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Understanding Our Times: Whom Do We Worship

Romans 1:18-32

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We're calling this short series *Understanding Our Times*, trying to better understand the times in which we live in order to be more effective in accomplishing our mission as a church. Last week I covered a lot of ground and there's just no way I can go back and review all of that. I'm definitely building on that this week. So, if you weren't able to be here last week, I'd really encourage you to get the transcript in order to get up to speed with what we talked about.

Ultimately, we reminded ourselves that there are all these issues in the culture. We make a mistake when we get too fixated on the issues, realizing they're just symptoms of a deeper problem. If we don't get to the deeper root of the problem, nothing of substance will ever really change. We went back and looked at Genesis 1, 2 and 3. We reminded ourselves, according to Genesis 3, that the root problem comes down to this: That we, as people made in the image of God, have a choice to make. Either we will surrender to God as God and live life that way, or we choose to practically function as our own gods, deciding for ourselves what is good and bad and right and wrong. At the end of the day, that's the great divide—whether we worship the creature or will we worship the Creator. All issues ultimately come down to this core issue. It's what I think the New Testament sometimes refers to as *The Temptation*. We also, in order to make it as clear and practical as possible, delicately waded into talking about these principles related to a particular issue, and that is the issue of homosexuality.

We want to continue that discussion this morning because that's exactly what the Apostle Paul does. He takes Genesis 1, 2 and 3 and applies it to this specific issue in order to make the same point we're trying to make in Romans 1. So, if you have a Bible, turn with us to Romans, Chapter 1, and I want to pick it up in verse18:

> **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.** (*NASB, Romans 1:18-23)

Now, it's fairly obvious that Paul is reaching back into the early chapters of Genesis. In verse 18, when he talks about **against all ungodliness,** the Greek word literally means un-godness. In other words, it's the same thing we were talking about. What he's going to describe here is those who are unwilling to surrender to God as God. Now the text is very clear. He's not specifically referring to atheists, although certainly they would be included. But he says these are people that know there's a God—that God has made Himself known both within us through our conscience and without through creation to such a degree that all people are without excuse. But the text goes on to say they *know* there's a god, but they do not *honor* Him as God—what I sometimes refer to as *The*

Great Exchange. They exchange the truth for a lie. Rather than worshiping God in all of His glory, they choose to worship *us*—fallen, corruptible creatures—that we make ourselves god. *The Great Exchange* is that we move from the glory of God to the sin and corruption of *us* as God's fallen creatures. So that's basically what he's describing. It's what we talked about last week from Genesis.

Now I want to move on, but before I do that, one quick point. Romans is the most exhaustive, tedious, complete conversation of the gospel of grace in the entire Bible. So it's worth noting that Paul starts the conversation exactly where we talked about last week—not with a bunch of issues that are symptoms, but he starts the conversation by going right to the core issue. The core issue is that we worship the creature rather than the Creator. There is all kinds of fallout that come from that. It's just an affirmation of what we talked about last week. Verse 24:

> **Therefore,** in light of this, **God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.** (Vs. 24-25)

Now, this phrase **God gave them over**—you see it several times in Romans 1—basically carries two ideas. One is that, as people made in the image of God, we have a volitional will. We have a will to choose. We can choose to worship or we can choose to not worship. We can choose to love God or we can choose to hate God. That's part of what it means to be made in the image of God. So, we can choose. God allows that. That's part of how God loves us. He gives us the freedom to choose to worship Him or not. But it also carries the idea that there are consequences to choices. You don't just choose with impunity. You can't just make up your own story. This goes all the way back to Genesis 2 and 3. God said, *"If* you choose to disobey me, surely you will die." Consequences! You remember the serpent came back and said, *"You will not surely die!"* This is the whole idea. They exchanged the truth for a lie; worshiped the creature rather than the Creator. So the reminder is, yes, as a person made in the image of God, you do have the freedom to exercise your will and choose. But there are consequences to those choices.

Now all the way back to last week's discussion. In Genesis chapter 1 we learned that we are created by God, which implies design and purpose in His creation. We are created by God in His image, with the capacity—the ability and the responsibility—to image God to the world. One way that's done, and the very first way that's mentioned is through our male and femaleness. God has created us in such a way that we experience this deeply intimate relationship between a male and female whereby we are fruitful and multiply. We reproduce; we bring forth life, and that is meant to be a picture of the love relationship that God wants to have with His people—in the New Testament, Christ and His church. It's a beautiful thing. It's where we find life.

We talked about this idea of marriage, as defined by God, is filled with theology and soul-satisfying pleasure. It's deep and it's rich. If the sexual relationship is meant to picture this deep intimacy between God and His people, what do you suppose the consequence is going to be when we choose to worship the creature rather than the Creator? In other words, when we begin to rebel against surrendering to God, where is that most likely going to show up in a culture? Answer: in our sexual behavior, and that's the very first thing he talks about.

In verse 24, the word **impurity** is a reference to sexual impurity. He goes on to talk about that. Because we worship the creature rather than the Creator, the outflow of that is going to show up in our sexual behavior. I think that paragraph is referring to sex outside of God's boundary. God's

boundary is a husband and wife in a lifelong, one-flesh relationship. Anything outside of that is considered rebellion. It's outside of God's intended boundary. We saw this last spring when we talked about sexuality from the Proverbs and the reference to the *strange woman*, understanding that it was a reference to sex outside of God's boundary. Any sex outside of that, God considers *strange*. It's outside of His intent. It's something *other than* what His design and purpose was. So that's what he's talking about in verses 24 and 25. He goes on in verse 26:

> **For this reason God gave them over** [there's that phrase again] **to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.** (Vs. 26-27)

So now I think the progression of the conversation goes from rebellion which is outside of God's boundary, to rebellion that is out of God's design. In other words, God's design is male-female sexuality to produce life within the context of marriage. But this now—women with women and men with men—moves beyond not only God's boundary but even beyond God's design. The terms **natural** and **unnatural** literally mean *according to God's design.* No question, it's a reference to Genesis 1 and 2. As a matter of fact, the terms *man* and *woman* are literally, in the Greek, "male" and "female". For example, if you go to other passages in the New Testament that are quoting Genesis 1 and 2, when it quotes, "God made us male and female", these are the two Greek words used to quote Genesis 1 and 2. I wish the New American Standard Bible would have left those terms *male* and *female*. It's a more obvious connection with Genesis 1 and 2.

Now I mentioned last week that this issue of homosexuality is not a gray area. It's not unclear in the Bible. This is one example where the Bible is very clear on this topic. I frankly don't know how it could be more clearly stated. As a matter of fact, the text is so clear that those who are pro-homosexuality do crazy things to try to explain this text away.

For example, one of the things that is done is they just simply throw the text out. There's kind of this movement where, "*That's not Jesus; that's Paul, and, I don't agree with Paul! That's just Paul's opinion. We're for Jesus, but we throw out Paul*." That's a complete misunderstanding of the whole of Scripture. I mentioned last week that from Genesis to Revelation, it is the God-breathed, authoritative word of God. There is no difference between Jesus and Paul. Paul spoke with the Jesus Spirit-breathed words of life. It's the words of Jesus, the Spirit of Jesus, from Genesis to Revelation. Actually, if your choice is simply to throw out parts of the New Testament, you cease to even be evangelical in your theology. That's one of the pillars. To be evangelical, you submit to the authoritative inspired Word of God. So that is surely no option.

Another possible explanation is to say: "*Actually the issue at hand is that there were Roman men* —adults—*who were having sex with young Roman boys, and that was the particular behavior that was being identified*." Now first of all, that's not what the text says. It doesn't even come close to saying that. But also, the very first behavior Paul talks about is women with women. And we know for a fact that in first century Roman culture, no older women were having sex with little girls. Clearly, that's not the issue being addressed. That's just silliness.

The third attempt to explain this text away is to say: *"Actually, what Paul's talking about is you just need to be true to yourself—in other words, true to what is natural. So if my natural bent is heterosexuality, I need to be true to that. But if my natural bent is homosexuality, I need to be true to that. Just don't be untrue to your natural passions."* Well, first of all, that's clearly not the

intent of the text. It is referencing Genesis 1, 2 and 3 and this issue of worshiping the creature rather than the Creator—living contrary to God's design and intent—Genesis, chapter 1. But also, if you look closely at the text, what the text is saying is that women burned with passion toward other women. Men burned with passion toward other men. That is the behavior that's being condemned. It is saying this was the natural passion, and that's the behavior being condemned. Why? Because it's outside of God's design and purpose. So, clearly, that third attempt to explain this text away doesn't hold up at all. Now we're back to the fact that this is just as clear as it could possibly be.

I do want to take just a minute to talk about this whole idea of that third way to explain away this text—that idea of "natural passion". I hear this all the time, and I hear it from Christians all the time. The logic is that because people have a natural attraction to someone of the same sex, they didn't ask for it. They maybe don't want it—which I agree with. But, because that's true, then it's morally acceptable. That, in my opinion, is where the logic breaks down. That's quite a leap! As a matter of fact, I would suggest to you that there is virtually no other behavior where we apply that logic. As a matter of fact, the very essence of the Christian faith is that we say *no* to the desires of the flesh that are contrary to the will of God. And with the power of the Spirit within us, we rise above them to walk uprightly before God. That's the very essence of who we are as Christians.

Let's imagine two adolescents—two fifteen-year-olds—a boy and a girl, and they have a natural desire within them to have sex with one another. Are we willing to say if that's true, that makes it morally right? Go for it. What about a middle-aged man who, for whatever reason, has this passion deep within him to have sex with young children? Because that's a passion that comes deep within him, are we willing to say, "Then go for it?" It's morally acceptable. Are we willing to say, "If it feels good, do it? If this is the passion within you, it must be morally acceptable." If people have a natural bent toward alcohol, toward drugs, toward anger, toward violence—toward all kinds of unacceptable behaviors, are we willing to say that because it seems to come naturally for you, that makes it morally acceptable before a holy God? That's ridiculous!

So why do we take that approach toward this one particular issue? As a matter of fact, I would suggest that if you look at the end of verse 27, the text is actually saying that this sexual confusion, this now disarray, this rebellion, this confusion around our sexuality that now defines our culture is actually part of the judgment of God. It's the due penalty of our choice to worship the creature rather than the Creator. Rather than saying, "That must be how God made me; therefore it's morally acceptable," the text would say: No! Once you decide to worship the creature rather than the Creator, everything is going to fall apart and there's going to be sexual confusion that will be hurtful and will create an environment where people will have an inability to ultimately satisfy the longing deep within their soul. It is part of the consequence of the choices we've made as a culture. There is a reason why. As a culture becomes more secular, a culture becomes more sexually confused. That's not a coincidence; it's part of the judgment. Once we move away from God and choose to become our own gods, there are consequences to that. We see those consequences everywhere we look in our culture.

One of the core issues that I *don't* think the text is saying is: Homosexuality is the worst of all sins. I don't think it is saying that at all. What it is saying is that this is a picture of the bigger problem. In other words, page one of the Bible is that our sexuality was meant to represent, to picture this beautiful, intimate, love relationship with God. But, when we choose to worship the creature rather than the Creator, when we practically function as our own god, then we begin to rebel against God. So, sex outside of God's boundaries is a picture of that rebellion. It's a picture of the bigger problem. But, eventually we go from rebelling against God to basically dismissing God altogether.

Now it's just man on man! Now we're saying the picture is that we're in this ourselves and God is dismissed. We've become a secular culture. That's the logic of the argument. The behavior is actually an illustration of a much deeper problem.

One of the things you hear among the homosexual community is that their sexuality actually becomes their identity. As a matter of fact, when Christians say things like, "Hate the sin; love the sinner" —which, by the way, is a phrase we need to do away with—but when we say that, it makes no sense to them because they can't separate those two things out. All they hear is, "Hate the sinner." The fact that they find their identity in their sexuality is exactly the point of Romans 1—that now their identity is not found in being a person made in the image of God; it's found in themselves. *"I'm going to do this myself, without God. Therefore, my identity is not as a person made in the image of God, it's in my own sexuality."*

Even the term *sexual orientation* roots back to this concept. The term originated with Sigmund Freud. Sigmund Freud was an atheist. Sigmund Freud had huge problems with people believing in God and did all he could to move people from a belief in God to finding their identity in themselves. His primary focus for that was to get people to focus on their sexuality. So he actually coined the phrase *sexual orientation* for the express purpose of getting people to find their identity in themselves rather than this ridiculous notion of an identity found in God. So that is at the core of this issue, and that's exactly what Paul is saying here. Verse 28:

> **And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them.** (Vs. 28-32)

Now it's worth underscoring the very last line of that paragraph. Not only is there a warning to those who participate in those twenty-one vices that are listed, there is a warning to those who give **hearty approval** to such behavior! I think I mentioned last week, from Isaiah: "Woe to those who call evil good, and to those who call good, evil..."

Now the New Testament version: There is a warning to those who give **hearty approval** to behavior that is offensive to God. I think Christians need to sit up and take note of that! There are twenty-one vices listed that are basically saying: Once we choose to worship the creature rather than the Creator, then there is this outflow of behavior. There's a consequence—and all of those behaviors which are listed now define our culture.

So, what does all of this have to do with accomplishing our mission? First of all, let me start here: I love Lincoln Berean Church! And what I love *most* about Lincoln Berean Church is the people. I think we have remarkable people. As a matter of fact, I get asked on a regular basis, "What is it that makes Lincoln Berean special?" I always have the same answer, "It's the people—amazing people that God keeps sending through our door! People that love God...people of grace...people of compassion...people of forgiveness." I think we have a wonderful culture of grace that defines us. I would suggest to you that anyone could walk through the door, guilty of any of those vices listed, and they would be loved; they would be accepted; there would be a feeling that this is a place that is safe for people to come who are struggling to try and sort it out and figure out: *Where does God fit*

in all of this? I think every single one of those, except one...except one...except one! I think in this area of homosexuality, this is an area where we can grow.

One of the conversations I've had, actually multiple times over the years with homosexuals that I've reached out to, is they'll say something like this: "This is the problem. We go to the liberal churches, and there we feel welcome and accepted. They even tell us that our behaviors are okay before God. But there's something deep within us that says we're not sure that's really true. And they don't have what we're looking for. They don't really teach the Bible, and we find ourselves not fitting there. That's not what our souls are longing for. So we go to the evangelical churches; we feel like these are people that take the Bible seriously. They open the Word of God. This may be the very thing we're looking for! The problem is: they don't want us. We don't fit there; it's not safe for us." And so they look at me and they say, "What are we supposed to do?" It's a pretty good question. What if we became the place that stood fast on the Word of God without comprise, but also created a context where anyone struggling with any issue would feel loved, would feel safe, would feel that this is the place you can come and struggle and try to sort it out, and we will walk with you through that journey. What could God do through us if we were truly such a place? (clapping)

Let me give you a little bit of a history lesson. I want to build on the fact that I think over the last two weekends I have been very clear. There is not even the slightest hint that we're going to compromise on this issue. It's simply unfair to say we're compromising. We're not! I've been as clear as I can be on that, so let's not be fearful of that. But let's also agree we can grow and do better as a church. Here's my understanding of the history and what affects us today.

There was a time in our culture where the culture, by and large, hated homosexuals: they were disgusting; they were repulsive. The culture hated them. Homosexuality was listed as a mental disorder, and that's how people viewed them. Imagine in that day, having the same-sex attraction that you didn't ask for, that you didn't want, but having the culture feel that way about something you can't change. So it represented a group of people who were in such pain!

The church had a remarkable opportunity to be counter-cultural—not to compromise, but to reach into that community and say, *"I know everybody else hates you, but you need to understand Jesus loves you; Jesus died for you; Jesus has what you're longing for. And even if the rest of the world hates you, we're willing to love you and walk with you through your journey."* One can only imagine what might be different today, had the church done that. I'm talking about the evangelical church. But we didn't. We actually became fellow stone-throwers with condemnation and judgment. We just heaped up more and more pain on them.

One of the ways that we did it as fundamentalists is through radio broadcasts, through television broadcasts, and through books. We felt it necessary to go into great detail of the sordid, sexual behavior of homosexuals, to portray all of the graphic details for one express purpose—to create what one author called a *gag reflex*—that we would be so offended, we would be so repulsed, we would be so upset we would *gag* at the thought of such people.

So now time has passed and the culture has changed. Now, by and large, the culture is very supportive of this new agenda. I think the question remains: Will the church, this time, be counter-cultural or will the church, once again, just go with the flow? To go with the flow *today* would mean to say: "You know God doesn't care. It's okay. Live it up." My fear is that a lot of evangelical churches are going to go down that path.

To be counter-cultural means that we take the Word of God seriously. We're willing to have the courage to speak the truth in love. But it also means that we take our mission to be stewards of the gospel seriously. We create a context where any struggler is welcome to be loved, to be accepted—not the behavior condoned—but to say," Hey, it's safe here for you to become real and honest and authentic and to struggle to figure out who is Jesus and how might He fit into this confusion and struggle in my life? I think one thing that makes it very difficult for the evangelical church to accomplish that is that the residue from the "gag reflex" remains.

Over the last couple of years, I've been on a mission to try to figure this out, to try to understand how we, as a church, can do better? If you open up your ears and listen, you hear those comments from Christians all the time. "It's repulsive; it's sickening. It makes me want to puke; it makes me want to gag. Now, I want you to think about that context in the midst of this story. I've had several conversations over the last couple of years. They look kind of like this:

Let's take a fifteen-year-old boy, a young adolescent boy. He's never had sex with anyone. But somewhere in his early adolescent years he began to realize: "Something about me is different. I don't fit in. I'm not like the other kids." Over time, as he grows and matures, he finally figures it out: "I don't have an attraction to girls. I have an attraction to boys; I have a same-sex attraction. I didn't ask for it. I don't want it." As a matter of fact, I think every single one of those young adolescents I've talked to would say: "Every night I cry myself to sleep and I beg God night after night after night, 'PLEASE take this away!'" But it doesn't change.

Now imagine the level of pain and confusion and loneliness—and the one place where you feel the most unsafe is among the people of God. "If these people found out what is really true of me and it's something I can't change, I didn't ask for it, but if they actually found out what is true of me, they would GAG! They would puke! They would be repulsed! They would never look at me again!" Can you imagine the level of pain that a young adolescent struggles with, believing that's true? And eventually the conclusion is: "There's only one place where I'll ever be loved and accepted, and that is in the homosexual community." And then we're shocked that somebody would choose that! We're not slow to cast our judgment on that. We fail to realize, in some ways we're complicit in that; we pushed him out the door! Where do you think he's going to turn? My opinion would be that Christians have very strong opinions on this topic, but by and large, the opinions are very uninformed opinions.

Over the last two years, I've been on a bit of a mission—we together as a staff. Me, myself, I'm not an expert, but I have read over twenty-five books on this subject, written from every direction imaginable. I'm not uninformed; I have done my due diligence. One of the things that is very consistent is that people with same-sex attraction typically realize it very early in life. There's a lot of debate on whether it's *nature* or *nurture*. Where is this coming from? There's really no conclusive evidence that it's genetic, but if one day that was found to be part of the cause, it would only confirm Romans 1 is true. It's part of the due penalty of our rebellion! It shows up in our genetic structure in lots of ways. Sometimes it's from abuse or trauma—not always—but what is typically referred to as an *unwanted attraction*. "I didn't want it! I didn't ask for it! I'd give anything for it to go away!" These are not people that are so sexually out of control that homosexuality is the next best thing! That's just not true; that's not what it is! The more you start to realize what's true, and it could be your son...it could be your daughter...it could be your spouse...it could be your brother or sister...it could be your grandchild! All of a sudden this is coming out of nowhere and it doesn't just change. They can't just decide one day, "I think I'll be heterosexual," any more than I could get up one morning and decide, "I think I have a desire toward another man." You can't just conjure it up—it doesn't work that way. You can't just flip a switch!

They didn't ask for it. They don't want this. It's full of pain. It's full of struggle. It's full of heartache. It's such a difficult road to sort out.

But what if, in the midst of all of that—understanding that—we created a culture of compassion, a culture of kindness and love that says, "*You know, we just want you to know that this is a safe place. You can come. You can seek. You can struggle, and we'll walk with you to try and figure out where does Jesus factor into your pain and your confusion and your sexuality,"* to understand, at the core is the need for them to experience the life-changing power of Jesus, or nothing of substance will ever change—and then, to trust the power of the Holy Spirit to do His work! The moment someone trusts Christ as Savior, there's not a switch that flips and suddenly: "I'm heterosexual!" It doesn't work like that. There's still a lot of confusion. There's still a lot of struggle.

When you go through this list of vices, there are people in this auditorium that have been Christians for many, many, many years, but yet you still struggle with some of the vices on the list. We understand that. We're very loving and accepting and patient and grace-filled with people as they struggle. Why would this one issue be different? Why wouldn't we understand that it's possible, even after someone comes to Christ, it's going to take time for the Holy Spirit to grow them and mature them to understand how God figures into this. They're going to struggle along just like we struggle along with every other vice on the list. Who made the rule that this one vice isn't something a Christian can struggle with, to understand, at the end of the day, the goal is not heterosexuality? At the end of the day, the goal is holiness.

They can't change if they have a same-sex attraction or not, but they can choose whether or not they're going to walk uprightly before a holy God. But I want you to understand this: In order for someone with a same-sex attraction to walk in righteousness before God means that they will commit themselves to a lifetime of celibacy. I just want you to let that sink in. Can you imagine being sixteen years old and realizing that in order to walk in righteousness before a holy God, that means I must choose celibacy for life? There are very few people, in my opinion, in this auditorium, willing to make that extreme of a commitment to the righteousness of Christ. People with same-sex attraction who are willing to make that commitment are courageous, faithful Christians that should be applauded and celebrated as heroes of the faith. In a culture like ours, to make that level of a commitment to holiness is absolutely remarkable!

I want to close by reading a letter from a college-age student that I think remarkably captures this. He doesn't live in Nebraska; he's a friend of a friend. This was an open letter that he published.

> *I'm gay. My preferred terminology is that I'm a Christian who is gay and celibate. But I understand that, in some cases, you don't get to use that many words. I've wrestled with the proper label for myself for many years. I've decided to embrace the term "gay" because, despite certain disagreements I have with its associations, currently no other word more adequately represents my experience. While I don't claim ultimate allegiance to this label, "Christ follower" will always hold that place. It is a helpful term that describes a significant part of me. It doesn't simply represent an attraction or a sin with which I struggle; it represents for better or worse how I relate to people of both sexes, ways that I think and act, and even interests that I pursue.*
>
> *The decision to remain celibate for life can sound to some like I'm being disingenuous to myself, however I don't believe that I'm repressing my sexuality in my decision to refrain from sexual same-sex relationships. Yes, I'm repressing what I consider to be sinful desires as I would repress any desire that God has called me to rise above. However, God*

calls all of us to abstain from desires and actions that the culture of this world deemed necessary to live a fulfilled life. And He promises a better life without any of those things. I truly believe that my decision to remain celibate until the Lord changes my heart or calls me home will provide an entirely fulfilling life.

I realize that I am sharing something rather intimate. Some may understandably be wondering why I would talk so openly about it. I believe that the church and wider communities cannot properly make room for people like me unless people step forward and are willing to talk openly. To quote blogger Matt Jones, "I'm choosing to live openly because I love the Church too much to let it love LGBTQ people so poorly." I'd like my story to bring encouragement and hope not only to those who experience similar feelings, but to all people, removing the taboo around this topic so that the gospel can go forth without hindrance.

Where do I go in my next life? A good friend once chastised me for thinking God had simply called me to not pursue sexual relationships with men. He claimed that God's only purpose for calling us from something of the world is to call us toward something greater. I hold fast to that thought. While I'm still discovering God's calling for my life in this life, I know that first and foremost I'm called to follow Him with my whole heart and to share His gospel with all who will listen.

I would consider this young man to be a hero of the faith. That, for a college-age student, is a remarkable perspective. We have people in this congregation every single weekend like this young man. They have a same-sex attraction. They didn't ask for it. They don't want it. They would give anything for it to change. But that is who they are, and in order to walk uprightly before a holy God, they have made the decision to live a celibate life for the rest of their lives. These are people I love and respect. I believe they are heroes of faith. They are people with so much courage to live that way in a culture like our culture.

Just imagine if we created a culture where we stood firm on the Word of God without compromise, but also created an environment where all strugglers felt safe to come and to struggle and to sort out their hurt and confusion and to figure out—*Where does Jesus figure in my life*? —and that God would raise up an army of young men and women like this young man to help us be stewards of the gospel in the 21st Century. What God could do through that is absolutely staggering! And that must be part of our future!

Our Father, we celebrate this morning Your love for every single person. God, we as a culture, we as a race, as human beings, have decided we want to go our way, not Your way, and the consequences are evident everywhere we look. God, You have called us as Your church to be stewards of the gospel to every single person that remains in darkness. God, I pray that You would cause this place to be an exceptional place of grace to all strugglers as we seek to be faithful stewards of the Good News. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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