

Helping Children Embrace Who God Made Them To Be

Steve Alley

Today's world has created a new challenge for children: the "popular" freedom to "identify" with whatever gender feels "right." The Church has been labeled "intolerant" or even "hateful" because we believe that God creates us according to His plans, with the gender He wants us to have. How do we show God's love to children, while also remaining faithful to what He says in the Bible?

It is possible to "sidestep" the issue, while dealing with it "behind the scenes." If the Church works hard to affirm each child's value, apart from any confusing gender stereotypes, we may be successful in helping children embrace who God made them to be.

With What Do We "Wrestle"?

1. Showing God's love to those who openly disobey His standards.
2. Knowing that we "should" love them; but, not knowing what that means.
3. Confused about the difference between "loving" those in the LGBT community and "affirming" their lifestyle.
4. We have never dealt with a lifestyle issue that is displeasing to God, and yet "taught" to our children in the schools.
5. How to support the children and parents in our ministry without appearing to be judgmental.
6. Dealing with the "silence" in the Church, while the world's message is being amplified loudly.
7. Not being able to mention "gender confusion" in our ministry; yet knowing it's a critical issue.



What We Do Know

"The things I don't understand drive me to the things I do understand."

Pastor Greg Laurie – Harvest Christian Fellowship

1. God created us all, male and female, according to His image – Genesis 1:26, 27
2. God loves everyone – John 3:16
3. God doesn't want anyone to be separated from Him – 2 Peter 3:8, 9
4. God wants us to love all people – Matthew 5:43-48
5. God "calls" all to repent and follow Him – Acts 17:30
6. God's love is "free," but "fellowship" and "blessings" aren't – 1 John 1:5-10
7. Sin separates us from God – Isaiah 59:2
8. Homosexuality is sin – Lev. 18:22; Lev. 20:13; Rom. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 6:9-10; 1Tim. 1:8-10
9. Jesus' style of ministry was interaction – Matthew 9:10-12
10. We are called to be "light" and "salt" – Matthew 5:13-16
11. God is very interested in how we treat "our neighbor" – Luke 10: 30-37
12. Children's innocence is priceless!



The Goals of This Approach

1. Know how to **affirm** a child's identity through God's eyes.
2. Know how to **support** children who feel they "don't fit" the "normal" stereotype of male or female. How to **empower** them to be "who they are," regardless of the stereotypes.
3. Know how to help children **discover** what it means to be a "woman of God," or a "man of God."
4. Know how to **highlight** gender-affirming aspects of Bible stories to identify God's amazing design for males and females.



The Concept of “Spiritual Immunization”

“Immunize” children against the influences of “the world,” and reduce the threat of gender confusion.

The Ingredients of “Spiritual Immunization”

We must “inject” this “medicine” into every aspect of the children’s ministry (CM)! The children must hear it in our words, see it in our faces, feel it in our interactions, and read it in our curriculum.



1. **Strong awareness** of what God says in the Bible about God’s design for gender uniqueness and strength.
2. **Healthy support** for “identity” in God’s creation, and how He designed each of us.
3. **Strong awareness** of the fact that God doesn’t make mistakes.
4. **Being ready** for what “the world” will tell them about gender issues.

What Is Going On?

The Church Is Not Immune To Sexual Sin and Gender Confusion

“What is different about sexuality and gender identity confusion, struggles, and hostile battles happening inside the Church is that there are Christians enthusiastically supporting practicing same-sex behavior and gender reassignment as sanctioned by God.”

“After a hotly-contested election of a “bishop” who is an openly partnered lesbian, the United Methodist Church will gather in St. Louis to possibly determine whether or not their denomination will deny their historical Christian teaching on marriage and sexuality and embrace progressive sexual ethics.”

“The Episcopal Church has taken steps to revise their Book of Common Prayer, which could include gender-neutral language for God.”

The Institute on Religion And Democracy,
Evangelical Action Director Chelsen Vicari

To Stop Trans Kids From Killing Themselves, Accept Them

“The Transgender community has disproportionately high levels of depression and anxiety. A new study shows that a startling 41% of trans people attempt to take their life... Trans advocates argue that mental anguish in the trans population is the result of environmental factors like discrimination, rejection, and harassment...”

By Diana Tourjee
https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/pg7nq7/to-stop-trans-kids-from-killing-themselves-shocking-study-says-accept-them

Gender Dysphoria, Gender Identity Disorder and Informed Consent

“A mother, concerned for some time about her young son's preference for female friendships, lack of male playmates, identification with the feminine such as an interest in Barbie dolls, finally decides to ask the pediatrician if these are signs of a potential problem.... What's usually wrong with such a child is that due to a number of specific stressful factors the boy or girl has psychological conflicts that interfere with embracing the goodness of his masculinity or her femininity.”

From “The Institute of Marital Healing” – A Catholic ministry
<http://www.childhealing.com/articles/genderidentitydisorder.php>

The Mayer Report 2016

- The understanding of sexual orientation as an innate, biologically fixed property of human beings — the idea that people are “born that way” — is not supported by scientific evidence.
- The hypothesis that gender identity is an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex — that a person might be “a man trapped in a woman’s body” or “a woman trapped in a man’s body” — is not supported by scientific evidence.
- Sex-reassigned individuals were about 5 times more likely to attempt suicide and about 19 times more likely to die by suicide.
- Children are a special case.... Only a minority of children who experience cross-gender identification will continue to do so in adolescence or adulthood.

From “The Mayer Report”
<https://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/executive-summary-sexuality-and-gender>

The Causes of Confusion or Depression Among Children

A look at the possible causes for the spread of gender confusion, and the increase in depression among today’s children.

God created us all to need loving attention, affirmation, understanding, hope, and significance!

Without these things, we get confused and depressed!



1. Gender Stereotypes

- a. They have always been used to “rate” a child’s progress toward “adulthood.”
- b. Toys are indicators of gender – boys toys focus on battle or destruction; girls toys focus on princesses or babies.
- c. The pressure to “be” what others expect, regardless of the stereotype, has always added stress to children. “Boys want to...” or “Girls like to...”
- d. If a boy is uncomfortable, or not interested in typical boy activities (sports, battle, aggression), then he may feel, or be told he is “different.”
- e. If a girl is not interested in playing with dolls, or dressing as a princess, she may feel, or be told she is “different.”



2. Feeling Displaced

- a. A child may feel “pressure” to “be” what the stereotypical boy or girl is.
- b. If a child is not encouraged to pursue his/her interests, regardless of gender stereotypes, he/she will feel displaced, disconnected, or frustrated.



3. Bullying

- a. Both children and adults can “bully” a child into believing that he/she is different.
- b. Bullying can push a child further into gender confusion.



4. Society Pressure

- a. The pressure from the “society” around the child can lead the child into gender confusion.
- b. Today’s society says, “If you’re not comfortable with who you are, change your gender.”



Things to Do

- ✓ Always compliment interests
- ✓ Model healthy gender perspectives
- ✓ Thank God for uniquenesses
- ✓ Look for signs of confusion or depression
- ✓ Make every child feel welcome

God's Views And Advice

What does God's Word, and His actions, say about His views and advice for addressing this "epidemic"?

1. Self-identity

- We are His creation, He calls us "very good" – Genesis 1:27; John 1:12; Psalm 139:14
- He calls those who believe in Him, "His children" – 1 John 3:1
- He calls those who believe in Him, "Friends" – John 15:15
- He calls us a "Royal Priesthood" – 1 Peter 2:9
- God knows everything about us – Luke 12:7; Psalm 139:1-18
- God will provide, and care for us – Philippians 4:19



2. Embracing Differences

- God made all kinds of people, and loves them all – Revelation 7:9
- God doesn't prefer people over others – Galatians 3:28; Acts 10:34, 35
- We are not to "judge" people, or "rate" them – James 2:1-26
- We are to "accept" Jews and Gentiles alike – Galatians 3:28

3. Don't Compare Ourselves With Others

- Don't measure ourselves to others – 2 Corinthians 10:12
- Seek the approval of God, not people – Galatians 1:10
- Set your own goals and standards – Galatians 6:4, 5

4. Loving Others

- Value others more than yourself – Philippians 2:3, 4
- Love your neighbors and enemies – Matthew 5:43-48
- God commands us to love others – John 15:12



God And Those Who Are Different

Gentiles

"God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears Him and does what is right" (Acts 10: 34, 35).

Lepers

"Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man." (Mark 1:40-44)

Tax Collectors

"Zacchaeus, hurry down, for I must stay at your house today..." "Today salvation has come to this house... For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:1-10)

Doubters

"Put your finger here and look at My hands. Reach out your hand and put it into My side. Stop doubting and believe." (John 20:24-29)

Adulterers

"Woman, where are your accusers? Has no one condemned you?... neither do I condemn you. Now go and sin no more." (John 8:1-10)

Samaritans

"Give Me a drink." (John 4:1-28)

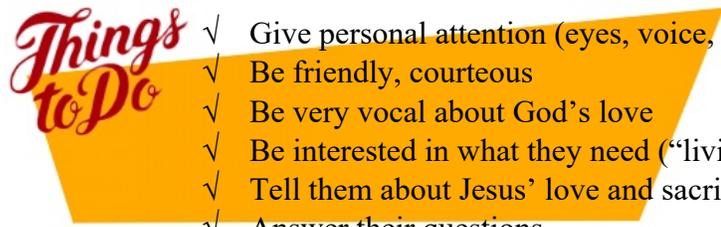
LGBTQ

What would Jesus do? Could God be more interested in how we treat those of the LGBTQ community, than He is about their lifestyle choices?



The Difference Between Loving And Accepting

1. We are told to love everyone!
 - a. Love those who don't love you (Luke 6:32)
 - b. Perfect love drives out fear (I John 4:18)
 - c. Love is patient, kind... (I Cor. 13: 4-8)
 - d. They will know that you are my disciples by your love for each other (John 13:35)
 - e. Follow Jesus' example "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8)
2. God's love leads to repentance
 - a. God's kindness leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4)
 - b. Continuing in sin indicates a lack of love for God or repentance (I John 5:18; James 1:22-25)
3. We are not to judge
 - a. We will be judged by how we judge others (Rom. 2: 1, 2)
 - b. God' judges with righteousness and truth (Rom 2: 2, 5)
4. God accepts all who fear and honor Him (Acts 10: 27-29, 34, 35)
5. God's wrath is fierce upon those who reject His love (Hosea)
6. Repentance must come before acceptance (Rev. 2: 5, 16, 21; Mark 6:12, Acts 3:19; Acts 8:22)
7. Jesus modeled love for all, with a challenge to honor God in lifestyle (John 8:1-11; John 4:4-42; Luke 19:1-10)

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- √ Give personal attention (eyes, voice, face, hands)
 - √ Be friendly, courteous
 - √ Be very vocal about God's love
 - √ Be interested in what they need ("living water"?)
 - √ Tell them about Jesus' love and sacrifice
 - √ Answer their questions

What Can We Do?

Specific ways we can influence children to be satisfied with who God created them to be, and to inspire them to choose to be men or women of God.



Avoid Applying Adult Thinking To Child's Play

"Young children are very creative and they move between fantasy and reality with considerable ease. If you're always coming down on the side of reality, you might not be in tune with where your child is coming from. You can also miss out on what your child might be trying to tell you -- for instance, a girl might say she wants to be a fireman simply because she wants a Dalmatian. A boy might want to be the "mommy" when playing house because he doesn't get enough chances to be nurturing or in charge. Play with your child and you might be surprised by his or her true wishes."

Ken Corbett, Ph.D., Clinical Assistant Professor at the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis and author of *Boyhoods: Rethinking Masculinities*.

From "Positive Ways To Address Children's Gender Identity Issues" Parents Magazine 11-8-2018
<https://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/development/behavioral/gender-identity-issues-children/>

Reinforce Your Child's Gender Identity

"One of my son's favorite toys is a pink fairy house that lights up and plays music. The toy doesn't belong to him, but whenever he gets into his sister's room, he goes right for it. Does this alarm us? No. Two-year-olds like bright colors, flashing lights and lots of noise. Our son has no idea that this is a girl's toy.

Children today have an amazing array of academic, athletic and creative interests that venture outside of traditionally held roles and expectations. A cousin's son loves to cook. My niece plays rugby. Many of the old fault lines of what society deemed "gender appropriate" have broken down. However, many in our culture are now teaching that biology is irrelevant. Creating equal opportunities is one thing, but intentionally blurring the real differences between boys and girls is harmful to children who need social cues to understand themselves and their role in the world."

"As children grow up, they are seeking social cues to explain how the world works and how they fit within it. The great news for parents is that simply spending time with your children provides them with these necessary social cues. They learn healthy attachment patterns and observe a real-world man or woman at work.

Men and women — both — bear the image of God and express love, serve others and demonstrate the fruits of the Spirit, but we do so in uniquely masculine and feminine ways. This can't be explained to young children as much as shown.

Opposite-sex parents also play a critical role in a child's development. Like it or not, we often serve as a model for a future spouse by helping our child form their opposite-sex love templates. Girls who feel loved by their fathers are less likely to seek affirmation in unhealthy ways in adolescence and adulthood. And boys who are affirmed and respected by their mothers are less likely to engage in casual sexual behavior."

From "Reinforce Your Child's Sexual Identity" By Daniel Weiss, Focus On The Family
<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/sexuality/reinforce-your-childs-sexual-identity>

Minister To The Children When You See Them

1. Develop “instant” relationships through personal attention and kindness.
2. Be an excellent model of a godly man or woman.
3. Talk to and listen to them.
4. Play with them, laugh with them.
5. Be as “vocal” and consistent as the “world”!
6. Compliment individual abilities and talents apart from stereotypes and comparisons.
7. Show God’s love for each person.
8. Affirm gender values and differences.
9. Highlight examples of godly males and females in Bible stories.



Highlight Examples of Godly Men In The Bible

1. **Noah** – Do what God tells you to do, even if it seems impossible, and people make fun of you!
2. **Abraham** – Have faith in God’s promises, don’t doubt, no matter how impossible! Be a good husband and father!
3. **Moses** – Love God more than anything else! Obey, trust, and follow Him no matter what!
4. **Joshua** – Be brave, bold, and confident in God’s presence, power, and His Word!
5. **David** – No matter how young you are, be ready to be an example to others! Obey and follow God’s directions without doubting. Love those around you!
6. **Job** – Do the right things. Do what pleases God. When bad things happen, don’t doubt God. Keep worshipping Him! He is with you and will restore you!
7. **Daniel** – Stand up for God’s standards, no matter what! Keep praying! Be willing to be persecuted for God. Trust God, even when it looks impossible.
8. **Paul** – Follow God with your whole heart and mind. Be brave, and tell others about Jesus; even if you get persecuted for it! Use your mind to introduce others to Jesus!
9. **Barnabas** – Love others and do all you can to support them. Be willing to go anywhere for Jesus!



Highlight Examples of Godly Women In The Bible

1. **Esther** – Follow and obey God. Be available to become a leader. Honor others.
2. **Ruth** – Be loyal to those who are older than you. Be good to those around you.
3. **Deborah** – Earn your position as leader. Lead others with God’s standards. Be strong, even when faced with persecution.
4. **Rahab** – Respect and honor God. Do all you can to support others who are obeying God!
5. **Jehosheba** – Do what you can to protect others. Be brave, and honor God!
6. **Huldah** – Listen to what God “says,” and tell others how to obey Him. Be bold, brave, and speak up!
7. **Lydia** – Follow Jesus, and support those who are also following Him. Pray boldly. Use your home and talents to encourage others.
8. **Priscilla** – Work together with your husband to stand strong for Jesus, and teach others. Risk persecution and work hard to support those who are also following Him.
9. **Phoebe** – Be involved in the Church and be an example to other men and women. Be trustworthy and earn the respect of others.



“These words that I am commanding you today are to be upon your hearts. And you shall teach them diligently to your children and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.” Deuteronomy 6:6, 7

Empower Parents

1. Give them specific ideas to apply the challenge of Deuteronomy 6: 6, 7 in the four “sensitive” times of a child’s day. **NO SCREENS INVOLVED!**

- a. **Inside Times** (“...sit in your house”)
 - i. Meals together
 - ii. Games together
 - iii. Watching shows together
 - iv. Cooking
- b. **Outside Times** (“...walk along the road”)
 - i. Meals in the car
 - ii. Walking in the mall
 - iii. School lunch time
 - iv. “Dates”
 - v. Movies together
 - vi. Fishing or hobbies
 - vii. Art time
 - viii. Field trips
- c. **Bed Time** (“...lie down”)
 - i. Cuddling
 - ii. Complimenting
 - iii. Reading stories
 - iv. Talking about the day
 - v. Praying together
 - vi. Singing
 - vii. Talk about the day
 - viii. Laughing
- d. **Mornings** (“...get up”)
 - i. Time adjustment
 - ii. Cuddling
 - iii. Complimenting
 - iv. Talk about dreams/hopes
 - v. Praying
 - vi. Eating together



2. **Create a network of support and creativity for parents.**

- No contact information publicized or given out!
- “Organic” connections from seminars, etc.
- Private database for church use / communication only
- Parents may choose to connect via phone, text, or social media
- Parenting events publicized through church and network



Application Scenarios

Putting what we've learned into action...

Scenario #1

During a craft time, a second-grade boy says, "I wish I was a girl!" to one of the CM team members in a classroom. **What should be done or said?**



Scenario #2

While walking in the hallway with your fourth-graders, you hear two boys making fun of another boy. They say, "You're so gay! You should wear a dress instead of pants!" **What should be done or said?**



Scenario #3

During check-in, you see two women holding hands as they walk up to check in their third-grade girl. **What should be done or said?**



Scenario #4

During a "directed play" time, a 5-year old girl asks one of the female CM team members, "Why did God make me a girl? I want to be a boy!" **What should be done or said?**



Scenario #5

At second-grade check-out, before the child is checked-out, a mother asks a CM team member, "What can we do about our daughter who always wants to wear boys clothes and wants to play rough games. We're afraid she might be gay." **What should be done or said?**



Scenario #6

During a large group time, a third-grade boy sluffs into the room, and is sadly slouching the whole time. A CM team member notices, squeezes into a spot beside the boy and asks how he's doing. The boy, without looking up, says, "My dad wants me to play soccer, and I just don't want to. He told me that boys should like soccer. I don't want to play soccer! Am I a girl?" **What should be done or said?**



Scenario #7

After checking in her first-grade son, a mother asks you, "How do I protect my son from all of the messages that he's hearing about being gay, or becoming a girl? We can't afford to put him in private school, and he's surrounded with confusing things in the curriculum, and from people at school. What can we do?" **What should be done or said?**



The Bottom Line

Affirming Who, and Whose, They Are!

Be Personal – Let your eyes, voice, smile, and hands build connections with the children.

Be Vocal – Speak God’s affirmation about their gender and uniquenesses.

Be A Memorable Example – Show the children what it means to be a godly man or woman.

Be Positive – Compliment the children about who they are in the Lord, and who they are as people

Pray – For God to use you to “immunize” the children against the world’s message!

