

Sexuality Mentality

Leader Notes

Creating a Culture of Biblical Integrity

by Heather Ruesch

INTRODUCTION

Teens hear a lot of conflicting viewpoints about sex. The world tells them to follow their heart and do what feels right—that sex isn't a big deal, that pornography isn't harmful, that modesty and marriage are old-fashioned. But that's just not the truth according to God's Word for each of our lives. God's intentions for your life and your sexuality have never been about how to think or feel or act religiously, but rather, how to live with a clear conscience before Him and others. Through Jesus, we have the forgiveness of all our sins and the promise of eternal life with Him. What does this knowledge then do for us? It re-focuses our attention and opens our eyes to see God in the ordinary things that happen to us day by day. He is more than a "pop-in" God on our journey through life. More than the giver of super-human strength and power to resist temptation and sin. He is our Encourager, Guide, Corrector, Savior, and Provider at every stage of the game, for our whole life. By listening to God's Word and receiving His Spirit, we grow more and more discerning of the presence of Jesus with us at all times and in all places. The saving knowledge of the gospel, Christ for us and with us, is the most powerful "take-away" we can teach as we seek to instill in our youth a biblical sexuality mentality.

OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this study is to equip youth leaders as they intentionally disciple students in biblical sexual integrity, the true intentions of our real, present God as He created sex and marriage to benefit us in our earthly lives. The secondary or supporting objective is to hold the lies of Satan and the culture up against the truth of God's Word. i.e. To call-out the sexual "norms of society" that are causing our youth to default into the values of the culture around them rather than default into Christ's value of them and the vitality of life that is found in His love, mercy, and forgiveness of all our sins.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

- Include this five-week study in your Sunday morning youth group sessions or in your weekly youth night get-togethers.
- Connect with other local churches and get a retreat on the calendar where each of the five Bible studies are taught by a different youth leader during a 24-48 hour "Sexuality Mentality: Into the Mind of Your REAL.PRESENT.GOD." youth retreat.
- Initiate a five-week Bible study for youth in your church and community this fall and again next spring. This is a great opportunity for a home study group. Rotate to different youth member's homes each week with the goal of building a strong support system of like-minded, biblically-grounded families and students.

CALL TO ACTION

What do we have that's priceless and what are we doing to protect it? Or rather, what has Christ already done to protect that which is priceless to Him? Have we told our youth about Jesus' journey to Jerusalem to die and rise again for the sins of all He loves so tremendously? So unconditionally? For them? Are we actively, momentarily, giving them Jesus when they are searching for all the things youth search for in this life?

It was in my first year as the executive director of crisis pregnancy centers when I made this realization: Our kids have not been taught what true love and relationship was meant to be in Christ Jesus. I was seeing that first hand as they walked through our center doors, seeking help with unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, and a great deal of brokenness. Having the opportunity to tell them, "This was never the way God intended for His most prized possession to be cared for. You're being lied to by a great Deceiver. Let me show you a better way," and watching the hope flicker in their eyes was my payday. While understanding God's intentions for dating, sexual attraction, marriage, intimacy—our sexuality—is important to the building of strong and healthy relationships, I got to share with them that it's even more than that! Understanding God's intentions for sexuality directly impacts our identity: who we are, how we see ourselves, and how we see God. Take a mirror for example. If a mirror is stained or broken, it doesn't receive or accurately reflect what is in front of it. The cleaner the mirror, the more accurate its reflection and reception of the light. Just think about that for a moment within the context of your own life. Maybe you have a personal testimony you can share with your students that will allow them to connect more deeply with you as their leader and mentor.

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Here's what it comes down to: Our kids are having to "wing-it" out there. Let's equip them to seek Jesus first so that His value of every human life becomes the filter through which they see themselves first, and then everyone else around them after that.

What drives out darkness? The Light. No matter the time of night or depth of the void. The Light of Christ that shines through His death on the cross for sinners is what restores hope and sets us back on the path to newness of life. The true love and sacrifice of Jesus is what shows us how to truly love and value ourselves and the lives of others. Satan is depending on guilty consciences to cloud up our view of this value by causing us to doubt the love of Christ for His people.

But we are priceless to God and because we are priceless to Him, He seeks to protect us and defend us. He has put a provision plan in place to guard us from the schemes of Satan and the destruction of our sinful flesh. Knowing Who God is and the magnitude of His wisdom, power, and love, enables us, as Christian leaders and parents, to tirelessly, diligently, defend and instruct, with veracity, the most priceless possession we have: our children...who are ultimately God's children. At every age and at every stage. We love because God first loved us. We value the lives of all because God values the lives of all. We seek to restore hope and teach about True Love founded in Christ Jesus because God would have it that none would be taken from Him.

"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish." -Matthew 18:10-14

Leader's notes are in red throughout.

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SESSION 1: WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

God vs. Satan for the Souls of the People

Life Hike

Leaders, before this first study begins, print off the Life Hike cards on separate pieces of paper or cardstock. This opening exercise is a great way to break the ice and set the foundation for the rest of the study.

Think of your life as a hiking trip through the Rocky Mountains. You've got a number of peaks to climb as you go through life and each peak represents opportunities and accomplishments.

The Life Hike cards represent the years of your life.

INSTRUCTIONS

Invite six students to the front of the room to hold each of the cards.

Have them spread out equally spaced in a line across the room.

Explain to the students that each mountain represents different stages in their lives. Ask them, "Where are you in your life's hike? How much of your life is behind you and how much is ahead?"

DISCUSSION

1. At what stage will you make the most important decisions of your life?

The second mountain, 15-30. Consider the significance of the decisions that you will make at this stage of life.

2. How did you come to that conclusion?

Dependence vs. Independence. During 0-15, your parents make most of your choices for you. In 15-30, you begin to make your own decisions and take responsibility. Right now you are in a transition time between these two time periods. Handling this transition well and intentionally seeking God's guidance has important implications for your future.

3. What kind of decisions will you make during this time?

College, Car, Career/Ministry, Marriage, Home, City you live in.

4. When you look over the span of a lifetime, how do you think these decisions will affect your entire life?

15-20 represents the beginning of what is the most influential time in your life. Satan knows that during this time, you are most vulnerable to the desires of the flesh and sexual immorality. This study is intended to expose the lies of Satan that seek to knock you off the trail and open your eyes to the incredible rescue plan God has put in place to keep you safe, happy, healthy, strong, and faithful.

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Psalm Connection

Read Psalm 46 with this theme as your focus: God vs. Satan for the Souls of the People

TALKING POINTS

1. The very first thing we see in Psalm 46 is the title, “God is Our Fortress.”
What is a fortress and what is its purpose?
2. Now, picture God as your Fortress; He is surrounding you, in real time. Right now. He sees what you see, feels what you feel, and knows what you know. Because God is omniscient (all-knowing), He has always had a plan in place to answer every question you’d ever have, to protect you and guide you through the challenges and temptations of the sinful, fallen world we live in. Jesus is the plan. In Him we find out how completely priceless we are to God, our Creator.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.” -Psalm 46:1-3
3. The Bible often uses natural disasters to visually connect us to what God wants us to know. In this case, He’s making the comparison that even when your life is full of trouble, even if the worst things possible were to happen (i.e. the earth gives away like a rug pulled out from underneath you, your mountain-top experiences or successes get washed away or flattened out, when the world around you is roaring and foaming at the mouth and causing you to tremble from the inside out) you need not fear, but rather, look to Jesus. Your Help. Picture yourself over and over again within the walls of Him: The Fortress that surrounds you, protects you, and confirms your identity IN HIM.

Key Point:
Picture yourself over and over again within the walls of Him: The Fortress that surrounds you, protects you, and confirms your identity IN HIM.

What’s the Problem?

There is a great battle going on all around us. There are two sides fighting in this battle that supersedes any race, denomination, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or otherwise: The Battle of Good and Evil. All good comes from God. He is the Creator and Commander-In-Chief of everything that is life-giving and life-sustaining. God breathes forth vitality and love and companionship and contentment and establishes every human life as the single most important thing to Him.

Fighting God, on the other side of this battle, is Evil. All evil comes from Satan. He is the creator and Commander-In-Chief of all that is life-paralyzing and life-ending. Satan was kicked out of heaven for trying to BE God. Evil Satan breathes forth death and strife and anger and abuse and pain and he establishes every human life, including yours, as a pawn to weaken and squash in order to overtake God. Satan has many tools he uses to accomplish this. Consumerism, the devaluing of human life, and casual sex propaganda being among the most effective.

We may be tempted to think that we’re part of the crowd sitting on the sidelines, watching the fight and waiting to see who wins. But the truth is, nobody on earth or in heaven has that luxury. This is what life, this side of heaven, is all about. It is Satan’s desire and intention that every one of us, as people existing in this world, would saunter our way through the fight, incurring wound after wound, until he can convince us that we’re spiritually dead. (Think about where these things lead: untreated depression, sexual promiscuity, identity confusion, drug-abuse, self-harm/abuse,

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hopelessness.) But we have a powerful defense Who shows us how to fight against Satan in the moment, and Who also helps us get back up again when we get pulled down: Look for Jesus. Find Him in your Baptism. In His Word. And in Holy Communion.

Our Baptism, in which God writes His name on us and gives us our identity in Him. In His Word, where He guides our lives, and in Holy Communion, where we drink His blood and eat His body for the purpose of cleansing, restoring, and strengthening our bodies before we jump back into the front lines of the battle once again. This is where we're reminded what we're made of. Where we're shown time after time, who we are and to Whom we belong.

1. Why? Why does God fight so tirelessly for us? Look up Psalm 139 and read it aloud. This is how God, your Truest Protector, sees you; how He looks at you, ___(fill in your name here)___, and how He thinks of **you**.
2. We aren't much as soldiers. Rather, it's Jesus Who does all the fighting on our behalf. However, Ephesians 6:10-18 does tell us to put on the whole armor of God so that we may protect ourselves from the schemes of the devil as the battle is raging. We are given a great weapon to fight with as well: the "sword of the Spirit." God's Word. In it, we are shown over and over that Jesus died for every single human life. He is the Defender of us all. Knowing that God sent Jesus to fight for us is what emboldens us to take His gifts and use them to strengthen us for the fight. Even though our bodies are the battleground, Jesus is the One who is there fighting for it. Fighting for you.
3. In what way does God love us? Look up John 3:16-17. "God SO loved us." That little word "so" could very easily be replaced with the words, "In this way..." Read verses 16-17 once more but swap out the word, "so" for the words, "in this way."

Jesus. God loves us so much that He gave us Jesus. It's tangible love. A love you can point to! I can point to the cross and say, "THAT'S God's love for me." His life, His death, our redemption through Him. Jesus: who rescues you and I from the schemes of Satan. These deliberate, evil tactics are aimed at tearing you down, separating you from God, and isolating you so that you feel vulnerable and alone. As we begin the discussion on sexuality and relationships, be on the look-out for this. Specifically, look at how deceptions from the culture and sins of the flesh causes us to question our own intrinsic value and then that same value in others.

TRY THIS OUT!

Grab 30 pencils and bundle them together with a rubber band. Now ask the strongest person in the room to try and break it in half. It can't be done! Next, ask a different person to take away just one pencil from the rest of the group and attempt to break it in half. Easy, right? Alone we are weak, but together, with God and one another, we are unbreakable. Satan doesn't stand a chance at stealing, killing, or destroying us. (John 10:10) "The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Did you hear that? WOW. It seriously doesn't get any better than that! Jesus says to you and me that He has come so we may HAVE LIFE. ABUNDANT LIFE. Not this "scraping-through-by-the-skin-of-your-teeth" life that we all get caught up in sometimes. Because of Jesus we have hope in the midst of our struggles. Peace inside even when surrounded by chaos, and joy that exists simultaneously in the presence of our pain.

Key Point:
Look for Jesus.
Find Him in your
Baptism. In His
Word. And in Holy
Communion.

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What Does This Battle of Souls Have to Do with My Sexuality & Dating Relationships?

“This argument for chastity both before marriage and in marriage has as its foundation the conviction that sex, though obviously physical, is also a deeply personal matter. For better or worse, it touches and affects me in my very self. It has as much, if not more, to do with my mind than with my body. It affects what I think, how I feel and what grips my imagination. It has, in fact, more to do with my soul, my sense of self, me as a whole person rather than me as a man/woman, guy/girl. Thus, if sex is not properly personalized, it can depersonalize those who engage in it.”-Rev. Dr. John Kleinig, The Beauty of Chastity¹

Remember in the first part of this study where I said that God establishes every human life as the single most important thing to Him? So much so that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sins? When a battle is raging, what is it that the opposition desires to destroy the most? That which is most valuable to its enemy. Us. You and I are the most valuable possession of God. Satan uses casual sex to depersonalize us, because male and female were created in the image of God, complementary in every way to one another. In marriage, man and woman become one flesh. The perfect reflection of God, of Christ and His church (Genesis 2:18-24, Ephesians 5:22-23). In casual sex, that beautiful reflection is cheapened, and sex is no longer an incredible bonding into one flesh but an incredible mockery of it instead.

It is for this reason that Satan uses casual sex to destroy the people of God from the inside out. What God has created to be the single most intimate bond between a man and woman, Satan has twisted and distorted into something that is dangerous and destructive. God created marriage when He created Adam and Eve, before the devil even came along. He gave us marriage between a man and a woman, as an invaluable gift that protects not only our bodies but also our hearts, minds, and spirits from the perversion and mocking of our identity and our sexuality. Marriage is not only a shield against Satan’s distortions of sex but a picture of how Christ commits Himself to His bride, the Church. (Reference Genesis 1:27)

Although it’s much easier to justify bad behavior by picturing Him this way, God is definitely not an old man in the sky oppressing us with His outdated traditions and forcing us to hold out for sex. He is intimately involved in our lives here on earth and actively communicates His love for us in Jesus. In our Baptism, in His Word, and in Holy Communion, the body and blood of Christ, shed for you. The world around us says that sex is no big deal, that having many sexual partners and experiences is normal and mostly harmless—even beneficial to our overall well-being at times. But all we have to do is look around us and we can see with our own two eyes, feel with our own hearts, and know through our own experiences, that sex is powerful, whether used for Good or Evil. In Jesus, God gives us forgiveness of our sins and shows us our significance to Him. Holy Scripture teaches us and guides us with His law and order as He cares for our every need. And The Sacraments—being renewed in the water of our Baptism and fed Holy Communion—restore us and set us anew as we are washed from the inside out with God’s gifts that forgive our sinful thoughts, words, and actions. We have a clear conscience with nothing left to separate us from the healing power of God’s love.

Marriage is the shield God has given us to defend ourselves wholly from the attacks of Satan on our everyday lives and bodies. How?

- Trust between husband and wife.
- Sharing what is only meant for the two of them.
- Commitment...Christ commits Himself to His Bride.
- Procreation...God brings forth life.

Key Point:
In casual sex, that beautiful reflection is cheapened, and sex is no longer an incredible bonding into one flesh but an incredible mockery of it instead.

¹John W Kleinig, “The Beauty of Chastity,” presentation given at a Doxology Insight Conference (St. Louis, MO: August 12-14, 2015), p. 2, http://www.johnkleinig.com/files/1514/4210/8671/Beauty_of_chastity.pdf (accessed April 29, 2019)

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Marriage is WAY more than a piece of paper. In it, we bind ourselves together with our spouse and with God! The profound power of that is in the fact that we are never alone. We are woven so strongly together, the three of us, that all the good characteristics of God begin to bleed into us and all of the attacks on our marriages: fear, anger, resentment, lust, greed, control... melts away into Him. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

“The Lord of Hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our Fortress.” Psalm 46:11

Week One Prayer Challenge

TIME I WILL PRAY EACH DAY _____.

Set aside a specific time each day this week to intentionally pray about the Life Hike you're on. Write down the following thoughts:

What are the mountain top experiences in your life right now? Example: Friends, family, academics, sports, relationships. Thank God for them!

What are the valleys you're facing right now? Example: Stresses, temptations, hurts, doubts, relationships. Bring it to Jesus and His cross! His love FOR you is what produces love IN you. For yourself and for others. His forgiveness of your sins is what produces forgiveness IN you to forgive others. And His wisdom makes you wise to the temptations of the world. Ask your pastor, youth leader or friends to pray with you if your dealing with something heavy or if you just want to learn how to be more comfortable with it.

How does God lift you out of the valleys? Do you have to “do something” for it to happen? Or is His help a free gift of grace?

Next Week: What Do You Want Out of This Life?

Students will work to define the desires they have for their futures and then hold them up next to God's desires for them. Main theme: There's no such thing as safe sex outside the confines of marriage. We are not just physical bodies with physical consequences and benefits, as our culture would have us focus on. We are physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and social people, intricately and uniquely crafted to accomplish great things in this life, vocations that God is calling us into, for the purpose of furthering His Kingdom.

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SESSION 2: “WHAT DO YOU WANT OUT OF LIFE?”

Build Your House Upon the Rock

Psalm Connection

Read Psalm 46 with this theme as your focus: Build Your House Upon the Rock

TALKING POINTS

1. The theme, “Build Your House Upon the Rock,” comes from a Scripture passage in Matthew 7:24-27 where Jesus says that everyone who hears His words and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And when the rains fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on the house, it didn’t fall because it had been founded on the rock. He then goes on to say that the opposite is true, as well. Everyone who hears His words and does not do them, will be like the foolish man who built his house on the sand. When the storms came and the winds blew, that house fell and it fell hard.

Leaders, use the following questions as an opportunity to engage your students and create some fun interaction. i.e “Can I get a show of hands?” Or “Let’s put it to a vote!”

2. **As you reflect on our theme for this week’s study, how many of you think God is referring to an actual, literal house? How many of you believe the house is symbolic for something else? What might it be symbolic of?**

Read Matthew 7:24-27 together.

Jesus is using this analogy to give us an example or a visual representation of the secure future He guarantees to the wise people who hear his words and keep them. These are the ones who receive Jesus—His teaching, His value of your life, and His love for you—with understanding. Saving faith in Jesus is living and active and is eager to do what He says. Good works certainly and without a doubt are the fruit of true faith in Him.

3. **Think about what it takes to become a good contractor. (A person who designs and builds houses.) What might be some qualities of a good contractor?**

Utilizing his expertise and experience, a contractor has an intentional plan in mind when he sets out to build a house. In the very same way, God has a plan in mind to protect you from the perversions of the culture that Satan uses to separate you from Him. We call God’s plan our “Biblical worldview.” The Bible is our plan of salvation, our blueprint of sorts, by which God reveals to us how to build our daily lives. It starts with a perfect world and ends with a perfect world. In between, it shows us Jesus and how what was once perfect is made perfect again. In Psalm 46:1-3, God is telling us that we can have complete confidence in Him, as our Contractor and Commander-in-Chief, to guide us as He builds our houses. He doesn’t just hand us the blueprint. He hands Jesus the blueprint and Jesus secures us. Think about the analogy of the house on the rock. It’s not as though a person is told, “Okay, I’m putting you on Jesus...so build something that lasts.” The point is that when it’s built on Jesus, it WILL LAST.

4. **A lot of students stress about these kinds of things, what and who they’ll be in life. Let me ask you this: If you could be anywhere, doing anything with your future, where would you be and what would you be doing? Write it down.**

Key Point: God is telling us that we can have complete confidence in Him, as our Contractor and Commander-in-Chief, to guide us as He builds our houses. He doesn’t just hand us the blueprint. He hands Jesus the blueprint and Jesus secures us.

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Now, what's it going to take to get there? Can you do it alone? No! In Psalm 46:4-7, the river is a never-ending source of refreshment and inner strength. With God, the chaotic waters that stress us out, fill us with doubt and regret, are calmed and changed to be a source of life, renewal, and peace. And in verses, 10-11, we are reminded once again that we are not alone. God surrounds us like the powerful Fortress He is. Jesus Christ dwells within us, His love never leaving us. "Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!" This Contractor is worthy of our trust! So, how has HE built you on His Son, Jesus Christ...in your Baptism...in the forgiveness of sins...in the Word...in the Lord's Supper.

The Value of The Whole, Entire Person: Physical, Spiritual, Emotional, Mental, and Social

This study on sexuality and marriage comes from a different perspective than most sexual education classes you might have had in school. For these two distinct reasons:

1. You are not just a physical body that has physical needs, as the culture would like us to buy into. We are whole bodies made up of mental, emotional, social, and spiritual elements as well as the physical. Public sex education curriculums, when they're taught, focus primarily on a "safe sex" approach for equipping young people to make healthy choices. Because we can all agree that we are much more than just a physical body, zombie-walking the earth, we can also say with confidence that there can be no such thing as "safe sex" outside the boundaries of marriage either. *We'll dig deeper into that statement, don't worry!
2. Every human life has incredible value to God. When we recognize our own intrinsic value, we can see that same value in others. That's a wildly important part of the entire discussion on sex, relationships, dating, and maneuvering through your teen and young adult years. But it's almost never talked about. Especially in sex education or health classes. So, we're going to spend a lot of time talking about those two important concepts as we go through this study together. First though, take a few minutes to brainstorm together.

If you have a whiteboard in your room, have students call out answers to the questions below and have someone write them on the whiteboard. This exercise will get students thinking intentionally about the whole body, not just the physical but the whole person, who was bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

TRY THIS!²

What might someone you know be experiencing in each of these areas when they choose to engage in a casual sex lifestyle? Although physical concerns receive a lot of attention (teen pregnancy and disease) they are not the only consequences of casual sex and sexual activity outside of marriage. I would actually argue that there are threats far greater to your faith and salvation than even those. Consider the potential negative effects of casual sex for each of the categories in the grid below. In addition to the physical effects, fill in the mental, emotional, spiritual, and social consequences of sex outside of marriage as well. Here's an example to get you started.

Key Point:
Every human life has incredible value to God. When we recognize our own intrinsic value, we can see that same value in others.

² <http://www.amresources.org/>

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Physical	Mental (what you're thinking)	Emotional (what you're feeling)	Spiritual	Social
Example: Unplanned Pregnancy	Example: Regret	Example: Scared	Example: Ashamed to go to church/youth group	Example: Judgment from others

Additional examples for leaders to reference for filling in the grid:

Physical: Pregnancy, Sexually Transmitted Infections/Diseases, AIDS, Infertility, Cancer

Mental: Worry, Fear/Stress, Regret, Low Self-Esteem, Confusion, Depression

Emotional: Emptiness, Loneliness, Broken Heart, Anger, Confusion

Spiritual: Guilt, Shame, Regret, Separation, Not feeling good enough

Social: Reputation, Change of friends, Conflict with parents, Withdrawal, Paranoid that someone will find out

In contrast, as you reflect on the answers you've listed in the grid above, keep in mind that marriage is meant to be a picture of Jesus' relationship with His church. He is the Bridegroom (or simply-put, the groom) and we are His bride.

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own

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flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body.” Ephesians 5:25-30

Discuss for a moment the way Jesus’ love and sacrifice for you, His bride, transforms each of the threats you’ve listed above. How does it also impact the way we approach our sexuality as those He “gave Himself up for?”

Sinking Sand and The Security of the Rock

Sex was never meant to kill you, guys. When relationships are built on sex first, the “house” is being propped up in the sand instead of anchored on the Rock. It’s like trying to build it from a crayon drawing instead of a blueprint. Vital information is missing, and the lack of it will only get you so far. We see evidence of this in broken relationships all around us. God has given us an order to follow for dating, marriage, sex, and building families, because He knew that Satan would seek to separate us from the life-saving, hope-giving love of Christ if he could dis-organize it and fill the human conscience with guilt and shame. When that happens, it either leads us to confession of our sins, forgiveness, and therefore, a clear conscience and relationship with God, or it clouds our conscience and causes us to avoid God altogether.

He knew that Satan would attack your value at every stage. The defacing of human life is so crucial to Satan (because we are the most valuable creation of God) that sex must be protected within the strongest confines of that three cord relationship: you, your spouse, and God. Remember this quote from Dr. Kleinig in our last study? I want us to read it again.

“This argument for chastity both before marriage and in marriage has as its foundation the conviction that sex, though obviously physical, is also a deeply personal matter. For better or worse, it touches and affects me in my very self. It has as much, if not more, to do with my mind than with my body. It affects what I think, how I feel and what grips my imagination. It has, in fact, more to do with my soul, my sense of self, me as a whole person rather than me as a man/woman, guy/girl. Thus, if sex is not properly personalized, it can depersonalize those who engage in it.”-Reverend Dr. John Kleinig, The Beauty of Chastity

We are not just a physical body that has physical needs, as the world would have us think. We are a whole body made up of emotional, mental, spiritual, and social elements as well. When we talk about “safe sex,” we almost always focus on birth control and condoms. These things pertain only to the physical aspects of a whole person—simply one-fifth of the entire person that God created so intricately and intentionally in His image. As you can see, there is so much more to it than what the world would like us to believe.

“I was actually offended when I found out the truth about how powerful sex is. Nobody ever told me this before! Why not? I was offended that Satan thought he could mess with me like that. I was offended that everybody around me seemed to be focused on the wrong information! And then I realized that the devil was messing with them, too. I know now that sex has way more to do with me as a whole person in Christ than it does with making sure I know how to have “safe sex.” I know that I am smarter than Satan because Jesus gives me His Spirit that shows me God’s truth when I’m surrounded by lies.” -Sammie, a High School Student

Key Point:
The defacing of human life is so crucial to Satan (because we are the most valuable creation of God) that sex must be protected within the strongest confines of that three cord relationship: you, your spouse, and God.

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Satan knows that if he can distract our attention to focus on how to have “safe sex,” then our attention won’t be on the power casual sex has to deface our value, making us lonely, vulnerable and questioning our worth in this world.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CONDOMS AND DISEASE

There’s a profound “sex without attachments” mentality being pushed on youth today. A perfect example of this is that we see sex scenes regularly in most television programs and commercials. We hear about it openly in the music we listen to and the movies we see. But how often can you recall hearing the actor’s or the singer’s woes about the diseases he or she has contracted through their glamorous, promiscuous lifestyle? How about the pain of infertility, cancer, and medical treatments?

The Center for Disease Control has declared that we are in the midst of a sexually transmitted infection epidemic.* 50% of all new infections are found in 15–24-year-olds. It’s safe to say that there’s a whole lot of important but not very glamorous information left out of the media. That’s why it’s important to know what we’re up against. In the same way that we study before taking an exam, taking the time to be intentional about studying God’s intentions for sex and marriage will help us to have a stronger sense of who we are in Christ and more successful relationships and future families.

There are two categories of infections contracted through sexual contact—STIs (sexually transmitted infections) that develop into STDs (sexually transmitted diseases). They are symptomatic and asymptomatic. This is really important. Symptomatic means the infections present with symptoms, so the individual knows he or she has contracted a disease and can seek treatment, though not necessarily a cure. Asymptomatic means that the infection does not present with symptoms, so the individual doesn’t know he or she has contracted a disease until it causes further damage in his or her body. We’re talking chronic pelvic pain, infertility, cancer, and pelvic inflammatory disease, and even the strong possibility of passing an STI to your newborn baby through childbirth.

Bottom line, ladies and gents: you cannot pick your sexually transmitted infection. If you’re exposed to one, you’re exposed to them all. There’s a gravely false sense of security when we view condoms and/or birth control as protection. Can condoms and birth control reduce the risks of an unplanned pregnancy? Yes, when used consistently and accurately. That’s important information to know, but I hope you’re beginning to see that it is far from the most important thing in the discussion on sex and the value every human being has in Jesus Christ.

Every time a person thinks he or she is being responsible and practicing “safe sex” by using a condom or only engaging in oral sex, that person is still putting themselves at risk for contracting any number of diseases that can spread through simple skin-to-skin, genital contact, in whatever combination you can think of. Oral sex is not safe sex, just as using condoms and birth control is not safe sex. Safe sex can only exist within the walls of a monogamous relationship. Specifically: one person who’s only ever had sex with the other person. Ideally, marriage. When considering marriage, it’s important to know if the person you’re with has been sexually active in their past. If so, they should definitely get tested for any STI’s /STD’s before you engage in sexual activity of any kind. Comparably, the minute either of them steps out of that marriage relationship and engages in sexual activity with someone other than their spouse, that boundary of safe sex has been broken and neither of them is safe anymore.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT BIRTH CONTROL

I started the last section by saying that there’s a serious “sex without attachments” mentality in our culture today; it’s a minimizing of the things that deserve our time and attention, in order to place our time and attention onto items of less importance but which make us feel good at the time.

* <https://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/2018/2018-std-prevention-conference.html>

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(Feel good about the way we look, the way we dress, the quality of lifestyle we live, the amount of friends we have.) Have we begun to think of contraceptives as a “get into bed free card” that allows us to feel good in the moment?

There are so many personal and controversial aspects to the discussion on birth control but here's what you need to know right now: hormonal birth controls are prescription drugs that should be approached with a healthy dose of respect and education about what they do and how they can change a young woman's body (side-effects) .

Taking birth control outside of marriage, in order to prevent getting pregnant, means that you are, or you are planning to, act in a way that is contrary to God's incredible plan for your life, the blueprint that He's created to protect you and guide you toward a life that is happy, healthy, safe, strong, and faithful. As an unmarried woman, taking birth control to not get pregnant does not honor God, in the same way that dating someone who is using birth control to not get pregnant should make you ponder whether your relationship is headed in a God-pleasing direction.

But here's the good news: It's all avoidable, for real. Don't have sex outside of marriage. It is not honoring of your own value in Christ or the value of the person you're having sex with. If no one has ever told you that before, then hear me now. It is not okay for you to be having sex with your boyfriend or your girlfriend. Why? Not because I said so. But because God's Word and His love for you in Jesus Christ never gets outdated, old-fashioned, or irrelevant. Like Sammie said in her statement before, “Satan is messing with you,” and seeks to use your actions to hurt God in his vengeance against Him. With every cheap interaction, Satan wants to wound you and weaken you. Of course, if you choose to do it, it won't feel like that right away—that's why it's called “temptation.” It might feel good at first. That feeling is quickly replaced with the threats against your physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual body. But God—our real, present God—knows all of this. And that's why He gives you Jesus. He wrote His name on you in your Baptism. You belong to Him. Your value is affirmed as His beloved child. He gives you Jesus in Holy Scripture which guides and directs you in all your ways. He gives you Jesus in Holy Communion, the receiving of His body and blood which cleanses your thoughts, words and deeds, time after time after time.

Please note: In my years as an educator and youth speaker, I've met and spoken with many students who have been forced into sexual acts against their will—sexual abuse/assault. There is a tremendous difference between giving something away freely and having something taken from you. Remind students that God sees them. He is with them and He knows what was taken. Those same tools that equip us to fight against Satan's attempts on our lives, will also lead to healing. Remind students they are a precious, irreplaceable child of God. Encourage them to speak to you or a pastor.

WHAT DO YOU WANT OUT OF LIFE?

None of us are operating solely on a physical level; our sexual actions affect our whole being. What's going on in our minds, hearts, spirits, and relationships affects us deeply, as well. Sex plays into those parts of the body with the same amount of impact and importance. Is it any wonder that so many are struggling with depression, anxiety, self-harm, and overwhelming stress? By means of the culture and sexual propaganda, Satan is pushing you guys to believe that sex is something as casual and meaningless as the outfit you put on today, and yet the ramifications, the hurts, you carry with you after the fact are anything but casual. And thus, the cycle of abuse begins and it's not long before you're that soldier sauntering through the battle, incurring wound after wound, until you're spiritually dead. Here's what you need to know right now: Nobody chooses this intentionally. Nobody actively chooses to put themselves in a vulnerable or catastrophic position. In a culture as controlled by sex and vanity as ours is today, if we aren't diligently fighting against it, we will be consumed by it.

Key Point:
Taking birth control outside of marriage, in order to prevent getting pregnant, means that you are, or you are planning to, act in a way that is contrary to God's incredible plan for your life.

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“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

I grew up in a loving Christian family where, at a very young age, I remember hearing this Bible verse from Proverbs. Little did I know that God would use this verse to carry me through some of the most difficult times in my life. It’s truly amazing to look back and see how our merciful Savior was able to take a seemingly hopeless situation and bring such awesome blessings from it! That being said, if someone had told me that then, I never would have believed it. I had to learn that I could trust in Him first. Recently someone told me of the movie Bella, named after the daughter of a young girl who had an unplanned pregnancy. Of course, right away I ran out to get it since that sounded so much like my own story. After watching I was astounded at the similarities between this story and my own.

I was in college, working as a waitress, and having the usual amount of fun that goes along with that newly found, semi-grownup “freedom.” I was in a long-term relationship that was slowly becoming a bit too claustrophobic and found myself wanting some space—and less responsibility. After ending the relationship, a co-worker and I began to spend a lot of time together. He was the epitome of everything I had been missing. Carefree and spontaneous, he gifted me that “freedom” I had been craving. Looking back, now I know that “freedom” might better be termed “irresponsibility.” After only two months of knowing him, I was pregnant with his child. Ouch. I hardly knew this guy. How was I going to share the rest of my life with him? That is what you do in this situation, right—get married and spend the rest of your life lying in the bed you made? It seemed pretty hopeless. He wasn’t a bad guy, and he had a lot of great qualities. But the cold, hard truth is that I hardly knew him. As if that wasn’t enough, my mind was swimming with all of the other implications I was going to have to deal with. What about school? What were my parents and my family going to think of me? What about money? (I had none.) I could barely take care of myself—I was supposed to be living the life of spontaneity and fun! This was definitely not what I had in mind. This was not part of my “perfect plan.”

Well, one thing was right. There was no “perfection” in my plans. I had sinned. I had gotten sidetracked with what I wanted and what felt good for me at the time. Freedom does that if you’re not careful. Scared and very aware of the fact that another human life was now in my hands, I didn’t know what I was going to do. I broke the news to my boyfriend and soon after to my mom and two sisters. It wasn’t until we sat down with his parents that I was challenged with some of the moral mind-games that Satan tries to play. What about an abortion? The words hit me like a brick in the face. Abortion? No. Not an option. I could feel the sweat beading up on my forehead. You’re going to ruin your lives. You’ve got so much going for you. I left there that day feeling defeated—like I didn’t have a choice. I wasn’t the only one involved here. Didn’t I have to think of everyone else too? If I did keep this child, was that selfish of me? They’re the adults here, after all. Part of me wanted to trust they knew what they were talking about and that I just didn’t see the big picture. What if having this baby was the end of my life as I knew it? But God has a way of using what we see as crisis to be the means by which He brings us closer to Him. In the middle of what seemed like the biggest mess I could make for myself, my prayers seemed to me like daily conversations with God. The theme: TRUST. More

Key Point:
By means of the culture and sexual propaganda, Satan is pushing you guys to believe that sex is something as casual and meaningless as the outfit you put on today, and yet the ramifications, the hurts, you carry with you after the fact are anything but casual.

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specifically, Him showing me I could trust Him every day, every hour, every minute, every second. God forgave me in Christ.

Isabella Grace was born on May 4, 2000. She has been an instrument in which God has shown me His grace and compassion for His children, surpassed only by the death of His son, Jesus Christ. Upon Bella's conception, my life did change forever, and life got hard for a while. But I am eternally thankful that God never gave up on me. When I doubted my worth and my place in this world, He never did."

My Real Life Bella by Heather Ruesch, LifeDate, Publication of Lutherans For Life, Spring 2009

"He makes the wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire." Makes wars cease. Only God, not people, can do this, even as Christ alone defeated our enemies of sin, death, and the devil. (The Lutheran Study Bible footnote Psalm 46:9)

Next Week: What's It Going to Take to Get There?

Identifying and discussing the challenges (Satan's weapons) that are all around us. Pornography, social media, vanity and the diminishing value of human life.

RESOURCES USED

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Reported STDs in the United States," <https://www.cdc.gov/std/stats13/std-trends-508.pdf> (accessed April 6, 2019)

"All The Pro-life Facts About Hormonal Contraception That You Probably Don't Want to Hear," Abby Johnson, <https://www.lifesitenews.com/blogs/all-the-pro-life-facts-about-hormonal-contraception-that-you-probably-dont>

"2017 State of Mental Health In America-Youth Data" Mental Health America, <http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/issues/2017-state-of-mental-health-america-youth-data> (accessed April 6, 2019)

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SESSION 3: “WHAT’S IT GOING TO TAKE TO GET THERE?”

Vitality Vs. Decay

Psalm Connection

Read Psalm 46 with this theme as your focus.

TALKING POINTS

1. This lesson will strike the contrast between “vitality” and “decay.” The Bible is full of contrasts: life and death...righteousness and sin...light and darkness. When we look at how sin, death, and the devil attack our bodies, it’s to cause “decay”: the destruction and wasting away of our bodily existence that ends when our bodies are put into the ground. Our “Real. Present. God.” who has created us, redeemed us, and loves us undoes “decay” and brings forth “vitality.” Vitality is decay’s antithesis: God gives us “abundant life” in Jesus Christ (John 10:10). He promises a life for us that we can’t even begin to comprehend. In *The Great Divorce*, C.S. Lewis describes heaven as being so “real” that our earthly bodies can’t even interact with it. The colors are brighter and more vibrant than we’ve ever seen. The water is crystal clear and we can’t even penetrate its surface. How much more will our existence be life as we’ve never even begun to think about it?
2. Psalm 46:1 gives us evidence that both decay and vitality exist in the life of God’s people. Can you identify the contrast?

How does Psalm 46 point to a life that is being destroyed, wasting away, deteriorating? How does it give evidence of “decay?” How also does Psalm 46 hold forth the things that are full of life and fulfillment and promise? How does it show “vitality?”

“God is our refuge and strength...” is an indication of vitality. People tend to thrive in areas of refuge and strength, don’t they? On the contrary, “...a very present help in trouble,” most certainly indicates sinfulness and decay in some way. If there were no decay or wasting away, there would be no trouble and thus, we would not need vitality to live and thrive again!

Give some other examples of vitality and decay from Psalm 46 and from your own life experiences as well.

Examples: The changing of the seasons, the effects of smoking on the lungs and the body compared to a non-smoker’s body and lungs, before and after pictures of drug addicts. What happens over time when you don’t brush your teeth?

3. ***Consider for a moment that vitality is the presence of Jesus and decay is the presence of sin. How does this new element transform the conversation of vitality and decay? Apply Jesus and sin to the examples you’ve just spoken about instead of vitality and decay.***

We live in a sinful, fallen world—therefore, things decay. But Christ has come to remove that decay, even while we struggle with it here on earth, we have the promise of eternal life in heaven where sin will no longer exist.

4. Okay, now open up your Bibles to Galatians Chapter 5:16-24 and read what God’s blueprint for your life says about vitality and decay. When we speak about desires of the flesh, such as *sexual immorality* (homosexuality, promiscuity, masturbation), *impurity* (having sexual relationships outside of marriage and/or that which is included in sexual immorality), *sensuality*

Key Point:
Our “Real. Present. God.” who has created us, redeemed us, and loves us undoes “decay” and brings forth “vitality.”

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(dressing or acting for the purpose of attracting sexual attention), *idolatry* (worship of anything/ anyone other than God), *enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies* and things like these, it's helpful to look at it in terms of vitality versus decay. More simply put: vitality means something which is healthy, life-sustaining. Vitality encourages and brings forth life. On the contrary, decay is something that deters and takes life away, it's deadly. Vitality and decay. Pornography, self-pleasure, vanity, self-worship, chauvinism, radical feminism, casual sex outside of marriage, homosexuality, sensual photos/ selfies... all of these things eat away at our intrinsic ability to love others and to receive love ourselves: decay and death in the heart and mind of the person.

What or who might be forms of idolatry in our lives today?

5. ***Is sexual immorality/impurity only a sin if it's acted upon? Or can the mere thoughts of it cause death and decay in our hearts and minds as well? Check out Matthew 5:27-28.***

6. Psalm 46: 5-6 says that, "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts."

God is located in the place where decay, desires of the flesh, take place. Where the temptations, fear, strife, assault, and troubles lie, He is truly there with you. Literally. Jesus Christ dwells within you. When sin is happening, as decay is happening in our lives here on earth, it's incredibly important that we understand: Satan is reveling in the fact that we exploit the very body of Christ that lives within us with every exploitation of ourselves. Sin and decay equal death. Thanks be to God, however, because as seen at the end of this passage, with a mere whisper, an utterance of God's voice, all of that sin and decay melts away. It's gone. And what replaces it? Life. Vitality. Forgiveness in Jesus. His grace is what produces, then, the incredible fruit of the Spirit and sets us up to move forward on the right path once again.

7. Let's head back into the book of Galatians again and take a closer look at the fruit of the Spirit. You see, this entire passage is about opposites. Opposing sides of a battle for the souls of people. God's plan to get you through this life has Jesus Christ and our vitality in Him, as the foundation of every decision we make. So, as you read through Galatians 5:22-24, the fruit of the Spirit is a product of our faith in Him. It weaves in and out of our relationships. That faith creates love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The reality that Jesus Christ shed His blood for our sins is what compels us to go and act in ways that honor our real, present God. Our source of vitality.

Vitality doesn't come because of our choices. Vitality is totally God's work in Christ. God works in us and the fruit is vitality. Always. From the clothes you put on this morning, to the way you treated your family at breakfast, to the texts you send out to your friends, to the music you listen to, the guys and girls you date, the way you conduct yourself while you're dating them, how you steward the screen time you have in the privacy of your own bedroom. Ask yourself, "Is what I'm doing in accord with who I am in Christ? Or is it in accord with decay and death and sin?" All of it is either moving you forward in life-giving vitality; in the love of Christ, or it's causing you to rot and decay from the inside out as you reject God's work in your life. And there you have it. We see, again, a picture of that soldier sauntering through the battlefield, incurring wound after wound until he feels spiritually dead. Choose life! Choose vitality over decay.

Can you think of someone you know who is leading a destructive life of decay? Incurring wound after wound from things like drug abuse, promiscuity, recklessness, lying, stealing, gossip? Satan is the source, the epicenter, of such things.

How does a baby deer learn to walk? By watching his mother. How does a Christian learn to live? By watching our Savior.

Key Point:
God is located in the place where decay, desires of the flesh, take place. Where the temptations, fear, strife, assault, and troubles lie, He is truly there with you.

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What's It Going to Take to Get There?

We all want the good things of God, given to us through Jesus. We want to have a happy, healthy future with a spouse we are in love with, a job we are content with, and a family to serve and whom serves us back. I hear it all the time, then: "How do I do it?" So, let's spend some time going over what it's going to take to get the good gifts of God. Here it is friends: How do you get the good gifts of God which lead to a happy, healthy, faithful future? You've already got Him. It's Jesus, Jesus in your Baptism when He writes His name on you. He says, "You belong to Me". Your value is affirmed as His beloved child. The forgiveness of all your sins is yours. It's Jesus in Holy Scripture, which guides and directs you in all your ways. It's Jesus in Holy Communion, the receiving of His body and blood which cleanses your thoughts, words and deeds. Time after time after time. His body cleanses your body and His blood, cleanses your blood, all the sin from inside out. Receive it every chance you can get.

Remembering that those gifts are there and intended to be used for your benefit, is a habit of sorts that we develop over time. And applying them to our daily living can be a struggle for sinners like us. That's why it is so crucial to be intentional. Keep your eyes on Christ. He is training every part of us to be more like Him: physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Be intentional about putting good things into your mind, body, and spirit and surrounding yourself with people who do the same. As we watch Jesus and become more like Him, we become examples to one another and take on similar characteristics to each other.

Search yourself. Take a hard look at your choices and your character. If you have a source of pain in your life that is causing you to fix your eyes on that rather than on Jesus, you need to know that He died for it. He died for that pain and hurt and He wants to replace it with Himself. God promises to be with us always, in every moment of our lives. Very often, pain and abuse lead to more pain and abuse. This is a great source of separation that we face day to day. Bring anything that is shifting your focus away from Jesus, back to Jesus. Give it to Him and He promises to replace it with love, life, and vitality. God has a miraculous way of taking our pain and turning it into our passion. It is at the crossroads of pain and passion that we will either commit ourselves to a cause or be a leader who steps into the void. For example: A man becomes a doctor because his mother died of cancer. His dream is to see a world where no other sons lose their mothers to cancer. Or, a woman becomes a teacher because as a child once in foster care, she had a teacher who made her feel more like her child than her student. In Christ, God transforms our pain into passion that reaches out and transfuses His love into a hurting world. Through our experiences with pain and sin, Jesus forgives us and sets us back on the path in order that we might go and tell other hurting people what He has done in our lives. (*Sometimes, our pain is too strong to face ourselves. God gives us pastors to walk with us on our journey to healing in Christ. Don't ever be afraid to trust or reach out to your pastor.)

Lastly, we are relational people, created by a relational God. No matter where we go in our lives, we will always have to be in relationship with others. That's why your decisions (good or bad) are never "just your decisions." Every choice we make will affect us and the people around us in either a positive or a negative way. Prayer and worship connect us with our God and connect us with His people. Never be embarrassed to go to church or youth group or to boldly profess your faith. Look at it this way: In a world of filth and decay, you know where to go to get clean! In worship, we are in communion not only with those in the pews beside us, but we speak the liturgy, sing the hymns, receive the forgiveness of our sins, and receive the body and blood of our Lord, with fellow soldiers, brothers and sisters, all over the world and throughout all time. That's incredible! Can you imagine the strength our whole bodies gain from that? Again: physically, emotionally, mentally, socially, and spiritually. God can imagine it. That's why He created it and that's why it never gets outdated, old-fashioned, or irrelevant to your life.

Key Point:
As we watch Jesus and become more like Him, we become examples to one another and take on similar characteristics to each other.

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Jesus' value of your life and what He was willing to do to save you, is the epicenter of how we treat ourselves and others.

Write three goals or lifestyle changes that will help you focus your eyes on that love and value as you live your daily life.

1. Ex. If you could be anything, do anything in your future, what would it be? God has created you with specific talents and abilities. You are a very specific and special piece of His big, beautiful puzzle. How might you honor Him in your future profession? *It's important to picture yourself in the future, accomplishing your goals and dreams. Do it often. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13
2. Ex. What will it take to get there? Would you be able to do eighty push-ups for a million dollars? What would it take? List it out. Now, shift all of those things towards your goal for your future. Persistence, determination, capability, strength... how does God, in Christ, call you to live as His child?
3. Ex. How can you start preparing now? When you put "yuck" in, "yuck" comes out. Fill your whole self with the life-sustaining good things of God. Physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and especially, spiritually. Write down what some of those good things are for each aspect of your whole self.

Sexual Propaganda

Scholars, journalists, and politicians have long argued about how to properly define propaganda and distinguish it from other forms of mass communication. Propaganda is biased information designed to shape public opinion and behavior. Marketing agencies have been targeting specific demographics, focusing on race, age, gender, religion, salary, and more, for the better part of ninety years. For nearly a century, there have been people whose only job, forty-plus hours a week, has been to study the public and feed us what their clients want us to know in a way we are most likely to receive it. Because of its highly addictive, chemically-induced bonding characteristics, sex sells products. How much is sexual propaganda and a casual sex culture actually influencing your life?

TRY THIS!

Take a look at your five senses and make a list of commercials, song lyrics, news and social media articles, photos, books, food and fashion companies, etc... that are using sex to sell you something. Brainstorm together. *Here's a hint: Your sense of smell? That's the smell of money. Sex sells this we know. Consumerism! Marketing companies discovered this trick almost 100 years ago and have been fine-tuning it ever since. Sex sells their products because it taps into the addictive parts of the human brain.

Leaders, choose 3-5 of these videos from the link below to watch together. What product is being sold in each commercial? Challenge your students to identify the sexual propaganda in the videos you select.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLGVIR13slutUhtC3lgVTdS0UjWVfjqgGo>

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The Destination

God's kind of love, the love He's intended between a husband and wife, encourages life and vitality in all areas of the person. Each physicality that we, as uniquely male and female humans possess, were created first to lend themselves to sustaining a life together, not just a momentary "feel-good." Sexual activity stimulates addictive chemical responses in the human brain. Here's a major news bulletin: sex was God's idea! He created sex so husbands and wives would continue to bond throughout the course of their marriage and create families together. Sure, masturbation and fooling around or having sex with your boyfriend/girlfriend, feels good for a little while, that's why it's tempting. That's how Satan hooks us. He's all about living in the moment, with no interest in the future of the person. Are we surprised that something God created for good, Satan has sickly twisted into something perverse that causes good people to fall into a never-ending cycle of sin, guilt, shame, remorse, and isolation? "And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians: 11:14)

God, on the other hand, has designed our lives with full knowledge that this life is short compared to all of eternity, which He wants us to spend with Him in heaven. God is all about stability, constancy, absolutes, and long-terms. His design for sex between a husband and wife feels good forever because it produces all good things. He knew it'd take more than ongoing physical attraction for two people to build and maintain a strong, healthy family. Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, socially, and yes, physically as well. Hear this, though, God created our whole bodies to work in harmony with one another. When one or more of those physiological wheels overpowers another, we have an imbalance that throws the entire person out of sync. This is important for us to understand because as we look at issues such as pornography, sensuality and vanity, and casual sexual propaganda as Christians, we can still see not only the beauty but the power behind why God created sex in the first place.

As we look deeper into the inner workings of the whole created person, we see how easy it is to get thrown out of sync, especially when we're surrounded by sexual propaganda that is influencing us, very often, at subliminal levels. Sexual propaganda makes it very easy for the physical to take over the mental, emotional, social, and spiritual when images and lyrics, advertisements, and even other people's opinions, are all focused around sex and lust as the "be all, end all."

So how should we approach this culture that devalues human life, your human life and others, with shallow, fake lust in disguise of the true love of God? With our eyes wide open. Be aware of the great spiritual battle that is taking place against Jesus Christ Himself, through you.

Next Week: Christian Dating and True Love

How will I know I've met the right person? Is being in a homosexual relationship really such a big deal? How far is too far? Every successful organization has a General Operating System that comprises three main parts: The Operations Manual, the Mission Statement, and the Standards of Procedure. Figuring out how to date with biblical integrity can be a challenge. That's why The General Operating System will put your mind at ease and give you a guide as to what to look for and what to stay away from.

Key Point:
God's kind of love, the love He's intended between a husband and wife, encourages life and vitality in all areas of the person.

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SESSION 4: “WHAT SHOULD DATING AND TRUE LOVE LOOK LIKE?”

Identity

Psalm Connection

Read Psalm 46 with this theme as your focus.

TALKING POINTS

1. In Whom do we find our identity?

Leaders, our identity is found only in our real, present God. Knowing Him and His character allows us to see ourselves through Him. We are created in His image and our faith in HIM gives us validation of our identity and who we are to Him. That identity is the real deal. It's not subjective or changing dependent upon circumstances, experiences, sexuality, or even a person's perceived sexual orientation. A child who is searching to find themselves needs to be reminded over and over again to Whom they belong and the characteristics of their Creator. The identity they find THERE is concrete and unchanging because God is concrete and unchanging. Like a hand-made bowl, we belong first to our Creator and take on the style of who He is and made us to be. That identity breathes forth vitality, healing, hope... life. We are children of the King of Kings and irreplaceable to Him, whether we acknowledge Him or not, the truth remains: We have a Creator whose very blood runs through us and was shed for us. When a student is lost or seeking to “find themselves,” point them to Jesus where they see His value of their life and the truth of a Savior who comes to set them free. We cannot save ourselves from the sexual immorality we face in this world. Through faith, Christ leads us in a new way of life and our identity forms around His sacrifice on the cross, for us.

2. Why do we find our identity in Him?

In verses 1-3, God shows us that we can have full trust and confidence in Him. In verses 4-7, we see that He is always with us and never abandons us. In verses 8-9, God settles the matter. Big or small, His love for you moves Him to make things right again—in your life and in this fallen world as well. He does that through Jesus Christ, the world's only Savior and Redeemer. Your only Savior and Redeemer. And last, in verses 10-11, He repeats Himself so as to make us understand how much He means it—He is with us, our Fortress that not just surrounds us and protects us but is part of us. We are born of Him; therefore, at times in our lives when we forget who we are or are seeking to find our “true identity,” we remember that we find ourselves in Him, not in who the culture wants us to be. Think about the previous session on vitality and decay. Find yourself again and again in the mercy, grace, forgiveness, and unconditional love of Jesus Christ. Fix your eyes on Jesus in your Baptism, in the forgiveness of sins, in the Word, and in Holy Communion.

3. If you're the sort of person who is receiving God's gifts over and over again, what do you think will flow out from you?

4. I was impressed by a pastor once who said, “God is constantly telling us Who He is so that we can find ourselves, our true identity, in Him.” Oh, the irony! Since the beginning of time we've been trying to re-pay the favor, haven't we? Because we are continually trying to get God to find His identity in us instead, aren't we? The God of all creation certainly does not need us

Key Point:
Our identity is found only in our real, present God. Knowing Him and His character allows us to see ourselves through Him. We are created in His image and our faith in HIM gives us validation of our identity and who we are to Him. That identity is the real deal.

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to tell Him what kind of God He is. He doesn't give us our own personal Jesus, a Jesus that fits the mold we make for Him. He gives us a Jesus who makes Himself personal to us. God establishes right from the beginning in Exodus 3:14 that He is "I AM that I AM." He didn't say I am whomever you want me to be or whomever makes you feel better about your life or your circumstances or your choices. He is GOD. The only true God. He tells us. He gives to us.

Discuss how that makes you feel. Does that bring you comfort or opposition? Or possibly both? Why? Are there friends, family, teachers, in your life who would disagree with that statement? What might be some of the reasons they would disagree?

Human nature will always err on the side of sin. We are a sinful, fallen people who will seek to justify our bad behavior every time.

Yes, we will.

Every time.

If we aren't intentionally and regularly coming back to God's Word and the cleansing of our bodies by His body and blood shed for us, our sinful desires will take the lead. We will want to defy the sovereignty of God and His intended way of living that is meant to care for us and protect us from Satan's untruths.

It's easier to justify what feels good in the moment, and continually create more "good feels," than it is to face conviction and change the way we order our lives. Change is hard.

5. At first the realization that God tells us and gives to us the Law that He knows we need, may be hard to accept. But there is incredible comfort in knowing that my God has all the control and all the wisdom and all the know-how that I lack in order to get me safely through on my journey to heaven and eternal life.

Key Point:
If we aren't intentionally and regularly coming back to God's Word and the cleansing of our bodies by His body and blood shed for us, our sinful desires will take the lead.

What Should Dating and True Love Look Like?

One of the most crushing convictions I've ever had was the realization that many youth today think this superficial lust is IT. THIS is what you think we've been telling you to wait for. The lust of a hypersexualized culture that uses sex to sell you things wants you to think that this is what sex is supposed to be all about. We're being indoctrinated by Satan and the casual sex propaganda around us, to see casual, self-gratifying, physical relationships as true love. No wonder so many have bought into the casual sex lie! I get it now. Satan has created a "chase your tail" scenario that keeps people searching for something meaningful in the midst of the superficial. A wild goose chase to find the diamond in the sand. There is a better way! You don't have to go on that goose chase at all to find true love.

It's overwhelming for me to think about how many youth out there, right at this moment, have lost all hope or are losing all hope because of this gross deformity of God's love. I want you to do something for me. Get a blank piece of paper and draw a dot in the very center of the page. About the size of a penny. Now look at it. What do you see? A dot, right? Do you see anything else?

That dot represents Jesus in our lives. When we focus solely on Him, every other relationship falls into its proper place and radiates out from our relationship with Him. His love flows through us, and into the relationships around us. True love. True relationship. Real connections. Clear identity. Clear convictions. Humble repentance and absolute forgiveness and healing. A clear conscience that determines how I see and relate to God. As opposed to a bad conscience which clouds my relationship with Him.

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Now, take a look at that dot again. What if that dot is not Jesus in your life? What if that dot is your boyfriend or girlfriend? Or yourself? Or having sex? It's so clever, this sinful human-nature. It's the great imposter that is always seeking to take the place of God. Whatever our dot is, becomes our main focus and every other relationship will flow out of it.

Talk about that for a minute. Can you think of people, maybe even friends, who have made their boyfriend/girlfriend, themselves, or having sex the dot that their main focus and every other relationship flows out of? What is the evidence? Vitality or decay?

Use the example below to share if a conversation starter is needed.

Katie's Story: My best friend and I have been friends for as long as I can remember. She's been dating this really great guy for a few months now and while I'm really happy for her, every time we're together (and I'm certain even when we're not) she is either talking about him non-stop or talking/texting with him. Every conversation comes back to him. She's completely distracted. She might be in the same room as me but it's obvious that her mind is always on him. Last week my mom brought us to meet up with some of our friends from youth group at a concert. She accidentally left her phone in my mom's car and spent the entire night obsessing about not having it to send selfies and videos to her boyfriend. I kept telling her that she could get it back when my mom picked us up again and to relax and enjoy the concert, but it didn't matter. I don't want to sound jealous (even though I am a little bit), I'm just afraid of losing my best friend over this.

I absolutely love how Paul speaks about the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit in the book of Galatians. This gives us a perfect picture of how that dot manifests either for our good, in acts of true love, or for our detriment, in acts of the flesh. He follows that then with the awesome affirmations of the fruit of the Spirit and also the adverse manifestations produced from our sinful flesh. We are two people entirely. We are wretched, rotten sinners who serve our own flesh. But in Jesus, we are also holy, perfect saints. Our sinful bodies produce all sorts of works of the flesh. Our forgiveness of sins makes us saints, covered in the blood of Jesus, our "white robe" (as Revelation 7 calls it). As sinners and saints, we live our lives fighting against sin and our flesh. But when we're continually fed with God's love and His promises in Jesus, we overcome our sin and live out the fruit of the Spirit in our day to day lives and in our relationships.

Key Point:
when we're continually fed with God's love and His promises in Jesus, we overcome our sin and live out the fruit of the Spirit in our day to day lives and in our relationships.

The General Operating System

In order to give all of you an easy reference for what God's blueprint for dating looks like, I've tapped into something I used every day in my work as a Crisis Pregnancy Center Executive Director. Every successful organization has adopted a General Operating System (GOS) that comprises three main parts: The Operations Manual, the Mission Statement, and the Standards of Procedure. Figuring out how to date with biblical integrity can be a challenge. That's why The General Operating System, or GOS, will put your mind at ease and give you a guide as to what to look for and what to stay away from.

As Christians, our operations manual is the Bible. The Bible is our go-to at all times; there is no circumstance in which it isn't relevant to us anymore, not today and not at any time in history. In the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon says, "There is nothing new under the sun" (1:9). The Word of God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Everything we need to form our GOS is right there in Holy Scripture.

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After the Bible, the mission statement and the standards of procedure (SOP) are the most important tools for daily operations. Every decision you make as the leader of an organization has to fall in line with those two things. Throughout my time as a Pregnancy Center director, I read those documents daily, and sometimes more often. I needed to remember exactly who our mission statement said we were and how our standards of procedure said we did things. Inevitably, there were times when I would forget and go off on my own. I had people in my life, accountability partners, who would tell me that I'd gotten off track and needed to bring myself back in line with our mission statement so I could follow the standards of procedure. Are you following so far? Can you see the connection yet between the general operating system and dating? Let's continue!

YOUR MISSION STATEMENT

We have established that there's a general operating system that determines how we live our lives: being a Christian.

Within that system, we have an operations manual that tells us how we were created to live that life: the Bible.

Next, we have to craft our mission statement. Your mission statement sets the intentions for your life and encompasses every area of importance. Mine would look something like this:

"As a woman whom Christ died for, I seek to hold true to the inerrant Word of God before all else, honoring and defending the intrinsic value of every human life, including my own."

This statement then becomes our identity at a glance. In a few concise and powerful words, I am reminded of what I'm all about, who I am in Christ. And as you get older and are searching for answers to hard questions, you will always have this to guide you back to your Operations Manual, your Bible. When there's conflict or division or confusion in our lives, we can come back to that mission statement and view our actions right alongside those words for comparison.

Why do we hold true to the inerrant Word of God before all else? Because as sinners, we will try to justify our actions and behaviors by the world's standards rather than God's. Yes, we will. Every time.

Your mission statement will remind you of your identity in Christ. It doesn't take the place of the Bible; it serves as a mental note that connects you to all you know the Bible to say and be. It helps keep you on track and also shows you how to get back on track if you ever lose your way.

STANDARDS OF PROCEDURE

Finally, the standards of procedure. How do we execute the work and order our days?

"Upon opening the office at 7:30 am sharp, the office manager will first turn on the lights. The switch is located to the left of the front door. Next, the heat shall be set to 72 degrees, and the phone messages shall be documented and placed on the desk of the appropriate employee."

The standards of procedure allow for continuity and accountability. You've thought things through, intentionally, for the purpose of knowing where you stand on important decisions. This allows you to show up to a relationship prepared and also able to communicate your expectations to your partner. And as a side note, if you wanted to share your SOP with your closest friends, your parents, people you have comradery with, they will act as great accountability partners for you and hopefully you can be that for them as well.

TRY THIS OUT!

Mission Statement: 1-2 sentences that becomes your identity in Christ at a glance.

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Draft your own Mission Statement and Standards of Procedure using the information you've learned in these studies so far. You can do it as a group and act as each other's accountability partners or as individuals. Study your standards of procedure often and hang/place your mission statement in a place(s) where you will look at it daily. (In your car, locker, wallet, bathroom mirror, etc...)

Standards of Procedure: A list of expectations for dating relationships. i.e. What type of person will he/she need to be? Why is it important to have someone in your life at this time? What are your expectations in regard to having a physical/intimate relationship with someone?

Leaders: Tell your students not to just say, "To save all sexual activity for marriage," or something like that because it's what they think we want them to say. Encourage them to really think about this with intention and ask themselves what they believe about sexual integrity. What goes through their minds when you pose the question, "Do you believe in saving all sexual activity for marriage?" Write answers down on a white board if available so everyone can be encouraged by the mutual logic and reasoning that's shared among you. Offer some of your immediate thoughts/impressions as well to guide discussion as needed.

The Line in the Sand

If there is one question I get asked most often by teens, it is absolutely, without a doubt, this one.

"How far is too far?"

My response to that never changes:

"Why put yourself in that position in the first place? What you're actually saying when you ask, "how far is too far," is how far can I go without sinning? But hold on a minute... you're a sinner. Don't feed that. Crucify it. Put it to death with Christ. Drown it in your baptism.

When we entertain that question, we put ourselves in the awkward (and dangerous) state of questioning where to draw an acceptable line, pondering "how far is too far" in the midst of some very real temptation. At that point, then we have to ask the next obvious question, "Acceptable to whom?"

To me?

To my date?

To my parents?

To my friends?

To God?

That way of thinking is subjective; it is based on opinions and emotions that change, rather than facts and logic that don't change.

Leaders: Ask your students, "How far is too far?" Get them thinking about this question intentionally. It's really important here for adults to be real about how this generation is going to apply sexual integrity in their day-to-day dating relationships. The reality is that there is a very tangible way to honor the value of every person, while still showing affection towards them. It's a mentality that is bought into by understanding the big picture of God's creation of sex and the value of every human life. When they ask you for a straight forward, black and white answer to this question, generally, I'd pose these questions to them: Do your actions show

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honor for God's most valuable possession? Honor for every human life involved? ...Human life that Christ shed His blood for?

You see, dating relationships were never intended to include getting physical with the other person or seeing what amount of lust we could subject ourselves to. The purpose of dating is to find our future husband or wife, and only after marriage do we have the freedom to express our love through physical intimacy with that one person who is different from all the rest. Sadly, as a society, we've been taught to see this as the old-fashioned way rather than the intended way. If I tried to sharpen my pencil in a food processor, I might destroy my food processor, but I would definitely destroy my pencil. That's because it was never intended to work that way. That's not old-fashioned; it's fact and reason.

1 John 2:16 says, "For all that is in the world- the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions- is not from the Father but is from the world."

And again in Galatians 5:16, Paul says, "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

Lastly and most importantly, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 seals the deal by telling us, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God."

Do you see how sexual marketing and propaganda have skewed our way of thinking? We often don't even realize how superficial our mindset has become until the truth is put before us and we're given the opportunity to hold the lies up next to the truth. I tell my teenagers all the time, "Don't even put yourself yourselves in the position to be tempted. If you're mature enough to be contemplating sex, be mature enough to acknowledge that nothing good is going to come out of two unmarried, young people being alone together."

Already had sex? It's never too late for you and you've never been alone (Psalm 46:1). God is waiting and wanting you to bring it to Him. He already knows it's happened. He still loves you. He wants to stop the goose chase now, though, so that your (whole) body doesn't continue being hurt and separated from Him. Physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and socially. It's like crawling up in His lap and whispering your pains in His ear. "I'm sorry, Lord. Please forgive me and restore me." Developing your General Operating System will give you everything you need to start over, but it will be especially important for you to put good boundaries and accountability partners in place. Also, make an appointment with your doctor to get an STI/STD screening done. This is incredibly important because many sexually transmitted infections are asymptomatic. You don't know you've contracted it until it's too late. So make sure your body is healthy and strong as you move forward with getting the rest of you healthy and strong as well. You matter. You are a child of God and He has declared you PRICELESS.

Next Week: A Happy, Healthy Marriage. What's the Big Deal?

We are ignorant to God's intentions for marriage and our sexuality in this culture today. The breakdown of the modern family has led to the breakdown of the individual. And it's not by accident, it has been strategized over and implemented by the Evil Commander-In-Chief from the beginning of time. Two key factors in this study: Passionate love and companionate love.

Key Point:
You see, dating relationships were never intended to include getting physical with the other person or seeing what amount of lust we could subject ourselves to.

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SESSION 5: “A HAPPY, HEALTHY MARRIAGE: WHAT’S THE BIG DEAL?”

Companionate Love, Building A Life Together

Psalm Connection

Read Psalm 46 with this theme as your focus.

TALKING POINTS

The word “companionate” simply means, to be a companion to someone else. To accompany them. The Lutheran Study Bible footnotes say the following statement about Psalm 46.

“The almighty and Most High God controls nature, safeguards His chosen city against attacking foes, and stands over all nations at war. He is our sure fortress. In mercy, he makes Himself accessible and is, therefore, “God with us.” We as individuals, and as the Church, experience many troubles in this life on account of the devil, the world, and our own sinful nature. Yet amid every crisis of body or soul, God is with us in His Son so that we may face every upheaval.”

That is Companionate Love. The entirety of Psalm 46 and the entirety of the Bible is about God’s incredible companionate love for His children, brought to full completion through His Son, Jesus Christ and His death on the cross for sinners: you and me. Every one of us is a sinner in need of a Savior who accompanies us, is our Companion, on our journey through this life and into eternal life together in heaven.

A Happy, Healthy Marriage: What’s the Big Deal?

We live in a culture of cynics, marital cynics. Those who casually dismiss the grafting of an entire, intricate and delicate life together as something of minimal importance. I aim to set the record straight for all of you here and now! In the world today, we are seeing more and more couples choosing to have children together, live together, buy a house together, and putting off getting married. I call this “playing house.” Marriage is an incredible gift from The God, the only God, of all time. What are we thinking? Why wouldn’t we want that gift? How could we ever possibly take that for granted?

For two reasons: First, we are sinful, fallen human beings, and next, we just don’t know better.

“God’s giving us a gift? What? I thought marriage was just a piece of paper!”

We are ignorant to God’s intentions for marriage and our sexuality in our culture today. That’s why this Bible study topic is so crucial, and I commend you all for committing yourselves to it! (Even if you didn’t have a choice.)

My husband and I come from very different backgrounds. He chose to be abstinent all the way through college, until we got married when he was twenty-three years old. Although I grew up in the Christian church, went to youth group, and loved God with all my heart, I kept my personal life separate from my faith life. I fixed my eyes on myself and what made me feel good in the moment rather than the vitality I had in Jesus, that would make me feel good all the time. I was distracted by the lie that sex was just part of growing up. “Everyone is doing it, therefore it must be okay.”

Key Point:
Marriage is an incredible gift from The God, the only God, of all time.

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That the more attention I got from the opposite sex, the more desired and valuable I'd be. That turned me into a zombie soldier... wounded and isolated by the time I was nineteen years old. My "house" was definitely teetering on the sand and it all got washed away when I was a sophomore in college, staring down at a positive pregnancy test. I didn't know. Nobody told me that this wasn't how God intended my life to be and I was hurting because of it. I don't want any of you guys out there "winging it" on your own, saying, "Nobody told me," ending up like zombie soldiers in the battle for your life.

The choice to have a long, healthy marriage someday is the reason it's important for us all to learn about biblical sexual integrity. That is the goal here, not just marriage, but a long, healthy marriage and thriving families. That's the winning lottery ticket, the trophy at the end of the marathon you've trained your whole life for, a 5-year-old's first trip to Disney World! In the Garden of Eden, God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."

It is so very important for you to know how highly God regards marriage when we're speaking about our faith and issues of sexuality because the union of husband and wife gives us such a clear earthly picture of how Christ's relationship with each of us works. Even if someone never marries or suffers through the loss of a marriage, fully comprehending God's intentions for sexuality and marriage is a critical part of the Christian faith. Satan will always be attempting to attack you from the inside out. Knowing God's intentions for your body and the power contained in the midst of a marriage founded in Him, gives you the advantage. Because you know how the enemy seeks to destroy you, you arm yourself with the love of Jesus that targets every attack of Satan with total precision.

Jesus in your Baptism when He writes His name on you. He says, "You belong to Me," your value is affirmed as His beloved child. The forgiveness of sins is yours. Jesus, in Holy Scripture, which guides and directs you in all your ways. Jesus in Holy Communion, the receiving of His body and blood which cleanses your thoughts, words and deeds. Time after time after time. His body cleanses your body and His blood cleanses your blood, all the sin from inside out. Receive it every chance you can get. Jesus renews, restores, strengthens, and preserves us.

God created marriage to act as a shield that protects us from the attacks of Satan on our life and especially on our sexuality. Remember, although sex is obviously physical, it is also a deeply personal matter. For better or worse, it touches and affects you in your very self. It has as much, if not more, to do with your mind than with your body. It affects what you think, how you feel and what grips your imagination. It has, in fact, more to do with your soul, your sense of self, you as a whole person rather than you as a man/woman, guy/girl. Thus, if sex is not properly personalized, it can depersonalize those who engage in it.* OF COURSE Satan is going to use sex as his main method of destruction! The perversions of love and relationship in this world are an intentional attack on marriage and the value of every human life for the purpose of destroying God so that Satan can become God.

Leaders: God is our Fortress. In Him, we find protection from the things that seek to harm us in this world. Marriage is like the fence that protects us from the attacks of Satan on our whole bodies through casual sex relationships.

Key Point:
Because you know how the enemy seeks to destroy you, you arm yourself with the love of Jesus that targets every attack of Satan with total precision.

*(para-phrased) Reverend Dr. John Kleinig, *The Beauty of Chastity*

The Modern Family

A long, healthy marriage is vital to the survival of families and to human society as a whole. The benefits that children receive from both mother and father, in their purposefully distinct and contrasting ways, are irreplaceable and science backs that. The greatest irony of our cultural gender-blurring, is that admittedly, men and women are very unequally yoked. And yet, it is that

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very inequality with one another that makes us perfectly, whole together. And perfectly compatible, exactly the right blend for the children we parent, mom and dad, each with diverse and distinct forms of bonding and instruction. One without the other gives a child a faint view of himself and the world around him. In our culture today and especially as you mature and get older, our children need more than ever to see the joy of pairing a husband's and wife's weaknesses and strengths together as they wholly lean on God to guide their relationship.

Leaders: Here is a five-minute video that speaks to the great irony of being unequally yoked as men and women, but also as we seek to give our dating relationships and future marriages the respect they deserve. The time and intention that God designed for them.

<https://youtu.be/vnkGV-bJQPU>

Unfortunately, the reality is, that as long as we live in a sinful, fallen world, bad marriages will exist. Unhealthy relationships will exist. Divorce exists and it has hurt us. 40-50% of marriages end in divorce in the United States. The major breakdowns occur when we see the example of an unhealthy marriage as the standard by which all marriages are held.

What makes all the difference in the world is knowing that because God has given us a Savior who joins together with us, a healthy marriage is actually completely obtainable! For all of us. A marriage founded in the love and unity of Christ is good. It is an incredible gift of God. As hurting human beings, we tend to justify and rationalize the hurts in our lives in powerful and destructive ways. We make excuses in order to hide how we really feel and how truly hurt we've been by those who have rejected, neglected, and abused us in our lives. The evidence of this justification is seen all around us in the way we mis-trust commitment and try to keep everything in our lives on a superficial level; never stopping for a moment to look deeper and expound our way of thinking. The thought process goes something like this, "My grandparents didn't have a healthy marriage; my parents didn't have a healthy marriage either. Marriage is overrated. Marriage carries no value—it's just a piece of paper. As long as I love the person I'm with, then having sex outside of marriage is okay."

Fixing our eyes on Jesus is hard. It requires us to reflect upon our sin and pain and restore our conscience to good standing with God. Which means we have to admit that we are sinners struggling with some sin! Resentment and anger towards people who have let us down in our lives. Fixing our eyes on superficialities, requires nothing of us.

1. Grab your Bibles and look up Matthew 18:10-14. Read it aloud.

We are separated from the protection of our Father like the lost sheep that leaves the flock. And in the same way, as the parable goes on, we see that God always seeks to bring us back to Himself. Here's what it comes down to: we cannot serve two gods. He is either Lord of all or Lord of nothing.

2. Look up Matthew 19:4-6 together and read aloud.

Marriage was designed to hem in passionate love with companionate love. Passionate love is what we all feel in the beginning of a relationship. Companionate love is what a couple builds together as they weave through life's ups and downs. It's what sustains a family and establishes a trust that connects them with one another more deeply with every passing year.

This is the relationship our culture is starving for and trying to fill up on with casual, superficial sexuality. There's plenty of passionate love out there; it's abused, mis-used passionate love, but it's there nonetheless. We read all about it in our Session 3 study on Vitality and Decay.

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It was never God's design that there would be this tremendous gap between passionate love and companionate love with couples choosing more and more to put off marriage for living together and casual sex relationships. Neither was it God's intention that couples would end their marriages in divorce and thus break the cycle of trust and companionate love that was being built over time. God takes marriage very seriously, contrary to what our culture would have us believe. Not because He's this religious artifact wanting things done "His way or the highway," but because He loves us so very much that He can't bear to see us abused and beaten down by Satan's contortions of true love, the value of human life, and sexuality. Casual sex hurts. A marriage grounded in Christ is the fix.

Key Point:
God takes marriage very seriously, contrary to what our culture would have us believe.

TRY THIS OUT!

Building A Solid Home

Materials:

- (3) Decks of Playing Cards
- (3) Elmer's Glue
- (3) Duct tape

Instructions:

Break students into three groups and give them each a deck of cards, a bottle of glue and a roll of duct tape.

First, tell them to build a house with the cards, without using any glue or tape at all.

Next, have them build a house with the cards, using the elmer's glue only.

Last, have them build a house with the cards and the duct tape.

Discussion:

Which house was the weakest? Strongest?

The home without the glue or duct tape was the weakest. The home with the duct tape was the strongest.

Why was the house without the glue or duct tape the weakest?

It didn't have something to help bond it together.

THE FIRST HOUSE

The house without the glue or tape represents a dating relationship. While a commitment is somewhat obvious, both people in the relationship understand that it will either end at some point or result in marriage.

THE SECOND HOUSE

The house with the glue represents a co-habitation relationship. When we have sex with someone, we bond with them, whether we are married or not. The glue represents the bonding power of sex, but still the house is not stable. When people live together without the commitment of marriage and the unity of Christ, it is more likely the couple will not feel secure in their relationship and it will crumble a lot more easily than it would within the confines of marriage, where they have the strength of three to face life's trials: Man, woman, and Jesus Christ. With just the glue (sex) holding the cards together, it can crumble on its own.

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THE THIRD HOUSE

The duct tape represents the bonding power of sex as a couple joins together, with Christ, in marriage. Even when a married couple faces struggles in life, Jesus is there, intertwined with them. A three cord strand (Ecclesiastes 4:12), or in this case, like a roll of duct tape! The commitment of a marriage grounded in Christ, helps them stay together. In order to break this card house apart, we must physically tear the duct tape off the cards, separate ourselves from God. It doesn't crumble as easily as the first two houses.

Conclusion

The majority of marriages end today because of superficial convictions about passionate love. "What happened to the passion?" Couples in the 20th and 21st centuries are seeking after the next superficial high; they want it to be like it was when they first met, and their relationship was unpredictable, passionate and exciting! But here's what you need to know for your own futures as you watch all of this swirling around you: Marriage is all about the constants, and let's face it, more often than not, it's about the lows. Bearing with one another when everything feels like it's falling apart. Demanding jobs, overdue bills, sickness, fear, doubt, anxiety, abuse, pain. This is where companionate love matters most and this is where we can clearly see God at work in our lives. Passionate love and companionate love. Both a gift of God, often confused and distorted by sexual propaganda and a thief that seeks to steal from us the image of Christ and His Church in the unity of husband and wife.

Leaders: Take this opportunity to share a testimony or story where you, or someone you know, perhaps your parents, needed the companionate love of a spouse to get through a tough time in life.

Honoring God and His Son, Jesus Christ, is what biblical sexual integrity is all about. A healthy marriage brings with it the most beautiful picture of Christ's very life given for us. A microcosm, a smaller version of something larger, that grounds us in His true and never-ending love before we bind ourselves to our spouse's true and never-ending love.

"Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

Ephesians 5:25 "This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." Ephesians 5:32

In what way is marriage a proclamation of Jesus' love to the world?

Marriage gives us a picture of his love for the church in the uniting of a husband and wife. As the perfect bridegroom, he lays down his life and gives himself as the perfect sacrifice for his bride, the church. And as a bride, the church loves, and cherishes and honors the one who makes that sacrifice.

Why would we want to proclaim the love of Jesus Christ through our marriage (and our belief in marriage) in a casual sex culture?

Because what God gives us is always better than the cheap imitation version the world gives us, that keeps us wanting. God's ways bless us, edify us, and build us up.

Is it intentional that Scripture repeatedly refers to a man "leaving his father and mother" to be with his wife?

Key Point:
Honoring God and His Son, Jesus Christ, is what biblical sexual integrity is all about.

Sexuality Mentality

Leader Notes

Creating a Culture of Biblical Integrity

Yes, because it was never God's intention for there to be this gap between passionate love and companionate love that we're seeing in the trend of dating for years, living together, having kids together, and then getting married. God's established order, designed with our benefit in mind, was that we remain yoked and secure with our parents until we then become yoked and secure with our spouse.

Why would that be pertinent to our culture today?

Think about cohabitation/living together outside of marriage. The increasing number of young people being misguided by the lies of Satan that keep them isolated and alone. Separated from God and from a support system. Alarming numbers of struggling, hurting people who have never known that God never intended this lifestyle for them. (Single moms/dads, pains of abortion, cheating and abusive relationships, sexually transmitted infections/diseases at an all-time high, separation from God and the church because of guilt, shame, or disbelief.)

What is the difference between passionate and companionate love?

Passionate love is what we all feel in the beginning of a relationship. Companionate love is what a couple builds together as they weave through life's ups and downs. It's what sustains a family and establishes a trust that connects them with one another more deeply with every passing year.

Do they each hold a specific purpose and intention in God's plan for a long, healthy marriage?

Yes! A balance of both within marriage is what we always strive to maintain.

Do companionate love and passionate love both belong in a dating relationship? Discuss.

No. Passionate love is a great gift of God to be enjoyed within the safe waters of marriage where it can't be distorted into something that's dangerous and destructive. We have this to look forward to as God uses it to bond us with our spouse like a 5-point puzzle. Not just physically, as the world has cheaply shown, but richly in God's intentions through the joining of each entire person and also with Christ. "... a three cord strand is not quickly broken." Ecclesiastes 4:12b

LUTHER'S MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS

Morning: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray that You would keep me this day also from sin and every evil, that all my doings and life may please You. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Evening: I thank You, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Your dear Son, that You have graciously kept me this day; and I pray that You would forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong, and graciously keep me this night. For into Your hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Your holy angel be with me, that the evil foe may have no power over me. Amen.

Resources used:

<http://www.amresources.org/>

American Psychological Association, Marriage and divorce <https://www.apa.org/topics/divorce/>