

Biblical Sexuality: Youth and Biblical Sexuality (Part 5/5)

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Thank you all for joining us throughout this series on Biblical sexuality. It's a challenging, sensitive topic, and we're so grateful for your thoughts, questions, and honest conversations. Today, we're wrapping up by talking about Youth and Sexuality.

Just a quick reminder: This message is PG-13, so if you'd like to make arrangements for your children, whether you're online or in person, now's a good time to do so.

We've been taking longer with the sermons because there is so much to unpack with each topic. We've tried to shift things around - special thanks to Kristy, Alexis and the worship teams for being flexible and making space.

For the pastors who preached this series, we spent the better part of a year researching, praying, connecting with and listening to different people in order to prepare for this series.

We felt that it was an important discussion to have. We felt like it was an opportunity to start and create space for conversations. That has happened. I'm sure that there have been moments in this series where you were like, "Amen!" On the other hand, this series may have drawn out different feelings and reactions. It does for us too. Let's continue to wrestle and learn with Jesus and with each other as we allow Jesus to shape us together in God's love.

For the most part, we tried to finish our sermons extra early to have them reviewed by others including people from the congregation. Still, there may have been moments where we missed the mark. Please be patient with us. Please send us an email. Please come and talk to us. We make ourselves available. We love you and we truly want to make space for you. All of you.

Here's what we've talked about: these are all sermons that are longer, more researched and prayed over than probably any other series we've ever done. I'm not boiling their hard work down to a sentence or two. I'm reminding us about what we started talking about or encouraging you to check it out.

Series Summary

Over the past few weeks, we've covered a range of topics in this series:

1. The Jesus way

Our sexuality is part of God's good design for us, and it has boundaries.

2. The Bible and Marriage

The definition of marriage presented was "the union between two God-image bearers, a man and a woman, whose exclusive and intimate relationship mirrors the self-giving love of Jesus for human flourishing"

3. The Bible and Singleness

Challenged to see singleness as a valuable calling and path to flourishing. Whatever your status, married or single, it's good. Both have unique blessings and opportunities, limits and challenges.

4. People to be Loved

In this sermon on same-sex sexuality, we talked about why Cornerstone holds a historically Christian view of marriage and sexuality-- that God has designed sex to take place in the context of a marriage covenant between a man and a woman. Having said this, we are also called to welcome and relate to our LGBTQ family, friends and neighbours with the radical love of Jesus.

This series has aimed to create a space where we can openly discuss these topics in a way that helps us grow as a community and reflect God's love and truth.

Today's Topic - Youth and Sexuality

The grade 11-12's have been using a resource called Christian sexuality and so a lot of the material we've come across there will be included in today's sermon.

Let's start by addressing the elephant in the room. I'm not young.

I've had the blessing of being able to work with young people for 24 years and right now I get to lead a group of grade 11's. But I'm not a young person.

I'm grateful for the voices of young people who have spoken into this message. They have helped me see different perspectives, realities and complexities. Even without being a young person, I can see it is complex, so I want to do my best to touch on a few of those complexities so that we can all learn together.

For those who aren't teenagers, this message aims to give us a greater appreciation of what many young people are going through now.

For young people, this is a message to encourage you in your journey with Jesus when it comes to your sexuality.

For those of you who are journeying with teens, whether a parent/guardian, or mentor there will be some tools to understand youth, as well as tips on how to guide them.

I also think there is a message for everyone as we wind down this series

We'll be touching on 5 points:

1. Defining sexual integrity
2. The challenge of early exposure (to sex and sexual images)
3. Dating and relationships
4. Friendship and connection
5. Technology and the digital age

We'll wind down by talking about some practical steps for sexual integrity

We have a program for students in grades 5-6 that meets on Wednesdays that exists to help the preteens develop leadership, spiritually as well as socially. We call it LEAP. A few weeks ago the teacher made us all do an exercise. She had us put a finger above our heads and twirl it in a clockwise direction. Then she said slowly bring it down while still going in a clockwise direction. Try it. What do you notice?

You're sure that it's going in one direction until... it isn't

As you listen today, and as you think back to this entire series, is there anything that you've heard that has given you more perspective? What do you need to look at from a different angle to get perspective on?

Keep that in mind. If you are like me, it's so hard to put yourself in a young person's shoes - even though you were young. What they experience may be similar in some ways, but in other ways, in many ways, it's much different.

The world is different from when I was a young person. When I was a teenager, the internet had just come on the scene, phones weren't smart and not everybody had them.

We connected with people by going out. If you were fancy, you had a pager or flip phone.

When I asked the teens how they connect to people today, here's what they said: (keep in mind that this was youth at church in a youth group)

- Discord - it's an online app for playing games, chilling with friends, or building a worldwide community. You can customize your own space to talk, play and hang out

Online seems to be the main way many young people connect with others. Whether it's an app like discord or through their video games or instagram, that's the space many young people feel most safe.

If you are in your 40's and above, could you imagine that one of your closest friends would be a person online in another country? A person you've never physically met?

Although many of the other ways they connect are similar to previous generations, the fact that much of it is online is quite different.

- School
- Gym
- Community center
- Sports team
- Church youth group
- Camp
- One person said - airplane :)

So, how do we help young people navigate these changes with integrity? A study I came across said that teens spend around 7-8 hours a day in front of screens. That's equivalent to a work week. Another study said that 96% of teens use the internet daily, with 46% saying they are on the internet almost constantly. They are constantly bombarded with images. How can a young person live in this environment in a way that reflects God's design?

1. Defining Sexual Integrity

I asked some youth how they define sexual integrity.

One group said, "valuing one another, consent, knowing the significance behind how we treat one another."

Another group said, "obeying God and honouring his design of us - we're made to be sexual beings BUT within God's 'rules' and the boundaries of marriage (you can still honour God by being single too)"

Another group said - "resistance to sexual temptation and listen to our moms." That may bring a laugh but it's consistent with what research says - parents and caregivers are still top influencers of their children. How are you leveraging that?

Their answers show that even in this hyper-sexualized culture, Christian young people have a deep desire for boundaries that align with God's purposes.

In this series, we said that **sexual integrity means bringing our whole selves to God, including our sexuality**. This includes acknowledging our urges and desires, yet choosing to bring these parts of ourselves to Him.

One of our core values here at Cornerstone is all-of-life spirituality. **We grow in Jesus by offering every aspect of our lives to God.** The verse that goes along with that is Romans 12:2 which we're going to look at in our next point.

What do you believe? Does the way you live your life reflect that?

Listen to these verses:

“How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your word... I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” (Psalm 119:9&11)

Listen to it from the message translation:

“How can a young person live a clean life? By carefully reading the map of your Word. I’m single-minded in pursuit of you; don’t let me miss the road signs you’ve posted...”

2. The Challenge of Early Exposure

Young people today face a unique challenge: early exposure to sexual images, discussions, and pressures. With puberty often coming earlier and the average marriage age often later, they’re left with this huge gap between the start of sexual desire and the ability to fulfill it within marriage.

Early exposure is something that is super prevalent. As we have said, we live in a hyper sexualized culture. Most TV shows, movies, and social media are filled with sexualized images. They are shared between friends. It’s so central in our culture. The smartphone has given us access to the world - all the good and the bad and ugly of it. I feel like young people are smarter than older people because they have access to so much information. I feel like young people may lack the wisdom on how to navigate it all and that’s where older people can come in to mentor.. The exposure, normalcy and peer pressure can make it hard. It’s like the water we swim in. I wonder if we really understand how prevalent these things are.

This is extremely hard, but it’s also an opportunity to honour the call to live with a level of sexual integrity that reflects God’s holiness.

Romans 12:1-2 (Pastor Steve talked about this last week)

“And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice - the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don’t copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.”

Paul reminds us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. For young people, this can mean valuing and protecting their hearts, bodies and desires for connection even when it’s challenging.

It’s all about worship. Theologian Eugene Peterson says that it’s all about worship. “We try to keep worship contained to Sundays - with the singing, prayer, preaching and us all gathered here together in person and online. Worship is so much more than that, it’s all of life. It’s how

you act at school, at home, on your teams, with your friends, online, at work. It's a style of life where your body is given to God on a daily basis."

3. Dating and Relationships

There are generally two main perspectives on dating in Christian circles:

Dating for Marriage: This view emphasizes that dating should be with marriage in mind. Young people are encouraged to wait until they're ready for a committed, covenantal relationship.

Dating for Growth: Others see dating as a time for learning—an opportunity to understand yourself and build maturity.

To young people, I'd ask: What is your view on dating, and why? Do you believe in dating for marriage or dating for growth?

What does integrity mean to you in a dating relationship?

Some young adults were asking me about dating apps. Is it okay for a Christian to be on dating apps?

The short answer would be... it depends

You need to be wise. There are some dating apps that seem to be more about hookup culture than dating or marriage.

Look at **1 Corinthians 10** and what Paul says

Vs. 23, "I am allowed to do anything - but not everything is good for you. You say, 'I am allowed to do anything' - but not everything is beneficial. Don't be concerned for your own good but for the good of others..."

Vs. 31 - So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God"

One commentary I read said, "love for the other guides the way forward." How can we live in a way that loves others and thinks about their good? Just because you can doesn't mean you should.

I think I've mentioned this before but there's an old proverb about a student who finally thought she outsmarted her teacher.

She held a live bird in her hand. She asked the teacher if the bird was alive or not. She figured, if the teacher said alive then she would crush the bird. If the teacher said it wasn't alive then she would open her hands and show the bird to be alive.

The teacher thought about it and after a pause said - the answer is in your hands.

With dating apps - I would say the answer is in your hands. There is a way to be on a dating app that can bring glory to God. The opposite is true.

Let me also say that I've performed many marriages over the years from people who have met on apps and are doing quite well.

Matthew 6:33 says, "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

Do you trust that God will take care of you if you put him first?

The Message translation says, "Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes."

We have this space in our hearts, our souls, that can only be filled by Jesus. We try to fill it with other things but they don't last. Whether it's sex or marriage, or children, or our jobs or our stuff, our education, our entertainment... At the end of the day, only Jesus can truly fulfill us.

What would it look like to have such an intimate relationship with Jesus that you were already satisfied - and then out of that fullness you were able to pour into and receive from all the other relationships God blessed you with? Then you wouldn't be dependent on those relationships - because frankly, it's a heavy burden to expect from anyone - what only God can primarily fill.

Another question I get a lot is what is sex? Where is the boundary?

As we've talked about in the series, sex is about more than sex. It's intercourse but it's also much more. There's a physical and also emotional component. The Bible talks about Adam and Eve 'knowing' each other. It's not just physical. It's spiritual.

When many teens ask me about dating, they ask "how far is too far?" I wonder if that's the right question.

Story of fish and sex talk

All of us have deep desires for intimacy and for connection. To be seen, loved and supported... These are good things. In our culture though, we are often told to fill that longing with sex. But sex for the sake of it, won't fill that longing. That longing can first, only be filled by God, and second, filled by solid relationships with friends, family and maybe in the future, a spouse. These relationships that value, protect, care for and encourage our heart are what humans truly need. If our heart is not cared for, sex won't fix that longing, it will only make it more challenging.

Think of boundaries not as restrictive but as guards for your heart and faith. So that you can survive and thrive.

Remember, Jesus was single and he lived a perfect, fulfilled human life. He was never married and had no children. As said before in this series, he's the perfect example of a full human life.

Proverbs 4:23 - Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

Your heart is where you and God meet (Eugene Peterson). It's where faith, love and hope are. It's God's gift to you. It's a precious gift to be treasured. But like any gift it can be misused or lost.

To parents and adult mentors, I'd encourage you to consider your own dating experiences and lessons. What worked? What didn't? Communicate your expectations with your kids openly and help them think about boundaries—emotional, social, and spiritual. This is so important. Talk about it, don't make sex, relationships or big questions taboo. If we do, we make avoidance the norm. We need to talk about all the things!

4. Friendship and Connection

The world often tells us that romantic love is the key to happiness. Yet, a truly flourishing life includes deep, non-romantic connections too.

To young people: Who are your friends? Are they people who help you become the person you want to be? Are you investing in friendships that bring out the best in you and deepen your relationship with God?

Many young people (like all of us) are heavily influenced by what we see online, in movies, tv and hear in songs. Keep in mind that these art forms have an agenda. They will communicate whatever will make the most money. Whether it's the right thing or not. Is that the best space to get information from? To look for the truth?

As said in other sermons - this leads us to believe that we can only be happy if we find a boyfriend or girlfriend. A spouse. But what about friendships? There is a non-sexual intimacy that can be found in friendships. Healthy, meaningful Christ-centered relationships are the key to a flourishing life.

I was talking to one young person and they were telling me that they've made some meaningful connections to people online. These are people that are far away. They haven't seen what each other looks like and so are not 'distracted' by appearances. They can focus on building a friendship.

I can't lie - as an old person I was like could that really be considered a friend? They said, yes. And they said that one of them would be considered popular and the other not as popular. In

person, they would have probably never connected. But because they met online, they were able to see what this other person was like - past their popularity.

Young people - who are you connecting with? Who knows the real you? Who speaks the truth in your life whether it's easy to hear or not? Who can you count on to show up for you when you need it most?

There's no need to rush into a romantic relationship - older peeps - how many of you are married to someone you met in high school - raise your hands - look around. Not saying that it's not possible, but... look around.

In the series the youth are watching one of the speakers tell a story about eating donuts. If you ate donuts every day, you could eat enough to get full, but you wouldn't give your body what it needs to be healthy, to survive, to thrive.

Many look to dating or sex to fill them. But is that what we need most?

Sex outside of a supportive, loving marriage will not fulfill you. It's not supposed to. Sex inside a supportive, loving marriage won't fulfill you. Only Jesus will. Whatever you're using to fulfill you - whether it's pornography, gambling, gaming, dating, video games, drugs. If it's not Jesus, it may fill you momentarily, but it will never leave you satisfied.

Ecclesiastes 4:9

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble... a person standing alone can be attacked and defeated but two can stand back to back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken."

We often use this passage to talk about marriage relationships but what about friendships? What would your life look like if you had Jesus in the center of your marriage? Your friendships, your school, work, teams. A triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

What are your friendships and connections like?

5. Technology and the Digital Age

Our phones give us access to the world, but they can also expose us to harmful things. Early exposure to things pornography, for example, can distort one's understanding of sexuality and relationships.

Porn leads you to believe that using someone else for sexual gain is okay. And that's a dangerous space to be in. When you enter into a relationship you have a distorted view where you believe people exist for your own immediate gratification.

Porn is not real. It gives a view of sex that will probably never (and probably should never) be played out in real life. It skews expectations around sex.

If you are struggling with porn and you feel shame, that's the enemy. If you feel guilty, that's the right feeling. When we do something that is wrong, we feel bad. Guilt says we did something bad. Shame says we are bad.

The enemy wants you to feel that you are bad. But **Romans 8** says, "And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love."

Nothing separates us from Jesus. Nothing.

Be kind to yourself, be patient with your progress and keep trying.

Find a trusted adult to share your struggle with. As long as it's in the dark it will not change.

We have some resources we'll talk about later to help you in this area

Another thing I came across was sexting.

Sexting is any sexually inappropriate text message, image or video that you send or receive. I have to be honest. I couldn't come up with a good working definition.

For example, if you are married, is it appropriate to send naked images to your spouse?

Where is the line in terms of what exactly is sexting? Is it provocative images? Partial nudity? Full nudity?

I don't know.

It is estimated around 25% of teens have reported receiving a sext from their peers. Around 15% have reported sending these images (American Academy of Pediatrics)

Of the students that I asked at youth groups - who knows someone who has sent or received a sext - 50% said they knew someone.

One thing I know - once something is out there. It's always out there. Even if you delete a text or a post, once someone else has it, they can post it anywhere - even without your knowledge or permission. Who knows how that can affect you years down the road.

God created us in his image - How can we honour that precious image and the precious image of those around us?

“Stay alert! Watch out for your enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour” - 1 Peter 5:8

There is an enemy out there and he is looking to attack us so we need to be on guard.

Practical Steps for Sexual Integrity

Young people, here are a few practices that can help you live with sexual integrity:

1. **Spend time with God:** Be honest with Him about your struggles and questions.
2. **Seek a Mentor:** Find a mature Christian you trust who you can be open and honest with
3. **Cultivate Healthy Friendships:** Choose friends who challenge and encourage you.
4. **Set Digital Boundaries:** Be mindful about your online habits and avoid unhealthy influences.

You can get porn blocking software. An accountability partner. Maybe don't bring your technology into your room at night.

I have access to a parent version of the youth course on sexuality. Parents, email me to get a link to it.

Cornerstone has resources as well. If you're here in person, grab the green card with lots of helpful resources from this series.

Or scan this QR code to go to our webpage

<https://cornerstonechurch.ca/christian-sexuality/>

Do you guys remember our child dedications? After we ask the parents to make a commitment, we ask the congregation to make a commitment. We ask you to partner with the families in a way that will help their children come to know and live for Jesus. And you guys say, “we will with the help of God.” This is one of those moments. As aunts and uncles, mentors and friends, we can come beside young people. They are looking for mentors. I've come across resources that say that young people need at least five adults speaking into their lives. Could God be nudging you to be one of those people? Could you look out for a young person on a Sunday and build a rapport with them? Could you connect with the parents and see what type of support and prayer and encouragement they could use. In Jeremy's message he talked about single people hanging out with families. Are you a young adult? You could walk beside younger people showing them what the next stage of life will be like. All of us have the opportunity to encourage a young person, check in with them, talk with them, and model a way for them to follow Jesus.

Let's remember - the ground is level at the cross. Wherever you are, there is space for you with Jesus and here at Cornerstone.

Let me show you how.

Story of prodigal son

As we close, let's remember that we are all created in God's image. No matter what, His grace is available to us, and we are loved by Him. Living with sexual integrity isn't just about rules or restrictions; it's about embracing a life that reflects God's love and truth.

Thank you for journeying with us through this series. Let's continue to walk together, building each other up, learning, and growing in faith and love.

Prayer

We're going to have a time of prayer for needs at the front. For those of you who are ministering in prayer you can make your way to the front.

If any of you have any prayer requests or needs you can come to the front for prayer.

If you need anointing for healing according to scriptures in James 5 that is available as well.

If you're online and you have a prayer request you can send it through our website and our prayer team would be happy to pray for you.

When you are dismissed we ask that you exit the hall quietly so that we can keep this space for prayer.

If you'd like to stay in your seats to reflect on the series and pray you're welcome to do that as well.

Benediction - Numbers 6...

We have a new sermon series starting next Sunday - Prince of Peace. Wed' love to have you join us.