



DOCTRINE WITHOUT THE MACHINERY

What Does Our Reaction to Transgender People Reveal About Us?

Someone walks into your church whose life you don't understand. Something happens in you before you've decided anything, and then you respond. This piece sets aside the question of whether being transgender is sinful and takes up the one that never waits: how do I respond? Anchored in Matthew 7:3–5 (NLT), it looks at fear that calls itself conviction and disgust that calls itself discernment. With research, Scripture, check-in questions, and prayer prompts.



For everyone who wanders and feels far from home.

*For the ones who left when the noise got too loud, and the ones still
sitting in the back row wondering if they belong.*

*For the solo believer, the doubter, the tired, and the ones who feel
alone in a crowded church.*

**You are not lost. You are on your way home.
You are not the only one. This is for you.**

About Faith Over Factions

Faith Over Factions is a place for the spiritually homeless: people who still love Jesus but can't find Him in the noise of institutional religion or partisan faith. Everything here is free. No email address, no paywall, no algorithm deciding what you see.

You'll find reflections, portraits of Christians who resisted when it cost them something, devotionals for unsteady days, and a private Faith Journal for the questions you're not ready to say out loud. We don't take sides in the culture war. We take Jesus at His word and try to follow Him with honesty, humility, and a lot of grace for the stumbling.

Pull up a chair. You're welcome here.

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My life became considerably easier when I finally understood that figuring out who was a sinner and who was a saint wasn't my job.

That doesn't mean I stopped believing in sin. It doesn't mean I decided everything was permissible, Scripture didn't matter, or truth was whatever we wanted it to be.

I simply realized that I had been given a different assignment.

Jesus told me to follow him. He told me to love God and love my neighbor. He told me to forgive, show mercy, care for people who suffer, make peace, feed the hungry, welcome the stranger, and examine the enormous log sticking out of my own eye before becoming overly concerned about the speck in somebody else's.

Somewhere along the way, many of us added another responsibility to the list.

We became God's border patrol.

We started deciding who was in and who was out. Who was righteous and who was sinful. Who God approved of and who God was angry with. We became remarkably comfortable speaking against people while convincing ourselves that we were speaking for God.

I don't want that job anymore.

I'm not sure Jesus ever gave it to me.

I want to speak for Jesus.

That realization becomes especially important when we encounter people whose lives we don't understand.

And few groups reveal this more clearly right now than transgender people.

The Question I'm Not Asking

I should be honest about what this is, before we go any further.

This is not an article about whether being transgender is sinful.

I'm not going to answer that here, and I'm not going to pretend I'm building toward it quietly. It isn't the question I'm working on. I'm not trying to satisfy either side of the debate, and I'm not trying to position myself somewhere clever in the middle of it either.

Here is why.

That question may or may not be mine to settle. There's another one that is unavoidably mine, and I have to answer it whether I've worked out the first one or not:

How do I respond?

A transgender person walks into my church, my workplace, my family, my comment section. Something happens in me. It happens before I've resolved a single thing about gender, before I've located a verse, before I've chosen a position. And then I respond. I always respond. Silence is a response. Avoidance is a response. A glance is a response.

That question has never once waited for my theology to catch up.

So that's the question this article takes up. Not what they are. Not what's wrong with them. Not which camp is right.

What happens in me, and what I do with it.

If you came looking for a verdict, I don't have one for you. I have something I think is more urgent, and I'd argue it's the thing Jesus actually assigned me.

A Word That Contains Many Stories

One of our first mistakes is assuming the word *transgender* tells us everything we need to know about the person carrying it.

It doesn't.

There are people who experience profound gender dysphoria. There are people whose discomfort with their biological sex began very young. There are people whose understanding of themselves emerged much later. There are people who medically transition and others who don't. There are people who describe themselves as nonbinary. There are people whose experiences change over time.

These are not necessarily identical experiences with a single explanation.

Gender dysphoria itself is real, and it has a specific clinical meaning. The DSM-5-TR describes it as a marked incongruence between a person's experienced or expressed gender and their assigned gender, lasting at least six months and accompanied by clinically significant distress or impairment in daily functioning.¹ Two things in that definition deserve attention. The diagnosis concerns distress, not identity. The American Psychiatric Association states plainly that being transgender is not itself a psychiatric diagnosis, and that not every transgender person experiences dysphoria at all.¹

We should be able to acknowledge that without immediately turning it into ammunition for either side of an argument.

A suffering human being is not a debating point.

Neither is a complicated human being.

The Things We Don't Like Talking About: Desire, Shame, and Prejudice

There is another part of this story that makes almost everyone uncomfortable.

Sexual desire.

Pornography involving transgender performers is not some obscure corner of the sexual marketplace. Industry-reported data has placed it among the most-searched categories for years, a figure noted in a 2025 psychoanalytic paper examining the fetishization of trans women by heterosexual men.² Research conducted with transgender and nonbinary people describes the other end of that arrangement: being sexualized, fetishized, and reduced to particular body parts by people who never intended to know them.³

That does **not** mean pornography explains why people are transgender.

It doesn't.

But it does reveal something about the rest of us. And the research says something more interesting than the accusation you are probably bracing for.

A 2019 study surveyed 250 viewers of pornography featuring transgender performers.⁴ The obvious hypothesis was that watching it would track with hostility. It didn't. Greater viewing was associated, weakly, with slightly *more positive* attitudes. What predicted prejudice was something else entirely: shame. Viewers who felt shame about their own attraction expressed more hostility toward transgender people. The appetite wasn't driving the contempt. The shame about the appetite was.

That distinction is the whole thing, and it is the difference between an accusation and a diagnosis.

The accusation would be: *you only condemn them because you secretly want them*. That's cheap. It isn't what the research found, and it isn't what I'm saying.

The diagnosis is harder, and much more familiar to anyone who has read the Bible: what we refuse to bring into the light, we find somewhere else to put.

There's a second piece worth setting beside it. Sociologist Samuel Perry spent years studying pornography in conservative Protestant life, more than a hundred and thirty interviews alongside national survey data.⁵ His finding is not the one people expect. Conservative Protestants consume pornography at rates only modestly below other Americans, and the most devout men in his data resist the broader cultural trend somewhat. The distinctive thing isn't the behavior. It's the shame around it. Perry describes a subculture that treats sexual sin as uniquely corrupting, producing a moral incongruence so severe that many people eventually abandon their faith rather than the habit.

So we have a religious subculture that manufactures unusually intense shame around sexual desire, and a separate body of research finding that shame around one particular desire predicts hostility toward the people who occasion it.

I can't prove those two lines meet. Nobody has studied it.

But I know what Jesus said about people who avoid the light because they don't want what they're doing exposed (John 3:20, NLT). And I know Paul told a church to stop handing down verdicts ahead of time, because there is a day coming when God will bring our darkest secrets into the open and reveal our private motives (1 Corinthians 4:5, NLT).

Paul wrote that to people who were very confident about who was in the wrong.

A society can condemn people publicly while consuming images of them privately.

Someone can be disgusted by a person and fascinated by that person.

Someone can ridicule what they secretly desire.

Someone can turn another human being into a sexual curiosity without ever bothering to know that human being.

This is where I think followers of Jesus need to become very quiet for a moment.

Because maybe we have been asking the wrong question.

What Happens Inside Me?

Suppose I meet a transgender person.

Before I reach for Scripture, before I construct an argument, before I decide what I believe about gender identity, something may already have happened inside me.

Perhaps I am confused.

Perhaps uncomfortable.

Perhaps curious.

Perhaps compassionate.

Perhaps afraid.

Perhaps disgusted.

Perhaps sexually attracted.

Perhaps I simply don't know what to make of the person standing in front of me.

The initial reaction may be almost automatic.

But what happens next belongs to me.

That is where the spiritual question begins.

Why does this person bother me?

Why do I need to categorize them?

Why do I want to know what their body looks like beneath their clothing?

Why am I fascinated by their sexuality?

Why does their appearance make me angry?

Why do I feel threatened by someone else's understanding of themselves?

Why do I immediately start searching Scripture for something that will tell me what is wrong with *them*?

Those are uncomfortable questions.

Which is precisely why they may be worth asking.

The Mirror Jesus Gave Us: What Matthew 7:3–5 Actually Asks

Jesus said:

"And why worry about a speck in your friend's eye when you have a log in your own?" (Matthew 7:3, NLT)

That verse is almost comical when you really picture it.

Someone is walking around with a timber sticking out of their face while offering ophthalmological assistance to everybody else.

But most of us stop reading one verse too early, and the verse we skip is the one that makes the whole passage work.

Jesus doesn't end with the log. He ends with an instruction and a promise. "First get rid of the log in your own eye", and then, he says, you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye (Matthew 7:5, NLT).

Read that again, because it isn't what either side usually claims it is.

Jesus does not abolish the speck. He sequences it.

He isn't saying other people's specks are imaginary, or that noticing anything about anyone is arrogance. That reading gets used a lot and it can't survive the verse. What Jesus is saying is that there is an order, the order isn't optional, and the reason it isn't optional is that a log is an eye problem. A man with a log in his eye isn't merely rude. He cannot see. Whatever he believes he is looking at, he is not looking at it accurately.

Which is exactly why I'm not starting with the question everyone wants answered.

Not because there is no question. Because I have a log, and so do you, and Jesus was blunt about what that does to our vision.

The transgender person can easily become another speck.

We can spend enormous amounts of energy discussing their bodies, their clothing, their sexuality, their psychology, their medical decisions, their childhood, their chromosomes, their bathrooms and their sins.

Meanwhile Jesus asks:

What is happening in your heart?

That's a much harder conversation. It's also the one he put first.

What Self-Examination Doesn't Do

This kind of argument can be stretched until it means nothing at all, so let me put four fences around it.

Examining my own heart does not mean I have no convictions. It means my convictions are not exempt from examination. Those are entirely different claims. Someone who has looked honestly at his own motives and still holds a position holds it more soberly than before, not less firmly.

It does not mean nothing can ever be named. Cruelty is cruelty. Exploitation is exploitation. Nobody becomes a prophet by making a suffering person the subject of a joke.

It does not mean every disagreement is bigotry, or that every moral conviction is prejudice wearing a Bible verse. Some of them are. Not all of them are. Assuming otherwise is the same failure running in the opposite direction, and it does the same damage.

And it does not mean my reaction is the only thing at stake. It isn't. My reaction lands on a person. Transgender people face higher rates of victimization than the general population, and family and social rejection is among the strongest predictors of how badly things go for them.¹ Whatever I conclude about gender, I do not get to become one more reason somebody decides the church is a place where they will be destroyed.

That last fence is the one I'd hold onto if I could only keep one.

Disgust Can Dress Itself as Righteousness

There are reactions inside us that deserve examination precisely because they can masquerade as virtues.

Fear can call itself conviction.

Disgust can call itself discernment.

Cruelty can call itself truth-telling.

Contempt can call itself righteousness.

And lust can hide beneath condemnation.

None of that means every moral conviction is secretly prejudice. It doesn't mean disagreement is hatred. It doesn't mean Scripture has nothing to say about our bodies or sexuality.

It means we should be suspicious whenever our interpretation of Scripture conveniently gives us permission to despise somebody.

Jesus gave us a useful test for that too.

Fruit.

What is growing from what I believe?

Love?

Joy?

Peace?

Patience?

Kindness?

Goodness?

Faithfulness?

Gentleness?

Self-control?

Or rage?

Mockery?

Humiliation?

Obsession?

Cruelty?

If my theology consistently produces contempt for other human beings, examining the fruit isn't compromising my theology. It is testing it.

There are two honest objections to using fruit this way, and both deserve an answer.

The first is that fruit takes time. A conviction that produces friction today might produce peace in twenty years. That's fair, and it's why the test is about pattern rather than incident. Jesus said people can be identified by the way they act, a sustained way of acting, not a single hard conversation.

The second objection is stronger: Jesus offended people constantly. He called religious leaders whitewashed tombs. If giving offense is bad fruit, the Gospels are full of it.

So look at the direction it traveled.

Jesus's hardest words went upward, at the religiously powerful, at people who had built careers out of deciding who was clean. His gentleness went toward those already being crushed by them. When we reverse that, when our severity runs downward at the vulnerable and our tenderness runs upward toward power, we have not become prophetic.

We have become the thing the prophets were sent to confront.

Jesus Saw People

The Gospels are filled with labels.

Samaritan.

Tax collector.

Sinner.

Adulterer.

Unclean.

Gentile.

Prostitute.

Religious leader.

Poor.

Rich.

Disabled.

Foreign.

Jesus certainly understood categories.

But he had an extraordinary habit of seeing the human being underneath them.

The Samaritan woman at the well wasn't merely a collection of sexual decisions.

Zacchaeus wasn't merely an economic injustice.

The leper wasn't merely a disease.

The woman caught in adultery wasn't merely a sexual sin.

They were people.

People with stories.

People carrying wounds.

People making choices.

People capable of encountering God.

Jesus could speak truth without stripping someone of their humanity.

That distinction matters.

I Don't Have to Understand You Before I Love You

Maybe this is where I have landed after all these years:

Understanding someone completely is not a prerequisite for loving them completely.

I don't have to resolve every question about gender before treating a person with dignity.

I don't have to pretend biological sex is meaningless.

I don't have to pretend gender dysphoria isn't real.

I don't have to accept every philosophical claim somebody makes about gender.

I don't have to understand another person's experience from the inside.

I don't even have to agree with them.

Because love is not the reward we give people after they successfully pass our theological examination.

Jesus made that inconveniently clear.

"Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:39, NLT)

There isn't an asterisk.

There isn't a footnote saying *unless your neighbor's life confuses you*.

Perhaps Difference Has Something to Teach Us

Maybe the people who disturb our categories reveal things about us that comfortable people never could.

It is easy to believe I am compassionate among people I naturally understand.

It is easy to believe I am loving when everyone around me lives according to my expectations.

It is easy to believe I am patient when nobody tests my patience.

It is easy to believe I am humble when nobody challenges my certainty.

Then someone walks into my life whom I cannot neatly categorize.

And suddenly I discover what is actually inside me.

That person may never know what happened.

But I do.

And God does.

Maybe that encounter isn't primarily an opportunity for me to straighten somebody else out.

Maybe it is an invitation to look inside myself.

Search Me

If you have been reading honestly, something may have surfaced.

Maybe you recognized the disgust. Maybe the fascination. Maybe you recognized that you have spent more energy on a stranger's body than you have ever spent on your own heart.

I want to say something to you carefully, because this is the point where people get hurt.

That recognition is not your condemnation. It is mercy.

Nothing surfaced today that God didn't already know. The only thing that changed is that now you know it too, which happens to be the one condition under which anything can actually be dealt with. Conviction that leads somewhere feels like being handed a key. Shame that leads nowhere feels like being handed a verdict. One of those is from God. The other He never gave you. And the invitation, when we confess what we've found, has never once been withdrawn (1 John 1:9, NLT).

You also don't have to do this by willpower.

The examination Scripture describes isn't a self-improvement project. It's a request. David didn't audit himself. He asked God to do it: "Search me, O God, and know my heart". Then he asked Him to point out whatever was in there that shouldn't be (Psalm 139:23–24, NLT).

That's the posture. Not bracing for a verdict. Asking to be shown.

The Spirit isn't the prosecutor in this. He's the one who surfaces the thing so it can be healed. He is also, not incidentally, the one who grows the fruit you were just asked to inspect (Galatians 5:22–23, NLT). We don't manufacture love, patience, kindness and self-control by deciding to have better opinions about people.

The Question Changes: Asking What My Reaction Reveals

So I am trying to stop beginning with:

What are they?

Or:

What's wrong with them?

Or even:

Is what they're doing sinful?

There may be appropriate places for difficult conversations about bodies, sexuality, psychology, medicine and Scripture. Those conversations matter, and I'm not pretending they've been settled by anything written here.

But another question has to come first. Jesus said so, and he gave the reason: until the log comes out, I can't see well enough to be trusted with anything else.

What does my reaction to this person reveal about me?

Why am I angry?

Why am I afraid?

Why am I fascinated?

Why am I disgusted?

Why do I need an answer immediately?

Why does someone else's ambiguity threaten my certainty?

Why am I more interested in their sexuality than their loneliness, their hopes, their work, their family, their humor, their fears, their gifts, or their relationship with God?

Why am I looking at a category when Jesus keeps showing me a person?

Those questions belong to me.

Their answers may reveal sins considerably closer to home.

I Was Given a Different Assignment

There was tremendous freedom in realizing that I don't have to determine who God loves.

I don't have to decide who deserves grace.

I don't have to patrol the boundaries of the Kingdom.

And I certainly don't have to spend my remaining years searching the world for people to condemn.

I've got enough work to do in my own heart.

I was given something much better to do.

Follow Jesus.

Love God.

Love my neighbor.

Show mercy.

Seek justice.

Walk humbly.

Tell people about the Christ who has shown me far more grace than I could ever deserve.

And when someone stands before me whose life I cannot understand, perhaps the first question isn't whether I understand who they are.

Maybe the first question is whether I can love them while I don't.

Because I was never called to make another human being my enemy so that I could prove my loyalty to Jesus.

I was called to follow Jesus.

And if people encounter everything about my convictions except the character of the Christ I claim to follow, then perhaps the person who needs examination isn't standing across from me.

Perhaps he's looking back at me from the mirror.

I don't want the border patrol job.

I was never any good at it.

And I'm increasingly convinced it was never open.

Footnotes

1. American Psychiatric Association, *What Is Gender Dysphoria?* (physician review July 2025), summarizing the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition, Text Revision (DSM-5-TR), 2022. [psychiatry.org](https://www.psychiatry.org)
2. Alessandra Lemma, *On Not Having it All: Exploring the Fetishization of Trans Women by Heterosexual Men*, *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* (2025). [PubMed](#)
3. Annalisa Anzani et al., *Fetishization and Sexualization of Transgender and Nonbinary Individuals*, *Archives of Sexual Behavior* (2021). A thematic analysis of 142 transgender and nonbinary participants. Most described fetishization as a negative experience of sexual objectification; a minority described it positively or ambiguously. [Springer](#)
4. Thomas J. Billard, *(No) Shame in the Game: The Influence of Pornography Viewing on Attitudes Toward Transgender People*, *Communication Research Reports* 36, no. 1 (2019): 45–56. Online survey, N = 250. [Taylor & Francis](#)
5. Samuel L. Perry, *Addicted to Lust: Pornography in the Lives of Conservative Protestants* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). Based on more than 130 interviews and national survey data.

Check-In Questions and Prayer Prompts

Take these slowly. Write in the *Faith Journal* or on the lines below. What matters is that each question gets an honest answer somewhere.

1 What actually happened in you the last time you met someone whose life you didn't understand?

Go back to the first two seconds, before you had a thought about it. Name the feeling plainly, even if it embarrasses you. Nobody is grading this page.

PRAYER PROMPT

"God, I would rather show You the version of me that already has the right reaction. Here is the real one instead. Start there."

2 Why do you need to place people?

Pick one person you filed away quickly. Write what the label did for you: what it settled, what it let you stop wondering about, what it saved you from having to ask.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Lord, I sort people because it is easier than knowing them. Slow me down. Make me curious about somebody before I am certain about them."

3 What is actually growing from what you believe?

Not what should grow. What does. Look at the last month and write down the fruit honestly, the good and the rest of it. Then ask whether a stranger watching you would name the same list.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Jesus, I have been checking my theology and leaving my life alone. Show me the fruit I have been refusing to look at, and grow something better in its place."

4 When did you last go looking for a verse about somebody else?

Write down what you were hoping to find, and who you were hoping to settle. Then read the same passage again, slowly, with yourself as the subject.

PRAYER PROMPT

"Father, keep me from using Your words as a weapon and calling it obedience. Turn the verse around on me first. I can take it."

5 Name one thing you know about a person you struggle to understand that has nothing to do with gender.

Their work. Their dog. What makes them laugh. Who they take care of. If you cannot think of anything, that is the honest answer, and it tells you what kind of attention you have been paying.

PRAYER PROMPT

"God, I have been studying a category and calling it concern for a person. Give me one real thing to notice, and then give me another."

A Blessing for the Road

May the God who sees the wanderer find you wherever you are tonight.

May Christ, who never needed you to have it all together, meet you in the questions you're still carrying.

May the Spirit steady your feet when the noise gets loud, and quiet your heart when the world won't.

Go gently. Tell the truth. Love the ones in front of you.

And when you fall, and you will, may grace be the first thing you find when you get back up.

You're Always Welcome Here

If this helped, don't carry it alone. Write your answers in the [Faith Journal](#), free and private. Share this with someone who's wandering. And come find us at [faithoverfactions.com](#), on [Substack](#), [Facebook](#), [Bluesky](#), and [Instagram](#).



Faith Journal



This piece online

The porch light is always on.

Take Something for the Road

You don't have to walk this alone, and you don't have to pay to keep going. Here are a few companions for the journey. Three are free. No email address, no catch.

THE BELEAGUERED BELIEVER'S GUIDES

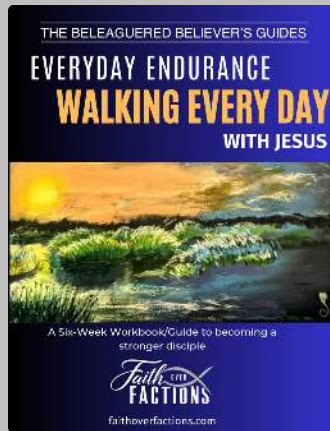


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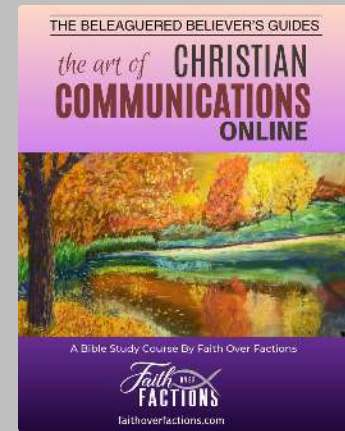


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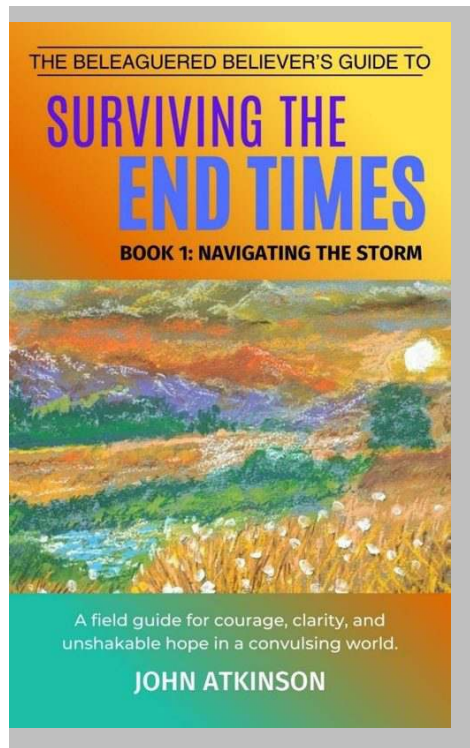
And a Quiet Place to Write It All Down

The [Faith Journal](#) is a private space for the questions in these pages, the prayers you mean, and the faith that doesn't fit neatly anymore. Write honestly. Share prayer requests only when you're ready. Free, private by default, no comment threads, no algorithm.



When You're Ready to Go Deeper

If something in these pages stirred you, you don't have to walk the rest of the way alone.



The Beleaguered Believer's Survival Guide to the End Times, Book 1: Navigating the Storm is a field guide for weary disciples trying to follow Jesus with a clear head and a steady heart while the world gets loud and cruel. It isn't a prophecy chart or a book of fear. It's teaching, reflection, and practice to help you:

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