

THE DEEPLY FORMED LIFE | Session 4: Sexual Wholeness

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what each participant should walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: A life of sexual wholeness results in deep, healthy, and satisfying relationships with others.

Head Change: To know that we are all sexually broken.

Heart Change: To feel motivated to wrestle with our sexual brokenness faithfully.

Life Change: To pursue a life of sexual wholeness by rooting out shame, cultivating vulnerability, and living in communion with God and others.

OPEN

Have you ever had an awkward or embarrassing (but harmless) interaction with someone of the opposite sex, maybe an awkward first date story or, if you're married, a silly disagreement you had with your spouse? Describe the interaction. What made it so awkward?

At some point in our lives, all of us experience something awkward or embarrassing when interacting with someone from the opposite sex. Though these interactions can be silly and harmless, they can sometimes be tied to what Rich Villodas calls our sexual brokenness.

In this session, Rich will tackle the difficult topic of sexual wholeness. While it's not always a topic we're eager to address, he will show us the biblical vision for our sexuality—a vision that leads to deep communion with God and others.

VIEW

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Rich Villodas's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

How does Rich define the term “sexual wholeness”?

According to Rich, what does it mean to be made in the image of God?

When the author of Genesis uses the word “naked,” what is he communicating?

What are the six theological implications from the story of Scripture that Rich highlights?

Watch Session 4: *Sexual Wholeness* (18 minutes).

REVIEW

For many of us, sexuality and sexual intimacy are topics that either were not talked about or discussed in awkward ways as we grew up. **How was the topic of sexuality handled in your home growing up? Did your family address it healthily or awkwardly, or neglect to address it at all? How has that shaped the way you think about sexuality today?**

In this session, Rich said, “God has intricately intertwined our bodies and souls, but our culture, both in and outside the church, seeks to divide body and soul.” Our culture’s casual view of sex, for example, ignores the connection God has made between our body and soul, leading us to treat people as objects for our pleasure. **Are there other examples from our culture that treat people as if they were simply bodies?**

It can feel like the church ignores or tries not to talk about sex and sexuality, while culture overemphasizes its importance and can’t stop talking about it. **In what ways does the church tend to communicate a negative view of sex and sexuality? In what ways does the culture prize sex and sexuality too highly?**

The way of Jesus—his positive view of sex and sexuality—corrects both the church’s and the culture’s misunderstandings and leads us to sexual wholeness. Rich said, “the prayerful integration of our spirituality and sexuality that results in deep, satisfying relationships with others.” **Before reading Rich’s definition, how would you have defined sexual wholeness? In what ways does your definition differ from Rich’s? How does the way we define sexual wholeness affect the ways we pursue it? Why?**

Deep, satisfying relationships, as Rich stated in this session, “root out shame, cultivate vulnerability, and lead to healthy bonding.” If we do not deal with our shame, we are prone to isolate ourselves and reject intimacy from others. **Do you feel like you struggle with shame? What are the sources of shame for you?**

Do you have any fears of cultivating vulnerability in your relationships? What fears speak the loudest? What anxieties might they be rooted in?

The roots of our sexual brokenness can be traced back to Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis. They were created in God’s image to exist, as Rich said, “in a circle of love with God and with one another.” They were naked and unashamed—deeply connected with one another and with God. But they sinned and ushered in the sexual brokenness we all experience today. **How do you react to Rich’s statement that, because of Adam and Eve’s sin, we are all sexually broken? Why do you think we need to acknowledge that we’re all sexually broken in one way or another?**

We can try to compensate for our sexual brokenness by striving for moral perfection—in other words, “paying for our sins” with good moral behavior. But, as Rich pointed out, we are incapable of moral perfection—we’re all going to stumble from time to time. While that doesn’t excuse our sin, it can help us to wrestle with our sexual brokenness faithfully without spiraling into shame. **What’s the difference between moral perfection and faithfulness? In what ways do you expect moral perfection from yourself? How do you react when you fail? What’s an example of a faithful response when we sin?**

Humans are relational creatures. We are made for connection, communion, and intimacy. **Do you sense in yourself a desire for connection, communion, and intimacy with others? How do you typically try to satisfy that desire?**

Sex is sacred and reserved solely for the context of marriage. In our culture, that can seem like an outdated view. But God has instructed us to keep sex within the marriage covenant. **Why do you think it’s become so taboo for sex to be reserved for marriage? Is this view something you struggle to hold yourself? Why, or why not? How do you respond when others disagree with your view that sex is reserved for men and women who are married?**

When we are pursuing sexual wholeness, our relationships are characterized by dignity and respect. Our society, though, has normalized relationships that use other people for our desires—we see others as objects for our pleasure instead of people to be honored. **What are some examples of how our society views people as objects to be used? For what reasons is it wrong to objectify people?**

In what ways do you struggle to view and treat people in a way that is not objectifying? What could you do to grow in this area?

Rich said that God is the source and end (or fulfillment) of all our longings. Every good gift we enjoy, including sex, is meant to point us to God and awaken us to his love. Since God is the source and end of our longings, ultimately, only he can satisfy us. **Why is it important for us to see that our longings can only be satisfied by God? In what practical ways can this truth help us in our lives?**

Contrary to popular belief, Rich argued that the gospel should make us more sexual, not less. He isn't saying that we should be more casual about sex, but that we are made for deep relationships with others. **In your own words, how would you describe what Rich means by the gospel making us "more sexual"? In what ways does the idea of becoming more sexual upset common perceptions about Christianity?**

What could it look like for you to become more sexual according to Rich's definition?

We don't always pursue relationships in healthy ways. Often, we sin—or we're sinned against. And we can carry shame because of it. But Rich shared a message of good news to those of us carrying shame. We'll never achieve sexual wholeness in its fullness in this life, "but we can by the grace of God grow in this area." **What could it look like for you to hand your shame over to Jesus and receive his love and forgiveness in its place?**

In what practical ways can you grow in sexual wholeness? What will it take for you to achieve that level of growth? Who can help you?

BIBLE EXPLORATION

To talk about sexual wholeness, Rich took us all the way back to the Garden of Eden when humanity's sexual wholeness was first broken. There's a lot we can learn from Adam and Eve's story. Read Genesis 2:18, 21–25; 3:6–13, 21.

In verse 2:18, we encounter the first incidence of God saying something in creation isn't good. What was it that wasn't good? For the man—Adam—to be alone. And while the context of this passage has clear ties to marriage, it also applies to non-marital relationships. **Why would you say it's not good for people to remain alone? What do we miss when we're constantly alone?**

God solved the problem of Adam's loneliness by creating Eve and bringing her to Adam. **How did the creation and introduction of Eve contribute to Adam's sexual wholeness? Who in your life—friends or your spouse—contributes to your relational wholeness? In what specific ways do they help you live out your God-given sexuality?**

Adam's response to meeting Eve was the equivalent of, "Finally, this one's like me!" **Have you ever had a similar encounter with a friend or significant other? What was that like?**

Genesis 2:25 says that Adam and Eve were both naked and "yet felt no shame." While their nakedness was physical, it was also much deeper than that. They were deeply connected and had nothing to hide. **Have you felt like you needed to hide something or part of yourself in a relationship? How did that affect your relationship?**

What do you think it would be like to have a relationship in which shame was non-existent? What could you do to begin pursuing that kind of relationship with others?

In only a few verses, Adam and Eve's idyllic relationship goes wrong. After an interaction with the serpent, they both disobey God—they sin—and descend into shame and blame. They hid from God and blamed others for their actions, damaging both their connection to one another and God. **Why do you think our sin sends us into hiding? How does our tendency to hide contribute to our lack of sexual wholeness?**

To what degree have you played the blame game like Adam and Eve? What was the result? In what ways does blaming others hinder us from pursuing sexual wholeness?

We can reject shame and the blame game through confession and repentance. Many of us are afraid to practice confession, worried about the rejection or judgment we will receive when we show others who we truly are. But, think of Jesus, who loved us and chose to die for us, fully knowing our hearts and minds. In Christ, confession doesn't expose us to judgment, but to loving forgiveness. **In what ways can the love of Jesus push us out of hiding? What would it look like for us to love others like Jesus when they confess and repent of their sin?**

Adam and Eve's connection was fractured. And like them, our connections with others often are filled with shame and blame. But it doesn't have to be that way. Even in our broken sexuality, God comes to us—as he did to Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:8–9)—and covers our shame. If our sin has been taken to the cross by Jesus, there is no more guilt to convict us and no more shame to keep us from God. Jesus has made a way for us to be reconciled to him. **Why is it good news that God covers our shame? What can you do to trust that, in Christ, your shame is dealt with once and for all? How can your faith in Christ impact your willingness to connect with others? With God?**

LAST WORD

Human sexuality is a topic at the forefront of our culture's mind. We are grasping for sexual connection, wholeness, and fulfillment in many ways, most of which are unhelpful, unhealthy, and unholy. Whether we know it or not, our culture is yearning for the biblical vision of sexual wholeness.

Sexual wholeness comes only by first recognizing that we are all sexually broken and in need of help from God. Only by allowing God to deal with our shame and lead us into deep communion with himself and others can we experience the fullness of life he offers.

So today, no matter what amount of shame you're carrying, receive this good news: you do not have to hide from God. In him, we are fully seen and fully forgiven. And, when we treat others as God has treated us, we can build strong, whole relationships with one another. In Jesus, there is no more shame.

DEEPER WALK

Confess: Today, make it your ambition to lay bare your sexual brokenness before God and, where appropriate, before others. Confess the ways you've pursued a life devoid of sexual wholeness.

Repent: Address your sexual brokenness with a trusted friend or your spouse and work to reorient your sexuality to the way of Jesus.

Receive: Receive the love and forgiveness of God offered to you. Believe that, despite your best efforts to hide, he sees and loves you.

Read: For a deeper dive into the topic of sexual wholeness, read chapters 7–8 of Rich's book *The Deeply Formed Life*.