

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Building Faith at Home Series, Part Two

Jeff Harrison

Flee Sexual Immorality

1 Corinthians 6, Luke 15

Introduction:

A. Mature content warning and prayer

We're continuing our Building Faith at Home series this morning, and the sermon today will continue to frankly cover the topic of sex. Parents, if you'd like to take your kids to Sunday School at this time, our volunteers would love to greet your kids in Jesus' name. The Kindergarten and younger classrooms are down this hall; the elementary classes are outside, up the small flight of stairs, and then in the first door. Let's pray for God's blessing this morning...

B. Heart behind the series

Now, building faith at home is one of our church's core values. God's Word makes it clear that home is an important place of spiritual growth. And I want everyone in our church, to enjoy a Jesus-centered home. And as you know, the choices we and others make sexually can make a profound impact in our homes. And some of those choices are greatly damaging the homes of our churches and country. That's why we need to address the topic of sex.

As we talked about last week, the topic of sex can bring up all sorts of uncomfortable feelings, both for you and the speaker. But I hope and pray that these two weeks remind us about the importance of being a place where we invite God's Spirit and God's people to help us deal with our sexual hurts and struggles. I love you guys, have been praying for you, and encourage you to keep praying for our church family. Let's invite God to start a work in us that leads to embracing His healing and His life-giving truth about our sexuality.

And if you're a parent, I encourage you to also think about how you can pass along these truths to your children. Let's winsomely share why God's glorious design for sex is so worth celebrating and lovingly warn about the consequences of sexual sin. Now it's not easy to have an ongoing, productive conversation with your kids about sex. But, if you don't fill in the blanks for your kids about sex, someone else will. And if you'd like support in having these kinds of conversations, join us tonight at 5 here in the worship center.

C. Review of last week's message

Now, we started our conversation on sex last week. If you missed that message, I encourage you to check it out on our church's website, nwchurch.org. It's important to hear that first message, which celebrates God's glorious design for sex, so that this message on sexual sin can be placed in its appropriate context.

In brief, last week we considered two truths that free us to celebrate God's glorious design for sex. First, we need an awe and love for Jesus. Jesus effortlessly created and sustains 100 billion galaxies, so if there's anyone who knows what your sexuality is designed for, it's the awe-inspiring Creator of it and everything. And Jesus also loved us enough to die for us, so if there's anyone you can trust has your best interests at heart sexually, it's our loving Savior.

Second, it's important to understand that freedom is not the absence of all restrictions. Rather, real freedom comes from finding the right restrictions. The gifted musician embraces the limitation of practice to release the freedom of playing great music. And if you lovingly tell your pet fish, "Hey, buddy don't jump out of your tank" you're not some kill-joy dictator trying to keep your fish from having fun on land. Rather, you realize your fish is designed for water, and he's only truly free if he stays in the water. And we are only truly free sexually when we stay within God's design for it.

Now God designed sex to be between one man and one woman in the context of a monogamous marriage. Only in this committed covenant relationship can the gift of sex really flourish. For it is only in marriage that we are free to fully enjoy the intensely relational nature of sex, free to fully enjoy the physical pleasures of sex, free to be in the best position to parent children, free to honor God's Word and our dignity, and free to reflect the ultimate purpose of sex, pointing us to the intimate love of Jesus and His church.

D. A brief word for those who don't know Jesus

Now, if you don't yet know Jesus, I'm so glad you're here this morning. As we discuss the topic of sex, some of your beliefs may go against what I say. I want you to know that this morning, I am challenging myself and other Christians to obey God's design for sex. In other words, we're really focusing on sexual sin inside the church, not outside of it. As the apostle Paul says, in the book of 1 Corinthians, "What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church?"

And if you've even been mistreated by Christians because of your sexual choices, please accept an apology from me on behalf of the church. Authentic, biblical Christianity loves

everyone, as Jesus did. As we examine the teachings of Jesus, it is very clear that while His followers will not agree with everyone, we are called to love everyone and to seek a good community for all of our neighbors, no exceptions. The story of the Good Samaritan is about sacrificially loving the person who is different from you, and Jesus says Christians are to love even those who persecute us. And Jesus modeled His teaching, sacrificing His very life on behalf of us all.

So while I hope everyone here will embrace God's design for sexuality, my heart's desire for you who don't know Jesus is that you'll start a life-changing relationship with Jesus through faith. And as you explore the Christian faith, it is best to start in the center, Jesus. To focus on whether Jesus is God, whether He really died for your sins and rose from the dead, not to focus on whether you happen to currently agree with all of Christianity's teachings on sex.

I. Sexual Immorality – 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

A. Clarifying what is sexual immorality

So, let's now turn to the subject of sexual immorality. If you've got a Bible, please turn with me to 1 Corinthians 6. 1 Corinthians 6. Please follow along with me as I read, starting in verse 12. ¹²“I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, “Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both.” The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. ¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Look back at verse 18, which says we are to flee sexual immorality. But what is sexual immorality? The term here in the Greek is the word *pornia*. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* defines *pornia* in this verse as “unlawful

sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, fornication.” Stated another way, sexual immorality is any form of sex besides that between one husband and wife in marriage. As we look at the teaching of the Bible, including the passages from last week, it says the gift of sex is designed to be enjoyed by one woman and one man in the context of marriage. In Matthew 5 Jesus warns that anyone who looks at a person lustfully has committed adultery in his heart. And in Matthew 19, verses 1-12, Jesus affirms that his followers’ two choices are to be sexually faithful in marriage or to abstain from sex. I know it’s countercultural, but I believe the Bible teaches that adultery, premarital sex, homosexuality, any masturbation or fantasy that includes lustful thoughts, and pornography are not only wrong, but will not lead to flourishing because they violate God’s design.

B. Is sexual immorality really wrong and harmful?

Look back at verse 18 with me, as we start to see the harm of sexual sin. In verse 18 Paul calls us to flee from sexual immorality, to actively run away from it. Why? Verse 18 says that whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. You have been endowed with incredible dignity, made in the very image of God Himself. And God wants you to see that you are far too precious to profane yourself by sinning sexually. Further, verses 15, 17, and 19 remind Christians that we are intimately connected to Christ and the Holy Spirit. So when you sin sexually, you are also dishonoring God and hindering your ability to enjoy His loving presence.

Look at the end of verse 16. Here Paul goes back to the beginning as he quotes the purpose for marriage and sex from Genesis 2, “the two will become one flesh.” To summarize our current passage, Paul is saying that sex with a prostitute, or any other sexual immorality, is wrong and harmful because sex is designed as a radically intimate, uniting act that only flourishes when it takes place in the radically intimate, united relationship of a marriage. It’s inconsistent and unwise to fully give your precious, dignity-bearing body to someone who has not fully given themselves to you in marriage.

Now someone might still wonder, “What’s the big deal if I watch some porn, or if consenting adults do whatever they want behind closed doors? They’re not hurting anyone.” Well, I invite you to consider where idolizing sexual pleasure has taken our culture. In representative surveys from 2009 and 10, the US Center for Disease Control reports that nearly 1 in 5 college girls had experienced attempted or completed sexual assault just since entering college, and that 1 in 10 high school girls and 1 in 20 high school boys reported that they had

been forced to have sex.¹ 2008 studies in the *Journal of Sexually Transmitted Diseases* examined the rates of STDs in the U.S., finding that our nation had about 110 million STDs, nearly 20 million of which were new that year.² Since *Roe vs. Wade*, the number of abortions in the U.S. is agreed to be in the tens of millions. And a 2010 study by the Educational Development Center found that 10% of Massachusetts high school students had sent a naked picture of themselves via text message in the past year.³

The recent book *Premarital Sex in America: How Young Americans Meet, Mate, and Think about Marrying*, written by two sociologists, completed an in-depth study of single men and women ages 18-23. Regarding pornography, here are three of their findings. First, people who use pornography can experience crushingly unrealistic expectations regarding physical appearance and sexual performance; second, a significant number of male porn-users experience a diminished desire for the difficulties of real relationship and marriage; third, women are increasingly being pressured to behave sexually in ways that mirror porn. Now this same book also shows that despite popular opinion, those who live together first and then chose to marry are more likely to divorce.⁴

In the book *The Meaning of Marriage*, Tim Keller summarizes the thoughts of author Wendell Berry, showing how our sexual ethics affect others. Quote, “The most obvious social cost to sex outside marriage is the enormous spread of disease and the burden of children without sufficient parental support. The less obvious but much greater cost is the exploding number of developmental and psychological problems among children who do not live in stable family environments for most of their lives. Most subtle of all is the sociological fact that what you do in private shapes your character, and that affects how you relate to others in society. When people use sex for individual recreation and fulfillment, it weakens the entire body politic’s ability to live for others. You learn to commodify people and think of them as a means to satisfy your own passing pleasure. It turns out that sex is not just your business, it’s everybody’s business.”⁵

Now some say that sex is wonderful in almost any form and that we should all express our sexuality as we please. But as you think about these statistics and what you observe in our

¹ <http://www.cdc.gov/ViolencePrevention/pdf/SV-DataSheet-a.pdf>

² <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/cdc-110-million-stds-among-us-men-and-women/>

³ http://www.edc.org/sites/edc.org/files/pdfs/APHA_sexting_presentation_fact_sheet.pdf

⁴ Research discussed in the footnotes of *The Meaning of Marriage*, Keller.

⁵ Ibid.

culture, do you really think that our society's sexual ethic leads to respect and safety for kids and women, to a positive body image for everyone, to appropriate sexual expectations, to healthy dating and marriages and families, to seeking the good of others? If you were God and saw all the brokenness in the world related to sex, what would you say?

Verse 13 tells us that the body is for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body. The Bible gives us sexual commands for our flourishing. And when you chose sexual sin, part of what dies is God's best for you and for us. So let's consider what can help us to flee sexual immorality.

II. Suggestions for fleeing sexual immorality

A. Intimacy with God, God's people, and God's mission

First, it's important to seek intimacy with God, God's people, and God's mission. As you draw closer to God and experience more of His love and glory through things like prayer and Scripture, you'll have more desire to please Him and avoid things that hinder your intimacy. We need the character development that can only take place as we invite God into our lives. For to be tempted sexually just means your biology is in good order. However, the ways we respond to those temptations, that's what makes the difference. And as our character grows, as we allow God more and more into our lives, it will make it easier to flee sexual immorality.

Intimacy with God's people is important too - people who love you, who you can confess your sins to, who pray for you, who hold you accountable. If you're struggling with shame because you've been violated, please don't deal with that pain on your own. And if you're trying to meet non-sexual needs in a sexual way, seek instead life-giving Christian relationships; for as more of those non-sexual needs for relationship are met appropriately, sexual temptation will decrease.

Now breaking free from sexual addiction or sexual shame is often difficult, messy work. And sometimes there are underlying issues fueling the sexual sin that also need to be addressed. That's why we need God and His people, and that's why it would be wise for some to also seek the help of a professional Christian counselor. Now going to a counselor is actually a sign of strength; for it shows that you have the adequacy and problem solving skills to work on a difficult challenge in the best way. And of course, if you're married, the most important person to seek intimacy with is your spouse. Some of us need to go on a date this week, or admit that we're struggling as a couple, and seek help.

Now, intimacy with God's mission is important to. In the book *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*, a couple was concerned because their thirteen-year-old daughter dated a guy who encouraged drug use. The parents tried keeping them apart, but it only made things worse. But then the parents decided to take on the mission of raising \$25,000 to build an orphanage for impoverished children in Mexico. And they invited their daughter into that mission, and she started raising money for the orphans. And soon after that, she broke up with her deadbeat boyfriend. Her father remarked, "No girl who plays the role of a hero dates a guy who uses her. She knows who she is. She just forgot for a little while." Parents, are you helping your kids see the glorious opportunity they have to partner with the very King of the Universe on His mission? Are you engaged in the mission yourself? As you have intimacy with God's mission, God's people, and God, it will strengthen your resolve to flee sexual immorality. The best defense is a good offense.

B. Keep in mind current and future consequences

Second, to flee sexual immorality, it's important to keep in mind current and future consequences. God created sex as a wonderful, powerful gift. As we talked about last week, only heroin is more physically pleasurable than sexual excitement. It's why sexual temptation can be so strong, and why sexual sin can even initially feel like a good thing. And that's why it's important to think about what kind of sexual choices you are making, and where they lead.

Please don't watch or read or fantasize about things that train your mind for polygamy and invite damaging addictions. Please don't let the way you dress and interact with others train you to only get excited about new attention. Please don't let sex keep you in the wrong relationship, or out of the right one. Please don't look for emotional support in the wrong places, for it is easy to let strong feelings justify sinful behavior. Please don't buy into the lie that anyone *needs* sex – no one has ever died from lack of sex. And please, never, ever bargain with lust, for it is always lying to you. As many have observed, sex is like fire. When kept in the right place, it can be life-giving and wonderful, like fire in a fireplace on a cold winter night. But when it is not kept in the right place, it will damage and eventually lead to death. If the Spirit's convicting you this morning, for His sake and yours, get help and flee sexual immorality.

C. Put life-giving boundaries in place

Third, put life-giving boundaries in place. Perhaps a great step to take today would be to get web-filtering and internet accountability software like is found at covenanteyes.com. Or

maybe you need to immediately create more distance between you and that fellow student or co-worker that you're a little too flirty with, and have a little too personal of conversations with. For your current and future relationships with God, friends, and family are far too important to not put wise, life-giving boundaries in place today.

D. Enjoy the fatherly love of God

And finally, to flee sexual immorality, embrace the fatherly love of God. Back in college I was stuck in a pattern of sexual sin. One Sunday morning, the pastor asks everyone to close their eyes and picture God looking down at us. He then asks us, "What expression does God have on His face?" In that moment I pictured my heavenly Father frowning and shaking His head at me with great disapproval, even a little disgust. Do you ever feel like God's looking at you in that way?

Now to be clear, conviction by the Spirit, godly sorrow over sin, and repentance are good things that can lead to experiencing forgiveness and growth. However, my view of God was wrong, and it hindered our relationship. For every time I returned to sexual sin, I'd beat myself up about it afterwards, telling myself things like "You're such an idiot for doing that again." Now I did this because I thought it somehow helped me get back in God's good standing, to remove His frown. I was living as if my relationship as God's child was based on Christ's death and resurrection *plus* me generating enough guilty, shameful feelings when I sinned. And it's tough to draw close to a God you think is frowning on you much of the time, making one even more vulnerable to sexual temptation.

God doesn't want His children to live this way. Life in Christ is not about carrying the heavy burden of your sins. As Romans 8:1 says, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." That day in church started an important change. Over time, God helped me see that I can only receive my sonship as a gift. As the hymn says, "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to your cross I cling."

Now God, like any good Father, is grieved by our sin and serious about our growth. But because of Christ's work, I am always God's child. And when His children sin, even habitually, God is not shaking His head with disgust at you or me. Let's see our Father's posture towards us as we consider the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15.

Conclusion:

A. Repent and return to our gracious God – Luke 15:11-32

Please turn with me to Luke chapter 15. So there's a Father with two sons. The younger demands his share of the estate, a very shameful act that means he wishes his father was dead. The son then leaves his home and its values, setting off for a distant country and wasting his illegitimate wealth in wild, sinful living. After losing all his money and friends, the son hits rock bottom. Filthy and starving, he decides to return home and ask his Father to hire him as a servant. Let's pick it up in verse 20.

²⁰So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

Here is Rembrandt's famous painting of this scene. I invite you to look at it, and see God's face towards every one of His wayward children. He's not shaking His head at you in disgust if you're in sexual sin. As the story says, He's filled with compassion for you, longing to see you return home so He can throw His arms around you and kiss you.

Recently I was looking at this picture, and thinking about the parable. My thoughts turned to my son Grant. Now Grant is only two, but I imagined him as a young man. What if he got in with a bad crowd, got addicted to drugs, rejected us and God, and stole money from us as he fled for another country. We're praying for him daily as we miss him and wonder if he's still alive. And then one day, Stephanie, myself, and our daughter Kate are outside in the front yard. And I see Grant at the edge of our street, limping towards us, looking as pathetic as the younger son does here, filthy undergarments covering his underweight frame, one of his sandals falling off, clearly broken from the painful path he has chosen. And I imagine myself, running towards Grant, hugging him close, and weeping.

As I thought about that scene, God just overwhelmed me with an incredibly powerful sense of His fatherly love for me. As the Father responded in the parable, in that moment I'm not interested in demanding an explanation or evaluating Grant's choices, I'm just so thankful my son is home. And if you've left God and His ways, take it from a father, our heavenly Father longs to welcome you home. If that's you today, won't you come to His loving embrace?

B. Band plays “Beautiful Things”

Now the worship team will lead us in singing “Beautiful Things” together. As they come to the front, please receive this quote from author Paula Reinhart.

“God’s heart is always to redeem – to reach into the fire of our own making and by his mercy pull out the good. Only God can bring blessing where we have sown a curse... right in the middle of the mess you have made, he carves a door of hope and pours his very life in and through you. He gives you beauty for the ashes of shame and failure. He makes new.”⁶

C. Conclusion

Amen, thank you worship team. Elders and wives, please come to the front. Now in light of what we’ve heard from Scripture today, if anyone desires someone to talk to, or pray with, the elders and elder’s wives up here this morning would love to connect with you.

Let’s pray now to our loving, heavenly Father, who’s always ready to welcome us home...

Dismissal - Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

⁶ From *Sex and the Soul of a Woman*