Transcript: Biblical Sexuality Session 02

Okay, excited to be back together this morning. Thank you so much. Um, I do this enough to, um, I do this enough to quickly discern, um, whether I have an eager crowd or I have a glazed-over, when's-this-going-to-be-over crowd. And you all are an eager crowd. It is so fun to talk to people who want to listen and are eager to listen. And so thank you for last night. Uh, not just the questions, but the conversations afterwards is it's very, it was very obvious to me that the Lord, um, is stirring something, um, within your congregation around the subject. And I think context matters. Um, I, I presented this material, um, really, uh, certainly all over the country, but also in different parts of the world. And it's really interesting to me. Um, I think, I think one connection I've made is, um, it, it matters the cultural context of where it is. So I've, um, I've done this, you know, all over the American South and small town, you know, uh, Southern PCA churches and so forth. And, and they appreciate stuff like that. But like, like when I did this in Toronto, um, it was as if like, I had this audience of like, please, please, I'm dying for Christian discipleship in this area because it's everywhere. And I think even though Nashville is in some, in many ways, a major Southern city, it is, I think with the nature of the arts scene and the, and the creativity of the city and so forth. I think, I think your context in particular, um, is, is a, is a place that is desperate for instruction in this area. And so hopefully, um, particularly with this talk, I think hopefully I can I can aid you in that. Um, so last night we began what I'm calling this sacred story of Eros love that I'm arguing is at the heart of God's story from eternity past. We are, uh, like I said, last night, I'll continue to say today, we are very careful not to sexualize the Trinity in any way, however, the Trinity has forever existed in an eternal exchange of love and that love is revealed and experienced most within the image bearer experience through the exchange of Eros through the one flesh union of male and female image bearers. That's the closest you will ever get this side of eternity to experience and taste the heights and depths and ecstasies of God's love. Okay. So in the second lecture, we come to kind of the tragedy of this love story that I'm telling, we know from our novels and films that every love story from the classics like Romeo and Juliet to the cheesy, you know, Hallmark romcoms, all of them, um, contain a tragedy that threatens love. And the reason we tell our stories this way is because we instinctively know that this is the story we inhabit a story of broken love. So having explored the beautiful revelation of love and Genesis one and two, now we're going to turn our attention to Genesis three and explore what I'm calling the redirection of Eros. And the reason why I use the word redirection is because that's what sin has done to Eros. We have not repudiated the erotic within us. It remains alive as the most compelling aspect of the human existence. What has changed all comes down to the direction of Eros. So Genesis two ends with this beautiful climactic declaration of the creation narrative and the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. I'm doing a pretty good job of saying naked. My wife, every time I go to do this conference, she says, don't say naked. It is just like, it never, do you sound more like a Kentucky way? This is Tennessee. So maybe you can handle it a little naked, but every time she's like, just please, can you say naked and said naked. So I'm doing a good job. But, um, so, so they are naked and without shame. And then immediately in Genesis three, the enemy of God tempts God's image away from their destiny. They succumb to the temptation and take of that, which is forbidden. And it is right to interpret the fall into sin in the broadest sense as a universal sinful nature, leading to sins of every kind, but have you considered

the specific consequences that immediately manifest in Genesis three, he created male and female. They were naked and without shame, they break God's command. And then verse seven says, then the eyes of both were opened and they knew that they were naked and they sewed fig leaves together and made loin cuffs for themselves, the consequence of the fall is immediately manifested in their nakedness, specifically the sacred area of their nakedness. And this is the underappreciated emphasis of Genesis three. Then the eyes of both were open. It's not that they were blind before is that they now see something they had never seen. And they knew that they were naked. They were naked before, but now they see their nakedness differently. What has changed? The clue is that next phrase and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. The first thing sinners do is put on underwear. The genitals that we celebrated last night now need protection. There is something about this new found perspective that specifically threatens the sexual differences between male and female. They are now vulnerably exposed to something dangerous and they instinctively know this to be true. And they know that they need to protect that part of themselves from the other. What is this new found threat? John Paul argues that love has been replaced by lust. The first seminal passage in Theology of the Body that we explored last night were the words of Jesus, but from the beginning, it was not sewed. The second seminal word from Jesus that speaks to fallen sexuality is from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus says, "Whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery." We are accustomed to think of adultery by its conventional meaning. And certainly the breaking of marriage vows is the full manifestation of lustful adultery. But Jesus is getting at the heart of what adultery truly is here and the reason why it applies to all of us in this room. Adultery literally means to alter, distort, change, corrupt, adulterate something from its original design and purpose. And according to Jesus, lust is the instrument of adulteration. Anyone who looks upon another, not to love them, but to lust for them has committed adultery. Adultery of what? What has been adulterated? Eros. Lust changes Eros into something it was never intended to be. That's the look Adam and Eve see for the first time. No longer do they look upon each other's nakedness in order to love, but in order to lust. And there is a huge difference between the two. And the difference all comes down to the direction of Eros' love. Again, Eros is still very present in fallen image bearers, but Eros has been redirected. And the redirection is away from another and toward the self. Where once Eros was designed to be selfless, it is now selfish. Where once Eros was a window, it is now a mirror. No longer a window through which we are given this beautiful glimpse into the love of the Trinity is now a mirror reflecting our love of self. And in this way, lust turns Eros from an icon that we discussed last night into an idol. The word icon simply means image. When the scriptures say we are made in the image of God is saying that we are icons of the divine. But what happens when the image turns inward on itself, when the image is no longer concerned with what it was created to image, but instead becomes obsessed and concerned only with the self. Well, then the icon becomes an idol, an idol of self-worship, self-love. And so now Eros, created as the most powerful icon of God's love, becomes the most powerful idol of self-love. Like I said last night, Eros was originally designed after the eternal exchange of love within the Trinity. That exchange, that eternal love exchange within the Trinity is a selfless exchange, not a selfish exchange. Each person of the Trinity forever gives love, but because each is giving love, each is likewise receiving love. Well, there's a huge difference between receiving and taking. And the former, you enjoy that which you have already given, and the latter, you are taking that which you are unwilling to give, and this is the essence of lust. Lust never gives, it only takes. So at the core of fallen human sexuality is that love's exchange has been replaced by lust's exploitation. And what happens when that happens? What happens is rules no longer apply except the rule of self. When Eros

was defined by the Trinity, then erotic love had to follow the will of God to be accomplished. But lust redirects Eros towards self, and therefore erotic lust must follow my will in order to be accomplished. Simply put, God sets the rules of love. I set the rules of lust. Therefore, now there are no rules except the rule that my lust must be satisfied. And those lustful desires don't have to just be about sexual pleasure. Often they are not. After the fall, God declared that lust, that sin is going to create this power struggle between the genders. He says to Eve, your desire will be for him. That's not a loving, good desire. That's a lustful desire. But he will rule over you. That's not loving authority. That's lustful authority. And there are certainly exceptions to this rule. Hear me say that. There are exceptions to this rule. But historically speaking, this is how lust tends to play out between the genders. Again, there are exceptions, but by and large, historically speaking, men tend to use power to gain sex, women tend to use sex to gain power, men tend to manipulate to gain sex, women tend to use sex to manipulate, men tend to give attention to gain sex, women tend to give sex to gain attention. And the point I'm trying to make is that both are approaching sex with lustful intentions, though the taking from the other might manifest differently. Both are seeking to take rather than to give. And so once love's giving has been replaced by lust's taking as the central human impulse, suddenly Pandora's box is open and the unique power of Eros that we discussed last night, designed to be creation's greatest glory, is unleashed as the source of creation's greatest ruin. Nothing in all creation is more powerful than the erotic. That was true before the fall, and tragically that is true after the fall. The fall has innumerable devastating effects, but the reason why this aspect of the human existence is singled out in the creation narrative of one and two, and is singled out in the Genesis fall narrative of chapter three, the reason why it is emphasized in both is because it is the most powerful part of both, the most powerful part of creation and the most powerful part of the fall. Throughout all of history, nothing has proven more destructive and ruinous than sinners compelled by lust's exploitation. Now that's true of history, but it's especially true in our time. I was asked earlier about my PhD research, and it's in the field of early American history. And what I quickly discovered when I got into that world of academia is that historians hate the word unprecedented, because nearly every time it's not true. How many times during COVID did you hear the word unprecedented times? Pandemics are not unprecedented. They're actually quite normal to history, and this is certainly true when it comes to the history of lust. Every form of fallen lustful sexuality that we see today has been around in some way since the fall. Okay. That being said, what I want to do, and I think is most helpful for us contextually speaking and personally, maybe for your lives, what I want to do at the remaining time of this talk is to explore the two ways I wish to argue we are living in unprecedented times of redirected Eros. So I've spoken generally about lust's exploitation, but I don't think it's going to be helpful to you if I don't get specific and honest about how that is specifically playing out in unprecedented ways where we find ourselves. And there are two ways that we need to appreciate technology and identity. What has technology and identity done to fallen Eros? Technology has magnified its devastation, and identity has solidified its devastation. Let me show you what I mean. First, let's consider fallen Eros in this technological age where we're living. I get asked to speak on sexuality and gender a lot, but most recently, most of the times I'm speaking, it's on technology. That was another research project of mine. I would be happy to come back to your church and speak on technology because frankly, I think technology needs to be at the top of the list of Christian discipleship right now. So I'm talking about technology all the time. And what is unique about the technological age that we are upon us is that technology has not created new sin, new evil, technology has magnified and turned the sins that used to be fairly limited by common grace. It has exponentially magnified their destruction, and this is true of lusts. Nothing new about lust exploitation, but what

technology has done is magnify exploitation in unprecedented ways. Here we come to the role of the internet and quickly approaching now, of course, AI. This technology has made lust so efficient that nearly every historical boundary that once, in a sense, curbed the lust of humanity, all those boundaries are being eliminated. Now, before I explore this, let me say that I know this one will be very personal for some, maybe many in this room, whether personal for you or personal for a child or a grandchild. So I never talk about this without a preface here. Pornography addiction runs on shame. We have to have this discussion, but my concern is that in so doing your shame will only deepen, and ironically, a Christian talk on this will send you right back into porn's shameful cycle. So we preface what I'm about to say with a dignifying word to you. Hear me say this very clearly, brothers and sisters. Yes, sister, you are not alone in your pornography usage. Women are the fastest growing demographic of online pornographic content. And yet every single one of them thinks they're the only one on the planet doing that, a lie that only compounds the shame and only reinforces the cycle. So hear me, brothers and sisters. Rather than shame you, I want to appeal to your dignity, your honor. Two things can be true. Your consumption is sinful and porn is ensnaring you by preying upon something incredibly beautiful and noble within you, your sexuality that we discussed last night. Behind even the most twisted expressions of fallen Eros is the glorious vision of Eros that I laid out for us last evening. Here's what's going on. Pornographers are tricking you. By preying upon something beautiful in you, but twisting it and leaving you feeling gross and worthless so that you will return once again to their deception and one day, pornographers, unless they repent and cast themselves upon the mercy of Jesus Christ, one day, pornographers will pay for what they have done to you. When they stand before almighty God and discover it would have been better for a millstone to be tied around their neck and cast into the depths of the sea rather than cause just one child of God to sin, they will pay for what they have done to you. As for you, child of God, your participation is wrong and it is sinful, but you are not beyond God's forgiveness, cleansing, healing, and redemption. Pornography is gross, but in the eyes of Lord, you're not gross. You are loved, so hold that in mind as we discuss this. What is pornography? When discussing the difference between pornography and art, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously said, "I know it when I see it." And indeed, this is true, isn't it? You can instinctively tell the difference, but what is the difference that you are intuiting? It all comes down to the intent of the artist. The artist and the pornography are both displaying the human body, but with opposite intentions. Our family got to visit Italy a couple of years ago, and we toured all the famous art museums, and it's just too much to take in if you've been over there, you know what it's like. So we just told our tour guide, just give us the Ninja Turtle tour, right? Like just give us Michelangelo, Donatello, Leonardo, all stuff. And so we did the Ninja Turtle tour of these art museums. And let me tell you, my four boys, ages 7, 11, 12, and 15 at the time, saw a lifetime worth of nudity in those museums. But Abby and I had no problem with it. But if those museums were filled with pornified nudity, it would have ruined their lives. Now, why? What's the difference? The artist showcases the human body as a glory to behold. The pornographer exploits the human body as a commodity to consume. Simply put, art echoes original Eros, porn echoes fallen Eros. Now there's nothing new about pornography. It's been around since we've had the ability to create it. So I am not calling pornography unprecedented. What's unprecedented is the technological proliferation of pornified Eros. Technology has eliminated nearly every historical boundary. Communal boundaries have been overcome. You alone with your screen in a locked room. Embarrassment boundaries have been overcome. Private browsing and anonymity. Content boundaries have been overcome. It is an inexhaustible supply. Accessibility boundaries have been overcome. It is available to you in your pocket as we speak. I grew up with the curtain of the movie

rental store. Don't go there. And then these seedy shops in the worst parts of town. It's in your pocket now. Preference, twisted preference boundaries have been overcome. There is no twisted lust you seek that you cannot find. In some ways, even physical boundaries are being overcome with the quickly evolving technology of AI and virtual reality, but if you still want the physical, which research is showing less and less actually do, but if you still do want the real thing, technology has an answer for that too, you could download an app and today locate someone in this area willing to meet up with you for mutual lustful exploitation. So the fall redirected Eros from selfless love to selfish lust and modern technology has essentially removed all limitations of that fallen redirection. There is no limit to exploitation in our society. Now, what are the consequences? Way too many to speak of. I could do an entire conference just on that, but for the purposes of our discussion on the beauty of human sexuality, Theology of the Body, the ubiquity of pornography as now a mainstream, not a taboo experience, a mainstream experience, there was a study done that, this is a Canadian study in Ontario, University of Ontario, and they wanted to see if they can measure, they wanted to see if they can measure the effects of pornography usage on the rising generation of men. See if we can actually research this and study it and see what it's doing. And, and the study, and this, they couldn't pull off the study. The research failed. For one simple reason, they couldn't find a, a test case. They could, they couldn't find men who had not viewed it to establish a baseline comparison. So they just had to give up on the study because we literally can't find young men who have not done this to even measure what is pornography doing to men. That is how mainstream this experience has been and what it has led to for the purpose of the discussion on beauty of sexuality for us is a nearly universal pornographic view of the body where God's beautiful design for our bodies that I spoke of last night has nearly been erased. Again, the difference between art and pornography comes down to the intent of the creator. Well, brothers and sisters, God is an artist, not a pornographer. But it is nearly impossible to view his divine artistry as anything but pornographic. The body in our society has become a cultural commodity of lust. We don't even know how to look at each other without exploitation in mind. Again, that's always been true, but never like it is for us in our porn saturated society. What a crafty scheme of our adversary who wants nobody to know God's love. To vandalize the central revelation of God's love by using technological progress to give God's image a pornographic definition, turning God into this exploitive pornographer rather than the loving artist that he is. Cursed be that thought, right? And if you are participating, I love the word that he gave of, "Hey, this is going to stir stuff up, we have pastors," and that's good with talks like this. So I will just say, if you are participating in that technological exploitation, that I can tell you the number one reason, perhaps the only reason that God's providence has you sitting in that seat, you are here for me as a minister of God on his behalf to tell you it's past time for you to stop. It is. In the name of God's glory and your health, but I would even add in the name of undefiled Eros love, renounce this exploitation of God's image. But you can't do that alone. As one who has been walking in sobriety in this area for now decades, I can tell you personally, you cannot do this alone. You have to come to your church and you are blessed by a church that will love you, not shame you. You have to come to your church. You have to finally tell the truth and let them help you find freedom. I cannot tell you how beautiful a porn-free life is, and that can be yours. Now let's turn to the next unprecedented development of our time, identity. So technology has magnified lust in unprecedented ways. Identity has solidified lust in unprecedented ways. Now, let me give a warning here. This is not like a content warning here, trigger warning. This is an intellectual warning. What I'm about to say, I'm going to get a little bit more TT intellectually luxury over the next, give me five to 10 minutes here, and I'm going to do my best to do it slow and make sure that you're following my

argument here. But really try to hang with me because this is so paramount to understanding what is transpiring in our society. I'm going to get a little academic, but I'm going to try to do it in a way that you can absolutely follow along. But I guess I'm just saying, wake up, put your thinking hats on, and listen to me for 10 minutes, okay? Because chances are you're probably in a vocational space with LGBTQ+ neighbors and friends, chances are maybe you have a child or a grandchild or a neighbor, you Christians have to understand this moment. And I'm going to do my best to help you understand the history of this moment. And if for no other reason you lead today and you say, I get it now, that's what I want to do right now. Carl Trueman has written a massively important book called The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self. It's not an easy read, but I'm going to do my best to give you the cliff notes highlights of his scholarship, because it's very important to understand. Trueman set out to research a simple question around a simple statement. I am a woman trapped in a man's body. Trueman wanted to understand how that statement could go from incoherent to coherent, from outlandish to ordinary in the span of essentially one generation. And what Trueman's research shows is that you can't make sense of it if you focus on sexuality and gender. You have to understand something that every single one of us in this room shares, no matter our sexuality and gender, the preeminence of self. That is to say, when you're trying to understand this whole notion of a gay identity or a gender identity, you're focusing on the wrong words. It's not the word gay or gender that you need to understand, but that word identity. The notion of identity is the real issue at play in our society. Let me do my best to help you understand. What had to happen for "I feel like a woman trapped in a man's body" to make sense is that the subjective word "feel" in that sentence had to usurp, had to become more authoritarian than the objective word "body" in that sentence. So meaning this, 30 years ago, 20 years ago, honestly, if you went to a doctor and this was a very real, their body dysphoria has been real forever. If you came to a doctor 20 years ago and you said, "Doctor, I feel like a woman trapped in a man's body," the doctor would recognize that as an issue, but the issue would have been with your feelings, not your body, thus the solution was to work on the feelings to make them align with your body. Now, if you say that to a doctor, it's still an issue, but the issue is now with your body. Thus, the solution is to align the body to match your feelings. And what this tells us is that in the span of just a couple of decades, our metaphysical feelings have gained greater authority than our physical realities. In fact, "I feel like a woman trapped in a man's body" has become obsolete. Now it's "I am a woman trapped in a man's body" because "I feel" is now "I am." Because what I feel is who I am. All of us, all of us, not just our LGBTQ+ friends, all of us now view ourselves this way. How did we get there? Trueman argues it began way before the sexual revolution that always gets blamed for this stuff, with a much more significant revolution of self-identity. And the first key development that had to take place was the internalizing of ourself, meaning this, historically, the answer to the question, "Who are you?" was answered externally. "I am the son of my father. I am a member of this tribe. I am..." Vocation often was an identity mark. "I am a farmer. I'm a blacksmith," or whatever my trade may be. And of course the most common answer historically is, "I am what my religion says I am." We defined ourselves externally by these external identity markers. In the 18th century, the answer, "Who are you?" moved away from the external and turned toward the internal. Trueman specifically focuses on the influence of the philosopher Rousseau, which Trueman argues Rousseau was able to successfully move Western society identity inward. Rousseau has this famous line that says, "Man is born free and is everywhere in chains," meaning your truest self is a free, autonomous, self-determining individual, but that individual has been chained by these external realities. Meaning this, he refrained all the externals that forever have defined our identity as now a threat to our identity. Family, societal norms, and certainly your religion, these are

all dangerous because they are external authorities seeking to define you and standing in the way of your quest to define yourself. Therefore, with Rousseau, our identity is no longer a dialogue with external realities, but an internal monologue of the self. Thus, we now have an internal identity. Well, after Rousseau comes Romanticism. Whereas the Enlightenment was the age of reason, Romanticism was the age of emotions, this was an important correction to the Enlightenment as art and poetry and music, these things that speak to our emotions more than our cognition, we see this resurgence, and that's good, that's beautiful. The problem, however, is when Romanticism's emphasis on our feelings is disconnected from the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason. Our emotions and our cognition should never be severed, but Romanticism gone awry did just that. So, take Rousseau's philosophy of individualism, where my identity is no longer defined externally but internally, and then you add to it the preeminence of Romanticism's emotions, and what we now have is not just an internal identity, but an internal emotional identity, meaning we define ourselves not by an internal monologue with our brain, but with our feelings. At this point, I believe philosopher Charles Taylor and his ethics of authenticity is more helpful than Trueman. The notion of authenticity has become paramount, hasn't it? When someone comes out of the proverbial closet, what do they say? "I was living a lie." Meaning, I wasn't being true to myself and authentically true to who I am. And Taylor argues, and this is why I think of Taylor, because Trueman only focuses on this revolution of sexual identity, but where Taylor is helpful is that he helps us see where all of us live our lives according to this ethic of authenticity. For example, when we talk about our jobs, when we talk about our work, we don't ask, "Is this an important contribution to society that allows me to provide for myself and my dependents?" That is how everybody always viewed work, "Is it an important contribution to society that will allow me to provide for myself and dependents?" Now we ask, "What am I fulfilled in my calling?" Or consider the way we now, our culture certainly now views marriage. We do not define marriage by external vows for better or worse till parted by death. Now our society asks, "Am I fulfilled in my marriage?" Who cares about the vows? If I'm not fulfilled anymore, I'm out. Christians, we need to see ourselves in this, Christians even tend to practice our religion according to Taylor's ethic of authenticity. So rather than the external work of Christ's cross and resurrection from the dead, rather than the external authority of the Bible, historical creeds, and sacramental practices, what do we do? We search inward for an internal, emotional, authentic assurance of what all of these externals are telling us is true. Meaning, we don't say, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so, end of story." We say, "Jesus loves me, this I really hope, if my authentic emotions can convince me inside that this is so." Now, the reason why I'm pausing here is to note that all of us, not just our LGBTQ neighbors, all of us tend to define ourselves this way by internal feelings. Even if those feelings are not sexualized, but it is true that sexual identity has risen in prominence to be the defining identity marker. You see, Romanticism defined us by our feelings. Well, what's the most powerful feeling that humans experience? We talked about it last night. In the first lecture, it is undeniably Eros. This was the observation of the next kind of key, groundbreaking, culture-changing scholar, one you have heard of, Sigmund Freud. According to Freud's research, everything comes back to erotic desire. We are defined not just internally as Rousseau argued, not just by emotions as the romantics argued, but by sexual emotions, sexual desire specifically. Freud argued that because the strongest and most satisfying happiness we experience is sexual, we must, let me quote him, and the quote I'm about to read is the world that you're living in. Because we define ourselves by our emotions and because sexual desires and emotions are the most powerful, therefore, Freud quote says this, "We must seek the satisfaction of happiness in this life along the path of sexual relations, and we must make genital eroticism the central

point of our life." There we are. That is our society. That is how our culture approaches sex. We seek the satisfaction of happiness in this life along the path of sexual relations, and we should make genital eroticism the central point of our life. Though many of his theories have been rejected, we do remain a Freudian society. But for his ideology to go mainstream, there was one problem. And the problem is we still kind of lived in a relatively Christianized society with sexual norms and taboos. And so for Freud's stuff to go mainstream, we had to kind of break that dam. And right after Freud comes a lesser known academic, Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey's character and research are highly controversial, but his mark on the field of human sexuality is indelible. All of the gender studies and sexual, all that stuff on the university campuses originates from the Kinsey reports, which gave academic legitimacy to sexual desires and practices that historically were considered immoral. His research essentially broke the dam of kind of longstanding social norms and essentially legitimized any and all expressions of sexuality, which is why he is commonly referred to as the father of the sexual revolution. So, Freud convinced us that sexual happiness is ultimate happiness. Kinsey broke the bonds, broke the bounds of that sexual happiness to include any and all expressions. And then right away, what do you know, comes the sexual revolution of the sixties and seventies, the swinging sixties. And how was that revolution defined? How was it spoken of? Liberation. But what was being liberated? Not just your sexual experiences and enjoyment, but quite literally you. You are now free to be you because who are you? You now are your sexual identity. So, we just went through centuries to come to this, where we are now. What we have now is an internal, emotional, sexual identity, 21st century. Now, I'm done with all the, now let's talk like people. In light of all that, in light of all that, I said all of that. It was really important to me to say, in light of all that, I said all that for you to now see this. Do you now see why your friends, neighbors, perhaps children and grandchildren who identify as LGBTQ plus, do you now see why they view this part of them as so important? Here's the reason why they don't view it as a part of them. It is them. It is their core identity. Therefore, on this one singular issue, tolerance, respect, kindness, civility, love, none of that is enough. Nothing short of affirmation will do. The tension we all face in this unprecedented age of sexual identity is the issue of affirmation. We have a category with our friends that we can still be friends and I not affirm your love of Tennessee football. I hate Tennessee football. And we can still be friends. Or Ole Miss, this is probably Ole Miss here, right? Whatever, whatever it is around here, Vandy, they're good now. Whatever it is, I can say, I hate that. I can say, I hate that. I can say, I really disagree with name your ethical issue, but this one issue, this one thing we are told here, we must be affirming of any and all sexual gender expressions and lifestyles. Why? Because my sexuality is not a part of me. It is me, and therefore to not affirm my sexuality is to not affirm me as a person. We can agree to disagree in every area because those areas don't define us, but in the area of sexual identity, to not affirm is to not affirm me as a person, you are not disapproving of my opinion, you are not disapproving even of my actions, you are disapproving of my existence. And so when you consider the reality of technology that magnifies lust exploitation and the reality of identity that has solidified lust exploitation, we are right to say we are living in unprecedented age of redirected Eros. But please hear me, now that I've depressed everybody and freaked everybody out, please hear me, we are not without hope. You're not going to win arguments. You're not. You can't debate your way out of this cultural moment. Like I said last night, technology and identity hold way too much power, culturally speaking, to fight with arguments, social media posts, podcasts, and certainly gotcha memes. There is only one way for Christians to engage this cultural moment. You must be heralds of a better story, a more beautiful story, not just herald it. You must live it. You must embody it. We must show the world a more beautiful story of Eros, the story of God's design for

sexuality and gender, a story that transcends this moment and every moment by stretching forth into eternity past and will be the story of eternity that is to come, and in our next session, that story gets better than we could ever imagine, it gets more beautiful than we could ever imagine. We're going to see that though we have made a mess of Eros, God uses Eros to save his love story, even entering into this love story as the hero of the love story who comes to slay the dragon and rescue his bride. All right, let me pray and then we'll take questions. Lord, so heavy in so many ways. I cannot imagine having this discussion and the way it would land on those of us who are in the heat of struggles in this area and those of us who love so deeply friends and perhaps even family members who have fully bought into this age of identity, it's just all so heavy. But I pray that supernaturally, by your Spirit, you would be able to... I don't know these friends, but you know them. You know them better than they know themselves, and you have them here for a reason. And so I surrender Holy Spirit to your applications. You have them here for a reason. And I just pray that your application, your words, your comfort, your conviction that you, Holy Spirit, would have your way with the people in this room and that this entire assembly would be guarded by the evil one who wants to enter into conversation like that and just turn it into a mess. Spirit, work in your people. Use my admittedly fallible words to accomplish infallible work among your people and surround this entire morning conversation with the grace and mercy of Jesus, which makes the foulest sinner clean. We trust you, O God, as we have this difficult talk. We still trust you that you can take this and you can use it. And that may be because somebody gave up a Saturday morning. Their life will never be the same. These are the big prayers I am praying and trusting you with through Jesus. Amen.