

Holy Sex

Series Overview

The differences between God's design for sex and our culture's messages about sex can create confusion for many followers of Christ. It's difficult to honor Christ with our sexuality while sin is constantly bombarding us from outside and within. This study will encourage participants to understand and live out God's design for sex and embrace redemption and restoration in areas of sexual sin. This study also discusses the unique joys and challenges in marriage and singleness.

Why This Series?

- Help small group attenders gain vision and perspective about God's design for sex
- Break down walls and misconceptions about sexual sin
- Begin a discussion in groups that will allow healing and growth in areas of struggle in their own lives
- Encourage all members to embrace restoration and redemption in their lives

Series Breakdown

Week 1: God's Design & Culture's Messages

This study will help group members gain an understanding for how our culture impacts our views about sex as well as understanding God's design for sex. We hope group members will leave having created strategies for navigating a world where God's design is in opposition to culture's messages.

Week 2: Singleness & Marriage

In this study your group will discuss and appreciate the unique opportunities and joys that exist in both singleness and marriage. Group members should also grow in understanding God's bigger picture in our lives regardless of our marital status.

Week 3: Counterfeits & Redemption

In this study group members will be challenged as they discuss the impact of counterfeit intimacy and sex (sex outside of marriage, masturbation, pornography, homosexuality, etc.). They will also be encouraged to rejoice in God's story of redemption, specifically as it applies to sexual sin in our lives.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
God's Design & Culture's Messages	Singleness & Marriage	Counterfeits & Redemption

FYIs

- Handouts are essential to this study! Be sure everyone has access.
- The goal for each of these studies is to generate about 45 minutes of discussion (excluding Accountability Questions). Some groups may find that they are able to divide an individual study into two nights of discussion—that's OK! Feel free to flex these as needed to suit your unique group dynamic.
- Please read through the entire three-week series of studies prior to beginning to lead. This will help you defer questions to the appropriate week as needed.

Additional Resources

- **Restoring Hope** [ministry](#), Hope Community Church: restoringhope@hopecc.com
This ministry offers resources and support grounded in the gospel. Through God's power and practical steps, we want to help you see more of Jesus and find wholeness in him.
- [Resources](#), Hope Community Church, specifically [Made for God](#) resources.

Week 1: God's Design & Culture's Messages

Learning Objectives

- Gain understanding for how our culture impacts our views about sex
- Understand God's design for sex
- Create strategies for navigating a world where God's design is in opposition to cultural messages

Steps to Prepare (For Leaders)

- Read the Series Overview before beginning this series.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
God's Design & Culture's Messages	Singleness & Marriage	Counterfeits & Redemption

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read Out Loud: For the next three weeks we'll be working our way through a study called "Holy Sex." This is where we're headed:

1. God's Design & Culture's Messages
2. Singleness & Marriage
3. Counterfeits & Redemption

Tonight we are going to begin by discussing the messages the world and our culture send about sex. Later, we'll look at what the Bible says about sex. We'll finish our discussion by talking about the difficulties of and methods for navigating the intersection of our culture and biblical truths.

The World's Messages

? As an adult, what would you say are some of the loudest messages from culture that you hear about sex?

Possible Answers: Sex is everything (and I need to be getting it a lot), What's the big deal? Sex = Intimacy. Sex defines me. It is the means to ultimate satisfaction. Everyone is doing it. We are created for sex.

? How do those messages compare/contrast with the messages you've heard from the church, your family, etc.?

Possible Answers: Just don't have sex, stop it, don't do it because I said so, worship your purity. We are told to uphold purity but not given reasons why.

? In what ways does our culture push us to put our identity in our sexuality or sexual behavior? Why is it so tempting to “believe” culture and put our identity in our sexuality?

Possible Answers: Our culture constantly sends messages about sex from every angle. It’s much “louder” than the church. Our culture normalizes sexual sin, tempting us to believe it’s not actually sin. Our culture can tell us sex and our sexuality is the most important thing about us (primary identifier). It makes us feel like we fit in. It’s the easier route.

God’s Design

Leader’s Note: Read through the “big idea” out loud as a group. Be careful of getting stuck here. This could become more time consuming than it’s intended. If you feel your group needs to spend more time here, plan to extend this study to a second night.

The “Big Idea” Of The Bible

Creation → Fall → Redemption → Restoration

1. **Creation** - God creates people, in His image, in a way that mirrors His triune nature.

Genesis 1:27 (NIV)

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

2. **Fall** - Sin wars against this, resulting in dehumanization.

Romans 1:22-25 (NIV)

²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

3. **Redemption** - God recreates wholeness through the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 3:18 (NIV)

And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

4. **Restoration** - One day we all will experience complete wholeness.

1 John 3:2 (NIV)

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

? Do you have any thoughts, concerns, or questions about what we just read?

Leader's Note: Because this progression is something mentioned fairly frequently in Hope sermons, people may not have a lot of questions. However, it's good to stop and ask the group anyway. Take some time here if your group needs it.

Read Out Loud: We see this same progression in the biblical narrative on sex and relationships.

Sex And The Big Idea

1. Creation -

Genesis 2:24-25 (NIV)

²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

? What was God's ultimate design and intent for sex?

Possible Answer: To bring unity. To glorify Him. To point husbands and wives to Him. To create true intimacy. A unique expression of love exclusively between a husband and a wife.

? God told Adam and Eve to be united in one flesh. He commands this to happen without shame. How would sexuality look differently if it still fully reflected God's original design?

Possible Answer: We wouldn't have to fight back lies of failure, comparison, inadequacy, brokenness. It wouldn't be used as a tool of authority or distorted by misunderstanding.

2. Fall -

Genesis 3:1-7 (NIV)

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

? What motivated Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the tree?

Possible Answer: They wanted to go from dependence on God to equals with God. The curse. God explains what life will be like now that sin has entered the world. Desire—sounds positive, but it's not. It's rooted in sin.

? How do we see sexuality distorted by the fall?

Possible Answer: God created humans to live in perfect unity with Him, caring for us as a loving father or husband would care for his family. Sin broke the perfect unity between people and God.

Optional Section

Leader's Note: The following passage is a graphic depiction of Israel as a sexually immoral woman. This passage from Ezekiel was written when Israel was being held captive in Babylon. God had allowed His chosen people to be taken into exile because they, as a culture, had walked away from His ways and chosen to follow other gods. Following the imagery in the passage, they were committing adultery with other gods, and He was a righteously jealous husband. Please use discretion about whether or not this section will lead to fruitful discussion in your particular group.

Read Out Loud: In the book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel draws on this comparison and uses graphic descriptions to show his listener just how broken they were.

Read: Ezekiel 16:1-19 (NIV)

¹ The word of the Lord came to me: ² "Son of man, confront Jerusalem with her detestable practices ³ and say, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. ⁴ On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to make you clean, nor were you rubbed with salt or wrapped in cloths. ⁵ No one looked on you with pity or had compassion enough to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out into the open field, for on the day you were born you were despised.

⁶ "'Then I passed by and saw you kicking about in your blood, and as you lay there in your blood I said to you, 'Live!' ⁷ I made you grow like a plant of the field. You grew and developed and entered puberty. Your breasts had formed and your hair had grown, yet you were stark naked.

⁸ "'Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine.

⁹ "'I bathed you with water and washed the blood from you and put ointments on you. ¹⁰ I clothed you with an embroidered dress and put sandals of fine leather on you. I dressed you in fine linen and covered you with costly garments. ¹¹ I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms and a necklace around your neck, ¹² and I put a ring on your nose, earrings on your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. ¹³ So you were adorned with gold and silver; your clothes were of fine linen and costly fabric and embroidered cloth. Your food was honey, olive oil and the finest flour. You became very beautiful and rose to be a queen. ¹⁴ And your fame spread among the nations on account of your beauty, because the splendor I had given you made your beauty perfect, declares the Sovereign Lord.

¹⁵ “But you trusted in your beauty and used your fame to become a prostitute. You lavished your favors on anyone who passed by and your beauty became his.¹⁶ You took some of your garments to make gaudy high places, where you carried on your prostitution. You went to him, and he possessed your beauty.¹⁷ You also took the fine jewelry I gave you, the jewelry made of my gold and silver, and you made for yourself male idols and engaged in prostitution with them.¹⁸ And you took your embroidered clothes to put on them, and you offered my oil and incense before them.¹⁹ Also the food I provided for you—the flour, olive oil and honey I gave you to eat—you offered as fragrant incense before them. That is what happened, declares the Sovereign Lord.

? Optional: The Lord compares Israel, His chosen people, to an adulterous, unfaithful woman.

That is a powerful comparison and one that can be hard for us to digest. Why do you believe the Lord chooses to use sexual imagery to describe the relationship between Him and His people?

Possible Answers: Because it's very intimate. Unlike friendship and other types of relationships or activities, sex is only with the person you are closest.

3. Redemption -

Romans 5:8 (NIV)

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1 Cor 15:3-5 (NIV)

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

? Within the church, there can be a tendency to view sexual sin as “bigger” or less forgivable than other areas of sin. Why is that? How does that impact the way we talk about and deal with sexual sin?
Possible Answer: Because there is a lot of shame associated with sexual sin. It touches parts of our life that are most intimate. Sometimes that leads us to harbor shame longer or hide this particular sin from others.

4. Restoration -

Ephesians 5:31-32 (NIV)

³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

In this New Testament passage, Paul quotes Genesis 2, bringing us full circle. Then he makes the big reveal--sex and marriage were created to teach us about Christ and the Church! Sex was designed to show the intimacy and faithfulness between God and His people.

? How does sex in marriage show the intimacy God intends between Himself and His people? What does this communicate to you?

Possible Answer: Covenant relationship - He desires us to be faithful to Him and Him alone. Because we have put our faith in Christ, we have now become one with Him and are no longer seen in our sin.

An Intersection—Where God’s Design And Our Culture Collide

Read Out Loud: 1 Corinthians 6:9-20 (NIV)

⁹ Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men ¹⁰ nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. ¹² “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

? Optional: Looking back at verse 12, what is Paul saying in this passage about the balance between legalism and license? How should the Gospel influence our thinking about sexuality?

Possible Answers: The Gospel influences us because of the freedom we now have in Christ. We are no longer mastered by sex, but by Christ alone. Our identity is now in Him.

? As followers of Christ, how can we know if we are being mastered by something other than Christ (vs. 12)? How can we determine what is beneficial?

Possible Answers: We can tell we are being mastered when that thing has power over us, whether it be our actions or our thoughts. Determine what is beneficial through God's Word and by being in community.

? What Gospel truths can we encourage each other with regarding our relationship with Christ and the proper place that sex should hold within our lives?

Possible Answers: Reminder that sex should never become our God. Our value, worth or identity is not found in sex, but rather in Christ.

? How can we use the truth of God's design for sex to help turn down the volume of our culture's messages about sex?

Possible Answers: When we are bombarded by cultural messages, we can remind ourselves of the truth in Christ. Leaning on truth can help us combat messages that oppose God's teaching.

For Discussion And Accountability

? What messages from our culture are loudest to you personally?

? How can we as a small group encourage each other as we battle to honor God with our sexuality?

Week 2: Singleness & Marriage

Learning Objectives

- Discuss and appreciate the unique opportunities and joys that exist in singleness and marriage
- Understand God's bigger picture in our lives regardless of our marital status

Leader's Note: Even if your group doesn't have singles or married people, make sure you cover each of the sections. You also may find it helpful to split this into studies covering multiple weeks. Do what's best for your group to have a fruitful discussion!

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
God's Design & Culture's Messages	Singleness & Marriage	Counterfeits & Redemption

Pray for your time together as a group.

Read Out Loud: Before we begin a discussion about singleness and marriage, it's important for us, as followers of Christ, to remember that our identity is not found in our sexuality or our relationship status. Let's look at a few passages about our identity in Christ.

Identity In Christ

Read the following passages out loud:

1. We are God's creation.

Psalms 139:13-16 (NIV)

- ¹³ For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

2. God values and loves each of us dearly.

Romans 8:31-39 (NIV)

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

3. In Christ, we are made new.

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 (NIV)

¹⁴ For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

? What stands out to you in the passages above? How are these linked to finding our identity in Christ?

Possible Answers: The Lord has ordained all my days before me, He knows me full well. He is for me. Nothing can separate us from Christ's love. Because of Christ, we have been reconciled to God.

? Of the points listed above (or others you can think of), which most encourages you to put your identity in Christ? Why?

Possible Answers: The idea of being made new really stands out to me. I can remind myself that through Christ my past sins are forgiven and God no longer sees them in my life. I get to be seen as pure and spotless!

? Other than Christ, what are you most tempted to find your identity in or value from? Why do you think that is so tempting for you?

Possible Answers: Easy to idolize marriage or relationships and believing that will fix my loneliness. Finding identity in what others believe of me and the reasons why I am or am not married. Easy to find identity as a wife or mom or the desire to be those things.

Optional Transition: We've taken some time to discuss our identity in Christ. As we transition to talking about marriage and singleness, it's important for us to remember that our identity or value is not found in our relationship status, but in Christ alone.

Marriage

Read Out Loud: Ephesians 5:21-33 (NIV)

²¹ Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. ²² Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ²⁸ In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church— ³⁰ for we are members of his body. ³¹ “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” ³² This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. ³³ However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband

? What is the purpose of marriage, according to this passage (and other passages in Scripture)?

Possible Answers: To reflect and represent Christ and the Church.

? What cultural ideas about marriage have you encountered? How do they compare with God's desires for covenant marriage?

Possible Answer: Marriage is a relational convenience. You get married when you want to have kids. Marriage is what happens after college. Marriage is an archaic institution that is no longer necessary. These views are quite different from what God desires.

? Based on Scripture and your observations, what are the blessings of marriage?

Possible Answers: Companionship. Someone to point you to Christ. Ministering together. Family.

? Based on Scripture and your observations, what are the challenges of marriage?

Possible Answers: Learning how to communicate well, learning to be vulnerable, laying aside your preferences and putting the other person first.

Singleness

? How do you think the church in general views singleness and marriage?

Possible Answers: When the church talks about singleness it is with extreme empathy, which can annoy single people. Or you'll get married, just be patient. In regards to marriage, that it is something to be esteemed.

? Optional: How does the church's view of singleness interact with our cultural obsession with relationship status? What impact does this have on single people in the church?

Possible Answers: The views are opposite. Culture is telling us to put off marriage, embrace the time you have before you settle down, etc. The church is saying get married, there are so many benefits to marriage, etc. It can create a tension at times, like you are being pulled two different ways. The world (statistics) lets you know it's ok that you are single while you feel on the outside at church.

Read Out Loud: 1 Corinthians 7:25-38 (NIV)

²⁵ Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy. ²⁶ Because of the present crisis, I think that it is good for a man to remain as he is. ²⁷ Are you pledged to a woman? Do not seek to be released. Are you free from such a commitment? Do not look for a wife. ²⁸ But if you do marry, you have not sinned; and if a virgin marries, she has not sinned. But those who marry will face many troubles in this life, and I want to spare you this.

²⁹ What I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; ³⁰ those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; ³¹ those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away.

³² I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs—how he can please the Lord. ³³ But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—³⁴ and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. ³⁵ I am

saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord.

³⁶ If anyone is worried that he might not be acting honorably toward the virgin he is engaged to, and if his passions are too strong and he feels he ought to marry, he should do as he wants. He is not sinning. They should get married. ³⁷ But the man who has settled the matter in his own mind, who is under no compulsion but has control over his own will, and who has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—this man also does the right thing. ³⁸ So then, he who marries the virgin does right, but he who does not marry her does better.

? How should we interpret Paul's suggestion to avoid marriage if possible? Pros? Cons?

Possible Answers: I don't think Paul is saying don't get married, I believe he is wanting to lay down his cards about both positions. Pros of singleness: undivided interest, not concerned about the things of this world, spouse, family, etc.—can be fully committed to God. Cons of singleness: sexual temptation looks different.

? What are the blessings of singleness?

Possible Answers: Time freedom, accountable to yourself only, easy to make or drop plans, financial freedom.

? What are the challenges of singleness?

Possible Answers: Loneliness, feeling left behind or left out, feeling inadequate.

Because We All Struggle...

? How can we remind one another that our identity is not rooted in our relationship status?

Possible Answers: Combat message in culture and the church that tell us otherwise. Lovingly challenge the “sayings” of other Christians that can wound others. Be careful of how we speak about marriage and singleness as well.

? How can we, as the church, create an environment where married and single people are valued equally?

Possible Answers: Include singles in your family gatherings as appropriate. In teachings, talking about both relationship statuses.

For Discussion And Accountability

? In the areas of singleness and marriage, where do you struggle most?

? How can members of your small group encourage you to put your identity in Christ in the midst of struggle?

Week 3: Counterfeits & Redemption

Learning Objectives

- Understand the impact of counterfeit intimacy and sex (sex outside of marriage, masturbation, pornography, homosexuality, etc.)
- Rejoice in God's story of redemption, specifically as it applies to sexual sin in our lives

Leader's Note: There may be some people in your group who don't have an ongoing, daily struggle with sexual sin. If this is brought up, it could be helpful to remind your group of a few things. First, we all struggle with sin and creating counterfeits in some areas. Help them to identify those areas. Second, remind them that there may come a time when this is a greater struggle, so preparation is key to battling sin. Third, this is a great tool for helping friends in this area of struggle.

Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
God's Design & Culture's Messages	Singleness & Marriage	Counterfeits & Redemption

Optional Activity

Leader's Note: Break your small group into 2 or 3 groups. Provide each team with a blank sheet of paper and a pen. Give the groups 5 minutes to recreate, as accurately as possible, a US \$1 bill on both sides of the paper. Groups MAY NOT reference a \$1 bill or an image of a bill. This should be from memory. After 5 minutes ask the groups to show their work.

? Which bill is closest to an actual \$1 bill?

? On a scale of 1 (pretty rough) to 10 (a very realistic counterfeit) how close would you say the reproduction is to the original?

Pray for your time together as a group.

? In previous weeks we've discussed God's design for sex. How would you define "Holy Sex"?

Possible Answer: An act of intimacy between a husband and wife that has been created by God to display His intimate affection toward us.

Read Out Loud: Hope Pastors have landed on the following definition: God created sex to be received as a gift in marriage and experienced at His direction for ever-increasing intimacy and benefit as an illustration of His relationship with us.

? Based on these definitions (online and Hope's Pastors), make a list of counterfeits to Holy Sex.
Possible Answer: Sex outside of marriage, Masturbation, Pornography, Homosexuality, etc.
Leader's Note: Depending on your group, it may be helpful to actually write out this list for the group to reference.

Definition of "counterfeit"

adjective

1. made in imitation so as to be passed off fraudulently or deceptively as genuine; not genuine; forged: *counterfeit dollar bills.*

2. pretended; unreal: *counterfeit grief.*

noun

3. an imitation intended to be passed off fraudulently or deceptively as genuine; forgery.

--dictionary.com

? Looking back at the list, why would you consider each of those a counterfeit?

Possible Answers: Selfish, one dimensional (physical act only, doesn't involve emotions etc.), act of oppression, not giving toward others, not part of God's intended design.

Read Out Loud: The Bible describes sin much like a counterfeit.

Read Out Loud: Romans 1:18-25 (NIV)

¹⁸ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. ²⁵ They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.

? Looking at the passage above, how is sin a counterfeit?

Possible Answer: We are exchanging God, our creator, for something that is created. We are choosing creation over our creator in hopes it will bring fulfillment and satisfaction.

? What is the impact of exchanging the truth (immortal God) for lies (mortal things)?

Possible Answer: God gives us over to our sin, to our lustful thoughts and desires. He permits us to participate in those things.

? Why can sin in the area of sexuality seem to do so much more damage in our lives than other areas of sin?

Possible Answers: It affects us emotionally, relationally and physically. We are unaware of the effects sexual sin can have on us until we are in a relationship.

Optional Transition: We've talked about sin and counterfeits. Thankfully, God didn't let us remain stuck in sin. He proved a way out through His son. Let's turn our attention to finding redemption and restoration in Christ.

Redemption In Christ

? Why can it be hard for us to apply forgiveness in our own lives to areas of sin? Are there specific lies that you battle around experiencing complete forgiveness? What are some of them?

Possible Answers: Feelings of shame, Christians know it is something they shouldn't do. Believe they don't deserve forgiveness. They may not see it as a sin.

Read Out Loud:

Colossians 1:13-14 (NIV)

¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1 Corinthians 6:14 (NIV)

¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also.

? Is it difficult for you to believe the 'power of God that raised Christ from the dead' is the same power that can assist us in overcoming our sexual sin? Why or why not?

Possible Answer: Yes: I feel like my sexual sin is too big for the power of God to overcome.

Maybe: I know that God's power is big enough; I have a hard time bringing it from knowing the truth to walking in it.

No: I trust and believe God's power will/has overcome my sexual sin.

Read Out Loud: Part of overcoming our sin is finding redemption and embracing healing. In a 2016 sermon, Pastor Steve Treichler talked about the phases of healing with regard to sexual sin. Let's take a closer look at those.

Phases Of Healing

1. Shame and Guilt

Genesis 2:25-3:13 (NIV)

²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. **3** ¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" ² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" ⁴ "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵ "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. ⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." ¹¹ And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" ¹² The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

? Although shame isn't a place where people should remain stuck, how can shame and guilt over sin point us toward the Gospel?

Possible Answer: God moves toward Adam and Eve after they sinned in the garden. We can believe that He is and will continue to do the same for us.

Read Out Loud: Let's take a look at God's response to Adam and Eve's shame of nakedness.

Read Out Loud: Genesis 3:21 (NIV)

The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

? We see that the Lord's response to Adam and Eve's shame is to mercifully provide coverings for their nakedness. What feelings or thoughts emerge when you consider God's response to Adam and Eve?

Possible Answer: At ease. Thankful for His grace and mercy. I can trust that He will provide the same for me.

2. Confession and Repentance

1 John 1:8-9 (NIV)

⁸ If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

? How is honestly admitting our sin before God a valuable part of finding healing from sin? If

God is all knowing, why is this a necessary step?

Possible Answer: Even though He knows all of our sin, for us to acknowledge and confess is an act of humility. It reminds us that we are in need and dependent on Him for forgiveness of sins and redemption. Confession leads to gratitude because He has chosen to forgive us.

3. Believing the Gospel in your Life

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)

⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

? Underline the truth statements in the passage above about our identity in Christ. When fighting sin, how can these truths be applied?

Possible Answer: Remembering that we are a part of God's chosen people can give us confidence and power to know we can live the way He calls us to!

? What are ways we can challenge and encourage each other to apply the Gospel to all areas of sin? What does it look like to preach the Gospel to ourselves and each other every day?

Possible Answer: Know God's Word and have it in our hearts so that when troubles come, we can remember and apply it. Help your group get to very practical application here.

4. Get out of the Darkness

James 5:16 (NIV)

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

? Why can it be so difficult to share sin struggles with other people?

Possible Answers: Shame, isolation, pride, fear

? What are ways we as a small group can make this a topic that is “normal” to talk about? How can we create a safe culture in our small group to encourage vulnerability about our struggles including, but not limited to, the area of sexuality?

Possible Answers: Answers may vary.

5. **Flee and Fight!**

1 Timothy 6:11-12 (NIV)

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

? What does it actually look like for you to run to the Gospel when fleeing from sin?

Possible Answer: Recalling truth statements. Actively removing myself from an area of temptation. Placing restrictions/boundaries on technology.

? What practical steps can we, as small group friends, take to encourage each other to not settle for counterfeits, but instead, to hold onto to the Gospel of Christ?

Possible Answer: Call them out when we see it. Remind one another of Gospel truths. Ask hard questions.

Hope For People Struggling

Read Out Loud: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV)

⁷ Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

? Looking at the passage above, what truths can you hold onto in the midst of your battles with sexual sin or sin of any kind?

Possible Answers: God will give me the strength I need each day to fight the fight. I am not in this alone. I may feel weak, but God’s power will be made perfect. It will overcome my weakness. We can now boast in the work that God is doing in us. The Lord’s grace is sufficient; we can rest in the power of Christ. I can delight in this time as I learn to be fully dependent on God.

For Discussion And Accountability

? Is there anything that you'd like to share in accountability time that you've felt like you just couldn't share in the past?

Leader's Note: Be sure to ask this in accountability time—not in the mixed gender group.