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**Speaker:** Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor  
**Scripture:** Matthew 5:27-30—Lust

Do you know that one of the biggest changes I have seen in our culture in my years as a Pastor is in the area of dating, sex and marriage? Today about ½ of the couples I meet with that want to get married met through dating websites. Twenty-three years ago when I started, that was almost nonexistent. But today, in our digital world, we have Match.com, e-Harmony, Christian Mingle and Christian Crush. Perhaps you have tried some of these dating sites. They can be very positive and connect you with someone who is compatible and has the potential to be a lifelong partner in marriage.

There are a variety of different dating websites and apps available online now but the most popular one, does anyone know what it is? Tinder. Are you familiar with Tinder? Tinder has 50 million users with almost 80% between the ages of 23-38. Here is how it works. I know this not because I am a Tinder user. I just researched it! First you download the Tinder app and then set up a personal profile that includes some pictures. Then, when you log on to the site, it shows you a photo, name and age of someone you may be compatible with. You can tap on the photo to get more information and then you can either swipe right to “like” them or swipe left to pass. If two people swipe right on each other, a screen will appear showing that you have a match and inviting you to send a message to each other—and perhaps set up a meeting or date.

Most users of Tinder would say that they are looking to find a meaningful relationship but unfortunately, more and more, Tinder is gaining the reputation of being a “hook up” app. Let me explain, especially if you are of my generation or beyond. We used to use this term, “hook up” to mean, just get together- *Hey, you and I should hook up—you know connect, to watch a hockey game.* No, today the term “hook up” more commonly refers to a casual sexual encounter.

Now you can imagine that as a pastor I have embarrassed myself on more than one occasion, using this expression in a way I thought it meant in a circumstance where it meant something else. I remember giving a talk on Western’s campus a few years ago and fielding a question from a young woman in the audience. When it became apparent that my time was running out to answer her question completely, I said to her in front of everyone, *hey you and I should hook up afterwards.* Meaning I will answer your question in more detail at that time. I wondered why she gave me such a strange look. Interesting, now that I think about it, I have never been invited back to speak to that group. See, this is why it is always good to be culturally aware and sensitive. So more and more in our culture today, Tinder, a dating app is being used for a “hook up”. To meet another person for the purpose of having a casual sexual encounter. Perhaps this sheds some light on the sexual ethic in our culture today.

I came across this article on the impact Tinder is having on our culture written a few years ago for a well-known pop culture magazine. Listen to some of the excerpts.

*It’s a balmy night in Manhattan’s financial district, and at a sports bar called Stout, everyone is Tindering. The tables are filled with young women and men who’ve been chasing money and deals on Wall Street all day, and now they’re out looking for hookups. Everyone is drinking, peering into their screens and swiping on the faces of strangers they may have sex with later that evening. Or not.*

*At a booth in the back, three handsome twentysomething guys in button-downs are having beers. They are Dan, Alex, and Marty, budding investment bankers at the same financial firm,*

When asked if they've been arranging dates on the apps they've been swiping at, all say not one date, but two or three: "You can't be stuck in one lane ... There's always something better."

"Guys view everything as a competition," he elaborates "Who's slept with the best, hottest girls?" With these dating apps, he says, "you're always sort of prowling. You could talk to two or three girls at a bar and pick the best one, or you can swipe a couple hundred people a day—the sample size is so much larger. It's setting up two or three Tinder dates a week and, chances are, sleeping with all of them, so you could rack up 100 girls you've slept with in a year." If you think it is only the guys, the author continues... "Women do exactly the same things guys do..... "They play the game the exact same way. They have a bunch of people going at the same time—they're fielding their options. They're always looking for somebody better, who has a better job or more money." A few young women admitted to me that they use dating apps as a way to get free meals. Even if sex is the price they have to pay.

I don't know whether this surprises you or maybe this is a world that you know, but I think we have to have an understanding of the culture in which we live to understand what Jesus was getting at in our text for today.

Let me just remind you that we are in this message series at North Park entitled, "On The Way".

In this series, we are going to go back and forth between Jesus' teachings in the gospels that were a little more intentional and those that appeared to be more spontaneous. This week, we come to one of Jesus' more intentional teachings and occurs once again, in the Sermon on the Mount.

In this sermon, beginning in Matthew 5, Jesus is instructing his followers on how he wants us to live in every area of our lives. Over the past few weeks we have addressed some of these areas. How we are to be salt and light to those around us. How we are to deal with issues such as worry and anger and today we come to Jesus' teaching on love and sex.

Now considering how deeply these two topics impact our lives, doesn't it only make sense that

Jesus would teach us about his ideal for love and sex. Some of you are thinking, *Jesus talked about sex?* Yes, there are sections of the bible dedicated to this important topic.

But, be honest with me, when you heard the passage I read earlier, isn't it natural to have a negative response? Why? Because it appears as though Jesus is saying that if you have any sort a sexual desire, you are going to hell. Which basically would include all of us but is that the mentality you grew up with in the church? Sex was shrouded in shame and guilt. Don't feel it, don't think it, and certainly don't do it, at least before marriage.

Our culture has latched on to that idea about Christianity that we have a negative view of sex but that is a great distortion of the bible and everything that Jesus taught about the subject.

In fact, read through the whole bible and you will discover that the Christian understanding of sex is definitely different than what the world teaches, but in the grand theme of things, it is one of the most attractive things about our faith.

Let's unpack this idea a bit. If you have your bibles, turn with me to the passage I read earlier in **Matthew 5:27-30**.

Within the grand narrative of the Bible there are two primary reasons for sexual relations. The first reason is:

1. **Procreation.** To produce offspring. To have children.

From the opening pages of the Bible in Genesis right through to the entire text, we see that sexual relations were intended to produce offspring and this purpose was seen as good and blessed by God. God says to Noah after the flood in,

*Genesis 9:7*

*Now be fruitful and multiply, and repopulate the earth."*

But this procreative purpose of sex was complemented by the pleasures and desires of physical love. That is reason number two that the bible gives for sexual relations. It's for:

## 2. Pleasure

Now that may rock your world a bit. That God actually had in mind that sex could be for humanity's pleasure. Will you let me stir you a little further? Listen to this conversation between a husband and wife.

*Oh, how beautiful you are!*

*How pleasing, my love, how full of delights!*

*<sup>7</sup> You are slender like a palm tree,  
and your breasts are like its clusters of fruit.*

*<sup>8</sup> I said, "I will climb the palm tree  
and take hold of its fruit."*

*May your breasts be like grape clusters,  
and the fragrance of your breath like apples.*

*<sup>9</sup> May your kisses be as exciting as the best  
wine—*

The Young Woman responds

*Yes, wine that goes down smoothly for my lover,  
flowing gently over lips and teeth.*

*<sup>10</sup> I am my lover's,  
and he claims me as his own.*

*<sup>11</sup> Come, my love, let us go out to the fields  
and spend the night among the wildflowers.*

*<sup>12</sup> Let us get up early and go to the vineyards  
to see if the grapevines have budded,  
if the blossoms have opened,  
and if the pomegranates have bloomed.  
There I will give you my love.*

No, that is not the poetry that Carolyn and I recite to each other at night. No, it is not the risqué new lyrics of a rap song or the latest Harlequin Romance or Fifty Shades of Grey book.

No, it is scripture. That's right, that is in the bible. Some of you are thinking, *What? That is in the bible, where do I find it?* Song of Solomon 7:6-12

Have you ever had someone come up to you and say, *you're not one of those Christians that takes the bible word for word, literally are you?* These are the verses where that comes in handy.

These beautiful, poetic expressions of the pleasure and delight of physical love stand in stark contrast to the vulgarity of our contemporary erotic literature that gutterizes sex.

So the bible describes two primary reasons for sexual relations. **1. Procreation** and **2. Pleasure**. Sex is a gift from God to be enjoyed and used for its intended purposes but from the beginning there were boundaries placed on how and when this gift could be used.

That's it. That is when God becomes the killjoy right? He equips us, body, mind and soul with this capacity for sexual relations and hangs it out there like a carrot on a string and slams the door shut by enforcing so many rules and regulations. That is what it may feel like to us. But remember, God always had in mind what was best for us. He knew that unbridled sexual desire left to run amuck would lead to the devastation of our relationships with each other and with God. We have example after example in the bible.

Despite his early yearning for Godly wisdom and being granted the privilege of building the temple of the Lord, King Solomon falls into the trap of erotic desire without boundaries and his life blew up. His relationship with God collapses.

King David, the man after God's own heart, gave in to his own flesh and beds another man's wife, which led to a whole series of lies and deception, death and destruction and compromised his relationship with God.

Just think of any example where there has been sexual immorality. Sex used beyond the purposes and boundaries God intended. I would be willing to bet that there has almost always been collateral damage that occupies it. Devastation to relationships with others and with God. Maybe you have been impacted personally by it. *Oh, but Paul, we were only messing around, it didn't mean anything.* No, no, no. It means everything.

Reckless, unboundaried desire, male or female leads to opportunities for deception and rationalization. On more than one occasion, I have had either a husband or wife in my office and listened as they described the love that they had discovered with someone else (usually fueled mostly by a physical attraction), and their willingness to give up everything, their faith, their marriage, their children and their reputations to pursue a life with this other person. I can tell you that in almost every situation where that person followed through with that new

relationship, it was over in a matter of months. They were left picking up the pieces of the relationships that they destroyed along the way.

Sex is God's gift to humanity but because it is so delicate and potentially volatile if misused, He put parameters or boundaries around it to maintain the integrity of sex.

Look at how Jesus begins,

*Matthew 5:27-28*

*"You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.'*

Then he continues, *But I say....* Jesus is going to build on it, but it is very clear that he is accepting the Old Testament principal, the law found in the Ten Commandments,

*Exodus 20:14*

*"You must not commit adultery.*

The understood biblical sex ethic of Jesus' day was that there was to be no sex outside of a marriage covenant. That was the boundary God placed on sex to maintain its integrity. Do you see that? Covenant is the boundary.

Covenant is a word that we have talked about before. Throughout scripture we see that God made covenants with his people and a Christian marriage is a covenant we make with our husband or wife before God as a witness.

A covenant creates a relationship that is far more loving and intimate, far more binding and enduring than a legal or emotional relationship. They tend to be more consumer driven. In those types of relationships, fueled by emotion and our own wants and needs, we are always thinking, *what can I get out of it, what's in it for me.*

To illustrate the depth of a covenant relationship let me contrast it with a consumer relationship. I have a friend that goes to the Farmer's Market in Kitchener every week and his goal is to get the best price he possibly can for his fruits and vegetables. So he strategically arrives near closing time when the vendors are especially motivated to unload their products and he begins to haggle with them.

He goes back and forth between vendors selling the same product so that he can get the best price. The relationship he has with one vendor this week

because they gave him the best price on lettuce may change next week if someone else comes in lower. The relationship is one sided.

The vendor has to keep adjusting to my friend or he will leave to go to where he gets his needs met because his needs are more important than the relationship. Do you understand? A consumer relationship says you adjust to me or I am out of here.

A covenant relationship is the opposite. A covenant relationship says, *I will adjust to you because I made you a promise.* The relationship is more important than my needs. You can imagine the turmoil that can result when you are in a relationship where one person is interested in the covenant and the other is only interested in being a consumer. There's a lot of exploitation in that dynamic.

Christian Pastor and Author Tim Keller states that there are three things that should define a covenant marriage commitment. If you are married see if these things define your marriage.

1. There is a zone of safety and security for you to be yourself. In a consumer relationship you are always marketing and selling yourself. You have to meet the person's needs or they will leave. In an ideal covenant relationship, you can be yourself.
2. When you are committed to someone apart from just your emotions and feelings, how you feel in the moment, deeper feelings grow. I thought I loved my wife Carolyn with all of my heart when I married her 35 years ago, but I can tell you, I love her more today. Why? It is because our commitment to stay together through thick or thin because of a promise not leaving at the first sign or trouble or when I have felt like my needs have not been met. This has caused deeper feelings to grow. I am sure many of you have experienced that.
3. There's a freedom. A covenantal, committed relationship brings freedom which seems upside down because when we get married our single friends think we have a ball and chain. But think of it, in a consumer relationship you are always a slave to your wants and needs. If I don't get what I want I

am out of here. Or if I don't give her what she wants, she is out of here. That attitude controls you and your actions. You are enslaved to them. But in a covenant, you are freed to be who you are with one another.

So what does being in a covenantal relationship versus a consumer relationship have to do with sex? This is the key. Don't miss this and again, I am thankful to Keller for the way he lays this out. I am borrowing from him here.

The bible states that sex is not a consumer good. It is a covenant good.

A consumer good is when you keep someone in a relationship because you have a need. For example, if I have a need for sex every so often because it makes me feel valued and adored, so I go out and find someone who will meet that need. Like the people in that article about Tinder I read earlier. Sex becomes a consumer good, a commodity.

But the bible says that sex was never designed to be a consumer good but a covenant good.

In a covenant relationship, a marriage, where a promise has been made before God and you surrender your own needs and wants for the needs of the other, sex becomes like a sacrament, Like communion that we are going to participate in later in this service. I bet you never thought of sex being like communion have you? Stay with me.

Participation in communion is an external action that represents an internal reality. That you have accept Jesus as your Saviour.

That is why it is so meaningful. Sex within in a marriage covenant is an external demonstration of an internal reality. That you have made that person a promise. When in marriage we make ourselves physically naked and vulnerable with our spouse, it is a sign of what we have done with our whole life. That is why sex outside the boundary of marriage is so damaging.

You are asking someone to do something with their body that they are not ready or willing to do with their whole life. You are saying to someone, *let's get naked physically, but I don't want to bare the other parts of my life to you.* Sex becomes a consumer good to have your physical needs met but you hold other parts of yourself back.

Conversely, each time you give your bodies to each other when you are in a marriage relationship, it is like a covenant renewal ceremony. It becomes something that symbolized that you are giving yourself to one another, all over again. It is where you graciously serve one another out of love and commitment not hold it over each other. It is incredibly deepening and dare I say *holy*.

This is why I get concerned when I hear of married Christian couples that say that they haven't had sex for years. I know there may be valid reasons for this such as stage of life, age or health but otherwise, if that describes your marriage, can I encourage you? Explore this one further with one another or with a Christian counselor. It deserves further attention.

For the rest of you married folks here, have some fun with it. Tonight or next week, invite your spouse to join you in a Covenant Renewal Ceremony and see what happens!

Let me just say this to those who are not married but have made the decision to live together. I had a young person say to me recently, *I am committed to my partner, she is committed to me and we are pretty sure that we want to get married one day, but we are living together to make sure we are compatible with one another.*

In an article published in the New York Times, Psychologist Meg Jay writes that couples that live together before marriage are more likely to get divorced and one of the reasons is that both men and women agree that the standards they have for a live-in partner are much lower than they are for a potential spouse.

If you are living together, it is a consumer relationship because you always have it in the back of your mind, *I wonder if I can I do better than this?* To try and figure out compatibility may be a nice way of saying, *I am trying to figure out whether this person is good enough to marry.* Sex within this kind of a relationship can almost seem like an endless audition to determine whether you made the grade. Whether you are good enough. You mustn't do with your body what you are not willing to do with your whole life. I have spent a long time on this but it is important. Look how Jesus continues in the text,

Matthew 5:28

*“You have heard the commandment that says, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

*You have heard.....You must not commit adultery-* Jesus is referring to the sexual ethic of this day. Then he continues, *But I say...*

Now he redefines it and describes what is expected for those who pursue life in the Kingdom of God. In the original language, Jesus uses an interesting word that is interpreted for us as lust in this text. He could have used another word that conveys sexual desire but instead he uses a word for lust in this context that means greed or idolatry.

*But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with **greed/idolatry** has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

That is interesting. But think of some attributes of greed. Greed is selfish-we only have ourselves in mind. Greed is addictive-the more we have, the more we want. Greed is all consuming. When we are greedy for money, all we can think of is how to get more or what we are going to do with it, when we get it. Greed is selfish, addictive and all consuming.

When we are greedy, we get consumed with thinking the object of our greed can fill that void in our lives that really only God can fill. We get delusional.

In this statement, Jesus is saying when you look at a woman or man in this way-greedy, selfish, addictive, all consuming, you are turning sex into an idol and a consumer good. You are mistakenly believing that it can fill a void that only God can fill in your life. How can sex be greedy, selfish, addictive and all consuming? In what ways can it play out in our lives today? Think of your own life. I would suggest the first way is:

1. In your marriage. Sex can be seen as selfish, addictive and all-consuming when one spouse only thinks of their own needs. Then they guilt their partner into feeling like they are never giving them enough sex. Or conversely, one partner holds back sex in a marriage as a way of controlling or “punishing” the other person.

2. Pornography. By the way, this is not just a male issue anymore. Recent studies indicate that as many as 1 in 3 woman watch porn every week. I have just spent the better part of 20 minutes talking about the biblical ethic of sex is that it is not a consumer good, but pornography is the ultimate expression of sex as a consumer good, isn't it?

It is selfish. Most often it is viewed alone under the cover of anonymity or secrecy. It is what you want, when you want it. It is available. It is addictive. It is all consuming. It can be purchased. It is affordable.

If you are here today and involved in pornography, it is not harmless. Don't listen to what the world tells you, that it is not hurting anyone. It creates a world of sexual illusion that objectifies men and women and creates unrealistic expectations and standards in the area of sexuality for your spouse or future spouse and maybe most significantly, it reinforces the anti-biblical idea that sex is a consumer good.

3. The way that all sex or sexual innuendo is used outside of marriage. That includes pre-marriage or extra-marital sex, flirting, chat lines, looking up and connecting with old high school boyfriends or girlfriends on Facebook or Instagram. Again, if you are involved in those sorts of things, why are you doing them?

It is usually about us, isn't it? To meet some sort of need in us. *How I feel. I want to be noticed, to feel attractive. I want someone to want me.* That is using sex as a consumer good. Do you see that this practice is all about us? We have to be careful that we are not using sex to fill a void in our life that only God can fill.

4. Sexual Abuse. This may be the ultimate way in which we can be greedy, addictive and all-consuming in our use of sex. It is by using power and control over another person against their will to selfishly meet our own needs and desires and this one is devastating lives.

Let me just say a word to those of you who are younger perhaps in high school or college. Are you

in a relationship and feeling pressured to have sex? Don't get lured into our culture's idea that you have to have sex to keep the relationship going. To take it to the next level. That is the consumer mindset for sex.

You and your boyfriend or girlfriend can commit to maintaining purity in this area and wait for God's glorious plan of sex within a committed covenant relationship. *I know what you are thinking, Oh Paul, that is so archaic, it is so counter-cultural* but to wait is so worth it.

Our time is running out, let's look at the last part of this passage in,

*Matthew 5:29-30*

*<sup>29</sup> So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your hand—even your stronger hand—causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

What is this? It is like Jesus goes into a bit of rant here. This topic has him a little riled up and impassioned. Of course, he is not literally telling his disciples to pop out their eye or cut off their arm. Remember back to our first message of this series? One of the teaching techniques Jesus used was he shocked people, he used hyperbole or exaggeration. It demonstrates that he is adamant about the seriousness of this topic.

As evident by the article I read about Tinder at the beginning of this message, more and more, we live in a "hook up" society today. For the majority, sex has become a selfish, consumer good. *It is just physical with "no strings" attached* we tell ourselves. *It is freeing and empowering.* But the research starting to come out about this sort of mentality towards sex reveals that it is just creating more loneliness and isolation, more guilt, more addiction, more relationships strains and more mental health issues. Are we surprised? We have taken something, a gift from God that was meant for procreation and for pleasure within a marriage covenant and turned it into a commodity, a consumer free for all and it is reeking havoc on our society out there and make no mistake about it, it is affecting us in here, as well.

Jesus seems to challenge us in this text, *look how this greedy mindset to sex has affected you. Do whatever it takes, I don't care how drastic to cut it out of your life is. It would be better for you to have one eye or one arm than to continue on in this way because it is a road to hell.* The word Jesus used here for hell is Ghenna. Do you know that Ghenna was a real place located just outside of Jerusalem where people would take their trash to be burned? It was a place of perpetual fire. A place of unfulfilled longing and unquenchable thirst.

Using sex as a consumer good will only leave you with an unfilled longing and unquenchable thirst. Some of you know that feeling. Jesus' plea to you in the text? Get rid of it. Do whatever it takes. Cut it out of your life. You are trying to fill a void, a longing in your life with something else when only God can fill it. You will never be fulfilled. You will always be thirsty if you don't stop it.

As we come to the sacrament of communion today, a visible symbol of an internal reality in our life, may we take the time to do some business with God in this area of sex in our lives?

If you know that you have been guilty of using it as a consumer good, make a commitment today to cut it out of your life and give it to Jesus. Confess your sin and then invite him into this area of your life so he can give you the strength and power to reorient around his Kingdom ideal of sexual integrity.

I know there are people in here today that have been decimated by this issue. There are marriages here today that are hanging on by the threads because one or both are using sex as a consumer good. Make a commitment today to not let it go on any further. Take some action. Step out in faith and invite Jesus to heal and restore you and your marriage.

## **Points to Ponder**

### **On The Way ~ Lust**

#### **Matthew 5:27-30**

**With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.**

1. If you feel comfortable, share any experiences or knowledge you have of online dating sites or apps. What is it that may be enticing about this method of finding a potential partner?
2. Share some positive and negative experiences you have had with dating. Have you noticed anything that has changed in terms of dating expectations over the years in Christian and non-Christian circles?
3. What is your initial reaction to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:27-30? What sort of "baggage" does Jesus' words carry for you?
4. In you have some history with Christianity, discuss some of the ways that you have heard sex taught and preached in the church. What has been positive and what has been more negative?
5. Discuss your thoughts around this idea that the biblical idea of sex is that it is to be a covenant good not a consumer good.
6. Jesus used the word that means "greed" for lust in this passage. Describe some ways that sex can play out as greedy in our lives.
7. Where have you seen sex turned into a commodity in our world today? What would it mean to "cut" it out?

#### **Prayer and Action Item**

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. If you are someone that struggles in the area of sex in your life or in your marriage surrender that to Jesus and invite him to redefine the biblical ethic of sex in your life.