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Proverbs 5:1-23

Third Message

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DRINK DEEP OF TRUE LOVE

One of the things I enjoy as a pastor is spending time with engaged couples in pre-marital counseling and then performing their wedding ceremony. I'll never forget a wedding I did for a young couple named Rick and Heather. On their big day, the church was filled with families and friends. When it was time for the exchange of vows and rings, I said, "Rick, will you receive this ring from Heather, as a token of her affection, sincerity, and fidelity toward you, and will you wear it as a symbol of your own affection, sincerity, and fidelity toward her?" He said, "I will."

Then I said, "Heather, will you receive this ring from Rick, as a token of his infection, sincerity, and fidelity toward you, and will you wear it as a symbol of your own affection, sincerity, and fidelity toward him?" I actually said "infection"! That term brings to mind so many images that you do not want to think about at a wedding. I tried to cover my mistake, but there was an audible gasp. Of course, after the wedding ceremony, I apologized profusely and we all had a good chuckle.

In pre-marital counseling, I tell couples that I want to help them build a strong foundation for fulfilling and lasting marriages, because they will need it to stand against the host of things that threaten marriage today. It's safe to say that Rick and Heather didn't expect the first threat to come from their pastor!

As we have been reflecting on God's word to us in Proverbs, we have found several wise and important lessons from a father to his son about how to love and trust the Lord, and how to love our neighbor as ourselves.

In our text this morning, from Proverbs chapter 5, we will listen once more to the father instructing his son on another important issue. In a vivid and practical way he teaches his son how to deal with sexual temptation and channel his sexual passions in a righteous way. This passage is for all of us, single or married, male or female, young or old. Scripture does not shy away from this topic, one that is especially relevant in our permissive culture.

The progression of the father's lesson looks like this:

- A. The temptation of adultery (5:1-6)
- B. The ruin of adultery (5:7-14)
- C. The joy of marital love (5:15-20)
- D. The scrutiny of God (5:21-23)

I approach this subject with humility and sensitivity, knowing that none of us is immune to temptation in this area.

Many in this congregation have felt the pain that results from having sex outside of marriage. It is not my desire to bring further pain or condemnation, but to reveal truths from this passage that will help us all avoid sexual sin and find healing and wholeness from our loving Heavenly Father.

Here then are the words of the father to his son.

A. The Temptation of Adultery

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ear to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths wander aimlessly, but she does not know it. (Proverbs 5:1-6 TNIV)

The father is telling his son to not be naïve when it comes to the seductive tactics of the adulterous woman. Don't be fooled by her attractive façade. She is dangerous, and looking to take advantage of unsuspecting men. Having chosen to abandon God and her marriage covenant, she wanders in moral darkness, destroying anyone who falls into her trap.

What makes her so tempting? Proverbs 7:6-21 sets out in greater detail the alluring ways of the adulterous woman:

At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice. I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in. Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent. (She is unruly and defiant, her feet never stay at home; now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks.) She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: "Today I fulfilled my vows, and I have food from my fellowship offering at home. So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you! I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love! My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till

full moon.” With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. (Prov 7:6-21)

Everything about the adulteress is attractive and inviting. Her clothes, her kiss, her words are all very seductive. She is persuasive and flattering as she appeals to the man’s ego and sensual desires. Preparations have been made, she says, to make this an extraordinary night. He has nothing to fear; her husband is away on a long trip. She assures him that there will be absolutely no price to pay for their sexual liaison.

The adulteress says she offers “love,” but it is anything but that. She offers sex not love. The two should not be confused. She has no desire for a future life together. She has no concern for him or his future at all. She is simply after an evening of selfish indulgence.

The father’s first exhortation to his son is that extramarital sex might initially be sweet and exciting, but in the end it brings only bitterness and disappointment. It is very tempting, but do not be deceived; it is not what it seems. It promises to soothe and satisfy our sexual drives but ultimately it is as painful and destructive as a two-edged sword.

The father now moves on to his second exhortation.

B. The ruin of adultery

Now then, my sons, listen to me; do not turn aside from what I say. Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you lose your honor to others and your dignity to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich the house of another. At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, “How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or turn my ear to my instructors. And I was soon in serious trouble in the assembly of God’s people. (5:7-14)

The father details the very practical economic, social, and emotional ruin that can result from becoming sexually involved with someone who is not your spouse. As the downfall and disgrace of many current public figures can attest, sexual immorality has a high price tag. Not only can it lead to the loss of position, power, and prosperity, it often results in shame and disgrace.

Listen to these honest words from one young woman:

Last year, I had a Christian boyfriend who meant the world to me. When we broke up, I was miserable. But what was worse than losing my boyfriend was the horrible realization that a big part of me went with him. We had been sexually active. I was left with shame, guilt and a broken heart. I still can’t get through a day without thinking about the things we did and feeling horrible about them. I won’t forget the pain for a long time. The few minutes of pleasure were definitely not worth a lifetime of guilt. I wish somehow I had been aware of the consequences of my actions before I let my hormones take over. Because sex is glamorized in our

society, I ignored the teachings of the Bible. As a result, I caused grief to myself and God. I want to tell others it’s just not worth it. Pregnancy and STD’s aren’t the only risks. I’m left longing for real love, but I fear I’ll never find it. I hope that others won’t make the same mistakes I did. I got a lot more than I bargained for.¹

With the opportunities for sexual immorality so tempting, and the consequences so severe, what are we to do? The strategy recommended by the father to his son is to avoid temptation at all cost: “Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house.” Sexual temptation is strong, and sexual immorality is deadly, so stay far away from any path leading toward it. If you don’t want to get burned, don’t go near the fire.

This strategy is echoed by the apostle Paul when he says simply but forcefully, “Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18). This is also the strategy Joseph employed when he was cornered and propositioned by Potiphar’s wife. He refused her sexual advance and ran out of the house, leaving his cloak behind.

The warning is loud and clear: We are to diligently avoid situations that draw us near to the slippery slope of sexual immorality. What are those slippery slopes for you? Is it the hotel bar, when you are away on a business trip? Is it when you are at certain weekend parties? When and where are you tempted most? For some of us it may be when we read particular magazines or romance novels. For others of us it is when we view certain web sites, television shows, or movies. Any situation that arouses in us a sexual fantasy for someone who is not our spouse is to be avoided at all costs.

Sexual fantasy and action are closely tied together. Our actions follow on the heels of our desires and thoughts. Many who have fallen say they sinned sexually because they were suddenly overwhelmed with temptation. But sexual sin is often the culmination of a progression of small and deliberate choices and indulgences. Instead of guarding our hearts and judging our thoughts, we entertain fantasies that often yield to sinful actions.

We must remember that sexual immorality is a matter of the heart and body. That is why Jesus made no distinction between lust and adultery, when he said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:27-28). We must be ruthless in watching our steps and guarding our hearts, minds, eyes and ears from the myriad of sexual stimuli that surround us. Having an accountability partner can be a great help.

Over the course of many years listening to men young and old, I can tell you that the temptation of Internet pornography is especially huge. Many men and teenagers fight an uphill battle every day. With such easy access and relative anonymity, protection from this particular source of temptation is very important.

At PBCC, all employees have an Internet monitoring device on their computer that records every website they visit. The list of visited web sites, with special attention drawn to ones that might contain objectionable content, is then e-mailed to an elder or supervisor.

This helps all of us to be accountable and to avoid temptation. I have installed the same program in my home. It costs only \$8 a month, a small price to pay for such vital protection for everyone in the family.

In verses 7-14, the father's second exhortation to his son is that sexual immorality can bring great ruin, so stay far away from any path that leads you toward it. A single night of pleasure can lead to a lifetime of pain and regret.

God has designed a far better way. Using two allegories, the father now illustrates how a blessed marriage can bring true and lasting pleasure. Verses 15-20:

C. The joy of marital love

Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. (5:15-18)

To understand the first allegory fully it is important to know that water is a very precious commodity in parched Canaan. It is a source of refreshment, satisfaction, and life that is far too valuable to ever be wasted.

The key to interpreting the image in the allegory is found in verse 18, "May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth." The different sources of water are used here, as they are in the Song of Solomon, to describe the source of sexual satisfaction experienced by husband and wife.

The point of the allegory is that water from our private garden is much better than water from a public source. Rainwater from our own cistern and well water fed by fresh streams are of a much higher quality than water running down the middle of the street. The true source for quenching our sexual thirst is not found in the individual off the street, but from the spouse who dwells within your own home, the one that is yours alone.

Today many people say that it is simply monogamy, not marital fidelity, that is important to develop deep intimacy. But the text does not say that we are to rejoice in sexual union with our lover or partner or significant other. It says we are to rejoice in our spouse, the spouse we have had since our youth. Our joy has the capacity to grow as the years go by, because a lifetime commitment to the bonds of marriage provides protection for the kind of vulnerability and openness that leads to the deepest intimacy imaginable.

The term "rejoice" has the idea of spontaneous and unrestrained outward expressions of joy. It is used for stamping the feet, clapping the hands, dancing and shouting. We rejoice in our children, our job, and our achievements, but how well do we celebrate our spouse? This involves much more than buying gifts once a year on our anniversary; it means prioritizing our marriage each day, giving it the best and not the leftovers of our time and attention. Even with our marital difficulties and differences we can still view our spouse as a gift and a blessing. Let's rejoice in them and celebrate the wonderful way God has uniquely made us for one another.

The second allegory the father uses only intensifies how much joy and pleasure we are to find in our spouse.

A loving doe, a graceful deer — may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love. Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman? (5:19-20)

Like the way of the deer and doe, our physical affection for our spouse is to be loving and graceful, energetic and playful. We are to be intoxicated with each other's tender and affectionate love, able to give ourselves freely and fully to one another as husband and wife.

After a long day at work or caring for children, it can be difficult to be energetic and playful in the evening. The transition from busyness to a slower, more attentive pace is not easy. That is why it is so important for married couples to make time for refreshment and connection whenever possible. This could be anything from sharing a brief phone conversation during lunch break, a leisurely walk around the block together after dinner, or getting away for a romantic weekend on a consistent basis. The investment is well worth it. Cultivating this kind of intimacy with our spouse is not only a source of great joy, it can also be mutual protection against infidelity.

As the father suggests, why waste our passion on short-lived, shallow, and sexually immoral relationships? Why not drink deep of true love and, for those who are married, invest our energy in developing a loving, lasting, and intimate relationship with our spouse?

Now we come to the father's final exhortation. In verses 21-23, he reminds his son that behind all the practical arguments for sexual purity there is ultimately a spiritual reason.

D. The scrutiny of God

For your ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all your paths. The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sins hold them fast. For lack of discipline they will die, led astray by their own great folly. (5:21-23)

The father reminds his son that sexual immorality can bring not only physical, financial, emotional, and social consequences, it also puts us on a path contrary to God. All our ways are under his scrutiny. There is no such thing as secret sin. Our

best friends may not know, our parents or spouse may not know, but God knows. He sees it all.

Neither money, nor power, nor secrecy will free us from the bondage and consequences of sin. The good news is that God loves us and seeks to redeem us, not condemn us.

Whether you are single, married, divorced, widowed, or struggling with same-sex attraction, how we express ourselves sexually is a matter of trust. Do we trust God that when he warns us against sexual immorality he is not trying to limit us or hold out on us? Do we see that he has our best interests in mind? His intent is to truly satisfy and fulfill us. Do we trust God when he says intimacy is not found in shallow encounters but in a committed marriage?

Some might say, “We are two adults consenting to sex. No one will get hurt.” But sex outside of marriage is sin – and sin always destroys. Contrary to popular opinion, extramarital sex is not liberating; it leads to insecurity, guilt, and even obsession.

For those who are strangled in the cords of sexual sin or those whose marriages are dull and lifeless, my word of encouragement to you is, please find help. All hope is not lost. Help is available if you want it.

Not only can you find help from a trusted pastor, counselor, or Christian friend, you can also find help from God himself. David, the king of Israel, committed adultery with Bathsheba. When he was confronted with his sin he confessed and repented, and God restored and healed him.

God wants to do the same for us. The cross of Christ reminds us that God paid a terrible price to extend to us his forgiveness and grace. Restoration and healing is possible if we repent of our sin. Let us remember the words of John, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

I am very sensitive to those who for one reason or another are not experiencing the gift and pleasures of marriage. The path you are on can be difficult. Many of you are struggling with tremendous yearnings for the emotional and physical intimacy that marriage can bring. You are wondering what to do with these longings. You are tired of the black-and-white rules and “just don’t do it” approach to sexual purity. You feel as though you’re left with nothing more than frustration and emptiness at best, or heartbreak and shame at worst.

You are thinking there has to be something more, something better. There is. I agree with Christians throughout the ages who believed that there is a close relationship between human sexuality and human spirituality. Behind our strong desire for intimacy with another person lies an even deeper and greater yearning for intimacy with God. “Our soul is restless until it finds rest in God.” We still struggle against the temptations and lusts of this world, but for all of us, single or married, cultivating daily faithfulness and intimacy with God and allowing him to meet our deepest longings is good protection against chasing after counterfeit physical pleasures.

At its core our problem is not that our passions are too strong, but that they are not strong enough and not directed at the right source. We become too easily satisfied with the pleasures of this world. Only the presence and love of God will ultimately fill our soul. The joy of marital love may never be the reality for all of us. We may never experience the intimacy of marriage, but we all can share in the deep intimacy of fellowship with Christ. We are his cherished bride for all eternity.

Jesus said to the thirsty woman at the well, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14). May we all drink deeply from his true love.

Heavenly Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for your warning of the ruin of sexual sin and the joy of marital love. We confess our sin to you, our indulgence in counterfeit pleasures. We ask for your forgiveness, and we thank you for your cleansing and restoration. We pray for your strength to turn away from temptation to pour our energies into deeper intimacy with you, and deeper intimacy with our spouse. Our deepest thirst is for you. May we all drink deep of your eternal love. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹ *Love, Sex and the Whole Person* (Carol Stream, IL: Campus Life, February 1996).

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