

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Building Faith at Home

Male and Female, He Made Them

(Genesis 1, 2; more)

Study #2

Introduction: A word about sinners...

As difficult as it may now be to believe, a bunch of years ago, I ran long distances. I ran several half marathons and completed one full marathon (yes, I nearly completed two others, but that's a long story for another time...)

I liked to run with friends, so I ran with such luminaries as Larry Gallo, Rick Hersack and Rick Clayworth.

One of my running buddies was Cindy Williamson, who continues to run marathons to this day.

Once, on a very foggy early morning run out Bandera Highway, at the intersection of Highway 16 and 211, we heard the sound of tires skidding toward us while we were halfway across the intersection. The fog was so thick that we couldn't see the car.

Instinctively, I bolted to the other side of the road to safety, instantly realizing that I had left my running partner exposed to the car that was skidding down the hill.

I had not thought first of her safety, but my own.

Now the car stopped in time and all ended well. But that incident has haunted me over the years.

It betrayed a tendency that I'm not at all proud of. It is self-preservation, self-protection. It is sometimes called cowardice.

Cowardice can surface in a variety of ways. For instance:

- I am often tempted to tell a story one way to one person and another way to someone else, based on how I believe they would appreciate that story. (it is called "spin")
- I have been tempted, at home and at church, to remain silent when a word from me would have been helpful.
- Before meeting with someone to deliver a difficult message, I may spend hours of fruitless worrying and a sleepless night or two.

I have a tendency, a bent, an orientation toward cowardice. I have often wondered how I would fare if faced with mortal danger or a need to act heroically. Given my life track record, I am not optimistic.

I don't know what you are thinking as I expose this about myself. To some of you, who know me well, this is no startling revelation. But many of you don't know my dark side (not that this is the sum total of my dark side).

And while confession may be good for the soul, it's lousy for a reputation.

Prior to this confession you would have known, hypothetically and theoretically, that I struggle with sin. You now know that I actually and truly struggle with sin.

My temptation to the sin of cowardice isn't attractive. But the longer I live, the more I am convinced of a couple of things. One, I need a Savior who will forgive me for my cowardice and other sins. Two, my Savior is powerful to forgive, cleanse, and change me into the person He saved me to become.

With respect to timing, I tell you this about myself today for tactical reasons. Today, we are exploring a biblical topic that is quite sensitive. It is an intimate issue. The Bible has something to say about this issue, which may be, for you, hard to hear.

With respect to this issue, the Bible swims upstream and against the current of much of 2015 American culture.¹

Today we are going to think together about what the Bible has to say about homosexuality, and Scripture doesn't stutter and it doesn't mince words about that theme.

But neither does it mince words about cowardice.

God told Joshua to be courageous (Joshua 1:8). Jesus urged His disciples to courage (John 16:33). And unbelieving cowards are at the top of the list of those who will find themselves in the lake of fire at the end of time. (Revelation 21:8)

So the club of sinners in need of a Savior is a very big, inclusive club. I am a card-carrying member, and so are you.

So, why address this theme?

Why address this theme?

The most pressing reason for bringing up the subject is the dramatic shift in our culture in recent years related to thinking about homosexuality.

While the percentage of those who say that they are part of the LGBT community remains quite low,² there is a growing acceptance of a same-sex orientation in the US.

¹ Ron Sider writes, "As 2014 comes to a close, many believe the question of the legal, public status of gay marriage has been effectively settled - even before the Supreme Court finally pronounces on the matter...Already about 60 percent of all Americans now live in states where gay marriage is legal. In those states, and perhaps soon in the entire country, the public policy issue is largely settled at least for a generation or two. But the change in public policy need not - and should not - settle the issue for the church. Instead all of us are being compelled to examine our beliefs and practices. This is a good thing."

² According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, July, 2014, 1.8 percent of men self-identify as gay and 0.4 percent as bisexual, and 1.5 percent of women self-identify as lesbian and 0.9 percent as bisexual.

Currently, thirty six states recognize same-sex marriage (today's message is really not about the legal battle over same-sex marriage) and the Supreme Court is expected to rule on the issue soon. Recently, many courts have sided with gay rights over religious rights.

In these times, it's on our minds. And, as I said last week, we sometimes need to speak "Bible" to the times.

As well, I want to speak about this issue because of love. The word of God to the person dealing with same-sex attraction is a good word. The word of God to people tempted to cowardice or greed or any other sin is a good word, too.

I want us, as a church, to understand and to embrace what the Bible has to say about homosexuality AND I want us, here, to be people who love as Jesus loved.

We are not the church of the "together" and the "arrived" standing in judgment over "them." We are a church of the broken messes whom God is repairing by His grace and for His glory.

This is not an "us" vs. "them" sermon. We are all a bunch of needy "thems" and we proclaim a Savior who has Good News for all who struggle with sin of any stripe.

We are going to start out this morning where we started out last Sunday in considering the sanctity of human life: the beginning.

Those who fail in their understanding of essential truth about human nature often fail to give because they don't give enough attention to Genesis 1 and 2. And when we get it wrong at the beginning, we will inevitably get it wrong later on.

Last week we saw that all human life is sacred because all human life is made ***"in the image and likeness of God."***

This morning we are going to pay more attention to the creation of humanity as "male and female" and the wisdom of God in the design of the sexes.

From the Beginning...

Male and Female He Made Them (Genesis 1)

[1:26] Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...[27] God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female He created them.

God's crowning achievement in creation came on the final day of Creation Week, when He made the man and the woman in His own image and likeness. And Genesis 1 gives us an overarching, telescopic view of creation.

Genesis 2 zeroes in and gives us a microscopic view of the special creation of the man and of the woman.

A Man Shall...Cleave to His Wife (Genesis 2)

Creation of Adam (male) (v. 7)

When we turn to Genesis 2:5, the world is filled with potential, but it needs a caretaker, a lord (small "l") to bring out that potential.

Enter, Adam.

[7] Then the LORD God³ formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

³ In the first chapter, God was called simply "God." Now, He is "the LORD God." The change is not minor. "Lord God" is a combination of two Hebrew words: Elohim and Yahweh. Elohim is a name meaning simply God, the mighty one. Yahweh is the name God gives Himself (see Exodus 3). The word derives from the Hebrew verb "to be" and means something like, "I am that I am." It signifies that God is eternally present, always the same. It is also the name God used when He was speaking of His dealings with His people. "Yahweh" speaks of God's relational and covenant-keeping nature. "Elohim", of His sovereignty. The LORD GOD creates the man and the woman in tender love.

Formation

God formed Adam out of the stuff we walk on. Dirt. Adam's name comes from the Hebrew word for "ground" - *adamah*. Humankind is earthy.

But humanity is also the result of God's artistry. The same word that is used to describe the formation of Adam is also used to describe the potter as he shapes a lump of clay (see Jeremiah 18:2-4)

There is art and there is intimacy.

Intimacy

Into the lifeless form of the man, the LORD God breathed into the form's nostrils His own breath. This is face to face. This is intensely personal.

One moment, there was no humanity. The next moment, with the breath of God, there is. This breath animated the man, but he is more than an animal.

The essence of "humanity"

This God-breath brought physical life, a God consciousness (something the animals don't have), and a conscience (moral capacity).

Not long after the creation of Adam, the Bible tells us of the creation of Eve.

Creation of Eve (female) (vv. 18-22)

The first "it is not good" (v. 18)

[18] Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper⁴ suitable for him."

⁴ The woman's role as "helper" is in no way demeaning to her. The Hebrew word used here for "helper" (vv. 18, 20) is used about twenty times in the Old Testament. It is used mainly of **God coming to the aid of Israel**. (Hebrew -

This was the first ever “not good.” The man’s condition - while perfect - was incomplete. So, God will make Paradise MORE SO.

Before He completes perfection, though, God is going to create within Adam a sense of need for what He is going to provide, so He gave Adam the assignment of naming all the animals. (Genesis 2:19-20)

Sure enough, the exercise had its intended result. At the end of the naming exercise, Adam was lonely.

He had been *alone* all along, but now, having seen Mr. and Mrs. Dog and Mr. and Mrs. Cat, and Mr. and Mrs. Elephant, he is *lonely*.

He has no one who “corresponds” to him. Adam is the ruler of all he surveys. But, that’s not enough to quell the aching need in his God-formed soul for human relationship and intimacy.

It is at this moment of Adam’s recognition of his need that the LORD God took action.

The Lord God fashioned the woman (vv. 21-22)

[21] So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that place. [22a] The LORD God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man...

God didn’t make the woman as He made the man, not as a potter works a lump of clay. No, the LORD God “fashioned” the woman as a craftsman delicately works his sculpture. The Bible tells us that God **built** the man and that He **fashioned** the woman.

She is not taken from the same dirt as Adam. She is taken from his flesh.

“ezer”; See 1 Samuel 7:12) God does for Israel what she could not do for herself. In the same way, the woman supplies help to the man. She supplies what he needs. She enables the man to do what he, alone, could not do.

She is, in her essence, exactly what he is, in his essence. Here, there is absolute equality of the sexes.⁵

After the world’s first surgery, God woke Adam up and, like the true “Father of the bride” that He was, He walked Eve down the aisle to her husband.

God established marriage (vv. 23-25)

The woman corresponds to the man (v. 23)

God specifically created the woman so that the man would have someone who corresponded to him. When Adam saw Eve, he was delighted. He said,

**[2:23]...This is now bone of my bones,
And flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called woman,
Because she was taken out of Man.”**

Eve is Adam’s counterpart. They “fit” physically and spiritually and personally.

The man and woman are husband and wife (vv. 24-25)

In this narrative, the first man and the first woman also become the first husband and the first wife.⁶ So Moses interjects,⁷

⁵ Poetically, the words of Thomas Aquinas, “God did not make the woman out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be loved.” This emphasis on the significance of the woman is unique in ancient literature. Other ancient accounts are truly demeaning to the essence of women.

⁶ You will notice, also, that child-bearing is not even hinted at in chapter 2. Procreation is considered an added blessing, but is not linked to the essence of marriage. Procreation is not the purpose of marriage. The creation of a one-flesh unit between a man and a woman is the purpose of marriage.

⁷ This is Moses speaking, not God. Adam and Eve had no parents to leave and Moses is giving instruction to his generation of Jews and to every generation that would follow.

[24] For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.
[25] And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

The picture is a very physical and sexual picture. But it speaks of a very personal union.

And this early narrative is the biblical foundation on which we build our understanding of human sexuality.

If all we had was Genesis 1 and 2 and nothing about homosexuality anywhere in the Bible, we would know that:
 (1). marriage is about a relationship between a man and a woman and,
 (2). sex is to take place within a committed relationship of marriage between a man and a woman.

God created the man and saw that it was not good for him to be alone. The solution God provided to resolve the problem of male aloneness was a committed, lifelong relationship with a woman.

This is NOT to say, of course, that singleness is an incomplete state!

Each man and each woman is a full expression of the image of God and singleness provides wonderful avenues for fulfillment and serving God, in some ways more than for the married.

But it is clearly seen from Genesis 2 forward, and without exception, that God only blesses sexual intimacy between a man and a woman, united in marriage.

We see it in the Law and the historical books and the wisdom literature and the psalms and the prophets of the Old Testament. We see it in the Gospels⁸ and in the Acts of the Apostles and in the letters to the churches of the New Testament.

⁸ A booklet on homosexuality asks the question, “What did Jesus teach about homosexuality?” When you open it, you discover nothing but a blank page. The intended point of the pamphlet is clear. Jesus said nothing about homosexuality.

Today, we are going to learn what the Bible has to say about same-sex sexual relations. Before we go there, though, I want us all to hear a positive word about sex, from the Bible.

The Bible Says

About Sex, Generally

Scripture is far from prudish or neutral when it addresses the subject of sex within a marriage. It is very positive and enthusiastic!

For instance, the 5th chapter of Proverbs gives about the most explicit descriptions of marital, sexual love between a man and a woman found anywhere in ancient literature.

Then, a whole book of the Bible - Song of Solomon - celebrates the sexual love of Solomon and his wife.

The Apostle Paul (a single man) affirms the goodness of married sex by urging husbands and wives to satisfy each others' sexual desires.⁹

And the author of the book of Hebrews writes, **[13:4] Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.**

From beginning to end, the Bible commends sexual expression in marriage as good.

But this is not quite true. When answering Pharisees who were out to trap Jesus on the subject of divorce, He told them that divorce was only introduced by Moses because of the hardness of people's hearts. God's original intent was (quoting Genesis), **[Matthew 19:5] “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.”** The disciples, realizing the enormity of the commitment involved in marriage, suggest that it would be better if they never married. Jesus' response is to suggest becoming a eunuch for the sake of the Kingdom. The only godly sexual alternative to heterosexual marriage is celibacy.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:1-7.

However, when it comes to same-sex sexual expression, the pronouncement is unanimous and prohibitive.

About Same-Sex

Narrative - the sin of Sodom (Genesis 19:4-11)

There is a narrative recorded in Genesis 19, of a group of men in the city of Sodom who approached the home where Lot (a nephew of Abraham) was staying.

This is a mob, a gang. And it is clear that the men in this mob wanted to have sexual relations with Lot and his guests (who just happened to be angels).¹⁰

In an attempt to protect his guests, Lot offered his daughters to the mob. As a father of a daughter, myself, I find that offer reprehensible.

But the mob refused the offer of the daughters and they refused to back down from their demands, so the angels struck them with blindness, making it impossible for them to find the door.

The plan of these men of Sodom to abuse Lot's guests was a complete breach of the near eastern world's requirement for hospitality. But it was more than that.¹¹

The threat of the men of Sodom was certainly violent and abusive, but it was more than that.

It would be a terrible misreading of the text to not see that the same-sex act they were seeking to carry out was, in and of itself, sinful.

¹⁰ They were investigating the city to see if it was as evil as had been reported, so that they would know whether or not to destroy it.

¹¹ As far back as 1955, D. Sherwin Bailey denies that the primary sin here is sexual, but breach of semitic hospitality laws, along with abuse and violence. Dr. Derek Kidner effectively refutes this idea.

They were not just being violent and unruly and inhospitable or they would have accepted Lot's offer of his daughters.¹²

They were intent to "**know**" (a not uncommon euphemism for sex in Scripture) the men in the house, and that desire was the sin that led to the destruction of the city.¹³

That's a narrative. The event recorded in Genesis 19 occurred hundreds of years before the Mosaic Law was given. The sin of the men of Sodom was condemned, not because it violated prescript, but because it violated the creation order presented in Genesis.

But, when it comes to prescript, the Old Testament couldn't be clearer.

The Mosaic Law's proscription

[Leviticus 18:22] You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination.

[Leviticus 20:13] If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them.

There is no reference here to violence or abuse. It is sin to engage in such behavior.¹⁴

And, not to pile on, but we find exactly the same thing in the New Testament.¹⁵

¹² Ezekiel describes the sinfulness of Sodom as consisting of ***[16:49] pride, fullness of bread, and prosperous ease*** along with haughtiness and ***[50] abominations*** - likely a reference to their homosexuality.

¹³ Jude 7 condemns the men of Sodom for going after "***strange flesh.***"

¹⁴ There is a scene similar to Genesis 19 recorded in Judges 19. That scene shifts from a demand for homosexual abuse of a man's guest to a fatal gang rape of the guest's concubine.

¹⁵ See Jesus' discussion with Pharisees in Matthew 15. He says that sinful things come out of the heart and mentions *porneia* - sexual immorality - a catch-all term for any sexual behavior outside of marriage including fornication, adultery,

New Testament

Romans 1:26-27

The Apostle Paul is the only New Testament author who explicitly mentions homosexuality, and he does so in only three places.

The first time is in the first chapter of Romans.¹⁶ There, Paul is making a case for the justifiable wrath of God against people who sin.

While we normally think of God's wrath as something "poured out" - as in the flood of Noah or in the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah - Paul views it as a "giving over."

When we *suppress* the truth about God that can easily be known through creation, we open ourselves up to a trip down the road that leads to destruction. And God's wrath is seen in that He allows us to travel this road. We walk away and He lets us go. He "gives us over" to sin.

This sin takes the form of exchanges. We exchange the worship of God for the worship of idols (vv. 22-25). We exchange the natural order of male/female sexual expression for male / male or female / female sexual expression.

[Romans 1:26] For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, [27] and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

homosexuality, and prostitution. These kinds of sexual behavior defile us. They aren't the only things that defile us, but they do defile us.

¹⁶ Matthew Vines, along with others who espouse the legitimacy of same-sex sexual intimacy, admit that Romans 1 is the most difficult passage to reconcile with their position. Vines, in particular, goes to great lengths to tie Paul's words in Romans 1 to first century Graeco-Roman practices, something that would be foreign to Paul's worldview and to the context of Romans 1.

Now, I don't believe that Paul is saying in Romans 1 that homosexual behavior is the worst kind of sin or even that it is the worst kind of sexual sin. But he is saying same-sex sexual acts are sinful.

As God's people, we are called to agree with Scripture's assessment of what is right and what is wrong. When the Bible declares something sinful, we say that it is sinful, too, whether that is currently a popular view or not.

If everyone in America were to suddenly agree that "greed is good," we would still come out solidly against greed because the Bible is solidly against greed.

Throughout his writings, Paul says that for a man and a woman in a committed marriage, sexual intimacy is a wonderful thing. He is just as clear that sexual intimacy between two people in any other arrangement is sinful.¹⁷

In the other two verses where homosexuality is mentioned, we find it in a list of sins which are condemned by God.

1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10

[1 Corinthians 6:9] Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, [10] nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.¹⁸

¹⁷ Most all biblical scholars agree with the conclusion Richard Hays drew in his study, in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, in 1996: Paul (and Jesus, and the rest of the New Testament) "presupposes and reaffirms the ... [Levitical] condemnation of homosexual acts." Even scholars who defend homosexual practice by Christians today (like Dan O. Via, John McNeill, and Walter Wink) agree that wherever the Bible refers to homosexual practice, it condemns it as contrary to God's will. They would just say that the Bible is irrelevant in this.

¹⁸ While some believe that this passage is addressing who will not go to Heaven, I believe that Paul is urging the Christians in the Corinthian church to abstain from such sins so that they will have a rich inheritance (reward) in the coming Kingdom.

[1 Timothy 1:8] But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, [9] realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers [10] and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching.

Not once in the New Testament is same-sex sexual activity spoken of positively. It is condemned in the only three places where it is mentioned.

None of the texts in the Old or New Testament address motives.¹⁹ Instead, they simply pronounce a sweeping condemnation.²⁰

In every case that homosexuality is mentioned it is wholly negative. To deny this, someone has to twist Scripture beyond reason, or simply walk away from the Bible.²¹

Now, I have wanted to lay out, from Scripture, God's plan for sexuality. The pattern is defined in Genesis 1 and 2, that a man and a woman are united as one in a committed relationship of marriage.

¹⁹ This illustration from Sam Allberry, a Christian with same-sex desires who has committed to celibacy: It is possible to display virtues while doing the wrong thing. Imagine a gang of robbers who are all loyal to each other. Their robberies are not therefore sanctioned. Same-sex sexual relationships may exhibit loyalty, faithfulness, and love, but they are still not permissible.

²⁰ It is not true that faithfulness or monogamy legitimizes a sexual relationship. Paul was dismayed about what was going on in Corinth between a Christian and his step-mother. (1 Cor. 5) He calls it sin. He doesn't ask if the couple is faithful. He doesn't ask about the level of commitment or if love is present. It was categorically sinful for them to be involved, sexually.

²¹ In a study of any certain topic, words are used and all words have a "range of meaning." A word can mean something in one context and something slightly different in another. To take a certain word out of its context and apply it contrary to the normal meaning of the word can truly make the Bible say anything and everything. But, to interpret correctly means that we take the words normally. Taking the words of the six passages that address homosexuality normally (as they would be taken, written by Jews who understood and embraced the worldview presented in Genesis 1 and 2) yields a consistent understanding of the sinfulness of same-sex sexual activity.

The six passages that speak to homosexuality help to clarify what God did not intend.

Next Sunday, Jeff is going to offer some helpful wisdom on how to lovingly engage a culture that increasingly takes a very different view from what we see in the Bible.²²

But as I wrap up today, I want us to think together about two related topics. First, consider biblical anthropology.

Conclusion

- **Biblical Anthropology**
- *Due to sin, all of us are broken.*

All of us here this morning are glorious wrecks. Made in the image of God, we have been polluted by sin.

We are all are out of synch with God's design. We are all twisted and bent and broken. It may not even be a stretch to say that we are all sexually bent and broken.

Some of us face lifelong struggles with greed, others of us with cowardice, others with jealousy or anger. Many, in this society, struggle with sexual sins.

²² Quoting Matthew Vines, who wrote [God and the Gay Christian](#), "Christians who affirm the full authority of Scripture can also affirm committed, monogamous same-sex relationships." Vines identifies himself as an evangelical Christian who holds to a high view of Scripture - "I believe all of Scripture is inspired by God and authoritative for my life." He (and others) argues that the Bible simply has no category of sexual orientation. That the Bible's condemnation is of sexual excess, hierarchy, oppression, or abuse - not the possibility of permanent, monogamous, same-sex unions. To this I would say two things. First, the Bible condemns the sins it condemns irrespective of extenuating circumstances. Thieves whose hearts are in the right place still cannot steal, and those with same-sex desires are not free to pursue a homosexual relationship. Period. Second, there is no other way to define "sexual orientation" than to say that a man desires to be with a man or that a woman desires to be with a woman, sexually. And this ("**men burning with desire**") is exactly what Paul says is condemned in Romans 1.

We are all attracted to stuff that is damaging to body or soul. So, in a very real sense, none of us are “straight.” We are all skewed.

And because of this brokenness, we are all in need of a Savior.

- *Due to sin, all of us are in need of a Savior*

Jesus lived and died and rose again to save sinners like me and like you.

He saves us wrecks and goes about the work of restoring us to original design. It takes time to be restored, and final restoration ends only when we see Him face to face.

But restoration begins on the day that we see our need for forgiveness, admit that we have sinned and can't save ourselves, and turn to Jesus for eternal life.

It is my prayer that if you have never placed the treasure of your trust in Jesus to save your eternal soul, you will do so today!

Finally, a few thoughts about the topic for today and Christian discipleship.

- **Christian Discipleship**
- *There is a lack of clarity when it comes to causation and “change”.*

There is a lot we don't know about homosexuality.

It is clearly not true that people with absent fathers or dominant mothers *uniformly* or *only* end up gay. Many who are same-sex attracted grew up in healthy, loving homes and in Christian homes.

We don't know if there is a “gay” gene. A sexual orientation toward same-sex attraction is a relatively recent phenomenon and from what we do know, it's pretty difficult to change.

I believe I would have great difficulty changing my own sexual orientation, and those who are same-sex attracted and have tried to change testify that it is tough or not possible.

Some certainly have changed, but many have sincerely wanted to and haven't been able to develop romantic feelings toward the opposite sex.

- *Celibacy is required for those not married to an opposite sex partner.*

However, that doesn't change what Scripture says. Homosexual activity is off-limits. It is not God's plan.

So, celibacy is required for those who are not married to an opposite sex partner.

That prohibition extends to widows and widowers who have not remarried, divorced people who have not married, single people who have not married, as well as to homosexuals.

Many people today are saying that this makes an unreasonable demand on those who are same-sex attracted.

But as Sam Allberry has said, (Sam has same-sex attraction and has committed to a life of celibacy), *“We are never better off without God's word and we are never worse off with it. The word to the same-sex attracted is a good word.”*

Yes, the word of Jesus to His followers may be a hard word, a challenging word. But it is always a very good word.

And not only for the same-sex attracted, but for all, following Jesus costs.

- *For all, following Jesus will mean leaving behind some things that we might enjoy and taking up some things that will be difficult - but it will always be way worth it!*

It has seemed to many in the gay community that those who are not gay are saying something like, *“We get to have it all and you don’t get to have anything.”*

Nothing could be further from the truth.

I have to fight the temptation toward cowardice every day. Non-stop. Sometimes I win and sometimes I lose. It is a never ending battle.

Some, to faithfully follow Jesus, have to constantly fight for control of their appetites. Lots of people have to do battle with alcohol or drugs or anger or lust or jealousy or envy.

The Gospel of Jesus shines a light on our flaws. Walking with Jesus involves putting to death the deeds of the flesh. (Romans 6) Every day is a fight. We all fight against sin all the time.²³

²³ This, from Ron Sider: If the biblical teaching on sexual intercourse is decisive for the church today, then celibacy is the only option for those who are not in a heterosexual marriage. But many today argue that celibacy is impossible for most gays. Dan Via, a proponent of same-sex practice, argues that a homosexual orientation is the “unifying center of consciousness” for a gay person, and that God’s promise of “abundant life” must include “the specific actualization of whatever bodily-sexual orientation one has been given by creation.” Such an argument would have astonished Jesus and Paul - both unmarried celibates who went out of their way to praise the celibate life. It is profoundly unbiblical to argue that one’s sexual orientation is the defining aspect of one’s identity. For Christians, our relationship to God and the new community of Christ’s church provide our fundamental identity, not our sexual orientation. That is not to claim that our identity as men and women with particular sexual orientations is irrelevant or unimportant. It does mean that sexual orientation must never be as important to us as our commitment to Christ and his call to live according to kingdom ethics....The call of Jesus’ call to discipleship is absolute while the call to sex is not absolute.

Among the worst errors we could make is to assume that everybody else is living a life of tranquility, humming hymns all day long.

The Gospel calls everyone, without exception, to a radical re-orientation. Not just same-sex attracted people.

We have all built our lives on a faulty foundation and the discipleship wrecking ball swings at everyone.

And, no matter how much we leave behind, it is always way worth it.

Into eternity it will be worth it, and it is worth it now as we sense God’s favor, as we live the abundant life promised to us when we “trust and obey”, and as we walk in community with each other.

- *If you are same-sex attracted (or confused), you have come to the right place.*

The last thing I would say this morning is that if you find yourself same-sex attracted, confused, or have friends and family who are touched by this issue, you have come to the right place, because the church of Jesus is to be a place of healing and help.

In the church, there can be safety in revealing struggle. We are here to help each other grow as disciples of Jesus. We will admonish each other as we move toward sexual purity. We will call each other to obedience.

And in the church, there is love.

Here, there will be no abuse or cruelty or coarse joking. Here we are family, with brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers.

We can live without sex and we can live without romance. We can’t live without love and intimacy. And here, you can find love.