

Here's a snapshot of Abundant Life: You Were Made for More! If you're interested in learning more, visit youweremadeformore.org.

*Abundant Life is a project of the ministry of Anglicans for Life.



Purpose -

- Engaging teens, partnering with parents, equipping youth leaders
- Facilitating small group discussions that challenge cultural attitudes on sexuality and provide insight into God's heart about relationships

Mission -

Our mission is based off of John 10:10: *I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.*

We believe that the worst thing our culture does for young people is to water down the issue of sexuality. We misunderstand teenagers when we assume that they are just immature, physically and emotionally, in how they think about relationships. Beneath the

physiological realities resides a deep, human desire for connection. We were made for relationships. Relationships are good; in fact, they are GREAT! But only when we recognize that ultimate intimacy comes from our relationship with God. We must first get that relationship right before correctly engaging in other relationships.

Teens, like everyone else, struggle with loneliness and isolation, and they desire intimate companionship. When we fail to help young people navigate how sex and relationships fit into the broader category of life, we are failing the God who created relationships to be deep, bountiful gifts for us.

The Sanctity of Life begins when we understand our own worth and what the purpose of life is. Then, and only then, can abundant life begin.

Module 1 Rooted: Knowing and Believing Who You Are

“Rooted: Knowing and Believing Who You Are” is the first module for a very distinct reason. The three teachings in this module are based around setting the scene for deeper conversations about issues that have the ability to penetrate our identity, so much so that sometimes we allow them to define us. First, we talk about the importance of identity, then about the distinguishable difference between love and infatuation. Finally, we dive into “God, Guys, and Girls” and getting our relationship right with God before we get our relationships with others right. Who we think we are really affects how we live into other relationships.

- *Teaching 1: Identity*

- Theme: When you know who you are, you begin to truly believe in who you are. The world will ALWAYS remind you of what you are not, and you must constantly remind yourself who you eternally and innately are in Christ. When you come to believe your identity in Jesus is ALL that defines you, it changes everything. It changes how you live, what you believe, and how you do relationships with others. God’s spoken your identity over you before you’ve even realized it; let’s talk about how to live into that identity and allow it to transform our lives.
- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** Who are you? Does what you do determine who you are? Does what other people think of you determine who you are? Does what you are good at or what you’re not good at determine who you are? In a world full of opinions of what is right and what is wrong, how do we know who we are?
- **Main Points:**
 - *Creation v. Evolution topic* - Who do you believe you are?
 - *Bottom line of the Gospel* - you aren’t worthless, you’re worth it.

- *Woman at the well discussion* - This is the kicker... when she [the woman at the well] learned that Jesus was right in front of her, offering her eternal life, she left the water jar – the vessel that held the water that would never satisfy. She left it behind – moved from a life driven by fear that she would be alone, a life in which she was not good enough and was rejected, to a life rooted in faith, to a life rooted in Christ, because she had an encounter with the God that made her. She left the vessel and became a vessel – drawing people to Jesus. She runs back into the town, full of people who have condemned her for her sins, and says ... “come and see this man who fully knows me and yet still loved me!” She was amazed that God knew all of her deeds, good and bad, yet He didn’t label her by what she had done. He offered her eternal life anyway. That caused her to stop filling her vessel with worldly things to her being a vessel filled with God’s love. We dig wells in the world and seek to be filled with purpose and satisfaction, and then we are shocked when they don’t deliver on their promises.
- *Ask students:* What’s filling your water jar?
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - Genesis 1:27, Genesis 2:7 (humanity)
 - Psalm 139 (creation)
 - Galatians 5:19-20 (acts of flesh, sin, and fallen humanity)
 - John 3:16
- *Small Group Questions*
 1. Take some time and think about these questions in light of the Gospel: Who am I, and what am I doing here?
 2. Who do you think that Jesus is? Do you believe He is who He says He is? Do you believe you are who He says you are?
 3. What vessel have you been looking to for purpose and satisfaction?
 4. What did Jesus mean when He said that He could offer her “living water?” Did He require anything from her before He offered it to her?
 5. What would it look like if you lived your life as a vessel already full with Jesus?

- *Teaching 2: Love v. Infatuation*

- Theme: There are a lot of ways to define love. So many in fact, that when it comes to loving people, we WILL get it wrong... unless we look to the Bible. Real love is often tainted by what we see to be normal in movies,

books, and music; instead of investing in relationships, “hooking up” has become the new norm, and commitment is not something that many people either desire or know how to do well. Statistics show that about 60% of married people will eventually be divorced. That statistic is daunting, but there is a way to do relationships better. That way is made clear when we don’t see love as an emotion, but when we see it as a choice. This week, we’re going to tackle how we get to the bottom of what it really means to love.

- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What is a good model for a healthy relationship? What’s the difference between love and infatuation? Have you been defining attraction incorrectly? What does Jesus teach us about love?
- **Main points:**
 - We love a lot of things: pizza, friends, our families, our dogs, and the sports we play. I say “I love you” to my best girlfriends and send them all the heart-eyed emojis every time I end a conversation with them. But let’s ask an important question. Is the way I love my iced coffee the same type of love that I give my momma? Well, I’d sure hope not... but if we say we love all of these things, how do we know what love really is?
 - *Four Greek words for love v. one English word for love* - what’s the big deal about that?
 - *Leads to a misuse of the word* - love v. infatuation definitions
 - *A greater truth:* We are all love-sick and love-diseased. Our views of romance, sexuality, dating, and marriage are killing us. We’ve been infected for years and haven’t even realized it. There are few things in this world that can cause you more pain, grief, and hurt than relationships and the pursuit of love. In order to realize where we went so wrong, we first need to see where it was all so right.
 - *1 Corinthians 13*
 - Why do we look at people who stink at love to teach us how to love, when we could be looking at the Creator of love to teach us how to love?
 - *Why is agape love the type of love that we want to give and receive?*
 - *Prayer* - “God, sometimes I don’t know what commitment looks like. Sometimes, I want to quit and give up. Help me to stay in the fight and not to act on my emotions. Help me to come to you first when I’m feeling discouraged and unloved, so that You can remind me of who I am. Grow endurance in me and make me dependent on You. Let me look to you and realize how loved and cherished I truly am.

Shape me into an expression of Your agape love. I know that I can do none of this without You, and I thank You that You will never change and You'll never leave me. I want to love people like You love me. Help me to do that, Lord. In Jesus' name, Amen."

○ *Main Scriptures:*

- 1 John 4:10, 16-17
- 1 Corinthians 13
- Romans 12:12 (World v. Word)

○ *Small Group Questions:*

1. What's the difference between love and infatuation?
2. Have you ever thought you've loved someone when you've just been infatuated with them? (Leaders: share a funny story when you've experienced this).
3. What does Paul mean in the book of Romans when he says "do not conform to the pattern of this world?" What are some practical ways we can live different in our relationships?
4. What is agape love?
5. Have you ever been in a tough situation where you didn't know how to love someone because you didn't agree with them? What can God teach us about loving those we don't agree with or those who have hurt us?

● *Teaching 3: God, Guys, and Girls*

- *Theme: So often, we place too much emphasis on who we are attracted to in a romantic way. While feeling romantic love can be a beautiful gift we're given by God, should we actually be placing as much emphasis on these relationships as we are? Culturally, the pressure to date and pair off starts at a very young age, and it only grows greater as we mature and grow up. If we want to do relationships better than we have been, we must realize that they aren't all about us. Relationships are about the other person; we know this because that's what Jesus teaches us. In order to be a source of life and not a sucker of life, we need to make sure we're connected to the original source of life Himself. We must get our relationship with God right before we can get relationships with each other right. Once we're on the journey with Him, He will bring a companion alongside of us who is on the journey with Him, too! Sex is first and foremost a reference to our maleness or femaleness. We are either a son of God or a daughter of God. Therein lies all of our identity. We are His and uniquely designed to reflect Him as men and women. Male and female, we bear the image of God distinctively. In this teaching, we'll take a look at creation and how God speaks into our sexual identities from the very beginning.*

- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What does creation have to do with relationships? Before I pair off with an individual, am I getting my relationship with God right? What happens if I'm attracted to the same-sex? How does that change how I navigate dating and relationships?
- **Main Points:**
 - What initial feelings do you have when I bring up dating? (It's important to talk about the fact that not everyone feels the same about dating & that's okay).
 - The list of opinions goes on and on and on. In a world full of opinions on dating, how do we know where the Truth lies? I for one stand here knowing that the absolute truth about dating is found right in the Bible. I believe that everything in the Bible is true, including what it has to say about who and how we date. We aren't told exactly what decisions to make, but we are given parameters and boundaries, which are going to lead us to flourish and thrive in relationships. Because of God's Holy Spirit, we are able to call on His power, which lives inside of us. The Holy Spirit can help us discern what God's will is for our relationships as we grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit comforts us, instructs us, gives us peace, and convicts us. All we have to do is ask for wisdom, and we will receive it, if we're willing to listen and obey out of love for the Father.
 - *Dating tension:* culture v. Truth (**Dating isn't bad, it's just how we are doing it that is.** The truth is: It's really hard to find a companion on the journey of life when we don't even know why we're here or what we are doing here. Before we get into how to create and sustain a relationship with another person, we have to deal with us!
 - The Bible actually doesn't have a lot to say about "dating" exclusively, because it is a fairly new cultural idea.
 - The majority of the Bible is a different kind of love story - a love story between God and His people. **The golden rule for dating is this, and it's found in Mark 12:30...** *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*
 - Sexual preference is no different than any other struggle; if you're struggling with something, you are told to bring it into the light. Either we choose to trust in His word or we trust our own feelings. Either I look to Him for the pleasure of what my soul craves, or I search for it in lesser things. Either I walk in obedience to what He says, or I reject His truth as if it were a lie. I'd argue that the struggle with homosexuality is not an identity battle but rather a faith battle. Is God your joy? Is He good enough? Or are you still

looking to broken vessels to quench a thirst only He can satisfy?
That is the battle.

- Depending on your group, feel free to dive into homosexuality struggles and other sexual sins and what the Bible says about them - don't ignore them.
- *Application:* After the fall, when Adam and Eve were separated from God, we see a trend within humanity. Cain and Abel, two brothers, are the next men named in the Bible... and if you know the story, you know that Cain ends up killing Abel. There was enough room for each of them (seriously, there were like.... very few people on the Earth at this point), but Cain still felt the need to defend his honor, to be the best. Again, where there is scarcity there is desperation and where there is desperation there is exploitation. Cain wanted so badly to be better than his brother, that he was willing to exploit him to boost himself higher. In the same way, when we feel threatened, we become desperate, and we exploit others. Exploitation by definition is the action of treating someone unfairly in order to reap the benefits for yourself; in other words, exploitation means sacrificing someone else's well-being or happiness to ensure your own.
- In the same way, after the fall, the next two women who were named in the Bible by name were both appropriated by one man. We see the sexual misuse of women enter the world.
- What does this tell us? Selfishness came into play after the fall. When we break away from God, we break away from each other. Every person of the opposite sex becomes someone to fill the vacancy in us. Every person of the same sex becomes competition. Every person becomes someone to fill some sort of emptiness in us. We look at what we can get from someone and what they have to offer us. But we tell ourselves it's fine, as long as it builds our personal kingdoms. We see pornography – the objectification of women – running rampant in our culture. We see men just wanting to use their bodies and not putting in the effort it takes to care for their souls. Love has become cheap, and it's become easy. We're missing out on the love we were created for and trading it for a cheaper, superficial version. If we look closely enough at our culture, we see that too often we use each other as a means of filling the God-sized vacancy in our souls.
- **The question you need to answer is: Before I pair off with an individual, am I getting my relationship with God right? Do I know where to go for answers, or am I looking everywhere else BUT the Bible?**

- This will take the desperation out of dating.
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - Proverbs 31:30
 - 1 John 4:7
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. What type of feelings does dating bring up for you?
 2. Culturally, what does dating look like? What are some ways we talked about the Bible being countercultural when it comes to dating?
 3. What does the Bible say about Jesus being a source of life? Do you believe that to be true?
 4. How does it change the dating-game when you're connected to the source of life? How does the Holy Spirit come into play with our relationship with Jesus?
 5. Where do you normally take your tough relationship questions? What do you think about taking them to God from now on? (*Youth Leaders: Lean into and discuss what this practically looks like*)
 6. Take some time to reflect on your past relationships or your hopeful future relationships. What do you need to ask God to redeem in you, and what do you need to be more faithful in praying about for your future partner?

Module 2: Let's Get Real

“Let’s Get Real” is the second module of Abundant Life: You Were Made for More. The three teachings in this module are focused around the reality of the culture in which our students are immersed. When we look at the reality of what their days are filled with, we can see a clear picture of counterfeit intimacy, distraction, and comparison that is fueled by social media. Online dependency has had some great effects on society, as it has increased our ability to communicate efficiently, but it has also created a dangerous place for unintended loneliness and corruption. As the Church, creating conversations around these cultural topics is so important; I know with certainty that teenagers yearn to have their questions answered about some of their deepest struggles. We must shine the light on struggles like pornography, loneliness, and rejection, and declare that there is hope, because Jesus has already overcome them. After taking a few weeks to study identity in module one, the second module will begin to look at how understanding our identity in Jesus is guaranteed to lead us to freedom. Before we fully live into the abundant life Jesus Christ has provided for us, we have to get real and deal with our relational and sexual brokenness.

- *Teaching 1: Social Media: It's Not What You Think*

- *Theme: Instagram. Snapchat. Twitter. Facebook. VSCO. Pinterest. Social media is great because it lets us stay connected to friends who live far away from us. Social media is awesome when it gives us the opportunity to encourage friends and stay in touch with them. But these platforms can quickly become dangerous and destructive. We are quick to comment our thoughts, even when they're offensive and discouraging, quick to judge, quick to compare, quick to make assumptions, and quick to react spontaneously, largely because we can't see the other person's face through the screen. While we may think that social media is allowing us to be connected to everything always, it's actually making us less present in everyday life and damaging our relationships. The dangers of social media are real, and until we filter them through a Biblical worldview, the internet can become a place of darkness that enslaves us to perpetual brokenness.*
- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** Why should social media be used to complement our sense of community but not replace it? How has social media changed our relationships? What does it mean to bring struggles into the light? Why is community an essential part of the Christian lifestyle?
- **Main Points:**
 - When online relationships thrive, real-life relationships can deteriorate.
 - Social media can make us feel like we are gaining connections because we have the power to get anything at our fingertips. The truth is, research has found we are actually losing connection. Researchers believe that the constant use of social networking affects brain development. They say that young users of online communities become more self-absorbed and may lose key parts of the socialization process that only direct human contact can provide. They point out that meeting people face to face and building personal relationships in real life is crucial for enabling young people to learn what acceptable behavior is in a social group. They also question whether or not it is possible to learn empathy through these social networking sites. Think about your virtual conversations. How do you assess the mood of the other person and communicate your own? Is it by texting in capitals and virtually shouting? Is it by sending a GIF? Or is it by sending an emoji? The answer is simple: you can never feel a person's real reaction through a screen. You'll miss the beauty of their nonverbal

communication, the awkwardness of trying to express something through the nerves, the rise and fall of their voice when they get excited about something, and the joy when you really click with someone.

- Mental-health deficit is clearly correlated with screen time, and screen time can affect sleep and general disconnectedness.
 - According to a report released by *USA Today*, your generation is the most connected and engaged online, but you're also the loneliest.
 - So, where SHOULD social media fit into our lives? I'm not going to stand up here and tell you to delete every app and go back to the 18th century. Just like you, I too see the benefits of social media. Technology can be a very useful extension of our embodied relationships, but here's the key: it should never serve as a replacement for them.
 - Face-to-face communication is much fuller than online communication (remember, God created us as holistic beings with emotions, responses, joy and sorrow responses, etc.).
 - Community serves as a protection for our souls in hard and tumultuous times.
 - Comparison thrives on social media and unfortunately, many people see that as being the place where they define their worth.
 - Practical Do's and Don'ts for your group (limits on social media and phone use, etc.)
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - Ecclesiastes 4:9-10
 - Galatians 6:2
 - 2 John 12
 - *Small Group Questions:*
 1. How much time do you think you spend on your phone? What are the apps you think you spend most of your time on?
 2. How has social media changed relationships?
 3. Discuss some healthy ways to utilize social media & why it should not replace our sense of community.
 4. What is the danger of having everything at our fingertips? What does Jesus say about bringing our sins out of the dark and into the light?
 5. Why is face-to-face intimacy needed to develop a relationship?

- **Teaching 2: Pornography: The Culprit of Diminishing Real Relationships**

- *Theme: Pornography is a phenomenon that not many youth groups are talking about, despite the epidemic running wild within the lives of our young men and women. The statistics are shocking, and if we take time to let them soak in, it becomes more and more clear that relationships are in desperate need of saving. Pornography is easy; it's accessible, requires zero relational effort, and it's safe because there is no vulnerability, no love, and no fear of getting hurt. Pornography is responsible for diminishing real romantic relationships. The saddest part is that if we decided not to give pornography power, it would have none. Pornography is so supplied because we demand it so much. A heart change is needed to tackle this epidemic; at the root of the pornography problem lies a tragic misunderstanding of who we were created to be and what relationships are supposed to be about.*
- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** Why is pornography a problem? What does the Bible say about it? Is there hope for people who struggle with pornography addictions? How is pornography impacting relationships?
- **Main Points:**
 - Pornography is defined as: "printed or visual material containing the explicit description to display sexual organs or activity, intended to stimulate erotic feelings."
 - Identify WHY we are talking about this - whether it affects you personally or it doesn't, you need to hear what God says about it... and if it does affect you, it can be an extremely shameful topic to discuss.
 - Now, the first step to changing the game is awareness; that's what we need to be doing with the issue of pornography. Right now, the porn industry is simply supplying what people are demanding. The only way this changes is if people pause, re-examine reality, get educated about the harmful effects of porn, and make adjustments. By stopping the demand for porn, we would be putting an end to something that addicts people, destroys relationships, and affects our society as a whole. It's time to change the statistics. Stopping the demand starts here, with us speaking the Truth. Once we become educated about the risks and consequences, it suddenly looks a lot less appealing. Once we realize that Jesus is the only One that can satisfy what we are looking for, porn suddenly becomes a lot less satisfying.
 - *Pornography statistics...*

- 12% of websites on the internet are pornographic – that’s 24,644,172 sites.
- 1 in 3 porn viewers are women. It’s not just a “guy problem.”
- Porn sites receive more regular traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined each month.
- Watching porn diminishes relationship commitment.
- Porn increased marital infidelity, or cheating, by 300%. A few studies reported in *Psychology Today* show that people who watched porn were more likely to engage in flirting (or more) outside their relationships and were more likely to cheat and hook-up with someone other than their partner.
- 50% of all adults do not think that porn is wrong – and most teenagers are encouraging, neutral, or indifferent about opinions of pornography. They say it’s “not a big deal.”
- Porn is a \$57 billion-dollar industry worldwide - \$14 billion-dollar industry in the US. That’s larger than all the combined revenues of all professional football, baseball, and basketball franchises AND more than CBS, NBC, and ABC combined.
- A pastor in Cincinnati, Ohio polled all the 7th graders in his church and 100% of those 11-year-olds admitted to having exposure to pornography.
- 50% of Christian men are addicted to pornography. Avg age of exposure is 11 years old.
- Discuss how pornography neurologically rewires your brain.
- Pornography is NOT just guy problem; girls struggle with it, too!
- Pornography is attractive because it gives intimacy without yielding to the risk of rejection.
- Porn is the opposite of love that is described in the Bible.
- This is my encouragement to you: Be real. Share your struggles, your hurts, and the hard spots in your life you just can’t seem to overcome. Be vulnerable. Start being transparent, raw, and real, showing the true meaning of boasting in the cross of Christ alone. You’re not alone. Community is so important, because we weren’t meant to fight these struggles alone.
- In the end, it’s not about behavior modification - it’s about realizing that Jesus is better than all of the other idols in our lives that we crave - that’s the only way freedom from addiction and healing can begin.
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - Philippians 4:8

- John 8:32
 - Mark 7:15
 - Hebrews 12:2
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. What do you know about pornography and what have you heard about it?
 2. How does the Bible change what you think about pornography?
 3. How does pornography affect the real relationships that we were made for?
 4. What is the hope that Jesus offers to those struggling with pornography addiction?
 5. Leaders, take this time to review the importance of sharing struggles in a Christian community and how bringing them into the light no longer gives them power.
- **Teaching 3: Uninvited: Loneliness & Rejection**
 - *Theme: We've all been there. And if you haven't yet, you undoubtedly will be. Our hearts feel pain so very deeply. Interestingly enough, tests have shown that the parts of our brain that light up in response to rejection also light up when we experience physical pain. Rejection can cause intense feelings of loneliness and despair and cause us to question the goodness of God. Sometimes, we look for affirmation and acceptance in all the wrong places, and other times, even when we have good intentions, we miss the mark. How do we deal with the negative emotions that we are all bound to face and not let them take root in our souls and start to distort who we are? The truth is, rejection can always grow us and shape us, but it was never meant to define us. Jesus wants to do something more with it, if we will let Him. They say hindsight is 20/20. It can be hard to look past our circumstances and look up at God. When we're in the middle of hard circumstances, our outlooks can be a little blurry. While we are waiting for God to come through on His promises, it can be hard to adopt a hopeful perspective. But so many times we can look back on God's past faithfulness and see clearly that He had a plan. He came through for you then, and He will come through for you again. This message is an invitation of hope from the God of the Universe – specifically for those students struggling with suicidal thoughts, depression, and anxiety. We'll take a look at the lies. And we'll invite them back to the Truth.*
 - **MAIN QUESTIONS:** Why is loneliness such an epidemic in our society? What does the Bible say about suicide? How do we deal with loneliness and rejection? What does the Bible teach us about these emotions, and how can knowing more about Jesus help us to navigate these?

○ **Main Points:**

- Even if we know what Jesus says about us, it's still more than likely we will feel things like rejection and loneliness. We still feel the weight of what other people think about us and what they say about us, or the lack thereof. We still yearn to be loved, and when we aren't, at times, it can feel like we are being crushed to a point that we can never come back from.
- MRI studies show that the same areas of the brain become activated when we experience rejection as when we experience physical pain.
- Cultural phenomenons that glorify suicide like *13 Reasons Why* - what they fail to show, and how we need to evaluate them.
- *Purse snatching analogy*: Many times, feeling lonely, rejected, or abandoned comes from the sting of betrayal or deception or the hurt of someone deliberately choosing to end a friendship or relationship with us. I once heard a story about a woman getting her purse stolen while she was shopping for shoes. She bent over to put a box back on the shelf, and in that instant a thief grabbed her purse and started running like a bolt of lightning through the store. Naturally, she started chasing him, and as many of us would do, she chased him out of the store, flailing her arms in the air and screaming at the top of her lungs, desperate for someone to help her get her belongings back. Interestingly enough, she chased the thief about two blocks, still screaming and flailing, when he decided that it wasn't worth it. People were staring, and he knew this woman wasn't going to give up; so, he threw the purse behind him. The woman picked up her mangled purse off the ground, panting from the chase, and walked back to the shoe store in shock. Despite her belongings being jumbled, nothing really was ruined or destroyed. Sometimes, I wish that life was like this purse snatching incident. We are used to our "normal," and then suddenly, something alters that normal, rips away from us something that we hold dear, and it leaves us in shock. When my normal has been taken from me, I wish I could run down the street, flailing and crying, and get the same result as that woman. I wish life would change its mind, tossing back what I lost. That's not always the way that things work out. Unfortunately, life doesn't just throw back our "normal" at us; instead, we are left in the aftermath of our normal being snatched and figuring out how to live in a new normal. Parents getting divorced. A significant other dumping you. A friend group

deliberately excluding you and leaving you out. Feelings of depression or anxiety that seem to come out of nowhere.

- Make sure to stop and acknowledge - no one, and I mean no one is immune to feelings of depression, anxiety, rejection, loneliness, or suicidal thoughts. No one. Take out your phone, lay down your pride, and before we go any further, type these numbers into your contacts. Some of you will need it personally, and some of you will need it to help a friend. None of us are above or beyond the reach of lies taking root in our souls. That's Satan's primary goal. To make you believe that you are in fact alone and worthless.
- *Share...* National Suicide Prevention Line: 1-800-273-8255, Youth Pastor Email or Phone (whichever one you are comfortable giving out – but, take this opportunity to speak to kids that you are there for them... that you're a safe place).
- Tonight's conversation really should be a wake-up call. Jesus is calling you and saying: "I see you, I care about you, and I want you to live." This is an invitation to take a step toward hope.
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - Ephesians 3:18-19
 - John 10:10
 - 1 Peter 5:7
 - Isaiah 41:10
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. Discuss feelings and truth – what is the difference between them, and how can we combat feelings with Truth?
 2. How does being vulnerable open us up for disappointment?
 3. What does the Bible say about us casting our fears and anxieties on Jesus?
 4. How do you tend to react when you feel betrayed, lonely, rejected, or taken advantage of? How do you react when your normal is stolen?
 5. How do we go about taking up a posture of freedom and identity in Christ?

Module 3: Purity: Rethinking, Reorienting, or Restarting

“Purity: Rethinking, Reorienting, Restarting” is the third module of Abundant Life: You Were Made for More. Confusion – tears – pain – joy – exhilaration – these are all words that describe love for teens. For some, the subject of dating brings up feelings of

intense pain, and for others it brings up immense joy & fullness. Either way, teenagers care deeply about dating, and there is a very real craving to pair off at an early age. Unfortunately, many teens haven't had great examples of what healthy relationships look like, whether due to family conflict or negative cultural influences. So, it's no wonder that there are a multitude of good and bad feelings that go along with dating. Statistically, the vast majority of youth want to get married and if statistics hold like they have for hundreds of years, the vast majority of them will. The rumors of the death of marriage have been greatly exaggerated.*

*The goal of this module is to take the teachings in the first two modules about identity and cultural issues and apply them. These teachings first cover how to date and who to date. Then we'll dive into forgiveness & healing from relational brokenness or sexual sin, and then talk about redefining the mission of marriage. *Mark Regnerus and Jeremy Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think About Marrying* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).*

- **Teaching 1: The Pursuit: Who to Date and How to Date**

- *Theme: Let's be honest – we haven't had the best example of what relationships were created to look like. Coupling and decoupling (pairing and pairing off) is dangerous – especially when we treat a relationship with another person like something we go to the store and pick up. Dating is not like selecting your perfect first day of school outfit – you don't get to do that with a human. You can't make a list of characteristics that you “need” in a person, and BAM, expect them to come out of thin air, flawless. Dating occurs between two very flawed people, both of whom are immensely loved by God. No matter how hard we try, we still manage to get this so wrong. In order to get it right, we have to look to the One who made us, who created us to be in relationship. The term “dating” isn't really in the Bible, so how do we know what the parameters are? Just because, culturally speaking, times were different back when Jesus lived, doesn't mean that what He taught is now ancient history. God addresses sex, purity, relationships, and marriage all throughout the Bible. We're going to talk about how to date, who to date, and how to pursue God's guidance in this process. We'll also talk about purity and how the larger idea is not just about abstaining from sex but rather engaging in a lifestyle, investing in abundant life. Dating with honor is doable, even amidst all of the confusion, especially when we see it is possible and desire it, because we know it's what is best for us.*
- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** How do we know who to date and how to date? What should we be looking for in another person who we are romantically attracted to? What does the Bible say about negotiables and non-

negotiables when it comes to dating? What's the difference between abstinence and purity?

○ **Main Points:**

- 70% of students will have their first sexual experience by 19. *WHY?*
- I think that it's because we really have come to believe that God's way, the way we were created, doesn't quite measure up to the world's way.
- Every good invention comes with an instruction manual – what to do and what not to do – but I fear that a lot of us only know what God says not to do. That is actually preventing us from having a higher view of sex, and that's preventing us from wanting God's best, because we don't even know what His best is. Too often, we automatically default to what the world is telling us is "normal."
- What's the real goal of dating? If we look in the Bible, the answer is marriage. Now, I'm not suggesting we go back to some 17th century way of dating, where your parents set you up with someone and you literally meet them when you are marrying them - that's crazy sauce, too! No, what I'm saying is that we need to think more about why, how, and who we are dating, instead of just doing what everyone else is doing.
- The Bible actually has a lot to say about romantic relationships and how sexual intimacy fits into them.
- *Fire analogy* - Let's think about sex as a fire. The gift of fire can be amazing, or it can be destructive, depending on what boundaries surround it. If it's in a fireplace, fire is good – it's comforting, warming, and creates an atmosphere of love. The same is true for sex. When inside of marriage (the boundaries God outlines in the Bible), sex is a gift that God has given us, and we shouldn't ever feel ashamed about that. Sex inside of marriage is safe and secure. When fire is outside of a fireplace though, it can be volatile. If sex is like a fire, then when it is outside of marriage or through a computer screen, it has the ability to destroy us. Virtual sex, or pornography, is like a fake fire. Casual sex, which is what the hook-up culture pushes, is like igniting a pool of lighter fluid. It ignites with a big flash and then disintegrates to nothing.
- Dating should be a way of evaluating if you want to partner with that person for the rest of your life.
- True love does not request access to your body while simultaneously avoiding any responsibility to care for you emotionally and financially. Try to make it sound as romantic as you

want, but it is a selfish endeavor and God does not acknowledge it as honorable. If your partner gives you a hard time about your decision to remain pure, then you have all the proof you need to show that he or she is just trying to get something from you, versus loving you as you deserve to be loved.

- The best way we can honor Jesus is to choose to honor our bodies – and the first step to doing that is realizing how complex of a person you were created to be (*chastity conversation*).
 - *How does physical attraction fit into dating?* When you're looking for a partner to date, physical attraction should be on the list of things that are important to you – it's not a bad thing to list at all! But it shouldn't be the sole reason you are interested in someone. Our attraction to beauty is a very good thing. God made us this way! In a sense, this attraction is rooted in our innate attraction to the beauty of God, which we will experience in Heaven. But we must also be aware of how our culture has warped our understanding of beauty. When you're married, even when you're "allowed" to have sex according to the Bible, 98% of your time as a married couple will be spent doing things that are not having sex.
 - A boyfriend-girlfriend relationship, as close as it may feel, can only declare, "I might want all of you." Please don't give all of yourself away to someone whose best is a solid "maybe."
 - *Application* - I think this is what God wants from us. If we ever date someone, regardless of whether or not we marry them, I want them to be able to say... "I am a better person for having spent time in proximity to that person." I believe that is a great aim in dating, and I think God would agree. You want the net effect of your presence in any relationship to be that the other person is better – that they trust and love God more because of your presence in his or her life. If you leave a trail of broken hearts and confused people, then you need to evaluate what you're doing.
 - *Key take-away:* If you have chosen to trust God with your eternal destiny, you can also trust Him with your dating life.
 - God doesn't want us to struggle through our relationships and our dating lives – He wants more for us. You were made by a King – and your body, heart, and dignity are worth valuing accordingly.
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - James 1:17
 - Psalm 145:16
 - Psalm 84:11

- 2 Timothy 2:22
 - Psalm 51:10
 - Hebrews 12:1
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. What are nonnegotiables v. negotiables in dating?
 2. Have you ever thought about choosing a partner in this way, or have you often jumped into relationships without any period of evaluating the friendship?
 3. What does culture tell us is “normal” when it comes to relationships?
 4. Why does God value purity, and why does He instruct us to keep it within the context of marriage?
 5. What is the goal of dating? How do you make sure that goal stays at the center, even as a teenager?
 6. Do you want to get married? What are your conceptions of marriage, what does your family history of marriage look like?
 7. Does this picture of a relationship scare you, intrigue you, excite you, etc.? Do you truly believe that this is God’s best for you?
- **Teaching 2: A Blank Slate: How the Gospel Changes Your Story**
 - *Theme: Sex. In a world overwhelmingly obsessed with it, why is the Church so silent about it? While our secular culture twists, perverts, cheapens, and idolizes sex, there are gaping holes in the Church's guidance of young people. The result has been generations of sexually illiterate people, who are drowning in the repercussions of overwhelming sexual struggles. It may look like touting virginity and misunderstanding purity; we have sexual brokenness in our hearts from the things we've watched or seen or pieces of ourselves we've given away without going “all the way.” We're dealing with all sorts of sexual sins that don't have to be the final act of sexual intercourse. The reality is that God cares about the condition of the heart, not the technicalities of our virginity, and He calls us to a greater vision of sexual understanding because of who we are. We all have a sexual past, and it's about time someone starts talking about what God thinks about those pasts. God was safe. God is safe. God never changes. God is for us, not against us. Shame does not come from God. Shame is produced by our sin. Guilt says, “I've made a mistake.” Shame says, “I am a mistake.” In Genesis 3:10, Adam hid from God, because he was naked and afraid. The very One that Adam should have felt safe with was God; but the opposite happened. He felt shame, and he hid. When sin entered the equation, it was Adam's projection of his sin that caused him to see God as unsafe. We're not punished for our sin, but*

by our sin. Adam and Eve were the ones who changed, not God. Our ability to see ourselves, God, and others for who they really are becomes distorted because of sin and shame. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Jesus came to save us from our brokenness, and, even today, no person is too far gone to be out of His reach. That's the message. That's the promise.

- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What happens if I've gone too far? What happens if I've already had sex? What are the results of being sexually active before marriage? How does shame play a part in our relationship with God? What does God say about shame, and can we be set free from our shame?
- **Main Points:**
 - My favorite thing about Jesus used to be that He created us – with care, with purpose, inviting us into living an abundant life. Somewhere along the line, though, the weight of the world, the expectations of those around us, and the temptation of living only for ourselves comes crashing down on us. My favorite part about Jesus now? Even after I've been crushed, sometimes willingly by my own choices, He doesn't leave me there. God doesn't just create – He recreates. He doesn't just forgive – He abundantly pardons.
 - *Sex in the Bible is holy* – the Hebrew word used in Genesis for sex is “echad.” It's describing being fused together at the deepest level, becoming one, the bonding of two people into one entity. It's a much higher view of sex than the culture has been feeding us.
 - The first tactic Satan used in the garden was to get Eve to say no to God's best, by convincing her that God wasn't who He said He was, that He didn't really have her best interest in mind, and that she'd be more powerful by herself. The first lie that Eve believed was that she wouldn't face any consequences for her sin, that even in her disobedience she could live. Isn't that interesting... **Today, Satan is still using the same tactics.**
 - *Consequences of sex -*
 - Each year, there have been 20 million new sexually transmitted diseases reported. 50% of all new STD's are transmitted by people ages 15 to 24. In other words, 25% of teenagers will contract an STD each year.
 - 1 in 3 women get pregnant before the age of 20, and about 1 in 3 of those teens will seek abortions. Over 200,000 teens get an abortion every year. Abortion is such a controversial

topic in our society, because choice is choice, and my body is my body, right? Well, I'd argue that that's not the point. By our choices, literally, we are demeaning human life. Every life was created, every life has purpose, and every life is sacred. That's what the Bible says, and even when I don't feel that way, it is true. You may think abortion has nothing to do with you or that you'll never come into contact with it, but statistically, it will impact you or someone you know – 1 in 4 of women in the Church have had an abortion. If it isn't abortion, maybe it's unplanned pregnancy.

- Proverbs 14:21 says: *“There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death.”* So, where do we go from there? Where do we go when the damage is already done, and we're left feeling so ashamed that we can't talk to anyone?
- Sexual brokenness can first be traced back to a basic mistrust in the character of God.
- When we forget who God is, it's easy to believe who the world says He is. When we forget who He really is intrinsically, we forget how He created us first and foremost out of love, for love, to love. When we forget whose we are, we forget what we are worth. When we forget what we are worth, we are much more likely to fall into the temptation of the world. When we fall into that temptation, we are much more likely to make it a lifestyle, because that's what Satan does. While God is in the business of creating and recreating, Satan is in the business of destroying us by small, seemingly unnoticeable grievances that lead to our ultimate defeat. He makes the world look appealing, and He disguises sin as the most beautiful comfort in the world.
- The woman at the well is a great passage to insert here for Scriptural teaching & discussion (identity, brokenness, etc.).
- End by offering hope and restoration through confession and repentance for those experiencing shame and hurt from past decisions.
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5
 - John 8:1-11
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. What does it mean when the Bible says that we are new creations?

2. Talk a little bit about sexual brokenness; what are some ways of sexual brokenness that do not include having sex? How is virginity different than purity?
3. Have you ever thought: "Is God really good?"
4. Why is how Jesus treats the Samaritan woman significant?
5. Have you ever judged someone's sexual history, while neglecting the impurities that reside in your heart? Why is it important to realize that we are *all* sexually broken?
6. What does it mean to be defined by your Savior and not your sin? How does that make you feel?

- **Teaching 3: Marriage: Why It Matters**

- *Theme: Most young people today do not bring to their dating relationships and marriages a great vision of God - who He is, what He is like, how He acts. They don't bring an all-consuming admiration for Him, reverence for Him, absolute surrender to Him, and deep satisfaction in Him. Instead, they bring a deep desire to be fully known and deeply loved by their spouse. The truth about marriage has been distorted by our culture. Marriage has a purpose that is far beyond our own happiness. Marriage was created by God, as a gift to us, with the specific purpose of being the closest thing to His love for the Church that we can experience here on Earth; the goal of this teaching is to once again reiterate that humankind is desperate for deep companionship, and that has been rooted in us since creation. Then, I want to talk about how we should think about and define marriage in a way that will help us navigate the highs and lows of living with another person who is sinful, just like us. We'll talk about what marriage is, what it isn't, and what the goal of a healthy marriage is. Lastly, we will hit on the point that if marriage was meant to glorify God's love for us, then we must realize that marriage is not the ultimate thing, and we must find more satisfaction in God than in our marriages. By doing this, when we are loving Jesus the most, we will love our spouse way better than we ever could on our own.*
- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What does creation tell us about marriage? What was marriage actually created for, and why has marriage developed into something that does not at all look like what the Bible says it should be? What's the meaning of marriage? Will our marriages ever fully satisfy us if we make them all about us?
- **Main Points:**
 - Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33).
 - Discuss the difference between *love and infatuation*.

- The reason so many relationships end is because, honestly, we get bored with each other - think about it. None of us are enchanting enough to keep someone entertained and interested for five to six decades. That just isn't gonna cut it. Eventually, your spouse is going to have heard all of your jokes, all of your stories, and if you aren't growing and constantly pursuing one another, you aren't going to be interested for more than a few years, let alone a few decades. We have to go deeper than that. Infatuation is not a good enough reason to get married; you may think you're in love with someone, but after that initial period of 12-18 months (the average length of infatuation) and the neurochemical reaction fades away, what is your relationship going to be left with?
- What does the first marriage in the Bible look like, and what does it teach us? (*Marriage isn't all about us.*)
- *Tim Keller's definition and purpose of marriage:* "Marriage is a lifelong, monogamous relationship between a man and a woman. According to the Bible, God devised marriage to reflect the saving love for us in Christ."
- Unity by marriage tells a *bigger story* - marriage is not just for our joy, but it is also a metaphor, a parable, a symbol of something great and universal and eternal - the union of Christ with His bride, which is His Church. It is a visual representation of Christ loving His Church.
- **Truths:**
 - Sex outside of marriage cannot exhibit the Gospel, because it enjoys the benefits of the covenant without the commitment to the covenant.
 - Same sex marriage cannot exhibit the Gospel, because Christ is not married to another Christ. Christ married and bought His bride, who was distinctly different yet like Him due to her oneness with Him.
 - Adultery cannot exhibit the Gospel, because it distorts the true beauty of covenantal commitment that God has placed on His Church - He promises never to leave us or forsake us.
 - All forms of sexuality expressed outside of the marriage covenant are a sin before God Himself - and some of us don't like that.
- Ephesians 5 explanation - In Ephesians 5, Paul offers the remedy to Genesis 3; a remedy that relies on the cross of Christ and the

filling of the Holy Spirit! Wives are to submit (instead of seeking to dominate). Husbands are to love their wives (instead of ruling them). The Cross makes a way back to God's original intent for marriage: union, fruitfulness, and common purpose.

- *Fear of submission* - What I have discovered is that when single women express their concerns about submission to their husband's leadership, they speak about the fear of being micromanaged or of having their dreams crushed. But I would suggest to you that is not a fear of submission to leadership; that is a fear of submission to bad leadership. In marriage, you are not signing up for submission to all men. You are vowing to respond to one man. This is why it is so important to pick the right man. Ladies, be discerning in dating. Don't settle for a selfish man and hope he will change. Get the right guy. Good leadership is a gift, not a burden.
- *Bottom line*: Seek first the Kingdom of God, and your marriage will be better for it.
- *Main Scriptures*:
 - Matthew 6:33
 - Mark 10:9
 - Ephesians 5:25-33
- *Small Group Questions*:
 1. Why is the first marriage in the Bible what all marriages should be based on? Do you believe that because God created marriage, that He sets the boundaries for marriage?
 2. What are some ways that you see marriage being broken?
 3. Do you believe that the institution of marriage is still good, despite the broken pictures that we see around us?
 4. What do you want your future marriage to look like?
 5. What are the benefits of marriage?
 6. Why should sex be kept inside of marriage?
 7. What is the mission of marriage, and why is it all about God, and not about us?

Module 4: An Overflowing Cup

This module is entitled, "An Overflowing Cup," and it's all about the true meaning of an abundant life. We hear that phrase all the time when talking about faith, including in the name of this curriculum. But how many of us have actually taken the time to think about what an abundant life looks like, what's necessary for it to exist, and where it comes

from? Truth is, abundant life is a grace-filled, undeserved gift, and we have free access to it at any point. Through the teachings in this module, we are going to talk about why following Jesus is worth it, why God finds it necessary to give us rules, and what love “in action” looks like. We have received the love of Jesus and His transforming grace, so we really need to dive into what it looks like to access and desire it above anything else. He pursues us unflinchingly and without end. Jesus is better than anything else, because He is the source of love and the model of a perfect relationship, which our human relationships shadow. When we are filled up by the Giver, His love in us can overflow into our earthly relationships.

- **Teaching 1: The Deeper Need**

- *Theme: The Deeper Need is referring to the desire in our hearts to look for happiness and fulfillment anywhere other than Jesus. It's referring to our natural tendency to veer off God's path and into the path of the world. Sometimes, it starts happening before we consciously realize it. Sometimes, the world's path looks better. Sometimes, following Jesus is costly. Sometimes, we may even question if it is worth it. All throughout the Bible, we see men and women who struggle while believing in the Gospel, who give everything, even their lives, to follow Jesus. Yet often we expect a life free of suffering when we become Christians. Truth is, there will be suffering, pain, and rejection, no matter how we live this life. And we get the choice – we can either do the hard things with Jesus or without Him. A Christian life doesn't promise us an easy walk, but it does promise us one that is worth it. Following Jesus is worth it, and through this message, we are going to talk about why that's the case.*
- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** Is following God worth it? In the midst of suffering, is believing in Jesus really worth the fight for our hearts?
- **Main Points:**
 - *The cost of decisions* - When students begin to contemplate a commitment to Jesus and realize that that decision may cost them something they're not sure they want to give up, they begin to ask... is it really worth the sacrifice?
 - Luke 9 - The disciples are at the top of the mountain after a long day of travelling and instead of getting up there and relaxing, they're now at the top, and they're discouraged and exhausted. Maybe that's where you're at. Maybe you're suffering, exhausted from all of it, and just tired. Next in Scripture, we see that the disciples fall asleep, and Jesus begins to pray. Eventually, the disciples wake up to an epic scene. He is shining brightly, even when they are asleep. Catch that – He doesn't start shining brightly

when they notice Him. He does it regardless of their acknowledgement. When they wake up, He is shining, and He gives them a look at what He really looks like.

- *The same is true for us - even when we miss God's glory because we are so focused on our suffering. He's still shining, waiting for us to wake up and see it (shift perspective from earthly to heavenly).*
- Ask yourself an honest question: Are you giving up a present thrill for your long term good? Are you choosing your long term good by sacrificing something that would be fun or feel good in the moment? Think about your decisions with money, school, and even sexual purity. Are you sacrificing God's great plan for you for a temporary pleasure? Are you honoring the people you are in relationship with because you trust the One who made them?
- Luke 14:26-27 says: If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.
- We see in Luke 9 that Jesus is unashamed and unafraid of telling us what it may cost to follow Him. He never sugarcoats it, never shies away from the truth, and is honest with us from the beginning. The Bible tells us that the world will hate us. There is a painful cost associated with being a Christian: choosing His will over my own, carrying a cross, and renouncing possessions. There is no small print when it comes to what it will cost us. Jesus is big and bold, offering us abundant grace, but also loving us enough to be real with us. There is no cheap grace – it's costly. But yet, He still invites us – come and be My disciple.
- This is the key point: the call of Jesus is not just a call to suffering and self-denial. There's so much more, and that's what we are called to put our hope in.
- The here and now will always be less than eternity.
- Jesus asks us the same question that He asked the disciples in the Gospel of Luke. He's asking you, today, do you believe that I'm worth it?
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - Luke 9
 - Luke 14:26-27
 - Luke 14:14
 - Jeremiah 29:11-13

- Peter 2:24
 - Matthew 13:44
 - Philippians 3:8
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. Have you ever questioned if following God was worth it?
 2. Do you think that you avoid following Jesus whole-heartedly to avoid disappointment if He doesn't answer your prayers? Do you avoid praying boldly?
 3. Have you ever suffered or went through hardship because you were a Christian?
 4. What's the difference between what God tells us and what Satan tells us?
 5. How can we better live into the Truth that following Jesus is the only way to real fulfillment and that He is worth it?
- *Teaching 2: Why Does God Give Us Rules?*
 - *Theme: Whether we are children, teens, or adults, it seems like our natural tendency is to veer away from rules and do the exact opposite of what we are told to do, even if the person telling us is doing so for our own benefit. Some of us think that they threaten our freedom, or maybe we are convinced that God won't love us or save us unless we keep His commandments perfectly. We think our salvation is dependent on our ability to perform and totally neglect the gift of grace. Or maybe the opposite—we take advantage of grace and do whatever we want, living however we see fit, because we know God will save us despite our sins. Neither is true. God gives us rules for our own good, and they actually aren't a restriction but rather a ticket to freedom. In this teaching, we will take a look at what it means to make some "half-time" adjustments in our lives to live a life worthy of the calling we've received as children of God.*
 - **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What is the point of rules? Why do we tend to do the exact opposite of what rules tell us to do, stretching the boundaries and testing the limits? Why does God give us rules and how do we know they are for our good?
 - **Main Points:**
 - We may be tempted to push the boundaries and break the rules because of our sinful nature, but that doesn't mean we have to (1 John 4:4).
 - God does care about every decision you make, every day, big or small.
 - *Ephesians 5:* "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because

these are improper for God's holy people. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Do not get drunk."

- God doesn't just care about rules – He cares about our hearts, the condition of them, and how we are loving others and being loved in return.
 - **Indicatives v. Imperatives:** Paul proclaimed in Colossians 3 that Christ is your life. He is. Fact. Done deal. He did not say that Christ is your life if you accomplish this, give that away, and forgive those. No. None of that. Paul stated, qualification free, that Christ is your life. This kind of statement in Scripture is called an *indicative* - something that has already been declared about you as a fact, a Truth. Indicatives aren't the only kind of statement in Scripture, however. There are also *imperatives*. An imperative is something we are supposed to do, phrased as a command or a direction. It might sound dry to talk about types of speech, but it is hugely important for this reason: when we confuse indicatives with imperatives, we sabotage our ability to live in our new identities.
 - Every imperative in Scripture is based on an indicative. In other words, we're never asked to do something until we're told something true about who we are. The truths of the Gospel support and sustain the commands of the Gospel. If we don't first understand the truth about who we are - the truest thing about us - we will be crushed by the weight of the commands.
 - Identity statements are everywhere. Find a command, and you'll find somewhere near it a truth about who you are!
 - God outlines "rules" for us in the Bible, guidelines, recommendations, or imperatives to give us the option of having an abundant life.
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - 2 Timothy 1:7
 - 1 John 4:4
 - Ephesians 5:3
 - Galatians 5:22
 - Colossians 3:1-10
 - 1 Corinthians 10:23-24
 - Romans 12
 - *Small Group Questions:*
 1. Have you ever felt like God is restricting your freedom with all of the commandments found in the Bible?

2. What do you think about God telling you who you are before He tells you what to do? Have you ever been told that before?
3. Do you believe the commandments in the Bible are for your good? Do you realize you realistically can never measure up to them? What's the good news found in that?
4. Have you made any decisions that you wish you would have done differently, unknowingly or knowingly?
5. What are some "half-time" adjustments you can make in your life to acquire and start living the abundant life that Jesus offers you?

- **Teaching 3: Love Does**

- *Theme: This is all about love. Dating, sexuality, relationships, and marriage, everything we've been talking about - it all rests on love, or rather, what we think love looks like. In the words of Bob Goff, "Love is never stationary." It's always moving, always acting, and always pursuing the best interest of the other person. If we have the wrong definition of love, we will be utterly helpless when we are trying to live it out in our day-to-day lives. Sometimes we are so inspired by sermon illustrations, and we connect with teachings about Jesus that inspire us to live into His greater story. But instead of going out there and creating our own epic stories of love, we marvel at someone else's, or we wait for extraordinary acts of love to be done to us. Truth is, if we love people greatly and deeply on a daily basis, God will teach us something through that. He will reveal Himself not only to the person we are loving, but also to us, as we seek to love more like Him. Here's what it comes down to: love is what defines our lives. We will be known for how we love others, and the definition of love is found in the Gospel of Jesus alone. The love of God is reckless - going after us and chasing us no matter what the cost.*
- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What do you want your life to be known for? How do you love people – is it based on the reckless love of God or is it based on the "norm" of love that we see around us? What does it mean to REALLY love?
- **Main Points:**
 - Love is all over Scripture. In fact, love is the point of the Bible. The Bible is a love story between the God of Creation and the creation itself. We've talked about the difference between biblical love and the example of love we see modeled around us. We see people committing to love each other forever but not taking that vow seriously enough to actually keep it "forever." We see distortions of real love: pornography, dating with no intentions, using one another to fulfill lustful desires, and exploiting others to lift ourselves higher.

The “normal” of our love doesn’t always match up with what our hearts wish it to be.

- There’s nothing we love more than a story of sacrificial love. Think about it. We are so inspired by heroism. We all love to hear about people acting selflessly, putting another’s well-being before his or her own. We love stories where a stranger steps in and protects someone in danger or where someone sacrifices time or money for the greater good. Those stories inspire us. (*ADOPTION, SERVING SACRIFICIALLY EXAMPLES*). But we can also connect with teachings about Jesus, so that they would inspire us to live into His greater story.
- **Definition of love:** Romans 5:8, “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” This verse tells us that love saves. Love rescues. Love helps. And it does so, if necessary, at great cost to the lover.
- **Bottom Line:** Your life is not defined by what you believe in, it’s about what you actively and deliberately participate in. What do you want your life and relationships to be known for?
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - John 15:13
 - Ephesians 5:1-2
 - Ephesians 2:8
 - Romans 5:8
 - Matthew 5:13-16
 - Micah 6:8
 - Romans 12:9-13
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. How would you define love?
 2. Have you ever fallen into the trap of loving people to make yourself look good and not for their benefit?
 3. Do you believe you are loved simply because of who you are?
 4. What are some practical ways this week that you can show others that they are loved for who they are?
 5. Do you think that God’s love is reckless? What does that mean?

Module 5: We Were Made for the "Not Yet"

“We Were Made for the ‘Not Yet’” is the fifth module of *Abundant Life: You Were Made for More*. The three teachings in this module are based on topics that we’ll admit that we

don't have all the answers to – rather, we want to ignite conversations about them. The idea of being made for the “not yet” is essential to how we live our lives here on earth. We were created by God, perfectly and uniquely – yet, because of sin, we are living in the here and now, which is much more broken than the original and far from perfect. The key is to recognize this that gap exists because of sin... to recognize that our souls will always yearn for the “not yet”, even when we know and love Jesus in the here and now. We will always struggle. Not everybody's struggle will look the same, of course. But until we're fully restored, the struggle will continue.

The first teaching will hit on the impact of trauma and how trauma's effects can gravely impact our relationships. The second teaching will cover dysphorias of gender, attractions, and identity, in order to open up conversations about how to love those around us, while also promoting a biblical view of sexuality to our students. Finally, the third teaching will speak into why friendship and community are so essential to all of us, especially in light of struggling.

**Note: Although we use both the terms “same-sex attracted” and “gay” in these teachings, we encourage you to pray, discern, and seek wisdom from God about what best suits you and your group. The issue of language and labels surrounding the gender identity argument is not what we are looking to reconcile in this teaching. Instead, we want to focus on our core identity. Our identity in Christ is first and foremost, so the labels that come after that, the ones that we often pin to our identity in an effort to “belong”, are interchangeable and don't hold as much weight as many think they do. The labels that God pins to our identity are SO different than the ones we want people to know us by. We'll take a look at why humans find labels necessary (for belonging, community, connection, acceptance, etc.) and provide an opportunity for some insightful discussion within your group.*

Many times, when a student is insistent on using a label, and questions why you won't use that label (such as the term “gay”), they are really asking you to affirm their desire for acceptance or love. They want to know that, if they associate with that label, will your treatment of them change? Will you still welcome them? Keep that in mind as you're tackling these topics.

The more important question we need to be working through is this: Would students who are questioning their sexual orientation or struggling with their gender identity feel comfortable raising this issue with our clergy or youth leaders at our church? If not, how can we reframe the narrative and reset the structure so that they do have a safe space to wrestle with hard things in light of the Gospel?

While some argue that using the word “gay” as an identifier will perpetuate the issues we're facing and reinforce that particular label into the student's identity,

others argue that using terms like “same sex attracted” is refusing to use the common, cultural language involved in this argument and will only further isolate students and distract from the Gospel message that they desperately need to hear. Again, we don’t have all the right answers – but we know that God does. When I’ve asked Him to help me discern how to write this teaching, He’s helped me see that engaging people is far more important than winning the argument. It’s all about people, and that’s what we need to focus on. It’s about winning back hearts for His Kingdom, and we believe we do that by meeting people where they’re at.

- **Teaching 1: How Does Trauma Affect Relationships?**

- *Theme: You were fearfully and wonderfully made – I bet you’ve heard that one before, right? But how many of us actually live with the perspective that we were made for more and allow it to permeate into our souls? Today, we’re going to be talking about trauma. Even if you don’t think you have any personally, I encourage you to lean in – because you most likely will have a friend who has experienced or will experience trauma. In the words of Dana Henry, LPC: “Trauma is something that takes a person and pulls everything they know that is safe and secure out from underneath them.” The goal of this teaching is to destigmatize pain, hurt, and hard things, through having discussions about trauma. So many students are struggling, and we believe that having conversations is vital in providing healing for students who don’t even know that they’re suffering from trauma. Many times, we think trauma must be this huge, for lack of a better word, “traumatic” experience. However, the truth is that we all have traumas that have shaped our perspective of the world and what happens around us – which is why we don’t live like we are fearfully and wonderfully made, made for more than we believe. The good news is that there is healing found in Jesus – for every trauma, big or small. Unfortunately, the reality of what happened to you, or what you experienced, will likely not change during this conversation, no matter how badly we wish or pray that it would. However, your perspective will change. Recovering from any sort of trauma is exactly that – a process, a journey through pain, a regaining of what was taken. Most of all, it requires self-awareness and a desire to wrestle with the truths of pain that are found in the Gospel.*
- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What is trauma? Who experiences trauma? What steps can we take to heal in our own trauma and the places we’ve been hurt? What role does Jesus play in the healing process? How can unresolved trauma hurt our relationships?

- **Main Points:**
 - Trauma is defined as any sort of disturbing experience that produces an overwhelming and unmanageable emotional response.
 - *Statistics about trauma* -
 - Two thirds of children report experiencing at least one traumatic event by the time they are 16 years old. Divorce, domestic violence, the death or illness of a loved one, and neglect are just a few examples of more serious traumas that may impact you, your family, or your friends.
 - Studies show the brain is negatively impacted by trauma, and because of that students that have had traumatic experiences may at times act, think, and feel differently than their peers.
 - *Students who have experienced trauma may do things like:* Engage in risky behaviors, have struggles eating, sleeping, and completing everyday tasks, be overly aggressive or passive (increased fight or flight response), or display attention-seeking behaviors.
 - Trauma affects every relationship you will ever be in.
 - Misconceptions about trauma.
 - *Terry Wardle's four types of trauma* - Wounds of aggression, wounds of withholding, event trauma, betrayal trauma, trauma of long-term duress.
 - Dating violence conversation.
 - Healing process - hard but holy work takes time and can't be rushed.
 - What does the Bible say about suffering?
 - Suffering was not intended. The silence of God does not always mean His indifference.
 - God uses suffering for good. (Suffering in itself is not good... don't mishear me - but God, the maker of all things good, CAN AND WILL use it for good... eventually).
 - Suffering can and should propel you into community.
 - You will go through trauma and suffering no matter what you believe in.
 - Believing in Jesus means that His resurrection signifies our pain and our trials and even our deaths are not the end of the story. Three days later, He walked out of His tomb, and I believe that

gives us the power to rise up, even in the midst of things that are supposed to crush us.

- *Main Scriptures:*
 - Isaiah 53:5
 - Philippians 1:29
 - 1 Peter 2:21
 - Isaiah 41:10
 - John 1:5
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. Did how you define trauma change by having this conversation? Is your definition different than it was before? If so, can you share how they differ and what you learned?
 2. Now that we've talked about what trauma is, do you think you have been looking at situations and circumstances through a lens of trauma or through the Gospel?
 3. In looking at your own life, how has trauma affected your own relationships?
 4. What is dating violence, and what are some signs of it?
 5. Discuss with your group why facing trauma, although it's hard, can be what's necessary to live a "you were made for more" life.
 6. Do you believe that God cares about the trauma in your life? Take the opportunity to dig into some Scripture passages about what God has to say about trauma.
- **Teaching 2: Attractions, Orientations, & Identity**
 - *Theme: In the fog of navigating relationships and sexuality - especially in this life, when we're living between "two gardens"- there is one topic that is still very much controversial inside and outside of the Church. Attractions, orientations, and identity are words that generate a well of emotions inside each of us, and most likely we ourselves or someone else has been deeply impacted by the wide variety of opinions and voices out there. It's time that we not only stop avoiding these conversations, but, when we do have them, we approach them with hearts yearning for our friends to really and truly believe that Jesus is better than anything else they could ever experience. In the fog of the culture war, a complex issue like gender dysphoria is reduced to slogans, social media rants, and political wars. If we really want to know the "right" answer when it comes to what God thinks about homosexuality (and all types of gender confusion), I think we need to approach this issue differently. The Biblical view of sexuality, which we'll cover in this teaching, does not call us to be straight - rather, it calls us to be holy. If you're listening to this teaching and you yourself are experiencing same sex attraction, are confused about your identity,*

already identify as gay, or trying to navigate how to love a loved one who is struggling with their attractions and orientation, our prayer is that this message would ignite a conversation, offer hope, and be a catalyst for this generation to lean into God.

- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What does the Bible say about homosexuality and same sex attraction, and how do we respond to our brothers and sisters who identify as being gay? What is the Biblical view of sexuality and what are the options that God lays out for us? Are homosexuality and premarital sex the same “sin” or is one worse than the other? What does the Bible say about gender dysphoria and transgenderism?
- *Note:* We do have “Going Deeper” sections available upon request about transgenderism and the Church and same sex attraction and the Church.
- **Main Points:**
 - “None of us has stewarded our sexuality – our maleness or femaleness – perfectly (Ferguson, *“Transgender and Transformation”*).” Which means... we are all in desperate need of grace and forgiveness to bring us back to what we were made for.
 - As we do with every question regarding relationships, we have to start with identity. If you’ve never thought about these questions before, I encourage you to do so.
 - Who am I?
 - What am I, and what’s the point of my body?
 - Where do I go for fulfillment, and where do I search for hope in the midst of pain?
 - Define attraction, orientation, and identity.
 - Sam Ferguson’s view of biblical sexuality using the terms defined above and how God created humans to be an embodied reality.
 - How does that holistic and embodied reality match up with what we’re currently experiencing?
 - So, the question remains - what do we do if we’re experiencing same sex attractions? What do we do if we feel male as a female, or vice versa? What do we do if we identify as being gay? What do we do if we’re a friend or a parent having difficulty loving someone else who identifies in one of these ways?
 - *God doesn’t call us to be straight – He calls us to be holy.*
 - Talk about the fall, Paul’s comment in Romans about creation being subject to futility, and how different types of dysphoria (not just gender) echo this.
 - Realistically, there are *two biblical options for pairing up:* heterosexual marriage (marriage between a man and a woman)

OR celibacy. *[make sure to cover the fact that one is not better than the other]*

- Discuss what the Bible says about homosexuality.
- Sometimes, God requires us to walk with Him in the midst of trying to be faithful and figuring out what it practically looks like to take up our crosses daily.
- The important thing to remember is that you are not your sexuality. Marriage is not heaven, singleness is not hell, and the only thing that can satisfy any sort of longing in your heart for experiencing ultimate love is not a thing but rather a person, named Jesus.
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - Hebrews 12:1-2
 - Romans 8:20-21
 - Romans 1:26-27
 - 1 Corinthians 6:9-10
 - Luke 9:23
 - Revelation 21:4
- *Small Group Questions:*
 1. Take some time to discuss these questions about identity. Who am I? What am I and what's the point of my body? Where do I go for fulfillment, and where do I search for hope in the midst of pain?
 2. Have any of us stewarded our sexuality properly? Talk about what Paul means when He refers to sexual immorality.
 3. Why does the Bible and the story of creation say that gender and biology cannot be separate? Do you agree or disagree?
 4. What types of dysphoria do we experience in the world?
 5. Do you believe that your identity in God is more important than any other identity you assign to yourself?
 6. What have you heard about celibacy, and what do you think of it?
 7. What's a practical way, right now, in the here and now, that you can honor God in your relationships and with your sexuality (no matter what your relationship status is at the current moment)?
- *Teaching 3: Fostering Friendship & Why the Gospel Demands It*
 - *Theme: The Bible says so much about friendship – so much more than we'll ever be able to cover in this teaching. Without people to love and be loved by (and we're not just talking about romantic and dating relationships; we're talking about real, life-giving friendships), I don't imagine faith is very sustainable. The essence of Christian friendship is companionship forged in the fire of two convictions: 1) Jesus alone can satisfy the soul, and 2) His kingdom alone is worth living for. True*

*friendship should do many things, including gently correcting sin in your life – it should love you **for** the glory of God and push you **toward** the glory of God. Friendship is a vital piece of community that keeps Satan from using depression, anxiety, and loneliness from discouraging our hearts. Friendship plays a huge part in bringing Heaven to earth, especially if it's done with Him and through Him. Through this teaching, we'll look at redefining how friendship is lived out, what its purpose is, and why it's so important to invest relationally in the people around you. God made us for community, for relationship, to be with each other, and it's about time we really understand why.*

- **MAIN QUESTIONS:** What's the point of friendship? Why are friendships so important for human life to flourish? What are the benefits of friendship? How does our current culture feed us expectations for our friendships that aren't necessarily true?
- **Main Points:**
 - 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
 - Remember – God created relationships for friendship and companionship, so that we would be able to experience the fullness of life through them.
 - Abundance is not found in romantic relationships - Abundance is found in God – and if it just so happens that you're following God and a romantic relationship is in His plan for you, than yes, abundance can definitely be a part of that relationship, but only because Jesus is a part of it.
 - As Wesley Hill, an author and professor, often says, "The New Testament views **the Church** as the place where human love is best expressed and experienced, not marriage."
 - Current generation and loneliness - how does Jesus' life remind us that life in isolation is not where abundance can be found? (also hit on the fact that science confirms we were made for relationships).
 - Another way sin has entangled itself in our relational narrative is by making us think that human intimacy is the same as sex - in other words, we can only experience intimacy through sex.
 - Cover the six parts of who we are as human beings (physical, emotional, intellectual, social, spiritual, and financial).
 - Marriage – of course – would be the culmination of true intimacy, because ALL parts of you are exposed to your husband or wife - that's why marriage is set apart from other relationships. That's the way God purposefully designs it. But it's so important to know that, if you don't feel like marriage is what you're called to, that in no way

means you can never experience intimacy in friendship and companionship. That is a lie that Satan is speaking to you, in an effort to make you settle for cheap, counterfeit intimacy, which isn't really intimacy at all.

- The truth is, friendship offers us a deep hope that helps us experience God's abundance here on earth, because *companionship always heightens joy.*
 - Not only are friends vital to our need for relationship, but God has also designed friendships to serve as a place of sanctification for us!
 - True friendship should give us hope and point us back to our ultimate source of relationship - Jesus.
- *Main Scriptures:*
 - 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
 - John 15:9-15
 - *Small Group Questions:*
 1. Think about your friend group. What talents do you bring to the table, and what talents do you really appreciate in your group that you see someone else bringing? (*Leaders: this could be a great opportunity to call out gifts in your students if you know them well enough, and a place to encourage them.*)
 2. Have you ever wanted to change someone to be like you? Where do you see the flaw in that now?
 3. How often are you on your phone/social media? Do you believe that that plays into what you are thinking about and what you're feeling? Does it have a negative or positive impact on you?
 4. Have you ever been in a situation where a friendship has sharpened you, or you've had to sharpen a friendship?
 5. How does friendship that's done well point you back to Jesus?