



Sexuality in Our Culture: An Open Door for the Gospel

The Story of Scripture – Part 35

If you have a Bible—and I hope you do—let me invite you to open with me to Colossians 4. It's good to be together around God's Word.

As we begin our time in the Word, I want to give you a heads up. We're going to be talking today about sexuality in our culture, specifically diving into LGBTQ type terms at different points. I want to say that at the start, because I'm always encouraging parents to bring their children with them to worship. But today we might be diving into some things that you're not necessarily ready to talk with younger children about. I don't want to put you in an uncomfortable situation. So if you have any doubts or are not ready for this, feel free now or at any point to take your children to kids' class or even The Rock. I would have given you more of a heads up, but this is not what I'd planned on diving into today. For the second week in a row now, I believe God is leading us in a different direction in His Word than what I had planned, specifically in light of circumstances around us in our community.

I've now been part of this church officially for two years, but I have only lived here for one year. I'm still learning much about the spiritual climate in our community. Over recent days, particularly with the lead-up to elections this Tuesday, I've learned much about things that are happening in our schools, specifically in northern Virginia, but with clear parallels to things that are happening in the District and in Maryland. According to a Washington Post article, northern Virginia specifically has been identified, along with the state of California, as "a laboratory for policies regarding lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues."

Last year, the Fairfax County school board—which is represented here in our Tysons campus specifically—voted, despite overwhelming opposition at the meeting which I saw on video, to replace "biological sex" with "sex assigned at birth." Basically they are saying that gender identity is not part of your biological makeup. Gender identity is a choice you make based on how you feel.

By the way, just as a side note, we are not talking here—or really at any point today—specifically about the small number of people whose physical anatomy is not typically male or female. That's a key difference and we obviously want to show abundant grace toward those who find themselves in that situation.

Going back to Fairfax County, our schools in this county contain what's called a "Family Life Education Curriculum," comprised of 80 hours of sex education that does not require parental permission and includes lessons for children teaching there are many ways to express gender. Girls might really be boys or boys might really be girls, so it's up to you to choose and live accordingly, with all that involves. So that's Fairfax County. Then Loudoun, Prince William and Arlington have all taken similar steps and are considering more in their curriculum or policies.

I'll mention more about school boards and elections later, but far more important is this. When I read these things, I realized that I have not at one point in the last two years specifically addressed these issues. I've not in any sermon looked into the eyes of those of you who have questions about these issues, or maybe those who identify yourselves somewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum, if we use those labels. And I have not encouraged you with God's love in God's Word.

I have not in any sermon looked into the eyes of a parent whose teenage daughter is saying she's a boy or whose son is saying he's a girl—or even those of you with grown children. I've not looked at you specifically and said, "Here is God's grace and truth to help you navigate these waters." I want to apologize for that. Martin Luther, whose anniversary of starting the Protestant Reformation was celebrated this last week, said:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proven, and to be steady on all the battlefronts beside is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.

I don't want to flinch or fly away from where the battle is raging. Now, to be sure, it would be easier to flinch or fly away. My other plan for today was much easier than this. Some of you might even wish we'd gone with the other plan. Some of you are already cringing, either because you identify somewhere on the LGBTQ spectrum, or you have kids or parents or family or close friends who do. Whenever this issue comes up in church, you cringe with anxiety or even anger that's been built up over years of hearing Christians talk about these issues in ignorant or unkind ways.

I just want to say that God has designed the church to be a safe place for people to honestly share their thoughts, desires, fears, struggles—even their sin—without fear of shame. This is the place to find in God grace, help, love, hope and life. That's my hope today. This is why at the end of our time, just like we've been doing every week, I'm going to invite people to believe in Jesus and be baptized, to put on one of these shirts and confess faith in Jesus publicly today.

You might say, "Well, how can talking about sexuality lead people to be baptized?" No matter who you are, no matter how you identify yourself, no matter what desires you do or do not have, no matter what you or your family are going through, I want to open up God's Word and show you His

goodness, love, help and hope. God has called us in the church to see how His Word powerfully and helpfully speaks to the real issues we encounter in this world.

This was clear in our Bible reading this past week which is why I had you open to Colossians 4. Listen to God's Word:

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. ⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Listen to that last phrase: “*So that you may know how you ought to answer each person.*” The whole picture here is followers of Jesus living in their culture and community, speaking with God's grace to pressing issues in that culture and community. So we're going to do this today. I want to show you specifically how the gospel speaks to and relates to sexuality.

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Now, for those of you who might not be familiar with the term “gospel,” it basically means good news. Specifically, it's the good news of God's love for you in Jesus. I want to show you how this issue of LGBTQ is so much bigger than sexuality. How we view gender identity and sexual orientation affects not just our understanding of who we are and how we live, it affects our understanding of Who God is, how God works, whether or not we can trust God's Word, and ultimately what we all most need in our lives—and not just in our lives now, but for all of eternity. The gospel and sexuality are deeply intertwined.

In your notes I've given you ten truths from God's Word. We're going to run through them pretty swiftly, camping out on a couple more than others. I want you to get a big-picture view of what the Bible says about sexuality. If you are not yet a follower of Jesus—maybe you're visiting today with a family member or friend, or you're on your own—I'm so glad you're here today, because there are so many caricatures of what the Bible teaches about sexuality according to so many outlets in our culture. I hope today that you will see a picture, not just of what God's Word says about sexuality, but a picture of God's love for you right where you're sitting in a way that I pray will be life-changing for you.

Then for those who are followers of Jesus, my prayer is that today you might see in these ten truths a picture of God's grace to stand on and share with children, family, friends and others in the culture and community around you. We'll close back here in Colossians 4, coming back to these encouragements from God's Word to us as a church in the culture around us. Let's look now at how the gospel relates to sexuality. I won't go through all the references in your notes, but we're going to go through these ten truths.

1. Every one of our bodies is wonderfully made by God (Psalm 139:13-16).

God's Word tells us that every one of our bodies is wonderfully made by God. This is the exact language the Bible uses in Psalm 139. Every one of us is fearfully and wonderfully made by God Himself.

I mentioned last week that my family has been in the process of international adoption again and we haven't known if this child will be a boy or girl. So in the absence of a name, we've just called him or her "Wonderfully Made." Well, this Tuesday we got a call with a name and a picture of a precious three-year-old little boy. I'll share more even next week, Lord willing, unless the plan changes. I wish I could show you a picture now, but I want to be careful. Nothing is final in adoption until it's final, so I'm going to wait. But with no offense to any of your children, my child is cuter.

I'll go ahead and tell you that my child has a cleft lip and palate, so we've been talking with doctors this week about what all that means—surgeries and speech therapies that lie ahead over many years. But do you know what the most sobering moment of this week was? It was when one doctor we were talking to told us that this is a reason some parents abort their babies. I thought, "No way." But it's true.

I read articles this week about the number of babies being aborted for minor deformities, multiplying in some countries over recent years, even tripling and quadrupling. I cannot wait to hold that boy in my arms and tell him we've been calling him Wonderfully Made for a reason—because he is. Though this doesn't specifically pertain to gender, the reality is we live in a culture that at the core is saying to babies before they're born, and children after they're born, that they are not wonderfully made—and it's not true. Every one of our bodies is wonderfully made by God. This is foundational for understanding our sexuality.

2. Every one of our bodies is ultimately created for God (Genesis 1:1; 1 Corinthians 6:13, 10:31)

Truth number two is also foundational. Every one of our bodies is ultimately created for God which is a very significant truth. This is foundational to any discussion of sexuality, because almost every discussion of sexuality today starts with a foundation of self. "Be true to yourself" is the mantra, or as you'll commonly hear it, "Live your truth. Be true to how you feel, what you think. Regardless of what your biology says or your parents say, regardless of what the culture says, you will be happy and fulfilled only when you are true to you."

We desperately need to ask what if that foundation is not true? What if you are not at the center of the universe and everything does not revolve around you? What if God is at the center of the universe and everything revolves around Him? What if the purpose of your body or my body is not ultimately self-gratification, but the purpose of our bodies is ultimately God-glorification? That foundation changes everything.

It's obviously common in our culture for the Bible's teaching on sexuality to be seen as offensive. It does not take long for Christians to be backed into a corner, trying to defend biblical views of sexuality or marriage. But this is where I think we need to realize that a biblical view of sexuality or marriage is nowhere near the greatest offense in Christianity. I don't know if this makes things worse, but the Bible is much more offensive than this. Christianity's offense begins with the very first words of the Bible, "In the beginning God..." So the initial offense of the Bible from the first words is that there is a God Who creates us, Who has authority over us and to Whom we are accountable.

Now, suddenly the focus is not "Be true to yourself." The focus is now "Be true to God." It's not "Trust yourself and how you feel." No, it's "Trust God and what God says." What if understanding this is the way to satisfaction in our bodies? What if the God Who created you and me—Who loves us and Who knit us together and knew us before we even knew ourselves—knows better than we do what is best for our bodies? That is gospel good-news truth that leads to number three.

3. Every one of our bodies is supernaturally designed by God to be satisfied in God (Psalm 63:1; 1 Corinthians 6:13).

Psalm 63 depicts this satisfaction we are created for can only be found in God and that nothing in this world can compare. First Corinthians 6:13 says, not just that the body is for the Lord, but the Bible teaches that the Lord God is for the body. That's the language. Do you hear that? God is for your body.

This is so critical to hear and believe, particularly in a day when it is increasingly common for men, women and children in our culture to question whether or not God's design for our bodies is good. In so many ways we question this, not just sexually. I get it. When our feelings and desires and thoughts go against God's design—which we're going to talk about in a minute—it's so tempting to then think, "Maybe God's design is not good." But I want to encourage you, don't believe the lie.

Like we talked about last week, even with special physical or intellectual needs, you are no accident. You were not born in the wrong body. God did not mess up when He made you. So don't go down a road, and don't let this culture take you down a road, that says God messed up when He made you. No, believe God's love for you and rejoice in the reality that God Himself has supernaturally designed your body to be satisfied in Him.

4. Every one of our bodies is sexually defined by God for our good and for the gospel (Genesis 1:26-28, 2:24-5; Ephesians 5:22-23).

That's a loaded statement, but it's so significant. First, every one of our bodies is sexually defined by God—and it's been this way since the beginning of creation. Genesis 1:26-28 says God created male and female, both beautifully crafted in His image with equal dignity, honor and worth.

Male is not better than female. Female is not better than male. Both are beautifully designed and defined by God with a hundred million nucleated cells carrying copies of male and female chromosomes,

all for our good. From the very beginning, our bodies were designed for our flourishing as distinctly defined males and females. They were designed for our multiplying, through males and females coming together in marriage.

That leads right into how God has not just made you a male or a female for your good—He’s also done this for the gospel. That’s why I’m including Ephesians 5 here. Think about this. When God created people, He didn’t have to do it this way. He didn’t have to create man and woman the way He did. He didn’t have to bring man and woman together in something called marriage as the means through which humanity would multiply and flourish. But He did it this way for a reason.

Ephesians 5 tells us that God designed a man and a woman to come together in marriage so that the world would have a picture on the canvas of human history of the depth of His love for us. Marriage between a man and a woman—a husband and a wife—is designed by God to show the world a portrait of His otherworldly love for you and me. And even outside of marriage, we’re designed to complement each other and bring glory to God as males and females working uniquely together.

So don’t think for a second that your biological makeup is a personal malfunction. Your gender identity is not a social construction. No, your gender identity is a supernatural invention. The good and loving Creator of the universe has defined you male or female for your good and for the display of His gospel, His love, to the world. “Then why,” you ask—and so many of us ask—“do I feel this way? Why do I have these real desires, these real thoughts, that are so different from what we’ve just seen?” The gospel speaks to this as well.

5. We are all prone to sexual confusion, deviation and rebellion against God (Genesis 3:1-7).

Remember that I mentioned the greatest offense in Christianity from the beginning of the Bible is that there is a God Who creates us, has authority over us and to Whom we are accountable? If you tell any person in our culture that today there is a God Who sustains, owns, defines, rules and will one day judge him or her, that person will balk in offense. Every person would because every person has—all of us have, without exception.

This is evident from the very beginning of the Bible in Genesis 3. The first man and woman ever created took God’s word and said, “Did God really say that?” The more they asked the question, the more they convinced themselves that God could not be trusted and that their way was better than God’s way. They went with what they felt and what they thought over what God said—and that is the same story for every single one of us. None of us are alone in this.

Sure, it looks different in each one of our lives. Specifically, some are attracted to men and others are attracted to women. Some of us feel this desire for that; others of us feel that desire for this. The challenge in our culture is that we have said, “If you have a desire, then you should fulfill it. You have a right to fulfill it. No one should stop you from fulfilling it, especially if you were born with that desire if it

is attributable in some way to your genetic makeup. You can't help that you desire it, so of course, fulfill it. You were made to."

Let's just state the obvious. We all know this. There are many desires we have that we choose not to fulfill—even desires we believe are attributable to our genetic makeup. Some might say this is an extreme example, but there was a report in TIME Magazine that says infidelity may be in our genes. So does that mean that a married man who has a desire for a woman who is not his wife must fulfill that desire in order to be happy or to be fully himself? No way. The mere presence of a desire does not excuse or promote unfaithfulness in marriage. "That's a desire I have" does not equate to "That's what I should do."

The point is we all have hearts that are prone to sexual confusion and question—to deviation from God's good design for us—with the temptation to go against God. This is why we could never say, "God would not allow someone to be born with a bent toward sexual confusion or deviation or rebellion." The reality is we are all born that way. We're all born with an inclination away from God and His good design for our lives.

Now, the fact that our inclinations, questions and temptations are different is part of the mystery in this fallen world. That's why certain people have certain desires while other people have other desires. We don't always choose our temptations, but we do choose our reactions to those temptations. Which is why this issue is so important in not just our lives, but think about our children's lives.

When children and teenagers are going through puberty, they are experiencing the height of sexual confusion and questions—all kinds of questions that every one of us inevitably have teenagers . We've all had potential deviations and temptations to go against God's design. So our culture actively says to children and teenagers, "Give yourselves over to whatever those desires and thoughts are." But then it is viewed as offensive or even on the wrong side of history to say, "No, trust and believe that God's design for you is beautiful and His Word toward you is good."

That is not the wrong side of history. This is what God has been saying throughout history: "You can trust Me." But we don't listen. None of us do. I am, you are, we are all personally, biologically, culturally and spiritually prone to sexual confusion, deviation and rebellion against God.

6. We are all guilty of sexual sin and separated from God (Romans 1:18-3:23; 1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

We're not just prone to it; we are all guilty of sexual sin and separated from God. This is from Romans 1-3. Every one of us in this gathering today is guilty of sexual sin, which 1 Corinthians 6 defines as any sexual thought, desire or action outside of marriage between a man and a woman. We are all guilty. I am, you are, and this is why we must be careful never to look at the speck in another's eye when there's a plank in our own.

If we shake our heads in disgust at this law or that ruling, then indulge in pornography or look continually at sexual immorality on TV or in movies or ads, then we have missed the point. Likewise if any one of us votes that way or takes this stand at that school board meeting, but then turn a blind eye to our own sexual sin, we have totally missed the point. We are all guilty of sexual sin and separated from God.

7. We are all desperately in need of reconciliation to God (Psalm 51:1-12).

This means we are all desperately in need of reconciliation to God. Psalm 51 is King David's confession of his sexual sin with Bathsheba before God, his going outside God's design and his desire to be brought back into relationship with God. At the end of that prayer, he says, "God, restore to me the joy of Your salvation." Which makes sense, doesn't it? Think about it. If God does indeed love us and He has indeed designed and made us for our good, then our greatest joy will be found in experiencing reconciliation to God, not in rebelling against God.

This is what is so sad, not just about this issue in our culture, but about this issue in every one of our lives. Let's be honest and realize that amidst all of our differences, we are all alike in this way—every one of us—regardless of where or how you or I might see ourselves on any spectrum of gender identity or sexual orientation. We all want to be happy and fulfilled. I want that. You want that.

Here's the deal. Please hear this. In our culture, we have convinced ourselves that sexual freedom is the key to our fulfillment. "If only I have sexual freedom to identify or act in this way or that way, then I will be happy." But what if that is not true? What if that is actually a lie? What if sexual expression itself is good, but it is not God? What if there is a God Who actually loves us? That would mean our greatest need is not liberation of our sexuality. No, our greatest need is reconciliation to our God.

I'm urging you today, no matter who you are—not based on my thoughts or my opinions, but based on God's Word—I'm urging you to believe this, to realize that the greatest need in your life right now is reconciliation to God, trust in God, not trust in yourself. In all your efforts to redefine and reorient yourself, you are running away from the only One Who can truly satisfy your soul.

8. Jesus has made a way for each of us to experience restoration to relationship with God (Romans 5).

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus has made a way for each of us to experience restoration to a right relationship with God. We are all sexual sinners and we all need a Savior—and we have one. Romans 5 tells us that Jesus has made a way for you and me, for every single one of us, to experience reconciliation and peace with God. Whether we are male or female, married or divorced, single or cohabitating—with whatever sexual orientation—every one of us has turned from God to ourselves. We have all sinned against God and are all separated from God.

But the good news of the gospel is that God has come to you and me in the person of Jesus and He has paid the price for all of our sin against Him. Jesus, in love for you and me, has died on a cross to make it possible for us to be forgiven of all our sin and reconciled to relationship with God. No matter who you are, no matter what you've done, no matter how you've struggled, Jesus has made a way for you to have your greatest need in life met forever. Jesus has made a way for you to find ultimate fulfillment by experiencing restoration to relationship with God.

9. Jesus has made a way for each of us to enjoy our ultimate identity in God (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:27, 3:1-11).

And it gets better because of this truth. Galatians 2, Colossians 1 and 3 all speak to how when you are reconciled to relationship with God through faith in Jesus, you experience an entirely new identity. Second Corinthians 5:17 says you are a new creation. This is so key in a culture that equates identity with sexuality. We could all view the world through the grid of various labels we assign one another—LGBTQIA and on and on and on, but the gospel awakens us to an entirely new grid. The gospel opens our eyes to the reality that God our Creator is good and loving, that we at our core have sinned against Him and our identity is sinful—each one of us. But Jesus came to pay the price for our sins on a cross, and in doing so, He has made a way for you and me to have an entirely new identity—His identity.

- No longer separated from God, but now reconciled to God.
- No longer stained by sin, but now clean from sin.
- No longer slaves to sin and self, but now free to live according to God's good design.
- No longer guilty before God as Judge, but now loved by God as Father.
- No longer deserving of eternal separation from God, never to grasp all that He has created you to be, but now having eternal life, experiencing more and more every day for all of eternity exactly who God has created you to be.

I think about Rosaria Butterfield, who describes herself as a lesbian professor at a large university, who took delight in disparaging the Bible and all who believe it. "Stupid, pointless and menacing," she writes, "that's what I thought of Christians and their god Jesus, who in paintings looked as powerful as a Brett shampoo commercial model." She wrote some scathing editorials about Christians in a local newspaper.

A pastor and his wife, after reading her comments, reached out to her and simply invited her into their home week after week after week. As she saw genuine love in them for her, she started reading the Bible and wrestling with this question: Did I really want to understand sexuality from God's point of view or did I just want to argue with God? One night she started praying and didn't stop until the morning. She wrote:

When I looked in the mirror, I looked the same. But when I looked into my heart through the lens of the Bible, I wondered: am I a lesbian or has this all been a case of mistaken

identity? If Jesus could split the world asunder, divide marrow from soul, could He make my true identity prevail? Who am I? Who will God have me to be?

This crisis of identity led her to what she describes as “one ordinary day” when she trusted in Jesus. “In this war of worldviews,” she wrote, “Jesus triumphed. I was a broken mess, a train wreck. I did not want to lose everything that I loved, but the voice of God sang a sanguine love song in the rubble of my world and I weakly believed that if Jesus could conquer death, He could make right my world.”

The guarantee God gives us in His Word is that when we trust in Jesus, He alone can make right your world and my world.

10. We each have a choice: reject and defy God in life or repent and trust God as life (Mark 1:15).

This means we all have a choice. We can reject and defy God in this life or we can repent and trust God as our very life. I am looking at a room full of males and females of all ages with unique stories, unique backgrounds, unique questions and unique struggles. Today, I want to ask every single one of us these same questions: What choice are you going to make in your life? Where are you going to put your faith—in the ever-evolving thoughts of our culture or in the everlasting truths of God’s Word? Where are you going to put your trust—in your imperfect desires or in God’s perfect love for you? Are you going to reject and defy God in your life or are you going to repent, which means to turn from yourself and change your mind, trusting God as your life?

I want to urge you to do the latter today, probably in a way you didn’t see coming, but God is speaking to you right now. When you trust in Jesus and experience reconciliation with God, then you will find and enjoy an entirely new identity in Him. It will be an identity and satisfaction and fulfillment that will last forever and that nothing in this world can take from you.

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Then, when this becomes a reality in your life, what do you do with these truths? Now hear what God is saying to us in Colossians 4 regarding the church and sexuality in our culture.

1. Pray to God steadfastly with alertness in the world and gratitude in your heart.

The first command in Colossians 4:2 is, “*Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful...*” This means don’t stick your head in the sand when it comes to what is going on in the world around you. We need to open our eyes. I mentioned earlier what is being taught in our schools and it’s not just here; it’s across our country. In some places kindergartners are being taught that there are many ways to express gender. Elementary schools are participating in exercises where they explore gender options. And in so many settings, teachers are required to teach this and may be fired—and have been fired—if they don’t.

Counselors are required to advocate this and may lose their licenses—and have lost their licenses—if they don't. In 18 states and the District now, there are bans on any counseling that would even question expression of a different gender.

Open your eyes, because the tentacles of this teaching go far beyond the classroom or the counseling room. They extend into the home, where there are stories around our country of parents whose children have been taken from them because the parents would not support their children's desire to identify as a different gender. In one court case in Ohio, a child was taken from her parents because they would not support her desire for male hormone treatments. The state accused the parents of resisting their child's wishes for religious reasons and they ended up taking the child from her parents. They've totally lost custody.

There is another story of a 14-year-old daughter who met another girl at school who said she was transgender. So this 14-year-old daughter decided she would be too. She first announced that she was a boy at school. Teachers and faculty began calling her a new male name without informing the parents. When the parents found out, they asked the school to call her by her given name. The school refused. The school's social worker went on to recommend that the girl explore halfway houses for children because of her parents' lack of support.

This is not unusual. Teachers in many places now encourage students to report parents for child abuse and neglect if they disagree with the child's gender identification. I could continue, but the point is we need to open our eyes. And before we do anything else, we need to pray to God with thanksgiving that He gives us the grace we need and that He is ultimately in control. We don't pray without hope.

2. Share the gospel clearly in the opportunities God opens.

We pray steadfastly with thanksgiving and we share the gospel clearly in the opportunities God opens for us. Do you know what's so interesting about Colossians 4? Paul is writing here about open doors for the gospel when he's in prison for sharing the gospel. That's one of the things I love about this passage, because Paul knows that with everything that's happening in the world around him—even the things he doesn't understand—there are open doors for the gospel.

I am totally convinced the same is true today. That's why I titled this message "Sexuality In Our Culture: An Open Door for the Gospel." I am convinced that open doors for the gospel are wider today in our culture than even a few years ago. The further we go down a dark road of sexual confusion in our culture, the brighter gospel light will shine. Be assured that God's design is better, more breathtaking, more beautiful, more satisfying than anything we could ever come up with on our own. Let's clearly share the gospel—the good news—that God alone satisfies and He will.

3. Live wisely according to God's Word in the time and place we're in.

As we share the gospel clearly, the Bible says live wisely according to God's Word in the time and the place we're in. Walk in wisdom, Colossians 4:5 says, "*making the best use of the time.*" That means we should maximize the time and place God has put us in. God put you and me in this time and this place, in this culture and in this community. So may we be found faithful in it, wisely stewarding the time and opportunities we have.

When we think about these opportunities, by God's grace we live in a country where we actually have a say in these things. We have a say in what is taught in our schools and what is legislated by our leaders. We have a say in who leads our school boards and who makes our state and local laws. Election Tuesday comes around every year as one of the ways we as followers of Jesus can walk in wisdom. So I want to encourage every person over the next couple of days to learn as much as you can about who is up for election, from your local school board to all the other races that have ramifications for biblical issues across our counties and state and in the District.

Obviously we've talked today about one issue among so many in our culture that our Bible speaks to. Some of you might be wondering, "Why do churches and pastors speak about certain issues and ignore other issues?" I would answer that I think that's a problem. It's one that I and our pastors are committed to addressing in better and better ways, speaking clearly wherever God has spoken clearly across political lines, being clear about biblical truth in every issue, not just pet or popular issues.

All this is to say do your homework on this and other issues over the next 24 to 48 hours, then wisely, according to God's Word, vote in a way that promotes Romans 13 and that which is good. We cannot sit idly by regardless, but all the more so when our counties are laboratories that affect this issue across our country. I was looking at the data recently and learned that one of the school board members here in Fairfax County, gained a seat last time by less than 200 votes. I read about a county in Delaware that reversed its policies on sexuality because enough people got involved.

We have thousands of people in our church and God has given us opportunity, by His grace—especially as we remember our persecuted brothers and sisters who don't have opportunities. So let's step into this and steward what God has given us, with wisdom according to God's Word and God's ways. I should probably point out here that what Colossians 4 is encouraging us to do hits on some of the hardest things to do and the things we fail in most today.

Think about it. To pray? We are so quick to talk and complain and so slow to get on our knees. To share the gospel clearly? We don't like to talk with others about sex, identity or ultimate spiritual truth. We prefer to talk about sports and weather. To be wise as citizens? We are so prone to either overreaction on one side or abandonment on the other.

4. Speak graciously with God's love for the people we're around.

This last point may be our biggest struggle as we strive to speak graciously with God's love for the people we're around. We need to speak graciously even though so many of us are prone not to speak on this issue but just to stay silent. And for those who do speak, too many times they speak on this issue without grace. This is where we need to remember that this issue is not ultimately about policies—this is about people. It's about kids, moms, dads, school board members, all of whom are seeking a way that seems right and good.

This means even when we disagree with ideas, we love the people who advocate those ideas. We invite them into our homes. We care for them in their lives. We meet them where they are. We go to the hurting, to the wandering, to the wrestling. We go to families and kids who are struggling and feel alone. We go to anyone who feels marginalized. We condemn any and every act of abuse or bullying. We need to be good at going and caring and loving with God's Word, knowing it's just going to get harder, knowing we may lose our jobs, or we may even go to prison like Paul did. But this is the way of Jesus. Even then, we speak with grace always, as verse six says, because we all know that we all need God's mercy in our lives.

So I'll close back where we started, looking specifically to those who either have identified at some level on the LGBTQ spectrum or those who are walking with a child or other family member or friend through honest questions and discussions, then generally to a whole gathering of people who struggle with sexuality. In light of these ten truths, know that Jesus is for your good; you can trust Him with your life personally and as you love people who are close to you in His name.

Will you bow your heads with me? Bow your heads and close your eyes just so you can focus before God, knowing that the greatest need for each one of us is reconciliation to God. I want to ask every person, right where you are sitting, have you trusted in Jesus to reconcile you to God? Have you turned from yourself and your ways to put your trust in God? This is not just a question for those who identify this way or that—it's a question for all of us. Have you trusted in Jesus to reconcile you to God?

If not, I want to invite you to do that today. God has brought you here, so I want to give you an opportunity to do that right now, right where you're sitting. Just say to God in your heart, "Dear God, I know that I have sinned against You and that I am separated from You. But today I want to be reconciled to You. Today I am putting my trust in Jesus and what He did on the cross for my sin. Today I ask You to save me from my sin and myself, restoring me to relationship with You, to fulfillment in You forever."

With your heads bowed, if you would say, "Yes, today I am putting my trust in Jesus to reconcile me to God," just lift your hand up before God. Amen.

God, You see these hearts that are saying they trust in You. We praise You for Your grace, not just in them, but for all who have put their trust in Jesus. We pray that You would give these, and all who do not have courage yet, to publicly confess new life and identification with You through baptism, even today.

In just a moment I'm going to close in prayer, then after I say amen, I will share with those of you who, trusting in Jesus, can be baptized today. But before I close, I want to ask everybody are there specific ways that you need to repent of going outside of God's design for your life—thoughts, desires, actions? I want to give you a moment to repent right now, praying, "God, I have turned from You in this way or that way. I need Your forgiveness. I want to have a close relationship with You."

God, we praise You for Your love for us. We praise You for the way You've designed us for our good and for Your glory. We pray that in the culture You've put us in You would help us live according to Your good design. Help us in the many battles in our lives to live according to Your design. We need Your grace. We need Your help. We praise You for Your love and promises to help, to lead and guide and satisfy us. So we say together that we trust in You. We trust in You and pray that You would help us be a reflection of Your love, grace and truth in the world, in this time and place You've put us in. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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