

Rethinking Sexuality

Romans 12:1-2

Dr. Matt Cassidy with Dr. Juli Slattery --- November 17, 2019

Have a seat. Thank you, Troy. Thank you, guys. Awesome worship today. Well, welcome, Grace, and good morning. The last semester has been fun. We spent a couple of weeks celebrating our fiftieth anniversary and then we've been talking about "Now what do we do going forward?" And we talked about the purpose of our church, why we do what we do. And when we talked about that, we said, "Look, we're going to do what we did before. We're going to continue to do this: to glorify God by guiding people to become like Christ in all of life. We're going to try and make disciples as much as we can to the extent, everywhere, that we can. And a disciple is a person who's trying to become like Christ in all of life.

Now we added that phrase "all of life" because it is pretty common for people to compartmentalize their discipleship, their becoming like Christ in all of life. They're becoming like Christ in some areas but not others. Sometimes they do that because they don't know any better. Sometimes it's out of ... I don't know ... indifference. Sometimes it's just rebellion. *I don't want Jesus to touch this section, thank you very much.*

And then sometimes you just grown into the next season of life and you realize, *I've got to get more like Christ in that season of life and its challenges.* So, to become like Christ in all of life --- that's what we do here at Grace. And today we're going to talk about a particular area that is especially important and critical to our understanding, the fullness of what it means to be like Christ. And because of that we brought in a subject expert.

This is Juli Slattery and she's here to talk to us about a compartment of life that we often leave out in our discipleship --- in the area of all things dealing with sexuality. And she's been doing this for quite some time. Dr. Juli is a doctor, she's a clinical psychologist. She got her master's degree at Biola --- Rosemeade, if you know what that means. And then she worked at Focus on the Family for a few years, and then realized how important this topic area is. And so, seven years ago she went and started Authentic Intimacy. She's written ten books, she's a famous speaker, she has a great podcast. A number of ladies told me that they enjoy listening to you weekly.

So, for three days Juli has been working very hard. She came here on Friday, she was teaching the leadership here at Grace and leaders around the city in areas of sexuality and how to bring that into a spiritual conversation. And then yesterday there was an all-day conference with the gals here at Grace and around the city. And today she said she'd stay over and talk to us about that as well.

Juli: Yeah, thanks so much for having me.

Matt: You bet. It's been great. And is Melissa here this hour? Melissa Eckel, stand up, again. Thank Melissa for all the hard work. She's been working hard this semester and this weekend for sure.

Romans 12: 1, 2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Here at Grace one of the phrases that we talk about a lot here, because it's a kind of summary of a lot of theology and how that theology applies. It's in Romans chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. Paul says, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual act of worship." And I think it's interesting that he says "your bodies --- make them holy." Because that's a great expression, a reasonable expression, of worship. Because what we do in our body --- we carry our soul in that. So, He wants our bodies to be holy.

But it's not just leaving it there with the physical expression. He goes now and talks about how we think. We need to change the way we think about all of reality. So, the next sentence says this. This is how we act, it's not nonsense, but we act like it. "Do not be conformed to this world (well, except in the areas and topic of sexuality). All those other areas, yeah, you

should be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that in that testing you may discern the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

If he were to write that today, he might write it just the opposite: “Do not be conformed to this world, (especially about topics of sexuality), but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

And it’s in this area of sexuality that it is so important, because it has so much profound influence on not just our well-being, but our spiritual lives and our relational aspects of how we treat one another and about the power of shame or boldness, whatever it might be.

But anyway, this topic is not an easy topic to even converse about in a living room, not to mention a church. Why do you think it’s so hard for us to talk about subjects of sexuality?

Juli: Yeah, I imagine even some of you show up here today on Sunday morning and are thinking, “What? We’re talking about what?” We’re not used to talking honestly and openly about topics of sexuality in the church or even within the family, which is ironic, because those are probably the two places we need to talk about it the most, because it’s where we can be vulnerable and where we can pursue truth together.

But if we look at the history of Christianity or Catholicism and the way we’ve handled topics of sexuality, it has been sort of this great divide of God is holy and we talk about God and we want to sing to God, but sexuality is just this earthy topic that, for many of us, feels like it’s clouded with shame and sin and confusion. And God doesn’t really seem to speak into those topics. He certainly doesn’t seem to want to know about our struggles or for us to really be honest with Him about what’s going on in our hearts.

And so, I just think that we’ve grown over time, because of the traditions that have been passed down, to assume that it’s not right to talk openly and honestly about sexuality in settings like the church or in the family. We have kind of these awkward conversations when we do have conversations. And they can feel like they’re judgmental, they can feel like they’re condemning, they can feel like they’re just adding on to shame instead of inviting freedom. And so, I’m just grateful to Pastor Matt and to the Grace body that would even invite this conversation and say, “Hey, we want to learn to do this well.” Because it is a very important topic.

Matt: Right. And I love your attitude and you certainly express that on Friday evening, that clearly, you changed your career for this. It must have been heavy on your heart --- the consequences of people's thinking and doing in this area. But it seems like the church is always late to this conversation. And I love how you want to play offense on this subject matter, not defense; not always be the counterpuncher, but lead. That's what you want the church to do, right, is to embrace this and to say, *Let's go! Let's be the first person to tell what the truth is instead of just hearing lies.*

Juli: Yeah, and I hope it's not just *my* heart. I hope it's representative of God's heart. If there's an area of our lives and our church and our humanity that has just been overtaken by the enemy, that area is sexuality. We really have learned to think about sex from the world's perspective, because we've been silent about it in the places we need to be talking about it. And so, I just went on this journey in my own life and in my own career as a psychologist of seeing how many people there were who loved God but really had no clue how to integrate biblical truth into this area of their lives. They were walking with shame and a sense that their sin could not be fully forgiven because their sin was so bad. Or brokenness in marriage, struggles as a single person, saying "Where's God in the midst of my loneliness?" And on and on. And we continue to see that evolve with the Me Too movement, with all the conversations about LGBTQ.

And people are confused. Christians are confused. Where's God in the midst of this? And if we're not willing to step into those conversations with compassion and with the desire to really know what God's heart is, then we're essentially conceding that whole conversation to the culture. And there are a lot of consequences to that. I think many of us know that in our own lives we see the consequences.

And so, I'm just here being obedient. This is not what I signed up for. I didn't ask God, "Please let me go and talk about sex in Your church." That's not what I want to do, it's not what my three sons want me to do. It's kind of embarrassing for them. But the Lord took me on a very deep journey with Him personally about seven or eight years ago, and He just shared His burden for you. And so, I'm not here with my burden – it's His burden. He wants you set free. He wants people to know His love and not just continue to think that God is a condemning God, but that He cares about every area of our lives. He knows our pain, He knows our brokenness. And so,

going on the offense is stepping into the most painful area of our lives and saying, *God wants to be in the midst of that.*

Matt: Right. I love how you said on Friday night that a church that says, *Look, we're going to take the Great Commission seriously --- to go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey, baptizing them, teaching them to obey all that He's commanded.* And we can't even do that unless we talk about that subject matter, sexuality.

Why do you feel like we're hamstrung in trying to do the Great Commission without this conversation?

Juli: Yeah. I really think that's especially true in our day and age. The Great Commission is evangelism and discipleship. And evangelism is stepping into, going into, the places where people are lost. And it's not just the physical places where they're lost. It's not just going into other countries. That's part of it. But it's stepping into the places of humanity where people are feeling pain and they're lost. And we see that Jesus did this with the woman at the well, the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus physically went to a place where most people wouldn't go. But then He stepped relationally into a conversation that most people wouldn't want to have about this woman's shame and about her sexual promiscuity and her brokenness. He brought it up even though she didn't want to talk about it. And He didn't bring it up to add to her shame. He brought it up because that's where her pain was. And He identified her desire for living water, to be satisfied. And He brought up the fact that she was going to all these men to satisfy her, but that she really was longing for a savior.

And so, evangelism is stepping into those places and into those conversations that represent pain, where people need to know that there's a God who loves them. So many conversations I've had over the last seven or eight years about sexual pain lead to conversations about God. I believe that every sexual issue at heart is a spiritual issue. People are not just asking, "Will I go to hell if I'm gay?" That's the question they present you with. But what they're really asking is, "Does God love me? And what is sin? And what is repentance? And who is God and does He know me and did He create me and does He feel my pain? Does He care about me?" And so, if we're not willing to step into lives where there's pain, then we can't share the gospel.

And the the second part of the Great Commission is that, once people come to Christ, what does it mean to follow Him with every area of your life? And that includes sexuality. I think a pastor named Kenny Locke once said, “Most Christians live like they’re sexual atheists.” And so, with most of our life we follow God. But in the sexual area we feel like we have the right to do whatever we want with our sexuality. We deny God. Part of discipleship is helping people understand, whether they’re single or married or whatever they’re struggling with, what does it mean to surrender this area of your life to the lordship of Jesus Christ? What does it mean to invite Him into healing and to help us learn how to honor God with our bodies and our sexuality? And that’s not just one sermon. It’s a lifelong journey of learning truth and surrendering to the lordship of Christ.

Matt: Right. The power of the gospel is able to penetrate the deepest recesses of our deepest longings. And so, in the Samaritan’s story, it’s powerful in that Jesus initiates going into ... Shame has its power in the shadows. Shame is something that can overwhelm you and be the boss of your life as long as it stays in the darkness. And Jesus invades that darkness just like we sang about. He’ll come into that shadow, into that darkness. And that’s what sets her free, is that conversation. Interestingly, as she goes and becomes an evangelist for Jesus and goes back to her community, she’s now bragging about the things she’s ashamed up. *He knew all about my life. Those things I was formerly ashamed of I am now using as a means of telling you of His redemptive power.* Huge. Now she’s free. That’s freedom.

So, again, if we don’t talk about this it doesn’t give us the power of the Spirit’s redemptive influence in our lives.

You talked in your book and in your conferences about the traditional model in a church. You talked about some of these areas where we use the purity narrative. And why don’t you describe what that purity narrative is and how you feel like it’s an inadequate expression of talking.

Juli: Yeah, so for sure. That word “narrative” really means “story”. We talk about narrative a lot in our culture. But narrative --- the way you understand something is the backstory of why something matters. And we’ve got to realize that, first of all, our culture has a very compelling, attractive narrative about our sexuality that says that your sexuality is important because it’s an

expression of who you are. That's why sexuality matters. And when you understand the cultural narrative, you understand why the culture is pushing so much towards what they would call sexual freedom, because they want you to be free to express.

Well, traditionally, the church has given us another narrative that is based on some truth. But I don't think it's a complete narrative. And I call that the purity narrative. And the purity narrative essentially says that God created sex for marriage and if you want to honor God, you save sex for marriage. And if you do that, then someday God's going to reward you with a wonderful spouse and you're going to enjoy this great gift of sex, guilt-free, and you're good to go. And that's what I grew up with. Many of you grew up in church settings and that's what you heard about sex. And there are certainly aspects of that narrative that are scriptural, that God did design sexual intimacy to be within the covenant of marriage, and that God wants us to honor Him with our bodies.

But there's so much more to understanding God's heart for sexuality. And when we only talk about this purity narrative it can come off as being legalistic, to let you know that the most important thing you can do to honor God is don't mess up in this area. And if you have messed up in this area it adds this sense of shame of *Wow, I've blown it, I can never be pure again, I can never be free again*. Maybe you've messed up in your marriage and you think, *Wow, it's all gone, it can never be redeemed*. That's not what the gospel says. The gospel actually says that none of us are pure. None of us are righteous. Even if you save sex for marriage, you still need a savior and there's still sin in your heart. And we all become pure through trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ. And then we walk out that new identity.

But the purity narrative for many Christians has been hurtful, because it's such a simplistic presentation of why sex matters. It almost becomes like a prosperity gospel. If I play by the rules, then God owes me this. And then when that's not been your experience, you begin to doubt everything about God and what He says about sexuality. The purity narrative doesn't give us a context, for example, of why gender matters and why talking about male and female matters to God. It doesn't give us a sense of that. It doesn't help us to wrestle through things like sexual abuse and trauma and pornography. And so, our understanding of God's heart for sexuality has to go way beyond what we've traditionally learned about just following a list of rules.

Matt: Right. It's keeping the conversation superficial when, in contrast, especially in contrast to "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed" --- what the Bible talks about in sexuality and sexual intimacy issues is far more profound than what we could even imagine somewhere else. I think in a number of your books and your conversations you talk about the spiritual dynamic about what's happening in courtship and longing and how it's a picture of what God is doing. Why don't you elaborate on that?

Juli: Yeah, that really transformed my thinking to be asking the question: *Why did God make us sexual people?* And to go beyond just, *Well, to have babies.* No, there's more to our sexuality than that. Our sexuality is really the aspect of our humanity that makes us crave intimacy, that draws us to say, *I'm not content to doing life alone. I want to share myself with somebody. I want to be known and embraced. I'm not okay just alone.* And in a physical way we experience that related to our sexuality. But we've got to think about the fact that everything God created in us physically, even everything on the earth that He created, has a spiritual significance that's part of God's self-expression. And so, God has given us these physical and sexual longings to connect with each other, to be seeking out significant covenant with each other, because ultimately, He's created us to be seeking and longing for intimacy with Him. And we see this hinted at all throughout Scripture. It's most clearly stated in Ephesians chapter 5 where Paul is talking about marriage and the roles of husband and wife and the purpose of marriage. And he talks about it in Genesis --- Moses said, "For this reason a man will leave his mother and his father and will be united to his wife. And the two will sexually become one flesh." And then Paul says, "But I'm really talking about Christ and the church. This is a great mystery."

What Paul is saying there is everything about our sexuality, everything about male- and female-ness, all of it, is this picture that is painted for us, of the relationship that Christ has with His people, the covenant promise, the intimacy, the passion, that God has created us for with Him. And so, our sexuality is not just about what happens with us horizontally here on earth; it's supposed to be something that makes us ponder, *Wow. I have a deeper need for intimacy with God. I need to be connected to Him.* And so, that's a profound thought that I've been chewing on for about eight years now, and unpacking that in terms of what does that mean as we talk about issues like pornography and sexual trauma and what sex should be like in marriage and sex and

singleness. And all these issues take on a different light when you see what our sexuality was created to represent in the first place.

Matt: Sure. Like C. S. Lewis' phrase that you might know, called argument from desire. And we have desires and they're pointing us to something different or something more or better still. A folk singer has a song called "That's What Lonely Is For." The depth of our dreams, the reason God has put these desires in our heart is to point us to something. And what happens with so many of the road signs that are in the Bible and even in our souls that are pointing towards God and are pointing towards heaven --- we're kind of like a really dumb Labrador that sniffs the finger and focuses not where the arrow is pointing --- that's what God is saying --- *Go there!* And so, sexual experiences, in the context of the boundaries that God has for us, is supposed to say that we have this longing for this. It's pointing towards something more. You know you want to be loved. You know you want to be known and you want to know someone else. And then you have that experience in marriage. And what happens in that context is you say, Wow, that was emotional and spiritual and physical ... but I bet there's got to be something more. And there is. It's still a clue to say that those desires can't be met here with a fellow human. They are met there. You are meant for eternity. It's an eternal longing. And sexuality is maybe --- I'll just say today, anyway --- the primary of wanting us to long for this level of intimacy and this depth of understanding. And when we break the boundaries or just talk about sexuality independent of its emotional, intellectual and then spiritual dynamics, we lose it. It becomes only mammal talk, not the nature of God in us talk.

So, what happens when a person, for example, breaks outside of the intended boundaries of the sacred nature of sex?

Juli: I think at one level we've all done that.

Matt: Oh, sure.

Juli: And so, there's the physical expression of that, when you're responding to pornography, for example, or when you're sleeping together outside of a covenant, or when you're unfaithful to your spouse. Those are the obvious symptoms that we're acting out. But all of us have at some

level separated sex from its relational and spiritual significance. We've all fallen for the ways that Satan vandalizes sex by saying it's just physical. And when we do that, a lot of things happen. First of all, 1 Corinthians 6 says that when we sin sexually, we're sinning against our own bodies. And one of the things that I find fascinating as a clinical psychologist, is that when you look at all the research of how sexual expression impacts us, how it impacts our brain, how it impacts our bodies, you see that sex was meant to bond you to someone; that we have very powerful hormones in our body and very powerful chemicals in our brain that are released during sexual expression that create great pleasure, but also create this sense of bonding. And when we exercise that pleasure and that bonding outside of being in a committed relationship, the long-term impact of that is really negative.

And I'm not just talking about "Thus saith the Lord." God's plan is written in our bodies and it's written in creation. So, for example, the research would show that those who are living together instead of getting married, your relationship is far less satisfying than if you were married. And even if you live together and say, *Hey, we want to test this out to see if we're compatible*, the research shows that if you live together before you get married, you're more likely when you get married to experience sexual infidelity and sexual problems in your marriage. And so, the research shows that what the world is telling you to do actually doesn't work. Going from person to person to person, trying it out, doesn't work. Pornography rewires your brain in such a way that you're no longer even capable of responding in a normal human sexual relationship. And so, when we go outside those boundaries, yes, the greatest consequence is that it separates us from this intimacy with God. And it also plays out in the ways that God has wired us to be functioning.

Matt: Humans are different in kind, not in degree, from other animals. We are spiritual, we are image bearers of God. And so, it's different. You can't compare. With that as an illustration, sex in the context of humans is different than with other mammals, just like communion is just a meal --- but it's not, right? It means a lot more. It is a spiritual event and I'm not sure what we can know about the depth of the spiritual things that take place during communion, but baptism is that way, marriage vows are sacramental --- sexual intimacy is sacramental. It is something happening spiritually that is pointing us to something more profound. When that's violated, it has a greater consequence. That's kind of the theology and the thinking of sexuality that we need to

talk about when we become like Christ in all of life in this area. It's more than what we probably imagine it to be.

I would imagine that everyone in some respect is broken sexually because we have been disciplined by the world in these categories.

Juli: Yeah, we've been disciplined by the world and we live in a fallen world and we have a sin nature. And this was kind of a light bulb for me, to realize that everybody is sexually broken. And I grew up, like I said, in the church, in the purity narrative, and the purity narrative says that some people are sexually broken. But if you stay pure before you get married and then you get married and you keep sex within marriage, then you're all good. And what I found in my own experience of following that narrative is my husband and I got married and discovered that there was all this brokenness and there are all these lies that we had believed about sexuality. And for many, many years our relationship in marriage was much more conflictual than it was bringing us unity. It was causing more pain than it was causing joy and pleasure. And it became manipulative and withholding and it was awful. It was broken.

But if you looked at it from the outside, you'd think, *Okay, here's a Christian couple and they're together and I guess everything's good.* And there were all kinds of brokenness that nobody would have called brokenness. But we understand brokenness only in the light of what we understand wholeness to be. And if you understand wholeness, sexual wholeness, to be this amazing metaphor of Christ's covenant love to His people and His sacrificial love and His passionate love, and you look at your own life, whether you're single or married and you view it as something different or you experience it as something different, that's brokenness.

And so, for me, starting out as a psychologist, as the teacher, as the helper, I think, *Oh, I want to help you.* And God begins to say, *No, you need help, too.* That we're all this journey of asking God to reclaim what the enemy has vandalized. And we all need to be on that. I have not arrived. I will not arrive until I get to heaven. God is in a constant state of renewing my mind and exposing lies I believe and exposing my selfishness and my fear. And so, I'm passionate about inviting other people on that journey to say, *We've got to talk about it, we've got to pray about it, we've got to seek God's heart for it.* And ultimately, we must ask Him to begin reviving us and reclaiming us so that we have something to offer to the world.

Matt: So, what's the next step? What I heard just now was --- I think the standard, in some respects, is "I'm not as broken as others." And we never had wellness and truth as the standard. If I'm broken and I want to go from not as broken as other people and want to go to wellness, whether it's because of, maybe, some shame, some decisions, or I want to know what it's supposed to be like in marriage, the fullness of what it should be.

If I'm warring with some kind of sexual sin in my life, if I don't have a biblical view, what would be the next step? How do I turn and face this thing that I've been ignoring for so long? What's next?

Juli: Yeah. I think the very first thing is to say that to God. It's crazy how many of us never pray about our sexuality. Even within marriage you pray about a lot of things, but have you and your spouse ever gotten on your knees and asked God to really heal you sexually and to give you joy in this area? And so, it begins by inviting God. And then being involved in a community. I know there are a lot of community groups here at Grace. And there will be more where the invitation is "Let's pursue God's truth together. Let's create an environment where it's normal and safe to talk about these things that we're all struggling with and we all have a heart to pursue the Lord together."

And so, a lot of this is done in a community of people that are pursuing truth and extending grace to one another.

Matt: It's very difficult to have the conversation without feeling like there's some shame attached to that. And I want to reiterate again that shame only has its power when it is kept quiet. Shame is a vampire. It works well at night. He dies ugly and turns to dust once the sun hits. That's the nature of that.

I'll never forget a number of years ago when Wayne Gretzky, who was the single best hockey player ever --- that's undeniable --- two or three years out of retirement he has a huge press conference. Everyone is there assuming he's coming back on the ice. And he just cleared his throat, checked the mic, and said, "I was molested as a boy at a hockey camp and it's tormented me my whole life. Thanks, everybody." And that was it. I mean, he just called a press conference to tell the world that he was abused as a child. And I watched and I thought, *Oh, this guy, a hero on the ice, a courageous man amongst men. But this thing has been kicking his tail*

since the time when he was twelve. And he's been serving it and hiding from it and hoping it didn't come out or he'd be found out. It was ruining his marriage, it was probably threatening other relationships. And he just said, "No more. Not again. Not another day. That's it."

So, he could have just told a friend, but it wasn't enough. I'm sure he told his wife. Still not enough. He wanted to tell everyone. And the more people that knew, the less power it had in his soul.

So, here's our application. Come out of the dark. Whatever it might be, or whatever insecurity, this is the job description this week. By next Sunday could you do this? Find one person. Could you have a conversation with someone that will be awkward, because they are ...? Whenever you do something for the first time it takes twice as long and it's kind of sloppy and all that. Okay. You're going to assume bad delivery. But could you just do this --- *I will choose to talk about this another human soul.* Can you hear God's Spirit talk to you about that? No more hiding. Say this: *not another week. Not another week of this.*

God is not embarrassed or blushed about these conversations. Your first conversation with Him was what Juli said. And then let's take it outside and talk to one person. I'd highly recommend finding a place, if you don't have an individual friend, you could find a group that's good into recovery. Celebrate Recovery does that, twelve-step programs ... I love these programs because when you introduce yourself there, you say, "Hi, I'm Matt and I'm a sinner. Hi, I'm Matt and I'm a sexual addict" --- whatever it might be. You just kind of lead with that. And do you know why you lead with that? Because every time I say it out loud it takes the power away of that thing in my life. And everybody says, "Hi, Matt." And I say, "I thought you were going to reject me for this. You're going to embrace me for this? I'm coming back next week!" That's what's happening in those meetings. And so, the ministry that the Lord has led Juli to do is a ministry of courage, having conversations about the power of God's Spirit of healing in your life; having a conversation about learning about these areas in your life.

So, that's our application time today, for this conversation, anyway. Let's play offense, okay? Let's grow tired of getting kicked around on this. Let's initiate a conversation instead of just hoping that it never comes up. Okay. Let's do that as a church and as a person.

Juli, one last thing before we leave. Austin is really a hard place to live in this conversation because everything is ... I don't know ... the value of tolerance is a one-way street, it seems. It only goes one way. So, to have a biblical view of sexuality and all those

conversations that fall under that definition of sexuality, gender, all that ... homosexuality ... how do I have a conversation with neighbors and friends and co-workers that you've found?

Juli: Yeah, boy, it's really difficult as you're saying, not just in Austin, but everywhere because these conversations about God and sex are controversial. And we have to recognize that what the Bible says about sexuality goes against what everybody else is believing in our day and age. We shouldn't be surprised by that. Because all the Scripture says that "Broad is the road to destruction, but narrow is the path to life." And that friendship with the world is enmity or hostility towards God. And it's not being friends with the world that it's talking about is buying into the world's system; that there's a tension, there's a spiritual battle going on. And sexuality is the heart of that spiritual battle today.

And so, there are a number of things that we want to be aware of. And I know we don't have a lot of time to talk about it. But as I've wrestled with this in my own heart, in my own ministry, in my own family and life, it feels like there's this tension of truth and love; that you have to choose to either be a Christian who is known for truth or to be a Christian who is known for love and compassion. And we see even churches and denominations splitting over "What are we going to lead with, truth or love?" But when we look at the life of Jesus, even as John described Him, He was a man full of both truth and grace. And as His followers, we're called to be full of truth and grace. And like Jesus, who never compromised truth for the sake of being loving, but never compromised loving compassion for the sake of speaking truth.

And I think, "Lord, how in the world do I do that? I'm not Jesus." But God promises to give us His Spirit, to have this spirit of Jesus. And there's one word that I think of that really defined who Jesus was when He lived here on earth, and in Philippians chapter 2 it talks about the humility of Jesus. And I've found that humility is really the key to being grounded in both truth and love; that when I'm humble before God, I recognize that He is God and I'm not. I don't understand His ways and there are things I read in Scripture that I don't understand. But by faith, I say that "You are the Creator, You are the Lord, You are the author of life. Who am I to rewrite Your Scriptures to make them more acceptable?" And so, humility before God keeps me from compromising truth.

But humility before God also reminds me that someday you're going to stand before God and give an account. You're not going to stand before me. I'm going to stand before God with an

account. And I'm just a human being. I'm not your judge, I'm not better than you, I have my own sin struggles, and I'll tell you about those. I'm not going to condemn you for yours. That's between you and God. And so, really asking God to give us the spirit of Jesus that has this humility, that shows compassion, that connects with people's pain, that says, "Me too." The power of those two words --- "Me too." *I'm struggling, too. I'm lost, too. I'm confused, too. I need God, too.*

And so often, I think when we talk about biblical sexuality it doesn't come across as "me too." It's comes across as "You better get your life right." And so, the humility of Jesus, the spirit of Jesus, really gives us the compassion to just recognize that people are lost just like we are and that we're captives of this world. And if you can see your friends and neighbors not as the enemy with an agenda to come after you, but just that we're captives of this world and Jesus wants to set us free, and it's His kindness that leads us to repentance. And so, we need to be known as people not just of truth, but of kindness. Jesus didn't say, "They will know you are my disciples by your actual theology." He said, "They'll know you're my disciples by your love for each other." So, don't talk about these things on Facebook. Look in people's eyes. Connect with their pain. Share who Jesus is to you. It's not your job to change anybody or convince anyone. Just be Jesus to them. And in time, when we build bridges, God's going to give us the opportunity to share the truth that set us free with the hope that He'll set other people free, too.

Matt: Wow, those are great words of wisdom. We'll end on that. Thank you, Juli, for coming. I told you, you're in the right place at the right time to hear this subject matter. So, let me close our time with a word of prayer and we'll sing another worship song.

Lord Jesus, we ask that You would put Your hand of blessing upon authentic intimacy and the ambitions that you have put in the souls of those men and women, that they are taking this message to the corners of the world. And we are grateful for that. Lord, I'd ask that You would bless that ministry. Bless Juli and her family, her boys, her husband, that marriage. Keep that sacred.

And Lord, we'd ask that we would be people of courage, of care and compassion. Lord, if there's something that we need to do, I'd ask that Your Spirit would give us the courage to do that, that You would give us a name or a face to talk with someone, that we might know how to

go forward and do next. Lord, I'd ask that Your Spirit would bring to our minds areas of brokenness in this subject matter, that we need to become like Christ in this area of our lives and surrender that joyfully to You.

Lord, bless us. Bless our church that we might be a church that speaks boldly with great compassion, that kindness brings people to salvation, and that we would be a church that is known for its kindness and its love, bringing the truth. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.