

Jesus Culture: Relationships (II)

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[0 : 00] for his help. Heavenly Father, as we come to a portion of the Sermon of the Mount today, as we hear the words of our Lord Jesus, we know, Lord, that they can be quite sharp.

They can poke us in places that maybe we didn't expect. But Father, we just pray, Lord, that we would recognize that as your sweet grace.

And so, Father, I just pray that by your Holy Spirit, you would be working, and you would please help me to preach, not in my own strength, but in the power of your Holy Spirit. And let your word do its work amongst us today.

All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Have you ever held a toothbrush, eaten with a fork or spoon, or used a paperclip?

If so, then you know the importance of good design. The very best designs in the world are often invisible. Ensuring that your experience of the object in question is perfectly seamless.

[1 : 04] After all, when you're using a paperclip to clip together some documents, you're not thinking about how amazing the design is. You just do it, and it works. Similarly, there's a reason why the basic design of a fork and spoon has remained unchanged for thousands of years.

It works. On the other hand, flawed designs are obvious too, aren't they? For example, just look at these drawers now on the screen.

Now, neither drawer can open completely, can it? Whichever interior designer dreamt this up, I don't think he's going to get a recommendation in the future. A flawed design makes for a frustrating experience.

Or just take a look at this plate on the screen. It probably took you a few seconds to realise this, but those ends are not real. Rather, they're part of the plate's design.

I wonder which person thought it was a good idea to design a plate with patterns of ends on it. It's thoroughly off-putting. It's a surefire design fail.

[2 : 12] Many people today conclude the same about God's design for sex and marriage. God's design is flawed.

These people, they think about what they've heard from religious people, whether that's Christian or some other religion. And they remember, oh, they said, oh, don't have sex before marriage. Stop touching here, touching there.

Stop looking here, looking there. And they find that it all makes for a pretty frustrating and even off-putting experience. It's just like those drawers and plates.

Hmm, maybe God got other things right. But when it comes to sexuality and matrimony, sorry God, it's a design fail. Otherwise, why is the experience so frustrating?

And so many in our world today have decided that God's blueprint needs a redesign. They think of themselves as Coco Chanel. Now, Coco Chanel, of course, was the famous fashion designer who made her name in the early 20th century.

[3 : 19] And in 1926, she premiered and completely transformed the way the world regards an item of clothing, the little black dress.

Previously, black dresses were only associated with people in mourning. An association, of course, that we still make in some cultures today. And indeed, during that time, you will only see widows wearing black dresses as they grieved the husbands that they lost in the recent Spanish flu pandemic.

But Coco Chanel took the little black dress and made it cool and exciting as she reimagined its purpose from mourning to socializing.

So now you would see people wearing black dresses at parties. And that's how the world sees God's design. They look at God's original design for sexuality and they associated it with words like

lifeless and boring.

And so they reimagined and transformed it, convinced that they can do a better job of making it cool and exciting. And the basic rule the world does this is by saying, from now on, there's only one rule.

[4 : 36] The universe exists simply to serve only one purpose, to help me follow my heart and be true to myself. As long as my sexuality and my marriage is authentic, as long as it makes me happy and brings me relational benefits, as long as it fits with who I believe I am, everything is good.

And I don't need someone from outside, whether that's my parents, or society, or the church, to impose their rules on me. So long as no one is hurt, how I conduct my relationships is my business. Well, that's how you resist oppression. That's how you find freedom. Customize God's design to fit your life. But what I want us to understand today before we get into today's passage is that this isn't just something out there in the world.

Christians themselves are not immune to this narrative. Without realizing it, many of us have absorbed the world's basic assumptions that number one, freedom is found only when we feel we are being true to ourselves.

And number two, God's design can be customized according to our individual needs. And if those are our assumptions, then Jesus merely becomes a means to an end.

[6 : 09] He's there to help us meet those goals of being true to ourselves, of finding fulfillment.

Now, we would never say it like that, of course. And we might not even know that's what we think.

But our hearts have absorbed those assumptions. But how do we know if we have bought into those assumptions? And what happens if Jesus' own teachings don't fit them?

I want to propose that today's passage is a good test case. You see, when you heard Matthew 5, verse 27 to 37 being read out just now by Grace, what did you hear exactly?

If we have these assumptions in place, let me suggest to you how we would hear Jesus' words. We would hear Jesus saying, you shouldn't go seeking satisfaction.

While others are enjoying looking at stuff that isn't anybody else's business anyway, well, you need to be an old-fashioned moralistic prude. And we all know how much fun being a moral person is.

[7 : 21] As fun as having to cut off your right eye and your right hand. And look, I know you don't want to be tied down because you're afraid of making a mistake. But if you are tied down and convinced that you've made a mistake in choosing your marriage partner, well, too bad for you.

You need to stay married and unhappy even though it feels inauthentic. Never mind that you met someone the other night who really understood you inside out and made you feel good.

Do you see how accepting the world's narrative would have a dramatic impact on how you would hear Jesus' words today? You would find Jesus unreasonably negative.

You would find his words repressive. And a number of things could happen. You might sigh and say, alright, I'm a Christian, I follow Jesus, I'll do what he says, you know, don't look, don't touch, don't bail out.

But you'll be robbed of your joy because deep down you believe you are getting the inferior product. You believe God's design is flawed when compared to the world's redesign of it.

[8 : 36] And you will struggle along. And you certainly won't be able to convince anyone else that what Jesus says here is a good thing because you don't believe it yourself.

He's simply being arbitrary and repressive. Or, you might decide that while Christianity was fine for you once upon a time, well, now it's no longer fine.

It was good when Jesus said things that spoke to my heart. But now that it doesn't and these words certainly don't, it's time to find something else. But this morning, what I want to do is to say, what if it's those assumptions that are flawed?

What if God's design for sex and marriage and relationships was actually completely good? But we just didn't recognize it. What if Matthew 5 verse 27 to 37 is all about Jesus showing us where true freedom lies?

Now, it sure doesn't sound like it, but let's survey the evidence. How is the world's design for sex and marriage going so far? Exhibit A is the Me Too movement.

[9 : 51] What the movement revealed is how shockingly commonplace sexual harassment is, emerging out of a framework that privileges instant gratification and power.

It has a profound impact on women especially, simultaneously conferring shame and insecurity on them. And don't make the mistake of thinking that this is just a Western thing.

Just last week, a Malaysian woman shared her experience of sexual harassment on Twitter, which then opened the floodgates for many other Malaysian women to share their own experiences. And over the years, I've heard some first-hand accounts myself. Exhibit B is the divorce rate. A couple of years ago, Datuk Fatima Abdullah, our state women and families minister, expressed alarm at the skyrocketing divorce rate in Sarawak, noting that the majority of people getting divorced had been married for five years or less.

Financial pressures was found to be one big factor, but interestingly, incompatibility was another. And so, if anything, the evidence at the very least shows that the world's design isn't as perfect as advertised either.

[11:13] And so, with all that said, let's give Jesus' words this morning another chance. And I'll encourage you, especially those of my generation and younger, to hear them afresh.

I know I took longer than usual to set things up before we dive into the passage, but I think we needed to make all those things clear, or we might not even give Jesus a hearing. We immediately dismiss him as wanting to take away our freedom and being restrictive. And I hope that as we explore the passage this morning, you will find that yes, there is no one more challenging than Jesus, but there is also no one more compassionate than Jesus.

For he is inviting us to step outside of the world's culture, and once again, embrace Jesus' culture. And Jesus' culture at its heart is about restoring God's original design.

It's about helping us find true freedom, not because we choose what we want, but because we choose what we were made for. And Jesus promises, if you stay faithful to God's design in the area of your sexuality, your marriage, and more broadly, your communicative patterns, well, you will flourish.

[12:39] And so those are the three areas we look at this morning, and I'll spend most of our time on the first one for today. Firstly, stay faithful to God's design in your sexuality.

Verse 27. You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. Once again, Jesus is citing one of the Ten Commandments.

And in general, I think the rightness of this particular commandment is still accepted by most people in our day. No one who is married and discovers that their spouse is off having sexual relations with someone else thinks it's a good idea.

And certainly not the Jews or Pharisees in Jesus' day. After all, if you committed adultery, you were breaking several of the Ten Commandments at once. You were coveting someone else, you were stealing his wife, and most likely, you were lying to achieve your aims as well.

But if we leave it just at that level, then just like last week, this commandment doesn't really touch us. We think, as long as I'm not sleeping with someone else's wife, I'm not guilty.

[13:55] In fact, I can point to this commandment and show how much I'm actually better than this person or that person that I know. But Jesus, of course, doesn't stop there, and this is where it gets interesting.

What is Jesus going to say? Verse 28, But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Wow! Once again, Jesus holds up God's law and asks us to look at it through the Jesus prism. And Jesus says, adultery doesn't begin with an act.

It begins with the heart. It begins at the level of desire. And although Jesus approaches this from the perspective of a male, presumably because he's speaking to a predominantly male audience, he of course means it to apply to both guys and girls.

The heart is where the real action is at because we plot our actions by our desires. But what is Jesus talking about here?

[15:07] Now, he isn't talking about the first spark of attraction you feel when you notice for the first time the physical form of a guy or a girl who has just walked into the room.

Now, that's to be human. God has made us embodied creatures who are naturally attracted to certain forms of embodied beauty. We can be confident of this because we have a book in the Bible called The Song of Songs which celebrates appropriate sexual desire and human beauty. And if we get this wrong and think that Jesus is forbidding even this, then we're reaching for an impossible ethic that Jesus never intended.

We will be frustrated for the wrong reasons. But what Jesus is talking about is what follows on from that initial spark.

It is the second and the third look he's talking about. You see, lust is to keep looking with the intention to fan the flames of desire within you, especially sexual desire.

[16:20] When we first feel the spark of attraction, we're meant to note it and then redirect that spark away to other things, or if you're married, back to your spouse.

But sin starts at the point we choose not to redirect that spark of attraction. It's when a look becomes the look. We look because we want to desire.

The look leads to certain thoughts and those thoughts turn to fantasies. And sometimes it goes beyond just fantasies. That's when sometimes we get full-blown adultery.

But Jesus' point is this. It began long before. The law declared the adulterous act as wrong and evil. But Jesus declares the intention that brings it forth as no less wrong and evil.

if so, then the question to ask in such situations is, why are you looking? Why are you looking again?

[17:29] What is going on in your heart as you look? See, it's not just about what you do with your body in the bedroom, but what you do with your eyes outside the bedroom.

Now at this point, one might ask, why? Why does Jesus take this so seriously? After all, it's just going on in my mind.

No one else will ever know. No one else will ever get hurt. It's innocent. It's harmless. But Jesus says it's wrong because it spoils God's perfect and beautiful design.

You see, what did God create sex for? He created it as the deepest and purest form of what some theologians call self-donation.

Now what that means is that the sexual embrace is the most intimate, complete, self-giving and self-surrendering act a human being can engage in.

[18:30] It's about two people saying to each other, I'm giving myself fully, exclusively and permanently to you. And that's why it's reserved for marriage because marriage is when you promise to do those things.

And sex is when you make those promises concrete. But lust is when you say, oh, it's not about you, but it's all about me. Another person's sexuality has become reduced to a commodity.

You are no longer a person to be known, and love, but you exist as an object simply for my gratification. And lust doesn't just remain inside of you, because it affects how you see any and every relationship.

You see, imagine an entire society that is affected by the attitude that underlies lust. It's an attitude that says it's all about me. It's an attitude that says I never give of myself to others.

I only take from others, sometimes even without their permission or knowledge. And if that is the fundamental attitude we bring to our relationships, then it's no surprise that our relationships end up in a mess, doesn't it?

[19:51] It is the lie of the devil to say lust never harm anybody, and so indulging in a pattern of lust won't do anything to you or to anyone else.

Around a decade ago, the musician John Mayer gave a really honest interview. After admitting his use of internet pornography, he said this, Internet pornography has absolutely changed my generation's expectations.

How does that not affect the psychology of having a relationship with somebody? It's got to. Well, this is my problem now. Rather than meet somebody new, I would rather go home and replay the amazing experiences I've already had.

What that explains is that I'm more comfortable in my imagination than I am in actual human discovery. In other words, his internet porn use had a destructive impact on his real life relationships.

Perhaps he compared what was going on on the screen with what was going on in his real life and the fantasy simply didn't match reality. You see, the world doesn't improve on God's design for the world.

[21:05] It actually destroys it. You see, we could easily think of Jesus' words here as incredibly burdensome. But what Jesus is really doing here with these words is restoring our freedom and honour.

Think again about what Jesus is really saying. He's saying to you if you're tempted to lust, don't go there, my friend. God created you for relationship with him and with others.

And when those relationships are healthy, you are healthy. You are in the sweet spot. But if you follow the way of lust, you'll be caught in a web of deceit and shame.

Your relationships will become poorer as a result. You'll be promised freedom, but you won't be free. And he's not just saying something to the person lusting.

He's also saying something about the person being lusted at. To that person, Jesus is saying, you are so precious, your sexuality cannot be violated.

[22 : 19] Not even in the privacy of someone else's mind. That's how much I care about you. Looking with lust is so serious precisely because a person's sexuality is so valuable.

And so do you see how Jesus is both challenging and compassionate like no other? Do you see how much Jesus cares for you with these words of his?

He is no frowning traditionalist. He is a radical reformer passionately exposing the world's flawed design. And that's why he says radical action must be taken.

Verses 29 and 30. If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.

And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

[23 : 27] Whatever action needs to be taken, do it. That's his point. Not so much that you need to literally ready the chopper, but that you must act if you're in danger.

Now what would that look like? Well let's look again at these verses. What does Jesus seem to be implying here? Firstly, he seems to be implying take the necessary action.

In other words, it's probably not random that the eye and the hand are the body parts that are chosen. It isn't the knee or the foot, because those are the parts that are complicit in the sin.

Quite often isn't it, when we have sin in these areas, we often feel guilty. And when we feel guilty, sometimes we try to make up for it in other areas.

I look at something that I shouldn't have, so I'll make up for it by making sure that I go to Bible study and prayer meeting this week, and then I'll do some extra volunteering for the church.

[24 : 33] I'll try to earn my holiness points in other areas. But Jesus says, if it's the eye or the hand that is causing you to sin, then deal with the eye or the hand.

Take the necessary action. Secondly, he seems to be implying, take decisive action. If that colleague of yours is dominating your thoughts, then don't even try to strike up a conversation with him or her.

If necessary, you might even request to change department. If the internet is a problem, then even though it's expensive, you might want to install Covenant Eyes, the accountability software.

Or even though it feels frightening, you might want to confess it to a trusted brother or sister in Christ. Not so that they can condemn you, but so that they can help you.

Because what are the consequences are not taking action. The end of verse 30 warns us, this is a matter of heaven and hell.

[25 : 42] This could lead to permanent separation between somebody and God. Now, I'm aware that this could raise a whole load of questions and even anguish for some of you.

Perhaps some of you are already thinking about past failures in this area. And so let me just say two things quickly before we move on. Number one, all of us are sexual sinners.

There is absolutely no one listening right now who has never sinned in this area. We might not have slept with anybody, but we definitely had thoughts we know are wrong.

We cannot cast the first stone. number two, Jesus cares for you. Remember, that's why he is saying these strong words.

He wants to restore you. Now, if you can remember back that far, remember the first sermon in this series. Remember that the Sermon on the Mount is founded on dependence.

[26 : 46] It is a sermon meant for people who are poor in spirit and mournful over their sin. And it is an exhortation for people to daily go back to God and to say, our heavenly father, forgive us our sin, your will be done.

You see, if that's you today, Jesus isn't here to point an accusing finger at you. He's here to restore you and to ensure that there is no permanent separation between you and God.

In a healthy family, a son who is in trouble will pick up the phone and call his dad. and say, dad, I need help.

And that's what Jesus wants you to do. To pick up the phone, to call on God and say, dad, I need help.

And so this takes us to the second area of God's design that we want to look at for today. Secondly, stay faithful to God's design in marriage.

[27 : 53] Verse 31. It has been said, anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce. Now, divorce was never part of God's original design.

Jesus himself makes that clear later on in Matthew 19 verse 8. But Jesus also knows that the Old Testament did permit divorce because of our hardened hearts and the fallenness of our world. It was never endorsed, but it was regulated in Deuteronomy 24. And in Jesus' day, there was a debate going on how to apply those verses in Deuteronomy, which is what Jesus is referring to in verse 31.

And basically, one influential group was saying, if a wife did anything that was displeasing to her husband, or was considered displeasing to her husband, he is justified in divorcing her.

Wasn't dinner bad? Obtain a certificate of divorce. Didn't like her makeup? Obtain a certificate of divorce. Basically, they took what Moses permitted and turned it into a permissiveness where anything goes.

[29 : 07] Marriage was just a game, and the certificate of divorce had become the magic card that allowed you to exit the game. And men especially benefited from this arrangement.

But once again, Jesus says, no, no, no, you're twisting God's design to suit yourself. In having a permissive interpretation of the law, they were actually twisting its intention.

The law in Deuteronomy 24 is quite complicated, but the basic idea behind having a certificate then was to protect the woman from being exploited.

But what was originally a law intended to safeguard the interests of women, now becomes a loophole exploited by unfaithful men. And so in verse 32, Jesus is basically saying, think about what you're doing.

But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

[30 : 18] By divorcing on frivolous grounds, you're voluntarily breaking a marriage that is otherwise intact. In that sense, you have made the woman a victim of adultery.

Why? You see, in that culture, it's very likely that she would remarry. But since the first marriage had not been justifiably broken, the second husband is now technically committing adultery, since the first marriage can still be considered valid in the sight of God.

And so basically, by treating marriage like a game that you can enter and exit as you wish, Jesus says, you are messing things up for everybody.

It's just like playing uno with three different players following three different set of rules. marriage.

And so Jesus is basically saying, I have a very high view of marriage.

It's a one-flesh permanent union as God designed it. And that's why I'm against divorce, especially as you guys are practicing it. But just like Moses, I know sin exists, Jesus says.

[31 : 32] And so Jesus grants an exception clause in verse 32, sexual immorality. Basically, that refers to adultery or some sort of very serious sexual sin.

In this case, divorce is permitted. Although, this is very important to note, it's not obligated. That's because in such cases, what has happened is so serious that the marriage is already destroyed. Divorce is simply formalizing the reality. And so Jesus is urging us, stay faithful. If you're not married, understand that marriage is not a game.

If you're married, understand the seriousness of the covenant that you're committed yourself to. I said that at the beginning of this sermon that in our world, the basic rule for many of us is to be true to yourself and to seek ultimate fulfillment.

That's the basic assumption. And tied to that assumption is that if something works for me and fulfills me for a while, but it doesn't work after that, well, I can move on.

[32 : 46] I should always look for something better. I should hold open all future options. We apply that to our phones. That's why people are always upgrading. We apply that to our jobs.

that's why I personally know people who are always moving companies. And we can apply that sort of thinking too to our relationships and marriages. My commitment is only conditioned on the premise that I can't find something better.

But that kind of attitude only sows the seeds of distrust and makes relationships more fragile. But Jesus says, trust me, God's original design for marriage as a lifelong union isn't flawed. Passion is good, it's a driving force of love, but it comes and goes. But true commitment is the protective boundary of love. It provides safety and security from which intimacy can thrive. Just look at God's own love for us. How do we know we can trust God? Well, one of the ways we can read the entire Bible from beginning to end is as the story of a marriage between God and His people.

[34 : 10] And it's a story about how God has remained committed to His covenant promises, to stay faithful to His word that He will one day bring blessing to the entire world.

It's a story where there's conflict and disappointment and heart ache. It's all present. Just read the Old Testament. And yet God perseveres. And it's a story with a happy ending because one day God will be with His bride face to face forever in relational intimacy.

Marriage points to the gospel and that same gospel gives us confidence that God's original design and His absolute commitment is very good.

But I also know that Jesus' words here can cut very close to the heart for one or two of you listening in this morning. Maybe you've been betrayed or divorced.

And if that's you, I want you to know Jesus knows what it's like to be betrayed by someone close to Him. Jesus knows what it's like to be abandoned and so He will weep with you.

[35 : 26] And in verses 31 and 32, remember Jesus is concerned to protect the victim. He will stand with you. For others of you, it cuts to the heart because you know you've done wrong in this area and have suffered the consequences.

Or maybe right now your marriage is in trouble. And if that's you, then don't ever forget, in Christ, hope and forgiveness is available.

In Ezekiel chapter 16, God portrays the relationship with His people as a covenant marriage. He washed her and He adorned her.

God's people betrayed Him. But in verse 15, this is what happens. You trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute.

God's people betrayed Him. And they did suffer the consequences. But that wasn't the end of the story. Because later on, in Ezekiel 36 verse 25 to 26, we read this, God says, all is not lost.

[36 : 51] I will cleanse you again. And I can turn things around. That's my specialty. Rebuilding a marriage is hard work. But God says my transforming grace is available.

The question is, are you ready to trust God to pick up the broken pieces or the breaking pieces and recommit to His design for marriage?

Well, I think time is getting on, so let me just briefly touch on our third area for today. Thirdly, stay faithful to God's design in your communicative patterns.

That's verses 33 to 37. Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the oaths you have made.

But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is God's throne, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great king.

[38 : 01] And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply yes or no. Anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

Once again, what this section has in common with the previous verses is taking something that God has designed and twisting it to suit our own purposes. You see, Jesus doesn't appear to be quoting a single command from the Old Testament here.

But summarizing what the Old Testament says about oaths, in the Old Testament, people were allowed to swear by God's name to substantiate their promises.

Your vow was voluntary, but once you took it, it was binding. But by Jesus' day, the Jews had developed an elaborate system of oaths.

Basically, the basic idea was that you could swear not just by God, but by many other things. The heavens, the earth, the city, and the temple, being just some of the examples.

[39 : 06] And depending on what you swore by, it was less binding than others, and they were all less binding than if you swore on the name of God. So, it sounded very impressive if you swore by heaven.

But since you didn't actually call on God's name, well, you could technically backtrack on your word. Later, you say, oh, I didn't swear by God's name, so it's not binding. And Jesus says, stop!

Stop twisting how words work! After all, these things all still belong to God anyway. Even your head, which you think uniquely belongs to you, is from God, since He's the one who determines your hair color, not you.

So don't twist words or anything else in creation to suit your own purposes. Just say yes or no. The point is, if you're a disciple of Jesus, your word should be so full of integrity that that's enough. Now, Jesus isn't forbidding all use of oaths as in court. Rather, his point is that we are not to be people who casually make promises that we cannot or won't keep.

[40 : 27] Well, this still happens today, doesn't it? People sometimes say, I swear to God. But if you need to do that, you're probably not in a good place already because you need oaths to back up your words.

and if you need oaths constantly to back up your words, it shows that your normal pattern is that you don't usually do what you say. And we Christians can be just as bad sometimes.

Think about it. Perhaps we get invited to a Bible study or seminar or ask to help out at Sunday school. And we say, sure, sure, sure, I'll come. But we don't actually have any real intention to be committed to it.

As soon as something else pops up, or something that we deem better comes up, we make our excuses at the last minute and then we don't show up. It's that same basic assumption again, isn't it?

Where we want to have all the options open to us all the time, and we just want to take the best option that would fulfill us. Oh, words are God's gift to us to help us to relate to one another.

[41 : 38] But so often we use them and we twist them to hide our lack of commitment to each other. And Jesus says that's not Jesus' culture, that's Satan's culture.

Verse 37 again. All you need to say is simply yes or no, anything beyond this comes from the evil one. Today's passage is some of Jesus' most challenging words in the Sermon on the Mount. I know that they've challenged me greatly, and I trust that they've challenged you as well. And I'm aware, like I said at the beginning, that I haven't been able to touch on many other matters that are related to sex and marriage and relationships.

And so if today's sermon has raised some questions that hasn't really been answered, please do feel free to get in touch with me. But I hope you've also seen how Jesus presents an alternative vision for our relationships.

I hope you've seen how good God's original design is, and how the sharp edge of Jesus' words today is designed to set us free, not to oppress us.

[42 : 59] You know, if all we said is, don't lust, don't get divorced, keep your word, and then we just leave it like that, well, Christianity is really just like any other religion. But when we understand that these words are the instruments that God is using to restore us as his masterpieces, to restore us to be who we were made to be, so that we can be as beautiful, as he intends us to be, then we realize that this is good news.

So hear these words as the words of our Savior and our Restorer. I'm just going to give us a few seconds now, let what we've heard this morning sing in, and then I'm going to lead us in prayer. Heavenly Father, we come today and we know that your word is living and active, and right now perhaps for some of us it is particularly living and active.

Father, we pray now, and I certainly pray for anyone listening in, that you would be close to them, that you would draw them to yourself, and help them to know that you are for them, that you want the best for them.

And Father, we come before you acknowledging that all of us, without exception, have failed in one way or another in the areas that we've heard about this morning.

[45 : 06] And so Father, please help us to come to you, knowing that you want to forgive us in Christ. So grant us a heart of repentance. repentance. And I pray that for anyone this morning who might be struggling in one or two of these areas, that you would move them to take action.

And Father, we ask, Lord, that you would indeed restore us and bring something beautiful out of today's sermon, so that we can be strengthened as your disciples and live in a way that is counter cultural to our world's assumptions and values.

So Lord, please be with us this morning. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.