

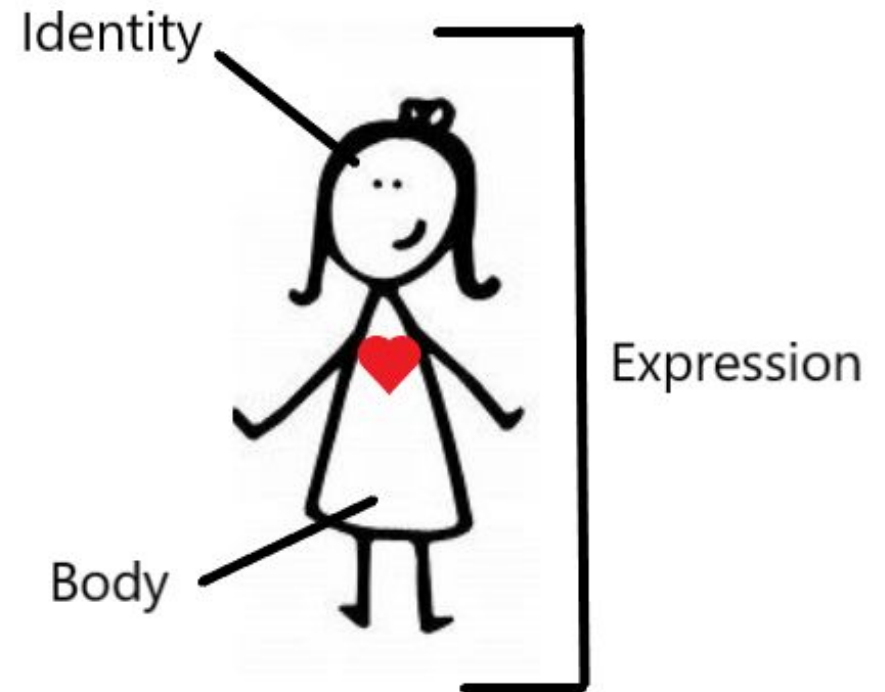
Loving Your Transgender Neighbor: A Biblical Basis for Allyship

WITH AUSTEN HARTKE

Gender

Your gender is made up of three different facets which all affect each other.

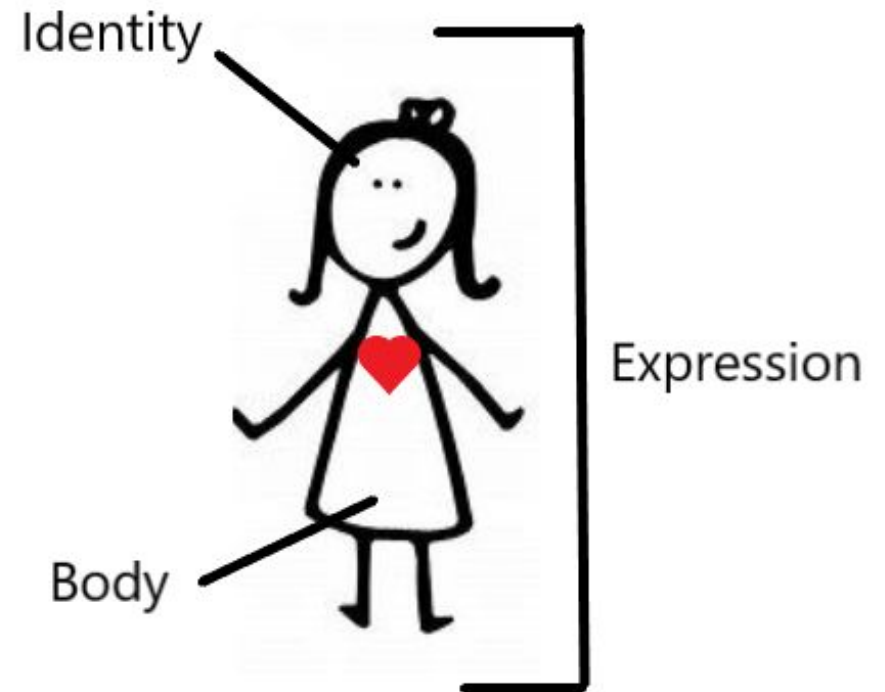
- **Your body** – Your internal and external reproductive organs, chromosomes, hormone levels, and brain matter. We are given an assigned sex based on external reproductive organs.
- **Your gender identity** – Your internal self-perception and experience of being female, male, both, or neither.
- **Your gender expression** – The way you show your gender to others through clothing, hair, mannerisms, voice, etc. which have gendered values in your society. Taking on specific gender roles can also be part of our gender expression.



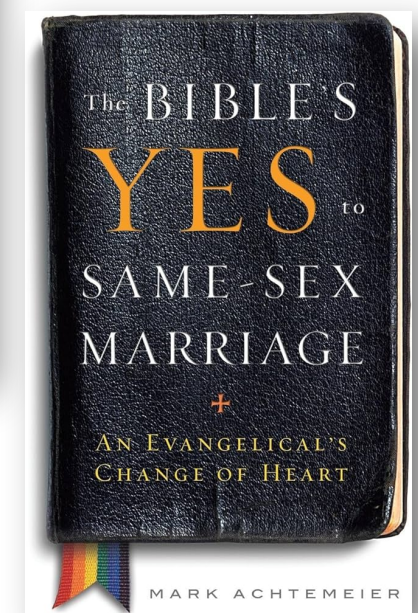
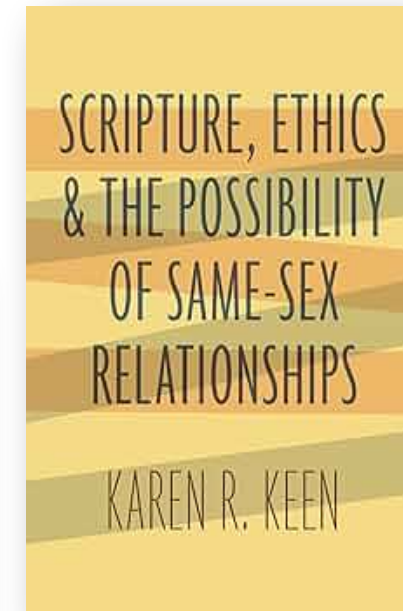
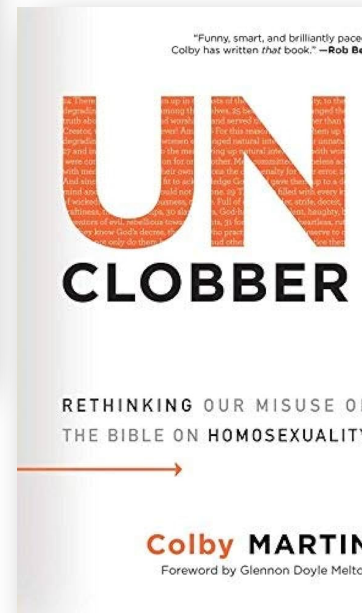
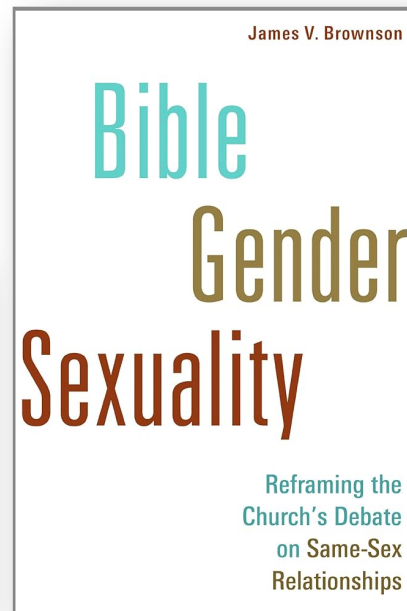
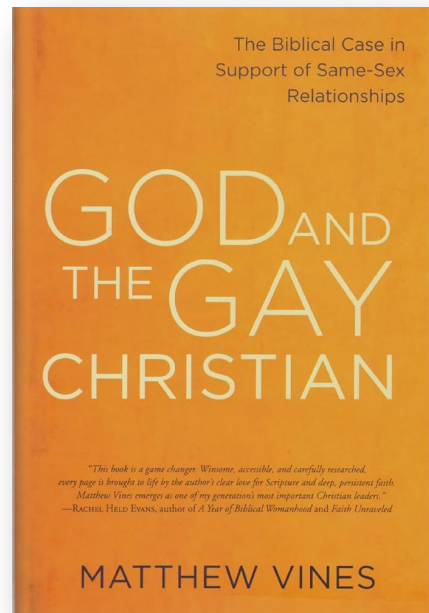
Gender Diversity

While most people are **endosex**, meaning they have physical characteristics that can be clearly assigned either male or female, about 1.7% of the population is **intersex**, meaning they have differences in sex development.

While most people are **cisgender**, meaning their gender identity matches their assigned sex, about 0.6% of the population is **transgender**, meaning their gender identity is different than the sex they were assigned .



Resources on orientation/sexuality in scripture



A few reminders before we dive in...

Remember that even though we can't usually say anything definitive about the **gender identity** of people in the Bible and in history, we can still look at reports related to **bodies** and **gender expression** to try to understand how they were seen and how they saw themselves.

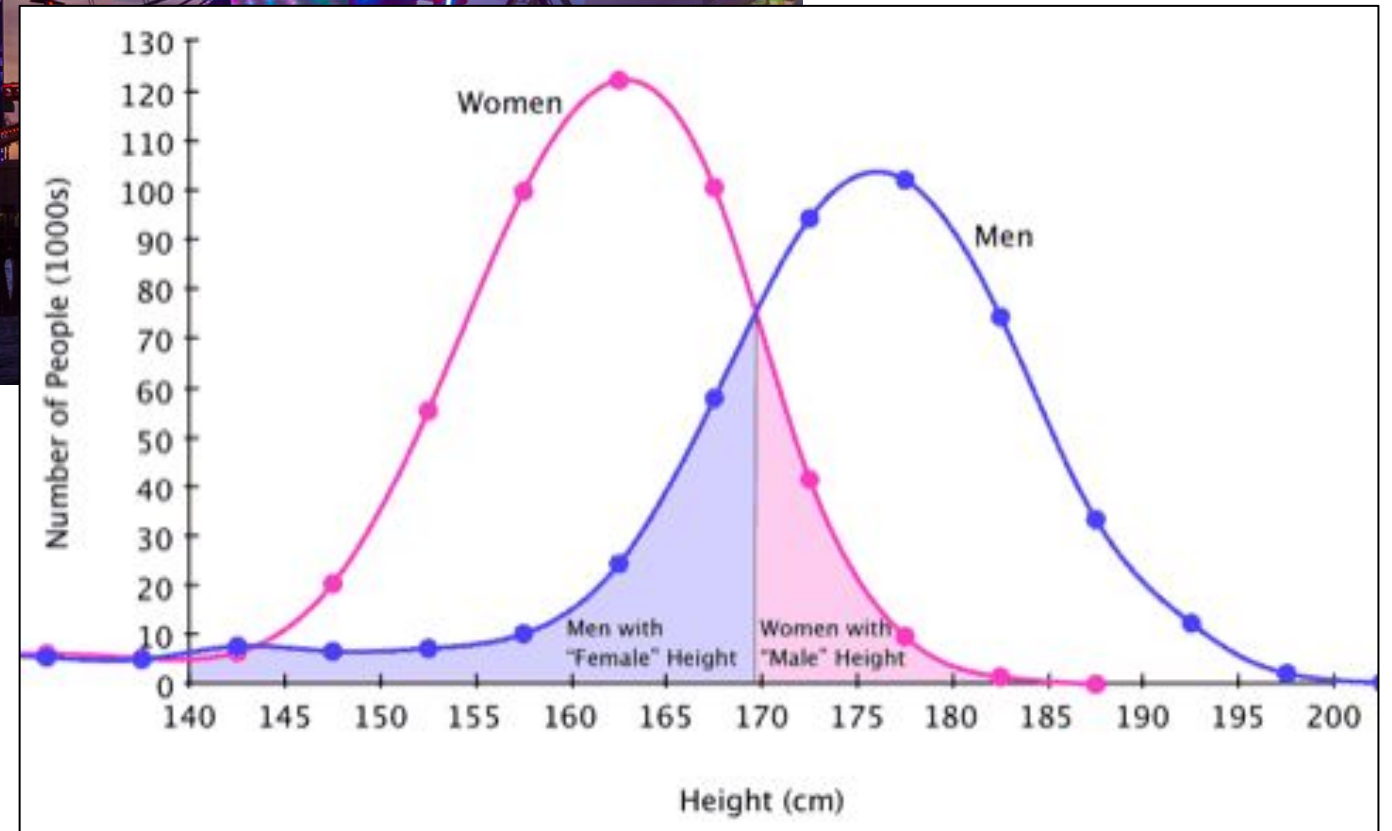
Because the identity categories we use today don't map easily on to the past, we can't "claim" people or their stories for one specific identity group today. Instead, we can acknowledge that people often hold multiple intersecting and complex identities at once.

Genesis

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

- **Genesis 1:26-27**

How do we deal with things not mentioned explicitly in Genesis?



Genesis

“Zachar u’nikeva” is, I believe, a merism, a common Biblical figure of speech in which a whole is alluded to by some of its parts. When the Biblical text says, “There was evening, there was morning, the first day,” it means, of course, that there was evening, there was dawn, there was morning, there was noon time, there was afternoon, there was dusk in the first day. “Evening and morning” are used to encompass all the times of day... Read not, therefore, “God created every human being as either male or female” but rather “God created human kind zachar u’nikevah, male and female and every combination in between.”

– “Male and Female God Created Them” by Margaret Moers Wenig in “Torah Queeries,” eds. Drinkwater, Lesser, and Shneer



Gender Expression

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

- Deuteronomy 22:5 (NRSV)

Does this mean transgender people can't wear certain kinds of clothes? What about cisgender people?

Gender Expression

The passage dealing with the attire of a man is juxtaposed to the passages dealing with going out to war, because Woman was created to rear children, and if she were instead to go out among the men to war, she would eventually become involved in debauchery.

- Abraham ibn Ezra (1089CE-1167CE), commentary on Deuteronomy

“...outward apparel should be consistent with the estate of the person, according to the general custom. Hence it is in itself sinful for a woman to wear man's clothes, or vice versa; especially since this may be a cause of sensuous pleasure; and it is expressly forbidden in the Law (Deuteronomy 22) because the Gentiles used to practice this change of attire for the purpose of idolatrous superstition. Nevertheless this may be done sometimes without sin on account of some necessity, either in order to hide oneself from enemies, or through lack of other clothes, or for some similar motive.”

- Thomas Aquinas, *“Summa Theologica”* (1265–1274 CE)

Deborah



Copper plate engraving of Deborah and Barak,
Unknown artist, circa 1650

Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” And she said, “**I will surely go with you**; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.” Then Deborah got up and **went with Barak to Kedesh**. Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand warriors went up behind him; **and Deborah went up with him**.

- Judges 4:8-10 (NRSV)

Joseph



Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his children, because he was the son of his old age; and he had made him a long robe with sleeves. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.

- Genesis 37:3-4 (NRSV)

Now she was wearing a long robe with sleeves; for this is how the virgin daughters of the king were clothed in earlier times.

- 2 Samuel 13:18 (NRSV)

Eunuchs

No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.

- Deuteronomy 23:1 (NRSV)

Are transgender people allowed to change things about their bodies, specifically in the case of reproductive organs? Are cisgender people?

Eunuchs

The word “saris” (סָרִיס in Hebrew), meaning “eunuch” and sometimes also “official,” “chamberlain,” or “cupbearer,” is used over 42 times in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. The word “eunouchos” (εὐνοῦχος in Greek), from which we get our English root, is used 8 times in the New Testament.

As far as we know, eunuchs were treated as a third gender in the ancient social orders of Babylon, Persia, and Egypt.

The word eunuch usually denoted someone assigned male at birth who was castrated, but was also sometimes used for people who were infertile, and for those we now know as intersex.



King Sargon II and his chief eunuch, excavated palace of Sargon II, Iraq

Eunuchs

But [Jesus] said to them, “Not everyone can accept this teaching, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone accept this who can.”

-Matthew 19:11-12 (NRSV)

The Talmud, the Jewish collection of oral law written and compiled between the first and seventh centuries CE, recognized four different kinds of people who exist outside the male/female binary:

- The **Androgynos** (having both masculine and feminine characteristics)
- The **Tumtum** (having indeterminate physical characteristics)
- The **Ay'lonit** (a person assigned female at birth but who develops masculine characteristics)
- The **Saris** (a person assigned male at birth but who develops female characteristics).
 - They distinguish between the “Saris hamah”—a person born with differences in external genitalia—and a “Saris adam”—someone who has been surgically changed by humans.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch



From the Menologion of Basil II
c 1000 CE

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch



From the Menologion of Basil II
c 1000 CE

He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: *“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”* The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch



From the Menologion of Basil II
c 1000 CE

Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

- Acts 8:26-39 (NRSV)

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

“The fact that this person is a eunuch is not erased or marginalized in the story. He brings the particularity of his gender to his encounter with Philip and ultimately to his relationship with God. The power of this story lies in its specific description of inclusion. He is not baptized in spite of being a eunuch, or after a lengthy session of apologetics explaining his gender to Philip, but simply at the point at which they pass a body of water. Bringing our whole selves, just as we are, is part of the integrity of our witness to God. In this story, we see that God does not ask us to put aside who we are in order to be a part of the community of faith, but rather calls us as we are in our specificity.”

- Justin Sabia-Tanis, “Trans-gender: Theology, Ministry, and Communities of Faith”

Jesus and Thomas

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

– John 20:26-29 (NRSV)

Jesus and Thomas



The Incredulity of St. Thomas
by Caravaggio c. 1601



Part of the *ID: Trans* exhibit
by Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin, 2018

Allies, Accomplices, and Co-Conspirators

Regardless of the words you use, the goals should be...

1. A lifelong commitment to relationships, conversation, learning, accountability, and action.
2. A practice of rejecting or diverting the power you're given in order to act in solidarity with the oppressed.

Allyship looks like...

“Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.” –
Philippians 2:5-7

Why is trans allyship important?

1. Because lives are on the line.

At least 321 gender-expansive people were murdered worldwide in 2023, with 32 of those deaths happening in the US. 84% of those killed were people of color. 94% were trans women or feminine in gender expression.

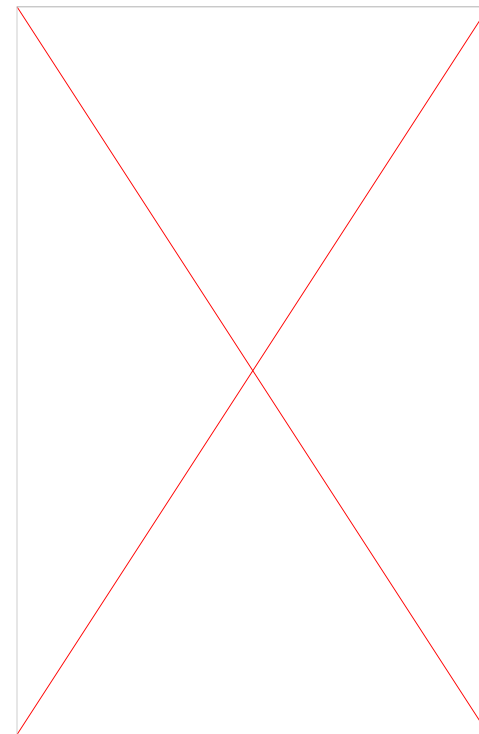
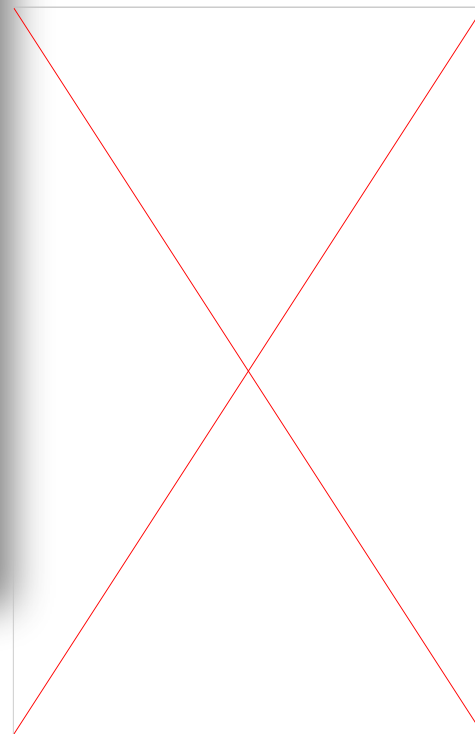
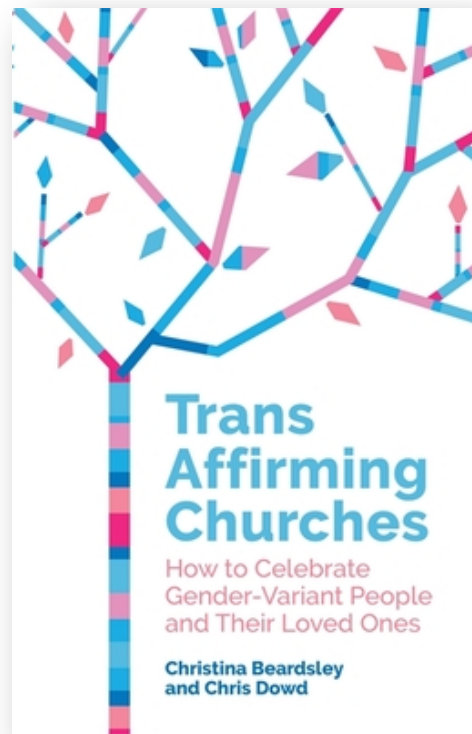
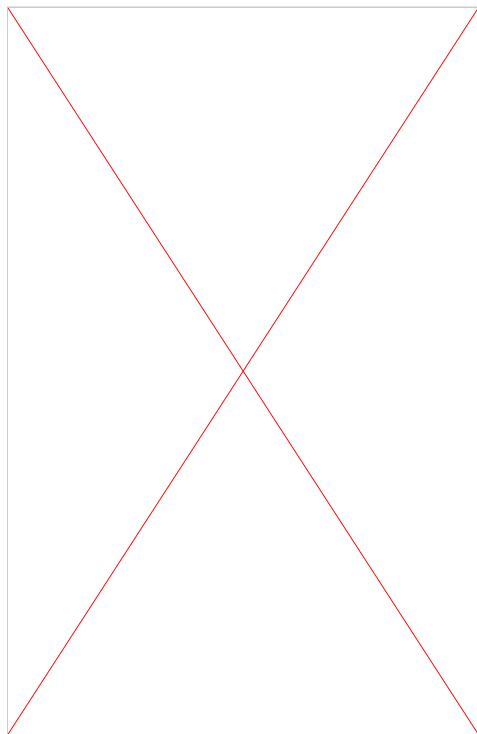
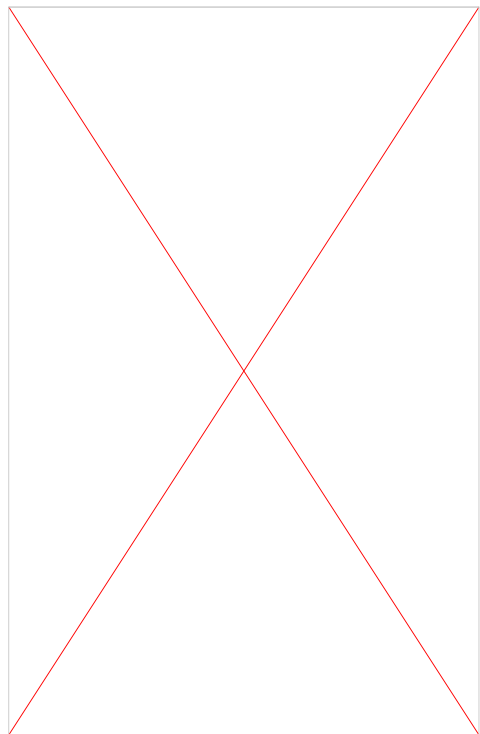
2. Because trans people are facing increasing legislative oppression.

2023 holds the record for the most proposed anti-trans bills in federal and state legislatures—600 proposed, 86 passed. In 2024 we already have 400 bills proposed.

3. Because trans people are already part of our churches.

According to the 2015 US Transgender Survey, 66% of trans folks said they had been involved with a faith community at some point in their life.

So what's next?



Keep going!

Resources for trans folks, family members,
and pastors:

<https://transmissionministry.com/resources>

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