

What Would Jesus Say to a Transgender Person?

Ever since Bruce Jenner announced in April 2015 that he had become a she, the debate over transgender rights began heating up. That same month, a gender-neutral restroom opened in the White House. Now, a year later, the federal government has sued the state of North Carolina over its so-called “bathroom law,” which requires people to use the bathroom that corresponds to their original gender.

Many ordinary Americans are scratching their heads. The word transgender is foreign to them—along with all the other new terms that have been coined in recent months to describe a person who wants to change their gender or isn’t sure about it. These terms include “gender fluid,” “pansexual,” “bigender” and “genderqueer.” The transgender phenomenon makes no sense to people who assume we live in an orderly world in which men are men, women are women and everybody just accepts the rules of biology.

But we don’t live in an orderly world. We live in a fallen world that has been marred by accidents, wars, human error, abuse, racism, environmental disasters, poverty, disease, terrorism, social injustice, sexual deviation, addictions and personality disorders.

As the Temptations sang way back in 1970, the world is “a ball of confusion.”

Transgender people only make up 0.3 percent of the U.S. population, so chances are you have never met one. I have. Several years ago, when I was on assignment with *Charisma* in San Francisco, I carried on a long conversation with Stephanie, a man who was living as a woman in the Polk district of the city. 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 told me his sad story. He 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 left that relationship and decided to identify as female. He worked as a transgender prostitute for years in San Francisco, 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 California vampire had sucked all the life out of him. I was not revolted. I felt nothing but compassion.

How do we minister to the Stephanies of the world? I did not slam my fist on the table and scold him for being confused. I certainly did not lecture him about which bathroom he should use. I was more concerned for his eternal soul.

In that coffee shop, my two friends 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 hold to the Christian idea that gender is a fixed component of our created identity. I also believe we need to use common sense when our state and local governments formulate bathroom policies.

But before we hit the streets to protest or pontificate, 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 before He confronted their sin.

If Jesus had talked to Stephanie, He would have looked past his purple nails and square shoulders. He would have invited him to discover that our true identity can only be found in a relationship with Him. {eoa}