**Benjamin Tindall’s Story**

I’ve been wrestling with my gender identity for about twenty-five years, feeling disgusted about being a man and desiring to be a woman. Wow. In some ways, it seems crazy to me that I’ve walked this journey so long. So many memories surface, and all that has happened overwhelms me at times. Yet, through it all, I’ve grown, I’ve learned, and I’ve seen God’s faithfulness and His love. God has led me to a place where I have to die to myself and live for Him.

I was born into a family that loved the Lord. My parents are both followers of Jesus, and they discipled their children to follow him as well. I’m deeply grateful to them for that foundation. I’m the oldest of three boys, but I’m also the smallest. My brothers are now taller than I am, but they can never be older than I am, so I still have that on them.

I put my faith in Jesus at age five. My adoption into His family and the presence of the Holy Spirit in my life has provided protection and a tether to hold on to through the decades as I’ve worked through my gender identity issues. Even in my brokenness, God is faithful.

When I entered puberty, I began to struggle with my identity. I didn’t know how to handle these feelings or really even what they were. At first, I fantasized about being something or someone else. I imagined myself as a cartoon character, and I wondered what it would be like to change myself into that character and live that life. The cartoon fantasy then morphed into imagining myself as a cat and living in the body of a large cat. I loved art and drawing, so I drew diagrams of how I could surgically be transformed into a cat. I fantasized about walking down the street on four legs as a big, sleek cat.

When I was eleven or twelve, everything changed. I was introduced to the idea of transitioning from male to female. My mom often watched daytime talk shows or left them on while she was doing other things. One day in particular, I was the only one in the living room watching the show. On that day’s program, guests were invited onstage to talk about a childhood friend that they hadn’t seen in years. A picture of the childhood friend was projected on the screen behind the guest as he or she shared stories of this person. Finally, the host welcomed the long-lost friend onstage so the guest could see how much the person had changed.

One male guest talked about a boy that he was close to growing up, a friend he played basketball with. The show’s host then welcomed the friend onstage … and out walked one of the most beautiful women I’d ever seen. The crowd erupted with applause and cheers. The host and audience asked questions about how this person transitioned from a boy playing basketball to a tall, slender, beautiful woman.

At that point, I realized my desire to be someone else was entirely possible. The scene with the boy’s photo projected in the background and the woman sitting in a gown on the stage seared itself in my mind. I became obsessed with the idea of transitioning from a boy to a girl. It seemed like it would be a dream come true.

To me, it made sense. I looked back on my life and recognized tendencies that could easily be interpreted as things that drew me to the female and that supported my felt longing to be the opposite gender. Growing up, my closest friends were girls, more often than not. People sometimes made fun of my friendships with girls, yet spending time with them always felt more natural or comfortable to me. I very much resonated with things that were stereotypically female.

From then on, I believed I was supposed to be female. I was really a girl, and I needed my body to show it. I often planned and fantasized about how and when I could make the transition. But I kept this all to myself. I was too scared to share it with anyone. I knew it wasn’t something I could talk to my parents about. They wouldn’t approve or support it. I don’t think I could have explained why, but I was certain they wouldn’t. I knew God wouldn’t approve of it either (though, again, I wasn’t able to state why). Growing up, I harbored a very judgmental, condemning view of God; therefore, a lot of guilt, shame, and fear kept me from pursuing a change to my gender identity more passionately than I did. Yet, as often as I could, I actively fed my craving and fantasy in secret and in private. I became very good at covering my tracks. Even in my confusion, God is faithful.

I started to dress up in my mom’s clothes. My mom is short, so when I was twelve years old, we were about the same height. I often sneaked into my parents’ closet while the family was away or in another area of the house, and I dressed up in my mom’s clothes. I put on her makeup too, then stood in front of the mirror longing to be the person I saw. I also took great care to clean everything up and put everything back the way I found it, hoping no one would find anything out of place or suspect anyone had been there. As far as I know, I was successful. No one in my family seemed to catch on.

I looked forward to getting out on my own and entering college. Once I no longer lived at home, I could pursue my dream of becoming a female. I could not wait … literally, I felt that I could not wait. As my body slowly started to change and as I saw myself becoming more masculine, it wasn’t a welcome sight. Puberty wasn’t my friend.

The night before my sixteenth birthday, I was getting ready for bed. That night I asked God to make me a girl. I didn’t make that sort of request very often because I felt it wasn’t something God wanted. But that night I longed so desperately for it to be true that I went ahead and prayed I would wake up the next morning as a girl. I begged God that the next morning I would wake up as though I’d always been a girl, that I’d always been a daughter to my parents and always been a big sister to my younger brothers. For some reason, I just knew I would wake up the next day a girl. It sounds ridiculous, and I can’t say that it was in any way a rational thought. But I went to sleep imagining that the boy version would disappear and I’d wake up as the person I wanted to be.

Needless to say, that didn’t happen. I was very disappointed and a bit crushed. Yet, at the same time, the intensity of my desire to wake up as a female scared me. In typical fashion, I also felt guilt and shame since I believed I was chasing something that wasn’t right. This brutal battle raged within my heart and soul.

Just as I prayed to become a girl, I also begged God over and over to please take this struggle and these feelings away. At times, I cried and writhed. I longed so much to change my gender and to be a girl, but I knew the desire wasn’t right. I pled with God to tell me why I had to deal with the desire. To this day, I can’t remember a day when my desire to be the opposite gender hasn’t played a role. I prayed and struggled, but the feelings and desires were still there. Even in my pain, God is faithful.

I probably knew fairly early on that I wouldn’t actually do anything about a gender change. I have this longing and incongruence within me, yet because of my guilt, fear, and loyalty to my family, I couldn’t bear the thought of the hurt and pain I’d bring them if I pursued life as a female. The thought that I might not be welcome to see them again if I went ahead with the transition was something I couldn’t face.

I was (and in some ways still am) a rather skittish person. Gender identity was never really talked about in my family. My parents eventually found out about my struggle when I was in high school and made it very clear that they were opposed to it. Their opposition reinforced my feelings that if I ever pursued a change in gender, I very likely would not see my family much again. At the same time, in my family there was a pervading thought that if you ignored something and didn’t feed it with your thoughts, it would eventually die. I think that was my parents’ plan for dealing with their son’s gender identity crisis: If we just don’t talk about it, it will die. But not dealing with it was simply that—not dealing with it. And it didn’t go away.

I went to college, which was supposed to be the turning point—the opportunity for me to live the life I wanted, be the person I wanted, and transition into a female. Plagued with guilt and knowing it would destroy my parents, I couldn’t do it. It was disappointing in the most severe sense of the word. I knew I wouldn’t pursue this lifestyle, even though everything in me wanted it. As much as I wanted to, as much as I played around in secret with cross-dressing and engaging with transsexuals online, I couldn’t go through with anything beyond that. But I was cross-dressing regularly in secret. I purchased some clothes, dressed up, felt guilty, and then threw the clothes away. It was a painful cycle. I even bought menopause pills because I read that they contained small doses of hormones. I took one dose, was overwhelmed by what I was doing, felt very guilty, and flushed the rest of the pills down the toilet in my college dorm.

The biggest issue for me during my journey has been the loneliness that comes with this struggle. I felt that only especially dirty people wrestle with this “taboo” issue, which made me feel very much alone. When I gathered the courage to talk to someone and share my story, hoping for some discipleship and help, I was generally met with a deer-in-the-headlights look, some good-hearted intentions to pray with me, but cluelessness regarding what to do with this struggle. Then the issue never came up again. Even when others haven’t been available, God is faithful!

Again, through these experiences, the loneliness pressed harder and harder into my mind. Some who wrestle with it apparently find relief in pursuing a change of gender through therapy, hormones, and engaging as the opposite gender. I looked up information online for “Christian transgender” or “transgender ministry” or something like that. The results were discouraging in many ways. I found several sites that were touted as Christian. They supported transsexuality and the idea that I could be a good Christian man who engages in the proper treatments and becomes a good Christian woman. I couldn’t find any resource for those who knew this to be incorrect. At the time, I had trouble putting my finger on why it was wrong; I just knew it wasn’t something that would honor God if I pursued it.

But again, I felt very lonely. I went to a college men’s group for a while, looking for some accountability and help. But no one there seemed able to deal with it. The focus was on staying pure and fighting problems such as pornography and masturbation. I didn’t feel like the other men’s struggles connected with mine since my problems didn’t seem quite the same (though some of the issues definitely overlapped).

Shortly after college, I got married. My relationship with my parents had become distant after I was out of the house on my own. My marriage meant I had someone else to fight for. I hoped that being married would affect the longing to change my gender, that it would ease the battle and make the struggle less intense. But it didn’t. The desires remained; however, God has used my marriage to bring about good. Without my wife’s support, I’d be living a life immersed in my gender confusion and struggling to find value and worth. Even in life’s changes … God is faithful!

After we’d been married a short time, I finally found a resource that provided the additional help and community I desperately needed. I came across a ministry that dealt specifically with gender identity from a biblical perspective. By the grace of God, I met the first person I’d ever encountered who understood this struggle and, even more so, understood the grace and healing God brings. For about a year, I talked with the director of the ministry on the phone, once every other week or so. Through those conversations, my view of this issue radically changed.

I was given information and resources to help me. I was also able to speak freely and openly with someone who understands this struggle and has walked it longer and farther than I have. I dug into the reasoning behind the struggle and explored the “why.” I started to see how the trauma and pain I experienced in numerous areas growing up led me to seek an escape. As a young boy, the retreat to the feminine was that escape. Jesus said in John 8:32, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” As much as I want to believe that I’m a woman in a man’s body, there’s nothing but my own imagination telling me that. It’s just not true. And I desire to live in the truth.

Over the years, I’ve realized that no matter how hard it might be to find at times, I need to pursue community with others. I’ve taken part in Celebrate Recovery and Help 4 Families, which have been godsends for me. God is so faithful! He never gave up on me, and He is now using the relationships I have with others who are walking through similar journeys. Together we struggle with transgender issues, but God is restoring us. He is also allowing me to use my story to help others. It has been an incredible journey to see how God can take something that is sinful and isolating and restore me and use that struggle to let others know they are not alone. I’ve been there too, and I know God always desires that they know and rest in Him.

God is so faithful. Through continued accountability and the support of a loving wife and community, God has been faithful to keep me focused on what is important. The feelings are not gone, and the desire is still there, but, unlike before, I’m not walking this path alone, and my God is stronger still! God is so faithful!