

GENDER

A CONVERSATION GUIDE
FOR PARENTS AND PASTORS



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the good book
COMPANY

Gender: A Conversation Guide for Parents and Pastors
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Published by: The Good Book Company
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Email (US): info@thegoodbook.com
Email (UK): info@thegoodbook.co.uk

Websites:

North America: www.thegoodbook.com
UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk
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New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz



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Previously published as *Gender: Conversation Guide*
(*Building Foundations*) by Acacia Books

ISBN: 9781784983505 | Printed in Denmark

Cover design by Dane Low/The Good Book Company

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INTRODUCTION

The world around us is changing quickly, and it is difficult to find clarity about some of life's most important issues. Whether you are a parent, mentor, pastor, youth minister, children's-ministry volunteer, or simply a friend, we wrote this book to help you bring clarity to young minds in a world that is spinning in confusion.

Although our world is filled with many challenges, this is the world in which God has placed us. Psalm 139 tells us that we are each knit together in our mother's womb. We are creations of God himself. In Job 14 v 5 we are told that our days are determined by God and not by chance. When these two important truths are placed together, we can see that God has not only chosen to create us, but he has also chosen *when* we would be created. It is important that we understand we are living in this time for a specific purpose. Jesus calls his followers to be a light where God has placed us, and to glorify him with how we live our lives in this world.

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The confusion we experience in this life is not from the absence of God, but because of the consequences of sin. In the same way that pain is a signal alerting us that something in our bodies isn't right, the pain and suffering in our world is a signal that something is broken. As Christian people, we need to speak with great clarity, compassion, and conviction about where the brokenness in our world comes from—sin.

In John 17 Jesus prays that his disciples would not be taken out of the world, but that they would be protected from “the evil one” (v 15) If Jesus' prayer is that his disciples stand strong in his truth, then our prayer for our children, family, friends, and even ourselves should be the same.

We are not called to *hide* from the world, or to blend in with the world; we are called to stand out. In order to grow to become distinctive disciples, we need to be able to have meaningful and deep conversations that explore difficult subjects and questions in the light of God's word.

In particular, there is a collective responsibility within the church to bring children up with clarity about who God is and what he has said. Furthermore, we have to raise our children in the world the way it is, not the way we would like it to be.

Consider God's word to Moses in Deuteronomy:

You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind

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them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth.

Deuteronomy 11 v 18-21

We are called not only to hold tightly to God's word, but to pass it along to the ones we love. It is not only something we should cherish, but also something which should be carried to the next generation.

The goal of this book is to help build strong foundations in children and young people that are rooted in God's truth and connected to the gospel. As the world is changing, we do not need to flee, but rather point to Jesus himself, who is both the truth and the life (John 14 v 6).

In a world cluttered with opinions about gender, sexuality, race, and truth, we don't need to be louder; we need to be clearer. We need to be compelling and competent to answer the questions that face the next generation, and to do so in a way that is loving intelligent and honoring to God.

Our prayer is that this resource would not only help in the discipling of your loved ones, but that it would also

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help in your own understanding of God's word. Let's be a people who take God's word seriously enough to teach it at every age, and let's teach it with great intentionality.

Brian Seagraves and Hunter Leavine

April 2018

GENDER: THE WHY

Before we dive in, it is important to first start with the “why.”

“Why should we care about gender at all?”

“Is what we believe about gender really that important?”

“Is this an issue that should matter to everyone?”

Without understanding the “why,” we will be tempted to slip into silence on the topic, or even worse, slip away from what God’s word says. If we do not take building foundations seriously, our children can fall into two massive dangers.

TWO MASSIVE DANGERS

1. The Danger of Misplaced Identity

Have you noticed that our culture discusses hot-button issues differently than it did ten years ago? It seems that people are much quicker to label disagreement as “hatred” or “bigotry.” Failing to affirm what someone

believes or does can often be taken as failing to love them at all.

While there are many reasons for this, the main reason is that society has bought into the lie that people are what they believe and what they do.

Think about it: if this is true and someone critiques your beliefs, you're much more likely to consider a mere rejection of ideas as a rejection of you personally.

For example, someone who is gay can easily interpret the condemnation of homosexual activity as a rejection of themselves. This happens when our identity is based on anything—our desires, attractions, skin color, or actions—other than what God's word says.

It's not just children who want to fit in with their peers; we all do. We all have a longing to be loved and accepted. Often, our fallenness leads us to want to be accepted *for* our brokenness, not in spite of it. Our identity can become based on things directly opposed to God's design.

The antidote to this problem is the gospel, where we find acceptance by God in the midst of our brokenness, not because of it; we find fulfillment that was elusive when we tried to locate our identity and self-worth internally.

When our identity is based on anything other than being an adopted and ransomed child of God, we stand awaiting an inevitable fall. We need to understand what it means to have been intentionally designed and saved

by God, or we may let our striving to find our self-worth elsewhere push us away from our Creator.

The gospel—the good news about Jesus’ work on the cross—not only gives us a new identity but also a new community. Within the community of the church, we can find clarity about some of life’s most important issues, as well as support, as we seek to honor God in a world that is plagued by sin and confusion. No matter what is happening in the world, we can find comfort knowing that as people who have been purchased by the work of Christ, we always have a home in his church.

2. The Danger of Unrecognized Authority

God’s word should be the lens through which we view the world around us, and it should be the ultimate authority of our lives. Our beliefs, thoughts, and actions should be shaped by what the Bible teaches.

Every day we are tempted to allow the world to shape the way we see God’s word, rather than allow God’s word to shape the way we see the world. It is crucial that the ever-changing views of the world are not allowed to affect the way we understand the everlasting truth of God’s word. There is too much at stake.

The danger is not just that we might “get gender wrong,” or that someone we love might become gender-confused, but rather, that a wedge might be placed between our lives and God’s word. If we choose not to believe what God’s word says about gender, we should

not be too surprised when we choose not to believe God's word at all.

When we start to pick and choose when to accept the authority of God's word, we are standing on a slippery slope; if one part is rejected, we will struggle to hold on to any of it. How we think and talk about gender is connected to our view of God's word as a whole.

We all live in a world that is vying not only for our *attention* but also our *allegiance*. This sets Christians—especially children—up for an inevitable collision. When two objects collide, the stronger prevails over the weaker.

In a very real way, our children need to be trained to handle the strongest assault the world will bring, and yet remain committed to God's word. You and your children need this book because, while statistically it is unlikely that your children will become transgender themselves, it is assured that they will have to decide who they stand with on the questions of gender and authority. There are only two options: stand with God or stand against him.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

We have created this guide for anyone who works with children and teens. Whether you are a church worker, relative, parent or friend, we believe that this will be a helpful tool for you on a very important topic. Although anyone can benefit from this guide, we address parents throughout the guide for simplicity's sake. It is up to you to take this and translate it into your context, and we hope that it will help you begin to speak clearly in our world today.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH AND PARENTS

There is a collective responsibility within the community of believers to bring children up with clarity. One of the blessings of being part of the church is that we do not have to go through life alone. We do not have to fear asking for help, and we can learn from and work

with one another to build foundations centered on the gospel and directed by God's word. When the church partners with families, children and students are most likely to flourish. Involvement in a local church is one of the most important factors in building strong foundations, and it is a blessing we all should seek.

PART ONE: FOUNDATIONS

In Part One the content has been divided into three main “foundations.” The foundations roughly align with pre-school (up to 7 years old), elementary (7-11 years old), and middle/high school (12-18 years).

You will benefit from reading all three foundations, regardless of your child's age. For example, if your child is elementary aged you will want to use the age tips and discussion questions found in the second foundation. However, you will be helped by knowing what is coming in the next foundation before your child gets there.

Key Concepts and Passages

Key concepts are found in each foundation, and guidance on areas of conversation. Important Bible passages to discuss are found on page 51. Common ideas and themes build cumulatively from one foundation to the next and are most helpful when taught together. Within “Key Concepts”, there will be some terminology that might be helpful when communicating to that particular age group.

Sample dialogue with the child will be in this paragraph style.

Age Tips

There are both unique opportunities and challenges at each age. The age-tips section lists some specific suggestions for addressing children at each level of development, and includes some important Bible passages that you will want to read and talk about with them.

Questions and Discussion Starters

Each foundation will also include age-specific questions and discussion starters that can be launchpads for more conversation. The goal is not to have a single conversation, but rather, to have ongoing discussions with your children and teens. This section will help you keep the conversation alive.

PART TWO: TOOLBOX

Part Two is a toolbox of helpful resources that contains a variety of short sections to better equip you as an adult to navigate this issue in today's society.

This Guide is Intended to be a Tool, Not a Crutch

Our desire is that this guide would serve as a tool to help you have conversations relevant to our world today that are deeply rooted in God's word. We do not, however, want this to be a crutch. This guide should

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supplement the work you are already doing in discipling your child—reading Bible stories with them, praying with and for them, enjoying church life together, and finding opportunities to serve together.

Building foundations can be hard work. It does not happen overnight, and it requires a big-picture perspective that looks to the future. While God's word never changes, our contexts will look different. We want to encourage you to actively think about how you can bring biblical clarity to your children in whatever situation you find yourself.