

We can't talk about Marriage without talking about Sex. So today we're going to be talking about sex, and what sex has to do with Marriage. We're going to be pretty straightforward, so if you have kids in here you'd rather lead that conversation with, you can and should take them back to our wonderful Kidz Church.



To help us frame this rather difficult conversation, we need to back up a few years, to 1926. To talk about sex, we need to talk about a little girl named Norma Jean. She was born in Los Angeles to a young single mother named Gladys Baker. To avoid the stigma of illegitimate pregnancy of the 1920s, Gladys gave Norma Jean her ex-husband's last name: Mortenson. Unfortunately, Gladys was not mentally healthy, so little Norma Jean Mortenson was passed from one foster home to the next, sometimes living with various aunts and uncles and occasionally her mother. When she was 16, to avoid having to either leave LA or return to the foster system, Norma Jean married a boy who lived in her neighborhood, just before he left to fight in WWII.

While working at a munitions plant, little Norma Jean Mortenson caught the eye of a photographer who encouraged her to go into modeling. The agency, however, was looking for blondes, so Norma

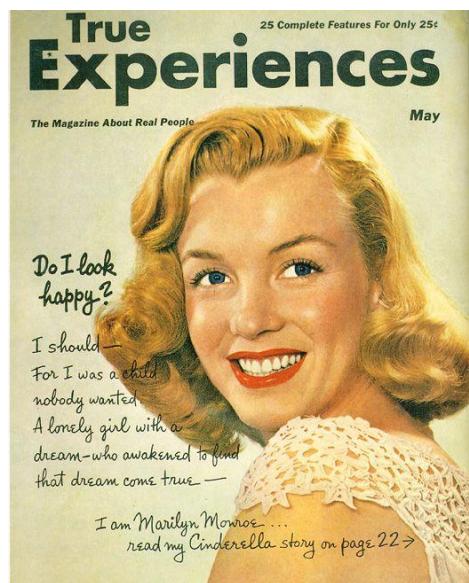


Jean dyed her hair (and never went back to brunette). Her modest success as a model brought her to the attention of a film executive. He insisted, however, that she take a stage name - he didn't think "Norma Jean" was very marketable.

Over Norma Jean's initial reluctance, the producer suggested the name Marilyn because he liked the alliteration with her last name. Norma Jean also decided to take her mother Gladys' maiden name - casting aside both Mortenson and Baker. So it was, that at just twenty years old, Norma Jean Mortenson became Marilyn Monroe, and was well on her way to becoming the quintessential American sex symbol.

Marilyn Monroe was America's sweetheart throughout the 1950s. Her story started out as the embodiment of the Fairy Tale Romance our culture loves so much. In a country without kings and queens, Marilyn was our princess. A cover story for the May 1952 edition of *True Experiences* magazine explained our fascination with her. The caption on the cover reads, "Do I look happy? I should—for I was a child nobody wanted. A lonely girl with a dream—who awakened to find that dream come true. I am Marilyn Monroe. Read my Cinderella story."

Throughout her film career and thanks in large part to her marriage to baseball legend Joe DiMaggio and her legendary affair with President John F. Kennedy, Marilyn became America's mistress. Even today, her look is iconic and sensual. Everything about Norma Jean Mortenson's story is the American struggle with sexual identity.



Try to learn about sex and sexuality - try to pick out a singular message in our culture. You can't find it. Far from clarity, dozens of messages assault us from every angle. Sex is good. Sex is bad. Sex is neutral. Sex is for procreation. Sex is for pleasure. 50 Shades of Sex. The best sex is married sex. Marriage kills sex. You should wait for marriage. But what if I'm not married anymore? You should wait until you're in love. It doesn't matter, it's just sex. What counts as cheating? Is pornography really that bad? That doesn't even count as sex. Do I look sexy enough? What about sexting?

So many voices assaulting us from so many different places. Advertisements. Movies. Music. Friends and family. God. What do we believe? Who do we listen to?

Today we are going to explore sex within the framework we've established over the last few weeks. We're going to listen to the voice of the Scriptures, to the clear message about our sex and sexuality and we'll hear this:

How we have sex (or don't) and how we express our sexuality is integral to living out Jesus' Good News to the world around us.

We're going to see that choosing not to align our sexuality with the pattern we find in the Scriptures creates discord in our lives that ultimately hinders our ability to join in God's rescue of the world.

You think, Really? I was just expecting "don't have sex outside marriage." Today, Sex has less to do with Marriage than ever before. Or maybe more accurately, Marriage has little to do with Sex. People can be married without having sex – many a sitcom joke has been made about that fact. And if the statistics are to be believed, most people in our culture have sex without factoring marriage into it. And we certainly don't think of sex as relating to the Gospel.

This points to a deep misunderstanding of our bodies in our culture. We mostly think of our bodies as "soul suits". The thinking is that our True Self is our soul. The body is just a temporary, decaying thing that hold our soul. It's not who we really are. If your body isn't who you really are, if it's removed to some degree from your True Self, then it becomes either a help or a hindrance to you. Is it helping you be who you really are, or is it getting in the way? (Some of the philosophy behind plastic surgery - your body is moldable. Let us bring out the "real you") So Norma Jean became a permanent blonde and changed her name so she could be the American Cinderella.



Since we consider our bodies auxiliary to our True Selves, since they're not who we Really Are, then the purpose of our bodies is to make our True Selves better. To give us pleasure. And if we want to be really happy, we have to have better bodies, just like Norma Jean became blonde bombshell Marilyn Monroe. We spend billions of dollars every year on plastic surgery, cosmetics, gym memberships, clothes, on anything that will help us become better, sexier, more desirable versions of ourselves.

Because it all culminates in sex and sexuality. The best thing we can do with our bodies is get pleasure. It's all about looking the best, feeling the best, being the most desired. Sex is mainly about the pleasure of the body - the ultimate climax of the romance story.

But we'll never make it. We'll never be sexy enough. It's ironic that if she were working today, Marilyn Monroe wouldn't be considered a sex symbol. At a size 10, modeling agencies would consider her for a larger plus size model, which currently ranges from sizes 6-12. Abercrombie, Gap, Victoria and Vogue wouldn't want anything to do with her.

That's pure insanity. If you stop for just a minute, you have to wonder if, just like Norma Jean, at some point maybe we're actually losing our True Selves, not finding them. Is it any wonder that with such twisted messages about our bodies, there's so much confusion about sex and sexuality? That in a world where bodies are commodities to be cut and shaped and molded, where bodies are used to sell pretty much *everything*, that we'd get the idea that bodies are really just for pleasure and the purpose of sex is murky at best?

Unfortunately, the Church doesn't say much about any of this because we've reduced the Gospel to a spiritual thing - it's all about ditching this Soul Suit and going to Heaven. So how much can it *really* matter what we do with our bodies? Even people who know that the Church says sex should be confined to the marriage bed aren't really sure *why* because that's about the only time the Church cares what I do with my body.

So let's first get our thinking about the Gospel straight, and then see how that shapes our thinking about our bodies and our sexuality.

An intellectual asked Jesus once what the Greatest Commandment was. Essentially, his question was, Hey Jesus, of all the rules we have, which is the guiding rule? Which rule sums all the others up?

Jesus replied: **The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.'** The second is equally important: '**Love your neighbor as yourself.**' - - Mark 12:29-31 (NLT)

Usually when we sum this up, we say the way of Jesus is "Love God, Love people." But look closer at that first part:

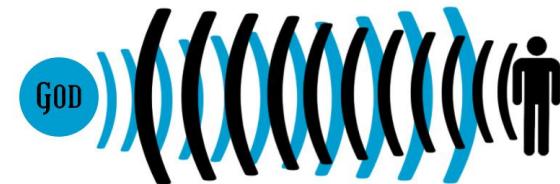
You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.

Jesus is quoting Old Testament law here, and it gives us important insight into how the Biblical peoples understood persons. The True Self, the Real Person, was all of these things - heart, soul, mind and strength. Or we might say emotions, spirit, intellect and body. (And Jesus adds a fifth thing - our community, the "people" we're called to love as ourselves).

For the ancient Hebrews, the body was an integral part of who you are. You can't talk about YOU apart from your body. There's no such thing. It'd be the same as trying to talk about you without your mind. What does that even mean?

According to the Scriptures, there is no You apart from your body. It's an integral, essential part of who you are.

And that means God's Good News, Jesus' Gospel Announcement applies to your body as well as your soul. That's why Jesus' resurrection is such good news - even though our bodies break down and decay, they will be restored, resurrected! It's not just a spiritual reality. It's a physical, bodily reality.



God never intended for us to be divided. In fact, the dissonance we feel between our bodies and our souls, or our emotions and our minds, or our minds and our bodies, whatever - all of those are the legacy of the sin in our lives.

Think of it like sound waves - God has a way, a melody that we are called to participate in. We understand Sin as a deviation from God's Way, playing our own song, so to speak.



Sin fragments us. It sets the different aspects of our whole person against each other. Imagine someone hurts you in some way. Maybe our Mind truly wants to be like God and forgive but our emotions are hurt and no matter how hard we try, we can't get past that feeling. It causes discord.

Coming to Jesus, learning to live in his new kingdom, is in part a process of aligning our hearts, minds, souls and strength. It's getting every aspect of ourselves, our Whole Person, in line with God's song.

That means that our bodies are part of how we participate in God's new kingdom. That's why we clean parks. It's why we work to free people trapped in slavery. It's why we feed hungry kids. Because the Gospel isn't just spiritual. It's mental and emotional. The Gospel is *physical*.

The Gospel is for the whole person. That means the Gospel is about our sexuality. It means that how we have sex has to do with the Gospel.

That who we have sex with (and who we don't) is part of how we love God and love people.

To say that our sexuality is an aspect of how we love God and love people is to say that we have to bring our sexuality in line with God's Way. But in a world that has disconnected Sex and Marriage, what does God's Way look like?

The Scriptures make no distinction between sex and marriage. Sex is the physical manifestation of the marriage covenant. When you have sex, you're marrying with your body. At the end of the story of the creation of the first man and woman, Genesis 2 describes their marriage like this:

"This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one flesh." -- Genesis 2:24 (NLT)

In the ancient world there were no marriage licenses. Weddings were a huge, multi-day party, and the couple wasn't considered officially married until - right in the middle of the party - they went into

a tent and had sex. That's why we sometimes refer to sex as "consummating" the marriage. It finishes the marriage. The couple has already joined their minds, hearts and spirits in the presence of their community. They finish by becoming one flesh, uniting their bodies.

This is why, in the New Testament, Paul uses this verse, this picture of marriage and sex, to talk about the Gospel. When he's writing to the Corinthians, Paul addresses a concern that they had about some of the members of the Church continuing to visit temple prostitutes. Many Corinthians had the same low view of the body that we do - it's not particularly important, what matters is your Soul, your True Self inside the body. So having sex with whomever wasn't a big deal (one guy was apparently even sleeping with his mom, or possibly stepmom). So here's what Paul writes to them:

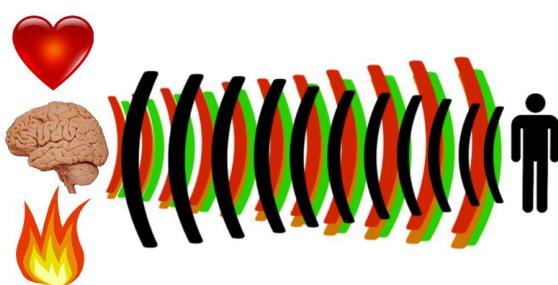
"You can't say that our bodies were made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord, and the Lord cares about our bodies. And God will raise us from the dead by his power, just as he raised our Lord from the dead."

First, Paul affirms that our bodies aren't worthless and disposable. They're an integral part of who we are. He goes on then:

Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never!

Next, Paul points out that we're all part of a larger body, the Church. So what we do with our bodies actually affects everyone else we're gathered with to worship.

And don't you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one flesh." But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him." -- 1 Corinthians 6:13-17 (NLT)



Finally, quoting Genesis 2, Paul points out that when you have sex, you're physically marrying that person. He's not advocating that you have to marry every person you have sex with. He's saying that when you divorce sex from marriage, you introduce discord into your life. You're marrying someone with your body, but not with the rest of you. And Paul says, Look. If you're a follower of Jesus, then first and foremost you're united with God.

Just as we've seen throughout this series, marriage is a picture of our relationship with God. God comes first. And Paul says that by having sex outside of marriage, you're sowing discord in your life and in the life of the Church.

We're called not to discordant sexual confusion but to the clarity of healthy, ordered sexuality - what the Church calls Chastity.

I know when you hear 'chastity' you think of chastity belts right? We mostly think that Chastity is just another word for virginity - something that only applies to people who have never been married.

Unfortunately, many Christians make the same assumptions as the larger culture - that sex is all about my pleasure, using my body (and your body) to make me feel better. So Churches and pastors and Christian authors tell us that the best sex, the really good stuff is married sex. As though the wedding ring has some sort of mystical erotic properties. That's not Chastity.

And no one talks about what happens on the other side of marriage. What if you're divorced or widowed? You're not a virgin anymore, so does it even matter? Or was the only thing that really mattered waiting for that first person?

Chastity reframes all those questions. Chastity says that what's most important about your body isn't your pleasure. Chastity teaches us that whether you're married or single, you're called to bear witness to Jesus' rescue and redemption through your sexuality.

That means if you're single - on either side of marriage - you don't have sex. Because you are not married in the other aspects of your life - your mind, your spirit, your heart, your community. If you choose to have sex, you're creating discord in your life and the life of your community.

And if you're married, you're called to chastity. That means sex only with your spouse. And more than that, Gospel-centered sex with your spouse. Reject the idea that the most important thing when you're in the sack is your own pleasure. Instead, give yourself to your spouse, for the good of your spouse. Make your spouse's pleasure the most important aspect of your sexual experience. The way of Jesus, the way of the Gospel is to give yourself up for the good of the Other. That goes for your bedroom as much as any other aspect of your life.

That's *not* what our culture tells us. We hear a thousand times a day to do what makes us feel good, to follow our hearts, to be in the moment. But Chastity warns us that those momentary feelings aren't to be trusted. That the Way of Jesus is better. It's harder, for sure. But it's better.

The choice we have to make is whether we'll give into our cravings or trust God's way. If we give into our bodies, if we listen to our cravings, our appetites, we get temporary pleasure. We feel good in the moment. We may even feel prettier or stronger or more connected and fulfilled in that moment.

But we are disobeying Scripture. We're willfully transgressing the Way God calls us to. And there are always consequences. God's way is life. Everything else is death. To choose not to live a chaste lifestyle - whether you're married or single - is to sow discord in your own life and in the larger life of this community you're a part of.

For example, many people today consider pornography to be more-or-less socially acceptable. Even setting aside how purely pornography turns reduces whole people to bodies to be bought and sold, it still can have devastating relational consequences. The vast majority of porn users are men who prefer images of young women. Fathers, then, who uses porn, pull away from their daughters once their daughters hit puberty. Suddenly their precious little girls begin to look far too much like the girls their brains have been rewired (thanks to years of pornographic images) to find arousing. The Father-Daughter relationship, which is supposed to be beautiful and life-affirming for both daddy and his little girl is instead a confusing mixture genuine love with shame and sexual urges. Both the father and the daughter suffer. That's just one example, and it's not even in the primary marriage relationship.

The reality is if your sexuality is disordered, if married or single you don't pursue chastity, your life will be discordant. Your witness for the Gospel is compromised. And rather than offering the world a compelling counter to the Cinderella story, we'll just participate in it. We'll get caught up in the same story that transformed brunette Norma Jean Mortenson into the plastic sex symbol Marilyn Monroe. And we know how poor Norma Jean's story ended. After more than a decade of being reduced to a body, a commodity to be advertised and sold, after years of looking for fulfillment, wholeness and love in all the wrong places, Marilyn's psychiatrist found her dead of an apparent suicide.

Norma Jean's story is the paradigm for all of us who refuse to live Chaste lives. When we refuse the Way of Jesus, we court death. Norma Jean's story was beautifully captured by Sir Elton John in a song called "Candle in the Wind". This song is a lament. For Norma Jean, but for all of us who live in a culture so confused about healthy sexuality.

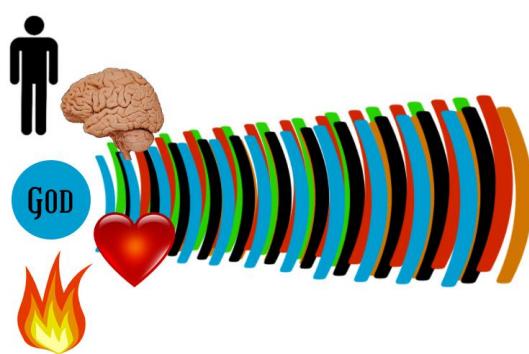
We've covered a lot of ground today. So during this song, I'd like to invite you to consider your own life. How chastely are you living? Are you sowing discord? Or are your heart, body, soul, mind and community aligned with the Gospel Way of Jesus?

Let us take seriously the messages about sex our culture is sending. Let us reject them, let us lament them together.

[["Candle in the Wind"](#)]

Sir Elton shames us by reminding us that Marilyn Monroe was really a broken little girl named Norma Jean. And rather than helping her to heal, our culture put her on a treadmill, changed her name, and spent the next decade exploiting her sexuality. And even when cruel machinery left her broken and dead, all we really cared about was not that a little girl named Norma Jean had died, but that even the scandal of how she was found was sexy.

If you listen to our culture's ideas about sex, this is where it takes you. And God has a better way.



To claim that sex is best expressed only inside a marriage covenant isn't just an old-fashioned idea. It's to claim that our bodies are an integral part of who we are, that God cares about our whole person and that our bodies as well as our souls are involved in the process of redemption and rescue.

To claim that sex belongs only inside a marriage covenant is to claim that we were designed to be whole persons and that we are most fully ourselves when our whole person is aligned with the way of Jesus.

So which will it be for you? Will you choose chastity? If you're married, will you choose to unite only with your spouse? To give yourself body and soul for the good of the other person? If you're single, will you choose to live as a single person who does not have sex, who is more than the sum of your cravings?

We can be a community that shows the world a better way to live. We can be a place that celebrates the Norma Jeans, not the manufactured Marilyns. We can show people that our bodies are good, that they matter, and that there is a Way that's better, the Way of Jesus.

But we have to get our act together here before we can have any credibility out there. So here, now, let us agree together, as the Body of Christ, to be chaste.

That way we are all singing the song of God, a clarion call of rescue and redemption to all the Norma Jeans desperately seeking something better.

[*Prayer*]

Response Time

“Be Thou My Vision”