



REWIRE

REDISCOVERING GOD'S HEART IN OUR SEXUALITY

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with over 50 dedicated and diverse Navigator staff.

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SEXUALITY: *THE TRAILER*

God knows us inside and out. More importantly, He really, really wants us to know Him. That's why it's been said that He has provided two "books" where anyone can go to learn about Him: nature and the Bible. In nature He speaks visually. In the Bible He speaks verbally.

But have you ever read His other "book"—the tell-all "book" He has written where He reveals Himself relationally? It's called human sexuality!

That's the premise of this whole study: That God is Person (actually, three Persons). He's a highly relational Person who longs to know and be known. So in His longing to build a family for Himself, He beautifully designed humans with personhood and with relational sexuality. That way, we can relate to one another as the glorious men and women we are—rather than as non-personed animals or non-gendered robots. By embedding His own image in our maleness and femaleness, we can know Him and be known by Him with unparalleled intimacy. And as a bonus, we can know and be known by others, too.

It's like God is the dazzling Original ... and we are the beautiful but imperfect photocopy. Or He is the blockbuster movie ... and we are the teasing movie trailer.

But let's not be naïve. Of course, we humans have messed up our sexuality. But His plan to heal and redeem our broken relationships and sexuality may be even more beautiful and glorious than His original design. And wait until you discover the end of the story of His love!

In each chapter you'll want to connect the clues to God's heart that He has hidden in our sexuality. As we learn to "read" our sexuality as part of God's self-portrait planted in our bodies, we will want to live our sexuality relationally to reflect and honor Him.



What was God thinking when He decided to create us male and female? There must be something incredibly good about sexuality—so significant and full of meaning that He didn't want us to miss it. But surely He also foresaw the pain we would experience because of sexuality. So what is it? What do our sexuality, gender, and sex itself reveal about us and about the Original Designer?

Sad to say, but too many of us are looking in all the wrong places to answer these questions. For example, looking at pornography used to be something that mostly middle-aged men did. But not anymore. These days 67% of American teens and young adult men (age 25 and under) seek out porn at least monthly. And so do 33% of teen and young adult women (<https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon>). What do trends like these say about how well (or not) our culture has served us in dating, mating, and getting married?

TIME FOR AN ALTERNATIVE?

Perhaps there's never been a better time to consider a biblical view of sexuality. In a breath of fresh air, the Bible assures us that we don't need to stare at sexualized strangers on our screens to fulfill sexual desires, or sleep with strangers to test sexual compatibility.

This just isn't what the Designer had in mind. So where else would be a better place to turn than God's Word to explore the genuine, deep concerns and questions embedded in our God-designed human nature? Questions like:

- » *Who am I as a gendered and sexual being?*
- » *What's so beautiful and even sacred about sexuality?*
- » *How have sexuality and man-woman relationships gotten so messed up?*
- » *Why does God say "one and only one forever" when it comes to sexual partners?*
- » *How can I handle temptation, lust, and my desires well?*
- » *How can I be content whether I'm single or married?*
- » *Is there anything better than sex?*
- » *Where can I get rid of my shame and find mercy?*
- » *What does my sexuality reveal about my relational God?*

REWIRE: REDISCOVERING GOD'S HEART IN OUR SEXUALITY BIBLE STUDY

The document you are looking at is an attempt to address these questions in a gracious and truthful way. It is an 8-week Bible study exploring sexuality from God's perspective. Of course, with only 60 minutes of personal preparation and 60-90 minutes of small group discussion per week/chapter, you will only scratch the surface. But you will study many important Scriptures and Bible stories on sexuality, and you will unpack life-giving principles for living well as a sexual, gendered being.

Don't expect to be taught or told what to think. You will have to read and think and pray and write for yourself, and then talk and listen and process with friends in a small group. Then you'll form your own convictions.

Also don't expect change to be easy. A salmon swims upstream to fulfill its mating role. Similarly, if you are a young adult who wants to live a life of Christ-like integrity, you'll have to swim upstream, too—against the strong sexual trends in media, music, education, and friendship.



BE ENCOURAGED

A word about terminology. You'll read the terms "sexuality," "sex," and "gender" many times in this study. Though they are closely related, they aren't exactly the same. And people have different ideas about what they mean. Don't get too hung up about their distinctions.

It doesn't matter what your sexual history is—or isn't. Perhaps you have struggled with one of these:

- the shame of having been sexually or relationally exploited
- the cynicism of promiscuity
- the longing and loneliness of celibacy in a relational desert

Or perhaps none of these describe you. Wherever you are, you will find comfort and wisdom in the pages of the Bible and its very authentic human stories. When God gave humanity freedom of choice, He also gave us the ultimate healing cure to the devastating effects of our poor choices: His beloved Son Jesus as Friend, Savior, and Redeemer.

Our cultures and ethnicities impact how we view sexuality. So we'll be considering that throughout the study, too.

Finally, you will form personal convictions to help you navigate the rocky waters of confusing sexual messages. Be forewarned: the hookup culture really does have a hook. We want to help you avoid further shame or regret to your soul by discovering how to build fulfilling relationships where person meets person. To embrace and practice what God intends will offer you freedom and joy in your design and will bring glory to the One who designed you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Because sexuality is such a personal and private topic, we suggest that your group be "closed"—no new members added after the first one or two meetings. Also, please ensure that your members commit to keeping everything discussed among you completely confidential.



It is a sexualized world out there! This reality invites followers of Jesus both to address the challenges and to seize the opportunities that sexual brokenness brings—in our own lives and in our ministries. So since the Bible has a more beautiful song to sing than Hollywood does, we want to be singing it with gusto! We set these three purposes for this study:

1. To explore what the Bible reveals about God’s purposes and beautiful design for sexuality
2. To provide an inductive foundation for building strong, personal, biblical convictions
3. To promote engaging conversations with the younger generation in our disciple-making process

WHAT THE STUDY IS NOT

First, a few clarifications. This study:

- Is not a teaching tool (message, video, book, article, workshop outline, etc.). It is an inductive Bible study that will require about 50-60 minutes of personal preparation, more if participants want.
- Will not answer all the questions that people raise, but will help people develop a biblical worldview for themselves.
- Will help many, but is designed to appeal especially to men and women ages 18-35, including not-yet believers open to a biblical perspective.
- Won’t address the serious struggles of someone with a sexual addiction. A better resource for that purpose is *Walking in the Light* (for men) and *Living in the Light* (for women). *ReWire* will also not substitute for professional counseling or therapy when needed. Facilitators should compile a list of recommended local professionals for that purpose.
- Our team decided not to add chapters addressing the specific concerns of those of us who are in the LGBT+ community. This means that you won’t find very much in this study about gender identity, sexual orientation, transgender and gender dysphoria, gender roles, masculinity and femininity, etc. This study’s virtual silence on these topics isn’t from lack of awareness or concern. Just the opposite. With the limited time and depth of an eight-week study, and with the scarcity of Bible verses using these terms, we just couldn’t do justice to the complex and very personal questions surrounding these important topics.

SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE STUDY

Here are some other features of the study that we hope will be inviting and intriguing:

- » Opens with true, real life stories
- » Includes color images and multi-cultural perspectives
- » Draws heavily on Scripture narratives and stories
- » Addresses heart issues as well as head and theological issues
- » Provides authentic tone for more vulnerable sharing in a safe small group
- » Designed for groups of men, groups of women, and perhaps co-ed groups
- » Offers thought provoking quotations from contemporary authors
- » Relies on the ESV (*English Standard Version*) and the NIV (*New International Version*) of the Bible, but also draws freely from other contemporary translations. Participants are free to use the Bible translations of their choice.
- » Explores the meanings of a few Hebrew and Greek words



- » Encourages pausing for conversational prayer
- » Provides key verses at the end of each chapter by way of summary or to memorize (optional)
- » Digital and downloadable so people can print off their own copies for personal study & preparation
- » Needed Time/Chapter: 50-60 minutes to prepare for questions marked with **?** and 60-90 minutes to discuss in small group
- » Easy to facilitate with a group; has optional no-prep discussion questions marked with a **?**.

STRUCTURE OF EACH CHAPTER

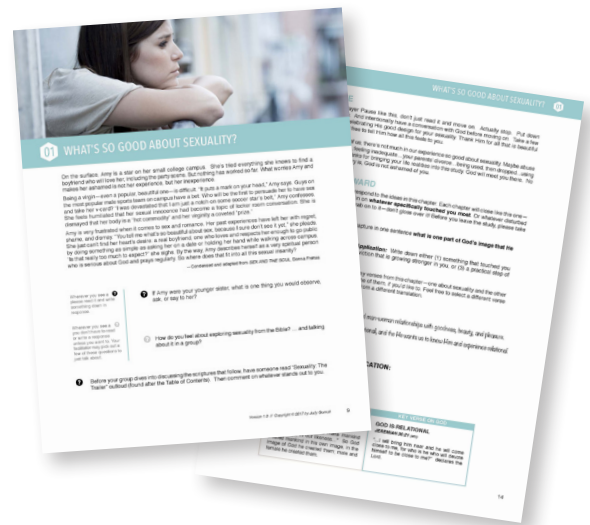
Each chapter has a simple structure to guide your personal study and your group discussion:

Page 1: A contemporary open-ended story, taken from real life, to raise the chapter’s central question

Pages 2-5: The heart of the study with scripture passages to read and prepare, structured under:

- **EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS**
- **EXPLORING YOUR REALITY**
- **PRAYER PAUSES** and **WORD PAUSES**

Page 6: **GOING FORWARD** invites you to summarize your best insights, a personal application, and two key verses for (optional) memorization.



FACILITATORS

Group facilitators won’t need a separate Leaders’ Guide. If group members come prepared, it isn’t necessary to re-read the scripture passages. Rather, discuss what they already discovered in their private study time and wrote under questions marked with a **?**. Facilitators may also select some extra questions marked with a **?** to draw out more personal reflections. Don’t expect to discuss all of the questions; choose the ones you prefer and skip others.

Freely admit that you struggle sometimes, too, and that you don’t have all the answers. Your vulnerability as a facilitator will set the tone of authenticity and inclusiveness. Also, we strongly encourage you to share leadership with a co-facilitator.

Expect to experience the enemy’s attacks against you or a group member. If someone gets seriously triggered or shares struggles you are not equipped to handle, be prepared (with names and contact information) to consult with or refer to local professional counselors.



01 WHAT'S SO GOOD ABOUT SEXUALITY?

Amy is popular on her small college campus. She's tried everything she knows, including the party scene, to find a boyfriend who will love her. But nothing has worked so far. What worries Amy is not her experience, but her inexperience. "It puts a mark on your head," Amy says.

Amy is very frustrated when it comes to sex and romance. She just can't find her heart's desire: a real boyfriend, one who loves and respects her enough to go public by doing something as simple as asking her on a date or holding her hand while walking across campus. "Is that really too much to expect?" she sighs. By the way, Amy describes herself as a very spiritual person and she prays. So where does that fit into all this sexual craziness?

—Condensed and adapted from *SEX AND THE SOUL*, Donna Freitas

Wherever you see a **?**, please read it and write something down in response.

Wherever you see a **?**, you don't have to read or write a response unless you want to. Your facilitator may pick out a few of these questions to just talk about.

- ?** If Amy were your younger sister, what is one thing you would observe, ask, or say to her?
- ?** How do you feel about exploring sexuality from the Bible? ... and talking about it in a group?

- ?** Before your group moves on, have someone read "Sexuality: The Trailer" out loud (found after the Table of Contents on page 1). Then comment on whatever stands out to you.

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

This world had a Designer. So when He drew the blueprint for humanity, what was God thinking by making us male and female? Why did God give us a sex drive if we have to suppress it until we get married? There must be something incredibly good about both sexuality and sex that He didn't want us to miss. **But what is that?** In this chapter, we'll explore the **goodness and beauty** of sexuality. We'll ask what sexuality reveals about our design as creatures made in God's image.

STORY: Creation of Human Beings (Genesis 1)

Did you know that within the first few pages of the Bible, we discover that God created human beings as gendered beings—and God declared it all “...so good, so very good” (MSG)! How and when exactly God created humans is a question for another day. Instead we're exploring **why** He created humanity as male and female.

- ❓ Skim the **GENESIS 1** creation account now from the Bible translation of your choice. Then unpack these key verses, perhaps the Bible's most important verses about sexuality! In fact, the most important Bible verses on the topic of sexuality are right here!

²⁴And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so... And God saw that it was good.

What do you notice about God creating life?

- He spoke everything into being

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness,

Who do you think the words “us” and “our” refer to?

²⁷So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

Why does it take both male and female together to reflect God's image?

³¹God saw all that he had made [savoring its beauty and appreciating that], and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

How did God view His creation of life and humanity?

(NIV and Voice)

WORD PAUSE

When you see this “Word Pause,” we'll give you the meaning of an important Hebrew or Greek word. Feel free to explore it more deeply on your own if you want.

Tselem (HEBREW) → “Image” in **GENESIS 1:26-27**

A masculine noun meaning image, replica, pattern, copy, or offspring. *Tselem* means that we humans are an imprecise copy of God, who is the Original! Only humans hold His Spirit and are a temple for His glory. Also called the *imago dei*—the truth that all people are made in God's image and are granted dignity, bodily purpose, and inviolable rights.

Demuth (HEBREW) → “Likeness” in **GENESIS 1:26**

A feminine noun meaning likeness, similarity, or expression. *Demuth* means that we humans can grow to become like God and share in His divine nature. This happens in the process while God raises us as His children and teaches us His ways, nature, and character. We become like Him—and that brings Him glory.

- ❓ What do you think it means that God created male and female “*in His image and likeness*” (vs. 26-27) and why is it important?

- ❓ God created humans with personhood—unlike all the other animals and life forms. What difference does that make to you?

“

If we are created in the image of God, then our sexuality reflects something of who God is. Sex is not a means to the end of the propagation of the species, or even for fun, but **to make the Creator known**.... How we understand and live out our sexuality is profoundly important because we will either reflect our Creator or not.

—REDEEMING SEX, Deborah Hirsch

”

STORY: Adam and Eve (Genesis 2)

Genesis 2 zooms in for a close-up on the story of the first couple—Adam and Eve. It captures the dawn of man and woman’s beautiful **design**, and it points us to God’s even more beautiful **destination** for man and woman in Revelation (which we’ll explore in Chapter 8)! Jot down one thing that stands out to you from these passages.

GENESIS 2:4-9, 15-17

GENESIS 2:18-20

GENESIS 2:21-25

- ❓ **VERSES 24-25.** Did you notice that “woman” becomes “wife” in this verse—clues to the first marriage. In this pre-shame period, why were Adam and Eve comfortable being so exposed?

STORY: Solomon and His Bride

BACKGROUND. “We don’t read very far in the Song of Solomon before we realize two things: one, it contains exquisite love lyrics, and two, it is very explicit sexually....Despite our sordid failures in love, we see here what we are created for, what God intends for us in the ecstasy and fulfillment that is celebrated in the Song.” *INTRODUCTION TO SONG OF SONGS, THE MESSAGE*

Jot down in the margin anything you notice about the goodness, beauty, longing, intimacy, and pleasure of God-given sexuality.

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:8-10 (also called Song of Songs)

Listen! My lover! Look! **Here he comes**,
leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills.
My lover spoke and said to me,
“Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and **come with me.**” (NIV)

SONG OF SOLOMON 7:10-13

I am to my beloved’s, and his desire is for me.
Come, my beloved, let us go out into the fields...
there I will give you my love. (ESV)

SONG OF SOLOMON (selected verses)

Groom to Bride: How beautiful you are, my dear!

How so very beautiful!
Your eyes are like doves.
Like a lily among thorns, that is what she is;
My dear is a captivating beauty among the young women.
Open yourself to me, my dearest,
My sweet dove, my flawless beauty.
My heart is your captive, my sister, my bride;

Bride to Groom: I belong to my love, and he has desire for me.

Kiss me with the sweet kisses of your lips,
For your love delights me more than wine.
You, my love, are so handsome! A pleasure to behold!
He placed me at his banquet table,
For everyone to see that his banner over me declares his love.
I longed and looked for my soul’s true love.

SEXUALITY IS ABOUT...

Longing for him/her to come to me.

? Read **PSALM 27:4**. What connections might there be between the beauty of humanity and the beauty of God (the “*delightful loveliness and majestic grandeur of the Lord,*” AMP)?

EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

❓ In the Garden, God gave Eve to Adam as a companion and wife to ease his aloneness. Whether or not you're in a relationship, how alone or lonely do you feel—or do you not feel? Explain.

❓ Let's sum up what you have read so far. What are one or two things about our design as gendered beings—male and female—that give us a glimpse into God's heart?

Our sexuality reminds us of how much we are wired to long for relationship—to be known by and bonded to another. And we inherited that longing from God. Listen to God inviting you into a close relationship with Him:

JEREMIAH 30:21

"...I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?" declares the Lord. (NIV)

❓ How is your heart responding to His invitation right now?

PRAYER PAUSE

Whenever you see a Prayer Pause like this, don't just read it and move on. Actually stop. Put down whatever is in your hands. Have a conversation with God before moving on. Listen to God celebrating His good design for your sexuality. Feel free to tell Him how all this feels to you.

But let's be honest. For lots of us, there's not much in our experience so good about sexuality. Maybe abuse is part of your story. Or rape...feeling inadequate...your parents' divorce...being used, then dropped...using others. Wherever you are, thanks for bringing your life realities into this study. God will meet you there. No matter what your sexual history is, **God is not ashamed of you.**

As a group, flip to page 57 titled *PRAYER PAUSES* and read it out loud. Are your prayers more like monologues or dialogues? Discuss together.

GOING FORWARD

Each chapter will close like this one—open-ended to invite you to zero in on **whatever specifically touched you most**. Or whatever disturbed you the most. Whatever that is, grab on to it! Before you leave the study, please take time to do three simple things:

1. **Key Insights:** We will suggest a couple of insights from the chapter about God's heart revealed in our sexuality. Read them thoughtfully.
2. **Application:** Write down something important God is speaking to you about, perhaps (1) something that touched you to take away, or (2) a biblical conviction that is growing stronger in you, or (3) a practical step of application He wants you to take soon.
3. **Key Verses:** We will select two key verses from this chapter—one about God and the other about sexuality. Consider **memorizing** one of them, if you'd like to. Feel free to select a different verse that touched you more or memorize from a different translation.

KEY INSIGHTS

On God: God is good and beautiful and relational, and He wants us to know Him as a Person and experience relational intimacy with Him.

On Sexuality: God designed sexuality and man-woman relationships with goodness, beauty, and pleasure.

APPLICATION:

KEY VERSE ON GOD	KEY VERSE ON SEXUALITY
<p>GOD IS RELATIONAL JEREMIAH 30:21 (NIV)</p> <p>“...I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?” declares the Lord.</p>	<p>SEXUALITY'S GOOD DESIGN GENESIS 1:26-27 (NIV)</p> <p>Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.</p>



02 WHAT DOES FAITHFULNESS HAVE TO DO WITH SEXUALITY?

We were happy for several years. But his deployment has put a lot of pressure on our marriage. Now it's happening all over again, four years after his first affair tore my heart to pieces. Back then he repented and I forgave him. I really believed we'd be one couple who would make it. Until two weeks ago.

"Jayden, is this true? How could you?! I've forgiven you every single time you've cheated. Do you think this is OK? I love you, and I want to choose you. But please look me in the eye and tell me that you choose me, too."

"It's too late," he sighed numbly. "I tried that before. Nothing is going to change. Let's just end this marriage. You'll be better off without me."

"Please, no! We made a promise to fight for this together. To fight for us! But I just can't share you with other women." I guess now I have to wait and see if he decides to fight for both of our hearts—or just gives up in shame.

? How (if at all) can you relate to this story?

THINK ABOUT IT: Why not enjoy lots of partners until marriage? Nature isn't monogamous—well, except for swans, wolves, angelfish, and lovebirds. Our culture tells us "the more the merrier." So why does God want us to share the deepest intimacies and ecstasies of sex with just one person? Maybe it has more to do with His faithfulness than ours.

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

“ God, our creator and designer, formed our sex organs, creating nerve endings so that sex would be enjoyable. Sex is SO GOOD and God wants us to enjoy it without shame, guilt, and disease. As the creator, for our good, God wisely defines the timing for sex and the person with whom to have sex.

—Bob Reehm ”

Lots of passages in the Bible urge us to save the gift of sexual pleasure for the person we marry. Here are two of them. As you read, underline what we should do with our sexual desires, and **highlight** what we should not do.

PROVERBS 5:15-20 (FROM A FATHER TO HIS SON)

[My son], here's what you should do to be satisfied: go home and drink in the pleasures of your own cistern, your wife; enjoy the sweet, fresh water that has been there all along, flowing from your own well.

Take care. Should your own springs, your body, be freely shared? Should your streams of water satisfy anyone in the streets? Absolutely not!

They should be kept pure for you and you alone, not for sharing with strangers.

May your fountain, your sex life, be blessed by God; may you know true joy with the wife of your youth.

Lovely as an angel, beautiful as a rose—don't ever quit taking delight in her body. Never take her love for granted!

Why would you trade enduring intimacies for cheap thrills with a whore? For dalliance with a promiscuous stranger?
(THE VOICE BIBLE, also V)

NOTE: It isn't the prostitute/sex worker who is rebuked here, but the man who hires her.

- ❓ If we asked the Father above what blessings and pleasures come to those who reserve sex for just one person in marriage, what do you think he might say?
- ❓ Why choose between “enduring intimacies” and “cheap thrills” (PROVERBS 5:20) when it comes to sex? Why can't we have them both?

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:4 (FROM A YOUNG WIFE TO SINGLE WOMEN)

Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires. . . . Heed my warning: I charge you not to excite your love until it is ready. Don't stir a fire in your heart too soon, until it is ready to be satisfied. (NIV and VOICE)

- ❓ Do you think it's possible to enjoy “enduring intimacy” with God? Explain.
- ❓ In Song of Solomon 8:4, what does it mean to not arouse desire until it is ready? When is desire “ready”?

STORY: God and Jerusalem (EZEKIEL 16)

BACKGROUND: The Old Testament makes one thing loud and clear: God has experienced spiritually what too many of us experience in relationships—betrayal, unfaithfulness, flirtation, affairs, cheating, and adultery. God’s chosen, covenant people the Israelites had also messed up terribly through generations of spiritual adultery—which is called idolatry.

This story is an R-rated prophetic message about God’s love for a “whore” named Israel. It is a disturbing story about love, passion, marriage, lust, betrayal, unfaithfulness, rejection, adultery, prostitution, and jealousy. If it stirs up feelings in you, don’t ignore them.

As you read this disturbing and graphic story, notice that you can read it from three angles:

- as a romantic tragedy about a man and his wife
- as a historical allegory about God and Israel (called Jerusalem)
- as a modern parable about the Lord and us

List whatever you notice about their relationship. Then give each scene a title.

SCENE 1. READ EZEKIEL 16:1-22. TITLE: _____

- Their pagan heritage was hard to shake
-
-

SCENE 2. READ EZEKIEL 16:23-34. TITLE: _____

-
-
-

? How have you or others you know tried to find lovers to fill up emptiness? How has that usually worked out in the end?

“What Israel did in the marketplace of spirituality, many of us do in the marketplace of human relationships. We attempt to find lovers to fill up the emptiness we live with, the emptiness that only God can fill.
— *THE SHAME EXCHANGE*,
Steve & Sally Breedlove and
Ralph & Jennifer Ennis”

SCENE 3. READ BELOW EZEKIEL 16:42, 58-60 AND 18:21, 32. TITLE: _____

My fury and jealousy will be satisfied, and I will be at peace and not angry with you any longer.... But you must live with the consequences of your indecent and shocking behavior...because you have despised My oath and broken our sacred covenant. But I will remember the covenant I made with you when you were young, and I will establish with you a new covenant which will last forever!... I will securely establish My covenant with you, and you will know that I am the Eternal One.... There is good news even for the wicked. If the wicked turn away from their sins, choose to uphold My laws, be honest, and live a righteous life, then they will surely live.... So turn back to Me and live. (VOICE)

-
-
-

SCENE 4. READ BELOW ISAIAH 62:2-5, 10-12. TITLE: _____

Here, again, is the great hope God promised His people if they would only return to Him—and Him alone. As you read, **highlight** how their names changed and what they are compared to.

...You'll get a brand-new name straight from the mouth of God...
 No more will anyone call you Rejected, and your country will no more be called Ruined.
 You'll be called Hephzibah (My Delight), and your land Beulah (Married),
 Because God delights in you and your land will be like a wedding celebration.
 For as a young man marries his virgin bride, so your builder marries you,
 And as a bridegroom is happy in his bride, so your God is happy with you.

Walk out of the gates. Get going! Get the road ready for the people.
 Build the highway. Get at it! Clear the debris, hoist high a flag, a signal to all peoples!
 Yes! God has broadcast to all the world: "Tell daughter Zion, 'Look! Your Savior comes
 Ready to do what he said he'd do, prepared to complete what he promised.'"
 Zion will be called new names: Holy People, God-Redeemed, Sought-Out, City-Not-Forsaken. (MSG)

-
-
-

? How would it feel to you to receive a new name from God?

WORD PAUSE

Hesed (HEBREW) → Noun often translated as “steadfast, faithful, or unflinching love.” Implies dependable kindness, committed affection, and loyal devotion. *Hesed* is meant to be mutual and reciprocal—love promised or owed to someone forever. It describes God’s love for His chosen and covenanted people.

As you read these verses, **highlight** anything you notice about God’s faithful love for us.

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-23

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (ESV)

DEUTERONOMY 31:6, 8

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you....It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. (ESV)

HEBREWS 13:5

Let your character [your moral essence, your inner nature] be free ... and content with what you have; for He has said, “I will never [under any circumstances] desert you [nor give you up nor leave you without support, nor will I in any degree leave you helpless], nor will I forsake or let you down or relax My hold on you [assuredly not]!” (AMP)

It’s easy to say “I love you” for a moment or a semester or until someone better comes along. But the God of *hesed* love hard-wired us to long for more than a series of temporary affections: we long for enduring, steadfast, unflinching love—faithful love protected by public commitment. Like a wedding vow . . . or a sacred covenant.

- ❓ Re-read **EZEKIEL 16:8** and **MALACHI 2:14-15**. How was God’s *hesed* love-based covenant with Israel similar to a couple’s vows exchanged at the time of their marriage covenant?

EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

Our human longing for love is God-intended and universal. Our hearts want to be known without fear of others turning away. It is faithfulness (*hesed* love) that satisfies this longing by saying, “I see you. I love you. And I will never, ever leave you.”

- ❓ Why do we refer to unfaithfulness as “cheating”?
- ❓ Have you ever been impacted by someone else’s unfaithfulness or abandonment? Explain.
- ❓ Consider how faithful you have been in your deep friendships?... or your man-woman relationships? ... or your relationship with God? Choose one of these relationships and respond.

“ One of shame’s features is as a harbinger of abandonment, of catastrophic collapse of relationship. ... Lurking deep within us is what Satan convinced our first parents to believe—that we are not important enough for God to remain with us. ... We come into the world looking for someone looking for us.

— *THE SOUL OF SHAME*, Curt Thompson

- ❓ Go back one page and read **HEBREWS 13:5** again—out loud. How do God’s promises to love you faithfully and never abandon you speak to your heart? Or do you sometimes doubt that you’re truly that important to God?
- ❓ On a scale of 0-10, how do you feel about being valuable enough for God to remain with you?

PRAYER PAUSE

Many of us are silently thinking, “It’s too late for me. I’ve already messed up sexually big time. I’ve cheated on my lovers—if not actually, at least virtually. So I can’t be forgiven. What hope is there for me to experience God’s good design for my sexuality now?” Or, “It’s too late for me. I’ve already been cheated on. I could never trust men/women again.” Or think of ways you may have cheated on God. If this is you, pause for a few minutes to talk with God about this. If you hear words of condemnation or accusation, those words aren’t coming from God. In Christ, you can command other voices to be silent (**JAMES 4:7**). Read page 57 again to help you hear God’s voice clearly.

GOING FORWARD

KEY INSIGHTS

On God: Human marriage (with the expectation of sexual faithfulness) is a beautiful metaphor for God’s faithful, covenant love for us that promises, “I am yours and you are Mine. I will always love you and never leave you—NEVER!”

On Sexuality: God embedded sexual love within the marriage relationship and covenant vows so we would be faithful to each other over a lifetime.

APPLICATION:

KEY VERSE ON GOD

GOD LOVES FAITHFULLY

PSALM 100:5 (ESV)

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.

KEY VERSE ON SEXUALITY

LOVE FAITHFULLY

MALACHI 2:15b (NIV)

So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.



03 WHAT DOES JEALOUSY HAVE TO DO WITH SEXUALITY?

Mateo and Dakota have been dating for three years. For the last two years, they've been living together and are seriously considering marriage. Recently they both joined a Bible reading group, exploring sexuality and emotions. A topic came up in the study: exclusivity in relationships. Was it reasonable for God to insist that His people's hearts be exclusively committed to Him and no other gods? After all, other ancient people groups worshipped lots of gods simultaneously, and those gods didn't seem to care.

The conversation turned to romantic relationships. Someone asked, "How would each of you feel if the other started seeing someone else on the side? Would you be jealous?"

Mateo paused. "I mean, uh, I suppose I'd feel a bit hurt, but I guess she has a right to see anyone she wants, and I wouldn't want to judge..." He wasn't sure what to say after that. For him, jealousy was a negative.

Dakota was a bit more sure. "Well, I would be jealous for sure! I'd tell him he needed to pick between us. He's either all mine, or he's not mine at all!"

- ❓ Do you relate more to Mateo or to Dakota? Explain.

- ❓ Do you see jealousy as always bad or sometimes appropriate?

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

Jealousy gets a really bad rap in most cultures—and usually deserves it. Too much drama! It smells too much of selfish boy/girlfriends, sleazy soap operas, and nasty divorces. That’s because most people (like Mateo) view jealousy as a bad thing—a self-centered, suspicious, or bitter character flaw.

There’s only one problem with this view of jealousy. **EXODUS 34:14** says “...for the Lord, whose name is *Jealous, is a jealous God.*” If the Lord’s name is Jealous, then there must be something very good about jealousy. Consider this: maybe God embedded jealousy in our sexuality so that we can understand why He feels jealous for us.

❓ What do you notice about God’s jealousy from these passages?

EXODUS 20:4-5

EXODUS 34:13-14

❓ Try putting yourself in God’s place emotionally as you read **PSALM 106:35-40** and **44-45** aloud. How do you suppose He was feeling when He saw His people having “affairs” with other gods?

STORY: Solomon and His Bride in Love

Christians read the Song of Solomon from different perspectives:

- The intimacy of marital love between man and woman
- God’s deep and jealous love for His people
- Christ’s Bridegroom love for His Bride, the Church
- The Christian’s love for his/her Lord

“It is a prism in which all the love of God in all the world, and all the responses of those who love and whom God loves, gathers and then separates into individual colors.” — *SONG OF SONGS, THE MESSAGE*

The Song doesn’t give us a sentimental valentine view of marital and sexual love. This is about passion, relentless jealousy, and unyielding strength—until death! It expresses the good side of jealousy. **Highlight** whatever stands out to you.



SONG OF SOLOMON 8:6

Place me like a seal over your heart,
like a seal on your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
its jealousy unyielding as the grave.
It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. (NIV)

SONG OF SOLOMON 8:7

Many waters cannot quench love;
rivers cannot wash it away.
If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love,
it would be utterly scorned. (NIV)

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:16

My lover is mine and I am his... (NLT)

SONG OF SOLOMON 6:3

I belong to my lover, and my lover belongs to me... (NIV)

- ❓ From these passages, what (if anything) seems good about jealousy within a committed relationship?
- ❓ Read **SONG OF SOLOMON 2:16** and **6:3** again. How does it (or would it) make you feel to “belong” to someone you love who also loves you?
- ❓ Belonging is at the heart of godly jealousy—in contrast to envy. What’s the difference between **envy** and godly **jealousy**? Fill in the blanks:

_____ is the selfish desire to possess what doesn’t belong to me; to covet

_____ is the cherishing desire to protect what does belong to me

STORY: A Young Couple

Twelve people in their twenties and thirties in a small group were asked this question: “Is jealousy a positive or a negative emotion to you?” All but one said it was negative. They turned to the woman who viewed jealousy as positive and asked why. She replied, “Because when my husband stopped being jealous for me, it was the end of our relationship!”

- ❓ What do you think the woman meant by “he stopped being jealous *for* me”?
- ❓ Would you want your spouse (fiancé, boy/girlfriend) to be jealous *of* you, or jealous *for* you, or neither? Explain.

STORY: Hosea and Gomer (HOSEA 1-3)

BACKGROUND. “We live in a world awash in love stories. Most of them are lies. They are not love stories at all—they are lust stories, sex-fantasy stories, domination stories. From the cradle we are fed on lies about love.... [Hosea chapters 1-3] is an astonishing story: a prophet commanded to marry a common whore and have children by her. It is an even more astonishing message: **God loves us in just this way—goes after us at our worst, keeps after us until he gets us, and makes lovers of men and women who know nothing of real love.**” —FROM HOSEA, THE MESSAGE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND. The rest of the book of Hosea (chapters 4-14) describes the times Hosea and Gomer lived in. The Israelites were flagrantly violating the covenant relationship between them and God. They had turned to Baal worship, were sacrificing at pagan altars (including child sacrifices), worshipping a calf image, and associating with prostitutes at the pagan sites. No wonder God accused them of “spiritual adultery”! But alongside God’s anger, this book proclaims God’s compassion and jealous love that cannot let Israel go—no matter how much His heart breaks.

For each scene below, list whatever this couples’ story reveals about God’s relationship with us. Then give each scene a short title.

SCENE 1. HOSEA 1:1-11. TITLE: _____

- God commanded Hosea to marry a whore to illustrate His own commitment to “whoring” Israel

SCENE 2. HOSEA 2:1-13. TITLE: _____

SCENE 3. HOSEA 2:14-23. TITLE: _____

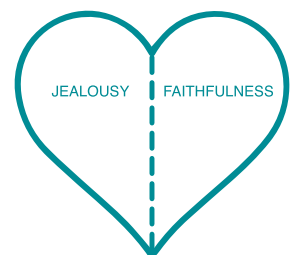
SCENE 4. READ HOSEA 3:1-5 BELOW. TITLE: _____

Then God ordered me, “Start all over: Love your wife again, your wife who’s in bed with her latest boyfriend, your cheating wife. Love her the way I, God, love the Israelite people, even as they flirt and party with every god that takes their fancy.” I did it. I paid good money to get her back. It cost me the price of a slave. Then I told her, “From now on you’re living with me. No more whoring, no more sleeping around. You’re living with me and I’m living with you.”...But in time they’ll come back, these Israelites...ready for the end of the story of His love. (MSG)

- ? Think about Hosea: Why do you think Hosea didn’t just divorce her and find a better wife?
- ? Think about Gomer: Do you think Gomer believed that she deserved Hosea’s love? Where do you think Gomer might have ended up if Hosea had not been jealous for her?

Godly jealousy is about zeal and passion. It is the complement to faithfulness because it says, “I don’t want you to ever withdraw your love or leave me, so I will fight to protect our relationship and protect your weaknesses.” This is the positive, protective, possessive face of jealousy that has been virtually lost in our culture.

- ? With the Song of Solomon and Hosea as examples, describe what godly jealousy might look like in our man-woman relationships.



WORD PAUSE

The English word “love” has almost too many meanings—all the way from loving our kids to loving pizza! In ancient Greek (the language that the New Testament was written in), there were at least four different words for love depending on who you loved and how you expressed your love. God is the source of all true love.

Match each Greek word for “love” with its description. Check online for help.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p><u> C </u> STORGE LOVE (<i>store'gay</i>)</p> <p>_____ PHILEO LOVE (<i>fi-lay'oh</i>)</p> <p>_____ AGAPE LOVE (<i>uh-gah'pay</i>)</p> <p>_____ EROS LOVE (<i>err'ose</i>)</p> | <p>A. Romantic passion, usually between lovers</p> <p>B. Self-sacrificing love for those we know, or even for strangers and enemies</p> <p>C. Natural devotion within families, especially between parents and their children</p> <p>D. Strong affection between close chosen friends; deep emotional connection with enjoyment and appreciation</p> |
|--|--|

Now, to sort out how inclusive or exclusive love is meant to be, match these different kinds of love with who we are called to love.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>_____ STORGE LOVE</p> <p>_____ PHILEO LOVE</p> <p>_____ AGAPE LOVE</p> <p>_____ EROS LOVE</p> | <p>A. Love as many people (even strangers and enemies) as you can this way</p> <p>B. Love all your friends this way</p> <p>C. Only love the person who truly belongs to you by covenant this way (your spouse)</p> <p>D. Love as many family members as you have this way</p> |
|--|---|

“ We don't only want to be loved at “our best”; we want—in fact, we need—to be loved at our worst. We need to be loved in our nakedness: warts, blemishes, and all. ... All the hungers we have for love, for union, for happiness are given by God to lead us to him. The difference between a saint and the greatest sinner is where they go to satisfy that hunger.

—Christopher West ”

According to the Bible, God calls us to love many people, but only make love to one person. God, too, loves absolutely every human being in the world. But He offers the gift of spiritual intimacy only to those who truly belong to Him, by the covenant in the blood of Jesus.

- ?** So when we express *eros* love within a marriage between one man and one woman, what specifically are we reflecting to the world about God's heart?

PRAYER PAUSE

God really loves you. And He really likes you, too. He stands ready and eager to delight and enrapture you so that nobody else's love and nothing else's allure can hold a candle to His love. If you have never experienced anything even close to this kind of love from God, mark this day as a beginning. Right now, in prayer, allow your heart to be claimed exclusively by the One-and-Only-One—*forever!*

EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

- 1 ? Have you ever seen or experienced a relationship where jealousy turned ugly and became more about power and ego and control than about cherishing and protecting? Describe that.
- 2 ? Read **ZECHARIAH 8:2**. What does it mean to you that God is jealous *for* you? How does that make you feel?

PRAYER PAUSE

These stories and verses tell us that God—like true lovers—absolutely will not share our love, devotion, and intimacy with any other “gods” or idols or anything else we allow to come between us. That’s what He means by giving Himself the name Jealous. Pause and become fully present to God. Consider any possible rivals for your wholehearted loyalty and devotion to God. In prayer, ask Him to “search your heart” (Psalm 139:23-24) and show you if anyone or anything is getting between the two of you or seducing your heart away from Him. Wait in silence to hear back from Him. Also tell Him how you feel to hear Him say, “You are Mine, and I am yours.” Welcome His protection of your heart.

SUMMARY:

- God created us in His image as relational beings.
- We are designed male and female as sexual beings.
- God is jealous for us and won’t share us with other gods.
- We are jealous for our spouses and won’t share them with other lovers.

GOING FORWARD

KEY INSIGHTS

On God: In His jealous love, God promises us, “I will fight for your heart protectively so that you will always love Me and never leave me for any other ‘gods.’”

On Sexuality: Only *eros* love is meant to be exclusive, so God embedded jealousy within our sexuality to protect our hearts from straying to other lovers.

APPLICATION:

KEY VERSE ON GOD	KEY VERSE ON SEXUALITY
<p>GOD IS THE ONLY GOD EXODUS 34:14 (ESV)</p> <p>You shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.</p>	<p>ONLY ONE LOVER SONG OF SOLOMON 6:3 (NIV)</p> <p>I belong to my lover, and my lover belongs to me.</p>



04 HOW DID SEXUALITY GET SO BROKEN?

Instantly my worst fear came true. At only twenty-four years old, my secret immoral life, which I had worked so hard to conceal, was about to be exposed: My porn addiction and frequent trips to adult bookstore video booths. My promiscuity, including the club hopping that none of my friends or ministry colleagues had any idea about. The alcohol abuse that became increasingly necessary to numb my shame, depression, and self-hatred. The massage parlors. The strip clubs. The endless cruising for sex-for-pay on darkened streets. And finally, the escort services (actually high-priced prostitution services) that I couldn't afford but also couldn't stop myself from using.

But my "education" into messed-up sexuality had actually started much earlier. Maybe when I attended AA meetings with my dad at age five, about the same time I was first exposed to porn. Or living in a trailer park and participating in family drug rehab at age ten. It was like I'd been attending the University of Effingup all my life.

—Adapted from *SURFING FOR GOD*, Michael Cusick

? What stands out to you from Michael's story?

“ Our culture has redefined sexual morality to justify what used to be called promiscuity. Serial bed partners are common. Sexual intercourse is expected early in the course of dating. Why the great stampede to tenuous relationships, sex without promise of commitment, and bitter endings? We are desperate to cover the shame of our emptiness and loneliness. If someone loves us, or at least desires us, then maybe we are okay. But attempting to heal our shame by any hookup means that in the end we only multiply our shame. We opt for relationships with people who also have gaping holes in their souls, thinking somehow they can fill ours. The serial sexuality of our culture both masks and multiplies the shame within.

— *THE SHAME EXCHANGE*, Steve & Sally Breedlove and Ralph & Jennifer Ennis ”

? What stands out to you from this quote?

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

STORY: Adam and Eve's Fall (GENESIS 3:1–4:1)

Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis portray Adam and Eve enjoying the beautiful “dance” of gender. They had joy, innocence, freedom, equality, pleasure, beauty, complementing each other, and not a trace of shame over their gender or sexuality. That is, until the great deceiver brought evil into their world and turned their dance with God and each other into a deadly duel.

“ Having complemented one another well in Eden, Adam and Eve braced for mutual brokenness outside the garden.

—*STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS*,
Andrew Comiskey ”

Read **GENESIS 3:1–4:1**, pausing to respond to these questions as you go.

- ❓ **VERSES 1-7.** What were Adam and Eve deceived about?
- ❓ **VERSES 7-10.** What do you notice about the birth of shame in these verses?
- ❓ **VERSES 14-19.** Notice that God cursed the serpent and the ground, but not Adam and Eve directly. What consequences are still playing out in women's lives today? How about in men's lives?
- ❓ **VERSES 3:20-24.** Any observations?
- ❓ **VERSES 4:1.** Notice that in God's design, marriage and love-making and babies are meant to be connected, especially in that order. Since the Sexual Revolution of the 1960's, what are some ways these three have become separated?

WORD PAUSE

Yada (HEBREW) → Adam “knew” Eve in **GENESIS 4:1**. Verb for having sexual intercourse. It implies enjoying a deep, experiential connection with the whole person—not just the physical act. Also *yada* is used most of the time for knowing God intimately—not just knowing about God.

- ❓ What do you think happens to lovemaking when we don't bother with “knowing”?

“ God came to find Adam and Eve to provide them the opportunity to be known....For only in those instances when our shamed parts are known do they stand a chance to be redeemed.

—*THE SOUL OF SHAME*, Curt Thompson ”

STORY: Humanity's Sexual Brokenness (ROMANS 1:18–2:1)

So what happened? How in the world did the delightful dance of genders turn into such a deadly duel? Paul explains that there is a direct relationship between (1) what people think about God and (2) what they give themselves permission to do—especially with their sexuality. As the first deteriorates, so does the second. He could be describing the downward spiral of a culture, as well as the degeneration of a person.

As you read this passage, mark it up with underlining, circles, or different colored pens.

1. **Mark in one color** what you notice about the decline of peoples' **thinking** and **attitudes** towards God and sexuality. Use the left column to summarize.
2. **Mark in another color** anything you notice about the decline in peoples' **behavior** and **actions**. Use the right column to summarize in your own words. Some things could go on either side.

THINKING & ATTITUDES

- Twist or ignore the truth

ROMANS 1:18–2:1 (NIV)

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men [and women] who **suppress the truth** by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and bird and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

²⁶ Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relationships for unnatural ones. ²⁷ In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

²⁸ Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done [gave them just what their lustful hearts desired...released them to their own vile pursuits]. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed, and depravity.... Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

^{2:1} You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.

BEHAVIOR & ACTIONS

- Do evil, God-denying acts

- ❓ The Apostle Paul wrote that we are all born with original sin (which we inherited from Adam and Eve)—even before we were old enough to choose sin. So we often exchange good things for bad things, such as:

VERSE 23. They exchanged _____ for _____.

VERSE 25. They exchanged _____ for _____.

VERSE 25. They exchanged _____ for _____.

VERSE 26. They exchanged _____ for _____.

VERSE 28. They exchanged the knowledge of God for a depraved mind.

- ❓ What questions or feelings stir in your heart as you consider this part of Scripture?

- ❓ People of every possible sexual orientation are subject to “*shameful lusts*” (v. 26) and “*every kind of wickedness*” (v. 28). God is justified in judging people. But to keep us humble and prevent us from pointing fingers at others’ sins, Paul warns us not to condemn others with a judgmental or self-righteous attitude. Why not, according to these verses?

ROMANS 2:1

ROMANS 3:23

PRAYER PAUSE

Remember not to just read or skip over each Prayer Pause. It could be that this conversation you have with God is more significant than anything else you study today. Sexuality gets broken whenever we separate physical sex and relational knowing. We all need God to heal us and make us whole. That’s why God wants us to know Him intimately. Pause for a minute or two to pray about that, perhaps using these words of Moses to get you started.

EXODUS 33:13

Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways so that I may know You [becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with You, recognizing and understanding Your ways more clearly] and that I may find grace and favor in Your sight. (AMP)

EXPLORING GENDER BIAS

One horrific consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin was the birth of gender bias. At a minor level, we’ve all heard “dumb blonde” and “clueless male” jokes. We’ve watched daytime talk shows and sitcoms turn disrespect for both genders into crass entertainment. A lot of bullying springs from gender bias, too. Underneath this war between the sexes, a relentless spiritual battle has been raging ever since the Fall.

- In the **second** column, write some ways that we devalue or disrespect women or femininity.
- In the **third** column, write some ways that we devalue or disrespect men or masculinity.

	WOMEN ARE DEVALUED...	MEN ARE DEVALUED...
BY MEN		Measuring manliness by how much they can drink
BY WOMEN	Cutting gossip	
BY CULTURAL PRACTICES & ATTITUDES	Unequal pay	
IN MUSIC & THE MEDIA		

MISOGYNY:
the dishonor or disrespect or hatred of women and femininity

MISANDRY:
the dishonor or disrespect or hatred of men and masculinity

Gender bias has devastating consequences on men and women—and it appears in the social patterns and legal systems of virtually every culture of the world. Here are some ways that both women and men are devalued. **Highlight** any that you have experienced, and be prepared to share one example with your group.

Sexual abuse	Pornography	Incest	Other: _____
Domestic abuse	Sexual stereotyping	Rape and molestation	_____
Prostitution	Affairs and adultery	Gender discrimination	_____
Sexual harassment	Genital mutilation	Sex trafficking	_____

NOTE: If any of these have happened to you, please consider talking to a qualified professional counselor. Your group leader can help you find someone local.

EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

- ❓ Has this study reminded you of any ways in which you disrespect males? Females? If so, write down one practical next step you could take to change that and honor your own gender or the opposite gender better.
- ❓ Can you name someone you know whose past pain around sexuality has been healed and now inspires you?
- ❓ We are often influenced by our culture and the communities we grew up in. What gender biases are you aware of in your own culture?

PRAYER PAUSE

Each of us has a sexual history. Some parts may be sweet and innocent; other parts may be confusing or shameful. But every part is within the reach of God's mercy. This is what the power of the Gospel is for! In the next chapters we'll consider more about living well as a sexual being. Pause now to pray about what you long for God to heal in your own life or in others, and how hopeful you are (or aren't) that He will heal you.

God has a solution to our sexual brokenness. Read **COLOSSIANS 1:19-22** out loud twice—first from your Bible, then from below:

COLOSSIANS 1:19-22

Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe—people and things, animals and atoms—get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross. You yourselves are a case study of what he does. At one time you all had your backs turned to God, thinking rebellious thoughts of him, giving him trouble every chance you got. But now, by giving himself completely at the Cross, actually dying for you, Christ brought you over to God's side and put your lives together, whole and holy in his presence. (MSG)

? How does this passage give you hope that God can heal broken sexuality and shame—even yours?

GOING FORWARD

KEY INSIGHTS

On God: God can and wants to heal and redeem every kind of shame and guilt and pain we face, including our struggles sexually.

On Sexuality: We have messed up sexuality with our sin and selfishness and gender bias, causing one another lots of pain and shame.

APPLICATION:

KEY VERSE ON GOD

GOD WANTS TO BE KNOWN

EXODUS 33:13 (AMP)

...Let me know Your ways so that I may know You [becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with You, recognizing and understanding your ways more clearly] and that I may find grace and favor in Your sight.

KEY VERSE ON SEXUALITY

ALL FALL SHORT

ROMANS 3:23 (PHILLIPS)

Everyone has sinned, everyone falls short of the beauty of God's plan.



05 HOW CAN I HONOR AND PROTECT SEXUALITY?

Have you ever heard of the Sirens in Greek mythology? They were three irresistibly beautiful mermaid-like creatures who lived on the treacherous rocks of a channel so narrow that sailors often crashed their ships trying to squeeze through.

Whenever a ship approached, the Sirens sang a seductive, alluring song. They were so sexually powerful that some sailors crashed their ships or helplessly dove into the water to reach them. That's when the evil side of the Sirens appeared—they didn't have romance or sex in mind. No, the Sirens ate their victims!

One day a handsome Greek sailor named Odysseus (Oh-diss'-ee-us) approached the Sirens' channel. He desperately wanted to save his ship and crew. But he also ached to hear the Sirens' seductive song. So he ordered his crew to tie him securely to the mast with ropes and to pour wax into their own ears so they wouldn't be able to hear the Sirens. They all escaped with their lives.

Later, another sailor named Jason faced the same predicament with his ship. But he had planned ahead. He had brought aboard Greece's most beloved musician—Orpheus. As soon as they approached the Sirens' channel, Orpheus drew out his harp and played music that was even more beautiful—drowning out the Sirens' bewitching song! Jason and his crew also escaped with their lives—not by restraints like ropes and wax, but by listening to a more beautiful song!

? What stands out to you from this story?

God designed us as spiritual creatures wrapped in physical bodies—with sexual desires as part of His good package. Our spirits are connected with our bodies and what we do with them. That's why a biblical view of sexuality must start with a biblical view of our bodies: to help us enjoy our sexuality in ways that fulfill our souls—not cheapen them.



EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT YOUR BODY

“

Here is perhaps the most profound truth I have learned from studying what God says about sex: Whether you are single or married, having great sex or no sex, **your sexuality is inseparable from your spirituality**. In fact, every sexual choice is also a spiritual choice. Sex isn't just about sex.

—25 QUESTIONS YOU'RE AFRAID TO ASK ABOUT LOVE, SEX, AND INTIMACY, Dr. Juli Slattery”

”

Are you having trouble understanding how your bodily “sexuality is inseparable from your spirituality”? These Bible verses may help. **Match** each passage on the left with its body-spirit principle on the right.

A. ROMANS 12:1

 A

Being made in God's image means your body's main purpose is to be a vehicle of worship, not to attract others.

B. MATTHEW 6:25, 31-33

Use your body in ways that honor and exalt Christ rather than dishonor or shame Him.

C. 1 CORINTHIANS 6:15, 19-20

Having sex is wonderful. It is meant to point you to something bigger—intimacy between Jesus and His church. But it isn't the pinnacle of existence or required for abundant life.

D. PHILIPPIANS 1:20

Pour your passion and attention into advancing God's Kingdom and righteousness, rather than obsessing over how you look to others.

E. EPHESIANS 5:31-32

Even though your body decays with age, your body will be transformed in heaven.

F. PHILIPPIANS 3:20-21

Christ and His Holy Spirit actually live in your body, so use it to honor Him. After all, you and your body belong to him now. *(Adapted from SIN DEEP by Ann Swindell, Relevant Magazine, Jan-Feb 2017)*



From these verses, what touches or disturbs or confuses you?

“

Culture wants us to believe we have the autonomy to decide what we do with our bodies and how we understand our identities. Which is not new, in the sense that's what started in the Garden. ... [But God] created sex and created the body. And so, I have to (if I'm a wise person) submit to the Creator of the body in how the body should behave and function.

—CHRISTIAN SEXUALITY INTERVIEW on Christian Sexuality YouTube channel, Jackie Hill Perry”

”

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT YOUR SEXUALITY

STORY: The Corinthians (1 CORINTHIANS 6) and the Thessalonians (1 THESSALONIANS 4)

If you think our current culture is sex-crazy—just consider ancient Corinth. Of course there was healthy sex going on. But self-centered sex defiled almost every side of life—even the religious side! When Paul started the first church there, a thousand priestesses and prostitutes entered the city every night as part of worship at the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. Sexuality was so entwined with religion that the Corinthians were getting confused!

Jot down your best take-away from each verse below, found in **1 CORINTHIANS 6**.

VERSE 12

You may say, “I am allowed to do anything.” But I reply, “Not everything is good for you.” And even though “I am allowed to do anything,” I must not become a slave to anything.

I’m free to live fully as a sexual being. But not all sexual expression is good for me. In fact, some sexual habits can enslave me.

VERSE 13

...Our bodies were not made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies.

VERSE 18

Run away from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body.

- ?** Some of us are still wondering, “Why did God give us a sex drive and then put boundaries around it?” It seems the Christians in Thessalonica wondered the same thing. From **1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-7**, identify at least 4 reasons why we should be concerned about purity of life, including sexual purity.

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS ABOUT PROTECTING SEXUALITY

“There is a growing cry, not necessarily for a return to the nostalgic past, but for some new form of boundaries that protect the sacredness of sex. Especially for [people] who long ago lost their virginity, there is a longing to regain the innocence of soul that boundaries imply... Many of us give away something precious before we know what we have. No one in our lives alerts us to our vulnerabilities; no one values our sexuality enough to struggle for its protection. Or perhaps we do not allow ourselves to hear One who wants to help.

—SEX AND THE SOUL OF A WOMAN, Paula Rinehart

PROTECTING SEXUALITY BY NOT BEING NAÏVE

Frequently we get into compromising situations sexually because we're just naïve and foolish. That can blind us to the red flags and "Beware of Thin Ice" signs God sends to us. **PROVERBS 7:6-22** describes a person who is too trusting and "naïve...gullible...lacks good common sense" (several translations). If you are a man, read this passage as written (a seductive woman luring a naïve young man into sex). If you are a woman, read it reversed (a seductive man luring a naïve young woman into sex).

NAÏVE: a person who believes whatever he/she is told, without questioning motives or truthfulness; is easily manipulated and seduced

- ❓ Write below how a naïve person can become more wise and discerning, especially when facing sexually tempting situations.

VERSE	NOTE WHAT "RED FLAGS" SOMEONE WITH GOOD SENSE PAYS ATTENTION TO
6-9	TIME, PLACE, ENVIRONMENT. I'm especially vulnerable at night, in places I've never been, and where drinking & drugs are available.
10-13	FIRST IMPRESSIONS
14-20	WORDS
21-22	POSSIBLE SNARES, TRAPS, OR MOTIVES

PROTECTING SEXUALITY BY LIMITING TO MARRIAGE PARTNER

So far, we've touched on honoring our bodies and not being naïve. Now **highlight** any sexual partners that God puts "out of bounds" for His children.

EXODUS 22:19

Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must certainly be put to death. (NLT)

Animals (bestiality)

EXODUS 20:14

You must not commit adultery. (NLT)

LEVITICUS 18:6

No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord. (NIV)

1 CORINTHIANS 6:15

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! (NIV)

ROMANS 1:26-27

Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

- ❓ How do you feel about God telling you who you should and should not have sex with? Is it even any of His business?

ALLOWING THE LORD TO PURIFY YOUR HEART

To help you protect sexuality (both yours and others'), how could you apply each of these verses in a practical way?

EZEKIEL 36:26-27

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. (ESV)

ROMANS 12:1-2

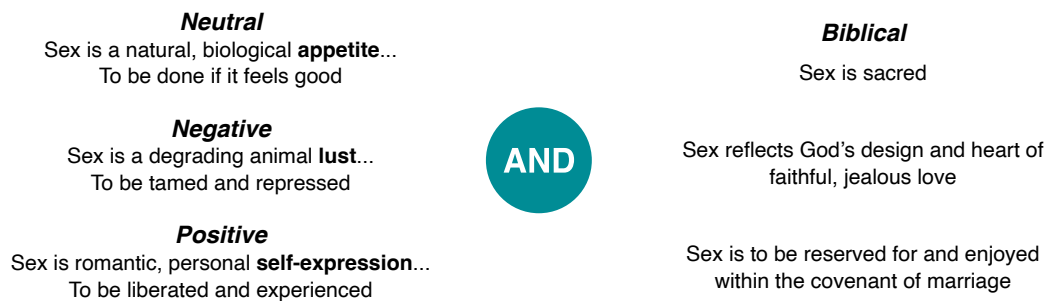
And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (NLT)

1 TIMOTHY 5:1b-2

...Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. (NIV)

EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

Over the centuries, people and cultures have looked at sexual behavior in several ways:



❓ Which of these views have been influenced by your ethnicity and culture? Explain.

❓ Read **COLOSSIANS 2:20-3:1** and recall the story of Jason and Odysseus trying to protect sexuality.

- What's wrong with trying to tame your lust Odysseus' way (with ropes and beeswax, restraints and rules, do's and don't's)?
- What's better about Jason's way (embracing the more beautiful song of God's sacred design in your heart)?
- Where do you run into Sirens in your life, and how do you tend to deal with them?

THINK ABOUT IT: What if God really does have a more beautiful song for your sexuality than the world does? Do you really want to experience it if it means change and freedom? Do you believe change and freedom are actually possible for you? Are you willing to do whatever it takes to experience change? What would be your first step?

PRAYER PAUSE

This chapter may have stirred up some troubling memories or feelings. Perhaps you have fallen for the cunning of a seductive person, or have had your private shame turn into public humiliation because of sexting or other social media. However your story reads, consider asking God to heal you sexually.

Here is how you could surrender your sexual history and brokenness to the lordship of Christ in prayer. It's a **big** decision. And it's not a onetime shot. So read it through first to see if you're ready for this radical release of your sexuality to the One who designed it and wants you to enjoy His gift. Now go back and pray this prayer to the Lord out loud, adding your own words, too.

Jesus, I present myself to You now to be made whole and holy in every way. I present my body, my sexuality, my sexual nature, my longings, and my desires to You. I ask You to cleanse me of my sexual sins now. Cleanse my body, soul, and spirit. Cleanse my heart and mind and will. Cleanse my sexuality, memories, and imagination.

I renounce every claim I have given Satan through my sexual sins. Those claims are now broken by the cross and blood of Jesus Christ. I renounce any vows I've made to protect myself from pain. I ask You, Jesus, to break any pronouncements anybody made over me [EXAMPLE: "No one will ever love you."].

Lord Jesus, I receive Your forgiveness now. Please help me to forgive myself for all of my sexual wrongdoing. I also choose to forgive those who have harmed me sexually. I now bring the cross of my Lord Jesus Christ between me and every person I've ever been sexually intimate with [by name]. I ask Your healing grace to come and free me from all consequences of sexual sin. Restore my sexuality to wholeness and my life to faithfulness. In the name of Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.

—Adapted from *SURFING FOR GOD*, Michael Cusick

GOING FORWARD

KEY INSIGHTS

On God: God is holy and pure and wants to be honored (not ashamed) as He lives in our bodies.

On Sexuality: We need relational and sexual boundaries for our bodies to keep ourselves pure and to honor others' sexuality, too.

APPLICATION:

KEY VERSE ON GOD	KEY VERSE ON SEXUALITY
<p>GOD LIVES IN US 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20</p> <p>Or don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.</p>	<p>PURSUE PURITY ROMANS 12:1 (NLT)</p> <p>And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.</p>



06 HOW SHOULD I HANDLE TEMPTATION AND DESIRE?

When Toshiro married Li-Mei two years ago, he thought his sexual struggles would be over. She was beautiful, sexy, and sweet—the woman of his dreams. During their engagement they had managed to stay within boundaries sexually, and he felt good about that. But now he is spending way too much time on the Internet looking at pornography and masturbating. Okay, so they aren't the really hard-core sites. But Toshiro fears how crushed Li-Mei will be if she ever finds out. He's ashamed that he just can't seem to stop, and afraid of losing her trust if she discovers what he is really doing late at night.

Something tells Toshiro that he should confide in Dan, his small group leader, about his struggles. But he doesn't want to risk losing Dan's respect. Besides, he isn't quite ready for the kind of man-to-man accountability that Dan will probably suggest. Maybe he isn't as serious about living well sexually and keeping Li-Mei's trust and Dan's respect as he likes to think he is.

- ❓ How do you relate or respond to this story? What if the characters were reversed and it was Li-Mei (not Toshiro) who couldn't stop watching porn? Then how would you respond?

- ❓ Do you think a porn addiction or other sexual struggles usually go away when someone gets married? Why, or why not?

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

Sexual sanity in a hook-up culture begins by preventing temptation from even getting into your line of sight. But how? By committing your body to God in holiness, setting boundaries, having sex only with your spouse, not being naïve, and allowing God to purify your heart—among other things. So Chapter 5 was about prevention.

But sometimes the enemy sneaks around your perimeter. Suddenly temptation is staring you in the face from a computer screen. He tries to get you to indulge in a little “harmless” fantasy. And it’s not just men hooked on pornography! Women can and do lust with their eyes and their imaginations—with or without masturbation. So in this chapter you’ll explore four of your options. You can: **Resist, Run, Repent, and Reconnect.**

RESISTING THE PULL OF PORN & FANTASY

If someone regularly fantasizes with porn, erotic media, books, or vulgar music, what’s the harm? As you read these quotes, **highlight** below whatever you notice about the potential harm caused by porn and fantasy.

“

Porn allows a man to feel like a man without having to be a man.... A tremendous amount of courage is required to break through the counterfeit pleasures of porn and face the realities of your own heart.

—SURFING FOR GOD, Michael Cusick

Addiction exists wherever persons are internally compelled to give energy to things that are not their **true desires**...Addiction, then, displaces God’s love as the source and object of our **deepest true desire**.

—Paula Rinehart quoting Gerald May

”

NOTE: This study doesn’t go in depth on the devastation pornography has caused to men and women. For a more in-depth exploration, we recommend *Walking in the Light* for men and *Living in the Light* for women.

Read MATTHEW 5:27-28.

- ❓ Do you often watch erotic stuff on a screen and fantasize about it, then justify it by calling it “entertainment”? Ask God if there is anything He wants you to simply stop watching.

- ❓ What is your history of watching porn (with or without masturbation)? How free are you today? What has helped you resist? (**JAMES 4:7**)

RUN: JOSEPH RAN FROM POTIPHAR'S WIFE (GENESIS 39:6-12)**QUICK BACKGROUND:**

Joseph was a man with a God-given dream that he would have significant influence with people. But first, God humbled him. In this passage, his employer's wife tried to seduce him.

- Read Joseph's story from **GENESIS 39:6-12**. Identify several steps Joseph took to escape from sexual temptation.

- What if Joseph had not resisted and run? What impact do you think it might have had on his destiny?
- Joseph obeyed (ran away/stayed pure), and it turned out very badly for him. How will you respond when you make the hard choice to flee sexual immorality, and things get harder for you?

REPENT: DAVID REPENTED ABOUT BATHSHEBA (2 SAMUEL 11 & PSALM 51)**QUICK BACKGROUND:**

David committed adultery with Bathsheba. Then he covered it up with conspiracy, deceit, and having Bathsheba's husband Uriah killed in battle. But David also showed us how to respond well to our own moral failure after it happens—and that's where many of us find ourselves sooner or later. So when we have blown it, David's story gives us hope through repentance and restoration.

- Read **2 SAMUEL 11:1-5 and 14-15**. Identify several steps David took to indulge his forbidden desires—and cover it up afterward.

- Read **PSALM 51:1-12 and 16-17** *out loud*. David wrote this after he sinned sexually against Bathsheba. What stands out to you?

Story: Amnon Refused to Repent of Raping Tamar

Read the tragic story of Amnon (David's son) raping his half-sister Tamar. He didn't just devalue her: he devastated her. This sexual crime devastated Amnon, too—and poisoned relationships in David's whole family. Read the story in **2 SAMUEL 13:1-22**.

- What do you think was really going on in Amnon's heart? Was he "in love with her...sick with desire" (vs. 1-2) or "filled with disgust and hate" (v. 15) or something else?
- Maybe sexual sin ran in David's family. How do you think David's history of committing adultery with Bathsheba may have influenced his son Amnon or other family members?

- ? Read again **GENESIS 39:9** about Joseph and **PSALM 51:4** by David. What deep conviction about God helped Joseph **run** and helped David **repent**?

RECONNECT: WITH YOUR TRUE DESIRES

WORD PAUSE

Did you notice in the quote from Paula Rinehart on page 38 that not all desires are created equal? Some are deep, true, and God-given while others are counterfeit and toxic.

Epitheméo (GREEK) → “evil desires” in **COLOSSIANS 3:5**. A noun with two meanings—healthy and toxic.

HEALTHY <i>desire, longing, eagerness for, and passion</i>	TOXIC <i>lust, intense sexual desire for someone other than your spouse, forbidden urges of the flesh</i>
<i>Examples of healthy desires to pursue:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For respect and admiration • • 	<i>Examples of toxic desires to put to death:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For illicit movies • •

- ? By resisting or **running away** from counterfeit pleasures, what are some true desires you could be **running toward**? List several below.

PSALM 37:4

Take great joy in the Eternal! His gifts are coming, and they are all your heart desires! (VOICE)

2 TIMOTHY 2:22

Run from anything that stimulates youthful lust. Follow anything that makes you want to do right. Pursue faith and love and peace, and enjoy the companionship of those who call on the name of the Lord with pure hearts. (NLT)

- ? Where could you go to fulfill those desires in ways that are not necessarily romantic or sexual? (Consider what Jesus did with His desires—especially His desires that were not fulfilled.)
- ? If you habitually indulge in sexual sin, how might that impact your calling and desire to disciple others?

Three Narratives¹

Sadly, when it comes to handling sexual temptation and desire, we’ve let the world disciple us. And, frankly, the church hasn’t done much better by dividing people into the “pure” and the “impure.” The truth is that we are **all** sexually broken somehow. We **all** need Jesus to redeem the whole mess. We need a paradigm shift, a “narrative” that focuses more on our hearts than our behaviors.

As you read these options, notice any possible problems you see. Check which narrative you are probably operating from.

PROGRESSIVE
NARRATIVE

Live free! Express your sexuality. It’s the core of your chosen identity. You’re the boss of your body and sexuality, so trust your instincts. Maturity means being free to experiment sexually—as long as no one gets hurt. You don’t need a piece of paper to prove your love. Look forward to a future of sexual gratification, freedom, and self-expression.

CONSERVATIVE
NARRATIVE

Live safe! Protect your sexuality. Your marital status is key to your identity, so trust social norms. Maturity means keeping yourself sexually pure and getting married as a virgin. If you do, God will bless you with a wonderful marriage, filled with great sex, and no more temptation. If you don’t ... well, God still loves you and has a Plan B for your life. Look forward to a future of security, social status, and happiness.

Live abundantly! Steward your sexuality. Your identity in Christ as God’s beloved child is the core of your true identity, so trust God’s design and Christ’s lordship. Your manhood/womanhood is a gift from God, so offer it as a blessing to others. There is no sexual brokenness that God cannot heal or redeem. Marriage is a sacred covenant. So maturity means seeking God’s leading as to whether and when and to whom you get married. Whether you choose singleness or marriage, look forward to an eternal future where *“all your ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God”* (MATTHEW 22:30, MSG).

BIBLICAL
NARRATIVE

❓ What is one significant thing that would change if you start operating from the Biblical Narrative?

EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

❓ Where are you most vulnerable to sexual temptation? Give a real example. (Example: when you’re feeling bored or stressed, when the other person uses flattery or touch or is a good listener, when you want to express your rebellious streak, etc.)

Christians like Toshiro need community. They just won’t make it for the long haul unless they open up to God first and also to a good friend like Dan. Read **JAMES 5:16**.

❓ Have you been trying to manage sexual struggles, temptations, or vulnerabilities by yourself? Honestly, how’s that working for you? Instead of gutting it out alone, which one of your friends or family would offer you trusted confidentiality, biblical wisdom, and grace to safely process this issue? Write their initials here.

¹ Inspired by Juli Slattery, *Rethinking Sexuality: God’s Design and Why It Matters*.

- ?
- Recall the sexual history of your family—your siblings and cousins, parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles. Would you say that sexual sin runs in your family? If so, seek help to break the cycle of generational sin.

PRAYER PAUSE

Each of us has a sexual history. Some parts may be sweet and innocent, while others may be confusing or shameful. News Flash: Every single one of us has some sexual brokenness in our life. But every part is within the reach of God's mercy. Have you ever just talked frankly with God about your sexual story and your longings? Sometime this week, try it and see what happens. He longs to hear from you, especially if:

- You have ever despaired, like Tamar, that you would never be able to get rid of shame and disgrace linked with your sexuality
- Your life has been touched by rape, incest, sexual abuse, or domestic violence—whether you were the sinner, the sinned against, or an observer
- You suspect that sexual sin runs in your family
- A friend of yours is caught up in sexual sin and could really use your help

Remember that God makes Himself vulnerable to you. So give yourself permission to be totally vulnerable with Him. Take anything and everything to the Lord (**PSALM 62:8**). Then open up some space in your heart to hear Him respond.

GOING FORWARD

KEY INSIGHTS

On God: Regardless of whether we marry some day or remain single, God gives us legitimate desires and longings to remind us of how much our souls desire and long for Him.

On Sexuality: When we are tempted to twist our God-given desires into selfish demands, we can escape by resisting, running, repenting, or reconnecting with our healthy desires.

APPLICATION:

KEY VERSE ON GOD	KEY VERSE ON SEXUALITY
<p>GOD GIVES DESIRES PSALM 37:4 (VOICE)</p> <p>Take great joy in the Eternal! His gifts are coming, and they are all your heart desires!</p>	<p>RESISTING TEMPTATION 1 CORINTHIANS 10:13 (ESV)</p> <p>No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.</p>



07 SINGLE OR MARRIED? WHY AND WHO?

When Ryan and Caitlyn first met two years ago, they decided to see if they were compatible. Now, they both agree that the sex was great. But they can't agree on whether to go ahead and get married.

Caitlyn doesn't want to end up like her mother: a single mom who raised three kids by three different fathers and who still bounces from one man to another. She longs for the stability and security and protection against loneliness that she believes comes automatically with marriage.

Ryan is more skeptical. After 35 years of marriage, his parents might as well be living on different planets for the cold distance between them. He still resents his Christian dad for not divorcing his mom long ago—before her alcoholism turned their home life into a nightmare. Ryan doesn't want to end up like them, either—imprisoned in a toxic marriage.

Ryan has another important factor swirling around in his mind. Last year a buddy from high school led Him to Christ. But Caitlyn isn't ready to go there spiritually. Now's he's excited that an international development agency is recruiting him as their IT Director in a hard-to-reach country. It sure feels like a God-thing. But for sure, Caitlyn isn't ready to go there, either! So he wonders what Jesus wants him to do—marry Caitlyn, break up with her, or just keep things the way they are and not rock the boat?

- ❓ How can you relate to Ryan or to Caitlyn?
- ❓ Are you married or single? In 1-2 sentences, explain why.

If you are looking for the usual helpful hints on how to be happily married (communication, resolving conflicts, etc.), this chapter may disappoint you. Sorry. You can find excellent resources on that elsewhere. Instead, this chapter will explore the *why*-to's for marriage and singleness, as in, why to get married and why to stay single. You'll also look at the *who*-to's, as in who to and who not to marry, according to the Bible.

Recent research suggests that most young adults today will not marry until they are at least 27, and a full one-fifth of them will never marry at all. The church world does a lot to prepare young people for marriage, but not much to set them up for fulfilling singleness. God gives a lot of freedom to His children to make the choice for themselves. But He also cares deeply about *why* we marry and *who* we marry. So whichever state you're in right now, know what your real reasons are for staying that way—or for wanting to change—and choose for good reasons.

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

- ❓ From this quote, which way do you tend to lean, and why?

“ Traditional societies, with their focus on family and children, tend to make an idol out of marriage. Contemporary societies emphasizing personal choice, fulfillment, and happiness, tend to make an idol out of independence.
— *THE GOSPEL AND SEX*, Tim Keller ”

The only chapter in the Bible that specifically addresses both singleness AND marriage is **1 CORINTHIANS 7**, so we're going to hang out there. In it, Paul helps us de-idolize both, and instead, receive both as good grace-gifts from God. Both are valid ways to illustrate the image of Christ and His Bride to the world.

BLESSINGS OF BOTH SINGLENES AND MARRIAGE

In these verses, **highlight** Paul's tender counsel (not commands) to all people—married and unmarried.

1 CORINTHIANS 7 (*selected verses*)

⁶ I am trying to encourage you and give you some wise counsel, so don't take this advice as a command. ⁷ I wish that all of you could live as I do, unmarried. But the truth is all people are different, each gifted by God in various and dissimilar ways...¹⁷ So here is my instruction to all the churches: each must live with the gifts the Lord Jesus grants you and with the call God offers you...²⁰ It is important for all people to live out faith in the circumstances they know...³² My primary desire is for you to be free from the worries that plague humanity...³⁵ I am not trying to give you more rules and regulations. I only want to give you advice that is fitting and helpful. I want to help you live lives of faithful devotion to the Lord without any distraction...³⁸ So those who marry do a good thing, and they will share in a holy blessing; and those who do not marry do an even better thing because they are part of an even greater blessing in the service of God. (*VOICE*)

- ❓ How should all believers live for now, whether we are gifted with singleness or marriage?

GIFTS OF BEING SINGLE

“ We are to choose between marriage and singleness not on the basis of whether we want the personal [fulfillment and independence of singleness or the] status of a family, but on the basis of which state makes us most useful to the kingdom of God.
— *THE GOSPEL AND SEX*, Tim Keller ”

Paul admits his personal preference for singleness. After all, the Gospel spread all over the place in the beginning because of Paul's undivided devotion to Christ and availability. As you read Paul's fatherly advice to singles, **highlight** what stands out to you, both advantages and down sides.

1 CORINTHIANS 7 (*selected verses*)

⁸ To those who are unmarried or widowed, here's my advice: it is a good thing to stay single as I do. ⁹ If they do not have self-control, they should go ahead and get married. It is much better to marry than to be obsessed by sexual urges...³³ A single man can focus on the things of the Lord and how to please the Lord, ...³⁴ The same idea is true for a young unmarried woman. She concerns herself only with the work of the Lord and how to dedicate herself entirely, body and spirit, to her Lord...³⁶ But I have this advice for every single man: If anyone thinks he is behaving badly toward his fiancée, if his desires prove to be too much for him, and if he feels they ought to marry, then he should do what he wants; it is not wrong to marry her. It is better that we let men and women in this situation do as they wish and get married.³⁷ If a man has no compulsion and chooses not to marry his fiancée, but commits himself to live a celibate life for the sake of following God and has the strength to live out his conviction, then he is doing a good thing. (*VOICE*)

- ❓ From these verses, list what's good about singleness. Would you add anything else?
- ❓ Paul described single people focusing on the things of the Lord and dedicating themselves to the Lord and living for the sake of God (1 CORINTHIANS 7:32-34, 37). Do you think Paul expected singles to go into ministry, like becoming a pastor or missionary or nun? If not, then what did he mean?

Jesus also remained single here on earth—and He did it for us! His humanity must have drawn Him to the natural desires for a wife, sex, and kids. But they were not compatible with God's salvation plan for Him to live, die, and rise again. Read Jesus' (admittedly hard to receive) words explaining three of the possible reasons for singleness. Jot down your observations and questions. Also jot down the initials of singles you know of who may fit loosely into these categories.

MATTHEW 19:11-12

But he said to them, "Not everyone can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are different reasons why men do not marry—some because they were born [that way, with birth defects, making them incapable of consummating a marriage, without the ability to produce children, without the desire.] Others were made that way by men. [They] were celibate because they were castrated, disabled by men, as punishment or to serve in harems. And some men have given up marriage [through abstinence] and chosen to live that way for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it.

(COMPILED FROM VARIOUS TRANSLATIONS)

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS

Both Paul (v. 37) and Jesus (v. 12) expected singles to be celibate, just as they expected married people to be celibate outside their marriages. **Highlight** and respond honestly to these thoughts on celibacy.

“ Christian celibacy ... is not a rejection of sexuality; it points us to the ultimate purpose and meaning of sexuality. “For this reason ... the two become one flesh”... Those who remain celibate for the kingdom “skip” the earthly sacrament of marriage in anticipation of the heavenly reality, the “marriage of the Lamb.” ... Celibacy for the kingdom is not a declaration that sex is “bad.” It’s a declaration that while sex can be awesome, there’s something even better—**infinitely better!** Christian celibacy is a bold declaration that heaven is **real** and it is worth selling everything to possess.

— *THEOLOGY OF THE BODY FOR BEGINNERS*,
Christopher West

Both singleness and marriage will require sacrifice: The sacrifice made by the single is not that of “giving up sex” but the much more significant sacrifice of giving up heirs.

— *THE GOSPEL AND SEX*, Tim Keller ”

YOUR RESPONSE

- ❓ Speaking of “giving up heirs,” do you believe that being single means you’ll never have a family or any kids in your life? If not, what are some ways that singles and married, kids and elders, could genuinely do life together ... or at least mutually bless one another?

- ❓ Are there other ways a person could obey the command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (**GENESIS 1:28**), besides having biological children? Explain.

GIFTS OF BEING MARRIED

Paul offered this advice to prepare us both for the “holy blessings” (v. 38) and for the challenging realities of married life. **Highlight** key points.

1 CORINTHIANS 7 (*selected verses*)

² ... each man should feel free to join together in sexual intimacy with his own wife, and each woman should join with her own husband. ³ Husbands and wives have reciprocal duties. Each husband has the responsibility to meet his wife’s sexual desires, and each wife should do the same for her husband. ⁴ In marriage neither the husband nor the wife should act as if his or her body is private property—your bodies now belong to one another, and together they are whole. ⁵ So do not withhold sex from one another... ¹⁴... when faith enters in, God sets apart these children [children with a Christian parent] to be used uniquely for His purposes... ²⁸ but know that marriage is not easy and those who marry will face hard times. I am only trying to protect you... ³³ A married man has to worry about the details of the here and now and how to please his wife. ³⁴ A married man will always have divided loyalties. ... On the other hand, a married woman has vast responsibilities for her family and a desire to please her husband... ³⁸ So those who marry do a good thing, and they will share in a holy blessing; ... (*VOICE*)

EPHESIANS 5:22-27 (*selected verses*)

Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing... Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ’s love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. (*MSG*)

1 CORINTHIANS 11:11

Nevertheless, in [the plan of] the Lord and from His point of view woman is not apart from and independent of man, nor is man aloof from and independent of woman. (*AMPC*)

- ❓ From these verses, list what’s good about marriage. Would you add anything?

- ❓ What stirs in your heart as you read these passages about marriage? Fear or insecurity? Longing or eager anticipation? Sweet satisfaction or disappointment? Something else?

- ❓ *Eros* love—that powerful and passionate attraction to your lover’s beauty—is an awesome gift from God! But *eros* love alone probably won’t sustain a marriage for a lifetime. If you want to live happily ever after with your spouse, how important do you believe *agape* love (self-sacrificing) and *phileo* love (friendship) are? (See Chapter 4 on kinds of love.) Explain.
- ❓ Where can singles go to experience these same good blessings?
- ❓ Does this phrase describe Marriage or Singleness? Fill in this blank: _____ is a gift of God + a blessing + an opportunity + hard sometimes + not always permanent.

Paul wasn’t naïve then, and we shouldn’t be naïve today. Sadly, about 30% of marriages between Christians end in divorce, only slightly below the national average in the United States (Barna research). **Highlight** what Paul suggests to those of us in difficult marriage situations or considering divorce, or even considering marriage.

1 CORINTHIANS 7:10-16

¹⁰ To those who are married, here’s my command (to be clear, this isn’t merely my opinion; it comes from the teaching of the Lord Jesus): it is not right for a wife to leave her husband. ¹¹... Likewise, the husband should not divorce his wife. ¹²⁻¹³ To everyone else, here’s my counsel (this is not a direct command from the Lord; it is my opinion): if a brother has a wife who does not believe Jesus’ teachings and the truth of His resurrection, he is to stay with her as long as she is willing to live with him. The same is true for any sister; you should not leave your husband even if he has no allegiance to Jesus... ¹⁵ If the unbelieving spouse decides the marriage is over, then let him or her go; the believing partner is freed from the marital vows because God has called you to peace. ¹⁶Remember that anything is possible, so the life you lead and the love you show under this strain may be what finally liberates your partner... (VOICE)

- ❓ From these verses, what’s your biggest take-away besides “avoid divorce if you can”?
- ❓ What stirs up in your heart as you read these verses about marriage? Hope and encouragement? Resistance or regret? Something else?
- ❓ How might these principles have impacted Ryan’s father when he chose not to divorce Ryan’s mother?

“ The essence of intimacy in marriage is the beautiful realization that finally you have someone who really understands you and accepts you as you are, someone you don’t have to hide from. But if the person is not a believer, he or she cannot understand your very essence and heart.

— THE GOSPEL AND SEX, Tim Keller

- ❓ If someone who knows and loves Jesus goes ahead and marries someone who doesn't know Him, what are 2-3 challenges you think they'll face? Read **2 CORINTHIANS 6:14**.

EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

- ❓ If Ryan asked you for advice, what would you tell him?
- ❓ How have you been impacted by divorce?

“ Singleness need not be permanent. It merely means being content in our present situation while being open to marriage—and yet not consumed by the pursuit of marriage.

— *OUT OF A FAR COUNTRY*,
Christopher Yuan

- ❓ Time for a check-up! All humans, single and married, need deep friendships, welcoming community, and physical touch (among other things) to thrive. Give yourself a grade (A to F) for how you are honestly doing in:

___ friendships ___ community ___ touch ___ loneliness ___ contentment ___ self-giving

- ❓ Consider if any of these apply to you now:

- I am deployed/away from my spouse
- I am single, divorced, or widowed
- I am in a marriage that is difficult
- I am same-sex attracted
- I am in a season where sex with my spouse is infrequent
- A medical condition affects sexual function
- I have ED due to my porn addiction or aging
- I am turned off to sex due to rape or abuse
- I feel disappointed or cynical about sex
- I am not dating anyone special
- Dating/marriage aren't priorities right now
- Other? _____

- ❓ So sex between a man and a woman in marriage is supposed to be beautiful. We get that. But many of us (as described above) also long for belonging and for relational intimacy. From everything you've studied in this chapter and previous chapters, what hope does Jesus offer to you?

- ❓ God calls husbands to offer protection, provision, leadership, love, and care to their wives and families. But everybody needs those same things—including husbands and singles. Whether you're male or female, married or single, how have you experienced the Lord providing those things for you? Read **ISAIAH 54:5**.

PRAYER PAUSE

In a previous chapter you had an opportunity to surrender your body and sexuality to God. Now consider giving Him your marital status, too. Imagine yourself laying whatever feels burdensome at Jesus' feet. Suggested prayer:

Lord Jesus, I want to present my marital status to You—past, present, and future. Don't let me decide on marriage or singleness for worldly, selfish, or fearful reasons. I confess that sometimes I do feel frightened about getting emotionally or physically intimate with someone. I affirm, Lord Jesus, that You are the only spouse Who can truly fulfill me. And that Your Father's family is the only family that will truly embrace and satisfy my heart. And that You, Lord, truly are enough for me. Please help me engage with (or find) true friends and places in Your family to give myself away. I now consecrate my sexuality and my marital status to You in every way. I ask You to fill those parts of me with Your healing love and goodness. Please give me both the grace and the gift to live contentedly according to Your calling. In the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

GOING FORWARD

KEY INSIGHTS

On God: Both the covenant of marriage and celibate singleness are metaphors pointing us to Christ's faithful love for His church. Relationships within the family of God are eternal. Marriage on earth is a temporary status, but what it stands for lasts forever.

On Sexuality: Both singleness and marriage are good options blessed by God. So our primary choice isn't between singleness and marriage, but between a life of self-giving and a life of self-centeredness.

APPLICATION:

KEY VERSE ON GOD	KEY VERSE ON SEXUALITY
<p>INTERDEPENDENCE OF MEN AND WOMEN 1 CORINTHIANS 11:11 (AMP)</p> <p>Nevertheless, in [the plan of] the Lord and from His point of view woman is not apart from and independent of man, nor is man aloof from and independent of woman.</p>	<p>SINGLENES AND MARRIAGE 1 CORINTHIANS 7:38 (VOICE)</p> <p>So those who marry do a good thing, and they will share in a holy blessing; those who do not marry do an even better thing because they are part of an even greater blessing in the service of God.</p>



08 WHAT'S SACRED ABOUT SEXUALITY?

Just yesterday, Ruth's awesome friends threw her the mother-of-all surprise birthday parties to celebrate her turning fifty. Today she's lingering at her favorite coffee shop, reading through the stack of cards they left—young and old, single and married, believers and not-yet believers, diverse in many ways. The funny cards make her laugh out loud. Others thank her for her years working in environmental protection. The rest speak sweet words of affirmation for all the ways "Aunt Ruth" has blessed them and their families. Her cup is overflowing with love and meaning!

Some can remember her from her B.C.C. years—"Before Christ and the Peace Corps." Others only know her A.D. years—"After Dave." He'd been the love of her life, but died in the Iraq war just before they would have gotten married. Since then, Jesus has been the love of her life. Despite her desires for a life companion and sex and children, she has remained single. And, looking back now at all her adventures, she has no regrets.

But this milestone birthday makes her pause to wonder what it all means and what God has up His sleeve for her second half—and beyond. And about her longings as well as her choices to remain unmarried and celibate for now. She wonders how God will bring all the pieces of her life to completion in eternity. How will the story of His love affair with her end?

- ❓ If Ruth were your friend, would you feel happy for her, or sad, or something else? Explain.

- ❓ OK. You get it now. God designed sexuality to be beautiful, not dirty. Marriage to be a joy, not a padlock. Singleness to be an opportunity, not a second-class burden. But is there really something even better than sex and marriage and singleness combined? Yes or No?

What if sexuality is a central clue to what God is up to in the world? Sexuality and the act of "having sex" are not all there is! What if there is also something sacred about them? The "shadow" of human marriage is meant to point us to the "substance" in heaven—Christ's Marriage to His Bride. Even though Jesus never married or had sex with a woman, He described His desire to "take us to Himself" and "become one"—meaning relationally and spiritually—now and for eternity! How might our knowing the "End of the story of His love" (**HOSEA 3:5**, MSG) impact how we choose to live out all the years until then?

EXPLORING WHAT GOD SAYS

“

If we want to know what is most sacred in this world, all we need do is look at what is most violently profaned. Your sexuality is an intense battle because it is the arena where God desires to demonstrate who He is and what He's like.

—SURFING FOR GOD, Michael Cusick

”

- ? So what's sacred about sex? **Match** these verses with the statements below. Sex is sacred and God-like because:

A. MARK 10:6-9

B. ISAIAH 62:5

C. GENESIS 4:1

_____ **SEX CREATES:** God's creative action together with human sex co-creates a new soul—not just to increase the human race, but to create families and communities of disciples and leave a lasting legacy.

_____ **SEX DELIGHTS:** Sex reflects the joyous self-giving and pleasure of love within the life of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit forever devoted to One Another and forever rejoicing.

_____ **SEX UNIFIES:** The original purpose of sex was to “become one flesh,” meaning a complete personal union of intimacy and self-giving. Sex hints at becoming relationally one with Jesus and with others. Its essence is connection and serving.

SACRED: something connected with God or like God, and so treated with great respect.

In most churches, marriage is still a sacrament—or “sacred symbol.” That's because the Lord wants the couple's relationship to symbolize the unbreakable bond of love between Him and His people. As you read these verses, **highlight** in one color descriptions of Christ and husbands. **Highlight** in another color descriptions of the Church and wives.

EPHESIANS 5:25-27, 32-33

Husbands, you must love your wives so deeply, purely, and sacrificially that we can understand it only when we compare it to the love the Anointed One [Jesus] has for His bride, the church. We know He gave himself up completely to make her His own ... However, each man among you [without exception] is to love his wife as his very own self [with behavior worthy of respect and esteem, always seeking the best for her with an attitude of loving kindness], and the wife [must see to it] that she respects and delights in her husband [that she notices him and prefers him and treats him with loving concern, treasuring him, honoring him, and holding him dear]. There is a great mystery reflected in this Scripture, and I say that it has to do with the marriage of the Anointed One and the church.... (VOICE and AMP)

- ? What do you think this passage reveals about the heart of Jesus' marriage to His bride some day?

PRAYER PAUSE

Talk awhile with Jesus about how you do or don't experience oneness and intimacy with Him. Perhaps invite Him to speak into that. Simply ask Him to express His desire for you—whether you are a man or a woman. Then ... listen in silence.

STORY: Jesus and His Followers (JOHN 14, 17)

Yes, God's DESIGN for human sexuality was very good. But His DESTINATION for humans and their sexuality also points us to what's so sacred about it. Jesus prayed for His disciples (living and yet to come) just hours before He died. But He wasn't saying good-bye forever. He sounded more like an engaged man or soon-to-be Bridegroom than a man headed for execution. **Highlight** and jot down what you notice about Jesus' Bridegroom heart for us.

JOHN 14:1-3

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that **I go to prepare a place for you?** And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also. (ESV)

JOHN 17:9-10, 24

I am praying ... for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them ... Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (ESV)

JOHN 17:21-23

My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are—I in them and you in me, all being perfected into one. Then the world will know that you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me. (NLT)

OBSERVATIONS

- Jesus was excited to prepare a home for us so we can live together—forever!

- ❓ Jesus was looking forward—not to death but to the consummation of His marriage to His bride—the time when all of us will shout, “At long last, we are finally together forever!” And Jesus will shout loudest of all! What are some things you learn about the Lord's heart from these passages?

STORY: The Wedding Feast of the Lamb (REVELATION 19)

One thing's for sure: newlyweds enjoy intimacy and oneness! That illustrates the connection between sexuality and spirituality. This oneness and intimacy found its origins in the Triune God-head, where three unique person-hoods make up one God. Our desire for sexual intimacy points to the greater reality: a deep longing for—and His longing and eternal plan to be with us—forever!

In a spectacular vision, God showed John even more about the wedding day of the Lamb. Highlight below whatever stands out to you about...

REVELATION 1:1 ...what is real?

[The purpose of John's vision was to] ... show His followers the realities that are already breaking into the world and soon will be fulfilled.... (VOICE)

REVELATION 19:5, 7, 9 ...*who will be at the wedding feast?*

A Voice: Give praise to our God, all of you, God's servants, all who reverence Him, small and great.

Multitude: Now is the time for joy and happiness. He deserves all the glory we can give Him. For the wedding feast has begun; the marriage of the Lamb to His bride has commenced, and His bride has prepared herself for this glorious day....

Guide: Write this down: "Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb." What I am telling you are the true words of God. (VOICE)

REVELATION 21:2-6 ...*what the marriage will be like?*

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride on her wedding day, adorned for her husband and for His eyes only. And I heard a great voice, coming from the throne.

A Voice: See, the home of God is with His people. He will live among them; they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them. The prophecies are fulfilled: He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning no more, crying no more, pain no more, for the first things have gone away. And the One who sat on the throne announced to His creation,

The One: See, I am making all things new. (Turning to me) Write what you hear and see, for these words are faithful and true. It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will see to it that the thirsty drink freely from the fountain of the water of life. (VOICE)

- ? This is the ultimate destination of those who belong to Jesus. From these passages, what is touching your heart most—either exciting or troubling? Explain.

STORY: The End of the Story of His Love

Remember the horrible, holy story of Gomer and Hosea? There was nothing Hallmark-worthy about her desperate promiscuity or his determined pursuit. But God chose this broken couple to illustrate the heavenly "...*End of the story of his love*" (**HOSEA 3:5**, MSG)

“As beautiful as marriage can be, by design it is a mere shadow of something much greater.

— *YOU AND ME FOREVER: MARRIAGE IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY*, Francis Chan

WORD PAUSE

Telos (GREEK) → "the end" in **1 CORINTHIANS 1:8**. *Telos* is a noun meaning "the intended end and purpose of all things; consummation, completion, culmination, perfection, fulfillment."

One time some of Jesus' critics asked Him what would happen to marriage (and sex) at the resurrection in heaven. He replied:

MATTHEW 22:29-30

"You're off base on two counts: You don't know your Bibles, and you don't know how God works. At the resurrection we're beyond marriage. As with the angels, all our ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God." (MSG)

- ? According to Jesus, there will be no marriage (or sex) in heaven because there will be something even better! Explain what you think Jesus meant.

- ❓ At the consummation of creation and history, Jesus will descend to complete all His purposes and claim His Bride. What are some of the wondrous things awaiting us on that day? **Highlight** them.

MATTHEW 19:28-29

I tell you this. When creation is *consummated* and all things are renewed, when the Son of Man sits on His throne in glory, you who have followed Me ... will inherit eternal life. (VOICE)

ROMANS 8:18-21

Now I'm sure of this: the sufferings we endure now are not even worth comparing to the glory that is coming and will be revealed in us. For all of creation is waiting, yearning for the time when the children of God will be revealed. You see, all of creation has collapsed into emptiness, not by its own choosing, but by God's. Still He placed within it a deep and abiding hope that creation would one day be liberated from its slavery to corruption and experience the glorious freedom of the children of God. (VOICE)

- ❓ At the consummation of history, when Jesus descends to complete all His purposes and to claim His Bride, how will His Bride respond? **Highlight** what you notice below:

2 THESSALONIANS 1:10 ... How will His Bride respond to Him?

... on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people, and to be marveled at [admired, glorified, honored, exulted, praised, and regarded with splendor unimaginable and breath-taking wonder (other translations)] among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (NIV)

- ❓ In the meanwhile, we wait expectantly. During our waiting time, what does God promise us?

1 CORINTHIANS 1:8-9

Until that final day [*telos*], He will preserve you; and on that day, He will consider you faultless. Count on this: God is faithful and in His faithfulness called you out into an intimate relationship with His Son, our Lord Jesus, the Anointed. (VOICE)

EXPLORING YOUR REALITY

OPTIONAL: Do together as a group. Skip over to and read the Study Summary right after this chapter. It tries to summarize the highlights of all 8 chapters in this study.

- ❓ If this life is not all there is... if you long to enjoy "*ecstasies and intimacies ... with God*" forever as Jesus promised, then how is that showing in your life now? How are you actually living out your sexuality in light of eternity?
- ❓ From everything you have learned in this study, and regardless of how you've handled your sexuality so far, how do you sincerely want to live out your sexuality moving forward?
- ❓ Do you want to know more about God's beautiful design for sexuality? Do you want to experience for yourself the "*perfect form of these ultimate realities*" (**HEBREWS 10:1**)? If so, who do you know and trust who could help you?

PRAYER PAUSE

Would you say that you are thirsty for more of the water of life (**REVELATION 21:6**), or not? Do you believe that you will be invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb? Why, or why not? If so, how did you get the invitation, and how have you responded? If not, would you like to be invited? Talk for awhile with God about this. Listen for His words to you. Later on, talk to a trusted friend about your desires.

GOING FORWARD**KEY INSIGHTS**

On God: God has a plan for us to experience complete intimacy and oneness with Him in eternity that our lives on earth have been preparing us for.

On Sexuality: Our desire for sexual intimacy points to the greater reality: a deep longing for oneness with God.

APPLICATION:

KEY VERSE ON GOD	KEY VERSE ON SEXUALITY
<p>GOD REJOICES OVER HIS BRIDE ISAIAH 62:5 (ESV)</p> <p>For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.</p>	<p>DESTINATION OF SEXUALITY MATTHEW 22:30 (MSG)</p> <p>“At the resurrection we’re beyond marriage. As with the angels, all our ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God.”</p>



If we could somehow tape record your prayers to God, would they sound like monologues or more like dialogues? The truth is, most of us do all the talking in prayer—maybe because God is such a good and patient listener. But God longs to have conversations with you where He also gets to talk while you listen. Can you hear His invitation when He says, *“Listen closely, and come even closer. My words will give life, for I will make a covenant with you that cannot be broken, a promise of My enduring presence and support like I gave to David”* (ISAIAH 55:3). He longs for you to experience His presence even more than His principles.

Of course God speaks through the Scriptures; that’s why we’ve written this Bible study for you—to invite you to learn what He has to say about the topic of sexuality. But don’t be too quick to jump from study (“OK, I get it”) to application (“OK, this is what I need to do”)—not without pausing along the way to interact with Him personally in conversational prayer. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for doing that when He said: *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, but you refuse to come to me that you may have life”* (JOHN 5:39-40).

So ... make God’s day! We encourage you to develop the habit of *“coming even closer”* into His *“enduring presence”* by learning to listen to His words spoken directly from His Spirit to your spirit.

If all this is pretty new to you, here are a few practical guidelines to get you started.

GUIDELINES FOR LISTENING TO GOD

1. Give Him your **full attention** by being **fully present** with Him. Find a quiet place with **no distractions**, no friends, and no electronics.
2. Put **other voices on mute** for a while—even your own. God doesn’t accuse! So if you have thoughts that are mean, accusing, judgmental, or condemning—those aren’t from God. You can exercise Christ’s authority to silence them.
3. Ask God to **search your heart** and reveal things you may be unaware of or in denial about—especially things under-the-waterline. **Confess any sins** that come up.
4. Ask the Three-in-One to **reveal Himself and His loving heart** to you in a special way you’ll recognize. Perhaps through a thought, an image, an impression, words from a song, or words spoken in your heart.
5. **Wait in silence** ... then wait a little longer. Don’t be in a hurry. Don’t put pressure on yourself to always hear something.
6. If you feel you’ve heard from Him, **write it down**.
7. If a **verse of Scripture** comes to mind, read it and talk with Him about it. If you don’t understand why it came up, just ask Him to explain.
8. If you think you’ve heard from God, but you aren’t sure, **check it out** with a trusted friend and the Word. Ask him/her, “Do you think Jesus would say something like this?”

There’s an old church song that celebrates the intimacy of conversing with God this way:

“I come to the garden alone while the dew is still on the roses,
And the voice I hear falling on my ear the Son of God discloses.
And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known!”

OK, the song is old. But we promise that learning how to walk with Him and talk with Him and hear His voice telling you that you are His own—**that will never get old!**



Sex is for fully committed relationships because it is to be a foretaste of the joy that comes from being in complete union with God. The most rapturous love between a man and a woman is only a hint of God's love for us.

— *SEX AND THE GOSPEL*, Tim Keller



OK. It's time to connect several dots and draw some conclusions. One big take-away from this study is that we **shouldn't mess with sex!** What does "messing with sex" look like? Out the 8 chapters, here are a few you've looked at. Add a few more.

- Dismissing differences between men and women as mostly "social constructs" (chapter 1)
- Cheating on your boy/girl friend or spouse (2)
- Being cynical about one-and-only-one-forever (3)
- Demeaning or disrespecting someone just for being a man or a woman (chapter 4)
- Indulging your body to do whatever it wants in the moment (5)
- Lusting but pretending it's loving (5)
- Feasting your eyes on pornography or getting lost in sexual fantasies (6)
- Dating or marrying someone mostly for outward appearance and sex appeal (7)
- Assuming that there's nothing better than sex awaiting you in eternity (8)
-
-

But **why** shouldn't we mess with sex? That's another big take-away. Because:

- When people look at God-designed sexuality embedded in you, it ought to tell them some important things about the Designer Himself—some good and beautiful things about His loving heart.
- When people see what you're doing with your physical sex and your relational sexuality, they are sizing up God, too.
-
-

Because we bear His image in our maleness and femaleness, people ought to be able to see that:

- God wants us to really know Him and experience relational intimacy with Him (chapter 1)
- God loves us faithfully and promises never to leave or forsake or give up on us (2)
- God loves His people jealously and won't share our devotion with other gods (3)
- God can heal every kind of pain or shame or guilt we struggle with (4)
- God is holy and pure and wants to be honored (not ashamed) as He lives in us (5)
- God has passions, longings, and desires, too (6)
- God is our Husband (Provider, Protector, and Lover), whether we're married or single (7)
- God has destined us to experience ecstasy and intimacy in complete union with Him for eternity (8)
-
-



	KEY VERSES ON GOD	KEY VERSES ON SEXUALITY
CHAPTER 1 What's So Good about Sexuality?	GOD IS RELATIONAL <i>JEREMIAH 30:21 (NIV)</i> "...I will bring him near and he will come close to me, for who is he who will devote himself to be close to me?" declares the Lord.	SEXUALITY'S GOOD DESIGN <i>GENESIS 1:26-27 (NIV)</i> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness..." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
CHAPTER 2 What's Faithfulness Got to Do with Sexuality?	GOD LOVES FAITHFULLY <i>PSALM 100:5 (ESV)</i> For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.	LOVE FAITHFULLY <i>MALACHI 2:15 (NIV)</i> So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.
CHAPTER 3 What's Jealousy Got to Do with Sexuality?	GOD IS THE ONLY GOD <i>EXODUS 34:14 (ESV)</i> You shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.	ONLY ONE LOVER <i>SONG OF SOLOMON 6:3 (NIV)</i> I belong to my lover, and my lover belongs to me.
CHAPTER 4 How Did Sexuality Get So Broken?	GOD WANTS TO BE KNOWN <i>EXODUS 33:13 (AMP)</i> ...Let me know Your ways so that I may know You [becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with You, recognizing and understanding your ways more clearly] and that I may find grace and favor in Your sight.	ALL FALL SHORT <i>ROMANS 3:23 (PHILLIPS)</i> Everyone has sinned, everyone falls short of the beauty of God's plan.





	KEY VERSES ON GOD	KEY VERSES ON SEXUALITY
CHAPTER 5 How Can I Honor and Protect Sexuality?	GOD LIVES IN US <i>1 CORINTHIANS 6:19-20</i> Or don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.	PURSUE PURITY <i>ROMANS 12:1 (NLT)</i> And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.
CHAPTER 6 How Should I Handle Temptation and Desire?	GOD GIVES DESIRES <i>PSALM 37:4 (VOICE)</i> Take great joy in the Eternal! His gifts are coming, and they are all your heart desires!	RESISTING TEMPTATION <i>1 CORINTHIANS 10:13 (ESV)</i> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.
CHAPTER 7 Single or Married? Why and Who?	INTERDEPENDENCE OF MEN AND WOMEN <i>1 CORINTHIANS 11:11 (AMP)</i> Nevertheless, in [the plan of] the Lord and from His point of view woman is not apart from and independent of man, nor is man aloof from and independent of woman.	SINGLENESS AND MARRIAGE <i>1 CORINTHIANS 7:38 (VOICE)</i> So those who marry do a good thing, and they will share in a holy blessing; those who do not marry do an even better thing because they are part of an even greater blessing in the service of God.
CHAPTER 8 What's Sacred about Sexuality?	GOD REJOICES OVER HIS BRIDE <i>ISAIAH 62:5 (ESV)</i> For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.	DESTINATION OF SEXUALITY <i>MATTHEW 22:30 (MSG)</i> "At the resurrection we're beyond marriage. As with the angels, all our ecstasies and intimacies then will be with God."



