

Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse, who leave the straight paths to walk in dark ways, who delight in doing wrong and who rejoice in the perverseness of evil, whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their ways.

It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life.

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Would you take a Bible and turn to the book of Proverbs this morning. Proverbs, chapter 2.

Proverbs is a book of practical wisdom that is straight forward and easy to read. If you think that the Bible is too theoretical for you...too hard to understand, then you should look again at Proverbs. This book even speaks to our culture's tiny attention span; many of the messages here come at us in bits and pieces, like TV commercials, and yet they address the ageless problems of our human race.

A quick look through this book reveals that certain issues come up again and again. I thought we'd take a few weeks and look at the themes that recur most often, since those are, apparently, the most troublesome issues for humanity.

Last week, we looked at the dangers of greed. We said that greed is the *desire for more, the feeling that we never have enough*. It's the culprit behind our dissatisfaction with life. Greed is a sin; it's contrary to the Christian teaching of contentment, and if left unchecked in our lives, a greedy appetite kills – it kills our witness for Christ in the world, it warps our

perspective of right and wrong. Greed kills our health – we wear ourselves out trying to get more. And we said last week that greed kills our faith – the desire for more consumes all of our time and eventually pushes God right out of our lives.

Proverbs says, “Beware of greed.”

Today, we look at a different kind of danger – the danger of lust.

What is lust? Maxie Dunnam says, “Lust is a preoccupation with the object of our desire.” Lust is desire gone wild. Lust is greed applied to specific things. It comes at us in many different ways, but it seems to me there are three basic categories of lust.

First there is the lust for things. Material lust is the hunger for certain kinds of possessions, whether large as a house or small as a ring.

Second, there is a lust for status or position. This is the burning desire to have a title: “President,” or “Director,” or “Doctor,” or “Pastor...Reverend.” Really, it's the desire to be noticed – it's the desire to make heads turn when you enter a room – a desire for some kind of public validation.

But it's the third form of lust that's most common in our society. Sensual lust. The desire to *have* another person in order to give ourselves sexual pleasure.

Of course, our society continues down the path of, not only accepting, but glorifying lust, in all of its forms. But if you don't think sensual lust is the most pervasive form in our culture, then you explain to me why you can't pick up almost any magazine, you can't go to the mall, you can't turn on the television or computer without seeing half-naked people selling everything from cars to clothes to furniture to news. The marketers of our culture know very well what our culture wants – sexual involvement...sexual pleasure. So they appeal to our lusts to sell their stuff.

In fact, there are fewer and fewer places where one can go to avoid sexual temptation. Children can't be allowed to roam unsupervised through the neighborhood video stores because of the racks of videos with alluring covers of half-dressed exercisers and playmates of the year. The images on the covers of the R-rated movies used to be found only in pornography magazines...now they're right there for all to see. A trip to the big grocery stores takes you past the book aisle with suggestive covers on romance novels that contain graphic descriptions of sexual encounters. Along the highway, billboards for beer, for cars, for movies all use sex to sell. Radio stations readily play sexually explicit songs today – songs that were banned from the airwaves not all that long ago. A trip to the mall takes you past stores with, not mannequins, but pictures of real people hardly dressed; many posed provocatively. Annette and I were there just this past Monday, and we said, for the sake of our kids, we're going to avoid even walking by certain

stores. I don't want those images in my head, and we certainly don't want them in the minds of our sons.

But just staying home doesn't solve the problem. Our homes are invaded with sexually explicit images over even the free non-cable TV channels. And then, of course, there's the stuff that's available on our computers.

We know all this is true, don't we? Do I really have to go any farther in making this case that to live a Christian life – a holy and pure life, we stand *against* the largest part of our culture?

I think the overarching message of the book of Proverbs is twofold. First, the writer, King Solomon, calls us to rightly understand our situations. He doesn't want us to be blind to the realities and the temptations of life.

In these verses of Proverbs 2, he speaks about the dangers of lust, of the perverse words of wicked men, of people who leave the places of light and walk in dark places to pursue their lusts, so that no one else can see what they're doing. He warns us of those who are devious – who will do anything to get what they want – these are warnings against the lusts of possessions and status.

Then, Solomon warns us about those pursuing sexual lust – those who use seductive words to gratify their desires; the adulterer, who's already broken the

marriage promise with God and who now seeks to seduce others in order to fulfill her desire.

It's strange to me that in our culture, we usually think about men being the seducers. We think its men who are sexually charged and out looking for conquests. But here is a warning about the very same attitude in women. This tells me that neither sex is immune to lust – we fool ourselves if we think we are.

So the dangers are out there – we read it in here in Scripture, we see it in our culture. And let's be clear – lust is a spiritual problem. Lust is a sin against God.

People have tried to say, “What I do in the privacy of my home is no one else's business and doesn't hurt anyone else.” Don't believe that. Don't believe that lust, especially sexual lust, doesn't hurt other people. Hundreds of thousands of people, millions, all over the world, are enslaved either physically, emotionally or financially by lust and the industries that feed off of it. People are emotionally scarred, abused, trapped in a world that isn't real. They're sucked in and kept in this desire gone wild...this desire than can never be satisfied. Don't tell yourself that this little peek here or this indiscretion over here doesn't matter. The world is paying the price, our nation is paying the price, and our children will pay the price for our lust.

So, what is our response? How do we beware of lust?

I've said many times that in gaining victory over specific sins, Scripture consistently says that we have a part and also that God has a part. *We* have a responsibility and so does God in our conforming to the image of Jesus.

First, what's our part?

Well, imagine you're out in your front yard and you spy a weed. A big dandelion right there in the middle of your otherwise lush, green grass. What do you do? You know that that weed isn't going to just go away. In fact, you know what will happen if it's left alone. In my yard at least, the flower will grow and then the seed pod will develop and my little boys will run to it and pick the seed pod and blow on it and then I'll have 100 dandelions growing in my yard.

Even though I appreciate the nostalgia of that image, if I see a weed in my yard, I dig it up, root and all, and throw it away. If I'm to keep control of my yard, that's what I *have* to do.

The same is true in our spiritual lives – our spiritual yards. When we see weeds in our lives, sins that arise, no matter how small, no matter how insignificant they seem to us at the time, we're responsible to root them out and throw them away.

Lust, and the practices that feed it need to be rooted out of our lives: maybe it's a preoccupation with someone, maybe its pornography or fetishes, a certain

TV program, maybe even those seemingly harmless playful relationships between men and women. When you see the first growth of a weed – take it and kill it. Put the filter on the TV and computer, stay away from provocative movies and provocative people, set up accountability structures in your life. Don't waste any time, pull all the weeds that you see.

Take a lesson from King David and Bathsheba – it wouldn't surprise me that Solomon had that event on his mind even as he wrote this Proverb. King David let his weed of preoccupation with Bathsheba lead him into all sorts of sin, with tragic results.

“Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men,” Solomon says. “Wisdom will save you from the adulteress.”

Our part in living holy lives is to keep our lives weeded.

But we have another part as well. We have to do the work necessary to keep the healthy parts of our yards strong.

You know, to be constantly pulling weeds, particularly the *same* weeds over and over again is a frustrating way to live. To be continually fighting temptation – every time you turn around there's another one here and one here and one out by the walk over there. Pulling and pulling and pulling. Maybe you're lawn is so

full of weeds, you have to bring in a spray and kill off the whole thing; that may be necessary in your case.

But what's going to grow back there, if the earth is left alone? It won't be good grass – you'll just get more weeds.

Pulling weeds alone won't grow a healthy lawn. Growing a healthy lawn requires us to work on making the good grass healthy. We need to plant and nurture good plants, so they grow thick and strong and fill in those open places where we've pulled weeds from our lives. This is what Romans 12:21 means about the Christian life not being overcome by evil, but overcoming evil with good.

Too many sincere Christians, in their battle with lust, pull the weeds that grow in their lives, but then they never plant anything good in those vacant places; and so the weeds just come right back. They recognize that this practice in their lives doesn't please God – they recognize a weed when they see it and they pull it, but then they don't do anything to encourage the good parts of the lawn to fill in those empty places.

This is where God's part comes in. God says, “Seek me and you will find me.” God says, “Fill up these vacancies in your life with the pursuit of me.” Of course this takes a certain amount of discipline on our part at first; it takes humility to ask for God's help, to admit that we just can't control this by ourselves. That's

why so often, God has to let us sink completely to the bottom before we'll really turn to Him.

But when we do finally turn to Him, God meets our effort with His Spirit. When we finally realize that we have no where left to go, and we turn to Him with a contrite heart, He'll fill us up with himself. "My grace is sufficient for you," He says. That's true in every way, in every area of life.

It's not enough to just pull the weeds and then leave the vacant spaces. We need to pursue God and ask Him to grow healthy habits in us. Ask him to take those places where weeds once grew and fill them with Himself so that no weeds can ever come back.

Bill Hybels says that "Lust (sensual lust) is the reduction of a human being (a person made in God's image) to merely a *body* – a *thing* capable of gratifying our sexual desires. When we lust we don't care if that person matters to God. We don't care if that person has parents or brothers and sisters that love him or if they have children or a wife or husband. When we lust, we only care that this person soothes our own physical need."<sup>1</sup>

What will rid our hearts of the sin of *lust*? Only the *love* of God, poured into the heart by the Holy Spirit, applied to those vacant places where weeds once grew. The good *overcoming* the evil. You see, the love and the presence of Christ in the heart of a Christian does not

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<sup>1</sup> overcoming

merely manage sin – it destroys it. It transforms the way we think; it changes the way we see people. When we're walking with Christ, when we're living in the Holy Spirit, when we see an attractive person, we don't think, "I've got to have her...I've got to have him." Instead, we see a child of God. We see a person of worth and dignity. We see them as God sees them. This is the evidence of a mind and heart controlled by the Holy Spirit. We see, not through eyes of lust, but through eyes of love, true love, divine love, agape (selfless) love. Life by the Spirit trades the perverse for the genuine.

I'm talking about the love of God as though it's a commodity that we buy...it's not. The love of God is a *person* – Jesus Christ – alive in the heart of a believer. The love of God is the person of the Holy Spirit – welcomed into our lives, sought daily for guidance, given free reign to do as He pleases in every part of us. The love of God is present in a sanctified heart – a heart given as completely as we know how, to God.

Does this describe your relationship with God this morning? Does He have all of your heart? Is the love of God overcoming the weeds in your life, and particularly this weed of lust?

If you've never received Christ as your Savior, you need to know, the journey begins there. Christ died for you so you can have a relationship with God the Father. You do that by believing in Jesus, receiving Him into your life through faith today. If you need to do that, come and let's talk about it.

Maybe you're already a Christian today, and yet you still struggle with this chronic sin of lust – maybe it's sexual lust, maybe it's a lust for stuff or a lust for status. You've pulled all the weeds you see, you've set up the boundaries, you've got an accountability partner, you've tried and tried, but you still know that lust is alive in your heart. You still see others with eyes of lust and not eyes of love.

God asks you today, “Would you let me into that part of your life? Will you admit your need of me there? Will you let me fill those vacant places with good grass so that love can overcome the evil?”

God would give you His mind, His eyes, His love for others. We no longer have to see people as objects to take advantage of. We can see people as God's children. Would you seek God for that today – a transformation?

## C27 Come Everyone Who Is Thirsty in Spirit

Every Sunday morning, Annette asks, “Is there anything different in the service today, meaning a baptism or dedication, or some special event?”

“For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding. He holds victory in store for the upright; he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for he guards the course of the just and protects the way of His faithful ones.” Proverbs 2:6-8