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Proverbs #5

## Sermon Summary #5

### The Anatomy of Adultery

#### Proverbs 7:1-27

To preach one sermon on the sin of sexual infidelity, in a society that considers it not only a virtue but an entitlement, is to invite criticism. To preach two sermons on the evil of adultery, on consecutive Sundays no less, is to subject oneself not only to criticism but to scorn and ridicule as well.

Anyone who exalts marital fidelity as I have done or who portrays extra-marital affairs as sinful is usually looked upon as repressive and morbid and prudish in his view of human sexuality. This, in spite of such biblical passages as we saw last week in Proverbs 5:19 where the author, in speaking of a man's sexual relationship with his wife, commanded men, and I quote: "Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love." Still, though, to suggest that marriage is a life-long commitment in which a man and a woman pledge to be faithful to one another is considered to be, at best, outdated, unenlightened, and boring. I trust that our time last week in Proverbs 5 put to rest such distortions. You may recall that Solomon clearly affirmed that ***God's solution to your thirst for sex is sex! Sexual intimacy between a husband and a wife is to be frequent, fun, and downright intoxicating!***

This week we turn our attention to Proverbs 7 where the focus is again ***a warning about the dangers and destructive consequences of adultery***. This passage is cast in the form of a father giving instruction to his son, urging him to embrace and cultivate wisdom in his life in order to "keep" him "from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words" (7:5). Once again let me remind you that ***although the danger is portrayed as coming from a sexually promiscuous and seductive woman, we could just as easily turn the tables and describe it in terms of the philandering and immoral man***. So we must all, both men and women, pay close attention.

#### *A Father's Admonition to his Son (vv. 1-5)*

We see from these opening verses that "*wisdom*" is again something eminently practical. Wisdom is what will guard the heart of the young man or woman and keep them from falling prey to the manipulative and clever tactics of the adulterer and adulteress.

In v. 2 the father exhorts his son to keep this teaching as “*the apple of your eye*.” The word translated “apple” refers to the “pupil” (cf. Deut. 32:10; Ps. 17:8). The pupil of the eye is that part upon which our sense of sight completely depends, and thus something to be guarded with the utmost care. No less than you would strive to preserve your own eye-sight, be diligent to observe and assimilate this instruction on the tactics of temptation employed by the wayward woman. As v. 4 says, be as conversant and intimate with wisdom as you are with the members of your own family.

### *The Adulteress and Her Tactics (vv. 6-23)*

Here the father tells his son (or his daughter) what he has seen or witnessed. He describes himself as if he were peering out the window of his house watching the behavior of the simpleton, the fool, the young person who doesn't have the good sense to come in out of the rain. Their lack of wisdom is precisely what will lead them into the trap set by the adulteress.

In describing this young person as “*simple*” and “*lacking sense*” he doesn't mean someone who has a low IQ or someone who is self-determined and hardened in sin and sets out from the get-go to gratify his/her lust. He's talking about the young man or woman who lacks discernment. This is naivete at its worst. The problem is aggravated when the young man thinks himself to be a real man's man, worldly-wise and beyond temptation. “You've misjudged her,” he insists. “She means no harm. She's just helpless and needy and I wouldn't be much of a man if I didn't offer my services.” The father says, “No, you're just stupid and you're heading for a fall.”

Notice in vv. 8-9 how he describes both *the place and the time* of the temptation. As for the place, he stupidly wanders near her house. Perhaps he's heard of this lady and out of curiosity he wants to see where she lives. He probably doesn't set out with the intention of ending up in her bed. He just wants to walk or, in our situation, drive by her house. Or let me make this a bit more contemporary with our circumstances today. Don't visit any chat rooms on the Internet. Stay off Facebook if she is there. Delete her Twitter account. Do whatever you have to in order to avoid her completely.

And *when* does this happen? In the “*twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness*” (v. 9b). Do you hear the romantic overtones in this language? It reminds me of the words to a very old song: “Some enchanted evening, you may meet a stranger . . .” The word “twilight” literally refers to a “cool breeze” which comes from the east as the afternoon sun sets. And the words “night” and “darkness” suggest that he chooses this time so no one will see him. He is careful to visit her under cover of night, thinking that this will protect his good name. But what it actually does is to put him precisely where she is able to make her play without being seen by others.

Some have actually seen a progression in these terms. Twilight refers to later afternoon. Evening points to the time of the setting of the sun. The word “night” is the hour of 9-10 p.m., and “darkness” points to the most intense blackness of night. The point is that he mindlessly and foolishly wanders deeper and deeper into that situation where he is most vulnerable and easy prey for her appetites.

One can't help but think of how foolish **King David** was when he first laid eyes on Bathsheba. The simple and obvious fact is that David should have known better. He never should have stayed at home alone while his army was fighting in the field. He never should have lingered late at night on his rooftop. He never should have set his eyes on that beautiful lady. He never should have inquired about who she was, nor should he have sent for her, nor should he have slept with her. He should have known better.

But King David committed adultery and Bathsheba conceived. And it only got worse from there. Adultery is most often merely the first sin of many that follow in its wake. David never should have tried to force Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to sleep with her, hoping that he would think the child was his own. He never should have arranged for Uriah's death.

But in a vain attempt to cover the sin of adultery, David committed murder. He should have known better. Having committed adultery with Bathsheba he should have acknowledged his sin to the Lord. But he didn't. Having conspired to kill Uriah, her husband, he should have confessed his transgression. But he didn't.

He kept quiet about his sin. He suppressed it. He shoved it deep down inside, thinking it gone for good. He ignored the tug on his heart. He denied the pain in his conscience. He numbed his soul to the persistent pangs of conviction.

Then one day the prophet Nathan told David a story. It was all about a rich man who stole the one little ewe lamb of a poor man rather than taking a sheep from his own huge flock. "Surely this man deserves to die," shouted an enraged David.

With a bony finger pointed at David's nose, Nathan calmly declared, "You are the man! . . . Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife" (2 Samuel 12:7, 9).

***The point is this: even the King of Israel, even the author of countless psalms, even the man after God's own heart, can ignore wisdom and fall prey to foolishness and end up in the arms of another woman. Be wary of idleness! Be wary of wandering off where you shouldn't go! Be wary of thinking yourself invulnerable to temptation. David should have known better, and so should we.***

You will notice in vv. 10-12 how this woman is described in terms of her outward clothing, her inward depravity, and her method for capturing her prey.

She is "*dressed as a prostitute*" (v. 10a). Most likely her clothing was seductive and revealing, all designed to draw attention from any man who passed her way. As for her character, she is "*wily of heart*" (v. 10b). The word "wily" literally means "guarded" or "secretive." In other words, she is careful

not to let anyone know her true intentions. She is cunning. She pretends to love her husband and to be infatuated with her unsuspecting victim, but she in fact despises them both.

She is “*loud and wayward*” (v. 11a), which is to say she lacks the delicate features of femininity and hopes to allure her victim with brash and trashy behavior. She is “wayward,” wandering throughout the street, then the market, and “*at every corner*” (v. 12). She is profoundly unstable and feels no loyalty to her place of residence.

The proposition itself is described in detail in vv. 13-20. This woman cares nothing for social custom or moral propriety or common decency. ***She is utterly devoid of modesty.*** She baits her prey before he is even aware he has been trapped. She grabs hold of the man at the first opportunity and kisses him (v. 13). Her aim is to captivate him before he’s had the chance to say No.

What follows in vv. 14-15 is simply stunning! ***She portrays herself as religious and spiritually devout!*** This is a reference to the sacrifice of a peace offering as commanded in Leviticus 7:15ff. The Mosaic Law required that the flesh of the sacrifices be eaten on that very day, or at the latest the next day, by the person who offered them. In effect, this is what she’s saying:

“Hey, fella, you’re hot! Listen, I’ve just come from a church service and I was hoping you might come to my house for dinner. I’d love to hear what you think and believe about God.”

***And notice how she carefully personalizes her seductive offer.*** Although she’d be happy bedding down any unsuspecting man, she wants you to think there’s something special about you alone. Note the repetition of the pronoun “you” – “I have come out to meet **you**, to seek **you** eagerly, and I have found **you**.” She knows how to touch that inner longing of every man to be regarded as more attractive than all others, to be “the one” who alone can awaken her interest.

In vv. 16-17 she describes her bedroom in a way that she knows will grab his interest and cause his hormones to rage with desire. Don’t overlook her appeal to all five senses!

He “**sees**” the way she is dressed, ever so subtly suggestive that she’s available to him (v. 10). He “**hears**” her invitation and flattery, her smooth and silky words that overcome whatever moral restraint he might otherwise have mustered (vv. 14-15). He “**feels**” her embrace as she “seizes” him (v. 13a) and he “**tastes**” her lips as she “kisses” him (v. 13b). Finally, he “**smells**” the perfume of her bedroom, the “myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon” (v. 17). By now, having gone this far in engaging her physically, he’s doomed. There’s no turning back.

The fantasy comes to full form in v. 18 - “*Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love.*” There are no boundaries, she says. The only thing that matters is your desires and my availability to fulfill them to the max.

“And you don’t need to worry about my husband, for *‘he is not at home; he has gone on a long journey’*” (v. 19). No fear of discovery! No fear of an angry man walking in on us in bed! Secrecy is ours. No one will ever know. By the way, contrary to the rendering of the ESV, she doesn’t say “my” husband. She literally says, “*the man*.” It is a dismissive way of referring to him, as if to say she cares little if at all for him.

Not only that, but he took enough money with him to be away for a long time. The second half of v. 20, with its reference to the “*full moon*,” indicates that he won’t be home for several days. “We’ve got the run of the house for a long time with no fear of being discovered. Come on, let’s go for it!” And although it isn’t stated explicitly, you can almost hear her saying: “Besides, my husband means nothing to me. He doesn’t understand me the way you do. You are so tender and caring and he’s a jerk. I’m so desperate to be loved by a real man who knows how to treat a woman!”

And he takes the bait! Look again at vv. 21-23. In her effusive “*seductive*” speech and her “*smooth*” talk she probably says something along the lines of:

“Sweetheart, I know why you’re here with me now. Your wife hasn’t met your needs. She’s turned a cold shoulder. She has no interest in you sexually. All she does is nag and complain. If you stay with me tonight, she’s got no one to blame but herself. You deserve better than what she’s provided. So just know that I’m here for you now and I always will be. And don’t forget, everyone else is doing it. God certainly wouldn’t frown on something so sweet and satisfying as this. He wants your happiness as much as I do.”

Such sickening rationalization and shifting of blame is typical of the adulteress and the adulterer.

So off he goes into her bed, like an ox being led to slaughter (v. 22), like an animal caught in a trap or a bird in a snare. Before he knows it and can do anything about it, he’s lost everything of value (v. 23), maybe even his life.

#### *A Father’s Final Appeal (vv. 24-27).*

Listen to the urgency of his counsel: “Son, don’t dwell on her in your heart. Don’t think about her. Turn your mind to other things. Don’t go anywhere near her home or where she hangs out. If it’s at a bar, stay away. If it’s in the office, never allow yourself to be in a room alone with her. Steer clear at all costs!”

“But Sam. Is it really practical or feasible or even humanly possible to completely turn your heart and mind away from such temptation?” No, not in this life. But we can take steps to redirect our attention

until the temptation passes. I'm especially encouraged by the approach taken by John Piper. He utilizes a simple acronym: ANTHEM.

A – AVOID as much as is possible and reasonable the sights and situations that arouse unfitting desire. I say “possible and reasonable” because some exposure to temptation is inevitable. And I say “unfitting desire” because not all desires for sex, food, and family are bad. We know when they are unfitting and unhelpful and on their way to becoming enslaving. We know our weaknesses and what triggers them. “Avoiding” is a Biblical strategy. “Flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness” (2 Timothy 2:22). “Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Romans 13:14).

N – Say NO to every lustful thought within five seconds. And say it with the authority of Jesus Christ. “In the name of Jesus, NO!” You don’t have much more than five seconds. Give it more unopposed time than that, and it will lodge itself with such force as to be almost immovable. Say it out loud if you dare. Be tough and warlike. As John Owen said, “Be killing sin or it will be killing you.” Strike fast and strike hard. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

T – TURN the mind forcefully toward Christ as a superior satisfaction. Saying “no” will not suffice. You must move from defense to offense. Fight fire with fire. Attack the promises of sin with the promises of Christ. The Bible calls lusts “deceitful desires” (Ephesians 4:22). They lie. They promise more than they can deliver. The Bible calls them “passions of your former ignorance” (1 Peter 1:14). Only fools yield. “All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter” (Proverbs 7:22). Deceit is defeated by truth. Ignorance is defeated by knowledge. It must be glorious truth and beautiful knowledge. . . . We must stock our minds with the superior promises and pleasures of Jesus. Then we must turn to them immediately after saying, “NO!”

H – HOLD the promise and the pleasure of Christ firmly in your mind until it pushes the other images out. “Fix your eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 3:1). Here is where many fail. They give in too soon. They say, “I tried to push it out, and it didn’t work.” I ask, “How long did you try?” How hard did you exert your mind? The mind is a muscle. You can flex it with vehemence. Take the kingdom violently (Matthew 11:12). Be brutal. Hold the promise of Christ before your eyes. Hold it. Hold it! Don’t let it go! Keep holding it! How long? As long as it takes. Fight! For Christ’s sake, fight till you win! If an electric garage door were about to crush your child you would hold it up with all your might and holler for help, and hold it and hold it and hold it and hold it.

E – ENJOY a superior satisfaction. Cultivate the capacities for pleasure in Christ. One reason lust reigns in so many is that Christ has so little appeal. We default to deceit because we have little delight in Christ. Don’t say, “That’s just not me.” What steps have you taken to waken affection for Jesus? Have you fought for joy? Don’t be fatalistic. You were created to treasure Christ with all your heart – more than you treasure sex or sugar. If you have little taste for Jesus, competing pleasures will triumph. Plead with God for the satisfaction you don’t have: “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days” (Psalm 90:14). Then look, look, look at the most magnificent Person in the universe until you see him the way he is.

M – MOVE into a useful activity away from idleness and other vulnerable behaviors. Lust grows fast in the garden of leisure. Find a good work to do, and do it with all your might. “Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord” (Romans 12:11). “Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Abound in work. Get up and do something. Sweep a room. Hammer a nail. Write a letter. Fix a faucet. And do it for Jesus’ sake. You were made to manage and create. Christ died to make you “zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14). Displace deceitful lusts with a passion for good deeds.