Our existence as human beings begins within the context of families. Whether we are born into a family with a mom and dad, or a single parent family, or we were given up for adoption at birth...how we think of ourselves and understand our place in this world is HUGELY influenced by our families. So, it is appropriate and fitting that we spend some time for the next few weeks unpacking some of the biblical truths and applications regarding marriage and family.

Now...before going any further, let me acknowledge that many of us carry painful wounds and memories from our families. In fact, if we are being completely honest, we ALL have some scars from our families...no one is exempt from that reality. So, before we even get started, let me be perfectly clear from the outset: this series is not intended to project an impossible standard that shames us all for being horrible spouses, parents, children, and families! The Gospel provides plenty of grace to go around for every person attending this series, so please know you are loved and welcome to be where you are, regardless of how broken or messed up you think your marriage and family might be! We value Safe Harbor at Colonial, so please feel safe to be you and to bring your experiences and thoughts about marriage and family before God with confidence in His grace and healing power.

Secondly, this series is not intended to make a political statement or advocate for any particular political party. Laws pertaining to marriage and family are out there, and we may comment on those laws or interpretations of the law from time to time in the series, but we have no intention of promoting any particular political party or agenda. We have every intention of promoting JESUS and JESUS alone.

Finally, this series does not hope to fully address the complexities of “families” as we find them in various expressions throughout the world. In other words, we acknowledge that there are many views and presuppositions about “families” in various cultures, and we understand that even our American culture does not always agree on what constitutes a marriage or a family. We’ll touch on some of those issues, but our primary goal is to speak into family and marriage from a biblical perspective with the intention of empowering Christian marriages and families through the grace of the Gospel to heal, to thrive, and to bring glory to God. That said, we invite and welcome non-Christians to join us for this series in hope that families inside and outside of the church will be encouraged and equipped to thrive.

Now, I want to honor Pastor Tami Lundgren who has done the lion’s share of the planning for this series. As such, Pastor Tami assigned me the duty of unpacking a biblical definition of marriage and family here at the first of this four part series.

To get started, let us stand and read Matthew 19:3-6:
3 And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, “Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?” 4 He answered, “Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning
made them male and female, 5 and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

My message this morning will fall under three subheadings: 1) God’s created intention for sexuality, marriage, and family; 2) The corruption of God’s created intention; and 3) The hope of the Gospel.

I. God’s created intention for sexuality, marriage and family
When I began serving in ministry in the summer of 1989, the culture was different than it is today. For me to stand before a group of people and speak about the biblical understanding of marriage and family would have been received as “common sense”…but that is clearly not the case today in the year 2021. Many of the “common sense” assumptions of our past are no longer held to be self-evident; and there is considerable angst regarding the definition of marriage and family in our country today. As you know, the United States Supreme Court has in recent years redefined marriage and family based upon their interpretation of the Constitution; thus our culture now operates on a different set of assumptions than it did in 1989. Even so, the Word of God has not changed, and nor has our biblical understanding of these issues. Now, before I get started, I am going to assume from the outset that we have many among us, either in person or online, who are not yet followers of Jesus or those who ascribe to a biblical worldview. For that reason, I will take just a moment to establish some context for my message today and our series for the next few weeks.

As Christians—as followers of Jesus—we hold to a biblical worldview. That means that we look to the Bible as our objective authority in all matters of faith and practice because we are convinced that God has revealed Himself as well as the Truth about how things are through His Word, and most specifically through the Word made flesh, His only Son, Jesus of Nazareth. Now…why would we believe such a thing? In short, our faith is anchored just outside an empty tomb. Let me explain: The Bible reveals that Jesus of Nazareth was born of a virgin. He fulfilled myriads of OT prophecies, lived a sinless life, taught with unprecedented authority and performed many signs and wonders as recorded by multiple witnesses in the New Testament. He claimed in John 14:6 to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He said no one could access God the Father except through Him. He was then publicly crucified following a bogus trial by the Jewish Sanhedrin. He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Three days later, on the first day of the week, His tomb was discovered to be empty as testified to by several women who had gone to adorn His body with spices. There at the empty tomb were messengers from heaven who testified that Jesus had risen. It was then the testimony of several hundred people that they saw Jesus, that He spoke with them and even ate with them in the 40 days following His public execution. Many of the witnesses to these events were then severely persecuted by both the Jews and the Romans, but they never recanted their testimony, even when tortured and martyred. One persecutor of the early witnesses, Saul of Tarsus, tells his story in the New Testament of meeting the risen Lord just outside of the city of Damascus, and his life was completely transformed. He was changed overnight from a fierce persecutor of the Jesus followers to the greatest evangelist and Christian apostle the world has ever known, the man we now know as the Apostle Paul who accounts for 13 of the 27 books in the New Testament. The Bible bears witness to these events…but you may ask, “Why should we believe the Bible is true?” The Bible has come under
intense scrutiny for nearly 2000 years by scholars and critics of every ilk, but again and again the claims of the Bible have been proven true and accurate, particularly in the historical references, events, geographical and political details, and so on. We also find it compelling that the influence of Jesus of Nazareth did not wane or fade away following His death; instead, His influence exploded and continues to sweep across the world even to this day. Many people, and I am one of them, have a testimony of encountering the Risen Jesus, and that encounter was life-altering...even transforming, and so we, His Church, are witnesses to the biblical, historical claim that Jesus is not dead, He has risen. We understand Jesus to be “the author and perfector” of our faith, and so as the Church we look to Jesus as our primary authority because Jesus was God incarnate, the God/Man, who walked amongst us and showed us God and then revealed how we are to live, how we are to think, and how we are to love one another. His death and resurrection accomplished what every soul is desperately in need of, and that is reconciliation with our Creator through the forgiveness of sins. I will return to that hope in a few minutes; but for now, I invite you to consider the biblical worldview of marriage and family beginning with what Jesus reveals to us in Matthew 19.

In the passage we read this morning, Jesus is being “tested” by the religious authorities. They ask, “Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause?” The Pharisees knew that the question of divorce was an explosive one. Some well renown rabis in the first century taught that divorce was only acceptable in cases of marital infidelity, while other rabis taught that divorce was acceptable whenever a husband wearied of his wife for any reason. How Jesus responds not only speaks to the question of divorce; He also recaps and restates the biblical worldview of sexuality and marriage. Jesus states, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female...” Let’s stop there for a minute and make a few observations.

Notice that Jesus appeals to what has been written and “read.” Jesus appeals to the creation narrative in Genesis 1-3 as authoritative and the source for our understanding God’s created intention from the beginning. And Jesus makes two very important observations.

First, Jesus reminds the Pharisees that God “created them.” At the core of a biblical worldview is the conviction that we...all of us human beings...are created by God. The Bible is very clear in Genesis 1:27, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” This biblical view of a created identity is incompatible with the notion that human beings simply evolved by random selection and blind chance over billions of years, thus rendering all human beings to the status of accidental, impersonal, amoral machines. We are not accidental machines...we are lovingly designed and created, and we all bear the image of our Creator. That is the biblical worldview of our created identity.

Secondly, Jesus reveals that from the beginning, God created humanity with two unique expressions: male and female. This is the biblical worldview of sexuality: either the male or the female gender is assigned to us by God according to His creative design, and both masculine and feminine features reflect the image of God, since all human beings bear God’s image. This biblical view of sexuality is incompatible with the notion that we are free or, God forbid, responsible to assign ourselves with a gender identity. According to a biblical worldview, from the beginning, God created human beings in His image and God made them male or female...there are no other gender categories nor are there any choices required of human beings
to define or assign their gender preferences. Now, I know we live in a culture that disagrees with what I just said. Let us not be surprised by that…our culture is not inherently “biblical” or “Christian,” so we should not expect unbelievers to ascribe to and promote a biblical worldview. Even so, let us be clear that a biblical worldview of identity and sexuality is incompatible with the prevailing views of our current culture. In other words, either God created humanity in His image and assigned our gender as male or female according to His design, or we are accidental machines with no inherent design and we are at liberty to assign ourselves whatever gender identity we feel like. If we are people of faith, we are obliged to receive and be grateful for the gender that God assigned to each one of us. It was God’s intent from the beginning that we would be male or female according to His sovereign plan for our lives, and we can be confident that our maleness or femaleness is God’s choosing and God’s blessing for our lives. Now…there is more to say about the current state of our sexuality, even as believers, and I will get to that in a minute; but I hope you can see what Jesus has clearly presented thus far: 1) All humans are created by God; and 2) All humans were created and assigned their sexuality, either male or female, and both genders bear God’s image.

Let us look further to what Jesus says beginning in vss. 5-6, “and (God) said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”

Jesus once again appeals to the creation account in Genesis 2:24 and defines God’s created intent for marriage. Marriage was intended to involve one man who leaves his father and mother and “hold’s fast” to his wife, and the two (man and woman) then become one flesh. We are going to unpack this idea of the “oneness” in marriage later on in the series, but for now let us simply observe the plain and obvious intention for marriage according to God’s created design. Marriage was created by God to be the union between one man and one woman. In fact, the man and the woman are joined together by God in marriage, according to Jesus. The consummation of their marriage is their coming together as one flesh, which is both descriptive of their sexual union as well as the union of heart, soul, resources, and name—that is, the physical, relational, spiritual, and social cohesion that forms what?…a family. In Genesis 1:28 God instructs Adam and Eve to “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth…” Hence, marriage between a man and woman is the foundation of family, according to God’s created design.

Again, this was the picture from the beginning…this was God’s created intention: that a man and a woman, created in His image, would leave father and mother and hold to each other as husband and wife, and that they would bear children and live as families who lived in perfect relationship with God and with God’s creation. This arrangement of groom and bride in holy marriage is a picture Jesus draws upon regularly in the New Testament to describe His love as the Bridegroom for His Bride, the Church. Again, I will touch on that a bit later.

For now, let us agree. There can be little doubt concerning God’s created intention for sexuality, marriage and family from the beginning as I have shown you. However, part of our biblical worldview is the sober acknowledgment that things are not as they should be, and that leads me to my second subheading:
II. The Corruption of God’s Created Intent

I want to pause here for just moment to challenge the unbelievers who are with us to think about something very important and interesting. It does not take a religious person or even an intelligent person to observe that, in nature as well as in most cultures, human sexuality and marriage generally looks like what we just unpacked from the Bible, right? In other words, it would appear from general observation that men and women fall in love, get married, have kids, and live together as families. That is happening every day, all over the world in every tribe, tongue and culture. Furthermore, we see male and female creatures of every kind coming together to produce offspring and living, in some way or another, in family units. However, we can also observe that this natural order of things is somehow broken, particularly when it comes to human cultures. Divorce is a painful, hurtful experience for spouses and children that tears families apart, and yet divorce is rampant in our country. Pornography is degrading to women and inevitably leads to objectification and twisted views of sexuality, and yet pornography is one of the largest, if not the largest industry in the world. Hundreds of thousands of women choose to kill their unborn children every year. We can also observe other unnatural behaviors. We observe men who are attracted to men, and women who are attracted to women, men who dress up like women and women who have their body parts cut off to look like men. These unnatural behaviors leave us with this inevitable quandary: there appears to be a natural order of things… a way that things are supposed to be, but then that order of things appears to be broken in lots of people and cultures.

Listen to me now: every worldview…every religion, every philosophy, every homespun “view of how the world is” must give an account for what all of us can observe without a bit of religion or education: there is indeed a “natural” way that things are supposed to be, but that way is apparently broken and corrupted. People are both beautiful and heartless. Nature is both stunning and ruthless. Marriage is both fulfilling and incredibly hard. Families are both nurturing and completely dysfunctional at the same time! How do we account for what we can observe beginning by looking in the mirror and looking at our own families and relationships?

I would submit to you that only a biblical worldview gives a reasonable, intellectually satisfying answer for the way things actually are. The Bible helps us to understand that there was, in the beginning, a perfectly beautiful design for life on planet earth that featured husbands and wives becoming moms and dads who raised their children in families that loved God and loved the creation. But the Bible also gives us an account for why things are so messed up. In Genesis 3 we learn of the fall of mankind, and it’s a brutal story. The husband and wife believe the Liar who promises them a god-like freedom if they simply set aside God’s boundaries and devour whatever looks good to their eye. In that act of rebellion, all of creation is corrupted. Whereas just moments before the naked man and woman had felt completely safe and unashamed in the presence of their spouse and their God, they now hide from each other and from God…and we have been hiding ever since. The Bible tells us that the man and woman brought upon themselves a curse. To the woman, God states, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” To the man God states, “…cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Then God drove them
out of the place of perfection, away from the Tree of Life, and the very next story in the Bible is that of Cain killing Able. Soon after we read of the horrific corruption on earth that leads to God wiping out almost of all His creation in the flood in Genesis 6; and then a few chapters later in Genesis 19 we read of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

When we read the Bible as a narrative, we must always take care to acknowledge God’s created intention prior to the fall, and the corrupted consequence of sin that resulted after the fall.

Prior to the fall, sexuality, marriage and family were beautiful, simple, and perfect. Following the fall, sexuality, marriage and families became corrupted…and we have lived in that corruption ever since. The corruption of our hearts, minds, and bodies continues to wreak havoc in our relationships and our families. Every human soul is inherently selfish and self-serving. We are inclined to love all the wrong things for all the wrong reasons. We continue to devour everything that fancies our eye, and we continue to feel the consequence of God’s curse that accompanies our sinful choices and behaviors. That is the natural state of humanity now, and we can observe this corruption everywhere in the world, beginning in our own marriages and families.

Let me take a moment to make this personal: I am, by nature, a hopelessly selfish person…just ask my wife! Left to my own devices, I would rather be fishing most days…period. I can be quick tempered, ill-mannered, and emotionally obtuse. I am also a man who has, by nature, corrupted desires in my heart and mind. To quote the great Jeff Foxworthy, “Men are not complicated. Women are always wondering. “What is he thinking?” I’ll tell you what we’re thinking: I’d like a beer and I’d like to see something naked! Look at any man anywhere in the world, and that’s what he’s thinking!”

Now…before you start drafting your email, take an honest inventory of your own heart and mind, and I think you’ll discover some not-so-flattering qualities about yourself, though you may not be quite so honest to admit it. Maybe you don’t relate with Jeff Foxworthy, but the truth is undeniable and inevitable that in our natural condition, we all struggle with unflattering desires of the heart. We want what we want, and we give little thought to the needs or desires of others. I can testify from personal experience that most of us men are inherently selfish creatures, and we lack sensitivity to the needs of our spouses. On the female side of things, I have found through years of counseling that many (if not most) wives harbor deep feelings of resentment and unforgiveness towards their husbands. This resentment turns into contempt, and contempt leads to hopelessness. Listen: not one of us is without sin…and the sooner we acknowledge our own issues with sin, the sooner we will be in a position to move toward healing, wholeness, and restoration in regards to our sexuality, our marriages, and our families. And that leads me to my third subheading:

III. The Hope of the Gospel
In recent years, our culture has “normalized” and even “legalized” the unnatural, corrupted expressions of sexuality and marriage that have become commonplace on this side of the fall. From no-fault divorce to redefining the definition of marriage, brokenness has been normalized. Now, I will concede that these measures taken by our government are well-intended efforts to protect various expressions of sexuality from being bullied and threatened. Nonetheless, the
“normalization” of broken forms of sexuality and marriage does nothing to help the sin problem that we all struggle with.

Now, these recent developments in our American culture have deeply upset many in our country who feel that these new laws and policies are sure signs and indicators that the world is coming to an end. However, we should acknowledge that historically, there is nothing new here in regards to what is happening in our culture today. In fact, if you were to step into a time machine and zoom back to first century Athens, you would find many of the same corrupted expressions of sexuality that we observe today in America. I encourage you to read 1 Corinthians carefully and write down the sexual behaviors that Paul deals with in his letter to the church in Corinth! Read the book of Genesis and you will be amazed at the sexual corruption that you’ll find there. Sexual corruption and the disintegration of families has been the norm all over the world after the fall…that is until Jesus. Jesus interrupted the “normalcy” of corrupted sexuality by providing vision, hope, and the redemptive power to restore what sin had corrupted. It was Jesus and His followers who began a restoration movement to reclaim God’s original intent for sexuality, marriage and family, and it is still in Jesus’ name that we find hope for restoring what has been lost. And that is where I want to land the plane this morning. Because of sin, marriage and family is hard…it’s always hard. Because of sin, we struggle with our sexuality…lots of us do, and that struggle is real. But here is the good news of the Gospel: Jesus has overcome the power of sin. Jesus has REDEEMED us through His sacrifice on the cross, and He has SAVED us by His grace. And because of the love of Jesus and the forgiveness He provides for every repenting and believing soul, there is hope yet for our bodies, our marriages and our families. We learn in Ephesians 5 that Jesus actually models the kind of love that leads to a redemptive, blessed marriage. Paul encourages wives to submit to their husbands as unto the Lord, and he charges husbands to lay down their lives for their wives as Jesus gave up His life for the Church. When Christians take their faith seriously and live a life steeped in the Gospel, following the commands of our Lord and seeking to apply the grace they have received to their marriages and their families, healing and wholeness can be and often is the result. We will talk about this in greater detail throughout the series; however, here’s the deal: we have to come to a place where we own our mess. As long as we remain self-justified in our resentment or our selfishness or our pain, we will only feed the corruptive power of sin in ourselves and our relationships. Healing in Jesus begins when we humble ourselves, when we confess our own shortcomings, when we recognize His grace that was poured out for us that we might be forgiven, and then we begin to apply His grace to our relationship with our bodies, our relationship with our spouses, and our relationships in our families. Over the next three weeks, we will look at practical ways to apply the grace of the Gospel to our broken marriages and families, and it is my prayer that we will find healing and restoration as we invoke Jesus into these powerful and formative realities in our lives.

For now, as we close, I want to remind you that no matter how bad things might be, there is still hope. In Jesus there is always hope, and our marriages and families are worth fighting for. It’s going to take some hard work, a lot of humility, and a lot of grace, but remember: we are not alone in the fight. Jesus suffered on the cross so that the power of sin would once and for all be defeated, and that begins now as we submit to Him and prayerfully ask Him to heal what sin has so terribly broken. And remember also that you are in good company: we all struggle in marriage and family relationships, but we can find comfort and hope in facing these struggles together. On this side of the fall, there will always be some brokenness in our bodies, in our marriages and in
our families, but the grace of the Gospel empowers us to stay together…to walk the broken road on this side of the fall together.

A few years ago, one of my favorite artists released a song that brought me to my knees the first time that I heard it. Many of you are likely familiar with Casting Crown’s “Broken Together.” Christy and I resonate with the lyrics, the hardships, and the hope that this song articulates, and we would like to share it with you as we close the service today.