

Understanding Human Sexuality and God's Big Story

Walking Together

Course Objectives

In this course, you will:

- Experience the love of God
- Know how the Big Story of Jesus' good news relates to human sexuality, and how that Big Story speaks to your own story
- Grow in empathy for others in your community along their own journey of sexuality, through listening, hospitality, and discernment
- Identify one next step you can take in your discipleship around sexuality that will lead to greater flourishing in your relationship with God, yourself and others

Inviting You along for a Journey

In this course we want to help you reflect on your own experiences and develop a framework for how to approach the many questions you'll encounter in this conversation. Other introductory notes:

1. **A content advisory** – We discuss sensitive subjects. Please take care of yourself as you read.
2. **Adapt an open and curious posture** – It's not about debate but understanding others.
3. **The journey looks different for everyone** – Your experiences of life affect your perspective.
4. **Take this course in community with others** – Consider inviting friends or mentors to join you.

The Big Story of Human Sexuality

What is God's Big Story?

- **Circle One:** God created the world to be good and beautiful. Relationships were designed to flourish between us and God, us and other humans, and us and creation.
- **Circle Two:** We broke the flourishing God designed us for. All our relationships have been affected by this brokenness, and we feel its effects every day.
- **Circle Three:** God doesn't abandon us to the consequences of our choices. We are rescued through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.
- **Circle Four:** We see the outworking of our divine rescue. Through the Holy Spirit, we are being healed, transformed, and invited to join in God's kingdom work.

Defining Sexuality and Spirituality

Sexuality

The deep desires, feelings, attractions, actions, and longings that drive us beyond ourselves in an attempt to be intimate with and understand someone other than ourselves.

Spirituality

The deep desires, feelings, actions, and longings that drive us beyond ourselves to connect with God.

How are sexuality and spirituality connected? The fact that we have desires for connection outside ourselves is an important part of God's good creation. Our challenge is that we desire wrong things and try to meet our desires in wrong ways. To this, God brings restoration and healing!

Looking at Sexuality through God's Big Story

We'll be applying the framework of God's Big Story to the realities of human sexuality:

- **Circle One:** How do we see ourselves being designed for desire in God's good creation?

- **Circle Two:** What happens to our experience of sexuality when our desires are misdirected?
- **Circle Three:** How does the restoration of our desires inform our attitudes towards ourselves and others?
- **Circle Four:** What shape will our lives take as we allow our desires to be directed by the Holy Spirit for the good of the world?

Designed for Desire (Circle 1)

What Does It Mean to Be Designed for Desire?

Desires

Our core human desires are God-given longings for something good God has made.

God loves you and was delighted by every aspect of our creation. That includes our design as sexual beings – being commanded to have kids and God affirming Adam’s desire for a companion.

- Instead of shaming ourselves for experiencing desire, remember that our misdirected desires are often a distortion of our good original design.
- We were made for relationships and intimacy.

Made for Relationships

God designed us for relationships and in the image of the relational, triune God. We also see how Jesus is relational. Jesus spent time with close friends, was born with human male anatomy, had the same deep desires for intimacy, and perfectly expressed his sexuality as a celibate man.

Made for Intimacy

Intimacy

A deep connection with others, *knowing* and being *known* by them.

Different forms of intimacy include spiritual, social, mental, emotional, and physical intimacy. If we feel deficient in one area of intimacy, we can feel like we don’t have any intimacy in our lives.

The most significant form of intimacy we can experience is spiritual intimacy with God. It overlaps with other forms of intimacy and grants us more wholeness that we can then offer to others. But we need both intimacy with God and with our fellow human beings.

Misdirected Desires (Circle 2)

Warning Label

As we address how brokenness affects sexuality, take care of yourself and feel free to engage as much or as little as is comfortable for you. If you are tempted to launch into judgement mode, choose to be curious instead and ask yourself, “Why might someone feel this way or go down this path?”

PASTORAL WORD

This course isn’t a substitute for mental health resources. Don’t be afraid to get professional help, especially if anyone might be a danger to themselves or others.

What Does It Mean to Have Misdirected Desires in God’s Big Story?

Genesis 3 shows what happens when God’s guidance clashes with humanity’s desire to make our own decisions about what’s best for us. Even today, we try to bypass God’s commands by misrepresenting them or obscuring them, following our own rules instead. The more we run from God’s guidance, the more we want to isolate ourselves from God. Even in those moments, God longs for us to bring ourselves into the light, even in the midst of our shame.

Recognizing Misdirected Desires in Our Lives and around Us

Whenever we treat someone else's body as an object for our own sexual gratification, we are being driven by a misdirected desire.

It's easy to justify the kinds of misdirected desires that feel good to us, while judging other people's misdirected desires more harshly. But when we let God define the boundaries of right and wrong, our job is not to justify ourselves, but admit our misdirected desires and invite God's healing presence.

Misdirected desires affect every form of intimacy and can cause others pain or trauma. All of us experience misdirection in our desires, but if we want to live the life God designed us for, it will mean saying no to some of the desires that feel like they're intrinsically part of us.

Application

If you've recognized your own misdirected desires or you're grieving the ways someone else's misdirected desires have caused you pain, start by sharing your story with God and a trusted person (Confession).

Restored Desires (Circle 3)

What Is Jesus' Good News for Our Experience of Sexuality?

Human brokenness is not the end of the story. Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, he defeated sin and death to restore us. Christians can have courage knowing they are sanctified and restored into relationship with God.

Following Jesus' Way in Our Sexuality

Jesus invites us to align our desires with his desires and to let him be the lord over our lives. If we don't truly trust God, we'll never be able to discern how we're called to live as Christians. Examine your motivations – are you genuinely eager to ask the hard questions and then live in whatever way Jesus calls his followers to live, no matter how costly it is?

PASTORAL WORD

Real lasting change only happens once people have declared that Jesus is their Lord. Refrain from focusing on behavioral change until asking the question "Who is the lord over my life?"

Stewarding Our Sexuality

As we discern what God calls us to in the realm of stewarding our sexuality, we can look to these sources of authority:

- The words and actions of Jesus.
- The background context of Jesus' life and teachings and the way Jesus' first followers responded.
- The historic and global teachings and practices of Christians.
- The teachings and practices of our current Christian community, friends, and mentors.
- The guidance of the Holy Spirit, filtered through the lens of all the above sources of authority.

These sources of authority work together and clarify each other. In the end, it all comes back to Jesus, and our conviction is that God's words revealed to us in Scripture have the preeminent authority.

Most of the historic and global church have understood that there are two paths of sexual stewardship for Christ followers, both which are described in Scripture:

- Marriage, which Scripture tells us is meant to be a lifelong, monogamous covenantal union between male and female.

- Celibate singleness, which might be a lifelong calling or something a person pursues for a season. We hold to these views of sexual stewardship confidently, but we also hold them humbly.

Marriage is about embodying the image of Jesus' love and commitment to his bride the Church, anticipating our ultimate union with him in heaven. Singleness is about anticipating our future union with Jesus by offering our entire bodies and all our devotion to him right now. In both, we are called to live lives that are fundamentally not about us.

As you walk faithfully from day to day on the path God is leading you to pursue, think about what it might look like to apply the sources of authority to the way you approach your important relationships.

Our Response

If we want to live with the kind of love, joy, faithfulness, and self-control Jesus invites us into in the realm of our sexuality, then we need to give Jesus his spot on our life's throne and allow the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts—this is not something we can do through our own effort.

Desires Directed (Circle 4)

How Can Our Desires Be Directed Towards God's Desires?

God restores our desires for our sake, but also to direct us to the world around us. Jesus calls us to love God and others, not just by our own personal sexual stewardship but by loving those who have been pushed to the margins because of experiences related to human sexuality.

Missional Practice of Hospitality and Justice

You can join God on mission through...

- **Hospitality** – By creating space for people whose experience of sexuality have left them feeling ostracized, such as sexual abuse survivors, LGBTQ+, people with STDs, etc. One important piece of advice is to learn the culture and vocabulary of the community you want to show love to by using public resources and listening to the stories of people from that community.
- **Justice** – Ask yourself, "Where is there brokenness in my community related to human sexuality? What concrete actions can I take to offer healing?"

Now What?

Devotion to God

Here are the three lenses through which we can discern God's will for our daily lives:

1. **Prayer** – Prayer is our line of connection to God, how we ask God for wisdom, and listen to God's direction. The more we do it, the more we mature in our ability to recognize and understand him.
2. **God's Word** – When God is directing us, it will align with what's said in Scripture. Study God's Word, identify similar experiences, follow themes, and understand the clear boundaries he's set in his infinite wisdom. Be careful not to force questions that the Bible isn't trying to answer and not to manipulate it to say what we want it to say.
3. **Community** – Community should be a place safe for open discussion, where you can seek wise counsel, explore questions, and find compassion and accountability. Keep in mind that your community is likely to be helpful in your discernment process only to the degree of trust you have with them. Remember that the goal is to confirm and clarify how God is speaking.

Related Resources

- [Building Trust with the LGBTQ+ Community](#) (Ministry Library Resource)
- [Redeeming Sex: Naked Conversations About Sexuality and Spirituality](#) by Debra Hirsch
- [The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality](#) by Ronald Rolheiser
- [Redeemed Sexuality: 12 Sessions for Healing and Transformation in Community](#) by Andrew A. Boa
- [Breaking the Marriage Idol](#) by Kutter Callaway
- [The Case for Vocational Singleness](#) by Pieter Valk
- [The Meaning of Marriage](#) by Tim Keller
- [Single, Gay, Christian](#) by Gregory Coles
- [The Wounded Healer](#) by Henri Nouwen

Recommended Courses

- [Ministering with Gen Z](#)
- [Ministering Across Cultures](#)

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