

D - Hello?

J - Hello Denise?

D - Yeah.

J - Hi this is Jason Low.

D - Hi how are you?

J - I'm doing well how are you?

D - I'm doing good thank you.

J - Thank you so much for agreeing to help out and I appreciate it a lot.

D - Oh sure anything to help people understand this brokenness, you know, the woundedness.

In a sense when we don't understand them we don't come alongside of others out of fear.

J - Right right. Sure sure. Yeah so maybe I can give you a little bit of a background so you know what this is for. You know, who we're aiming at.

D - Great.

J - So our church, it's a Chinese church with a Mandarin, Cantonese, and English speaking congregations, and so my responsibility in the podcast are for the youth. That's our sixth graders all the way through our college students. And so this episode is gonna be a part, the second part of a three part series on sexuality. Yeah so the first one we did on the topic of God's design for our human sexuality, this second episode we're gonna talk about gender and some of those kinds of issues. And then the last one we'll talk about homosexuality and issues related to that.

D - Ok that sounds wonderful thank you, I'm so glad that you have a heart to help young people understand. It's the generation we need to be seeking

J - Right, right. Ok so we can do this a number of different ways. With the different questions that I've asked. With the podcast, with this episode of the podcast, I want to explore what is gender and talk a little bit about the differentiation that God established at the beginning, but

then also talk about how we understand gender today and how gender gets confused in our culture, and I think I also wanna touch a little bit in the episode on stereotypes. And so you have certain stereotypes of what it means to be manly or masculine or feminine. And how some of these stereotypes, you know, maybe they come out of patterns that are there but maybe some of these stereotypes can be harmful when we think about someone being a man or a woman and saying, "To be a man you have to play sports" or "To be woman you have to play with dolls" and how some of those stereotypes really hurt our ability to think about gender in a healthy way. So that's where I wanna go with the podcast in general. But I think your expertise or your experience interacting with, from your own story but also your experience interacting with people who are struggling with gender dysphoria and those types of issues. I think it will be really valuable to be able to hear from you.

D - Ok thank you.

J - Maybe we can just start with a little bit about your ministry and just some general things about your ministry.

D - Sure. Help for Families has existed since 2004 so we are now officially sixteen years old. We have served countless families and loved ones through the services that we have to offer, the resource that we have, we published books to help bring a better understanding of this to also minister to the families, to also minister to the loved ones that struggle with their gender identity. So we serve families and loved ones, both that are either confused or have a loved one that's even away from the transgender identity as well. So somebody that contacts us is saying, "I've been living the life as a transgender person, but I realize this is not God's factor, this is not the way God would have me live my life." They desire a change in their life through Jesus Christ and so we walk alongside of them as well.

J - Ok. That's great. Sixteen years it's a good amount of time. I know this is not a new issue but it's become a louder issue in recent years and I know your ministry has kind of even preceded some of the discourse that's been going on more recently so I appreciate the longevity of your ministry.

D - Thank you.

J - So how would you describe the philosophy of ministry or the ministry approach that you have at Living Stones or Help for Families?

D - Our ministry approach is to welcome the person, to meet them where they're at. Not to be combative but to really have a caring and listening ear to what they're going through, what their life has brought, and the fact that discipleship. To be there not only for pastoral counseling or pastoral care, but to make disciples which is what the church tells us well. And to stand alongside of them while they're really trying to discuss and get to the root of the heart. You know the issues of the heart. So many times someone has been wounded so deeply as a child or a young person, and so for somebody that would defy sex reassignment surgery or live under the identity as a transgender there is a reason that they're looking to run from the masculinity or femininity role that society will look at as more accepted so they're seeking the issues here at the heart.

J - So if I'm hearing you right, a big part of your approach is understanding and empathy.

D - Yeah, yeah. Exactly. Being a trusted ear and coming alongside in a way that a community comes alongside. Look at the church if somebody walks in that's a prostitute, to have other folks that really care, number one, about what they're going through where they've been in life and love them right where they're at, and so in a sense I'll be your friend, I will be there for you, you know. Invite them out for a cup of coffee, don't be afraid to get to know the person. And so a lot of this is just doing things that we do in church under certain circumstances, but we can allow a

label, if we may say so of transgender that makes us think we have to ■ a whole new biblical way to approach somebody that's hurt

J - Sure sure. That's actually really helpful to think about that it's not so different than what we would do with an average visitor who comes into our community

D - Exactly

J - So you know, when someone comes to you and you've talked with them for a bit and understood where they're coming from, how do you decide or what are some of the possible directions that you might take after that initial exploration?

D - Well we would take it from, more than likely, walking through the grief process because there's been some deep grief in their life and so to walk away from the person that they were created to be, you know, what brought them to that point, where is the center of their pain. And many times, I can't tell you how many times, it's really walking through the pain and sorrows they have, the grief, and in some circumstances, some cases, the regret that they have especially if the person that comes to us and saying that, "I have come to Christ, I'm looking for the port for help. This is not the life that I want to lead. This is not the life God has called me to." to be willing to walk with them through that. Recently working with a female to male, she had stated, "It is like I'm killing the other person." She lived under the identity as a male and so in the process of regaining the life as a woman and the identity as a woman, she's commented on it's like killing, you know there's a male identity, killing that person that she's come to know, to rely on, where she felt safe being. And so it's been walking through that grief of her saying goodbye.

J - So from what you're saying, I get the sense that you walk with the person when they feel some discontent or dissatisfaction with the life that they've been living. So how many of the, I'm assuming that if they have some second thoughts, you encounter a fair number of people who

walk away from their relationship with you and your ministry and go back. Is that a fair thing to say?

D - Yeah, I would say the fair thing is the individual who contacts us and they're looking for affirmation or perhaps, I've had some counseling care calls meetings with them and they decide that that's what they don't want, what we would say scripture based, God's way for their life. It would be that I actually meet them compassionately let them know that I understand and I respect what decision they come to but we will always be here should they decide to come knocking on our door again. They realize that you care, that if you just need to talk to somebody please just pick up the phone. Don't hesitate to give us a call if there's some need that you have at the time.

J - If you gave a rough estimate, how many, what percentage of people that you make contact with end up deciding to walk away?

D - In sixteen years we have had, if I take a very small percentage, I would say maybe two percent, three percent of the people. So the majority of folks that call us they are that committed to God and that committed to the healing so it isn't just to God it's to realize that the folks have met a point in their life that they want healing.

J - Yeah I see. So for those ninety seven, ninety eight percent how long would you say you tend to walk alongside them before your contact with them is complete?

D - I would say anywhere from, the average would honestly be about three to five years. Sometimes you have somebody for a year, just different circumstances, understanding what they have journeyed through and what they've worked through. But the majority of folks I would say the average is about three years, actual care.

J - Ok maybe we can talk a little bit about gender dysphoria. There's a lot of ideas out there about what gender dysphoria is or where it comes from. How would you describe it in terms of what it is and what its origin is and just how we should understand it as Christians.

D - I think that it's, folks would understand that this is when somebody is really emotionally distressed about being in their biological gender that they are in and so if we look at somebody that has anorexia and looks in the mirror and believes they are two hundred pounds when they may weigh seventy five pounds that distress and psychologically how that person feels is the same thing for somebody internally that is a biological male, let's say for an example, that looks in the mirror and has the vision of him being a female and so if we understand that it is a real struggle for these folks. It isn't anything that should be dismissed, or laughed about, or joked about. There's no pain inside the person. Many times someone who identifies as the opposite biological sex has struggled with a real or perceived rejection and struggled with being confident in their God created body and mind. Other situations may involve sexual abuse, personal vows, and when I say personal vows that person has made a decision, for instance if a girl has a mother that's been abused physically or mentally by a male relative, they will look at their mother as the weakened sex. Personal vow, "I will not be like mom, I do not want to be a woman because that means I'm a victim." And so they believe by taking on that more masculine role they would be able to protect themselves and actually many times wanna protect other women from men. There can be an affirmation that the child received. Boys, sometimes a relative dressing them up in girls clothing, and affirming them, "Oh you look so cute, you're so pretty, you make the perfect girl." Or perhaps it was the fact of a boy, a son, gaining the attention of dad and being affirmed over and over again and you have yet that girl desires that so thinking, "If I was a boy dad would give me that, he would give me that attention. I would have that love that my brother has." But these are just some of the reasons the underlying issue.

Some people would say that they became in love with becoming a man or a woman and actually become in love with that image of what they would look like. And what's so sad is that when I hear from individuals or family members where their loved one has had numerous surgeries in trying to become the most complete man or woman. One mom and dad that I've spoken with their son had had twenty six surgeries and he still wants more and so he started to think psychologically how it's not enough in trying to become that perfect looking woman.

J - You know I heard talking a lot about ideas of affirmation or self image and confidence. How would you connect some of these experiences that people have with maybe just a theology of sin and the fallenness in our world?

D - Well in the fallen world we're challenged by our fleshly desires, sin, and also how we decide to deal with pain that creates a fracture in our life. You know sin has distorted us and pain of our way of thinking and believing of ourselves. God is the creator of male and female. When we have a sense we should be someone else it's vital that we discover our identity in Jesus Christ. Some people may ask, "What if God did transgender person?" Well God creates everyone, however we know in Genesis 1:27 God created mankind in his own image and the image God created them, male and female, He created them. Each person is amazingly crafted by the creator, each one is unique and we begin to follow Jesus we find our real self not our distorted self. So many different times people still question and say, "Did God really create?" and my reply to that is we look back in the Garden of Eden when Satan came as a snake before Eve and said, "Did God say you cannot eat the fruit? Did God?" So we begin, if we start to question the authority of the word of God in the beginning it's not going to end just with Genesis we will start to question scripture throughout the Holy Bible. And I think we also need to remember that our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit, where the Holy Spirit lives and gives us boundaries with

our body in life, but we have the option to choose through our free will of how we will either run to or from God in our times of trouble and in our pain.

J - You know when you're talking about the way that God is creating and creating people with a given gender and at the same time you hear conversations out there, even arguments or debates about whether or not something like gender dysphoria, or even an issue like homosexuality, whether it's something that a person chooses or whether they're born with it.

How would respond to that question or debate?

D - Well I don't believe that anybody would willingly just wake up one day, for myself, to say, "I'm really a man." or vice versa for a boy. And I think we have to realize that again this is not, I will not say this is by choice, that this is an alternative way to deal with stuffing down painful events or painful way that one has perceived themselves to be, and so I don't believe that it's by choice, now we make decisions on how we're going to deal with the confusion that we may have and what's important that if we compare what we're questioning, or we're questioning our identity in any way that we look to how God really describes us, which we're wonderfully made, we're fearlessly made and through all that we are a child of God, we're beautiful, a masterpiece, accepted, and we're strong. And so if somebody is questioning their identity that they seek God and seek the word of God, their mind would be transformed to the way of believing who they are or their value of who they are.

J - Shifting a little bit to as a church community how we practically approach the issue but especially how we love those in our community either who are struggling with it themselves or families who are wrestling with this what would you say is most important for us to consider or what do those who are struggling most with gender dysphoria most need from the church?

D - I think it's very beneficial when the church looks at the person who struggles with gender identity as a hurting individual, again not to look under the label that somebody might be



believing that they are or somebody else has put over them, but to recognize that this is an issue of the heart. There's a rejection of who they are and that's happened for a reason and it's our job as Christians to love them, stand alongside of them, and disciple one another, to be there for anyone that's hurting. You got to allow, have someone identify or frighten us away from them, but to be there, to understand sometimes there's an addictive cycle to this as well so somebody that has a heart, understands, and is willing, and is patient to stand alongside of this person and to understand the addictiveness to believing the identity that they believe. The most harmful thing that a church can do is to point them towards the door, which breaks my heart when I hear that happen, and when they believe that, "Ok this person came to Jesus Christ therefore instantly they are healed and changed." I'm not saying miraculously that doesn't happen for some folks, but because of so many layers of pain and what the personality makes up and the individual, not everybody being the same and having the same walk and same circumstances, it's not a light switch. I don't expect the person to turn the light on therefore they come to the Lord and lah lah. You know, Ellen is now Evan, something of that nature. It's gonna be getting your hands down in the dirt and be willing to be in the soil, just as we are with a garden, and to fertilize it and to watch the seeds take root.

J - I know that you've probably had a fair amount of interaction with families, parents, with children who are struggling with gender identity. What advice or wisdom would you share with parents who are wrestling with a child who's struggling with gender identity?

D - I think one of the important things is to have the home be a faith environment for them, where they're able to share with mom and dad how they're feeling, the struggles that they may have to share as well, for the parents to obviously just to remind the child that they love them, because our love does not go away no matter what parent or family is going through. So for the parent to just remind the child, "We love you, we care about you, and we're here for you,

wanna walk alongside of you with this.” To affirm the child in their biological sex. To take time and relationship. Jesus Christ was so relational, and still is with us, so when we take a look at how he demonstrated relationship, if dad working a lot of hours try to cut back a little bit and try to see what your son, what does he like to do, does he like to play the piano go to piano lessons with him. If you daughter likes to play baseball, softball, go to the games with her. They need affirmation in part of who they are and they need to connect with that biological sex parent.

J - One of the things that can be difficult about ministering to or caring for people is that we don't really know what to say or how to talk about it. What would you say about some of the terminology or phrases that are used and how do we share with or come alongside someone in a way that makes them feel affirmed, when we might be saying things where we're unknowingly harming them in how we talk.

D - And a lot of times that is when we get down to the most messy part of somebody identifying as somebody else and that would be affirmation that they're looking for and I think the important thing here is if we are going to respect one another, if it's, whoever it is, to respect, to understand, to go to them privately and say, “I have my different belief and I hope that by that belief system, just because you are asking and sharing how you feel that we can share those thoughts but there is not pressure on me as I would not put pressure on you to affirm something that I don't believe through my faith based perspective of this.” Affirmation is where it can be a slippery slope and an entry way into much more beyond that. Denying your loved one or your friend's to be referred by his or her chosen identity may be the most difficult and heart wrenching decision that family members and friend have to make. It would need to be covered in prayer beforehand for strength and wisdom. Our actions to honor God, it's difficult but necessary for us to do our very best, to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has need not to be ashamed, rightly handling the Word of God. In Proverbs I'd like to share a

proverbs (Prov 1) of Solomon son of David king of Israel for gaining wisdom and instruction, for understanding words of insight, for receiving instruction and prudent behavior, doing what is right and just and fair, for giving prudence to those are simple knowledge and discretion to the young, let the wise listen and add through learning, and let the discerning get guidance but speaking the truth in love. We are to grow up in aspects and to him who is head, Jesus Christ. And what I like about this is where it speaks, "but speaking the truth in love." See the attitude in our heart is sometimes carried sometimes by the tone of our voice and if I would've called, if I would've said to my dad in a mean and resentful way, "I'm not ever calling you Becky!" That's saying the tone of my heart I'm not being compassionate or respecting what I'm saying. The person is possibly hurting over, but I'm showing that caring heart, "I'm sorry I can't call you that and it's not because I'm hurting you, I'm trying not to hurt you, but this is my personal conviction."

J - It's not an obvious path, simple one.

D - No no. This is the most difficult task that I think, anybody has to come to a decision on how they're going to identify the person. And so sometimes family members are able to come up, there's been nickname that their child has. Some other way of this has been kind of a meeting the person without affirming that child.

J - Right right their desire to take on a different identity.

D - Yea exactly and there's so much to that. But we also know in Proverbs 24 verse 4 where it says, "Answer not the fool according to his folly, lest you be like himself." And there's just a lot of wisdom in that, saying somebody's a fool that is identifying in this way, but we need to lovingly come alongside of them. And though we can't take our responsibility or take offense to how somebody else free willingly decides to answer us or react to us, but we can continue to pray for them if they reject the fact that we're asking for them to understand our personal convictions.

J - Earlier I referenced stereotypes and there's a value in our culture these to wipe gender differences and to make man, woman quite the same in as many ways as possible. And that sorta doesn't really fit the distinction that scripture makes between men and women, that there is a difference in the genders, but at the same time some of the differences, maybe that we notice become defining in terms of masculinity or femininity. Can you share maybe a little bit about your perspective on stereotypes and just how you think about them and talk about them with, not necessarily with those who come to you to talk about their gender identity, but just in general?

D - Sure. I think just in general that the rule of thumb or the way culture use to refer or think of women, for instance back in the fifties a stay at home mom, women need to be trained and equipped to do any job a man can do. Just because it's been a man's occupation throughout history doesn't mean that it isn't something a woman can do, vice versa. I remember when myself when I was a young adult and male nurses were the big challenge to culture, because men were always the doctors and women were always the nurses but some men just have that instinct of being very nurturing, very caring for ill people. And to me it's just part of their makeup, their personality. And so I don't believe in that, I have two daughters. Now I have one daughter that had taken dance classes from kindergarten up to high school graduation. It was ballet, dance, tap, jazz. And then my younger daughter that was four years younger than her, one day she had said to me very young, she said, "Mom, I'm not a girly girl like my sister." Now this particular daughter would rather work on cars, learn about cars, shoot with her dad in the backyard, target shoot, and she's still interested in guns, security and all of these different traits that the other one isn't that doesn't make her less feminine than her sister. And so I think for us to say to a girl, "Well you wanna be a police officer, a state trooper, you can. Oh gosh that's more like a man's job." Or for a man to be a nurse, or to work in the office. That doesn't make

him any less than a man. But society or different message can somebody feel like they're less of a man or less than a woman for if they don't, in a sense, equal what somebody else's perspective of them is.

J - Yeah that's good. What would you talk about in terms of what masculinity is or what femininity is or what it means to be a man or a woman if we're moving beyond some of the traditional stereotypes that we've, that have defined the idea for so long?

D - Well I think masculinity, healthy masculinity, is being secure, well for either sex, who are secure in who you are as a man or a woman. For a man to look at it from a biblical approach, to be strong in a way of leading your home, of leading your family, being head of the household, taking responsibility, loving your wife that you love more than yourself, your own life, that's time with your children as a father, to take time for your son to understand what that masculinity role looks like. It can be soft, it can be them, the children, witnessing dad giving mom a hug or a kiss on the cheek, but praising her and her work and who she is and in her own giftedness. For a woman, today more than ever, to be secure in being that woman. Not to allow somebody else to take that identity from you because of who they believe you are or should be, to be confident that you can fulfill the reason God has you here on Earth. That it's not weak to cry, that it doesn't mean you're weak because you have emotion. We're biologically set up differently, men and women, and so for us to see that and respect that to know that it's good. What is man is good, what is woman is good, there isn't one biological sex that's better than the other.

J - I've asked you a lot of questions during our conversation, is there anything that is on your heart, that I haven't brought up, that you think is important for our students to hear?

D - I think above all I would really be blessed if they just hear the fact that folks that are looking for this other identity generally are in a lot of pain and they need a friend they need somebody

that will stand alongside of them, somebody that's trustworthy, and not to be afraid to invest in their lives, but by praying asking the Holy Spirit to lead them in that relationship.

J - I was just thinking Denise you were saying earlier about the idea that people who struggle with gender identity are trying to find a way to deal with some kind of pain or dissatisfaction with some past experience some sense of who they are. Do you think it's fair to say that we all do this in some way, shape, or form but there are just those who choose to deal with it with regard to gender identity whereas others may deal with it in a different way?

D - Oh definitely, you have some that may make the decision to drown their sorrows, to drown what's happened to them in alcohol or drugs, some sexually. And so it's different ways, we stuffed our emotions, we have everything stuffed and there needs to be an outlet, and so if we choose a healthy or unhealthy way for that outlet it needs to be out, so most definitely. We're all broken, there's not any of us that are perfect. I just think this is a deeper sense of somebody that is looking to disconnect who they really are with somebody else. That is for some reason they see as the fix. Fortunately so many times the individual has said, I was just recently talking with a person that has struggled with this for over forty years, and he just said, "I'm tired of this, it is not ■ anything." That's most of a lifetime.

J - So you're saying that this person for forty years lived as the opposite of their biological gender and then when you were talking to them they said that that forty years of doing this wasn't fruitful?

D - Right right, and then to say, "Will God ever forgive me." and God forgives us all but they need to hear that yes. He wants goodness for you, He wants to see fruit in your life, He wants to see you happy and fulfilled. By having that personal relationship with Jesus Christ, that's the fix for all of us.

J - I really appreciate Denise the hour or so you've given to share your thoughts and experience on this.

D - You're welcome.