

*The following is a transcript of a sermon from July 28, 2013 called "The Gospel & Homosexuality." You can listen to the corresponding audio [here](#).*

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1Well, howdy, howdy. How we doin' this morning? Good, good. It's good to see you guys. My name is Jon, I'm one of the teaching pastors here at Midtown. Really glad to be with you this morning. Glad you're here. Really appreciate what Adam said, that this is not a forum for us to draw attention to ourselves, that's just not what we're doing. But as I've been prepping and preparing, I just thank Jesus that I, I just have such high expectations for you guys in the way that you respect each other and love each other. So, I'm really excited about this morning and what we're gonna be talking about. Let's just go ahead, I'll pray and then we'll get started, alright?

Father God, thank You so much for today. God, thank You for Your clarity, Your Word that helps us understand life. God, thank You that You love us. Thank You that You chose to care about us when we didn't deserve that, when we didn't do anything to earn it, God. It seems like probably you should've just ignored us and punished us, and instead you chose to love us and offer us grace. And You did so at great sacrifice and cost to Yourself, God, that You gave up Your Son for us, for my sin. God, thank You so much that You chose to love me at great cost to Yourself, Jesus. God, as we get going this morning, I confess that so rarely do I love people the way that You love us. My love very rarely looks like Your love. God, so much of the time I'm filled with so much self-righteousness and pride, and I just confess it. I ask for Your grace and I thank You for Your grace secured for me in the cross of Jesus. Jesus is my only hope. God, and I pray this morning that all of our hearts as individuals and collectively as a group that we would be drawn towards Jesus, that we would see Jesus as our hope, as our righteousness, that we would see His goodness and His love and His grace for us as our one chance at knowing You and being part of Your family. Thank You so much for Jesus. Pray it all in His precious name, amen.

Here's how we'll handle this morning. In a little while, I'll have the privilege and honor of inviting one of my good friends to join me on the stage, and he'll share some of his perspective and his personal experience with same-gender attraction. That will be just a really incredible blessing and encouragement and challenge for all of us.

Before I invite him up here with us, let me lay some groundwork. I met him about three years ago. I was planning our college spring break trip up to Boston. He and I decided to do an optional Q&A late night session. So, we had sessions each night, but for one night, we had an optional, later-night session. And we told the college students on the trip, "Instead of seeing this beautiful city of Boston that you've probably never been in before, instead of that, you can come back to this optional Q&A session, and the topic will be the Gospel and homosexuality." And we thought maybe 30-60 people would come, and instead, like all 200 of them came back for this late-night session. And we just didn't anticipate that at all, but I started to really understand even different than when I was in college how rapidly this issue is becoming a massive issue in our society and in our culture. People want to talk about it, and they want help thinking through it and processing through it.

So, really, I think what happened that night is that through his honesty and his vulnerability, it started to set this culture in our church family where people felt safe, they felt safe to talk about their issues with same-gender attraction. What happened is that when they began to talk about it, they didn't find rejection. They didn't find people saying, "Get out, I don't wanna talk to you. We don't want to be around you, you're not welcome here." Instead, they found love and they were still welcomed into the church family. So it has bred this culture, and what happened is that a few years after that, one of our pastors Brandon Clements took a group of people who were dealing with different amounts of same-gender attraction. They all went to a conference together to learn more about the topic. And while Brandon was there at this conference, he met this lady from a different church in a different city. They were getting to know each other, and he was telling her that he was a pastor, that he doesn't deal with same-gender attraction, but was with a group of people from our church that did. She just, as he was talking, tears just started to well up in her eyes, and she looked at him and she said, "Wait, you mean to tell me that in your church, people can be honest and open about their same-gender attractions and they just get welcomed in, and they get people who come alongside and walk alongside of them? I've never heard of that before. I didn't know that that was a thing."

And that story makes me so proud of my church family in one way, and it makes me so sad at the same time, because the church as a whole ought...if the church is the gathered group of people who have been rescued by Jesus's grace, then what should be happening in the church is the Gospel should be making the church the safest place on earth for anyone, because the Gospel is the only way of looking at the world that says no matter what you believe, no matter who you are, no matter what your background is, no matter how hard of a life you've lived or how easy of a life you've lived, no matter what color your skin is, no matter what gender you are, it doesn't matter. Everyone is welcome at the cross of Jesus. The Gospel is very progressive and very inclusive in that manner, that all of us are welcome to come and repent at the cross of Jesus, that all of us find out that the God of the Universe loves us more than we can imagine at the cross of Jesus, and we're all invited, and we're all welcomed. And unfortunately, that's just not the case. So much of the time, churches aren't a safe place for this conversation, and churches aren't a safe place for people with same-gender attraction.

And so, what I want to do before I invite my friend up here on stage, I just wanna lay 12 foundational points to give us some common grounding for this conversation that we'll be having this morning, alright? I'll obviously have to move quickly through these. They'll be on the screen so you can write them down if you like. If you have follow-up questions, feel free to ask us after the Gathering or on Tuesday night at the Panel that we'll have here with some live Q&A that Adam mentioned earlier, alright? We'll pick up right where I was just at with #1.

## **1) Our culture has a track record of being unloving to people with same-gender attraction.**

Honestly being cruel, disrespectful, and unloving. This is absolutely not okay. Specifically for us as Christians who believe the Bible, here's why, because we believe Genesis 1:26-27 where God says, "Let us make man in our image." "So in the image of God He created him. Male and female, He created them." See, as Christians, we believe that every human being has been created by God, was created for God, and was created in the image of God, which means that all of us have inherent dignity and value and worth that all of us are worthy of some amount of respect and love from one another because this is what the Bible teaches.

## **2) This issue in our culture is overly polarized.**

This issue is overly polarized. It's polarized because it's kinda filled with all this political tension and angst. It's polarized to the point that it almost feels like people will leave our church family no matter what we say today. Like, I won't be able to be conservative enough for some of you, and I won't be able to be liberal enough for some of you. There's just so much tension and polarization on this issue. It's polarized to the point where it almost seems like adult human beings otherwise rational can't have a conversation about this topic without calling each other names. Now that's exposing of something. That's exposing that this issue gets down to some really root, cultural values and deep idols that we hold. Can I just say this? If I can't disagree with you without calling you a name, then I am not tolerant, no matter what I would like to believe.

I'll throw one more out there before we move on. I am not going to make any political statements this morning whatsoever. We could have a different conversation about that, but that's just not what I'm gonna do this morning. I'm not recommending any laws that I think should be passed or should not be passed. That's just not the nature of the conversation that I'm entering into this morning. But the hard thing with this topic is that anything I say, it will sound like I'm saying a dozen other things that I didn't actually say. So, I'm gonna try to make a deal with you, okay? I've worked as hard as I can to say precisely and exactly what I mean to say. Will you do me a favor? Will you do the best you can to just deal with and wrestle with the things that I do say, and not the other maybe dozen or 100 things it sounds like I could be saying, 'cause I'm not, and I didn't say those things for a reason. You don't have to, but I'm just asking for that favor. It's tough, I know.

## **3) Our culture's narrative for same-gender attraction is oversimplified.**

The common story that the culture's saying is oversimplified. It goes something like this. You were either born straight or gay. That will reveal itself to you through your feelings sometime around puberty for most of us. From there, you choose to date, like, pursue, and marry whoever you'd like. Anything else will make you miserable, and anyone who tries to stand in your way hates you and wants you to be miserable. This is a very oversimplified story, okay?

There are a variety of things that contribute to our sexuality for all of us. There are some born-in elements that we were born with. There are some environmental nurturing elements based on how we were raised and who we were raised around, and also there are some individual decisions and thoughts that reinforce some of those nature and nurture elements. The Scripture's story of the human narrative is more beautiful and more complex than the oversimplified cultural story that we've been told. Number 4 will go right along with #3.

## **4) Our culture sees sexuality as an identity. This is incorrect.**

We are not defined by our sexuality. We know this. You are more than your sexuality. Who you are, your identity, it's more than, it's bigger than, it transcends your sexuality. But somehow, when the topic is homosexuality, it's like we've lost any grounding in that, and we believe that our sexuality is who we are. That's not true. Biblically speaking, that's too small. If you want to

read more about that, I recommend a book called *The End of Sexual Identity*. The subtitle is *Why Sex is Too Important to Define Who We Are*. And I love that subtitle because it blows up categories in my brain, and I think it's really helpful.

## **5) Everyone who becomes a Christian is called to submit our desires and our identity to Jesus.**

You're gonna want to note the word everyone in that sentence. Everyone who becomes a Christian is called to submit their desires and identity to Jesus. Here's how I know. This is what Jesus says in Luke 9:23. "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." This is not optional for any Christian. This includes good, bad, and neutral parts of your character and your identity. It all gets submitted to Jesus.

## **6) Sin is not just bad things that we do.**

This is really important, and I wish I had more time, but we'll do it as quickly as I can. Sin is not just bad things that we do. Sin is searching for satisfaction in anything other than God. Now, if you're not a Christian and you're with us this morning, and I hope some of you, that's exactly where you're at, welcome, we're really glad you're here. That might be throwing you a little bit, because in our culture, this is how sin gets talked about constantly. "Sin is the bad thing that you do, don't do the bad things." And it's like, that is not close to a holistic, Biblical picture of sin. That's way too small. I don't have the time to dig in all the way, but I'll just give you a few aspects of sin that are important for this conversation.

Biblically, sin is born in. It's a state of the soul, a bent in us. The biblical words are depravity and iniquity. All of us are born with a sinful nature. We are born with an internal bent towards sin. All of us have born-in sinful desires and attractions. In some way, all of us are born sinful. All of us have sexual brokenness of one kind or another. So here's why this is important. It's absolutely biblically faithful to say that someone could be born with same-gender attraction. Genetically and scientifically, this has not been conclusively proven, for what it's worth, but I'll take my friends at their word, and I know that that is different from plenty of college professors' teaching. But it hasn't been conclusively proven, but I'll take my friend at his word. It's absolutely, biblically possible that someone could be born with same-gender attraction, and that does not immediately mean that there's no possible way it could be sinful. Sure, it could be. We're all born with sinful traits and desires. Number 7 goes right along with #6.

## **7) Sin is a big deal because God loves people and He wants His best for our lives.**

When God tells us that sin is a big deal, it is never because He hates us. It is always because He loves us. Let me throw a few implications of that out there, okay? A lot of churches do not seem to make a very big deal out of sin in general. But then when it comes to homosexuality, they seem to make a very big deal out of it being sinful, and that strikes some people as being hypocritical and inconsistent. And I'll tell you why it strikes them that way. It's because it's hypocritical and inconsistent. That's the problem. Here's another implication. Okay, look, for me to tell you, or better yet, for you to tell me something is sinful in my life, I do not assume that means you hate me. My wife on a consistent basis tells me things that are sinful in my life, and

I don't think that's because she hates me. God loves us and He wants His best for our lives, so He points out sin because it's not His best for our lives. It's choosing to find satisfaction in something other than Him.

## **8) There are many people in our church family who have varying levels of same-gender attraction.**

This one makes me very happy. Here's what that means. You can absolutely be a Bible-believing, Jesus-loving, on-mission, Holy Spirit-filled Christian, and have same-gender attraction. 100%. I know you can be, because I know some of you, and that's exactly what some of you are. And it's beautiful. And I'm really thankful for Jesus's grace, that we have an environment where that can be true.

Now, before I get to number 9, I want to show you some of my Biblical homework before I come to the conclusion where we land and where the Bible lands as to whether homosexual activity is sinful, okay? Now, unfortunately, some of the verses that I'm about to read have been, they get kinda labeled as 'clobber verses' and 'bully verses', and the reason they get labeled that, it's because sometimes they've been used to clobber people and to bully people, and that's really unfortunate, because that's not what these verses were designed for, alright? God shows us what's sinful because He loves us, not because He hates us. These verses aren't for clobbering or for bullying. They're just verses that are supposed to be read like all the other verses in Scripture. Here we go.

Romans 1, some selections from verses 23-37. "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal men and birds and animals and creeping things." Alright, here's where we get this idea that sin is more than bad things we do. It's trading God for anything else, looking for it to be satisfying. Keep reading. "Therefore, God gave them up to the lusts of their hearts to impurity, for their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another." Not a clobber verse, it's just a clear and direct verse.

1 Timothy 1:9-10: "Now we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully. Understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the sexually immoral men who practice homosexuality, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine."

1 Corinthians 6:9-10: "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

## **9) The Bible clearly, directly, and repetitively describes homosexual activity as sinful.**

Clearly, directly, and repetitively. Let me be really careful here. None of these verses say that same-gender attraction is sinful. They all say homosexual activity is sinful. This is why, throughout church history, across denominational lines, from Catholic to Pentecostal, until very

recent years, there has been overwhelming general consensus about what these verses mean, because they're very clear. They're very apparent in what they mean. Not intended to beat up, just intended to inform truthfully and faithfully.

Now, I will say this. I'll just give the benefit of the doubt. Some valid and legitimate questions that you might have about some of these passages, or some valid and legitimate questions that you might hear come up sometimes. With Romans 1, sometimes people ask the question, "Well, isn't that passage really just talking about weird, outdated temple worship involving idols?" And the answer is no. That's not what Paul is talking about. Paul's making a much larger argument. All of us, whether we've ever set foot inside a temple or not, in our hearts we create idols that we trade God to try and find other things that satisfy. Some people will even ask the question, "Is Paul saying that we shouldn't reject our natural desires and turn to something that's unnatural to me specifically?" And the answer is once again, no, that's just not what he's saying. You can't faithfully read the passage and really land there.

When it comes to 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy, a lot of times the question that will come up is, "Isn't the Greek word that Paul uses in those long lists of things, isn't it really obscure and kinda hard to define, and what it refers to is older men having strange, pedophilic relationships with younger boys?" And once again, the answer is no. I won't get all the way into the details, but the Greek word is a combination of two other Greek words directly translated from the Hebrew, and it would be like in our language, if I said Columbia-dweller, and you were like "I've never heard that English word before." True, I just made it up, but you can figure out what it means, 'cause it's two words put together. Columbia dweller. A person who dwells in Columbia. None of us would be confused. It's the exact same thing with the Greek words that Paul uses in both 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians. If you have more question about any of that, we'd love to talk with you afterwards or at the panel on Tuesday night. Number 10...this one is why #9 is really, really important.

## **10) Anyone who chooses to pursue unrepentant sin of any kind over Jesus is exposing that they aren't truly a Christian.**

This is 1 John 3:9: "No one born of God makes a practice of sinning. For God's seed abides in him, and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God." Wait, is that saying that no Christian ever sins ever? Absolutely not. Absolutely not. All of us sin and will sin for the rest of our lives. However, the question is not, "do you ever sin?" The question is, "Are you fighting it? Are you confessing? Are you repenting? Are you walking in the Light? Are you submitting your desires and your identity to Jesus?" Because that's what all of us are called to do as Christians. That's what we all do. And if you choose not to do that, then that exposes about your heart that you are choosing something over Jesus, which exposes that you're not really a Christian in that regard. And if you make a patterned, unrepentant choice to choose sin over Jesus, that's not what a Christian is. A Christian is someone who over and over and over again makes a pattern of choosing Jesus over sin. Not that we never fail. We walk by grace. We absolutely fail. But it's about whether you're fighting or not.

Now let me be clear on this, because this is a point where you could hear something I'm not saying, okay? I am not saying that someone who has same-gender attractions needs to be reoriented. I'm not saying that. Here's why I'm not saying that. I would hate for you to believe that what I think is heterosexual marriage is the hope for us. It's not! Jesus is hope for us! Not

marriage. Marriage isn't my hope. It's not your hope. Jesus is my hope. He's what I want. Are there some people with same-gender attraction who choose heterosexual marriage? Yeah, that happens sometimes, and Jesus can absolutely be glorified by that. Are there sometimes where they don't, and they stay celibate their whole lives? Yep, and Jesus can absolutely be glorified by that as well.

## **11) Culture will force us to decide where we land on this issue.**

I can't let you be naïve enough to think that you could land at, "Eh, I don't really know, not a big deal." Culture's not gonna let you land there. You can't land with a nonchalant attitude on this issue. If you deal with same-gender attraction, then you're gonna need to decide to follow Jesus not just once, but over and over again, you're gonna need to redecide to resubmit your desires and your attraction and your whole identity to Jesus. If you're a Christian and you don't struggle with same-gender attraction, you're gonna need to decide whether or not you're gonna be faithful on this issue. Here's how Martin Luther put it. He said, "Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, not at the edge of the field." The question is whether you're gonna be faithful to Jesus if it means people are gonna hate you for it. Just looking at the cultural trend, it doesn't seem that this viewpoint is going to become more popular over time.

And I'll just, can I be real honest with you guys? One of my biggest fears and anxieties in life is that I really want people to like me. Like you guys, I want you to like me. I really do. It totally bums me out that to agree with the Bible, I'm probably gonna lose friends over it. That makes me sad. People that I liked are probably gonna decide at some point that we can't be friends because I agree with Scripture. It makes me sad. There are parts of me that wish that the Bible said different things than what it says. But it doesn't. And me wanting it to be so doesn't make it true. Culture will absolutely force your hand to decide where you're gonna land on this issue. #12...where God ultimately wants us to land on this issue...

## **12) Jesus calls us to love God and to love people.**

Matthew 22:37-39: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." That's where God wants us to land. Jesus's formula for what was most important in life is very simple. Love God, and love people. Love God so much that the only thing that even comes close to how much you love God is how much you love people. Don't pick one or the other, pick both.

Here's what's unfortunate. Our culture's trying to force this issue in a way that there are only two categories for you. Category #1 is you can be really hip and progressive and tolerant and you can love and affirm everything about homosexuality. That's one category. Or, if you don't pick that, your only option is that you are a mean-spirited, bigoted, angry, closed-minded, small-view, backwards individual. Those are the only two categories that culture really gives us. I am so thankful that God gives us more categories than our culture does. And what God says is, "No, those aren't the only two categories. Love Me, and love people. Don't let anybody outserve your homosexual friends. Don't let anybody outlove them. You go show off the way that I love people who disagree with me. Go show off the way that I gave you grace when you wanted nothing to do with me. Go love people! Shatter the categories."

I've heard it said like this. Don't, for the sake of loving God, fail to love people. And don't, for the sake of loving people, fail to love God and be faithful to Him. Twelve foundational points, and I think that by Jesus's grace, that a little bit of that loving God and loving people has happened, and so there's kind of been this culture and environment of safety for people to be honest, and so at this point, I'd like to invite my good friend, one of these people, to come up on stage, and we can all learn from him. If you don't mind, would you give him a big round of applause? [applause] Great. Thanks so much.

## Interview:

[Jon] If you don't know him, he's been one of our pastors in training. He's also been a LifeGroup leader and a coach of LifeGroup leaders and a faithful brother in our family. So, why don't you start us off, man. Tell us a little bit about yourself and your story, and when did you first notice same-gender attraction, when did Jesus get involved in your story? Give us some background.

[Interviewee] There's a lot of different ways through this issue. I think that for some people it came kinda later in their life, for some people they experience it kinda temporary or whatever. My story is more of the normal story. I've always known this was there. When you're a kid you don't really know what that is, right? But looking back at my childhood, I could see it was different. But it's probably like around middle school that you start to realize that, "Oh, my experience of the world is different from what others' experience of the world is" and you just kinda start to piece that together. And, I sorta grew up knowing there was a God, like I always believed there was a God. And I realized this about myself, and it threw me into turmoil. I kind of wanted to seek out God, and so I got a Bible, which is a good place to start. I started reading at the beginning, and I was reading Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and I got to the verses where they were talking about like, "You should kill gay people." And even then as an eighth grader in the late '80s, I still heard this thing like "God hates them. Like, they were right, it's what they said...it's right here, that God wants to kill me." And I was crushed, because I wanted to find God. I didn't really have the rest of the story, you know I was just thinking, "I guess it's too late for that." But God works in mysterious ways and He had me a couple of years later getting my big crush on the most Christian guy in our high school.

[Jon] That's irony right there, people. Or sovereignty, your choice. Either one.

[Interviewee] It's like, I think, what drew me to him really was the Holy Spirit living inside of him, which, he really loved Jesus and invited me to church, which I didn't want to do, but he was there, and...I eventually after several months ended up going, and I heard the Gospel, and I still didn't really get it, but I began to kind of ask my friends. And I was probably the hostile kid who'd you'd never guessed would become a Christian, so if you have those friends or coworkers, don't give up on them. But, you know, I think through people's prayers, God just chased me down. Eventually I submitted to Jesus and got what Christians meant when they talked about this thing, the Gospel. I thought that then, these attractions would change. Obviously, it says in the Bible it's not something we wanted, but that didn't end up happening. It was very disillusioning at first. "You know, maybe I shouldn't follow God that passionately if He doesn't do for me the one thing that I want Him to do," wanting a vending machine God. I put in the Christian activity, and out comes what I want, the blessing. But that didn't happen, but God



did a lot of signs and wonders in a way to keep me following and trusting that He was actually listening and hearing me.

In college, I was still petrified to tell anyone about this because I had this image of a Christian kid, but eventually the Holy Spirit just began to crush me and grind me down and saying, “You have to tell this to people.” I remember getting to the point where I was like, if I tell people this, I will definitely get kicked out of church. I will definitely get asked to not come back, and I was a high school youth group leader, so definitely not that. Eventually I couldn’t ignore it. I was just gonna go insane or I had to tell someone because Jesus was pressing me all the time. I told people and they were like, “Okay.” And I was like, “What? All these years of torment and just that?” They were like, “Yeah, people deal with that, and people have sins...everyone has things they’re dealing with, it’s not a big deal.” And I was like, “What?” It was extremely anticlimactic. It almost made me very angry. [laughter]

But we really can end up believing lies. I got involved in a church, but I was still hesitant about making this public. I was still really hoping for orientation change. I think I was really pursuing that, I wanted to feel normal. I wanted to be a fully-fledged Christian like all of my friends who were getting married and having kids. And I was putting that before getting more of Christ. Through then, over the years, I realized that that is not really what God is after. Even if He were to have a sort of magical wand that would redirect my orientation, I always thought that that would be the best possible thing, but I came to realize that that would be bad for me. At best, it would be a sideways leap. I would be like those lepers who Jesus healed and then walked away and forgot that Jesus healed them. I still would’ve been mired in sexual sin. I still would’ve had a broken sexual orientation, where I was sexually oriented towards people but the one person whom I would spend the rest of my life with. Why would God change broken sexual fantasies and desires from one thing for another thing? It would be a complete sideways leap.

God has showed me then, “It’s about Me. I’m fulfillment of your desires. I’m what is going to meet your needs, so keep pursuing me.” There’ve been times when I’ve been in good community, when I was in Michigan. When I went overseas, I was out of community. I thought, “I’ve got this now. I don’t need to continue being broken and sacrificing my reputation all the time on the altar” and all those terrible things. So I thought, “Now I’m a missionary and I can do it.” Being out of community, if I can be honest, I got in some bad places. I was involved with guys who weren’t believers. I was a very mature Christian at the time, I was even a missionary. But this was so deceiving. I knew it was totally wrong, but I was so out of community, so out of a place where I was being challenged to submit my desires to Christ. But I ended up there, and even a couple of times along the way, if I’m honest, even since I’ve lived in Columbia, there’ve been times when I’ve met Christian men who are attracted to men who love Jesus and I got along with them very well, and you get to that point, like, “Could this work?” Just on the brink of like, “Maybe I should just screw church and what people think about me, but maybe somehow keep Jesus and make these two things work. It seems like if it were going to work, it would be with this person.” There’ve been a couple of times I’ve felt—Brandon Clements has heard me cry and pout, “I just want this to work, but it’s not going to work, I know it won’t, but I’ll get there eventually, just let me cry for a minute.”

In all of that, I feel like I’ve come to the brink. My witness isn’t my stellar behavior. I’ve certainly made my share of mistakes, and there are times when you can catch me that I don’t probably fully believe this stuff, but my witness is Jesus Christ and His faithfulness, who’s never let me go, never let me forget.

[Jon] Talk to me, it sounds obviously like community is a big part of how you follow Jesus as you struggle. Talk a little bit practically about what it's like day by day to follow Jesus, to submit your desires to Him.

[Interviewee] I think every story which is power in our culture is about a hero going where they don't want to go, but they have to go. I think life which is lived for Christ should be hard, and it should hurt, and it should really cost us. It's going to be because that's just how the world is, but in the end, it's worth it. It's the road that leads to a happy ending. I think some of the things I've learned along the way is that homosexuality isn't my biggest issue. It certainly feels like it, in a lot of my brothers and sisters who deal with this, "I feel like this takes up 80% of my mental energy some days. What would I be able to accomplish if I weren't spending 50-80% of my energy every single day fighting this?" But, I think for probably every Christian, we're probably spending 50-80% of our day pressing in toward Christ and constantly denying the natural direction of our flesh and our spirit and our will, and if you're not, you probably should.

I've realized, too, that my deepest sin struggles are pride and fear, and homosexuality is just one of many, many, many outworkings of this deep cocktail of pride, idolatries, and fear which bubble up in my life in many, many different ways. Maybe homosexuality is the most socially stigmatized one, it's the one most easily focused on, and it overlaps with a lot of our culture's idolatries, which I'll talk about soon. So, that becomes more the focus, but it's not my main issue. If I could change one sin in my life, it wouldn't be, well I don't believe same-gender attraction is a sin, but if I could change even one thing about my life about how I'm bent or how I'm wired, that is not what I'd change. There are much more detrimental things to my health and my ability to enjoy life than this.

The opposite of homosexuality is not heterosexuality, which is what would jump to mind. The opposite homosexuality is holiness. And the opposite of heterosexuality of holiness. Heterosexuality is actually a sinful sexual orientation. Heterosexuality is an identity built around the fact that, "I like to have sex with people of the opposite gender." So, that is not where God would want you to land. God wants to call you away from that. And so all of us have a broken sexual orientation which betrays us and works against us. All of us are called to leave that behind to follow Christ, to pursue Christ, to submit our desires to His desires, to submit the world's identities and categories to Him. So, like I said before, that would be a sideways leap if God made me a heterosexual, because it doesn't help any at all along the way towards holiness.

[Jon] If someone heard you saying that, and you even talk about temporary pain but it brings the only actual happy ending or happiness, what if someone walked up to you and said, "This isn't going to work, man. You're never gonna be happy. This is never gonna satisfy you. Quit. Quit doing this. This is dumb."

[Interviewee] Certainly I've had people say that to me all the time, even some Christians who think they're being helpful by saying that to me.

[Jon] So that's not helpful.

[Interviewee] Not helpful.

[Jon] Good to know.

[Interviewee] I think the reason that that question is so hard or the reason why we're just like, "Oh I want you to be happy," it's because our culture in general has this obsession with happiness. But if you really think what happiness is scientifically, it's the absence of negative impulses in your brain. So all happiness is is avoiding any sort of stimulus that would provide you discomfort, which, is that really what Jesus came to rescue us for, is that? If that's true, we should just get on a morphine trip for our whole life and we'd be totally happy.

[Jon] When you say it like that, happiness doesn't sound that good.

[Interviewee] Exactly. Happiness is really a deep, powerful idol, but it's enshrined in our Constitution, right? "Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." And it permeates American Christianity in a way that is so warped. I was so blessed to get to live on the Chinese/North Korean border and to interact with Christians there. Happiness means something totally different there if you become a Christian in North Korea. What you think God owes you as a follower of Christ is very different, and when I read the Bible, contrary to what Joel Osteen might say, I don't see a Bible that promises you wealth and friendship and health and a long life. What I see is a Bible that says you joyfully accept the confiscation of your property. You'll be hated and spoken against by all men. You will fill up in your own body what is lacking in the sufferings of Jesus Christ, and unite yourself to His crucifixion and His death so that you will be reunited with Him in His resurrection. The Bible picture of what it means to be a Christian is that you have to now all of a sudden swim totally against what everyone else is doing. You'll absolutely run into all kind of resistance. You'll lose your possessions, lose your reputation, lose your money, your friends, probably your health, probably die an early death, but what is waiting at the end is so worth it, like the parable of the treasure in the field we talked about a couple of weeks ago, to sell everything you have in order to buy the field that contains the treasure, which is Jesus Christ.

[Jon] Worth it.

[Interviewee] Yeah, so, happiness. Is happiness what I'm supposed to be going for? The point of being a human on earth is not to be happy. It's like the most self-full way. The point of being a human on earth is to be transformed to more and to the image of Jesus Christ. And the point of being a human on earth is to make God's characteristics known to the world that was made, that was built, to know that, to see those things, and it's being blinded to them, and to discover in your life by looking at your life the great and powerful enough-ness of Jesus Christ compared to all of these other idols. That is why we're human. It's not to be happy.

And I think one of the reasons this is such a contentious issue is sub to all this happiness idolatry, our culture has a huge romance idolatry. All of these romance pop songs of Taylor Swift, or all of these romance movies are as detrimental to our way of seeing the world and seeing our own sexuality as blatant pornography is, because what this is saying is is, "Because happiness is obviously the thing that life is all about, and romance is the main way to get that happiness. It's finding your soulmate and having a romantic relationship with them, that will fulfill all of your dreams," which is not true. Jon has found an amazing, beautiful, talented, gorgeous wife, and I know that hasn't fulfilled all his dreams. [laughter]

Being in a relationship doesn't answer all of your idolatries. It doesn't deliver what it promises to deliver. So, if you believe that romance is the best way to be happy, and happiness is the point of earth, of course working backwards, you'd be the cruelest person to tell someone you can't be romantically involved with who you want to be because that's the only way to be happy and being happy is the point. So, we come across as very cruel, but I think if our lives can just show there's something so much more than romance. If you, as Christians, are like, "It's not about my marriage. It's not about my romance. It's not about my happiness. It's about Jesus. It's about being replaced by Him. And ironically, I find my greatest joy, my greatest shalom, my greatest happiness." The Bible's calling us to shalom, which is absolute peace, everything, with God, other people. That is such a better goal than happiness. I'd much rather have reconciliation, peace, and complete contentment in my relationship with God than have happiness. I may experience some sense of torment and self-doubt in my earthly relationships and thoughts about romance, but I have peace, deep peace in my relationship with Jesus Christ. My friends who are involved in homosexual relationships, they have some degree of peace, but not even that much peace in that relationship, and they have a lot of torment and doubt in their relationship with Christ. To me, it's not worth it to be in that calculus.

[Jon] It's a bad trade. It gets said a lot, I hear this regularly a lot in our culture: "Well, I know God wants me to be happy," which is true or false?

[Interviewee] False.

[Jon] Straight up, what if someone went up to you and were like, "Aren't you worried that you'll be alone for your whole life?"

[Interviewee] That is the hardest thing. And if anyone ever trusts you enough and loves you enough that this is something they struggle with, that's probably the hardest thing. I desire to be a husband. I desire to be a father. Those are God-given desires. It is hard to see other people experiencing those things. Sometimes there's a poopy diaper, and I'm glad I'm not in that, but... [laughter]

[Jon] Smart, smart.

[Interviewee] But I've really come to see the context in which I can still live out my gender. It's in relationship with the church. As I read through the Bible, the Old and New Testament, God is constantly elevating our relationships with the people of God above our relationships with our spouses and our children. Our main family, our main destiny, our main calling, our main tribe is the church, and God didn't come to save individuals. He came to save a people. He wants us to submit all of our earthly relationships to the church and to really live out the church richly. So, I do worry about that. What happens when I'm 50? What happens, will I be alone? Will I be miserable? But, honestly, if you would've asked me when I was 20, "What if you found out you were 35 and single?" "Aah, I'd be single when I'm 35?! How miserable! That's terrible!" But, you know, I'm 35 and single, and it hasn't been that bad.

God has provided me so much family through Midtown and through you guys specifically in Columbia that have really given me a platform to husband people, figuratively, who need husbanding, to father younger brothers and sisters who need fathering, and to experience and live out my masculinity in relationship to the church. When you look at the whole church's history, the church has always had very special roles for celibate individuals, like priests, and

nuns, and monks, who were given the front line tasks of bringing about the kingdom of God of earth. They were seen as having this special gift and dispensation of having time, of having freedom of relational energy to do the work.

But I think that because of some of the perceptions of the culture that the nuclear family is under attack, Christians have responded in America by elevating the nuclear family above all things, like the whole point is being a good husband and a good father. That's hard enough for the 15% of straight people who will never get married, not by choice, but because no one comes along. No one ever pursues them, especially women. They would love more than anything to have this Christian guy to pursue them, but the odds are against you. There's more women than men, they're never gonna do that.

When we elevate marriage, and you have to be married and have to be a parent to be a fully-fledged Christian, it's a terrible thing and it's even harder for them, for people who deal with homosexuality, if the church is on the one hand holding up family, family, family, but then say, "Oh, but you want to have a family, you can't." We're telling them what they really need to be a Christian is to be married and to have kids, but you can't do that.

[Jon] Instead of saying we're the family...

[Interviewee] Instead of saying, no find that family. Exercise those desires in the context of the church, in your LifeGroup, with your roommates, with this community.

[Jon] Tell them what you told me about Kent.

[Interviewee] Yeah, so my friend Kent, he said that when he was getting married to his wife Ana, who I helped to get together, I'll take credit for that...

[Jon] Good job, very fatherly.

[Interviewee] He said one day to me, "If you're ever lonely...just move in with us. We'll let you move into our house and be a father to our kids. We'd never want you to be lonely. You don't have to be." Sorry, I'm also leaving next week, so it's a lot of emotion. Anyway, just to provide them a family is an amazing and a really powerful thing, to let people be the family, to give single people or whatever form that is, an equally valid role and integrated role into your family lives and into your community lives, I think is an important thing.

[Jon] What would you say if someone came up to you and said, "No, you're wrong. The Bible doesn't prohibit homosexual activity. All the stuff Jon was talking about, there's different ways to interpret those verses, that's way off."

[Interviewee] Yeah, I mean, I think there are Christians who, because they love Jesus, or they at least love being around the church and what it provides, but they also really want a relationship with someone of the same gender because of these romance and happiness idolatries which are normal for Americans and we don't usually call out in people. It's like the best way to get around this is to try and make the Bible not say that.

So, they'll take the verses that talk about homosexuality as kind of like, "These are supports that are holding up this system of beliefs that say I can't be in the relationship that I want, and if I can

knock out each of those Bible verses somehow, then the whole thing which is against me will collapse, and I can have both this relationship and God.” But the problem is, I’ve read all of those, and I really wish that those verses didn’t say what they did, and I’m a linguist, I just got my PhD in linguistics...I can dazzle you with the aorist mood and the imperfect preterite in Greek...twist you into thinking that those verses don’t actually say that, but I am convinced, like I’ve read the best arguments that people try to slip around, “Maybe these verses actually say that,” but they’re so unfulfilling. And I think that most of the people that will be on the panel on Tuesday, we’ve all come to that conclusion, like as much as we wish these explanations were true, it’s just such bad exegesis, like it’s bad understanding of this text. As much as I want with my soul for it to be true, and as much as I could, I just can’t.

But even if you were somehow able to take out those verses by reinterpreting them, or even if the Bible had never contained any verses that talk about it, the Biblical position on this issue is not resting on those verses. It’s not resting on a few specific prohibitions. It’s resting on this gigantic tree trunk of the whole, beautiful picture of why God put gender into the universe, and what gender and complementarity do and how that runs through everything in all of creation, and His desires for intimacy and His desires for life. It’s this much, much bigger picture. What the Bible upholds, what the Bible says is the center we should be running to is so unambiguous, and is so clear, that these questions of “How close can I get to the edge and still be okay” are sorta meaningless.

So, it’s not really that these are pillars holding up this belief system which is against people. It’s these are branches of this giant tree which is the Tree of Life, which is the tree of what God is wanting to do, and you could even try to saw off those branches, but this thing would still be supported by the weight of the whole tree. And in order to really get the Bible to say that God totally doesn’t care, that homosexuality is part of His original plan for creation, you’d kinda have to saw down the whole tree. I’ve met a lot of people, I have a lot of really good friends who have done that, and what you’re left with is not the Gospel, it’s not really Jesus, it’s not a recognizable Christianity. Ultimately, it’s kind of unsatisfying.

[Jon] Reminds me about the Stepford God. Tim Keller is a pastor who kinda explains the Stepford Wives movie where they guys figured out a way for their wives to do exactly what they wanted and only what they wanted whenever they wanted. They ended up with not fulfilling relationships at all, because it’s not a real relationship with a real human, and it’s kinda what your friends ended up with with God. It’s, “If I can make God do everything I want,” it’s not a real relationship, because He can’t contradict me. I’m wasting your time so I’ll stop and move on. We asked people to send in questions, and it seems like a lot of the question that people sent in were, “Is there any way that I can stay a Christian and still also be in a long-term, committed homosexual relationship? Is there a way to rectify it? Can I make it work?”

[Interviewee] I’ve stared that possibility in the face longingly for many years, I’d say. I think the question behind that question is really, “Can I still get into heaven if I’m in a homosexual partnership?” And to me, what that is is that your eyes are actually on the gate to Heaven. What you’re looking at and thinking of is, “Am I in or out? Can I do this and still get in?” But Heaven isn’t about its gate. Our eyes aren’t supposed to be focused on who gets in and who’s out. It’s like going to Disney and focusing on the turnstile all day. That’s not the point. The point is to get in Disneyland and to see what’s inside. Heaven is about Jesus Christ. Heaven is about God. It’s about the Center. It’s about the amazing and beautiful plan, and our sexuality will be stripped from us in some ways in heaven anyway. It’s about getting as close as we can

to Jesus and obeying Him as close as we can, and replacing as much of our nature with His supernature as possible, replacing as much of our desires with His desires as possible. That's what being a Christian is, it's what our destiny is. If you're worried with "What can I do and still get in?" it's like the seventh graders in youth group who are like "What can I do that it doesn't count as sex? How much can I get away with with my girlfriend?" That's totally the wrong question. If that's the question you're asking, then of course you're going to make mistakes. The only way to find the edge is that you're going to fall over it. The point is, "What is as close to Jesus? What does Jesus uphold? What does God say, 'This is the best thing for you. This is really what you were designed for and intended for, and this is going to give you the most blessing and the most happiness.'" So, I can't really answer that question, but if you're worried about getting in or out of Heaven, you may have the wrong understanding of what Heaven is for. People get into Heaven not because of "I did X sin," or "I didn't do X sin." We're either in sin, we're either in this native, inborn condition of sin whereby every desire of our hearts is completely corrupted, or we're in Christ, in which we are completely possessed, His righteousness and His holiness, so to me it's kind of like, a Christian means to be a little Christ. What would Christ want for you? What does Christ say is the best thing, the closest thing you can get to His plan for your sexuality, your intimacy, your gender?

[Jon] Heaven's about Jesus in the center, not about getting in. That's great. Go a little more rapid-fire, practical speaking. What would you encourage someone if there were someone in the room right now, has some amount of same-gender attraction, they've never told anyone in their whole life. What would you tell them to encourage them?

[Interviewee] I know it's scary because of this social stigma, and it's certainly taken me a long road for me to get to the point where this is not a big deal to do this, but Jesus is your reputation. You are not your reputation. You need to die to your reputation. Your reputation is something you need to sell and give away. You are not a good Christian, none of us are. You are not your witness. Jesus is your witness.

As long as you try to project this, "Oh, I'm okay, I'm just normal. I'm like everyone else. I'm this good Christian who never does anything," no matter how much people love you or affirm you, you'll never receive it, because they'll be this affirming this imaginary version of you, and even if they're trying to affirm the real you, you'll just think, "Oh, if they really knew who I was." If you're dishonest about this, you're really enslaving yourself from any possibility to receive love and affirmation through other Christians. You need to be honest. You need to start dealing with it.

Yeah, you may end up losing some of your reputation, but it was all imaginary anyway. God knows you and chose you for who you really are. All of this struggle, all of your failures, everything, God saw all of those when He was on the cross. And He still chose you. All of your messing up, you don't need to pretend those things didn't exist because God fully knows about them and He chose you anyway. Take comfort in that and start to be real. Not everyone will know what to do with it when you share with them. Part of the responsibility is to help them know what you need or help them know how to help. It's really hard to drop something on someone that you've been wrestling with for five years and expect them to have the perfect answer, like you've had five to twelve or thirty years to be thinking about these things, you can't expect them to get caught up overnight.

[Jon] That makes sense. Kinda playing on that same idea, talk to people, if someone's in the room and they have a very close loved one or family friend or someone in their LifeGroup tells

them that they're dealing with same-gender attraction, and they don't know how to respond. How would you encourage someone in that situation?

[Interviewee] I would respond by pointing out the similarities between all human struggles. This struggle isn't special as much as I wish it were special because I like to think I'm special, it's not. The stuff I have to deal with is the same thing that all of you have to deal with. For all Christians, life is about not looking for hope in a romantic relationship or in sexual orgasm. Life is about finding our fulfillment and purpose in Christ. All Christians are called to deny themselves, to find fulfillment in the church. When there's pangs of loneliness...like, when God gave us hunger, that pang of hunger is our signal to go out and find food. When you're hungry, you don't just sit there with your mouth open and wait and hope someone shoves food in it. When you're lonely, when you experience that loneliness, that's a God-given grace to go out into the world and create community where it doesn't yet exist. I can guarantee that there are hundreds of people who are also lonely and waiting with their mouth open and waiting for someone to come shove community into them. [laughter]

[Jon] Yes, I think we can all agree.

[Interviewee] When people are lonely, that loneliness is a healthy thing for us; it's a grace to create community in the church that doesn't yet exist. Just to be real and not let yourself communicate these happiness idolatries, these romance idolatries, and if your life communicates to them, no matter what yourself, "Life is all about me being happy. Life is all about romance and finding this perfect thing," it's going to be crushing to those people who feel like they can't ever get that if they're trying to follow Jesus. So just really, to build common ground, to really listen. Don't assume that that person's gonna be attracted to you. Don't be afraid to ask questions. A lot of times when people share with their LifeGroup, they say, "Oh, I shared four weeks ago, and my LifeGroup hasn't brought it up since. It took me 7 years to build up to talk about that and what's going on? Were they really uncomfortable?"

[Jon] "Are they ashamed of me?"

[Interviewee] Yeah, exactly. I think that people in LifeGroup might think, "Oh, it's really awkward to ask this, and I don't know if he wants me to bring it up." But that's not true. They want you to bring it up. They wouldn't have shared this if they weren't desperate for you to walk with them. So ask every question that may come to your head, no matter how awkward, because it's better to know what real questions you have rather than for them to imagine what kinds of questions you might be having. It actually is validating and is helpful to think, "Oh, you've actually thought about it and you care." And don't assume that it's gone away, even if they tell you, "Oh, one time I had this thing and it disappeared." Take that with a grain of salt. It might not be true, they might have just told you that because it was easier for them to say than it was an ongoing and persistent issue, so don't let them off the hook.

[Jon] That's great. Just to simplify and clarify, if they're honest with you, respond with your own honesty. Be honest about the questions you have. That's great.

[Interviewee] And if you don't recognize in your own story the struggle, the constant self-denial, I wonder if you know Jesus. The story should sound eerily familiar to you if you're really following Christ, because we're all in the same boat.



[Jon] That's great, man. What are the most helpful and the most unhelpful things that people have told you over the years of you following Jesus in the midst of this issue?

[Interviewee] I'll start with the bad news first. I think the most unhelpful things is when people are pressuring me or asking about dating the opposite gender. And I have tried some of that, and I've been doing it at my own pace, but when you're super excited about someone dating someone of the opposite gender, it adds a lot of unhelpful pressure, and it will usually doom the relationship. If people sense at all, "They're happy that I'm fixed," it's not going to work out. It will be crushing. Even to encourage people, you should be encouraging people to find their fulfillment in Christ. If something else evolves with someone of the opposite gender, then it will look very different than what it does for other people, and there are a lot of those stories, and they're beautiful. But don't put that kind of pressure, like, "Oh, you just haven't met the right girl."

Even within Midtown there've been so many times where I've heard people make gay jokes or gay comments without their even thinking about it. It's just part of their native language and it just comes up, but you never know, I'm sure there's at least a dozen people in this room who deal with homosexuality right now, and you just never know who's listening, and someone who might have otherwise found you to be a fountain of life, just one little comment can crush their soul.

[Jon] So what you might think is one little dumb joke, like, "That's so gay," can be crushing.

[Interviewee] Even making a comment about someone's manners. It can show that you're a very unsafe person.

[Jon] You mentioned in the 9:00 service as well, sometimes people encourage you to pursue same gender relationships.

[Interviewee] That's another thing that I think is really unhelpful. It's just another kind of idolatry, right? People, they want to seem progressive and liberal, and "You should just do what makes you happy, like I don't get it. You were born this way." We can talk more about the origins of this on Tuesday, but when people say that to me, it's like, "You're being so unhelpful, like I want to punch you right now." If a Christian wants to fight, let them fight. It's not your job to absolve them or to let them off the hook. God called them to fight, and if you try to make things easier for them by saying, "Oh, you don't need to fight this," you are doing the most unloving thing you could possibly do. If they come to that conclusion, they need to come to that conclusion on their own, but not because they're encouraged to do it by you. What really pisses me off...if I can say that...

[Jon] Yeah, you did.

[Interviewee] ...is that there are so many people out there who are trying to say, "Oh, it's all okay, you can do whatever you want," not because they love those people, but because they want to come off as being progressive, like, "If I take this stance, people will like me better and accept me because I'll seem tolerant and very enlightened." It's like, "You're telling these people these things not, you don't even know their story, you don't even know what they're dealing with, what they've wrestled with in the dark hours of the night, you're just telling them to do these things and texting and instagramming these propaganda things because it makes you

look cool. You're laying down your brothers and sisters as firewood at the altar to burn for your own glory." That is so annoying.

[Jon] That's great. Helpful things people have said.

[Interviewee] Midtown has been a great church. I can't have asked for a better place to have been. Whenever I talk to my friends who are in great churches all around the country and describe what's happening, they're amazed. You guys are really doing things which are helpful. Your LifeGroups are full of people who deal with this and many of your LifeGroups are led by people who deal with this. You treat them totally equally. You give them the space to be pastors, to be pastors in training, coaches, LifeGroup leaders, LifeGroup members, you really treat them as if they're normal Christians, and that's by far the best thing that you can do.

Especially as people get older, I think this is a little like Frodo in Lord of the Rings. The burden gets a little heavier to carry the older you get because as it gets harder and harder to be with other single people, and society expects more and more things from people your age as you get older, actually the weight does increase. I think just being really intentional as a church, but what do we do for women who would love to be married, but just aren't gonna? What do we do for people who are divorced? What do we do for people who deal with same-gender attraction? How do we give them a sense that they're really in family, and that there really is a place where they're loved and pursued, and that their gifts are able to be expressed and unlocked, not just kinda being locked up inside of your own family unit? Those are really like the things that are the most helpful things.

Again, building connections between their experiences and yours, because they really are all the same. We all have a genetic makeup. We all have a physical nature which works against us because we live in a world where everything is warped, where all of creation is subjected to futility and is waiting for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We live in a world where people have done terrible things and things which are sort of normal but have unintended consequences, and we're all born stuck in this spider web of sin, of the consequences of other people's choices that we're wrapped in, and we've all made our own choices, to set up habits, to program our brain, our ways of thinking, to believe lies, and all of these things combine for every single Christian to find us in a hopeless situation with our genes, our environment, and our own choices, our own habit-forming working against us, were it not for the rescuing work of Jesus Christ who saves us from that sinking ship and allows us to be presented spotless before the throne because of His sacrifice.

[Jon] Yeah, amen. I think Jesus is a good note to end on. And we're also out of time, so we'll end there, which would be great. Here's how I'd love to close our time this morning. I'd love to spend some time as a family praying. Let's just thank my friend for how helpful that has been. [applause]

Thanks so much, seriously. Two times now this morning, I have been incredibly encouraged by it. As a family, let's bow our heads and close our eyes, if you want, you don't have to, you can journal if you want, and let's just spend some time praying for ourselves as a church, and even for some specific groups of people who might be here this morning.

Let's start by praying that God would grow us into a family that loves Him so much and that loves people so, so well, the way that He loves people. ... Let's spend just a minute praying for

anybody in the room who might have a close loved one or family member who's dealing with same-gender attraction and they don't know how to engage them and how to love them well. Let's pray for them to have wisdom and Jesus's love and grace to offer. ... Pray for anybody in the room who might be dealing with same-gender attraction and has never told anybody and they're living in hiding and shame, just pray for them to have the courage and see the beauty in being able to be honest and walk in the light. ... Pray for all of us as a church family with whatever kind of sexual brokenness we're dealing with, that we would see Jesus as so much more valuable than our sexual sin desires, that we would run to Him and repent from anything else.

Father God, thank You so much for Jesus. Thank you that He is what we are created for, that He is so much more valuable than anything else we could give our lives to. Thank You that You are our hope, Jesus, not marriage, and not happiness, and not romance, nothing else, but You are our hope. You make us family with each other. You give us a way to live in honesty, and you give us a way to be a part of Your family. I pray that you would grow our hearts to see you more clearly and love you more and more to value You, to treasure You, that everything else we would consider a loss compared to You. Thank You for loving us when we had no interest in You in the first place. And You're way, way, way too good to us. We love You, amen.