

Sex MATTERS

Why God cares about our bodies and our relationships

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I put together this Sex Matters series for our student ministry, The Edge, because we always strive to help students to get to know God through His Word, to love Him passionately, and to allow the gospel to transform every area of their lives. One important area of life is sexuality. And although students are often bombarded with sex messages from magazines, billboards, the Internet, and friends, most of what they're hearing doesn't portray God's design for sex.

So we decided to spend six weeks digging into what God's Word says about our sexuality and how to use it in a way that honors Him. Many of our students had heard the message of "save sex for marriage," but we really wanted to give them more than that. We wanted to give them a holistic picture of *why*. We wanted to show them the storyline of sex in the Bible, convince them of why it matters, and offer them the vision of something better than the world tries to sell them.

We knew that students have a wide range of familiarity with the topic. No doubt, based on the alarming statistics, many of our own students are involved in sex—whether pornography, sleeping around, recovering from past abuse, or simply testing limits. But we also knew that we had some young middle schoolers who may be pretty naïve still—and that's not always a bad thing! So we were very thoughtful in how we presented these issues. We chose to teach each week from a passage of Scripture with the primary goal of showing God's heart and why He calls us to purity. In the breakout groups after the message (which allow us to split more by age and gender) we dug a little deeper into what particular students were facing. But in all of it we were tasteful and careful.

We also made a point of connecting with parents ahead of time, giving them a parent packet about the series with brief outlines and a few questions to ask their students at home. Sex is a topic that can be uncomfortable for many parents to talk about with their kids, but studies have shown that, even if it's awkward, it makes a big difference to have those conversations! We asked parents to partner with us by taking time each week to have a short conversation with their students—and even to consider at some point after the series, taking them out for ice cream or breakfast and digging into the topic on a deeper and more personal level.

Please feel free to use these notes and questions as you disciple students in your own life or ministry, but if you do please just cite the source properly.

Thanks for investing in students.

For His fame,

Jennifer M. Kvamme

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WEEK 1: DESIGNED BY GOD

Gen. 1:26-28, Gen. 2:18-25

God designed sex to honor Him.

HOOK:

Split into groups of 2-3. Give each an object (toothpaste squeezer, metal hand de-scentser, etc) and have them brainstorm what it is and how to use it and then create 2-min infomercial for group. (Vote on best—Starbursts for group to split)

Funny to see your creativity—but if you really want to know what something is and how it's meant to be used—how it works best--who would you ask? The people who made it! They could tell you that this is a table crumner... etc.

In the same way, people have made a lot of interesting “sells”—“THIS is what sex is for! Here's the best way to use it!” For instance: It's fun! It will make your boyfriend stay with you. It will make you feel better. It will make this other person jealous. It will get back at your parents. It will make you feel more powerful. No one else can tell you when it's right; you just need to decide for yourself what feels right. In my research for this message, I actually read an article online with “5 reasons every couple should have sex before marriage.”

And yet every day a lot of people wind up confused, disillusioned, or really hurt, feeling used and abused and alone from trying to use sex in a way it wasn't designed be used. Every 2 minutes, someone in the US is sexually assaulted. One in 4 teens in the US has an STD. The pornography industry brings in more than \$97 billion a year--that's almost 5 times what McDonalds makes. Somewhere between a third and half of marriages end in divorce, and every 26 seconds, a baby is aborted from an unwanted pregnancy.

Is that what sex is really designed for? Or have we been trying to come up with our own uses and—just maybe—missing the boat on its real design?

If we really want to know what sex is and how it's designed to be used, whom should we ask?

For people who don't believe in God, it's an interesting question.

The Advanced Apes.com (modern science and philosophy website) quotes Darwin:

“We do not even in the least know the final cause of sexuality; why new beings should be produced by the union of the two sexual elements. The whole subject is as yet hidden in darkness.”

Author (Cadell Last) says though, that now, through better understanding of genes and evolution, we do know. He says,

“In essence, sexual reproduction exists because it increases genetic variability, allowing natural selection to produce organisms that can adapt to changing environments, parasites, and purge bad mutations. These evolutionary benefits are worth the energetic expenditure required to find a suitable mate to share your genome with. Unfortunately love and companionships are only proximate by-products.”

If you didn't follow all of that... sex is basically just about genes and survival of the fittest. In fact, he says, with new technological advances, we may be able to get ride of the male/female need for sex in order to procreate and change what sex is altogether.

Yet he goes on to say this,

“I have always felt like there is a strange force behind sexual bonds. No other bond I've experienced is quite as powerful or intensely emotional. There is nothing quite like sharing your body with another human.”

So even when he boils sex down to its evolutionary science and all we can know about genes and reproduction, he still admits that it feels like something deeper is involved.

Maybe for as much as we've learned about biology and genetics, we still need to go back to the Creator to learn WHAT sex is and WHY IT MATTERS.

So today, as we start this series we're calling “Sex Matters,” we're going back to the very beginning. Genesis 1-2 tell us the story of when God masterfully created human beings and, in His grand design, made us sexual. It's a really important place to start!

Let's take a look... **READ PASSAGE.** Gen. 1:26-28, Gen. 2:18-25

At first glance, it may not seem like this passage has anything really profound to say about sex. I mean, it doesn't even use that word!

But the creation account is quoted in the NT many times!

- ∞ Jesus quotes it to show that marriage is permanent—divorce not part of original plan (Mt 19)
- ∞ Paul quotes it to show that marriage creates one flesh from two, so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies—a picture of Christ and the church (Eph 5—which we'll look at next week)
- ∞ Paul also quotes it to show that sex is meant for marriage only—like glue!—and has real effect on our spiritual lives (1 Cor 6—we'll look at this one later, too.)

Clearly, the account of creation is the foundation for a biblical understanding of our sexuality.

So what do we see in the creation story?

Big idea: God designed sex to honor Him.

God made it (like toothpaste squeezer) so He knows how it works best.

When we follow His design for sex, we honor Him. And this passage shows us 4 specific principles about God's design for sex.

- ∞ **God designed both men and women to bear His image.** (1:26-28). We are created in His image, male and female. (Contrast AdvancedApes: Why are there men? Females actually carry the child; why not asexual reproduction or, like fungus,

reproduction with anyone else in the same species?) God COULD have made just one gender and made procreation happen by touching toes or something, or without the need of another person at all. But He didn't. He had a purpose for making men and women, and making them different from each other. Both genders are unique, complementary, relational reflections of Himself. Both just as valuable. And God designed both men and woman as sexual, with their sexuality meant to be used in relationship with one another with the opportunity to then co-create with God and bring new life into the world through their union. Do you know what the first command to Adam was? "Be fruitful & multiply" (before anything about eating fruit) (1:28) Part of the way we display God's image can only be shown *together*. Which leads me to point #2...

- ∞ **God designed us to live in relationships.** (2:18). God declared that it was not good for man to be alone; He wanted to find a make a helper and companion for him. This is also part of bearing God's image. God Himself is relational; He's eternally existed in 3 persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) in complete unity. So when He chose to make us relational, not loners but in need of intimacy, this was a reflection of who He was Himself. Now, God doesn't need anyone else because He's complete in Himself; the Trinity is perfect in relationship. But when God made man, He chose to make him a partial reflection of that: relational, but not self-sufficient. Man needed someone to be in relationship with.
The fact that God recognized this need and found a way to meet it shows that God knows us (after all, He designed us) and that He cares for our needs and desires. He didn't leave man to be alone. He brought to Him every other created species and allowed the man to name it and see if it would be a "helper suitable for him." He could have any pet he wanted. But that wasn't what he needed. It wasn't enough. There wasn't anyone just right for him.
- ∞ **God designed woman as a custom-made match for man** (2:18-23). Woman was made as a helper "fit" for man (corresponding to, just perfect, custom-made for). God knew exactly every detail of who Adam was and what he most needed—He designed and created Adam. So He chose to custom-make a second person just perfect for Adam. That person was Eve. Implications:
 - Woman & man are not the same (but are equally image-bearers). He didn't have to make a woman; He could have made a second man. They could have been alike in every way and liked all the same things gotten along great—no arguments about "stop trying to fix everything; I just need you to listen!" or "why are you being so emotional?" But He didn't. That's not what Adam most needed.
 - From Tim & Kathy Keller: Help (*Ezer*): supplies strength in an area that's lacking in the other. *Ezer* often used about God, or military strength brought in to win the battle. It's strength in an area that's lacking, help that they couldn't provide on their own. It's not a lesser designation; it's powerful. "Suitable" lit "like opposite him." Like two puzzle pieces that fit together—not exactly the same but not randomly different, but perfectly fitted to the other. Men & women are different! Sometimes frustratingly so because we don't understand the other, and so we make fun of them or roll our eyes at

them. But if we instead learn from them & allow God to shape us through them, we'll find that we can become more reflective of God *together* than we can *alone*. We need each other.

- This of course raises the Q: What about singles?? Does this mean that it's "not good" for you to be a single? Clearly not, for Jesus was single, and so was Paul (who wrote half the NT and described singleness as "better"—but we have a whole lesson devoted to that coming up in a few weeks). But this was the pattern for humanity that God was making, and He didn't want Adam to be alone. He created marriage, and sexuality, and family, and community, and all of that was very good. It doesn't mean every single man or woman from creation on will be married, just that it's the pattern for families and God's design to "be fruitful and multiply."
- But it IS His design that none of us be alone. Single or married, we are ALL created for relationships, and it's not good to be isolated. We know this intuitively, and many people are so afraid of being alone that they get or stay in unhealthy or abusive relationships just so they aren't alone—but they wind up feeling even more lonely. Of course, God is always there with us, but He created us to need other people, too. When we build deep friendships with others, share life together, and spur each other on in our walks with Christ (whether in marriage or in friendships), we honor God.

- ∞ **God designed the sexual bond between a man and a woman to be permanent and free from shame** (2:24-25). God designed for man and woman to join in marriage and become one flesh for life. When God talks about the man and woman becoming "one flesh," we learn something more about the "fit" between Adam and Eve. It's not just relational and spiritual—it's also physical. The bodies of a man and a woman are designed to fit together in sex. And this act is meant to draw two people into a union that is the closest of relationships. Marriage and sex aren't differentiated in this passage because they weren't designed to be separated. Becoming one flesh is supposed to be permanent. This is God's design for sex. Note that there is *no shame* in sex as God intended. (2:25) There is perfect intimacy, closeness, nakedness, without fear or guilt. Just joy in each other. Adam and Eve were together, nothing between them, nothing to hide, just enjoying each other.

Did God know His beautiful design for sex would go wrong after the fall, and that His good creation would be used for all sorts of evil and hurt? That we would take the image of Himself that He created in us and run it through the mud, allowing people to call God evil and blame all sorts of things on Him? Yes, yes He did. He knew that in the very next chapter shame would come because Adam and Eve would choose not to heed the voice of God but to go after our their desires and what looks good in the moment instead. By the end of chapter 3 we find them trying to sew clothes for themselves, hide from God, and blame each other. In chapter 4, we see one of their sons killing his brother. Things went downhill fast.

Did God know that His good creation of gender was going to be used as a tool to oppress women and to divide people? Did He know there would be people who feel

“stuck” in the wrong body, as if their gender was a mistake and desperately wanting a different sexuality? Yes, He knew. And can I just remind you? Jesus knows all about suffering. He knows all about being stuck in a body with limits He wasn’t designed to have. He, the eternal, limitless, uncontained God of the universe took on a body that was contained by space and felt pain got sick and hungry and died. He did this because of how much He loves us. He wants to walk with us through the struggles. And He wants us to trust Him, and trust that as broken as it may be in our fallen world, there is good in the XX or XY He wrote on every cell of your body.

God knew that every aspect of His good creation would be misused, at times bringing terrible hurt instead of the joy He intended. But in spite of all the pain He knew would come, God said that His design was very good, that it was worth it, and it was worth giving people a choice in how to use it. He knew that He could redeem even the worst of sin and heal even the deepest hurt through the cross of Jesus. And that He could continue to hold out an offer of a way to live that is beautiful, free from shame and full of joy, and reflects our Creator to the world around us. And that’s what He wants for each of you.

∞ **Application:**

- Trust your Creator and His design for sex, gender, and marriage. He really does know ourselves, our sexuality, and our need for relationship better than we do. And He is infinitely good. If we trust Him and follow His guidance, it will be worth it.
- Commit to honoring God with your body and your relationships, and you will experience the joy of intimacy with God as well as freedom from shame.
- Take a step to build a deeper spiritual friendship.

Throughout this series on sexuality, if you have questions:

1. You can always ask in your breakout group! There may not be time to fully cover your question, but we’re happy to at least start to talk about it.
2. Box for anonymous Qs (final week of the series is forum)
3. Your youth leaders are always happy to talk with you, even about hard stuff! If you ask us, “Hey, can we get ice cream sometime and talk?” Yes.

Really excited for the rest of the series! Kevin will be bringing the Word next week, talking specifically about marriage! In future weeks we’ll tackle singleness, homosexuality, temptation, and more, so we hope you can be here for all of them!

Breakout Questions:

- Was there anything you heard that was new, that you disagreed with, or that you aren't sure you understand?
- What are some ways you have seen our culture stress our individuality, autonomy, or independence from one another? According to Genesis 1-2, why is this healthy or unhealthy?
- How have you seen others deal with loneliness? In light of Genesis 1-2, why are these methods healthy or unhealthy?
- Why do you think Genesis 2 goes out of the way to tell us that Adam & Eve were naked and felt no shame? Why do you think we often feel shame when we think or talk about sex or our bodies? Should we?
- Why does our sexuality matter to God?
 - What does it mean that we are His image-bearers?
- How does the creation story shape our view of marriage? sex? male & female? homosexuality? relationships? God?
- What will you commit to this week as a response to what you've learned? Examples:
 - Study the Creator's design for sexuality. Commit to being at The Edge each Wednesday this series, and study the passages on your own at home.
 - If there's an area of your sexual life where you do feel shame, come clean by confessing to God and to a friend who shares these values and will keep you accountable.
 - Since we weren't created to be alone, call up a friend this week and spend time together having fun and talking about things that matter.

WEEK 2: MARRIAGE: A PICTURE OF GOD'S LOVE

Ephesians 5:22-33

Marriage is a living picture of Christ's undying, sacrificial love for His church.

Intro: What is marriage?

Some people see marriage as this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQJvSzkVfRg> (Sesame Street: Grover discusses what is marriage). Some see it more like this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suAhGfVr_4U (Seinfeld: Kramer on marriage)

If you google "what is marriage" you get some interesting answers. Everything from "it's prison" "it's a scam" or "your life is over" or (I actually saw this) "it devalues love" to something like Grover's definition of a man and a woman who love each other and choose to do life together, to help each other. Though, throughout most of history, love wasn't a necessary part of the arrangement: it was often a union arranged for financial or practical reasons. And then there are others who say it doesn't have to be a man and a woman, it could be two men or two women, or maybe a man and a bunch of women, or anyone who wants to join with anyone else, as long as they're adults and they all agree.

But is that all that marriage is? A union of people who love each other, to help each other, where you will hopefully both be happy and not feel like a prison or choose to divorce like about half of marriages wind up? When my coworker, who wasn't a believer and had been living with her boyfriend for years, got married, I saw her shortly after the honeymoon and asked, "How's marriage?" She shrugged: "It's pretty much the same."

From God's perspective, marriage is a whole lot more. And it's so much more beautiful, costly, life-giving, and God-like.

Marriage is telling a story. It's a picture pointing to Jesus (like sacrifices, Passover, communion, baptism).

Marriage is a living picture of Christ's undying, sacrificial love for His church.

Read passage (Eph 5:22-33).

- ∞ **Marriage is a picture of our relationship with Christ** (v. 22-25). Husband and wife relate to each other like Christ to the church:
 - The husband is the head (authority, responsibility) like Christ is the head of the church; the wife is called to submit (or yield rights)--as we submit to Christ, not out of duty but love and trust. See v. 21: submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.
 - Women are not called to submit to all men, only their husbands. This was giving a lot more freedom to women of the time who were seen in many ways as property.
 - The husband is to love his wife like Christ loved the church—giving himself up for her, helping to make her holy. (This is actually the harder role, and if a husband does it well, it makes the wife's role of submission easy.)
 - Most of the text addresses men. Paul devotes 3 times the space to the duties of the husband 9 verses to the husband 3 to the wife.
 - Both of these are extremely difficult tasks as we are by nature selfish, self seeking, self righteous, and are called to be the opposite. Husbands are called

to love their wives to the highest standard—to be like Christ who gave His life for His bride. And wives are called to trust, yield, and submit to their husbands as we do to Christ. And this giving up of ourselves and our personal desires for the other is a picture of what Christ has done for us and of the kind of relationship He calls us to have with Him. When a marriage lives this out, we create an incredible picture of what it's like to be the bride of Christ, whom He died to redeem.

- This is only possible through the power of the Gospel.
- Married love is sacrificial—just as Christ, in loving us, chose to die for us (v. 25). It's not about whether it's easy or fun or if you currently *feel* like you're “in love” or “belong together.” It's a giving up of self on BOTH sides.
- Goes against the cultural view of marriage, where if it's not fulfilling you or making you happy, you deserve better, you should start over with someone who will treat you like you deserve, etc... putting you at the center rather than Christ. Christ is honored when we work hard at a difficult marriage.
- ∞ **Marriage is a picture of our union with Christ** (v. 28-31). Husband and wife are united together into “one flesh”—and so, because they are one, to love your spouse is to love yourself (in a good way) This is also a picture of Christ & the church—that we are united with Him; He cares for us, and desires us to love Him (v. 29-32). It's also a picture of the unity within the Trinity--See Jn 17.
 - Marriage is a union, a joining of two people into one flesh for life (v. 28-31; cf. Mt. 19). It's a vow, a covenant (Mal 2:14). Just as Christ promises that nothing we do can separate us from His love, so in marriage that love is to be a permanent picture of Christ's commitment, and a joining not meant to be undone.
 - It is a radical idea in this world to love each other unconditionally. This image reflects Christ love for His bride the church.
 - Side note (but important): Some of you have experienced divorce in your parents' marriage or in friends'. Have you felt that ripping, that breaking? It's not our role to judge someone else's marriage or divorce; there are biblical grounds for divorce, such as unfaithfulness. And obviously what's in the past can't be undone. But you need to know:
 - ∞ that the pain you feel from that separation is normal. It's because our world is broken and it's not meant to be this way. Jesus said Moses allowed for divorce “because your hearts were hard” (Mt 19)—because of sin.
 - ∞ NOTHING can separate us from God's love (Rm 9).
 - ∞ There is forgiveness for divorce, like for any of our sins.
 - This is a profound mystery. Sacrament: a physical, outward sign pointing to something spiritual. It's deeper than we can fully understand. The fact that God chose us, died for us, united us with Himself, and pursues and loves us regardless of what we do to Him... this is beyond our ability to comprehend. But marriage—though on this earth it's flawed and broken—is one picture God has given us of this marvelous mystery. He takes two people and makes them one. Sex is the physical act that binds them together; it's the glue. It's part of why divorce hurts so much—it's ripping something apart. It's also

part of why adultery or sex before marriage bring so much pain—it's meant to be the glue that keeps a marriage close, and when it's outside of that context of oneness, it's trying to make two people one who are actually still separate. You still feel that pulling. And the ripping. But more on that next week...

- When a husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church and a wife submits to her loving husband, it shows the world a picture of God's relationship to the church.
 - It shows God's love, devotion, and great care and affection to His bride the church. See verses 25-27. Marriage is so important because it reflects God's glory.
- ∞ **Marriage is more about making us holy than making us happy** (v. 26-27). Just as Christ loved us and died for us in order to make us holy for Himself, our love in marriage should call each other to be more like Christ. More is at stake in marriage than just whether or not you're "in love" or want to be together. Our sanctification and Christ's glory is also on the line. The world is watching: what kind of picture of Christ are we drawing through our marriages?
- We are taught in our culture that marriage is about our own happiness. However, this is not what the Bible teaches us. It teaches us that marriage is about reflecting the relationship between Christ and the church to the world around us. It is about showing the greatness of God to a sinful and fallen world. It is important to strive for a marriage that brings Christ honor and glory and praise.
 - Remember that these words about marriage were written in a culture of arranged marriages. So excuses about not being incompatible or falling out of love or making a wrong choice or all of that fall pretty limp when you realize this is how husbands and wives were called to love each other even when they'd had no choice in the matter of who their spouse was. We have an advantage of getting to choose whom we marry and choose someone we love and enjoy. But if there comes a point where we no longer feel like we love or enjoy or even like that other person—and that may well happen—we can still make the choice to love them like Christ loved us when we were His enemies. And in doing so, we bring great glory to God by showing our love for Him is greater than our desire for our own pleasure and happiness. God also uses it to deepen our character—and ultimately, our joy—as we pursue Him first in this marriage relationship that is sometimes spectacular and ecstatic and sometimes a lot of hard work.
 - Husbands and wives are to love, sacrifice for one another, and forgive each other in a way that helps to sanctify them.
 - John Piper says it correctly when he says, "Husbands and wives, recognize that in marriage you have become one flesh. If you live for your private pleasure at the expense of your spouse, you are living against yourself and destroying your joy. But if you devote yourself with all your heart to the holy joy of your spouse, you will also be living for your joy and making a marriage after the image of Christ and His church."
- ∞ **Application:** I know none of you (students) are married, but there is still application for each of us from this passage:

- Celebrate the depth of Christ's love for you (and commitment to you) and focus on loving Him in return.
- Allow God to shape your character to prepare you for the kind of marriage that will honor Him.
- Respect the marriages of people around you as something holy.
- Keep this view of marriage in mind in your dating relationships.

∞ Breakout Questions

- Was there anything you heard that was new, that you disagreed with, or that you aren't sure you understand?
- How have you seen TV or movies depict marriage? Why do you think the picture provided is healthy or unhealthy?
- Have you ever seen what you would consider a biblical marriage? Why does it stick out to you as a positive example?
- In your own words, describe why a marriage needs to be characterized by selflessness and servanthood.
- How is marriage a picture of Christ & the church? Why do you think He chose marriage to be this picture?
- Why is the picture often so blurred in marriages, and sometimes broken altogether? How do you think God wants us to respond to conflict/abuse in marriages, or to divorce?
- How does this view of marriage change the way you think about dating?
- What will you commit to this week as a response to what you've learned?

Examples:

- Plan a "date" with God this week: Celebrate His great love for you and find a creative way to grow your love for Him.
- Think about a couple whose marriage you admire. See if you can get together with them and ask them what has helped their marriage stay strong and how you can develop some of the character traits that will help your future marriage last.
- If you're going through a difficult time right now, remember that your holiness is worth more than your happiness; ask God to help you view this difficulty as a chance to shape your character.
- Commit to honoring marriages in the way you talk about them or talk to someone about their spouse.

WEEK 3: SEX STICKS

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Sex is a strong bond that is physical and spiritual, and destructive when misused.

Hook: Two wood hearts glued together. Have someone try to separate them without damaging either heart (impossible).

- ∞ Analogy: sex is like super glue! Great for joining something when you want the bond to stay strong under pressure... bad when it gets on something you didn't want to stay connected (like your fingers). And, like these hearts that were joined together as one and then pulled apart, it can have lasting, painful consequences when misused.
- ∞ Intro to passage: "Everything is permissible for me"—but not everything is beneficial (v. 12). God's grace brings great freedom. Nothing we do can cause God to love us less. He wants us to live freely! And yet some of our actions still have *huge* consequences (for good or bad). So God still calls us to holiness—which means to be more like Christ (v. 9-11). And this is for our own good, as well as His glory (v. 13b). (Our culture values "freedom," but using your body however you feel like in the moment isn't true freedom; it's actually slavery to something else. God wants more for you.)

READ PASSAGE (1 Corinthians 6:12-20)

There's some strong language in that passage, isn't there? Clearly Paul saw this as a big deal. And here's the big idea I think God wants us to take away from tonight:

Big idea: Sex is a strong bond that is physical and spiritual, and destructive when misused.

Let's look at four points Paul makes about this strong bond.

- ∞ **Our primary bond is with Christ** (v. 13, 15, 17).
 - Our bodies are meant for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.
 - The NT is full of language about being "in Christ" or "with Christ." Our bodies are members of Christ (remember how marriage showed us the example of how we are to live out the bond between Christ & the church?)
 - He who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. WHOA. Note that the passage tells us we are united with Christ in spirit AND in body. It's the whole of who we are that is in Christ, and He is in us in both a spiritual and a literal way, and all of this is a great mystery, but it's an amazing gift.
 - In other words, sex is *not* the deepest or most intimate connection you can experience with another. The strongest and closest bond is not marriage or sex or BFFs or any human relationship—it's our union with Christ. It's not only the strongest and most intimate bond, but it's also first and most important. Thus, primary. It's the greatest gift we are given and the union we most want to protect and honor.
- ∞ **Sex bonds us with another person and leaves damage if ripped apart.** (v. 15-16).
 - Remember how sex is like glue and helps make two into "one flesh"? In every other place in Scripture, Gen 2:24 and the picture of becoming one flesh is used in the context of marriage. But here Paul takes it out of that context and talks about sex outside of marriage. And what he says is really profound.

- Not just marriage creates “one flesh”—sex alone does that because of the way it emotionally, physically, & spiritually connects people.
- But sex wasn’t created to exist outside of marriage, and our bodies (and our souls) weren’t made for that. It tries to create one from two, but as singles we’re still separate individuals. We separate, but just like the wooden hearts, we find we can’t neatly separate and be just as we once were. It results in pain and brokenness. The more we join with someone, separate, join with someone else, separate, the more we break. We’re not created for that. Sex wasn’t created for that.
- To sin sexually is to hurt your own body—more than any other way we sin (v. 18). Therefore FLEE sexual sin (v. 18). Do you guys remember what Joseph did when Potiphar’s wife wanted to have sex with him? He literally ran out the door, leaving his robe in her arms! God, in His wisdom and love, wants us to do whatever it takes to save the glue for marriage.
- ∞ **Sex bonds us physically and spiritually.** (v. 15-20).
 - As Christians, we are in Christ. Paul says “our bodies are members of Christ Himself” (v. 15). We’re part of His body, the Church. We’re in Him, and He’s in us. That’s the amazing mystery Paul talked about in Eph 5! Marriage gives us a small glimpse of this, but it’s mind-boggling. Also note that Paul says “our bodies” (not just our souls). We are whole people, and our bodies are eternal and significant as well as our souls. That’s why Paul talks about the resurrection here. In eternity, we won’t be body-less spirits floating around Heaven. God is coming back to raise up our bodies. We’ll be embodied beings for all of eternity, so our bodies matter! Yes, they’ll be changed and perfected and we don’t know exactly what that will be like, but we’ll still have them. Our bodies are temples of Christ, members of Christ; they’re eternal and significant, and they’re indivisibly connected to our souls. We can’t separate our body and our soul; what we do with one we do with both, because we’re whole beings. Therefore how we use our bodies, especially in the area of sex, is not just physical—it’s also very spiritual.
 - That’s why God created sex to be in the confines of marriage. Both are to be considered sacred and precious things. (Often think of confines, limits as negative. Show pics of beautiful ocean, then tsunami damage. Same water – out of its natural, God-created “limits” causes great destruction. When God tells the waves “this far you shall come and no further” it’s a great act of grace. Same when He gives us confines for sex.)
 - For as much as culture tries to convince us of the opposite, that it doesn’t matter, sex is *not* just physical and relational but much, much deeper. It has a very real impact on our spiritual lives and our relationship with Christ.
- ∞ **Our sexual bonds can either honor God or bring shame on Him** (v 16, 19-20).
 - Then Paul says “Shall I take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? NEVER!” Christ lived the ultimate holy life. To somehow take Him and unite Him with a prostitute... it’s unthinkable. But get this: Paul is saying that’s exactly what we do when we, as Christians, choose to have sex outside of marriage. “Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, ‘the two will become one flesh’” (v. 16). Citing the creation account.

- Because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and Christ dwells in us, when we sin sexually we also sin against Christ (v. 19). We're called to honor God with our bodies (as well as our hearts and minds) (v. 20).
- Example of how we view our bodies/sexuality: disposable cup: throwing away our sexuality and self worth or like fine china: for the finest use, well taken care of and maintained like a temple: FOR SOMEONE SPECIAL! For God and your future spouse. **[bring disposable cup & teacup from Grandma]** Remember that my sexuality is a priceless treasure that's been entrusted to me. Treat it as such. If I use it how it's intended, I can bring so much honor to the God who made me.

So we've seen how sex is a strong bond that is physical and spiritual, and destructive when misused. We could spend more time talking about the types of destruction that misused sex can cause. But I think most of you are aware of how much pain there can be. So I just want to end with this reminder:

There is no pain or destruction too deep for Jesus to heal. If you're here tonight and you have regrets—if you've experienced some of the brokenness that comes from sexual sin—or if at any point in your life you do and you think back to tonight, I want you to remember that Jesus is the Healer, the Redeemer. Even though our sin is ultimately against Him—He delights to forgive and to make whole. There is no sin too big for God to forgive, and there's no pain too deep for Him to heal. There might be continued consequences we struggle with while in the body, but there is freedom and grace and healing in Christ.

When the religious people of Jesus' day brought Him a woman caught in the act of adultery and reminded Him that the law called for such people to be stoned, Jesus said, "Let him who is without sin be the first to throw a stone." In doing so, He reminded us that all of us are undeserving of God's grace, and that's precisely why it's grace. When they all left the woman alone, He said, "Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir." "Go now, and leave your life of sin."

∞ Application:

- Commit to saving sex to strengthen your marriage and honor Christ, not to abuse it and cause you pain and dishonor Jesus.
- Commit to purity from the inside. Mk 7: all sin springs from the heart. Mt. 5: If you look at someone lustfully, that's having sex in your heart. Purity has to start inside. It's a high calling. Avoid even a hint of sexual immorality or impurity (Eph 5:3). [distinguish between temptation that we can't control and our chosen response to it—feelings/desires not sinful, but feeding them or giving in to them is] But it's for our own good, as well as to honor the name of the one who created us, loved us, bought us at a price, and joined us to Himself.
- It's a good idea to decide NOW what you're going to do with your body and sexuality. If you make a commitment to God, yourself, and your potential future spouse, God will honor that decision and help you in times of temptation when you feel weak. Decide now what you will and won't do with your body to bring the glory to God.

Sex is a strong bond that is physical and spiritual, and destructive when misused.

Prayer: God, thank You for making us to be sexual beings. Thank You that we were created to know another in such an intimate way. God, please help us to understand the grave importance our sexuality holds. Help protect our hearts, minds, and bodies from sexual immorality. Give us the strength and courage to save sex for marriage in a culture that places no value on it. For the students that have chosen today to take a stand for sexual holiness: please bless them and encourage them as they strive to honor You. Let our lives and our bodies be used in such a way that is pleasing to you. May we bring you glory with our bodies as we strive to preserve them as your holy dwelling place. Amen.

Breakout Questions

- Was there anything you heard that was new, that you disagreed with, or that you aren't sure you understand?
- Why do you think Paul talks about sexual sin in a way that makes it sound more significant than other kinds of sin? What's unique about sexual sin?
- How have you seen sex promoted or talked about as if it were "no big deal"? How does this fit with what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6?
- How is sex spiritual as well as physical? Why does it matter to God?
- Is it wrong to feel sexual temptation or desire? When does that temptation cross the line into lust or sin? (check out Mk 7:20-23 & Mt 5:27-29.) How can you keep your heart pure when those desires do spring up? What role do we play in helping our brothers or sisters in Christ to stay pure? (Girls: do you think how we dress matters?)
- What are the biggest temptations to sacrifice purity that you think you or others your age face? As a community of believers, how can we help each other in times of temptation?
- [be appropriate by age etc] Do you think God would include [pornography, fooling around with boyfriend/girlfriend if you don't go "all the way," living with someone before you're married as long as you're committed to them, etc] as sexual sin? Why or why not? Does it have the same consequences?
- Can the brokenness people experience from past sexual sin be healed? How?
- What will you commit to this week as a response to what you've learned?
Examples:
 - Since our primary union is with Christ, set aside a time this week to grow that relationship.
 - Flee sexual sin by setting up guardrails to keep you from situations you know you'll find tempting and/or asking a Christian friend to keep you accountable.
 - Help create a culture of purity by prayerfully considering the way you dress, talk, text, and act around people of the opposite sex this week.
 - If you're dating, go to a public place (like a coffee shop) and have a heart-to-heart talk with your significant other about these issues and where you both stand; set up clear boundaries to help you save the "glue" for marriage.

WEEK 4: SINGLE-MINDED

1 Cor 7:25-40

Christian singleness honors Christ as the ultimate object of our love.

Hook: Do you know any single folks over 40? What do you think of them? (Write observations on white board.) Can you think of any single folk in the Bible? What do you think of them? (Write on white board.)

Time on earth is very brief. Eternity is, well, eternity: a long time followed by a longer time.

Can you think of activities/things that are designed for this earth but will not be part of eternity? (Shopping, evangelism, marriage...)

Can you think of activities/things that are designed for eternity?

Society sends us numerous messages about getting all we can in this life, whether it is sex or possessions or applause, but this life is an infinitesimal drop in the bucket compared to eternity. We must be wise to invest our lives and our resources in that which will outlive this world.

READ PASSAGE.

What is the primary advantage to being single? - devotion to Lord

In what sense is Paul's advice on being single "for our own good"? - free from anxiety

Background to passage (big picture): He's addressing questions from the Corinthian church.

Tone is different from how Paul addresses other issues (i.e., *this is not as big an issue as you're making it.*) The really big picture behind all that is said in this chapter is found in vers 17:

"Each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them." Rule of Thumb: Where you are at when you were called by God is a fine place. You don't need to change your present situation in order to honor God. What is of primary importance? v. 23 Our being bought at a price; our salvation. We are slaves of God not men. He is my Lord. Everything else falls under this big picture.

Believers should not be in a hurry to change their marital status. Status of any kind is ultimately irrelevant with God. Singleness is not a lesser status than marriage. In fact:

Christian singleness honors Christ as the ultimate object of our love.

Paul highlights 4 facts about singleness and marriage from God's perspective:

∞ **Singleness is a gift from God.** (v. 7-9, 25-31).

- 7-9 Paul addresses three possible outcomes for our lives as it relates to the question of marriage. His first choice, and the one he encourages, is that an unmarried person remain as they are. But he also recognizes that it takes a special gift from God to do so in a way that honors God. Option number two is to marry. It too is a fine choice. Option three, and an unacceptable one, is to remain unmarried, but to burn with passion. This does not honor the Lord.
- "It is clear from these verses that, in Paul's view, the most fortunate state is that of the unmarried person who is under no pressure to marry; less desirable is that of the person who must express his sexual nature and does so within marriage; least desirable is that of the person who needs marriage as such a means of expression, but attempts (or possibly is compelled) to do

without it.” C.K. Barrett p. 161

- v. 25-31 What is the present crisis? Probably a reference to the end times, the eschatological woes that are impending over the world, and are already anticipated in the sufferings of Christians. Marriage will only add to the complexity and trials of this time.
- Paul urges his readers to recognize that our time on this earth is very brief and we must learn the value of the things of this world. In this context, Paul wants to elevate the eternal – our devotion to the Lord – over those institutions of this world that have no permanence, such as marriage. So when he instructs those who are married to live as if they are not, he is not instructing them to divorce, but to understand correctly their priority to love, serve, and please the Lord above all else (v. 32 – see also Mark 12:25).
- ∞ **Singleness allows you an undivided focus on pleasing God** (v. 32-35).
 - We can live in this world without anxiety. One of the beauties of the Christian faith is that we can trust God in every way. Justified by faith, we have peace with God (Romans 5:1). God demonstrated his love to us while we were sinners, and we can have absolute confidence in his grace. Anxiety is out of place with respect to our salvation and ought not be any part of our lives as we live in dependence upon our Lord. So, the pleasing of the Lord is not in the sense of gaining God's approval for salvation, but rather submitting to him as a slave to a master. It is all about the relationship. The unmarried man has the same desire to please the Lord, but having committed to marriage relationship finds that his mind is divided between the two relationships and the concomitant commitments.
 - Note that the parallel statement about the single women focuses upon holiness. Holiness seems to be confined here to single women, but we know from elsewhere that holiness is a priority for both the unmarried and the married (Rom. 6:12; 12:1 1 Cor.6:13, 15, 19, 20 -last week's lesson- 2 Cor, 5:10 etc..). Perhaps Paul is picking up on one of their statements. “Again, he is making the point that though in the present circumstances the unmarried state is desirable, it is not intrinsically better” Barrett p. 181
- ∞ **Singleness and marriage are both approved by God** (v. 36-38).
 - Most likely the man and woman are an engaged couple, and to renounce marriage may seem to be a fine and spiritual act. It is possible that the Corinthians overvalued the ascetic lifestyle (thinking of it as being more spiritual) and thus pressured people toward celibacy (see verse 1). But in many or most cases it may not be best choice. So they ought to marry. Again Paul indicates that both are acceptable in God's sight, and yet he would suggest that not marrying is the better option.
- ∞ **Marriage is a lifelong commitment** (v. 39-40)
 - There is a faithfulness to the wedding vows that is assumed by Paul. This is vitally central to the covenant of marriage. But if there is a death by one of the members, then the single person has freedom to marry anyone who belongs to the Lord (39-40). This is equally applicable to those that have never married. It is God's desire that those that belong to him marry another of those that belong to him.

∞ **Application:**

- Embrace your singleness as a chance to serve God wholeheartedly.
- Pursue God as your highest desire, whether He calls you to marriage or singleness.
- Seek community and friendship in the Body of Christ; singleness is not meant to be loneliness.

Breakout Questions:

- Was there anything you heard that was new, that you disagreed with, or that you aren't sure you understand?
- How have you seen others (TV, movies, radio, friends, etc.) talk about singleness? What are some stereotypes about single people?
- What would you say is the biggest challenge about being single? Why?
- Do you think our culture over-values or under-values marriage? What about the church?
- What are you able to do as a single person for the cause of Christ that you might not be able to do if you were married?
- What are some ways you can stay connected to other people and experience healthy relationships even while you are still single?
- Why do you think God wants Christians to marry only other people who share our faith? Do you think that applies to dating as well?
- What will you commit to this week as a response to what you've learned?

Examples:

- **Embrace your singleness as a chance to serve God wholeheartedly.** Schedule a "date" this week to invest in someone who doesn't yet know Jesus.
- **Pursue God as your highest desire, whether He calls you to marriage or singleness.** Schedule a "date" with God this week and spend time deepening your relationship with Him through His Word and prayer.
- **Seek community and friendship in the Body of Christ; singleness is not meant to be loneliness.** Schedule a "date" this week with a friend who helps you draw closer to Christ.

WEEK 5: HOMOSEXUALITY

Romans 1:18-2:4

When we disregard God's design in favor of our own desires, we mar God's image and commit idolatry. When we disregard our desires in favor of God's glory, we reflect and worship Him.

Show optical illusions on screen.

It's disconcerting when I can't trust my own senses! I'm increasingly aware that my own senses and emotions are not the most trustworthy judges of reality. But if I can't trust what my own eyes are telling me about what I see right in front of me, what can I trust? In my life I've become more and more thankful for the Word of God, because over the course of thousands and thousands of years He has shown Himself trustworthy. Unlike my senses, He sees all reality clearly and always speaks the truth.

But one area of Scripture called into question frequently in our culture is what God says about homosexuality, or the gay lifestyle. The church is often seen as an enemy of the LGBTQ community.

The church has often taken one of three stances toward homosexuality: either disregarding God's Word and going along with the culture in celebrating it, firmly taking a stand against it but unfortunately doing so in a way that lacks love toward those who disagree—being more known for picket signs, judgmentalism, and hypocrisy—or, trying to ignore it and hope the problem just goes away.

Well, it's not going away. It's been around since Bible times, and God does have some pretty clear things to say about it. But I don't think any of those stances really reflect the heart of God. Today we're going to look at not only what God says about homosexuality but why it's important and how we as Christians are called to respond.

Read passage (stop after first two slides and ask volunteers to summarize). This is heavy stuff, isn't it? No one really loves talking about sin and God's judgment. Probably many of us know people we love who have come out as gay or trans. So in some ways this is a hard passage to teach. But I truly believe every passage of Scripture is here for our good, and truth is always a gift. As we dig into this a little, I hope you'll see how there is good news even here.

But for tonight, here's the big idea I hope you leave with: **When we disregard God's design in favor of our own desires, we mar God's image and commit idolatry.** But also, the flipside: **When we disregard our desires in favor of God's glory, we reflect and worship Him.**

We see this first of all in the fact that...

- ∞ **Sin has distorted God's created design for sex** (v.18-27).
 - Did you notice that this passage (just like the one on marriage and the one on sex like glue) points back to the creation account? Clearly there's some important stuff there. There are core things about how God made us that shape how we view sexuality.

- Creation (the way we are made and the way the world is) points back to our Creator (v. 18-20).
 - BUT people have chosen to ignore what's plain about God from creation and to do their own thing (v. 21-23). And that's not just in the area of sexuality, but lots of other behaviors.
 - God allows people to choose their path and face the consequences (v. 24, 26).
 - Sexual impurity (all sex outside of marriage—v 24) and homosexuality in particular (v. 26-27) are distortions of God's created design for sex and for our bodies.
 - Homosexuality is called “unnatural” (v. 27)—this is *not* saying some people don't feel those desires innately, “naturally,” but rather pointing back to creation and saying “not as designed.” Because of the fall, all of us deal with desires which come unbidden but do not reflect what God created us for. For example, the desire to argue angrily with someone who makes me upset, the desire to get even when someone hurts you, or to eat the whole chocolate cake, or to drink alcohol and keep drinking until you're wasted. It's important to distinguish between temptation that we can't control and our chosen response to it—having certain feelings or desires not sinful. It's part of having a fallen human nature. We cross the line into sin when we start feeding ungodly desires or giving in to temptation.
 - Remember, sex was designed to be the “glue” in marriage that makes two people into one. Marriage was designed to be a picture of God's relationship with the church and as a way to be co-creators with God through having children and filling the earth.
 - Homosexuality is therefore a turning away from God's design and a perversion of His gift of sex.
 - But so is any misuse of sex: unfaithfulness in marriage, child abuse, rape, divorce, pornography, living together before you're married, playing around with a boyfriend/girlfriend.
 - Because we bear God's image, when we misuse our bodies, we dishonor Him.
- ∞ **Sex is ultimately an issue of worship** (v. 23-25).
- Sex (not just homosexuality) is ultimately a worship issue, as we choose to worship sex, our feelings and desires, other people, or pleasure rather than God. Because sexual desires can be so strong, they are a watershed moment to ask ourselves: What is most important to us? What has a hold on our hearts? What is our greatest desire directed toward? Because whatever that thing is--that's what we worship.
 - When we choose sex (or another person—or anger or money or fame or anything) over God, we are, by far, giving up something greater for something lesser (v. 25). We're exchanging the glory of God for created thing meant to reflect Him but not meant to replace Him. Ultimately, when our own desires come into conflict with the call of Christ, we're at a crossroads. The choice we make shows us what we view as better, more important. It shows us what we worship.

- The idea that embracing our desires and living without any sexual constraints will fulfill us and make us happy is a lie... as is anything that promises to satisfy us apart from God. Only God offers deep, lasting joy and the fulfillment our hearts are really searching for. (Remember Eve & the fruit? – at the heart of sin is distrusting God’s goodness, trusting your own wisdom/desires more than His Word, believing that something God has withheld can satisfy more than He can.)
- On the flip-side, when we choose to worship God, trust His heart, and obey His commands (even if it means sacrificing our desires), He promises to satisfy abundantly (Ps. 34:10 says those who seek the Lord lack no good thing). We’re going to get into this more next week, but when we give up something to gain Christ, what we gain is better by far than anything we give up. Nothing else compares to Jesus. When Jesus calls people to follow Him, He frequently reminds them that there’s going to be a cost. Take up your cross and follow Me. He who loses his life for Me will find it. We like to think that by obeying Christ He’s going to bless us and our lives will be easier—we’ll avoid pain or get more money or whatever. But Jesus doesn’t promise easier; He actually tells us there will be hardships. He just promises Himself, and that He is ultimate goodness and we will be most satisfied in Him. He is the pearl of great price, which was worth the merchant selling everything he had to buy it. To intentionally turn away from something that pulls on our desires because we believe Christ is better is not only our ultimate good, but it’s the most honoring way to worship Christ. It’s easy to sing songs. It’s not all that hard to give 1/10th of your money. But giving up your life, or sacrificing things that feel important to you, perhaps without fully understanding why God calls you to that but trusting Him, turning away from sin even though it’s sin that really feels good for the time—that’s a sacrifice that honors God. That’s a reflection of the heart of Christ, who asked God to take this cup from Him so He wouldn’t have to go through the horrible death of the cross and bear the weight of all our sin, but said “Not my will but Yours be done.” And that’s a startling statement to the watching world that you’ve found something better than all the world has to offer. That makes them ask, what’s so great about this Jesus?
- I want to offer two brief comments here. First, some of you, depending on how you were brought up, may be almost afraid of homosexuality. You’ve heard it’s wrong but you don’t understand it and you don’t know what to do with it and you just want to either avoid or “fix” people who struggle with it. Please hear this: We all have sins that we struggle with. For some people, temptation comes in the form of same-sex attraction and it may not be something they can easily change. Could God change their desires? Sure; He can do anything. Will He? Well, does He always take away our greed—our desire for things that do not belong to us? Does he take away our tendencies toward pride or anger? Our own sexual temptations, in whatever form they come? Even our tendencies to put good things, like family or grades or outward appearance or sports or friends ahead of God in our hearts? Or does He sometimes allow those temptations to remain, as a regular reminder of our need for His grace and His strength, and as frequent opportunities to

worship Him by choosing Him over something we still feel a pull toward but which we choose to put beneath Christ in our hearts?

Which leads me to my 2nd comment: If you are someone who feels attracted to the same sex, or to both sexes, or feels like your body is the wrong gender and you wish you could change it, or any other desire that's reflected by this passage: I know this message is hard to hear. You might disagree with me, and if that's the case, I just encourage you to prayerfully search the Bible for yourself and ask God to show you His heart. I promise you that if you really discover His heart, you will find it to be good—but perhaps not what you expect. What I most want you to hear is that, even if following Christ feels like it requires a huge sacrifice—something that feels like taking up your cross, a call to come and die—I want you to know that Jesus is better than anything He calls you to give up. He is capable of satisfying your every desire more fully than anything in this life can. Including sex. And ultimately anything He asks of you is for your good. You may not be able to always understand that, but you can trust Him.

- I've really loved learning from Jackie Hill Perry, who lived a lesbian lifestyle as a teenager and then had an encounter with Jesus that was transformative. I think her story might be encouraging to all of us. (Play Jackie Hill Perry video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLAe_JBvVwg)
- ∞ **We are all equally offered grace and equally unworthy of it (1:29-2:4).**
 - Homosexuality is not the only sin Paul mentions. Verses 28-32 talks about "every kind of wickedness," including envy, strife, gossip, boasting, and disobeying parents! Have any of you envied someone? Or caused strife with a sibling? Or disobeyed your parents? All of us fall guilty to one of those and so *all of us are just as guilty before God and just as deserving of His wrath as those who sin in the area of sexuality or homosexuality.*
 - Therefore we have no right to judge others (2:1-3). Judging others shows contempt for God, who is merciful and patient as He chooses to hold back on judgment and allow people to repent (2:4). We can hold fast to the truth of what God declares to be right and good and what He declares to be sinful because it is contrary to who He is and how He designed us. But if we do it in such a way that we are judging others as worse than ourselves, we've missed the point of God's mercy.
 - The goal of God's mercy is that we would repent, whatever our sin, and turn back to Him, worshipping Him as the only one worthy and living our lives as He created us to live them. This offer is held out to all of us, and we look like God when we hold out to others what He's given to us: undeserved grace.
 - In other words... if you struggle with same-sex attraction, or if you've messed around with your girlfriend or boyfriend and gone way too far, or if you've committed the worst possible sexual sin... God offers grace. The definition of grace means that it's undeserved. It's the gift of God, and it's offered to all. There's nothing you can do to make you beyond His reach. But it's your choice to accept it.
 - On the other hand, if you've never so much as kissed someone or watched a PG-rated movie... you are just as undeserving of God's grace as the worst

sexual offender. This is often where God's people have gone wrong. We've (sometimes) correctly called out the misuse of God's gift of sex by saying that it belongs only in the context of a marriage between one man and one woman—true. But in the process we've often alienated those who struggle with homosexuality and other sexual sins by treating them as if they're somehow beyond the scope of God's grace. By judging them and not ourselves. We act as if their sin is really, really bad, maybe unforgivable, or at least demonstrative of a heart that is certainly not ready to receive God... but we minimize and shrug off our own sins of pride and greed and envy and selfishness and gossip and disrespect of our parents and all those other things that also go against God's design and the image of God in us and dishonor God. We are just as much in need of grace, just as undeserving of it.

- Certainly some sins have greater consequences that can be far-reaching for ourselves and for others who are affected, often deeply. As we saw a couple weeks ago, sexual sins may be at the top of this list. But that doesn't mean that if we avoid them, perhaps due to circumstances and upbringing and lack of opportunity, or perhaps due to God's grace in giving us strength to say no, we're any more deserving of God's favor. We are all sinners who have worshipped other things instead of God, who have cheated on Him in our hearts and harmed His reputation by dishonoring Him in our words and actions.
- We can be correct to call homosexuality a sin and yet wrong to do so if we are not also admitting our own need for a Savior and showing those who struggle with same-sex attraction or gender confusion the same kind of grace we've been shown—which is undeserved, joyful, accepting, extravagant, and wooing us to repentance through kindness.
- My prayer is that the church will be known by that kind of grace and love and humility, just as Jesus was. That we would be strong enough to hold out the truth but known for our love of those who disagree and who fail. So far we have a long ways to go, but I have hope that, by God's grace, we might be the generation to shift that reputation and show the beauty of God's truth and God's good design while at the same time offering love, hope, and grace to those who sin—which includes us all.

∞ **Application:**

- Understand why our sexuality matters and why we can't re-create marriage or sex according to our desires (as if we're wiser than our Creator).
- Model a lifestyle of purity that reflects God's design for your body and, by your joy in God, shows the good of His design.
- Offer grace and love along with truth as you befriend those who deal with same-sex attraction or gender confusion. We are all sinners offered unbelievable grace.
- Repent and weep over your own sin & celebrate the cross.

∞ **Pray**

∞ **Breakout Questions (at end, each group collect Qs for forum):**

- Was there anything you heard that was new, that you disagreed with, or that you aren't sure you understand?

- How have you heard others talk about homosexuality? What does it reveal about their heart?
- How have you seen the church do a poor job relating to homosexuals/transgendered or those who support them? What would you suggest we do different?
- How is homosexuality a distortion of God's design for sex? Is homosexuality worse than other types of sexual sin, or other types of sin in general? Why or why not?
- How is sex ultimately a worship issue? When is it idolatry? How can we worship and honor God with our sexuality?
- How can we best love those we know who identify as gay or trans?
- What will you commit to this week as a response to what you've learned?

Examples:

- Recognize your own need for God's grace by taking time to reflect and repent of your own sin this week.
- If you know someone who is homosexual or dealing with those desires, be a friend. Remember that it's God's kindness that leads to repentance. Pray for opportunities to show how Jesus is better.
- If there's something in your life that you've been worshipping above God (in your time, desires, or focus), ask God and a friend to help you displace that idol in your life.

WEEK 6: RESIST

Hebrews 12:1-16, 28-29

Fight sin with endurance, to the death, because the joy Jesus offers is infinitely worth it.

Intro: Marathons and battlegrounds. A casual mention of them inspires admiration for strength, bravery, and endurance. But in reality, they're usually not pretty pictures. Sweat, blood, months or years of training, and lots of sacrifice are involved.

So with the Christian life. Taking up your cross and following Jesus sounds exciting, meaningful, maybe even adventurous. And it is all of that. But it's also a call to come and die. Don't forget that the cross meant torture, death, and injustice, as well as life and salvation and victory.

In today's passage, the author of Hebrews invites us to consider what it means to follow Jesus. He tells us following Jesus is like a war, and a marathon, which brings along with it self-denial and great cost. But he invites us to embrace the sacrifice with joy, as Jesus did, because the prize at the end is infinitely worth whatever we have to give up to gain it.

Read passage

Big idea: **Fight sin with endurance, to the death, because the joy Jesus offers is infinitely worth it.**

This passage tells us four truths about the battle that are essential for us to know if we are to fight it successfully:

- ∞ **The battle will be hard-fought** (v.1, 3-7, 11-12).
 - The picture Hebrews gives us is certainly not a cake walk. He uses words like run with endurance, don't grow weary and lose heart, struggle against sin to the point of shedding your blood, endure hardship, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees, make every effort to be holy.
 - In other words, if you're expecting the Christian life to just be easy, you've been reading the wrong Bible—or following the wrong Jesus. Following Christ is wonderfully good—and we'll talk about that more in a minute—but that doesn't mean it's easy.
 - In particular, this passage is talking about a battle with sin. He describes sin as something that easily entangles us, that hinders us from running the race set before us, and even that tempts us to give up our eternal inheritance. He says without holiness no one will see God, meaning there's something huge at stake, the enemy is fighting hard, and you're going to need to be ready to fight back, with everything you've got.
- ∞ **The battle is transforming us** (v. 9-11).
 - The passage also paints the picture of a dad disciplining his kids. He says all of us, whether or parents are close to perfect or pretty messed up, have parents that disciplined us, and mostly they tried to do it to help us be better people, right? Or to help keep us from danger. You maybe got a time out if you hit your brother or pulled your sister's hair, which you hated and thought completely unfair, but they were trying to teach you to be a kind and gentle

person who could resolve conflicts with negotiation instead of violence. You maybe got yelled at and your hand yanked for trying to touch a hot pot on the stove, which maybe made you cry, but it saved you from burning your hand. In the same way, he says, God is our heavenly Father and He's disciplining us for our good. The difference is, He's perfectly good and trustworthy and all-wise, so when hardships come, the author encourages us to see it as an opportunity to be transformed for the better. God is trying to make us more like Jesus, and sometimes the only way to get there involves a level of pain. Also, sometimes pain just happens, maybe as a result of someone's sin or a result of living in a world that has things like death and disease, but God's desire is to use all of that as a means of transforming us into His character.

∞ **The battle is worth it** (v. 2-3, 14-16 – also 18-29).

- So if the battle is going to be this hard, this painful, this wearying, this long, what's our motivation for fighting it? Hebrews tells us to fix our eyes on Jesus. Jesus is the prize at the end that makes all of it worth it. He's also the power to keep fighting when it gets hard. And he reminds us that Jesus endured the battle and went to the cross *because of the joy set before Him*. In other words, He kept the prize at the end in mind. He remembered how it was going to be *so worth it* and so He endured. Fighting sin and following Jesus is worth it for us, too.
- So far nothing in this passage has been about sex, right? And that's on purpose, because it's the same battle posture no matter what the fight is over, right? We need to fight pride, and greed, and bitterness, and all of that with the same level of endurance and struggle as we fight sexual temptation. But the author of this passage knows that sexual sin presents a difficult challenge because it can be *so* tempting, the desire so strong. It's where a lot of people stop resisting and give in. So look at what he compares it to in v. 16-17: "See to it that no one is sexually immoral or godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done."
- I don't know if you're familiar with the story, but way back in Genesis we read of Abraham and Isaac, and then Isaac has two sons, Esau and Jacob. In those days the oldest son always inherited the family estate. Not saying that was fair, just how their culture was. Jacob was a pretty conniving guy, and at one point Esau was out hunting and Jacob was at home making dinner. He made stew, and it must have been good. It was like their favorite family dinner, and Esau walked in after being out hunting all day, famished, and he smells it. Mmmm. You know how when you're super hungry everything just smells and looks so much better? Let's read what happened, from Genesis 25:
 - Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished.³⁰ He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.⁴)
 - ³¹ Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright."
 - ³² "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?"

³³ But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

- Remember, the birthright was inheriting everything: their land, their business, their money, and all the honor that came along with it. Esau comes in and his body and brain tell him: I’m hungry; I need to eat now! I don’t care about something that’s 10 years down the road. But in listening to his desires in the moment instead of considering what was of ultimate worth, Esau trades his whole inheritance for a bowl of lentil stew. Good choice? Clearly not. That’s why the text says “he despised his birthright.” He didn’t actually despise it, in the way we think of that, but in that moment he believed a bowl of chili to be worth more than his whole inheritance, and he exchanged what was infinitely better by far for a bowl of stew that tasted good in the moment but wouldn’t ultimately last or satisfy.
 - Hebrews warns us, don’t be like Esau. When you give in to sexual temptation, you’re trading what is eternally better by far—a life of intimate communion with Jesus and an eternal inheritance in heaven—for something that will feel good in the moment but ultimately will not satisfy. In doing so, you’re despising Jesus because you are believing in that moment that the temporary pleasure of going after your desires is going to be more satisfying than Jesus. And it’s not true. Not by a long shot. But Satan knows we often fall for it.
 - The day will come when everyone will see the glory of Jesus and realize all these other things they chased were not worth it if it meant giving up Jesus. But Hebrews warns us if we wait until then it will be too late. It’s now, in this life, that we need to choose whether we will worship Jesus (meaning to recognize Him as better and more worthy than anything else) or give Him up for the stuff of the world that’s temporary and won’t ultimately satisfy.
 - Hebrews goes on in verse 28 to tell us that the kingdom we’re receiving cannot be shaken. That’s great news to cling to. When we choose Jesus and His Kingdom, even if it means giving up some stuff of the world that looks really good, even if it means feeling the pangs of hunger or loss, we are gaining something better that can never be taken away. It’s worth it.
- ∞ **The battle can be won because Jesus won it.**
- Telling you the battle is hard but it’s worth it is true, but it’s not really good news, is it? Because how many of you feel like you have the strength to resist sin to the point of shedding your blood? To be able to throw off all the sin that so easily entangles and run this race with perseverance? To be able to always look at temptation and see it as the bowl of stew it is and trust Jesus? Victory seems pretty tenuous.
 - But Hebrews isn’t encouraging us to do it on our own strength. It’s encouraging us to remember Jesus, and to remember that Jesus has already won His war. He defeated the enemy and sat down on His throne in victory. *And* He’s given us His Spirit so that we can finish our race and join Him in His Kingdom.

- So yes, make every effort to live in holiness. It's worth anything you have to give up. Fight sin, to the death, because the joy Jesus offers is infinitely worth it. But do it keeping your eyes on Jesus, remembering that He's the one that scored the victory. And it's His strength that allows us to win the battle.

∞ **Application:**

- Understand that the pleasures of sin are like a bowl of stew in comparison with the eternal birthright offered us as children of the King.
 - Resolve to fight sin to the point of shedding your blood (i.e., no matter what it takes) by keeping Jesus forefront in your heart. This is worship!
 - Ask God what weights you need to throw off in your own heart and life as you strive to fight sin and pursue Jesus (in a minute, but also make it a habit - examen).
 - Thank God that even when we are not victorious, Jesus is!
- ∞ Let's pray. (Include time of quiet for confession.)

∞ **Breakout Questions (at end, each group collect Qs for forum):**

- Was there anything you heard tonight that was new, that you disagreed with, or that you're not sure you understand?
 - In what ways is following Jesus like fighting a bloody battle, or running a hard race?
 - What parts of following Jesus feel like the biggest sacrifice for you currently?
 - What motivations does Hebrews 12 give us for continuing the fight against sin, no matter how attractive?
 - What about those for whom following Jesus means being persecuted and killing your whole family because of your faith? Is Jesus really better by far? Why? Or those who are same-sex attracted and need to spend their whole lives fighting those desires and living single? Etc
 - If you find yourself in a place where sin (the bowl of stew) seems worth trading your inheritance for, what can you do?
 - What will you commit to this week as a response to what you've learned?
- Examples:

- If you aren't sure that Jesus is really worth the sacrifices He calls you to, pray. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you as He really is so that you can see His goodness.
- Search your heart for areas of sin that routinely snag you. What would it look like for you to fight that sin "to the point of shedding your blood?" Keep looking to Jesus as the means and the prize of your battle.
- Make a list of all that God promises you in eternity as His child. Make a list of the best that the world can promise you if you pursue pleasure in this life. Post it somewhere as a reminder when you're tempted to trade in the eternal for the momentary. (maybe do together in breakout!)

WEEK 7: FORUM

Collect questions (written) a couple weeks in advance. Have a leader facilitate, and take questions on the spot, too.

Panel: (4-5 adults, different ages and backgrounds, with solid theology and practice)

Have everyone introduce themselves (name, when you came to know Christ, single or married and, if married the story of how you met your spouse—all in 2 min ☺)

Pass out pieces of paper for students to write Qs that come to mind.

Questions from students:

- ∞ Thoughts on the Super Bowl half time show? (Related: How does God want us to make decisions about what we watch or what we wear?)
- ∞ Will homosexuals go to Heaven?
- ∞ How should we treat others that are homosexual?
- ∞ If you never have sex does God call that a sin? (*I'm not sure exactly what this is referring to, or if it's meant to be related to the previous Q about homosexuality, but I think we'll leave it as is... I can think of a few helpful convos from it.*)

Questions we've received in the past:

- ∞ Why is pornography bad? It doesn't actually hurt another person.
- ∞ How far is too far when you're dating? E.g. Does oral sex count as sex? Related: What guardrails did you put in place to help you stay pure until marriage?
- ∞ If I'm committed to another person and we're getting married soon, it's OK to have sex, right? What's the difference? Related: If I'm emotionally and sexually committed to one person, what's the point of marriage? It seems to be just a piece of paper.

Take Qs from students—paper or voiced.

If time:

- ∞ What has marriage taught you about God or yourself OR how has it made you a better person?
- ∞ What was/is the biggest challenge of being single? (Also, how did you make the most of your time of being single? Is there anything else you wish you would have done before you got married?)
- ∞ Has marriage solved all of your needs for friendship and to be with others? If not, what advice do you have about cultivating deep spiritual friendships with others or living in community?