Bob: Although Jackie Hill Perry has experienced and has given into same-sex attraction in her life, she has decided not to refer to herself as a gay Christian. She says there are other things much more significant about her than the temptations she faces.

Jackie: I’m a Christian. I’m black; I’m a woman; I’m a mother; but I think my main/primary identity is: “I am a Christian.” I love 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, where Paul is saying that neither an idolater, those who practice homosexuality—notice he didn’t say, “homosexuals”—those who practice homosexuality, sexually immoral—they will not inherit the kingdom of God. “But such were some of you. You were washed; you were sanctified; you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

He talks about those sins in the past tense, so I'm going to do the same thing; so for me, I refuse to identify myself by my temptations, but rather identify myself by what Christ has done for me.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Thursday, July 4th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine. At the end of the day, understanding our identity, as followers of Christ, may be the foundation necessary for us to live lives that are pleasing to Him. We'll explore that idea today with Jackie Hill Perry. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us on Thursday, on the 4th of July. I know we've got listeners all over the world, but the 4th of July is a big day in the United States. In fact, I just have to say—I'm concerned that moms and dads are not doing a good job of reminding their children of the heritage of America and the goodness that is America. We ought to have our emotions stirred as we reflect on the patriotism of this country and the goodness of this country.

Ann: We, often, take our freedom for granted. I love that we can take a day and remember and celebrate our history.

Bob: Yes; nobody's saying America is a perfect country—we've done everything right.

Ann: No; no.
Bob: We’ve got our issues—and certainly, we do; and we need to address those issues—but when you stop and think about things, is there a place on earth you’d rather live? Is there a place on earth where you would enjoy the freedoms you enjoy in this country? God bless America.

Dave: God bless America. He has blessed America.

Bob: We have been listening, this week, to an interview that we did—this was back in March—with an author named Jackie Hill Perry. She’s written a book called Gay Girl, Good God. We’ve heard, this week, her story of growing up and embracing a lifestyle of same-sex attraction, living as a lesbian for a couple of years before she met Jesus and had a transformational experience in her life.

Today, the conversation goes to the whole issue of identity and how we understand, in this culture, where there’s great confusion around gender, and sexuality, and identity. Jackie can speak to this maybe in a way that a lot of other people aren’t able to speak to it because of her experience. We talked to her about the reality that—the culture we live in today—there are a lot of people who come at this issue with this predisposition—they come, thinking: “Well, I’m gender fluid. I’m part straight/part gay.” She says we’ve got to rethink that.

[Previously Interview]

Jackie: I speak at a lot of conferences—speak to a lot of youth/a lot of parents—everybody—mainly girls are the honest ones—but everybody, in one way or another, thinks they’re gay or struggles with being gay. Some of it is that we have not equipped our children to understand the place of temptation in the Christian life or in the human life. What has happened is—children are being tempted and they are assuming, because the temptation exists, “This must be a part of who I am.”

I think that’s the problem with this whole idea of orientation—is that we have defined people by their affections. We just have to reshape how we see personhood, and how we see temptation, and how that this whole conversation of orientation. The word, heterosexual, doesn’t even exist in the Scriptures; oftentimes, when homosexuality is mentioned, it’s a verb, not a noun!—but we made it a noun. So now, when people are struggling, it’s like: “Oh, that’s who you are; so this must be really hard for you to resist.”

It’s like: “No; that’s not necessarily who they are—that’s what they do. Who they are is a sinner; but who they are is, also, an image-bearer of the living God.”

Dave: In the last part of your book, you go into identity, which is a fascinating thing.

Jackie: Yes! It’s huge; yes.

Dave: Talk about identity from that, because that’s what our culture thinks.
Jackie: Yes; I think this is how it fleshes it out when someone is a believer. The world, and their temptations, and the devil, and the flesh will say, “Okay; because you are still tempted with this, you are not a Christian; you are not a believer.” It’s like: “No!—even Jesus was tempted; yet, without sin. His position with God, and who He was before God was not changed because of His temptations. If anything, who He was governed how He responded to them.” The question shouldn’t be, “If I’m tempted...”; the question is, “What do you do when you are tempted?”

Ann: So, we have parents coming to us, a lot in the church, saying, “My son” or “…daughter just came out.” Can you talk to them and tell them they shouldn’t be that person?

Jackie: —shouldn’t be gay.

Dave: —shouldn’t be gay.

Ann: Yes! What would you say to those people that come up?

Jackie: I would wonder if this is a matter of pride for them; because I’ve seen where some parents—you don’t want your children to be gay, because you don’t want someone to indict your parenting.

At the end of the day, it’s a matter of sin. Does our parenting affect, I guess, the ways in which our children might go?—sure; for sure! But at the end of the day, this is between them and the Lord. They don’t believe Him; and they’re just struggling with sin, because they are human beings in the world.

I would also say that it is always a good thing to bring your stuff into the light because, if someone cannot be honest about their sin, they can’t confess; nor can you counsel them / nor can you disciple them, because you don’t even know where they are. For someone to come out of the closet, allows for people to be like: “Oh! That’s where you are. That’s who you say you are at this moment. Cool! Let’s deal with it; let’s talk about it; let’s discuss it.”

I think our response, as people—as parents, as disciple makers, as youth pastors—is to respond to the confession of sin—whether it’s coming out of the closet or not—the same way that Jesus does/the same way that God does. I’ve always been encouraged by how, in the Garden, when God approached Adam and Eve after they sinned—He didn’t stomp through the Garden; He didn’t run in that muck—it said He walked in the cool of the day. He was very calm in His approach to them, even when they were sinning. I think we need to be the same way.

Dave: I have a friend, who says when anybody is honest with you, that’s a confession.
Jackie: Yes.

Dave: What do they want?—a priest; they want someone to lean in and empathize with them and walk with them.

But here’s the thing: in the church, this confession: “I’m gay,” is the sin of all sins—that’s the perspective—so they are not going to say it. And if they do, that’s why these parents are coming in, going: “What do I do?! What do I do?! He’s not saying he’s struggling with his integrity; he’s saying his identity is—he’s a gay person. I don’t know what to do with that.” What would you say to them?

Jackie: You are more equipped to handle this than you think. One, you have the Holy Spirit! That’s why I love the Book of Acts. God is prompting these men to say stuff on the fly that is full of gospel, full of truth, wise, winsome, and honest. I think God—like we have the same Holy Spirit in us—so even these random conversations that we have can be little “Acts moments,” where we see the Lord doing what He said He would do, which is to give us the words to speak when we need them.

But two, we may not all understand each other’s specific sin; but we need to understand sin in general. The same gospel application you need now and today—the same way you needed someone to walk with you when you were struggling is the same thing you do. It’s really that simple. Also, recognize that someone’s salvation is not dependent on you! God uses us, but does He need us?—not necessarily! He could have an angel come and blow a trumpet and say, “Hey; believe Jesus is Lord,” and that’s that!

But He chooses to invite us into the Great Commission and use us to draw people to Himself; so don’t have all this pressure on yourself to say, “I have to preach the gospel every single time for them to be converted.” You’re not nobody’s Holy Spirit; you know? Just live life; preach the gospel when you need to; make food—hospitality works! [Laughter]

Bob: I’m hearing you say that; and I’m thinking, Eden’s three years old.

Jackie: Yes.

Bob: Can you even imagine Eden being 17 and saying to you, “Mom, I’m gay”?

Jackie: I expect it! I am not naïve to this culture. Because I really believe that it is so normative that the same struggle that’s been going on for the past 30/40 years—when it comes to fornication and losing our virginity earlier and earlier—is the same struggle that children will have with their identities. I’m expecting it!

I am already preparing her to not see herself through the lens of what she’s attracted to or by what she is tempted by; but instead, to see herself through the lens of who she’s created for and what she should do with it: “Just because you are tempted by this, that
doesn’t govern your identity. This is how we respond to temptation, as Christians, and as non-Christians.” I’m not waiting until she’s 17 to disciple her into understanding sexuality. I’m starting now, at a three-year-old level, saying, “I know you want to be angry, and I know you want to throw your Daniel tiger toy; but just because you feel it, that’s not what you do.”

Bob: If at 17, she says, “Mom, I’m gay,” what do you do at that point?

Jackie: Will I grieve in some ways?—yes. But I am prepared to hear things from her that may not be my expectation. I am not trying to set myself up to think that I will be able to guard my child from the evil one; but instead, I’m praying that whatever she goes through/whatever trials the Lord throws her way, that they would be whether God is building a testimony in her or the way He draws her. I’m saying that now, but that’s what I want to hold onto.

Ann: What would you say to those parents, whose—maybe their kids are married to same-sex person or in a relationship—what would you say to them? What would be the best way for them to love their kids?

Jackie: One of the things I’ve done, when it comes to people who have partners is, honestly, to love them like I would love anybody else—to converse with them on a human level—to be hospitable even. I enjoy seeing Jesus sitting at tables with sinners a whole lot—in their houses/in their homes—eating with them. The only people who have beef with it are the self-righteous folk.

Bob: Right.

Jackie: I think hospitality goes a long way; because unbelievers, and specifically those in the gay community, don’t expect Christians to be hospitable. They don’t expect Christians to be kind. They don’t expect Christians to be able to see through them in such a way, where it’s not just “Let me be nice to the gay people,” but “Let me be nice to David,” “Let me be nice to Paul.” What is their name? Do we even know their name? Do we know their favorite color? Do we know what they like to do?—how they were raised? Or is the basis of our whole understanding of this person just their sexuality? People are much more complex then who they are attracted to, so our evangelism should be the same.

Ann: That’s good.

Dave: Your book title says Gay Girl; and yet, you say, “That’s not my identity.”

Jackie: Right; right.

Dave: Again, I’m going to press in on this: “What is your identity?”
Jackie: I’m a Christian—I’m black; I’m a woman; I’m a mother; but I think my main/primary identity is: “I am a Christian.” I love 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, where Paul is saying that neither an idolater, those who practice homosexuality—notice he didn’t say, “homosexuals”—those who practice homosexuality, sexually immoral—they will not inherit the kingdom of God. “But such were some of you. You were washed; you were sanctified; you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” He talks about those sins in the past tense.

I’m going to do the same thing; that’s why the subtitle says: The Story of Who I Was, and Who God Has Always Been. For me, I refuse to identify myself by my temptations; but rather identify myself by what Christ has done for me.

Bob: You know, there are Christian colleges and universities, where they go, “Yes; we couldn’t invite Jackie Hill Perry come speak to our…”

Jackie: No, no; I know some of them; yes.

Bob: And there are students at those universities who find you subversive and problematic—

Jackie: Yes.

Bob: —at Christian universities.

Jackie: Yes! I feel as if people’s compassion is trumping their convictions or changing their convictions—you know?—where, in the name of compassion, we feel as if we have to loosen up our grip on what the Scriptures have to say to be loving—when that’s not loving; that’s going the opposite way of love. I think some of it is because we don’t see that God is the highest good. If I think you just being with whoever you want to be with is the highest good, then that’s what I’m going to affirm.

But how unkind of me to allow you to believe that the freedom to love anybody on earth, as long as this life lasts—which is very short—is the best thing for you when we have a whole eternity that we have to spend somewhere. If anything, I need to remind you that even marriage doesn’t last. The relationship that lasts is the relationship between Christ and His church. That’s the relationship that I want to overemphasize for you—is to love Him.

But also, we are a people who are naturally fearful—we fear our tax [exemption] being revoked; we fear people not applying to our schools; we fear being called bigoted; we fear being identified with Jesus. I think God has not given us a spirit of fear. I think we have to be willing to believe that, so that we won’t give into it.

Bob: John 1:14, you know, says Jesus was the reflection of the Father; and it says He was full of grace and truth.
Jackie: Yes.

Bob: I think we’ve got a lot of people today who are full of truth and haven’t figured out the grace thing yet. And I think we got people who are full of grace and have let loose of truth. All of us have to figure out: “How can we be, in our relationships with others, like Jesus?—not half truth/half grace—but full of grace and truth; so that we don’t back down from truth, but we don’t back down from grace either.”

Ann: Okay; let me ask you this, based on grace and truth: “If your son or daughter was deciding to marry a person of the same sex, would you go to their wedding?”

Bob: Let me ask the expert on that. [Laughter]

Dave: Toss the hammer!

Jackie: Expert?—I am not that; I am not that.

Bob: Yes? Well, how have you counseled people who have asked you that question?

Jackie: One, I’ve affirmed the difficulty of it: “That is a really hard conversation to have,”—and I’m sensitive to that. But my conviction is that I would not attend, primarily, because I believe marriage is a glorious thing that God created to show off His gospel. Because of that, to be present at something that is, technically, not a biblical marriage, I believe, is affirmation of the union.

But I also think, on the other end, and me having to explain why I could not attend is room for a gospel conversation, where it’s: “This is God...” “This is why He made marriage...” “This is what marriage is supposed to be; and I have to honor Him, even if that means our relationship has some tension/has some weirdness. I don’t want there to be weirdness; I don’t want there to be tension,”—being honest—“I want to go, because I don’t want you to think that I don’t love you; but I can’t.”

Ann: Yes.

Bob: You said that’s a matter of personal conviction. I think there’s space here for us to look at this situation and go, “This is a hard, sober question; and you have to, before God, wrestle this to the ground, and say, ‘What is it that God would have me do in this situation?’”

I’d double check your—because you’re going to lean in one of two directions. I would say: “Okay; it’s my natural bent to lean this way—lean in the grace direction,” or “…lean in the truth direction.” I think you have to look and say, “If that’s my natural bent, I need to really fully embrace the other part of that and see, ‘Why am I coming to the conclusion I’m coming to?’”
**Jackie:** Yes.

**Ann:** Yes.

**Dave:** Right.

**Bob:** I wanted to get to the point, where you started looking at a guy and going, “He looks good to me!”

**Jackie:** “He looks good to me.” [Laughter]

**Ann:** Tell us about *that* relationship—with your husband now.

**Jackie:** The thing with Preston is—when we met, we met at a poetry show. I was doing a poem about my testimony as an ex-lesbian; he was doing his poem about how he used to sleep with everything that can walk and had lip gloss. We met, you know, with all of our stuff out on the table. He was out here; I was like out here. We were like, “Hey, we should be friends.” At that time, I was a believer for maybe six months, so I was *not* interested in him—

**Ann:** Wow.

**Jackie:** —in the least bit. But over the course of three years, we were just friends. He lived in Chicago; I lived in L.A. for a time. I started to have an affection for him that I didn’t know what to do with. I thought, “Maybe I’m just bored,”—I had nobody to text in a long time; [Laughter] I hadn’t been in a relationship.

**Ann:** That’s why we started dating, too; I was bored! [Laughter]

**Jackie:** Yeah! Because, you know, you’ve got friends—and they’re texting everybody—and it is just like you’re in movies alone. It’s like, “Man, I just want to text someone.” That’s what I thought; but I told the woman that was discipling me, “I think I like Preston, but I don’t know if it’s the devil. I don’t know…” [Laughter] This was serious—like, “I don’t know what to do.”

**Ann:** Yes.

**Jackie:** She said, “Just keep praying about it.” For a year, I just continued to pray, hoping that the affections would wane in some way; and they never did—they just kept increasing.

Finally, I just told God—I said: “God, I don’t know what Your plan is for me and Preston; but if it is Your plan for us to be friends, then give me the self-control to treat him like a brother and not a crush. But if it’s Your plan for us to be together, then put it on his heart.
to pursue me.” He calls me a week later! He says: “Hey, I feel like God is calling me to pursue you. I like you; do you like me?” I said, “Yes; I do.” He was shocked, and there we go!

I think the thing is my attraction to him took time. I was attracted to his character first. I was attracted to his intentionality, his consistency, his intelligence, his mind, his creativity. But with that, as we started to grow in intimacy with each other, is when I then became attracted to all that he was, which includes him being a man. It’s taken time, but it’s happened. I think the distinction is—I’m not attracted to men in general; I’m attracted to a man—the man that God has called me to be with.

[Studio]

Bob: Well, again, we’ve been listening to a conversation with Jackie Hill Perry, the author of a book called Gay Girl, Good God. What great insights on the whole issue of understanding your identity: who you are; who God created you to be, and embracing that and living that out. I just think that’s so desperate in our culture today. We need to hear these messages.

Dave: I think God has raised up Jackie Hill Perry in this time. It’s a time and a culture of confusion. Nobody seems to know the answers; and she brings God’s Word in a very specific way because of her experiences, as a person. I really believe God is using her to bring answers.

Ann: She has a voice that is powerful, because she’s been there. She can say things that some of us couldn’t say. I love that she is so honest; I love her theology; I love her boldness; and I love her vulnerability.

Bob: Yes.

Ann: It was fun to be able to ask her questions.

Bob: I think listeners will really appreciate—you appreciated her book. I remember you saying to her: “…beautifully-written book” as well as being “a compelling story.” We’ve got copies of Jackie’s book, Gay Girl, Good God, in our FamilyLife Today Resource Center. You can order the book from us, online, at FamilyLifeToday.com. Our offices are closed today, because of the holiday; so the best way to order is online. Again, the website is FamilyLifeToday.com.

We’ve got the President of FamilyLife®, David Robbins, who is with us. He’s been listening back to these conversations with Jackie Hill Perry, and this is powerful stuff.

David: Yes! Wow, Bob! There is so much that is helpful today, but the core of this conversation comes down to knowing who we are in Christ. Our identity is that we are a new creation; and as Jackie said, we aren’t defined by what we are tempted by and we
aren’t defined by successes or failures. We are defined by Jesus and His performance on our behalf and His opinion of us.

**Bob:** That’s so good.

**David:** We’re going to have successes and failures—as a husband or a wife/as moms and dads—as ambassadors of Christ, trying to have an impact in our communities. There will be good days and bad days. But as Henri Nouwen said, “If you know you are the Beloved of God, you can live with an enormous amount of success or an enormous amount of failure without losing your identity; because your identity is that you are the Beloved.” Let’s live out our identity of being the Beloved today.

**Bob:** Yes; absolutely. Thank you, David.

One final note before we’re done here today, on the 4th of July—when it’s warm and sunny, most places, outside—and a lot of people enjoying a holiday today. How would you like to be somewhere where it is warm and sunny?—except it’s Valentine’s Week—and most places, it’s cold or snowy; but you’re in the sunshine and in the warmth? What I’m talking about is the 2020 *Love Like You Mean It*® marriage cruise that FamilyLife will be hosting, Valentine’s Week of 2020.

We’re at the point where we’re either completely sold out or we’ve got a handful of staterooms left. I’m not sure exactly what that number is at this point. But I do know this—there’s one cabin available that’s not for sale, because we’re going to be giving a stateroom to a *FamilyLife Today* listener. We’ll cover the cost of your airfare for you and your spouse, your cabin/your stateroom, and we’ll put you up in the hotel the night before the cruise. We’ll take care of all of that.

Here’s how you qualify. You sign up, as a couple, for a workout plan. This is a relationship workout we’ve got planned for you—this is so that you, as a couple, can strengthen your marriage. In fact, it’s called “The Stronger Forever Marriage Workout.” When you sign up, we’ll send you the workout details. We’ll send you some emails to prompt you during the next several weeks.

You sign up for the workout. You do some of the workout and one of you—one couple—we’re going to draw your names, and you’ll be our guests on the 2020 *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise. There is no purchase necessary to enter. The contest began July 1, 2019; it ends on August 30, 2019. Official rules can be found at FamilyLife.com/StrongerForever. We’ll look forward to seeing one lucky couple on the 2020 *Love Like You Mean It* marriage cruise.

I hope you can join us back tomorrow when we’re going to hear a remarkable story from a woman who was told, at one point, that she had what the doctor said was a Christopher Reeve-level injury. They said she would be in a wheelchair throughout the
rest of her life. That’s not exactly what’s happened for Katherine Clark. We’ll hear her story tomorrow, so I hope you can join us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

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