

In *I am Cait*, Caitlyn Jenner is doing the Lord's work

By [Lily Burana](#)

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(RNS) Caitlyn Jenner, Olympic athlete turned world-class glamour girl, took the planet by storm in April when she sat down for an interview with Diane Sawyer and announced her ongoing transition from male to female.

Now she's back with an eight-episode miniseries, "I Am Cait," that debuted Sunday (July 26) on E!. The show, which airs in 154 countries and in 24 languages, serves as both classic reality TV lookie-loo entertainment and a spiritual exercise. Even the most Kardashian-resistant viewer can get something out of it.

Philosopher Martin Buber said, "All journeys have secret destinations of which the traveler is unaware," and it's clear from the very first moments of "I Am Cait," when we see Jenner lying awake strafed by insomnia at 4:32 a.m., that she's not sure where this whole thing is headed.

"What a responsibility I have," she says to her camera bare-faced and bleary-eyed. "I just hope I get it right. I hope I get it right."

The notion of getting it right is one of the prevailing themes in the Christian conversation around Jenner and trans people over all. Traditionalists argue that gender is gender, chromosomally determined and the roles clear-cut and worth honoring.

Progressives are more likely to see gender as being fluid, and while the facts of genetics are inarguable, a person has a right — and a destiny, perhaps even a divine calling — to live a life in which one's gender expression feels authentic to him or her.

One thing both sides agree on: God doesn't make mistakes.

Sounds civil enough, but the debate around whether being transgender is part of God's plan or a willful deviation from it can get ugly — particularly in social media, with either side posting, "But the Bible says ..." and, most likely, deteriorating from there into the online equivalent of "well, bless your heart" rictus grins.

I suppose we could turn God-splaining into a sporting event, where we just shout Scripture at each other until someone collapses from frustration and exhaustion. The winner gets: absolutely nothing.

But what we really need to do as people of faith, is to engage in moments of disagreement with tact and compassion. (Yeah, I know. I feel the same way you do: Oh, crap. Do I *have* to?)

“I Am Cait” is a groundbreaking example of bringing a taboo subject into the light with respect and an aim toward social progress, and the show’s clear theme of personal liberation is inspiring.

“Caitlyn Jenner reminds us of the freedom in courageous truth telling,” said the Rev. Jes Kast-Keat of West End Collegiate Church in New York. “She bears witness to life abundantly, the abundant kind of life that Jesus preached about.”

I believe that, as beloved Christian writer Anne Lamott says, “Laughter is carbonated holiness,” and my fave Cait moments are the humorous ones.

Former stepdaughter Kim Kardashian, while standing in Jenner’s closet helping her vet her wardrobe, looks at a dress Jenner holds up enthusiastically, and announces, “Mom has that one.” To which Jenner replies, “Oh God ... I better wear it before she does!”

In another scene, our crack All-American athlete learns a hard lesson about womanhood. Jenner, now that you have lady breasts, you *do* have to wear a sports bra for tennis.

But the show, at its core, is a serious one, and its influence is not to be underestimated.

The Rev. John Russell Stanger, executive director of Parity, an organization that helps LGBT people reconcile issues of faith and identity, said, “Caitlyn Jenner inviting us to witness her transition is a gift because she allows us to see how our Creator has been quietly at work in her life all along. During her recent ESPY speech Caitlyn lived out her Christian faith by speaking passionately about those still ignored, rejected, and even killed in our communities — trans youth. The cries of these vulnerable youth should awaken us all, as they have awakened Caitlyn. God is calling us to dedicate ourselves and resources to supporting trans youth, especially

those of color, before more of their invaluable lives are taken from us.”

Those who struggle in their own hearts to make sense of trans people in a spiritual context can remind themselves that the point is not to approve without question, but to understand. Compassion is never wasted, but condemnation can kill.

We are all worthy and equal in the eyes of a loving God. But “I Am Cait,” which layers glamour with activism, and heart with humor, shows that some of us have moments in which we are just a tad more fabulous than others.

The Bible tells us to not hide our light under a bushel. By showing her true self, Caitlyn Jenner is heeding God’s word and, quite possibly, bringing healing to a needy corner of the world.