

"DISHONORABLE PASSIONS"
WRESTLING WITH

romans 1

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INTRODUCTION

"HEY ALEXA, PLAY 'WHAT'S THE USE' BY MAC MILLER"

I believe there is something deeply useful about wrestling through the sticky bits when it comes to scripture – and Romans 1 is, to put it mildly, a sticky bit. Romans 1 is a “clobber passage,” used to condemn and reject our LGBTQIA+ siblings inside and outside of the church. It is the most explicit condemnation of homosexuality in the Bible upon first glance, so it is often used as the debate-ender when it comes to conservative views on issues like same-sex marriage.

So why study this passage at all? Why give it air time? *What's the use?*

By way of explanation, let's kick off this study of Romans with a passage from Genesis (off to a good start, aren't we? Answering Bible questions with more Bible passages?):

Genesis 32:22-31, NRSVUE

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

The man asked him, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,[a] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.”

But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

This text illustrates a bizarre scene – Jacob in a wrestling match with an angel, demanding a blessing. Eventually, the angel renames Jacob, blesses him, and then messes with his hip.

My hope in selecting this text for our study is that, by wrestling with it, we can reach toward healing and engage in more fruitful interpretations of Scripture. Like Jacob wrestling at Peniel, we have permission to demand from this text a blessing – to seek wisdom, to seek growth, to seek insight. Over the next few days, we may encounter more questions than answers. We may find our questions met with multiple answers, perhaps even contradictory answers. Practice sitting with the complexity, and we will emerge on the other side.

OVER THE NEXT SEVEN SESSIONS, WE WILL:

- Explore ancient Roman understandings of sexuality, providing a new lens for us to read texts on gender and sexuality from the New Testament
- Uncover several alternative lenses for reading the “clobber” passage in Romans 1
- Complicate (helpfully, I hope) our understanding of a “Biblical sexual ethic”

BEFORE WE BEGIN, AN INVITATION & A HOPE

My invitation to you is to use the next seven sessions as an opportunity to practice holding space for complexity, tension, and gray area. But before we begin, one piece of permission: When all is said and done, you have permission to write Romans off entirely. You have permission to read this passage, walk through our time together, and say “never again.” You still have access to God, limitless and abundant, whether or not you find value in this particular ancient text.

My hope is that we can find beauty in the wrestling. My hope is that we emerge from the wrestling like Jacob did – changed, but blessed.

women described as unfinished men – humans who, due to factors like temperature in the womb, had not fully developed into men.²

However, it's not just women we see lower down the Man-Unman Spectrum. Un-men also include male and female children and male and female enslaved people.³

So... who was considered a man?

The men who ranked highest on the Man-Unman Spectrum were free, landowning heads of household. The fewer of those characteristics you possessed, the lower you would have ranked on the gender spectrum in antiquity.

SEXUALITY IN ANTIQUITY

So what does all this have to do with sexuality? Scholar Jennifer Ingleheart introduced to the term “Romosexuality,” a sexual ethic primarily concerned with the performance of status and power through the act of penetration (yep, I know - we're really in it now).⁴ Let's break that down a bit:

- Romosexuality is phallogentric: In antiquity, ideas and rules about sexuality primarily revolved around penises and where they go. Female sexuality flies largely under the radar.
- Romosexuality understands sex as a performance: In the ancient world, “maleness” was an identity you had to work to maintain. Sex was understood largely as a non-consensual experience - a tool for performing the acts of power and dominance required to maintain one's "masculine" status.⁵
- Romosexuality is all about status and power: The Man-Unman Spectrum helps us understand who would have had sexual access to whom in the ancient world. Ancient beliefs about sexuality extended from this understanding of gender as a spectrum - people with more power (men) had nearly unfettered sexual access to those of lower status (unmen). It would have been considered normal (even appropriate) for free, landowning heads of household to have sex with their wives, young girls, young boys, and enslaved people of any gender within their own households.⁶

“Women, Paul and other ancient authors often assumed, are ‘naturally’ the passive recipients of a phallus during sexual intercourse... Citizen men, however, are ‘naturally’ dominant, and they dramatize their status as free men whenever they take an active role in sex, whether they are participating with women, slaves, or boys.”⁷

Remind me - why are we talking about all of this?

Particularly when we get to reading Romans 1, is important to understand what would have been considered "normal" or "natural" behavior for men and women, especially where it differs dramatically from our contemporary understandings.

Take a moment to reflect on today's learnings - the following questions can serve as a guide:

- How would you describe your religious community's (or the community of your upbringing's) sexual ethic today? How do they describe what is right and wrong, moral and immoral when it comes to sex and sexuality?
- Think about your community, or the broader culture. How would you describe the modern sexual ethic? Is it different from that of your religious community?
- How different or similar does the ancient Roman sexual ethic sound from the contemporary sexual ethics we encounter?

DAY 2

“DEGRADING PASSIONS” IN ROMANS 1:18–27

Q; What does the author of Romans mean by “natural” and “unnatural” passions? Does it really oppose homosexuality?

Over our next two sessions, we will be taking a look at Romans 1:18-27 through a few different interpretative lenses. First, we’ll explore what the text could mean when it references “natural” and “unnatural” relations.

AUTHORSHIP AND THE BIBLE

When we read the Bible, particularly the letters in the New Testament, it’s important to remember that what we have in front of us is other people’s mail. Imagine looking into a random mailbox and opening a random letter. If you have any hope of making sense of that letter, you would need quite a bit of information about the writer, the recipient, the context, and the culture. Pete Enns once described the New Testament as,

“personal letters written two thousand years ago by people I’ve never met and intended for people I absolutely know nothing about in places I am not remotely familiar with in a culture I cannot really hope to grasp.”⁸

We’re going to look at today’s passage from a couple different angles, and make sense of what’s happening in a few different ways. As we do this, remember that Romans is a letter with an author and a recipient who both live within a particular context within a particular culture.

Romans 1:18–27 (NRSV)

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse; 21 for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another. Men committed shameless acts with men and received in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

DISHONORABLE PASSIONS: THE BASIC PREMISE

It's important to read closely here and notice both what the text *is saying* and what it's *not saying*. What we see in the text is the author's concern that status and honor are at stake when people give up their "natural" role in sexual acts.

Given what we know about ancient Roman sexual ethics, what could the text mean by "unnatural"? Let's consider a few options:

Sexual pairings

The text could be referring to what the author believes are the "normal" sexual acts or sexual pairings. This sense of "natural" and "unnatural" would have been influenced by the ancient Roman understanding of sex, so think back to the Man-Unman Spectrum from Session 1. There we see a framework for the "natural" order of sexual pairs. What is "natural" within that framework? One free male performing a dominant sexual act over one unman

(a woman, enslaved person, young boy, etc). Anything else would be considered “unnatural,” including penetration of women by women, men by men, or something else entirely.

Consent & female participation

The reference to “unnatural” could have nothing to do with the sexual pairings at all. Think back again to the last session – Romosexuality views sex as a performance of status and power. Manhood in the ancient world was a fleeting identity that must be constantly maintained through demonstrations of power and dominance. This turns sex into an act of preserving identity.

Even the author of Romans himself parrots this understanding with the word “χρησις” (translated as “intercourse” in the NRSV) – Biblical scholar Jimmy Hoke argues that this word is most appropriately (and most frequently) translated as “usage.” Here’s how those verses now read:

26 For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural usage for unnatural, 27 and in the same way also the men, giving up natural usage of women, were consumed with passion for one another.

The author of Romans “defines sexual intercourse as usage: in other words, one person using another person. [This] definition of sex matches a Romosexual conception of sex, as seen on the agency axis: sex involves the actor using another person (the willing or unwilling passive participant).”⁹

By choosing this particular word for sex, the author betrays his own underlying beliefs about sexuality through a single word – sex is about one person’s “usage” of another. Perhaps the scandal, at least in this author’s mind, was that Christian men were giving up their identity as powerful dominators (and the status that comes with it) by participating in more consensual sexual experiences. Perhaps this passage is not referring to same-sex relationships at all – perhaps it means Christians were upending the dominance-saturated sexual ethic of ancient Rome.

Tomorrow, we will continue working with this passage, introducing yet another lens to make our conversation around this text even more interesting.

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

- How have you seen Romans 1 used? Have you heard it preached? What was the message?
- How does shifting your lens for reading a text like this feel? Did anything surprise you?

DAY 3

"FOR THIS REASON..." IDOLATRY & THE ISIS CULT

Q; Is Romans 1 a blanket condemnation of homosexuality? What other historical lens is available for a more fruitful reading?

Before we begin, take a moment to look back to Romans 1:18-27 from yesterday. Today we'll focus on two very particular phrases -- one in Romans 1:24, and one in 1:26.

"Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves."

"For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions."

Therefore. For this reason. Let's go back to middle school for a moment. "Therefore" is a conjunctive adverb, which acts as the connective tissue between ideas. Imagine the phrase:

"I studied for ten hours for the exam. For this reason, I earned an A."

Using the phrase "for this reason" suggests the author believes they got an A because (and only because) of the ten hours of studying.

Back in Romans 1, the author seems to suggest that something is *causing* the unnatural sexual acts. These acts are

just an outcome stemming from something the author disproves of. As we will read, this seems to be a condemnation of a particular group of people participating in a particular kind of worship the author considers heretical. This looks less and less like a blanket condemnation and more like a very specific reference to "specific people over here."

So let's look back at the passage again. What are "these people" the author is referring to? In Romans chapter 1 verses 22-23 he describes them:

"...for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools; 23 and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles."

What is happening here? It sounds as though the author is more concerned with idolatry (idol worship) – in

particular, the brand of idolatry that represents God (or gods) as animals (“birds or four-footed animals or reptiles”). Given the prominent local cults at the time (when you hear “cult,” don’t think of our end times bunker friends – in antiquity, cult was just a term for religion) this is most likely referring to the Egyptian cults. This letter’s audience would have been deeply familiar with this particular group and their religious practice.

“In the public and very flamboyant cultic processions at Rome, Isis priests carried faces of animal-faced gods and other unusual objects, including a golden urn with sacred water from the Nile.” The fixation on Egyptian cults would also explain the description of female “dishonorable passions” first – the Isis priestesses were particularly visible religious leaders.”¹⁰

Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

Over the last few days we have looked at several ways we might interpret this passage in Romans.

- How does it feel to hear several possible readings of the same text? Is it possible to keep more than one reading in mind at once?
- Can you think of other forms of communication where more than one interpretation is possible?

DAY 4

VICE LISTS IN ROMANS 1

Q; What is a vice list, and how can we use it to understand the author's views on sin and other-ness?

Today, start by taking a look at Romans 1:29-31. What we see in this passage is a rhetorical device called a *vice list*. Vice lists show up often in scripture, especially in the letters of the New Testament. They serve a few key functions, both of which we can see playing out in Romans 1:

Vice lists distinguish the in-group from the out-group

Vice lists exist within a broader trope of distinguishing the “in group” from the “out group.” These vice lists consist of behaviors you accuse other ethnic groups of doing (in this case, Jesus followers distinguishing themselves from the Gentiles), both vilifying the “other” and establishing your group as righteous in comparison. This means we don’t have to read these as universal commands – rather, they serve the function of identity construction for an early Jesus movement trying to establish itself.

Vice lists highlight "everyday" vices

Theologian Robert K. Gnuse writes that vice lists like the one we see in Romans 1 serve a particular rhetorical function

– they mix intensely bad activities with everyday vices to attempt to make a point and correct a community:

“Many of the vice lists may have the purpose of condemning the everyday common vices of people by including them in lists with very sinful activities. The horrid vices would then be a foil for the author to really imply that Christians should seek to overcome greed, gossip, and envy. A vice list can sometimes use extreme examples of evil behavior to condemn the common sinful activities of everyone in order to declare that all sin is significant and requires repentance, forgiveness, and commitment to good behavior.”¹¹

Let’s revisit the vice list in 1 Romans to see an example of this rhetorical device at work.

“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind and to do things that should not be done. They were filled with every kind of injustice, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, craftiness, they are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, rebellious toward parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. They know God’s decree, that those who practice such things deserve to die, yet they not only do them but even applaud others who practice them.”

Here we see envy listed right next to murder on the list. The vice list in this case stands to remind the reader that no one’s sin is better or worse than anyone else’s – walking the path of goodness requires each of us to take a clear and honest assessment of the state of our own hearts.

Let’s take a look at a few other examples from throughout the New Testament:

Galatians 5:19-21

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Colossians 3:5

Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry).

2 Corinthians 12:20-21

For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder. I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.

Vice lists establish group identity

Paul was active in his ministry during a time when the Jesus movement was finding its footing – establishing itself and forming its own identity. One effective way of forming group identity is to establish who and what you are *not* (we see this often in contemporary political rhetoric). If we remember last week, Paul drew an identity distinction

across national lines – if we are *Roman* Christ followers, we don't do things associated with foreign (Egyptian) cults.

Vice lists provide a similar tool for establishing identity within a new community by instilling an “us vs them” mentality. They paint foreign communities as evil and corrupt, positioning one's own group as morally superior.

Imagine you are writing a letter to a modern faith community. Keep in mind what we know about vice lists, write your own vice list in the style of Romans 1 to highlight problematic behaviors or attitudes you wish to highlight within the community.

DAY 5

WHAT DO WE DO WITH PAUL?

Q; What should we keep in mind when interacting with Pauline writings? How might decentering Paul allow us to have more dynamic interpretations of scripture?

Thus far in our study of Romans, we haven't touched the topic of authorship. Who wrote the book of Romans? We have studied text and context without once mentioning the P-word. Paul.

Why the omission?

Put simply, in the words of Joseph A Marchal (remember him from our Romosexuality session?), "Paul is probably the least interesting thing about Paul's letters." ¹²

Paul was an apostle in the first century whose influential writings shaped the religious dialogue of the early Jesus movement. At least seven of the 27 books of the New Testament are commonly assumed to have been written by Paul (some lists of Pauline authorship go as high as 14). Over time, Paul has been the subject of an enormous amount of scholarship trying to answer questions like: Who was he? What was he like? What did he really mean?

UNDERSTANDING PAUL'S CULTURAL CONTEXT

Paul's letters are some of the most frequently cited when it comes to defining a "Christian sexual ethic." After reading Paul's borderline exhaustive commentary on human sexuality, you may come away assuming Paul was just *obsessed* with sex. But it's important to consider Paul within larger conversations around Stoicism.

Stoicism is an ancient Greek philosophy focused on controlling one's passions and reaching full self-mastery. According to Stoicism, the excess of any particular feeling is bad – too much anger, too much joy, even sexual feelings that are too intense. Within this philosophical system, through the power of self-control and rational thought, you can control every emotion and reach temperance, which is considered true enlightenment.

Paul was a huge fan of Stoicism, and you can see its influence when he writes about marriage and sexuality:

1 Corinthians 7:9 (ESV)

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.

1 Corinthians 7:36

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly toward his betrothed, if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry – it is no sin.

Romans 1:27

And the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

Passions! Self-control! All Stoicism. In Romans 1, we see the issue of passions arise yet again.

It is possible to read this passage of Romans as a critique not of a specific sexual behavior, but as a critique of those who are “consumed” with sexual passion, which leads them to use others to feed their self-centered, uncontrollable hungers.

MOVING FORWARD: DECENTERING PAUL

The scholarly fixation on Paul is particularly strong when it comes to Paul’s writings on sexuality – What were his views on sexuality? Where did those come from? Was he asexual? Was he gay? Did he have an early experience of sexual trauma? The unanswerable questions go on and on, and they can result in diving so deep into the subject of Paul that we forget to pop our heads above water and take a breath.

There is another option for us as readers engaging with Pauline writings. We can choose to look “past” Paul, putting him in the passenger’s seat when we read his contributions to the New Testament. We can choose for his perspective to be *present*, but not necessarily *prescriptive*. We can read the letters of Paul to learn more about the early Jesus movement without putting his beliefs and perspectives on the highest pedestal. Jimmy Hoke calls this “decentering Paul.”¹³

Why decenter Paul?

The practice of reading and understanding sacred text can bear beautiful fruit – wisdom, encouragement, and the energy required for justice and peacebuilding. Decentering Paul allows us to spend more mental energy on what’s important, and less mental energy on what isn’t. Decentering Paul spares us the cognitive load of deciding whether or not we “like” him, casting him as hero or villain. It allows us to understand Paul as he is – a present voice, but at the end of the day, one voice among many.

Before this session, what did you know about Paul? What have you been taught about him? What would it mean for you to “decenter” Paul? How does that feel? What would you lose? What would you gain?

DAY 6

FINALLY, THE ONE TRUE BIBLICAL SEXUAL ETHIC

Q; What do we mean by a Biblical sexual ethic?

So... what is the one true Biblical sexual ethic? What is the Christian view on sexuality? To answer this question once and for all, let's take a look at a few passages that can provide us with some clues. Take a look at the three Scripture passages below. While you read them, take a few minutes to reflect on the following questions:

- From what you can tell, what does the author of this text believe about sex? Is sex inherently good, bad, or something else?
- What is the sexual ethic described here? What does the author think about how to handle sex appropriately? Is there a difference between moral sex and immoral sex that is implied here?
- Are there any other moral/religious lessons implied by the author here?

1 Corinthians 7:1-3

“Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: ‘It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.’ But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband.”

PERSPECTIVE 1: SEX IS BAD, AND BEST AVOIDED

In Paul's writings about sex, we see a reflection of his context and time. Paul's letters were written only a few brief decades after the death of Jesus. To Paul, Jesus' return was imminent (in 1 Corinthians 7:29, he reminds us that the “appointed time has grown short”). With this urgency in mind, marriage and sex was nothing but a distraction from the work of the Christian life.

Paul's chief concern is controlling elicited thoughts and desires. As we can see in 1 Corinthians 7:2-3, Paul sees marriage

as a tool for managing those desires – he sees marriage and sex as simply a backup plan for a humanity unable to control their passions (see again: Stoicism).

[To ancient Christians], sexual intercourse, though given by God, was nevertheless an expression of an ‘evil impulse,’ best overcome. As early Christians saw it, the purpose of sexual intercourse was neither to encourage intimacy between heterosexual couples nor to call God’s blessing upon an idealized notion of family and home, but to keep desire in check. Sex for its own sake was to be carefully avoided.¹⁴

PERSPECTIVE 2: SEX IS PART OF GOD’S GOOD CREATION

Here we see a passage from Song of Solomon, an ancient Biblical love poem, a celebration of physical intimacy. Here we see poetic illustrations of physical, embodied love. What does it mean that we see mentions of “Solomon and His Bride” in section headings, but no mention of marriage in the body of the poem? Does this mean that the Bible’s sexual ethic includes sex with a beloved, even outside of the institution of marriage?

The second century Rabbi Akiva declared that Song of Solomon was not only a meaningful part of the canon, but “the holiest of holies.”¹⁵

Song of Solomon 7:6-10, 8:6-7
**How beautiful and pleasant you are,
O loved one,
with all your delights!**
**Your stature is like a palm tree,
and your breasts
are like its clusters.**
**I say I will climb the palm tree
and lay hold of its fruit.**
**Oh may your breasts be
like clusters of the vine,
and the scent of your
breath like apples,
and your mouth like the best wine.**

**It goes down smoothly
for my beloved,
gliding over lips and teeth.**

**I am my beloved's,
and his desire is for me.**

PERSPECTIVE 3: SEX IS FOR DOMESTICATION AND SALVATION

1 Timothy 2:8-15

I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness — with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing — if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Here we see a passage from 1 Timothy, included in a group of letters called the Pastoral Epistles (this also includes 2 Timothy and Titus) – these letters are primarily concerned with advising pastors on how to shape their congregations towards orderly operation and right behavior. Here, we see marriage and sex referenced for the larger purpose of the control, domestication, and discipline of naturally sinful and disobedient women. It links women’s salvation to their ability to marry and bear children.

WHAT NOW?

Well... as someone wise once said, "clear as mud." Turns out there might not be a "once and for all" when it comes to the Bible and sexuality. When we look to the Bible for prescriptive answers about sex and sexuality, we may walk away disappointed. The dissatisfying truth is that the Bible contains many sexual ethics. Within its pages, we see countless (sometimes contradictory) lessons about the morality of sexuality. This is the case with most of the important questions of human existence.

What have you been taught about the Bible’s sexual ethic? Where did those lessons come from (where, from whom)? How does it feel to encounter multiple perspectives on sex and sexuality within Scripture?

DAY 7

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Over the past several sessions, we have encountered quite a bit of murkiness. We have encountered the tension that lives within translations. We have encountered many different sexual ethics – contemporary sexual ethics, the sexual ethic of ancient Rome, and several presented to us in scripture.

As readers of the Bible, where does this leave us?

Perhaps it leaves us with a God who lives in the tension, in the gray, in the messiness of the human life.

Perhaps it leaves with a dynamic God, unsatisfied with black and white answers to gray questions.

Perhaps it leaves us with a God who trusts their beloved humanity to tell a story.

Perhaps it leaves us with a God who trusts us to listen for the whispers of wisdom, ready to adapt to our time and context.

Perhaps it leaves us with a God who invites us, like Jacob at Penuel, to wrestle long into the night in search of a blessing that is on its way.

We have covered quite a bit of ground over the past six sessions. As we wrap, take a few moments to reflect on what is standing out to you or stirring your spirit.

- **Over the past seven days, what did you learn that surprised you?**
- **What will you take with you on your journey?**

NOTES

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14. Knust, *Unprotected Texts*.
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