

Christian Witness

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[0 : 00] So, there are handouts. If you didn't get a handout, raise your hand and Ben's coming around with them. So we are several weeks into our class on gender and sexuality, looking at God's purpose for making us in his image as male and female and how we're to relate to one another and how to glorify Christ.

So, this morning we were looking at the theme of hospitality and holiness.

That's what I want to entitle this morning's lesson, or Christian witness to the LGBT community.

That is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and you could add more letters to that as well.

So, just a couple of schedule notes. So the next two weeks, we are sort of taking a break from this class. Next week, it says prayer. Jeff Stevens is actually going to teach next week. And if he was here, he could tell you what he's teaching on.

But he's not here yet. So, he may teach on marriage or he may do something on prayer. And I just asked him a couple days ago, so it's not his fault. But he will be leading you next week.

[1 : 12] And then there's a missionary who's been part of our church this fall who's staying at the Overseas Ministry Study Center named Dr. Adam Shaba from Nigeria. And he is a pastor from Nigeria.

And he is going to share some of what he has been... He's going to share with us on the 24th. So, I've got to talk with him. He is... I'm trying to think. He's working on two projects, and I won't be able to remember what they are.

One of them is, I think, something like how Christians should respond when they're persecuted. And then another... Because a lot of... He works with pastors and churches, some of whom have been violently attacked.

And so, how do Christians respond? You know, how do... You know, do you run away? Do you take up arms and fight? Do you just sort of stand there? You know, what does it look like, you know, when it's really intense?

You know, that's... And how do we face opposition more broadly? So, he might speak on that or just other things that the Lord has been teaching him. And then December, we'll come back to this class and continue.

[2 : 19] We're going to do one week on pornography, one week on sexual abuse, and then finally, we'll look at our heavenly hope, the hope of glory, right? So, we're in the middle of this fallen world.

We're dealing with these challenging issues, but we want to keep our eyes on the promise that God has for us. And so, that's where we're going to end. So, so far in this class, we've looked at God's design for our bodies and how we're beautiful, created by God, and broken because we're corrupted by sin.

How in Christ we're called into redemption and he has begun his work of redemption in us. We looked at how marriage and singleness, when we live those out in a Christ-centered way, can both point towards Christ's redemption.

And last two weeks, we looked at homosexuality and we looked at transgender identity in light of the Christian story. But today, so far, we've been sort of looking at everything in light of the Christian story.

Right? In light of the gospel, in light of the biblical narrative. But today, I want to ask the question, how do we relate to people who haven't yet bought into the Christian story? Right? How do we relate to people who are outside the church with wisdom and love?

[3 : 35] And the Bible has a lot to say to us about that. I think if we start by looking at the ministry of Jesus, we can look at how did Jesus relate to people in the world who were not yet his disciples?

Now, there are several examples you could point to. But three groups of people that Jesus relates to. So one, in the beginning of Mark, tells a story about Jesus encountering a leper. And a leper would have been outside, sort of an outsider, someone who was literally forced to remain separate from the community because they were worried that his disease would spread to others.

And so he would actually have to call out, unclean, unclean. And so there's a lot of shame associated with being a leper. And we see a story where Jesus touched the leper and then healed him.

We also see another group of people who we see Jesus relating to are tax collectors. Now, tax collectors were notorious cheaters. Right? So pretty much you could assume that someone who was a tax collector was actively engaged in sin.

[4 : 42] Deception, greed, etc. How does Jesus relate to tax collectors? Well, we see Jesus calling Levi and Matthew, whether those two were the same person or two different people, but calling them to be his disciples, and they left behind their former way of life and followed him.

But we also see an interesting situation where Jesus calls Levi to be his disciple. And then he goes to Levi's house, and it says many tax collectors were there at Levi's house eating and drinking with Jesus.

And a lot of people looked at Jesus and said, Jesus, why are you eating and drinking with those people? Why are you going to the house of people who are obviously actively engaged in sinful and destructive behavior, cheating our own community, bringing dishonor upon us?

You know, why would you be associating with them? And Jesus says, it's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I haven't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Another group of people who we see Jesus interacting with who are not yet his disciples would be, so in John chapter 8, beginning of John chapter 8, there's a story about Jesus encountering a woman caught in adultery.

Now, there's a little, you know, this story may or may not have been exactly where it currently is in the Gospel of John. It's sort of one of two passages in the New Testament that might, we're not totally sure if it was right where it is now.

[6 : 14] But another story in Luke, similar story, there's a prostitute who comes and anoints Jesus' feet, or it says, a sinful woman of the city, which you can sort of read between the lines.

Again, someone who was sort of would have been seen as notorious. And she was attracted to Jesus. And so, how does Jesus respond to, well, in John, with the adulterous woman, he says, neither, he says, let the one who's without sin throw the first stone.

Right? Because some people, they bring her to him and they want to stone her. And so, and then all the other people go away and Jesus is left standing there. And he says, neither do I condemn you. Go now and sin no more.

So isn't that so interesting, right? In all these episodes, and we could look at others as well, we see that Jesus is hospitable. He's remarkably generous towards outsiders.

People even are attracted to him who are not attracted to other religious leaders who normally keep their distance from the Pharisees and other, and Sadducees and other sort of well-known religious leaders.

[7 : 22] Jesus attracts them to himself. He eats with them. He meets them on their own turf, even though it damaged his reputation to do so. But Jesus also calls those who follow him to a life of holiness.

That is to being set apart for God and his purposes. Right? So Jesus doesn't, he calls those who follow him to a life of uncompromising devotion, even saying, take up your cross and follow me.

Right? So Jesus calls his disciples to forsake our sin and to follow him. And I think what you see in Jesus's ministry is that his generous hospitality both precedes and promotes holiness.

So what I mean there is, Jesus doesn't wait until everyone's completely forsaken their sin in order to be generous and kind and open-hearted to them, but he's also not generous and kind and open-hearted in a way that encourages them to remain in the same sinful or self-destructive patterns.

So there's that balance there. Right? Jesus is generous and open-hearted to people. He meets them right where they are, but in his grace, he doesn't let them just stay right where they are.

[8 : 31] Isn't that true? Isn't that how God meets us? So I think this gives us a model of how do we relate to people who are not yet followers of Jesus? Jesus. And in fact, in the epistles, we see the

same commands to us.

Romans 12, seek to show hospitality. Be generous and open-hearted. And that's true, not even just for fellow Christians, but the verses go on to talk about don't repay anyone evil for evil.

If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. Right? That's what hospitality involved in the ancient world is inviting someone in your home and giving them a meal.

And Jesus says, even to someone who is opposing you, right? Extend that kind of generous welcome. And another verse that I think goes along with this is when Paul in 2 Corinthians says, we regard no one according to the flesh.

Now, what does that mean? Basically, what Paul is saying here is we don't just see people in sort of worldly categories. We don't just see people in the way that this world defines them or even just in the way they might define themselves.

[9 : 39] We see people in the way that God defines us as people who are made in God's image, every single human being. And as every single human being is broken and corrupted by sin.

Right? And we're all in that same boat. That's where it sort of starts. So we see people, we, and that's something we can pray. Lord, help me to see other people as you see them or in light of how you see them.

But second, holiness, right? The same chapter, Romans 12 says, abhor what is evil, stay away from what is evil and hold fast to what is good. So Christians should have clear and distinct moral standards, embracing what's true and right and good and beautiful and resisting what is deceptive and distorted and dishonoring to God.

And I think standing for holiness starts with seeking holiness ourselves. Right? So in other words, sort of let's clean our own house first.

Right? So I used this analogy in a sermon about a year ago where I talked about poison ivy that had infiltrated our yard and it was mostly coming from our neighbor's yard. But you know what?

[10 : 50] If I just got really mad at the neighbor and, you know, because I needed to start by cleaning it out of our yard. Right? So that I wouldn't get it again.

Because it was awful. Right? You know, so we need to start seeking holiness by taking up our own cross and following Christ. And that's the only way that we can sort of be a credible witness to others to challenge others to also do the same.

So practically, what does this look like in relation to the LGBT communities? Now I'm using this phrase LGBT community not because everyone who is gay or lesbian or bisexual or transgender or queer or intersex or asexual or however they might define themselves is part of one community because that's not really true.

But just sort of people who identify that way. Right? And there's many, you know, people, so some terms. I've listed some definitions of terms just to understand how terms are commonly used.

Right? And that's helpful. Right? Part of meeting somebody where they are is understanding how they see themselves or how they define themselves. And at least understanding it. Even if you might say, well, I don't know whether I would see that as the whole picture.

[12 : 07] But you know what? You've got to at least start by understanding people. And I think here it's good to ask questions. I mean, there are many terms out there.

I think it's fine to ask questions like, how do you identify yourself? Can you tell me what that means to you? What has your experience been like? It's better to ask an honest question than to make a wrong assumption out of fear.

Some terms are phrases that may provoke negative reaction from many people who identify as LGBT. So one would be calling someone a homosexual.

People sort of hear that word and are like, but that's not how I define myself. That sounds sort of more like a clinical term. Or referring to a homosexual lifestyle.

People might be like, well, what are you envisioning when you think of, when you use that phrase? Are you saying that everyone lives the same way in all these respects? If someone calls himself gay, they might not like it if you refer to their experience of having same-sex attractions.

[13 : 14] So same-sex attractions is a more common phrase within the Christian community, especially because many Christians use that phrase to basically say, this is what I'm experiencing, but this isn't at the deepest level who I am.

But many people who have embraced a gay or lesbian identity, if you use that phrase same-sex attraction, they'll be like, but you're immediately trying to tell me that that's not who I am, and you're

trying to tell me that I need to get rid of this part of me that I think is actually very fundamental to who I am.

So it's sort of like, could be seen as like immediately provoking a conflict just by the phrase that you use. Right? So, so I think sometimes it's wise to sort of just avoid phrases that immediately, that might immediately cause offense in the process of building a relationship with someone and sort of representing Christ.

Another thing I think can be helpful is to recognize that there are some similarities between the evangelical conservative Christian community and the LGBT community.

You might think, really? Well, think, think about what is the experience like, right? Both groups feel like marginalized minorities in a hostile or indifferent world.

[14 : 35] Both groups find solidarity and strength in being together. Right? Why do we come together on Sundays? Because we want to find strength in our Christian, Christ-centered identity. Both have a message of freedom and liberation.

Right? This idea, we used to be living in the darkness, in the closet, in shame, and now we're living in the truth, and we want to be accepted and loved for who we really are. Right?

For Christians, we found that truth in the person of Christ. Right? That he loves us and he has given us our true identity. And, but in the LGBT community, there's a sense that having sort of found our sexual identity might be a part of, might be a similar experience.

Both also want to be accepting and hospitable and outreaching communities in a sense. Wanting to bring more people into our community or to extend our community into the wider world.

The other similarity is that each group sees the other as a potential and, or as a specific or at least a potential threat to its well-being. Right?

[15 : 42] So, most recently, Beto O'Rourke at one of the Democratic debates said that he thinks that churches that take a traditional position on marriage should have their 501c3 status revoked.

Now, right? How does that feel as a Christian? Right? You know, first of all, you're like, really? Like, boy, that would like decimate a lot of charitable organizations.

I don't think you realize what you're doing. I don't think you realize how many of the poor and other people that your party stands for, like, are being helped by these very organizations actively. You know?

So, right? But, but even besides that, right, as a Christian, you sort of feel like, whoa, like, we feel like we're being attacked here. And, people, you know, people in the LGBT community feel like, you know, when there was a whole, you know, long debate about same-sex marriage and, you know, Proposition 8 in California and, you know, it's those evangelical Christian churches who are standing against our right to, and our freedom.

Right? So, there's, there's this sense and vocal members of each group advocate for mutually opposing public policy stances. Right? Now, not everybody has the same politics in either group, but, still.

[17 : 01] The other thing I'll say is that Christians who experience same-sex attraction but who choose not to pursue a same-sex relationship because they prioritize their Christian identity and their, their biblical commitment over their sexual desires are sort of caught in the middle.

So, they're generally not well understood or accepted within the wider gay community, but they're also not always well understood or supported in the church. And I think, one of the things I hope within this class is that we would be equipped and encouraged to stand with our brothers and sisters in Christ or walking this challenging and hard road.

But how can Christians faithfully bear witness to Christ when relationships can easily become distant, polarized, and tense, right? When each group sort of sees each other as a potential threat. What should be the distinctive witness of Christians? Well, I don't think that Christians should abandon our traditional understanding of biblical marriage. You know, we've talked about that in past weeks.

And, but I do think that if we're finding our identity and our security in Christ and not from ourselves, because that's really the difference, right? Where do Christians find our deepest identity outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ?

[18 : 23] Where does, you know, if someone who is identifying as LGBT and sort of claiming that as the, sort of, one of the deepest parts of who they are, well, it's in their own sexual desires and experience, right?

So, that's sort of the main difference is where is the source of your identity coming from? And I think as Christians, because the source of our identity is coming from outside us, I think that we have some resources to engage in these kind of challenging relationships.

So first, as forgiven sinners, I think we can be less defensive. We can be more able to admit our own flaws and our own weaknesses and our own sins.

And we're not, right, as Christians, we are not out to prove that we are better than everybody else in the world. And if we are, then we've forgotten the gospel, which says, Christ died for our sins, right? And by the grace of God, we are what we are. Second, as recipients of God's common grace, now, common grace is just a word that means the blessings that God extends to all people, regardless of whether they believe in Him.

[19 : 35] So, life and being made in God's image and, you know, the sun and the rain and everything, we can affirm all that is good and a reflection of God's image in LGBT people.

So, for example, there may be many admirable aspects of a gay couple's friendship, even though Christians cannot celebrate the sexual aspects of that relationship.

Or, a lesbian couple may be admirable, excellent parents in many respects, even though Christians may be concerned that they've deliberately structured their family and chosen to exclude a male parental figure in how they've structured their family.

Right? So, I think Christians have an internal, third thing, Christians have an internal motivation through our union with Christ to love people who are different than us, people who disagree with us, or even people who attack us.

And that's not something that is inherent in the LGBT community or the world at large. Right? Just because you identify as gay or lesbian does not actually give you any resources to love somebody who disagrees with you or who understands your identity differently.

[20 : 50] But, identifying as a Christian should. Right? It should enable us to love people better, even people who deeply disagree with us or even might attack us.

I'm not going to get into what kinds of public policies Christians should advocate for. I will recommend a book called, by John Inazu, who called *Confident Pluralism*, which sort of talks about how Christians can engage widely.

It's written not just to Christians, but he's a Christian law professor. And there's a copy on the bookshelf. But it's a very thoughtful book. It gets into some details of legal cases and things like that. And he's sort of trying to say, how do we live together in a society where people have very different views and opinions?

Is there a way that we can pursue the common good together? So I think that's a thoughtful book and a good resource in that direction. But next steps for the church in reaching out to people who identify as LGBT.

Extend hospitality. Take initiative to befriend and listen to and learn from people. Repent of double standards. Believe that all sexual sin is destructive. Let's clean our own houses first.

[22 : 04] Third, acceptance is not the same as affirmation or approval. Now just think about how you express this in other relationships. Right? There's many other relationships that we all find ourselves in where there's some aspect of how people are living or their habits or the way they conduct themselves at work that you're like, I really don't approve.

I can't go along with that. I really have concerns about that. I think that's certainly wouldn't be acceptable for me as a Christian to engage in. But you have to relate to that person and respect them.

Right? So just think about how you do that in other relationships. Sometimes I think this feels very tense. Right? How do we like accept somebody but without affirming them? Well, I mean, do you have any friends who are heterosexuals who are cohabiting and they're not married and they're not Christian?

Well, how do you relate to them? Right? I mean, that's a close analogy. Right? There's plenty of other analogies. Four, I'd say invest for the long haul not just for the short term.

More specific questions. Let me jump into more specific questions, try to run through these a little quickly and then open it up. I want to make sure to leave some time for questions that you have.

[23 : 21] How should I respond if somebody comes out to me as gay or lesbian or et cetera? First, thank them for trusting you enough to share that with you because if they know you're a Christian, they probably have some fear that you would reject them or have an immediate sort of negative response like, I don't want to deal with you anymore or something like, or distancing yourself.

So, thank them for trusting you enough. Reassure them that you're committed to your friendship or whatever your relationship is with them, you know, that you won't reject them as a person. My brother came out to me several years ago and I said, I just want you to know, like, you're always going to be my brother and I, you know, I love you and I want you to know that. And that was part of our conversation.

Third, listen to them. Ask honest questions, right? Tell me more about what it's been like for you. Who have you told? How have people responded? Are you in a relationship? Right? These are helpful questions. Third, pray for them.

Or fourth, pray for them. Pray that God would reveal his goodness to them. Pray that your faith, friendship would be a faithful expression of that goodness. Now, another question that comes up is, should I tell my friend, my gay friend, for example, or my gay brother, that I don't support gay marriage?

[24 : 38] So, I did not initiate that conversation when my brother came out to me, but he asked me very directly, so that gave us a good opportunity to talk. So, the short answer is it depends.

Okay? So, consider at least the following factors, right? Does your friend claim to follow Christ and accept the authority of the Bible? Okay?

Have you had conversations about the gospel, like the big picture of the Bible, anything else about God? Do you have a friendship that generally allows for disagreement and mutual challenge on a personal level?

Or not? And, is your friend asking for your opinion on this particular question? So, if the answer to all those questions is yes, then yes. You need to be clear about where you stand. If the answer to all those questions is no, probably no, you don't need to initiate that conversation.

If the answer is somewhat yes and somewhat no, then that's, right, the discerning place in the middle. So, now, what if, right, what if somebody asked you directly, right?

[25 : 42] Say, random person on the street, or a person that you, you know, whatever, crazy situation, right? You're like, oh, I don't want to be in this conversation. Where is this going?

Why are they asking me this question? Do you think homosexuality is a sin? So, sometimes a simple direct answer is best. Yes, I think God intended sex to be for marriage between a man and woman.

I think anything outside of that is not God's will for those who follow God. So, actually, so I have a lot of books. Where is this one?

Okay. So, Beckett Cook was an actor in Hollywood and he was sitting at a coffee shop in LA and he was like, you know, I'd never, like, I'd never really interacted with Christians in the worlds that I lived in.

You know, pretty much, we never talked about God. Most of us agree that God probably didn't exist. And then I was sitting at this coffee shop and there were these guys, like, reading the Bible together and, like, discussing the Bible at a table near us.

[26 : 44] And I was like, this is really weird. Why are they here? You know, this is like a hip coffee shop in LA. Like, you know, I thought they were only in Arkansas. You know? And so, he's curious and so he's talking to his friend and he's like, should we ask, like, so he goes over and he's like, who are you guys?

Like, what are you guys up to? Oh, we're Christians. We're reading the Bible together. You know, we're from this church. You know, he asks him some more questions and he's like, well, so, you know, what about homosexuality? Like, where do you guys stand on that?

And he's like, the guy was very honest. He said, you know, he and his church did not think that, that, that gay sex was, you know, they, they believe that gay sex was not pleasing to God.

And that guy happened to sort of have, that guy also said, you know, I also have same-sex attractions myself, but I've chosen to not pursue those because I'm committed to following Christ. And the guy was like, well, that's sort of weird. Like, why would you do that? But then, you know, the guy like gave him his, gave him his card and was like, hey, if you want to come to church with me, you're welcome.

[27 : 52] And so, like a week and a half later, he goes to church and he's sitting there and he's listening to the sermon and he's like, the sermon, he's like, I never wanted the sermon to end.

It was so fascinating. Right? You're like, boy, the Holy Spirit must be working. The sermon was like an hour long. Like, you know, and, and he had, so anyway, he had this like remarkable conversion.

Right? Anyway, you can read the story. But, you know, but he was like, it was actually really helpful that somebody was just clear and like didn't get all weird about it.

We're just like, well, no, that's where we stand. But, you know, that's, you're welcome to come to our church. Like, now sometimes I think it's worth trying to bring in the bigger picture.

Right? So, here are ways to bring in the bigger picture. And many times Jesus did this. So, sometimes Jesus, people come to Jesus with a question and he answers with another question. Or he sort of brings in a bigger picture he doesn't answer immediately directly.

[28 : 51] So, is homosexuality a sin? Well, what do you think sin is? Well, the Bible says that everyone has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So, that sort of opens up a bigger conversation.

Right? You don't want to just avoid the question and never answer it. But, it's sort of bringing in a bigger, is it, okay, so, you know, so we're clear that we're not just saying those people are sinners and we're not.

Right? No, the Bible's saying we're all sinners. Well, what is sin? Right? All right. Third question, should I attend a gay wedding if I'm invited? Okay?

Some Christians say no because they would say attending a wedding means you're witnessing and blessing the vows of the couple getting married. Other Christians say yes, you can attend a wedding as an expression of friendship without endorsing the marriage.

Right? So, is this like going to worship in an idol's temple or is it like Jesus eating and drinking with the tax collectors? Right? Okay, good question. I think there's, so, there's some roles in a wedding that clearly communicate I approve and I'm here, I'm completely behind sort of everything that this couple is doing.

[30 : 02] Right? Officiating, obviously, I think also being in the wedding party, you know, standing up there, that's sort of symbolic, that seems to fall on that side.

I think just being in the audience may or may not communicate approval. So, traditionally it did. Traditionally it's like God and these witnesses. Today, it's not, I don't think people see the audience in a sort of that way.

I think people see the audience as, well, they're here, they're our friends, we want them to be part of our party. So, so I think it's more problematic if someone is having same-sex wedding explicitly in the name of Christ and sort of because that isn't something that Christ actually is sort of authorizing and blessing.

But, question is to ask. If I attend, what will that communicate? If I don't attend, what will that communicate? If I attend something I can't fully support, how do I maintain integrity in that setting? Sort of, what boundaries will I draw? So, again, so I, my cousin had a same-sex wedding. Yes, I have a lot of extended family members who are in, who identify as LGBT and I had to ask myself, do I go?

[31 : 27] Right? So, but what do I, what do I say as I walk through the receiving line? Right? And so I said, you know, I'm really glad to be here with you today and I'm really thankful for you, for you guys.

Right? I can say that with integrity. Right? I'm thankful for you, for having you guys in my life. Um, but other people might choose not to attend.

Other people might feel like, I just can't do it. Like, I just can't do it with integrity. That's fine. If you're there, then, then I think the question is, how do you, sort of, um, be intentional about pursuing relationship with people both before and afterwards?

And sort of expressing, like, you know, and maybe you're explicit about why you can't attend, maybe you're more distant and you just, you know, uh, decline the invitation.

But how do you express, like, I still, I, I value you as a friend or as extended family member? Um, all right. I'm sure these questions raise more questions, but we'll go on.

[32 : 29] What about preferred pronouns and people who adopt a new name as part of their gender transition? Is that, is calling someone by their preferred name and pronoun an expression of hospitality, meaning people where they are?

Or, is it bearing false witness because you are affirming something that, that is not actually true? Calling someone he when they are really she in God's eyes.

Uh, so, so there's a lot of pressure, uh, including legal pressure. I think New York City passed a misgendering ordinance and in Great Britain there is one as well. Um, so there's pressure to just

call people whatever they want to be called and don't you dare question that.

Uh, now, I think there's a question that as Christians we need to be discerning and prayerful and patient and courageous. So, you know, if somebody introduces themselves to you by a certain name, I think just go with that name, right?

I've had people introduce themselves to me by all kinds of names. I'm G. I'm, you know, whatever. And I'm like, I don't think that was your birth name.

[33 : 32] Okay? Right? But you know what? I'm not going to ask for their ID. I'm not going to say what did your brother name you when you were born. I'm not going to, I'm just, fine, I'll relate to you however you, like, whatever name you're telling me.

Like, we're just starting a relationship here. Um, now if you have an existing relationship with somebody, you could have an honest conversation about what you're willing or not willing to do. So you might say, I'm willing to call you by the name you want to be called, but I don't feel comfortable referring to you as he. Is that, you know, is that okay? Um, so, in some cases you can sort of work that out.

People will accept that. There's sort of a way of, okay, we're trying to respect each other and, you know, there may be some give and take on both sides. um, uh, now in at least some cases, um, just, I'll, I'll get back to you.

Uh, in at least some cases you may, uh, so an obvious case might be, uh, someone who is suicidal, someone who is extremely depressed, uh, or mentally unstable. Um, I, I think there are certainly some cases where you, you might decide it is not wise to even attempt to open this can of worms right now because there are sort of bigger issues at stake.

[34 : 42] And maybe we can talk about this down the road but the best thing would just be let's not even try to navigate, you know, let's just, let me, let's just try to, uh, sort of, um, uh, even accept something that might be maybe less than ideal.

Um, avoiding pronouns is possible at times it can be awkward. All right, last question and then I'll open it up. Uh, how do I talk about all this with my children? Or if you will have children, right? Christian parents should actively guide their children in age-appropriate gender identity development. Uh, so, this begins with repeatedly and regularly affirming in different ways how wonderful it is that God has made them male or female and explaining God's good design for the human body and male and female relationships at an early age.

And I think the best way to do this is to talk about this, uh, before, uh, children are directly confronted with sort of fallenness and brokenness in this area.

And not as a reaction to, um, seeing something that you're like, oh no, I can't affirm, I can't, we can't promote that so I need to tell my children what God's design is.

[35 : 55] No, we, we need to, first, the best thing is like, start early. Um, so, uh, we used, uh, two books that I think are on the bookstore called The Story of Me and Before I Was Born.

They're sort of, um, uh, book, uh, picture books with, uh, very tasteful, uh, illustrations. Um, so we were the first one when our children, our older children had just turned three and five.

Uh, and so these for us opened the door to many further conversations. So it's a normal topic in our household, uh, to talk about being male and female, even to talk about sex. Our kids can ask us questions.

Now, I'm not, you know, like, you can be discreet here. Okay? Right? I'm not going, I'm not saying let's, you know, be, be, um, uh, sort of, uh, inappropriate.

But, but I also think, um, you know, uh, this is something that God has made. Right? God made our bodies. They're good. He made them good. Right?

[36 : 54] He made humanity to reproduce sexually. Right? You can explain that to children in an appropriate way. Right? It takes a mommy and a daddy, a man and a woman to come together and make a baby. Right?

Like, it's a mysterious, you know, at first you can say it's just, it's a wonderful thing. Like, mommy and daddy love each other so much that they want to, um, sort of bring, uh, another person into the world.

It's a gift from God. So, I think it's important not to just avoid talking about these topics because of some misguided sense of shame or embarrassment. Uh, so, back in the 19th century in the Victorian era, and sometimes the church is a little bit influenced by this, nobody ever talked about sex.

Right? That was like off the table. Don't talk about it. But, you know what? People talked very openly about death. You're gonna die. You would take children to maybe, you know, you might, growing up, see the corpses of people who were, had passed away.

Uh, death was not hidden away. Uh, people might die in your home. Right? Now, today it's the reverse. Right? American adults are, you know, advertisement, TV, sex is everywhere.

[38 : 04] But we don't want to talk about death. And we want to keep death behind closed doors and somewhere else. And we think that not telling children about death at all would be a good thing because we're protecting them.

I don't think the Bible, the Bible is both discreet, about these topics, but also very frank, actually. Uh, talk about what they are, God's plan for them, and, and the hope that we have as, as Christians. Uh, it's not unusual for young children as they're exploring the world and their bodies develop to say things like, I wish I was a boy or I wish I was a girl. That doesn't mean a child has gender dysphoria. It probably means they're attracted to some quality that they primarily associate with the opposite sex.

Right? And it's good to be able to appreciate qualities of the opposite sex. That's one quality we want to inculcate in our children. Right? Not to be sexist, you know, not to be like, oh, I hate those girls, I hate those boys.

No, again, that's probably natural adult mental stage, but you've got to help your children get beyond that. Right? You don't want that to grow up into adulthood. Right? Last point, both mothers and fathers should be involved in conversations with children about gender and sexuality.

[39 : 23] This is not a responsibility that should be delegated to one parent alone. Usually, it's delegated to the mother. Dads, take up your responsibility. And this is a privilege.

It's a privilege to be able to talk with your children about these things. And to talk about God's design with them and have this be a topic that is part of sort of our ongoing discipleship with our children as they grow.

And to be able to receive who they are as a good gift from God and relate in healthy ways to people of the same or opposite sex. All right. Questions?

We've got ten minutes. Ivor. Well, first of all, I think this is the best teaching I've ever heard about this. and I think you should probably publish it.

It needs to be out there. But avoiding the whole idea of pronouns is very good. It's just someone's name is what I was taught when I was counseling.

[40 : 25] Yep. The name. Just say that. Yep. Whatever they give you, that's what you use. Yep. Yep. You can certainly do that. That's, that's, yeah. Yeah. And avoid Ms.

and, you know, all those different contractions and just use that whole name. Yeah. Or title.

Yep. Yep. Yep. You can just use somebody's name. Yep. Elizabeth. This is a suggestion as a resource.

I've been watching YouTube videos instead of, you know, movies. And Eric in Texas interviews really interesting people. so one night he was interviewing Beckett Cook and it was just astounding. So you can hear his whole story, you know, on a YouTube video instead of buying a book. Yeah. And there's a guy Yeah, if you're cheap or if you don't like reading books.

[41 : 31] Yes. Yeah, sorry, go ahead. So I just suggest that as a resource. And also, yeah. Rosaria Butterfield has wonderful YouTube videos. Yes.

So I have a bunch of books here. I mentioned Beckett Cook, Rosaria, I've got Rosaria Butterfield. So she's another example of someone who came to Christ out of a non-Christian LGBT background.

Who else? David Bennett, he also has an interesting story. He also came to faith in Jesus as a 19-year-old who was a political activist in the LGBT community.

And I think he was in the UK. And what else? So I have some books from last week on transgender if you're interested in these.

So if you're interested in borrowing any of these books, I am happy to let you borrow them. These are some on just Washington Waiting with Wesley Hill, Same-Sex Attraction in the Church, Ed Shaw, Christopher Yuan.

[42 : 34] Christopher Yuan was here eight years ago and spoke at Trinity and other places. So he's a great resource. There's also a good ministry called Harvest USA, and they publish, among other things, some sort of shorter booklets that address topics.

So this is sort of your gay child says, I do. What if you have a child who is getting married, sort of navigating that particular question, can you change if you're gay, homosexuality in the Bible. So these are well-balanced resources. I wouldn't just say take one of these and give them to somebody. It's more like for equipping Christians and thinking through these things, and for Christians who are asking these questions.

So if you want to look at any of these, feel free to ask. Yes, Dean. I have a general question question, and that is that we're all sinners. Yes. The Bible looks at sin in a certain way.

Yeah. The society looks at sin in a different way. Yes. How often does the Bible first take identity as sin versus, let's say, compared to let's say, adultery or to killing or usury or whatever.

[43 : 51] Yeah. Versus, let's say, how society can be said. Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, so, I mean, there's certainly some sins that are discussed more often in the Bible than sexual sins.

So greed is probably, various forms of greed are probably discussed, you can probably find more Bible verses about those. but there are a lot of Bible verses about sort of God's design for male and female in general, for marriage.

Adultery is sort of, you know, marriage is sort of, from the beginning in Genesis, God's design, and so adultery is sort of like the paradigmatic sexual sin. In other words, that's sort of like the sexual sin that's discussed most often, but it's sort of like, almost like, when the Bible talks about adultery, it's sort of almost pointing to all the other varieties of sexual sins that are connected with it.

So, yes, in terms of gender identity, I think I'd go back mostly to Genesis about God made us in his image male and female, and sort of Jesus reaffirms that.

I think the first thing the Bible is saying is like, that's a good gift from God. And so, there are not as many verses in the Bible that specifically deal with transgender expressions, partly because they were not very common in the ancient world.

[45 : 25] And even today, even though they may be more common, they're still, you know, like, you know, that's why we don't preach on this topic every Sunday. Right?

You know, we don't have a long Sunday school class on this every single year. Right? Because we're trying to, as a church, we want to sort of see the whole picture and have a biblical balance of the topics we address.

So we wanted to do this as sort of a more in-depth class because I think there's a danger in sort of very briefly addressing issues like these. And so we try not to make side comments about homosexuality or transgender identity that might not be helpful.

Right? Because it isn't, it's like, well, why did he make that side comment? Is he just trying to be offensive? Is he just trying to score points with somebody? You know, we want to actually see what does the Bible actually say about this and sort of take a more in-depth and a more comprehensive approach so we're not just singling out one issue.

So that's the idea behind how this class was put together. But yes, Dean, I appreciate that comment. And so we want to sort of, as a church, we want to be growing into the image of Christ in every way that God has called us to.

[46 : 43] Tyler. A general question. How do you navigate between faithfulness, will cause and offense to a world that's rebellious against God versus what we are talking about today where we don't want to cause unnecessary offense, especially in the LGBT conversation.

A loving thing is to have some repentance of a sin that grieves God, but at the same time we don't want to be unnecessarily offended. Yeah. How do you navigate trying to be faithful which may cause offense versus I don't want to offend you right now.

Right. Right. So just because you offend somebody does not necessarily mean that you have been unfaithful to Christ and it also doesn't necessarily mean that you are being faithful to Christ by offending them.

So again, I think in general, you know, Paul says I'm becoming all things to all people. That's a verse that can be taken out of context.

There's a context to that. But basically what Paul is saying is I don't want to cause unnecessary offense apart from the truth of the gospel and the implications of the gospel. So, yes, like, you know, the gospel says we are all sinners and honestly that offends every human being's pride.

[48 : 12] Like, and to say yes, the Bible does say that this is a sin among many other things. sometimes somebody will walk away and not want to have anything to do with you again.

And that may be a cost. And I think that's true. And I think the question in that case is how do you sort of continue to be open to a relationship with somebody, continue to pray for someone, perhaps, even if they slander you or attack you or want to cut off a relationship with you in the worst case or just distance themselves from you or sort of feel like they were offended by you.

So, I mean, yes, I've had plenty of cases where people have been offended because I've confronted them about a sin. And, you know, if you've never been there, then probably if you're, you know, again, I think our responsibility to one another within the body of Christ is if we see each other sort of walking in a habitual pattern of sin that dishonors God and doesn't live up to sort of our profession of faith, the loving thing is to confront each other.

Now, I don't think the same thing is you have to go and confront somebody who is not a Christian because they don't share that same framework, right? They don't share that same loyalty to Christ. You don't expect a non-Christian to just start living like a Christian. So, you know, there's not the same sort of command there.

But, yes? Stephanie? Yeah, yeah, yeah, right.

[50 : 08] That's a great question. And I, the question is how should Christians think about what policies they should support? For example, whether insurance should reimburse gender-affirming surgery.

So, I think, I think that book by John Inazio, *Confident Pluralism*, is a good place to start because he deals with some very specific examples, not including surgery, but including some transgender rights cases.

So, I think as Christians we need to think about sort of the common good. I do think we need, I mean, I do think there are some people who want to say that, who want to classify all, there are some people who would want to classify, honestly, some of the things I've said in this class, as discriminatory hate speech.

I think that's, so, and, and, and have legal penalties for that. I think that's a genuine concern. And I think that's a genuine concern for all, like, honestly, that Christians should have for religious freedom for all people.

You know, there's many Jews and Muslims that have, take sort of, conservative or traditional stances on these matters. And, you know, should, I think the bigger picture that Christians can advocate is how can we seek the common good while acknowledging that we don't agree on many fundamental things in life.

[51 : 35] So maybe that's sort of a bigger framework for how Christians can think about contributing positively to society. You know, tolerance in the Christian view doesn't mean approving everything that everyone else stands for, but it does mean honoring people as being made in God's image.

So, I'm not answering your question directly, but I'm not sure I, I, it's, it's, it's a good further conversation. All right, one more question.

Don Young. Um, my parents are not Christians and they don't tend to think about LGBTQ event by people or like these things as sinning or like having a sin.

Um, and my sister always took him out as lesbian in China, parents are from China, um, like a decade ago. Um, and they tend to reason, reason this throughout, through a very independent lens because they are not influenced by the Christian culture.

Yep. And I think as, so I have a daughter who is infertile, who is having sort of disability, and so that gives them the reason to love them further.

[52 : 47] Um, so like I have a disabled kid and I just want to extend my love, like regardless. Um, that's a really cool interpretation, like understanding of my sister. Um, and I don't, I'm certain, and I am this person who, who came to Christ five years ago, and trying to like sort of present my ideas through a Christian lens, which could be challenging, um, and sort of overturning their ideas.

I don't want to, yeah, but anyways, I thought their, their way of thinking of this is actually good as well. Um, at least that make them feel like easy to go by in their hearts and how to love their daughter.

Yeah, so they sort of see, uh, they're sort of seeing it through the, we talked last week about the, sort of a disability framework for seeing, uh, things sort of, so they see, uh, your sisters, um, uh, being a lesbian as she's sort of, uh, uh, a condition that, that should, uh, lead them to be compassionate and loving to her, right?

And I think, I think at that level Christians can, can, can agree. Yes, we should be compassionate and loving to people. We all, like, uh, struggle in this world with many burdens, um, and many difficult challenges.

So, so I think, I think, yeah, I think in this case, I, I think I would, you know, I, I think I would encourage you to talk about, I mean, I think the first thing you want to communicate is, like, the bigger picture of Christianity Christianity and what, and who God is, who people are, who Christ is, um, I think only when, when they sort of understand the bigger message of Christianity would it make sense to sort of have, you know, I, I, I think understanding the Christian view on this issue will only make sense in light of the bigger story of Christianity.

[54 : 37] Is that, um, all right, let's pray, uh, and I know we ran a little late, so let's head upstairs for service after this. Lord, thank you for this time. We pray that you would give us your wisdom, uh, and, uh, fill us, Lord, with, uh, the, the love of Christ, uh, that would lead us to extend hospitality.

Uh, we pray that you would also fill us with the, uh, conviction of the Holy Spirit to pursue holiness, uh, to be people who are distinct and different, um, because we belong to you. Uh, we pray, uh, that, um, uh, that you would be working through us for your glory to bring many people, uh, to know and love you and, uh, submit their lives to you.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.