

Wisdom to Live By: Purity
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Sometimes, our sermon topics require a tad more maturity than others; this is one of those Sundays. Today, we're going to talk about matters related to purity and faithfulness. Proverbs is filled with teachings on the subject. Why? Because it is so important. Friends, in my observation of working with people during the most difficult moments in life, nothing tops the hurt, the betrayal, the shock of marital infidelity. I can honestly say that that I've seen more tears from unfaithfulness than death. How we deal with our intimate lives is critically important.

Everybody else is talking about sexual matters. The secular music that plays over the airwaves that our kids hear on a daily basis refer to it. The TV shows and movies we watch are suggestive all the time. People in Washington, in Hollywood, can't seem to keep their hands off of each other and we see it on the news everyday. I know this is not the most comfortable topic (imagine how I feel), but don't you want to hear God's voice on the subject? I sure hope so. And here's what you can count on from God. True words. Pure words. Words we don't have to be embarrassed by. Words that will lead us and our children to life. You want to hear words of life, don't you?

I want to help you today. If you're married, I want to help protect your marriage. I want to save you from throwing your marriage and family away by giving into sexual temptation. I want to lovingly steer you back towards your spouse where you delight in each other and not in forbidden love. If you're single, you are a sexual being. I want to show you why you want to protect and save your purity for a possible marital relationship. If you're a young person, I want to ask you to believe God's words today; I want to call you to care about what God has to say about your purity so that when you're being tempted by your own desires, by those around you, and by Satan himself you choose to be wise and not a fool in this area.

Can I say one more thing before I get into the heart of our topic today? Maybe you're thinking, "Brian, I've already failed in this area. I've already made these mistakes." You're embarrassed; you're ashamed. And you can't get over the guilt. Friends, this is why Jesus came. He came for you. To forgive you. He came to rescue you. Believe the gospel, my dear brothers and sisters. And rejoice that God still loves you, accepts you, forgives you, and invites you into his family because of what Christ has done. Look to the cross and believe the most important truth of our faith; Jesus Christ has come to save sinners, you and me being the worst of the bunch. Let the sure grace of Jesus wash over you today and leave here hopeful and forgiven and not ashamed and guilty.

Or maybe some of you are on the brink of making a huge mistake in this area. Or maybe you're caught. You've got a secret sin; you've got an inappropriate relationship. You know it needs to end, but you really don't want it to end. You feel completely trapped, alone, and afraid. Friends, ask God to help you do the impossible: confess. There's hope if you confess. Prov.

28:13 says, "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." You need mercy and to get it you must confess and forsake this sexual sin. I know it's going to be painful and, you're right, we don't know what will happen when you do. But we do know you will get mercy from God.

The teaching found on this issue in Proverbs is unlike most of the other teachings. You might remember me saying that Proverbs is littered with these little nuggets of wisdom here and there on a wide range of topics and you kind of have to search the entire book about a topic and then compile what you read; we did this last week talking about money. But the issue of purity and sexual temptation is primarily condensed into three chapters. Chapter 5, half of 6, and all of 7. Now, you might think that all of the teaching is negative; don't do this and don't do that. And sure, of course, there are fences that to keep us from trouble. But sometimes a good defense is having a good offense.

Sexual relations are God's idea. That means he created them for really good purposes. And when we follow God's plan we flourish. In 1 Cor. 7, for example, we're told without a hint of reservation or embarrassment that husbands and wives are to enjoy their intimate relations with each other. Don't forsake being together, Paul says. Husbands, don't hold out on your wives; wives, don't hold out on your husbands.

Proverbs also encourages and instructs husbands and wives to enjoy each other physically and intimately. And yes, I really mean enjoy. See for yourself and turn with me to Prov. 5. Now, for context, in this passage a father is trying to instruct his son about the dangers of a forbidden woman, a woman who you should not pursue physically because you are not united to her in marriage. Mark it down, friends: any person you are not married to is forbidden; think of a big red stamp with the word forbidden on everyone person you might be tempted towards. But this father doesn't just say what not to do, but he also says what his son should do. And notice how he turns his son towards his own wife (READ vs. 15-19).

Rejoice in your wife, men; ladies, rejoice in your husbands! God has given you to each other. Our ongoing intimate lives together as husband and wife serve at least two purposes. 1. It's a continued celebration of your marriage. And 2) it reestablishes your marital bond. There's a lot in this world that tears marriages a part. Ongoing physical relations serves to keep husbands and wives connected to each other. That's why sex with someone you're not married to is so dangerous. It binds your soul to someone who has not promised you anything. I'm so hopeful, young ladies, that you will not give yourself to your boyfriends; I don't want your soul connected to someone who hasn't promised you anything through marriage.

Do you remember how the Bible talks about intimacy with each other? Adam knew his wife Eve. Jacob knew his wife Rachel. When you are intimate with someone you know each other in a deep, spiritual way. But that kind of knowledge is dangerous when there's no marital covenant. It's why some girls can never let their boyfriends go settling for a lifetime of misery in marriage. It's why young men can be filled with jealous rage when their girlfriend dumps them.

The intimate act bonded them together and now he's not willing to let her go. This is the special, spiritual place intimacy has for a couple. It serves our marriages so well. It's worth waiting for and it's worth protecting.

Because our sexuality is so precious and sacred, Proverbs gives us these signs to protect us. That's what signs are for, right? You stop at a stop sign so you don't get t-boned by an oncoming car. Not all signs work, though. What would you do if you came to these signs (PIC 1, PIC 2). Sometimes, signs aren't helpful, but other times they are, but we don't want to follow them. Ask God to help you believe these signs I'm about to share (READ Prov. 6:27ff).

On our back deck, I have these little black marks in the floor panels where charcoal slipped through the grate on my grill and burned a hole into the deck. The writer asks, "Can you carry fire next to your chest and not be burned?" Of course not. There are consequences to being unfaithful. Vs. 29 says, "none who touches his neighbors wife will go unpunished." Then, there are 3 punishments detailed by the writer. Here's the first one: *heavy loss*. The writer compares an adulterous person with a thief and says, "Sure, stealing food is wrong, but you can hardly blame a guy for stealing bread to eat." But then he says, "But someone caught being unfaithful? The penalty is severe." Sevenfold means *total punishment, complete punishment*. And I've seen it. I've seen people lose family, house, car, income because being faithful wasn't a commitment anymore and they found someone else. Life dramatically changes for the worse because of unfaithfulness. The losses are catastrophic.

The second form of punishment highlighted is *shame and dishonor*. Look at vs. 32-33 (READ). If you've been around here a while you've heard me explain a certain category of sin; that category is *even people who don't know Jesus know it's wrong to....* There is a particular shame of betraying your spouse and everyone knows is. This verse particularly scares me. I fear the enduring shame and disgrace before my wife, before my boys if I would give into sexual sin. Throw on top of that the shame and dishonor I would bring to this church, to my Master, Jesus. Friends, I would rather die. There is a dishonor and a disgrace that can't be wiped away. It can be forgiven (praise God); restoration and reconciliation are possible; it's a long road, but it can happen. But there's a shame that remains that I don't want.

Look at the last punishment: *the wrath of your neighbor*. I love how honest this Proverb is. That wife, that husband you're tempted to have a relationship is married and they will be jealous for their spouse just like your spouse will be jealous for you.

If you look online, you will find news report after news report of jealous husbands or jealous wives going so far as to do physical harm to the one they suspect is stealing their spouse or to their spouse themselves. Now, that's obviously wrong. Vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay. That means God doesn't give you the permission to do that. But that's what you're inviting when you run around. You invite the wrath of a jealous husband, a jealous wife. Just like vs. 34 says, "For jealousy makes a man furious, and he will not spare when he takes revenge. He will accept no compensation; he will refuse though you multiply gifts." One

particularly sad story out of FL. A wife lied about an extramarital affair just to make her husband jealous. But that husband shot the other man without ever saying a word. He didn't ask if it was true; he didn't wait for an explanation. He would not accept any gifts, any story; he spared nothing.

These kinds of horrific details and warnings in the Bible are supposed to increase our fear of sinning. We are supposed to read these kinds of warning signs and say, "I don't want to be unfaithful. God, spare me!"

So, what do we need to do to be spared? What I mean is, "What kinds of things should we actually do to avoid getting caught into this particular snare?" I've hinted at some of them. If you're married, never stop cultivating a joy in your own marriage. I don't think I've ever met someone who was happy and content with their marriage who still found someone else. It doesn't happen that way. A discontent with what God gives us stirs our ungodly desires. But you might say, "But I'm not happy with my marriage. My husband doesn't pay attention to me. My wife doesn't appreciate me!" Yeah, I know. But you're kind of a pain, too. So, you work at work. You plead to God for help. You hate your sin more than your spouse's sin. You're watchful for the good in your spouse and you realize you have it better than you deserve.

If you're standing at the precipice of an inappropriate relationship or you've crossed the line already, you've probably crossed other lines that you shouldn't have crossed. Do you know what I mean? What are some of those lines? I'm going to give you three words that could fit underneath the umbrella of social interactions and then expand on them. Anticipation. Sharing. Touch.

Anticipation. I look forward to hanging out with my friends. I look forward to catching up; I look forward to game playing and the interactions. But if I have those feelings of anticipation for other women, that's something to be careful about. If you're thinking, "I can't wait to see..." when you get to work or get to church or when there's a New Years Eve party, that might be a sign that your affections are a little too strong for another. Don't freak out if that's you, but do be honest about it and do guard yourself. Make sure you put up boundaries; remind yourself of the truth we've been reading today about the danger around the corner. And here's what I've seen: when you turn away from that budding desire it will decrease as you anticipate and look towards the things of God. Be careful so that growing anticipation doesn't morph into greater, illegitimate desires.

Sharing. There some things married men and women don't need to share with one another. You don't need to share your frustrations about your husband to that male co-worker. If you have a favorite hobby or passion, the person you share that interest with shouldn't be a man or a woman who is not your spouse. And here's why: there is a link between our sexuality and our heart. When we share passions, secrets, intimate thoughts we are beginning to share our hearts and the chances of sharing sexual relations will increase. There are contexts in life where we can share our intimate thoughts. As a pastor, I can have pretty personal

conversations with people. That's why there are other boundaries and fences that are a part of that relationship so that the sharing taking place is always in purity.

Also, we need to be careful about the modes of our sharing. Texting and online capabilities have opened up new danger zones for inappropriate relationships. There are things we might text that we wouldn't say face to face. It's a private conversation we can keep hidden from others and it's a way to crack open our heart to another to see if they'll walk into our lives. Keep all your text to the opposite sex about business. Like, "Will you bring home Jr. from the game tomorrow?" "Do you know any good mechanics in town?" "Is school cancelled today?" If you get a text that's personal, that invites more intimate sharing, flat out ignore it and then guard future communications. And if you're afraid of being rude, get over it. Be more afraid of being rude to your wife.

Touch. There are boundaries of touch that should not be crossed. I could give you a list of do's and don'ts right now but that might miss the point. I know we're all different (some are a little more touchy-feely; others are not). And I get that hugs goodbye or hello can be fine given the situation. But indiscriminate touch is another line crossed that might lead to trouble. Touching a shoulder opens the door to touching a hand. Touching a hand might lead to touching someone's legs. And that opens the door for further touch. We have to be careful.

I like the helpful guide found in 1 Tim. 5 where Paul is telling Timothy how he, as younger man, should relate to the church family in Ephesus. And he says Timothy should relate to *younger women as sisters, in all purity*. How would you treat, and interact, and touch your sister? That's a helpful guide. And then he even adds, "in all purity." Make sure there's not even a hint of impurity in your interactions, in this case, in your touch.

Is it ok to give a hug to another woman? Another man? Sure, in some settings. Always in purity. But as a general rule: I think we need to reserve touch for those we are married to and not others.

Can I say one more time? Friends, Jesus came to help us with these very things. God has grace for us. Grace to help us avoid the pitfalls of impurity and grace to forgive. Remember: if you're caught, there is help for you. Please ask. God wants to rescue you today.

Key vs. Prov. 6:27

Questions for the week

- What was the most helpful word of wisdom you heard today? Why?
- What word is the hardest to believe or accept? How come?
- What change are you ready to make today?