



## Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

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### How Shall We Reach Them? A Path for Ministering to the Sexually Broken, Abused, Disfigured, and Confused

#### I. Introduction:

Owen Strachan has identified four major challenges the church faces today in its sexual ethics: feminism, postmarital sexual libertinism, transgenderism, and homosexuality.<sup>1</sup> Each one of these opens a flood-gate of potential counseling issues that need to be addressed with clarity and care for the church. Added to this are the many complexities of sexual abuse.

#### A. Defining Common Terms (as used by the counselee):

1. “Sexually”—This adverb frames the other terms below because the counselee connects their brokenness, abuse, disfigurement, or confusion with something sexual in nature, whether real, like abuse, or perceived, like emotions.
2. “Broken”—“I was born with the wrong sexual equipment; I was born broken. Did God make me this way?”
3. “Abused”—“Since I was sexually abused by a family member, I’m not sure I can ever enjoy a normal relationship with my spouse.”<sup>2</sup>
4. “Disfigured”—After four years of identifying as a man and nearly two years of looking like one, one woman reverted to her original gender. But the damage had already been done. This woman had taken testosterone for years, and she had had her breasts removed. Even after detransitioning, her voice remains deep, she continues to have a beard, and her chest will never grow back. “Strangers think I’m a man a lot of the time,” she admitted.<sup>3</sup>
5. “Confused”—“I’m not sure who I am because of what has happened to me and what I’ve done to myself.”

#### B. Today’s counsees are more exposed to “cultural confusion”

All of these are on display in the sad and on-going story of Jazz Jennings. Jennings, the 19-year-old male who identifies as a girl and has been a transgender celebrity since 2007, he recently shared a picture of his scars from transgender surgery on his Instagram account. He took pride in what he called his “battle

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind* (Ross-shire, Great Britain, 2019), 202.

<sup>2</sup> See Sue Nicewander and Maria Brookins, *Treasure in the Ashes: Our Journey Home from the Ruins of Sexual Abuse* (Wapwallopen, Pennsylvania: Shepherd Press, 2018). The authors describe how “being sexually abused, especially as a child, can bind us to lies and confuse our God-given design and desire for affection and love.”

<sup>3</sup> Tyler O’Neil, “Woman Who Thought She Was a Man on Transgender Treatment: ‘It’s Not a Cure at All,’” *Pjmedia.Com*, 3 October 2017, <https://pjmedia.com/parenting/tyler-o-neil/2017/10/03/woman-who-thought-she-was-a-man-on-transgender-treatment-its-not-a-cure-at-all-n113151>.



## Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

---

wounds.” His mother encouraged this mutilation of his body, saying his scars are “beautiful.” In an Instagram post, Jennings said, “These are my scars on full display in 2019, I’m proud of my scars and love my body just the way it is. I call them my battle wounds because they signify the strength and perseverance it took to finally complete my transition.”<sup>4</sup>

### C. Today’s counselees are frequently “sold” various treatments

“Medical gender transition is no longer a rarity. It is the recommended treatment for gender dysphoria, a diagnosable disorder of incongruence between one’s felt “gender” and one’s natal sex, the prevalence of which is increasing tremendously throughout the world. More and more children and adolescents are being diagnosed with gender dysphoria, and are undergoing medical treatment prior even to completing puberty.”<sup>5</sup>

“Treatment of gender dysphoria<sup>6</sup> currently includes such drastic measures as the removal of healthy, functioning body parts, the protracted and experimental use of cross-sex hormones, and the permanent circumvention of the normal pubertal process.”

- Today’s “treatments” follow a pattern of “social” → “medical” → “surgical”
- It’s likely you will encounter counselees who have been “sold” these solutions from a very early age.

## II. Data Gathering: Identify Strongholds

**2 Corinthians 10:5** “*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ”

**A. The World** (listening for philosophies, worldviews, teachings, and movements that shape the counselee’s perspective)

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<sup>4</sup> Cited in Tyler O’Neil, “Transgender Surgery Scars Are ‘Beautiful,’ Jazz Jennings’ Mom Says,” *Pjmedia.Com*, 3 January 2020, <https://pjmedia.com/culture/tyler-o-neil/2020/01/03/transgender-surgery-scars-are-beautiful-jazz-jennings-mom-says-n174553>.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Dirks, “Transition as Treatment: The Best Studies Show the Worst Outcomes,” *Public Discourse*, 16 February 2020, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2020/02/60143/>.

<sup>6</sup> Secular practice defines gender dysphoria as the “conflict between a person’s physical or assigned gender and the gender with which he/she/they identify. People with gender dysphoria may be very uncomfortable with the gender they were assigned, sometimes described as being uncomfortable with their body (particularly developments during puberty) or being uncomfortable with the expected roles of their assigned gender.” See “What Is Gender Dysphoria?,” *American Psychiatric Association*, n.d., <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gender-dysphoria/what-is-gender-dysphoria>.



## Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

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1. “Be who you want to be!”
2. “Live your truth!”
3. “The outer body is wrong, and the inner person’s view of themselves is the greater reality.”<sup>7</sup>

**1 John 2:15** “Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

### **B. The Flesh** (Often manifesting as errant emotions: anger, fear, despair, guilt, shame)

1. “My body is the wrong gender.”
2. “I shouldn’t have to go through this!”
3. “God has let me down.”
4. “I’m angry and afraid of what I’ve done to myself.”
5. “I can’t change what I’ve done.”
6. “No one cares. No one can help.”
7. “I’ll never be good enough for anyone to love me.”
8. “I was made this way, so I can’t help it.”

**Romans 13:14** “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.”

### **C. The Devil** (He Exploits Our Sin and Suffering)<sup>8</sup>

Richard Sibbes, “it is Satan’s practice to go over the hedge where it is lowest thereby gaining a foothold that has been, oftentimes, provided by the believer himself.”

1. When we’re careless in our walk with Christ (Eph 6:11; 1 Pet 5:8)
2. When immaturity is fostered among believers (Eph 4:14)
3. When we harbor anger (Eph 4:26–27)
4. When conflict and quarrelling take hold (James 4:1–6)

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<sup>7</sup> Example cited in John Street and Janie Street, *The Biblical Counseling Guide for Women* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2016), 309.

<sup>8</sup> David Powlison, *Power Encounters: Reclaiming Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 66.



## Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

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What we see in all of these schemes is that Satan is exploitive yet people are often complicit in doing his bidding (even if unknowingly). The reality is that the exploitive work of Satan often intersects with the daily lives of God's people.

### III. Involvement Spectrum: Understanding Your Counselee

Three areas of emphasis and involvement:

- A. **(Reengage/reconnect)** He/she has been barraged by the world, flesh, and devil
- B. **(Retrain/remind/rebuild)** They are doubting God's character and biblical truth
- C. **(Rebuild/restore)** They are without hope (Rom 8:24)

### IV. Agenda: Goals in Counseling (possible agenda items to explore)<sup>9</sup>

- A. Reveal the true condition of their relationship with God
- B. Providing hope which helps them recognize they are not alone
- C. Help them biblically process their experiences, thoughts, and emotions
- D. Build genuine and enduring relationships with the body of Christ
- E. Encourage others to counsel and disciple

### V. Counsel: Reach Your Counselee

- A. Emphasize the transforming nature of the gospel

In our current climate, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for all who have struggled or continue to struggle with their gender identity, as it is for all whose bodies have been irreparably damaged by surgery. Jesus alone can make us new (2 Cor. 5:17), and Jesus alone will make us whole (Phil. 3:21).<sup>10</sup>

1. Isa 56:3–5
2. 1 Cor 6:9–11
3. 2 Cor 3:18

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<sup>9</sup> Some of these I've adapted from Nicewander and Brookins, *Treasure in the Ashes*, 37.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Smith, "Discipleship and the Transgender Convert: Issues and Proposals," *CBMW*, 20 November 2019, <https://cbmw.org/2019/11/20/discipleship-and-the-transgender-convert-issues-and-proposals/>.



## Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

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4. 2 Cor 5:17
5. Philp 3:21
6. Titus 3
7. Rom 1

**B.** Help them understand God’s character (holiness, goodness, love, sovereignty, wisdom, justice)

“With a redeeming God, even the most painful journey can become a beautiful message of hope to others who are going through similar experiences.”<sup>11</sup>

1. Ps 16:2
2. Ps 25:8
3. Ps 34:8, 10
4. Ps 106:1
5. Ps 119:68
6. Ps 135:3

**C.** Help them recover a biblical view humanity

1. Male and female<sup>12</sup>
2. The Image of God (Col 3:10; 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29)<sup>13</sup>

**D.** Encourage them with the health of the church

“Make it a high priority to join a local church that teaches and holds firm to the Word of God...The counsel you can receive from biblically qualified Christians in the church, who know and love this same God, is the help you need.”<sup>14</sup>

1. Remember the mission of the church.<sup>15</sup>
2. Pursue them with hospitality.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Nicewander and Brookins, *Treasure in the Ashes: Our Journey Home from the Ruins of Sexual Abuse*, 37.

<sup>12</sup>See the chapter, “Sexuality” in Strachan, *Reenchanting Humanity*, 131–206.

<sup>13</sup> See Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>14</sup> Street and Street, *The Biblical Counseling Guide for Women*, 344.

<sup>15</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, N.S.W.: Matthias Media, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).



## Association of Certified Biblical Counselors

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3. Point them to healthy examples of parents, families, and all manner of “recovering” sinners.
4. Prioritize sanctification over immediate service.

“Had a pastor named Ken Smith not shared the gospel with me for years and years, over and over again, not in some used-car-salesman way, but in an organic, spontaneous and compassionate way, those questions might still be lodged in the crevices of my mind and I might never have met the most unlikely of friends, Jesus Christ himself.”<sup>17</sup>

### VI. Helpful Resources for the Biblical Counselor

Andreas J. Köstenberger and David W. Jones, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2010).

Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

Nicewander, Sue, and Maria Brookins. *Treasure in the Ashes: Our Journey Home from the Ruins of Sexual Abuse*. Wapwallopen, Pennsylvania: Shepherd Press, 2018.

Shrier, Abigail. *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters*. Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2020. **[Note, the author is not a Christian but documents the current issues with the transgender movement, see especially Chapter Six, “The Shrinks”].**

Strachan, Owen. *Reenchanting Humanity: A Theology of Mankind*. Ross-shire, Great Britain, 2019.

Street, John, and Janie Street. *The Biblical Counseling Guide for Women*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2016. **[See especially chaps 16–17 on transgenderism and victims of abuse].**

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<sup>17</sup> Rosaria Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Crown & Covenant Publications: Kindle Edition), Location 130-132.