

Being Christian in today's culture Episode 6: What is God's design for sex and relationships?

TRANSCRIPT

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NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.

[00:00:00] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Welcome to the Denison Forum podcast. I'm Mark Turman, executive director of Denison Forum and host for today's conversation that we're talking about biblical flourishing once again in this series that we're calling Being Christian in Today's Culture. And we're sitting down again with our cultural apologist, Dr. Jim Denison. Jim, how are you today?

[00:00:23] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I'm doing well, Mark. Good to see you. How are you?

[00:00:25] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, doing great and just enjoying spring and looking forward to today's conversation. But before we get into the specifics of what we mean today about biblical flourishing and being Christian in today's culture, I thought we needed to take a moment to find a nickname for this podcast, you know, it's, it's great, and we want to be known as the Denison Forum Podcast.

That's a good, a formal official name, but a lot of the podcasts I listen to have nicknames and that type of thing that are kind of catchy. And so I was going to throw out for your consideration, maybe coffee and clarity. Then I thought there's a problem with that because you don't drink coffee.

[00:01:05] **Dr. Jim Denison:** No, that would be a problem.

[00:01:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** maybe, maybe

[00:01:07] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I'm not sure I'm clear.

[00:01:08] **Dr. Mark Turman:** yeah, well maybe I can bring the coffee and you bring the clarity, maybe that would help.

[00:01:13] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Okay, you'll be coffee, I'll be clarity. Let's try that. Yeah,

[00:01:15] **Dr. Mark Turman:** that could work. Or maybe we just I was thinking I heard, maybe you can tell me if this was a true story or not, but. I heard that you know, your hero, my hero, CS Lewis, he would sit down with his friend Tolkien, and they would start their conversations. What has become more clear? Is that a true story or is it just a really good idea of a true story?

[00:01:39] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, it's probably both. It's certainly a good idea. And you never know about these things because they become apocryphal so quickly. But that's the story anyway. That's what's gotten reported out. Is that that was one of the ways that they wanted to be able to sharpen iron and kind of be connected.

They were part of the Inklings, as you know, that larger group that met at the Eagle and Child. I've been there a number of times to Oxford, to the actual pub where they used to meet. They, everyone calls it the Bird and the Babe. It's kind of the slang title for it. And the table's still there. At least a table is still there where they used to meet.

And there's a picture of the group up there on the wall and such. And so, yeah, they had this very regular group that met for decades. And that was one of the questions that they would ask each other and one of the ways that they would actually kind of critique each other's writings as well. Is that clear enough?

Clarity was a massive issue for both of them and something they were really striving for in what they accomplished.

[00:02:28] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, and something that is very needed in our day kind of a word that God has really etched into my life over the last five or six years is just, The need for clarity about a lot of things. And so, you know, you gotta love a group that is calling itself the Inklings, that's a pretty interesting title for a group but also speaks to the value of being in community with other people at a deep level.

We talk about that in church. We talk about the value of not only attending worship in a big room with a bunch of people, but being in a small group where you can really develop deeper connections and. Talk about things at a, a deeper level and hold each other, hopefully accountable in some of the ways that they were doing in Lewis's group.

And hopefully all of our listeners would see the value of that, but let's Scott, let's just talk about it from a standpoint of clarity conversation. Maybe we can bring some clarity to something today. Remind everybody our purpose. At Denison forum is to help people to think biblically, to act redemptively, to live holy so that the world the world does better for everybody until Jesus comes again, and then it's really going to do well for those who follow Christ.

And so we want to help that along in some way. So we've created this series. That we're calling being Christian in today's culture, where we're dealing with seven different, what we call pillars that we think if we would focus on these things, if we would live them out passionately as believers, individually, as families and as churches and groups of faith, that we would be doing our part to help the world flourish.

Not just for us, but for everyone. And I want to remind everybody on the teachings of Jesus that are found in the great commandment to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love others as you love yourself. They all kind of are based upon that foundation, but these pillars that we've talked about so far are embracing biblical truth and authority, the necessity of having faith, personal faith in Christ.

The sanctity of life in valuing every life as something that has the inherent value of God stamped upon it. We talked about biblical righteousness, things like racial harmony, immigration, biblical equality among the sexes, other things like that. Today we're going to talk about the very, very important issue of biblical sexuality, something that both Dr. Denison and I have written about, talked about in various places. And we're going to try to bring some fresh insight into that conversation. Our next conversation will be about the low key topic of political civility as we head into another election cycle. And then we're going to pull all of this together with a final conversation about cultural engagement.

So if you haven't heard the previous conversations, they are all here in the podcast that you can go back and you can pick up any or all of these conversations. I want to remind our audience. Every one of these conversations is supported by a very helpful white paper on each of these topics that Dr. Denison has written. They are available in the, in the show notes of this podcast. They are also available at our website, which is denisonforum.org. You can find every one of these white papers. If you're a leader in your church and you're going to be teaching on one or more of these issues, we would encourage you to not only listen to these conversations, but go and get the white paper and download those papers and maybe use that as a resource.

Oftentimes, Dr. Denison links to additional resources that he and others have created. You can find those links within the white papers. You can use all of that material to help not only strengthen your own understanding, create clarity for you, but also as you teach and serve and help others, these are great resources that we hope that you would access.

So all of that's kind of background and I hope useful for folks, but let's talk about in this world that we live in being Christian, Jim, in today's culture, why would you call out sexuality and particularly biblical sexuality? As something that is a pillar, really a very foundational, fundamental area.

That believers need to focus on personally and in their witness for Christ, I, I was just kind of wondering as I was walking again through what you wrote haven't we just focused too much on sexuality in our culture? We are a sex saturated culture in many ways. Wouldn't it be better if we just kind of moved away from this conversation and talked about other things,

[00:07:07] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, there are days when you would certainly hope so, you know, that would certainly be attractive, wouldn't it? Neither you or I are in this conversation because we have some larger agenda that would make us have this discussion. Really, I think we're here for two reasons. First of all, the Bible says so much.

about our subject. Clearly, the Lord knows that we are sexual beings. He designed us as sexual beings, created us as sexual beings, blessed marriage. He created marriage. It was his design, his intention. Wasn't necessary to procreation, I suppose, if you look at the other species that populate the world. But it was God's design and intention for us to do this.

And in fact, uses the marriage, as you know, Mark, as in many ways, a metaphor for the church. And vice versa, and talks about the marriage relationship in some ways as analogous to our relationship with Jesus as a groom and a bride. And so this idea of being sexual beings and living in sexual union with our spouse is something God designed and invented and something scripture says so very, very much about.

I have a plan by which I read through the Bible every year, and I just so happen right now to be reading in the Song of Songs or the Song of Solomon. Anybody that wonders if the Bible is willing to be pretty explicit. Around sexual topics just needs to go see that book. And you'll understand that in fact, it is very much so.

And so, first of all, we want to do this to be biblical, to help people to think biblically, the more God talks about a subject, the more we can understand that to be a relevant subject for us, because God knows us so much better than we know ourselves. But the other reason I think we have to have this conversation is because of the so called sexual revolution that we're still in that started in earnest back in the 1960s, that has so upended.

What our culture and really Judeo Christian history has understood sexuality to be and to mean and has become so pervasive across society. I so often quote my friend John Stone Street who says, Ideas have consequences, bad ideas have victims. Well, the victims of the so called sexual revolution are on every hand, on every foot.

And are just absolutely massive in the damage that's being done to our society. So I really don't know how we could be salt and light in this culture and not have to address the issues that are so unfortunately, so rampantly damaging and destructive in our society today. So maybe we can

bring the good news of God's word on the subject of sexuality to bear as we try to help people think redemptively about the damaging issues that are on every side.

In the context of sexuality in our culture today.

[00:09:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, it's so, so important. And as I've heard you say before both in public and in writing that God's not trying to be a killjoy here. He's not trying to take away some some beautiful, wonderful thing from us. He's actually trying to frame it in a way that it can, can be fully all that it is supposed to be.

And as enormous as a blessing, as sex can be, as marriage can be, he's trying to frame that in a way that. We can experience it to all of its fullness. But this, this also kind of loops back around to where we started in this podcast series on biblical authority and biblical truth explain, I know some people probably will have already heard you talk about this, but it, it really has been helpful to me just to continue to think through how a rejection of biblical truth has led to the sexual revolution and to the abandoning of.

What was understood for a long time about sex and marriage, tie those two things again together for us, that rejection of biblical truth that goes back even further than the sixties, but how it really set up what we saw get ignited in such a powerful way during the sixties.

[00:10:53] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, thank you for that. And so really, if you want to go back into some history around all of this, you can go a long ways back. You can go back, obviously, to the early era of the Christian history, where the context is that God has revealed himself through scripture, and scripture is the final word by which God continues to make himself known to us, and it's through the word of God that we understand the Son of God.

Amen. Well then you get out into the larger Greco Roman world and you're dealing with all the heresy and the paganism that's there. And over time there grows up the idea that we need the rule by which the church will interpret scripture so that we can keep heresy away from theology, good theology. And so over time, and this takes a long time, but eventually the church becomes the arbiter of biblical truth, the means by which scripture is to be interpreted.

And that kind of polarity persists for a thousand years. And then you get to the Reformation era, you see a breaking away of biblical authority as paramount in the life of the Christian on the part of the Protestant Reformation anyway. Sola scriptura, the idea that scripture alone is authority, well before long you're from the Reformation into the Enlightenment, and now there's this idea that well if the church isn't the authority, Authority by which scripture must be interpreted.

Is it really the authority of our lives at all? And this scripture, even the authority of our lives at all? Who, who, who put that in charge? Who, who decided that? And so you get a movement

back to the early era of a Greco-Roman kind of a culture and an elevation of human reasoning, of human authority.

You see the birth of the modern science back of modern science in the 17th with bacon and others. And so now you start seeing. It's not just the church that is not the authority anymore, but even Scripture doesn't have to be my authority if I choose for it not to be. You bring Darwin into the conversation and now we're learning that the Bible is wrong relative to the origins of man and the concepts of science as we understand that.

Then Freud comes along and convinces many people that even the concept of God itself is a kind of a fake. Oedipus complex of sorts and, and kind of rejection, a wish fulfillment sort of an idea. Then you see all the excesses of, of religious wars along the way as well. That, and you just get to the place.

By the 20th century, this growing consensus is emerging that would say biblical authority is really individual, personal subjective. Now, you layer with, in the midst of all of that, the postmodern relativistic movement that comes to bear in the fifties that says truth itself. It's personal, individual, and subjective.

A lot of background behind that we can get back to, but nonetheless, this idea that we think of today as a post truth culture, well, all that in play and position starts making it more and more plausible that in the fifties, you could see a growing rise of pornography under Hugh Hefner and the playboy kind of media empire that emerges.

And from that end of the sixties and the so called sexual revolution. So if the church isn't necessarily out there, what in the Bible is not necessary. And the Bible's not even necessarily right about matters of science and biology and the strictures of religion that Freud teaches us are to be, are infantile and they're to be left in the past.

Well, then really we're at a place where we can kind of do what we want to do with our bodies as long as we're not harming other people. A massive piece of this is the development of birth control. in 1960. And now for the first time men and women can have sex outside of marriage with less fear of pregnant inside marriage as well, but outside of marriage with less fear of pregnancy.

And so now we're for the first time able in the sexual revolution era to reject biblical authority with less consequence of unintended or unwanted pregnancy. And then of course, for those who are pregnant, but don't wish to be, we have abortion by 1973 and the legalization of abortion. Put all that together.

And you're in an era for the first time in Western history, where certainly in Judeo Christian history where the culture has adopted this this ethos is the sexual ethic that says you can do whatever you wish. As long as you're not harming others. Now, they leave the unborn child out of the equation, obviously, in the context of abortion, tragically.

But nonetheless, there just becomes this consensus that the Bible's outdated, irrelevant on these issues. The church is outdated and irrelevant. You can do what you want with your own body. My body, my choice is kind of the mantra of the day. Well, that relates, first of all, to premarital sex and to pornography.

And it doesn't take very long until you're in 1969 and now the proclamation of the Same sex relationships as being normalized and, and from there you're into the entirety of the LGBTQ plus and the full orb'd sexual revolution as we see it today. So that's a lot of history in a short period of time, but hopefully that could be helpful.

This didn't happen in a vacuum. A lot of folk that wouldn't know what I just said are nonetheless living off the consequences of a culture that believes sexuality is what you believe it to be. You can define your gender, your orientation, however you wish, and we have no right to tell you that you're wrong.

[00:15:54] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Right. Yeah. And it just really helps to frame that we're in a big story. That didn't just start a few years ago. And sometimes we think when we're hearing stories, listening to news, watching confusion at a distance or even in some of our personal friendships, we think that that is something new but Solomon said in the book of Ecclesiastes, there's nothing new under the sun and in some ways we've been at some of these places before not exactly in the same way, but we have been and it made me think as you were talking about the authority of scripture that when the early church was being born and starting to develop, they didn't have a holy book that was considered authority for everyone in the world.

You know, certainly the Jewish community felt that way about the old Testament scriptures, but they didn't feel that way about the teachings of Jesus. They didn't yet feel that way on a scale about the writings of the apostles and the others that contributed to the new Testament and certainly the Gentile world.

Didn't see any of that as having authority in terms of scripture at that point. So we're kind of back to that place of where the early church started of, of many people not embracing this objective idea that the scripture is authoritative for our lives. And as, as I've heard you say many times, you know, 2016, I believe it was, you said that Merriam Webster's dictionary declared post truth is the word of the year.

I did some research recently where 2015, a year before that, the word of the year was identity. And it's just interesting how when we get into conversations about things like sexuality, it immediately seems to get in this narrow category of people just talking about their sexual identity, even though identity is much bigger than that.

But we also started having a lot of confusion about identity at the same time that we were rejecting biblical truth. And it's not accidental that those things came together. I wanted to come, wanted to come back to this idea and the phenomenon you and I quote unquote came of age in the seventies and the eighties and in the continual rolling out of the quote unquote sexual revolution.

You and I like to follow at times the, the writings and and work of David French, the pol, the cultural commentator. I read a book about a year ago by a, a writer, a, a, a journalist with the Washington Post. Her name's Christine Iba. She wrote a book called Rethinking Sex. Both of those people IBA and French have said that in some ways they see the sexual revolution burning out.

Would you describe it that way, or is it just. Morphing into a different kind of fire. How would you talk about that?

[00:18:41] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, I would like to agree with him. I would like to believe that that is true, although I think to the degree that it would be burning out, what it would be leaving in its wake, in the embers, would be a very different world than what we had 50 years ago. And if it's burning out, it's only because. So many of the assumptions that we've been describing have now become codified as fact.

It's now just conventional wisdom in the culture, that your sexual orientation, gender identity are your own business, and we have no right to legislate that, and all of that. But what's happening even in recent days with Title IX would give the light of that. What's going on even as you and I are having this conversation where the Biden administration has brought forward massive revisions in Title IX protections relative to sex in the context of bathrooms and athletic space and things such as that to expand that to sexual orientation, to gender identity, to transgender issues.

There are a number of states that have already filed lawsuits against this revision of Title IX and other states that are saying they're not going to enforce it, that they're going to refuse to enforce it. And so. To the degree that the expectations and the now assumptions of the sexual revolution are still being fought over legally, then this certainly hasn't burned itself out.

This fire isn't by any means out yet. And as the adherence of kind of a LGBTQ activism continue proceeding forward, there's still more ground to be claimed. There's a great deal of interest

around polyamory right now and around polygamy and around defining marriage in a way that would allow for plural marriage, not just for same sex marriage.

And those battles are still ahead of us, I think out and out in front of us. I'm sorry to say this, but there is a growing interest. In very non normative sexual expressions around bestiality and around consensual marriage, regardless of age or biological relationship. And there's some of that even that is in the popular media.

A few years ago, there was a documentary entitled Dolphin Lover, in which the person who made the documentary is describing his sexual relationship with a dolphin, and it won any number of awards. This documentary did, and so unfortunately, I think there's still more ground to be claimed by these activists that are pushing this narrative forward, this non biblical, anti biblical narrative, and then a great deal of legal issue around all of this still to be fought as well.

The fire's still burning, and burning in even new ways, I think, and gaining even more oxygen with some of what's happening in the culture today.

[00:21:12] **Dr. Mark Turman:** let me, let me go a little bit further with that. If, if I could, Jim, if, if the culture gets to the place where like Imba another writer that I read described it as we've, we've gone and we continue to go, as you just described so far down this road, of warped and unbiblical, twisted sexuality. If the culture at scale becomes disenchanting or disillusioned with sex and the other things that we typically attach to it, which are marriage and family, if it becomes wide scale disillusionment.

Where does that take us potentially do you think?

[00:21:55] **Dr. Jim Denison:** It's on two levels. One of the things that we're seeing in Japan, and we're starting to see even more in the United States, is a privatization of sex. It's now possible because of pornography for individuals to have some sexual experience that don't date, that don't think they'll ever date, that don't think there are any suitable candidates for marriage.

And so we're seeing this privatized. With AI and AI video, I'm afraid, Mark, this is going to become even more of an epidemic and pornographic experiences are going to be even more addictive. And as this moves forward. So on the one side, this is becoming even more privatized and all of the gamut of sexual expression that we've been talking about that can be on some level privatized and hidden from public consumption makes it even worse to see some things that could happen on that relative to a decline of marriage as a result of what you're saying now.

No question. that we're seeing a smaller percentage of young adults getting married than at any time in American history. We're seeing birth rates falling now to unprecedented lows in this

country. And that is significant relative to the future of any country, of any culture if the replacement rate is not being on some level met.

Sociologists speak of a, of a number. Replacement rate number below which a nation or a culture is seeing more people die than births. More deaths than births. Over time, that population has to decline. Just by definition, not only are you going to have a smaller population, you're going to have an aging population because as you have fewer births, you have fewer number of young people to sustain that population as the older generation continues to age and we're aging to a larger degree than ever before because of medical advances and all inside that.

So now you're thinking about social security. Now you're thinking about social welfare networks. Now you're thinking about even the ability to maintain economies, as so many people are past working age, and they're not being replaced by people of younger age, because fewer people are getting married, and fewer people are having children, and all of that.

We're only seeing this in Western Europe. A great number of nations in Western Europe would be even worse off if it weren't for immigration. If it weren't for the replacement of their society by virtue of immigrants and immigrant populations, some of which have very, very high birth rates. And that may be the case in America as well.

There are parts of America right now where it's quite frankly Latino immigrants who are bolstering and holding up replacement rate kind of population shifts in ways that are keeping us from being in even worse shape relative to the future of our country. And so. Yeah. As you see marriage become less popular and you certainly see reproduction happening less often.

As you see more and more young people saying they don't want to have children. They don't want to bring children into this age. You bring climate change into this conversation and more and more young adults that are terrified of what the future of our world could look like from the point of climate disaster and climate catastrophe and don't want to bring children into what they think that future could look like, that world could look like.

And at some point, You really do begin to wonder what the future of that population looks like. And some of the predictions out there are pretty dire around what an aging population, especially in the global north, could look like in places where that that replacement rate's not being met. It's a massive issue in China right now.

They had a one child policy for years and now they've done everything they can to reverse that, to actually bribe families to have several children because they see what I'm talking about. Massive issue in Japan right now. Major issue in a lot of Russia right now. Certainly an issue in Canada, an issue in North America, and so, really the global north.

Is an end across Europe is really struggling around what we're talking about right now. Again, if we go back to what the Bible says about how God created us and created us for each other and created us for marriage and for family, there are exceptions, of course, to that in scripture and in common life today.

But if we get back to that biblical narrative, a lot of what we're talking about would be dramatically changed and for the good. If we could get back to seeing ourselves as God sees us.

[00:25:57] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, yeah, and I I recently heard an author talking about this how it how it's happening in Korea that Korea is really struggling with this,

[00:26:05] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Massive issues.

[00:26:06] **Dr. Mark Turman:** With a declining birth rate and it really is affecting their economy. I just I was wondering and he was also talking about how Just a, a country that values children and values people having more children is a forward looking community.

It's a forward looking nation rather than looking backward. I wonder, I wonder, do you see a a devilish agenda behind that, that Satan is doing this as a way of, of disrupting or even destroying not only families, but entire nations is, Is there, would you say that there's something just satanic or devilish behind some of these realities that are being played out at this kind of scale.

[00:26:52] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Oh, it's a great question. I certainly think on the first side of that relative to how sexual expression, sexual identity and what God intends for marriage has certainly been damaged, has been undermined by what Satan is doing. Satan can't create, but he can always distort. And that's his strategy always.

God made sex to be a beautiful expression of love between a man and a woman, and often with a procreative result. Well, Satan hates everything I just said. And so he's going to do all he can to undermine that. And so much of the way the sexual revolution has prostituted what God intended and corrupted what God intended, I think is satanic in his deceptions.

He's a liar and a father of lies, as Jesus said. Hadn't thought about whether he could also be behind declining birth rates. Especially in countries that have had at least historically a strong Judeo Christian influence and could be wanting to see that be replaced otherwise. I don't know that the Trindology necessarily would support that idea.

Many of the places around the world where we're not having the struggle, where you are seeing advancing birth rates are some of the places that are seeing growth of the evangelical movement and the global South where you're seeing very, very strong advance for the gospel. And in places where there is.

A strong re kind of procreation ethic and a procreative sort of, result. I think Sub Saharan Africa, certainly in Central and South America, you're seeing great advances for the evangelical church and there you're not seeing. The decline in birth rates like we're describing nearly so much as you are in the north and so don't know that Satan is so much being successful there, but certainly relative to undermining and corrupting what God intended sex to be and then send it sexual identity to be absolutely Satan's at work there and he is destroying what God creates because he hates what God loves.

[00:28:37] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And especially in this area, you know, the, just I mean, as in the conversation just recently about a family that's really struggling with some of these issues. But it really does seem, it seems so obvious that. That Satan and the culture are attacking God's beautiful idea for sex and for sexuality, for biblical marriage and for children.

But Jim, it always just, I kind of walk away from some of these conversations scratching my head going, you know, if we're so. Smart. And we are progressing so much as some people want us to believe. It just kind of astounds me that, that the counterbalance of that is so many people, not even people who are people of faith still seem to long for the biblical idea of an exclusive love relationship with one person that is characterized.

By both joy and loyalty and it, I sometimes think, well, you know, if, if marriage was, if marriage, the way the Bible describes it was so archaic and irrelevant and out of date, why hasn't it passed off of the scene a long time ago? How would you, how would you respond to that? Why hasn't, if we're so smart and advanced.

Why hasn't this whole concept of marriage and family gone away?

[00:30:00] **Dr. Jim Denison:** That's a great question. And in my mind, it's a strong apologetic for the relevance of scripture, even to this day. Human nature doesn't change. We are still the same people we've always been. And so what scripture said about Adam and Eve, it still says about us. What was true for them is true for us. And when the Lord said, it's not good for the man to be alone, that's still the case.

That it is not good for the man to be alone. We're in a loneliness epidemic right now. The surgeon general says that loneliness is more dangerous than cigarette smoking, even. And the deleterious effects, the physical, the psychological effects of loneliness are absolutely clear right now in the epidemic.

Results of this, not just because of the pandemic, but even on the other side of it or on every side or on every hand. And God turned out to be right when he said, it's not good for the man to be alone. When he created us for relationship with him and relationship with each other, when he

created us to love the Lord, your God with your heart, soul, mind and strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus teaches us to do that because we're made for it. To do that, we're created by God to do that very thing. So we ought not be surprised that a secular manifestation of that built in kind of God shaped emptiness, that kind of divine urging what could be called a signal of transcendence, even in Peter Berger's thinking would have a secular manifestation as well.

You'd see it in romance movies. You would see it in so much of popular music today. So much of Taylor Swift's music, which I, which I've Don't know a lot about, but from what I understand about is about breakups and about frustrations, about being let down by a lover and by somebody that wasn't a consistent partner that she hoped they would be, thought they would be, we're just built to want that, built to need that, to long for this.

And even in the secular world, we haven't given this up. People are asking your very question. For a long time now, for decades now, there have been extreme activists here who want to dismantle marriage entirely, who want to get rid of the institution of marriage itself, who want to make the claim that marriage and the idea of fidelity in marriage, the idea of that a person would be faithful only to one spouse is contrary to nature.

It's contrary to our natural impulses. A monogamy is outdated and ought to be dispensed with. And marriage ought to be dispensed with. Well, they're not making progress, are they? In spite of all the activism around all of this and the arguments they're trying to make, human nature doesn't cooperate with the activists, and we still are in a world where we long for what God made us to long for.

Things tend to do what they were made to do, and we were made for relationship with God and with one another.

[00:32:30] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And yeah, first of all, I was going to say, yeah, okay. If you're a Taylor Swift if you're a Swiftie, you need to like explain some of that because that was going to catch me off

[00:32:39] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, I've given you all I know.

[00:32:41] **Dr. Mark Turman:** it's just, it's woven into just the fabric of who we are, where, you know, like, many people even if they don't want to admit it, they know what the bachelor is, or they follow that program and it's, it's It's just interesting to me.

I don't follow it. I don't watch that show, but it's interesting to hear a water cooler conversation where people, if, if the couple that met through the show, the bachelor or the bachelorette, if that couple doesn't make it as one example, recently that I heard that the golden bachelor and his

chosen wife didn't stay married for about, for a couple of months and people take that as a failure. They see it as a failure and they're sad about it. They're disappointed that it didn't work, which just goes back to this pointing back to this reality that we were made, not, not that everybody is called into marriage, there's clearly there clearly is a carve out in scripture that you can be.

Called of God into a singleness and have a very rich, fulfilling and satisfying life. But most people seemingly from the scriptures and from practical life, most people are called into marriage and into a life of having children. And that is something very positive that God blesses. And other people on occasion are called into singleness.

But it just, it just, again, points back to what you've been saying, which is we have been made this way by God and to live out this gift of sexuality in a particular way that he can bless. Jim, in your article, in your white paper, you call out several non biblical expressions of sexuality. One of those being polygamy and polyamory.

Can you give us the quick definition and distinction? I hear you at times talk about polygamy. Then at times I hear you talk about polyamorous relationships. What's the difference between those two? And and if there's anything else that you need to say other than what you've already said about why they don't work because This paper does a great job calling out all of the positive all of the not only spiritual, but just practical and secular evidence for why the biblical model of sexuality, marriage, and sexual relationships is better.

But why doesn't polygamy work? Why doesn't that methodology actually replace marriage?

[00:35:10] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, thank you. And we're going to see this again via debate as this goes down the way, if the advocates have their way. Polyamory just means many loves. And so polyamory is a movement that's being championed right now, really across the media. We're seeing headline articles about it. We're seeing cover stories about this.

New Yorker had a massive story about this not long ago, in which they're trying to champion the idea. That you ought not try to be monogamous in your loving relationships. Now this is separate from marriage. We'll get to that just in a second, but in your dating relationships primarily, that there's nothing wrong with dating and even having sexual relationships with a number of people at the same time.

And so rather than serial monogamy, which has been a thought in the past, but Polyamory would say that there's absolutely nothing unethical about having as many sexual relationships at the same time as you wish to have, and having many loves is what polyamory is trying to endorse. But when you move that into marriage, it becomes polygamy.

Polygamy would be a legalized, a marital relationship involving more than two individuals, already legalized in two townships in Massachusetts. There's a movement to try to make that a national sort of a thing as well. One example of that, as you know, in the Muslim world, according to the Quran, a man is permitted to have as many as four wives.

Well, they're anywhere from 50 to a hundred thousand polygamous Muslim families in America today, researchers tell us they married their first wife legally, and then their second, third or fourth wives and kind of a civil ceremony down at the mosque or the Islamic center, or in just some kind of A common law sort of a way, but in a practical sense, they are in polygamous relationships.

And the argument is, well, we're discriminating against Islam. If we don't allow that to be the code of law for the entire nation, if Obergefell taught us that we can't discriminate against same couples, same, same sex couples, and we can't tell people what sex they can marry, how can we tell them what number they can marry?

And so polygamy becomes a legalization of polyamory, as it were. Well, this has been around enough now that sociologists have been able to do the research that I've reflected in the paper. And the, the results are unanimous here, on really three levels, that this doesn't work. From purely a sociological, psychological, relational point of view.

First of all, relative to life satisfaction rates, for those that are in polyamorous relationships and to some degree polygamous relationships their life satisfaction rates are dramatically less than is the case if they are single or if they're in monogamous relationships. Traditional marriages.

And that's really kind of across the board here. Life satisfaction goes down significantly. A lot of theories behind all of that. Jealousy could be an issue if you're in a poly, polygamous or polyamorous relationship. Sexually transmitted diseases are issues inside this. Trust issues become significant.

Public reputational issues become part of all of that. But, so anyway, so life satisfaction goes down significantly. The endurance of these relationships goes down significantly. Goes down significantly as well much more likely to end more more suddenly, more rapidly longevity issues become far less documented in these polyamorous or even polygamous marital relationships.

And then when you bring children into the equation. We see massive deleterious effects massive damage done to children who don't know who their parents are, who don't know what to call these people that are in these relationships, who don't know how to relate to them, who don't know who they are in these family relationships.

We're seeing massive damage done to children. And so just purely on a secular level, these things don't work. And it turns out yet again, that God was right. And how we designed us and designed us for each other and how we design marriage to function and not to function now I do need to add that not everything the Bible describes does it prescribe?

There's no question that polygamy is commonly practiced in the Old Testament, but nowhere is it endorsed in the Old Testament. Nowhere is it endorsed. And the consequences of it are made very, very clear in Scripture. If David was attempting a polyamorous relationship with Bathsheba by bringing her into his sexual dimensions and relationships and then eventually marrying her, of course, and having a polygamous relationship with her, well, The damage from just that alone to his marriage, to his family, to his descendants, really the high point of David's life and his legacy was intact prior to Bathsheba and everything goes downhill from there.

And so scripture does not prescribe what it describes at that point. And by the time you get to the New Testament, there's no question. In the letters of the New Testament, Paul, God absolutely intends marriage to be a lifelong covenant between one man and one woman. Anything outside of that is not God's best, and the research indicates that God is right.

[00:40:01] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah, so yeah, thank you for that. So good, which, which raises a question. I don't know if I've ever had this question. So it, this is spur of the moment. So I apologize for that. But is there any indication you spoke of David in, in what we see in him and Solomon having so many wives and that type of thing.

But by the time, like I said, by the time we get to the story of Jesus, that's recorded in the new Testament and the beginning of the early church, by the time we get to Jesus's birth. It seems at least within the Jewish community that polygamy has gone away and do we know exactly, particularly in that 400 year period between the end of Malachi the nation of Israel has been taken into exile, but by the time we get to the new Testament, do we know that there were particular things that, that kind of took this out of the Jewish community?

Okay.

[00:40:59] **Dr. Jim Denison:** levels. First of all, it's that argument of silence a little bit between Malachi and Matthew. We have the apocryphal literature that fills in the gaps to some degree, but it doesn't speak to this issue on any level. Kind of real specificity, but there are two things that are happening here.

First of all, polygamy itself and the sociology around all of that in an earlier era of the old Testament was a typical experience around the world as a means by which life and family could be perpetuated, which With very high infant mortality rates, with very low survival rates with

men dying at war, men dying in the, in their ability to make living with very down, very dangerous lifestyles, many of them.

And so a lot of widows at young ages that had children that they were responsible for. And so this idea of marrying them so as to provide for them, so as to care for them and for their offspring becomes in some ways, not just an expression of sexuality on the part of the man or lust on his part, but as a way of providing.

providing for women that are otherwise widowed and children that are otherwise orphaned. Well, by the time you get to the New Testament, that's less the case sociologically. You've moved from an agrarian lifestyle to more of a not industrial age lifestyle, but certainly living more in cities, living in in a culture that is safer in some ways you're seeing armies that with, with soldiers, professional soldiers, as opposed to a tribal culture where men are having to defend their own tribe and their own tent at a drop of a hat at Spurs moment and all of the conflict that can happen inside all of that.

And so you're in some ways, a safer environment in some ways between Malachi and Matthew and the need for polygamy in order just to protect women and Children. And To kind of preserve the culture and the tribe is much, much less a thing than was the case earlier. And so sociology is going to move away from some of that.

It becomes more difficult for men to have enough means to protect or to provide for many wives and many children. As a result of all of that, there's really no middle class to speak up. In the Roman era. And so you really have people working for masters. And so to the degree you see polygamy, it's on the part of this wealthy overlord, very small class, but the, the workers that are working for them really can't afford to have numerous wives and large offspring and such, and, and there's not the same necessity as might've been the case.

So there's a sociology. That comes to bear in some, some of this, but I think the other thing to mention quickly is the purification that happens on the other side of the Babylonian exile inside the Jewish movement itself. The Pharisees become a reality, as you know, during the Babylonian exile, this lay movement the 6, 000 or so people that are absolutely insisting on ritual purity and legalistic righteousness and such, there becomes a real purification of the Jewish movement.

There's this growing consensus that, Hey, we have been judged by God here. We have, because of not only the Assyrian, but then the Babylonian, and then we've been under the Persians and the Greeks and now under the Romans, and we have been judged by God. And there's a purity movement that results from some of this led primarily by the Pharisees.

And so by the time you get to the New Testament, you have a chastened Judaism, as it were, you have a purified Judaism. You don't see idolatry anymore. Nothing in the New Testament where

you again see the Jews engaged in anything like the Baalism of the Old Testament and the idolatry that you see back to Aaron and the golden calf and that you see in the time of Elijah and so much what the prophets are dealing with.

You just don't see that in the New Testament. That's no longer an issue. Really now it's the other side. Now the excesses are that now the Jewish people are becoming so focused on ritual purity and legalistic righteousness and all of that, that they're no longer understanding the need for a savior.

Their deed for redemption quite as had been the case before, because they are so insistent on being separate from this pagan Roman culture and all the excesses of that, all the horrific sexual excesses of that. And so by the New Testament, you have this purity movement as well that moves us in a very different kind of sexual ethic than had been the case earlier in the Old Testament.

[00:44:59] **Dr. Mark Turman:** no. Well, yeah. Thank you for that. That, that I've always kind of wondered how we turned that page in such a dramatic way and Like I said, this, that, that idea of that, we know that we have been chastised by God as a nation and some of the changes that started to come and like I said, the rise of the Pharisees and all those.

So let's, let's move a little forward then into the New Testament era and to as you said before, Jesus affirms the biblical ethic that we find early in scripture around marriage and around sexuality. He is very clear in some ways about. When he is questioned about divorce or he is questioned about other things related to marriage and sexuality, he goes back multiple times.

He goes back to what God's original design and intent were. And then if you move up to one of the most prolific writers of the new Testament, the apostle Paul, as he's inspired by the Holy spirit. His very first letter, Jim, as you well know, calls out 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 3 through 6 particularly.

He says that each of us is to live our lives in sanctification, that we're to know how to possess our bodies in holiness. And in purity and not with lust as the unbelievers do. And that becomes really a fundamental teaching of the church. It becomes something you can find in various other places of the 13 letters that Paul writes.

But as a pastor, you and I share this somewhat as a frustration, which is so many Christians. Who have chosen to cohabit before marriage. They have chosen to be engaged sexually before marriage. And many times they would come and sit down with me or you and say they want to get married, but it becomes pretty obvious pretty quickly that they are already engaged in a sexual relationship.

Many times they're already living together. And so I kind of, I've always struggled as a Christian and then later as a pastor was Paul, when he was writing this, was he, was God setting us up for failure was, is this idea just really not achievable of, of, of abiding by this idea that we're going to remain sexually chaste until we get married.

And then we're going to be exclusive with this person. That we do marry. Let's talk a little bit about the frustration of Christians who cohabit and who participate in sex outside of marriage before marriage. Give us some help on that.

[00:47:39] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, I think that we're seeing that, and we are seeing that, unfortunately, we're seeing that thing, I think, for three reasons, primarily. Number one is the church has been solid for far too long on these issues. I'll bet that if you could interview, candidly, couples that are in church on Sunday and cohabiting and say to them, you know that the Bible would tell you not to do this, they'd be shocked to hear that. If you were to come along and say, this is not biblical ethic, this is not God's intention for you, God does not want you to be in this cohabiting relationship, that would be news to them. Because so much of their lives have been lived in a way where the church hasn't spoken into this, at least in a way that they've heard, in a way that has been to them clear, and has been made relevant to them.

And so the church owes them. Biblical truth, biblical teaching at this point. I think on a second level to the degree that they're in church on Sunday, they're probably not on some significant level being influenced by a biblical worldview. They might be coming to church on Sunday, but they're living their lives in a secular world where they are inundated, absolutely inundated.

With the message. If it feels good, do it. And the expression of love is sex, even on the first date. That's how you show somebody that you love them. And of course you move in together. In fact, moving in together is a precursor to getting married. How do I know if I want to marry this person unless I live with them?

That's just become conventional wisdom. I mean, the movies and the pop music of the day, the culture, it's so unanimous and overwhelmingly kind of communicated to them and we get them for an hour a week, for a couple hours a week. And that's even if they came to church that week. And they're inundated the rest of their life and the rest of the week with far more pervasive, far more attractive, far more creative ways of telling the story than we do in our sermons on a Sunday morning.

And in ways, quite frankly, that line up with the fallenness of our bodies anyway. That line up with the a God given desire for procreation, but the way that the enemy has corrupted that into the kind of sexual desire that is so rampant in the culture pornography feeding into this so much just so much of a rampant sex drive that is rampant.

That has been in so many ways amplified and, and, and corrupted. And so, they're hearing a message that parallels what they want to do anyway, in their own fallenness, all of us would in our own fallenness. And then a third piece of this, there's really nothing in scripture that you and I can consistently obey without the help of God's spirit.

We can't be chaste without the help of the spirit, just like we can't be truthful without the help of the spirit. There's really no way we can manifest the fruit of the spirit without the spirit. We can't keep the Word of God without the power of God. We weren't intended to be able to do so. We can't, therefore, be chaste without the help of God's Holy Spirit.

And if there's any one place, you've heard me say this before, Mark, but if there's any one place where I think evangelical Christianity most needs to change, it's in our self reliance. It's in our sense that if I just show up on Sunday and I read the Bible and I pray and I try hard to be good, that that's all that's necessary here.

We have to be filled with the Spirit. We have to, every single day, as Ephesians 5. 18 commands us, get with God, I mean even today, and ask the Holy Spirit to take control of our lives and our minds and to empower us and to help us to live biblically. Then when we're tempted, we turn that temptation over to God and we say, God, I'm being tempted right now by lust or pornography or whatever it is, and I'm asking you to help me to defeat this temptation.

If I could defeat it on my own, Satan wouldn't bring it to me. He's a great economist. He's a much better, and he's much better attempting than I am at resisting. And he knows the things I can defeat on my own. I never see those. No one ever tries to get me to buy illegal drugs. I'm not boasting here. I just happen not to be tempted by illegal drugs.

If someone did, Satan never brings drug dealers by my path. He knows what I can't defeat on my own, and that's what he brings to me. But he wants me to think I can defeat it myself. So I'll try. And lose. So every time I face a temptation, I've got to say to myself, okay, I can't defeat this or I wouldn't be facing it.

Even though I think I can, even though Satan wants me to think I can. I've got to develop the impulse of immediately bringing that to God and saying, God, I, Lord, I'm being tempted by lust right now. I'm being tempted sexually or whatever it is right now. I ask you for strength. I ask you to help me to win victory over this.

Help me to be chaste. Help me to be pure. Give me the strength in my dating relationship to be pure here. We haven't taught that well enough. We haven't convinced people to live in the power of the Holy Spirit enough so as to resist that cultural narrative that is so all encompassing in our culture today.

Last thing I'll say, I wrote an article the other day, about a Christian couple that made the news. They've written the New York Post. They were a headline story because they're dating and they're choosing not even to passionately kiss until their marriage. They have been sexually active in the past.

They have been damaged by that. They have seen the results of that. And so this 34 and 31 year old couple are choosing never to spend the night together in the same place. And they are choosing not even to have a passionate kiss until they're married. And they are saying this is the best relationship of their lives.

They're having the best love of their lives. They are feeling the greatest intimacy of their lives. And they are so grateful they're doing what they're doing and they're encouraging other people to do it. And that was in the New York Post. Not Christianity Today or something. That was in the New York Post.

[00:53:02] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah.

[00:53:02] **Dr. Jim Denison:** day. It can be done. If we'll do this in the power of God's Holy Spirit.

[00:53:07] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. It's such a great, great explanation of not only how. To live a beautiful Christian life in your sexual experience, but in your whole experience and just that constant dependence, because as you were talking, it made me think of what I saw Paul David Tripp, right? In one of his books, he said, most of what people hear when they come to church on Sunday is God is good.

You're bad. Try harder. And that's what too many people walk away from the experience of a family of faith gathered for worship. That's what they hear. That's the way they interpret it. And it just never was intended to work that way. It doesn't work that way. And that all through the day, and especially in this most enormously beautiful, powerful area called sexuality marriage and family.

Do we need the Holy spirit? I just wonder, you know, there's so many more things that you call out in this paper. I hope people will, will go and read the entire document. You talk some about the, the realities of what's going on in the area of same sex attraction and same sex marriage. Talk about the difficult issue of transgenderism, the really pervasive and, and difficult problem of pornography.

All of those things are in this paper in different ways. And I would hope people would explore those, but to come back around to this and say, you know what, we are absolutely incapable on

our own of confronting and, and having victory in these areas without the Holy spirit, but that God has given us.

Not only his forgiveness, he's given us his word and he has given us his church as a community of support, and most of all, he's given us himself, he's given us the spirit and that if we will depend on him consistently learn to hear his voice and to live in his strength, we actually can live by these by these designs these ethical standards and pathways that he's given us.

And that's where we will find joy. And, and Jim, as we often like to do on this podcast and in other things that we do, we just want people to have hope that God did not set us up for failure. He set us up for his favor. And that's what the word of God describes to us. It describes to us the pathways to experiencing God's favor.

As your wife likes to say, say, live a life God can bless, but you can only live that life as you walk in harmony with the Holy spirit. And Yeah, just want people to hear that. All right. We we're just about gone too long. So a last word that you want to share with

[00:55:43] **Dr. Jim Denison:** Shocking.

[00:55:44] **Dr. Mark Turman:** we've already talked a lot.

[00:55:46] **Dr. Jim Denison:** in our coffee and clarity. That's right. That, that is.

[00:55:51] **Dr. Jim Denison:** I don't know about the clarity with the coffee, you know, there you go. So I do hope. That in the clarity of this, we really do hear that word of hope that the Lord, it's never too late to come back to God.

No matter what's going on in your life, no matter what your story might be, no matter what mistakes you might've made in the past, no matter what your own personal experiences might've been, God redeems all the allows. God can redeem even our past, even our experiences in ways that can give us a hopeful future in in the kind of purity and the kind of joy that the Holy Spirit made us for, that God literally designed us for, intended us for.

God is love. He can't help loving us. It's not that he loves us because we're lovable. It's not as though God loves you more when you're pure one day than when you're not. It's not that God loves you more if you've been faithful in marriage than if you haven't or that if you've been, if you've been holy in your thoughts than if you haven't.

God loves you because he loves you. Doesn't love you because you're worthy of love. He doesn't love you because you're lovable. He loves you because he is love. To say it crudely, he loves you because he can't help it. Can't help loving you. That's his character. That's who he is. God is love. In John 17, Jesus says, the father loves us as much as he loves his son. I can't get my mind

around that. To think that God loves me as much as he loved Billy Graham or Mother Teresa. Well, fine. That God loves me as much as he loves his own son. But because he is love, he does. So know you're loved. Know that you're loved unconditionally and know that God wants you to share his love with others and to experience his love in a way that could be transforming for you and for your culture.

Never give up on the love of God, I think would be the point today.

[00:57:33] **Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. Well, thank you for that. And I want to thank, as we get ready to close here, just thank our audience again for listening with us, following us. Thank you for being a part of this series and we hope that you'll again participate in and be strengthened and equipped from all of the episodes of what it means to be a Christian in today's culture. I want to also let you know that this is not the only podcast in this series not the only resource we'll be releasing in conjunction with this episode of the series. A new book that we have called sacred sexuality.

It's the work of a number of authors. I have a part in that. Dr. Denison wrote part of that. Ryan Denison, who's also on our team. We came together along with Mark Legg and we wrote a book that we hope that will be a good tool for you and that will be available along with this podcast to support all of the things that we've been talking about, and we want to help you to be equipped and successful as you walk with Christ and as you help others to do so as well.

So look for. Not only Dr. Denison's white paper that's attached here, but also the new book that's coming out called sacred sexuality. Again, thank you for being a part of this conversation. Thank you for your prayers and your support. We are a donor funded ministry and you enable us to make resources like this available for free through your donations.

And we're grateful for that. And we're thankful to be a part of the ministry that God has called us to be a part of together. God bless you. We'll see you next time on the Denison forum podcast.