



**ChristCommunity**  
an Evangelical Free Church

# EXPLORING GOD'S DESIGN FOR HUMAN SEXUALITY

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*Exploring God's Design for Human Sexuality*  
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February 2015

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# INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no other area in our contemporary culture has experienced a greater change than the Western world's reframing of anthropology, gender, sexuality, and marriage.

The dizzying speed of cultural change and sexual norms has been and continues to be a great challenge for us as individuals as well as faith communities and institutions.

Navigating such rapid social change regarding sexual ethics and marriage has been particularly challenging for followers of Jesus who seek to hold to orthodox Christian faith, teaching, and practice. Admittedly, we as the Christian church have failed at times to follow Jesus faithfully in the midst of so much change.

We have often held a hypocritical double standard regarding sexual ethics, focusing on the sins of homosexual behavior while neglecting to focus on the sins of heterosexual behavior. We have strongly opposed same-sex marriage, and yet have not put similar energy on the high rate of divorce among heterosexual marriages, something the Bible takes very seriously. We have harbored ungodly and non-Christian attitudes toward the LGBTQ<sup>1</sup> community, failing to treat all individuals as image-bearers. We have been less than willing to repent of our own sexual brokenness and quick to throw stones of condemnation on others who have different expressions of sexual brokenness.

The Apostle John shines the needed light of grace and truth into our sinful and broken lives when he writes, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn 1:8-9). As apprentices of Jesus, heartfelt repentance for sin in our lives and in our faith community is not merely a one-time event, but a life-giving reality that helps shape our ongoing spiritual formation. Now is the time for us as apprentices of Jesus to assume a posture of repentance. May we humbly repent of our sin and may our gracious Lord restore us and our local church family with the joy of our salvation.

Now is also the time for us as followers of Jesus and as a local church family to clearly reaffirm God's revealed truth regarding anthropology, gender, human sexuality, and marriage. Let us wholeheartedly embrace grace and truth, remembering our Lord Jesus is the perfect incarnation of both (Jn 1:14). Let us also reaffirm that we, the local church, are called, commissioned, and empowered to incarnate both grace and truth in all that we say and do. While we are called to live lives of gracious compassion for all image bearers of God, we are also called to be a gospel-centered people who faithfully incarnate and proclaim propositional truth.

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<sup>1</sup> While we understand there are other letters and configurations of this title laid out by various parties, this is the designation we have chosen to use for the purposes of this paper.



The Bible is the bedrock of our integral Christian faith and worldview, speaking with coherence regarding God's unchanging design for human flourishing. Human sexuality is not socially constructed; rather, it is an integral aspect of our image-bearing humanity and foundational in God's good creation design. To be human is more than being a sexual creature, but not less.

We must recognize that the rapidly changing cultural tide regarding human sexuality and marriage is, in many respects, contradictory to what we believe to be God's design for human flourishing, as revealed in the Bible. We believe Christian faithfulness in our time requires not cultural accommodation, but a humble and courageous confidence that speaks uncompromising truth with tender love and compassion for God's good, yet badly broken, world.

It is our prayer that this resource will help each one of us to be more informed both in regard to Scripture as well as contemporary culture, and that we will have the wisdom to be a faithful presence for Christ in the midst of rapid change. Let us grow in our understanding of God's design for human flourishing. Let us press into that design in all areas of life, living out gospel faithfulness together in Spirit-filled unity in the context of our own messy lives and a broken world. May we do this with both grace and truth!

Tom Nelson  
*Senior Pastor*



# WHAT INFORMS OUR VIEW OF HUMAN SEXUALITY?

Sex is God's idea.

He designed it, and he knows best how it works.

Many readers likely agree with this statement on an intellectual or theological level. We believe this is what the Bible teaches, and we are not surprised to see it at the beginning of this resource. But perhaps there is something that does not sit quite right. It feels overstated, outdated, or just too simple.

Maybe the disconnect exists because the world around us tells a different story about sexuality. In fact, statements like this make Christians appear intrusive, bigoted, or just plain silly. What gives anyone the right to meddle in the private lives of other people? If people are happy and satisfied in their sexual expression, why should Christians step in and insist on a different way of life? Shouldn't consenting adults be free to do as they please?

## SEXUALITY TODAY

Such questions echo a more familiar refrain regarding sexuality in our day. Sex is often viewed primarily as a personal and private matter, giving self-fulfillment and individual pleasure the highest value. In keeping with this value, we as a society increasingly accept casual sex, cohabitation, and the redefinition of marriage and family as normal steps along the road to human advancement – so long as one's lifestyle does not hurt others. If nobody else is harmed, there is freedom for personal sexual expression.

We as the church believe there are good reasons, in addition to the biblical witness, to distrust the prevailing view of sexuality. In many ways, our culture's perspective on sex subtly understates the potential negative impact of privatized sexuality on society at large. For example, the freedom of casual sex for consenting adults also allows for an increased number of children born out of wedlock, resulting in higher rates of abortion, impoverished single-parent families, and an overloaded foster care system. Emphasis on self-satisfaction engenders a relational and sexual consumerism that damages true relationship and cultivates a culture of no-fault divorce. Also, the physical risks associated with having multiple sexual partners cannot be overlooked.

However, the potential negative social impact is not the primary reason Christians should be wary of certain views on sexuality. The Bible provides clear indications regarding God's design for sexuality, and these words must always guide our views and inform our posture, regardless of what the current societal trends might be. In fact, in these writings we find a number of situations in which a Christian community was struggling with many of the same issues we are today.



## SEXUALITY IN CORINTH

Indeed, the cultural momentum of our day hardly considers human sexuality on God's terms, but this is not a new problem exclusive to our post-Christian Western context. The new Christians in 1st-century Corinth adopted a similar ethic for their sexuality, and it nearly destroyed their church.

Corinth was an important city in the Greco-Roman world, a bustling center of commerce and culture that scholars have compared to New York, Los Angeles, and Las Vegas – combined! Corinth had a reputation for sexual promiscuity, and the church Paul had planted reflected this reality, reportedly engaging in sexual activity that made the unbelieving Corinthians around them blush. Cultural influence on sexual norms and ethics can be powerful and persuasive – even for those in the church.

So how did the apostle Paul address the issues in this local church? What informed his view of human sexuality? Paul's understanding of sex was rooted in the Genesis creation account. He pointed the Corinthian church away from the prevailing "spirit of the age" and to the authoritative word of God. They had a wrong view of their freedom as Christians, and needed a right perspective on God's design for human flourishing as sexual beings.

Paul's approach is a good example for us today. Though centuries removed from the Corinthian church, we face similar cultural challenges. Like these ancient Christians, we do not need a fresh new word on the topic, but rather a fresh application of unchanging truths around which we can build a sound, liveable, God-glorifying perspective of sexuality.

## SEXUALITY IN SCRIPTURE

Before we dive into the Bible itself, it is worth mentioning some key convictions that we hold concerning its place in our lives. Most importantly, we believe that the Bible is the inspired word of God, perfect in its original form (2 Tim 3:16). Biblical interpretation is hard work that is subject to human error, but we believe the Bible can be trusted as the ultimate authority for all matters in life and faith.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, we are convinced that God's word, rightly understood, provides us with the truest perspective on sexuality and human flourishing.

We also believe the Bible is a story about what God is doing in the world. The drama of Scripture displays God's redemptive activity through time and eternity, a narrative that can be divided into four major chapters: *Creation*, *Fall*, *Redemption*, and *New Creation*. This framework helps us put phrases, verses, passages, and books in their appropriate place as the story unfolds. This is critical for understanding God's design.

Instead of looking first to specific verses related to sex, we will follow the contours of the biblical narrative, watching God's design for sexuality and human flourishing unfold in the drama of Scripture. This way we will gain a clearer understanding of how we can live the life God designed us to live.

<sup>2</sup> See EFCa Statement of Faith, Article 2. <http://go.efca.org/resources/document/efca-statement-faith>.



## CREATION: DESIGN

We were created as sexual beings with a purpose in mind. Though the creation account of Genesis is brief, it is the cornerstone for understanding the whole story of the Bible. It is in this account that we understand that God created all things to reflect his glorious image, including humans and their sexuality. This is where we learn of God's **design** for human sexuality.

### Image-Bearers

The first two chapters of Genesis present parallel accounts of God's creation of humanity. Genesis 1 offers a brief sketch of God's creative activity as a whole. Humanity is located within the rest of the created order as the crown jewel of all God made, and is said to be "very good" (Gen 1:31).

As part of our unique createdness as human beings, we bear God's image (Gen 1:26). Like reflections in a mirror, our purpose is to portray God's creative and redemptive activity in the world he has made, even in our sexuality. God created humanity in his own image, male and female. Since God's character includes both *male and female* attributes (Gen 1:27), we bear God's image in our sexual differentiation. Maleness and femaleness are not incidental to our nature, but essential.

Genesis 2 gives more texture to these differences. We're told that God made man from the dust of the ground and breathed life into his lungs. Adam was given a beautiful garden in Eden to maintain and enjoy – a job tailor-made for him (Gen 2:1-17).

We are also told that it wasn't enough. It was not good for Adam to be alone; he needed another human being to truly bear God's image. He needed someone that could help him fulfill God's mandate to be fruitful and multiply. He needed someone less like the animals and more like himself.

And yet, he needed someone very different from himself: Adam needed a woman. So God made Eve, a "helper-companion," not from the dust of the ground but from Adam's own being.<sup>3</sup> Man and woman are similar yet distinct, equal yet different. In God's good design, masculinity and femininity are not just psychologically or socially constructed realities – they're immutably tied to biology. Fitted together, man and woman beautifully display the unity, diversity, and equality intrinsic to God's design for human sexuality.

Indeed, this tension between sameness and distinctness is actually a reflection of the Godhead. Father, Son, and Spirit are same yet distinct. Each person is fully and equally God, yet they are different. So also masculine and feminine distinctiveness is part of what God declared from the beginning to be "very good," reflecting his nature as the triune God.

### Marriage

After God created Eve, he brought her to the man and joined them together in the very first wedding (Gen 2:24). Marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships. Of all the human relationships possible (e.g. parent-child, friend-friend, etc), God chose marriage (husband-wife) to be the first and most foundational in his story of redemption. A man and a woman must "leave" all others and

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of clarity, this does not mean that Eve's image-bearing is derived from Adam. Genesis 1:27 is clear: God created both male and female in his image.



“cleave”<sup>4</sup> to their mate, a faithful embrace that is paramount to all other human relationships. It is a sacrificial commitment that supremely values the good of the relationship over each individual’s needs.

This commitment is at the heart of covenant, a concept that is increasingly absent from our cultural framework for relationships. Today, marriage is commonly viewed as a contract built upon individual happiness and fulfillment, the quest for a compatible soul mate that will provide lasting satisfaction and passionate romance. In the Bible, marriage is not just a bilateral contract agreed upon between two human beings, but a sacred bond that is horizontal *and* vertical in nature, where vows are made with one another and with God. Covenant involves both intimate love and binding commitment, the necessary ingredients for a faithful, lasting marriage. In the garden of Eden, marriage was as it was intended to be – one man and one woman living in covenantal relationship with God and one another.

### Sex

Marriage, by God’s design, includes sex. As sexual beings, we were created by God with something specific in mind. Ultimately, sex is about the glory of God, as are all created things (Col 1:16). In keeping with this comprehensive purpose, there are subordinate intentions for the gift of sex that carry out this design.

As hinted at already, sex is intended for the **consummation** of the marriage covenant. God brought Adam and Eve together and gave them to each other to be “one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Marriage begins with a public promise of exclusive commitment and is ratified by sex as the physical expression of the union of marriage.

God’s blessing of the new couple also included the command toward **procreation**. After God brought Adam and Eve together in marriage, He commanded them to bear fruit and multiply (Gen 1:28). Procreation ensures that the earth continues to be populated with those who bear God’s image, filling the earth with his glory.

Sex in the context of marriage is also intended for **joy**.<sup>5</sup> Sexual pleasure is a good gift from God, experienced most fully in the selfless giving of each spouse to the other. While physical pleasure is certainly part of God’s design, the greatest joy is found in pleasing one’s spouse. Within the marriage covenant, mutual sexual pleasure comes as a wonderful result of selfless love between husband and wife.

Scripture testifies to the goodness of God’s creation of humans as male and female, and the creation account displays the beauty of intimate union of a man and a woman in covenantal marriage. Sex is a good gift from God, and like all other areas of life, our sexuality is to be submitted to God’s creative purposes. As God designed it, the created order was said to be “very good,” leading God to rest in the beauty and joy of his work.

4 The historical and social consequences of “leaving and cleaving” in the ancient world are staggering. Comprehending these significant implications should deepen our understanding of the sacrificial nature of marital commitment. See *The Meaning of Marriage* by Tim Keller, 126-7.

5 Pleasure is often thought to be a selfish, carnal product of the Fall, but this is not biblical; one simply cannot come to such conclusions after reading, for example, the Song of Solomon. cf. Prov 5:18–23; Eccl 9:9; 1 Cor 7:5.



## FALL: DISTORTION

*“Adam and Eve lived happily together in their beautiful new home. And everything was perfect – for a while. Until the day when everything went wrong.”<sup>6</sup>*

The garden, once solely characterized by unity, fellowship, and intimate love, was shattered by idolatry, shame, and desire for domination. The deadly intrusion of sin through our rebellion tainted every part of God’s good creation, including human sexuality. In Genesis 3, we come face-to-face with the heartbreaking **distortion** of God’s design for sexuality.

### Idolatry

God placed Adam and Eve in a beautiful garden with all the pleasures they could imagine (Gen 2:8-9, 16). They possessed all they needed for a full, satisfying life together. There was just one simple rule for life in the garden: don’t eat from one tree. That’s it. The rest of the garden was theirs to enjoy and to keep.

But it wasn’t enough – or so they were told. The crafty serpent persuaded them into taking the fruit from the forbidden tree. He dismissed God’s prohibition (and its consequences) and promised god-like knowledge and power. He told the most terrible lie ever told: you can be like God (Gen 3:1-5). Within that false promise is the root of all idolatry: to abandon our place as creatures and make something else our god, be it ourselves, others around us, or some other created thing. And this is what Adam and Eve did.

They believed the lie. They were *already* like God, created in his image to display his glory, but their disobedience betrayed that trust. The whole of God’s creation was thrown into disorder because of their failure to carry out their task as image-bearers. The world was no longer the way it was supposed to be.

All the brokenness in this story and in our world is the result of this idolatrous exchange. Idolatry is at the heart of all sin, and its self-seeking inclinations are disastrous for our sexuality. In the garden of Genesis 3, we learn that sin distorts sexuality both through the experience of shame and the struggle for power

### Shame

Shame is a powerful feeling. It’s an awareness of the gap between what I *am* and what I *ought to be*. It’s fear of exposure, fear of judgment, fear of failure – a terrible feeling that leads to dangerous emotional and relational isolation.

While familiar to us, this sense of shame was foreign to Adam and Eve in the garden. Who they *were* and who they *ought to be* were one and the same. But everything changed when they exchanged God’s truth for the serpent’s lie. The trust that allowed for the full exposure of vulnerable intimacy had

<sup>6</sup> *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones, p. 28



been broken. In an instant, Adam and Eve were self-conscious about their naked bodies and felt the need to hide from one another and from God (Gen 3:7).<sup>7</sup>

Like Adam and Eve, we were never meant to experience the isolation that shame inflicts. We work hard to cover our imperfections. We feel shame about how our bodies look, searching for worth in how well we reflect the magazine cover instead of our Maker. We know that if others heard our thoughts or felt our desires, we would never find the acceptance we crave. Shame's self-focus stands in the way of the vulnerable, sacrificial love that is required for the intimacy for which we were made.

### Power

Adam and Eve's disobedience also led them to finger-pointing and blame-shifting, as neither wanted to own the consequences of their rebellion. Now, rather than having a harmonious relationship with God and each other, a struggle for power would define relationship between men and women, each in a unique way.

God spelled out sin's consequences in Genesis 3. The serpent was cursed above all living things, and as God's enemy in the world, his eventual defeat would be certain and final. The woman will now suffer pain in childbirth, striking at the heart of her distinctiveness as female. The man will now struggle to provide food from the ground, the very soil of his existence. Instead of harmony between humanity and the physical world, there is now pain, suffering, and death (Gen 3:14-19).

But sin would affect more than just their physicality; Adam and Eve's relationship would be strained by sin, too. There would now be an ongoing struggle for power in their relationship. The woman will have a desire to oppose her husband, and the man will seek to assert himself in a domineering way. Instead of a relationship characterized by mutual upbuilding through service and sacrifice, there will be a constant struggle for power.

This struggle for power is no stranger to us today. Men seeking to assert power over women in a domineering way, regretfully, is the story of most societies. Power struggles in marriages and intimate relationships between men and women is often the norm, regardless of our attempts to build a just and equal society.

### Beyond the Garden

What began in Eden marked human existence from that day forth: God's design for sexuality was stripped of its foundational covenant-keeping love and turned inward, leading to both the experience of shame and struggles for power. The idolatrous exchange in the garden – trading the Creator for created things – is at the core of our sexual brokenness.

One way this idolatry continues to surface is in the disordering of our affections,<sup>8</sup> often referred to as "lust" by the writers of the New Testament (Col 3:5; 1 Thess 4:3-5). More than mere sexual attraction, lust is an act of the will that seeks to fulfill one's own sexual desires exclusively instead of those of one's spouse. It is a serious condition of the heart that Jesus equates to adultery (Matt 5:28).

<sup>7</sup> Some explanations for sexual shame point primarily to repressive thinking, intolerance, social constraints, or the lack of freedom for sexual expression on our own terms. Indeed, these realities are commonly internalized as shame and drive people into relational isolation, or to exaggerated public displays of sexual promiscuity. But we believe the remedy is not found in abandoning design, but rather in coming into alignment with it. Freedom and acceptance are ultimately found in the cross of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> Job 31:1; Ps 119:9-10, 37; Prov 4:23; Mt 5:28; Mk 7:20-23; Gal 5:19; James 1:14-15; 1 Pet 2:11; 1 Jn 2:16.



In Romans 1, Paul provides clear theological reflection on how our distorted sexual affections and behavior are a demonstration of idolatry. Paul paints a picture of humanity abandoning God as the rightful ruler and creator, and instead turning to themselves as the supreme authority for life and conduct. The language of “exchange” is used three times in vv. 22-27, echoing the rebellion in the garden and extending it to all instances of sin, most notably sexual misconduct of any kind (vv. 24-25).

He illustrates such distortions by pointing to same-sex sexual behavior as an expression of this idolatrous exchange. While certainly part of a broader category of misconduct,<sup>9</sup> same-sex sexual behavior is a particularly vivid example of the disordering of God’s design for sex between one man and one woman in covenant marriage.

This shows that homosexual behavior is sinful, but should not be subject to greater disapproval or more severe judgment than heterosexual misconduct, or even non-sexual sins like pride or gluttony. Even so, we must be clear concerning its prohibition in Scripture, especially given the pressures the church faces to make accommodation in belief and practice. It is a mark of the universal fallenness in which we all share, and Paul correlates it with idolatry of the highest order.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, we all experience sexual brokenness in some form or another. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul exhorted the church to flee *all* sexual immorality, as it destroys the body and robs God of the glory that is due him in the sexual union of a husband and wife (1 Cor 6:18-20). It is God’s will for us to abstain from any form of sexual activity outside of marriage (1 Thess 4:3), so that we can preserve the honor of this exclusive union and its physical expression in sex.

But sexual misconduct can also creep into the marriage bed. There is no room for sexual pressure or abuse in marriage, since each partner’s body now belongs to the other and should be joyfully given in sacrificial love to meet the other’s needs. By the same logic, Paul teaches against sexual abstinence in marriage, since lack of sexual fulfillment may hinder the fight against temptation (1 Cor 7:4-5). Abstinence in marriage is only appropriate when mutually agreed upon for a temporary season.

### **In Our World**

Echoing the witness of Scripture, the distortion of sexuality is easily observable in the world around us, which includes the church. As an institution, marriage has been redefined by the social acceptance of cohabitation, the normalization of no-fault divorce, and the legalization of same-sex unions. These have contributed to the deterioration of the family as God designed it. Gender confusion is also a complex issue, as many men and women have lost the biblical distinctiveness of humanity created in God’s image as male and female.

We have allowed sex to become a profitable commodity in our society, promoting an even further, and, sometimes lethal, distortion of our God-given sexuality. Media is increasingly more sexually explicit and widely available, and we’re unphased by commercials or advertisements that promise sexual promiscuity in exchange for product consumption. The boundaries of television, film, and literature are constantly stretched to boost the bottom line, and the adult entertainment industry is one of the most lucrative in business. As native technology users, our impressionable children and adolescents are at greatest risk, with 24/7 access to explicit pornographic material that is destroying

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<sup>9</sup> cf. Rom. 1:28-32.

<sup>10</sup> For a much more thorough treatment of Romans 1, see *The Bible and Homosexual Practice* by Robert Gagnon, p. 229-303.



families in our day. Tragically, there are also thousands of victims of sex trafficking in the US who are literally losing their lives for the profit of others.

In short, the idolatry of Genesis 3 continues to play out in the distortion of our design for human sexuality. Our relationships, desires, behaviors, societies, and churches are all affected; we feel it in the world around us. It is difficult not to despair in the face of such brokenness, or to give in to these distortions that so powerfully pull at us all. And indeed, if the story ended here, the situation would be hopeless, and at most, this compelling picture of Eden would be a cute fairytale to tell to children before they actually encounter the world. But God in his mercy decided to write another chapter.

## REDEMPTION: DEVOTION

*“Well, in another story, it would all be over and that would have been...The End.*

*But not in this Story.”<sup>11</sup>*

Our use of God’s gift of sex is not as it should be, but needs to be redeemed and healed. Scripture reveals to us the form of that redemption, and there are glimpses of God’s plan before we leave the garden. It’s in this chapter of the biblical story that we see our sexuality redeemed for **devotion** to God.

### Covered

Adam and Eve heard the verdict from God, and were expelled from the garden to begin life outside of Eden (Gen 3:23-24). But before the man and woman could take a step toward their new world, God atoned for their sin by killing an animal, providing the skins as covering for their nakedness (Gen 3:21). The shame and guilt of sin would need to be dealt with if humanity could be in relationship with God, and he makes the way possible.

Throughout the Old Testament, God provided a cover for sins in the form of the levitical sacrificial system, where offerings would be given to atone for the sin and guilt of God’s people. This religious system was insufficient to fully remove sin (Heb 10:1-4). There had to be a better way, a lasting solution that would close the gap between their current relationship with God and the one for which they were made.

There is a better Way. God has made redemption possible through the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> He wrote himself into humanity’s story and did for us what we couldn’t do for ourselves: take away sin and bring life out of death. Where our Adam and Eve were disobedient to God’s word, Jesus was perfectly submissive, living life exactly as God intended it. By faith, his life, death, and resurrection can be ours. There is hope of reclaiming God’s design for life in the world, even when it comes to our sexuality.

<sup>11</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 35-6.

<sup>12</sup> Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; 1 Pet 1:18-19



## Washed

If anyone needed this good news, it was the floundering church in Corinth mentioned earlier. This was a city enslaved to the kinds of sin – including gross sexual misconduct – that characterized those outside the kingdom of God.

*“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **And such were some of you.**”*

*But you were **washed**, you were **sanctified**, you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

The Corinthians *were* outside God’s kingdom before the blood of Jesus washed away their sin. He took it to the cross, the ultimate symbol of shame and guilt in the first century. The cross of Christ is now the symbol of freedom and hope for all Christians, the place where God’s love, justice, mercy, and grace come together for our good and God’s glory. This is the heart of the gospel message.

## Justified

Redemption from sexual brokenness is rooted in a profound, hopeful truth: the Christian has been remade (Gal 2:20). We have new life in Christ. We are no longer bound to our distorted desires, guilty before a holy God. We are slaves to Christ, declared “not guilty” in his perfection (Rom 6:17-18). Our identity is now rooted in the person and work of Jesus (Rom 6:5-11).

This has massive implications for our sexuality. We are no longer defined primarily by our sexuality, but by new life in a risen Redeemer. We are pure and blameless before God, secure in the perfect obedience of Christ and sealed by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need not be defined by past failures or present struggles, but can find our identity in Christ’s victory at the cross. Victims of sexual misconduct need not be overcome by shame, but can find comfort in the innocence of their Savior.

Our identity is no longer the sum of our desires, actions, biological inclinations, or social standing. We have been renamed by God in Christ. If the Christian faith says anything, it proclaims that our identities can be changed through the gospel of grace. The goal of the Christian life is not healthy heterosexuality, but complete union with Jesus.

## Sanctified

Still, the battle for faithful devotion remains. The cross has secured victory over sin and death, but the war against sin rages on because we live in the “already-not yet” reality of God’s kingdom on earth. We are a redeemed people, set apart for God’s purposes, but not yet perfect and complete (Heb 10:14). The Corinthian church was “exhibit A” for this paradox of the faith community.

For those bound in sexual sin, freedom is possible. God accepts all who cry to him in confession and repentance, turning away from sin and toward him in faith. Grace is available for the wife that has been unfaithful, the teen ashamed of his porn addiction, and the man struggling with same-sex behavior. Freedom from sin is possible. Yet, this freedom normally does not involve absence of desire,



but rather comes along with gospel awareness of our sinful tendency and the discipline of community to keep our lives in check.

For those wounded by sexual sin, healing is possible. Restoration may seem like a distant dream for the victim of sexual assault, abuse, addiction, or abandonment. But there is hope in the cleansing work of Christ's blood to redeem feelings of brokenness and shame. This journey toward healing may include the safety of an ongoing counseling relationship and other trusted advocates, but restored joy and wholeness in Jesus are possible, even on the path toward full redemption.

### **Sacrifice**

The paradox of the gospel lies in the fact that it is through our sacrifice and suffering that we find the deepest joy and freedom in God's kingdom. Jesus lived a life completely submitted to his Father's will, putting others' needs above his own. This is the life he calls us to and has enabled us to live (Phil 2:5–11). In this life we will find the fullest satisfaction, even in the midst of our sexual brokenness.

One way Paul describes this gospel message is by pointing to covenant marriage as a picture of Jesus' sacrificial love for his Bride, the Church. God's redemption of human sexuality is beautifully displayed in rightly ordered marriage, where husbands and wives can give up their own desires to sacrificially love and respect one another (Eph 5:22-33). By Jesus' sacrifice, the curse of sin in Genesis 3 can be reversed, replacing the struggle for power with harmony, as husbands and wives embrace God's design for marriage through the acceptance of the gospel.

However, marriage is not the only picture of the gospel, and therefore neither is it inevitable for all Christians.<sup>13</sup> The gospel also brings life and meaning to those outside of marriage. The gospel is portrayed in the celibate life, when single or same-sex attracted Christians prioritize their identity in Christ over their sexual desires. While these desires may not go away, the celibate life can be a powerful witness to Jesus' call to follow him above all else. In many ways, single and same-sex attracted Christians are uniquely gifted to serve God's church as they demonstrate the sufficiency of Christ in their faithful obedience.

While devotion to Christ always involves sacrifice, we should never suffer alone. For single or same-sex attracted Christians, sacrifice often includes feelings of confusion, betrayal, loneliness, and questioning God's presence or goodness.

The local church ought to be a place where these feelings can be named and known, both in the context of marriage and singleness. There should be an awareness that all of us, married and single, are sexual beings who struggle to embrace and embody God's good design. We desperately need the family of God to be a place where we all belong to one another as full-fledged members, esteemed in our differences. It has not always been so, but the unique witness and faith of single and same-sex attracted Christians in the church should be unleashed, not muted. These brothers and sisters have much to teach us about faith, hope, and love.

The gospel of Jesus Christ offers hope for redemption from distorted sexuality and makes new life possible. For Christians and their sexuality, this life includes deep, loving, non-sexual companionship for those who are not married, as well as faithful commitment within the sexual union of monogamous marriage. Marriage acts as a sign of God's covenantal love with humanity and the union between

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<sup>13</sup> In fact, the church has often made marriage and the family the objects of idolatry rather than pictures of the gospel.



Christ and his church, which declares the reality that will be brought to completion when Christ returns.

## NEW CREATION: DELIVERANCE

*“One day, John knew, Heaven would come down and mend God’s broken world and make it our true, perfect home once again.”<sup>14</sup>*

The empty tomb gives us a window into the final chapter of God’s redemptive story as the foundation of Christian hope. The drama of Scripture concludes with a promise of **deliverance** from the curse of our rebellion, where the created order is restored and all things are made new.

### Resurrected

Jesus’ bodily resurrection changes everything. If Jesus hadn’t been raised from the dead, then sin and death would still reign. There would be no freedom from sin or healing from its effects if Jesus remained in the tomb. Indeed, the hope of a changed life today is rooted in the historical reality of the resurrection.

But Jesus’ bodily resurrection does even more. It is also the basis of our hope for full redemption at Christ’s future return, offering a foretaste of what believers will receive in the new creation: new bodies made for glory. The grace that made redemption possible covers our shame, washes away guilt, sanctifies for God, and justifies us by faith – this grace is also our hope of glory.

### Restored

Furthermore, all of the created order awaits this hope, when Jesus’ return brings restoration of all things (Rom 8:18-24). Sin will finally be eradicated, realigning all relationships with the design set forth in the garden. Humanity’s protective and productive relationship with the physical world will be fully restored, with no more pain or suffering in work. Our fellowship with God will be perfectly intimate, no longer characterized by idolatry or guilt but by whole-hearted worship and gratitude.

And human relationships will be what they once were in the garden. There will be no tears, heartache, or pain, but only the sweet fellowship of the redeemed sharing together in the glory of the Lord (Rev 21:4)! Our distorted affections will be made right. Dysfunction, loneliness, unfaithfulness, lust, power struggles – all such sin and its disastrous consequences will be done away with for good. The Enemy at the heart of this mess will finally be destroyed.

But full restoration also includes judgment for sin. God’s desire is for all people to turn to him in repentance and faith, but not all will choose this path. Those who do not choose God will face his judgment, eternal separation from their Maker. We were never meant for life apart from our Creator, but those who choose to worship the created over Creator – continuing the idolatry of Genesis 3 – will experience this eternal death.

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<sup>14</sup> Lloyd-Jones, 348.



## Renewed

The book of Revelation paints a picture of a new heavens and earth where all of creation is restored. It also gives us a surprising window into the future of marriage when God's kingdom is fully established. The Church is prepared as a bride (Rev 19:6-10), and there will be great rejoicing at the final and perfect reconciliation between Jesus and his beloved. This is the moment which the whole Bible is leading up to, that blessed day when Jesus and his Bride enjoy perfect intimacy.

Consequently, marriage in the new creation will be between God and his Bride alone, since the human metaphor is no longer needed: it exists in its fullness (Matt 22:29-30). This future reality should help us for the present, granting us a healthy framework for understanding human sexuality and its purposeful expression today. In the new creation, our sexuality is transposed to reflect the intimacy of Christ and his Bride, the church.

We have been renamed in Jesus, granted a new identity that is found in him as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. We are part of a community wed to Christ, whether married or single, awaiting the consummation of a covenantal love that has been pursuing broken and sinful humanity from the beginning. In this future reality where God's people are reunited with their Creator, the intimacy and relationship that we broke in the garden will be finally restored, forever.



# HOW DO WE LIVE OUT GOD'S DESIGN?

God has made this life possible by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He has also given us the Holy Spirit, whose power and presence is the source for faithful obedience in the fight against sin. And we have also been given the body of Christ, a new family, for support and encouragement along the journey of faith. These gifts of God are our only hope for integrity in a world where sexual norms and ethics are rapidly changing.

## BY THE GRACE OF GOD

One of the beautiful realities of the Christian faith is that the gospel of grace places us all on level footing before a holy God. None of us can stand before God on our own merit, but are dependent upon what he has done for us in Christ. The Christian life is a work of grace from beginning to end, and this includes our growth in sexual integrity. Our freedom from sexual sin and healing of its consequences are a gradual work of righteousness.

### Transformation

*"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect"* (Rom 12:2). This work is not just external, only involving our behavior. Rather, it is a transformation of the inner self. God is just as concerned with the state of our hearts and minds as he is with our conduct. Indeed, we were designed for wholeness of character and conduct, a seamless knitting together of head, heart, and hands.

By grace through faith, God grants his people a new heart that is capable of the integral life (Ez 36:26). Our freedom from sexual sin is grounded in this foundational truth. If this isn't our starting place for living out God's design for sexuality, we will veer into a dangerous legalism that is not pleasing to God. Christian maturity, including sexual healing and wholeness, is a work of God.

### Effort

But growth in grace is really a cooperative effort. God is at work in our hearts to change us, but we must be diligent to reject the patterns of this world and work hard at faithful obedience. As Dallas Willard has put it, *"Grace is opposed to earning, not to effort."*<sup>15</sup> The notion that God has done it all and we are mere consumers of his grace will most certainly lead to spiritual stagnation, apathy, and even license. If sexual sin is going to be combated in fruitful and effective ways, grace and effort must work hand in hand.

### Progress

The measuring stick for growth in the Christian life is not perfection, but progress. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus provided the perfection needed to pay for sin. We will not be perfect this side

<sup>15</sup> *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*, 34.



of Christ's return, but that doesn't mean there shouldn't be noticeable maturity in faith and obedience – even if our starting points and our growth rates are different.

## THROUGH THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Fortunately, we're not left to fight in our own strength. God's grace gives us a new heart, but we still battle with sin because our distorted desires remain. God has filled us with his Spirit – the Spirit of truth – as a Helper for the journey of faith (Jn 14:16-17). When we walk by God's Spirit, we have the necessary power to say “no” to sexual sin and “yes” to godly living (Gal 5:16-26).

### Revealing Sin

The Spirit helps us live out God's design for sexuality. One of his primary tasks in the world is to reveal sin and convict the world of the need for salvation from judgment. *“And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment...”* (Jn 16:8). We often aren't growing in maturity because we are blinded to the sinfulness of our desires and deeds (1 Cor 3). The Spirit names our sin and convinces us of our guilt, which should lead us to confession and repentance.

### Producing Fruit

He not only reveals our sin and helps us fight it, but he produces in us the fruit that is in keeping with those that have been united with Christ in his death and resurrection. *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires”* (Gal 5:22-24). We know that these attributes are integral to our sexuality as God designed it – love, faithfulness, and self-control, in particular – and the Spirit is at work in the hearts of God's children to produce such fruit.

## WITH THE HELP OF COMMUNITY

This walk with the Spirit, essential to living out God's good design, was never meant to be done alone. When it comes to sexual sin, freedom and healing are impossible apart from the love, support, and encouragement of a faith community. In fact, the forgiveness accomplished by Christ at the cross is often experienced most powerfully when appropriated by the church – the hands and feet of Jesus.

### Compassion

If the church is going to help one another grow up into maturity, it must do so with loving compassion. The sensitive nature of sexual brokenness makes vulnerability very difficult, so we must be quick to create an open environment that allows for honest sharing. While we are committed to proclaiming the truth of Scripture, it must be communicated in the love of Christ and the safety of a trusted community.

### Confession

One way this sharing takes place is through confession of sin. Confession is at the heart of the gospel of grace, and is the first step towards repentance and faithful obedience. Only when we see our sin as offensive to a holy God can we really understand the forgiveness that we have in the blood of Jesus.

Regular confession of sin provides the power for freedom and healing from sexual sin. The burden of guilt and the shackles of shame can be lifted – not completely, but powerfully – through the practice



of regular confession of sin. Often it's a close friend or family member, or maybe even someone in your community group, but it should be a trusted brother or sister in Christ who is committed to your spiritual vitality. This could also be accomplished in a professional counseling relationship.

### **Commitment**

Confession of sin should lead to repentance, which is a turning from sin toward God. The faith community must be committed to encouraging one another toward the obedience of faith that Christ's death and resurrection has made possible. But living out God's design for sexuality must be a commitment that we make, for ourselves and for one another, in the way of grace and truth.

## **SUMMARY**

We are convinced that Scripture provides us with God's design for flourishing human sexuality. Like the Corinthian church of the first century, we must stay tethered to the bedrock truths of Scripture, empowered by the gospel of grace to live out God's design in a world with ever-changing sexual norms. Indeed, brokenness is in, through, and around us all, but Jesus' death and resurrection makes a better way possible. We wait with hopeful anticipation for the day when Christ's return sets all things right again, and our sexuality finally accomplishes perfectly what it reflects so dimly: the glory of God and the good of his people.



# COMMON QUESTIONS & OUR RESPONSES

## GUIDING FRAMEWORK

We are convinced that Scripture provides us with a clear design for human sexuality, a blueprint that is helpful for navigating the ever-changing sexual norms and ethics of our day.

But when it comes right down to it, our lives are messy and complicated, and difficult questions still remain. God's design in Scripture is clear, but that does not mean we find on its pages the concrete answers for all our concerns.

As a church, we certainly do not claim to have all the answers, but we do hope to provide direction for those who want additional help. It's not our aim to be definitive, but rather to offer humble responses we trust are graced with spiritual wisdom, tethered to the Scriptures, and relevant for a variety of experiences.

In the following pages you will find **questions and responses** for various topics related to sexuality today; these have been provided by our pastoral team. If you have questions that you do not find listed here, or would like to discuss one of these responses in greater depth, please don't hesitate to reach out to a pastor and schedule a time for dialogue.

While we hope you find this resource useful, we know that it's not exhaustive. We want to keep the lines of communication open for discussion.

There is also a [resource list](#) provided for further engagement. We have tried to gather some of the best work on various topics (books, articles, blogs, etc.), as many will want to continue their exploration. Of course, please do not interpret inclusion on these lists as wholesale endorsement of authors and/or their positions. We want to provide thoughtful conversation partners for further engagement, and hope this list is a good start.

## CHURCH LIFE

- » [What safety measures are in place to protect our children from sexual misconduct?](#)
- » [What would the church do if a leader or staff person was found in sexual sin?](#)
- » [Is the church required to perform same-sex weddings?](#)

*Questions continued on next page.*



## COHABITATION

- » [My boyfriend and I want to divorce-proof our future marriage. Is living together a good test for future compatibility?](#)
- » [Is it okay to live together if we commit to sexual purity?](#)
- » [If the Bible doesn't specifically condemn cohabitation, why can't we live together?](#)

## DIVORCE

- » [What does the Bible say about divorce?](#)

## GENDER

- » [What does the Bible say about masculinity and femininity?](#)
- » [What does the "Q" in LGBTQ represent, and how should the church respond?](#)
- » [My friend recently told me that he feels like "a woman trapped in a man's body." What should guide my response?](#)
- » [How should I think about "intersex" persons?](#)
- » [Is it normal and healthy for my children to participate in cross-sex behavior?](#)
- » [What is the best course for helping children who are gender confused?](#)

## HOMOSEXUALITY

- » [Does the Bible prohibit loving, monogamous relationships between same-sex partners?](#)
- » [Can someone be same-sex attracted and a Christian?](#)
- » [What are the relational choices for Christians who have a homosexual orientation or who are attracted to those of the same-sex?](#)
- » [How should Christians think about the legalization of so-called same-sex marriage in our country?](#)
- » [I received a wedding invitation from someone close to me who is gay. How do I respond to the invitation? Should I attend the wedding?](#)
- » [Should practicing homosexual individuals or partners be allowed to become members of our congregation?](#)

## MARITAL SEX

- » [Are there any sexual activities that are inappropriate for married couples?](#)
- » [My spouse and I haven't had sex for months. Is that okay?](#)
- » [My spouse and I were recently married, and want to wait to have children. Does the Bible say anything about birth control?](#)

*Questions continued on next page.*



## **PORNOGRAPHY**

- » [I have been a Christian for years, but I still struggle with pornography. Why can't I break free?](#)
- » [Will marriage satisfy my lust for pornography?](#)
- » [I am interested in accountability for sexual purity, but these relationships have failed me in the past. What does a successful accountability relationship look like?](#)
- » [How should we view masturbation?](#)
- » [How can I help protect my children from explicit material?](#)
- » [What should I do if I suspect my teenager is looking at pornography on his/her mobile device\(s\)?](#)

## **PREMARITAL SEX**

- » [I have been dating my boyfriend for a long time, and we are very much in love. If we are both ready, why can't we have sex?](#)
- » [How far is "too far" before marriage?](#)
- » [How should we respond to teenage pregnancies?](#)

## **SINGLENES**

- » [I have often heard that singleness is a "gift," but it doesn't always feel that way. What is meant by this sentiment?](#)
- » [If God is all I really need, why do I still yearn for a spouse?](#)
- » [Does contentment mean that I should relinquish my desire to marry?](#)
- » [Is it ok to date a non-Christian?](#)
- » [What are the struggles unique to singleness, and how can the church better understand and support brothers and sisters who are single?](#)



# CHURCH LIFE

## » What safety measures are in place to protect our children from sexual misconduct?

We take the safety of our children very seriously, and have measures in place to protect them from various kinds of harm, both sexual and otherwise.

In addition to physical boundaries in place at each of our campuses, we require anyone working with children to engage in a thorough application process, including a criminal background and reference check. We also ensure that each volunteer and staff person working with children has completed Child Protection Training and adheres to the Child/Youth Protection Policy. This document seeks to clearly define sexual abuse, incident reporting, supervision procedures, and other important guidelines that serve to protect our children and nurture their growth.

While we have worked hard to create a safe place for our children, we understand that we live in a broken world that is cruel and unpredictable. We will continue to strive toward sound policies and procedures that will make Christ Community a place for human flourishing, especially for the most vulnerable among us.

## » What would the church do if a leader or staff person was found in sexual sin?

While it is our prayer that each of us continue to grow in holiness as apprentices of Jesus, we are not naive about the temptations and dangers that plague us all – including both congregational and staff leaders. During the application process, each volunteer and staff person affirms their desire to live out God’s design for sexuality, and we hope each will continue to grow in this commitment.

But this doesn’t always happen, and we must confront sin (of all types) in the church with truth and grace. In the case of any sexual misconduct, whether by volunteer or staff persons, Christ Community will proceed, by God’s grace, with discernment and integrity. While it is not our place to judge matters of the heart, there may be times in a faith community when discipline (of various kinds) is the most loving course of action for all (1 Cor 5:1-13). The elder leadership, along with the rest of the pastoral staff, value your support and prayers for wisdom as they seek to steward those whom God has entrusted to their care.

In short, this is not the place to outline specific policies and procedures for sexual misconduct in our midst. If you have a question about employment policies, you may contact the church office about how we seek to embody grace and truth in our processes.

## » Is the church required to perform same-sex weddings?

Our nation’s historic constitutional commitment to religious freedom includes the broad understanding of separation between church and state. The current Title VII law ensures local churches, as religious organizations (a protected class), to be free from government interference or mandate to answer this question.



While some religious organizations will choose to perform same-sex wedding ceremonies, Christ Community will not do so based on our biblical and moral conviction that God's design for marriage embraces only a one man and one woman union.

## COHABITATION

### » **My boyfriend and I want to divorce-proof our future marriage. Is living together a good test for future compatibility?**

No, living together before marriage is likely not a good indicator for future success in marriage. You may have been told that living together for a time before marriage will give a good insight into whether or not marriage will work for a couple.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, this is severely misguided advice.

Why is that the case? As the common argument goes, "You wouldn't buy a car without test driving it first, right?" Many want to simulate marriage with their partner before entering into such a huge, life-altering commitment. The problem with this common analogy is that marriage is not a purchase, or even the ratification of a "natural fit;" marriage is a choice. It's a decision to forsake all others and elevate one's spouse above oneself every day for a lifetime. Cohabitation as a "test drive" for marriage reveals the deeper myth that some external force determines the success or failure of a marriage. In fact, a marriage is successful when the couple chooses it to be so.

Even more, the covenant commitment that is absent for the cohabiting couple is actually the very foundation needed for an enduring marriage, making the "test drive" incomplete, at best, and predisposed to failure, at worst. We have seen God's design for marriage in Scripture, and at the heart of the relationship is covenant. Without the loving promises of future commitment, all relationships stand on shaky ground. Cohabitation conditions our hearts to relate apart from this kind of sacrificial commitment.

The surest way to divorce-proof your marriage is to center it on the person and work of Jesus Christ. When a couple reflects Christ's interaction with the church, through forgiveness, submission, and self-sacrificial love (Eph 5:22-33), they will find themselves equipped for a marriage that lasts a lifetime.

### » **Is it okay to live together if we commit to sexual purity?**

If a couple is truly committed to sexual purity and yet chooses to live together, they are making a terribly unwise decision. A commitment to such a grand thing as sexual purity in the context of a pre-marriage relationship ought to be met with every measure to enable its success. A mark of Christian maturity is a full realization of one's predisposition to sin, and a full realization of just how destructive that sin is. Joseph had a good grasp on both, which led him to run from sexual temptation – at great cost to himself (Gen 39).

<sup>1</sup> Research over the past several decades has actually demonstrated the opposite. Marriages that were preceded by cohabitation have been shown to be as much as 33% more likely to end in divorce. Recent studies claim different results, namely that marital success is more dependent on *when* individuals marry (linking positive results to couples married later in life) than whether or not they lived together before marriage. This same research does not claim that cohabitation improves a couple's odds for marriage, though, and actually outlines significant downsides (inability to leave a bad relationship, issues related to child-rearing, etc). We have ample reasons to distrust such an arrangement before marriage.



More than likely, something is going on beneath the surface of this question. If you find yourself or someone you know asking this question, consider what might be under the waterline. Is there a need for attachment? What fulfillment is being sought in the shared living space? Searching for these needs in cohabitation will only lead to a profound letdown, in addition to the likely broken commitment to sexual purity.

Some are faced with this question pragmatically. Perhaps individuals live in separate cities, and one is moving to the area of the other shortly before their wedding. Do they really need to live apart for those months? Maybe the couple's financial reality presents cohabitation as the most sensible way to live near each other. In response, this couple should ask themselves how far they're willing to go for the sake of their future marriage.

Given both the statistics and the heightened temptation to step outside of God's design, we do not recommend cohabitation before marriage.

» **If the Bible doesn't specifically condemn cohabitation, why can't we live together?**

The Bible, though unchanging in its truth and relevance, is nonetheless a culturally situated book. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, its authors took the character of God, revealed in the Law and the person of Jesus Christ, and applied it to contemporary issues. Paul's conversation on whether or not a Christian should eat food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor 8, 10) was an extremely important teaching for his letter's audience, if not directly applicable to most who will read this paper.

Cohabitation is a similar topic, in that this paper's cultural situation demands a biblical response. But none of the cultural norms with which Scripture deals included cohabitation as a normal living arrangement. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect Scripture to answer it directly.

What we can know from Scripture is God's design for marriage and sexuality (as outlined in the theological reflection above). From here, we can extrapolate God's design for cohabitation. The Bible's silence on this specific topic does not therefore make it unimportant. The contrary is true: it is immensely important that we seek to deal with cohabitation inside of God's grander design for marriage and sexuality.

## DIVORCE

» **What does the Bible say about divorce?**

Before approaching the topic of divorce, it's vital to remember the foundation on which marriage stands. On pages 7-8 ([link](#)), the first chapter of the Four Chapter Story establishes that marriage is first and foremost part of God's good creation. In the first marriage in Genesis 2, God brings together Adam and Eve, and in that act He establishes His continuing design for marriage: it is between one man and one woman, and the man and woman become 'one flesh' (Gen. 2:24). In other words, marriage is a covenant: it is a sacred relationship between a man and a woman and with God. The marriage covenant is not simply a contract, instead it is a binding, lasting, intimate



commitment of love that is both horizontal and vertical. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, Scripture uniformly harkens back to God's design for marriage in Genesis 2.

Jesus' teaching on divorce in each of the Gospel accounts (Mk. 10:2-12, Mt. 5:31-32, Mt. 19:3-12, Lk. 16:18) is clear in affirming God's design in Genesis 2. In short, Jesus states that divorce is a violation of God's design for marriage. Jesus' words prohibiting divorce in the Gospels are established and supported by the entire witness of Scripture. In Malachi 2:14-16, marriage is described as a covenant that is symbolic between God and His people. Therefore, God hates divorce because faithfulness to the marital covenant and faithfulness to the covenant with God with His people are held in unison. Likewise, in Ephesians 5:25, marriage is also given as a symbol between Christ and His church. Divorce dissolves the unity and fidelity of the marital covenant, which in a mysterious way, is a covenant that intimately reflects the covenant love expressed by Christ to His Bride.

With that said, there are two exceptions to the prohibition against divorce within the New Testament. The Scriptures reveal several circumstances where divorce may be permissible. In Matthew 19:3-12, Jesus offers one admissible reason for divorce: adultery. Adultery may be rightly understood as a variety of sexually immoral behaviors. This could include things such as sexual infidelity and addiction to pornography.

In 1 Corinthians 7:15, Paul cites 'separation,' or, 'abandonment,' as grounds for divorce. While Paul does convey physical separation in 1 Corinthians 7:15, his word choice is not limited to physical separation alone. One does not have to be a physical distance away from their spouse to abandon their spouse. Thus, abandonment may include extreme circumstances such as abuse (emotional, physical, sexual, etc.), addiction, and possibly others.

While these examples may offer permission for divorce, neither mandate it. Just because divorce is biblically permissible, does not mean the marriage covenant should be broken. In a fragmented world plagued by sin, divorce happens. But God's clear desire is that couples remain committed to the marriage covenant. Through His love, God can heal deep wounds, mend broken marital vows, and reconcile individuals to Himself and then couples to each other.

Although God's kingdom is marked by reconciliation and redemption, it is possible a marriage could be at such a destructive level that efforts to keep the couple together may exacerbate the situation and perhaps amplify the harm within the family. In addition to God's command for marital fidelity He also deeply desires that the vulnerable be cared for and protected. If you find that you are in an abusive relationship, it is vital that you seek help immediately. While God does hate divorce He also hates the abuse of others.

If you are considering divorce, please seek out a pastor. As much as the section above tries to clarify our biblical perspective on divorce, each relationship comes with its own uniqueness and can only be handled appropriately when taken case by case. When considering such a life altering decision, it's important to seek pastoral counsel. If you and your spouse are not already seeing a counselor, your pastor can direct you to a marriage counselor or individual counseling and provide financial assistance for those sessions if needed. After reaching out to a pastor and marriage counselor, entering into a period of separation may offer a time of respite and a place of safety to recover



mental and emotional stability. Also, separation can be a time to work on personal issues with the long-term hope of reconciliation.

## GENDER

### » **What does the Bible say about masculinity and femininity?**

The Bible says a lot about masculinity and femininity, but still probably less than we think and definitely less than we wish. What do we mean?

First, maleness (masculinity) and femaleness (femininity) are not incidental but essential to our humanness. When we look into God's design, we see God intentionally starts in Genesis with male and female marked by either XX or XY chromosomes. While God creates male and female with equal dignity, he equips them in complementary ways, which is accentuated even in how the effects of sin and brokenness impact them uniquely. When we abandon God's design for sexuality (generally) and gender (particularly), we risk losing a core part of ourselves.

When it comes to various masculine or feminine activities, there are many aspects of our individual definitions that are culturally situated. But this does not mean masculinity and femininity are merely "social constructs." Rather, these innate and beautiful differences of gender, anchored in an individual's biological design, bring unique opportunities of contribution in marriage, in the church, and in our communities.

### » **What does the "Q" in LGBTQ represent, and how should the church respond?**

Depending on who you talk with in the LGBTQ community, the "Q" can stand for "questioning" and/or "queer." Many times what people mean when they say they are a "questioning" individual is that they are unsure of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Whereas "queer" is an umbrella term encompassing a variety of sexual orientations and gender identities outside of heterosex. With both of these concepts, there is an overarching refusal to accept gender as binary (male and female) and heterosexuality as normative.

As for the church, we seek to embrace God's design for all of life as laid out in Scripture, and Scripture clearly speaks of God's created and enduring purpose for two (and only two) distinct genders, reflected in distinct sexual organs that are equal and complementary, showing heterosexuality to be the normative good.

Therefore, as we seek to embrace God's call to the other, whether they be "questioning" or have embraced a "queer" gender identity, we will continue to lovingly affirm, when invited in conversation, God's design for their life in embracing a gender identity that coincides with their given physiology.

### » **My friend recently told me that he feels like "a woman trapped in a man's body." What should guide my response?**

First, *listen with compassion*. Whenever someone discloses something like this to you, recognize that you are in a privileged position of trust by understanding how difficult it likely was for the person to share this with you. With compassion, seek to listen to what they have to say and seek



to understand why they have shared this with you. Are they looking for help? Affirmation? Just someone to listen?

Second, *acknowledge the person's struggle with a hopeful realism*. As you understand a bit better why they have shared this with you and what they are hoping to receive, acknowledge the reality of their struggle. Point to the fact that in a biblical worldview, we understand God created male and female, and that these distinctions complement and enrich one another, allowing us to reflect God's image.

But also be quick to point out that when sin entered the world, it ravaged everything. Nothing was left untouched, including our sense of who we are as men and women. Gender confusion was not God's design, but is a very real part of life after the fall. The struggle they face is a result of sin's pervasive effects that touch every part of creation and us as creatures.

Then offer the hope that because Jesus has entered the world as a human being, he is redeeming and will fully restore us to who we are created to be as human beings according to God's design. There will be struggle in this life—at times even massive disorientation about who we feel we are and who we were made to be. But there is hope. We can be restored. Those in Christ will—in the new heavens and new earth—feel completely at home in their bodies. There will be no more disorientation or confusion.

Third, *connect the person with a pastor or professional counselor*. If they are open to it, offer to connect the person with a pastor or counselor who can help them navigate the unique complexities of these feelings and help them find a way of living in the world with hopeful realism according to God's design.

#### » **How should I think about "intersex" persons?**

First, *be informed and understand what the term means*. Many have not even heard of this category for one's sexual identity. Caleb Price is helpful here. He explains,

"...whereas the term 'transgender' is an umbrella term used to describe those whose feelings and perceptions of their gender do not align with their biological sex, intersex individuals have a congenital condition in which their sexual anatomy and/or reproductive organs don't appear to correspond to typical definitions of male or female. Often this results in varying degrees of indeterminate or ambiguous genitalia. Sometimes these anomalies are apparent at birth; in other cases, the intersex condition doesn't become apparent until puberty or even later in life, if at all. This condition can be biological and/or chromosomal in origin and can sometimes be surgically corrected."<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes the term "hermaphrodite" has been used to describe intersex persons, but this is not correct. The "hermaphrodite" from Greek mythology refers to someone who is half male and half female—which is not what people with indeterminate or ambiguous genitalia are. The situation of indeterminate or ambiguous genitalia is a result of brokenness that sin ushers into the world. Thus, it requires compassion and hopeful realism.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pureintimacy.org/w/what-is-intersexuality-and-how-should-christians-respond>



Second, *don't reduce identity to genital organs*. As human beings, our identity is rooted first and foremost not in whether we have a vagina or penis, ovaries or testes. Our identity is rooted in the image of the God who created us, and Jesus who is redeeming us by the Spirit. This does not mean that gender identity is inconsequential—it matters greatly! But it is secondary to who we are in Christ.

The Bible is clear that God created male and female. Sexuality and gender are binary. There is not, in God's design, endless variation between or beyond maleness and femaleness. Therefore, as much as possible, with the help of family, medical professionals, friends and church community, we ought to seek to support intersex persons in living out their lives as either male or female.

Finally, *love those with intersexuality*, knowing the unique challenges and complexity they face.

» **Is it normal and healthy for my children to participate in cross-sex behavior?**

Yes, up to a certain age. Until about age seven, occasional cross-sex behavior is normal and not a cause for concern. Children are curious. They are learning about and discovering their world. At this stage, cross-sex behavior is usually a matter of curiosity, play, and imagination, much like children pretending to be dogs, cats, or other animals.

There is nothing wrong with young boys playing with dolls, pretending to be a mommy or daddy, or young girls playing with trucks or wanting to dress up like their brother or dad. In fact, giving too much attention to these behaviors when children are young can often cause more confusion than clarity for them.

However, there is cause for concern when older children regularly or consistently engage in cross-sex behavior. If this becomes an issue, the best thing to do is contact a pastor or counselor who can help the family navigate the unique complexities of the situation, and help the child embrace the gender and sexual identity God has given them.

» **What is the best course for helping children who are gender confused?**

In general, the best course of action is the consistent, positive modeling of healthy gender distinctions in the child's home and community. This, perhaps more than anything else, will help children understand the goodness of who God has made them to be and beauty of sexual and gender difference and distinction.

However, it is also important for families to seek the help of pastors and/or professional counselors who can help them navigate the unique complexities of the particular child and situation in order to help the child embrace the gender and sexual identity God has given them.

## HOMOSEXUALITY

» **Does the Bible prohibit loving, monogamous relationships between same-sex partners?**

One of the most common objections to the Church's historical teaching on homosexual activity is that the writers of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament do not know homosexual



orientation the way we do today. Those writers (Paul, Moses, etc.) were not speaking against those with a homosexual orientation that were seeking a lifelong committed relationship. Rather, as the argument goes, Paul and others were only prohibiting very specific types of homosexual acts (cult prostitution in pagan temples, sexual relationships between adults and children, and abusive homosexual acts). Therefore, it would seem that because God does not desire any human to be alone (Gen 2:18), that it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1 Cor 7:9), and just the fact that it seems cruel to force people into celibacy and deny them the beauty of marriage – many have come to the conclusion that the Bible does not prohibit loving, monogamous relationships between same-sex partners.

But this argument has significant problems. To begin with, the apostle Paul was most certainly aware of homosexual orientation and lifelong committed same sex-relationships, and Paul would have most likely been aware of those in his day advocating that homosexual relationships be recognized as marriage. Despite many historical sources that clearly demonstrate this, many Christians continue to think Paul knew of no advocates for loving, monogamous, lifelong same-sex relationships. Paul heard many of the same things we hear today, and the historical record makes that clear.<sup>3</sup>

Paul could have become an advocate alongside them, yet he did not. Instead, he viewed homosexual activity among the Gentiles as proof that they had abandoned true knowledge of God (Rom 1:26-27). Thus, to become an advocate for lifelong committed same-sex relationships today is to stand in direct contradiction to what the apostle Paul taught.

Additionally, the Bible, in every place, only speaks negatively of all homosexual acts. It is hard to imagine the nature of marriage changing this drastically from Genesis 2 without Jesus, Paul, Peter, or some church leader preaching or writing on this issue. Instead, there is a uniform voice across the Bible: the only place where sexual activity can flourish is in the context of covenant marriage between a man and a woman.

Some view this silence from Jesus as an endorsement to lifelong committed same-sex relationships. However, arguments from silence are weak, at best, and one could more reasonably argue that the lack of explicit teaching from Jesus communicated his agreement with the Hebrew Scriptures and Genesis 2. He had every opportunity to redefine the nature of marriage and did not, but instead only affirmed Genesis 2 in his ministry (Matt 19:1-19).

In fact, one could persuasively argue, with Gagnon, that Jesus not only affirmed the Torah's sexual ethic, but actually deepened it and raised the stakes. Concerning Jesus' teaching, Gagnon writes,

“He regarded all sexual activity (thoughts and deeds) outside of lifelong marriage to one person and of the opposite sex as capable of jeopardizing one's entrance into the kingdom of God. In relation to our own cultural context, Jesus' views on sex represent on the whole a staunchly conservative position. Those who find in the Gospels a Jesus who is a prophet of tolerance, who forgives and accepts all (except, perhaps, the intolerant), regardless of behavioral change, have distorted the historical reality.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Robert Gagnon covers this in greater depth in his book, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 380-395.

<sup>4</sup> Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 209.



From Genesis to Revelation, there is a consistent and coherent sexual ethic that excludes homosexual practice. It is our conviction that it is impossible to remain faithful to the biblical text – and historic Christian teaching – while simultaneously affirming the place for romantic same-sex relationships and homoerotic behavior.

### » Can someone be same-sex attracted and a Christian?

Yes, someone can be same-sex attracted and a Christian. Christians deal with all kinds of issues (remember the Corinthians!), and sexual identity is not a marker of whether or not someone is justified in Christ (Rom 1:30). We must be careful not to elevate one sin over another when evaluating one's culpability in the eyes of God; only God is able to judge concerning matters of the heart (1 Cor 4:1-5). As Wesley Hill has so beautifully written, "The dynamics of human sinfulness and divine mercy and grace are the same for all of us, regardless of the particular temptations or weaknesses we face."<sup>5</sup>

This is ultimately a question about identity, and it's worth backing up to understand some key distinctions related to same-sex identification. In his book *Homosexuality and the Christian*, Mark Yarhouse makes a helpful "three-tier" distinction between same-sex attraction, homosexual *orientation*, and *gay identity*.<sup>6</sup> One might also think in terms of a spectrum, with *attraction*, *orientation*, *identity*, *relationships*, and *behavior* on different points along a scale. In any case, such distinctions help guard against labels and nurture a listening posture that is eager to hear and understand individual stories.

*Attraction* is something that cannot be controlled<sup>7</sup> and is primarily descriptive in nature. This is true for heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual attraction alike. Sometimes these patterns of attraction are "strong enough, durable enough, and persistent enough" that someone claims a homosexual *orientation*.<sup>8</sup> One may also be attracted to the opposite sex, in which case they might claim a bisexual orientation. Orientation is a way of describing the nature of one's attractions, whether in amount or persistence, and is usually a private matter.

*Identity*, on the other hand, is more prescriptive in nature and is typically more public.<sup>9</sup> Gay identity may involve an expression of social and political solidarity with others who share similar experiences, and thus go beyond simple recognition of personal attraction or orientation. In cases of such solidarity, gay identity can lead to a rejection of biblical teaching, either in doctrine or in practice, but this is not necessarily the case.<sup>10</sup> Many gay and lesbian persons are committed to a celibate lifestyle.

Same-sex *relationships* (public) and homoerotic *behavior* (private) are, in the eyes of many, the natural outworking of a same-sex identity. Such corresponding behavior might cause some to question whether or not someone could be a "gay Christian," as they are conscious decisions to

5 Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 19.

6 Mark Yarhouse, 41-48.

7 For more conversation about what may contribute to same-sex attraction, see Yarhouse, 57-80.

8 Yarhouse, 41.

9 Ibid, 42. These distinctions, including gay identity, are couched in a broader treatment of sexual identity, which we commend to you as context that would enrich and extend this discussion.

10 Wesley Hill is a great example of a Christian who is same-sex attracted and embraces God's design for human sexuality.



reject God's design for human sexuality. Still, we do well to tread lightly when evaluating one's position in Christ. Gay identification does not necessitate homoerotic behavior either.

When it comes to sexual practice, we uphold the biblical design for sex between one man and one woman in the context of covenant marriage. For someone who experiences same-sex attraction, claims a homosexual orientation, or announces a gay identity, adherence to the Christian sexual ethic is possible through celibacy or, in some cases, heterosexual marriage.

Again, we maintain that someone can be same-sex attracted *and* find their identity in the person of Christ. To summarize this position, we turn again to Wesley Hill as someone who embodies such an experience. He writes,

“...being gay isn't the most important thing about my or any other gay person's identity. I am a *Christian* before I am anything else. My homosexuality is part of my makeup, a facet of my personality. One day, I believe, whether in this life or in the resurrection, it will fade away. But my identity as a Christian – someone incorporated into Christ's body by his Spirit – will remain.”<sup>11</sup>

If you would like to talk about anything related to your experience as a same-sex attracted Christian, please don't hesitate to reach out to your pastor and/or a professional counselor. We love you and want to serve however we can, and we realize that there is much we can learn. Please don't go it alone.

#### » **What are the relational choices for Christians who have a homosexual orientation or who are attracted to those of the same-sex?**

In all honesty, the best direction for this question is to read Wesley Hill's *Washed and Waiting*. Wesley is a gay Christian who does a marvelous job of unpacking the relational struggles of someone with a homosexual orientation who has committed to a life of celibacy as they follow Jesus. Leaning heavily on his contributions, we point to four relational avenues for the homosexual Christian:

**The local church.** This is one area where Christians need much repentance. A common experience for same-sex attracted persons in the church is that they have a hard time opening up about their struggles. In many cases, fear of condemnation and judgment have been realized after opening up to others, and their voices often are not truly heard. This makes for a silent struggle that is plagued by loneliness and isolation.

The local church must be a place where same-sex attracted persons are unconditionally welcomed, heard, and loved. Listen to their stories, seek to understand their feelings, and learn from their experiences. Loneliness is a common struggle for all Christians – homosexual or heterosexual – who find themselves called to a life of celibacy. The gospel makes it clear that all Christians are adopted into the family of God; this truth has important implications for how the local church should engage unmarried people.

The church should be a relational space where those with same-sex attraction are able to find acceptance, prayer, encouragement, and the love of family. No one should ever feel they have to

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<sup>11</sup> Hill, 22.



hide; in fact, everyone in the body of Christ should discover the ways they are uniquely gifted to serve others. The church should be looking for ways to unleash the gifts of all its members.

**Spiritual friendship.** Wesley Hill [blogs](#) frequently on this topic (and has a book on this subject), so we would encourage you to see his writing. Hill intentionally lives with other housemates, creating a place of community in his home. Moreover, he rightly speaks to the importance of depth in friendship. This is a relational need not just for homosexual persons, but for all people. Christians should work to nurture a community where people are known.

**Celibacy.** Because of our conviction rooted in both the teaching of the Bible and the historical teaching of the Church, our encouragement to those who have enduring same-sex attraction would be to lead a celibate lifestyle.

But we would also want to point out, along with Wesley Hill, that wherever the Bible contains passages prohibiting homosexuality, soon after come words of marvelous grace. To give one example:

*Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:9-11)*

Like marriage, celibacy will always be filled with temptation, and the gospel will always extend more than enough grace for struggles and failures.

**Mixed-orientation marriage.** On occasion, same-sex attracted Christians intentionally enter into marriage with a Christian whose orientation is solely or primarily heterosexual. In some cases, a same-sex attracted man has married a same-sex attracted woman.<sup>12</sup> Biblical marriage is between one man and one woman, and as long as this is the arrangement, such a marriage should be considered within God's design.

Honesty concerning sexual attraction and orientation is crucial; each partner should be knowledgeable before entering a marriage relationship. While this option is certainly not the best for all, it is a possible way forward for same-sex attracted Christians committed to God's design for sex and marriage. Homoerotic behavior is always prohibited, regardless of sexual attraction or orientation.

### » **How should Christians think about the legalization of so-called same-sex marriage in our country?**

Like other important questions regarding social change and shifting cultural perceptions, the proposal to legalize same-sex unions – calling them marriages – requires a biblically informed, thoughtful, and gracious response.

The concept and language of same-sex marriage fundamentally violates the clear teaching of Scripture and its design for marriage. As covered above, the boundaries of the biblical definition of

<sup>12</sup> We believe mixed-orientation marriage is an option for persons with same-sex attraction, though Christ Community is not promoting it as ideal or compulsory.



marriage are confined to a man and a woman entering into a covenant of marriage. The proposal to legalize same-sex unions as marriage is problematic because the advocacy of equal rights seeks to affirm the moral equivalency of both heterosexual and homosexual unions, behavior, and practice. While not the same as a moral good, legalization brings with it the connotation and public perception of moral good, and Christians should not support such an equivalence. For the biblically faithful Christian, not all that is deemed lawful by human government is deemed moral by God.

While the current cultural trajectory seems to be moving towards the legalization of same-sex marriages, it is important that all people of faith (and non-faith) protect the religious freedom of all those who, out of conscience, will not participate in, facilitate, or endorse same-sex ceremonies.

» **I received a wedding invitation from someone close to me who is gay. How do I respond to the invitation? Should I attend the wedding?**

This may be one of the most difficult questions Christians have to face with respect to homosexuality. It reveals the deeply personal nature of homosexuality, and how Christians are to love friends and family with same-sex attraction.

Before responding to this question, it's first worth asking, "What is a wedding? What is marriage?" The answers to those questions may seem at first obvious, but unpacking them will be important as we discern how Christians should think about attending same-sex weddings and ceremonies.

We have already discussed God's design for marriage. Succinctly, biblical marriage is between one man and one woman, designed by God from the beginning of creation as a gift to men and women. Marriage has a design and a Designer.

A wedding, then, is a communal celebration of this gift of marriage. It is the time when the community and family surround the couple to celebrate their union and encourage them in their new life together. This might be painfully obvious, but it is worth pointing out before we launch into seeking to answer the question, "Should I attend this wedding?"

The reason we feel the weight of this question is because we're weighing two competing goods. On one hand, you love and care for the person getting married, whether they are a family member or a friend, and intentionally choosing not to attend someone's wedding seems unkind and judgmental. For the good of the relationship, you feel that you should demonstrate your love by attending the ceremony.

On the other hand, you are convinced that what you would witness at the ceremony is (a) not a true marriage and (b) is actually a celebration of something that stands in direct contradiction to God's design for marriage and sexuality. For this reason, you feel like attending the wedding would be condoning something that God condemns.



How do we make sense of this tension? In our culture, the first option would appear the obvious choice. And that answer would seem to have some biblical support – e.g. the supremacy of love above all else (1 Cor 13:13) and the fact that Christians should work hard not to offend when possible (1 Cor 10:32-33). We want to “love the sinner and not the sin” – and that will certainly at times require being in places that we would rather not be. Even Jesus gathered a negative reputation for being in places that seemed “off limits” to religious people (Matt 11:18-19). For these reasons, many Christians have attended same-sex weddings to support their friend and preserve the relationship.

However, sometimes the most loving thing to do is not what appears the most loving on the surface. [Matt Hosier has written](#) in response to this question for The Gospel Coalition, saying, “I don’t want to do something in order to make someone else feel more positive about me if by doing it I am in effect encouraging them to do something harmful. Going to a same-sex wedding is not the most loving thing to do because I don’t want to encourage my friends in actions that run contrary to God’s command.”

Second, one should consider the possibility that loving a gay friend or relative may not require attending the ceremony. While Christians should never seek to offend unnecessarily (1 Cor 10:31-33), sometimes love requires conflict (1 Cor 5:1-13). This should not be born out of pride or self-righteous superiority, but rather a conviction that Christians ought not celebrate certain things.

Ultimately, your attendance is a matter of conscience. In a matter with such relational significance, please seek wise counsel from others as you prayerfully and earnestly make this decision.

If you choose to attend, graciously seek out opportunities to openly dialogue about your faith convictions, including what you believe to be God’s design for sex and marriage. Pray that your attendance would not jeopardize the witness of the gospel, but would rather point others to the gospel.

If you choose not to attend, communicate that decision with humility and grace, and actively search out other ways to love them.

Whatever your decision, pray for your loved one, that God would make known his love to them through your relationship.

» **Should practicing homosexual individuals or partners be allowed to become members of our congregation?**

This is a very difficult question that demands a nuanced response. Same-sex attracted people are obviously encouraged to worship on Sunday mornings as part of the congregation. We are all broken people in need of grace because of our sexual brokenness. Jesus invited people of all backgrounds and lifestyles to be near him and with him (Mk 9:10).

But church membership is another issue. By joining a church, members submit themselves to the beliefs of the church, as well as the support, guidance, and correction of pastoral and elder leadership, affirming that the Christian faith is more than just an individual decision to follow Jesus; it is lived out in the body of Christ. In *any* case of known, willful, unrepentant disobedience to the teaching of Scripture, be it related to sexual sin or otherwise, we would discourage candidates from continuing the membership process in order to work toward the obedience of faith required



of Christians. We will never be perfectly obedient, but membership is a public profession of such a determination, and should not be pursued if one's life displays a pattern of disobedience.<sup>13</sup>

## MARITAL SEX

### » **Are there any sexual activities that are inappropriate for married couples?**

Generally speaking, it is safe to deem as inappropriate anything that makes the other uncomfortable. We know that living this out is a little more complicated. Using the framework of God's story of redemption, we will offer a few guidelines to talk about this in a healthy way.

First, we must remember we are all fallen individuals who come to marriage with sexual brokenness, often including unrealistic or unhealthy expectations regarding sex. The extreme sexualization of our society (impacted especially by increased access to pornography) has created a highly egocentric view of sex, which is shaped more by control, pleasure, and power than intimacy. For some, past experiences or other factors have created irrational fear and disgust with certain sexual practices. In any case, brokenness needs to be confessed and expectations worked through as the couple explores what is appropriate and enjoyable for them.

Second, we must remember that the gospel has freed us to serve the other person rather than to be served. The gospel calls us to give up our own rights and our own desires for the other, just as Christ gave up his rights and position as God to come and serve us, even to death on a cross (Phil 2:5–11). So in marriage – and sex within marriage – we are called to live a life of sacrifice, giving ourselves generously to the other person. As we engage in sex, it will be important to share our thoughts, desires, and fears, but it is even more important to listen. Listen carefully to your spouse, and strive to please your partner in this incredibly intimate and beautiful process together. Serving the other – giving rather than demanding – and growing together will bring much greater joy and intimacy than any particular sexual activity.

Finally, it is important to note that we live in the “already not yet.” This means that, although there will be incredible healing and freedom for many who came to marriage with deep sexual scars, a degree of sexual brokenness will always remain with us. We must be careful not to nurture unrealistic expectations that don't factor in the vulnerability of this part of marriage, or the “creeping in” of egotistical (and unfulfillable) desires. Keep talking, keep sharing, and keep expecting to grow in sexual intimacy together.

### » **My spouse and I haven't had sex for months. Is that okay?**

The apostle Paul actually addresses a very similar question in 1 Corinthians 7:1–5. There, the church is asking him whether couples should simply not engage in sex, and he very explicitly says that this is not only an unhealthy mindset, but a dangerous procedure that could lead to worse sin.

From Paul's teaching, along with other passages in Scripture, current social sciences, and common sense, we know that sex is a vital part of the marriage relationship. Marriage is about intimacy in all areas, including sexual intimacy. Marriage is also, according to Scripture, the only place where

<sup>13</sup> In accordance with the previous question, membership is not dependent upon sexual attraction or orientation, assuming the candidate is seeking to lean into God's design for sex. Questions such as these highlight the importance of helpful distinctions.



true sexual intimacy can be achieved, and, in fact, should be pursued. Once one is married and has experienced a degree of sexual intimacy with his or her spouse, a desire and a need is awakened that is very difficult to suppress. If the spouse is not getting that kind of intimacy from his or her spouse, the desire often will continue, but will begin to shift its focus elsewhere. This is what Paul means when he says that Satan tempts us because of our lack of control (1 Cor 7:5).

Of course, this is no excuse for adultery or any extramarital sexual engagement (e.g. pornography) as an “outlet” for that desire. Rather, it should be a stern warning that leads the tempted one to spend time with his or her spouse to recover the sexual intimacy they once had (or create it from scratch in some cases). Take Philippians 2:4 to heart, and start considering his or her needs above your own. Strive to know your spouse well, and lavish him or her with compliments, gifts, and time. Drop any other unnecessary commitments and ask the Lord to help you rebuild a healthy marriage. And pray for self-control like only the Holy Spirit can give during this process.

» **My spouse and I were recently married, and want to wait to have children. Does the Bible say anything about birth control?**

In one sense, no, the Bible does not mention specific birth control mechanisms that are so easily accessible to us today. In fact, the global church has wrestled deeply with how to approach these control options since they were invented. Various traditions have landed differently, and the debates are far from over.

However, there are a few truths that practically all Bible-believing Christian traditions can agree on. On the one hand, Scripture upholds a high value for human life, even at conception. With this in mind, a Christian must not justify any kind of birth control method that intervenes in the birth process after conception. These methods are considered “abortive,” and must be avoided. Beyond that, most Protestant traditions agree that birth control mechanisms are not unjustified on a Scriptural basis, as long as there is agreement between the spouses and a clear conscience before God.

If you are considering using birth control, please consult a physician to make sure there are no health risks for the spouse who will be taking them. If you have questions concerning ethics, please contact a pastor or reference one of the resources provided below.<sup>14</sup>

## PORNOGRAPHY

» **I have been a Christian for years, but I still struggle with pornography. Why can't I break free?**

In many ways, we could replace the word “pornography” with any other sin struggle and try to answer the same question. Why can't I break free from gossip? Or deception? Or pride? The unfortunate reality, which many know too well, is that Christians still sin. Our old sin habits die

<sup>14</sup> See *Ethics for a Brave New World* by Paul and John Feinberg, as well as The Village Church's online article entitled *Should Christians Use Contraceptive Methods and Reproductive Technologies?*



hard, and often follow us as we follow Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross and subsequent resurrection save Christians from sin's *penalty*.

However, we are still in the process of being saved from sin's *power*. Thus, we live in what theologians call the "already, not yet," where we anxiously await salvation from sin's *presence*. This daily tension is difficult and frustrating, and is especially challenging with regards to habitual sins, like pornography. In times of desperation, as you stumble and fall again, look to the cross of Jesus Christ. In doing so, remember that your sins — all of them — have been paid for. This wonderful truth isn't a license to keep sinning, but a call to continue walking forward out of sin, empowered by and in step with the Holy Spirit (Rom 6:1-4; Gal 5:15-25).

On the other hand, there is something unique about the sin struggle of pornography. While all sin is equal in the sense that it all equally (and rightly) puts us under God's wrath, in another sense, not all sins are created equal. Our modern justice system even makes this point with worsening degrees of punishments for certain crimes. Modern neuroscientific research has shown that pornography essentially functions as a drug, making it very easy to become addicted. The sin struggle of pornography is much like quicksand: it doesn't look dangerous initially, but before you know it, you're sucked in and suffocating.

If you sense that you may be addicted to pornography, please talk to your pastor and/or professional counselor about steps you can take toward freedom and healing.

#### » **Will marriage satisfy my lust for pornography?**

Sex within the covenant of marriage can be immensely satisfying and fulfilling for both men and women. As we have seen, this is part of God's good design. But marriage will not satisfy the problem of pornography, because it is a matter of lust in the heart. The physical satisfaction and relational closeness that is found in the marriage bed certainly helps fulfill passions, but it does not address the issue of lust.

In Galatians 5, the Apostle Paul contrasts the "desires of the flesh" (e.g. the desire to view and use pornography) with the "desires of the Spirit" (Gal 5:16-26), laying out a framework for us to "walk in the Spirit" and "crucify the flesh with its passions and desires." That's what we must do to our lust for pornography—we must kill it, or it will kill us (even if we are happily married).

A lust for pornography cannot exist in healthy marriage as God designed. The use of pornography is self-serving, while marriage is self-giving. Pornography demands isolation and privacy, while marriage demands openness and intimacy.

Marriage is not designed to satisfy sinful lusts and passions. Rather, marriage is designed for a greater satisfaction and fulfillment (as God designed) than any temporary pleasure that may come from using pornography. A young or unmarried person who has been using porn as a functional remedy for their sexual lust may indeed benefit by being married, though still in need of repentance and chastity. The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthian church "if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (1 Cor 7:9).



If pornography is part of your sexual history, pray for a heart of contentment and be thankful for the spouse that God has given you. Your spouse is a good gift from God. But if we allow lust and sin to reign in our hearts, we will never be satisfied; we will actually be miserable.

If you are a married person struggling with pornography, we encourage you to talk with a pastor. This may be a difficult step, but breaking the secrecy of pornography use will lift the burden of shame and begin to break the chains of isolation. Do this for your spouse, that he or she may begin the healing process. If your spouse is struggling with porn, please don't suffer in silence. This [eBook](#) is a great resource for wives who have been devastated by their husband's pornography use.

» **I am interested in accountability for sexual purity, but these relationships have failed me in the past. What does a successful accountability relationship look like?**

Often, Christians turn to accountability relationships as a last resort to fix a sin problem. When this happens, the relationship is almost guaranteed to fail. Instead, we submit that healthy accountability relationships should be part of the Christian's journey at every point — when life is going poorly and when it is going well. One good analogy is that successful accountability relationships function like preventative medicine — much like good hygiene, or regular exercise.

Or it might be helpful to think of a successful accountability relationship like a simple house. The foundation of a successful accountability relationship is meeting together (Heb 10:23-25), whether in person, or through alternate means of communication, like a phone call or an email. The load-bearing pillar of the relationship is confession (Jas 6:16), being truly honest with one another about our sins and where we stand with God. The outer walls of the relationship are prayer and encouragement, both of which nurture the relationship and help it grow. Finally, all of this is underneath the roof of the gospel — the good news that Jesus came and died on the cross that we might experience the forgiveness of our sins. Like even a simple house, a successful accountability relationship will take time to come together. It won't be easy work, but it will be worth it.<sup>15</sup>

» **How should we view masturbation?**

We must acknowledge that the Bible doesn't name the physical act of masturbation as sinful. But this does not fully answer the question; it only reveals that the physical act should not be in primary view when we are considering what God thinks. There are several "critical questions" that may nuance the initial question in helpful ways:

First, *is the act of masturbation tied to sexual lust?* If the answer to this question is "yes," then it is imperative to avoid masturbation, as the Bible clearly calls sexual lust sinful (Matt 5:28). While some take the position that it is possible to perform the physical act of masturbation without sexual lust, we would encourage caution before adopting that position. Only God can see into our hearts and minds (Jer 17:10), so we do not dismiss this position, but we are skeptical about the level of self-control that is necessary for such faithful obedience.

Second, *is your habit of masturbation conditioning you to be selfish?* Even if one is able to perform the physical act of masturbation without succumbing to physical lust, we need to consider more questions related to God's design for sexuality. The Bible teaches that the heart and soul of

<sup>15</sup> Much of this answer is indebted to Luke Gilkerson's blog posts on healthy accountability relationships, which can be found on the [Covenant Eyes website](#). We commend this website in *Helpful Resources*.



sexuality is a mutual, sacrificial experience between two people: one husband and one wife. Solo masturbation necessarily is a sexual encounter outside of that realm, and as such, can condition one to become selfish. Thus, if the answer to this question is “yes,” it is wise to avoid masturbation. As Gilkerson says, “your sexuality was meant for bringing you close to another person in love, not close to yourself.”

Third, *is masturbation mastering you?* If there is even an inkling of an answer of “yes” to this question, then it is wise to avoid masturbation. As the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:12, “*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything.*” We do not want our freedom in Christ to land us in slavery to something else.

Overall, we would encourage caution regarding masturbation, and appeal to readers to make wise decisions in this arena that fit into God’s broader design for human sexuality.

### » **How can I help protect my children from explicit material?**

Protecting children and teenagers in this digital age is an increasingly difficult challenge. We’ve seen the damage that explicit material (i.e. pornography, violence, and language) can cause on young lives and families, but we often fail to take action in protecting our young people from such content. Whether from a lack of knowledge, an inability to keep up with technology, or simply a lack of courage, we often fail to take the right measures in order to protect our young ones.

Most of the explicit content is privately viewed, used, and shared today on computers, phones, and other mobile devices (including gaming systems). Parents can begin to protect their children by considering the location of all devices, limiting the amount of time their child spends on a device (as well as the content made available to them), leading by example in one’s own use of technology, and loving their children through struggles and failures.

**Locate.** Location is a huge issue in a time where our computers are always with us—in the form of “mobile devices.” Consider where your computers are located throughout your home and where your devices go throughout the day. Almost every device sold today has the capability to access the internet through a wifi connection, even personal gaming systems, which can easily be overlooked. Consider placing home computers in a high-traffic shared space of the home where there is accountability and transparency. It is much easier to protect your children online when you can look over their shoulder. You can also consider having a box or a bin where mobile devices live and charge throughout the night<sup>16</sup> and during meal times. While each family will approach this differently, knowing the location of your technology is key to protecting your children from explicit content.

**Limit.** The internet and video games can be very addictive, especially for children and teenagers. Limiting the time your children spend on the computer will help protect them from addictive and obsessive behaviors, as well as explicit content. Pornographic material is the most commonly searched-for content on the internet, but it can also be shared with your children by peers. But tragically, explicit material is so widely available that children often “stumble” onto harmful sites, pictures, or videos. The more someone stays online, the more opportunity there is to stumble onto

<sup>16</sup> Reports show that many teenagers suffer today from sleep deprivation due partly to text messaging and internet use in bed throughout the night.



explicit content. Set boundaries for the amount of time your children can spend on the computer, as well as the time of day they can access their computers/devices.

Parents can also protect their children by limiting the content that is available to them (including video games). Limiting content is not a foolproof way to prevent your child from accessing, viewing, or using explicit content, but it is essential to building adequate protection for your family. There are many services that “filter” content for you and your family—predetermining sites that contain explicit content and then blocking access to those particular sites. Two organizations that we commend to our families are Covenant Eyes and XXXChurch.com. Both have services and tools to filter, monitor, and report online content for most devices and computers, as well as some other resources to support individuals and families with this particular issue. If you are interested in setting up accountability software on your devices, please talk with your pastor.

**Lead.** Many parents are not as “digitally native” as their children, who are growing up without knowing what it was like before wifi internet, video games, and phones without wires! Therefore it may take some research, hard work, and discipline to lead your children well in this digital age. Set the expectations in the home regarding use of technology, and then live by those same expectations. Families can use technology together as a family, and they can also put it away as a family at the appropriate times. Begin to protect your children by protecting yourself from the same explicit content and practicing healthy habits.

**Love.** Pastors and researchers are reporting some disturbing news regarding explicit content (namely pornography) and our children. On average, children are seeing explicit images and videos for the first time at much younger ages than ever before. Most of the time it is shared (by a peer). Pornography, violence, and harsh language, while they seem normative in our broader culture, can be incredibly alluring for teenagers who are curious and fascinated by the elusive nature of such content. The truth is, unless you place your kid in a bubble and keep them there, they are going to happen upon content that dishonors God and his design for our flourishing. When our children fail and fall into sin, we must lovingly and graciously lead them to repentance and faith.

» **What should I do if I suspect my teenager is looking at pornography on his/her mobile device(s)?**

If you suspect your teenager is viewing pornography, you must take action. Talk with your child and thoroughly check web histories (on all devices), photo albums, storage devices, and the like. Do not wait or try to “catch them” in the act of viewing porn; this could be harmful for you both. It is often most effective for dads to talk with sons and for moms to chat with daughters. Single parents have unique challenges, but our pastoral staff and adult leaders would be happy to help in any way we can.

You must talk with your teenager if you suspect they are viewing pornography. This can be very disappointing for the parent and shameful for the teenager, but the stakes are high. Pornography is often likened to drug addiction, as the chemical and psychological effects on the brain are intense. The younger the brain, the greater effect pornography is going to have. This must be stopped. You cannot simply wait it out or “pray it away.”



Don't assume they are hiding because they are devious and rebellious. Many hide their sin because they are embarrassed and ashamed. Teenagers often know that pornography use is wrong, but they just don't know how to stop. That is where you come in as a parent. Share with them the consequences and dangers of this kind of destructive behavior, and model for them the superior joy that can be found in Christ. Communicate your love and your desire for them to flourish.

Lastly, whether you conclude your teenager is using pornography or not, set up healthy boundaries for the family and its use of technology. See the Common Question: "How can I help protect my children from explicit material?" for some helpful tips in protecting your family from explicit material.

## PREMARITAL SEX

### » **I have been dating my boyfriend for a long time, and we are very much in love. If we are both ready, why can't we have sex?**

Everything that God created was said to be 'good', including sex. But God intended sex to be enjoyed in a very specific way between a man and a woman who leave their parents and are committed to each other for a lifetime in marriage (Gen 2:24). As his creation, we have to trust the creator's design and plan for the things He has made as what will lead to our flourishing as sexual beings.

Love is not the singular requirement for sex and neither is being "ready." Can you enjoy something even when you use it improperly? Yes. But it would pale in comparison to enjoyment of that thing when it is used the way it was meant to be used. Having sex before you are married will diminish the enjoyment, value, and uniqueness that is found in sex that is reserved for the person with whom you will spend the rest of your life.

Ask yourself the question, "How much am I worth?" "Am I worth waiting for?" "Does my boyfriend love me enough to never want to have sex with anyone but me?" If your boyfriend really loves you and you really love him, why the rush? If your love leads to lasting commitment, you have the rest of your life to get to know each other and to enjoy sex with each other. Save sex for marriage. Save it for the way it was designed to be enjoyed. Save it for the one person with whom you will spend the rest of your life.

### » **How far is "too far" before marriage?**

The motive of this question will almost always lead to the same result: going "farther" than you intended to go, regardless of where you drew the line in the first place. When this is your mindset, what you are really asking is, "how close to sinning can I get without actually sinning?" This makes it too easy to move the line when faced with temptation.

Instead of framing our questions around some arbitrary line – "is this or that behavior OK for the Christian?" – we should be asking whether or not our behavior honors the Creator's plan for human sexuality. In James 1:25, it says that the person who pursues God's law – his design for how to live – and perseveres in it, that person will be blessed. In other words, if we choose to pursue



God's design for how to live, rather than flirting with temptation and sin, we will experience greater joy as we live out God's plan for our flourishing.

If you are close to marriage, we discourage long engagements as a way of guarding against compromising your purity.

### » **How should we respond to teenage pregnancies?**

We must remember that nothing can separate us from God's love, even sexual activity outside of marriage. God's grace far outruns anything we can do. This is a serious matter, but God is gracious.

For families walking through this difficult reality, remember that the home should be a safe place for everyone to be open, honest, and loved. Because the unborn child is a human being made in the image of God, elective abortion, though legal, is morally wrong. This baby is a gift from God, even if the circumstances of the pregnancy are not ideal. We must always fight to protect the most vulnerable among us. In addition to keeping the baby, adoption is an option that beautifully reflects gospel love.

Pray for wisdom and direction, and seek counsel from those you trust. If you or a loved one is in this position, please feel the freedom to reach out to a pastor. Pregnancy crisis centers can be a great resource for parents and teenagers alike, and we recommend Advice & Aid Pregnancy Center as a great option.

## SINGLENES

### » **I have often heard that singleness is a "gift," but it doesn't always feel that way. What is meant by this sentiment?**

When people refer to singleness as a "gift," they usually have in mind one of two biblical passages: Matthew 19:9-12 or 1 Corinthians 7:8.

In Matthew 19, Jesus speaks with the disciples about marriage as a sacred vow that's not to be broken. Understanding the sobriety and difficulty of this charge, the disciples respond to Jesus, saying, "If this is the situation between husband and wife [and divorce is only an exceptional provision], it is better not to marry." Then Jesus replies, "Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given."

In I Corinthians 7, Paul states that it is not wrong to get married, but he wishes all Christians could stay single so their attention isn't divided between pleasing the Lord and pleasing a spouse: "I wish that all of you were as I am. But each of you has your own gift from God; one has this gift, another has that."

These Scripture passages, along with others, confer upon singleness both a dignity and a provision that God extends toward those who never marry. That said, it's interesting to note that both of these passages (Matt 19 and I Cor 7), while affirming the unique value of the single life, also understand marriage as a natural desire and a blessing from God. These passages point to both the "gift" of singleness and the "gift" of marriage.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Arguably, the prevalent link between "gift" and "singleness" in our current evangelical context owes more to celibate monastic



What seems clear from Scripture in these passages (and elsewhere) is that God gives to His children his grace for faithful obedience in every station of life. Amidst the blessings (and challenges!) of singleness or marriage, God knows exactly what is needed for our life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). God gives generously, that each of his children might live fully and wholly as he has designed. The gift we receive and celebrate is the gracious work of God in our lives, though it often looks different than we'd imagined. (That part's called faith.)

» **If God is all I really need, why do I still yearn for a spouse?**

To helpfully answer this question, we'll need to dig a little deeper. What does it mean that you yearn for a spouse?

Do you yearn to know and be known by another? Do you yearn to feel connected? To have the same someone ask about your day or someone (anyone?!) to notice when you're sick in bed? Do you yearn for companionship? For physical touch? For company in joy and pain?

Then you yearn as every human – married or single – has yearned since the beginning of time. You yearn as a person created in the image of the Triune God, who has eternally existed as three persons in one essence. You yearn as Adam, of whom God said, “it is not good for the man to be alone.” You yearn because God made you for himself and for community with others.

This next part might surprise you: you yearn also (in very similar ways) as married men and women yearn, when they experience the curse of sin in their relationship together, the enmity that alienates and wounds. Surely the deep ache of loneliness and the sharp sting of betrayal share similar terrain in the heart? Marriage isn't a magic fix for all of our longings.

Of course, it's not that all of our desires are identical. Most assuredly, single people long for different things than married people and at different times. But none of us will find all of our longings met through marriage or a spouse.

That said, we must acknowledge that marriage is a very special, sacred gift – and responsibility – that singles have not been given. The Scriptures are not “ho-hum” on this. Marriage is a unique, one-of-a-kind relationship that's meant to embody, in every dimension, the love Christ has for his church (Eph 5:22-33). This is more than floral bouquets and a name-change. It's more than companionship, security, and intimacy (though at times, marriage may provide these). It is the biblical pathway to parenthood. It is the covenant in which two people become one. It is (in its best moments) a living illustration of God's love. May we never diminish such a sacred gift and calling, however common.

It's natural, and it's okay, if you yearn for this. Indeed, at times it may be healthy for you to grieve the absence of this gift in your life (even as you appreciate the perks of being single). But as you yearn for a spouse, do so with honesty about all you're longing for and all that God has given.

Ironically, singles who struggle most in longing for a spouse often forget (or fail to understand) the full, biblical intent of marriage. When we recall God's design for marriage – to lovingly submit to another for God's glory – our appreciation for the single life also grows. We see that singles are invited to share in the very same sacrificial essence of marriage, as they submit their deepest

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traditions than to any one biblical passage.



desires to God. Every. Single. Day. In this, the Body of Christ is united as we proclaim to a watching world the goodness and sufficiency of Christ and his body.

» **Does contentment mean that I should relinquish my desire to marry?**

There are appropriate desires that fuel our desire to marry and to experience the formation and provision God may provide in the context of a marriage. There's no need to relinquish this desire. But there is a clear call to joyfully submit our desires to God's will, trusting above all his love and wisdom (Mt 6:10). So while contentment doesn't mean abandoning a desire for marriage altogether, it does mean abandoning an inordinate desire for marriage: a desire that's misguided or too strong.

Simply put, if you're looking to a spouse to meet your needs instead of to a Savior, you should abandon your desire. It's misguided.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, if you're longing for marriage more than you long for Jesus, you should relinquish your desire. It's too strong. Your loves are misordered.

» **Is it ok to date a non-Christian?**

If you are a Christian considering a dating relationship with a non-Christian, please think long and hard. It may not be sinful, but it also doesn't sound very smart. Generally there are two types of dating: (a) casual "just for fun" dating, and (b) dating with an eye toward marriage.

Casual dating could be perfectly harmless. However, if you desire to follow Jesus' teaching regarding sex, your relationship with a non-Christian – and their potentially different sexual ethic – will make that a tough road. Living out God's design for sex is difficult enough when both people are actually trying to follow Jesus. With only one, it's very difficult.

More seriously, even if it's "just for fun," there is always the potential of it turning into a long-term relationship over time – maybe without either party realizing it. It may start as casual, but as the relationship develops over time, refusing marriage may be extremely difficult and/or brutally painful. Assuming you actually have the conviction and resolve to walk away, why put yourself through that?

This perspective perhaps assumes an answer to a bigger question – is it sinful to marry a non-Christian? Let's be mindful of Paul's words: Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14). It seems like Paul calls this a sin.

But for the sake of argument, let's assume it isn't sinful to marry a non-Christian. It is still really difficult to imagine that it could ever be the wise thing to do. Jesus demands everything – our hearts, our minds, our behaviors. He demands our income and our possessions, our children, our goals, our futures. He demands that we see the world as he sees it, and that we realign everything else accordingly. This is what it means to follow him. Jesus redefines our significance, our security, our satisfaction, our everything. Jesus will never be our hobby. He is our Lord or nothing at all.

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<sup>18</sup> This is true for the single and married person alike.



And to willingly partner yourself in the most intimate of all relationships – the one relationship that will impact you, shape you, and determine your future more than any other relationship – to someone for whom the cross is mere foolishness (1 Cor 1:18), seems incredibly heedless and unwise.

Practical questions abound: How will you raise your kids and how will they experience Christ in your home if only seen in one of you? Will you go to church? Will you give generously as God commands? What about serving? What about Christian friends? Sure, there are couples that “make it work,” but God wants so much more for us than “making it work.”

It can also be an extremely lonely place to live. The loneliness that many singles face is extremely difficult, and we would never want to make light of that. Our hearts break for singles in their loneliness, and the church longs to be a place of intimacy and community for all. But often, even harder than being single and alone is being married and alone.

And yes, over the course of time, they could become a Christian. We pray they will. But we caution against entering a marriage simply out of what we hope might be “someday” in the future. The risks are simply too great.

Our advice? Don’t date a non-Christian.

» **What are the struggles unique to singleness, and how can the church better understand and support brothers and sisters who are single?**

The very process of asking this question is a “start” at answering it and honoring singles in our congregation. For those really wanting to make headway here, some of the most loving and instructive things to do are (a) befriend a single person, (b) ask him or her about their experience as a single person in the church, and (c) earnestly invite their feedback and opinions.

Beyond such homework, here are a few other ideas:

1. When speaking of singleness and marriage, seek to uphold the biblical value of each and give proportionate gravity and time to addressing each station of life, as Scripture does. Church leaders must stop making singles an afterthought – in their sermons, in their programming, in their scheduling, in their hearts.
2. Make the family of God a reality that seems to you as indispensable as your own nuclear family. Love singles in the church as your brothers and sisters. Many singles don’t experience fellowship with married people or friendship with those of the opposite gender. (Ironically, this is more true the longer one is single.)
3. Many singles experience the difficulty of “covering all the bases,” with a special vulnerability tied to projects or tasks that correlate with gender-associated skills.<sup>19</sup> Look for ways to bless singles, especially in places where they lack skills or seem most vulnerable. And, of course, singles can and should serve one another in this way as well!

<sup>19</sup> Of course, there are exceptions to every gender stereotype and listening to your brother or sister speak about his or her needs is the most important place to start.



4. Invite singles into your home – and not just to babysit. Make an effort to leave your world of marriage and family to enter their world of singleness. Line up some activities for your kids so you can devote more attention to conversation with your single friend. Invite your single friend to a movie or to work together on a project they need to tackle. Consider inviting a single friend along on one of your (married) date nights or rethinking the New Year's Eve invitation list. Even occasional small gestures go a long way toward making singles feel as if they are full-fledged members of the congregation, worthy recipients of sacrificial love from time to time.
5. Be mindful that holidays and vacations are often difficult and solitary spaces for single people. Invite a single friend along for a few days of your family vacation or ask them to join your family on Christmas afternoon. Send a text or card on their birthday.
6. Learn some vocabulary and conversational-skills outside the world of “marriage” and “family.” You won't be asking about their spouse or kids, but who is inside of their inner circle? How are they doing? How does your single friend like to spend their day off? And this is an important point: Please don't assume that singles in your congregation have “more time” than those who are married with kids. Time is allocated differently, but for the faithful follower of Jesus, there is no shortage of commitments or calendar events.
7. Befriend singles before you set them up on dates. Ask a few caring questions before you ask if they're dating someone. Don't overthink it, but be sensitive that your questions and suggestions about dating can be hurtful. Acknowledge that, though you were single at one time, there's probably a lot you don't know or understand about their experience of singleness.
8. One way you can demonstrate that you think of your single friend as more than a “project” (someone to be married off) is to ask them directly how they're feeling about their singleness – just as you might ask a friend about her marriage. What are the biggest challenges? What brings them most joy? What are some practical things they do to cope with the struggles or to maximize the joys?
9. Be aware that many Christians anchor their identity in who they are as a spouse or a parent. Singles can be tempted to define themselves only by what they're not. Work hard to affirm singles for who they are. Explicitly encourage. Name their gifts. Make them feel wanted.
10. Singles can easily believe that their daily reality will never be as important or valuable or stressful or...(name the adjective)...as those who are navigating marriage or parenthood. Especially in hallway conversations or small group discussions, be aware that singles usually defer to those who are married or have children. As one who is given this deference, intentionally seek out input and opinions from single people. (Even about marriage and parenting...though you'll want to broaden the conversation at times also.) Don't let your single friends get away with surface answers or prayer requests only on behalf of others. Ask them to share their true selves. Know something about their interior.





# HELPFUL RESOURCES

For those interested in further exploration, we hope you find these resources helpful. Each book includes the publisher's summary thoughts to give you an idea of the book's purpose and content.

If there is a book that interests you, please feel free to ask your pastor whether they can provide a copy. And if you have questions about a book or article that you've come across, please reach out. We want to help however we can.

[Biblical Sexuality](#)  
[Gender](#)

[Homosexuality](#)  
[Lust and Pornography](#)

[Marriage and Family](#)  
[Singleness](#)

## BIBLICAL SEXUALITY

### Books

***Counter Culture: A Compassionate Call to Counter Culture in a World of Poverty, Same-Sex Marriage, Racism, Sex Slavery, Immigration, Abortion, Persecution, Orphans and Pornography*, David Platt**

In *Counter Culture*, New York Times bestselling author David Platt shows Christians how to actively take a stand on such issues as poverty, sex trafficking, marriage, abortion, racism, and religious liberty—and challenges us to become passionate, unwavering voices for Christ. Drawing on compelling personal accounts from around the world, Platt presents an unapologetic yet winsome call for Christians to faithfully follow Christ into the cultural battlefield in ways that will prove both costly and rewarding.

***Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, John Piper and Justin Taylor**

The Bible has a way of shocking us. If Americans could still blush, we might blush at the words, “Rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love” (Proverbs 5:18-19). But, of course, sin always tries to trash God's gifts. So we can't just celebrate sex for what God made it to be; we have to fight what sin turned it into. The contributors to this unique volume encourage you to do both: celebrate and struggle.

***Understanding Sexual Identity*, Mark Yarhouse**

Today's youth struggle with difficult questions of sexual identity. How can a youth worker offer wise care and counsel on such a controversial and confusing subject? Mark Yarhouse, director of the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity, equips youth ministers so they can faithfully navigate the topic of sexual identity in a way that is honest, compassionate, and accessible.

***What is the Meaning of Sex*, Denny Burk**

From marriage to birth control, homosexuality to singleness, *What is the Meaning of Sex?* sets forth a distinctly Christian perspective, equipping you to engage our confused culture with a God-glorifying vision of human sexuality.



## Online Resources

[\*The Gospel and Sex\*](#), Tim Keller

## GENDER

### Books

*The Meaning of Marriage*, Kathy and Tim Keller (“Embracing the Other”, Chapter 6)

Based on the acclaimed sermon series by New York Times bestselling author Timothy Keller, this book shows everyone—Christians, skeptics, singles, longtime married couples, and those about to be engaged—the vision of what marriage should be according to the Bible.

*Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, Mark Yarhouse (Available July 2015)

In *Understanding Gender Dysphoria*, Yarhouse offers a Christian perspective on transgender issues that eschews simplistic answers and appreciates the psychological and theological complexity. The result is a book that engages the latest research while remaining pastorally sensitive to the experiences of each person.

## HOMOSEXUALITY

### Books

*Compassion Without Compromise*, Adam Barr and Ron Citlau

Truth does not preclude kindness – and a good dose of humility is necessary to love our neighbors. With sensitivity and winsomeness, this book will offer an honest but inviting message to readers: We are all in need of the healing that can only come from the truth of the gospel.

*Homosexuality and the Christian*, Mark Yarhouse

In a clear and compassionate style, he explains the research regarding what causes same-sex attraction and whether or not it can be overcome. He also discusses what Christians can do when someone they know opens up to them about their homosexual attractions.

*Is God Anti-Gay?*, Sam Allberry

Christians, the church and the Bible seem to be out of step with modern attitudes towards homosexuality. And there is growing hostility towards those who hold a different view. So is God homophobic? And what do we say, and how do we relate to both Christians and non Christians who experience same-sex attraction?

*The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, Robert Gagnon

Gagnon offers the most thorough analysis to date of the biblical texts relating to homosexuality. He demonstrates why attempts to classify the Bible’s rejection of same-sex intercourse as irrelevant for our contemporary context fail to do justice to the biblical texts and to current scientific data. Gagnon’s book powerfully challenges attempts to identify love and inclusivity with affirmation of homosexual practice.



### ***Washed and Waiting*, Wesley Hill**

“Gay,” “Christian,” and “celibate” don’t often appear in the same sentence. Yet many who sit next to us in the pew at church fit that description, says author Wesley Hill. As a celibate gay Christian, Hill gives us a glimpse of what it looks like to wrestle firsthand with God’s “No” to same-sex relationships.

### **Online Resources**

[\*Dear Justice Kennedy: An Open Letter from the Child of a Loving Gay Parent\*, Katy Faust](#)

[\*Is Christian Teaching on Sexuality Psychologically Harmful?\*, Andrew Walker](#)

[\*Seven Things I Wish My Pastor Knew About My Homosexuality\*, Jean Lloyd](#)

[\*spiritualfriendship.org\*](#)

[\*julierodgers.wordpress.com\*](#)

[\*wesleyhill.tumblr.com\*](#)

## **LUST AND PORNOGRAPHY**

### **Books**

#### ***Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace*, Heath Lambert**

In *Finally Free*, Dr. Heath Lambert, a leader in the biblical counseling movement, lays out eight gospel-centered strategies for overcoming the deceitful lure of pornography. Each chapter clearly demonstrates how the gospel applies to this particular battle and how Jesus can move readers from a life of struggle to a life of purity.

#### ***Pulling Back the Shades: Erotica, Intimacy, and the Longings of a Woman’s Heart*, Dr. Juli Slattery and Dannah Gresh**

With solid Biblical teaching and transparent stories, trusted authors Dannah Gresh and Dr. Juli Slattery, offer an unflinching look at the most personal questions women ask.

#### ***Pure Eyes: A Man’s Guide to Sexual Integrity*, Craig Gross and Steven Luff**

Whether single or married, all men must cope with sexual temptation – sometimes on a daily basis. This honest treatment of an uncomfortable issue will free men to experience forgiveness and renewal.

#### ***Sexual Detox*, Tim Challies**

A huge percentage of men need a porn detox, a moral and psychological reset. Do you? If so, whether you know it or not, pornography has corrupted your thinking, weakened your conscience, warped your sense of right and wrong, and twisted your understanding and expectations of sexuality. You need a reset by the One who created sex.



### ***Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is)*, Joshua Harris**

Honestly sharing his own struggles, Harris exposes lust's tactics and helps readers create a personal plan for fighting back. Men and women will find hope in God's grace and learn the secrets to lasting change.

### **[The Porn Circuit](#), Luke Gilkerson**

Science shows us that acting out with pornography taps into our powerful neurochemistry, and this can quickly lead a person to use porn habitually. Much like a drug, the chemicals that fire when watching porn cause the brain to increasingly crave it until eventually it can feel almost impossible to break free.

### **[Your Brain on Porn](#), Luke Gilkerson**

Download this free e-book to learn the five proven ways pornography warps your brain, including how porn decreases sexual satisfaction, lowers one's view of women, and desensitizes the viewer to cruelty. You'll also learn how the gospel, obedience to God's Word, and quality fellowship renews your mind and moves you toward freedom from porn and sex addiction.

## **Accountability Software**

[Accountable2You](#)

[Covenant Eyes](#)

[x3watch.com](#)

## **Online Resources**

[Covenant Eyes e-Books](#) (Free)

[XXXChurch.com](#)

# **MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**

## **Books**

### ***Ethics for a Brave New World*, Paul and John Feinberg**

Aldous Huxley's 1932 book *Brave New World* foresees a world in which technological advances have obliterated morality and freedom. John Feinberg and Paul Feinberg, in the first edition of *Ethics for a Brave New World*, noted how Huxley landed frighteningly close to the truth. Their book responded to ethical crises such as abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, and genetic engineering by looking to Scripture for principles to guide us through the moral quagmires of our time. There is a new chapter on stem cell research and greatly expanded material on issues such as homosexuality and genetic engineering.



### ***God, Marriage, and Family*, Andreas Köstenberger**

In the second edition of *God, Marriage, and Family*, Köstenberger and Jones explore the latest controversies, cultural shifts, and teachings within both the church and society and further apply Scripture's timeless principles to contemporary issues.

### ***The Meaning of Marriage*, Kathy and Tim Keller**

Based on the acclaimed sermon series by New York Times bestselling author Timothy Keller, this book shows everyone—Christians, skeptics, singles, longtime married couples, and those about to be engaged—the vision of what marriage should be according to the Bible.

### ***The Mingling of Souls*, Matt Chandler**

Matt Chandler helps navigate these issues for both singles and marrieds by revealing the process Solomon himself followed: Attraction, Courtship, Marriage...even Arguing. *The Mingling of Souls* will forever change how you view and approach love.

### ***This Momentary Marriage: A Parable of Permanence*, John and Noel Piper**

*This Momentary Marriage* unpacks the biblical vision, its unexpected contours, and its weighty implications for married, single, divorced, and remarried alike.

### ***What Did You Expect?*, Paul David Tripp**

Marriage, according to Scripture, will always involve two flawed people living with each other in a fallen world. Yet, in counselor Paul Tripp's professional experience, the majority of couples enter marriage with far different expectations. These unrealistic expectations leave them unprepared for the day-to-day realities of married life. This unique book introduces a biblical and practical approach to those realities that is rooted in God's faithfulness and Scripture's teaching on sin and grace.

## **Online Resources**

[\*Should Christians Use Contraceptive Methods and Reproductive Technologies?\*](#), The Village Church

## **SINGLENESS**

### **Books**

#### ***Redeeming Singleness*, Barry Danylak**

Though marriage is highly esteemed throughout Scripture, the Bible also affirms singleness as an important calling for some Christians. *Redeeming Singleness* expounds a theology of singleness that shows how the blessings of the covenant are now directly mediated to believers through Christ.

#### ***Singled Out: Why Celibacy Must Be Reinvented in Today's Church*, Christine Colón and Bonnie Field**

Thoughtful and accessible, *Singled Out* is an invaluable voice of realistic encouragement for any single as well as an important tool for church leaders and others concerned with mission and ministry for singles.



*Thrive: The Single Life as God Intended*, Lina AbuJamra

In *Thrive*, Lina AbuJamra - who has been single for over 40 years - will show you how you can make a difference with your life right now instead of sitting around waiting for something to happen to you. If you're ready to figure out what God has to say about singleness instead of relying on your own feelings and conclusions, this book is for you.

### Online Resources

[\*Singled Out\*](#), Christina Cleveland

[\*Really, It's Okay To Be Single\*](#), Peter Chin

[\*Single, Satisfied, and Sent: Mission for the Not-Yet Married\*](#), Marshall Segal

[\*Sex and the Single Woman\*](#), Fabienne Harford

[\*Should I Be Content With My Singleness\*](#), Betsy Childs

[\*The Single Life: Where Do We Go From Here?\*](#), Carissa Mulder

[\*The Single Person's Good Desire for Sex\*](#), Paul Marshall