



[Title Slide] In perhaps one of the greatest moments of the Covid-19 lockdowns, there was a lawyer in a virtual court case that went so wonderfully viral:

[Slide] Kitten Zoom Filter Mishap (0:41)  
<https://youtu.be/KxIPGPupdd8?si=RuRoc2iCMapj-s9l>

[Slide] **“I’m not a cat”** might be the greatest line ever uttered in all of the American court system’s history.

We use filters a lot, don’t we? We filter our photos, we filter our videos – some of the filters are silly and obvious, some are subtle – we want our image to be perfect without anyone realizing it’s filtered. We filter our lives, don’t we? The stories we tell, the things we share online, the way we dress and act and what we do. We even filter our interactions at church, don’t we? I wish that wasn’t true, but I know it is because I’m guilty of it. Sometimes I keep my doubts or questions quiet, I’m embarrassed for people to know what I’m thinking, to know all my story, to allow the vulnerability that comes with being totally unfiltered.

[Title Slide] Over the next four weeks I want to have some very unfiltered conversations together around who we are, our identity, and how that connects to sex, gender, relationships, and more. Why? Because we’re all thinking about it, we’re all wondering about it; seeing what the Creator of sex and gender and sexuality and our desires for connection has to say about it is such an important thing to do. The problem is, it tends to be something we talk about everywhere other than church.

When I was 10 or 11 years old my dad had “the talk” with me. Kind of. He stopped by my room, handed me a handful of cassette tapes from a popular Christian author and speaker at the time, and told me to listen to them. He gave me no warning about what he was giving me. They were just a bunch of ancient audio recordings of some old dude talking about puberty and changing bodies. I was traumatized. And I learned a big lesson: this is something we don’t talk about.

That was the wrong lesson to learn. Which is why I think it's so important that we take some time to be unfiltered together and have some imperfect but important conversations.

**[Slide]** *Colossians 2:6-10 (NLT) <sup>6</sup> And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. <sup>7</sup> Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.*

Let me give a couple thoughts I have as we begin this series. My approach is based on the idea that most – if not all – of you have an interest in Jesus, that you have become a Christian or you're thinking about it. My goal is for us to think about what it means; what God intends when He describes what it is to be one of His followers. In other words, just like Paul assumed he wrote this to Christians, I'm coming at this from a standpoint that if you're a Christian, then you should want to have your roots in Jesus, your life built on Him. Why is this a big deal?

**[Slide]** *<sup>8</sup> Don't let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ. <sup>9</sup> For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body. <sup>10</sup> So you also are complete through your union with Christ, who is the head over every ruler and authority.*

Not much has changed in two thousand years; there are still a lot of ideas and belief systems and dangerous nonsense in the world around us. God wants you to be complete, to be a whole person, to be all that He designed and created you to be. Do any of you find yourself longing to be complete? To arrive? I know I want it.

Here's the challenge: adolescence, puberty, your teen years, are the biggest years of growth and change and chaos that any person will experience, and you're right in the middle of it. One of the biggest questions I had when I was a teenager was...

**[Slide] Who am I?**

A big part of being a teenager is figuring out who you are and what kind of person you are going to be and currently are. The decisions you make now, the habits you form now, will impact the rest of your life. No pressure, right?

Here was my problem: I wasn't a typical dude. I'm still not. I know I break all the stereotypes of manliness and manhood and all that, and not in the cool ways. The thing is, now I'm comfortable with who I am, and I embrace it.

When I was 12, 15, 17 years old, I was terrified there was something wrong with me. I couldn't – and can't – grow facial hair, I read books like crazy, enjoyed going shopping, read poetry for fun, liked musicals, loved being in the theater productions, didn't like outdoorsy stuff, and I still hate getting dirty. I was a nerd before it was cool. My high school was small, so small that they would only offer two electives per semester. No one said it, but apparently, they were gendered electives. I remember that one semester our options were welding or cooking. I remember thinking, I'll never need to weld, but I will want to be able to eat. So, I signed up for the cooking class. I was the only guy to do so. I didn't know you could get teased that much.

For years of my life, I was teased for liking “girl things,” accused of being gay, I was bullied and harassed and mocked. I really did wonder if there was something off about me. I didn't have the language for it back then, but I wondered about my sexuality and gender identities because I knew I wasn't like what I thought I was supposed to be. These self-doubts and questions nagged me until I was 22 years old.

I'm a data guy. I love research stuff. It's my language. I read a book that looked at all the data and research that had been done to that point on guys and their identities. It talked about the confusion of adolescence that comes from so much change and hormonal development going on internally, and one of the stats that really jumped out at me was that 25% of people experience same sex attraction at some point during adolescence but only 5-8% of adults fall under the LGBT+ umbrella of identities.

That blew my mind. Here's why: for the first time I began to understand that puberty and adolescence is a journey, not a destination. It's a process, and just because I didn't fit the stereotypes I was familiar with, didn't mean I wasn't growing up to be a healthy man.

When our bodies begin puberty, there is an explosion of growth, our brain produces far more neurons than we need, our bodies grow, our hormones are firing more than any other time in life. It's kind of like our bodies are testing out all sorts of scenarios. It's like a fire with gas being poured on it.



# UNFILTERED

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- When you hear that every person is made in the image of God, what does that mean to you personally?
- Think about someone who frustrates or annoys you—how might seeing them as God’s child change the way you treat them?
- In Matthew 25:34-46, why does Jesus take acts of kindness—or the lack of them—so personally?
- What do you think Jesus is teaching us about identity and love through this parable?
- How do Genesis 1:27 and Ephesians 2:10 connect with how we view others and ourselves?
- What are some examples of how our culture encourages us to see people as objects instead of image-bearers?
- How does social media make it easier to “crop the head off” and forget about the person behind the photo?
- What are some intentional ways you can show others they are valued as God’s creation this week?
- What do you need to change in your own behavior or mindset to better reflect God’s love when you interact with others?
- If someone asked you for advice about sexting or nudes, how would you respond based on these passages?



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