

Wisdom & Purity

Please open your Bible to the book of Proverbs and chapter 5.

We're talking this morning about pursuing purity and integrity in our sexuality. That's what most of chapters five through seven deal with, and it's worth our time visiting again. I don't intend to be crass today, but I do want to acknowledge what the Bible speaks to, so if you would rather have these conversations with your kids at some other point, then you can take them to the kids' ministry downstairs.

In these chapters, Solomon is teaching his son about the dangers of adultery or having sex outside of marriage. But this warning is bigger than just avoiding adultery – Jesus tells us that if we lust after a person, it's as though we've committed adultery in our hearts. So this is also addressing lust and pornography and any kind of sex outside of covenant marriage.

Let me give you a warning up front – there's not a lot of funny stories today. We're going to pack a lot into today's message not just from Proverbs, and we'll still leave some things unsaid. It may or may not be longer than usual, but I do think there's more content packed into this sermon than normal. There are notes on the church app which you can download on any of the app stores, and you can get the manuscript later this week online like other times if you miss something that you want to look at later.

Read **Proverbs 5:1-23**

Intro

We've talked about some practical things in this series – like wisdom and eating and how we talk and how we use our money. And we're continuing that today in thinking about how we live with wisdom as we pursue purity.

I don't think it's controversial to say that the world we live in is very confused about this issue. This is an area in which the church increasingly is standing against the tide of our culture.

-Annie at Lake Michigan, swimming when there are potential rip tides.

You know, the water is also rough out there in our culture. There are rip tides in the world today that threaten to break through and pull us away. It's not true of everyone, but many people who have walked away from the church or deconstructed did so in part because they were rejecting the Bible's teachings on sexuality.

So let me start with a question: Why is sexual sin so pervasive today? Why does it seem to be everywhere?

You could answer that it's always been a problem throughout history, and you'd be correct about that.

Or you could argue that there's always been sexual sin because our hearts are prone to sin and we have an enemy working against us. And you'd be right about that too.

But practically, why does this issue seem to be such a pervasive one in our world today? Let me give you just two suggestions...

We have a culture of *accessibility* and a culture of *autonomy*.

First, there is a culture of *accessibility* like never before. It is so easy to have access to pornography and find outlets for sexual sin through dating apps or online chatting. The internet and phones have made it so simple to have access to things which were much harder to find only a few years ago.

How many of you had no internet when you were growing up as a teenager or a student? We're thankful for you and for your presence in this church. If you were born after 1981 – we call those millennials – then you grew up with the internet as it was being formed. Gen X were sort of in between. And the younger Gen Z's don't know life without the internet.

And the internet has been both a blessing and a curse. It has allowed communication and advancements in technology that are incredible. But it has also given accessibility to sin in ways that prior generations did not face. It has allowed anonymity in that people feel like no one sees what they do. And so 'secret sin' has exploded. There is unprecedented access and consequently it has become the silent killer of our day, even among middle school and elementary kids being exposed to and sucked in.

And coupled with that ease of accessibility is this prominent idea in our world that you are *autonomous* – you should be free to do whatever you want to do. You don't have to listen to anyone else or submit to any authorities in your life. No one should be able to tell you what to do or how to live, especially when it comes to your sexual freedom.

And when you have both of those things, you have the recipe for disaster. You have the recipe for the eroding of a society. Our culture says you can do whatever you want to do, and you have the means to do it. Well, that has had and will continue to have disastrous effects.

And when we see all of this, we may be tempted to just throw up our hands and give in. What can we do? How do we stand against the current when our culture happily being carried out to sea?

Well, I believe that God has wisdom for us in these chapters of Proverbs. We are not left without help and guidance from God. I believe that there is a need for this issue to be addressed by God's people, even if it may make us feel awkward or uncomfortable.

These issues are plainly spoken about in the Bible in several places. All of Proverbs 5 is devoted to it. The last half of Proverbs 6 is devoted to it. And all of Proverbs 7 is devoted to it. So this is something God wants us to know, and to be reminded about. So even if you believe you know it, and this will be a reminder, it will be one that we all need.

There are a number of questions that come up when this issue is raised. How should you walk in purity before, during, and after marriage (after divorce or as a widow or widower)? What is the purpose of sex and why does God regulate it with rules and commands? What's that about? And what do we do when we've messed up in the past?

We'll get to those today in some form. I want to talk to all of us, no matter where we find ourselves in relation to this topic. But I also want to acknowledge that these kinds of sins seem to be particularly prominent among young men. I recognize that all of us may deal with different temptations to different degrees, but I especially want to speak to the young men in the room this morning.

That said, these chapters are for all men and women – married and single, young and old, those in the midst of the battle for sexual purity, and those who may be called upon to help. I believe all of us have a role in working to keep marriage honorable.

Hebrews 13:4

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Our culture has a low view of marriage. It's not treated as the honorable thing God created it to be. God wants marriage to be esteemed – it is a good thing. And the marriage bed should not be polluted by sin, especially sexual sin. And we all have a part to play in walking that path ourselves and helping each other live in purity and faithfulness.

So what I want to do is help raise our view of marriage, to lift it up again in our minds. We are so often bombarded by the messages of our culture that is devaluing marriage and seeking to divide it up, as though we can have pieces of it without the whole thing.

God's Plan for Marriage & Sex

Let's look first at God's plan for marriage given to us in the Scriptures. Remember, the book of Proverbs is in many ways a series of comments on how the Law of Moses in the first five books of the Bible are lived out in every day life. The book of Proverbs springs out of the first books of the Bible.

So let's look there and be reminded about what God says about His plan for marriage.

In Genesis two, God has created man by forming Him out of the dust of the earth and breathing into him the breath of life. But he is alone and that's not good. God had shown him the animals so that they could be named, but there was no one fit for him. So God creates the woman, Eve, out of the man's side. And when he awakes...

Genesis 2:23-25

Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."

24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. **25** And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

This is foundation for marriage – the union between one man and one woman as one flesh. The man and the woman hold fast to each other – they cleave together and are joined together. And they are unashamed in their nakedness and vulnerability with each other. They are intimately connected in both body and soul. They see each other wholly and love each other completely. This is what marriage is supposed to be.

Here's a definition: Marriage is the covenant union of one man and one woman. It is permanent, exclusive, and comprehensive.

Marriage is a covenant – a promise made before and with God. It is permanent – only death is intended to end it. It is exclusive – no one else should intrude on the intimate love in a marriage. And it is comprehensive – it involves the uniting of all of who we are, our lives, our schedules, our finances, our families, everything. We are body and soul united to our spouse in marriage. It's comprehensive.

By the way – that's one of the fundamental problems with sex outside of marriage. It's taking what is holy and good and meant to be part of the entire package of marriage and trying to say – I only want your body. I don't to be committed to you entirely. I don't want to be in covenant with you permanently and exclusively – I just want sex. It's a devaluing of the other person, and it dishonors marriage and the goodness of God's wise plan for marriage.

Sex is unavoidably vulnerable and intimate. And that vulnerability was created by God to give incredible joy and fulfillment, but it is also intended to be protected by the comprehensive promises of covenant marriage.

Randy Alcorn uses the illustration of a fire in a fireplace. If the fire is in the fireplace, it gives warmth and light to the whole house. But if you take it out of the fireplace, it can burn the whole house down. Vibrant sexual intimacy in marriage is a great thing and a blessing to you and those around you in your life. But on the other hand, sexual immorality brings devastating consequences to both you and those around you.

Proverbs 6:27

Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned?

Can you try to engage in sex outside of its intended place? You can, but God says you'll reap the consequences. You'll be burned. God designed sex to be about giving joy to your spouse and celebrating the union you have together with your spouse alone, exclusively.

There's a lot that goes underneath this – but let me just summarize a whole lot of biblical teaching and say that sex has three purposes in the Bible.

1. Sex is for **procreation** – it brings the possibility and blessing of having children.
2. Sex is for **unification** – it is to glue you and your spouse together. It is to refresh and renew the covenant vows you made together to become one flesh.
3. Sex is for **recreation** – it is for fun! It is to bring pleasure to you with your spouse.

All three purposes are good in the eyes of God. Proverbs 5 speaks to that last one, recreation or pleasure, very clearly – more clearly than any other passage with the possible exception of Song of Songs. Solomon writes about the joy of the marriage bed and how it should be celebrated only by a husband and wife in covenant marriage.

Proverbs 5:15-19

Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well.

16 Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets?

17 Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.

Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth,

19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe.

Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.

This is God's plan for those who are married. Enjoy sexual union with your spouse! Married couples, this is for you and no one else besides the two of you.

Let your fountain be blessed, rejoice in the wife **of** your youth. Notice, it's not rejoice in the wife **in** your youth or only when you're young. No, it's rejoice in the wife **of** your youth. In that day when many were married young, this is a command to be joyful in enjoying your spouse throughout your life.

Be delighted in her. Rejoice! And be intoxicated always in her love. Be drunk in your love for her. Be a little crazy in your passion. Don't be afraid of being too excessive in your pursuit of one another. This is God's design for a healthy marriage.

Some of you married couples could use this reminder from the Lord today – pursue your spouse. Be flirtatious. Be creative and romantic. Be passionate in your love. Work at it. Keep the fire in the fireplace hot! Enjoy one another. Be intoxicated always in her love.

But let it also be said, that husbands and wives are to pursue this kind of over-the-top love for one another with the kind of love that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 13, a love that is patient and kind. A love that is not rude; a love that does not seek its own or insist on its own way. This is not a command by God to be crazy in your enjoyment of one another in a way that ignores one another's desires or fears. It's not an excuse to be selfish about what you want. This is an invitation to love your spouse with passion.

So sex is for procreation, unification, and recreation. Paul also gives a fourth purpose for marriage and sex within marriage in his letter to the church at Ephesus. He quotes from Genesis 2 that we read earlier and writes,

Ephesians 5:31-32

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” **32** This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

Paul looks back at the establishment of marriage and tells us that there has been a mystery there. Something was hidden which has been revealed with the coming of Jesus Christ. The relationship of marriage is a sign that points to the relationship between Christ and the church.

The love and 'one flesh' union shared by a husband and wife reflects the kind of intimacy and love that Jesus intends to share with His people the church, not in a merely physical way, but in the way that sex itself is intended to celebrate the intimacy a husband and wife share.

God says that marriage points to the intimacy of the gospel. All marriages are signs that point to something greater than themselves – the relationship between Jesus and His people.

And that also means that it's not necessary for you to have the sign to experience the point of the sign. You don't need marriage to have intimacy with God. Marriage points to that reality, but it's not only for married people to enjoy. Marriage is the sign.

Let me give a word to those who are single – unmarried, divorced, or widowed...

- Don't look down on yourself or listen to the judgments of others, real or perceived. You are not 'less than' if you're single. Jesus was single and was fully human in every way. Don't live in shame. You can have intimacy with God without marriage.

- Fight for your sexual purity. As a single person, that may be harder.

But it's worth the effort to guard your heart and walk in purity. I know that's becoming increasingly difficult, but God sees and gives grace sufficient for our needs. He will help you – it's worth the fight.

- Cling to Jesus.

Work on cultivating a vibrant relationship with Jesus. He will never let you down. He is always there. He provides what we all truly need – reconciliation with God. Cling to Him.

For all of us this morning, let me summarize this first point: God's plan for marriage is that it would be a union of one man and one woman in a permanent, exclusive, and comprehensive covenant before Him. And ultimately, marriage points to the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church.

With such a high view of marriage in the Bible, it should not surprise us that God takes it very seriously. And He commands us to honor it and protect it.

God's Protection for Marriage & Sex

These few chapters in Proverbs, five through seven, are aimed at helping protect the honor of marriage. And so here we read stark warnings about how we are to flee from adultery and the temptation to violate the marriage vows. Solomon recognizes that there is a battle going on all around us that has to do with the honor of marriage and our sexual purity. And it's a battle that takes place in our hearts and in our daily lives.

And I want to suggest that in this battle, we have two weapons given to us by God for victory in this fight. In the fight for purity we have been given: the gospel and wisdom.

And that order is important – we must first have the gospel. We first need faith in Jesus and the grace that He alone gives us or the wisdom that we pursue will be in vain. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. We need to be rightly related to God before we can apply these truths to our lives. We need the gospel first, and then wisdom.

The First Weapon – the Gospel

So the first weapon we have in this fight is the gospel itself or the good news about what Jesus has done for us and in us by His death and resurrection. There are many places we can go in the Scriptures on this point, but let me draw our attention to one in the book of Romans and chapter 6.

Romans 6:6-7, 11

We know that our old self was crucified with him [Jesus] in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For one who has died has been set free from sin... **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Paul is teaching us in these verses that our old self, the way we lived before faith in Christ has died. And because the old self has died, we have been freed from sin – it no longer has power over us. We have been set free from sin, even sexual sin, and made alive to God.

So here's some theology this morning: we have been united with Jesus when we turn from our sin and put our faith in the gospel, the death and resurrection of Jesus. That means that just as Jesus died on the Cross for our justification – that we would be declared righteous before the Father – He has been resurrected for our sanctification – that we would be dead to sin and walk in newness of life.

That has huge implications for the battle for purity and the fight against lust. It means that Jesus is able to forgive our failures. Praise God! The work of Jesus frees us from the guilt and shame that so many of us carry because of the sins of our past.

It also means that the gospel gives us real power to pursue holiness. It's not a matter of will-power or trying really hard to do what's right. God's Spirit is in His people because of what Jesus has done so that we are dead to sin and alive to God.

This means we need to keep ourselves in the gospel every day.

Did you notice how chapter five of Proverbs starts? We are to treasure God's Word and His instructions for us.

Proverbs 5:1-2

My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding,
2 that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge.

He repeats that same idea in chapter six (20-24) and chapter seven (1-5) Listen to the words of wisdom! Keep them with you always.

I might say it this way, guard your heart with the gospel. Preach the good news of what Christ has done for you to yourself. And do that every day! Read and re-read the Scriptures and see how God has worked to show you His grace and redeem you.

The battle against lust and sexual sin begins in your heart and the first and best weapon you have is the gospel of Jesus. Root yourself in the gospel. Don't try to move from it. Go down deeper into it.

Learn more about what it means that God sent His only begotten Son to live and die and rise again in your place, so that you might be justified and sanctified.

And let me just pause here and speak to the person who may have come today and you're not trusting in what Jesus has done to save you. I'm glad you're here. You're welcome here! And I want to invite you to think about what you're trusting in to deliver you from your sins. Who will set you free?

This is the gospel – Jesus came as God's own Son, and He died on the Cross, and He rose again on the third day so that when we put our faith in Him, we can be forgiven and reconciled to God. If you've not put your faith in Jesus, won't you do that today? That's where you have to start if you are seeking the freedom and forgiveness that God offers. We'd love to talk with you more about how you be freed by the grace of God.

That's the first weapon – the gospel. The second weapon we have in the battle is wisdom. We have been given wisdom by God – practical steps that we can take to help us walk day by day in purity.

The Second Weapon - Wisdom

I've got four things that I see in these chapters – Proverbs 5-7 that I want to recommend to you. I'll go quickly through them.

1. See beyond the temptation

Temptation brings with it the promise of pleasure, but there are consequences on the other side. Look again at verses 3-4 of chapter 5.

Proverbs 5:3-4

For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil,
4 but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.

Temptation toward sexual sin looks appealing – like honey. But 'in the end' is bitter and deadly. You see not only does temptation lie, it also murders. It will bring death, even if as verse 6 says, she does not know it.

What Solomon is trying to teach his son and us today is that we should see beyond the temptation to the other side. We need to see the whole picture, lest we believe the lie and deceive ourselves into thinking that we'll be fine. I'll be ok – it won't affect me. I'll get away with it.

You may have used one of these before, or at least seen one. This is a mousetrap.

(show picture)



One of the remarkable things about mousetraps is how unconcerned they are with hiding their mechanism. It's just right out there – this bar is spring-loaded and will easily snap shut if the food or the bait is moved.

Now, I understand that a mouse doesn't have the mental capacity to understand how a spring loaded trap like this one works. I get that. But still...a mousetrap doesn't even try to hide how it works, and yet it still does. Mice will still see the cheese or the peanut

butter or whatever bait you use, and they will fixate on it and pursue it to their own destruction.

I have talked to guys who know that sexual temptation will end badly for them. They know what God says about it. They may even see the danger, but they get fixated on the temptation until they're not thinking straight. They lose sight of the bigger picture, and they pursue it to their own destruction. I don't know if there's a better way to say than this – they're acting stupid.

Proverbs 6:32

He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself.

The one who gives in lacks sense. They're being foolish. They're being stupid.

If you're hearing this message this morning and you've been toying with a relationship that is nearing or even crossed over the line of what's appropriate...if you're harboring a habit of secret sin in your life, fueled by lust and selfish desires...if you're seeking out companionship or sexual fulfillment outside of marriage...let this be God's grace to you today – don't do it! Don't be stupid. Don't destroy yourself.

Guys, gals – God is telling you that one way to walk in wisdom as you pursue purity is to see beyond the immediate temptation. Look down the road and the devastation which will come if you give in, the harm it will do to your loved ones and to your own soul. See the whole picture.

2. Take the far path

What do I mean by that? Listen to verses 7 and 8 again...

Proverbs 5:7-8

And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth.

8 Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house,

Solomon tells his son – keep your way far from the forbidden woman. Don't go near temptation. Don't put yourself in a position where it will be easy to sin.

This idea is repeated in several places in the Bible. In Romans 13, Paul says, “Don’t make provision for the flesh.” Make it hard to sin. Push back on the radical accessibility to sexual immorality in our culture.

That may mean taking some radical steps in your life. Let me be practical – I don’t think it’s wise to have a phone without accountability software on it. Especially don’t give your kids unfiltered access to the internet. Take the far path.

That may mean cancelling a subscription. It may mean changing the movies or TV shows you watch or the music you listen to or the social media that you use. It may mean that you need to live differently than your peers or friends at school or work or wherever. Ask yourself, where am I prone to fall? If I were to fall, where is that most likely to happen? Make sure that you avoid temptation. Take the far path.

3. Get others involved in your life.

Walking in wisdom also means that we listen to the voices of godly counselors and friends. Listen to the warning from verses 11-14 of chapter 5 from the one who gave in.

Proverbs 5:11-14

and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed,
12 and you say, “How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof!
13 I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors.
14 I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation.”

This is the lament of regret a person has when at the end of their life, they’re looking back and saying, “I wish I would have listened...”

Brothers and sisters, you need help in the battle. You need the voice of godly counselors and friends. You need to heed the warnings of your parents and teachers.

We live in a day where there are books and resources available to help you in the fight. We have men’s and women’s groups who meet together and pray for one another. You can look at those on the church app or website. If you’re struggling in this battle with lust – don’t try to go alone. Get help! You have brothers and sisters who will walk with you.

Sisters, if you want to talk to someone, but you may not want to come to me or the other pastors, you can reach out to the church office or Patsy Lewindowski and we'll try to get you help whether it's this issue or something else.

Don't try to work on this alone, get others involved.

4. Enjoy what God has given you to enjoy.

We mentioned this one already, but it's not bad to say it again. Not only should we look past the temptation and take the far path and listen to godly counsel, wisdom also instructs us to enjoy what God has given us to enjoy. He says here that we should drink water from our own cisterns. That is, pursue your spouse and enjoy each other's love. That's the instruction from verses 15-20 of chapter five.

And then notice what he says just after those commands. Look at verse 21.

Proverbs 5:21

For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD,
and he ponders all his paths.

God sees all. I think we often read that as a threat – no one gets away with anything because the Lord sees all. And that's true. God does see all. But if you notice that verse 21 comes after verses 15-20 in which God commands us to delight in our spouse.

God also sees our passionate pursuit of His gifts. He sees your attempts at obedience, even when they are frail and full of mixed motivations, and He is pleased. And He desires that we would continue on the path of purity, not just for a moment or just this afternoon. God is after our long-term purity. God is pleased when we seek to live in purity year after year. He sees all and knows our paths.

So let us be a people marked by holiness in this area.

Let us be a church who holds to a high view of marriage and keeps the marriage bed held in honor.

Let us run to Christ when we fail and look to Him for strength to fight lust in our hearts. Let us each pursue purity first with the gospel and also by wisdom.

Let's pray...

(moment to apply the Word in our hearts)