

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

Talking to Your Kids About Transgender Issues

An Excerpt from 'God and the Transgender debate' by Andrew Walker

Here's a text I received not so long ago from a good Christian friend:

"Today at school, while my 10-year-old son was in the restroom, a girl his age came in and used the restroom. Except he says she's not a girl anymore—now she's called Bryce."

I know the bathroom controversies may seem insignificant. But until it is your kid who is having to deal with the change in culture, you never realize how challenging this topic is. And I'm struggling. My son and I went on an hour-long walk tonight to talk about it. I never thought I would have to explain to my son what transgenderism is at such a young age.

You may have had a similar experience to my friend. Maybe you've gone for a walk to

talk about it with your child. Or, perhaps your experience is that your daughter or your son has told you that they feel like Bryce does.

And the question is: On that hour-long walk, what do you say?

Will you avoid the topic altogether?

If you are a parent, it is going to be impossible to avoid this topic. It's not a question of if you'll have to talk to your son or daughter about the growing acceptance of transgenderism; it's a matter of when. When that happens, what will you say?

Will you shrug your shoulders in disbelief and avoid the topic altogether, leaving your child to be informed and have their opinions shaped only by the outside world?

Will you respond in mocking disbelief, and tell your kids, "Those people are crazy. They just need to know what it means to be a man or a woman. And that'll take care of it"? Will you panic, withdraw your child from school, and aim to shield them from this—and everything else that is wrong "out there" in the world?

Or will you sit down and have a difficult and honest conversation about a challenging topic that their young minds may find very difficult to understand?

You can't avoid your child having this conversation, sooner or later. The question is whether your child will have it with you, or with someone else. If you find yourself wanting to avoid the topic altogether, and your child knows it, not only will it communicate that you don't want to help your child navigate challenging topics; it will suggest to them that Christians lack the ability to give a compassionate, nuanced answer, and that your faith can't cope with reality.

The temptation to shield our children from such topics is understandable, but it is not acceptable. A part of being wise as a parent is balancing a desire to protect your child from the world with the need to prepare them for the world. So what you say to your 8-year-old is going to look different than what you would tell your 16-year-old. But you're going to have to say something.

Talking points

So here's what I'd say to a 10-year-old on an hour-long walk:

1. People see reality in different ways, and Christians base our view of reality on what the Bible teaches about the world, because it is written by the God who made us.

2. God made men and women equally valuable, and He made them to be different,

and this difference is wonderful and good, and is what leads to humans reproducing in every generation. The human race relies on sexual difference. I'd talk, in an age-appropriate way, about the unique traits of being a boy, and being a girl.

3. I'd also aim to poke holes in cultural stereotypes about gender. I'd tell my child that not every man likes to hunt or watch football. Some men enjoy cooking and writing poetry. Not every young girl wants to wear princess dresses. Some girls may enjoy tramping through the woods in overalls. And that's okay.

Not all men are going to act like men in the same way that the culture demands. Not all women are going to act like women in the same way that the culture demands. And that's okay.

I'd point out to them that in our church, there are men who are sports-obsessed, unlike their dad! Equally, there are men who can't fix a car, like their dad! And there are women who don't enjoy cooking, and women who run their own business, and women who love cooking and work in the home.

4. While God made a very good world, it's been messed up by sin, and sin causes brokenness in the world and, in very different ways, in people's lives. I would be looking to make very clear that there is a difference between suffering the effects of a sinful world, and active personal sin; and that we are all sinners, including them, in different ways. (You'll notice I'm basically taking my child on a walking tour of

Genesis 1-3.)

5. The biblical view of this world is not one that everyone shares. People who reject God's good rule are not going to accept God's teaching. Sometimes, we don't feel like accepting it either.

6. Some people feel they were born a different gender than their birth sex, and they feel alienated from their body. Feeling like this really upsets them, and it's a very hard place to be in. We don't need to be mean to these people, and we must never consider them weird or freakish because they're made by God, in his image. But we need to remember that God made them to be a man or a woman, with a male body or a female body, and so how they feel about themselves is not what God wants for them. Bryce is a girl, because God made her that way.

7. In a fallen world, every human is walking with sin and brokenness that they did not choose and that they cannot simply walk away from. And so every Christian sometimes has to say "no" to what they want or how they feel, because Jesus is their King.

To be a Christian means we trust in God even when it seems different than what our experiences, perceptions, and desires say. To be a Christian also means loving those around us, even when—perhaps especially when—we disagree with them. That's what Jesus did.

8. If your child asks a question you don't have an answer to, have the courage to say, "I don't know. But let me do some studying

about what the Bible says about that." Being honest with your children about hard topics, and letting them know you are committed to helping them instead of giving them some ham-fisted answer, will demonstrate that you are serious about helping them navigate a challenging culture thoughtfully.

Keep the lines of communication open

Finally, find ways to keep this conversation going. Naturally, as your child grows, it will. As a child matures and experiences new phases of life, there are going to be natural questions about proper expectations and how that child understands himself or herself as a man or as a woman.

Encourage that. Don't run away from important questions about sexual and gender identity just because your pre-pubescent child, or pubescent teen, is asking hard and awkward questions.

Reject the temptation to offload parental responsibility in the awkwardness of puberty. That's when your child needs your greatest attention, your confidence, and your affirmation. In the home, as much as in the church, we each bend toward harsh "truth" or untruthful "love"—and we need to be aware of this in our parenting. We need to pray about, and against, whatever particular tendency we as parents might have when parenting our kids.

Communicate confidently, but not arrogantly. Communicate compassionately, not harshly. Communicate honestly, not simplistically or tritely.

FUNNIES

A six-year-old boy called his mother from his friend Charlie's house and confessed he had broken a lamp when he threw a football in their living room.

"But, Mom," he said, brightening, "you don't have to worry about buying another one. Charlie's mother said it was irreplaceable."

On his way off the front porch, a young boy met a salesman coming up the steps.

"Is your mother home?" the salesman asked the small boy.

"Yeah, she's home," the boy said, scooting over to let him past.

The salesman rang the doorbell, got no response, knocked once, then again. Still no one came to the door.

Turning to the boy, the fellow said, "I thought you said your mother was home!?"

The boy replied, "She is; but this isn't where I live."

Little Jimmy's preschool class went on a field trip to the fire station. The firefighter giving the presentation held up a smoke detector and asked the class: "Does anyone know what this is?"

Little Jimmy's hand shot up and the firefighter called on him.

Little Jimmy replied: "That's how Mommy knows supper is ready!"

A four-year-old boy and his father went to the beach. There was a dead seagull lying on the

sand.

The boy asked his father, "Dad, what happened to the birdie?"

His dad told him, "Son, the bird died and went to heaven."

Then the boy asked, "'And God threw him back down?"

Teddy came thundering down the stairs, much to his father's annoyance.

"Teddy," he called, "how many more times have I got to tell you to come down the stairs quietly? Now, go back up and come down like a civilized human being."

There was a silence, and Teddy reappeared in the front room.

"That's better," said his father. "Now will you always come down stairs like that?"

"Suits me," said Teddy. "I slid down the handrail."

Pete and Larry had not seen each other in many years. They had a long talk trying to fill in the gap of those years by telling about their lives. Finally Pete invited Larry to visit him in his new apartment. "I have a wife and three kids and I'd love to have you visit us."

"Great. Where do you live?"

"Here's the address. And there's plenty of parking behind the apartment. Park and come around to the front door, kick it open with your foot, go to the elevator and press the button with your left elbow, then enter! When you reach the sixth floor, go down the hall until you see my name on the door. Then press the doorbell with your right elbow and I'll let you in." "Good. But tell me...what is all this business of kicking the front door open, then pressing elevator buttons with my right, then my left elbow?"

Pete Answered, "Surely, you're not coming empty-handed."