

I Kissed Waiting Goodbye

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- [0 : 0 0] Lord, as we transition in this moment, please give us wisdom to hear, to hear particularly on this topic that we're introducing today that can be difficult.
- Give us wisdom to process in this next season. And get through it all, Lord, give us a sense that we are loved deeply. In Jesus' name.
- So I want to start by saying a few words from the Song of Solomon.
- Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth. For your love is better than wine. Your anointing oils are fragrant.
- Your name is perfume poured out. Therefore, the maidens love you. Draw me after you. Let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers.
- [1 : 0 5] We will exult and rejoice in you. We will extol your love more than wine. Rightly do they love you. While the king was on his couch, my nard gave forth its fragrance.
- My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breasts. My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of Inghetti.
- Ah, you are beautiful, my love. Ah, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves. Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved. Truly loved.
- Our couch is green. The beams of our house are cedar. Our rafters are pine. I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.
- As a lily among brambles, so is my love among maidens. As an apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among young men.
- [2 : 0 6] With great delight, I sat in his shadow, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his intention towards me was love.
- But here's my favorite. I slept, but my heart was awake. Listen, my beloved is knocking. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one.
- For my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. I had put off my garment. How could I put it on again?
- I had bathed my feet. How could I soil them? My beloved thrust his hand into the opening of my inmost being, and my inmost being yearned for him.
- I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with hurt, my fingers with liquid mud. On the handles of the bowl. I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and was gone.
- [3 : 1 0] So these are just a few of the verses from the short book of poems in the book that is known as the Song of Solomon, or sometimes as the Song of Songs.
- It's this really short book, but it's dripping with sensual language and imagery. Even if you've never read it, I hope you caught some of those things happening. Things were dripping, and you know, a lot was happening.

Just saying, you know. Whew. There are lines that are deeply erotic, and if you translated them into more modern language or language that was less poetic, we would probably consider some of this explicit.

But, and because this song is so often not read, or if it's, you know, if it's preached upon, the text isn't actually read. I wanted to start by reading some of that.

It's also this book that some folks have said should not even maybe be in the biblical canon, because it is, it doesn't actually mention God.

[4 : 19] And yet it's full of all this incredibly, like, lush imagery that carries with it this sense of being returned to Eden, the Garden of Eden, this place of beauty and uncompromising vulnerability and safety.

It's a set of poems about intimacy with the divine, but also about our desire for human connection. It's about the erotic, and it combines the erotic unashamedly with the divine.

The prominent Jewish interpreter, Rabbi Akiva, who lived in the first century into the late second century, said that of all the scriptures are holy, but the song of songs is the holy of holies.

In Jewish tradition, the holy of holies was this place of divine encounter where you could experience the presence of God. But it was also understood as a place of risk, a place that you had to prepare to enter through this variety of rituals.

Dr. Tina Sellers, who's a therapist and does a bunch of writing at the intersection of the church and sexuality and sex, notes that all of those rituals to enter the holy of holies were about mindfulness.

[5 : 46] We can think about the same thing as we start this series. So we're beginning the series today. We want to talk about what it means to engage sexuality and the erotic mindfully.

Recalling the series, I Kissed Waiting Goodbye, a real talk series. On faith, sexuality, and the erotic. The title isn't meant to say that no one is waiting, waiting.

Yes, that's not what it's meant to say. But it is about this idea that there are so many things in church that we don't say that are true and that we're doing and practicing and we just don't talk about them.

Often, while we may have put off the ideas of purity culture, in many ways we're like still practicing and we're still performing it before other people because of the way we want people to perceive us.

All right, so what we're about to do, we're going to have a panel discussion, invite a few folks from our community up. We want to start with kind of embodied ideas. What are folks in the room processing? Becky's going to come up.

[6 : 51] And then the other thing I want to say before she does come up is that I chose the word erotic on purpose. I am deeply aware that many of us in this room or some of us in this room may identify as asexual or may not experience the desire for sex for a bunch of reasons or aren't having sex for a bunch of reasons.

So we want to talk about, as well, the erotic as the power for connection. So we'll talk a lot about sex and sexuality. But we hope that these conversations also go broader than that in many ways.

We hope that these conversations are about this kind of God-given gift to steward intimacy and connection and to become more mindful about it. So with that, Becky's going to come on up.

Thank you, Temehla. The worst. The worst. The worst.

God bless you.

[8 : 24] Right now, Becky. We'll rearrange the stage to make all the mics work. Hi, everyone. I am Becky. I am an elder emeritus here at the table. And I'm very excited to moderate this conversation today.

And this has been something I think I have been in it. I have been the pebble in the shoe of leadership for a long time about we need to have a good, full, rich conversation about sex and erotic and sexuality here.

So I'm very excited about this. But most of this is going to be not me talking. So we're going to take a minute to introduce our panel here today. And we're just going to be asking some questions of each other and talking a little bit about our experience with the conversation of sex and sexuality in the church, in our lives, what our fears are, what some of the things we are growing in.

And it promises to be a great conversation that shouldn't stop here. So hopefully we'll continue with one another in the more informal space. So let's start. I'm just going to go on down the road here. If you each would take a moment to introduce yourself and just talk a little bit about who you are to yourself.

Hi, everyone. I'm Danielle. I use she, her pronouns. And I now lead the Women's Affinity Group. Right now, I'm very nervous. So while I talk about a lot of this in my personal life, I was telling friends that like having the cross and being in a church, all this is really freaking me out.

[10 : 05] But we're going to go through it together and it's going to be great. But I grew up Catholic and went to an evangelical school for a while. So I'd say I'm like recovering Catholic, have some like purity, shame culture that I've been working through for a long time and have been in the table at the table church for about two years now.

Great. I'm also nervous. So I share that feeling with you. Richard Bentham, he, him. I've been at the table for about 15 years. I met my husband here.

Both of my parents are from Barbados and they came here when they were in their 20s. I had me. I'm a D.C. native. Grew up right outside in Prince Jesus County.

I love to laugh and love museums. And I think if anything else. Yeah, I'll leave it there.

Hi, I'm Jess. She, her. I identify with the L, at least closer to the L on the LGBTQIA plus spectrum.

[11 : 17] And I've been attending the church since August 2019 with my fiancé Joy. And I grew up with Jesus from Texas. So if you are familiar with a similar song, Jesus from Texas, that's really all you need to know to understand what I'll be sharing today.

So I don't know that song. My name's Matt. I'm from Britain originally. So I grew up with British Jesus, who is very quiet and I think a little, but anyway. I, so I'm married to one former called Anna Chelsea.

We've been married almost four years. We met at Richard's wedding. And yeah, I'm excited for this conversation. I think it's, it touches on a lot of things that are quite raw and scary.

So let's see where we go. Speaking of things that are raw and scary. My first question for you all today is when you hear a church saying, we're going to do a series on faith and sexuality and the erotic.

What fears come up for you and what hopes come up? I can take that. Becky, much like you, I'm excited about this.

[12 : 33] And so I don't necessarily have fears about the topic, but I do have fears that like, as a church, we might lose some people because it's a controversial topic.

Churches tend to stay away from these topics because they want to keep attendance. But my hope is because we're taking the chance to like approach this topic that it will make people be like, oh, like this is a church that I want to go to because they are not afraid to talk about things like this or that are controversial.

I think similarly, this is a topic that I think every church I've ever been to has done badly in some way, shape or form. So I hope we don't do that. But I think more than that, I think the church generally, whatever flavor we grew up in, has done some harm around eroticism, around sexuality, around sensuality.

And so my hope is that this can be the beginning of a slightly restorative process where the church talks about this in a way that's better and starts to begin some of that healing for folks. Anybody else want to add?

I think they nailed it. Nothing to add to that one. So can you panel members share with us a little bit about how you were raised to think about sex and sexuality, both kind of in your family of origin or in the influence of your church community?

[14 : 06] What was life-giving and maybe what was less helpful? I'm happy to start. I'm happy to start. So I grew up. I'd say my kind of deepest experience, especially as it relates, formative experience as it relates to this topic, is I went to an evangelical middle school.

And it was like on accident. My parents are like culturally Catholic. They're really not religious. And it was that was the good school in the area that would bust me. So I was like, great. You're going to that school. And did not realize like all of the baggage that would come along with that sixth grade education.

But I remember it was like my first few months in the school and everyone had a purity ring. They had the little ring on their finger. And you're a middle school girl. You want to be like everyone else.

So I, too, got a purity ring saying when I was in sixth grade. So you're like 11 years old that I was going to save myself for marriage and save myself for marriage and was not going to have sex until I got married.

And I was in sixth grade when I really did not know anything about sex or what it was. And I think that just really started this very long journey of like purity and perfectionism and the shame that's associated with that of like purity is actually like an impossible thing.

[15 : 19] It's not a real thing, purity. But when you're trying to be pure, like how do you contort yourself into all these little boxes to try to fit the box you think you're supposed to be in?

So that was like a 20 year journey that I'd say I'm still definitely in. And it took me leaving the church, like the institutional church for a little bit to be able to find it again and come back to it and really like deconstruct, for lack of a better word, all of that that came with what that meant for me and my identity.

You said some stuff that made me think about some things that I think I had buried deep, deep down in my memory, including. I'm almost positive that at my high school, there actually was like a purity pledge day.

And I went to a public high school. In Texas. Yeah. So. So. The fact that we had a table where someone was standing so that we could sign this pledge to either save ourselves or to pledge to rewrap our gift, because that's the wording that was used over and over again.

Like that memory just came flooding back. But in the churches that I grew up in, my father's side of the family attended. Southern Baptist, like white churches.

[16 : 45] But my dad's family is Hispanic. So that was an odd sort of like way to feel in that space. And I really just remember hearing marriage, man, woman and like nothing else.

And that's the extent of it. And. That led into our school system. Which prevented us from getting like real sex education.

So we actually had. And I don't know if this still stands, but our teachers could not. Our health teachers could not teach sex education. Like they couldn't or they couldn't teach the.

The actual sex portion of the sex education class or part of the class. So our teachers would switch classrooms. So the teachers that were not assigned to us would actually give us the education we needed.

So they were essentially finding the only loophole they could to protect children from a policy that was harmful. And I can say that's definitely how like church influence not only like my my personal life with my family, but also my educational life as well.

[17 : 52] Yeah, I just want to add that. So my church. So I grew up in a mega church with Baptist roots. And marriage between one man and one woman.

Same thing. In addition to that, you know, as like growing up coming into knowing that I'm gay. They would also make fun of, you know, queer folk on the pulpit.

And this would any time it would come up in the news or it, you know, became a big thing in their mind. There was jokes just thrown out there. There was jokes. Which made me feel even like, okay, well, I really this is not a safe space.

But I want to be faithful to my church. So I'm going to stay here and deal with it and and work this out. Yeah.

So Britain is different to America in that sense. Like we can't get away with as much stuff as I think you all can. And the way we get away with it is by not talking about anything. So a lot of what I think I experienced growing up was people really not talking about things.

[19 : 02] You know, people didn't talk about, certainly people didn't talk about sex a joke. The places that people talked about sex were not healthy places to learn about it. The places that people talked about, you know, how to understand, you know, what you thought of as erotic was very narrow because that was all we had access to.

So I think for me, there was a lot of like, just don't talk about it. And so that then brings a whole bunch of shame that comes with it when you're interested in things or thinking about things like this doesn't fit with what I perceive to be what everyone else is doing because nobody else is talking about it.

So I think there was a lot. For me, there's really a journey of, okay, well, what is, you know, what do I care about? What I'm interested in? What do I like?

What is that sort of erotic piece that is important? And how do I get in touch with that? Because for, you know, I left Britain in 2014. So that's, you know, that was those 20 odd years of learning not to talk about things and squashing it down and trying to pull it back out of that has been a journey.

I'm going to go off script just really briefly. But both Danielle and Jess, you guys mentioned purity culture and purity reigns. I get a sense that that was a very gendered thing.

[20 : 16] Has anybody on the sort of male identifying side of this platform ever experienced like that same sort of push to keep yourself until marriage, to have an outward statement of purity like the more female gendered side of the stage has?

No. Like, it was, we were held to the same standard, but it seemed like the women at the church, it was just like, absolutely not.

It is a sin. Like, you need to make this pledge. Men, we kind of understand if things happen, but get back on track, pray, and keep moving forward.

And also, like, you know, we had times where women would become pregnant, and it was from a guy, and they would have to walk with that shame.

And the guy wouldn't. People are like, well, who was the man? What happened here? And they get to just keep going. This is just really unfair.

[21 : 24] So I'm going to ask you all some more individual questions, and I'm going to start with Matt. I know you straddle sort of two cultures, but both of them are cultures kind of based in white privilege and white supremacy.

So I'm wondering how that has impacted the way that you have thought about faith and sexuality and the erotic. Yeah, that's a great question. Like, just as an aside, while I put my thoughts together, I think asking how white supremacy has made you think about anything is a really good exercise in general.

So I think there's two things. I think the first one is that most of the stereotypes about sexual subcultures are very racialized.

And I don't think we need to get into what those all are. But I think that is a product of white supremacy, that there is this sort of white standard of sex, and then everything else is somehow other. Like, whether it's, oh, this subculture is particularly promiscuous, or this subculture is a particular way.

But it's always stemmed from sort of this white norm, and then there's these other subcultures. I'm married to a brown woman, so I'm beginning to understand some of those subcultures as well. But I think the other piece, and I think this is where white supremacy robs of everything, is any sense of identity.

[22 : 45] Like, I think, you know, understanding sex or sexuality, what is erotic, what is sensual, that comes from, first of all, understanding who you are and understanding yourself. And I think white supremacy does a great job of not letting us do that, not understanding what's important to us as individuals, what's important to us culturally, what's important to us as humans.

And so I think we create this very beige, bland nothingness that is white supremacy, and then attempt to squash anything that deviates from that, because we can't understand it.

We don't want to understand it. We're scared of it. And I think there's a lot of folks walking around with some degree of, you know, misinterpreted, misunderstood, misdirected frustration, because white culture doesn't let you get into that.

Building on that, Richard, I'm interested in the converse side of that. Are there ways in which the stereotypes of physicality and the prowess of black people has shaped your faith in sexuality and your understanding of the erotic?

So this is a hard question for me to answer, because I want to say, like, I feel like the black community, we're not a monolith.

[24 : 01] So we all have our different experiences. In my experience, I lived in Fredericksburg County, which, you know, a lot of my high school teachers said that you live in a bubble, essentially, because everyone here is, you know, African American.

We have, like, we're all different classes. So, like, a lot of those potential, like, scars at a young age didn't necessarily happen to me, which a lot of my friends who grew up in more predominantly white areas have had those scars and influenced them now.

But, like, growing up, you know, I was labeled by my own family as the fat kid, which made me basically feel extremely insecure about my body.

Outside of the home and at church, I was labeled as the kid that probably played football or some kind of sport. But I hated sports, especially at that time. And then as I got older and I had sexual experiences, you know, I experienced fetishization of, you know, me as, you know, my black body.

And I think these, all these experiences unconsciously negatively affect how I feel about my body to this day. And I'm, like, still, like, working through that.

[25 : 20] For Jess and Danielle, I think you kind of touched on this a little bit when we talked about purity culture. But are there ways that your gender has shaped your thinking about faith and sexuality and the erotic?

I have to say, this was the question that ahead of time stumped me probably the most. Because it's not something I actively think about. And maybe that's kind of the issue there.

It was something I didn't get to really think about. A lot of, there was a lot of shame around desiring sex or desiring sexual relationships.

So if you get to the point where that's the kind of relationship you're in as a young person, like, especially for me, like, as an adolescent, there was automatically just this.

Well, this is wrong. Okay, it's wrong. Why does it feel okay? And that's what I think I kept asking myself. Like, why is this so wrong when this feels more right than things that I know are absolutely wrong?

[26 : 24] Like, where's the moral? And I have a, I've always felt that I have a very strong, like, moral compass of what right and wrong is to the point where I'm, like, pretty, like, black and white of what is right and wrong in my head.

And I've kept to those most of my life, probably consistently. And that was one thing that didn't feel wrong. If I wanted it, if it was okay, if I consented, what was the problem there?

I was like, I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. As a high school kid, I drove myself to church most of the time.

I attended by myself at a church that I chose to go to with, really, I started going there. My mom eventually went. At this point, my parents were divorced. So I was going myself. And I would still walk into that space three times a week because that's the amount of times I attended church as a teenager.

And I would carry that shame and that guilt, but would sit there very confused as to why it was shame and guilt. I was also like, we would have in Catholic school morning church.

[27 : 35] So I was like the girl who would go to her mass in the morning, and I felt really great about myself. And I think it was kind of as I think about the role of gender and its impact on how I think about sexuality and the erotic, it's the good girl perception.

It's also like women. Like, what role are you supposed to have? Like, you aren't supposed to know anything until you get married, but you're supposed to be like really good once you get married.

Because if you're not, your husband's going to run away and it's going to be your fault. But the church should be okay with it. And like, they'll pray for you and bring you back in. So you're not supposed to know anything.

And just also the role, like how we think about women's bodies, I think, in general of you should look nice, but not too nice. And if you dress a certain way and someone looks at you a certain way, then that's your fault.

And you have to hold that shame. So it's like the role of like self-responsibility. But when you're a young girl, like that's not your responsibility to hold. And I think coming from society, but also from church where like that's supposed to be where you're like loved the most.

[28 : 39] So it like messes up how you think about God. Only if you're good, that's when God loves you. That's when you can love yourself. And that's when you can be in relationship with other people. Speaking of that, I would really like to hear how your faith experiences have influenced or shaped the way you see sexual pleasure or consent or mutuality or some of these things that feature into a sexual ethic.

I threw this in on the fly. So they're thinking. Can you say that one more time?

Yes, I can. How does your experience growing up in the church talking about sex and sexuality, how has that affected your perceptions about pleasure, about consent, about mutuality as you are experiencing and sharing?

Erotic and sexual experiences. I think Danielle touched on this, but it's an important point to dig into a little further is that like this sex is wrong.

Like you grow up in church and sex is wrong and then you get married and suddenly it is the rightest thing ever. And I think that like trying to learn through that and, you know, with that growing up and to your point, Jessica, growing up in a culture where sex is normalized, you know, generally like most people, particularly, you know, as you're going through college or going through high school, like folks are having sex, talking about sex and growing up in a sort of more purity culture space where like that's not okay.

[30 : 15] But the thing the church always tells you, and I'm sure people can relate to some version of this, it's like people outside of the church are unhappy. And the way that you know that is they're doing all of these things.

And most of the things that they list off doing are things that are generally good fun. Like, oh, they're going out drinking on the weekends. They're having a bunch of sex. They're, you know, doing all of these other things. You're like, yeah, no, that would, that will probably make people happy.

So why am I sat in church on Sunday feeling all this, you know, feeling all this guilt? So I think that sort of the, try and get back to your question.

I think the church is bad at giving us a good sexual ethic. And I don't think that's necessarily scripture's fault. I don't think that's sort of a Jesus problem.

I think it's a how we interpret it and how we're willing to talk about it. And I think the challenge for how we do this as a church is we've put limits on people.

[31 : 15] We've said this is okay, this isn't. You know, this is okay now, this isn't okay now. And I think what, you know, if we take the gospel seriously, the gospel is supposed to be about freedom. And I think that includes a sexual and neurotic freedom.

And I don't think that's said much in church. Did that even get to your question at all? So I know we're getting close to time and I appreciate you guys hanging in with us.

But I think this is a really important discussion. But I want to hear from maybe some of you what you've learned or what you think the church needs to learn from the queer community. This was the easiest one for me to answer ahead of time.

I spent over 10 years not attending churches. So from the time I went to college at the age of 18 till the age of, I guess it was 31 when I stepped foot like back in this space and the table space.

Or into it for the first time, for that matter. And that was a long time to spend away from church, especially feeling like I felt like a good person.

[32 : 26] I felt like I was doing good things in my life. But I had distanced myself from God because I associated God and I associated Jesus with what everyone taught me growing up was God and Jesus from the perspective that was very limited and very hateful.

And not the Jesus I thought existed truly, like truly in my heart. So when I would attend Pride Festival during that 10 year plus period away from church, those were the moments when I felt closest to God.

And those were the spaces where I felt the actual love of Jesus Christ embodied by the people who were living their truest, most authentic self.

And actually showing what it means to love everyone. End of story. Period. Full stop. So those places became a place for me to worship God's creation.

But finding a place like today, just in worship earlier, finding a place where I felt like I could authentically worship and I didn't feel like I was having to force my feelings of being present with God.

[33 : 46] It just feels what it just feels what it should have been the entire time and what so many people and what I was robbed of growing up. Anyone should be able to come into a space like this and not feel ashamed or concerned that who they are in their fullness isn't okay.

We should all be accepted. And I know this space knows that I'm absolutely preaching to the choir at this point saying those things. But yeah, that's the biggest thing.

Pride was my way of worshiping for a very long time. I think the biggest thing the church could learn is the queer community is just what I think of as radical community.

I mean, we have it here. The LGBT group is just like really tight. Like I have when I first started when it first started up and I started attending the meetings, the stories that we would share, the way how we would be there for each other, make sure that each of us was heard and seen.

And even when we're not dealing with our sexuality, you know, like someone passed away in their family, like we're right in that chat, you know, like, you know, making sure that that person is taken care of.

[35 : 09] And, you know, I just don't see that in a lot of spaces. People like really loving up on each other. So I want to kind of end it with each of us, each of you having a chance to say, to share one more thing.

And this is about looking at what do you see that is bringing joy or good news for you as you're, as you are discovering things regarding your faith and sexuality and the erotic.

So are there like stories or scripture passages or things that you've learned and experienced that is helping you that you consider to have been like good news as you're moving along this journey?

I'd love to have each of you respond if you get a chance to do that. When I was in my like in-between church time, I went to Evolving Faith. This was like 2019.

And I went alone and I like pushed myself to go. I'm like, you can do this. Like, let's give church another shot. And there was a woman there who preached about original blessing. And it like broke my brain that like growing up in the concept of original sin, that like we are born with sin, especially as women.

[36 : 18] Like you have sin and you got to clean your sin off for God and anyone else to love you. And getting to really embrace what like when you read scripture and when you read the gospel with like a fresh perspective you see is already there.

That like you are loved exactly who you are and how and how you are. And there's nothing you have to like clean up for to be worthy of God. And I think getting that experience, like learning that brought me back into the church in a really beautiful way and like helped get me also on my own.

Like I was really like terrified of figuring out what sex and the erotic and all that meant for me. And it really opened up a piece for me to be able to explore like what did that mean for me as an adult person who was like really terrified of all that.

Like I'm even saying that because I'm like talking about sex and church, what that meant for me in my life. And I think it helped me to read the Bible again with a fresh perspective and show up in community in a different way.

And just shout out to the women's affinity group here. And there's some folks in the room like that was like one of the first community spaces within a church in which I can talk about a lot of that super honestly. So I feel really lucky that that's a part of my life here at the table.

[37 : 29] So often I feel like the queer community is left out of like, you know, scriptures and talking about them. And like I was trying to figure out how to answer this question.

And I could not think of one, but in like prayer and like looking at different scriptures, I saw Genesis 1 and 31 where God saw everything that God had made. And indeed, it was very good.

So I would like to think that they that they looked down not just on the earth they had just finished creating, but also had the ability to transcend time and space and look into the here and now and see me a part of that could work.

Looking at this from the perspective of only having come back to church within the last four years. And I can honestly say that during a lot of that time, I considered myself agnostic.

So that's how far away I felt from I mean, I won't get into stuff here. I, I didn't have a close relationship with God.

[38 : 38] And I. When I started reading scripture again, when I started talking about what a relationship with God could look like and really studied, I spent about a month of time away from like television.

I really limited my entertainment and spent a month just in scripture. And that's actually how I like reintroduced myself to that relationship with God. And one of the songs at that time that kept hitting me was reckless love.

And then looking at the scripture that that song is based off of. If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost?

And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety nine that didn't wander away. In the same way, it is not my heavenly father's will that even one of these little ones should perish.

And I think about attending pride and seeing possibly little sheep who have wandered away, not because they wanted to, but because they were possibly forced to.

[39 : 51] And it's an opportunity to shine light and remind people that God is always present, even if they've been told by others that he's not present because of who you are.

And yeah, I'll be holding this one close to me this weekend. I think particularly in college, I was in a college ministry and a lot of what was talked about was how if your relationship with God was perfect, then everything else would fall into place.

And that included your sex life. So really what you needed to focus on was praying a lot and then your sex life would become magically better. I'm never quite sure how that was supposed to work.

I think I'm confident now in saying that's not true. And the best way to improve how you care about, you know, what you care about erotically, what you care about sexually is to work on that for yourself.

And I think there is a lot of freedom in like, OK, like there doesn't have to be. I don't think you have to necessarily be able to point to a Bible verse to say this is OK.

[40 : 56] Like there are there are not a lot of references to say whips and chains in the Bible in a sexual context, but I'm pretty sure that God is not looking down from heaven going, put those away. So I think freeing ourselves from what we've been told about scripture and to I think everyone's point coming back at it with new eyes, like it's OK to figure out who you are because God made us who we are.

And if we can't necessarily find our exact analog in scripture, that's OK, because it's a snapshot of a small number of people over a fairly short period of time. So I think for me, there isn't one specific verse, but I think it's looking at that question of like recognizing that we are all truly and wonderfully made and aren't made incorrectly.

And that extends to our sexual and erotic desires. And there are people out there who share those and who will be able to support you in understanding what those are. But understanding it yourself, I think, is the big it's been a barrier for me to understand.

And I think it is a barrier to a lot of folks. It's getting deeply in touch with that. What is that erotic piece? And putting the Bible down for a minute, being like, what is it that I actually want? Put that away for a minute. What is it that I actually want?

And let me find a community that'll that'll help me help me understand that. Thank you all so much for coming up here and facing into the nervousness and fear and sharing of yourselves and being vulnerable.

[42 : 15] We really appreciate that you guys can help me thank them. Thank you.