



AFFIRMATION GUIDE FOR
**TRANS AND
GENDER-EXPANSIVE
IDENTITIES**

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designed and edited by
Q Christian Fellowship



Table of Contents

- 3 Introduction
- 5 Scriptural and Theological Affirmation
- 11 Life in Community
- 16 Resources
- 18 Bibliography



Taj Smith

I'm (he/him) a Black, transgender Christian, all of which drastically affect how I see the world and, in turn, how I see God. Theology, to me, is a giant, open-ended question. Rather than asking "what" God is, I prefer to ask "how" and "why." I'm okay with not having answers.

My personal theology has been heavily influenced by liberation theology, queer theology, and science fiction. I have a vested interest in leaving the world a better place than it was when I entered, which requires thinking beyond myself and the God that I know, to how God may show up to my children's children's children.

I received a BA in Politics (political theory) from UC Santa Cruz and an MDiv from Harvard Divinity School where I focused on the theological implications of contemporary literature on modern life. My thesis explored theological themes in Ursula Leguin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*.

My coaching method is born from this work and underscored by my unceasing pursuit of a world in which people are free to live as themselves.

Bio from <https://www.tajsmith.com>.



Introduction

Transgender people often face isolation, social and professional inequity, and transphobia from close family members, friends, and clergy. In 2015, the National Center for Transgender Equality surveyed nearly 28,000 transgender people about their experiences with discrimination and bias. They found that “26% had lost a job due to bias, 50% were harassed on the job, 20% were evicted or denied housing, and 78% of trans students were harassed or assaulted.”¹ Only 17 states have laws that explicitly include gender identity and/or gender expression in their nondiscrimination policies, which can leave transgender people feeling alone and unwelcome in the wider world.

As an individual’s isolation mounts, their risk of suicidal ideation and death by suicide also grows. The same survey showed that 39% of respondents had faced significant psychological distress in the month prior to completing the survey and 40% of respondents have attempted suicide in their lifetime. For transgender people of color, these risks rise between two to four percentage points. This can be startling news for people outside the trans community, since just 5% of the general U.S. population reports experiencing significant psychological distress and 4.6% having attempted suicide in their lifetime.²

The facts paint a picture of a population in deep need of social, emotional, and spiritual support. But while providing this kind of support to their members has historically been a responsibility of faith communities, many traditions are further isolating their transgender members. This is especially true of the Christian faith. Instead of offering support, many Christian leaders choose to condemn LGBTQ+ people with constrictive theologies based on narrow interpretations of Scripture.

This guide is designed to counter the idea that transgender people cannot be Christians. In fact, many transgender people have very fulfilling and fruitful spiritual lives as followers of Jesus. This guide is meant to support anyone who is and/or loves someone who is transgender. What do I mean by “transgender”? The term “transgender” is an umbrella term for anyone who identifies as a different gender than the one they were assigned at birth. This includes people who identify as nonbinary, genderfluid, and genderqueer, as well as anyone who chooses to have medical intervention involved in their transition. When I refer to “transition,” I mean the process by which transgender people personally and/or publicly affirm their gender. A person’s transition can include changes to their name, pronouns,

1 Information pulled from <https://transequality.org/issues/non-discrimination-laws> and <https://transequality.org/issues/us-trans-survey>.

2 Ibid.

and appearance. There is no one way to transition, nor is there one right way to be transgender.

Whether you identify as transgender or consider yourself a cisgender ally, this guide aims to help you find resources for spiritual comfort and affirmation. Regardless of your church affiliation (or non-affiliation) or your political leanings, there is something in this guide for everyone with ties to the transgender community. Its existence is a sign of hope for trans people seeking comfort in their Christian faith. More than that, it's a sign that more people are hungry for a theological vocabulary that speaks to, for, and through transgender people.

Hopefully, in a few years, this will be a drop in the bucket that is a plethora of Christian resources for trans people. Until then, you have this guide and the sources from which it draws.

This guide is divided into sections, each speaking to a different aspect of spiritual wellness. The first section is dedicated to scriptural and theological affirmation. I will present the common counter-arguments to the passages in scripture anti-trans Christians use most. Then, I will focus on some ways you can read the Bible to affirm the trans identity and experience as a gift from God, with specific scriptural references and theological resources. The second section is dedicated to trans experiences of faith and some examples of what being a fully-affirmed transgender Christian looks like. The third section discusses the importance of community told through the personal stories of transgender people. The final section is a list of resources for you as you move forward. This section categorizes resources for trans people, cisgender allies, and clergy.

Blessings on this part of your journey!



**There is no one way
to transition, nor is
there one right way
to be transgender.**



Scriptural and Theological Affirmation

The debate surrounding LGBTQ people in the church has been a pivotal issue for the last two decades. On one side, there are the traditionalists who hold that being faithful means maintaining a Western-centric, mid-century perspective on what the Bible says about gender and sexuality. On the other side are the revisionists who believe that the texts can be reread to have new meaning. In his book *Bible Gender Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*, James V. Brownson examines traditionalist and revisionist interpretations of the Bible with the goal of “reinvigorating the imagination of the church” in its readings of gender and sexuality in Scripture. He doesn’t start by focusing on particular passages. Instead, he approaches the question by looking at how the two sides think about what the Bible means. Rather than focusing on the words of the texts themselves, he identifies the “moral logic” underlying each side to explore how the two sides arrive at their conclusions about the texts.¹ His approach helps us to place the Bible in its historical context, while giving space for us to examine how the texts apply to us today.

Brownson grounds his interpretations of sexuality in Scripture in the concept of kinship. He describes kinship as:

- a delight in the other;
- a deep desire for gratification and union;
- the attendant call to honor and serve the other in committed bonds of mutuality;
- and a fruitful vision of committed love that overflows in many ways—in procreation, adoption, service to the community, and hospitality to others.²

This view provides us a lens through which we can read the Bible. Though Brownson’s book made no mentions of transgender inclusion specifically, his methods can be applied to find a more gender-expansive view of Scripture.

Scripture

1 Brownson, James V. *Bible, Gender, Sexuality: Reframing the Church's Debate on Same-Sex Relationships*. Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2013, 5.

2 *Ibid.*, 278,

Though there are many references to gender throughout the scriptures, there are relatively few scriptural references that could apply directly to the question of gender variance.³ Why, then, does it seem like biblical references in arguments against trans people are so prevalent? Indeed, anti-trans Christians often base their arguments on specific scriptural passages. Though not necessarily explicitly anti-trans, these verses alone are used to shape an entire worldview in which proponents feel justified in disavowing the very existence of transgender people. We'll take a look at some of these passages and how they have been used against transgender people. Then, we'll dig deeper into those verses, and others: rereading them in ways that affirm who we are, and bringing out instances in which we can recognize ourselves in the biblical narrative.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The Bible is a collection of writings that illustrate how the descendants of Abraham (actual and spiritual) coped with a hostile world. Through slavery and exodus, exile and captivity, war and occupation, the Bible gives us ready examples of individual people defying the odds and of a collective people defining themselves. The Bible carries a rich oral history. Before it was written down, much of its content was likely passed down to younger generations in forms easy enough to commit to memory. Songs, poems, letters, sermons, fables—these are some of the devices used throughout Scripture to make a message memorable. They are what allowed these ideas to endure. Which is to say that the Bible is a living document, in that the text is and has always been in conversation with the lived experiences of its readers. With this in mind, I read the Bible through my own experiences as a queer, binary-identified, transgender man of color.

What follows are interpretations of two passages often used against transgender people. I read these through my knowledge of ancient Christian history, queer theology, political theory, and a deep love of science fiction.⁴ These are my tools for scriptural excavation. I encourage you to identify the tools you apply to the texts.

GENESIS 1:26-27

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So

3 Tanis, Justin. *Trans-Gendered: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003.

4 Science fiction has been my model for imagining a possible future where it's normal for bodies to shift and change in ways that blur the concepts of male and female. Ursula LeGuin's *Left Hand of Darkness*, Octavia Butler's *Patternmaster* series, and Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312* are some of the novels that helped expand my imaginings of the human body in the future. In college, I noticed that many sci-fi novels, movies and TV shows have strong spiritual undertones shaping how people interact with technology (think of the Force in *Star Wars*). I realized that the divine is present in our imaginings of the future regardless of how different it looks from what we think of as spirituality today.

God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (NRSV)

The Creation story culminates in the creation of humankind, in which the concepts of “male” and “female” are established in God’s image. Some choose to read this passage as codifying the categories of the gender binary, choosing to see “male” and “female” as the only two legitimate genders. Proponents of this view see transgender people as out of order with the rest of Creation, either by choice or as a result of original sin.

I READ THE BIBLE THROUGH MY OWN EXPERIENCES AS A QUEER, BINARY-IDENTIFIED, TRANSGENDER MAN OF COLOR.

If you’re coming from a tradition that reads Genesis in this way, accepting a new interpretation will radically shift your interaction with Scripture and the worldviews it can foster. Reinterpreting this passage can seem akin to reinterpreting your entire view of the Bible, since the creation story is so foundational. For this reason, reimagining Genesis will provide a foundation for reimagining our biblical worldview.

Looking closer at this section in context with the rest of the Creation story can give us a more expanded view of gender. Let’s look at the first two verses:

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. (NRSV)

The beginnings of Creation are enshrouded in the possibility of what’s to come. The earth is a “formless void” covered in water and in a darkness unlike anything we have ever known. A wind from God (*Elohim*) sweeps over the surface, preparing to call forth the first thing (light). The dark waters draw the reader in with imagery resembling the inside of a womb. In her book *On the Mystery*, process theologian Catherine Keller writes, “These waters express the widespread myth of a primal chaos, an infinity of unformed and unfathomable potentiality.”⁵ It’s not that the earth was a barren wasteland so much as it was a playground of possibility.

5 Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003).

That the earth was a “formless void” anticipates the variety of form God gives to it in the succeeding verses. Leading up to the creation of humankind, we see God engaged in acts of creation akin to wide brush strokes. From the chaos of the void, God covers the earth with all manner of plant and animal life, complete with every kind of in-between and fluid transition. That nuance is God-given, as it mirrors God’s own image (*imago dei*). We are *imago dei*. Whenever the desire to create roils within, God is speaking through us, telling us to play. Our experience of gender--the balance between the masculine and the feminine in each of us, and the creative ways we explore and express our unique experience of them, and transform our cultural understanding of gender--reflects the fluid and expansive creativity of God.

DEUTERONOMY 22:5

A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the Lord your God. (NRSV)

The book of Deuteronomy is the only book to explicitly forbid cross-dressing. Deuteronomy 22:5 was the script that ran in the back of my mind when I was coming to terms with the fact that my gender didn’t match what I was assigned at birth. I’m not alone in this. The words of the verse are so simple, and it’s given among the binding statutes of the Torah. To resituate this passage in its context, we’re going to have to look at the origin, history, and cultural uses of the book of Deuteronomy as a whole in order to gain some clarity about why Deuteronomy 22:5 exists as it does and what we as modern Christians can do with it.

Deuteronomy is the comprehensive record of the Mosaic Law concluding the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. The Harper Collins Study Bible has this to say:

Deuteronomy is the only part of the Pentateuch to identify itself explicitly and repeatedly as a record of Mosaic Torah (usually translated “law” in the NRSV... Torah in these contexts may be characterized as the inspired, comprehensive “polity” (or “constitution”) that Moses, unable himself to lead Israel across the Jordan, enacts for the people as a normative guide to their corporate existence in the national homeland they are about to occupy.⁶

Here, Deuteronomy is set up as a list of ordinances established by God through Moses for the Israelites to follow as they form an identity. The ordinances explain and expand in great detail the covenantal relationship established at Mount Horeb with the Ten Commandments. What’s written in Deuteronomy arose directly from the context in which the people of Israel occupied the land, as Israel sought to set themselves apart from the surrounding nations. With this in mind, we can think of Deuteronomy as the covenant codifying Israel’s cultural identity. Most of the specific ordinances in Deuteronomy are no

6 Harold Attridge and Society of Biblical Literature, eds., *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2006).

longer observed by Christians-- including the command about “women” and “men’s” clothing. To be clear, the moral themes of Deuteronomy are still revered by Christians: faithfulness to God and caring for strangers. Though the specific legalities laid out in Deuteronomy may have helped Israel live into these principles when they were written, they may not be as relevant to Christians now.

With this in mind, it is important for us to consider whether God is calling modern Christians to adopt practices that set us apart, and if so, which ones. What practices identify us as Christian within our current time and place? One of my favorite hymns is “They Will Know We Are Christians By Our Love,” especially the middle verse. The lyrics are:

*We will work with each other, we will work side by side
We will work with each other, we will work side by side
And we'll guard each one's dignity and save each one's pride
And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
They will know we are Christians by our love.*

What sets Christians apart in our modern context, as in every age, is the call to emulate Jesus in his love and compassion for those oppressed and excluded by those in power. Where discrimination and ridicule are the norm, we see in Jesus an example of compassion for the most marginalized people. Just as Jesus challenged unjust laws to care for those in need, Christians are called to challenge those laws that continue to oppress the most marginalized, especially since the consequences of unjustly applied laws are seen and felt in the bodies of the most marginalized. The church, as the Body of Christ in the world, is meant to carry this work forward in the theology it imparts to new disciples and the work it does as an institution.

Exercises for Theological Development

Here is an exercise I’ve used to help guide me in my development of a personal theology. It is meant to help externalize everything you’ve internalized about the Bible, identifying where you feel those internalizations most, and what you know to be true about God. It works best when done in groups or with a processing partner. Feel free to use any passage; I used Genesis 1:1-31 for the sake of this guide. If you think it will help, give it a try!

1. Grab a piece of paper and turn it so that it’s horizontal.
2. Fold the paper into thirds to make three vertical columns.
3. Label the first column “What I was taught,” the second column “What hurts,” and the third column “What I know to be true about God.”

4. Fold it so that only the first column is showing and write down everything you were taught about the creation story.
5. Now, fold the paper so that only the second column is showing. Write down what hurts have arisen while you were writing down what you were taught. The pain could be emotional, physical, spiritual, mental—whatever you notice after completing the first column.
6. Fold the paper so only the last column shows and write down what you know to be true about creation.
7. Unfold the paper and look at your results. (Take deep breaths.)
8. Circle any consistencies you see between the beliefs across the first and last columns. Cross out the inconsistencies. We want to identify what we were taught that is no longer what we believe to be true.
9. Re-read the creation story while holding the consistencies at the front of your mind. What were you taught that you still believe? Keep track of any recurring pains from column two, making note of any changes. Are there beliefs you still hold which are causing you pain? Are there beliefs you no longer consciously hold which are still causing you pain?
10. Talk about what comes up with a spiritual companion. This could be your best friend, your partner(s), or your cat.
11. Repeat this exercise each week until column two is significantly shorter or until you no longer notice any consistent pangs upon reading those particular verses.
12. What resentments linger in your heart related to being an LGBTQ+ person? How have these blocked your ability to act creative



Life in Community

The road to self-actualization is different for everyone. Choosing to walk that road can lead to challenges, both expected and unexpected. It will also lead to many, many blessings. I found a supportive queer community in my first year as a transfer student at the University of California–Santa Cruz. The Lionel Cantú Queer Center was a ready-made hub for queer life on campus. I just had to plug in. I wasn't identifying as transgender at the time, and was still trying to make sense of my identity as a queer person. At first, I found my home in activist circles that left me feeling spiritually malnourished. In 2008, at a vigil for queer youth who had committed suicide in succession across the country, I found a group of progressive Christians, most of whom were queer-identified. I started going to their Bible study each week and eventually got up the courage to walk through the door of the UCC church down the road from campus. The more I engaged in Christian community, the more connected to God I felt. The more connected to God I felt, the more I felt connected to my innermost self. Eventually, I couldn't continue to hide who I was. I needed to set myself free.

I began transitioning in 2009 when there were precious few resources available for trans men of color. As far as I knew, I was the only black trans man in Santa Cruz (though I was incorrect) and one of a mere handful of trans Christians in the area. I had walked away from a more fundamentalist faith in search of a community I felt could hold all of me with love. At the time, I wasn't ready to admit my transgender identity to myself and did what I could to bury it deep within the recesses of my soul. In place of my true self, depression and anxiety took hold. Base-level, everyday functions took up most of my energy, making engaging with anything else outside of those basic functions a challenge. My emotional shell became impenetrable, and I felt as if my soul was wasting away. I knew I needed to do something, so I started going to a support group at the local LGBTQ center. There, I was introduced to the person who would become my mentor in my early years of transition.

After I'd been attending the support group for a few months, the facilitator moved, and they needed someone to take over the position. I volunteered. It was one of the best decisions I've ever made. The guys in that group were unforgettable and I credit each of them for teaching me something about life in community. A couple of guys would drive 45 minutes from San Jose over a twisting mountain highway to our twice-monthly meetings. Those meetings were the only times they knew they would talk to other trans guys. There was an elderly man who transitioned in his 70s. He would come whenever he could. Guys from the group would check in on him after medical procedures and help him around the house. One man started coming to the group after having lived without disclosing his trans status for 30 years. He transitioned in the 1970s and hadn't really talked about it until he found us. He told us that groups like

ours didn't exist when (and where) he came up. With us, he finally felt like he could be seen.

One night, an unfamiliar person sat in on the meeting without speaking. They looked fearful when they came through the door, and throughout our time, they frequently looked out the window. At the end of the meeting, they stood up and told us that they wished they could transition. That person knew their truth but could not take the steps to realizing it for fear of losing everything. They feared violence at home and harassment in public. They never came to another meeting. I think about them almost daily.

FOR CHURCHES LOOKING TO BE INCLUSIVE OF TRANS PEOPLE, SIMPLE CHANGES ARE A START.

Each person in that group faced their own unique challenges when searching for community. The same is true for many other trans people, especially those in rural and lower-income areas. Finding others who share in the joys and challenges that come with being trans is difficult. Invoking the term “community” assumes that a person has access to spaces where they are likely to find others that they can relate to. For people who don't “pass,” or have appearances that easily fit into socially defined notions of male or female, the search for community can be isolating in a binary, cisnormative world. They face misgendering, harassment, and the fear of violence, even from others in the LGB community. Transphobia can stem even from other queer people, often assumed to be our allies. This sort of rejection hurts the most. On the road to self-actualization, trans people learn that when a church claims to be LGBTQ+ friendly, that often only applies to the L and G. For churches looking to be inclusive of trans people, simple changes are a start, such as having gender-neutral restrooms, the option to write pronouns on name tags, and a commitment to honor pronouns when given.

Faith in Self-Actualization

Wherever your path leads you, finding a solid community in which your spirit can rest is crucial to your survival. Humans cannot survive without support from one another, which makes it even more essential for those of us with marginalized identities to find people in whom we can confide. I am often asked whether it is possible for transgender people to find a supportive church community, to which I give a resounding “Yes!” There are denominations known for being open and affirming, such as the United Church of Christ and the Episcopal Church, which have been grappling with the question of spiritual integration for LGBTQ+ people for decades. You'll find more information on this in the resources section at the end of this guide. This section contains interviews with two trans people living their best lives in supportive Christian communities: M. Shea McGinnis and Monica Cross.

YOU ARE ALREADY IN THE STORY

Shea and I met in 2018 while working on a campaign to protect transgender nondiscrimination protections in Massachusetts. As the two staffers working with religious groups, we found comradery in our shared love of the Bible. Assigned female at birth (AFAB) in Arkansas, Shea began to seriously question his gender identity when he was in seminary. He started identifying as genderqueer and took up they/them pronouns, which were what he wanted at the time. He was serving as an Associate Pastor in a large Presbyterian church. He'd grown up in the Presbyterian denomination and had realized his call to ministry after college, while searching for a way forward professionally during the 2009 recession. He didn't feel particularly called, but his campus minister recognized his gifts. He says of seminary, "I wasn't doing anything better, but quickly realized I couldn't be doing anything better."

Shea's Christian identity is central to his identity as a transgender person. For him, coming into his identity was easier because of his faith. What he saw in the Bible reinforced the validity and joy of the miraculous bodily changes of his transition. He says:

Being Christian helps me be trans. I look at the Bible and see that amazing things are possible. Like, I can't believe in the Trinity without believing we have different modes of being and that it's possible for bodies to cycle through them. I read the Resurrection story and felt a connection. Like it's possible to make myself new.

Indeed, the Gospels also show us how finding closeness to Jesus can help when we are hurting. The stories of healing in John (Jn 4:46-54; 5:1-18; 9:1-12; 11:1-44) portray a Jesus who wants us to be well. He teaches us that faith is a catalyst for our wellness and that our faith will be the thing that can bring us back into a connection with God and with the people around us. In each circumstance, the people healed could not heal themselves on their own. We all need help sometimes. Asking for help is hard, but it's also a part of what keeps connections between people strong.

Community keeps Shea accountable to his values, giving him a sense of purpose. He says:

Christian identity is central to my sense of belonging and purpose, giving me a sense of inner and outer focus, that I am supposed to work for justice. Community holds me accountable and helps me hold on to hope. I feel like there is something I can do.

His support network is small, but mighty. His parents, his partner, his church community, his therapist, and his close-knit groups of friends surround him in love. Still, in our conversation we talked about how difficult it can be to find friends, especially when you move to a new place. Shea hadn't been in Massachusetts for long before he realized he needed to have friends close by. He found an open and affirming church in the United Church of Christ near him and went with his partner. Making friends at

church took a little time, and he still wanted another social activity that wasn't related to church. That's how he got involved with the campaign in which we served together. He started as a volunteer and ended the campaign as the Deputy Faith Director.

The Bible remains a source of inspiration and motivation for Shea. When I asked him what he wants people just starting their transitions to know about reconciling their gender identities with their Christianity, he replied, "You are already in the story. You don't have to be written in." Most of the problems he has had in churches have stemmed from people's assumptions around what is natural about gender and sexuality. (Much of the Church operates within a cisgender and heteronormative paradigm that is considered "natural." For those of us living an experience outside of this paradigm, this assumed normativity is stifling.) Shea has internalized some of the shame and guilt that comes from having grown up with the idea that only cis genders are natural, but he is learning to live in the truth that his transgender experience makes him someone with unique gifts and perspectives to offer the church and the world.

YOU HAVE TO BE REAL

Monica Cross has been sharing her gifts of ministry, education, and activism across the United States for more than a decade. She is a fiercely intelligent Black theologian and Navy veteran with over 20 years of service. She grew up in Los Angeles going to an African Methodist Episcopal church and a Seventh Day Adventist church. She hid who she was until God called her out of hiding. She says:

What I was doing wasn't sustainable. I would go out [as a woman] and have to get up to go to work the next day. And I had a wife and kids. God tapped me and told me to be myself and that people would accept me. I just had to trust it.

She wasn't surprised when she felt more whole as she started to transition full-time into her identity. But she was surprised by how many people in her life took the news well. Her commanding officer told her that he didn't care how she showed up in the morning so long as she showed up ready to serve. She began transitioning while still in the Navy.

Monica has made liberation her mission. She works to bring healing, justice, and hope to other transgender Christians. We met in 2010 at a convening of transgender people in Cleveland, Ohio, gathered with the intent of creating a task force whose purpose was to make the United Church of Christ a more welcoming denomination for transgender people. Monica is the founding minister of the Global Prayer Network. She identifies as a Christian first. She says, "Before identity, before politics, or anything like that, I am a Christian." She leans into her relationship with God, knowing that her thriving depends on her connection to God and to those around her.

Monica talks to her mom regularly and has a therapist and a spiritual director. She checks in with her pastor and her close friends to make sure she is staying true to her call and to herself. She is also in touch with some of her old professors from the Pacific School of Religion. Her network holds her up when the demands of ministry are exhausting her. Each person in her network is someone with whom she can be vulnerable and “real.” Monica’s advice to people just starting to transition is: “You have to be real.” By this, she means being honest about your feelings, boundaries, expectations, and desires. Beloved, you deserve love and fullness of heart. You deserve a chance to thrive, to be seen, and to have your voice heard. You deserve to take up space. The best thing of all is that there are people who will help you grow in all these ways. You might find them through an online message board, a local knitting group, a weekly gaming group, your church, a running club, a writing group—any community that allows you to show up as your whole self. A list of resources follows the exercise that can help start you toward self-acceptance and finding your people.

Exercise

Take some time to reflect on the six questions below. Write your answers in a place you feel safe enough to be vulnerable. If you are more of a verbal processor, record yourself saying the answers aloud as if you are being interviewed.

1. What is your relationship to your Christian identity?
2. What is your relationship to your trans identity?
3. What is the hardest thing about being a transgender member of the Christian faith?
4. In what ways have you witnessed the church being harmful toward transgender people?
5. What’s the most important element of worship for you?
6. What advice do you have for people just starting out on this journey?



Resources

The number of resources for integrating Christian identity and gender identity is beginning to grow. In the 10 years since I transitioned, more trans people have gone public with their own stories of transition, faith, and reconciliation. Below is a list of resources for trans people, those who support trans people, and those wanting to learn to be better allies.

Books

- *Transforming: The Bible and the Lives of Transgender Christians* by Austen Hartke
- *Transfaith: A Transgender Pastoral Resource* by Christina Beardsley, Chris Dowd, and Justin Tanis
- *Beyond a Binary God: A Theology for Trans* Allies* by Tara K. Soughers
- *The Bible and the Transgender Experience* by Linda Tatro Herzer
- *Otherwise Christian: A Guidebook for Transgender Liberation* by Mx. Chris Paige
- *Beautifully and Wonderfully Made: I am Enough* by Cheryl B. Evans
- *Counseling Transgender and Non-Binary Youth: The Essential Guide* by Irwin Krieger
- *Ministry Among God's Queer Folk: LGBT Pastoral Care* by David Kundtz
- *A Brief Guide to Ministry with LGBTQIA Youth* by Cody J. Sanders
- *Retreating Forward: A Spiritual Practice with Transgender Persons* by David Elias Weekley
- *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity* by Fr. James Martin

Websites

- Queertheology.com — Fr. Shay T.L. Kearns and Brian G. Murphy. Home to resources such as the “Inclusive Church Checklist” and “How to Tell If Your Church is Welcoming to Transgender People.”
- OurBibleapp.com — Home to the Our Bible app community. Includes devotionals, chat rooms and podcasts, as well as opportunities to write for and join events hosted by the app.
- Transfaith.info — This organization started off as a web index of all the faith-based, trans-inclusive resources its founder, Chris Paige, could find. It has since evolved into a national network of people dedicated to being the source for trans-affirming religious resources. Check out their “Resource Roundup” page in particular

Podcasts

- *A Tiny Revolution* — Kevin Garcia
- *Queer Theology* — Fr. Shay T.L. Kearns and Brian G. Murphy
- “Rika is on a Gender Journey,” *Queerology E57* — Mathias Roberts
- “Broderick Greer on Liberation,” *Queerology E48* — Mathias Roberts
- *The Life After* — Chuck Parsons and Brandy Hardin. This podcast interviews people who have moved away from Christian Fundamentalism and other oppressive religious movements.

Articles

- *A Christian Curriculum for Gender Justice* — Liam Hooper
- *TransAction: A Trans Curriculum for Churches and Religious Institutions* — Pacific School of Religion
- *Transitioning to Inclusion: A Guide to Welcoming Transgender Children and Their Families in Your Community of Faith* — Pacific School of Religion
- *A Transgender Curriculum for Faith Communities* — Pacific School of Religion
- *Biblical Sexuality and Gender: Renewing Christian Witness to the Gospel* — Pacific School of Religion
- *Transgender Welcome by Bishop Gene Robinson* — The Center for American Progress

Denominational Organizations

- UCC Open and Affirming Coalition (United Church of Christ)
- Reconciling Ministries Network (United Methodist Church)
- More Light Presbyterians (Presbyterian Church USA)
- Dignity USA (Catholic Church)
- Integrity USA (Episcopal Church)



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