

## 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?