

BATTLING LUST

2 Samuel 11:1-5, 14-17, 12:1-7a

This is a familiar passage and many of you have heard sermons about it, some of you have probably even taught on it. But before we get into the details of David's story and the specifics of dealing with lust, we need to deal with a preliminary question: is it wrong to lust? Now 1,000 years ago, even 100 years ago, there would have been no question: of course it is, it's one of the seven deadly sins. But today, it's an honest question. In fact, my guess is that if you went down to the strip any night of the week and interviewed random people about whether it's wrong to think or act sexually towards someone who is not your spouse, at least half, maybe 3/4ths would say no, or not always, or "It's just sex- just a physical need to be satisfied, like eating or drinking."

Now, we need to be careful in our attitude towards those whose opinion is different from ours. We can't just write them off as 'immoral,' we need to look deeper. Frederica Mathewes-Green is a Christian writer who helped me understand this. She writes, "These [sexually active] students have an objective morality. It's just different from ours. They believe that it's objectively wrong to dump someone in a callous way. It's wrong to have sex with someone who isn't willing. It's wrong to transgress any one of a hundred subtle etiquette cues about who may sleep with whom under what circumstances. There is plenty of objective morality on their side, and they think it's better than ours. As far as they can see, theirs is working and ours looks pointlessly difficult. Why should they switch?"

In other words, why accept the traditional Christian morality on sexuality? But, actually, this is more than just Christian morality- in fact, every major religion in the world agrees on this point, that sex should be reserved for marriage. As Tim Keller likes to say, "Do you know how hard it is to find something on which every major religion agrees?" It's incredibly hard, but this is one of them. The answer as to why to accept the biblical view of sex and marriage, in short, is because it's the greatest safeguard for experiencing real love and acting as fully human people. Christianity teaches that sex is covenantal, something that requires the whole person. If you try to use your sexuality outside of a total covenantal commitment, you'll miss much of the spiritual and emotional beauty of it and it will actually work to divide you in a destructive way.

In the idea that lust keeps us from acting as, and seeing others as, fully human people, professor Dennis Lyle says, "The problem with pornography [and all lust] is not that it shows too much but that it shows too little. It doesn't reveal a totality of the human person... Pornography draws our attention only to the external, so we never really arrive at a true appreciation for the person as he or she is. The person becomes an object ... like a toy or a tool."

If we've established that lust outside of marriage is wrong, then we need to talk about how to fight it, because it's one of the greatest battles many people will fight. And I'm convinced that pornography is the greatest epidemic of our day, especially deadly because, unlike smallpox or Black Death, this is an epidemic that is internal and fairly invisible, but will (and already has) destroy generations of families. I want to comment on 3 things in this story:

David's Weakness

We see this in verse 1. But, before we go further, let me ask you, when I said David's weakness, what came to your mind? We often hear the phrase, "He's got a weakness for the ladies." Being attracted to women is not a weakness, that's the strength of a man- that's how marriages happen and how families get started. The weakness we're talking about is failing to lead and protect your family. This is what happened to David. The text is very explicit, David should have been out at war protecting his country and family.

That often happens- men who are not strong enough to love and protect their families often fall into sexual sin. It's the opposite of the worldly image, which says that you're a stud if you're with a lot of women- no you're not, you're weak and failing at the most basic part of being a man, protecting and honoring your family.

David's Foolishness

We see this in verses 14 and 17, where David starts making bad decisions. In verse 14, he sends his death warrant with Uriah, the very man whose wife he stole and whom he wants to have killed. In that letter, he tells Joab, his general, to put Uriah at the frontline and then to have the other soldiers draw back. Joab realizes that this would get more people than necessary involved in the plan and the text seems to indicate that Joab changes the plan so fewer people are aware of David's wicked intentions, to cover over David's foolishness.

This also is very common- people who are caught in sexual sin often cannot think clearly. There is a riveting account in the book *An Affair of the Mind* where the author tells about her husband, who went, after years of sexual and pornography addiction, from being a corporate executive handling million-dollar accounts to barely being able to work a factory-line job. Adam and Eve learned this lesson painfully, that sin does not make you wiser, but actually more foolish.

David's Conviction

In chapter 12, God sends Nathan to tell a very clever word picture to draw David in and get him to implicate himself. When David reacts against 'the man' who stole another man's only lamb, he is finally caught and made aware of his sin. Nathan declares, "atah ha ish," Hebrew for "You are the man!"

Guys, if you're fooling around, you're going to get caught; either now or in the future, God knows. And you know what: it would probably be the best thing for you! This leads us to some practical defenses we can set up to help guard against this lust.

Practical Defenses/ Offenses

1. Tell someone. One of the reasons sexual sin is so powerful is because it's usually very secretive, which makes it exciting, there's a thrill of being caught. As soon as a secretive sin gets out into the light, it loses some of its power. I've known men who were secretly flirting with an office co-worker, but as soon as they told someone they realized how stupid they were acting. It's better to say 'I am the man' than to have someone else say "atah ha ish", "you are the man."

2. Get others involved in your life. It's not enough to just tell someone once, you need to have people who encourage you and know you. We're going to be starting up community groups in a few weeks. This Fall, on Tuesday mornings I'll be starting a

men's group called the Men of the Covenant, where we'll meet to encourage and pray for each other.

3. Go on the offensive. If you struggle with the internet, get a filter or internet accounting software. I have a program called X3 Watch installed on my computer, which sends a list of every website I'm on to my wife and two men I trust. That's a pretty good deterrent when I feel tempted! If you're going to be staying in a hotel by yourself and you struggle with what you watch, call ahead or have your wife call ahead to turn off the cable or have the TV removed.

4. Learn to 'bounce your eyes,' as one recent book put it, and I would add 'bounce your memories' when you see something that is tempting, or when your mind starts to recall an erotic scene from a movie or magazine you've seen.

And there are other practical things you can do and I would encourage you to think through them and do whatever is necessary to protect yourself. But, if I were to end the sermon here, I would leave you hanging. Because I haven't given you what you really need to fight this battle. It's like this weight-set I just bought at a yard sale. It's sitting in my sunroom; I know how to use it, all the different exercises I can do, and I even know that it would be good for me. The problem is my motivation.

The Heart Issue

What's the deeper motivation here, what I would call the 'heart issue'? John Piper does a great job of picturing it, so I'll let him speak: "There are many practical strategies for being sexually pure in mind and body. I don't demean them. I use them! But with all my heart I know, and with the authority of Scripture I know, that the tiny spaceships of our moral strategies will be useless in nudging the planet of sexuality into orbit, unless the sun of our solar system is the supremacy of Christ." Here's what he's saying. You can set up all the practical defenses in the world, but if you don't deal with your heart, you haven't done the real work and you may even find yourself farther from God than when you were losing the battle!

The heart issue is that you were made to know and enjoy beauty and intimacy. But we too often trade real intimacy for false intimacy. I've often thought about Bruce Marshall's famous saying, "The young man who rings the bell at the brothel is unconsciously looking for God." That young man is looking for intimacy, pleasure and love (all good things, in and of themselves), but he's looking in the wrong place for them.

The hard thing is that evil often looks good, it's very deceptive that way. I've been reading C.S. Lewis' book *The Magician's Nephew* to my girls recently. In it, we first meet Jadis, the White Witch, who is the most beautiful woman young Digory Kirke has ever seen- but also the most evil. At first he is impressed by her and drawn to her, but eventually he realizes that she will destroy him and he learns to fear and fight her, especially after he meets her arch-enemy, Aslan. The key in this battle is to know and be captivated by real beauty so that you will no longer be infatuated with false beauty. It's to be so overwhelmed with the love of a good and eternal thing that you don't need the love of what's only temporary and destructive.

In other words, you need to be captivated by God's love for you if you're ever going to find the power to overcome lust. And where do we look for God's love? You've heard the expression, "greater love has no man than he lay down his life for a friend." The greatest expression of that love is in Jesus' death on the cross, along with

His resurrection and ascension. There we see that God loved us enough to send His only Son to die in our place, and that He has conquered death and ever lives to intercede for us. Think on that: Jesus gave up His life for you and is now walking with you through every trial. He cannot love you any more than He already does, and He will not love you any less. There is incredible power and motivation in that kind of love.

The movie *Good Will Hunting* illustrates this very well. Matt Damon plays Will Hunting, a brilliant young man who also has a troubled past of foster homes and abuse that has made him angry and unable to be open or intimate with anyone. A math professor at MIT recognizes his brilliance, but also realizes that if he doesn't get his anger under control, he's never going to realize his potential and will go back to prison. So, the professor brings in a bunch of psychologists who each try their different strategies on Will. The problem is, Will has read all of their books and makes them each look stupid. Finally, the professor brings in an old friend named Shawn, played by Robin Williams. Instead of using all of his strategies to come above Will and try to fix him, he simply comes alongside him and tries to know him. Shawn can identify with Will, because he also has suffered greatly, having lost his wife to cancer. Will comes to love and depend on Shawn, and it's the beginning of his being able to open up to people and act wisely.

We find proof of this need of love and sacrifice in this passage. Most commentators look at what happens leading up to David's adultery. I think the key lies in what happens *after* he commits adultery. Two key things happen.

He repents. In fact, do you know the only difference between David and Saul? Both sinned, but only one repented. In fact, you could make a case that David's sins were worse- Saul only tried to kill David, he never succeeded and he never took another man's wife. David was the worse sinner- but he repented, whereas Saul never did.

His sin is paid for. The penalty for adultery under the law was death, and Deuteronomy makes it clear that this applied to the king. David should have died for what he'd done. But God spares His life. How? He takes the life of another. David's son is killed instead of David.

There's an intriguing episode in chapter 12 where we see David mourning his infant son's illness. As soon as the child dies, David gets up and stops his mourning, and then he comforts Bathsheeba and they conceive another child- Solomon, whose name literally means "his peace." 2 Samuel 12:20 has an interesting phrase, "Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself." Peter Leithart sees this as a type of 'resurrection' - that because of the death of one, David is able to arise to new life. The child who died is a type, a shadow, of Christ's sacrifice for us.

This is the answer to every sinner's question- why do I need Jesus? Why can't I just do it myself? Oh, you can pay the price yourself. And if you are not trusting in Jesus, you will. But if you want to find life, if you want to find His peace, you will put your faith in the One who died in your place.

Now let me answer an objection here: Didn't David get off easy? Does this mean that my sin's not that bad? NO. The consequences of David's sins are enormous. In fact, the Bathsheeba episode is the pivotal event in 2 Samuel- everything's going well

until that sin and then David loses people's trust, his family goes beserk, and he almost loses the kingdom. But there was grace for David, and there's grace for you.

Battling lust is not easy, and you can't do it on sheer will-power. You need the ultimate motivating factor, the love of God in Christ. The way we win this battle is ultimately through the two-step walk of the gospel, repentance and faith. "I messed up, but I know that God loves me and I can go back to Him. I am a sinner, but Christ paid for my sins and is working to make me like Him."

I'm indebted to Peter Leithart's commentary on 1 & 2 Samuel for some of the exegetical insights, and to 2 excellent books on the gospel and sexuality, *False Intimacy* by Harry Shaumburg and *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ* by John Piper & others.