

## I. Set Up / Welcome.

A. Today we turn to the last of the Seven Deadly Sins. The topic is lust and the message has been rated PG13. Given the climate of today's culture, it's hard to imagine that anything said this morning will shock anyone. We are a long way from the days when Rob and Laura Petry – though married – slept in separate beds. Nevertheless, we do not want to rob any children of their innocence or catch any parents off guard. We think it would be best for children 7<sup>th</sup> grade and below to take advantage of the wonderful children's programs available during the worship service.

B. In 2 Cor. the Apostle Paul instructs us to hold every thought captive to Christ. We'll hear more about that in a bit. What is worth starting with is that one of the easiest ways to block out inappropriate thoughts is to be overwhelmed with the goodness and greatness of God. Right now...

II. Video – MJW at health club. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

A. This past week the staff awarded me with a Troscar – it's like an Oscar only it looks like a troll and I won in the category, "Video Shorts That Have No Content." I was actually thinking I deserved whatever award you get for being willing to make a complete idiot of yourself or "acting without talent."

B. When you ask people to name the Seven Deadly Sins, lust is the one that almost everyone remembers.<sup>2</sup> I suspect this has always the case. In Dante's *Divine Comedy* those who gave in to lust resided in the first circle of hell. In part this was because the first circle was the highest up – the farthest from Satan – indicating Dante's view that it was the least serious of the sins. But it was in part because it was so common.

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<sup>1</sup> Quotes: 1) We have deceived ourselves by the smallness of our surrenders. Derek Kidner; 2) I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will; 3) ~~Lust and greed are more gullible than innocence.~~ Mason Cooley; 4) The desire of love is to give. The desire of lust is to get. Author Unknown

<sup>2</sup> It's worth distinguishing between "worst" and "most common." Theologians debate whether pride, envy or sloth is the worst. Some today may say lust is worst because it's most common. I suspect few would say lust is the worst sin.

C. And that was a while ago, before women's swim suits were reduced to nothing, before sex became a mainstay of advertising. We know lust was the high profile sin back in 1941 when Dorothy Sayers gave a speech entitled, "The Other Six Deadly Sins." Sayers was so frustrated by her sense that we had reduced "immorality" down to lust that she wrote, "a man might be greedy and selfish; spiteful, cruel, jealous, and unjust; violent and brutal; grasping, unscrupulous, and a liar; stubborn and arrogant; stupid, morose, and dead to every noble instinct" and still not be deemed "immoral" – for, lo, he has kept his zipper zipped." She went on to note, "I am reminded of a young man who once said to me with perfect simplicity: I did not know there were Seven Deadly Sins; please tell me the names of the other six."

D. Clearly, to many people's way of thinking, lust is the deadly sin.

E. On the one hand this is a bit odd. After all, Jesus said less about sexual sin than he did about any of the others. On the other hand, maybe not. We live in a hyper-sexualized culture, and what Christ did say about lust didn't leave much wiggle room.

F. You may be aware of all of this, but given that the traditional sexual ethic is no longer widely embraced, and given how dramatically the ground is shifting underneath us, my sense is that it's worth backing up to the basics. Sex is now one of those areas where common sense is not so common.

### III. I have seven points:

A. One: God is pro-sex.

A.1. It's all His idea. He made us as sexual beings. He is the one who wired us for pleasure. He is the one who designed the parts to fit together the way they do. He made us sexual beings for the purpose of: consummating marriage, expressing love, making babies and having fun.<sup>3</sup> God is not against sex, surprised by it or in any way a prude.

A.2. If you doubt any of this just read the Book. Pay particular attention to passages such as:

A.2.a) Deut 24:5 where Moses instructs newly married soldiers not to go on campaign but to stay home and "cheer" their wives

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<sup>3</sup> The Platonist sees sex as bad, the hedonist views sex for pleasure, the romantic view suggests that sex is to make us happy. In contrast, the biblical perspective of human sexuality – which reserves sexual intercourse exclusively for marriage – is that sex is to: 1) establish a one-flesh union (Gen. 2:24-25; Matt. 19:4-6); 2) provide for intimacy within the marriage bond; 3) be a source of mutual pleasure (Prov. 5:18-19), and 4) procreate the race. (Gen. 1:28).

A.2.b) Or I Cor. 7:4, where Paul writes: The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other...

A.2.c) The Song of Solomon is filled with enough barefaced rejoicing in sexual pleasure that many blush and single Hebrew men were not supposed to read it.<sup>4</sup>

A.2.d) Proverbs 5:18 reads: May your fountain be blessed, & may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer, may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love.

A.3. The church has not always gotten this message out, but the message has always been there. God is pro-sex.

B. Two: Our sexuality has been affected by sin.

B.1. Like everything else on this planet, what was pure and innocent and altogether good has been corrupted. What was designed to be a gift shared between one man and one woman joined together in a mutually-honoring, life-time commitment, has been corrupted by selfishness, power and lust.

B.2. The Bible teaches that sex has the potential to be a wonderful blessing and a powerful connecting force. But – like fire, like food, like nuclear fusion – it can be as bad as it is good. Its potential for joy is matched by a potential to destroy.<sup>5</sup>

C. Consequently, Number Three: There are rules

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<sup>4</sup> If you want the NC17 version, read it in the Hebrew, where there the language is suggestive enough that the Jews did not allow single men to read it.

<sup>5</sup> To be sure, this is not the view of everyone in our culture. Many contend that there are no moral absolutes; that we are simply physical beings and that lust is not only perfectly natural it is perfectly harmless – not “a victimless crime,” but no crime at all. Others see the need for some restraint. They recognize that the “free love” experiments of the 60s did not work. But they would dismiss what I’m advocating as Victorian. “We need to roll things back just a bit, but let’s not get carried away.” What I am setting before you is what God has laid out in this Book. When Jimmy Carter confessed to committing lust in his heart John Updike noted that the reaction of the press was “nervous hilarity.” “How strangely on modern ears falls the notion that lust – sexual desire that wells up in us as involuntarily as saliva – in itself is wicked.” Many would argue that lust is not just a fundamental right, but that it is a necessary component for our economy.

C.1. Because sex is dangerous and because our corrupted desires are not a safe guide for what is right or best, God has provided us with laws to govern sex.

C.1.a) Exodus 20:14. Do not commit adultery

C.1.b) Exodus 20:17: Do not covet your neighbor's wife

C.1.c) In Matthew 5 Jesus says, Do not lust. Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

C.1.d) Hebrews 13:4: Keep the marriage bed pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

C.2. These laws are not there because God is a cosmic cold shower, but to protect us and to protect sex. Don't miss this.

C.2.a) They protect us because sex can be so overwhelming. There is nothing quite like it. It causes people – men especially – to make real idiots of themselves! People will lie and cheat. Otherwise rational, thoughtful people will do the craziest things when their sexual desires jump the tracks. God's laws are there to protect us from ourselves.

C.2.b) And God's laws are there to protect sex, because it turns out that sex is not only sacred it's fragile. God designed sex to be a strong glue that bonds one man and one woman to each other. This is the Scotch Tape theory of sex I've shared before. The tape works best when it goes down once. If you peel it up and use it a second time it doesn't work so well. If you use it a third time it works even less well. It loses its stickiness. The same is true of sex. Sex binds people best when it binds them once.

C.3. We have lots of supporting data on this. Study after study shows that the women who report the best sex lives – that is, the most sex, the most enjoyable sex, who are the most happily married – are religious women who have been sexually monogamous their entire lives.<sup>6</sup> One partner. Because that is the way God made us. A woman finds greatest sexual joy in the context of an all-encompassing, total life union with someone to whom they can be committed with reckless abandon. With whom they are safe, loved and unconditionally accepted. Forget worrying about whether or not the kids are going to walk in, there is no fear that the man is going to walk out. They are one. God's laws lead to that. God's laws lead to the greatest joy.

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<sup>6</sup> And one of the greatest turn-ons for women is praying with their husbands. Who knew? God did!

C.4. The same actually holds for men, though it's different. When it comes to sex, men and women are different. I assume you've noticed. The differences go beyond the architecture. I'm speaking in generalities, but women (as opposed to men) are more dialed in on the emotional relationship than the sexual event. It's been said that women "use sex to get love" whereas men will "leverage love to get sex." Now, men do not simply want sex. They want sex with a partner who loves them. They want to feel wanted.<sup>7</sup> But the sex part seems to be more important for the man. Offer a woman a choice between sex and chocolate and it's anyone's guess. It's never a guess for a guy.<sup>8</sup>

C.5. There are other differences. Men are more visually stimulated than woman are, which is why there are a lot more pictures of naked women out there than naked men. Playboy magazine took off; Playgirl not so much.<sup>9</sup> Women, on the other hand, favor romance novels and, increasingly, erotic literature. I would submit *Fifty Shades of Gray* series as evidence. I've not read it, but I've read enough about it to know that while it's not porn as classically defined, it's designed to arouse – to elicit a sexual response. Men and women are different.

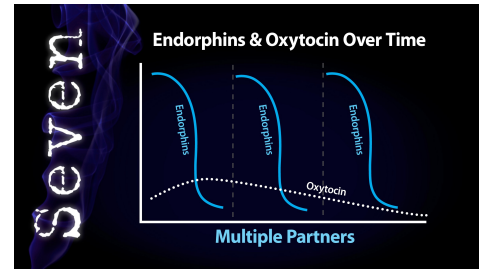
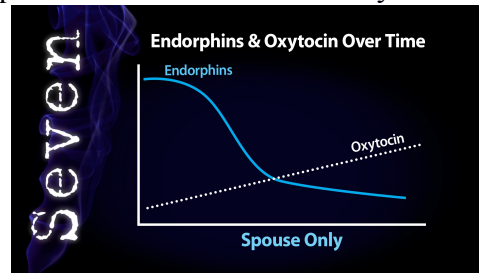
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<sup>7</sup> In research conducted by Feldhan, 97 percent of men said that getting sex was not enough. They wanted to be wanted by the woman as well.

<sup>8</sup> What is the joke? If a woman is asked by her husband to describe a perfect evening, she talks about a long walk with deep conversation, a nice meal, music – the description could go on for some time. If a guy is asked by his wife to describe a perfect evening he says, "I'm watching football and you show up naked." We are visual.

<sup>9</sup> These are generalizations. There is a growing woman's porn problem. Some women, especially those exposed to pornography at a very early age, are more visually stimulated than in the past. But Playgirl magazine never enjoyed the success of Playboy.

C.6. Back to my point about rules to “protect sex.” What we recently learned about men is that God has set us up to bond as well. BRAIN CHEMISTRY CHART. This chart notes two types of chemicals dumped into the male brain during sex. The levels of endorphins is highest when a man is with someone new – or looking at a picture of someone new. But there is a second chemical (oxytocin) that acts like glue. And it builds over time provided the man is monogamous. God cements couples together – provided they are faithful. Over time – twenty years – sex with the same person gets better provided no other people enter the equation.<sup>10</sup>



C.7. As a pastor I’m no longer surprised by the number of sexless marriages I run across. Couples – young couples – who say things like, “The sex part doesn’t work for us. We’re past that. It’s too complicated. We’re just looking for help getting along for the sake of the kids.” Men and women, sex is not that complicated, but it is fragile! That is why a loving God has given us rules to follow – rules to protect us and to protect sex so that it keeps working and is able to act like glue. You cannot build a marriage around sex, but sex can certainly help strengthen a marriage.<sup>11</sup>

C.8. There is a grand positive behind every restriction God sets before us, a loving reason for every “thou shalt not.” The Biblical prohibitions against sexual

<sup>10</sup> Sex is largely a mind game and our largest sexual organ is our brain. And, God actually knows how what He designed works best and so He gave us rules to govern it.

<sup>11</sup> Sin is never the best path. It is always second rate b/c it is damaged good. As Peter Kreeft writes: Evil can’t be greater than good b/c evil is a bent good, a diseased good, a parasite on good. You can not have destruction without something to destroy. You can not have sexual immorality, perversion or pornography if the beauty and joy of sex and marriage did not come first. Rick James, *Flesh: An Unbreakable Habit of Purity in a Pornographic World*, WSN, 2004, p. 37.

immorality are not intended to deny us something pleasant, but to protect something that is wonderful but fragile.<sup>12</sup> The ones who follow the rules win.<sup>13</sup>

#### D. Four: Lust is a Sin

D.1. I John 2:15-16 reads: Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.

D.2. Lust is sin. It separates us from God. Lust – that is, obsessive or excessive thoughts or desires of a sexual nature – is a sin.<sup>14</sup>

D.3. I am not talking about desire in marriage. In the early chapters of Genesis we read that “a man is to leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife.” The term for cleave – to “cling” – describes “a man’s deep attraction for a woman, almost to the point of irresistibility.”<sup>15</sup> Desire in marriage is not lust.

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<sup>12</sup> His laws are always for our best. God is for you: 1) In Psalm 84:11 we are told that he does not withhold any good thing from us; 2) In Romans 8:32 we are told that he did not spare his own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; 3) If He was willing to sacrifice His own Son then, obviously, he has our best interest in mind; 4) We are foolish to second guess his infinite wisdom! If you are single you need to recognize that sexual relations are not essential – you can be a full and complete person. Jesus was! If you are married recognize that your sexual energy needs to be channeled into your relationship with your wife – alone. And that your commitment to her is to be like Christ’s commitment to the church. (Eph. 5:21-23)

<sup>13</sup> Note: I am choosing not to even begin to unpack the problems of sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Suffice it to say, God’s laws protect us from ourselves.

<sup>14</sup> Let me come at this a different way. The term for having sex before you are married is *fornication*. The term for having sex with someone other than your husband or wife is *adultery*. The term for wanting to or imagining having sex with someone other than the person you are married to is *lust*.

<sup>15</sup> Ike Miller, *A Man’s Perspective: The History of Lust*.

D.4. I'm also not talking about temptation. Being sexually tempted is not a sin. Jesus was tempted.<sup>16</sup> It is not wrong to be sexually attracted to someone other than your spouse. In some settings it is impossible not to be. Noticing is not a sin, but noticing can lead there.<sup>17</sup> Lust starts with noticing. Lust is what happens when we do not actively redirect our eyes or thoughts. Lust is what happens when we have an undisciplined mind.

D.5. It may or may not have been a sin for David to look down on Bathsheeba while she was bathing. I actually think he knew what he'd see if he went out on the balcony at that time of night. Regardless, not walking off the balcony right away was a mistake. He allowed temptation to become lust and then allowed lust to become adultery. It ruined his life. He was never the same. He was forgiven – his relationship with God was restored. We can always be forgiven! – but forgiveness doesn't remove the consequences, and the consequences of his actions were devastating.

D.6. We are quite casual about lust today. It's considered normal. It's expected. It's a victimless crime among those who still think of it as a crime. Jesus had a very different view. I already referenced Christ's comments on lust from the Sermon on the Mount, but let me read them to you from a contemporary paraphrase.

D.6.a) "You know the next commandment pretty well, too: 'Don't go to bed with another's spouse.' But don't think you've preserved your virtue simply by staying out of bed. Your *heart* can be corrupted by lust even quicker than your *body*. Those leering looks you think nobody notices—they also corrupt.

D.6.b) "Let's not pretend this is easier than it really is. If you want to live a morally pure life, here's what you have to do: You have to blind your

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<sup>16</sup> Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, but was without sin.

<sup>17</sup> As Agnieszka Tennant writes, even people who are happily married: "are occasionally broadsided by unwieldy yearning. Misguided cravings do not discriminate b/w single and the married, the celibate & the promiscuous. They plop onto your lap unannounced. You see someone, & suddenly you want to do something – often something that is not yours to do. Like it or not, think healthily about it or not, pray against it or not – desire happens." Agnieszka Tennant, *Desire Happens*, Christianity Today, April 2007, p. 80.



right eye the moment you catch it in a lustful leer. You have to choose to live one-eyed or else be dumped on a moral trash pile.<sup>18</sup>

D.7. There is no allowance for any “window shopping” or “innocent” flirtation in those words. Jesus employs hyperbole to say: take extreme measures not to do it. And by not “do it” he doesn’t suggest that we need only keep the strict letter of the law, he argues that we need to have a clean mind. Jesus changes the ban from actual adultery to lust.<sup>19</sup>

D.8. Temptation is not a sin, but lust is. To paraphrase Martin Luther, we may not be able to keep the birds from flying over our head, but we better keep them from making a nest in our hair.<sup>20</sup> This means we must control who and what we think about. We must “hold every thought captive to Christ.”<sup>21</sup>

E. Five: Pornography is sin.<sup>22</sup>

E.1. The whole point of pornography is lust. The issues we are dealing with today go beyond porn. You could never look at pornography and still lust. But today it’s impossible to comment on lust without commenting on porn because.<sup>23</sup>

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18 Matthew 5:27, The Message

19 Writing on this passage, St. John Chrysostom wrote: “Rather, if thou desirest to look and find pleasure, look at thine own wife, and love her continually; no law forbids that. But if thou art to be curious about the beauties that belong to another, thou art injuring both thy wife by letting thine eyes wander elsewhere, and her on whom thou hast looked, by touching her unlawfully. Since, although thou hast not touched her with the hand, yet hast thou caressed her with thine eyes; for which cause this also is accounted adultery...” (*John Chrysostom’s Homilies on St. Matthew* Part One (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843), 256.

20 Crawford Loritz suggests that it’s the third look that gets us into trouble. He says the first look is innocent and the second glance is to confirm that we just saw what we saw – and those happen almost without conscious thought. It’s the third glance that gets us into trouble. Most writers say trouble starts with the second glance. Let’s agree that the clock has started with the first intentional look. At that point we are choosing to move into harm’s way.

21 The citation is 2 Cor. 10:4f. Frederica Mathewes-Green notes, “Nearly all sins begin with thinking about sin. Control your thoughts and you have a good head start on behavior.”

E.1.a) Porn has become so ubiquitous. You used to have to go out of your way to find it. You now have to go out of your way to avoid it.

E.1.b) And because porn is so problematic. I hear from men who feel trapped in addiction and I hear from wives who are thoroughly rattled by their husband's or son's addictions. And I occasionally hear from women who are addicted or couples who are wondering if it's OK for them to watch porn together. Clearly, porn is mainstream. It has lost much of its stigma.

E.1.c) So let me be clear: it's wrong; it is a sin.

E.2. I am not suggesting that there is anything wrong with the human body. Nor am I suggesting that there is anything surprising about being powerfully drawn to provocative pictures of the human body. Men in particular are particularly drawn to naked women. I can tell you exactly where I was when – as a third-grader walking home from school, an older boy pulled out a Playboy centerfold and I saw my first picture of a naked woman. I didn't have to be told to like it. I remember being mesmerized. There is nothing surprising about that, but pornography is wrong. It objectifies women; it cheapens marriage;<sup>24</sup> it treats something that is sacred as if it's casual;<sup>25</sup> it fuels an underground that perpetuates rape, abuse and sexual trafficking.

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<sup>22</sup> I am not going to try to define porn. Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart wrote that it was hard to define what was sexually obscene, but “he knew it when he saw it.” It can be hard, sometimes, to divide art from pornography. But, we can generally tell. Yes *National Geographic* magazines were not designed as pornography but they definitely pushed the buttons of 12 year old boys. But let's be real big enough to admit that if you want art you are downtown at the Art Museum. The pictures in the magazines or on the web are never going to hang there. Part of what separates art from pornography is that the second is designed to produce desire. Pornography is what appears in Playboy Magazine, and what people would complain was missing if it was pulled. Or, to quote Charles Rembar's famous line from his 1968 book *The End of Obscenity*, “porn is in the groin of the beholder.”

<sup>23</sup> A third reason is because pornography has become so vile. As one commentator wrote, “This is not your father's pornography.”

<sup>24</sup> When the Bible refers to human sexual organs, it often employs euphemisms and indirect language. Although there are some exceptions (a woman's breasts and womb are sometimes mentioned), generally Scripture maintains a basic modesty towards a man's or woman's sexual organs. Pornography also leads to practices that the Bible condemns: sexual exposure (Gen. 9:21-23); adultery (Lev. 18:20); bestiality (Lev. 18:23), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13); incest (Lev. 18:6-18); prostitution (Deut. 23:17-18).

E.3. And there are a host of other problems with it as well. Such as this: it's deceptively thin and shallow. One of the problems with porn is that the pictures mislead by showing too little. Set aside the lie that the models look like their pictures or that those pictured (typically women) are interested and available to the attention of some random sexual partner,<sup>26</sup> the most profound deception is the suggestion that the picture represents or captures the essence of the person. A picture is not a person. When God talked about the union between Adam and Eve, He used the verb *yada* – “to know.” It is a holistic term. It describes the merging of lives. Porn is the opposite of that. It reduces people made in the image of God into something very thin.

E.4. Additionally, porn is also addictive, especially internet porn.<sup>27</sup> Our understanding of this is limited, but it's expanding. A few years ago I read an article by a neurosurgeon in which he claimed to be able to tell by looking at a brain whether the person was addicted to porn. He said that he wasn't always able to distinguish between internet porn and crack cocaine, but there were telltale physiological features present in a brain of those addicted to both. I sent the article to Mike Walsh, a friend and neurosurgeon, and asked if this was true. He said it was. Pornography is addictive and Internet pornography is particularly vicious. Because it is sin it is subject to the same laws of diminishing returns. It demands more and more and gives less and less back. As a result the same high demands longer viewing or more shocking pictures. What excites today will not excite tomorrow. It is a slippery slope into an abyss of despair.<sup>28</sup>

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25 There is no such thing as casual sex.

26 As Steve Martin once asked, “Do you know that look a woman gives you when she can't wait to rip her clothes off and jump into your arms? Neither do I.”

27 Internet porn is especially pernicious because it is anonymously available and essentially unlimited. Greg Gutfield, writing in *Men's Health*, states: “What makes sex online far more compelling than any shrink-wrapped smut is instant gratification in endless variety – you never get to the end of the magazine and have to start looking at the same pictures again. With old porn, once you view it, you've consumed it. You've chewed the flavor out of the gum. This can't be done on the Net. The gum never runs out of flavor. A new piece of flesh waits behind every old one, and expectation bids you to go further. Much further. Because as long as there's more to come, you'll keep looking. This is all so new. No stimulus like this ever existed before.”

E.5. I can go on. Porn leads to comparisons which leaves real people – wives in particular – unable to compete.<sup>29</sup> Naomi Wolf, the feminist writer recently wrote, “in today’s world real women are just bad porn.”<sup>30</sup> Porn makes people miserable.<sup>31</sup> I could go on, suffice it to say, God really does know best. Porn is sin.

F. Six: Our culture makes sexual purity difficult.

F.1. God is pro-sex; our sexuality is affected by sin; there are rules; lust is a sin; pornography is a sin, number six: our culture is making it harder and harder to maintain something approximating sexual purity.

F.2. Cultures are not neutral. None are perfect but some are better than others, at least on some points. There is much to celebrate in ours. But our sexual ethic is not one of them. Our culture is in serious decline.

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28 Pornography leads to two ends: 1) increasingly prurient forms of porn. Soft porn leads to hard porn. And hard porn can lead to strip clubs or prostitutes or sexual violence. In extreme cases it serves as a gateway drug to truly horrendous acts. Not in every case, but we are told that pedophiles and rapists and the Ted Bundys of the world almost always are big purveyors of porn; 2) impotence. Normal sex becomes boring. We not only see this with people but with whole cultures. In the 1970s Denmark removed all of their anti-obscenity laws. This led to a spike in interest in sex, which was followed by a continuous decline. Today, “the most common immediate reaction to a one-hour pornography stimulation is boredom.” The quote is taken from *Reefer Madness*, by Eric Schlosser. In it Schlosser advocates that we remove all laws against porn because that would demystify it. (He highlights how many of those who publicly oppose porn secretly consume it.) One of the effects of a society that moves into porn is a dramatically falling birthrate. I read some very interesting articles by women complaining that men are increasingly passive wimps. In an article entitled, *From Pornography to Withdrawl*, by Adriadne von Schirach, she complains that the more pornographic German society becomes the less men pursue women and the fewer babies anyone is having. She says that Germany is becoming a “masturbatory society” where men have little energy left for the hunt or for the real work of a real relationship with a real woman. Another woman, Jennifer Roback Morse, writing at Townhall.com, states, “Dude, masturbating in front of a computer screen is not natural behavior. The nature argument is that men get more aroused by visual stimuli, not that they prefer the virtual to the actual. If you spend all night surfing the net when there is a live woman in your life, you don’t get to play the ‘nature card.’ Honestly, can you imagine our primeval ancestors staring at pornographic cave paintings rather than chasing live women?”

29 People addicted to porn are not happy. But it becomes an addiction that many men feel powerless to break. Craig Gross, who runs XXXChurch and has a ministry to people in the porn industry and an outreach to Christians, says that while it’s hard to get Christians talking about porn, it is not hard to get people in the industry talking about God because they are so miserable. They so desperately want a normal life. Gross also says that you can become addicted to Internet porn in 3 days. If 0 is no problems at all, and 5 is addicted – by which he means you end up looking at some form or porn every day – he believes you can move from 0 to 5 in three days. And be virtually powerless to break the habit on your own at that point.

F.3. Fifteen years ago we fought to keep adult bookstores away from kids – to keep them relegated to “the bad parts of town.” Now everything once available only there is piped into our living rooms and finds its way into the hands of our children. To quote Faith Popcorn, porn is norm. Our culture is “pornified.”<sup>32</sup>

F.4. We are not the first culture to head down this path. Societies either fall to an outside power or crumble from within. Most of those who crumble from within do so in large part because they allow sex to jump the banks of traditional behavior.<sup>33</sup>

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30A study conducted by Douglas Kenrick at Arizona State University found that men looking at pornography rated their wives as less attractive than those who looked at abstract art. Set aside guilt and decreased self-esteem, pornography diminishes the joy of marital sex. Naomi Wolf, a prominent writer and feminist, wrote the following in a NY Times piece. “For two decades, I have watched young women experience the continual “mission creep” of how pornography—and now Internet pornography—has lowered their sense of their own sexual value and their actual sexual value. When I came of age in the seventies, it was still pretty cool to be able to offer a young man the actual presence of a naked, willing young woman. There were more young men who wanted to be with naked women than there were naked women on the market. If there was nothing actively alarming about you, you could get a pretty enthusiastic response by just showing up. For the first time in human history, the images’ power and allure have supplanted that of real naked women. Today, real naked women are just bad porn.” Naomi Wolf, *The Porn Myth*, Oct. 13, 2003.

31 Second, it frustrates. This shouldn’t surprise us, sin is always ultimately frustrating. It is defective good. It is always based on a lie. It may give us what we want in the short term, but it will always fail to satisfy in the end. We are wired to move from arousal to intimacy with a real person – the one who aroused us. With porn that doesn’t happen.

32 Several years ago Faith Popcorn announced that “Porn is norm.” It was not an endorsement, just a prediction that media technology would push the limits on what was acceptable in a culture of instant gratification until porn had moved out of the back allies and onto the main streets. In one of her reports she noted that porn would become the norm. It has.

33 I’ve not been asked directly if “I want sex with that” in the same way that McDonalds tries to add fries to anything you order, but I think that’s because it now comes standard. Sex is used to sell everything from beer, cars and clothing to movies, music, vacations, soda and the 6 o’clock news. There is little marketers won’t do to catch your eye. The fact that it objectifies women, sexualizes your children, weakens the bond of sex in marriage, strengthens the link between sexuality and violence and creates disillusionment with real bodies is all just collateral damage.

F.5. We are not the first to head down this path, but we are now racing down it.<sup>34</sup> In the last forty years we moved from *Father Knows Best* and *The Andy Griffith Show* to 500 channels of everything imaginable. And we moved from *Playboy* magazine 1970 to Internet porn.<sup>35</sup> Images previously unthinkable in public life adorn billboards for all to see. You have to leave the West for a while – camp in Africa for a few weeks and reset your gauges in order to appreciate how low we have sunk.<sup>36</sup>

F.6. It has happened quickly. Forty years ago Elvis shocked the nation with a few hip gyrations, Marilyn Monroe shocked our sensibilities in modest bathing suits and Hugh Hefner went to jail for publishing pictures of topless women.<sup>37</sup>

F.7. There are signs that we might not survive this. We are watching countries fall into demographic death-spirals. Men – who used to get married and become fathers – now just look at porn.<sup>38</sup>

F.8. I could go on, but you get the point. Our culture is in trouble, and though we know it, we have little appreciation for how much trouble we are in – for how many little concessions we have made. The situation is bleak.<sup>39</sup>

G. Seven: There is hope.

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34 One man recently confided to me that he sort of wished he'd been born 150 years ago because then he wouldn't have the problems with lust he know has because the opportunity would not be there. "If I were born 150 years ago and wanted to see a naked women I'd have to walk three miles to a neighbor's home and risk getting caught looking in their window if I had any hope of seeing someone undressed. Now it is just a click away."

35 Most kids today find – or stumble across – pornography: 1) 80% of 15 – 17 year olds have had multiple exposures to hard core porn (John Coleman, *Porn in the USA*, **Salvo**, Spring 2007, p. 21); 2) The average age of first exposure is 11 (Marcia Segelstein, What Parents Need to Know About Porn and Their Kids, OneNewsNow, 2/24/2009.); c) 20% of kids under the age of 17 have been sexually solicited on-line.

36 It's a much darker world today. Statistics contend that ninety percent of 8 – 16 year olds have viewed pornography. In most cases this means that a child's first exposure to physical love – "something we believe is a holy mystery close to the heart of who we are as God's creatures – comes at the hands of sleazy spewers of lies." Jason Byassee, *Not Your Father's Pornography*, **First Things**, January 2008, p. 15f.

37 John Coleman, *Porn in the USA*, **Salvo**, Spring 2007, p. 20.

G.1. There are always ways forward for those who turn to God. There are always ways forward. We can move in the right direction and that brings life and hope. I couldn't do this job if I didn't believe that. God forgives sinners who repent.

IV. So, how do we move forward? What – other than grow depressed – do we do? Let me suggest five things

A. First, realize what we are up against. Fire is fire. Better men and women than you or me have gone down in flames because they underestimated the challenges of our disordered sexual desire. Every misstep we take – every line we cross – not only leads to trouble, it makes trouble that much easier the next time.<sup>40</sup>

B. Flee sexual temptation. Run don't walk to get away. Make no provision for the flesh. We are seldom more faithful than our options, so limit the options. Don't let yourself get in situations where you are going to fail. Remove temptations. In talking to men I tell them that it's not just that I don't trust them, I don't trust myself. I use Covenant Eyes on my computers – which don't limit my searches in any way but report inappropriate searches to two of my friends – because I don't trust myself. I don't think, "this can't happen to me." I think, it most certainly can. When it comes to sexual sin we are not told to stand strong and fight, we are told to run.

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38 Years ago I met an environmental psychologist. Who knew there was such a thing? I asked what he did and he explained that one of his recent projects was designing a way to keep a certain destructive insect from multiplying and destroying crops without using harmful pesticides. To do so he isolated the pheromone that attracted the males to the females. In nature this molecule occurs one part in ten billion. But the male can smell it and track it and find the female wherever she is up to three miles away. To prevent this from happening he dropped two gallons of the stuff in the middle of the field. It attracted every male bug within three counties, but they couldn't find the females if they were six inches away from them. That is what porn is doing today. Make no mistake, part of the reason people put off getting married is because sex is not reserved for marriage and because men don't even need to find a willing woman any longer.

39 Today – just four decades later: 1) if you type sex into Google you get 180 million hits; 2) sixty percent of all web-site visits are sexual in nature; 3) major studios release 500 movies per year. The porn industry releases 700 per month; 4) 800 million adult movies were rented last year; 5) fifty percent of all hotel movies rented are pornographic. Porn is a multi-multi billion dollar business. Some say 12B, others go as high as 56B. *Porn, Pervasive Presence: The Creepy Wallpaper of our Daily Lives*, (National Review, Nov. 19, 2001, p. 41)

40 In conversations with my own boys about all of these topics one of the points I've tried to stress is, it's not simply that I don't trust them. I don't trust myself. My computers have filters and the reports go to a couple friends.



C. Seek God. Play offense. We need to pursue a more vibrant relationship with him. G.K. Chesterton said that the man knocking on the door of a brothel was there looking for God. So just look for God. Tim Keller frames it this way, we have a “glory vacuum” in our heart and if we do not fill it with God we will fill it with someone else. And sex is high on the list of something else.”

D. Memorize Scripture. Not thinking about something is never a viable plan. We have to think of something else instead. I have found that Scripture has an unusual power to help redirect thoughts. Memorize verses. Carry a few around with you to work on. Store up God’s Word in your heart. Both Paul and the writer of Hebrews describe the Word of God as a double-edged sword.

E. Finally, destroy the power of secret shame by confessing your own sin to others. This is why Men’s Fraternity works when it works. Once a quarter we have someone get up and tell their story, exposing their failures. On a fairly regular basis we have someone confess to drinking problems, drug problems, anxiety, financial collapse, business failure, porn addictions and the like. We don’t ask everyone to make confessions before the group because that’s not what we are called to. We have leaders do it in order to say, “we are all broken. Your struggle may not be my struggle, but there are only about a dozen to choose from. And we set up small groups to be safe places to talk about these things. And we say, “you will not be kicked out of the group for your sins or addictions. The only way you get kicked out of MF is if you talk outside the group about anyone else’s struggles.” What we need are others pulling for us, who know the worst about us and are still there for us – encouraging us, praying for us, holding us accountable. We are told to confess our sins to one another – and when we do we remove the power of secret shame.<sup>41</sup>

V. We are going to end this morning with a time of corporate confession.

A. None of us are unscathed here. I will frame an aspect of lust, give you a few moments for silent confession and then I’ll lead us in prayer. As will be obvious on the screens, I’ll close with “Lord have mercy on us.” And your collective response will be: Lord forgive me for my sin.

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<sup>41</sup> I come at this topic with a sense of sympathy for those who struggle. About six months ago I watched a 20-20 expose on men who were trying to hook up with underage girls. It was a sting operation and they busted about 20 guys. I started watching this with a sense of revulsion. These were sexual predators thinking to prey on young girls. Lock them up. I ended up feeling very sorry for them. To a person they hated what they were doing. And I realized that I could not take any credit for having sexual desires that were in the mainstream. The challenges here – whatever they are – are real and strong. I get that.



B. Let's begin by taking a moment to confess that our views about sex are disordered and dishonoring and that we come before him with a lot of sexual sin and shame. (Give a moment for reflection).

B.1. "Lord we confess that we have failed to be sexually pure. We have misused and misunderstood sex. We have treated what is sacred in casual ways. We have used sex for selfish ends – we have allowed our desires for pleasure, power, acceptance and fulfillment to disorder our desires. We have dishonored you and hurt others by our actions. Lord have mercy on us"

B.2. People: "Lord, forgive me for my sin."

C. Let's take a moment to confess our undisciplined thought life; the times in which we let our mind wander in inappropriate ways. (Give a moment for reflection)

C.1. "Lord, we have not held every thought captive to Christ as we have been instructed. We have been undisciplined in our thinking. We have fueled sin, we have crossed lines, we have allowed our thoughts to dishonor you and others. Lord have mercy on us"

C.2. People: "Lord, forgive me for my sin."

D. Let's take a moment to confess a lack of discipline with our eyes; second glances, inappropriate movies, books, pornography.

D.1. "Lord, our visual diet has not been honoring to you. We have been poor stewards of our eyes. We have gazed at those other than our spouse – we have objectified them for our own fulfillment. Lord have mercy on us."

D.2. People: "Lord, forgive me for my sin."

E. Let's take a moment to confess ways that we have allowed our culture to shape our views of sex. (Give a moment for reflection).

E.1. "Lord we have allowed our standards to be eroded by an eroding culture. Rather than follow your path, we have deceived ourselves by a series of small compromises. We have come to accept sex as a vehicle to sell and to excite. We now laugh at things that should break our heart. We have allowed our culture's view of sex to warp our own identity and diminish our own self-worth. Lord have mercy on us"

E.2. People: "Lord, forgive me for my sin."

F. Create in me a clean heart oh God, and renew a steadfast Spirit in me.

## VI. Conclusion

A. There are two options for exploring the challenges associated with lust. For men, this Friday we'll have a special Men's Fraternity session on Lust. For women we have a special counselor available to interact on this topic – whether your challenges come from your own disordered desires or those of your husband. Her name is Suzanne Baker and you can contact the church for contact information.

B. You have fliers for Lessons and Carols to use as invitations. You have a card outlining all of the things coming up around Advent. This week Scott Sanderson will be speaking at the Cancer Support Group.

C. This has been a good series, but I'm glad it's over. I'm ready to talk more about hope than about sin. We move in that direction starting next week, where I will be pulling together the lessons learned over this series.