

Transgenderism: An Introduction to the Literature for Biblical Counselors



by JOSHUA BLOUNT

One of the most basic categories of human identity is male and female. The first question asked of any expectant couple is: “Boy or girl?” And yet, for contemporary Western society, the very existence of this “gender binary” has become a source of contention, strife, and power struggles. “Boy or girl?” has become a loaded question, a tripwire of tremendous proportions.

And, increasingly, the cultural question is becoming personal: “Dad, I don’t think I’m supposed to be a boy.” “Pastor, our daughter just told us she is transitioning. What do we do?” We should not be surprised that when the larger culture begins to question the existence of a fixed category like male or female, individuals will also begin to question, even challenge, such distinctions. Others will find themselves confused and will bring their questions to us: “I don’t fit in with the other girls at school. I’ve been reading on the internet, and I wonder: Am I trans?” When the binary becomes blurred, the casualties and uncertainties begin to mount. As those charged with the care of souls, we need to know how to bring the living word of Christ into these situations and we need to be prepared in advance.

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The transgender phenomenon has many dimensions. But in what follows, I have a modest goal: to introduce pastors and biblical counselors to a selection of the best resources on this topic, and to summarize the insights and case wisdom from a selection of transgender memoirs. The hope is that these books will provide a good starting point and help define the role we have as Christian helpers in this area. Are we engaged in an apologetics battle (truth over error)? A call to listen and affirm (relationships over doctrine)? Or a different role altogether?

In contemporary Western society, the very existence of a “gender binary” has become a source of contention, strife, and power struggles.

Using the selected resources, I outline an approach that is sensitive to both apologetics and relationships but locates these concerns in a larger context defined by Scripture’s transformative purposes. We will not serve people well if we reduce the pastoral task to an apologetic battle that pits Scripture against modern culture. We must listen carefully and humbly to each person’s struggles, knowing simultaneously that each of us faces temptations that are common to man (1 Cor 10:13). In other words, transgenderism calls from us both courage and compassion: courage to stand against a deeply destructive ideology, and compassion to engage its inevitable casualties.

To pursue these goals, we will learn from three Christian authors on the overall topic of transgenderism and then review three affirming transgender memoirs that represent different perspectives. The first three books will help us bring biblical truth to bear as we evaluate transgender ideology. They are:

- *Talking Points: Transgender* by Vaughan Roberts,¹
- *God and the Transgender Debate* by Andrew Walker,² and
- *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?* by Sharon James.³

1. Vaughan Roberts, *Talking Points: Transgender* (The Good Book Company, 2016).

2. Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate* (The Good Book Company, 2017).

3. Sharon James, *Gender Ideology: What Do Christians Need to Know?* (Glasgow: Christian Focus, 2019).

The memoirs we will discuss are:

- *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* by Austen Hartke,⁴
- *I Promised Not to Tell* by Cheryl Evans,⁵ and
- *Tomorrow Will Be Different* by Sarah McBride.⁶

These differ substantially from the perspective of the first three books and do not offer a faithful biblical response to these issues. Yet listening to the authors' language and their interpretations of the transgender experience will help us prepare for wise pastoral care.

A Biblical Perspective on Transgenderism

We begin with the three books that address transgender from a cultural rather than a personal care perspective. I've chosen these three out of the increasing variety of books available on the topic to provide a useful selection of resources for the pastor or counselor. Vaughan Roberts's book is short, accessible, and one that could be given to a counselee or family member. Andrew Walker's book is more expansive, taking into account some of the public and political dimensions of transgenderism, and also provides a more extensive bibliography. Sharon James's book is a short but thorough review of the intellectual ideologies that affect contemporary understandings of gender. Taken together, the three provide a useful survey of the current literature.⁷

Talking Points: Transgender. If you're looking for a quick introduction to transgenderism from a biblical perspective, Vaughan Roberts's book is the best place to start. Published in the *Talking Points* series from

4. Austen Hartke, *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018).

5. Cheryl B. Evans, *I Promised Not to Tell: Raising a Transgender Child* (Cheryl B. Evans, 2016).

6. Sarah McBride, *Tomorrow Will Be Different: Love, Loss, and the Fight for Trans Equality* (New York: Crown Archetype, 2018).

7. Readers familiar with the topic may wonder why Mark Yarhouse's *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2015) is not included. While Yarhouse's book represents a wealth of case-study wisdom, his integrationist model for the relationship between Scripture and psychology represents a different approach than my own. The same is true of his more recent, coauthored book: Mark Yarhouse and Julie Sadusky, *Emerging Gender Identities: Understanding The Diverse Experiences of Today's Youth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2020).

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