Linked Wk3

Series Road Map

**Series Overview:** Who and how we date is so important. Culture tells us that relationships and sex are just for fun. It tells us that we can change other people into versions we like more. It values physical attraction to a degree that almost nothing else matters. We’re told to have fun, be carefree, and don’t worry about the consequences because they’re not real anyway. And it all sounds so fun! So fun, in fact, that at first glance it seems like the way to go. But can that really be what God intended for us? To use people? To allow ourselves to be used? To treat our bodies and our hearts with complete recklessness? In this series we’ll discover that healthy bonds and true intimacy are the real gift and God even gives us the directions to see that link establish in our own lives.

**Week Overview:**  We’re made to believe that sex is casual. That as long as both parties consent, it’s all good and fun. But without mutual respect, sex can be catastrophic. Because respect is submission. Respect is looking out for another’s best interest. Respect is an act of love. And respect will never lead us to be a regret in another person’s story.

**Grab the Room (Intro):** Speaker walks in w/ saxophone miming Careless Whisper, pausing to impart fake bits of wisdom about sex.

**Tension (What's the Struggle?):** Sex is everywhere. Culture flaunts and pushes it. And because we’re desensitized to it on our screens, we’ve become desensitized to it in our own lives.

**Truth + Supporting Text (Illuminate):** 1Corinthians 6:12-20, Hebrews 13:8

**THP (What’s the Takeaway?):** Build your relationship on the foundation that holds

**Application (Call to Action):** Imagine a future where you’re linked to someone who…

Use this time to wrap up entire series

*Red – Scripture*

*Blue – Personal Story*

*Green – Prop*

***THP/Main Points – Bold***

Can we acknowledge the obvious real quick? Sex is everywhere. We’re inundated with temptations and bad info relentlessly, whether it’s from social media, the shows we watch, or the apps we use. It’s constant. And if we were to take the general sum of all we watch and all we take into our minds, we find that our view of sex and dating is built by our culture. Taken at face value, that doesn’t seem all bad, right? I mean culture is what we make it. Culture is a collection of the things we as a society value. So could adopting their view of sex really be bad?

Well lets think about it. And to begin, we won’t even use a Christian context or biblical worldview. We’ll just judge it for what it is, through its own merits.

What even is culture? Culture is the conscious and subconscious of a people group. It’s the habits, the beliefs, the customs, the views, the food, the art, the music, and the character we develop and accept as normal or acceptable in a society. Anthropologist Cristina De Rossi describes it this way: “Culture encompasses religion, food, what we wear, how we wear it, our language, marriage, music, what we believe is right or wrong, how we sit at the table, how we greet visitors, how we behave with loved ones and a million other things.” So simply put, culture is a generally accepted collective of beliefs and characteristics of a people group.

For example:

* Mexican culture conjures images of Day of the Dead with sugar skeletons and marigolds. It’s cherishing the family unit and all those delicious tacos and burritos
* Canadian culture brings to mind mooses… meese, moosi, multi-moose, whatever, and maple syrup. It’s saying things like ‘op’ and ‘eh’ and ‘sorry bout that’. It’s hockey and universal healthcare, really colorful currency, and a 5 party government.
* French culture is beautiful architecture and the allure of Paris: the City of Light. It’s eating snails and beef tartar, the best little coffee shops you could ever find and wineries that sweep the countryside.

You get the idea.

So can the norms of a people group ever really be a bad thing? Well lets look at some cultural norms held for centuries to see how they hold up…

* Since the early days of man and up until only a couple thousand years ago, the idea that “might makes right” was almost universally accepted. The idea was that the strong could take advantage of the weak, just because they were strong. If you were strong and wealthy, you were that way to lead the weak and poor. And any harm you inflicted on the weak was okay because you were mighty and that made you right-y
* Slavery over any people group was considered okay. People could be taken from their homes and their families to work for no pay. Sometimes this was done to repay what they couldn’t. More often it was just because the powerful could make money off it. So people for a millennia stood by and watched as families were torn apart and bodies were mangled for the financial benefit of the already rich.
* Women are inferior to men. They aren’t as smart, aren’t as capable, can’t control their emotions, and should never speak on important topics, let alone lead. We can’t even trust women to vote! And speaking of controlling women…
* Infibulation or Female Genitalia Mutilation was a widely held practice in some African and Eastern countries that is shockingly still practiced in some areas today. FGM is a non-medical procedure where a woman’s anatomy is cut and sometimes sewn as a way of controlling them.

On and on the list could go. But for the sake of time, we’ll stop there. But imagine living in a culture where these beliefs didn’t just exist, but were acted out so often it was the norm. No one batted an eye. It just was what it was. A powerful, wealthy man could use his strength to overcome the weak around them. They could enslave the men to work in the field and sell the women off. The women they kept could be brutally mutilated in an effort to control them and keep them from having kids. And no one thought that was wrong. It was just the culture they lived in.

Our social consciouses have shaped us to be a people who believe that all of these things are wrong. Not just wrong, but reprehensible. So how could what was once so common now seem so backward? Because culture shifts and moves. It changes and grows and ebbs and flows.

So how can we hitch our beliefs and our consciouses to something that’s always shifting? Put simply: we can’t. We need something stronger. We need something more timeless. We need wisdom that doesn’t change, but is static and strong and true. Where you won’t find that is in our culture. Our culture’s view on sex and relationships has changed vastly since I was a kid, let alone over the course of generations. If learning from our culture isn’t wise, what is?

Luckily we have the blessing of a Christian context and a biblical worldview. One that has remained constant, even when the world changes back and forth like the swinging of a pendulum.  Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

**Build your relationship on the foundation that holds**

From the very beginning of the Old Testament with Abraham to the Jesus-born New Covenant, we are shown that sex is far from a bad thing. It’s a gift God’s given us to enjoy our husband or wife more fully. God created sex and said to Adam & Eve “Here ya go” but what we seemed to hear was “now go crazy.”

Now sex is on every television show. Around 15% of websites are sex based and over a quarter of online searches are for sex. Social media apps are inundated with people flaunting it everywhere and music tells us that sex is almost the only thing in the world worth singing about. And the more you see it, the more accustomed you are to it. And the more accustomed you are to it, the more you view it as a normal thing. That’s what it means to be desensitized. We no longer feel the way we used to when seeing sex played out in front of us. It’s just another day at the office and we’re completely unaffected.

But this can’t be what God had in mind for us. Surely he didn’t want us to use people for instant gratification or to be used by others for their own desires. Surely God doesn’t want us to treat our hearts and our bodies so recklessly and dangerously.

So what did God design sex for and how does He want us to engage with it? To gain a little insight, I want to look at a passage in First Corinthians. This book is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. And Corinth had a culture all its own. Corinth’s most widely worshiped deity was the mythical Greek goddess Aphrodite. And here in Corinth were three separate temples to Aphrodite, one of them being one of her largest temples on earth. Since she was the goddess of love, temple prostitution wasn’t just a form of worship, but a huge money maker for the temple. Here in Corinth new Jesus followers were being told that the culture they lived in and the gods they worshiped were all false and even dangerous. We can see how true this is from our vantage point 2,000 years later, but to them it was crazy. It wasn’t just unusual, it was contrary to everything their culture taught them. Kinda like hearing that all the things you see on tv and social media aren’t the correct ways to view sex and relationships.

So Paul wrote to them in their struggles to help them gain a proper view of sex and their bodies… Don’t you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! And don’t you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, “The two are united into one.” But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don’t you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body. -1Corinthians 6:15-20

When we follow Jesus, our bodies become literal temples where His Spirit lives. Each of us are like a living, breathing, walking temple, created to be filled with God’s Spirit and cherished like the relationship we get to have with Him because of the sacrifice of Jesus. But how do we honor God when we don’t honor our bodies? When we join our bodies in sexual acts with people outside of the parameters that God gave us sex in?

Paul compares it to joining Christ with a prostitute! Man that just feels offensive, doesn’t it? The idea that we’re offering God our bodies, the very same thing that we’re offering to others to use for their gratification and your temporary pleasure. That the best thing we give to God is the very thing we give away flippantly to others. But even outside Corinth’s context of prostitution, the truth remains the same. When we are casual with our bodies and enter into sexual relations, we unite God’s temple with lustful, uncaring people through the perversion and corruption of the beautiful gift He gave to us.

But here’s the biggest difference we read in that passage. God bought you with a high price. Sexual partners are given it for free.

God earned our hearts, our faith, our bodies – all of us! He sent His only Son to die brutally on a cross, just so we could be together again. That’s what God did for us and that’s how He showed His love.

Sexual partners outside of marriage on the other hand? They didn’t earn anything. They didn’t sacrifice for you. They didn’t prove themselves to you. They didn’t protect your heart and give their very life to be with you. They didn’t make a commitment to never leave or forsake you. They just promised a good time before the shame and regret sets in.

Share a story of how you’ve seen this played out…

I had a friend in college who really struggled with this. He wasn’t promiscuous in high school, but he had a couple serious relationships that led to sex. One he even thought he was going to marry. But like most high school relationships it ended. And he never really thought much about it until he started falling for the girl that would one day be his wife. His wife behaved a little differently in high school. She had relationships like most of us do, but she always saved herself for her husband, wanting to give him the best gift she possibly could, a gift that was more valuable than money and more treasured than gold. She wanted to give the gift of herself. Her full self. Not a self that was given to anyone before, but her whole self that was kept specially for him. As you can imagine, when Joel found this out, he was at once honored and horrified. On his wedding day, he’d be given a priceless gift that he couldn’t reciprocate. And even though Sarah knew about his past and assured him that she understood and forgave him, the guilt was so strong! It wrecked him! So much so that premarital counseling turned to personal counseling because he felt so awful that he couldn’t give the person he loved most the same gift he was receiving.

God tells us to honor our bodies. To care for the home He resides in. To respect our hearts and guard them wisely. To love ourselves enough to not fall to a temptation that affects our bodies more than any other.

But it’s not just about you. God tells us to honor others above ourselves. To never take advantage of others. To not gratify our own desires by using other people. Jesus followers never become a regret in the life of another.

And believe me, you will regret anyone you unite yourself to before your spouse. Because one day you’re going to meet someone who makes all the things you didn’t do worth it. Or make all the things you did during the wait a regret.

So **build your relationship on the foundation that holds.**

It’s at this point when talking about sex that the same shame and regret that was felt shortly after comes creeping in again. Because lets be honest: in a room this size, more than a few people have decided not to wait for marriage and engaged in sexual acts already. You’re shown how God designed sex and how He intended for it to bless our lives and the conviction you feel from God is followed by feelings of shame and unworthiness. That’s not from God. So please hear me right now. Stop letting your eyes roam the room and look up here. Matter of fact, everyone dial in right now. If you’re dealing with feelings of shame because of past decisions, you are not less than. You are not unworthy, you are not any of those negative thoughts that shame puts on your heart. Losing your virginity before you’re married doesn’t make you worthless. Matter of fact, it doesn’t even make you worth less. Because your value doesn’t come from your past decisions. Your value comes from your creator. He gets to say what you’re worth. And you were worth enough to die for. You were worth enough for God to pursue you and you’re worth enough to be a part of His plan and family forever. You are His beloved and there’s nothing you can do to change that.

So there’s a lot to think about. Through this series we’ve talked about learning to love by walking with Jesus and seeing what true love looks like. To put Jesus before anyone and anything else. We’ve talked about how healthy bonds unite us and enrich our lives. We’ve talked about how influential the people we love are and how that influence can lead to a life we can only dream of. And we’ve of course talked about sex. The gift that it is and the joy that’s experienced when enjoyed the way that God intended it to be used.

Now imagine if you will what it would look like if we took all this and learned from it. But not just learned it, lived it. Allowed the Bible to come alive in our very own lives. Imagine the love, the pleasure, the companionship, the comfort and peace and security of a person whose greatest desire is to love you the way God loves you, by putting you above all others and loving you with a ferocity we thought only exists in poems.

That love is possible. That relationship can be yours. If you **build your relationship on the foundation that holds.**

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus says “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

**Build your relationship on the foundation that holds.**

So tonight I want to end with prayer. But not my prayer, your prayer. We’re going to offer some space for you to have a conversation with God. To tell Him what you want in a future spouse and what you want that relationship to look like. But I don’t want you to just pray a wish list for the perfect spouse. I want you to pray for your wisdom and strength so you’ll be able to offer them what you hope to receive yourself. And I want you to pray for that person. Wherever they are, whatever they’re doing. One day this will be the most important person in your world. Pray for them now. Ask God to love them well and reveal His heart to them. Ask that they be given the strength and wisdom they need. Start loving that person well right now, in this moment. And don’t stop tonight. Make this an everyday thing. This is the most important human relationship you’ll ever have. Don’t just start working on it when you meet them down the road. Start loving them well here and now.

Give space to pray and then end by praying over your students.