

# Sexuality & Fulfillment by God's Design

## *Mere Sexuality* Sermon 2

John 4:1-26; Jeremiah 2:1-13

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Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John **2** (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), **3** he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. **4** And he had to pass through Samaria. **5** So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. **6** Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour. **7** A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." **8** (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) **9** The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) **10** Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." **11** The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? **12** Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." **13** Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, **14** but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.[b] The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." **15** The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water." **16** Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." **17** The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; **18** for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." **19** The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. **20** Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." **21** Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. **22** You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. **23** But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." **25** The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." **26** Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." (John 4:1-26, ESV)

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The word of the Lord came to me, saying, **2** "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. **3** Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest.

All who ate of it incurred guilt; disaster came upon them, declares the Lord." **4** Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel. **5** Thus says the Lord: "What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless? **6** They did not say, 'Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt,

who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells?' **7** And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination. **8** The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit. **9** "Therefore I still contend with you, declares the Lord, and with your children's children I will contend. **10** For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has been such a thing. **11** Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. **12** Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord, **13** for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2:1-13, ESV)

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Recently while on an airplane, I couldn't help but notice the title of an article a nearby passenger was reading. In large red font the title read, "The Future of Sex." The pages seemed to consist of interviews of couples. Curious though I was, I resisted reading over her shoulder. Most people would be a little embarrassed to be caught reading such an article in public. But these types of articles sell magazines, because the topic of sexuality matters to most people, and affects us all in significant ways.

Sexuality, and all it represents, touches upon deep aspects of who we are and what we need: our maleness and femaleness. Our primordial need to survive through procreation. Our desire for intimacy and lasting connection with another. Our hopes for family and the warmth and fixity of a home. Few things are more significant than all that our sexuality represents.

Like most things of great importance, however, our sexuality can also be a source of pain and brokenness. Situated properly beneath the hearth of marriage and home, it can give joy and a unifying warmth. Loosed upon a river of passions, its flame can consume. For some, their experience of sexuality has been a cause for much joy. For others, sexuality has been a cause of mild to great disappointment, perhaps experienced as a curse or prison when desires go unmet or unrequited.

While our culture continues to profit off it, its advice and guidance around sexuality increasingly lack wisdom and are out of sync with God's purposes. And we are increasingly a sexually obsessed culture made up of sexually broken people. Wisdom and guidance, we need, but where to look?

What I'd like to do is draw our attention to a conversation Jesus has with a woman who is particularly sexually broken. She's had five failed marriages and is currently sleeping with a man who is not her husband. Jesus meets her at a well in the middle of a hot day. Though taboo for a Jewish man to engage publicly with a Samaritan woman, Jesus has come to Jacob's well, just outside the town of Sychar, precisely to speak to her. The conversation takes unexpected twists and turns and is layered with meaning. A question about water and natural thirst turns to failed-marriages, deeper longings and Jesus' offer of living water. This event occurs in John 4. While in this sermon I won't offer a detailed exposition of the passage—we will return to it one day in the future—, I want to allow this encounter to function for us like a mirror. We are meant to see ourselves in this woman. Her brokenness is ours; her thirst is not unlike our own.

A far better approach to the topic of sexuality than sipping from the broken cisterns of *Men's Health* or *Cosmopolitan*, is to turn to Jesus' offer of Living Water in John 4. To do so, however, we must, like this dear woman, find our sexuality—our longings, sins, and questions—laid bare at the feet of Jesus. We must allow Him to teach us. And as we will see momentarily, Jesus does not expose this woman's sexual brokenness to condemn her. He does so to offer her living water that will save her—even truly satisfy her.

We'll lift this scene up as a mirror by asking one fundamental question, which we'll then offer three answers to. The question is this: ***What happens when we place our sexuality at the feet of Jesus?***

## **I. Jesus Saves Us from the God of Sex**

First, Jesus saves us from the god of sex. Perhaps a surprising feature of this scene for the modern reader is what Jesus does not do for this woman. He does not fix her relational needs—at least not the way she may have at first hoped. He does not offer her advice about how to find the right man or become the best spouse. He doesn't liberate her from the sexual constraints of her Samaritan culture, inviting her to have as many partners as her desires tell her she should. Neither does Jesus become the perfect man for her. Numbers often carry meaning in John. And although we can't be sure, it's at least curious that she's on her sixth man (five husbands, and now another lover), which would make Jesus potentially the seventh. In the Bible seven is often the number for completion or perfection—God created the world in six days then rested on the seventh. A reader might imagine, as the scene unfolded, that Jesus was going to fix her life, not by saving her, but by dating her.

But none of this happens. Instead, the conversation moves from physical relationships to spiritual ones: *Where is the right place to worship* (vv. 20-22); *What type of worshipers God is seeking* (vv 23-24); *Who God's Messiah is, namely Jesus* (vv. 25-26).

The conversation moves from sexual relationality to spiritual relationality—from connecting with others to connecting with God. And herein lies the first lesson about what happens when our sexuality is laid before Jesus: *He dethrones it*. **Your Godward orientation is more important than your sexual orientation.**

If Jesus simply set her on a course to find relational success, she might succumb to the delusion that her sexual fortunes were, in fact, her savior.

Is it fair to say that sex is a god in Western culture? On top of the fact that the focus and money tied to it culturally suggest that we worship it, let me offer three signs that sex may be creeping onto the throne of people's lives.

## 1. Identity

First, one's sex drive, what we call sexual orientation, plays a decisive role in determining identity. Young persons are pressured to declare to classmates if they're gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual or an array of growing options. Athletes and movie stars find it necessary to tell the world their sexual identity.

In her book, *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are*, Jenell William Paris notes that our culture sends a clear message that our sexual desires determine our identity, and that this is quite novel.

Of all humans who have ever lived, very few have had sexual identities. Sexual identity is a Western, nineteenth-century formulation of what it means to be human. It's grounded in a belief that the direction of one's sexual desire is identity-constituting, earning each individual a label (gay, lesbian, straight, etc.) and social role. Perceived as innate and as stemming from inner desire, sexual identity has to be searched out, found, named and expressed in order for each person to be a fully functional and happy adult.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Behavior

Along with constituting identity, sexual desires dictate behavior. Once aware of sexual feelings, in order to be authentic and true to oneself, one must act in accordance with those feelings. Thus, sex determines moral behavior.

### 3. Hope

Finally, sex holds the keys to your hope and happiness. If you are your sexual feelings, then you are as whole and fulfilled as your sexual fortunes.

Something that determines identity, governs behavior, and holds the keys to hope and happiness, is a god. And though sex may be a good, even wonderful gift, it makes a terrible and oppressive god.

I want to stress especially for the younger people here, you don't have to be ruled by your sexuality. It doesn't have to control who you are, how you must act, or whether you'll be happy. In the guise of freedom, the western world turns us over to the oppression of sexual tyranny. You are more than your sex life.

The first thing that happens when we lay our sexuality at the feet of Jesus, is that He saves us from the god of sex. In verse 26 Jesus declares that He is the Messiah. To respond to such a claim, one must surrender and entrust the entirety of who they are to Him. This includes their sexuality. To lay our sexuality at the feet of Jesus, not only means saving from the goddess of sex, but also means entrusting our sexuality to the better wisdom and guidance of a new teacher. This takes us to our second answer: when placed at the feet of Jesus, Jesus situates our sexuality according to His Father's design and purpose.

## **II. Jesus Situates Sex according to His Father's Design and Purpose**

We find Jesus at different times teaching about sexuality. One such instance is when a group of Pharisees ask Jesus if it's okay for a man to divorce his wife for any reason. Wanting to underscore the profundity and goodness of marriage, Jesus takes His listeners back to the two most foundational passages for a biblical view of Sexuality: Genesis 1 and 2. He answers the Pharisees:

**4** Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning “made them male and female,” **5** and said, “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?” **6** So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate (Matthew 19:4-6).

Jesus brilliantly combines these foundational texts to underscore God’s basic design and purposes for sex. I want to note two foundational truths here: One, God created a two sexed world of male and female, both equally in His image. Second, God’s design for sexual activity is what the Bible calls a “one flesh” union between one man and one woman.

This term “one flesh” is crucial for understanding the deep logic of biblical sexuality. One flesh speaks of more than an *emotional* or *relational* bond. While it includes the emotional and relational connection of the union, with the term “flesh” it emphasizes the *physical* nature of it. Like interlocking pieces of a puzzle, the oneness of sexual union celebrates God’s design for the male and female bodies. Sexual activity celebrates the Creator’s design of human bodies.

Todd Wilson, in his very helpful little book (from which I got the title for our mini-series), *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality*, writes this about the meaning of “one flesh”:

A marital union is a unique kind of union. It is a comprehensive union in which people join together not only mentally, emotionally, and spiritually but bodily as well. The bible calls it a ‘one flesh’ union because the uniting of bodies of flesh, is essential, not optional. The language of ‘one flesh’ is meant to be very specific, concrete reference to your flesh, your physical body.<sup>2</sup>

Along with the physical fit of the male and female bodies, God’s design for sexuality serves the purpose of procreation. The male and female uniquely can be fruitful and multiply. This procreative and binding reality is why God intends sex only to happen within the permanence of the covenant of marriage. The vision of sexuality rooted in Genesis 1 and 2 has important and sensitive implications for all of us.

First, it means Christians need to take seriously any forms of sexual activity occurring outside this context as sinful—as out of accord with God’s design. Pre-marital sex. Cohabitation. Pornography. None of these accord with God’s design or purposes. In a fallen world, sin touches every part of us, and none of us has stewarded our sexuality perfectly. This is an area where we need to be honest with God, and with a few trusted others, seeking God’s forgiveness, healing and guidance.

The Bible's teaching here also has implications for how Christians think about the idea of so-called same sex marriage. The Bible is clear, as is the overwhelming majority of Christian teaching on sexuality across two millennia: sexual activity between members of the same sex is not God's design and is a sin. It coheres neither with His design for our bodies, nor His purposes for marriage.

But it is crucial to add that the Church has not held this view because it hates persons who experience same-sex attraction. It holds this view because it submits to the Word and Will of God. The Church should be a place where persons with any experience of sexual orientation or desires is welcome. But the Church's role—if it is to be a Church—is to help all persons lay their sexuality at the feet of Jesus. Thus, while the church must be a place that is welcoming for persons of all forms of *sexual attraction*—it can only teach and uphold one form of *sexual activity*, that of marriage between one man and one woman.

The Church has not always done a good enough job loving those with same sex attraction. We have demonized one form of sexual brokenness while making allowances for many others. This is not godly. Neither have we done a good enough job distinguishing between the *experience* of same sex attraction and the *expression* of same sex activity. To experience cravings and desires that do not accord with God's design is a common experience for all of us. Feeling these feelings is not a sin; it is when we then act on them, knowing the actions contradict God's Will, that we sin.

I want to stress at this point what is one of the most fundamental differences between a Christian vision of sexuality and our culture's. Along with being rooted in the Creator's design, the Christian view of sexuality is aware of the fallenness of the human heart—which Paul says is “darkened” (Romans 1:21). Therefore, Christians know that our sexual behavior must be guided, not merely by our feelings, but more fundamentally by the Word of God.<sup>3</sup>

There are more implications from what we have just covered, many having to do with how we approach unmet needs and longings. Many may find that the “one flesh” union in the Bible is something they've never known. Others, within a biblical “one flesh union,” may not have found the satisfaction they thought it promised. One cannot talk about human sexuality without recognizing a sea of unmet longings. Here is where we need to turn to a third and final observation: When we place

our sexuality at the feet of Jesus, Jesus offers the thirsty Living Water, satisfying what sexuality has not.

### **III. Jesus Offers the Thirsty Living Water, Satisfying What Sexuality Has Not**

In John 4 Jesus moves from physical realities to spiritual ones; thus, He moves from physical drink to what He calls Living Water. And this Water, He says, satisfies in a way that other things do not. This Living Water represents Jesus Himself coming into our lives and hearts—and both the work He’s done for us and the work He continues to do in us. Living Water is the life of Christ poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Here, and with this point, I want to move into application. Here we are essentially asking, *what does it mean to drink of this Living Water? And what does drinking of this Living Water have to do with this area of our lives called our sexuality?*

#### 1. Drink the Living Water That Satisfies Our Need for Forgiveness

The reason the conversation between Jesus and this woman moves past her sexual brokenness to the topic of God and His Messiah, is because her greatest problem is not her unfulfilled sexuality. Her greatest problem is her sin before God. Whether through promiscuity or adultery, she has not followed God’s Will for sexual activity.

She is broken, ashamed, and unfulfilled, yes. But these are all symptoms of a deeper problem. The Living Water Jesus gives is not a perfect mate or restored social status. Why? Because in this fallen world our greatest problem is not our unmet sexual desires. Nor is it our frustrated relationships with each other. Our greatest problem is our sin against God. The woman’s problem is that she does not know God and has sinned against Him: adultery, promiscuity, divorce.

- She needs forgiveness. A great sexual partner cannot offer her this.
- She needs reconciliation with God. A great sexual partner cannot give her this.
- She doesn’t need Jesus to date her. She needs Jesus to save her. She needs grace. And this, Jesus pours out lavishly.

In our hyper self-focus, we tend to think that our biggest problem is our experience of unmet longings. This is not true. Our biggest problem is our sin against God. Which will eventually result in the worst of experiences—eternal separation from Him. To drink the living water, is to taste that Jesus has satisfied God's justice on your behalf, and every sexual sin you've ever committed—along with every other—is vanquished. You are clean.

## 2. Drink the Living Water That Satisfies through Peace and Contentment with God

Jesus offers hope to those not fully filled in their sexuality. And friends, in a fallen world, that's all of us, though in varying degrees.

I've heard several friends or writers who experience same sex attraction and are also following Christ share very honestly about how hard things can be. Many share that what they fear more than a decision to be celibate, is the reality of no romance, or permanent relationship. What they fear is *loneliness*. This is indeed a daunting cross to take up.

There are many others who also fear loneliness or unfulfillment as single persons. Whether because of divorce, or being widowed, never marrying, or marrying late, more and more people live life as single. According to the 2015 census, 45% of the US population over 18 is unmarried—that's over 109 million people.<sup>4</sup>

While the evangelical Church in America has done a good job promoting the health of marriage and the nuclear family in past decades, one unintended consequence is that, at times, it has made the married life out to be the only really good life. And in this sense, it makes singleness out to be strange, like a failure, something implausible as a full life. Thus, singles can find themselves between a rock and a hard place; the world tells them sexual expression is the only path to wholeness; and they come into the Church for refuge, just to be told marriage is the only path to fullness. Jesus was the healthiest and most complete human who ever walked the earth. And He was single. He never knew a romantic embrace or the fixity of His own family. The Church must be careful to set forth both the married and single life as a viable Christian option. But we must also be careful here.

Dissatisfaction and loneliness are experienced by married persons, too, and in higher numbers than many single people think. This may surprise you. But many people who are married are disappointed sexually. Many people who are married also look at the single life as the best life—all that free time and no responsibilities. Many divorced persons think what they need is the right partner, and they'll find that next time.

The fact is this: in a fallen world, no one is fully fixed or fulfilled through their experience of sexuality. Some have more enjoyment than others, but for everyone, there is a longing in the soul that sexual activity does not sate. As William B. Yeats put it, "The tragedy of sexual intercourse is the perpetual virginity of the soul."

To all those who are unfulfilled by their sexuality, Jesus stands before us as the most complete, contended, perfect human being ever: and Jesus lived among us as a single man. Jesus' peace and contentment was not found in a romantic embrace or the perfect family—it was found in His Father.<sup>5</sup>

Unfulfillment in the area of sexuality can act like a can opener, levering open chambers of longing into which living water can flow. The presence of Jesus, conveyed through the Holy Spirit, brings into the human soul—like a gentle and quite brook—streams of peace and joy that foster a fulfillment that will, into eternity, satisfy more deeply and profoundly than earthly sexual experiences ever could.

### 3. Drink the Living Water That Flows through the Family of God, the Local Church

Our sexuality points to our need to connect with another, and our desire for intimacy and family. Jesus teaches in Matthew 21 that physical marriage does not persist in heaven. But family does. And the family that God is forming is something we participate in and can enjoy even now. And Jesus also teaches that those who drink living water, see that water overflow, like a spring, it bubbles up.

Especially for those who may not have nuclear families of their own, and for those for whom their own family is not a haven but a burden, the local Church needs to not just be, but feel, more and more like family.

We need to commit to our Church, because in doing so we commit to each other. We need to be in deeper and deeper fellowship, to form relational bonds that soothe the soul. Our individual homes

should be porous, with hospitality being part of who we are. Here in the local Church, God begins to satisfy one of the deepest longings that underlies human sexuality—the need to be loved and the need to belong.

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## Endnotes

1. Jenell William Paris, *The End of Sexual Identity: Why Sex Is Too Important to Define Who We Are*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011), p. 41.
2. Todd Wilson, *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality*, (Zondervan, 2017), p. 79-81.
3. Caveat: some might say, aren't the Bible's teachings on sexuality social condition, or culturally condition—say, like some of its teachings on the institutions of slavery. To this we must respond, Jesus takes us back to the pre-fallen world of Genesis 1 and 2, which transcends all time, cultures and contexts. It is in fact what God intended.
4. See United States Census Bureau  
<https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/newsroom/facts-for-features/2016/CB16-FF.18.pdf>
5. Todd Wilson, *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality*, (Zondervan, 2017). But Jesus' life deconstructs this pervasive and powerful cultural myth. His life says something different. From the story of his life, we learn that sexual activity isn't essential to human flourishing or personal fulfillment... To be blunt, he didn't need sex—not because sex is sinful or somehow beneath his dignity, but because sex isn't essential to being human" (49–50). "The Son of God, though biologically sexed, lived a sex-free, fully contented life. Not an easy, pain-free existence, but a whole and deeply and richly human life. This is a remarkable fact—one that confronts all of us, whether we're same-sex attracted or straight, married or single. IN also confronts our sexual culture and the evangelical church culture as well—I suspect in some uncomfortable ways" (50). Jesus didn't have sex and was supremely satisfied in God: "One of the main claims of mere sexuality, as it has been articulated and practiced throughout the church's history, is that while sexuality (our being biologically sexed as male and female) is central to what it means to be human, sexual activity is not" (50).