

W E A R E A L L

CALLED  
TO  
COUNSEL

## About Jonathan

Jonathan Holmes is the Founder and Executive Director of Fieldstone Counseling. He previously served for fifteen years on the pastoral teams of Parkside Church and Parkside Green. Jonathan graduated from The Master's University with degrees in Biblical Counseling and History and his MA from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. He is the author and contributor to a number of books including *The Company We Keep*, *Counsel for Couples*, *Rescue Skills*, *Rescue Plan*, and the forthcoming book *Grounded in Grace: Helping Kids Build Their Identity In Christ*.

Jonathan has written for *Christianity Today*, *The Gospel Coalition*, the Biblical Counseling Coalition, the ERLC, and the *Journal for Biblical Counseling*. Jonathan serves on the Board of Trustees for CCEF (Christian Counseling Educational Foundation), the Advisory Board for ABC (Association of Biblical Counselors) and the Council Board for the BCC (Biblical Counseling Coalition).

Jonathan is a Visiting Faculty member at CCEF, an instructor at Westminster Theological Seminary in the Masters of Counseling program, and he speaks frequently at conferences and retreats. He and his wife, Jennifer, have four daughters.



# A Scripture-Shaped Story of Human Sexuality & Gender

*ABC Called to Counsel 2024* | Jonathan D. Holmes

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*Introduction:*

*Alasdair MacIntyre:* I can only answer the question “What am I to do?” if I can answer the prior question “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?”

*A Scripture-Shaped Story of Human Sexuality and Gender*

## Creation

*Genesis 1:26-28:* Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

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

And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

## *Four Foundational Principles*

- You are a created being: Gen. 1:26
  - *John Stott:* The biblical revelation reminds us that human beings are not self-explanatory. They derive their meaning from outside themselves, from God in whose image they are made. We are not autonomous individuals, creating ourselves constantly by the decisions and choices we make. No, we are images, we are reflections. The dignity of our humanity is derivative; it comes from him whose image we bear. We are dependent beings.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Watkins, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible’s Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 92.

- You are an engendered being: Gen. 1:27<sup>2</sup>
  - *N.T. Wright*: The binaries in Genesis are so important...It's all about God making complementary pairs which are meant to work together. It's an entire narrative which works with this complementarity so that a male-plus-female marriage is a signpost or a signal about the goodness of the original creation and God's intention for the eventual new heavens and new earth.<sup>3</sup>
  - *Sam Andreades*: The Bible sees gender as a further gift added upon our biology, shaping our identities and deeply revealing of God's self.<sup>4</sup>
  
- You are a sexual being: Gen. 1:28
  - *Nancy Pearcey*: If we are ever tempted to think that sex is corrupt or dirty, we need to remind ourselves that it was God who created it in the first place. Sex is not something introduced after the fall...God pronounced [it] "very good".<sup>5</sup>
  - *Todd Wilson*: Put positively, all sexual activity ought to express and embody the one-flesh union we call marriage, for this is the God-given purpose of sex. Put negatively, any form of sexual activity that fails to express or embody a one-flesh union is out of step with the teaching of Scripture and outside the will of God.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Herman Bavinck*: God is the creator of the human being, and simultaneously also the Inaugurator of sex and of sexual difference. This difference did not result from sin; it existed from the very beginning, it has its basis in creation, it is a revelation of God's will and sovereignty, and is therefore wise and holy and good. Therefore, no one may misconstrue or despise this sexual difference, either within one's own identity or in that of another person. It has been willed by God and grounded in nature.

<sup>3</sup> Brett McCracken, "The Beauty of Complementarity Goes Beyond Gender," July 28, 2018, *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/beauty-complementarity-goes-beyond-gender/>. Accessed 5 May 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Sam A. Andreades, *engendered: God's Gift of Gender Difference in Relationship*, (Wooster, OH: Weaver Publishing, 2015), 38-39.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering the Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), Kindle loc. 138.

<sup>6</sup> Todd Wilson, *Mere Sexuality: Rediscovering the Christian Vision of Sexuality*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 110.

*Genesis 2:18-25*: Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

“This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
she shall be called Woman,  
because she was taken out of Man.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

- You are a relational being: Gen. 2:18-25

## Fall

*Genesis 3:1-7*: Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

- Doubt
- Distort
- Dismiss and deny
- Deceive

*Genesis 3:8-11*: And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

- It affects their bodies
- It affects their relationship with others
- It affects their relationship with God
- It affects their relationship with creation

Redemption

## Consummation

*Revelation 21:1-5*: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. And he who was seated on the throne said, “*Behold, I am making all things new.*”

## Application

*If you don't know God's story, you'll be tempted to write your own story*

*God's voice and word on sex and gender is authoritative and good*

# Identity: What Is It and How is It Formed?

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*Carl Trueman:* The fact that “I am a woman trapped in a man’s body” makes sense to Joe Smith probably has far less to do with him being committed to an elaborate understanding of the nature of gender and its relationship to biological sex than to the fact that it seems intuitively correct to affirm someone in his or her chosen identity and hurtful not to do so, however strange the particulars of that self-identification might have seemed to previous generations.<sup>7</sup>

*Jonathan Haidt:*

- *Test 1:* Is it harmful or not?
- *Test 2:* Is it freeing or oppressive?
- *Test 3:* Is it fair or discriminatory?<sup>8</sup>

## Expressive individualism

*Andrew T. Walker:* What is at the root of humanity’s assault on God-defined expressions of sexuality and gender? God’s authority over sexual desire and sexual relationships, and God’s design for how gender is conceived and expressed, is cast off. As it is with every issue of ethics and morality, the idea that any objective standard exists and is binding begins and ends with whether God exists and whether He intends to hold individuals accountable for their actions.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 38.

<sup>8</sup> The other three are: loyalty & betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation

<sup>9</sup> Andrew T. Walker, “Gender and Sexuality,” *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/gender-and-sexuality/>. Accessed 25 October 2021.



How do people develop an identity?

### Traditional identity

### Modern identity

- *Jean Jacques-Rousseau*: The individual is at his best—he is most truly himself as he should be—when he acts in accordance with his nature.<sup>10</sup>

### Modern identity: problems and critiques

- Modern identity is incoherent
  - *Nancy Pearcey*: Though our feelings are important...they are not what define our identity. Nor are they a reliable guide to God's purposes. Because we are fallen and sinful, our feelings fluctuate over time. The most reliable marker of who we are is our physically embodied, God-given identity as male and female.<sup>11</sup>
  - *Brian Rosner*: The cruel irony is that, while it's never been more important to know who you are, it's rarely been more difficult.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Trueman, 123.

<sup>11</sup> Nancy Pearcey, *Love Thy Body: Answering the Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 156.

<sup>12</sup> Brian Rosner, "Is it good advice to "be yourself"? Why looking inward is not necessarily the answer", July 3, 2022, [https://www.abc.net.au/religion/brian-rosner-is-it-good-advice-to-be-yourself/13957180?fbclid=IwARiVDj9Fn7nj37\\_wqVmyAifLcYZ9Pc8G7N-JIAGo6-UmTE7pPG3ygXP\\_Jc](https://www.abc.net.au/religion/brian-rosner-is-it-good-advice-to-be-yourself/13957180?fbclid=IwARiVDj9Fn7nj37_wqVmyAifLcYZ9Pc8G7N-JIAGo6-UmTE7pPG3ygXP_Jc). Accessed 6 March 2024.

- Modern identity is crushing
  - *Christopher Watkins*: The fact that we are in the image of God and are not God therefore prevents us from thinking too highly of ourselves. It also prevents us from assuming the burden of defining ourselves. It reminds us that we are not the final court of appeal in questions about our own identity...I do not ultimately own or define myself.<sup>13</sup>
  
- Modern identity is fragile
  
  
- Modern identity is exhausting
  - *Taylor Swift*: We are so many things, all the time. And I know it can be overwhelming figuring out who to be ... I have some good news: It's totally up to you. I also have some terrifying news: it's totally up to you.<sup>14</sup>
  - *Alan Noble*: But the freedom of sovereign individualism comes at a great price. Once I am liberated from all social, moral, natural, and religious values. I become responsible for the meaning of my own life. With no God to judge or justify me, I have to be my own judge and redeemer. This burden manifests as a desperate need to justify our lives through identity crafting and expression. But because everyone else is also working frantically to craft and express their own identity, society becomes a space of vicious competition between individuals vying for attention, meaning, and significance, not unlike the contrived drama of reality TV.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Watkins, *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible's Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life and Culture*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 93.

<sup>14</sup> Emily Burack, "Taylor Swift Delivers Commencement Speech at NYU's Graduation", May 18, 2022, *Town & Country Magazine*, <https://www.townandcountrymag.com/leisure/arts-and-culture/a40036310/taylor-swift-commencement-speech-nyu-2022/>. Accessed 6 March 2024.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God In An Inhuman World*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 4.

- Modern identity is an illusion
  - *Jeremy Treat*: It's interesting how being "true to yourself" usually means aligning with some mainstream cultural narrative.<sup>16</sup>
  - *Trevin Wax*: We think we're blazing our own path, but the paths we take look strangely like everyone else's.<sup>17</sup>

### Gospel Identity

- *Matthew 10:39*: Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.
- *John Stott*: The astonishing paradox of Christ's teaching and of Christian experience is this: if we lose ourselves in following Christ, we actually find ourselves. True self-denial is self-discovery.
- *Alan Noble*: There is no image for you to maintain because you were made in the image of God. There is no identity for you to discover or create because our identity was never actually in question.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> <https://twitter.com/JeremyTreat5/status/1173624816382795777>.

<sup>17</sup> Trevin Wax, "The Faithful Church in an Age of Expressive Individualism", October 22, 2018, *The Gospel Coalition*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/faithful-church-age-expressive-individualism/>. Accessed 6 March 2024.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Noble, *You Are Not Your Own: Belonging to God In An Inhuman World*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 136-137.



# Jonathan D. Holmes

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & COUNSELOR

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## BOOKS & RESOURCES

*[The Company We Keep: In Search of Biblical Friendship](#)*

*[Counsel for Couples: A Biblical and Practical Guide for Marriage Counseling](#)*

*[Rescue Plan: Charting a Course for Prisoners of Pornography](#)*

*[Rescue Skills: Essentials Skills for Restoring the Sexually Broken](#)*

*[New marriage counseling video-training resource from ABC: \[Caring for Marriages\]\(#\)](#)*

*[Pre-Order: \[Grounded in Grace: Helping Kids Build Their Identity in Christ\]\(#\)](#)*

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