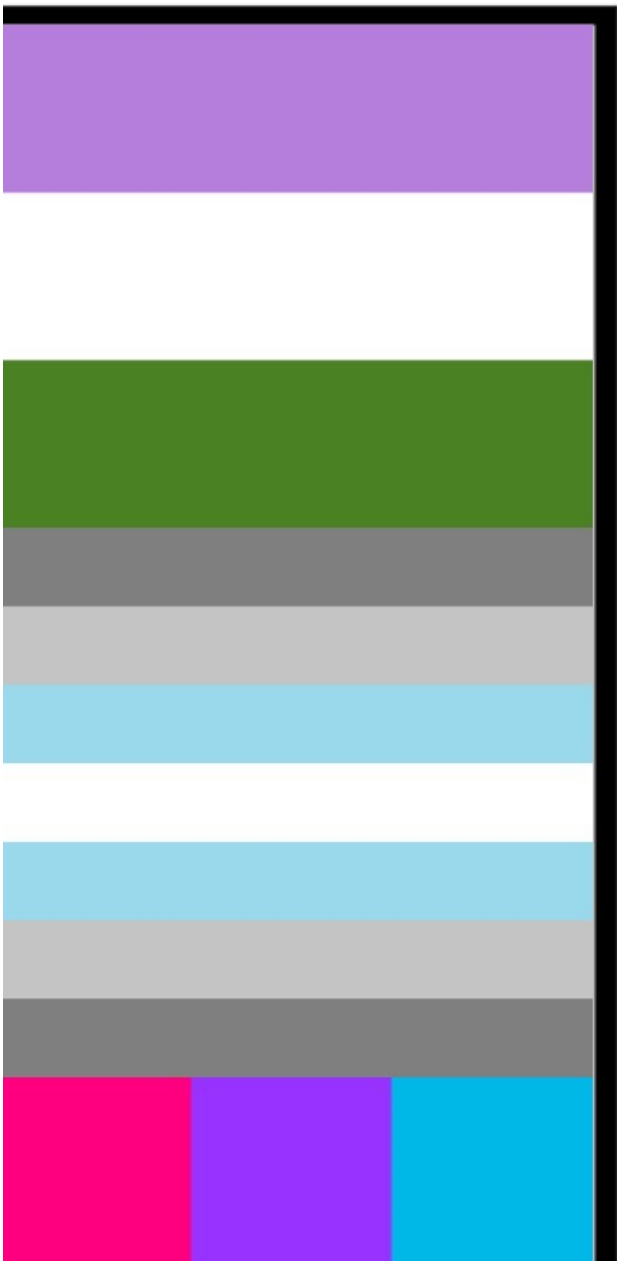




**Glory
to the**



Gender-Bending



God

A devotional

about

Trans

Lives &

Experiences

SCMCANADA.ORG



Introduction

Historically, Christianity has not welcomed transgender and gender nonconforming people or treated them well. In most Christian communities, the existence of trans people is erased, ignored, or met with open hostility. These circumstances can leave trans Christians struggling with their identities—as trans people, and as Christians.

Christians who are hostile to trans people often root their hatred in the Bible. However, the Bible makes no mention of trans people. Some Bible scholars try to show the presence of trans people in the Biblical passages about eunuchs. While a eunuch may have been a third gender category to ancient Israelites, to compare eunuchs to trans people would ignore the cultural connotations that ancient Israelites held with the word “eunuch”. The word “eunuch” cannot simply be translated or substituted by the word “trans”.

Some people have found characteristics associated with trans people in accounts of certain biblical figures—in particular, Eve, who was made from Adam's rib, would have had XY chromosomes and Jesus, the product of a virgin birth, would have had XX chromosomes. However, these theories are speculation, and do not bring the lived experiences of trans people into contact with the text.

Most often, conversations about transgender people and the Bible take a few verses out of context and apply them superficially to trans people. This is the case among both those who wish to affirm and those who wish to condemn trans people. For example, Galatians 3:28 reads “In Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or citizen, male or female.” Taken literally, this verse would mean that upon Baptism, each Christian becomes nonbinary. However, a literal reading disrespects the complex text of the Bible. Similarly, Jeremiah 31:22 reads, “For YHWH has created something new in the world: Woman will encircle man.” To any trans person reading this, this verse is blatantly speaking of a transgender man. However, other readers may understand this as either an analogy of the nation of Israel's relationship with God, or a prediction that Israel will be so safe that men will no longer have to take on the role of protecting woman. Biblical interpretation in any case depends on both perspective and context.

Even though the Bible doesn't mention trans people specifically, many recurring themes are relevant to common experiences of trans people—creation & identity formation, experiences of being an outcast, name changes, struggling against institutions, body regulation & liberation, chosen family, and seeking refuge. This devotional will explore these themes more deeply each day.

A Note About Language

Though most adherents of the Abrahamic traditions use masculine language to refer to God, most agree that God is not solely a male figure. This devotional will therefore alternate the pronouns each day used to refer to God. It will use he/him, she/her, they/them, and zie/zer. It may feel awkward at first to use a traditionally plural pronoun to refer to God, but remember, the Hebrew Bible also uses the word “Elohim” (plural of “El”, the Hebrew word for a god) to refer to God.

This devotional will use he/him pronouns for Jesus because these were the pronouns he used during his time on earth.

All scripture readings come from *The Inclusive Bible*, a translation published in 2007 by the Catholic group Priests for Equality. Some minor changes have been made to make it more trans-inclusive (such as changing phrases like “pregnant women” to “pregnant people”). Some commentary from *The Inclusive Bible* has been used to provide context to the readings.

Terms & Definitions

AFAB (assigned female at birth, adjective): Someone who was presumed female at the time of their birth, usually based on their external genitals.

Agender (Adjective): A person who does not have a gender.

AMAB (assigned male at birth, adjective): Someone who was presumed male at the time of their birth, usually based on their external genitals.

Cisgender (Adjective): A person whose gender matches their sex assigned at birth.

Enby (Noun): the noun form of nonbinary. Nonbinary is to enby as female is to woman.

Gender dysphoria (Noun): Discomfort that a trans person may experience based on "gendered" aspects of their body or how their body is perceived by others.

Gender Expression (Noun): How a person presents their gender through visible factors like their clothing and behaviour. Gender expression may be masculine, feminine, or androgynous.

Gender Nonconforming (Adjective): This term refers to anyone, transgender or cisgender, whose gender identity or expression does not conform to the normative cultural ideas associated with that gender. A cisgender boy who enjoys wearing dresses, for example, would be gender nonconforming.

Intersex (Adjective): A person whose naturally-occurring primary and/or secondary sex characteristics do not match solely those typically associated with women or those typically associated with men.

Nonbinary (Adjective): A person whose gender is neither solely male nor solely female. It may be both male and female, in between male and female, neither male nor female, or a combination of these.

Queer (Adjective): An identity label used to describe either sexual orientation, gender identity, or both. Note: may be considered a slur, particularly by older LGBTQ folks.

Trans (Adjective): An umbrella term for those whose gender identity does not match their sex assigned at birth.

Transfeminine (Adjective): a trans or nonbinary person whose gender and/or gender expression leans more to the feminine end of the spectrum.

Transgender (Adjective): A person whose gender does not match their sex assigned at birth.

Transmasculine (Adjective): A trans or nonbinary person whose gender and/or gender expression leans more to the masculine end of the spectrum.

Two Spirit (Adjective): An identity specific to Indigenous peoples. It may be considered a gender identity, sexuality, spiritual identity, or a mixture of these. Because of the cultural connotations, settlers should not adopt this identity. The meaning of "Two Spirit" may vary from individual to individual, and from Nation to Nation.

Not all people whose gender doesn't match their sex assigned at birth identify as transgender. People identifying with binary genders (either male or female), may not consider themselves transgender anymore once they have transitioned. Nonbinary people may also not consider themselves transgender under the belief that they are not "transgender enough". This devotional will be using the word "trans" to mean anyone whose gender is different from the sex assigned to them at birth. On an individual basis, it is best just to discretely ask people what terms they use to describe themselves.

Order of Service

Each day, you may open the devotional with these words:

- ◆ One: O God, open our lips
- ◆ All: **And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.**
- ◆ One: God is our refuge and our strength.
- ◆ All: **O come, let us worship.**

The **Introduction** piece of each day's devotional provides some background into the issue being explored that day. You may read it in its entirety, or simply read the prayer in bold.

Each day's devotional has one or two **Scripture** readings. If in a group setting, you may choose readers among you to read them aloud.

In lieu of a sermon, this devotional has **Context** and **Reflection & Discussion** sections. If in a group setting, you may have a conversation surrounding these sections. If alone, you may wish to simply take some time to reflect on them. Some of the discussion questions are intended for trans people, some are intended for cisgender people, and some are intended for both.

The **Prayer** section offers some suggestions for people to pray for in relation to the theme. You are welcome to add in prayers at your own discretion.

To close the devotional, you may use these words:

- ◆ One: God of peace, enable us to do your will in every kind of goodness as you work through us, for in you we find wholeness, strength, and affirmation.
- ◆ All: **Amen.**
- ◆ One: Go forth into the world, to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.
- ◆ All: **Thanks be to God!**



Monday: Creation & Identity Formation

Introduction

Coming into one's own identity as a transgender or nonbinary person can be a long and challenging process. When a person realises they are trans, they may feel lost and scared. Our identities may seem to be a mistake or a flaw—far from intentional or God-given. As trans people become comfortable in their identities and begin to come out to others, it may be difficult for family and friends to affirm our identities. We are told that we are confused, mistaken, or wrong. Often, trans children and teens are told that they are “too young to know” or that their gender is simply “a phase” that they will outgrow. These assertions fail to recognise the grace that comes with identity exploration and identity assumption, especially of transitional identities. Instead of being treated as empowering and holy, coming into one's own identity is seen as harmful or even dangerous. **Dear God, you formed us in your image. Help us to become that people that you created us to be, and to support others on their journey of identity formation. Amen.**

The Bible tells us that our identities are purposefully and lovingly bestowed upon us. From humanity's creation as stewards of the earth, to shaping individuals like Moses for specific purposes, God's creation of us as a humanity and as individuals is deeply meaningful and deliberate. Furthermore, God calls us to be co-creators. The first human helped God name creation, while the Hebrew Nazarites engaged in self-creation in order to become closer to God through renouncing wine and keeping uncut hair.

Scripture

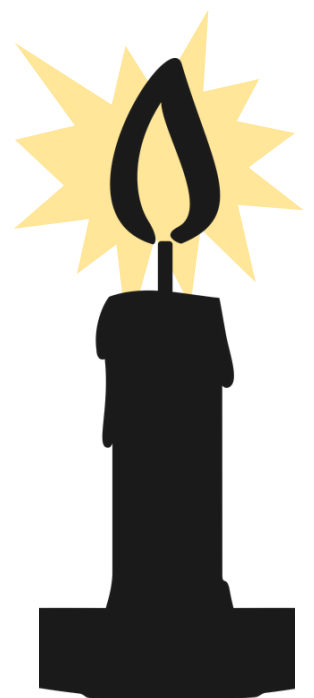
Jeremiah 29:11

I alone know my purpose for you, says YHWH, my purpose for your prosperity and my purpose not to harm you, my purpose to give you hope with a future in it .

Psalms 139:1-14

YHWH, you've searched me,
and you know me.
You know if I am standing or sitting,
you read my thoughts from far away.
Whether I walk or lie down, you are watching;
you are intimate with all of my ways.
A word is not even on my tongue, YHWH,
before you know what it is:
you hem me in, before and behind,
shielding me with your hand.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
a height my mind cannot reach!
Where could I run from your Spirit?
Where could I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you're there;
if I make my bed in Death, you're already there.
I could fly away with wings made of dawn,

or make my home on the far side of
the sea,
but even there your hand will guide
me,
your mighty hand holding me fast.
If I say, “The darkness will hide me,
and night will be my only light,”
even darkness won't be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day –
darkness and light are the same to
you.
You created my inmost being
and stitched me together in the
womb.
For all these mysteries I thank you –
for the wonder of myself,
for the wonder of your works –
My soul knows it well.



Context

→ Ours is a faith of resurrection. Our faith must be free to change and grow if it is to thrive. The identity of Jesus developed over time; The Word took flesh, became human, died, and then rose to new life. Without this process of change, the Christian faith would not exist, or else look very different.

→ God created us to change and grow. This can include parts of our identity that some assume to be static, like our gender. To demand that something must remain static is contrary to God's dynamic world that we can see both in the Bible and in creation.

→ God created us with purpose and intention. We are not born with the ability to follow these purposes, but we are born with the potential to do so. Instead of saying "God created me perfect the way I am", it would be more accurate to say, "God created me with all the necessities to become the person I was meant to be."

→ No matter how unworthy we may feel, there is nowhere we can go and nothing we can do that will separate us from the love of God.



Reflection & Discussion

Think about the growth and identity formation you have undergone throughout your life.

→ What has changed that you believed would stay the same?

→ Which changes to your identity were easiest, and which were difficult?

→ Which changes were deliberate, and which were unexpected or out of your control?

→ How has your perception of gender changed? How has your perception of your own gender changed?

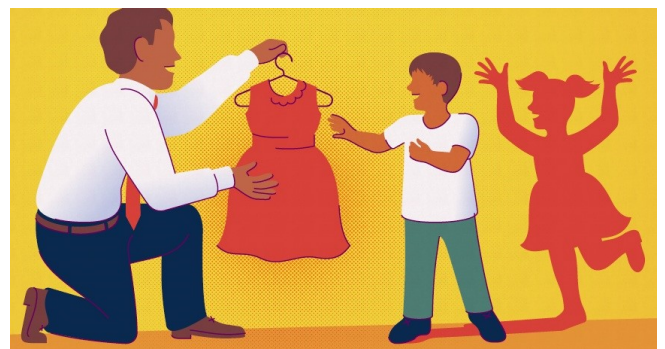
This doesn't have to be your gender identity; it might be your gender expression. (For example, if you were a cisgender girl born in the 1940s your parents probably gave you dresses to wear, but as an adult you may have found pants a lot more comfortable, even though you still identified as female).

→ What impact has God or your faith had in your identity formation?

Prayers

Let us pray for ...

- **People who are currently questioning their gender identity.**
- **Children and youth, that they might be free to explore their gender identity without shame or disapproval.**
- **Trans people who are certain in their identities, but whose identities are not seen as Godly by those around them.**
- **People who believe that being trans is a rejection of God's plan for us, that they might treat trans people with respect and dignity regardless.**



Tuesday:

Open to the Outcasts

Introduction

Trans people were often accepted and celebrated in many societies and cultures around the world prior to colonisation; however during the colonial period, conquering European nations imposed their rigid and binary views of gender onto colonised peoples. Any gender cosmologies that did not fit into the European notion of gender were assimilated, and anyone who did not fit into the European mold of gender was

In recent decades, Indigenous people of North America have been reclaiming “Two Spirit” as an identity. Today, trans people—whether Indigenous or (willing or unwilling) settlers— remain outcasts of society. Unemployment and poverty disproportionately affect trans people, especially transfeminine people of colour. Trans people are seen as abnormal and trans-specific issues are largely ignored.

The New Testament authors make a point to show Jesus interacting positively with those considered outcasts by the dominant culture they were living in. He listened to the opinions of women, socialised with foreigners, ate with tax collectors, and asked for children to be brought to him. Jesus’ acts of welcome to outcasts echo the experience of the Hebrew people as an outcast nation. The Israelites and later the Judeans were occupied and colonised by various foreign rulers, including the Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Macedonians, Ptolemies, and the Romans, with sparse periods of autonomous self-rule. Even so, God claimed this outcast nation as her own. **Dear God, as you chose the outcasts, we know you choose us. Help us to welcome the outcasts as your son Jesus did. Amen.**

Scripture

Luke 8:43–48

In the crowd was a woman who had suffered hemorrhages for twelve years, and had found no one who could heal her. She came up behind Jesus and touched the fringe of his cloak, and immediately the bleeding stopped.

“Who touched me?” Jesus asked.

When no one nearby responded, Peter said, “Rabbi, it’s the crowd pressing around you.”

But Jesus said, “Someone touched me. I felt power leave me.”

When the woman realised that she had been noticed, she approached in fear and knelt before him. She explained in front of the crowd why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed.

Jesus said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace.”

Mark 28:5–10

Then the angel spoke, addressing the women: “Don’t be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus the crucified, who is no longer here. Jesus has been raised, exactly as it was foretold. Come and see the burial place. Then go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus has risen from the dead and now goes ahead of you to Galilee. You will see Jesus there. That is the message I have for you.”

The women hurried away from the tomb with awe and great joy and ran to carry the good news to the disciples.

Suddenly, Jesus stood before them and said, “Shalom!” The women came up, embraced Jesus’ feet and worshiped.

At this, Jesus said, “Don’t be afraid! Go tell the disciples to go to Galilee, where they will see me.”

Context

→ During Jesus's lifetime, in Judea, menstruation was thought to make a person "unclean", meaning that anything or anyone the menstruating person touched would also become "unclean". The woman who touched Jesus had been considered "unclean" and was therefore ostracised by society for twelve years. According to the laws of the land, coming into contact with Jesus (even by his cloak) may very well have made him "unclean" until the evening. Any other person might have been angry at the woman, but Jesus blesses her instead.

→ We know that women were considered lesser than men in Judea in the first century BCE. The gospel account of the Feeding of the Five Thousand only numbers men who were present, with women and children mentioned as an afterthought, implying that their presence was not part of the miracle. Regardless of attitudes towards women during this era, Jesus chose women to be the first to know of his resurrection and the first to whom he appeared after his resurrection. The angel and Jesus also gives the women a task which would shape Christianity for the next two thousand years: Go and spread the good news. Without Mary Magdalene and the other women, the news of Christ's resurrection would have been forgotten in the tomb. Women, who would have been disregarded by their society, suddenly became essential to Christ's ministry.

Reflection & Discussion

In a perfect world ...



Think about those who are ostracized in your social and cultural context.

→ Have you ever felt like an outsider? In what context? How did it affect you?

→ In ancient Israel, people were ostracized due to "uncleanliness". People became unclean from things within their control (like eating or touching unclean things) and from things outside of their control (like menstruating, giving birth, or contracting a disease). How do we decide today who is ostracized? Do we base it on things within others' control, outside of their control, or a bit of both?

→ How does intersectionality aggravate ostracization? (For example, being both homeless and transgender).

→ How has your church or denomination caused ostracization? What has it done to combat it?

Prayers

Let us pray for ...

- **Trans people who are ostracized and discriminated against in employment, schooling, and housing.**
- **Trans people who feel excluded from those around them, whether this exclusion occurs deliberately or unintentionally.**
- **Faith communities, that they work to welcome outsiders in, especially trans people who have historically been excluded or had their identities denied by faith communities.**
- **Trans and nonbinary people who do not necessarily feel safe or included in LGBTQ+ spaces, especially trans people of colour, Indigenous trans/Two Spirit folks, and trans people with disabilities.**

Wednesday: The Power of a Name

Introduction

We typically associate most names with a particular gender. Because of this, trans and nonbinary people often choose a different name than the one they were given at birth. They may refer to the name given to them at birth as their “dead” name. Changing a name, especially for trans and nonbinary people, can be a long and barrier-ridden process. Depending on the laws of the jurisdiction, changing the legal name of a trans or nonbinary person can involve hefty fees and a team of willing professionals, which might include doctors, lawyers, and/or psychologists. Even changing a name socially rather than legally can be a frustrating process as family and friends adjust to new language. **God, we know that you call us each by name—not necessarily the name on our birth certificates or ID cards—but the name that we claim as our own. Help us to recognise the grace and power of each others’ names, be they given or chosen. Amen.**

From Sarai to Sarah and Simon to Peter, name changes occur frequently in scripture. Sometimes, these changes occur to renew a covenant (as with Abraham), recognise a vocation (as with Peter), or an accomplishment (as with Israel). Sometimes, these changes occur gradually, as if the Bible is trying to get used to the language that it has established. Other times, the change is instantaneous, and the “dead” name is never mentioned again. Meanings in names—whether of places or of people—are frequently mentioned in the Bible too.

Scripture

Exodus 3:13–15

“But,” Moses said, “when I go to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ if they ask me, ‘What is this god’s name?’ what am I to tell them?”

God replied, “I AM AS I AM. This is what you will tell the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

God spoke further to Moses: “Tell the children of Israel: God, the ‘I AM,’ the God of your ancestors, the God of Sarah and Abraham, of Rebecca and Isaac, of Leah and Rachel and Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my Name, forever; this is the name you are to remember for all generations.”

Genesis 32:22–29

In the course of the night, Jacob arose, took the entire caravan, and crossed the ford of the Yabbok River. After Jacob had crossed with all his possessions, he returned to the camp, and he was completely alone.

And there, someone wrestled with Jacob until the first light of dawn. ²⁵Seeing that Jacob could not be overpowered, the other struck Jacob at the socket of the hip, and the hip was dislocated as they wrestled.

Then Jacob’s contender said, “Let me go, for day is breaking.”

Jacob answered, “I will not let you go until you bless me.”

“What is your name?” the other asked.

“Jacob,” he answered.

The other said, “Your name will no longer be called ‘Jacob,’ or ‘Heel-Grabber,’ but ‘Israel’ – ‘Overcomer of God’ – because you have wrestled with both God and mortals, and you have prevailed.”

Then Jacob asked “Now tell me your name, I beg you.”

The other said, “Why do you ask me my name?” – and blessed Jacob there.

Context

→ In the ancient Near East, knowing someone's name meant knowing a person's true essence, but it also meant that you could exert power over them. The true name of God is represented by the four consonants YHWH. The phrase, "I am as I am" is alternatively translated as "I am who I am". This phrase also indicates the role that God played in creation (as in, "I am the one who brought things into being", as well as God's presence for their people (as in, "I will be there"). The revelation of this phrase gave Moses insight into the true essence of God, but not power over them.

→ While returning to his homeland, Israel had an identity-altering experience which resulted in his adoption of a new name. The name "Israel" – rather than the name his parents gave him—becomes the name of the nation founded by Israel's descendants. The name that resulted from Israel's experiences takes precedence over the one he was given at birth.



Reflection & Discussion

Think about your name. If your legal name is different from your real (chosen) name, think about your real name.

- If your parents, a relative, or someone else gave you your name, what do you like about it? Did you go through a process of "growing into" it? Have you ever thought of changing it to something else?
- If you chose your name yourself, what kind of process did you have to go through to claim it? Was the process short or long and drawn out? Did you have a period of trial and error where you tried out different names? How and when did you know your name was yours?
- Some people know they don't want to keep the name they were given at birth but don't yet know which name to claim for themselves. If you are one of these people, think about how you feel in this transitional space. Are you scared, or relieved? Who do you trust to confide in or guide you in your process of claiming a name?

Prayers

Let us pray for ...

- **Trans people around the world who cannot use their chosen name for fear of retribution, or whose chosen names are ignored by loved ones.**
- **Trans people facing barriers to legal name changes.**
- **People struggling to adjust to their trans family and friends' new names.**
- **People who fail to recognise the sanctity of trans people's chosen names.**



Sacred

(So please respect it)

Thursday:

Struggling Against Institutions

Introduction

Trans people often struggle to have their names, gender, or even their basic human dignity recognised by institutions. Governmental institutions—where transgender people are not criminalised—often create significant barriers for legal gender changes, including mandatory sterilisation in many European countries. Other laws make the public lives of trans people more difficult, such as the infamous “bathroom bills” used to restrict the access of trans people to washrooms in many U.S. jurisdictions. Even when laws against trans people do not exist, organisations and institutions often create policies resulting in the same discrimination.

A common theme in the Hebrew Bible is struggling against conquering nations. When Moses stood against Pharaoh, when Esther risked her life to seek intervention with the King of Persia on behalf of her people, they were struggling against powerful institutions. In the New Testament, Jesus struggled against the religious authorities. **Dear God, we know that you are greater than any human institution—even those that claim to represent you—and that you are present with those who are affected by unjust laws and policies. Help us to oppose institutionalised discrimination against transgender people, wherever it may occur. Amen.**

Scripture

Daniel 3:16–22;49

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied to Nebuchadnezzar, “Great Ruler, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If you throw us into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to overcome the blaze and rescue us from your hand. But even if God does not rescue us, we want you to know, Great Ruler, that we will not serve your Gods or worship the image of God that you set up.”

Nebuchadnezzar fumed in anger at what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had told him, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual and commanded several of the strongest soldiers in the army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and throw them in the blazing furnace. Wearing their trousers, shirts, headdresses, and other clothes, they were tied up and thrown into the furnace. Because Nebuchadnezzar’s order was so urgent and the fire was so hot, those who were carrying the three of them were killed as they approached the flames, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego fell headlong into the blazing furnace.

But the angel of YHWH came down into the furnace, and stood beside Azariah and his friends. The angel drove the flames away from them, and blew toward them in the heart of the furnace a breeze as cool as the air after a rain shower, so the fire didn’t touch them or hurt them in any way.

Mark 11:15–18

Then they went on to Jerusalem. Jesus entered the Temple and began driving out those engaged in selling and buying. He overturned the money changers’ tables and the stalls of those selling doves; moreover, he would not permit anyone to carry goods through the Temple area.

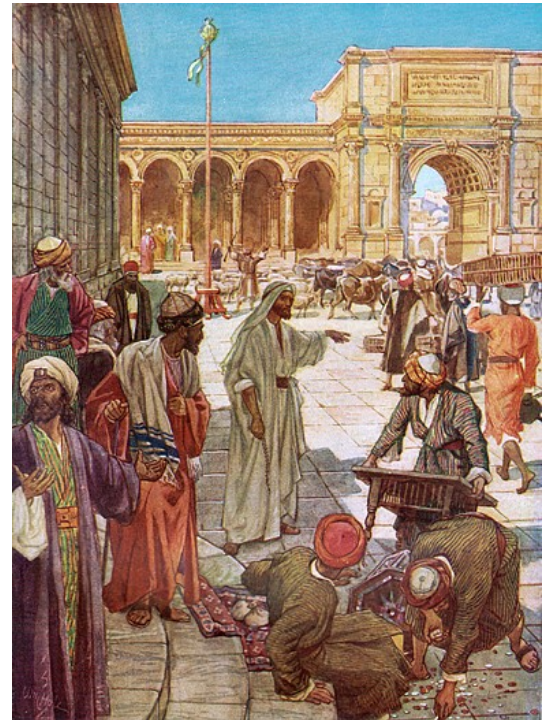
Then he began to teach them: “Doesn’t scripture say, “My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples? But you have turned it into a den of thieves!”

The chief priests and the religious scholars heard about this and began looking for a way to destroy him.

Context

→ By policy, ancient Babylon dispersed conquered nations. This made it easier to assimilate them into the dominant culture and religion. When ancient Israel was no exception, and they were exiled in Babylon for around 70 years until Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon and allowed the Israelites to return. During their years of exile, the Babylonian authorities tried to assimilate the Israelites. For the Babylonians, the Israelite identity was an obstacle, not a sacred part of personhood.

→ Jesus clashed with the authorities of his nation, but his struggle was for his own people—the impoverished, the unwanted, and those denied power.



Reflection & Discussion

Think about the times you interact with institutions.

→ How much do you know about the policies and laws of your work, school, and government and how they affect the lives and wellbeing of trans people? Is information on them easy to access, or impossible to find? Are the policies easy to change, or difficult?

→ What would you do if your work, school, or government created policies or laws that banned you from the washroom you felt safest using, prohibited you and others from using your real name, or refused to issue you ID with the correct gender marker on it? How would you feel?

→ How can you work to change the unjust laws and policies towards transgender people that are upheld by institutions? Where institutions have affirming policies and laws, how can you make sure they are respected?

→ If you are a trans person, how do you know when you need to take a break from struggling against institutions? What things do you do to unwind? Who can you turn to for support?

Prayers

Let us pray for ...

- **Trans people throughout the world who are criminalised because of their gender identity.**
- **Trans people who are discriminated against through institutional regulations.**
- **Nonbinary people, whose gender is not considered a valid option in almost all governments around the world.**
- **Trans people and their allies who are currently working to undo discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, as well as the trans people who struggled against institutions before us without seeing the result.**
- **Institutions that discriminate against trans people—whether deliberately or unintentionally—that they may work to reform their policies to make their institution safe and affirming.**

Friday: Christ's Body & Trans Bodies

Introduction

The bodies of trans and nonbinary people are often disparaged and regulated. Trans people may be subjected to invasive questions about hormones, surgery, and their genitals. Many jurisdictions force trans people to provide proof of gender confirming surgery before having their gender legally recognised, or require that trans people take hormones before approving them for gender confirming surgery. Nonbinary people face scrutiny over their identities on the assumption that there is no body that “matches” their gender. This ignores the existence of intersex, and insists on attaching the words “male” and “female” to particular body types, even though this is a human construct. Trans also people often struggle with dysphoria. **Dear God, as you resurrected Christ's body, help us to appreciate the resurrecting power that living authentically—whether through surgery, hormones, or other changes to appearance—can have for trans people. Amen.**

Religions in the ancient Near East were concerned with purity, taking the form of regulating sexual activity, diet, physical contact with objects considered “unclean”, such as corpses. The religion of the ancient Israelites was no different. However, both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament point to the primacy of the soul or spirit. Our bodies were made from common clay, but our soul is the breath of God. It is not that our bodies are unimportant or that we shouldn't take care of them; rather, our souls take precedence in determining who God intended us to be rather than the genitals we happen to have.

Scripture

1 Samuel 16:7

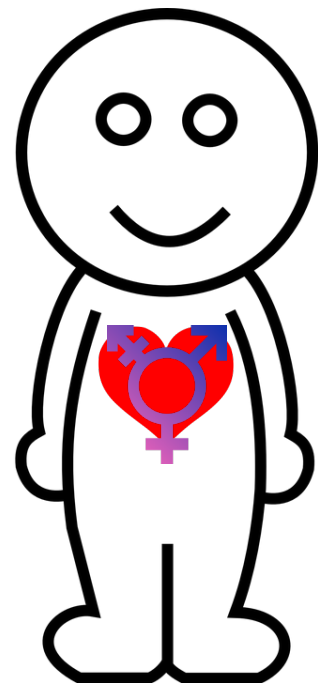
But YHWH said to Samuel, “Pay no attention to appearance and height; I have rejected him. YHWH does not see as mortals see; mortals see only appearances but YHWH sees into the heart.”

1 Corinthians 12:12–21

The body is one, even though it has many parts; all the parts – many though they are – comprise a single body. And so it is with Christ. It was by one Spirit that all of us, whether we are Jews or Greeks, slaves or citizens, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit. And that Body is not one part; it is many.

If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” does that make it any less a part of the body? ¹⁶If the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” would that make it any less a part of the body? If the body were all eye, what would happen to our hearing? If it were all ear, what would happen to our sense of smell? Instead of that, God put all the different parts into one body on purpose. If all the parts were alike, where would the body be?

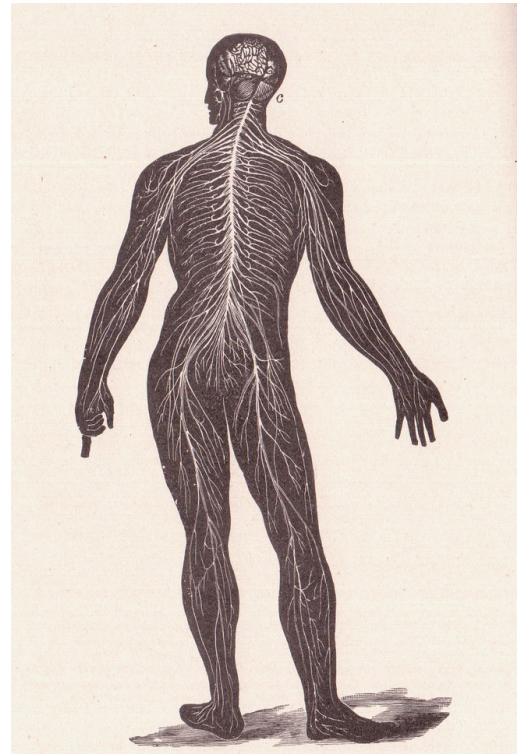
They are, indeed, many different members but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I do not need you,” any more than the head can say to the feet, “I do not need you.”



Context

→ God ignored human qualifications when selecting David to rule after Saul. David may have been the youngest, but God saw beyond his birth order and outward appearance. God does not rely on first impressions of us because she already know us, and she knows that our inner self is more important than our fragile bodies, including our gender.

→ Paul's analogy compares the Body of Christ to the body of the church. This is not a lesson about the bodies of individuals, but of the functioning of a community that respects diversity in individual membership. Many communities in Christ may consider trans members unnecessary or unworthy, but Paul says to be open to the gifts that diversity brings. It is not within our capacity to say whether certain people belong in the Body of Christ and which do not; rather, being baptized into the Body of Christ is radical inclusion.



Reflection & Discussion



Think about your own appearance and the way you appear to others.

→ How does the way you dress, the way you behave, or other pieces of your appearance reflect who you are?

→ Have you ever changed the way you present yourself in a way that made you feel uncomfortable for your own safety or to make someone else happy?

Think about a recent first impression you had of someone.

→ Did you make assumptions about this person (gender, wealth, importance, education level, age, etc.) based on their appearance?

→ Did you treat this person differently based on their appearance? How so?

Prayers

Let us pray for ...

- **Trans and nonbinary people who want to take hormones and/or have gender confirming surgery, but cannot because of the costs or pre-existing medical conditions.**
- **Trans people who are struggling with dysphoria or who are misgendered because of their appearance.**
- **Trans people who do not want to take hormones or have surgery, that their identities and choices are respected.**
- **The communities of the Body of Christ, that they remain open to all who wish to be a part of it.**

Saturday:

Chosen Family

Introduction

Coming out as transgender to family, especially for trans youth, can be a daunting prospect. Even if trans teens or young adults are not told to leave home, unaccepting parents and family members can make life at home unbearable, causing pressure for them to leave home all the same. These pressures have resulted in staggering statistics—possibly as many as 2 in 5 homeless youth are LGBTQ.

As trans and nonbinary people recover from rejection, many find that they have to rebuild family from scratch. Through surrounding themselves with affirming friends, partners, communities, and connecting to other LGBTQ people online or at events, trans people begin to create a new, chosen family. This allows them to leave behind toxic relationships in favour of healthy ones. These families may not always be legally recognised, but they are intrinsic to the health and wellbeing of trans and nonbinary individuals. **God, help us to see the love within chosen families so that we may celebrate them alongside traditional families. Amen.**

The Bible often stresses the importance of producing genetic children, especially sons. However, the Bible is also full of nontraditional family structures. In many cases, children are raised by people who are not parents or family members. Esther was raised by her cousin Mordecai, Samuel was raised by the priest Eli, and Jesus himself was raised by Joseph (technically his step-father). The Bible also demonstrates strong friendships. In particular, Jesus was close to his Apostles, who he chose to be with the night before his death.

Scripture

Psalms 27:10

Even if my own parents reject me, you, YHWH, will accept me.

Ruth 1:11–17

But Naomi said to them, “Go back, my daughters. Why do you want to come with me? I have no more sons inside me that you can take as spouses. No, you must go back, my daughters. I am too old to marry again. Even if I told you that there was still hope for me, if I were to find a spouse and have children tonight, would you be willing to wait until they are grown to marry them? Would you refuse to remarry for this far-off hope? No, if you did that, it would tear me apart, for the hand of the Most High has been raised against me.”

And once more they wept loudly. Then Orpah kissed Naomi and returned to her people. But Ruth stayed by her side.

Naomi said to Ruth, “Look, your sister-in-law has returned to her people and to the god of her ancestors. You too must go. Follow your sister-in-law.”

But Ruth said to her, “Please don’t ask me to leave you and turn away from your company. I swear to you:

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge.
Your people will be my people,
and your God, my God.
Where you die, I’ll die there too
and I will be buried there beside you.
I swear – may YHWH be my witness and judge –
that not even death will keep us apart.”



Context

→ Often, God's love is compared to a parent's love, or the Christian community is compared to a family. For trans people who have been rejected by their parents or faith community, these comparisons are not exactly a comfort. Phrases like "sisters and brothers in Christ" can feel particularly exclusionary to nonbinary people. Psalm 27 reveals that the perception of God as a parent is not entirely accurate. The writer finds themselves persecuted, surrounded by enemies, and rejected by the parents they believed could not reject them—yet they are still able to find sanctuary in God. God's love is more steadfast than any human relationship.

→ After the death of her sons, Naomi's daughters-in-law had no legal obligation to stay with their ageing mother-in-law. Their marriages had not produced any grandchildren for Naomi, so any culturally-accepted or legal relationship ties they might have had were voided. Because they had lived together for ten years, however, their now "unofficial" bonds to each other were still strong. Ruth refused to leave Naomi, renouncing her biological family—her people—for Naomi's. In this way, Naomi becomes her chosen family.



Reflection & Discussion

Think about the relationships in your life.

→ Are there people you consider family, even if you aren't biologically or legally related? For example, many people grew up calling a close friend of their parents "auntie" or "uncle". How do you perceive this relationship? How do others perceive it?

→ Are there relationships in your life that you struggle to adequately name? Are there barriers due to gender? (Such as a lack of a gender-neutral alternative to aunt/uncle)? Are these barriers due to language? (Such as having no word to describe people who take care of you, but who are not biologically or legally related). Are these barriers cultural? (Such as having a word to describe the relationship in your first language, but no equivalent in another language).

→ How do we prioritize our relationships, and why? Do we "owe" something to those we are in relationship with? Do we "owe" more to those we have legal or biological ties to? How might this be different for estranged family members?

Prayers

Let us pray for ...

- **Trans youth whose parents have told them to leave home, causing them to become homeless or in a perilously housed.**
- **Trans people who are lonely or isolated.**
- **Trans people whose chosen families do not have the same rights and legal recognition as biological families**
- **Organisations that provide support to trans youth, their parents, and nontraditional families**

"This is my family. I found it all on my own. It's little and broken, but still good. Yeah, still good."

- Lilo & Stitch

Sunday:

Refuge

Introduction

Many trans people do not feel safe in their daily lives. Judgemental stares, verbal harassment, sexual abuse, or physical assault are all issues that many trans and nonbinary people experience regularly. Trans-feminine people of colour are particularly vulnerable. Harassment can occur in many places—at work, at school, at church, out in public, on transit, in washrooms, or in change rooms. Therefore, trans people need safe spaces where they can receive support and unwind.

The Bible offers many different names establish God as a source of refuge. Zie is described as a rock, a stronghold, and a shield, a protector from the violence of enemies, a relief from oppressors, and a defense against slanderers. Many biblical figures who find themselves in desperate situations turn to God for comfort. When Jesus knew his death was near, he retreated to Gethsemane to pray to God his Parent. **God, we pray that those in need of safety, refuge, and comfort may find this in you and in those through whom you work. May we ourselves have recognise the need for comfort among others, and work to provide a safe space for vulnerable people wherever we may be. Amen.**

Scripture

1 Samuel 2:1-10

Then Hannah prayed:
My heart delights in YHWH,
to YHWH I lift my horn high.
I gloat over my foes,
I rejoice in your deliverance!
There is no one holier than you.
No one is holier than YHWH;
there is no Rock like YHWH.
All bragging must cease.
Boastful arrogance must come to an end.
For YHWH is all-knowing,
and weighs all mortal deeds.
The bows of warriors are broken,
While those who stumble gain renewed strength.
Those who had their fill now sell themselves for crusts of bread
while those who were hungry are sated.
Childless people bear seven children
While parents of many are forsaken.
It is YHWH who deals out both life and death;
it is YHWH who casts down to Sheol, and raises up again.
It is YHWH who makes both the poor and the wealthy.
It is YHWH who both humbles and exalts.
YHWH lifts the weak from the refuse dump

and raises the poor from the cesspool,
to place them among the mighty,
and promotes them to seats of honour.
The foundations of the earth belong to YHWH,
and YHWH sets the world upon them.
YHWH lights the ways of the just
and delivers the evildoer to darkness.
It is not by strength that the just prevail:
it is YHWH who shatters foes.
The Most High thunders against them in the skies;
YHWH judges the ends of the earth
YHWH will endow the ruler with strength
and exalt the head of the anointed one.”

1 Peter 5:7-11

Cast all your cares on God, who cares for you. Be sober. Be watchful. For your adversary the Devil roams about like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Stand up to the Devil as one strong in faith, fortified with the knowledge that your siblings throughout the world share the same afflictions.

But the God of all grace, who called you to eternal glory through Jesus Christ, will fulfill, restore, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered a little while. To God be glory and dominion forever and ever! Amen.

Context

→ Hannah was constantly tormented by her husband's other wife because she was childless. She prayed to God out of desperation, and God blesses her with a child. She returns to pray and rejoices in God. Hannah's prayers are an example in the Bible where someone prays spontaneously and intimately to God—a practice so abnormal in this time that the priest Eli believes she is drunk. Her prayers were not out of obligation, but came from an inability to bear the emotions she carried. In God, she was able to find not only an answer to her prayers, but strength and joy. Mary's song in the Luke is a close twin to Hannah's prayer.

→ Monotheistic Christianity in the 1st–3rd centuries CE seriously clashed with Roman Pantheism, where subjects were required to recognise the divinity of the Roman Emperor. Persecuted early Christians were not safe. Many sought refuge in God and in their Christian communities. When Peter said that God will strengthen us after we have suffered only a short time, he was likely speaking of the second coming of Christ—early Christians believed this would occur soon, if not during their lifetime. Today, very few people believe that the second coming will happen during their lifetime, so we reconsider this verse to mean that God is with us in the midst of our suffering, and offers us strength and support throughout.



Reflection & Discussion

Take a moment to think about a space where you felt anxious, unsafe, or unwelcome.

→ What about this space made you feel this way?

What could have been done to change it?

→ How can we make it easier for God to work through us in spaces like these?

Take a moment to think about a space where you felt safe, affirmed, and loved.

→ What about this space made you feel this way?

What can be done to replicate it for others?

→ How can we allow God to work through us to create spaces like these?

Prayers

Let us pray for ...

- Trans people in need of refuge, solace, security, and affirmation.
- Trans and nonbinary people who feel abandoned by God, that they may find comfort.
- Those who make it more difficult for trans people to access God, that they might learn to remove barriers rather than create them.



References & Resources

- On the SCM website:
Tips for a Trans-Affirming Church: <http://scmcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Tips-for-a-Trans-Affirming-Church-PDF.pdf>
Queer Christian Resources: <http://scmcanada.org/queer-resources/>
- Priests for Equality (2007). *The Inclusive Bible*. UK: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, INC.
- Labelle, Sophie. *Assigned Male Comics* (Comics created by a trans woman about trans experiences): <https://www.facebook.com/assignedmale/>
- The Canadian Centre for Gender + Sexual Diversity: <http://ccgsd-ccdgs.org/>

What is SCM?

The Student Christian Movement (SCM) of Canada is a youth- and student-led grassroots network passionate about social justice, community in diversity, and radical faith in action.

As a radical ecumenical movement, we welcome all at our table, regardless of belief, sexual orientation, faith tradition, and age. Together, we take action for social justice, engage in progressive spiritual and faith activism, and seek to foster community in diversity. We work to be a prophetic voice for justice in our world.

We are based in autonomous student communities, which we call Local Units across the country. SCM Canada is one of more than 100 affiliated movements in the World Student Christian Federation. We are part of the global ecumenical (Christian Unity) movement.

