



# A FRAMEWORK

Sometimes, approaches to evangelism and apologetics can feel like 'gotcha ammunition', memorized presentations or arguments that talk past people. However, it is helpful to have a framework of things to look for and articulate in a conversation about difficult issues.

## BEAUTY

In our theology we have a concept called **common grace**, a belief that while we are *comprehensively* fallen (there is no part of our existence not tainted by sin), we are not *completely* fallen in the sense that sin has not stripped the image of God from us. Whether someone is a Christian or not, they still carry the dignity and beauty of being made to glorify God. As such, the church for centuries has sought to name and celebrate even the actions of non-believers which reflect the actions and desires of their Creator. It is important that this is not a hollow observation used to blunt harsh criticism, but a true celebration of God's creation even in the midst of brokenness.

## EMPATHY

Because of the role of our own sinful choices in our suffering in the world, it is sometimes easy to adopt a 'they asked for it' perspective on people's pain. Yet this was never Jesus' position. Saving his anger for the religious elite who did not believe they needed healing, Jesus entered into the pain around him, feeling compassion for sinful and broken people. Acknowledging that people truly hurt and long for relief, even if their own solutions for healing are not godly, is an act of Christ-honoring kindness that also often helps build relationship.

## INCONGRUITY

It is important to emphasize this is not exactly an objection to someone's beliefs or actions. Noticing a place of incongruity in someone's beliefs stems out of the relational work present in the rest of the framework. If we have spent time celebrating what we can about someone, and joining them in their pain and longing for redemption we can begin to honestly ask why their core beliefs/lifestyle choices are not answering their experiences of brokenness. Again, these observations are not 'gotcha' moments but are honest questions posed within relationships where both parties believe they are 'for' one another.

## AT A GLANCE

### FRAMEWORK

- Beauty
- Empathy
- Incongruity

### DIRECTION

- Diversity
- Divinity
- Disability

## WHERE ARE WE GOING?

Christian psychologist Mark Yarhouse argues much of the tension in our society around trans issues stems from different parties viewing transgenderism with differing lenses, and then talking past one another. He outlines these three lenses this way:

### Diversity

Yarhouse describes how, due to struggles queer and trans individuals have experienced, the LGBTQ+ community has coalesced into a 'people group' with similarities to a nationality or ethnicity. Therefore, many within society view this through the lens of diversity and civil rights, that a global culture is lesser for not having queer and trans perspectives and such a culture should not only be tolerated but celebrated and elevated.

### Divinity

Often the perspective of many religions, this lens views trans perspectives as deviations from a created/intended order, perhaps even as sinful. This position raises questions of healing/redemption, choice/volition, origins, etc.

### Disability

A controversial name for some, it nonetheless sums up the perspective of many trans individuals whose daily experience is not ideological/philosophical, but marked by pain and difficulty. This is often the 'middle' of the spectrum that those with other lenses argue would be 'fixed' with movement to either end.

## HOW COULD PEOPLE BELIEVE THIS?

Sociologists use a concept called **plausibility structures** to describe the 'realm of possibility' people will (even unconsciously) consider when processing a question. While it may 'seem' strange for someone to believe in multiple genders, or to the ability to transition gender, or even just to define gender, consider the 'ifs':

- *If* an individual was not created with outside authority and purpose, then the self really is the final authority for belief and action - including issues of gender
- *If* one's core identity is one's self-autonomy, it makes sense that those beliefs would be shared with others, including children

Considering Yarhouse's lenses, it is unsurprising that from an ideological standpoint, those holding to a position of self-autonomy would write children's books and advocate for children's medical choice, and be threatened by religious positions to the contrary.



## HOW SHOULD(N'T) WE RESPOND?

At the beginning of week one, we started by describing the emotions we were feeling as we came to this conversation. It is important to remember that we as a Christian people also are experiencing collective emotions in this season of history:

- **Grief and loss** - For a long time in the United States and elsewhere, Christianity was the basis for many cultural and moral decisions in society (often thought of as 'Christendom'). Sociologist Robert Bellah called the religious and cultural shift in the US coming out of the 1960s **expressive individualism**, a belief (consciously or unconsciously) that one's self (and thus one's feelings) is the only basis for authority, meaning, and purpose. Sadly, many Christians respond to this shift with anger and anxiety.
- **Anxiety and shock** - Again, many Christians are also shocked that people would want to disseminate a position of expressive individualism in many cultural circles and institutions, specifically those who help raise children. However, many Christians respond to these initiatives with ridicule, anger, disgust, and vitriol rather than humble opposition and conversation.
- **Love and hospitality** - While many LGBTQ+ individuals who seek out churches look for those who are affirming of their identities and choices, churches that hold a position of humble truth (speaking about holistic gospel truth in all its areas of application) and radical love and hospitality (inviting people into conversation, providing care and community) have a unique opportunity.

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



SEE YOU NEXT WEEK WHEN WE  
CONSIDER THE MORAL AND  
SPIRITUAL IMPLICATIONS OF  
TRANS - WOULD JESUS USE MY  
PRONOUNS?

