

SEXUALITY BEYOND SEX

*An Unexpected Conversation
on Embodiment, Identity,
and Desire*



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THE FRUITFULNESS OF CHASTITY

*I should have listened more carefully to these words
and, having made myself a eunuch for the kingdom of
heaven, more joyfully awaited your embraces.*

SAINT AUGUSTINE

IN GENESIS 1:28, GOD’S FIRST WORDS to the newly created human race are “Be fruitful and increase in number.”

If we read these words by themselves, without paying attention to the whole witness of Scripture, we might conclude that God wants every human being to make babies. If you’re having kids and increasing the earth’s population, you’re obeying God’s orders. And if you’re celibate, or infertile, or not having kids for any other reason, you’re . . . disobeying?

Thankfully, the Bible goes on to clarify how this command applies to all of us. We’re all called to be fruitful—absolutely! But not all fruitfulness looks the same. Some of us are called to the literal fruitfulness of having babies. All of us, whether or not we’re called to baby-having, are called to bear fruit for God’s kingdom.

The word for this Christian calling to bear fruit is *chastity*. Many people today use *chastity* as a synonym for *celibacy*—that is, not having sex. But in the historically Christian understanding, chastity is a goal



every human being is called to pursue. Here's how the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) defines it: "Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being."¹

For the married person, chastity involves reserving sex exclusively for their spouse (though as we'll see, it means far more than that). For the unmarried person, chastity involves abstaining from all sex. And for every person, chastity means dedicating our bodies to bearing kingdom fruit.

In other words, limitations of sexual behavior are just one part of the larger vision of chastity. Chastity is ultimately about the *integration* of our sexuality, our bodily reality becoming increasingly aligned with our spiritual reality. This goal applies to us no matter what our sexual orientation may be. In fact, shortly after the CCC defines *chastity*, it goes on to clarify that chastity isn't just for heterosexual people: "Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery . . . they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection."² (In chapter nine, we talk more about the various words used to describe people who experience attraction to the same sex.)

A celibate gay person like Greg is no less or more invited into chastity than a married straight person like Julia. Jesus calls both of us to integrate our sexuality and our spirituality—even if faithful Christian integration looks very different in Julia's life than it does in Greg's.

Chastity may or may not include having biological children. We see a vision for fruitfulness without baby-making beautifully depicted in Isaiah 56:3-5:

Let no eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them

I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.”

The eunuch’s fear of being of a dry tree is a fear of fruitlessness. It’s a fear of living an insignificant life, creating nothing new, dying and disappearing without a trace. But God’s response to this fear isn’t to make all the eunuchs start having kids. Instead, he promises them a different kind of fruitfulness: “a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters . . . an everlasting name that will endure forever.” The eunuch doesn’t need to have kids to be fruitful in God’s eyes. The eunuch can have something *better* than kids.

Jesus carries this idea of eunuch fruitfulness into the New Testament. In this book’s introduction, we looked at Jesus’ shockingly countercultural words in Matthew 19:12:

For there are eunuchs who were born that way, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by others—and there are those who choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.

When Jesus invites his followers to consider lifelong singleness—to accept the calling to “live like eunuchs” if they “can accept this”—he isn’t asking them to be unfruitful with their sexualities. He’s asking them to be *differently* fruitful. He knows that building heaven’s kingdom on earth will require both married folks and single folks working side by side. In God’s family, spiritual parents aren’t always biological parents. Infertile couples and lifelong eunuchs can also leave behind a vast legacy of fruitfulness.

What, then, does fruitfulness look like for the celibate or childless person? When we don’t have kids—or when the only love affair our bodies are involved in is a chaste love affair with Jesus—what uniquely beautiful marks might we leave on the world around us?

JULIA: Fruitful Eunuchs

There was a meme going around a few years ago about teaching evaluations for Jesus. “He’s kind of forgetful—my name is Simon, but he’s been calling me ‘Peter’ all semester. . . . It’s really annoying, I’ll be first in line for his office hours, and then he calls in the *last* person. . . . The guy is obsessed with seeds. I’m sick of hearing about seeds, seeds, SEEDS!”

We’d expect a seeds-obsession from a God whose first words to the humans he’d just created were “Be fruitful!” The Old Testament makes it abundantly clear how seriously the Jewish people took this command. The Egyptians were furious that the Israelites were multiplying so quickly. Married women who find themselves barren are portrayed as profoundly unhappy. The Psalms applaud the happy man with a wife like a fruitful vine and a quiver full of children. And eunuchs, people defined by their inability to beget offspring, are depicted as . . . heroes?

That’s right. Surprising as it may be, *both* Testaments present eunuchs in a wholly positive light. The crucially important passage we cited above from Isaiah 56 declares that eunuchs who obey God will have “a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters.” But other eunuchs named in the Old Testament are also depicted as playing an active role in salvation history. Ebed-melek the Ethiopian takes pity on Jeremiah in the cistern and orchestrates his rescue (Jer 38:7-13). Under orders from Nebuchadnezzar, the chief eunuch Ashpenaz brings Daniel and the other captive youths to the palace; but “God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs,” so Ashpenaz colludes in Daniel’s vegetarian scheme (Dan 1:3-16). Both Ebed-melek and Ashpenaz perform acts of kindness with important consequences for persecuted people of God.

This astonishingly positive evaluation of eunuchs helps give context to Jesus’ teaching about becoming eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven.



Right before he talks about the different kinds of eunuchs, Jesus says, “Not everyone can accept this word [*chōrousin ton logon*], but only those to whom it has been given” (Mt 19:11), implying that this calling of celibacy is a blessing and a privilege. The verb translated “accept,” *chōreō*, literally means “have room.” It appears with *logos* again in John 8:37, where Jesus tells the unbelieving Jews, “I know that you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are looking for a way to kill me, because you have no room for my word.” Both passages suggest that having room for the *logos*—or perhaps the *Logos*, the Word (Jn 1:1)—means receiving the fullness of God’s gift. That’s why the one who can accept it should!

We see the prophecy of Isaiah 56 fulfilled in the book of Acts (8:26–39), where the Ethiopian eunuch is the first non-Jew to be baptized into the new kingdom. Notice the miracle that does *not* happen. Jesus’ disciples, entrusted with his authority, were perfectly capable of regenerating withered or even severed body parts. But the eunuch doesn’t ask for this kind of healing, and Philip doesn’t offer it. Instead, as soon as the eunuch is baptized, he “went on his way rejoicing.” According to tradition, though biological fatherhood was impossible for him, he went on to become the spiritual father of Africa.

An exchange like this one—spiritual parenthood instead of biological parenthood— isn’t an anomaly. It’s at the very heart of the gospel. There’s not a single passage in the New Testament indicating that having a happy marriage and children is superior to being celibate for the sake of the kingdom. Instead, every time Jesus talks about family—which he does quite a lot—it’s to make the point that spiritual family is more important than biological family. While Matthew records Jesus as saying that people who love their families more than they love him are not worthy of him (Mt 10:37), Luke conveys this shocking idea in even more shocking terms: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26).

Jesus is obviously not encouraging people to hate their families (which would contradict his command to love everyone, including enemies). But his astounding hyperbole drives home the point that discipleship is *far more important* than biological family.

This attitude also translates into concrete action. Jesus tells people to leave their biological families behind for his sake. By doing so, he says, they'll receive bigger and better spiritual families: "And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life" (Mt 19:29; cf. Mk 10:29-30; Lk 18:29-30).

He makes this point most powerfully and concretely by using his own family as an example. When his disciples tell him his mother and brothers are looking for him outside, "he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother'" (Mk 3:31-35; cf. Mt 12:49-50; Lk 8:19-21).³ Similarly, when a woman cries out that the womb that bore Jesus and the breasts that nursed him are blessed, he replies, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Lk 11:27-28). Jesus' stunning statements are clearly not a mark of disrespect for Mary—after all, Mary heard and obeyed God's word in a world-changing way when she told the angel Gabriel, "Let it be done to me according to your word"! Rather, Jesus is saying that her spiritual motherhood is *even more important* than her biological motherhood.

These teachings of Jesus about family are essential to the conversation about sexuality. As we noted in the introduction, Catholicism teaches that sexual activity can be fully blessed only when it's ordered toward the giving of life.⁴ Yet the Gospels make it crystal clear that people who do not get married or have sex, who become "eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom," are called to the *even more important vocation* of spiritual parenthood.



This calling has to be kept in mind to understand the CCC's crucial teaching we saw a few pages ago, that "homosexual persons are called to chastity" and to "Christian perfection." By using the phrase "homosexual persons," the CCC acknowledges that having a homosexual orientation can be a component of a person's identity. Even more importantly, there is no suggestion that "Christian perfection" requires a person to stop having a homosexual orientation, or what the previous CCC paragraph calls "deep-seated homosexual tendencies." On the contrary: People with those tendencies "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided."⁵ Part of avoiding "unjust discrimination"—which, frankly, affects single people in the Church no matter what their sexual orientation is—means learning to treat celibate laypeople as the right arm of the body of Christ, not as the appendix.

GREG: Absence / Presence

As a celibate layperson, I've certainly had my fair share of well-meaning Christians try to get me married off. Some of them want me to marry a woman. Others want me to marry a man. Despite their very different theologies of marriage, the one thing all these matchmakers seem to agree on is how much better my life would be if I were married.

I sometimes find it helpful, as I'm gently discouraging my generous matchmakers, to remind them that all our human marriages are temporary. Jesus makes this clear in Matthew 22, when the Sadducees try to prove the impossibility of resurrection life. They tell a hypothetical story about a woman who marries seven brothers, one after another, as each previous husband dies. "At the resurrection," the Sadducees ask Jesus, "whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" (Mt 22:28). Jesus responds by explaining that the premise of their question is false. She won't be any of these men's wife in eternity. Human marriage will be a thing of the past: "At the

resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven” (Mt 22:30).

Notice that Jesus doesn’t seem sad about the disappearance of human marriage. And yet he isn’t being anti-marriage. He’s simply pointing out that the relationships his hearers think of as marriages are no longer necessary in eternity. As we explore in chapter two, a new kind of marriage will rise up to take the place of these old marriages—a marriage between Christ and his Bride, the Church. The intimacy we’ll experience in our resurrection life renders earthly marital intimacy obsolete. And since this is true, we can be confident that people who don’t marry and experience marital intimacy in this lifetime ultimately aren’t missing out on anything. In the end, none of us will be married, because all of us will be members of the Bride in the Great Wedding.

Three chapters before Jesus’ words about the disappearance of marriage, in Matthew 19, Jesus celebrates the kingdom gifts of eunuchs. Specifically, among other things, he’s celebrating the importance of nonsexual relationships between men and women. After all, male eunuchs in the ancient world were prized and valued in part because they were considered “safe” around women. Eunuchs weren’t going to steal anyone’s wife—that’s why they made such great companions for queens and other female dignitaries.

When Jesus enthusiastically invites his followers to live like eunuchs, then, he’s declaring how beautiful it is for unmarried folks to love all our fellow humans without any thought of sexualization. This beauty applies to everyone who chooses to express our love through celibacy, regardless of which people we’re sexually attracted to by default. In fact, some biblical scholars—including fairly conservative ones like Robert Gagnon—have argued that the category of “born eunuchs” probably included “people homosexually inclined.”⁶ So it’s not a stretch to say that, among the many gifts Jesus has in mind when he celebrates the kingdom’s eunuchs, my own lack of sexual interest in women could be *somewhere* on that list. (And for

asexual folks—that is, people who don’t experience a strong pull toward sexual behavior with any gender—the gifts of sexual noninterest abound still more! We say more about the “gift of non-attraction” in chapter nine.)

But while this absence of sexual attraction can be a joyous part of my celibacy and the celibacy of my asexual friends, good celibacy is never primarily about absences. As Eve Tushnet so wisely says—causing me to quote her incessantly and yet unapologetically—“You can’t have a vocation of No.”⁷ I’m increasingly convinced that everything we celibates experience as an *absence* in our celibacy creates space for a bigger and better *presence* Jesus has dreamed for us. So in my case:

- My *absence* of sexual attraction to women (paired with the fact that a significant majority of men aren’t attracted to me) creates space for the *presence* of so many exuberant and instinctively nonsexual friendships.
- My *absence* of a spouse and kids taking center stage in my weekends (as I would want them to, if I had them!) creates space for the *presence* of Saturdays spent writing in coffee shops and Sundays before church spent walking along the Boise River as I savor the solitary company of Jesus.
- My *absence* of genetic offspring creates space for the *presence* of uniquely special Honorary-Uncle and Biological-Uncle relationships with some of the coolest young people I know.
- My *absence* of sexual intercourse with a spouse creates space for the *presence* of . . . what, exactly?

This last question vexes many Christian celibates, including me. Yes, it’s great to have time in our schedules for loving our communities and communing with Jesus. It’s great to lean into the life-sustaining gifts of friendship, our avuncular or materteral relationships, and so on. But what *presence* could we possibly gain by not having sex? What better gift enters to fill that absence?

I'm still sorting out my own answer to that question. But in the midst of my sorting, the Catholic tradition's definition of chastity as "the successful integration of sexuality" has been so helpful for me. Sexual abstinence doesn't have to contradict our sexuality. Abstinence can actually *express* our sexuality, modeling how our bodily and spiritual realities come together as one.

For me, and for celibates like me, our spiritual reality is one of betrothal; the final marriage still awaits us. But our bodies aren't wasted in the meantime. We're being made ready for our Bridegroom, like a bride from the ancient world being washed and perfumed and pampered in anticipation of the wedding night. Our spiritual goal is also a bodily goal.

JULIA: Imagining Joseph

In our discussion of chastity as "the successful integration of sexuality within the person," it makes sense to spend a little time imagining the man who, in the Catholic litany that bears his name, is given the title "most chaste."⁸

For most of my life as a Christian (since 1987) and even as a Catholic (since 2004), I didn't give Joseph of Nazareth much thought. If I had a mental image of him at all, it was as a hardworking carpenter. A silent accessory to balance Mary in the manger scene. A self-effacing older man who receives communications from God in the passive mode of sleep and speaks not a syllable in the Bible. My husband and I used to chuckle a bit over the title "Joseph, most chaste." After all, Catholics believe that Mary remained a virgin for her entire life—and the downside of being married to a perpetual virgin is that you don't get to enjoy the usual marital privileges!⁹ "Josephite marriages," in which the spouses voluntarily agree to abstain permanently from sex, are and always have been a fringe phenomenon. The "quiet man who made things out of wood" was a beautiful model of humility who



shows us the dignity of work,¹⁰ but he was hardly someone I'd look to as a model of getting sexuality right.

That began to change in 2021, which Pope Francis declared the Year of Saint Joseph.¹¹ The more I thought, read, and listened to podcasts about Jesus' earthly father, the more I realized how inadequate my mental picture of him was.¹²

Every Christian should be able to agree that, objectively speaking, Joseph was enormously important to salvation history. Out of all the humans on earth, he was the one chosen by God to be the primary example of fatherhood and manhood for the New Adam. Like his Old Testament namesake (another prophetic dreamer who moved to Egypt), he saved the world from starvation, this time by preserving the Bread of Life. His unique task was to help form and guard the treasure compared with which all other treasures are a speck of dust.

It's with these things in mind that we should consider the question of his sexuality. If the best we can do is to think, "I guess he had to suppress it, poor guy," or "Maybe he was too old for it to matter," or (as some Protestants argue) "He *must* have had sex after Jesus was born," I'm pretty sure we're missing something.

Naturally, our understanding of Joseph's sexuality is intimately bound to our understanding of Mary's. The "holy of holies" in the Temple was the most sacred place on earth, the inner sanctum where only the high priest could enter, once a year, with fear and trembling. But Mary's womb was the *holiest* of holies, containing the living reality of God's presence; all that came before was mere symbol and metaphor. Through her full and free consent, her body became the bridal chamber in which the marriage of heaven and earth was consummated, the first realization of the eternal marriage for which the Author of creation wrote the whole story. When Joseph learned about her miraculous pregnancy (and I feel certain she told him as soon as she knew), I believe that his initial impulse to send her away was not

only from a desire to protect her from those who wouldn't understand, but also out of reverence for this ineffable mystery.¹³

Joseph's role as the head of the Holy Family shows us that passing on one's genes—the biological goal of sexuality—is not necessary to living the fullness of fatherhood. I always found it surprising that the genealogy at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel is of Joseph, not of Mary; part of Matthew's (and God's) point must be to emphasize, once again, the relative unimportance of biological parenthood compared with spiritual parenthood in the new kingdom. Similarly, when Mary and Joseph find their lost boy in the Temple, Mary says simply, "Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you" (Lk 2:48), not "your foster father" or "your adoptive father" or "your somehow-second-string father." Since we're all children of God by adoption (Eph 1:5), it's fitting that Jesus' own nuclear family should present in his father-by-adoption a beautiful example of chastity's fruitfulness.

Re-forming our imagination of Joseph can be an important part of re-forming our understanding of chastity as the expression of sexuality that brings the greatest joy to us and glory to God. Archbishop Fulton Sheen, with his characteristic vigor, paints an inspiring picture of Jesus' earthly father:

Joseph was probably a *young* man, strong, virile, athletic, handsome, chaste, and disciplined. . . . Instead, then, of being dried fruit to be served on the table of the king, he was rather a blossom filled with promise and power. . . . Mary and Joseph brought to their espousals not only their vows of virginity but also two hearts with greater torrents of love than had ever before coursed through human breasts.¹⁴

Sheen's hilarious "dried fruit" metaphor reminds me of Rumer Godden's 1969 novel *In this House of Brede*, which centers on a middle-aged widow named Philippa who leaves a successful career to enter a

Benedictine convent. Speaking to the young and beautiful postulant Cecily, Philippa compares herself to “an orchard where the fruit is ripe, but some has fallen in windfalls, some been spoiled by wasps, some sold, . . . or given away or wasted . . . but the one who comes at nineteen or twenty or even twenty-three . . . gives the whole orchard, blossom and fruit and all.”¹⁵ When Cecily is later visited by a mother with her baby, she “incautiously put her hand through the grille to touch the baby’s with her finger: [the baby’s] hand was unexpectedly warm and suddenly the minute fingers closed round Cecily’s finger and held it in a surprisingly strong grip.”¹⁶ That moment haunts Cecily for weeks, as she thinks about the man she loves and has left behind, the family she still could have if she chose to live the normal life her own mother wants for her. But ultimately, Cecily comes to realize that this would not be enough. With full awareness of the sacrifice she is making and the pangs she may always feel, yet with a deep sense of confidence and peace, she chooses to offer her divine Bridegroom the whole orchard.

If I may be allowed to say so, I’m also reminded of Gregory Coles. My young, handsome, brilliant, delightful coauthor is what is popularly known as “a catch.” He has had people of both sexes seek him out for romantic relationships. Modern laws would allow him to marry a man. Modern technology would allow him to sire children. Instead, he has chosen to scandalize the world, as he said at a recent Revoice conference, by “wasting all of my dreams and passions—and my body’s prime lovemaking years!—on a chaste love affair with a 2000-year-old Jewish man.”¹⁷ Like Saint Joseph’s, Greg’s offering of his entire self shows us the superabundant, thirty-and-sixty-and-hundredfold fruitfulness of chastity.

GREG: Trees by Their Yield

Sometimes Julia says things about me that are so kind, I blush a little on the inside. To be sure, I’m doing celibacy—and life with Jesus in



general—quite imperfectly. But I heartily concur with Julia that my unmarried life, for all its imperfections, can be a thing of great beauty and fruitfulness. So can any unmarried life, or any life without sex or biological offspring. When we let God tell us what we were made for, and then we choose to imperfectly go where he asks us to go, fruitfulness is guaranteed to follow.

The orchard we're given might look nothing like the orchard we expect. We might have to let go of what we *think* counts as fruitfulness, retraining our imagination to look for fruit in surprising places. We might wind up with a story like Joseph's: Prepared for our life to go in one direction, until the Holy Spirit's curveball sends us down a road we never could have dreamed.

I have to admit, when Julia first told me she wanted to write about Joseph in this chapter, I was skeptical. Why, with so many fabulous unmarried role models in the Bible, should we look to a married man like Joseph? (Especially when Protestants and Catholics don't agree about whether he ever had sex during that marriage?) Besides, the Bible doesn't have much to say about Joseph once Jesus is born. Isn't he kind of . . . forgettable?

But this, I'm coming to realize, is precisely the point. The legacy Joseph leaves behind is *Jesus*. Joseph takes care of Mary and Jesus during their vulnerable years of pregnancy and infancy. He keeps them safe through a harrowing evacuation to Egypt and a long journey back to Nazareth. He raises Jesus as his own son, training him up in his carpenter's craft. When full-grown Jesus bursts onto the ministry scene, Joseph's fingerprints are all over the story—but Joseph himself has disappeared.

In other words, the most important fruitfulness of Joseph's life has nothing to do with biological fruitfulness. (Whether or not Joseph and Mary had future biological kids, we know for sure that Jesus had none of Joseph's DNA.) The most important thing Joseph does with his



sexuality is willingly choose *not* to have sex, while remaining faithful to the woman he's promised to marry and the baby God placed in her womb.

I wonder if Joseph ever had to grieve this loss of biological fruit-bearing. I wonder if he ever looked at Mary's growing belly and wished the baby inside had his own genes instead of God's. I wonder if he ever caught a glimpse of his own partly invisible legacy and complained alongside the eunuchs of Isaiah 56: *Where's my fruit? Where's my orchard? I am only a dry tree.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a celibate nineteenth-century poet and priest, wrestles with this same fear of fruitlessness in his unfinished poem "Trees By their Yield":¹⁸

Trees by their yield
Are known; but I—
My sap is sealed,
My root is dry. . . .
It must be so—
I do not love.

Hopkins's fear has been my fear too: That no matter how deeply and widely we love, all that love will be forgettable and invisible in the end. That we're too imperfect to leave the kind of spiritual legacy Jesus and the celibate saints before us have left . . . but we're too celibate to leave a physical legacy with our sexual partners and kids. That the only kind of fruit anyone will care about after we're gone is the one kind of fruit we don't have.

If Hopkins had finished his poem, instead of trailing off mid-sentence in the second stanza, I would have liked to read it. But there's something deeply honest and human about its unfinished state. At the end of the story, the questions are still questions.



Even so, Hopkins knows there's more to the story than his first stanza admits. He starts the second stanza by asking, "Will no one show / I argued ill?" In other words: *Can someone please prove me wrong?* He knows there must be a mistake in his logic somewhere, because he knows he *does* love. Even though he has no way to prove it, he knows his love must matter.

I often feel the same when I look at the love of my Christian siblings (both historical and present-day) who are celibate or experience infertility. I think of all the beautiful childless people who show up for their communities in a hundred simple and invaluable ways, as friends and confidants and cheerleaders. I think of the Christians who come alongside their community's parents by acting as honorary aunts and uncles to the young people around them. I think of the spiritual parents who patiently plant seeds of faith, whether or not they get to see the roots that deepen or the fruit that springs up in the end.

I think of all the ways we love. I think of how our love is never wasted.

My hope for myself and my childless siblings is that we'll leave legacies like Joseph's: Legacies as abundant as an orchard, even if the world around us never learns how to see it.

JULIA AND GREG

What does Jesus' invitation to bear fruit look like in your life?

Maybe you're on a path that you hope will lead to kids someday. Maybe you have biological or adoptive kids already. Or maybe your life is turning out more like a eunuch's, and you expect (or fear) that you'll live and die without kids of your own.

No matter which of these stories is yours, the Christian journey toward fruitfulness beckons us to integrate our sexuality within the bigger picture of our personhood. Jesus isn't asking us to pretend that our sexual bodies and longings don't exist. In fact, the longer we try to pretend, the longer we'll delay our fruit-bearing. Jesus invites us to



offer these parts of ourselves to him with unfettered honesty. He wants to bear fruit in us, not *despite* but *through* the bodies and stories he's allowed to be ours.

In other words, pursuing chastity isn't primarily about saying no to our sexuality. All of us—married or single, childless or child-full, gay or straight or something else—say no at times so we can say yes to bearing the fruit Jesus has dreamed up for us. Christian chastity says no in order to say a better yes—and that yes is always fruitful, even and especially when it looks fruitless at first glance.

The way Jesus tells it, biological parenthood is fantastic—and spiritual parenthood is even more fantastic. If we choose to believe Jesus' words, we can't possibly go on treating the eunuch life as lesser or deficient. Whether or not we have children of our own, our best legacy—like Joseph's legacy, like Jesus' legacy—will be the legacy of our spiritual genetics.

If the word *chastity* still sounds boring and old-fashioned to you, that's okay. With or without that word, Jesus' invitation to you remains the same. And if you say yes to that invitation, he'll take you on an adventure that's the opposite of boring.

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

1. As you were growing up, what messages did you hear about how to live a fruitful life—a life that matters?
2. Have you ever experienced someone being a “spiritual parent” to you? What made their role in your story so significant?
3. If your sexuality and spirituality were more fully integrated, how might your life look different than it does right now?

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