

What's wrong with me? Lust

Message for Sunday, November 26, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Ephesians 4:17-19 and more

Children's Message:

Proverbs 17:17, New Living Translation:

A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help
in time of need.

Let's pretend that you've just moved to Stirling, and you would like to meet people and make some new friends. What would you look for in a friend? *Write down all their answers.*

There's an old saying, and it's very true: "If you want a friend, be a friend." In other words, instead of asking, "What can this person do for me?", ask "What can I do for this person?"

So look again at that list of all the things you look for in a friend. Are you that type of person?

Message: "What's wrong with me? Lust"

Some of you, especially parents of girls, may remember last year when *Discovery Girls*, a magazine for girls ages 8-12 years old, published an article giving advice on what kind of swimsuit would go well with your body shape. Here are some quotes from that article:

If you're curvy on top, coverage is key! A bra-like top offers extra support. Side ties and cut-outs draw the eyes down.

Draws *whose* eyes down, and down to where?

If you're straight up & down, add curves with asymmetrical straps.

In other words, if your breasts haven't developed, make them look like they have by wearing this style.

The magazine's Facebook page and Twitter account were flooded with comments from parents who were outraged for making their little girls into sex objects.

The article didn't surprise me, though. We live in a society where sex is everywhere. It used to be that if you wanted to see people in the nude, you had to go

to one of those special movie theatres in the grungy part of the city. Now all you have to do it watch Game of Thrones on prime time TV or do a search on the internet. Making pre-teen girls into sex objects is just the natural outcome of this obsession with sex.

We are coming to the end of this series of messages on the Seven Deadly Sins. Today's sin is lust. Let's remember that the people who came up with this list were monks and nuns who retreated to the desert to get away from all the temptations and sins of society. Yet they found that these temptations and sins followed them wherever they went. Including lust.

So if devout monks and nuns in the 3rd century had trouble with lust, we should expect it to be an issue for us today. I know it certainly is for me. I'm thankful that, by God's grace, I've never had a fling or an affair, even though the temptation has been there at times.

There's a story about an elderly professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. He was counseling a young man who was struggling with lust. This particular professor was highly regarded for his godly character and pastoral wisdom. At one point, the seminarian asked, "At what age will lust no longer be a problem?" The professor replied, "I can't say exactly, but it must be sometime after 82!" So lust is an issue for all of us here.

1) Sex is good, very good...

One thing I need to say up front, so there is no misunderstanding: sex is good. Intimacy and pleasure with another person is a beautiful gift from God. God created us with these body parts that reproduce life and give pleasure. God gave us the desire for sex, so it's a good thing.

Genesis chapter 1 describes God creating the universe. Each day God makes another part of the plan, and at the end of each day God says, "That's good." But on day six, when God creates humans—male and female—God says, "That's very good."

2) ... but lust corrupts the goodness

What, then is the problem with lust? Why call it a "Deadly Sin"? Lust is a problem because it corrupts all that goodness. Instead of that good desire for

one's spouse, it shows up as excessive and selfish sexual desire.

a) Lust ruins relationships

Ephesians 4:17-19, New Living Translation:
 With the Lord's authority let me say this: Live no longer as the ungodly do, for they are hopelessly confused. Their closed minds are full of darkness; they are far away from the life of God because they have shut their minds and hardened their hearts against him. They don't care anymore about right and wrong, and they have given themselves over to immoral ways. Their lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed.

This passage tells us that something has gone wrong with our desire. Lust is desire which has gone wild, craving only pleasure for itself, not caring about the consequences. The beauty and intimacy of sex is gone, for the other person is only a tool used as the means to an end, a selfish end. While good sex builds a relationship, lust ruins relationships. I think that's what Jesus is telling us when he talks about lust.

Matthew 5:28, New International Version:
 "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

There is no relationship there, no sharing, no love. It's just raw selfish desire.

b) Lust is all about me getting what I want

Sex is designed for giving as well as receiving. We give our bodies, our selves, to another person for their pleasure. We make ourselves open and vulnerable. That's why sex is best in the trusting relationship of marriage.

1 Corinthians 7:3-5, New Living Translation:
 The husband should not deprive his wife of sexual intimacy, which is her right as a married woman, nor should the wife deprive her husband. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband also gives authority over his body to his wife. So do not deprive each other of sexual relations.

So sex is a beautiful sharing of each other's bodies. There is no giving in lust, only me getting my satisfaction.

3) Healthy Virtue: Love

All through this series, I try to focus on the positive, rather than the negative. So for each Deadly Sin, I suggest an alternative, a Healthy Virtue. The Healthy Virtue which replaces lust is love. Lust ruins relationships, but love builds relationships. While sex is a pleasant physical act, it's primarily about building the relationship.

Of course, you know that you can have deep, loving, intimate relationships that have nothing to do with sex. You can have wonderful friendships built on honesty, trust, the enjoyment of each other's company. Love is the key to healthy relationships.

4) Ways to move from lust to love (Next Steps)

a) Temptation is much easier to avoid than it is to resist

Can you imagine being on a diet while you worked in a bakery, especially one where you were welcome to taste samples to make sure they were of good quality? That's setting yourself up for disaster. The same is true for sexual temptation. It's better to not be tempted in the first place.

Here is the software I use to keep that stuff away from me:

- J Computer: K9 Web Protection. It's free for home use, and very inexpensive for work computers. I use it at both places, and highly recommend it.
- J Android phone or tablet: Funamo. No yearly subscription; just pay for it once, for as long as you use that device.

There are lots of other softwares for this purpose. Find one that works for you.

b) Say "Yes" to something even better

2 Timothy 2:22, New Living Translation:
 Run from anything that stimulates youthful lust. Follow anything that makes you want to do right. Pursue faith and love and peace, and enjoy the companionship of those who call on the Lord with pure hearts.

Saying "No" all the time will wear a person out. Better to use that energy with something positive.

One of the ways to deal with lust is to fill our minds with good things that give us pleasure and enjoyment. Enjoy the world outdoors—yes, even in the winter! Sunsets are beautiful anytime of year. Go for a walk; after the cold outdoors, a cup of hot tea, alone or with a friend will be a blessing.

Enjoy reading. Try your hand at painting or crafts. Play cards. Practise yoga. You can do all of these alone, but they're even better when enjoyed with others. If you're a married couple, remember to include single people in your social life. You will all be the richer for it.

The surest way to say “no” to sexual temptation is to be so busy saying “yes” to God and his gifts that lust isn't the least bit interesting. You've got something much better.

Finally: a word to those who have already been snared by lust, and regret what you've done. Know that in Jesus there is forgiveness, there is healing, there is hope. He is able to forgive, yes for the hundredth time. He is able to heal, both your brokenness and the hurt you have done to others. He is able to help, by filling your life with joy, beauty and love.