

Series: Reboot

Sermon #7

Four Things the Church Must Reclaim Moving Forward

Romans 12:1-2

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin – February 13, 2022

Well, good morning, Grace. Thank you for joining us. You'll be glad you did. Today we're finishing up our series called *Reboot*. The idea behind *Reboot* is the awareness that individually we should just reboot, start over. Even as a church let's reboot. Let's start over.

And what that means is to be thinking and living biblically in the culture—not away from it. We're not going to isolate from the culture, we're not going to imitate the culture. Our hope is to infiltrate the culture. We'll have to live a courageous life to do that.

Romans 12:1-2

Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. ² And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

We've been doing a deep dive into two simple sentences—not simple—actually, deep sentences in Romans 12:1-2. It says, **“Therefore I urge you, my brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your logical, your spiritual service of worship.”** And then he goes on and says, **“Be not conformed to this world, but rather, be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”**

We started the series in the first week of January. That was about forty days ago. And in that first lesson, we said, *What is it to be conformed to this world? What is this culture that we're living under?* And I propose the value that today's culture violates the sanctity of words and

logic, but for a purpose. And the purpose is to divide things that are sacred—sacred in the mind of God, set apart for a purpose—relationships with our fellow human beings. It's dividing families, it's dividing churches, and even civilizations.

And so, some of you took us up on the pledge to abstain from all sorts of input in your life, except for the Bible or sources from the Bible and just be clean and distant of that. And it's been about forty-one or forty-two days. I looked up just last night—did you know there's a big football game today? That's news! And other trivial news that I missed out on ... I think I'm going to do another forty days. Join me if you like. You won't miss a thing except for some bad things, I guess, in many respects.

Anyway, in light of the idea that words and logic are being violated for the purpose of division, we have a scholar with us today, a very special guest, who on her web page says she respects the power of words and the use and the power of the Gospel. She is committed to the restoration of language so that she can unite people to have a conversation about the meaning of the life of Jesus Christ, His death, and the power of His resurrection, and the forgiveness that brings to us.

So, this is perfect for the series that we're doing together. Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin is going to join us in just a few minutes. Let me introduce you with her résumé. She was raised in the United Kingdom. She has a doctorate from Cambridge in English Literature. She moved to the United States in 2008 where she served for about nine years in a ministry some of you know about, the Veritas Forum, which is a way to encourage and instruct and motivate faculty members to use their faith—not to just be courageous in explaining their faith, but in applying their faith in the discipline that they practice regularly.

She's written three books, and her first book was not just a best seller, but also an award-winning book chosen by *Christianity Today* and The Gospel Coalition. We've been selling it for weeks, and we bought some more to sell this week—*Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion*. It is a beautiful defense of the Christian faith. But it's with a different style. It's a new kind of defense, because there's a new kind of atheism and a different kind of culture. Apologetics has changed, in other words. It's a book that I would describe in a single word as meek—meek in the biblical sense. Sure, you might have seen the video of a six-hundred-pound gorilla petting a kitten--power under control. It is a powerful book

that is humble. The mood of the book itself makes you want to become like that writer or that type of person.

The application for the book itself, if you wouldn't mind, is if you would read the book, for sure. But it's a perfect book to read in a book club with someone that you have a good friendship with. You say, *Sure, I'll read your book on attributes of atheism, and then we can read this book together, and let's discuss this and see where truth leads us. Why don't we use true words and logic and have a civil conversation?* It's perfect for that.

Of course, it's going to deal with subject matter like the problem of evil and suffering and if the Christian faith is scientifically viable, but also new topics of the day, such as sexuality and the issues that are current today. There's a version of that that she wrote for teenagers called *10 Questions that Every Teen Should Ask (and Answer) about Christianity*. It's a wonderful work that's similar to the other book that I mentioned. And the way that book would best be used is a parent and child in that age category reading that book together and discussing that.

She has a short, concise and powerful article that she wrote on The Gospel Coalition website that I would encourage parents to read. The title is something to the effect of "Don't Protect Your Children from These Difficult Debates—Rather, Train Them in How to Have Conversations about It."

Lastly, a book that she most recently wrote—it might even have a 2021 copyright date—is *The Secular Creed*. And Dr. McLaughlin just works down the signs that are in our neighborhoods that are, in some respects, victims of the false dilemmas of either/or—you have to choose one or the other. (Well, what if there's some stuff in between?) And not only that, but how do you have a moral conversation without a foundation for morality? And the only foundation for morality is a biblical, Judeo-Christian worldview. It takes each one of those topics and says, *Yeah, but you can't have righteous anger without God validating those moral absolutes*.

All of that is to let you know who will be speaking to us today. I'd like to bring up Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin on stage with us.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: Thank you so much for traveling. She lives in Boston, actually Cambridge.

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: I do.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: If you can come a little closer—thank you. So, today—you know, as an introduction, in many respects, in the Book of Esther—it’s a profound book in that, in the absence of the name of God, there’s the nemesis of Haman, who seems to have unlimited power for evil. And he builds the gallows to kill Mordecai the Jew. And in his building of that gallows, it turns out that the thing that the Jews were to fear the most, was, in fact, the means by which Haman would be destroyed. He’d be the first to fall. He would die in the context of his own invention. It’s the original Dr. Frankenstein story in many respects. And I thought about that when I looked at what Rebecca will be talking about with us today. Because I think sometimes the very thing that we fear is the thing that we ought to grasp. The assaults on Christianity are actually, maybe, the places where we ought to start and considering enjoying.

So, why don’t you tell us a little more about that.

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: I’d love to. It’s great to be with you guys. I’ve got to tell you, I’ve never been compared to a six hundred-pound gorilla before. I’m not quite sure how to take that. *[Laughter]* But I’ll try to live up to that expectation.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: What is one other attribute that you don’t know ...? Rebecca’s husband is an OSU Cowboy.

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: It’s true.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: So, she’s literally married to a cowboy. And you’ve got to wonder about children—you have three children, is that right?

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: Three children.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: I’m sure there’s a debate—I want Mom’s accent. How do I get Mom’s accent? Anyway ...

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: The first time I visited that climate with Brian, he took me to Stillwater to OSU's campus. And I saw a guy dressed as a cowboy. And I said, "Brian, why is that guy dressed as a cowboy? He said, "Because he is a cowboy." I honestly thought that cowboys were just in films. I did not know that there are actual cowboys still today. So, we then spent the next hour driving around campus, with me taking surreptitious photos with cowboys—so exciting.

As Pastor Matt mentioned, I'm English. So, that means I have to talk about Harry Potter wherever I go. But I need to have a show of hands first. Raise your hand if you've not read Harry Potter books or seen the films. Okay. I'm sorry, guys.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: You've had ten or twenty years.

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: You've had a while.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: Yeah.

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: So, there are two problems in our service this morning. One, we're not hearing the Word preached, which would be better than anything that I've got to say. And, number two, if you haven't read Harry Potter, you should probably walk out and start reading now. But, if you don't want to do that, I need to block your ears for the next couple of minutes. Because I'm going to drop the most horrendous spoiler, and I would hate to be that person who ruined it for you.

But if you have read the books or seen the films, you'll remember that in *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, J. K. Rowling basically sticks a knife into her readers' hearts. Dumbledore is the Gandalf of the series, the only man whose power for good can match Lord Voldemort's evil. But in the sixth book, a weakened Dumbledore stands at the top of the astronomy tower surrounded by his enemies. And He appeals to Harry's teacher nemesis, Severus Snape, for help: "Severus, please ..." And Snape kills him.

The scene is devastating. We never liked Professor Snape, but we hoped beyond hope that he was Dumbledore's man. And now his betrayal of his mentor is complete.



It's only in the last book that we realize how wrong we were. When Harry dives into that Pensieve (Do you remember the magical bowl where you dive into somebody else's past?)—and now we discover that everything that Snape has done has been driven by his passionate but hopeless, unrequited love for Harry's mother. We see Snape's anguish when Lily Potter is murdered by Voldemort, and how he thenceforth commits himself to Dumbledore. We hear Dumbledore telling Snape that he is dying from the slow-working, irreversible curse, and making Snape promise to kill him when the moment comes. And suddenly, the meaning of "Severus, please ..." is reversed.

When my non-Christian friends look over at the Christian faith, they see a lot of things like Snape killing Dumbledore. They see a white-centered religion with a history of racism and scriptures that condone slavery. They see an anti-intellectual mindset and a contradictory Bible that's been disproved by scientists again and again. They see homophobia, the denigration of women, and a refusal to acknowledge that love is love.

But, just as when Harry dived into Snape's memories and his understanding of Snape's life completely changed, I believe that when we look more closely at each of these seemingly devastating roadblocks to faith in Jesus, they become a signpost. I think we have a great opportunity before us in this cultural moment today. But in order to grasp that opportunity, there are four things we must do.

Number one: we must reclaim diversity. Number two: we must reclaim the university. Number three: we must reclaim morality. And number four: we must reclaim sexuality. But we must do all of these things with humility, and not by watering the Scriptures down, but by lapping them up.

So, number one: we must reclaim diversity. Back in February of 2019, a Nigerian street preacher named Oluwale Ilesanmi stood outside a train station in my hometown of London, preaching to the commuters as they went by. And two white British police officers came up to him and gave him a choice: go away or be arrested.

“I will not go away,” Mr. Ilesanmi replied, “because I need to tell them the truth. And Jesus is the only way, the truth, and the life.”

“They don’t want to listen to that,” the officers replied. “They want you to go away.”

“You don’t want to listen to that?” Mr. Ilesanmi said. “You will listen when you are dead.”

And so, he was arrested.

What do we make of this story? Are we encouraged by our brother’s faith? I certainly am. Are we reminded that preaching the Gospel always comes at a cost, and that we Western Christians have gotten far too used to a comfortable life? For sure. But a black, African Christian preaching the exclusive message of Jesus while white Westerners block their ears is a little parable for the religious world today.

See, if we go back about forty years, every sociologist of religion was predicting that as the world became more modern, more scientific, more educated, that religious belief would naturally decline. That’s what had happened in Western Europe, where I’m from. And so, the logic went, that where Western Europe leads, the rest of the world must follow.

But no. In the last forty years, not only has religious belief failed to decline globally, but now, as experts look at it for the next forty years in 2060, they anticipate an increasingly religious world. Right now, Christianity is the largest global belief system, with about 31 percent of the world identifying as Christian. That proportion is set to increase slightly to 32 percent by 2060.

Islam, which is the second largest global belief system, is set to increase from about 25 to 26 percent, to 31 percent, making it a very close competitor with Christianity. Buddhism and Hinduism are both expected to decline slightly.

But here's the real shock. The proportion of people who do not identify with any religious belief, which includes atheists, agnostics, and people who just check "None" on a census form if asked what religion they affiliate with—that proportion is set to decline from 16 percent to 13 percent.

The tide isn't going out on religion; it's coming in. I think this is surprising to my non-Christian friends. But perhaps what is even more surprising is that Christianity is the belief system of diversity. If we look across the world today, Christianity is hands down the most diverse belief system, if you look at race, if you look at culture, if you look at geography, if you look at socioeconomics. If we look at America today, Black Americans are as much as ten percentage points more likely to identify as Christians than their white peers. They're more likely to go to church every week, to read the Bible, to pray, to hold core evangelical beliefs, whether or not they would use that particular word.

White Americans sometimes think that immigration is eroding America's Christian history. But in fact, immigration is a much-needed blood transfusion for the American church. I live in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in one of the adjacent cities of Somerville, English is the third most commonly spoken language in evangelical churches, after Portuguese and Creole. And this should not surprise us.

See, the first-century Jewish man we worship broke through every racial and cultural barrier in His day. And He commanded His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. And they began at once. We meet the first African Christian in the Book of Acts, the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts chapter 8. And Ethiopia went on to become one of the first Christian states in the world, before St. Patrick ever went to Ireland and centuries before the Gospel ever came to America.

In the Book of Revelation, we have an amazing vision of people from every tribe and tongue and nation worshiping Jesus together. This is our destiny, and in many ways, it's becoming our reality.

Look at China today. China was the global center of atheism. But experts believe that in the next five years there will be more Christians in China than in America. And some even think that China could be a majority Christian country by 2060.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: Wow.

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: When our non-Christian friends realize this, my friends—I don't know about yours—care deeply about diversity. And when they hear the exclusive message of the Gospel, they imagine that it's all about white Westerners forcing their beliefs down other people's throats. But when Mr. Ilesanmi said to those white British police officers that Jesus is the only, way, the truth, and the life, he was not saying "My culture's cooking is better than yours." He was saying, "I was starving too until I found bread."

So, let's reclaim diversity. Because Christianity is the most multi-racial, multiethnic, multicultural movement in all of history.

Number two: we must reclaim the university. I have a dear friend from back in my grad school days in the UK. He is now professor of the natural sciences at Harvard. He's so smart that he isn't in just one scientific subject; he's the professor of the natural sciences. And he is a culturally Jewish atheist. So, he and I have been arguing about God for many years. And a few years ago, I took him and his then-girlfriend to an event at Harvard where the agnostic chair of the Harvard philosophy department was in dialogue with New Testament scholar N. T. Wright. The title of the event was "The Bible: Gospel, Guide, or Garbage?"

And after the event, I said to my friend, "I know that you think what I believe is crazy."

His then-girlfriend, who was a much gentler soul than either of us, said, "I'm sure he doesn't think that."

I said, "Yes, he does. I believe that the whole of human history revolves around a first-century Jewish man who died on a cross and was supposedly raised to life three days later. Crazy, right?"

My friend said, "Yes."

I said, "The problem is, I think that you believe some crazy things as well."

You see, our friends think that they are standing on a perfectly coherent sort of secular ground that does all the work that Christianity does for us, except without them having to believe in crazy things. But there is no such belief system. And in this next generation, I believe that the university is going to have to start grappling with Christianity again.

There's a professor named Fenggang Yang at Purdue University. He's one of the leading experts of sociology of religion in China. And he says that the university in the West is going to have to go through a paradigm shift much like a scientific revolution when the failure of the

secularization hypothesis comes home to roost, i.e., when Western academics realize that the world is not becoming less religious as it becomes more modern. See, for decades now in the university, this secularization hypothesis has functioned not just as a diagnosis, but also as a prescription; it's not just what will happen, but what should happen.

So, what are Western academics going to do when they realize it hasn't happened? And that atheism, far from being the belief system of diversity and progress, is actually the belief system of white Western men and communist regimes? It can be easy for us as Christians today and for our non-Christian friends to get the idea that Christianity is anti-intellectual. You know, the Gospel is simple. It's something we can explain to a small child or to somebody with learning disabilities.

But Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart and our soul and our mind and our strength. And He is not content with three out of four. And if we look back over the last two thousand years of Christian history, we'll find that Christians have written some of the greatest literature of all time. We'll find that Christians have dreamt up some of the greatest philosophy of all time. And perhaps, most surprisingly to our non-Christian friends, Christians invented what we now call science—not as an alternative hypothesis to believing in the great Creator God, but because they believed in a Creator God who was both rational and free.

There's a professor at Princeton University named Hans Halvorson. He's probably one of the top four philosophers of science in the world. And he says that not only is it the case that the modern scientific method was first developed by Christians because of their Christian beliefs, but that even today, it provides a better philosophical foundation for science than atheism does. In fact, he says that atheism doesn't give you a philosophical foundation for science at all.

So, in this next generation, let's reclaim the university—not as a hostile takeover, but as a homecoming. Because Christianity isn't anti-intellectual. It's the greatest intellectual movement in all of history.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: Homecoming indeed. We lost the beachhead that we invented. The truth originates from God. I remember an interview with Dr. Peter Craig. He's a philosophy professor at Boston College. This is maybe a little more than ten years ago. He stated this fact that there is somewhat a revolution and maybe a revival in the academy, particularly in the hard sciences, because he said the more you look at creation and the details, and what is required to keep all

things together, and the beauty and the wonder, it leads an objective person to believe in at least a creator. And he said there are things happening at the academy. They're bringing people to theism and some, actually, to surrendering their lives to Jesus Christ, by just looking at the facts, looking at what God has done.

And I remember stepping back thinking, *I've been ignorant of what is taking place in the academy, and therefore have been discouraged*. Knowing the words that you have spoken to us and how many people are starting to realize the emptiness of not just atheism, but consistent nihilism, it's encouraging to see that open-minded men and women are saying, "Well, maybe, just maybe, there are absolutes after all, and there must be a Maker."

So, what other roadblocks, or real road signs, are there for Christianity that we need to engage in?

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: Yeah, so **a third point**, bridging from what you just said, Pastor Matt, **is that we must reclaim morality**. I've read in the last few years a number of books by non-Christian historians and philosophers. One example is a book by Yuval Noah Harari, who's an Israeli historian. And he wrote this global best seller called *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Now he's speaking from an atheist perspective and looking at the history of humanity. And that book includes statements like this: "*Homo sapiens* has no natural rights, just as chimpanzees, hyenas, and spiders have no natural rights."

He says that "Human rights are figments of our fertile imaginations."

He quotes the Declaration of Independence—"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal"—and says, "The Americans got the idea of equality from Christianity. But if we stop believing in Christian myths about creation and humans having souls and being made in God's image, what does it even mean that humans are equal?"

He says that the scientific study of *Homo sapiens* has embarrassingly little to do with human rights and value.

Or I think of another non-Christian historian, a fellow Brit called Tom Holland—not Spiderman, a different Tom Holland. And he wrote a massive, very interesting book called *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*. Now Tom Holland himself stopped believing in a Christian God when he was a kid. He found the Greek and Roman gods much more attractive than the seemingly pathetic hero of Christianity. And he studies as a historian and

wrote a number of popular historical books. And then he set out to research for this great book, *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*, and in it, he's looking back over the last two thousand years of Christian history in the West. And what he discovered in the course of his research was that the moral beliefs that he as an agnostic believed to be basic moral common sense, self-evident truths, not needing any religious grounding, turned out to be specifically Christian beliefs: for example, his belief in universal human equality and rights, his belief that men and women were equally morally valuable, his belief that the strong and the rich and the powerful didn't have the right to trample on the poor and the weak and the marginalized.

I don't know if he has yet properly put his trust in Jesus, but I heard an interview with him where he was talking about how it was like he was on the diving board sort of considering whether he should take the plunge.

Or I think of a friend of mine, one of the few people, actually, who knew me and my Oklahoma husband before we knew each other, a wonderful woman named Sarah Irving-Stonebraker. She comes from Australia originally. She's now a professor of history at a university in Australia. She was a convinced atheist when she came to Cambridge to do her PhD. She was a convinced atheist when she went to Oxford to do her postdoc. But while she was at Oxford, she went to a series of lectures by a fellow Australian, a world-famous philosophy professor named Peter Singer.

Now, Peter Singer is one of the atheist philosophers who takes very seriously the fact that we can't just trade on Christian ethics anymore. And so, rather than saying that all human beings are equal by virtue of their humanness, Singer says that we should evaluate beings, whether human or otherwise, on the basis of their capacities. For example, on their capacity to suffer, their capacity for self-awareness, et cetera. And by Singer's calculation, a human infant is less morally valuable than an adult pig.

As my friend Sarah heard these lectures, she experienced what she later described as "intellectual vertigo" as she realized that her atheism stuck a knife in the back of her deepest moral beliefs. She had thought that Christianity was the enemy of diversity, the enemy of universal human rights, the enemy of equality of men and women, and of care for the poor. She gradually discovered it was the basis for those things.

And so, as a young assistant professor of history at Florida State University, she put her trust in Jesus.

Now, when we come to receive Jesus, we come flat on our faces morally. So, I could talk to you now about the evidence that shows that people who attend church every week actually are much better in a number of moral axes than folks who aren't religious, whether it's in terms of how much money they give to charity or how much they volunteer or how less likely they are to be involved in various criminal activities.

But there's an extent to which I don't even know that that's helpful for us to hear, because we Christians are so quick to get on our moral high ground. And actually, we can't come to Jesus that way. And I don't think we can share Jesus that way either. So, in this next generation, let's reclaim morality like divers pulling treasure from a wreck. And let's flee self-righteousness like toxic waste.

And that brings us to **our last point, which is to reclaim sexuality.**

When Snape killed Dumbledore, all doubt in the readers' minds as to whether he was on the side of good or evil died as well. And when we stand for Christian sexual ethics in our culture today, we move over in people's minds from delusion to bigotry. But just as when Harry dived into Snape's memories, he found not a story of hate, but a story of love; when we look at what the Scriptures have to say about sexuality, we find that it's a love story too.

The love song begins in the Old Testament as prophet after prophet compares God to a faithful, loving husband, and Israel to his often-unfaithful wife. We see that picture made clearer when Jesus comes onto the stage of human history and declares that He is the bridegroom. We see the Apostle Paul writing to the Ephesians and explaining that human Christian marriage is like a little scale model of Jesus' love for His church. And we see the love song rise to full-blown crescendo in the Book of Revelation when a great shout goes out, "The wedding of the Lamb has come!" And Jesus' marriage to His church brings heaven and earth back together.

This is why marriage is male/female and why husbands and wives are called to different roles. Like Christ and the Church, it's a love across difference. Like Christ and the Church, it's a love built on sacrifice. Like Christ and the Church, it's a flesh-uniting, life-creating, never-ending, exclusive love.

Marriage is meant to point us to Christ. But it's also meant to disappoint us. Because even the best human romance could only ever be a tiny echo of Jesus' love for us.

And one of the great ironies of the 1960s (some of you in this room would be old enough to remember) was that the sexual revolution was sold to us as the liberation for women. For

centuries, men had been finding ways to sort of sneak around Christian marriage and have commitment-free sex. And now, great news—thanks to the pill, women could as well.

But in the time since the '60s, women's self-reported happiness in America has actually declined. Why is that? One of the reasons is that commitment-free sex is a poisoned chalice. For both men and women, stable marriages correlated with multiple mental and physical health benefits. But for women in particular, increasing our numbers of sexual partners is correlated with negative mental health outcomes, increased slightly in depression and suicide tendencies and sadness and alcohol abuse and drug abuse. We were sold sexual freedom as a gift. And it turns out that it's a poison. So, let's not lose confidence in Christian marriage.

But we must also remember—and this is where I think we Christians often most trip up—we must remember that marriage is not the only relationship that is designed to give us a taste of Jesus' love. **“This is my commandment,”** said Jesus to His disciples, **“that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than that he lay down his life for his friend.”**

Now if we're honest, in most of our churches we would have finished that sentence differently. We would have said, “Greater love has no one than this, than a love of a husband and wife”—or maybe the love of a parent and a child. But Jesus says, **“Greater love has no one than this, than that he lay down his life for his friends.”** And we see in Jesus' life and ministry a beautiful, extraordinary intensity of love between people of the same sex in the body of Christ. We see in the Apostle Paul's writing that he calls us brothers and sisters together. We see him say that we are one body. We hear him say to the Thessalonians that he was among them like a nursing mother with her children. Now that's a little awkward sounding, right? And then we hear him write in his letter to Philemon about his friend Onesimus, that Onesimus is his very heart.

Now imagine Pastor Matt here saying that a male friend of his was his very heart. We'd think that was a little bit intense, a little awkward. The kind of love and community that we see in the New Testament is at a level of intimacy that we Christians almost never reach. And part of reclaiming sexuality in the next generation is going to be us reclaiming fierce, abiding, non-erotic, non-romantic love.

I'm not saying any of this is easy or straightforward. I've been a Christian for as long as I can remember. And for as long as I can remember I've been attracted to other women. If I wasn't

a Christian, I'd like to be married to a woman today instead of a man. And you might be looking at me, thinking, *What a sort of weird, strange phenomenon that you must be*. I am weird, but not for that reason. I'm weird in all sorts of ways.

Actually, the largest demographic of same-sex attracted people is women like me who are attracted to other women, but not exclusively so where they couldn't be possibly be married to a man. So, it's about 14 percent of women who experience same-sex attraction and only about 1 percent who are exclusively attracted to other women. For men it seems like it's about 7 percent who experience same-sex attraction and 2 percent who are exclusively attracted to folks of their same sex. And people can also experience change in the course of their life in any and all directions. We humans are very messy, complicated creatures.

The question for all of us in the room today, whether we're married or single, whether we're attracted to folks of our same sex or the opposite sex; the question is not if we're ever attracted to someone we're not married to; the question is will we submit to our attractions to Christ. We have too often as churches bought into the idolization of marriage—which is a very good thing—and we have done so at the expense of singleness, which the New Testament actually holds up as an equally good if not better state for Christians. And we have done so at the expense of friendship. And we have created Christian culture too often where if you're not married, then you feel like you don't belong. That's the opposite of the picture that we have in the New Testament. So, let's reclaim sexuality in this next generation.

And as we go out with the message of the Gospel, as you guys go out into this city with the message of the Gospel, we must reclaim diversity, reclaim the university, reclaim morality, and reclaim sexuality. And we must do all of those things with humility. We must repent of the ways that we have allowed racism to infect our churches. We must repent of the ways in which we have abandoned the life of the mind. We must repent of the actual homophobia, i.e., the fear and hatred of gay and lesbian people that's impacted our churches for years. Because the same-sex attracted people in our congregations who are living faithfully for Jesus are not an embarrassment; they're an asset. There is no more of a pathway in our culture to testify to the Gospel than to turn away from your own sexual and romantic fulfillment because you believe in a better love. So, we need to take a hard turn away from ourselves and a hard turn toward the Scriptures. Because Jesus is not a relic of the ancient world; He is our modern world's best hope.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: Wow. We have a few moments for questions. Rebecca, how do you perceive the future, let's say ten years from now, fast forward. If we did this and took hold of these roadblocks that are really road signs, where do you see the Church or our culture?

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: Yeah, what I would love to see---number one on that point of reclaiming diversity—there is so much heartbreaking sin that we can look back on in our culture in this area, that has led us into a place where many of our non-Christian friends legitimately associate Christianity with racism. And that is so antithetical to what the Scriptures teach. So, what I would love to see in the next ten years is us breaking that down and us living more into the vision that the New Testament gives us, that people from every tribe and tongue and nation are worshiping Jesus together. This is our destiny. We need to make this our reality in tangible ways.

I think we need to create a culture where kids are raised in church to be the most intellectually curious people in town. And rather than being sort of afraid that they might learn too much and therefore fall away from Jesus, I believe that Jesus shines more brightly if we expose our kids to all sorts of other potential options. Jesus is not going to look worse; He's only going to look better.

I think we need to have an ethic of humble love towards those outside the Church that draws people in. And it's an ethic that we're given in the New Testament and that we see in the early church. And we've done better or worse on various questions in this, but I think we need to have an ethic of humble love as we reclaim morality. And most—not most importantly, but equally importantly—we need to make it real, that the Church is a family. I walk into church on a Sunday morning with my husband and our three children. That is not the primary family unit for Christians. The primary family unit is actually the Church. And so, on a Sunday morning and throughout the week, we need to find ways to live into that reality so that our brothers and sisters who are single or maybe widowed—all of God's people in all of the life situations that they're in—that we are family working together. That's how we're going to look very different in ten years' time from now.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: This is for me, and they can listen in. But your gentle courage is both inspirational and contagious. But as a blunt instrument, I don't understand how that happens, and

I was wondering if that was natural for you—your tone in your books and even today. I want some of that, but I'm more argumentative and am trying to win an argument rather than save a relationship. I'm not suggesting that's good. There's a wake of injury behind me.

Is this natural for you, or is this something that you had to surrender to? How'd you get here?

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: Yeah, if you read through the gospels, you'll find yourself at times thinking, *Oh, my goodness, the apostles are so dumb*. Right?

Dr. Matt Cassidy: Yeah—that's me.

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: Like Jesus has just explained that He is going to suffer and die, and they want to argue about who's the most important.

I'm just like them. I have a pride problem. I quite like to position myself on the moral high ground, and I quite like winning arguments. It makes me feel good. And if somebody is coming at me and wants to attack my beliefs or attack my tribe—you know, they want to attack the Church and the Church record on this or on that, or if they want to attack my country, my response—my first kneejerk response, or heart-jerk response, if that's a thing—is to want to fight them back with the same weapons. That is not what we can do as Christians. We have very powerful weapons as Christians. But they are the weapons of humble love. And like I was saying earlier, we come into the Christian faith flat on our faces morally. We don't come from a moral high ground. We come on our knees to Jesus. And that is how we share the Gospel as well. And that is why we need to engage in dialogue with people who disagree with us, rather than thinking, *How can I beat this person down and prove to them that I'm intellectually or morally superior to them?* When you think, *How can I love this person and how can I humbly bring the truth of Jesus to them?* Because Jesus is on the moral high ground, and He makes universal claims. And we can't love anybody by pretending that He doesn't or by watering down the truth. But our job is not to convince other people we're so great. We're actually coming to them as sinners in need of a Savior and pointing them to Him.

So, it doesn't come naturally to me. It's something I have to work on continually—yeah—fighting my pride and trying to cultivate humility.

Dr. Matt Cassidy: Well, it has been a pleasure to have you here, and it's been a joy to read your books. We'd like to pray for your ministry. In closing, I think that your explanation here of how you do it comes back full circle to our definition of what a disciple is and what it means to be healthy, to become like Christ in all of life. And Christ is compassionate and loving and truthful, and confrontational, but caring for the human soul. So, I think that becoming like Christ in that aspect of our life is how we can become great ambassadors for the Gospel and to the glory of God.

Jesus was asked the question, "What is the greatest commandment?" And we etched it in glass [*Matt indicates the etched words in the stained-glass windows behind the stage*]. It's to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your might.

The beauty of our time together and her writing is that it is engaging the mind, and it's done so in a gentle and powerful way. I hope you learned and enjoyed your learning experience today.

Let me pray for you.

Rebecca's going to have to run for a plane, so she won't be able to have a meet-and-greet after the service. That's just how planes work. They'll leave without you!

Lord Jesus, we lift up the ministry that You have given Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin, and the influence that she has, and the doors that You have opened for her--I ask that You continue to open those doors. We pray blessings upon her marriage, that You would strengthen and fortify and protect it, that they would have the fullness of the experience of marriage in this lifetime. We pray for her young children, that You would protect them and provide for them, and that they would know that that protection and provision are coming from their mom and dad, but ultimately from You; and that You would call them and they would surrender to You at an early age.

I'd ask that You would bless this ministry, and bless it indeed. Expand the boundaries of this insight in this time—"for such a time as this." We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Dr. Rebecca McLaughlin: Amen.

