of failure or inadequacy.

The only way men can overcome these struggles is to talk openly about them. So the church has to become a safe place where men can be open and vulnerable about their pain.

4. We prefer to medicate our emotional pain. God created us with the capacity for emotional release. He gave us mouths so

we can talk about our struggles. He gave us tear ducts so we could cry when necessary. He gave us ears so we can listen to others when they are hurting. And He gave us arms and hands to be able to embrace each other when we are dealing with grief or tragedy.

Pain must be processed; it cannot be stuffed away. But what happens when we don't use those God-given outlets? When a man buries his problems, he will almost always find a way to medicate. This is why so many men, including Christian guys, become addicted to alcohol, nicotine, porn, illegal drugs or prescription medicines.

Are the men in your church struggling? Are they paralyzed by shame, loneliness, secret addictions and a lack of spiritual passion? We can't build healthy churches if we don't have healthy men. But churches today are ill-equipped to meet the needs outlined here.

As this pandemic slowly fades, let's look for new strategies to connect men and provide the healing they need. If we make this a priority, God will change emotionally crippled men into healers.{eoa}

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Are You Resting in the Lord ... Or Sweating?

Here's an honest confession: I struggle to rest in the Lord when I'm doing His work. The apostle Paul told the Philippians: "For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). It is a wondrous truth that God uses flawed human vessels to do His will. But He can't work through us if we are anxiously trying to do the job ourselves.

In Old Covenant times, God instructed the priests to dress in linen garments instead of wool so they wouldn't perspire while they worked. Ezekiel 44:18b says: "They shall not gird themselves with anything which makes them sweat." God doesn't need our perspiration to accomplish His purpose. He can't work through us if we are anxious, fretful or pursuing our own agendas.

He works through people who trust Him. Our job is not to strive in the flesh but to rest in the Spirit. If you want God to use you powerfully, you must learn the difference between the sweat of the flesh and the sweet oil of heaven. There is a big difference.

As I have prayed for more of the Holy Spirit's power in my life, I've realized that we often manufacture our own version of the "anointing" so it looks like God is blessing what we do. Often this is because we have a distorted understanding of what the true anointing of God looks like. We must discover the following truths:

The anointing isn't in numbers. We place so much importance on church size today, yet God doesn't seem impressed by crowds. I have nothing against megachurches, as long as they preach the gospel (and some of them do a better job of it than small

churches). But we're headed for disaster if we think seating capacity reflects God's approval. Stop striving to fill chairs and just minister to the people God brings!

The anointing isn't in eloquence. Some people have an uncanny way with words (including non-Christian motivational speakers), but persuasive skill isn't the same as spiritual anointing. The oil of heaven is holy; it brings conviction and repentance. True preaching doesn't exalt preachers – it crucifies them and focuses all attention on the Son of God. Stop trying to be a celebrity and just let God speak through your brokenness.

The anointing isn't in looks. In today's evangelical scene, we worship what's cool. Rock star pastors are expected to be sexy, and everyone in the praise team needs trendy clothes. There's nothing wrong with dressing to reach your audience, but I hope we don't think the Holy Spirit is impressed with hipness. The grandmother with orthopedic shoes might have a word from the Lord for the congregation – but will we allow her on the stage? Today, we need a demonstration of the Spirit more than we need a show.

The anointing isn't in technology. I love to use digital graphics when preaching. But some of the most anointed meetings I've been in were in poor countries where we didn't even have reliable electricity, much less projectors and big screens. When genuine anointing falls on a preacher, he or she can talk for two hours without having to entertain.

The anointing isn't in emotionalism. In many churches today, lack of anointing creates a vacuum that is filled by screaming and other forms of religious theater. It doesn't matter what is preached – it is "anointed" as long as the preacher punctuates it with enough volume and the people shout back. Remember: Backslidden Israel shouted so loud that the earth quaked, but by the end of that day the Philistines had plundered them (see 1 Sam. 4:5-11). The anointing isn't

determined by volume!

The anointing isn't in contrived manifestations. I love it when the Holy Spirit does miracles. But when people fake the supernatural in order to get an audience response (or a big offering), I run for the door. If we had the fear of God, we would never pretend to have the anointing by stretching the facts in a testimony, pushing people to the floor or sprinkling glitter on ourselves and pretend it is "glory dust."

Charles Spurgeon referred to the Holy Spirit's anointing as "unction," and he said this of it: "Unction is a thing which you cannot manufacture, and its counterfeits are worse than worthless." Let's turn away from every false form of anointing and ask God to soak us with His heavenly power.

Rest in the Lord. Pray and surrender your heart to His will. Trust Him to work through you. Instead of sweating and striving, relax and be a conduit for His powerful presence. {eoa}

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In a World of Gender

Confusion, We Need the Love of Jesus

When I was a kid growing up in Alabama, I was taught there are two genders. I learned to read using the popular *Dick and Jane* books, and we had girls' restrooms for girls and boys' restrooms for boys. My first-grade teacher, Mrs. Mizelle, wouldn't have permitted a boy to use the girls' restroom in 1964—and the parents of students at my school would have been up in arms if she had.

But things are different today.

Just when I thought there were only 64 official genders on record—such as “gender fluid,” “pansexual,” “bigender” and “genderqueer”—a video began circulating last week on TikTok. On that video a person named Bunny explains new terms such as “genderfae” (“nonbinary identity with no feelings of masculinity”) and “genderfaun” (“no feelings of femininity”), along with “genderfaer” and “genderflor.”

If you are scratching your head about these designations, note that we also have a list of new pronouns to memorize. Some people want to be referred to as “ze” or “zir,” “xe” or “xem,” as well as “they” or “them.”

This transgender phenomenon makes no sense to people who assume we live in a binary world in which men are men, women are women and everybody just accepts the scientific rules of biology.

But we don't live in an orderly world. And even though we are constantly reminded today to “follow the science” when it comes to vaccines, viruses or global warming, we are supposed to ignore science when it comes to gender.

Transgender people only make up 0.6% of the U.S. population,

according to a 2021 Gallup Poll. So chances are you have never met anyone who identifies as a different gender compared to the one they were born with. My experience has taught me that I must show compassion to people with gender confusion, even though I don't agree with the movement to normalize or promote this behavior.

When I was on assignment with *Charisma* in San Francisco a few years ago, I carried on a long conversation with Stephanie, a man who was living as a woman. Stephanie had already paid \$2,300 for breast implants, but he was saving money for a full sex-change operation.

His hair was bleached blond, and he wore thick blue eye shadow and dark red lipstick. He had feminine mannerisms, but the hormone pills he had been taking couldn't soften his square jaw or shrink his thick hands, which were decorated with long purple nails.

"I feel kind of lost sometimes," he told me after I bought him a cup of coffee.

Stephanie had been raised in a trailer park near Pittsburgh, and while still living as a man, he entered the Navy after high school. He even married a Filipino woman for a while, but he decided to identify as female. He worked as a transgender prostitute for years, but that income dried up as he got older. He was living on disability when I met him.

Stephanie told me he had attempted suicide more than once, and I could see the scars on his arm where he had slit his wrists. Then he said: "My stepmother told me, 'If you ever commit suicide, don't leave a note to us because we don't want anyone to know you are related to us.'"

Stephanie displayed a hollow sadness I've never seen on any other human face. It was as if some invisible vampire had sucked all the life out of him. I was not revolted. I felt compassion.

I didn't slam my fist on the table and scold Stephanie for being confused. I certainly didn't lecture him about which bathroom he should use. I was more concerned for his eternal soul.

In that coffee shop, my friend Scott and I shared the gospel with him, and we prayed for him. I remember struggling with whether to use "him" or "her" in my prayer, but I realized that God is not so concerned with pronouns when a life is teetering on the edge of eternity.

"Jesus, we know you love Stephanie," we prayed. "Heal this body, and show Stephanie how much you want to help."

I don't know if Stephanie ever got a sex change operation. I don't know if he ever visited the church I recommended. If he did, I hope he was treated with kindness.

I'm not being soft on sin when I plead for compassion on this issue. I believe gender is a fixed component of our created identity. When it comes to public policy, we should not allow children to be subjected to a transgender agenda in public schools. Teachers who seek to indoctrinate impressionable children in gender nonconformity are participating in child abuse.

But as we work to protect kids and restore sanity in our culture, let's remember that reacting in anger toward the transgender community is not the Jesus way. Jesus always upheld biblical morality, and He certainly affirmed traditional gender identity. Yet His religious critics called Him a "friend of sinners" (Matt. 11:19) because He accepted and loved tax collectors, prostitutes and adulterers even as He confronted their sin.

If you meet someone who is unsure about their gender identity, don't just launch into lecture mode and try to prove a scientific point. Listen, show genuine concern and introduce them to the love of Jesus. Only His love will end this rising

tide of confusion. {eoa}

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We Grieve for Afghanistan—and We Also Pray

The world watched in horror this weekend as the United States hurriedly pulled its military out of Afghanistan. As U.S. planes took off from the airport in Kabul on Sunday, Aug. 15, Taliban fighters captured the capital city and occupied the abandoned government palace after conquering more than a dozen other cities.

Thus ends a sad chapter in Afghanistan's history—and in the history of American foreign policy. A 20-year "war on terror" has ended. It cost the United States more than \$1 trillion, but the human toll since 2001 was worse. America lost 2,448 servicemen in the conflict, along with 3,846 other Americans. More than 20,000 U.S. soldiers were wounded, and Afghanistan lost an estimated 66,000 soldiers and 40,000 civilians.

Afghanistan's president, Ashraf Ghani, fled the country on Sunday. But Afghan citizens were less fortunate. Many of them rushed to the Kabul airport in full panic mode, and some tried to board planes unsuccessfully, desperate to escape the brutality of Taliban rule.

A few Afghans actually clung to the undercarriage of a U.S. plane as it was taking off. One now-infamous video showed two people falling from the plane as it ascended.

How do we respond to the horrors of war? American politicians and journalists are busy pointing fingers at previous presidents, or at President Biden—who strangely waited until Monday to address the nation about the crisis. But people of faith know that our job is not to assign blame but to pray for peace.

Here are a few ways the Christian community should pray for this chaotic situation:

1. It's OK to grieve. When I don't know how to pray, sometimes I just cry. The prophet Jeremiah wrote: "For the mountains I will take up a weeping and wailing ... because they are laid waste so that no one passes through" (Jer. 9:10). It's okay to weep over injustice or human pain. Cry for the people of Afghanistan who have lost loved ones, homes, businesses and hope of a better life. And weep for U.S. veterans who lost limbs or suffer from PTSD because of their service.

2. Pray for freedom to replace tyranny. One of my favorite psalms is Psalm 37, which reminds us that wicked men will not prosper forever. "Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more; and you will look carefully for his place and he will not be there" (Ps. 37:10). Terrorists and criminals may gain the upper hand at times, but they never stay in control. God will always uproot wickedness. Afghanistan is one of the biggest exporters of illegal drugs in the world. Pray that the Lord will deliver Afghanistan from evil and establish a peaceful government.

3. Pray for women and girls who are especially vulnerable. When Afghanistan was under Taliban in the 1990s, girls were forbidden to attend school, and women were forced to wear burkas. Women were required to have male chaperones just to

walk on a street. Makeup was forbidden; a woman caught wearing fingernail polish could be beaten; and women accused of adultery were executed publicly. Afghan women today fear a return to these harsh rules. Pray that God will raise up voices to defend human rights.

4. Pray for protection for followers of Jesus in Afghanistan.

It is illegal for a Muslim to convert to Christianity in Afghanistan, and that law will likely be harsher under Taliban rule. Nevertheless, the number of those who follow Jesus, and the number of churches, has been growing there.

Reports are circulating that Taliban warriors have already begun targeting Jesus' followers and churches. Leaders are confirming that Taliban soldiers are going house to house to demand allegiance to Islam, and those who refuse are beaten or killed. Some church leaders have already been martyred. Pray that the suffering church will grow stronger in the face of martyrdom. And pray for angelic protection for these brave believers and that they feel Jesus' presence deeply.

5. Pray for a visitation of the Holy Spirit in Afghanistan.

All of the might of the United States military could not stop the Taliban from gaining the upper hand. But our trust is not in weapons or armies. We remember Psalm 20:7: "Some boast in chariots and some in horses, but we will boast in the name of the Lord our God." God can do what man could not do. Pray for a miracle of transformation!

We must remember that in the year 1900, there were no Christians in South Korea. By 2010, 29% of the population identified as Christian. Pray for a similar miracle in Afghanistan. Pray that the gospel will spread through podcasts, videos, radio and other means. Pray for special boldness for those called to preach and plant churches in Afghanistan, even at the risk of their lives. And pray that the people (including Taliban soldiers) will encounter Jesus Christ in supernatural ways—through dreams, visions and

miraculous encounters.

We pray together: Father, you don't want anyone to perish. We ask You to save and heal Afghanistan. Let the Afghan people know that You care for them. Let freedom replace dictatorship. Let kindness replace brutality. Let light replace darkness. Let the Afghan people know the joy, peace and love of Jesus Christ. Amen. {eoa}

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