

Lesson 1: All Things Pure

Begin with a prayer.

Alright as we begin tonight, I need two volunteers. I need someone who is hungry and someone who is thirsty. (Need a water bottle and a brownie.)

Well, it's 99.9% pure. But the person who was drinking out of this water bottle had the flu. So it's not 100% pure.

You're not drinking that.

This is 99% pure ingredients. But you should know, it's 1% doggy dodo.

You're not eating that.

We have a desire for things to be pure. And not just partially pure. In fact, if something is only partially pure, it's not pure. It's impure.

In a similar way, God is not interested in only a part of our lives being pure. He desires us to be pure in every aspect. Wholly holy.

Pure hearts and pure hands. (Psalm 24:3-4) Pure eyes. (Matthew 6:22-23) Pure minds. (Phil. 4:8) Pure motives. Pure lips (James 3) Pure bodies. (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

Over the next few weeks, we're going to be talking about something that is going to sound super awkward at first.

We're going to be talking about sex.

Here's the weird thing: it's not awkward for you to hear about this subject anywhere else. Because everybody at school is talking about it. Everybody in the locker room is talking about it. Everybody on TV is talking about it. It's in the movies. It's in our music. It's on Netflix.

Everybody else everywhere else is talking about sex.

And I'm here to tell you tonight that we had better talk about this in the church. In fact it's of the utmost importance. If we neglect to talk about sex, we are neglecting a big portion of the Word of God. It's filled with teaching about sex.

If you wanted to gain a better understanding of how a computer works, you could talk to your friends about it, but wouldn't you much rather have the opportunity to talk to Bill Gates?

If you wanted to gain a better understanding on how to run a Fortune 500 company, you could talk to some people at school about it or but wouldn't you much rather talk to the corporate executives on Shark Tank?

In a similar way, if you want to gain a better understanding of sex, would it be better to listen to what your friends have to say about it with their very limited knowledge, or would you rather listen to what God has to say about it, the one who invented sex?

As we begin this series tonight I want us to turn our attention to 1 Thessalonians 4, because I think this passage is a great place for us to start when it comes to understanding what God wants for us as His people.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

And let's call timeout real fast here, because this is so important. First off, this is the will of God. To me that makes my ears perk up. What is God's will? I need to know this. I need to pay close attention.

This is the will of God, your sanctification.

You see that word sanctification? Do you know what it means?

This school year, Laura and I have been leading some Bible studies for our high school guys and girls called "Set Apart." And we've taken the guys and the girls and we've set them apart and the entire study has been about this concept that we read about here in this very passage. The idea of sanctification.

Sanctification is the very idea of being set apart, or being made holy.

And so Paul says, "You want to know God's will for your life? It's for you to be sanctified. It's for you to be set apart. It's for you to be made holy."

But he's not finished yet. Same verse. Same sentence. Same thought. Look what he says next.

This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; [if something is immoral it means it's wrong, it's sinful. So we're talking about sexual sin]

Please get this. Paul says it's God's will for you to be sanctified. Then God says "Let me show you what I mean. Let me show what that looks like. You want to know how to stand out? Be set apart in your sexuality.

If you want to truly be set apart for God, be set apart in your sexuality. If you want one area of your life to truly stand out and be counter-cultural, this area truly makes a difference.

People will look at a mission trip and say, "That is a wonderful thing. What a wonderful sacrifice of your time and your money and your vacation days. To go and do something like that to help others in need. What a beautiful sacrifice." That's the way the world looks at doing good deeds like that.

But if you really want to be set apart for God, follow God's plan for sexuality.

People will not look at that and say, "Oh what a wonderful thing. What a beautiful sacrifice. What a beautiful thing you are doing for the world!"

Instead they'll say, "What in the world does this person believe that they would say no to one thing and yes to something else? That's a bizarre sacrifice."

This is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,

God says, "We need to spend some concerning ourselves with figuring out how to control our bodies." It's the very idea of self-control.

You're right there at this age where your body is going to be telling you to go one way but your conscience and the Spirit of God and going to be telling you to go another way.

The Olympics just happened. Did you guys watch any of it? I think we got destroyed in the medal race this year...

The athletes in the Olympics spend an insane amount of time training. They have a strict and rigid diet that they follow. They know they can't afford to take days off. Because they know that wasted days lead to wasted opportunities.

Controlling your body for sexual purity is a hard thing. It takes discipline, wisdom, hard work, preparation, and a tremendous amount of determination. We can't afford to take days off. We've got to constantly stay on our guard.

In elementary school I remember being told that humans were animals. You're not an animal. And your ability to have self-control is one of the big differences between you and an animal. You weren't made to just follow your instincts all of the time. You were given a discerning mind so that you could make choices about what is best, not just what feels right or what your body wants.

4 that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, **5** not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; **6** that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. **7** For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

In verse 5 he says, there's the way that the Gentiles act sexually. They just follow their lust. Their passion. Whatever feels good, they're doing it. And he says they act that way because they don't know God.

But then he says verse 7, "But that's not for you. That's not what God has called you to. You do know God. So act like it in your sexuality. Be pure."

So before we move on, I just want to make sure that everybody understands this: sex is bad. Don't have sex.

Are we clear?

Listen, if that's what you think the Bible says about sex, you've got it way wrong. You've got it completely backwards.

The Bible teaches us that sex is good. That it is a gift from God. And God wants you to have it. God wants you to have sex. God wants to give you that gift. I mean, how cool is our God? He wants you to have sex.

I'm not sure we spend enough time talking to you guys about the blessing and the beauty of sex. It really is an awesome gift, but in order for sex to be good and in order for sex to be a gift you must follow God's plan for it. If you don't follow God's plan for sex, it will not be the blessing to you that He designed it to be.

Again, sex is good. And God wants you to have sex. But not right now. Sex is God's wedding gift to you, and your sexuality is your wedding gift for your spouse.

I think I was somewhere around 4th grade when I first remember learning about the word "perverted." And usually this word was used to describe a sexual joke and the way that guys were talking when they could sort of take whatever you said and make it sound really dirty.

But the word perverted actually has a deeper meaning than that.

To pervert something is to take something that was intended to be used in a certain way and twist it to be used in an improper way.

Remember the Garden of Eden? Remember how Satan convinced Adam and Eve that God's way was not the best way? "Did God really say that in the day you shall eat of that fruit you shall die?"

Remember how he convinced them that God was holding out on them and the only reason he told them not to eat of the forbidden fruit was because He didn't want Adam and Eve to have as much power or knowledge as He had?

I know this analogy is a little different from the Garden of Eden because sex is not a forbidden fruit. Remember, sex is a gift. It was designed for Adam and Eve to have with each other. Sex is good. God wants you to have it.

But the way that satan goes about selling us lies about sex hasn't really changed since the Garden of Eden.

Did God really say for you not to have sex? Did God really say to wait until you're married? That's not possible. That's unrealistic. That is so old-fashioned. Nobody really believes that or does that anymore. Sex is a healthy part of life.

God's way isn't really better. Just do it your way. After all, sex is meant to be enjoyed. You don't need to wait. God's holding out on you. You can have as much sex as you want with as many people as you want. Or if that's not your style, you can have it with just that one special person (if they're special enough) before you get married. It's not a big deal.

God's way is just a way. It's not the way. Besides if you love each other, what's the big deal?

And so satan takes this beautiful gift meant to be used in a certain way, for a husband and a wife only, and he perverts it. He twists it into something harmful. And it leaves destruction in its path. Sex can become a weapon that can ruin relationships and marriages. It can tear families apart. It can wreck your career.

Sex before or outside of marriage can bring about pregnancy. It can bring babies into an unhealthy environment where they don't have two married, committed parents to raise that child. Sex before or outside of marriage can bring about diseases.

But again, none of this has to happen. If we would just use the gift in the way that was intended to be used, none of those things come about. And really, God's plan for your sexuality is just like everything else in life: if you and I will follow God's blueprint for our lives, we will be blessed. If you trust God with your sexuality, you'll be blessed.

Before we close tonight, I want to share with you three things I need from you throughout the duration of this series.

1. I need you to be here.

This is an important teaching. In fact, we've decided to cancel the Set Apart Bible studies on Monday nights and move this material to Wednesday nights, in hopes that we can reach more of you with this very important message.

2. I need you to keep an open mind. When it comes to the topic of sexual purity, it's so easy to just sort of roll your eyes and think, "Ahhhh...here we go again with the sex talk."

The reality is, all of you are wired to be interested in this topic. You were created to be interested in sex.

So don't act like you don't care about this. I know that you do. You care about sex!

Now, that being said, you might not like everything that you hear during this series. Because there are things that God teaches about sex that our culture has a tough time with. And that's putting it lightly. The better way of saying it is that our culture wants nothing to do with God's way.

But just because you don't like something doesn't mean you don't need something.

For example, I'm not a big fan of getting shots. Laura's like, "You're afraid of shots." No. It's just given the option of "Hey, would you like being stabbed with a needle today?" my answer is always going to be "No thanks."

But sometimes you need a shot. Sometimes you need to hear things that you may not like to hear. We don't always like truth, but it doesn't make it any less true.

Sometimes the teachings of God are hard. Sometimes the followers of Jesus would go "No thanks," and turn away from following him. I don't want to be a fair-weather disciple. I want to follow him even when it's hard.

God's plan for sex is different than the world's plan. God has a better plan. It's a harder plan, and it's not the plan that you and I necessarily want to follow. But I can promise you this, if you will trust God's plan for your sexuality, you will be blessed.

And I promise you this, too: if you don't trust God's plan for your sexuality, your life's going to be a lot harder than it has to be.

So number two, I need you to keep an open mind when it comes to hearing God out on this topic.

3. I need you to know that God loves you no matter what.

I need you to hear this: no matter how much you've blown it, no matter what you've done with your girlfriend or your boyfriend, or how many times you've done it, God can take your sin away.

So don't buy into the lie that says since you have already crossed a line you did not need to cross physically, this stuff that we're studying doesn't matter.

Sexual sin is no different than any other sin as far as God's ability to forgive it. And sexual sin is no different than any other sin as far as your need to repent of it.

If you have crossed lines you're not proud of, don't be content to live and stay on the other side of the line. Come back to God. He'll take away your sin. You just need to rededicate your body to Him.

I'll close with this: it doesn't matter who you are, you're not immune from struggling with this.

You want to know one of the hardest things about teaching this series? It's that as much as I want to be pure, I'm not.

I really want to be pure. I really want to have pure intentions. I want to have pure thoughts. I want to be pure in heart. I want to have a pure tongue. And pure eyes and pure actions. I want to be pure.

But as much as I want that, I'm not. I didn't always do the right thing as a 17 year old kid and I still struggle as a 33 year old kid.

And so if that's where you are tonight, if you are a fellow struggler, let's bow before the throne of God and let's pray to Him.

Create in me a clean heart, O God...

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart; be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

All Things Pure Lesson 2: Clear Eyes Full Hearts

-Begin with a prayer.

-Review (first 4 slides)

Two weeks ago, we had Jonathan Harrison over here, who is a counselor at Freed-Hardeman University. He talked a lot about the harmful effects that pornography can have on your mind and on your marriage and on your life. Remember the slide where he said “This is your brain. This is your brain on drugs. This is your brain on pornography.”

It's good to know things from a scientific and psychological perspective. But tonight I especially want to make sure that all of us inside of this room understand the impact that pornography, and sexting, and things along those lines can have on your soul.

Tonight I thought I would begin with a trick question: if you went to biblegateway.com, and you do a word search on the word “porn,” how many times do you think will you find the word “porn” appearing in God's Word?

Zero.

Someone might say, “Ah, ok! So since the Bible never talks about viewing pornography on my smart phone, I can watch it as much as I want!

Well, no.

I think you guys understand this principle, but how many times did God say thou shalt not blow up thine neighbor's house with a grenade launcher?

“Well the Bible doesn't talk about grenade launchers, so I can shoot my grenade launcher at my neighbors house anytime I want!” (For the record, you'd probably only get to do it once)

Why doesn't the Bible talk about grenade launchers?

They hadn't been invented yet!

So does God ever have to say thou shalt not look up pornography on thine smartphone for us to know that it's wrong?

No. Why? This is a really important principle. It's because God has told us enough about His plan for sexual purity for us to know, “Ok, clearly pornography doesn't fit into God's plan.”

So, tonight, I want us all to take a honest look into the living and active Word of God and let's talk a little bit what God wants us to know about pornography.

Ok, remember that trick question from a minute ago? While it is true that you won't find the English word “porn” or pornography or pornographic in the Bible, there's a word in the original Greek language that I think you'll find interesting. (Don't pronounce it yet! Remember the New Testament was originally written in Greek.)

But this word that I think you'll find interesting is the Greek word that means “fornication.”

And by the way, the word fornication is an important word for us to understand, too, in the New Testament. It describes sexual intercourse between two unmarried persons or two persons not married to each other.

Well the Bible never says sex before marriage is wrong. Yes it does. Show me where! It's anytime that the word fornication is used. And

it's used about 17 times in the NT if my memory serves me correctly.

And so back to that interesting Greek word. Are you ready for this? The Greek word for fornication is the word "porneia."

Pretty obvious connection, right?

So, technically the word porn does appear in the Bible. It just isn't used to describe pornography as it is thought of today.

So let's dig into the Scriptures. What are some passages that we need to hide away in our hearts when it comes to this topic? I wish we had time to look at several, but I think you'll see that we won't have to read many Scriptures before we see that it's a pretty clear teaching.

And again, I just want to remind you that we're not just talking about pornography here. We're talking sexting, movies that may not be classified as pornography but that are loaded with sex and nudity. We're talking about stuff that's really all over the place in our society. On billboards, and television, and Netflix, and man is it ever on Netflix...

This stuff is all over the place.

Let's start in Matthew 5:27. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.'

Ok, yeah. Pretty clear point there. Everybody would be on board with that. Adultery is a bad, bad thing. It hurts families and tears marriages apart.

28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Whoa. Game-changer. Jesus changes the game here. This is a powerful teaching. It's not only about the letter of the law (which is still important. Adultery is most definitely a sin) but Jesus also draws our attention to the spirit of the law. He says this is also a heart issue. This is a lust issue.

I'll show you exactly what I mean. Sometimes people in society think about pornography as not being that big of a deal.

"I mean, what's the big deal? It's just porn. It's not real. It's just fantasy. It's just something that I do. It's not hurting anybody else. And it's not like I'm really doing anything that bad. I mean, it's not like I'm really having sex with that person."

I'll just leave this here.

...everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

It's not like I'm having sex with that person in real life. Jesus says, "You are in your heart."

You want to know how Jesus feels about pornography? And again, this is not just about pornography. This is a lust issue. This is a heart issue. It's about the way, guys, that you look at a girl as she walks by.

Guys, what kinds of pictures are you asking girls for? Girls, what kinds of pictures are you sending? What are you viewing on your Instagram discover feed? What Snapchat stories are you constantly looking for?

I can't put it any more plainly than Jesus does.

28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Why do people look at pornography?

Jesus gives us one reason right here. It begins with a lustful intention in your heart. In other words, I'm going to open up my browser and see what I can find. I'm going to look at these pictures and I'm going to watch this video because, well, because I like what I see.

Sometimes it is accidental. Maybe you're at a friend's house and they say hey I want to show you something. And you've never seen anything like that before. And you weren't looking for it, and you were innocent as far as your heart was concerned. But sometimes you accidentally, by no fault of your own, are exposed to it.

By the way, that's the way that the story of David and Bathsheba began. David wasn't looking for the naked woman taking a bath on her rooftop but when he saw that and he didn't look away, and he allowed that lust to overtake his heart, that's when everything began to unravel.

Other people look at pornography because they are curious. They heard something at school they didn't understand and so they went to Google, just like anybody else born in this generation would do, and they googled that term and sure enough, there was a ton of information out there on the Internet about what that word meant. And there were pictures and there were videos. And they found it to be a very educational experience. The Internet is a joyless, heartless teacher with no conscience.

But I'll give you another reason someone might look at pornography: they are pressured. And you'd be surprised how often this one is happening. A guy and a girl are in a relationship. Things are progressing in the relationship physically and romantically, and the guy says to the girl "I want you to do this." And the girl is like, "I don't know what that is," and the guy says, "Well here watch this."

...I'm pleading with you. Jesus is pleading with you to please take a step back and see how twisted and perverted this is.

Remember how we talked about the word perverted a couple of weeks ago? Sometimes it gets thrown around to describe somebody that's making dirty jokes and stuff like that. But really to pervert something is to take something that was intended to be used in a certain way and twist it to be used in an improper way.

So here's this beautiful gift of sex that God designed for you. He wants you to have it. And He wants you to have it with your spouse and it is to be shared only with your spouse.

So, back to my example: here's a guy with a perverted view of sex because he's been watching perverted sex (that's sex intended to be used in a certain way and twisted to be used in an improper way). And now he's **pressuring** his girlfriend (which is by the way, a perverted view of love. "If you really love me, you'll do this for me." The Bible says "Love does not insist on its own way." That's not love. Girls if a guy tries to pull that kind of manipulative garbage on you, run and don't even look back.) and so he pressures that girl to open up her view to his perverted view of sex.

Guys, that is twisted. It's twisted in a dating relationship. And by the way, that's twisted in a married relationship.

But where did it all start?

It all started a lustful intention in the heart.

That's a powerful teaching when it comes to the topic of pornography. And that's a powerful teaching when it comes to the way, guys, that we look at girls and they pass by.

Now, we've looked at two verses so far. And if that was all that Jesus had to say about it, it would be enough. But he's not done yet. Look at the next verses.

29 *If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell.* **30** *And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.*

Alright this is sort of graphic, isn't it?

Tearing off body parts throwing them in the garbage.

Abby Smith was telling me that yesterday in a class that she is taking they got to dissect the leg of a cadaver.

Wouldn't you hate to be the garbageman that opens up that little gift? That's a horrifying discovery! In fact, that's probably where they get the next cadaver, the garbageman has a heart attack and dies and donates his body to science and they amputate his leg. It's a cycle. All cadavers are garbageman.

Anyway. The language that Jesus is using here is pretty intense.

In Mark 9 Jesus uses the same imagery but He adds a little bit more language to it to describe this idea.

43 *And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire.* **45** *And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell.* **47** *And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell,* **48** *'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'*

Again, this sounds pretty extreme! Tearing and cutting off body parts.

"Why on earth would I do anything like that Jesus?" He says, "It is better to go to heaven and be missing an eye, than to have two eyes and go to hell." It's better to be crippled and enter eternal life, than to have both feet and be thrown into hell."

Ok.

I'm about to say some things you guys are not going to like. Are you ready? Keep in mind when we started this series, I asked you to keep an open mind.

You're not like going to like this, but I'm really going to go there.

If Snapchat causes you to sin, get rid of your account. For it is better that you lose your Snapchat streak than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

If Instagram causes you to sin, delete it from your phone. For it is better that you lose Instagram than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

If your smartphone causes you to sin, get rid of it, or get some heavy duty, protective software on it, or get a flip phone. For it is better that you lose your smartphone than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

If Netflix causes you to sin, get rid of it. For it is better that you lose Netflix than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

You guys are about to kill over and die, aren't you? How can I live without Snapchat? You really think it's realistic for me to not have a smartphone?

Guys, this is not that radical when you think about it. The Christian walk has always, always been about denying self. That means saying no to the things that are here on earth that sometimes want and like, in order to spend the rest of my life in heaven.

Would I rather lose some internet privileges or my soul?

I mean, do you realize that what I suggested—things like getting rid of something on your phone that you don't need—my suggestion was a lot less painless or drastic than what Jesus said?!!

My suggestions didn't cost you any body parts. They might cost you an app, or the ability to search the internet without filters or whatever...

I think the reason why Jesus is using this painful language here about ripping off body parts is because giving up something that we like causes us pain.

Do you love having two hands? Two eyes? Jesus said, "Don't love your self, or your body, or an area of your life so much that you're willing to sacrifice your soul for it."

Let me give you a different example. (Grand Theft Auto) Why was that hard? It's because we liked that video game. Giving up something that we like is hard. But your life will be better without that thing that's hurting you.

You might think I'm kidding about what I suggested about Snapchat and Instagram and Netflix and your phone. But I've never been more serious, because this is about your soul. The reason it hurts when I suggest doing something like deleting Snapchat, or Instagram, and a changing something about your phone, or your Netflix account, is because we like those things.

But I'm telling you, we could fill in this blank with whatever we want. If an unhealthy relationship causes you to sin, cut it off. For it is better that you lose that relationship than that your whole body be thrown into hell.

Yes, it's hard to imagine our lives without those things that we love. We grow attached to them. I'm fond of having two eyes and two feet and two hands. But I could get by without them. I don't need them.

What I need is my heart to be right with God.

Do not let a phone keep you out of heaven. Do not let a boy or a girl or whatever it is, keep you out of heaven.

Sigh. Ok.

As we bring things to a close tonight, I want to share with you a terrifying thought. Something that makes me weary and to be honest with you, something that scares me to death as a parent is the thought of seeing my son or my daughter struggle with this sin.

I pray that for them about this right now. The God will find a way to keep it out of their lives. I know that our culture has not yet reached a point to where it is interested in taking down the porn empire.

I think we need to be praying about that.

And so as I was thinking about what I wanted to say to all of you as we bring things to a close tonight, I couldn't help but think about my kids.

And I may not tell you this very often, but sometimes I think about you guys being like my kids. And so for the next few minutes, I want to talk to you as if I were talking to my own children.

1. I will do everything within my power to protect you and you need to be willing to do whatever it takes to protect yourself.

The trap of pornography is difficult to get out of once you are in it.

The good news is, you can do some things on the front end that will help keep you out. You can do some things to help lock the door so to speak.

If I was your dad, and you were my kids, you would not have a device that wasn't locked up and protected in some way. I would do everything I could to keep the bad stuff away from you.

And by the way, I would be a bad parent if I wasn't willing to do my part to protect my family.

My kids are not going to like that. I don't really care. I love them too much than to let them have access to pornography whenever they feel like having it.

And that's exactly what we've done by giving you guys smartphones.

If your parents haven't protected the device that you have, I am pleading with you tonight to talk to them about that. It's just wise. It just makes sense.

Would you go into the roughest part of the world in the roughest neighborhood in the world and live in a house where you didn't lock your doors?

It DOES NOT make sense for you to have a phone that in a matter of seconds can show you the roughest images this world has to offer. That's the internet.

I have a responsibility to protect my family.

You guys need to do whatever it takes to protect your soul. That's what Jesus is talking about when He says "If your eye is causing you to sin, pluck it out."

Yes it will cost you something. It might cost you an awkward conversation with your parents, but that pales in comparison to the cost of your soul.

It might cost your parents a few dollars every month for them to get some software.

If you know me, you know how much I dislike spending money. But if my son came to me and said "Dad, I need some help. I need some software on my iPad or on my phone."

I can promise you this: it will be the fastest I will ever spend money.

You are teenagers. You don't like being told that you need to be protected. You think you can fend for yourselves.

I'm sorry. Don't take this the wrong way, but you're not as invincible as you think you are.

Have enough wisdom right now to know that you need to be smart about what you allow to come across a screen.

Job said, "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a young woman."

2. I would say this to my children and I would say this to you: I know that you are not perfect. Neither am I. I know that you struggle. I do, too.

And I love you.

You are not disgusting. You are human. You are not unforgivable. You can be forgiven. You are not alone. I am by your side every step of your way.

And you are not trapped. God is merciful. God is gracious, and He always gives us a way out. Freedom comes through Christ.

I hope that I will always be an earthly image of my heavenly Father. I hope that my kids will look at me and learn some things about how much their Father in Heaven loves them.

If you're wrapped up in this sin, don't quit fighting. But you may need to change the way that you've been fighting. I can promise you this, if you want to talk to me or Laura or Will or another cocoon leader or whoever, I can promise you this: you're not alone. You're not weird. You're human just like the rest of us. I won't treat you any differently. And we will do whatever we can to help.

Let's pray.

-Handout resources.

All Things Pure Lesson 3: Understanding Your Identity

-Begin with video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CU_kFm7lhA&feature=youtu.be

-Week one: God's plan for sex. Week two: Jonathan Harrison—pornography. Week three was about what the Bible has to say about lust, keeping our eyes pure, etc.

Let me give you an idea of where we're going next in this series. Next week we will be split up into guys and girls. The girls will be with Laura and I'll talk to the guys. And we are both really looking forward to talking about dating. And that's an exciting topic. You probably want to go on a date someday or maybe you have, or maybe you're still working on that, just trying to find a girl that will say yes to you.

Story of my life right there...

And as we were thinking about this series and the importance of it, and how we would break it down each week, we thought about something pretty important.

In my mind sometimes I think, "Oh, we need to do a lesson on how to be a Christian on a date." Or "how to be a Christian at your school" or how to be a Christian at work" or how to be a Christian on your sports team," or how to be a Christian fill in the blank.

And those things are important to consider but please don't miss this: it's not really about how to be a Christian at "fill in the blank."

The important teaching and I think the better teaching, is how to be a Christian no matter where you are or where you go or what you do. It's not about, "Oh, I'm on a date, so I need to act a certain way now." Or "Oh, I'm at work. So how should a Christian act at work?"

This is a matter of understanding your identity—what it means to be a child of God no matter where you are or what you're doing or where you go.

Let me see if I can illustrate this in a way you'll understand.

Growing up in the Dursley household wasn't easy for the young orphan Harry Potter. He just didn't fit. He was frequently blamed for incidents that he didn't cause, he was frequently bullied by his cousin Dudley, and he wasn't even given a proper room to grow up in, instead being forced to live underneath a staircase.

His life was pretty much miserable.

But his life was about to change. For around the time of his 11th birthday, Harry began receiving mysterious letters in the mail, letters delivered by owls. Letters from a faraway place called Hogwarts.

A short time later, Harry meets a friendly, half-giant by the name of Hagrid who reveals some strange new details about Harry's past. Harry learns that his parents were not killed in a car crash when he was a baby, as he had been told. But were killed by an evil, powerful wizard with a name so evil you're not even supposed to say it.

And then Harry hears the news that changes everything he knows about the life that he's been living.

"You're a wizard, Harry!"

Whoa. Everything was different now. Everything that he thought he knew about his life was way wrong. Turns out he had a completely different identity from the one he had before.

Once Harry understood his identity, he began living the life that he was meant to live, doing the things he was meant to do, and pursuing the things he was meant to pursue.

Tonight I want to share with you an important truth. It may be one that you've heard me or Laura talk about some before. But just because you've heard it before, number one, doesn't mean you need to stop hearing it. And number two, just because you've heard it doesn't mean you've totally grasped it. I hope that you'll listen to this truth with fresh ears tonight.

Once you and I understand our identity, we begin living the life that you and I were meant to live, doing the things we were meant to do, and pursuing the things we were meant to pursue.

I want you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter 2:9-10. And we will get into that passage in just a minute, but before we do, I want to ask you a question and I want you to be really honest about it.

Who do you allow to define your identity? Is it your friends at school? What other people say about you? Is it the guy/girl that you date? Is the opposite sex? Is it Instagram—is your worth found in the numbers of likes your pictures get? Who gets to decide your worth? Who do you allow to define your identity?

I don't know how you answer that question, but I'm here to tell you that the way you answer that question is very important. All of us find our identity from somewhere, or someone, or in something.

But how about this?

What if instead of finding your identity in ____, or ____, or ____, you allowed God to be the one to define your identity? What if we turned our attention to God and said, "Ok, God. I'm listening. Tell me who I am. Show me what I'm supposed to be."

What does God say about you? Now, there are hundreds of passages that we could consider. We've don't have time to read 100s of passages tonight. But I do think this is absolutely crucial for you to understand.

And so we created a handout. I hope you'll look over these later on. This is about 7 pages worth of Scriptures that would be worthy of your study tonight after the lesson is over. It won't take you long to read over them.

Since we don't have time to look at all of those passages, I want us to see some beautiful teachings that are found in 1 Peter 2:9-10. Let's study together.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Peter is writing this to Gentiles who've put on Christ, and he wants them to see some important things about their new identity.

Now the Gentiles weren't used to hearing things like this. They weren't used to being called priests, or a holy nation, or chosen. That's why we read Peter saying "once you were not a people."

The people, God's people, in the Old Testament, were the Israelites. They were the ones with the priesthood and they were the people that God himself set apart. They were the holy nation, the ones that had God dwelling in their midst. Remember the tabernacle? The ark of the covenant? The temple?

That was all a part of Israel's story.

But now, Peter says, now you are God's people. Now you have received mercy.

Peter wants them to grasp their identity.

He says first of all, you are chosen.

Isn't it an awesome feeling to be chosen?

Maybe you apply for an internship or a scholarship or maybe you enter a contest, and out of all of the applicants, or all of the contestants you get picked. That's an awesome feeling.

Maybe you're playing a sport and someone chooses you to be on their team.

I think about how out of all of the people in the world that Laura could've married, she chose me.

I hope we never take for granted how amazing it is that the God of the universe chose to love us.

Next he says we are part of a royal priesthood.

Let's talk about that word priesthood (we'll come back to royal in a minute).

Over the last few weeks, we've talked about God's desire for us to be set apart. As Christians that's what God has done for us. He wants us to "Be holy as he is holy."

Again, if you were an Israelite in the Old Testament, you understood some things about being set apart.

There were commandments, that is, rules that set their conduct and their speech apart. There was circumcision, a distinct sign that men belonging to this tribe, to God's tribe, were set apart. There were laws about cleanliness and laws about their diet that set their day to day routine apart.

On top of all of this, there was a priesthood! Yes, being an Israelite would set you apart, but if you were an Israelite belonging to the tribe of Levi, you were even more set apart. Priests came from the

tribe of Levi. In fact, there's an entire book of the Bible written for Levites: the book of Leviticus. It's all about the priesthood.

I don't know if you've ever tried reading Leviticus, but it's interesting. It's filled with very specific instructions about how the Levites, remember, they were the priests, how the priestly tribe of Levi was supposed to conduct themselves and handle their responsibilities. They were to serve and to appear before the LORD, and so in order to serve before the LORD, they needed to be consecrated. They needed to be made holy so that they could carry out their holy work—things like offering sacrifices and making the people of Israel clean.

And so there's this image of a priesthood and the Gentiles have to be thinking, "Wait a second, we didn't come from the tribe of Levi? "What does he mean we are a priesthood?"

And on top of that there's the word "royal." I'm not royalty. I'm not a prince or a king.

And please get this. This is so awesome. And it's good news for us because we are the Gentiles.

We are not from the tribe of Levi. But Jesus is our great high priest. He is the King of Kings. We are part of His bloodline. We're washed by His blood. We have atonement, and we have become a part of the priesthood with Him!

How are we royal? It's because we are sons and daughters of the King!

He says, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people." Now you're a part of a holy nation. Jesus Christ tore down the barriers, the laws of the Old Covenant, and became our High Priest. Now, we "are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession."

And so you want to talk about an identity?! Look at everything God says to us here! He says, "You are chosen. You are one of my people. You are valued. You are distinct. You are royal. You are a priest. You are set apart. You are holy. You are mine."

I just want you to think about how powerful this is. Because it's kind of like the video from earlier. Sometimes we don't think about ourselves in this way. We don't think about how loved we are, or how valuable we are, or how we have been chosen by God on purpose for His purpose.

What if we spent more time dwelling on those thoughts and we took them to heart? When we allow these kinds of thoughts to ring in our ears, when we allow God's truths to ring loud and clear, and rule and reign over us, when we allow these types of characteristics to characterize us, we begin to take on this identity.

In other words, we act out of who we think we are.

Again, remember the video from the beginning of class? (I am worthless, I am unloved. I am a loser. Etc.)

If Satan can get us to buy into all of that garbage that we sometimes believe about ourselves, if he can influence the way that we think he knows that he can influence the way that we live and act and behave.

But that garbage is not who you are. You're not crippled. You're not doomed. You're not a disappointment. You're free, and you're redeemed, and you are loved.

We are chosen. Holy. We are treasured. We've been set free and set apart. And He loves us.

We act out of who we think we are. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance for us to have a very clear understanding of who we are, of our identity.

We talked about how Israel was set apart. We talked about how the Levites were set apart. But there was one person in the Levite tribe that was even more set apart.

Yes, even more set apart! Not just an Israelite that's one nation out of all nations of the world, not just one tribe out of the twelve tribes of that one nation.

We're literally talking about an individual that was like one in however many millions of people were alive in that day and time.

He was called the high priest. The name of the first high priest was Aaron.

The high priest wore a very specific item in his dress that I think is particularly fascinating. Here's Exodus 28:36-38.

"You shall make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it, like the engraving of a signet, 'Holy to the Lord.' And you shall fasten it on the turban by a cord of blue. It shall be on the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall bear any guilt from the holy things that the people of Israel consecrate as their holy gifts. It shall regularly be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord. (Exodus 28:36-38)

Fastened to Aaron's turban was an engraved plate that read "Holy to the Lord."

I believe God had a purpose in mind when He commanded this to be fastened to the turban. Every time he got dressed in the morning and he put that outfit on, he was reminded about who he was and what he was supposed to be.

And I imagine that every time that the people of Israel saw the high priest they were reminded of that, too.

Holy to the Lord.

Could you and I wear that label? When people see us at school or at work or in public, when someone cusses us out, or mistreats us, or stabs us in the back. When someone makes us mad, would that label still apply?

I think it's interesting that this label, this engraved plate, it didn't just go anywhere. It was right there on top of his head. Right where his mind was. In other words, this label, this idea of being holy to the Lord was on the forefront of his mind.

When you go out on a date, is that what's on your mind?

When you go into school or work, is the idea of holiness on your mind?

When that person gets on your nerves, is the idea of holiness still on your mind?

We act out of who we think we are. You cannot treat yourself as Holy unless you know that you are.

The question is not, "Do others treat me as holy?" It's not about what others say or think or how they treat you. It is God who tells us to treat ourselves as holy because we are exactly that: holy!

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (1 Peter 1:14-16)

If we are in Christ we have put on His holiness. Here's Ephesians 1:3-5.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will... (Ephesians 1:3-5)

And then 2 Corinthians 7:1.

Having said all of this, "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God." (2 Corinthians 7:1)

So what did we learn today?

- It was God's desire then, and it is God's desire today, for His people to be set apart.
- God sets us apart because He loves and treasure us. You and I are valuable to God, therefore, we are valuable.
- We act out of who we think we are. You cannot treat yourself as Holy unless you know, believe, and think that you are.
- Once you and I understand our identity, we begin living the life that you and I were meant to live, doing the things we were meant to do, and pursuing the things we were meant to pursue.

-Close with The Lion King story about "remember who you are."

All Things Pure Lesson 4: Dating (guys edition)

I was comparing my notes with Laura's notes for class tonight, and I couldn't help but notice that we are coming at this topic, the topic of dating, from two completely different angles. It's like apples and oranges. I mean it's like we live on two different planets.

I was thinking about this in terms of what do our guys need to hear and she was thinking about what do our girls need to hear? And I think that while the aim of the message is the same, the angle is completely different.

I think by and large, guys and girls think about dating in completely different ways.

-Get a volunteer to read Proverbs 4:23. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Here's what I discovered as I read over Laura's notes: the girls' message seemed to be more along the lines of: guard your heart and your mind. Keep your emotions in check, because the more they feel with their emotions the more likely they are to give of themselves. And we know this.

Girls want us to be romantic. They want us to show them how much we love them by us expressing these things called "feelings." Make them things, buy them things, write them sweet notes about how much we love them, do things for them "just because."

Girls are all about the feelings.

Guys on the other hand are thinking about dating from a completely different angle. For the girls, the message is about guarding their hearts. But what's the message to us as guys? Look with me at Titus 2:1-6. Someone read.

Titus 2:1 But as for you, teach what accords with sound[a] doctrine. **2** Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. **3** Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, **4** and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, **5** to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled. **6** Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled.

Ok, so he goes down this list. Talks to older men, older women, young women, and then finally he gets to the younger men in verse 6. What's the message to the younger men?

SELF-CONTROL. It's kind of funny. There's a long list of things for the other age groups. But he keeps it really simple for us. Maybe because we're not too good at remembering lists or maybe because this is every young man's struggle. I don't know. What's the main focus for the young men? Be self controlled.

Again, for the girls tonight, the message is about guarding their hearts. But for us, the guys, the message is about guarding our bodies. It's about self-control, about keeping our bodies in check.

Guys are wired differently. Sometimes we have a tendency to focus more on the physical feelings than the emotional ones. We're visual. We're physical. We think along the lines of "Look at her. She's hot. Maybe I can get her to date me."

We seem to think more about the physical aspects of a relationship than the feelings aspect of a relationship.

I'm not saying this is true 100% of the time for every single guy. I'm just saying that most guys aren't interested in being swept off of their

feet. We're more interested in figuring out how to sweep a girl off of her feet so we can date them and hug them and kiss them.

Girls want us to show them how much we love them by expressing our feelings. They want the romance. And guys are not as complicated. We're like "If you want to show me how much you like me, just like kiss me or something." Enough with the games!

Here's a passage that probably a lot of us in this room will connect with, because it uses some imagery from sports. What I really want you to notice though is how much this passage talks about self-control.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 **24** Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. **25** Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. **26** So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. **27** But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

I know this passage isn't written specifically about dating, but it is written about the Christian life. So in a way, it's about dating, it's about who you are at school, it's about marriage, it's about how you treat other people. All of that is covered in the race.

You know what else is important about this race?

(An important part of the Christian race is) Choosing who you run with. That's part of the race. Therefore dating is a really, really important thing for us to talk about.

As you date, keep your eyes on the prize. Keep running the race. Don't disqualify yourself because of the way that you choose to date. Verse 24, run that you may obtain it. Verse 25. We need to exercise

self-control in all things. Verse 26, don't run aimlessly. Remember why you're running. Remember what's at stake.

And I would say, don't date aimlessly. I'll talk more about that in just a minute. And then in verse 27. He brings up self-control again. Not just doing whatever your body feels like doing.

Ok. So, where are we going with all of this?

Earlier we sang the song, "Lord Reign in Me."

Over every thought, over every word, may my life reflect the beauty of my Lord. Cause you mean more to me than any earthly thing. So won't you reign in me again?

So here's the big question I want us to consider tonight: how do we allow God to reign over your dating relationships? Since God is the designer of love, we better let him reign in our dating and love life for it to be successful and all it can/should be. But how do we do that?

I. Be the right kind of person: one whose identity is found in Christ.

Remember this point from last week?

Man, you want to see a beautiful passage about who you are? Look at Colossians 3:3-4.

Colossians 3:3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. **4** When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Where's your identity? It's hidden with Christ in God. I love verse 4. Who is Christ? When Christ, who is your life, appears...

Christ is your life. That's powerful. My life, your life, is Christ. That's who we are. That's what we're about.

Remember this line from last week? You act out of who you think you are!

So how do you act on a date? What kind of guy are you? What kind of boyfriend are you? If your identity is found in Christ, you act the same way on a date that you would act anywhere else. You treat a girl with the same respect that you would treat everybody else.

If you want to date the right kind of person, be the right kind of person. That's how you attract the right kind of person.

If you want the Lord to reign over your dating life, you need to approach dating with the right motives. Let's talk about that for a minute.

In fact, let's just take a minute here. What are some reasons why a person might date? (Whether they are good reasons or bad reasons?)

You guys need to be praying about this right now. In fact, let's stop right here and do that.

Commit yourself to the Lord first.

"Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act."
Psalm 37:4-5

2. How do we allow God to reign in our dating life? Date the right kind of girl: one who has found her identity in Christ.

Date a Christian. And don't just date a girl that got baptized. Or that would just call herself a Christian. Date a girl who is actually is a Christian. She walks with Christ daily. (Homework: Read Prov.31!)

Do you want to marry a Christian? I hope you do. I hope every one of you will marry a Christian. Think of all of the hardships that you

will avoid if you marry a girl that loves the Lord as much as, or maybe even more, than you do.

I love sweet tea. Anybody else? Who has the best sweet tea in town? (CFA) Who has is sort of hit or miss? (Cracker Barrel)

If you want the best sweet tea in town, you know exactly where to look. In a similar way, if you want to marry the right kind of girl, if you want to marry a Christian, you're probably going to have to go the right places to find her. She's not going to be spending her time around the wrong kind of people or in the wrong kind of places.

If you want to marry a Christian, if you want to have a marriage that God will bless, there are some places and some girls that you don't need to date.

Ok, I get the fact that you want to date a girl that you find attractive. I get that. Physical attraction is part of the deal. You're not going to date a girl that you don't think is pretty.

But listen: there are some girls that you are going to think are really hot, but don't let that be the only criteria you follow when it comes to dating a girl. There are some girls that you do not need to date.

The Bible says "Evil companions corrupt good morals." That would apply to dating as well. If your companion doesn't care about following God's plan for sexuality, that will corrupt your good intentions and your morals.

If someone is bad for you spiritually, they're bad for you. Period.

I don't have to take a sip of Drano to know that drinking Drano would be bad for me. In the same way, there are some girls that I never needed to date in order to know that it would be bad for me.

Scripture says: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers.” (2 Corinthians 6:14). So what does that mean? God wants His people to be together.

Following God’s way is always better on us and in many ways it’s easier on us. I’m telling you: it will save you a ton of strife if you will date a Christian girl. Someone that loves the Lord like you do and has those same priorities. Two people working together in a marriage to serve God is going to make your life so much better than if you were having to do it alone.

You will marry someone that you date.

*Justin, my cousin.

If you date a girl that doesn’t follow after Christ, you may end up marrying a girl that doesn’t follow after Christ. And she may never become a Christian.

It is hard enough having a sexually pure dating life for two Christians. It’s near-impossible to have a sexually pure dating life with a non-Christian. I mean, why on earth would you save yourself for marriage unless God was apart of that equation? It goes against culture, and it goes against what your body wants to do.

*Talk about my dating life...but Laura was THE GIRL. I knew it. I knew in the 8th grade that I had found the right kind of girl.

3. How do we allow the Lord to reign over our dating life? Wait. Wait on the Lord. Wait on the right girl. Wait until you’re married to have sex. (Sometimes life is about waiting)

Throughout this series I’ve made it a point to say over and over again that sex is not bad! I’ve made it a point to say that sex is good and that God designed it to be good, and to a blessing to your marriage.

The Scriptures teach us that we should not have sex until we are married. That’s not a gray area. Most Christians know that is what God says. Again, the word “fornication” in the Greek is defined as “sexual intercourse between two people that not married to each other.”

I also feel the need to say this. Sometimes I hear people say “Well, oral sex is not sex.” Is apple pie, pie? Oral sex is a form of sex...its in the name! And it’s not God’s plan for you until you are married.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”

God (the creator of sex) knows sex is far too intimate to be handled outside of marriage. The human brain cannot handle sex spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically outside of marriage. God just didn’t design it that way. Sex is only beautiful and all it should be, when it is in a godly marriage.

Guys, listen: sex and all things leading to it outside of marriage will only bring harm spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. It will wreck you spiritually.

Satan will try to convince you that it’s okay if you think you are going to marry the girl. He will try to convince you that sex is okay so long as you love this girl.

But do not be deceived. That’s not what the Lord teaches.

It’s important for you to set boundaries about what you will not do with a girl that you are dating.

A few weeks ago, Jonathan Harrison talked about the decision making part of your brain that literally shuts off when you're in the heat of the moment. Works the same way in dating relationship. If you don't set boundaries in your mind right now about how far you will go with a girl, you will not have boundaries.

You guys have too many raging hormones to think straight. You need to set some boundaries. I'm not here to set boundaries for you. That's for you to set up for yourself, but maybe that would involve things like I will not touch a girl in these places. I will not be all alone with my girlfriend in an empty house. We will not spend time alone in a bedroom together.

I will only kiss her above her neck.

If things start to progress in a dangerous way, I will look for my escape and take it.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

"I couldn't stop it. I just couldn't escape the moment. Yes you can."

Now if you are doing all these things, there won't be clothes coming off. There won't be sex.

Again, God knows what's best for you. He gives His good gifts to us when He knows that we are ready for them. You are not ready for sex and all the things that lead to sex until you are married.

In conclusion:

I. I made mistakes. I'm not perfect. I was a teenager not long ago. I remember a lot of stupid things I did.

2. If you cross lines, you will regret them. And your future wife will also regret that you crossed them, too.

Take it from me: God has blessed me with more than I could have ever dreamed of. And it would have never happened if I continued to make my dating decisions based strictly upon (A) is this girl attractive? (B) Could I date her?

3. Finally, maybe you are sitting here feeling all condemned because maybe you have messed up in your dating life. Maybe you have already had sex or you have done things you wish you hadn't. Maybe you are sitting here thinking "Well, what's the point. I have messed up and God isn't going to give me the desires of my heart."

Scripture says that when we ask for forgiveness God remembers our sins no more. **Scripture says in Psalm 103:12** that he removes our sins as far as the east is from the west. In the same Psalm we are told that we can be forgiven of everything and healed.

So no matter where you have been, what you have done, you are not too far gone from God's grace. Ask for forgiveness, change your ways, and start anew in God. If you haven't been baptized, let's study. Let's talk about it how to have your sins washed away.

If you have been baptized but you need forgiveness then ask for it, make the changes you need to make, and believe God at His Word that you are forgiven.

Lesson 5: Dating (Girls Edition)

A Set Apart Love Story

My daughter, **Holley**, at age 5 is in love with love. She has always been so captivated by a love story.

I remember the first love story that really captured her heart was at age 2. She was fascinated with the movie **Frozen**. I remember her daddy and I being a little concerned about how much she loved Prince Hans. For the longest time her two year old mind did not grasp that Prince Hans was not a good guy. She never got past the “Love is an Open Door” song.”

She may have been about 3 when she realized Prince Hans was a fake and that he didn’t really love Anna. He just wanted power and the kingdom of Arendelle.

Our little girl has been speaking in full complex sentences from age 1 so for the majority of her life we have been able to have conversations with her. I remember one day, Holley, wide-eyed and a little tearful, asked “Momma, is he a bad guy?” I replied something to the effect of “Yes, he doesn’t really love her.” She responded with “Hmmm...that’s okay...sometimes the bad guys aren’t always that bad. She can make him a good guy.”

And from that moment on this momma started praying harder for her future mate.

From the time we are very little most of us (females) dream about the person we will marry. From an early age we are enticed by love and romance. We think about our weddings. Most of us even pretended to be a bride and played “house” in our earliest years. I know I did. We are set up from the very start to think this way. Any good movie, book, TV show has a love story that captures our mind and grips our heart.

God designed us to love and be loved. He designed us to desire love and intimacy of male/female relationship. From the beginning of time we see that God saw it was not good for man to be alone. He created a helper for man called woman. He then tells them “a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they should become one flesh.” God set the desire of this type of companionship in us from the very beginning of time.

So if God set this desire for us then we ought to pay close attention to his plans, desires, and intentions for this relationship.

I am humbled that I, of all people, am standing before you speaking to you about relationships. I am humbled by it for so many reasons but probably the one you would be most interested in is what happened when I allowed God to write my love story...and what happened when I didn’t.

I, like many of you, desperately wanted a beautiful love story. I wanted the boyfriend holding my hand, the fun dates, and most of all I just wanted to feel loved and wanted by a boy. I prayed about it, I thought about it (ALL THE TIME), and I sought after it.

Meanwhile, while seeking a boyfriend, my home life was a disaster. Things were really dysfunctional and my family had a lot of issues we were seeking help on. I wanted an escape from that and I just wanted something that resembled what I thought a “normal teenage life” looked like...

So, at age 14 I got my first real boyfriend. He wasn’t a bad guy. He was even a Christian. He was in my youth group and a year older than me. We got serious pretty quick. At age 14 a girl is going to be way more committed to the relationship than a boy will be. Girls will always be more mature than boys and at age 14. I couldn’t understand why it seemed like I was way more committed to this

relationship than he was. I wanted a forever relationship and he wanted to just go out and have fun.

At age 14 he really was kind to me. He wasn't pressuring me to do anything I didn't want to do...in fact we didn't even kiss for 8 months! However, we were a time bomb waiting to happen. I wasn't myself around him. I tried to be something I wasn't.

At age 15 we were still dating. Everyone thought we were the "perfect couple." Deep down I knew we weren't. I knew my happiness was way too dependent on what he thought, said, or did. I, many times, never felt enough for him. Most of that was my own insecurities but some of it was due to the way I allowed the relationship to go.

At age 15 he cheated on me and kissed one of my best friends in our youth group. He didn't tell me. I read it in a letter my friend had written him. I was heart broken. Yet, because of my insecurities, I only stayed broken up with him for about a day. So at 15 I felt more insecure and my feelings of not being enough continued.

I wish I could tell you that I ended this relationship earlier than I did. We had a few more short breaks in our relationship but our dating relationship lasted four years! Almost my entire high school career was centered on him.

He went to college my senior year, and we broke up that summer before school began. Our four years together had so many ups and downs that the final breakup came more as a relief for me.

I remember praying so hard one day in my bedroom about what to do. I truly did love this boy. As I was praying, asking God what to do, a picture fell off of the wall in my room. Ironically it was one he had given me. It was a portion of the 1 Corinthians 13 passage, the famous Biblical passage on love. I picked it up and read it.

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[b] ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.⁸ Love never ends."

I have no idea if God made that frame fall at that very moment. I do know He inspired those words. At age 18 I was starting to see that when God talks, it's time to listen. But I was confused by the words. Was I supposed to be all these things to this boy and try harder on this relationship? Or was it time to break up?

Still confused I sought godly counsel. I talked with my Bible teacher who led me to the passage in 1 John 1:8 "God is love." She asked me if God was in our relationship. The truth was He wasn't. Sure we prayed together...we talked the talk but we did not walk the walk. We couldn't have the type of love that 1 Corinthians 13 describes because that type of love only comes through having a relationship with God in the center and the focus.

I knew this was not my forever love story. I loved him but it wasn't with a love that would look like 1 Corinthians 13. It was actually a love that was all the opposites of that. It wasn't patient or kind...it had become easily impulsive and aggravated. It wasn't free of envy but covered in extreme jealousy. It definitely was insisting on our own way. It was incredibly resentful. It was not rejoicing in the truth and God's way but had lost all focus on what God calls us to be in our relationships.

I mentioned earlier that I had gotten into this relationship during a time my family was going through an incredibly hard time. Over the years I had become very close with his entire family...especially his mother. I did not want to lose their relationship. So the loss was way more than a boyfriend but an entire family.

We broke up. He fought to get me back. He fought the way I had wished he would have fought for me in our dating relationship. It was hard on both of us. I prayed constantly that if this was not the relationship I needed to be in that God would take my desire for it away. He did. God led me to see that He is greater than my heart. (1 John 3:20)

It wasn't without lots of tears or pain but God changed my desires to match His desires for my life. That wouldn't have happened if I hadn't yielded to His authority in my life. I don't say that with any arrogance. Because there are far too many times in my life where I haven't yielded to God and I have run the opposite direction. In fact, it took me four years to yield to His stop sign on this relationship.

At that time I couldn't see what God could see. I didn't know what His plans for my life were. I didn't know if God's plan for me included a future husband. I had hoped it did. I had to decide to take God at His word and believe He is who He says He is. I had to decide to trust in His plans and not my own.

The Scriptures have a lot to say about us being faithful and trusting God with our future: (Put these in PowerPoint)

- “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Jeremiah 29:11
- “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act.” Psalm 37:4-5
- “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9)

So now that you know a little of my dating history, let's talk about what it looks like when we yield to God and His plans for dating. As I said in the very beginning, God designed us to love and be loved. He designed us for companionship. Since God is the designer of love, we better let him reign in our dating and love life for it to be successful and all it can/should be. But how does one do that? **How can you allow God to reign in your dating life?**

First, you must have your identity in Christ.

The Scriptures are filled with passages that define who we are in Christ. God knew we would need to be able to place our identity in someone. He knew our identity would only be fully satisfied in Christ. When your identity isn't fully in Christ it will be in something or someone else. An identity in anything other than Christ is a disaster waiting to happen.

Jesus says in John 10:10 “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” Jesus says He came to give us a full abundant life. Well, guess what? If dating is a part of your life, He wants you to have a rich and beautiful dating experience. But to have that, it has to be one that includes HIM. It's the only good way to date because He is the way (John 14:6).

Philip talked to you a lot last week on what an identity in Christ means. I know my cocoon girls have heard me talk about this often. I talk about it often because it's the foundation of who you are. We are going to touch on it more this week. I desperately want you all to get this.

So what does it look like when you have your identity in Christ? Well it looks a lot like 1 John 1:5-9.

5 This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:5-9)

So to sum up what we just read: you are consistently trying to walk in the light of God's Word. You are abiding in Him. It doesn't mean you are perfect. It doesn't mean you won't mess up. We all will mess up and fall short. We are all in need of God's grace.

To put your identity in Him is to live in and for Him because of what He has done for you. It is to have fellowship with Him knowing His grace is cleansing you. To put your identity in Christ is to know that because you are a baptized believer, your God looks upon you and sees you as righteous.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Did you hear that Scripture? Let that really sink in? I'm going to read it again!

2 Corinthians 5:21 says "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

So if you are a baptized believer God sees you as righteous. He sees you as He sees the righteousness of His one and only Son. He sees

you with the precious blood of Jesus Christ cleansing you! (1 John 1:7).

Girls, your identity MUST come from that...it must come from knowing you are holy, righteous, and set apart because of Jesus' blood.

When you know you are righteous and holy, you start to act like it. You act out of who you believe that you are.

That's something you can take to the bank with you every time. It will always remain true!

You act out of who you believe that you are!

I believe that's why God puts over and over in Scripture who we are in Christ. God wants you to know who you are in Christ so that you act like Christ because that is what's best for you and the Kingdom. He sees you the same way He sees His Son!

It's hard to believe, right? I mean how can God see us with all of our imperfections, mess-ups, dumb decisions and still see us with the righteousness of Christ? We can't understand it. It's beyond our understanding.

But remember, our understanding is not God's understanding. Don't view God with human understanding. We must have faith to know our God does not think like us.

We must have faith to know that what our God writes in His Word is true. We must believe God is who He says He is and believe He does what He says He will do. When we take God at His Word it changes everything! God's Word is living and active, sharper than any double edge sword. (Hebrews 4:12)

God's Word changes everything. It transforms the mind, which transforms the heart, and because we believe who God says He is and who He says we are, it changes our identity.

I know we read these scriptures last week. But they are so important! So Here are just a few Scriptures of what God says about you:

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light

1 Peter 1:14-16 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Girls, the God of the universe says as baptized believers in Him **we are Holy. That's your identity in Christ.**

I will say it again because it's so very important: an identity in Christ changes EVERYTHING. When we know and believe that we are holy to God (just as Christ is holy) we will treat ourselves as holy.

God's chosen, holy people will treat themselves as holy to the Lord in all areas of their life, including their dating relationships. God's chosen, holy people know that in a dating relationship he must treat you as Holy to the Lord because you that's what you are!

Okay, so now that we know God says we are Holy, how do we find someone who knows this truth and how do we let God reign in our dating?

Number two, to allow God to reign in your dating life, the one you date must also have their identity in Christ.

Scripture says: "Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers." (2 Corinthians 6:14). So what does that mean? God wants His people to be together.

This command is for your benefit and not against you. All of His commands are. God always knows what's best (Isaiah 55:8-9). This command is not designed to inhibit your dating life but to enhance it. Waiting for someone whom you share the same beliefs is far more rewarding. This is a command given to give protection and honor to your dating relationship and to our God.

It is really hard to have a holy/set apart dating life even for two Christians. It's impossible to have a holy/set apart dating life with a non-Christian.

Many times it's easy to spot the non-Christian. For many Christian girls, it may be easier to not even date them. But what about the Christian guy that may not fully walk the walk of Christianity?

Girls, you better make sure the Christian you are dating truly does have his identity in Christ.

As Christians we all fall short of the glory of God. We all mess up. We are all in need of grace. But if the guy you are dating doesn't walk the walk of Christianity and only talks the talk of Christianity, his identity is not completely in Christ.

So what does a guy that talks the talk of Christianity but doesn't walk the walk of Christianity look like?

- He is the guy that goes to church anytime the doors are open. He is at all the youth events...but he is also at the parties drinking on Friday nights.
- He is the one that says he wants to stay a virgin till he is married but is pressuring you for everything but sex...at least for now.
- He is the one that wants you to be a little less “good”. He wants you to “live a little.” His version of “living a little” are things such as lying to get out of trouble, cussing, cheating, wearing a little less clothing, going further physically than you know you should go.
- He is the one that is always making fun of everyone and everything else. He doesn’t act like Jesus would act. He is immature and not ready for a godly dating relationship.

So... how do we let God reign in our dating?

1. **You must have your identity in Christ**
2. **The one you date must also have their identity in Christ**
3. **You guard your heart.**

Proverbs 4:23 says: “Above all else, guard your heart for everything you do flows from it.”

You must guard your heart in dating. A heart that’s identity is in Jesus Christ and His Word is the only way to truly guard your heart.

Consistently throughout Scripture we see that our hearts, our thoughts, and our actions are all connected. Matthew 15:18-19 says, “But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and

this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander...”

Remember, you act out of who you believe that you are and you think out of who you believe that you are.

The New King James version puts Proverbs 23:7 like this: “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.”

So, we can see that from these two Scriptures in Proverbs our actions and our thoughts come from our heart. That’s why guarding our hearts is so important. God wants us to guard our hearts in every area of life. But since we are specifically talking about dating let’s look at how one guards their heart while dating.

How do you guard your heart while dating?

Guarding your heart while dating and in life in general is done by obeying the greatest command. In Matthew 22:37 Jesus says: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

When you love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind, you abide in His Word. Just as Jesus said, if we love Him, we will keep His commandments.” When you abide in His Word He guards your heart. So you guard your heart by loving the Lord and following his commands (even in your dating relationship).

1 John 5:3

“For this is the love of God. That we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome.”

These commandments are not to create a burden for us, but to give life, peace, and to benefit us.

So which of God's commands apply to your dating relationship? All of them!

I know you are probably thinking, "Okay here she goes...she is about to talk about sex." And yes...you are right. But I hope you will listen to what I am going to say because maybe it's a little different than what you are used to hearing.

I'm not going to tell you "Sex is bad! Stay away from sex!"

I'm going to tell you that sex is good.

God designed sex to be a beautiful display of love and affection for a married man and woman. And since God designed it, we better take note of his commands regarding it.

Scripture tells us that we should not have sex until we are married. It's not a gray area issue. Most Christians know that is what God says. (I know Philip has already covered that when the Bible says "sexual immorality" and or "fornication" that those are words that in the Greek mean "sexual intercourse between two people not married". What I am not sure many people understand is that this command is for us and not against us.

Remember that God tells us in His word that we are to remain pure:

Mark 7:20-22

And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Thess. 4:3

"this is the will of God, your sanctification:^[b] that you abstain from sexual immorality;

I Thess 4:7

⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

I Corinthians 6:18-20

"Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." God (the creator of sex) knows sex is far too intimate to be handled outside of marriage. The human brain cannot handle sex spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically outside of marriage. God just didn't design it that way. Sex is only beautiful and all it should be, when it is in a godly marriage.

Girls, listen carefully: sex and all things leading to it outside of marriage will only bring harm spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically. It will not guard your heart, it will destroy your heart outside of marriage.

Satan will try to convince you it's okay through the world's standards. He will try to convince you it's okay if you think you are going to marry the guy. He will try to convince you sex and all things leading to sex is the only way to get a guy or keep a guy. Satan will try his hardest to convince you that sex is okay and to listen to your heart because after all you love this guy. This is why the book of Proverbs tells us to "guard our hearts."

I think about a dear friend of mine. She often struggles with all the sexual acts she did with boys from middle school to college. She describes it as these memories haunt her. She is at almost 34 years

old still battling the wounds that her past sexual experiences have left on her. Thankfully she has found a Christian counselor that is helping her to seek healing and grace. Which I will talk more about in a minute.

Remember, as God's people we are holy and we are to treat ourselves as holy. So one way you treat yourself as holy is to remember that you are the temple of the living God (1 Cor 3:16) and not defiling your body through acts of intimacy and sex that are only meant for marriage.

Again, Girls, remember that these commandments regarding purity are FOR you. I will say it till I'm blue in the face, God doesn't command things of His children that are not for their benefit. I think about how so many times Lucas and Holley do not understand why we tell them to do not do something. As their loving parents, we don't tell them to do or not do something that isn't for their good. Girl's... our Heavenly Father loves us more than anyone on this earth loves us. Don't let that get lost on you. He loves you more than anyone can on this earth.... Not only does He love us more... His ways and thoughts are always higher (like we read earlier in Isa 55) He wants what's best for you. He made you. He knows. He sees and knows the things we cannot know. The only way to see His ways benefit us is to walk in them.

Part of this means you setting boundaries RIGHT NOW...whether you are dating or you have never been on a date. You will never be able to **set the boundaries** you need to set in the heat of the moment with your boyfriend. There are too many hormones raging to think straight. You have to set boundaries before that date ever happens. Boundaries like:

-He will not touch me below my neck. (Anything below the neck will lead to more and more sexual intimacy.)

-We won't lie down on a couch or bed together...nothing pure will ever come from that. Even if your motives are not sexual...I promise you that boy lying with you is thinking about sex. That's how boys and men are wired. It would truly shock you to know how much they really are thinking about sex.

-We won't sit in a dark room alone.

-We will only kiss above the neck (so like here and up) only

-We won't park the car to "talk" alone. ---go to a public place.

-If things start to get heated in kissing... I will stop and leave. I will look for my escape and take it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

13 No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Now if you are doing all these things...there won't be a removal of clothing... there won't be sex.

I also feel the need to say this... I hear all the time..."oral sex is not sex" Well, let me ask you a question: is apple pie, PIE? Oral sex is sex...its in the name of the act! And it's not God's plan for you until you are married.

Again, God knows what's best for you. He is the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17). He gives His good gifts to us when He knows we are ready for them. You are not ready for sex and all things leading to sex until you are married.

So to have a healthy dating relationship I must:

1. Have my identity in Christ.
2. The one I date must have their identity in Christ.
3. I must guard my heart by following His commands.

As we come to a close on this lesson a portion of Scripture comes to mind:

Psalm 37:3-7 ³ Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.^[a] ⁴ Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. ⁶ He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. ⁷ Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him;

I love this portion of Scripture and the amount of promises God makes to us through it. I hope you will make time to reflect on this section of Scripture this week and really meditate on what it means to all areas of your life but especially your dating life and your future.

God promises us that as we trust in Him, are faithful, and delight in Him He will ACT on our behalf to give us the desires of our heart. There is not a man on earth that can fulfill your desires and act on your behalf like our Lord. No one else will even be able to come close to what He can do for you. What's so cool is that as you place your identity in Him, it's not hard to trust Him, be faithful, and delight in Him. That's just the natural response to our identity in Him.

Girls, God knows the longings of your hearts and as you delight in Him, He changes those longings and desires to match what He knows is best for you. He will do: "far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us."

Ephesians 3:20-21

Take it from me: God has blessed me with more than I could have ever asked, thought of, or imagined. I'm so very thankful He did not

answer my prayers regarding previous relationships with a "Yes." See, I couldn't see, but God had something so much better planned for me. God wanted to give me more than I could possibly even think to ask for! And He did—He really has blessed me with an amazing husband and two beautiful children.

Real quick I want to say something to you if you are sitting here feeling all condemned because maybe you have messed up in your dating life. Maybe you have already had sex or you have done things you wish you hadn't. Maybe you are sitting here thinking "Well, what's the point. I have messed up and God isn't going to give me the desires of my heart."

Scripture says that when we ask for forgiveness God remembers our sins no more. **Scripture says in Psalm 103:12** that he removes our sins as far as the east is from the west. In the same Psalm we are told that we can be forgiven of everything and healed.

So no matter where you have been, what you have done, you are not too far gone from God's grace. Ask for forgiveness, change your ways, and start anew in God. If you haven't been baptized find someone to study with and wash your sins away.

If you have been baptized but you need forgiveness then ask for it, make the changes you need to make, and believe God at His Word that you are forgiven. God will see you as faithful. And just as Psalm 37 says He will act upon your faithfulness giving you the desires of your heart. It's so worth it. Remember that we serve a God who wants to do more for you than you can ask, think, or imagine.

Understanding My Identity
(Resource we used for Lesson 3)

I am a child of God

John 1:12 -But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

I have peace with God

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. .

The Holy Spirit lives in me.

1 Corinthians 3:16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

I have access to God's wisdom.

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.

I am helped by God.

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

I am reconciled to God.

Romans 5:11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

I am not condemned by God.

Romans 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

I am justified.

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I have Christ's righteousness.

Romans 5:19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

I am Christ's ambassador.

2 Corinthians 5:20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

I am completely forgiven.

Colossians 1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

I am tenderly loved by God.

Jeremiah 31:3 the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

I am the sweet fragrance of Christ to God.

2 Corinthians 2:15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing,

I am a temple in which God dwells.

1 Cor 3:16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?

I am blameless and beyond reproach.

Colossians 1:22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

I am the salt of the earth.

Matthew 5:13 You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet

I am the light of the world.

Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden

I am a branch on Christ's vine.

John 15: 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

I am Christ's friend.

John 15:15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you

I am chosen by Christ to bear fruit.

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

I am a joint heir with Christ, sharing his inheritance with him.

Romans 8:17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

I am united to the Lord, one spirit with him.

1 Corinthians 6:17 But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

I am a member of Christ's body.

1 Corinthians 12:27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

I am a saint.

Ephesians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

I am hidden with Christ in God.

Colossians 3:3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God

I am chosen by God, holy and dearly loved.

Colossians 3:12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

I am a child of the light.

1 Thessalonians 5:5 For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

I am holy, and I share in God's heavenly calling.

Hebrews 3:1

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

I am sanctified.

Hebrews 2:11 For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source, That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers

I am one of God's living stones, being built up in Christ as a spiritual house.

I Peter 2:5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

I am a member of chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession and created to sing his praises.

I Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I am firmly rooted and built up in Christ.

Colossians 2:7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

I am born of God, and the evil one cannot touch me.

I John 5:18 We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

I have the mind of Christ.

I Corinthians 2:16 For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" But we have the mind of Christ.

I may approach God with boldness, freedom, and confidence.

Ephesians 3:12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

I have been rescued from Satan's domain and transferred into the kingdom of Christ.

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

I have been made complete in Christ.

Colossians 2:10 (NKJV) and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

I have been given a spirit of power love, and a sound mind.

2 Timothy 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

I have been given great and precious promises by God.

2 Peter 1:4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

My needs are met by God.

Philippians 4:19 And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

I am a princess in God's kingdom.

John 1:12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

I Timothy 6:15 which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,

I have been bought with a price, and I belong to God.

I Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

I have been adopted as God's Child.

Ephesians 1:5 he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,

I have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 2:18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

I am assured that all things are working together for good.

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,^[a] for those who are called according to his purpose.

I am free from any condemning charges against me.

Romans 8:31-33 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

NOTHING can separate me from the love of God.

Romans 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I have been established, anointed, and sealed by God.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee

I am confident that the good work that God has begun in me will be perfected.

Philippians 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

I am a citizen of heaven.

Philippians 3:20 But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

I am seated with Christ in the heavenly realm.

Ephesians 2:6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

I am God's workmanship.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

I can do all things through Christ, who gives me the strength I need.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

I am competent not in my own abilities but because He has made me competent by His Spirit. **2 Corinthians 3:5-6** Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God, who has made us sufficient to be ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

I do not look with disdain upon my weaknesses. I see them as an opportunity for God to display His powerful strength and grace through me.

2 Corinthians 12:10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

He will never leave me nor will He forsake me.

Hebrews 13:5 "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

The One who is in me is greater than he that is in the world.

I John 4:4 Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world

There is no weapon formed against me that can prosper, and every tongue that rises up against me in judgment shall be condemned.

Isaiah 54:17

no weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed,
and you shall refute every tongue that rises against you in judgment.
This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD
and their vindication^[a] from me, declares the LORD.”

As a faithful child of the Lord, God will give me the desires of my heart and will act on my behalf.

Psalm 37: 3-6

Trust in the LORD, and do good;
dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness.
Delight yourself in the LORD,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.
Commit your way to the LORD;
trust in him, and he will act.
He will bring forth your righteousness as the light,
and your justice as the noonday.

I walk by the Spirit and do not fulfill the desires of my flesh.

Galatians 5:16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

I am enabled to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Galatians 5:22–23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

The Lord guards my going out and my coming in, today and forever.

Psalm 121:8

The LORD will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.

I have been made in the very image and likeness of God Himself. This is my heritage. **Genesis 1:27** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

I have not been given the spirit of this world; rather, I have the Spirit of God that I might know the mind and will of God for me.

I Corinthians 2:12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

My steps have been ordained and ordered by the Lord.

Psalm 37:23 The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way;

I am a necessary and useful part of the body of Christ, and I will use my spiritual gifts to edify others.

I Corinthians 12:7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good

I have been given victory in Christ Jesus.

I Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

My ambition is to be pleasing to Him and Him alone.

2 Corinthians 5:9 So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him

Rivers of living water flow out of my inner being.

John 7:37-38 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"

I have been chosen by God to bring forth fruit that shall remain.

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

I am a brand new person. My old sin nature has passed away, and everything has become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.^[a] The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

No matter my past, I am forgiven of my sins because of the lavishness of His grace upon me. **Ephesians 1:7** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

I have been given every spiritual blessing in heavenly places.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,

I am, fearfully and wonderfully made.

Psalms 139:14

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;
my soul knows it very well

Whatever I ask for in prayer according to the Father's will, I believe that I have received it. **Mark 11:24** Therefore I tell you, whatever

you ask in prayer, believe that you have received^[a] it, and it will be yours.