

## Transcript 127

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. So this episode is going to be a little different than most of our other episodes. And this is going to be an issue we're going to be very conversational. Give you a little background. Many of you are probably aware that recently a prominent evangelical pastor was temporarily told to step down from the role due to a what was described as inappropriate relationship with a woman who is not his wife. And made a little more background on the issue and came out and said there was nothing sexual, nothing romantic going on. Essentially, they were texting each other through a messaging service associated with a popular app, his wife was aware of it. Her husband was aware of it. But the description was, both from him and from the elders of the church, that the the frequency and the familiarity shown in these messages was troublesome and revealed potentially something, an issue that needed to be dealt with.

Shea Houdmann

So we have no complaints about steps that the church took. The this pastor took ultimately would while we would like to know more about what's going on, really it's none of our business. So we don't even want to mention anyone by name, or really talk about whether the church made the right decision or what's going on. But a lot of people as a result are kind of like, well, OK, if there was nothing sexual romantic going on, why is this a problem? There are some other things that were said potentially is using some coarse language or coarse joking, there's a problem, or the church even had a policy against what was going on. But a lot of people on culture like, OK, what was the problem?

Shea Houdmann

So we've noticed just from conversations we've had amongst the staff, male and female relationships and the body of Christ can be difficult. It can be challenging in that there's some of the principle we talk about. You don't want to give the appearance of evil. You don't want to open yourself up for false accusations. You you would do not want to expose yourself to temptation. So there are good reasons why people have strong boundaries in these areas. But there's also I remember both with my parents and other parents of, especially teenagers, who strongly encourage their children to have good friendships with people of the opposite sex. Good friendships with people of the same sex. And then suddenly, it seems in Christian culture, a lot of Christian culture, the moments you get married, well, from now on, you can only have a close relationship with someone of the opposite sex, with your spouse and with your immediate family.

Shea Houdmann

And that just seems strange to really think about it, but essentially you're saying once you're married, you can no longer have meaningful relationships with 50% of the people in the world. And really think about that. Or even Gwen and I were talking yesterday about how does a pastor truly shepherd a flock that is often 50% female when he cannot have close relationships with any of the women in his church. Can he really pastor a flock when there's so many boundaries, so many barriers put up between him and the women in his church that how do you even do something like that so those are we talking about

today, not the issue itself. What happened in this church with the pastor and his female friend. But what are the implications of this and how do we think through this? And I hope you hear that.

Shea Houdmann

So Gwen the associate editor and administrator of [compellingtruth.org](http://compellingtruth.org) and Jeff, the administrator of [Bibleref.com](http://Bibleref.com) will be joining me, and we're not saying that we have all the answers. We're not saying that here's what everyone should do, but we don't think this is an issue we can go that direction. So hope you hear us struggling along with you trying to figure this out. For those who have very strong convictions and set up very strong barriers, we're not trying to talk you out of that. For those who believe they can have wonderful and transparent and vulnerable and even to it's in extent intimate relationships with the opposite sex in the body of Christ, we're not trying to convince you in a direction either, but we want to help people realize this is not as black and white or cut and dry as some people make it out to be. So Gwen maybe start us off what are some of the as we've been talking through this over the last few weeks, what are some of the things the Lord has brought to mind, or what are some of the things you've been really thinking about?

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think one thing that for me is I've been, yeah, thinking through it and you know, listening to other podcasts and reading articles is, I've seen people mention just the problem, really, of living in such a hyper sexualized culture. And of course that's going to seep into the truth, into the church. So I think a lot of the struggle and problem is that we've been kind of programmed to view one another as primarily sexual objects. Or potential sex partners. So, like, if I'm looking at people, you know, you feel like sometimes that's what that boundary is, you know, I can't be alone because it might lead to an affair. It's like, what kind of view of men and women is that? That's lacking so much of the rest of humanity. And I think that's really our culture at large has reduced the idea of humanity to sexuality rather than created in God's image and, you know, like having so much more to us than just that aspect.

Gwen Sellers

And so I think it it can be really hard for the church to of, we want to live in this Eden ideal of, you know, God created man and woman in his image to partner together in his work. And then, you know, we read in the New Testament, treat one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We're all one family. So there's this familial ideally, there's this original creation that were partners, but then there's also the reality of the fall. I mean, Genesis three happened. And we see sex scandals happen all the time, so it's kind of how do we wrestle through this ideal that God has created and has set up and calls us to an equips us for while also recognizing we are fallen and sinful and not immune to the pressures on ourselves and the pressures of our world.

Gwen Sellers

So I guess for me, I mean you know we're going to talk about some like practicalities and what does this look like? But I think for me there's just this more fundamental understanding of what humanity is and what it means to be the family and body of Christ that I think when we get that foundation more solid than sort of the practicalities of so what does that mean when I come to church on Sunday morning or can I have a private meeting with my pastor just becomes so much easier.

Jeff Laird

I think it's really important that we distinguish between some of those things, and what you're talking about really is realism on both sides of the issue. We don't want to be unrealistic. On one side, we don't want to act like every single person in the world is equally non judgmental and every single person is equally immune to temptation. We also don't want to assume that every single person in the world is a potential predator or vixen or whatever terms people want to use. There's realism that we have to be in there, you know, but we don't want to deny the possibility of any of those things being in there. So we as pastors, for example, have to be able to balance the idea that they need to have some level of spiritual connection with the people that they're trying to witness to and interact with and work with.

Jeff Laird

What I see as the biggest problem in a lot of these discussions is that we do tend to drive them to the extremes where it's almost like what we're talking about is either that they're supposed to be absolutely no distinctions and no controls and no boundaries taken otherwise, it is somehow oppressive and unfair or sexist. And then the opposite of that being that there has to be this extremely codified, paranoid sort of an attitude towards it. So for me, I think one of the things that we we have to do is we sort of have to establish that we have to talk about friendships or relationships sort of in in a different category as specific behaviors now because they're totally separate, but just be. I think we can distinguish the idea of a man and a woman who are not married having friendship in that sense, having connection, having community, having spiritual interaction with the question of OK, what does that actually mean in terms of setting things like physical, emotional boundaries. 'cause they're not, they're not the same thing. I can understand why we want to draw distinctions in that sense, we really do want to be careful with those because the world is going to judge and it's going to judge unfairly. But you don't want to give people an overly easy way to assume that something is wrong with what you're saying or with what you're doing. But you also don't want to let it interfere with healthy relationships just because you're worried somebody, somewhere is going to think the wrong thing.

Shea Houdmann

So for me a lot of this comes back to the accusations part of it. I would never want. It's not even a concern for like my reputation personally, but as the President, CEO of Got Questions Ministries, I would not want anything to happen or to be accused of anything that would cause a bad testimony to shine on Got Questions. So I try to be very realistic with boundaries, but for me like the biggest wake up call happened was probably about 15 years ago. I'll tell the story briefly. My sister, I have one biological sister. She was in town and I can't remember where Melissa, my wife, was. So my sister and I went out to dinner. At a local restaurant and we're just sitting there talking. I was having a good time, anyone who could see us would see, wow, these two people clearly know each other and like each other, enjoy each others company. Well, across the room at the restaurant I saw a family from our church who had never met my sister before, and the husband, father of that family, was glaring at me and if looks could kill, that this was an example of that. So ultimately I parted myself from my sister, went over and talked to him. Like I just want to let you know, that's my sister. And he was like, oh, OK, I just thought it looked really strange. So all this for me. So properly in his mind, seeing me having dinner and having a good time with a woman who was not my wife, he was probably assuming I was having an affair. Now it was a wake up call for me and that like one, like OK, why would that be his first reaction? And two, I need to

be careful because I would never want anyone to assume that was happening when it was out. Obviously, definitely not.

Shea Houdmann

At the same time you get the other extreme where, for example. We'll talk about this little, the Billy Graham rule and just put briefly the Billy Graham rule. I don't know if it was invented by Billy Graham. Or he learned it from someone else, is that he will never allow himself to be alone with a member of the opposite sex other than his wife or an immediate family member. I have again, like I said earlier, I would never try to convince someone if that is your conviction, I'm not here to try to tell you that's a wrong conviction, but that makes life very difficult and it limits who you're able to have meaningful relationships or meaningful ministry with if you can absolutely never be alone with someone.

Shea Houdmann

And so there's the two extremes kind of at work. And my wife MeLissa had a coworker once who was of this conviction. And occasionally they would both arrive at an elevator at the same time, and he would absolutely refuse. He would not ride up two stories in an elevator with my wife if it was just the two of them in the elevator. Again I have don't have any problem with that conviction, but MeLissa was like, this is just weird. We can ride in the elevator together without being tempted. And without giving the appearance of anything going on. I mean, but yeah, there's the the contrast between the two issues. I get it and I understand the importance.

Shea Houdmann

For example, First Thessalonians 5:22 says do not give the appearance of evil. So no, we absolutely should never do something that gives an appearance that something happening that's not happening. But how far do you take that? How strong a barrier is? How far out do you have to push the barriers when you can't live your life by other people misperceptions or other people judgmentalism. So it's a struggle. It's something that we've all dealt with to varying degrees and that I'm very mindful of as the president's organization, I would never want to give anyone any opportunity to accuse and all it takes is an accusation and then it becomes a he said, she said type of thing. And how many ministries have been seriously harmed or how many people's ministry, ability to minister have been destroyed by even a false accusation, even when it's proven false? A lot of people still think, was it really false? Was there something going on there and I would never want that to happen.

Gwen Sellers

I think so. Back to what Jeff said earlier, I really liked the distinction you made between that, like friendship or even, you know, like intimacy versus behaviors. Because I think, yeah, like, I just think that's really helpful to think through because I can have meaningful, solid connections with the men in my church. But, you know, for me that does often happen in the context of like Sunday morning when everybody is there, or at Community Group when we're all sharing and and it's, it's completely normal. It's free flowing. Like they know me. They treat me like a human being. I do the same for them, and so I think what can become problematic with behaviors is Shea like you're talking about with those boundaries, I mean, boundaries are good and appropriate, but certain of them communicate like, you know, like I'm a man, I can't talk to a woman, or I can't possibly connect with her. So it's I think it's when those boundaries become the thing and so they actually impede relationship happening as opposed to

real and deep and meaningful relationship can happen. And yes, maybe there should be some boundaries around it. So I think it's just sort of that being careful what we're communicating. Are we communicating that relationship and depth and connection is good? Or are we communicating you're the opposite gender and therefore you're scary and I need to close the door because we we should be suspicious of one another.

Jeff Laird

And a lot of people misinterpret because it's not, it's not part of the wider culture, that thought process. This is not necessarily part of the wider culture, so for example, Shea you were talking to Billy Graham rule that that's the easy way people refer to it. More recently, I've heard people call it the Mike Pence rule because he had a similar conversation. It was never really a rule. It was just a principle. It was actually one of four that Graham came up with. The others were things about money and honesty and transparency and things like that. But he was he was trying to prevent himself or his fellow evangelists from doing things that would give people reasons to criticize their ministry. And even with Graham, it was never it was never, first of all, it was never meant to imply that there was something literally immoral about the interaction of a man with a woman who's not his wife. And that's where one of the the misconceptions come up is that people think that, you know, for example, if I was to say no, I'm, I'm not going to share a hotel room with Gwen if we're on a business trip. You know that's well, that's because I I just cannot, you know, I I have to forcibly separate myself from women because one or both of us can't control ourselves or whatever else, that's not what it's meant to communicate.

Jeff Laird

It is meant to communicate the idea that we do want to create boundaries for the sake of what other people can see and can understand. Again, there's nuances. There's overlap. It's not that those temptations do not exist. I don't think it would be a good idea for, you know, an unmarried opposite sex couple to to engage in that level of familiarity because sooner or later for somebody, somewhere that is going to start to create some trouble and some some concerns in that. But I think a lot of people just misunderstand what the intention is and they just sort of blow it up to say if you set those boundaries then that's creating unfair separation. So I think it is right, we don't want to create. That we don't want to create coldness or fear or paranoia, but I do think some of those things are a good idea and and everybody at some level agrees with that, even secular persons. And I don't say that lightly, but if if I was to say that, a 65 year old CEO was going to go on a business trip and he and his 19 year old female intern were going to share a single bed in a hotel room because it was cheaper, absolutely nobody would think that was OK. Everybody would cringe. They would say, oh that's that, that just isn't right. And we can talk all day long about saying, well, what's the matter? Don't you trust him? Don't you trust her? Why are you assuming, why you that? But there does come a point when people look at that and say, yeah, I can see why that really raises a lot of questions. So it's OK for us to be careful about the questions that we raise, we just want to be careful about not doing it in a way that makes it feel like we are supporting those stereotypes.

Gwen Sellers

When I think that kind of speaks to to that, I guess the idea of like the broader principle, yeah, versus how it's worked out. I mean because and maybe that's even just an understanding of boundaries. I mean it is important and appropriate to have boundaries and to stick with them. But, but sometimes even

those flex. I mean then we know this like with our kids, you know, it's like, OK, bedtime is like this, but well, hey, not today because like we got home late from the football game or whatever. And so I think the same too of like when people have a general principle of like, I don't want to be regularly spending extended time alone with you know, somebody of the opposite sex to whom I'm not married versus, oh, like, we're both going to be at the office and there's going to be half an hour where nobody else is here. I guess one of us needs to leave. Like that's sort of it. And so I guess it's that idea of understanding what why you have your boundary and what its function is. So not letting the boundary rule you, but letting it help you and be a tool.

Gwen Sellers

And I think that's also a difficult thing for this conversation that is, you know, there's kind of like broader conservative Christian culture. And so the things we read about on blogs or here on podcasts or you know when somebody sets this is a rule for everybody, everywhere versus what it actually feels like in my local church, or the dynamics of my local church that need a different set of boundaries and rules may be stricter, maybe not like, yeah, so I think context really matters, which all goes back to the heart of how we're viewing each other and how are we intentionally trying to love each other well with the love of God and use, you know, understanding like you were saying Jeff, about the realism, understanding the world that we live in and intentionally trying to love well in truth.

Jeff Laird

And knowing what those boundaries are and what they're for is really important. So, for example, I set those sorts of boundaries, I participate in those. Where I'm very careful about, you know, what sort of social media messaging and texting and emailing and stuff I might do, or what sort of rooms I'm in or not with with members of the opposite sex. And I don't do that because I think, oh man, if I get left in a in a room alone with a woman, then that's just the end of it. No, I don't. However, I do recognize that not only am I protecting my wife. And my ministry from somebody taking something the wrong way, but I also recognize that if you set proper behavioral boundaries, it actually frees you to have deeper, more meaningful friendships. If I know that I just have a standing rule that I'm not going to be alone in some kind of environment with a woman who's not my wife, then for me, if I'm interacting with a woman at church, I feel more comfortable with being able to have meaningful contact and conversations. Why? Because the boundaries that I set sort of provide a buffer against some of those temptations that might come up. To to have something that starts as a friendship, turns into an infatuation and then becomes a problem, which is something that we have heard happen in circumstances where innocent friendships turn into something more severe. It's it's all about understanding those details. I like that we're, I hope the people listening get that we're emphasizing that this is not a one size fits all approach. There's going to be different ways that other people are going to approach this, because it's not going to be exactly the same for every single person in every circumstance, and there are going to be exceptions to those rules. If a 14 year old girl is stranded on the side of the road and I need to get her out of a thunderstorm and drive for a mile down the road, I'm probably not going to say sorry. You're just going to have to stay out in the rain because I don't want people to wonder what's going on. And we have to understand that this complexity to it.

Shea Houdmann

Again, when I say this, I'm not saying that those who hold to the Billy Graham rule or similar principles are pharisaical, but a lot of what the Pharisees did would take a command that's in the Bible. So we'll use example, do not commit adultery. It's OK, that's what we're not supposed to do. Well, I can't just go as close to that as I possibly can without actually doing it. No. I need to set the boundaries further and further away, and eventually by Jesus time they got so far away from the actual sin that you don't even really know what's going on. Like OK, why are we not doing this? Oh, because if you did that, that could lead to that, to that, to that, to that, that, that, and then 10 steps down the road your to the actual command that God gave. So that's what we can sometimes do with some of these boundaries is that. Yes. We're not to commit this one particular act, and we shouldn't even get close to it. But some people will push those boundaries so far away that it's just like this doesn't make any sense. And maybe the clearest example that I could think of in in Israel and most Jewish communities, they will not eat meat and milk in the same meal. OK, well well that that command is not in the Bible at all. There's the command says do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk. That's what the Bible commands against. We don't, going to go into why that command is there, but over the centuries it it grew and expanded so well, we can't even don't run this risk. So let's just not have those two things the same meal at all. Like, well, that's that's not the command. That's not the command at all. It had a very specific purpose. A specific reason had nothing to do with eating the two foods at the same meal. But that's how something like this can develop over time where that doesn't even make sense when you look at what the original command was. So we need to be careful to set reasonable boundaries, but not set a boundary so far out that it prevents us from actually have opportunities to minister to people.

Jeff Laird

One of the things that, if I understand right, was part of the reason for that is that sometimes there was a concern that the argumentation of, as I've read in some of the Jewish literatures, they're saying the reason you can't do that is because if somebody sees you doing it they could misinterpret it to mean the opposite of what the law says. I I think I've read something similar. It was about the blood of fish and blood of land animals or something like that. And it was saying, you know, you can't, you can't confuse those because if somebody is watching they may get the wrong impression and that's where I feel there's a lot of danger in all of it is we have to try to strike a balance between saying I don't want to give people the wrong impression. But I have to be realistic about the world that we live in. And know that if I give somebody a good reason to wonder, then I'm giving them a good reason to wonder.

Gwen Sellers

Yeah, I think there's, you know, there's that balance of like, we don't want to become a stumbling block to somebody else, but we also can't be ruled by another person convictions. So, yeah, there is that balance, I guess. And so, Jeff, back to what you were saying about boundaries, I love that idea of it can actually set you free. And and just those like clear definitions, I think when people understand like you were saying, when they understand why it's there or when you yourself know, then it can set you free. I remember. So I'm single and don't plan to get married, but I know like in my 20s, you know, there was always that kind of like awkward when you're interacting with guys like, oh, like, is he interested in me or is he just being nice or whatever? And so it was always a relief when I would interact with married men because it's like, this is great. I know he's not interested in me. I'm not interested in him. I can just be a person and like not worry about this other stuff. And so I think that's sort of what you're saying like when you know like this isn't gonna become like I have boundaries set so that this isn't going to become

weird. I'm going to like communicate upfront and appropriately, then you're free to enjoy the relationship that is.

Jeff Laird

And I think communication is important because it's good for us to tell people why we're taking the steps that we are. When I worked as an engineer, I distinctly remember an incident where I had a young woman who was a coworker who wanted to, she came to me because she needed a key to get into a specific area. And the technical way that the procedure was supposed to work is I wasn't supposed to give that key to somebody else. If they wanted to get in this area, I would go there with the key to let them in. But this meant going through several locked doors to get to this particular area. And I just said I can't go back there with you and I, but I was also clear in explaining I'm just not comfortable with the idea of going through several sets of locked doors with you because I don't want people coming to the wrong impression and there were other things going on in the environment that made that more of a concern with the way people were thinking. I said that doesn't mean I'm, I'm concerned or anything, but it just does mean let's go get a third person so that the three of us can go back there and do this. You know, I know that's going to take an extra minute.

Jeff Laird

But how we communicate this, I think, matters. If we just say it in a way that doesn't give people the right impression, that's not good. And I think we also need to think as to what do we overall communicate with the rules and the approaches that we have. One of the reasons that some of this stuff has even come up in the first place is, you know, she was talking about the idea of accusation, and it's unfortunate that we're living in an environment right now where to some extent an accusation that gets spread is as good as a conviction, and that's not fair, and that's not right. We don't want to be in the sense that we automatically are skeptical of everything that somebody says. But there, if we communicate the idea that if we can even accuse you of something, we can destroy your life. We can destroy your ministry, we can destroy your family. That communicates to men in particular that they need to be very paranoid about those things. But at the same time, if we communicate somehow that, you know, women are not to be trusted or that men cannot rely on a woman to be honest about a circumstance, then they're going to question why we have those rules in those boundaries. So I. The communication thing, I think is good. We want to tell people why we're doing what we're doing and the reasons we're doing it so that they can't be unfairly critical. And at that point, if we're clear about why we're doing it and we're transparent about all the things that are going on and somebody chooses to judge us anyway, there's nothing we can do about that. That's that's going to happen and we're going to need to count on our reputation to get us through that. I think it's First Peter 2:15 talks about, you know, you want to live a lifestyle so the people who slander you are just ashamed for even making the accusation in the first place. And I think some of these things can be healthy ways to make that happen.

Gwen Sellers

And I would say to you, I mean, you know, so we're talking about this mostly from sort of like the male setting, the boundary perspective, which I mean and my experience has been how we normally talk about it. But I'm thinking, you know, like there have been women who, well, women and men like sexual abuse is a thing. People have been traumatized in the past, so I think that it can be a safety for both genders. I mean there are women who would feel uncomfortable being alone with a man, maybe



because something in the past. So I think, you know, from the other side, it's helpful when men respect that too, and realize like, oh, you know, like maybe, maybe she would be uncomfortable in this situation. I actually had a family friend ask me that. We were, so he was teaching me something and so like I came to his house and then we were going somewhere and his wife was there when I got there. And I kind of assumed she was coming and was like, Oh no, she's not. And he said, you know, because of the culture that we live in, it's like, well, I guess this is kind of a thing. So like, is it OK if we drive alone together and I'm like yeah, that's fine with me. And his wife is like, yeah, you're like a father figure to her. I mean, he's known me since I was seven, so. But I do appreciate that he'd asked and, you know, acknowledged it for both of us. Like some people might not be OK with this, so let's just make sure it's OK.

Shea Houdmann

We've talked a lot about the boundary side of it. I think that's very healthy, but I don't want this episode to it all communicate, let's throw off all boundaries. But no, that's not what we're saying at all. We also want to talk a little bit about some of the positive aspects of male female relationships. For example, men and women are different. Despite what our culture wants to tell us these days, men and women are different. And even with all the generalizations in place, I've found the female friends that I have, have different insights into me, in my character, what they observe in me, than my male friends do. That often I've learned more from someone like a female friend, including some of my coworkers at Got Questions say so Shea when you said this, it came across to me like this. I mean, and none of the male employees thought that at all. It's like that's very helpful for me to know. It's things like that where obviously I have MeLissa, my wife of 25 years. But in in a sense, we've spent a lot of time together over 25 years. We've gotten very used to each other. We're used to how each other come across. And so we don't notice those things as much as a female friend who's far less intimately connected to me as my wife is. Female friends will notice some things that MeLissa won't notice or male friends won't notice. And to me I have found most insights very very helpful and learning more about some learning areas where I need to work on improve. Learning how to communicate better to people who don't know me all that well, and recognizing even how I come across. So it's things like that that I don't think, I think setting up so many boundaries that we cannot have meaningful relationships with the opposite sex lessens us in the sense it reduces the input we can have, the quality and the type of input we can have from people, just from a discipleship, from a Christian fellowship, from a let's love one another, and part of that include speaking the truth in love. And to only limit yourself to content from one side of the populace it's seem felt unwise and to an extent unbiblical 'cause we're if male and female for one in Christ, I don't see how there can be no barriers between Jeff and I, but between Gwen and I oh, there's gotta be all these barriers and all these hoops we have to jump through before we can even have a conversation. So things like that, that's really forced me to kind of think through this. And yes, I understand accountability and barriers and not giving the impression the appearance of evil and those separate things, but not to the extent that I can't have a meaningful relationship with members of the opposite sex.

Jeff Laird

And to highlight that, I think it's just just to re emphasize some of that is that there is a lot of value in those things. So for the unmarried persons it it can be valuable to have meaningful relationship in terms of friendship and spiritual with members of the opposite sex because men and women do not think the same way, we don't perceive things the same way. And there's a there's a lot of healthy growth that can

happen if there's able to be some communication between the two of here's what this perspective says and here's what that perspective says. Same thing if you are married. You know, if a if a woman I'm not married to doesn't like something that I've said or done, she has a little bit more freedom to feel like she can just tell me what she wants, because there's none of that sense of I have to go home with this person and get along with them later. You know, it's not about dishonesty, it's just it's knowing that there's that other perspective where somebody can actually speak into that.

Jeff Laird

So I think you're right. You you stand to miss out on a lot of insight and a lot of understanding. But there again to remind I don't think in most cases that's what most Christians are suggesting. Yeah, it's another thing I want to make sure people don't get the wrong impression. The vast majority of pastors and church members and businessmen and whoever else are not advocating that there needs to be some sort of hard gender separation where the two just never interact with each other. That's sort of a cartoon. That's not how people are really doing it and how they're really saying it. And I think most people recognize it. Yeah, there is value in that and we want to just be careful about how we handle that. Treat it well. Don't be careless with it.

Gwen Sellers

Well, I think, I mean that goes back to what we were talking about at the very beginning of that Genesis one ideal, you know, like it was not good for man to be alone. And I think, I mean, you know, and Adam's situation obviously that did speak specifically about marriage and for him to be able to fill the earth he needed a woman. But, but I think it speaks to that broader, we were made for community with one another. And like you guys have said, community with people who are not like us. I mean, that's one of the things I love most about my community group is the male perspective in there. It's like there are guys in the group and they share and I don't get that otherwise. I mean, I love my ladies Bible study too, but like, but those are just different connections and different things that you get. And actually, there's a woman in my Bible study who's a widow. And she said the same thing of like, you know, yeah, with my husband gone, like, I'm pretty much with women all the time, so it is nice that our church does groups that are cross generational and cross gender and, you know, trying to be this diverse community that lives in unity with each other, recognizing that each of us has something unique and a little bit different to bring.

Shea Houdmann

We're running out of time here, so. Let's see each conclude with just like conclude with some closed closing thoughts. What are we each taking away from the different conversations we've had together and with others about this issue? And what is something like the incident that started the conversation about having an inappropriate texting relationship with frequency and familiarity. What should be the take away? Or something like that. So Jeff, once you start us off, what's what for you is the biggest take away from something like this happening?

Jeff Laird

I think maybe the most important one, because my experience is very often talking to people who struggle with faith or or are not believers, is to use it as an example of saying this is how a lot of Christians, take this. There was nothing sexual. There was nothing truly inappropriate, and especially in a

secular sense, nothing illegal, nothing immoral. And yet the church was willing to set a boundary, say something about it, do something about it, and be transparent about it. So for as much as we hear about Christian leaders who fail and sweep things under the rug and try to cover up spiritual abuse, there really are true examples of churches that don't do that and take that. So that's a good thing. I think it also just reinforces my experience that it is good to have boundaries, not because of fear. And not because of angst, but for the same reason I have boundaries in the way we handle cooking and firing, you know, weapons and vehicles and chemicals and everything else like that, you just set healthy boundaries so that bad things don't happen and so that we don't give other people the wrong impression. So I think a really good thing to come out of that is an example that yes believers take this seriously enough that we're willing to be transparent and accountable. But I also think it helps, it helps us remember that it is good to set healthy boundaries, as long as everybody knows why we're doing it and what we're doing it for.

Shea Houdmann

Gwen, how about you?

Gwen Sellers

Think for me just sort of the the conversations and the topic in general is that this is really hard, but I think it's also really worth wrestling through. I mean, the church is a called out community that is reflecting Christ, and so it's worth us struggling through it of how do we really do that? What does it really mean to be the family of God. What do those interactions look like? So I think I guess just that encouragement of not being shaped by the world and not being shaped by a react like an overreaction to things, but really examining ourselves and allowing God to examine our hearts and asking him to give us wisdom and to give us his love and eyes for other people. So I guess it's kind of that encouragement that the church is a family and that it's a family worth fighting for. So let's keep working on this and learn how to be that community together.

Shea Houdmann

Great points both to you. Like for me, some of it still goes back to one of my initial reactions to to what happened in that I asked if the exact same conversations were happening between this pastor and this woman's husband, would there have been any concerns? If so, or if not, why? To me like if you're going to have a meaningful relationship, I think familiarity and frequency, it's part of it. I mean, how how can you have a true friendship with someone if you are not familiar with them? If you are not frequently communicating with them, again without saying we need more information, it's not what I'm saying. But I still struggle with that because I believe that the Bible teaches us that we are to have meaningful relationships in the body of Christ, and not just not just with half of the body of Christ, but with the entire body of Christ. So that requires some vulnerability, some interaction with the opposite sex. It requires appropriate boundaries, but not hard and fast. I'm sorry I can't talk to you because you're the opposite sex. And I know that's a caricature, but some have even taken, take that so far. Well, I can't even be seen talking to someone.

Shea Houdmann

So for me it's a conviction. I don't want to do anything that could give someone the wrong impression, especially if it could cause harm to the testimony of Got Questions Ministries. But at the same time, I

can't allow other peoples perceptions to control how I live. I can't constantly be worrying about how does this look to someone else. So appropriate boundaries, but not boundaries that choke out the opportunity to have relationships that I can be encouraged by and that I can actually encourage in different ways. So that's my biggest take away.

Shea Houdmann

And again, we don't really have the answer in the sense of here's a universal rule we can apply in all situations. But I think it's helpful just to think through these things. And remember, it's not as black and white as some people make it out to be. But we can struggle through issues like this together and come to convictions that work for all parties involved. So I hope our conversations have been encouraging, edifying to you. Obviously if you have any questions about this, you can submit at the website or you can struggle through these issues with us. So, Gwen, Jeff, thanks for joining me today. This has been the Got Questions podcast on opposite gender relationships. Got questions? The Bible as answers and we'll help you find them.