

**Recovering God's Story:**  
Marriage & Human Flourishing  
*Nathanael Egger*

**Scripture Reading:** Song of Songs 4

Welcome to Mack Ave Church. We are glad that you are here today. If you come here often then you will likely know that our normal mode of operation for preaching is Exegetical. In other words we walk through books of the bible verse by verse, chapter by chapter. We're taking a bit of a break, between our last series on 2 Thessalonians and our next sermon series on Nehemiah to talk about relationships within the church. This is our fourth sermon in the series and today we are going to focus on sexuality and God's plan for human flourishing. I'm told that this is the #1 most uncomfortable topic for congregations to hear about, and I imagine it's right up there for preachers to preach about. So, this should be fun.

My hope today is to be honest with you about what the Bible says about sex, where we as humans and as the people of God have gotten it wrong, and offer you some hope for recovering God's design for sexuality and fulfillment. Much of what I have to say today is drawn from the book by Glynn Harrison called *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing*. While the book is a bit academic at times, I think it does a remarkable job of painting the picture of how the church lost its voice during a crucial time in history as the sexual revolution which started in the 1960s and 1970s with decisions like *Roe v. Wade*, has continued to snowball into legalization of same sex marriages, and more recently the concept of gender fluidity. Today's sermon is just the tip of the iceberg, but hopefully it is enough to encourage you to recover and retell the story of God's goodness.

Avoiding the topic of sex, however comfortable that would be in the short term, is dangerous in the long run and (as we'll see) has led to much of the church being swept away in the tides of culture and the sexual revolution. My own family has been devastated by sexual sin in various forms and divided over its views of sexuality. Perhaps yours has too. I am a sinner and have had to struggle against sexual sin for as long as I can remember. Maybe you have too. If you have questions that you think may benefit the body, please feel free to raise your hand and ask them. If you have questions that are more personal, then please feel free to approach me or Leon or one of the elders.

Please pray with me. Lord God, we are humbled by your goodness and your provision in our lives. Passages like the one from Song of Songs 4 remind us that you created us as sexual beings and that sex is a wonderful gift, one that should be enjoyed. At the same time Lord, we are also humbled by our ingratitude, impatience, and discontent. Like Adam and Eve we are too easily seduced by cheap imitations. We miss the orchard for the tree. I confess Lord that my eyes and heart are prone to wander. Lord God, would you increase my appetite for you? Would you inspire us with your story today, a story of abundance and grace? Would you capture our emotions with your sacrifice and mercy? Lord God, would you make us more like you today?

So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face

of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food.  
(Genesis 1:27-29 ESV).

If you leave with nothing else today, then I want you to know that God delights in you. You were created with purpose, value, and worth. You were created to find your utmost joy in Him. That is the point of the creation account in Genesis. Out of nothing God created everything — from the diminutive ant crawling about on the floor of verdant forest to the untamable oceans teeming with fish and other creatures to the towering mountains capped with snow to the incomprehensible expanses of space with galaxies beyond galaxies. And, as we see from this passage in Genesis, God set humans at the pinnacle of creation. He created them as sexual beings, male and female, to be fruitful and to multiply, to rule over the rest of creation, living off of it and enjoying it.

We can trace God's story of human sexuality through the rest of Scripture as well. In the law, God called his people to take a step forward relative to the cultures around them, to be set apart in their sexuality. The wisdom literature (e.g. Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs) reminds us that sex is wonderful gift, one that we are commanded to thoroughly enjoy in its proper context of marriage. Proverbs 5:18-19, for example, reads:

Let your fountain be blessed,  
and rejoice in the wife of your youth,  
a lovely deer, a graceful doe.  
Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight;  
be intoxicated always in her love.

From the wisdom literature we move on to the prophets where the concept of marriage and sexuality is used to describe God's relationship with his people, the Israelites. The Israelites are often depicted as the unfaithful bride, committing adultery in the most explicit terms with the nations around her. God, on the other hand, is faithful. He bears with his bride and sanctifies her and welcomes her back and delights in her (Isaiah 62:1-5).

In the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament we see Jesus and the apostles reaffirming the Genesis 2:24 concept that marriage is "one mortal life fully shared between one man and one woman." Passages like Ephesians 5, also go on to flesh out the roles of husbands and wives and use those roles to point us back to the ultimate marriage, between God and his people. Revelation offers us a closing reminder that believers are to be preparing even now for this ultimate marriage—by fixing our eyes on Christ, putting to death sin, and putting on godliness.

That is God's story of sexuality, in a nutshell. Sexual desires/imagery serve to teach us of the intense passion of God's love for us. Both sex in marriage, and abstinence in singleness, showcase the faithful character of God's love. Sex also offers us a picture of the fruitful character of God's love. The world, on the other hand, is portrayed as offering us cheap imitations. To give into temptation and pursue these imitations has serious consequences now and, ultimately, lead to eternal separation from God.

Of course, God is not the only one speaking to us about our sexuality. Satan whispers to us even now, "Does God Really Know What's Best?". The same line of questioning that he used to unsettle Adam and Eve, to take their eyes off of the orchard they had been provided and focus it on the one tree they were denied, he uses on us today. Satan uses powerful stories to grab our attention and take our eyes off of God. Glynn summarizes the narrative of sexual revolution in the following terms:

“For centuries, traditional morality had us – all of us – in its suffocating grip. Year after year the same old rules, chained to the past, heaped shame on ordinary men and women (and boys and girls) whose only crime was being different. Enemies of the human spirit, these bankrupt ideologies befriended bigots and encouraged the spiteful. They nurtured a seedbed of hypocrisy and offered safe havens to perpetrators of abuse. No more. Change is here. We are breaking free from the shackles of bigotry and removing ourselves from under the dead hand of tradition. Our time has come. A time to be ourselves. A time to be truly who we are. A time to celebrate love wherever we find it. A time for the human spirit to flourish once again. And if you people won’t move out of our way, we are going to push you out of our way.”<sup>1</sup>

The sexual revolution offers our world today a compelling story. Complete with heroic individualism, redemptive trajectory, and a clear moral vision. In this story you are the hero and in order to realize your full potential you must reject external authority and look deep within yourself to find your truth and express your most authentic inner self. Free expression of whatever sexual interests you may have becomes a kind of moral good. The moral vision of the prevailing culture today is slanted towards the individual’s concerns of care, fairness, and alleviation from oppression. It offers open arms to those abused and marginalized by the church.

The church has been caught off guard, to say the least, by the sexual revolution. We were not prepared for a movement that took the moral upper hand, by exposing our sin and loving those we were not willing to love ourselves. Perhaps the greatest benefit of the revolution to the church is the awareness it has brought to our own shortcomings. While this awareness has cost us our prophetic voice for the moment, we still hold the words of life and there is hope for recovering God’s story and facing the world even now with love and truth.

Sadly, the response of many in the church as a church overall has not been to recover God’s story but adapt it to be more palatable to a world chasing after themselves. Truths that were held for almost 2000 years, have been quickly overturned in the matter of a few decades. Increasing exposure to the LGBTQ community, not only in the media but among our coworkers, friends, and family has leap-frogged our poorly thought out morality, which was buttressed in large part by prejudices and bigotry. What was “strange” and “dirty” before became commonplace. Afraid of being seen as intolerant and further victimizing those we’d already hurt, we went to Scripture looking for a way out.

Did God really say it was always a sin for men to have sex with men, or for women to do the same? Could the writers of the Bible really have imagined the kind of loving, monogamous gay relationships we see around us now? Or were they speaking more specifically against a predatory kind of relationship in which boys were sexually abused by men? And besides, there are all sorts of prohibitions in the bible we don’t follow any more. Why should this be different? If I can eat shellfish, shouldn’t I be able to have sex with whomever I please so long as I’m not hurting someone else? For many, these questions became a spring board for joining the revolution and throwing out whatever parts of the Bible didn’t fit with the theme. For others, those not willing to turn their back on the Bible and go with the flow, these kinds of questions have been paralyzing and left us in silence, with our heads in the sand.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Harrison, Glynn. *A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing* (Kindle Locations 793-799). IVP. Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> For answers to questions like the ones in this paragraph see Kevin DeYoung’s *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?*

My hope today is to offer you a way forward, a way to recover and celebrate God's story in a culture that despises it. People of God you do not have to be ashamed. Yes, there are lessons to learn. But you still hold the words of life. The cracks in the heroic narrative of the sexual revolution are beginning to show. It cannot deliver on the hope that it promised, but God can and He does.

I think that there are at least four lessons that we can learn from the sexual revolution.

1. First, we need to talk about sex as the gift that it is. It is not something to be ashamed about, but celebrated and thoroughly enjoyed in the context of marriage. When sex is a hidden/silent/repressed reality within the church, we leave ourselves at the mercies of the teachings of the world around us and sin spreads like wildfire.
2. Second, we need to start being open and honest about all of our sins, not just the "hot-button" issues. There are sexless marriages within the church. That is a sin. There is fornication and adultery within the church. Those are sins too. We need to find ways of recovering God's vision for sex that addresses these issues.
3. Third, we need to come to grips with our fear, prejudice, and disgust. The thought of anal or oral sex to many of you may seem so unnatural as to evoke a visceral, gut, reaction of "yuck". If it does, get over it. You are broken. You are sinful. You are in need of a Savior. When we react with fear and disgust, we are ignoring the plank in our own eyes and sabotaging our ability to bring truth in humility and love. We are playing the role of the Pharisees to the sinner's and tax collectors of Jesus's day, who he warned:

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness."<sup>3</sup>

4. Fourth, we need to find ways of meeting people where they are at, both physically and emotionally. If the majority of our interactions are with other believers, we need to find ways of getting outside the camp and doing life with those who don't think or act like us. Also, our retelling of God's story needs to appeal to the heart, not just the head. We need to offer people "the treasure hidden in the field" and "the pearl of great value", worth giving up your life for rather than simply asking folks to give up their lives.

But it has not been all good. There are shortcomings in the revolution that we need to recognize and, given the opportunity, use to challenge our culture to something better.

1. More sex? Better sex? One of the great promises of the revolution is uninhibited sex. The kind of sex that we see so often in the movie industry—an endless string of frequent, varied, erotic, spontaneous, and soul-satisfying sexual experiences. While parts of this may have been a good reminder for those of us who may of forgotten that sex was supposed to be fun, the revolution hasn't delivered. In fact, despite the collapse of societal barriers to sex outside of traditional marriages and the ease of "hooking up" through apps like Tinder, one researcher joked that at the current rate of decline "by 2040 the average person will not be having any sex at all."<sup>4</sup>
2. More fulfillment? Ironically, to make the pursuit of your own pleasure your primary aim is self-defeating because our pleasure depends on the pleasure of others. We are relational beings. Yet people are less connected to one another in real ways than ever and thus we

---

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 23:27-28. ESV.

<sup>4</sup> David Spiegelhalter, Oxford statistician. As quoted by Harrison, Glynn. A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing (Kindle Locations 1288-1290). IVP. Kindle Edition.

are lonelier than ever. Loneliness is the natural result of chasing after radical individualism's sacred values of freedom, autonomy, control of one's time and space, search for individual fulfillment.

3. Self-identity? We have been promised that by searching deep within ourselves we will find out who we really are and that this will lead to a stronger, more authentic, and more durable sense of core identity. However, in practice, we are unable to separate ourselves from the influences around us. Thus when we look "within" ourselves we are simply looking at the core values of the fallen culture around us, so engrained in us over time that they are indistinguishable from our own thoughts. This means when culture changes, our "inner" reality changes and being tossed around by the shifting expectations only exacerbates the feelings of emptiness and loneliness we saw above.
4. Victimhood & hypocrisy. One of the main thrusts of the sexual revolution was the idea of tolerance. Initially, it was a way of protecting those who had been hurt or victimized by the bigotry and prejudice of the church and prevailing culture. Over time this notion of tolerance as grown to become itself intolerant of the views of others. The decision not to bake a cake or provide some other service for a gay wedding on religious grounds, for example, will invite all manner of backlash on Twitter and Facebook. Your life will likely be threatened, friends will disown you, and you could be boycotted right out of business.
5. Where do kids fit in? Children have been overlooked by the revolution. For many they are the unfortunate byproduct of a sexual experience otherwise focused on one's own pleasure and should be avoided at all costs. Hence, the proliferation of contraceptive options and millions of children murdered through abortion.

Once born children bear the worst effects of the revolution. The simple truth is that children do better physically, cognitively, and emotionally on average when raised by two biologic parents than they do when raised in any other circumstance. Children's development is not only stunted by their family situation but by the information that culture is delivering to them. The ubiquitous nature of pornography means that this is where the majority of kids are receiving their sex education, rather than their parents or school. At the same time, their ability to form a sense of who they are sexually (which is crucial to development) is being undercut by the concept of gender fluidity. As Glynn Harrison writes:

Children are being told that gender is 'fluid' and that the biggest clue to gender is not found in the shape of your body but in the state of your mind. The problem here is that attempts to meet the needs of the few (no matter how well intentioned) risk confusion and harm for the many. Children and young people are being subject to an untried and untested social experiment involving potential interference with their gender identity development that has until now proceeded perfectly satisfactorily for the vast majority.<sup>5</sup>

Those are a few of the lessons we can learn and some of the cracks that have developed in the sexual revolution, which is simply the latest reiteration of the World's story. Where do we go from here?

We need to start by fixing our eyes back on God. Know the story of his glorious provision and celebrate it. Hopefully this sermon series will help you. there are other resources too, not the least of which is the Bible. God has spoken, so we can rest in the knowledge that we don't have to figure it all out for ourselves. He welcomes us into his reality, not one we make up for ourselves. We flourish as human beings when we work with, rather than against, the grain of God's reality. Meaning he created us to enjoy Him most of all. God not only reveals who he is,

---

<sup>5</sup> Harrison, Glynn. A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing (Kindle Locations 1649-1653). IVP. Kindle Edition.

but reveals who we are as well. We don't have to seek within ourselves or anywhere else to find our identity. We have simply to look to God and his word the Bible.

Know that no matter what, God is good. He delights in you and created you to flourish most fully in him. Zephaniah 3:17 reads:

The Lord your God is in your midst,  
a mighty one who will save;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness;  
he will quiet you by his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing.

While God's desire for human flourishing is clearly displayed in creation it is emphatically announced, shouted from the rooftops even, in the story of Christ's death on the cross. He could easily have destroyed or ignored us in our rebellion, but he did not. Instead, he humbled himself lower than we can imagine to become a man and join in our suffering and temptations and then to take the full weight of our sin on his shoulders.

With God clearly fixed in our mind's eye, we can move on to putting to death our sin. Confessing, repenting, and turning away. Whether it be pornography, masturbation, or sex outside God's design for marriage in its various forms (fornication, adultery, or homosexuality) we need to take this seriously, even if it means ridding our lives of things that seem like givens in our culture (TVs, internet access, computers, smartphones). The price for willful disobedience is death and eternal suffering apart from God. This is not a one-and-done kind of deal. It's a process we often have to repeat over and over and over again, some times with new sins and other times with the same sin as long as we live. Nor is the temptation itself the sin, but the entertaining of it in thought and action.

Knowing that the struggle against sin can continue for a lifetime, we must not hold up heterosexuality or "going straight" as the goal for our gay brothers and sisters. As with everyone, the goal is Christ and we honor him by not entertaining lustful thoughts (regardless of the object) or engaging in sexual relations outside of God's design for marriage "one mortal life fully shared between one man and one woman". They may, as in the case of author Rosaria Butterfield, find their desires changed but many will not. We need to learn to walk alongside these brothers and sisters in their struggle just as they walk along side the rest of the individuals in the church in their struggles.

On the same note, we need to make it easier to talk about struggles. One way of doing this is for each and every one of us to be modeling confession and openness. This can be through corporate confession, such as we do from time to time at MACC, but this can also be in the intimacy of one-on-one situations or small group settings. We cannot speak to a world that places such value on authenticity, unless we are willing to be authentic ourselves. But, unlike the world, this openness is not an end in itself but should move towards repentance. If there is no struggle against sin, then we remain "dead" in transgressions. We cannot claim the name of Christ, if we are unwilling to submit our entire lives to his teaching.

The final step, taken even as we are putting off sin, is to put on godliness. Our lives must be telling his story and declaring his worthiness. For the singles, this means championing the worthiness of God by remaining chaste. It is not a denying of your sexuality or desires but a declaration that God is better. He is our ultimate reward and worth laying down everything else for, including sexual experiences no matter how glorious. For the married, you are to regularly stoke the fires of sexual intimacy. You are to seek your pleasure in the pleasure of your spouse, not to use sex as tool for your own fulfillment or to punish your spouse by withholding it. Your

marriage should be a means for the building up of your spouse and for bearing witness to the faithful, passionate, and fruitful love of God for his people.

We also need to honor Singleness, really honor it. We need to celebrate the role that Singles have played in the story of God's people, and the role they continue to play as we move forward. Giants of the faith such as Elijah and Paul. More modern examples such as David Brainerd, John Marrant, Amy Carmichael, and Samuel Morris. How are we doing at inspiring the next generation of singles to see their position as a vocation, a special gifting that allows them access to people and places where families cannot go (e.g. certain unreached people groups or even domestically fostering kids who come from abusive backgrounds)... Singles, have we let you know that we need you?

Singles and married folks alike need to recognize that we have been adopted ourselves into God's family and begin to make the most of our spiritual household. This requires commitment over time. It requires seeking one another out. One of our focuses at MACC during summer is building fellowship. We're almost half way through the summer now. How are you doing? Are we getting outside our natural groupings and meeting those that don't look or think like us? Singles and families are you connecting with one another? How are we dealing with conflict in the church? Are we considering others better than ourselves, or fighting for our rights? Do we view messy situations as God-given opportunities to grow in our faith and character and to pray for and serve one another?

As we encounter those we disagree with both within the church and without, we need to start by listening. Then we need to listen some more. Not so we can better inform our arguments but so that we can find those areas where we have agreement and build real connections. I believe one of the downfalls of our fascination with social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook is that we have lost the ability to have conversations with those that disagree with us. Our blood boils too hot too fast to sustain dialogue. All we seem capable of is extended shouting matches. To change we will need to pray for spirits of peace and gentleness and bite our tongues, while reminding ourselves that we are talking with people who were created with purpose, value, and worth.

Finally, we need to ensure that our local bodies have godly leadership. We need pastors and elders who can support the body in grace and truth. They are the ones who are proclaiming God's word from the front and they are also the ones who often spend their nights and weekends counseling those hurting in the body. We need mechanisms of ensuring that leaders are properly prepared for their roles, have healthy rhythms of work and rest, and have ways of keeping them accountable as they are leading.

Friends and family. We are all hopelessly broken in ourselves, "dead in our transgressions" is how the bible phrases it. It does not matter whether our sins are primarily sexual or of some other variety they are likewise deserving of hell. We need God to breathe new life into us, to recreate us from the inside out. If you have not already begun that journey, will you let him do that with you today? If you have begun the journey will you commit yourself again to fixing your eyes on God, putting to death sin (again & again), and putting on Christ (again & again). Get involved in a local church, whether it be this one or another one. We would love to support you in this journey, whether you are a member or not.

Our friends and our neighbors and coworkers need to hear God's story too. They need to know there is a glorious alternative to our modern culture's a la carte sexual ethics which leads to long strings of fractured relationships and loneliness on earth and eventually unimaginable suffering in eternity. They need to be reminded of God's goodness and his sacrifice that allows us to go from death to life. Will you tell them? Will you model it for them? If today you have felt

God's pull at your heart to turn to him for the first time or turn back to him for the 100th time please do not ignore that call. He delights in you. He created you to flourish in him. Don't wait.

**Benediction:** Isaiah 62:1-5

**Resources:**

Butterfield, Rosaria.

DeYoung, Kevin. What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?

Harrison, Glynn. A Better Story: God, Sex And Human Flourishing

Ortland, Ray. Marriage and the Mystery of the Gospel.