



Safe Places

Newsletter

<http://www.buildingsaveplaces.org/>

August 2014

Dear Colleagues,

August 2014

This month, **Visions of God and the Church** and one of our resource contributions come from June's Building Safe Places for Everyone Training at the Netherlands Union Conference Office. Our core team, along with presenters Mitch and Patsy Tyner, Rene Drumm, Gerard Frenk, and Arlene Taylor spent an enjoyable and memorable week learning with and from pastors from the Netherlands, Dutch Antilles and Ghana. One of the qualities we most enjoyed was the ability of everyone present to have open, respectful, and caring conversations, no matter what their viewpoints or perspectives.

Our **Resource** section includes six books, two movies, two web sites, two ministries, and a television program. As always, if you access our website at buildingsafeplaces.org, you will be able to find these resources and others that have been mentioned previously. If you have found resources you would like to share with us please feel most welcome to contact us at info@buildingsafeplaces.org.

In our **Research Section** we are highlighting the work with gay and lesbian couples done by John M. Gottman and his team. Some of the research is already published, some is in the process of publication preparation. In our next issue we are going to begin to share our ongoing qualitative research with LGBTI people with Adventist backgrounds and those who consider themselves allies. The research is focused on the factors that go into people staying in the church and the factors that contribute to people no longer considering themselves a part of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Below is a quote from Dr. McKenzie that we think is particularly appropriate for our **Voices of the Heart**. The author spent many years growing into the life he now experiences and treasures – a Seventh-day Adventist surgeon with a loving wife.

You are welcome to pass along this newsletter and/or our website to anyone you think would find it interesting or helpful. If you have questions, would like to invite us to share our training/s, would like to contribute, or would like to be removed from this mailing list, please feel free to contact us at info@buildingsafeplaces.org.

Blessings,

Catherine Taylor and the Safe Places Team
– Ruud Kieboom, Floyd Poenitz, Frieder Schmid, and Ingrid Schmid



The journey toward wholeness is sacred ground.

Dr. Keisha McKenzie

Finding Diogenes – The hermeneutics of a Pastor

This article is a reworked lecture given at the Building Safe Places conference held in The Netherlands during June 2014. The audience consisted of ministers of the Dutch union. The informality of the language has been adapted for a reading audience.

[Read more on page 4](#)

What We've Learned: What Makes Same-Sex Relationships Succeed or Fail?

Dr. John M. Gottman and his colleagues conducted a twelve-year study of same-sex couples to learn what makes same-sex relationships succeed or fail. The research demonstrates that all couple types—straight or gay—have many of the same problems and the same paths to staying happy together. But research has shown that there are also some qualities of strength (like humor and ability to calm down during a fight) that are especially key to same-sex couples.

[Read more on page 14](#)

Living Whole

It is for anyone who wants to learn about female-to-male transgendered individuals. Specifically, it is for relatives and friends of transpeople, especially those with a Christian background, who are sincerely trying to understand what their loved one is going through. But it is really the story of one individual. It is my story, and shouldn't be extrapolated to be representative of all transmen. There is a kindred between us, but our stories are all different. Read with an open heart and a mind to learn. And may you never condemn another until you have walked a mile in their shoes.

[Read more on page 16](#)



Resources

[page 12](#)

Let the little children come unto me and do not hinder them
for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these.

Jesus as quoted in Mark 10:14

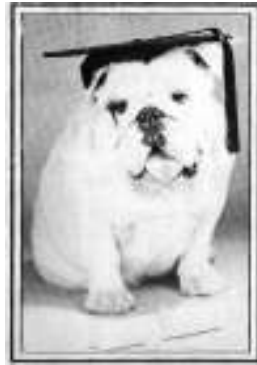
The following is a reworked lecture given at the Building Safe Places conference held in The Netherlands during June 2014. The audience consisted of ministers of the Dutch union. The informality of the language has been adapted for a reading audience.

Finding Diogenes – The hermeneutics of a Pastor



By Gerard Frenk

Longer ago than I care to remember a good friend received his masters degree in psychology. He thought it worth a celebration and I was asked to help mark this special occasion with a speech. In due time we received a slightly less than formal invitation.



The picture proved to be a source of inspiration. I decided to talk about the fact that we could both be considered dogs, but of two very different kinds. I posited a contrast between the Latin dog (*canis*) and the Greek dog (*kuon*). Where the Latin dog is generally seen as man's best friend and may well be allowed inside the home, the Greek dog is viewed as a scabby, timid, and suspicious type who spends most of its time in the shadows, wary of unpredictable human behaviour. The Latin dog has lent its name to a religious order: the Dominicans (*canis domini*). The Greek dog to a sorely mistreated and misunderstood philosophical tradition: *kunismos*. For the occasion I gave my friend the Latin label and turned myself into a Greek dog.

Kunismos

The party over, I put the speech on my desk for later filing. A few weeks later it caught my eye. I picked it up and my characterisation of myself as a Greek dog suddenly triggered a chain of thought about my ministry. The Greek dog, I concluded, has

not only given his name a philosophical tradition (*kunismos*) but also embodies a core value of the gospel. (I use the Greek *kunismos* because I want to avoid the word cynicism, a word that has negative connotations).



< Find the Greek dog >



Let's visit the man who inspired *kunismos*.

*Diogenes: ho Kunikos (the doglike one)
lived in a barrel or more probably a large amphora
considered and treated by many as a stray dog (kuon)
given the "nickname" ho kunikos
inspired the philosophical tradition called kunismos*



Diogenes was the intellectual *enfant terrible* of his day. He lived 404-323 BC. Born in Sinope, he lived in Athens until banished, then moved to and died in Corinth. A few stories will characterise him sufficiently for our purpose today.

- Diogenes walks through Athens in broad daylight. He has a burning lamp in his hand. Asked what he thinks he is doing, he answers, "I'm looking for an honest man."
- Alexander the Great and Diogenes meet in Corinth. Diogenes is relaxing in the early morning sunlight. Alexander, is thrilled to meet the famous philosopher, and asks, "May I grant you a favour?" Without regard for status Diogenes replies, "Yes, move out of my sunlight" literally: *unshade me*, which is a more telling reply.
- Alexander continues, "If I were not Alexander, I should wish to be Diogenes". Diogenes replies, "If I were not Diogenes, I should also wish to be Diogenes." In some versions the conversation continues and Alexander finds the philosopher looking at a pile of human bones. Diogenes explains, "I am searching for the bones of your father but cannot distinguish them from those of a slave."
- Socrates had thought to categorise living things. One of his distinctions was between animals walking on four feet and animals walking on two feet. One day Plato used Socrates' definition of man as a "featherless two footer". When Diogenes heard about it he went to Plato's academy and showed him this!



Now, this last story is a crux. It is much more than a joke played on Plato. Sloterdijk concludes that Diogenes here illustrates a fundamentally different

attitude to life and thinking (*Critique of Cynical Reason*, 1983). Diogenes' critique is not that Plato uses an inadequate definition; his critique is that reality cannot be captured in concepts and definitions. To think that you can come to understand life by abstraction, by systemic thinking, is, to Diogenes, absurd. It is a fallacy to work on the premise that thinking will result in knowledge that is clear, self evident, and eternally true. Diogenes would have laughed Descartes out of town. The world and life are much too complicated to be caught in words and concepts. Life is to be experienced, to be lived. *You cannot experience the concept humanity, you can only experience humans*. Abstraction creates distance. Direct experience is involvement, nearness. Distance and abstraction are forms of simplification. Involvement and direct experience expose the complexity and diversity of life.

This is why Diogenes the Greek dog, the *Kunikos*, marks an important moment in the search for truth. Plato locates true life in the head. Thinking leads to true knowledge. Logic is the instrument to be used. With Diogenes the practical embodiment is most important. How does it feel? What is the material and factual experience? "At that moment the search for truth is split into a discursive, highly theoretical battle order and a satirical-literary gang of sharpshooters." (Sloterdijk 1:181)



Plato

The *kunikos* confronts society, power and received wisdom by walking around as a living question mark. He drives people mad by repeating: *Who says so? How do you feel about that? It all depends, doesn't it? Who benefits?*

In his mind, received common knowledge is ever suspect. Power is to be undermined and resisted: not only naked abuse, but the subtle kind that claims to know natural and eternal truths while in reality defending its own interests. He questions morality when it seems most self-evident. The gods and religion are suspect because they are often allied to the status quo. The *kunikos* is a living pain in the *** for those in power and sets his teeth in the arm of bureaucracy. He barks, he yelps, he bites. People throw stones at him to keep him at a distance. He prods, he turns his verbal knives in open wounds, he laughs at the wrong moments. In its turn, the dominating culture will try to marginalise him and is generally able to do so because it controls the instruments of power. But the *kunikos* fights back with his whole arsenal: irony, sarcasm, mirrored stories, parables, his own alternative lifestyle, performances ... he is a one-man counter-culture. Nothing in life or society is simple or straightforward.



Diogenes

The Gospel

His instrumentarium should ring familiar to all of us who are reasonably at home in Scripture.

- the LORD said to him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD." So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. (Hosea)
- make bread for yourself. You are to eat it during the 390 days you lie on your side. Eat the food as you would a loaf of barley bread; bake it in the sight of the people, using human shit for fuel." The LORD said, "In this way the people of Israel will eat defiled food among the nations where I will drive them (Ezekiel).
- "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you

that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." (Jesus).

- "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.' But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that

is, devoted to God)—then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.” (Jesus).

Much more of the same nature may be found in Scripture. Consider Samuel who is highly suspicious of kingship. Read his ironical speech to the elders of Israel in 1 Samuel 8. In Deuteronomy 17 the king is warned that he must not regard himself superior to any other man. Ezekiel 16 and 20 may be read as a sarcastic/ironical retelling of the official, received history of Israel. The book of Acts knows of only one driving power: the Spirit of God. In Daniel nothing is left of the earthly powers but dust. The book of Revelation is one big question mark behind the power claims of Rome. And we could go on.

It is clear that Jesus has understood the prophets and treads in their footsteps. Like them he questions power, current morality, theology, custom. He is disruptive. Like the kunikos he knows that confessions, customs, norms are simplifications of reality. And simplifications are dangerous. They are generally instruments of power and therefore preferably

expressed in antagonistic terms: *This is true, that is false. It's between us and them. You are either for us or against us.* This is why the prophets and Jesus in their footsteps continually complicate matters. They do so by confronting people with themselves. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a prime example. The *either-or* world of the passers-by is being complicated by the deed of the Samaritan. His action questions a dichotomous understanding of reality. In the world of pure-impure there seems to be no room for mercy. In the world of duty there is no room for charity. The victim is a problem that has to be circumvented rather than a fellow human being needing help. It is the outsider who is *moved* by the plight of the victim. The parable thus makes life more complicated and the listener is asked to place himself in that new context.

On the internet there is a plethora of sayings attributed to Confucius. A very popular one reads: *Life is really simple but we insist on making it complicated.* This is nonsense. Even a superficial look at the following table and cartoon will suffice to prove the contrary.

Simple	Complicated	Complex
Following a Recipe	A Rocket to the Moon	Raising a Child
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recipe is essential Recipes are tested to assure replicability of later efforts No particular expertise; knowing how to cook increases success Recipes produce standard products Certainty of same results every time Optimism re results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulae are critical and necessary Sending one rocket increases assurance that next will be ok High level of expertise in many specialized fields + coordination Rockets similar in critical ways High degree of certainty of outcome Optimism re results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulae have only a limited application Raising one child gives no assurance of success with the next Expertise can help but is not sufficient Every child is unique Uncertainty of outcome remains Optimism re results



Embodiment

Simplifications tend to divide the world into us and them. When the *we* in the formula have power, there is generally little regard for the actual position of the *them*. That is why in power structures it is always the weak, the powerless who truly suffer. Here a deep Christian paradox surfaces. Christian theology turns on the suffering of one who is absolutely powerless and practices nearness by total identification (*splagnisesthai, kenosis*). So, if there is to be something as Christian power at all, it can only consist in forms in which suffering is not inflicted on the other and nearness is practised to the point of identification. Is that possible? That's the wrong question. The right question is: *how* to embody this theology? By talking about possibility or impossibility we are already distancing ourselves from others instead of practising nearness. It is in practising what we preach that we discover how to do it.

Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shrivelled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn (porosei) hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

The silence is telling. The man is a *problem, a case*. He is abstracted from his personal situation. He is not seen as an independent ego. Worse still, he is being used as a pawn on the chess board on which the scribes intend to checkmate Jesus. The scribes are willing to let the suffering continue because they are concerned with a larger future goal. Jesus brings the man near. He complicates the situation by asking a question which challenges the simple version of the law. May healing be considered an extension of what is lawful on Sabbath? His own answer to that question is made concrete in the actual healing. He does not want to become involved in a discussion in which the actuality is ignored. He insists on the priority of embodiment over abstraction. He thereby questions the norms, the authority, the power and the attitude

of an impersonal *them*.

Diogenes and Jesus. A Greek dog and a Hebrew dog. A Kunikos and a Rabbi. Is it possible to recognise the *kunismos* of the Gospel in the church? Does the church manage to embody the Gospel? These are questions that reach into the heart of ministry.

Thinking about the ministry of the church, its congregations and its ministers, we may conclude that an organised church is at best a paradox, but most probably an impossibility, because it will ultimately not be able to practice what it preaches. At best it will live in continual tension with its origins. That usually leads to a bad conscience. Such a conscience becomes visible when comparing what is said with what is practiced.

- *Kunismos* is at the heart of its beginnings but as it grows and organises it begins to marginalize the *kunikoi* in its midst. The question marks are replaced by exclamation marks of its own choosing.
- The church professes to encourage independent reading of the Bible and understanding of the Gospel. At the same time there is more than a desire to control exegesis, theology and morality. To do so, it must exercise power.
- Ministers are believed to be called by God and merely confirmed as such by the church. In practice the minister is deemed a representative of the organisation.
- Each member is considered to have a unique and personal relationship with God. In practice maximum uniformity is sought to maintain unity. Individual faith is stressed but membership is granted (note the verb) on the basis of assent to a confession.
- So the church is a paradox. In its body it carries instruments of power and instruments of resistance against that power, means of repression and means of emancipation.

A Question:

"If sheep do not belong to the church but to God/Christ and if each 'sheep' has a free and independent ego before God, is then the name 'pastor' not a form of hubris?"

For those who are interested:

Dostoyevsky has written the ultimate literary work on this: *The Brothers Karamozov*. His chapter on the Grand Inquisitor may be found on the internet:

Personal

Up to this point I have been relatively impersonal. From now on that is impossible, for two reasons. Firstly, Building Safe Places specifically asked me to speak from a personal perspective. Secondly, what follows cannot be a paradigm for others. It is my experience of and reflection on ministry and I can only share it as story.

Once the kunikos had entered my life and had made me look intensely at what I was doing, I had a few basic questions to answer. How does the paradox which is church, work out in the lives of individual believers? Closer to home: how do they work out in my life as a minister? In my work I am continually in conversation with individual members. I am told unique life stories. How near do I come, how distant can I remain? How do I resolve the tension? How do I tame the paradox? How do I embody the gospel as I understand it? My answer was: become a Greek dog with Gospel genes. The kunikos tells me that I can only embody the gospel by opposing abstraction and simplification. That has consequences. Whenever the gospel is presented in an *us-them* fashion I have to

bark. When people are kept at a distance, when norms become more important than values, I will have to howl! This is what Diogenes and Jesus have in common. They both say that you cannot experience an abstraction called humanity, you can only experience a fellow human. Therefore, my first loyalty as a minister is to the gospel, not as formulated in dogma, but as a call to practice nearness. I must closely listen to its many calls to embody love.

Many years earlier I had read Martin Buber's *Ich und Du*. He asked the question: Do I consider the other to be a *du* or an *es*? In grammatical terms, is the other a subject in his or her own right (the familiar *du*), or do I approach him/her as an object (the distant *es*)? Am I talking with and listening to? Those questions are equally relevant for my relationship with Scripture. Is Scripture a distant *es*, an object I use. Or is Scripture a *du*, a voice to be listened to with open mind and heart. (The usual English contrast I-thou picks up on the personal distance, but does not quite reflect the "objectification" expressed by *es*)

Sloterdijk

An important author who accompanied and, to a great extent, inspired my journey is Peter Sloterdijk. In one chapter of his book, *The Critique of Cynical Reason*, he contrasts two ways of doing (scientific) research (which for him picture two ways of approaching reality). In the first the ego of the researcher approaches the 'object' aiming to generalise, keep distance and control. This so called scientific method tends to aim at uniformity. Researchers use the same concepts, methodology and have a shared interest in maintaining uniformity. The existence of differing hypotheses over a long time is seen as a weakness and as an undermining of the current methodology. The right method should lead to a definitive answer and closure.

In the same chapter Sloterdijk refers to Adorno who has written on the priority of the object. By that he means that an object is not approached with a set of methodological questions, as if it is to be analysed, conquered and definitively described, but as something independent and worthwhile in itself. Sloterdijk concludes: "*the weaker our methods, the better for the "objects". As long as there are a number of 'interpretations', objects are safe from the delusion of the researchers that the objects – which they think they know – have been fixed forever. As long as 'interpretation' is alive, the memory of*

the fact that things 'as such' are something independent of whatever research on our side, is kept alive. When the object enjoys priority it is approached with sympathetic understanding, without the subject being forced into an inferior position. The best example of such an approach is love. There the object is not known, but at most familiar. There's no objectivity, just intimacy. When the researcher approaches he does not do so as master of research, but as neighbour, friend, someone who is attracted. He knows that the "relationship" is over on the day when things look as if they have always been the same, constant, mundane, identical, predictable. Where the sense of beauty ceases, war, indifference and death begin.

Here we have an open hermeneutic which is prepared to be surprised. It is prepared to forego power.

In my ministry I have tried to always give priority to the other, that which is not me. As a consequence I have been at odds with many General Conference statements, especially those on marriage and divorce, homosexuality and hermeneutics/exegesis. These statements seek to prescribe and proscribe. In the words of Sloterdijk, to generalise, keep distance and control. The gay person, the woman who has divorced her violent husband, the theologian who claims the right to independent reading of Scripture,

have become objects being judged by an (impersonal) subject. All are denied an independent ego. They are categorised, bureaucratised and spoken to and about, not with. Their individual history or narrative is not considered relevant or important. Their faith is considered wanting, inadequate. The method, the norm and confession have priority. This became particularly clear during the General Conference in Toronto (2000). When the changes to the Church Manual came up for discussion it became clear that the church was capable of inflicting psychological violence on a scale I had never suspected. Delegates were asked to vote in favour of the following:

A separation or divorce that results from such factors as physical violence or in which "unfaithfulness to the marriage vow"(see sections 1 and 2 above) is not involved does not give either one the scriptural right to remarry, unless in the meantime the other party has remarried, committed adultery or fornication, or died. Should a member who has been thus divorced, remarry without these biblical grounds, he/she shall be removed from membership and the one whom he/she remarries, if a member, also shall be removed from membership. (Church Manual)

During the discussion on the floor I pointed out that the church should leave this to the pastors and that if the wording was voted as proposed, the church would be forcing many a minister to simply ignore the manual. Upon return to the Netherlands I wrote an article with a case study of a woman who had endured almost twenty years of abuse and violence in her first marriage. I ended the article as follows:

"Remarriage? That doesn't seem to be a personal choice within the church. It may even turn out that your ex continues to dominate your life. What if, after many years of violence and the stress of a divorce you run into that gentle, loving man or woman who helps to restore your confidence and trust? Marriage? Not in church if your bully of an ex is still unmarried or hasn't been caught committing adultery in flagrante. You marry anyway? Then the church is left no other choice but to take disciplinary action. The pastor who has been your mainstay in the difficult years? He now needs to defend the indefensible. Or has he understood the gospel well enough to know that"

It is clear to me that in this case the manual sanctions the abuse of power. It inflicts violence. It leaves a wounded soul by the side of the road and at the same time claims to understand the gospel. It is time for the church to really do homework on hermeneutics and exegesis.

(Again a strange paradox. In fact the church has already admitted that texts can only be read in context and that the Spirit is more important than the letter. How else to explain that women may be ordained as elders?! Yet on the issue of ordination and in the case of divorce and remarriage the Bible is read as though cast in concrete. It is not surprising that those in the TOSC (Theology of Ordination Committee) who oppose ordination are also pleading for reversion of the decision to allow women elders.)

Now, an Adventist who is tempted to exercise power in this fashion must of necessity lead a schizoid life because somewhere in his or her heart he knows about the *kunismos* of Scripture and Christ. He or she knows that the Gospel raises its voice against all powers claiming to know (absolute) truth. By exercising or even representing power you run the risk of ending up not as a *kunikos* but as a cynic. What could be more cynical than publicly stating that you exercise power in the name of the Lord in order to protect the gospel? The moment you write that down or proclaim it the *kunikos* will burst out laughing and give you Dostoyevsky to read. It is the great paradox of organised religion and plays at all levels of church polity, and the minister is not excluded.

Colossians 1:13-25

*He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, **whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities**-all things were created through him and **for him. He is before all things**, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church;*

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

*For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, **"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart."** **Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through **the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.** For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, **but we preach Christ crucified**, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both*

Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The appeal to nature

Many years ago the Dutch essayist Rudy Kousbroek gave a speech at a PEN conference (worldwide organisation of writers). He pointed to the fact that power of any kind aims at its own perpetuation. Among its most effective weaponry is an appeal to nature. What is natural is said to be self-evident and of unchanging character. I quote (translation by me):

“All sorts of circumstances have at one time or another been characterised as irresistible, indestructable and inevitable: slavery, the caste and class systems, ruling dynasties, serfdom, inequality of races, sexes, social class, and income;

circumcision, clitoridectomy and other rites of passage; even the position in coitus and the length of hair have, in their time, been presented as the will of God, as revealed knowledge, as inherent in evolution, as part of survival of the fittest, as given with creation, as answering a cosmic consciousness, being part of the harmony of spheres, connected to the meaning and goal of history. What it finally always comes down to is an attempt to present culture as nature. The appeal to nature is an impediment to change and is therefore a much loved instrument of power.”

Dog face

Every morning I walk into the bathroom and take a quick look at myself in the mirror. I always hope to see the face of a full blown Greek dog. Each morning I am disappointed. The eyes that look back seem to say: “were life but that simple.” The paradox at the

heart of the church is none other than the paradox in the heart of the minister. There's only one thing to do: you fight the paradox. And the only weapon that truly works is that of proximity, nearness. It is the gentlest of instruments.



- <http://www.buildingsafeplaces.org/>

We encourage you to access our website, <http://buildingsafeplaces.org/>. On it you can find archives of all Safe Places newsletters, topics that include study of the Bible, self-harm and suicidality, same-sex marriage, and stories from both LGBTI Adventists and their friends and families among others. There are resources to address a variety of issues. The site also includes training and consultation opportunities. All the research we have shared in the newsletters is included in its own section on the site.

- **New Direction Ministries**

www.newdirection.ca

–*Generous Spaciousness – Responding to Gay Christians in the Church* (by Wendy VanderWal-Gritter)

- **Renewed Heart Ministries**

www.renewedheartministries.com

herb@renewedheartministries.com

- ***A Violent God-image***

(By Eugen Drewermanns)

(From: Gerard Frenk, former Ministerial Secretary of the Dutch Union)

- **Single, Pregnant, and Rabbi**

July 9, 2014

Julie Greenberg was a single lesbian in Reconstructionist rabbinical school in the eighties, and she was ready to start a family. Eventually, Rabbi Greenberg found a sperm donor, and got pregnant. She ended up having three children via sperm donors, and adopted two more, all while living in a small three-bedroom apartment, and working as the rabbi of Leyv Ha-Ir, Heart of the City, a Jewish

community in center city Philadelphia.

A new documentary, *All of the Above*, follows Greenberg and three other female clergy members in their journey to becoming single mothers. All four struggle with a strong desire to follow the Torah's first commandment, "Be fruitful & multiply" even when they haven't found their life partners. The film explores the choices demanded of Jewish women and

the often-competing desires of motherhood and faith.

All of the Above was broadcast on ABC in March of this year, but if you missed it you can contact the filmmakers about bringing it to your community. This is a poignant and compelling look at a new kind of Jewish mother.

- Tamar Fox

(From: Wim Wiersema, *pastor SDA regio Amsterdam*)



These are five gifts to share with your learning Christian family

From: Eliel Cruz – student at Andrew's University.

1. *Two Words: Why Hearing "I'm Gay" Changed My Straight Christian World* by Emily Timbol

Emily, a straight Christian female blogger and author, recounts her experience from opposition to advocacy. Her best friend came out and it rocked her world. Raised in conservative Christianity, his being gay forced her to question everything she believed about homosexuality, and why. In order to try and find the answers to these questions, Emily spent three

years talking to people in the LGBT community, listening to their stories, and experiencing things that challenged and stretched her. The book is surprisingly really funny, completely entertaining, intentionally honest, and has numerous *wow* moments. This is the best book I've read from a Christian ally's perspective, and it's a must have for the gay Christian world.

2. *Love is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation With The Gay Community* by Andrew Marin

Winner of 2010 *Outreach Magazine* Resource of the Year Award winner, Leadership Book Award winner Relevant Magazine, Top 20 Best Overall Books of 2009 by *Englewood Review of Books*, and numerous other awards, Andrew Marin's life changed forever when his three best friends came out to him in three consecutive months (funny how the ally paradigm shifts when it becomes relational huh?). The book shares how to successfully have a bridge-building, peaceful, reconciliatory conversation with someone in a conservative Christian community. Reframing the

dialogue, Marin doesn't speak to the theology behind homosexuality, as interpreted in modern day scripture, but works within the current theological framework ~ where LGBT people should be loved like brothers, sisters and those who have yet to decide ~ to show we can dialogue, love and accept regardless of our pre-existing theological worldview. An ally himself, Andrew Marin is the Executive Director of the Marin Foundation, and has dedicated over a decade of his life to advocating for LGBT people.

3. *Bible, Gender, and Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships* by James Brownson

If you want to dive into some of the theology behind homosexuality as interpreted in modern-day scriptures ~ this is the book for you! James Brownson provides the best "pro-gay" theological argument I have seen in this field. Completely reframing this dialogue, Brownson starts with gender, patriarchy and gender complementarily, to change the basis on

how we interpret those "six verses." What many theologians are calling a "game-changer," this book just came out this year, and has yet to receive the worthy praise it deserves. This book is a must for those who want to have intellectual, academic arguments for same-sex relationships.

4. *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel From the Gay Vs. Christian Debates* by Justin Lee

Justin Lee is a Gay Christian that could be considered a pioneer in this generation, advocating in church's for LGBT folk. As a teenager and young man, Justin Lee felt deeply torn. Nicknamed "God Boy" by his peers, he knew that he was called to a life in the evangelical Christian ministry. But Lee harbored a secret: He also knew that he was gay. In this

groundbreaking book, Lee recalls the events ~ his coming out to his parents, his experiences with the "ex-gay" movement, and his in-depth study of the Bible ~ that led him, eventually, to self-acceptance. Justin is the Executive Director of The Gay Christian Network, which has a fantastic conference that I'll be attending in January 2014.

5. *Seventh-Gay Adventist: A Film about Faith in the Margins*

Being queer and Seventh-day Adventist, this film has had the biggest impact in my life, and in the lives of my conservative loved ones. If I may call myself their biggest fan, I've seen this film more than any other person besides the director and producer themselves (which are this absolutely fantastic straight family of three) attending screenings in nine different states.

Following the lives of three gay couples, in the extremely tight-knit, and conservative community of the Seventh-day Adventist church, this film shares the stories of the gay couples and shows the effects of religious homophobia. I had such a pivotal moment of healing at one of the screenings ~ there was this one time when a redneck loved a queer.

I've read, watched, experienced and met every single one of these people behind these five incredible projects. Each of them has dedicated their lives completely to advocating for LGBT inclusion in churches, and conservative Christian.



What We've Learned: What Makes Same-Sex Relationships Succeed or Fail?

Dr. John M. Gottman and his colleagues conducted a twelve-year study of same-sex couples to learn what makes same-sex relationships succeed or fail. The research demonstrates that all couple types—straight or gay—have many of the same problems and the same paths to staying happy together. But research has shown that there are also some qualities of strength (like humor and ability to calm down during a fight) that are especially key to same-sex couples.

Research abstract:

Correlates of Gay and Lesbian Couples' Relationship Satisfaction and Relationship Dissolution

By John M. Gottman, Robert W. Levenson, James Gross, Barbara L. Fredrickson, Kim McCoy, Leah Rosenthal, Anna Ruef, and Dan Yoshimoto.

A sample of committed gay and lesbian cohabiting couples engaged in two conversations after being apart for at least eight hours: (a) an events of the day conversation and (b) a conflict resolution conversation. Physiological data were collected during the conversations and a videotape record was made. Couples viewed the video-

tapes and rated their effect during the interaction. The video records were coded with a system that categorized specific affects displayed. Models derived from physiology, from the perception of interaction, and from specific affective behavior were related to relationship satisfaction, and to the prediction of relationship dissolution

over a twelve-year period. Results supported previous findings that satisfaction and stability in gay and lesbian relationships are related to similar emotional qualities as in heterosexual relationships.

Published:

The Journal of Homosexuality, Vol. 45(1), 2003.

The 12 Year Study:

Gay and Lesbian Couples Research: A case of similarities of same-sex and cross-sex couples, differences between gay and lesbian couples

Using state-of-the-art methods while studying 21 gay and 21 lesbian couples, Dr. John Gottman (University of Washington) and Dr. Robert Levenson (University of California at Berkeley) have learned what makes same-sex relationships succeed or fail.

One key result: Overall, relationship satisfaction and quality are about the same across all couple types (straight, gay, lesbian)

that Dr. Gottman has studied. This result supports prior research by Lawrence Kurdek and Pepper Schwartz: They find that gay and lesbian relationships are comparable to straight relationships in many ways.

"Gay and lesbian couples, like straight couples, deal with every day ups-and-downs of close relationships," Dr. Gottman observes. "We know that these ups-and-

downs may occur in a social context of isolation from family, workplace prejudice, and other social barriers that are unique to gay and lesbian couples." The research uncovered differences, however, that suggest that workshops tailored to gay and lesbian couples can have a strong impact on relationships.

What have they learned? Results from the Gottman gay/lesbian couples study

Gay/lesbian couples are more upbeat in the face of conflict. Compared to straight couples, gay and lesbian couples use more affection and humor when they

bring up a disagreement, and partners are more positive in how they receive it. Gay and lesbian couples are also more likely to remain positive after a disagree-

ment. "When it comes to emotions, we think these couples may operate with very different principles than straight couples. Straight couples may have a lot to

learn from gay and lesbian relationships,” explains Gottman.

Gay/lesbian couples use fewer controlling, hostile emotional tactics. Gottman and Levenson also discovered that gay and lesbian partners display less belligerence, domineering and fear with each other than straight couples do. “The difference on these ‘control’ related emotions suggests that fairness and power-sharing between the partners is more important and more common in gay and lesbian relationships than in straight ones,” Gottman explained.

In a fight, gay and lesbian couples take it less personally. In straight couples, it is easier to hurt a partner with a negative comment than to make one’s partner feel good with a positive comment. This appears to be reversed in gay and lesbian couples. Gay and lesbian partners’ positive comments have more impact on feeling good, while their negative comments are less likely to produce hurt feelings. “This trend suggests that gay and lesbian partners have a tendency to accept some degree of negativity

without taking it personally,” observes Gottman.

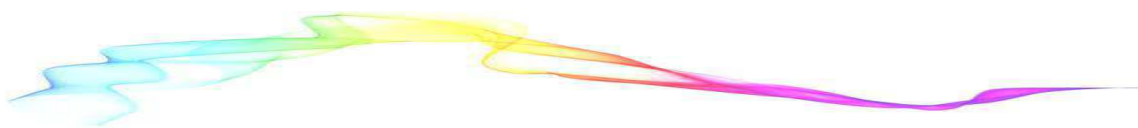
Unhappy gay and lesbian couples tend to show low levels of “physiological arousal.” This is just the reverse for straight couples. For straights, physiological arousal signifies ongoing aggravation. The ongoing aroused state—including elevated heart rate, sweaty palms, and jitteriness—means partners have trouble calming down in the face of conflict. For gay and lesbian couples this lower level of arousal shows that they are able to soothe one another.

Gay and lesbian differences—mostly gender differences—on emotional expressiveness

In a fight, lesbians show more anger, humor, excitement and interest than conflicting gay men. This suggests that lesbians are more emotionally expressive—positively and negatively—than gay men. This result may be the effect of having two women in a relationship. Both have been raised in a society where expressiveness is more acceptable for women than for men, and it shows up in their relationships.

Gay men need to be especially careful to avoid negativity in conflict. When it comes to repair, gay couples differ from straight and lesbian couples. If the initiator of conflict in a gay relationship becomes too negative, his partner is not able to repair as effectively as lesbian or straight partners. “This suggests that gay men may need extra help to offset the impact of negative emotions that inevitably come along when couples fight,” explains Gottman.

How did Drs. Gottman and Levenson study same-sex couples? They recorded gay and lesbian couples interacting and coded partners’ expressions to learn more about their emotions. They also used more common self-reporting and interview methods, in detail and over time. The combination of these measures provided a thorough assessment. The results of this research are currently under review for publication.



Students should be led to think for themselves, to see the force of truth for themselves and to speak every word from a heart full of love and tenderness.

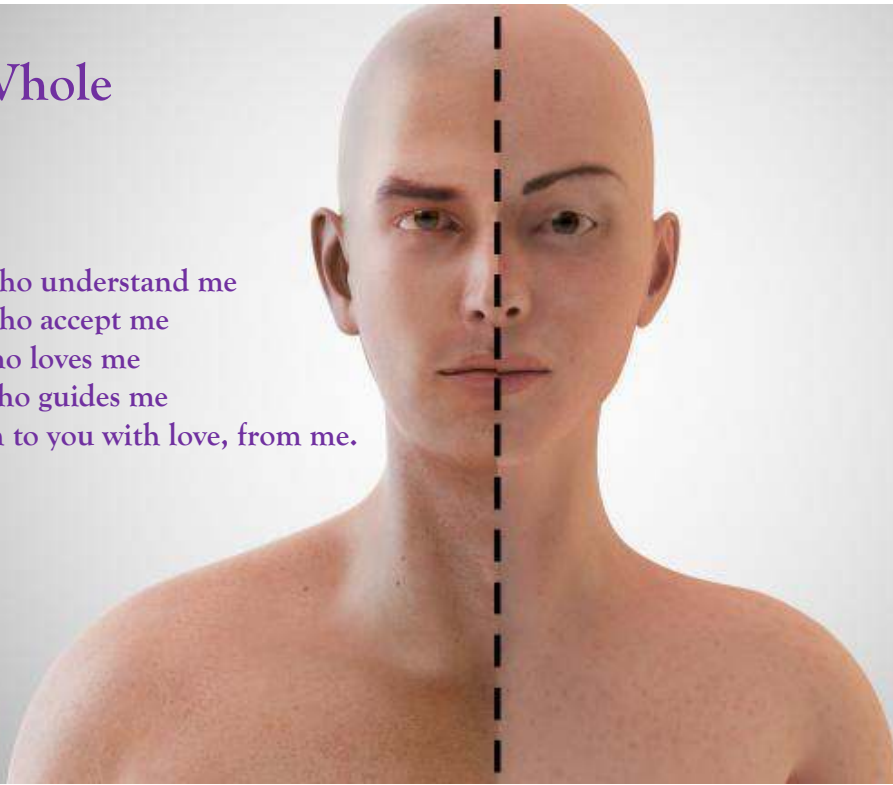
Ellen G. White Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students.

Living Whole

By Dane

Dedication

To the ones who understand me
To the ones who accept me
To the one who loves me
To the One who guides me
This is written to you with love, from me.



It is for anyone who wants to learn about female-to-male transgendered individuals. Specifically, it is for relatives and friends of transpeople, especially those with a Christian background, who are sincerely trying to understand what their loved one is going through. But it is really the story of one individual. It is my story, and shouldn't be extrapolated to be representative of all transmen. There is a kindred between us, but our stories are all different. Read with an open heart and a mind to learn. And may you never condemn another until you have walked a mile in their shoes.

Invariably, this will also be read by transpeople on various points of their own journeys. May you find understanding and solace.

Basic Facts

I am a transman. You pass me every day on the street. I look like an average guy and you have no idea that I was born a female. It's not that I don't want you to know, it's just that you really don't need to know because I am just me. That said, there are some things I want you to know.

First of all, I want you to know what *trans* means. I was born a female, I had a sex change and am now a male. You can refer to me as a transman or transguy. Technically, transsexual, transgendered, FTM, or female-to-male all mean the same thing, although some of those terms seem to be associated with various negative connotations. *Trans* can also mean that someone was born male, had a sex change, and is

now female. You might call them transwomen, transladies, MTFs, male-to-females, or just women. I honestly don't know what most transwomen prefer to be called, so I will leave it at that. Although we may have certain similarities, I will let them tell you about themselves if they so choose. For now, I will tell you about me. I can't help but speak for my kindred "brothers;" but, again, this is my writing and my story, so I apologize if I offend any of my brothers or if I say things that they don't agree with. Please understand that not everyone in my situation will agree with me or share my same sentiments and ideas.

I am not a creepy child molester or a perverted sex addict. I wasn't abused as a child. I have a life with

friends and family, some of whom do not see eye-to-eye with me. Isn't that the way it is in your family, too? I had friends in grade school, teenage crushes, and graduated from college with honors. I have a doctoral degree and am highly trained in a specialized field where I interact with regular people and colleagues daily.

I have faith in God. This article is not specifically about that; but, since it is part of who I am, you will

Beginning My Story

I bet you have a lot of questions. Questions like, "Does she, I mean he, have a penis?" "Is it 'he' or 'she' anyway?" "Do you like guys or girls?" OK, OK, I get it. You're curious about stuff you don't know about. That's human nature. The funny thing is, if you met me on the street you wouldn't have any of these questions.

I was about four years old when I became aware that I did not think like other little girls my age. I was standing outside of church when three "older girls" in their early teens exited the door and walked across the parking lot. They were dressed in their fine dresses, with their hair all done up and wearing nylons and "church shoes." I distinctly thought to myself, "That's how people think I am going to be when I grow up, but I'm not like that." I didn't share that thought with anyone, and it took me years to understand it myself; yet, somehow I knew I was different.

I was a smart kid, had a good family, and had a few close friends. My best friends were two brothers, and together we played with LEGO® toys, built birdhouses, had our own woodworking shop, collected beetles and bugs, and enjoyed our childhood in the country. But I couldn't understand the girls. Even though I was supposed to be one of them, I just didn't get them. For one thing, they wanted breasts, and leg hair to shave off, and makeup to attract the boys. I couldn't imagine ever having breasts. I wanted leg hair and arm hair. And I couldn't imagine putting makeup on. The thought of it just seemed wrong.

And then one day I got cancer. Well, I thought I did, anyway. I had taken a shower; and, while drying off, I discovered a lump under my nipple. A little "rolly" lump. I was sure it was cancer. Shirtless, I ran down the hall to find my mother putting clean linen away in the closet. She was on the phone with a good friend. "Mom," I shrieked, "something's wrong!"

I showed her the little lump, and she gleefully exclaimed, "Oh, you're developing!"

Developing? I was developing? You mean breasts? I

read about my Christian journey. If you are a Christian, I hope you find insight. If you are not a Christian, please know that this is not meant to offend you or convert you, but is simply part of who I am. If you are inspired to pursue your own faith-based journey, great. But mostly, I hope you are inspired to develop an understanding, respect, and appreciation for people who are different than you.

was horrified. I ran back to my room and stood for what seemed like hours with my head buried in the robe that hung on the hook behind my door. It seemed worse than having cancer. I did not know what to do with breasts. I felt betrayed by my own body, by life itself. From that day on my life was never the same. I now knew what those thoughts I had when I was four actually meant. My body was a girl's body but my heart was that of a boy's. It did not make sense. It was so confusing that I couldn't talk to anyone about it. I was sure that no one else anywhere, ever, would understand.



Life from that day on seemed to be covered in a dark, black cloud. As my breasts got bigger, my heart got smaller, shrinking into something unrecognizable, unthinkable. I refused to wear a bra until one day I was over at a friend's house playing flight simulator. His mother asked him to come fold laundry, so I volunteered to help. I happened across his mother's sports bra. I hadn't noticed one of those before. I thought it would help to compress and hide things under my already baggy clothing. Other than that, there wasn't anything else I could do. I would lay in

bed at night and dream of waking up and having the right body—a guy’s body, or having my body transplanted, or just being in a world where everything made sense. My friends were growing up, developing into young ladies and young men. And I was left, stuck in a place in time where my boy heart had no place to grow and my girl body continued to betray me, day after day.

My parents were oblivious to what was going on inside of me. All they saw was a shy but intelligent girl who refused to stand up straight or wear a dress. My father would push me against the wall to show me how to get my shoulders back and have good posture. He didn’t realize that I wanted good posture; I had nothing against that at all. The problem was what the good posture made more prominent: breasts.

I had the usual teenage crushes on girls my age. I enjoyed hanging out with them, giving them rides on my bicycle, and playing music together. Music was something that put me in a place where gender didn’t matter. It lifted me above the confusion of my life and gave me something that elevated my soul and spirit. I loved music. Fortunately, my natural talents allowed me to learn a variety of instruments easily, play with different music groups, and write my own songs. I could express my thoughts and feelings in ways that made sense.

Then I fell in love. She was beautiful, with flowing blond hair, bright blue eyes, and a voice like an angel’s. We became instant friends. We spent hours making music together, traveled Europe, and shared an apartment. Our relationship grew over time, until one day she realized that the way I felt about her was not the way she felt about me. She was emphatic that our relationship could not continue as it was, and that it was wrong—that it was the way “homosexuals were.” I struggled, more confused than before, to make sense of everything. I didn’t think I was gay. I hadn’t meant to love her “that way.” I didn’t mean to fall in love at all. It had happened in the most natural, *guy-falls-in-love-with-girl* kind of way.

I moved out and tried to move on with my life. I silently fought within myself to understand. Perhaps I

was gay. Maybe that was what was wrong with me. I didn’t know anyone that was gay, except a distant relative who shot himself in the head because his family couldn’t accept him. Perhaps that was an easy way out. No, I decided, no matter how bad this was, I thought my mother would still hurt more if I was dead; so that just wasn’t an option. What could I do? Who could understand?

Time went by. I continued to search for answers. I prayed that God would heal me and take away my sins and make me who and how I was supposed to be. During this time, I spent a year overseas with a mission organization, and had much opportunity to reflect, pray, and study the Bible. Over and over again, I read that “God is love” (1 John). That He knows where I was born (Psalm 87:6). That He puts my tears in a bottle (Psalm 56:8). That He understands my infirmities (Matthew 8:17, Hebrews 4:15) and forgives my sins (1 John 1:9). I didn’t understand my life and my heart, but I was comforted by knowing that there was Someone who did understand me, who made me who I am, and who loves me in spite of anything. Psalm 139:13-16 says, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.... When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body.”

“He [God] has planted eternity in the human heart,” wrote the great King Solomon (Ecclesiastes 3:11, NLT). Seventeenth-century scientist and philosopher Blaise Pascal expounded on this thought in his book *Pensees*: man tries in vain to use everything around him to fill the void inside of him, but “this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object, in other words, by God Himself.” The proof I needed to understand the existence of God was in my own heart. It was in the beautiful things of nature that were all around me, and it was in the music that I loved so much. That made sense. But I still could not make sense of myself.

Hope

One lazy weekend afternoon during college I was lounging around at my friend’s place, day-dreaming. My friend was talking to me, but I wasn’t paying much attention. I was thinking of all the things I knew for sure:

- I wasn’t gay, because gay women feel like women and I sure didn’t.
- God loves me and I love Him, too, and always want to follow Him.
- I had friends, though few, who loved me, as me.

In the middle of my reverie I heard the word, “transsexual.”

“What?”

“A transsexual,” my friend repeated, “you know, someone whose body on the outside doesn’t match the gender they are on the inside.”

“I’ve always felt like a guy on the inside,” I replied.

“No, I mean, *really* feel like a guy. I *really* feel like a guy inside,” my friend retorted.

“Yeah, I get it. I’ve always felt that way, too.”

We stopped, looked at each other, and suddenly realized that we both felt the same way. I now had a term for how I felt. And I realized that I was not alone.

I began to investigate what “transsexual” really meant, what other people said about it, and what could be done about it. My friend already had concluded that she was “trans” and that someday she wanted to change her body to match her true gender. I began to feel like there was hope, after all, and that perhaps I could get to the bottom of what had plagued me thus far in life. It did not take me long to come to the same conclusion as my friend had: I was “trans.” I would do just about anything to be able to

have congruency between my mind, soul, and body. However, I wanted to be absolutely sure in my heart and mind that that was the right thing to do, and I had to wait for the right time.

As the next few years of life went by, I remained relieved that at least I had answered some of my questions and found some people who understood and identified with me. I sought out counselors with varying perspectives and also pursued an exhaustive Biblical study to help in my understanding. Some changes occurred in my family, with the passing of the person I knew would have the hardest time if I “transitioned” (i.e., physically became a male). I became more secure in myself as a person. Finally, I knew the time had come for me to take the steps I needed to truly become male.

“I see no problem with this,” said the judge discreetly, as I stood before him. My voice had deepened. My body was becoming more masculine. And, just like that, I was declared by the state to be officially male. The hard part of telling my family was done. I was finally free to live my life the way it was always supposed to be.

How to Become a Man

This section is written purely to satisfy your curiosity. Therefore, it is not specifically about me, but about transguys in general. If explicit details make you uncomfortable, it’s fine to skip this part.

What does it take to become a man? Is it a penis? Is it testosterone? Is it all in your head? I’m sure there are many ways to answer that question, but I think what you want to know here is how someone has a sex change. First of all, you have to know that you have the heart of a guy—that you think like a guy and that you are a guy on the inside. You know this just because you know it. If you are not a male, you should never try to be one. Nobody does this kind of thing just for kicks. Many transguys will see a therapist or counselor at some point. Some seek out help in understanding and sorting out what they are going through. Others simply seek clearance for medical treatment, such as hormones and surgeries. No one should put their body through these kinds of changes without direction from a physician.

Speaking of hormones, testosterone is the hormone in utero that causes a fetus to develop into a male. Even if a fetus has the male karyotype (the genes, XY chromosomes) it will be phenotypically female (look like a female) if either testosterone or

the receptors that attach to testosterone are missing. Testosterone is what is secreted by the testes when guys go through puberty. It causes the distinctly male characteristics to emerge—facial and body hair, deepening of the voice, muscle development, and enlargement of the external genitalia. If an anatomic female takes testosterone, the same things happen. Additionally, testosterone blocks the effects of female hormones and menstrual periods usually cease. The increased development of facial musculature adds to a masculine appearance.

Some transmen have one surgery, some multiple, and some have none at all. The most common surgery that transmen have is bilateral mastectomies, or removal of the breasts. This is usually done by a plastic surgeon. Small-breasted transmen may not need any surgery to remove breast tissue, and others may be able to have what is called a “keyhole” mastectomy, leaving their own nipples and skin in place but removing underlying breast tissue through a very small incision. Many transmen, however, undergo routine mastectomies with some form of reconstruction of the nipple and areola (the pink or dark skin around the nipple). The incisions are usually made in the infra-mammary fold, the crease that lies under-

neath the breast. Breast tissue and excess skin is removed. The nipples and areolae are sized to a typical male size and grafted back into the appropriate position, creating an anatomically male chest.

Some transmen have hysterectomies (removal of the uterus) and oophorectomies (removal of the ovaries). Testosterone may increase the risk of some female cancers, so having a hysterectomy is probably a good idea. Keep in mind—that surgeries are not cheap and transmen generally have to pay out of pocket. Mastectomies cost somewhere around \$7000, a hysterectomy around \$8500, and genital reconstructive surgery runs around \$30,000.

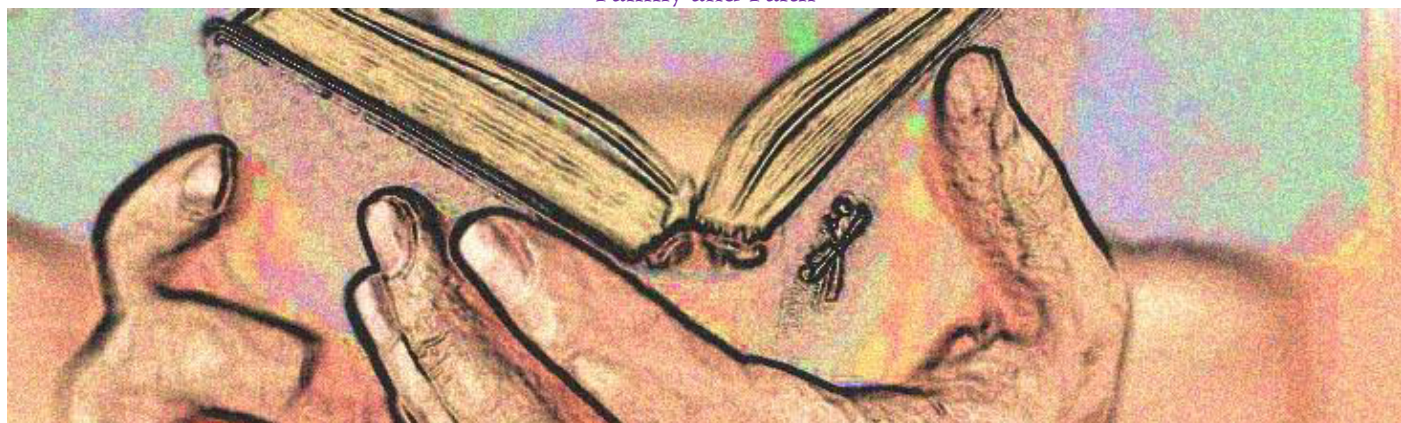
There are different types of genital surgery that transmen may have. A phalloplasty is creating a new penis (phallus). The clitoris, the female equivalent of a penis, enlarges with testosterone and is often incorporated into the new phallus during phalloplasty to retain the sexual sensations. A metoidioplasty is a procedure that essentially releases the clitoris, freeing it to be a small penis. This is usually combined with the creation of a scrotum from the labia and placement of testicular implants. With some of these procedures, the vagina is removed. Urethral extension is sometimes performed, so the person can

urinate while standing.

There is also a legal aspect to having a sex change. This can be simple or difficult, depending on which state you live in and where you were born. Some states have a relatively simple process of changing your gender, similar to having a legal name change. Not only do you need a court-ordered gender and name change, but you also need to change all your legal documents, such as your driver's license and passport. Again, this can be more or less difficult depending on your state. Some states will also change the gender on your birth certificate. Once the legal part is done, you are now officially a man, with all rights thereunto except for the ones you don't get, like being able to join the military. In reality, much of what you are entitled to depends on the state you live in. Some people are able to get legally married, while others fight legal battles simply to keep their jobs. Unfortunately, most states do not have antidiscrimination laws protecting transgendered people.

So what, really, does it take to become a man? Maybe it's a penis. Maybe it's testosterone. Maybe it's all in your head. I guess it all depends on your perspective. Somehow you just know.

Family and Faith



My mother is the most unselfish, wonderful, loving person in the world; yet she cannot understand or “accept” me. If there was one thing I could wish for in all the world, it would be for her understanding. She did not want me to “go through with this.” She said over and over, “How can you do this to your family? Think of all the people this will hurt and affect. What about your siblings? Your cousins? Your other relatives?” *I know, Mom. I thought of all of them, including you. I still do. Someday, I hope you understand the heart-wrenching decisions I have had to make. I was willing to go through my whole life uncomfortable and out of place, for you. But I realized that “for the greater good,” I had to do what I had to do. God gave me dreams in my*

heart and a mission in life, and it was my God-given duty to fulfill it. I couldn't do this mission without being able to be who I really am. I could not give to and take care of other people without first taking care of myself. I could not fill my “vessel” while it was broken. I needed God to help me be repaired, in part, to be able to take His love to others. I hope that someday you will understand. Until then, I know that you love me, and I am forever grateful for that.

I was raised with a keen sense of right and wrong. My mother also instilled in me a love for God and a personal knowledge of His love for me. I never had to question the existence of God—the ample evidence I find through nature, the Bible, personal experiences, and the writings of other Christians make God all

too real to me. I have had plenty of other questions, however. I don't profess to have all the answers or even to be right. And yet some things I do know. If you are not a Christian, this may not mean much to you. But if you are a Christian, it may be quite significant.

I believe in eternal life (John 3:16). I believe the Bible when it says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16:31). I believe that the Ten Commandments still stand as rules to live by today (Exodus 20). I believe that we (humans) are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). I also believe that something has gone horribly awry on this planet (Genesis 3). We are not in a perfect world as God created us to be. We are marred and broken, and "the whole creation groans and travails in pain" (Romans 8:22, NKJV). Things are not as they should be. God is a compassionate God, and it seems He takes all this into account. For example, He calls David a man after His own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), despite David's fall with Bathsheba. Another example is how man's diet changed over time. In the Garden of Eden, man was provided with plant-based food to eat (Genesis 1:29). After the Flood, people were allowed to kill animals and eat their meat (Genesis 9:3). Things dying were certainly not in the original plan; but as the world changed, so did God's allow-

ance of certain things. It seems to me that being transgendered is in this same category. Something that was not in God's original plan, but it happens now that things are not perfect in this world. It's almost a birth defect, of sorts. God certainly did not intend for babies to be born with imperfect bodies any more than He intended for anyone to have to suffer the consequences of evil.

Some people argue about whether God is male or female. Some argue that He is both. I don't know, but I suspect that He just is. "I AM that I AM," God said (Exodus 3:14). "There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, but you are all one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28). Both male and female are made in God's image. And someday, in heaven, maybe gender won't matter at all. Do you know Jesus' answer when asked about marriage in heaven? He said, "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). Maybe that means we will be neither male nor female in heaven. I'm not sure, but I do know that however it is will be perfect. That is how God is. Someday, everything will be right again. The world will be made new. Whatever gender I am in heaven will be perfect. Until then, I will do the best I can with what I have been given.

FAQs

"Do you have a penis?"

This has got to be the top question that everyone wants to ask but nobody actually will. That being the case, I won't actually answer it either, because really, that's none of your business. But, in all candidness, I will say that most transguys probably don't have penises. Think what you want, but this makes them no less men than the other guys you know.

"Are you a he or a she?"

Plain and simple. I am and always have been a "he."

"Do you like guys or girls?"

I have always identified as a straight guy and been attracted to girls. But just as with the general population, there are some transpeople that identify as gay and are attracted to people of the same gender with which they identify.

"If you're really a guy now, why do you call yourself a transman?"

I'm a guy now, just a regular guy, for all practical purposes. If you met me, you wouldn't know that I

wasn't always just a guy. But in the real sense of the word, I am truly a transman. I was not raised as a boy or brought up to be a man. I was not socialized as a male, coached as a male, or treated like a male. Therefore, there are things that go along with being a man that I know I will never know or understand. For example, one of my friends once commented that the worst thing about being a guy was having erections at inappropriate times, such as during church. I don't *know* about that, *per se*. But though I was raised female, there are, oh, so many things about being a girl or a woman that I also will never understand. So I find myself in a unique position, crossed-over, so to speak, in a place that only other transpeople can really truly know. If there were more than two genders in our society, I would probably fit into one of them. (Other books have been written on this very topic, which you can read if you are interested.) I know that I am not 100% male, but I am certainly not female either. Gender is probably a spectrum, and I fall onto the male side. Perhaps I am 90% male, I don't know, and it doesn't matter much anyway.

Essentially forced to choose one or the other, I had to choose what fits me best, and that is the male gender. I blend in well, fit in fine, and rarely think about the fact that I am trans. But every so often, in the world of men, I find a detail that I don't understand. I am OK with that. I understood very little in the world of women.

Having the heart of a man, I now have the body of a man, too. The congruency in my life allows me the freedom to do what humans do—interact with other

people, help people, and be fulfilled in life. It allows me to think less of myself and more of God and of others. It relieves the selfishness of being so absorbed with myself that I could not focus on anything else. Some people say that to change your gender is an act of selfishness that only causes hurt to other people. If only they could understand the anguish transpeople go through, and realize that often the most unselfish choice is to go through the struggle, the pain, the hurt, and the rejection to finally be who we really are.

