

Sex and the City

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[0 : 00] Well, if you are new to Watermark and you don't know me, my name's Kevin, I'm one of the leaders here. And as you heard, we are doing this series called Living Distinctively. Those of us that are Christians believe that Jesus, or Christianity is not just good advice, it's good news.

It's good news that actually changes us. The gospel doesn't just save us to get to heaven one day, it creates a new kind of people. And Christians are those who then live distinctively.

And specifically, we are looking at how the Christian faith reshapes and reframes three things that most Hong Kongers think are essential for a meaningful and satisfying life.

In Hong Kong, we generally believe that we treat things like money, sex, and power in a very consumeristic way. And we believe that to have a meaningful and satisfied life, you need more of those things, right?

More money, more sex, and more power is going to make you a happy person. Well, this morning we want to look at how, well, in this series we're looking at how Christian faith challenges that and reframes that.

[1 : 04] And this morning we're going to look at the topic of sex. How does Christian faith, and the gospel in particular, reframe and reshape the way we think about sex and intimacy and sexuality?

Now, before we dive in, Henry's going to come and read the scripture to us this morning. But before we go there, I want to just say a couple of things. The first thing to say is I know that this topic is one that for probably most of us in the room is one that is very difficult to talk about and very difficult to listen to in church.

And there's a couple of reasons for that. One of the reasons is probably all of us here carry some level of shame or regret when it comes to sexuality and sex and intimacy.

None of us here are the standard of moral perfection. Probably all of us here have some track record of regret and guilt and shame. And so that alone just makes it difficult.

For some of us here, maybe we are right now feel enslaved to some kind of sexual addiction. It could be pornography. It could be visiting sex workers.

[2 : 15] It could be some other kind of addiction. And so in addition to the shame and the guilt, we feel trapped. We feel enslaved. We feel like there's no way out. I don't know. We can't see any light at the end of the tunnel.

For some of us here, we may have been the victims of sexual abuse. That could be physical and overt and direct in our face. It could be subtle and suggested, but it's abuse nonetheless.

And abuse is always traumatic. For some of us here, maybe we carry either the shame or the scars of betrayal, of unfaithfulness in a marriage.

And even if that was many years ago, and there's been reconciliation, and there's been forgiveness, and there's been healing, we still live with the scars and the shame and the memory.

And we'll live with that for all of our lives probably. Friends, for some of us, maybe you've been hurt by the worst of Christian purity culture.

[3 : 17] Churches typically have handled this really bad. And so maybe you were told growing up, listen, if you're a good boy and a good girl, and you keep your pants up, one day God is going to bring you an amazing spouse, and you're going to have sexual utopia for the rest of your life.

And it doesn't quite work like that. That's not how things work. Or maybe you're told in the church, if you have sex outside of marriage, it's the unforgivable sin, and you're now broken goods.

The petals being pulled off, and that's the way it is. Sorry for you. Friends, that's not necessarily true. It's serious, but it's not unforgivable. There's redemption. There's healing. You are not broken goods.

Or maybe you experience kind of a male chauvinism, where the women were just told, your job is not to make men stumble. And your job is to please your husband so that they don't go off somewhere else.

And it's kind of this very chauvinistic misogynist in the church. Friends, for lots of different reasons, this is an area. Here's another reason. Most marriages experience real difficulty in the area of sex and intimacy.

[4 : 24] Most marriages. And so for lots of different reasons, the chances are, most of us, this is a difficult topic. And I just want to acknowledge that and say, we're going to try and deal with it, with grace.

We're not here to add shame. We're here, we want to talk about it because we think God's got something to say. And we trust that as we listen to Him, we'll experience the grace and the kindness and the freedom of God.

One other thing I want to say before we start is, or before we get to our scripture, we're going to look at the scripture today. And the reason is because we believe that the scripture, God's word is good. What it means to be the church is to be God's people.

And God's word, the Bible, is not just advice or moralism or the rules. It is the living words of the true God. Or it's the true words, the living God. God's word comes to us to bring hope, to challenge us at times, but also to bring freedom.

To speak a better word than the word of our culture, the word of our shame, the word of our guilt.

To speak a better word. And so we're going to look at the scriptures because God's word is good for us.

[5 : 30] So, as Henry comes up, Henry, do you want to come and read? We're going to look at 1 Corinthians chapter 6. As he does that, I want you to notice something about this passage. There's lots of quotation marks.

And the way it works is those quotation marks aren't in the original Greek. The English translators put them in. But they're probably accurate. They put them there to help us. What's happening here, there's a conversation.

The Corinthians, either in a previous letter or this is their thinking, they say some things in quotation mark and then Paul responds. And so Paul says, you say this, but listen to my response.

And so this is a conversation between Paul and the Corinthians. I say that just so you can understand a bit of what's going on. So on that note, let's listen to the reading of God's word this morning. So the passage that we're looking at is from 1 Corinthians 6, starting at verse 12.

Sometimes there are really surprising things in the Bible. And we think, does the Bible really say that? Well, let's listen to what God says, really says in his word this morning.

[6 : 39] 1 Corinthians 6, verse 12. All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything.

Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food. And God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord and the Lord for the body.

And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are the members of Christ?

Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never. Or do you know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her?

For it is written, the two will become one flesh. But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality.

[7 : 42] Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. Now concerning the matters about which you wrote, it's good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.

For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time that you may devote yourselves to prayer. But then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

[8 : 58] This is the Word of God. Great, thank you Henry. Okay, so let's dive in. The big idea for today is this.

Christianity shows us that sex and intimacy are God's good gifts for relationship, not self-gratification, to deepen and develop intimacy, not identity, and to point us to Christ because sexual love is meant to reflect God's saving love.

Okay, so that's the big idea. I know it's a long sentence. Let me say it again. Christianity shows us that sex and intimacy are God's good gifts given for relationship, not self-gratification, given to develop and strengthen intimacy, not identity, and to point us to Christ because sexual love is meant to reflect God's saving love.

And I've got four things to say along these lines, okay? Let's dive into the first one. Sex is about love, not freedom. Okay, sounds very obvious.

Look at our passage here today. I want you to notice a couple of things that the Corinthians were saying that reflect our own culture's view towards sex and intimacy and sexuality.

[10 : 19] The first thing that they say is, sex is a private matter. Sex is about my own freedom. Who are you to tell me what to do? They say here, look at the quotation marks, all things are lawful for me.

Or as the NIV says, I have the right to do anything I want. That's what they're saying, right? Listen, Paul, who are you? Who is this Jesus fellow? Who is the church to tell me what to do with my body? I am free. I can do whatever I want. All things are lawful for me. I have the right to do whatever I want. And Paul says, if you approach sexuality like that, you won't be free at all.

You'll become a slave. You'll be a slave to your own desires. Slave to your addictions. Look at what he says. All things are lawful for me. You say, but I tell you, not all things are helpful.

You say, all things are lawful for me. Yes, but don't be enslaved or dominated by anything. In the ancient world, when Paul's writing this, sex and intimacy largely had to do with, yes, personal fulfillment and gratification, but it actually had a lot to do with power and the power structures of the day.

[11 : 28] In the ancient world, not anybody could just hook up with anybody. Men were allowed to have sex with almost anybody they wanted, but women who had far less social standing and power had to be chaste and very conservative and dignified and were expected to be virgins by the time they got married.

But men could sleep with almost anybody they wanted as long as they were lower than them on the social standing ladder. So men could have sex with a servant, a slave, a concubine, a poorer woman, even young boys.

No problem. But for the women, they had to be very chaste. In other words, in the ancient world, sex was about personal fulfillment and pleasure, but it was also an exercise of power.

The strong enforcing themselves, gratifying themselves on the weak, the powerful taking advantage of the powerless. And so when the Corinthians say, I have the right to do whatever I want, what that means is I'm free.

I'm my own person. Who are you to tell me what to do? Until the gospel comes in, and the gospel says this, sex is about love, not freedom, because sex is not about using your power to get your own way or personal fulfillment.

[12 : 41] It's actually about becoming vulnerable and mutually giving up power in the service of one another. It's not about using your power to gratify yourself.

It's actually about giving up your power mutually and becoming vulnerable to serve each other, just as Christ did for us. Think about how Christ Jesus, who had all the power in the universe, gave up his power, became vulnerable to serve his bride, the church.

Look at chapter seven. Henry read it to us in verse four. There's a lot here, so we won't go into all of it, but verse four says, the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.

In the ancient world, every male reading that says, yeah, we all know that. So what? What's the big deal? Until the next line, Paul writes, likewise, the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.

What? Wait. In the ancient world, nobody would have believed such progressive nonsense, right? Everybody knew the man has authority over the wife's body and not the other way around.

[13 : 49] But the gospel comes and shows another way. Friends, the gospel shows and says, sex is not about power, about what you can get, it's about what you can give. Those that had discovered Christ and Christ's approach to loving his bride saw there's another way to approach this.

Now, in modern times, we also view sex as personal freedom and pleasure, not so much based on power and authority, but based on individualism and autonomy. So in our culture, these days, we believe that to be fully human, to be a fully authentic person, you must be free to express your individual desires, however you want, on your journey towards personal fulfillment.

But again, the gospel comes and says, sex is not about expressing individual autonomy or fulfillment, it's about giving up your autonomy. It's about serving and vulnerability and mutually serving one another, just as Christ did the church.

Think about how Christ gave up his autonomy, became a servant, a man to serve his church, his bride, and so, sex is not so much about freedom, what can I do, what can I not do, gratifying myself, it's about loving and giving up your rights for the sake of the other.

In 1 John chapter 4, the apostle John writes and says, this is how we know what love is. This is the love of God made manifest, that God sent his son into the world to be an atoning sacrifice that we might live for him.

[15 : 22] This is love, not demanding my rights or my privileges, but giving those up for the sake of the other. This is love, not demanding my own gratification, but serving.

Sex is about love, not freedom. In the 1990s, there was a famous pop song called, What's Love Got to Do With It? Anybody remember that? Okay? Tina Turner, I think it was.

That is the tagline of our modern sexual ethic, right? What's love got to do with it? Prince Christianity says, love has everything to do with it, because sexual love is meant to reflect God's gracious, generous, saving love, a giving of himself, which means giving up power, giving up individualism, becoming vulnerable and naked, not just physically, but emotionally, relationally, letting the other in and say, this is who I am.

Giving up individualism as you love and serve the person you committed to loving and serving, whether for better or worse, all the days of your life. Okay? I hope that makes sense.

Sex is for love, not freedom. For relationship, not individualism. Secondly, sex is sacred, not insignificant.

[16 : 38] Look at the second thing these Corinthians are saying. I think this is verse 13. They say, listen, food is for stomach and the stomach is for food. Okay? In other words, what they're saying is, sex is really nothing, it's just a natural biological impulse, it's a natural desire.

There's food, I've got a hungry stomach, they go together. I've got a body, it desires sex, they go together. In other words, just as food and my stomach is a natural appetite, is what it means, I've got to satisfy this appetite, so I have a sexual appetite, my body does that, what's the big deal, right?

Like food and sleep and any other natural appetite, the way to handle my sexual desires is to feed them. Food is for the stomach, stomach is for the food, certain body parts are for sex, sex is for certain body parts, what's the deal?

In other words, sex is nothing. Don't make it a big deal. Friends, again, does this not reflect our modern culture? As moderns, we no longer think of sex as a function of procreation or having children or an expression of commitment is nothing more than just a physical appetite, something to satisfy from time to time.

But look at what Paul does in response to this. Paul tells the Corinthians that they've profoundly misunderstood both the nature of sex and also the human body because sex is overwhelmingly sacred, precious, not insignificant.

[18 : 08] Who you sleep with is profoundly significant. Look at how Paul says this. He says, the body is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord is for the body.

Friends, Christians understand that as Christians, our bodies are not just a container to hold our immaterial soul. We are not just immaterial beings that happen to have a body that will one day go to an immaterial world.

We are embodied beings and our body is important. Our body matters to God. What we do with our body shapes who we are and it shapes our very self.

It is important to shape the kind of people we become. We are to worship God and glorify God with our bodies. Verse 14, Paul says, God raised the Lord Jesus Christ in a body and will raise us by power as well.

In other words, Jesus Christ came to earth in a physical body. He died and rose again in a physical body. He will come back again in a physical body and we will be with him in glory in a renewed, healed, restored physical body.

[19 : 22] Our physical bodies matter and what we do with our bodies and how we handle them shapes us and shapes our hearts and matters to God as well. Verse 15, Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?

Or verse 19, Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit with whom you have from God? Think of what a temple is. A temple is the place where God's Spirit resides.

It's a holy place. It's a sacred place. And Paul says that our physical bodies and in this context our sexuality is a sacred and a place. It's a place where God's presence is.

Where God is with us. What we do with our bodies matters. It's profoundly significant. He says, You are not your own or your body is not your own for you were bought with a price.

So glorify God with your body. See the Corinthians are saying it doesn't really matter it's just a physical desire it's a natural impulse. What really matters is what's going on in our hearts.

[20 : 27] Do I love God with my heart? And Paul's saying yes your heart matters but so does your body. Friends, if you are a Christian in other words if you've come to see yourself as a sinner that is saved by grace alone you've cried out to God for his saving mercy do you realize that you are not your own?

You belong to Christ. Christ is your Lord and your master. You belong to him. Previously your motivation was what glorifies me?

what satisfies me? What pleases me? But a Christian is someone who says Christ you are my master now I live for what pleases you what satisfies you what glorifies you. Friends, if you are not a Christian this morning well of course you get to live however you please right?

You do you. But I must warn you there are two things you must be aware of. One you doing you will enslave you forever.

It won't set you free. You'll be a slave to your desires and a slave to sin. And two you doing you you will do that in a Christless hell for all eternity.

[21 : 42] But friends if you are a follower of Jesus if you are a Christian this morning now you've come to love God with your heart your soul your mind your strength and your body.

Now in view of God's profound mercy we offer our body to God as a living sacrifice. Friends look at verse 19 you are not your own you are bought to the price so glorify God not just in my heart but with your body as well.

Our culture screams at us a thousand times a day that our desires are nothing but just private physical natural desires. Means for you to express your authentic selfhood.

And Jesus Christ says nothing could be further from the truth. Friends isn't the long long track record of pain and shame and trauma and embarrassment and bitterness and resentment and loneliness in our culture attest me to what Jesus says is true that sex is profoundly significant profoundly precious.

Why does sexual abuse pain us so much more than physical abuse? Because there's something profoundly significant about it. And so Paul says in verse 18 here he says every other sin that a man or a person commits is outside the body but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

[23 : 06] When somebody gets drunk they don't become one with a bottle of alcohol. When someone cheats on their tax return there's not this deep mingling a oneness a unity with money.

But there's something profoundly significant about intimacy that God has designed. Lewis Smedes wrote this he says there's more to sex than meets the eye or excites the body.

There's no such thing as casual sex. No such thing as no matter how casual people are about it. No one can take sex out at night and put it away until he or she wants to play with it again.

Nobody can go to bed with someone and leave their soul parked outside. your soul is necessarily intrinsically involved. And that's Paul's point here.

He says sex is not just body on body flesh on flesh skin on skin it's heart on heart it's soul on soul there's a deep intermingling and intertwining the two becoming one as people join themselves together in love.

[24 : 10] Okay so two things sex is for love not freedom sex is significant it's profound it's not insignificant it's sacred. Here's the third thing this is probably the biggest thing that speaks against our culture sex is for covenant not consumerism or another way of saying that sex is for self-giving not self-gratification.

In the Corinthian church what is happening in the Corinthian church rather than letting the gospel cause them to live distinctively the Corinthians were living just like the culture they were an echo of their culture and what is happening in the culture in the culture of the ancient Roman and Greek world prostitution was just a non-issue there were temple prostitutes many men after dinner party they would go down to the temple and engage in prostitution it was not a big deal at all everybody was doing it and Paul writes and says you are becoming just like your culture and so the problem was that even the Corinthians were viewing sex as a consumer product to consume to satisfy their own desires they were seeing it as something for my own pleasure my own self-fulfillment my own gratification but look at what Paul does here he says that sex and intimacy is given to us not for self-consumption not for self-gratification but as a way as a means of strengthening the one flesh union and intimacy and relationship that is birthed and started when you commit to love each other for better or worse throughout your life look at verse 18 he says do you not know that one who is joined to a prostitute becomes one in body with her for it is written the two will become one flesh so Paul is quoting

Genesis 2 God's original marriage mandate and he says the main purpose of sexual intimacy yes to have children and procreate that's true but also to deepen and intensify the relationship the oneness the vulnerability the relational intimacy that exists within marriage in this sense the Bible portrays intimacy as like a covenant renewal celebration okay and I know that that sounds awfully boring that's one way to take all the passion out of it okay a covenant renewal celebration but hear me out here okay I know that sounds very terrible but hear me out I hope I'm not going to destroy communion for us forever but most Sundays as a church we take communion okay we take the Lord's Supper what is the Lord's Supper about it's a covenant renewal celebration you come to church on a Sunday and you feel beaten up you've had a rough week life has been hard parenting is hard marriage is hard work is hard or maybe you feel beaten up by your own sinful nature your own sinful desires and you come to church and your shoulders are drooping and just feel like I've got to grind through and you come to church and you take communion and the communion steward looks you in the eye and says this is Christ's body broken for you this is Christ's blood shed for you do this in remembrance of him and as you do that you are reminded I am welcome and accepted here by grace yes I feel beat up but Christ is for me Christ is with me I can go into another week with Christ for me before me behind me above me Christ is with me and you leave this place with your shoulders back feeling like I know it's a wild world out there but I am in Christ and Christ is in me this covenant is renewed right it's a covenant renewal celebration friends when a couple make love together it's not just about satisfaction and desires it's a way of saying those vows that we made to each other on our wedding day that all that I am and all that I have belongs to you I'm giving myself to you those vows are still true and we may have had a rough week maybe we haven't seen each other much maybe you've been working hard I've been working hard maybe we haven't actually connected that well but this this is me telling you that all that I am belongs to you I give myself to you in vulnerability in transparency in nakedness not just physically relationally emotionally all that I am I'm giving myself to you he says it's meant to be a covenant renewing celebration it's not just consumeristic gratifying my desires and that's of course the problem with pornography right our world tells us listen you don't need the messiness of a real relationship of actually getting to know the person putting up with their drama yeah just just satisfy yourself here's endless pornography here's a screen here's some tools just look after yourself and it's removed the very heart of what intimacy is all about from covenant and relationship and love to just a consumeristic tool that I just trade with to please myself listen to how

Brian Chappelle and Kevin DeYoung described this in one article they wrote today's sexual culture is just as depersonalizing and objectifying as the ancient world in the ancient world there was usually one party the party with power using the other party as an object to satisfy typically his physical needs today the parties are often both using one another treating the other as an object for

meeting one's needs to be related to only as long as those needs are being met that's the message of our culture right satisfy yourself please yourself and when you're done just dump the person dump the relationship move on in the old testament you'll often read when it's talking about the act of sex it'll say for instance Genesis 2 Genesis 4 I think Adam knew his wife and she conceived and gave birth to a son the bible uses the word for the act of sex as to yada as the Hebrew word to know somebody and the reason the biblical authors did that was not because they are shy and don't want to use the

[30 : 37] S word it's because they're trying to tell us something this daughter I hold books at home on sex my one daughter says dad there's a lot of books with the S word all over the house right okay that's not what the biblical authors are trying to avoid they use this word yada to know to know somebody because that's the heart of what intimacy is about it's about saying I'm gonna let you know me I'm gonna open myself up and be vulnerable and I'm gonna get to know you in the bible that word yada is the word that the bible often uses for God to know us you have searched me and you know me oh God Psalm 139 at the heart of intimacy is about knowing one another being vulnerable and real now there's two important implications for this okay and those of you that are single listen up the first is this the narrative that we hear in our media and our culture is this when you get when you get married you're gonna have the most amazing passionate wonderful sex in the whole world and then it just all goes downhill okay this is for you finance people

I know you like graphs and that kind of stuff our culture tells us it starts amazing and then it's just downhill okay that may be the case but that's not God's design that's not the way it's meant to be that's how it is when you think of it as a consumeristic way but friends for those who are approaching sex and intimacy as a way of getting to know and love and serve the other person deepening intimacy and relationship God's design is actually the opposite when you first get married it's clunky it's messy nobody really knows what they're going on it's awkward but God's design is that as you love each other not just physically but emotionally your relation as you open up your heart to each other as you serve each other actually over the years it gets better and better and all the research actually proves this that those that are on healthy marriages are actually having the best intimacy 10 and 20 years into marriage way more than the beginning okay and here's the reason because God's purpose for sex it's not about positions and body parts it's about knowing each other it's about being known it's about being safe even though you are your most vulnerable because sex is meant to reflect but also strengthen the complete nakedness emotionally relationally even more than physically here's the second implication don't believe the lie that our culture tells us that says you must work out with your boyfriend or girlfriend whether you're sexually compatible before you get married and the reason is because nobody is sexually compatible when you first get married you've got to as you love and serve each other as you open up your lives to each other that's how you grow more compatible that's how actually intimacy gets better and better as you lay down your life and your rights and your expectations and look to serve and honor each other just as Christ did for us so sex is for covenants not consumerism it's for self-giving not self-gratification friends those of us who are married or those of us that hope to get married one of the best things that you can do apart from prayer and possibly repentance is to ask yourself and maybe even ask your spouse how can I serve you physically how can I satisfy you how can I become more vulnerable to make you feel loved and served in this moment sex is not an end in itself it's a means to an end not only child rearing and procreation but strengthening the commitment the bond the intimacy the love the relationship between two people who have committed to themselves all their lives okay are you with me okay last thing is this sex is good but it's not God okay so sex is about love not freedom it's sacred not insignificant it's about covenant not consumerism it's good but it's not God modern culture seems to have a bipolar attitude towards the value of sex on the one hand we tend to use it and exploit it it's as if it's nothing we use it to get a job we use it to advance our careers we use it to pay the bills we use it to avoid loneliness we use it to make friends right it's just a commodity that we trade and at the same time our culture also tends to elevate it where we say it's everything it's your identity if you're not having sex you are not a fully functioning human being and so we elevate it to the place of identity

Julie Slattery says this we have both cheapened it but also elevated it to represent our identity our status our happiness but God tells us that his design for sex is not nothing it's not everything it's a good gift that he gives but it's not the main purpose in life in Genesis 1-2 God says that he calls male and female to multiply and fill the earth and he says this is very good very good this is he calls

husband and wife to leave their father and mother to be united together in one flesh union and they were naked and they felt no shame and this is good it's God's good gift now what that means is this contrary to Netflix and the porn industry would have you believe sex is not the ultimate experience in life without which you're doomed to a life of misery and loneliness that's not true it's not everything it's not your identity friends some of us if you're going to take God's word seriously some of us may go our whole lives never experiencing sexual intimacy because you're going to take God's word seriously and that does not mean that you're half a human being that does not mean that you are not an authentic human being you're not your authentic self that does not mean that you are doomed to a life of misery and loneliness not at all sex is not everything at the same time contrary to traditional cultures and some people's experience sex is not just this degrading humiliating necessary evil just to go through to endure and have children it's a good gift that God gives to married people to strengthen their covenant relationship the problem however as Julie Slattery says is that when our culture so elevates sex to identity it turns it into a kind of God that you've got to worship friends when we look to anything to form our identity to give us a sense of meaning and value and self worth we are on very very thin ice because that identity can never sustain you never sustain you trying to tying your identity and sense of self worth to how attractive or enchanting or beautiful you are or romantic relationships is profoundly fragile is building your entire self worth on such thin ice and it's only a matter of time before that ice cracks and you get dumped in a lake of despair and hopelessness friends the only identity that can withstand real pressures real rejection from people real struggles in life is an identity that is given to you by the one who loves you by grace alone an identity that's given to you it's not earned it's not achieved you don't get it by performance it's given to you by grace alone by the one who knows you better than you know yourself and loves you still friends if you look to sex and intimacy in order to feel beautiful or enchanting you'll feel ugly and unlovable your whole life rather let those desires for intimacy drive you to the one who truly loves you and who truly will accept you the one who gave himself up on the cross for you sex is good within the safety of a lasting covenant but it's not God it can't rescue you it can't give you hope it can't give you peace it can't give you an identity it can't give you meaning it can't give you a satisfying life sex is not your God only Jesus can give you that okay I've gone on longer than I expected

I'm sorry let me let me close really practically okay now don't get nervous it's not going to be that practical but a couple of practical things okay a couple of practical things firstly for all of us today Galatians 5 says this it is for freedom that Christ Jesus has set you free so stand firm then do not submit again to a yoke of slavery friends this is an area where most people are enslaved slave to past guilt and shame slave to current addictions and desires Jesus Christ wants to set us free and freedom starts with a very little word called repentance repentance friends all of us here if I can be so bold to say all of us are sexual sinners including me I need repentance I need grace I need the mercy of the loving God to come wash me clean and be a work of my life friends we all need it why don't we start by getting on our knees and asking God Almighty you can do it physically if you want but you don't have to but in your heart get on your knees and say God Almighty pour out your grace and mercy for those of us that are married here's four very practical things firstly

I want to encourage you to talk about it most married couples don't talk about it and when they do it's full of shame and embarrassment and defensiveness and it's awkward talk about it ask each other the question what is our sex life satisfying do you actually enjoy it you might be surprised what you hear but talk about it secondly pray about it God is the author and the designer of sex God is more interested in your sexuality than you are I really think so so pray about it pray about it together as a spouse bring it before God say God we need your help we need your wisdom we need your guidance God we're struggling God won't you help us pray about it thirdly work on it get some books get some speak to a professional if you're struggling talk to somebody about it here's a book I want to recommend I read half of it this week it's an outstanding book Julie Statterly's book God Sex and Your Marriage I meant to bring a copy it's an outstanding book

[41 : 15] I think Henrico's got some copies at the office so we can order some more I really encourage you if you're married read this book it's a great great book here's the final thing if you're married prioritize it it's not nothing but it is sacred it is important Paul says don't don't withhold from one another it's meant to deepen your love strengthen your union so put away your laptop cancel your Netflix subscription unsubscribe from Disney plus put away your phone and prioritize it honestly okay for those of us that are single here are a couple things to think about your sexuality doesn't start when you only get married you're a sexual being now what does it look like to steward

your sexuality now what does it look like to bring it before God what does it look like to honor Christ with your sexuality now here's the second thing if you're single I want to encourage you cultivate good healthy relationships with the other gender in the church learn how to become the kind of person that sees cross gender relationships as a way of honoring each other not using each other our culture tells us someone the opposite gender you're there to use them for your own gratification but if you go your whole single life thinking like that you don't just on your wedding day suddenly become a selfless giving person cultivate a heart of selflessness of giving of honoring of treasuring the other gender now while you're single and then thirdly

I want to say to those of us that are single sex is not utopia marriage is not utopia friends the greatest sex in the world will not satisfy you or your heart Jesus Christ will the media is lying to you pornography is lying to you Jesus Christ is what you were made for he's the only one that can give you the treasure the meaning the peace the hope the longing the satisfied life trust in Jesus sex will not be your God but Jesus will be your God and he will save you and rescue you let me close with this one day Jesus Christ is walking in the Middle East and he comes across a lady who's had a litany of relationships and she's a social outcast because she's had tons of relationships and the man she's with right now is not her husband she had five husbands and she's not the man she's living with and sleeping with is not her husband now and she's an outcast and society has cast her aside she's rejected she's scorned she's shamed and Jesus Christ comes to her and he does two things he puts his finger right on her shame and her pain he doesn't avoid it he doesn't save face he doesn't ask her about the weather he goes right to her area of shame and pain and he puts his finger on it and he brings into the light but the other thing he does is he meets her pain and her shame with grace and kindness friends all of us here have probably got shame in the area of sexuality and intimacy

Jesus Christ doesn't want us to skirt around the edges he wants to meet us right in that place but he wants to meet us not with condemnation not with a scorn not with a finger but with open arms and with a grace and with kindness Jesus says he knows us better than we know ourselves and he loves you infinitely more than any person will ever love you or even you will love yourself and he's come to bring healing and grace so bring your life to him bring your sexuality bring your intimacy submit and surrender to him and let him bring his healing grace to your life let's pray Lord Jesus Christ this is such a massive area of life God and our culture is screaming at us and lying to us every day Lord we need your grace we need your grace God for some of us here we are enslaved and trapped oh God won't you set us free God we want to say this morning we hate what sexual sin has done to us we hate God the feeling of shame and guilt we hate God the being enslaved and trapped not knowing how to get out

God we hate the trauma that we carry and the memories that we carry God almighty we ask by your spirit and your power won't you set us free God we're sorry we're sorry Jesus we need you every hour we need you Jesus we need you God I pray won't you give us faith to turn to you to turn to you in faith and repentance and to trust you God I pray for those of us that are married I pray God that you help us to strengthen our union and our oneness and our intimacy help us to have great marriages God Lord I pray this church will be a church full of great marriages for those of us that are single God help us to steward our sexuality help us to honor you help us to know God your profound love for us God for all of us may we live distinctively from our city and from our world as you let the gospel shape us

I pray this in your great and wonderful name Amen Amen