

RECOVERING YOUR TRUE IDENTITY

PORTICO
LEARNING HUB



WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT SEXUALITY, GENDER & IDENTITY?

MODULE 19A



“Scripture acknowledges that believers may experience tensions or temptations that conflict with God’s ideals regarding sexuality, and our identity in Christ.

Unfortunately, the church has struggled to understand and show compassion towards issues of human sexuality.

While society emphasizes the concept of rejecting our given identity, as believers we are called to shift the focus from identifying with external factors to recognizing our belonging to God.

This course aims to present a positive affirmation of Biblical sexuality while recognizing differences with current cultural perspectives.

To learn more about what we believe about this topic, please read the following excerpt from the Pentecostal Assemblies of God’s Statement on Gender, Sexuality and Identity.”

Rick Carroll

EXCERPT FROM THE PAOC STATEMENT ON GENDER, SEXUALITY AND IDENTITY

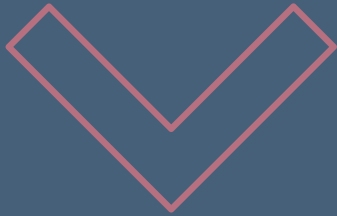
While believing in the inherent dignity of all persons and being well aware of our call to love our neighbours, as a church we have often failed to understand, show compassion to, or recognize the depth of the struggle concerning issues related to human sexuality. In particular, we've found it challenging to adopt a redemptive posture toward those who experience same-sex attraction and/or question their "created and gendered identity"—both in society and within our church community. The purpose of this statement is to outline the biblical and theological foundation on which we base our position on biblical sexuality, and to provide practical advice for pastors, ministry leaders, and local church congregations for living out our beliefs in a way that extends love, grace, compassion, redemption and hope. Our views on human sexuality are often counter to our culture's perspective. However, too often our statements have emphasized what we were against rather than what we are for. This document will focus on clarifying and presenting a positive affirmation of biblical sexuality, while acknowledging that the PAOC biblical perspective may not align with current culture.

While God's ideal for humanity is established in the early chapters of Genesis, Scripture is also clear that the current human reality does not match this ideal. The decision of Adam and Eve to displace God and His right as Creator to establish human morality has profoundly and negatively affected human experience in multiple dimensions—spiritually, socially, psychologically, physically and cosmically (Gen. 3; Rom. 1:18-32; 5:12-21). This rebellious act introduced sin into the world, which distorted the image of God and negatively affected all of creation. Included in this distortion are sexual behaviours, conduct and desires contrary to God's moral standards and created design, along with tensions (psychological and/or biological) in our human experience that are not aligned toward God's sexual ideals. God has always intended to save humanity and creation from this fallen condition by His redemptive plan in and through Jesus Christ. Believers in Christ experience some aspects of the full future redemption now by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:17; Eph. 1:13-14). However, the human experience will continue to include brokenness until Christ's second coming and the complete realization of God's kingdom and new creation, when sin and evil will be eradicated, and wholeness fully experienced for believers (Rev. 21:1-4).

Scripture does not tell us that believers will be free from the tension of living with tendencies (whether shaped biologically or socially) that do not align with God's ideals, and experiencing these tensions or temptations is not a sin in itself. However, the Bible directs believers away from activity, desires, patterns of behaviour, conduct and thinking that do not align with God's ideals for human sexuality. Believers are called to be obedient to what God requires, and to avoid sinning by resisting any misaligned desires related to our sexuality, even when this may not necessarily resolve inclinations, temptations and tensions. We are, however, assured of the presence of the Holy Spirit, who, along with God's people (the church), will help the believer live faithfully and victoriously in the midst of tensions and temptations.

INTRODUCTION

Theological Foundation



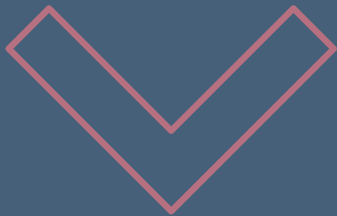
Human Fallibility

The decision of Adam and Eve disrupted God's ideal, leading to spiritual, social, psychological, and physical consequences.



Impact of Sin

Sin distorted the image of God and introduced behaviours contrary to His moral standards.



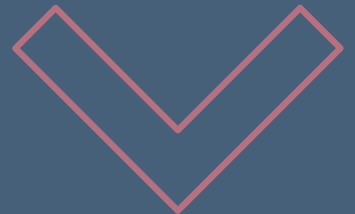
Redemption through Christ

Jesus' redemptive plan aims to save humanity from the fallen condition, though full redemption awaits His second coming.

Living with Tensions

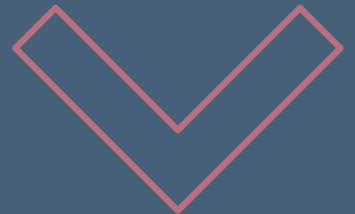
Resisting Misaligned Desires

Believers may experience tensions due to tendencies not aligning with God's ideals. Scripture directs believers to resist activities and desires not in line with God's sexual ideals.



Role of the Holy Spirit

Believers are assured of the Holy Spirit's presence to help them live faithfully amidst tensions and temptations.



Belonging to God

Society emphasizes the concept of "identification," which can stem from various aspects like race, ability, job, or sexuality. True identity lies in belonging to God rather than striving to become something else.



KEY TOPICS

1

We are created in Christ's image

pages 5-9

Reflection Questions

page 10

2

Sin has separated us from our intended identity

pages 11-15

Reflection Questions

page 16

3

Christ invites us to recover our true identity

pages 17-21

Reflection Questions

page 22



1

WE ARE CREATED IN CHRIST'S IMAGE

The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC) statement on Creation and Humanity affirms that God's original design in creation was the establishment of two sexes, male and female, who were formed in God's image (imago Dei) and entrusted with the care of God's world.

This belief in the inherent dignity and worth of every human being as an image bearer of God is foundational to recognizing our common identity and deserving of love, honor, and respect.

CREATED IN GOD'S IMAGE

1 How We Were Made

According to Genesis 1:26-27, God created human beings, both male and female, in His own image. Adam literally means "man", but God created all humankind, both male and female, as the image bearers of God.

2 Reflecting God's Likeness

As image bearers of God, we are not God Himself, but we reflect His likeness in our ability to feel emotion, express ourselves, communicate, discern morality, and connect spiritually - qualities that set us apart from the rest of God's creation.

3 Inherent Dignity

Because every person bears God's image, they are deserving of love, honor, and respect, regardless of how they live out God's ideals. This is a foundational truth that the church must uphold.

REFLECTING GOD'S IMAGE



Emotion

As image bearers, we can feel and express a range of emotions, just as God does.



Communication

We have the capacity to connect with God spiritually, to worship and commune with Him.



Morality

We can discern right from wrong and make moral choices, mirroring God's own moral nature.



Spirituality

We have the ability to communicate through speech, writing, and other means, reflecting God's own communication with us.

TREATING OTHERS WITH DIGNITY

Respecting All People

Because every human being is an image bearer of God, we must treat all people with dignity and respect, even those with whom we may have conflicts or who have not recognized their inherent worth.

A Failing Point for the Church

Sadly, the church has often failed to uphold this truth, denying the dignity of certain individuals or groups. We must repent of this and strive to see all people as God sees them - as precious image bearers.

God's Esteem for His Creation

The Psalmist reflects on God's high regard for human beings, who are "only a little lower than God" and "crowned with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:4-5). This should shape how we view and treat one another.

THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

1 Original Death Penalty

In Genesis 9:5-6, God establishes the death penalty for taking another human life, because "God made human beings in his own image." This underscores the sacredness of human life.

2 Starting Point of "Good"

The Bible tells us that when God finished creating, "he saw that it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). Our identity as image bearers began in a state of goodness and blessing.

3 Loved by God

As image bearers, we belong to God and are loved by Him. Nothing can separate us from this identity, even as we navigate our own personal journeys of self-discovery.

EMBRACING OUR IDENTITY

Inherent Dignity

Every human being is an image bearer of God, deserving of love, honor, and respect, regardless of how they live out God's ideals.

Belonging to God

As image bearers, we belong to God and are loved by Him. Our identity is rooted in this fundamental truth.

Journey of Self-Discovery

While we navigate our personal journeys of identity, we must not lose sight of the fact that we are first and foremost image bearers of God.



UPHOLDING THE IMAGO DEI

Recognizing Inherent Dignity

Acknowledging the imago Dei, or image of God, in every person is the starting point for recognizing our common identity and dignity as human beings.

Treating Others with Respect

Because each person bears God's image, we must treat all people with love, honor, and respect, regardless of their circumstances or how they live out God's ideals.

A Call for the Church

The church must uphold this foundational truth and repent of any past failures to deny the dignity of certain individuals or groups. We are all image bearers of God.

Navigating our Journeys

As we navigate our personal journeys of identity, we must never lose sight of the fact that we are first and foremost image bearers of the Creator God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Is there something in your life that you're trying to identify as that is taking you off the path of trying to understand who your identity is in?

How does the concept of being created in Christ's image influence your understanding of human identity and worth?



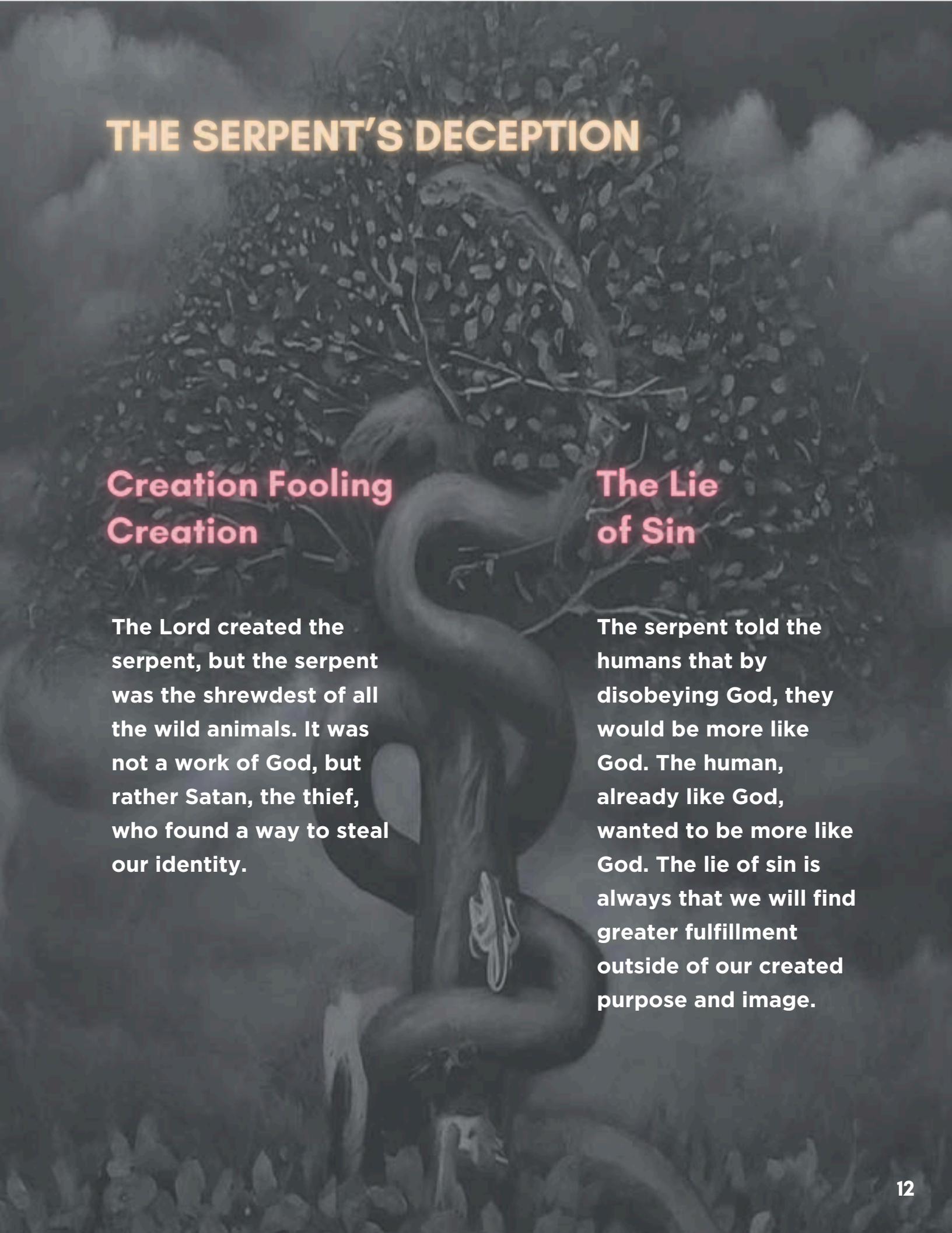
2

SIN HAS SEPARATED US FROM OUR INTENDED IDENTITY

With the "Fall of Humanity", we have moved from being "good" to what we're experiencing today.

Understanding sin helps us understand why as image bearers of God, we don't always feel like His image bearers.

THE SERPENT'S DECEPTION



Creation Fooling Creation

The Lord created the serpent, but the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals. It was not a work of God, but rather Satan, the thief, who found a way to steal our identity.

The Lie of Sin

The serpent told the humans that by disobeying God, they would be more like God. The human, already like God, wanted to be more like God. The lie of sin is always that we will find greater fulfillment outside of our created purpose and image.

THE DIRECT RESULTS OF SIN

1 — Shame

Sin made them think there was something wrong with them. Up until this point, to be naked was normal and comfortable, unrecognizable. They suddenly felt their nakedness and had a desire to cover up. This self-awareness led to self-consciousness.

2 — Fear

They needed to protect themselves. God's presence should not be fearful to us, even when we're completely exposed. When we have shame, we become afraid. If we feel threatened by God's presence, it's a signal that something is wrong.

3 — Hiding

When we feel shame, it makes us fearful. Many people are presently walking through a journey of trying to discover their identity, but we won't find fulfillment by finding a group of people to identify with. We must allow people to be vulnerable and be true to our creator.

THE DANGER OF SHAME AND FEAR



Shame

Sin made them think there was something wrong with them. The entire feeling of shame is not typically associated with anything that we've done wrong, usually more associated with a way that we feel about what we've done.



Fear

When we start to deal in shame, God's closeness makes us afraid. The fear of judgment leads us to hide our deepest secrets from friends and family.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE CHURCH

Honouring Others

We must be Christians who treat other humans in a way that honors them so that they don't have to hide themselves away from God and try to find "safe" places, away from His presence.

Vulnerability with God

We must be believers who are not trying to cover up things in our own lives, trying to convince God that we've not altered our journeys in a way that takes us away from being made in His image.

Radical Love

The church must show radical love for people, regardless of their struggles or where they are in their journey of faith.

Radical Obedience

The church must maintain a radical adherence to Scripture as the only truth, guiding believers in their pursuit of holiness.

Vulnerability

We must allow people to be vulnerable, and open in their discussions, otherwise we will fail at helping this generation discover their identities in Christ.

Welcoming & Disciple-Making

The church should be a place where everyone is welcomed, included, and encouraged to grow spiritually, allowing God to work in every area of their lives.

THE INTENDED IDENTITY

1

Created in God's Image

Up until the Fall, Adam and Eve were comfortable and unashamed in their nakedness, recognizing that they were already in God's image.

2

Distorted by Sin

After the deception of the serpent, sin made them feel ashamed and fearful, leading them to hide from God's presence.

3

Restored in Christ

As believers, we must allow people to be vulnerable and help them discover their true identity in Christ, free from shame and fear.

THE PATH FORWARD

Treat Others with Honour

Create safe spaces for people to be open

Be Vulnerable with God

Find fulfillment in our identity in Christ

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Is there something in your life that's causing you to feel shame, to fear, or to hide that you need to confess to God, so He can work His love and forgiveness in your life?

How can the recognition of your vulnerability and the consequences of sin motivate you to create spaces of acceptance and honesty where individuals feel safe to explore and embrace their true identities in Christ?



3

CHRIST INVITES US TO RECOVER OUR TRUE IDENTITY

Whether we are single or in a relationship, our sexuality is deeply connected to having a strong identity in Christ. While some may feel they lack their full identity until they've expressed themselves sexually, not all intimate relationships need to be sexual. The church must handle these sensitive matters with humility and grace, recognizing the need to get to know people walking through these journeys.

SEXUALITY & IDENTITY IN CHRIST

God's Ideal

The PAOC statement outlines the biblical truths on human sexuality and God's ideal regarding believers' behavior and sexual expression. While these ideals can be complex to live out, the church must handle these matters with humility and grace, recognizing the real human cost.

Sanctification Process

God calls believers to holiness and conformity to the image of Christ, but also recognizes our weakness and mortality. The church should allow people the space to go through the lifelong process of sanctification, acknowledging the tension between the ideal and the reality of the struggle.

Welcoming & Disciple-Making

The church should be a welcoming, disciple-making community where each person is included in the journey of growing spiritually and allowing God to work in every area of their lives. The church must show radical love for people while also adhering to Scripture as the only truth.

RECOGNIZING SINFUL URGES

1 Sinful Desires Remain

We need to acknowledge that even as we receive our new identity in Christ, we can still have sinful urges and desires.

2 Closer to Christ

The closer we get to Christ, the more we recognize and become aware of the sinful desires within us.

3 Embracing Discipleship

Embracing the lifestyle of a disciple, with Christ's help, is the path forward in overcoming our sinful tendencies.

THE COST OF INTIMACY



Emotional Intimacy

True intimacy goes beyond just physical expression, it involves a deep emotional connection and vulnerability.



Community Support

The church must be a supportive community that walks alongside people as they navigate the complexities of intimacy and identity.



Spiritual Growth

Embracing our new identity in Christ is a lifelong journey of sanctification and spiritual growth, not a one-time event.

EMBRACING OUR NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST

1

Throw Off the Old

We are called to throw off our old sinful nature and former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.



...throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception.

Ephesians 4:22 (NLT)



2

Be Renewed

Instead, we are to let the Spirit renew our thoughts and attitudes, and put on our new nature, created to be like God - truly righteous and holy.



Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

Ephesians 4:23-24 (NLT)



3

Become Like Christ

In this new life, our identity is not defined by our earthly status, but by the fact that Christ is all that matters, and He lives in all of us.



Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile...Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us.

Colossians 3:10-11 (NLT)



NAVIGATING SEXUALITY & IDENTITY

1

Acknowledge Complexity

Sexuality and identity are complex issues that require nuance, empathy, and a willingness to listen to people's stories.

2

Embrace Grace

The church must approach these matters with humility, grace, and a recognition of our own weaknesses and need for God's transformative power.

3

Pursue Holiness

While acknowledging the complexity, we must also remain steadfast in our pursuit of holiness and conformity to the image of Christ.

BELONGING VS. BECOMING

Belonging

The search for identity is not a quest of "who am I," but a reminder of "whose am I?" It's a question of belonging rather than becoming.

Becoming

Life is not a journey of creating who we will become, but a journey of discovering who we were created to belong to.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What would it look like for you to participate in a disciple-making church?

How does the invitation to recover our true identity in Christ challenge or affirm your understanding of the complexities of human sexuality and intimacy?



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