

Today, we are in a pandemic. Not the one you are probably thinking of right now. It is another type. I am about to introduce a word, that may make some parents in here uncomfortable, but I think we need to be talking about it more and we need to normalize it because of how rampant it is. We are in a pandemic of pornography. I realize I may upset some of you parents by using that word but I just believe that we need to be having these conversations in the church and you need to be having them at home, probably much earlier than you think. I was exposed while staying overnight at a friend's house at age 5, and that was long before smart phones and tablets. The average age of first exposure is 11 by most accounts,¹ but others are saying it is now 9. By age 14, 94% of children will have seen it. 90% of boys and 60% of girls say there were exposed before 18. Just recently a friend told me his 1st grader was exposed to it at school here in Abilene.

Let me recommend a couple resources to help guide conversations between you and your children: *Good Pictures, Bad Pictures* (6-11) Jr (3-6), *The Talk. Pornography is bad pictures.* "Bad pictures show the private parts of the body that we cover with a swimsuit." All our body parts are good, including our private parts, but taking pictures of them is not good. Its important to keep private parts private.

We are in a pandemic. The stuff is now everywhere. The recent Grammy's awards show had soft porn on display on regular television. Consider this. The number of years it took for each product to gain 50 million users. Airlines: it took 68 years to get 50M users. Cars: 62 years. Phones: 50 years. ATMs: 18 years. Cell phones: 12 years. YouTube 4 years. Fb: 3 years. PornHub: 19 days. 40M Americans are regular visitors. The porn industry's annual revenue is more than the NFL, NBA, and MLB combined. 1 of every 8 online searches and one out of every 5 mobile searches is for porn. Porn takes out 1/3 of the web's bandwidth.

This is staggering: 68% of church-going men and over 50% of pastors view it on a regular basis. Another study revealed that 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women admit to watching at least once a month.² 87% of Christian women have watched it. 57% of pastors say addiction is the most damaging issue in their congregation. According to *Covenant Eyes*, 1/3 come across it weekly, even when not seeking. 61% of young adults (18-24) seek it out at least once a month. 71% of teens have done something to hide what they do online from parents. And listen parents, they are smarter than you are with technology. More than 1 in 8 web searches are for erotic content.

Friends, I bring all this up to say we have to be dealing with it. And Jesus has a Word for us. We are in the Gospel of Matthew (p. 760). If you are new, we teach right through books of the Bible, verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, book by book. We have been learning that the OT points forward to King Jesus, who calls us to repent for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Repent is to drop our agenda and take his, to change our minds about life and follow him with all we are. And Jesus calls us to a certain way of life. Kingdom ethics. And in 5:13 Jesus says we are to be salt and light and the main point is we are to be distinct, a contrast society. And when it comes to sexuality, we are very distinct from current culture. / Let's consider two points this morning: lust is serious, and take lust seriously.

I. Lust is Serious 27-28 – For the second time now in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus quotes the Old Covenant Law. You have heard it said in the Law, in the Ten Commandments, specifically the seventh commandment: you shall not commit adultery. Adultery is sexual infidelity to one's spouse. It is clearly forbidden in the OC law. Pretty straightforward and pretty easy to keep.

¹ Stonestreet, 162.

² Stonestreet, 155.

But remember what Jesus came to do with the Law? 5:17 – he came to fulfill the Law. Jesus brings out the fullest and truest sense. **5:20**. We saw that that is the law on your heart R, the stony heart replaced by the heart of flesh R. God cares about the heart. He not only wants us to avoid the terrible fruit of adultery, but its seed, which is lust. King Jesus says whoever looks at a woman with lustful intent, lustfully, with a desire to have sex with her is an adulterer at heart. **15:10-11, 16-20**. Adultery comes out of the heart, as does every other sin. James 1 says we are tempted when we are lured by our own desire, then desire is conceived and gives birth to sin, which leads to destruction. So desire leads to action.

In fact, the word for lustful intent is “desire.” That’s the root issue. Desiring someone who is not your spouse. Wanting them too much. Coveting them. Jesus uses the same word here as the term for covet in the 10th commandment: you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife. You shall not desire her. So we need to see the seriousness of the sin of lust. It is breaking the 7th commandment, the 10th commandment, and therefore the 1st commandment: you shall have no gods before me. To desire, to covet is to want something more than god: so that you’ll dishonor God to get it or you will dishonor God if you do not get it. Lust is an idolatry issue.

Now, it is important to distinguish attraction from lust. You will notice attractive people. That is fine. Luther said we can't stop a bird from flying over our head, but we can stop a bird from nesting on our heads. Attraction is a gift of God. He came up with beauty. It is the lingering, the second look. Attraction is not a bad thing, but when attraction turns to lust, we have crossed the line. God gave us attraction and a sex drive so we’d pursue marriage. That is one of its purposes. So don’t despise it, but use it according to its design.

The Bible is very clear about lust and sexual sin. This year I heard a famous pastor say that the Bible whispers at sexual sin. I don’t know what book he is reading but it is not this one. The Bible screams about it: **Gal 5:19-21, Eph 5:3-5, Col 3:5-8a, 1 Thess 4:2-5, 1 Cor 6:12-20** Pixel prostitutes. Lust is serious, therefore we should take lust seriously.

II. Take Lust Seriously 29-30 – Tear out your eye and cut off your hand? Now, we should not take Jesus literally here. He is using hyperbole to prove a point. Hyperbole is extreme speech not meant to be taken literally but to drive home a point, and that point is that any sacrifice necessary to pursue sexual purity is worth it. He wants to shock us. Jesus doesn’t think you should literally tear out your eye and cut off your hand. Why? Because there are plenty of one-eyed perverts. You don’t need an eye to struggle with lust. You can lust with your eyes closed.

You may have heard of Origen. He was an early church father in Alexandria Egypt who sought to combat his lust by rolling over barb wire naked. As you can imagine, that didn’t work. So, then he took the extreme step of castrating himself, thinking this was what Jesus wanted. Hermeneutics matter. He later realized he misinterpreted Jesus here.

The point though, is that we should be deadly serious about fighting lust. We need to eliminate it at all costs. I have shared the story of Aron Ralston with you before. He was a 27 y.o. man from Southern Utah, who loved to hike and rock climb. He parks his vehicle, and journeys 7 miles from it to climb. Falls into ravine. 800lb boulder falls on right arm. 7 days, 127 hours. Pain like never experienced before. Sorry for the grossness here, but on day 5 he wrote epitaph on the rock as he realized he'd die there. Until he decided he had a choice. He could stay there and lose his life or use a dull pocket knife and lose an arm. He chose the latter and hiked the 7 miles back to his truck. Lived to write a book about it: *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*.

I worry that some of you may be way too casual about this sin. Like it is no big deal. Jesus says it is an incredibly big deal. Get serious about this sin, or lose your life. Rom 8:13: “or if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Why should we take drastic measures against lust? Because the stakes are so high. Let me give two reasons, one from experience and the one Jesus gives us in the Text. First, it will ruin your life here and now. It will destroy your marriage. It will take your joy. It distorts your view of sexuality. Increasingly, it is violent and degrading. It distorts your view of the image of God. Turns people into objects. It dehumanizes. It is linked with social anxiety, depression, low motivation, lack of productivity, guilt, shame, decreases interest in sex with one’s spouse, increases divorce, causes all kinds of disfunctions.³ It is Idolatrous self-worship. It severs sexuality from relationship with one person for a lifetime, the way God intended and designed this good gift. It is the opposite of what God intends: tender, self-giving, and others-focused.

It creates addicts. It literally rewires your brain. Arousal releases dopamine, which is the neurochemical that leads to the reward center, which creates new nerve pathways, that encourage us to do it again, making it easier to do it the next time, and harder not to do it. Your brain connects the pleasure with the activity. The brain also releases oxytocin and vasopressin, which chemically bonds us to the other person.⁴ The Bible calls this one flesh. That’s why 1 Cor 6 said we become one body when we are intimate. When it is a screen, it is a pixelated prostitute. You are literally bonding with the screen.

Adolescents are more susceptible to forming addictions than adults because the dopamine neurons in the brain’s reward center is much more active and have an exaggerated plasticity in response to addictive stimulus.⁵ It hijacks the brain in the same way cocaine does. It stimulates the same areas of the brain and releases the same chemicals. Letting kids have unmonitored phone access is like encouraging an alcoholic to sleep on a cot in a liquor store.

And because of the way we are wired, this stuff never satisfies. You need more and more stimulation to reach the same effect. And the type of images gets stranger and stranger. A 2015 study from Cambridge found that pornography use can drive novelty-seeking, so users need more and more extreme content over time in order to achieve the same level of arousal.”⁶ So it escalates because of its addictive nature. You need more and more to feel the same level of enjoyment so hard-core stuff is sought out. You enjoy it less but want it more and more. The prophet Jeremiah would say we are hewing out broken cisterns that hold no water.

So it destroys your life here and now. But what reason does Jesus give on why we should take lust seriously. He says it at the end of verse 29 and 30. For. Get serious about repenting of this sin for, because if you don’t you will go to hell. Cut off your hand or you will go to hell. Amputation occurs because something else might kill you. Infection may spread to the bone or whatever so you amputate a limb. Figurative amputation is better than facing hell. Jesus says we are talking about eternity.

According to Jesus, lust is serious so we must take lust seriously. Maybe you are one of the few people in here that doesn’t struggle against lust. Praise God, but listen up in order to help others. Part of being a church

³ Stonestreet, 165.

⁴ McKnight, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 92; <https://amgreatness.com/2019/12/15/a-science-based-case-for-ending-the-porn-epidemic/>;
<https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-affects-sexual-tastes/>

⁵ <https://endsexualexploitation.org/publichealth/>

⁶ <https://endsexualexploitation.org/publichealth/>

member is a commitment to help other members fight sin and walk with the Lord. Let's consider a 9 step battle plan against lust. There will be some overlap with our battle plan against anger because sin is sin:

1. Realize that you can gain victory. You can overcome this. **Rom 6:11-14, 17-19**. There is hope for lasting transformation. It may require the hardest work you've ever put it, but you can, so be optimistic. You are a new creation in Christ.
2. View it as war, because it is. Jesus says we cannot take it serious enough. Ryle: the Christian life is not a playground but a battleground. War requires drastic measures. Follow the example of Job: Job 31:1: "I have made a covenant with my eyes; how then could I gaze at a virgin?" Take thoughts captive. Listen to the violent language of 2 Cor 10:3-5: "For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ." We wage war by violently arresting ungodly thoughts and take them captive for Christ.
3. See it as a worship issue, an idolatry issue, again because that is what it is. Remember, breaking the 7th is breaking the 10th and the 1st. You desire someone who is not your spouse, you covet, you replace God with lust, or whatever it is you are seeking through lust, whether it be to relieve stress, or to gain comfort, or to exercise power, or merely for sensual pleasure. You want that more than you want to honor God. When temptation comes, you have a choice to make. Which god will you worship?
4. Watch and pray. Jesus said, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matt 26:41). 1 Cor 16:13: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." 1 Pet 5:8 "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Be on guard. Avoid temptation. Know your weak spots. If you were your own enemy, when and how would you go after you? Then shore those up! Is it a certain time of day (usually late for most people), location, shows, even music. Watch and pray.
5. Get accountability – you cannot do it alone. There is no biblical category for Lone Ranger Christianity. Lone rangers eventually become dead rangers. Heb 3:12-13: "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." How do we take care? How do we avoid sin? From hearing exhortations from fellow church members. We need one another to help us from being hardened by sin. James 5 says confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another. D-Groups are one of the best means to fight this sin. Home groups are wonderful for fellowship, but not for confessing and fighting sin. But a group of 3-5 men or women who know, love, and trust one another is needed.
6. Build high walls. In other words, restrict access. Metaphorically tear out an eye and cut off a hand. Make it really hard to sin. This is much harder today than it used to be due to smartphones and tablets, but get serious, radical even. Are there stores you need to avoid, streaming services you need to cancel, devices you need to get rid of, travel you need to stop, purchasing ability that needs to be restricted, app stores that need to be password protected, passwords you need to give to your spouse, browser access that needs to be eliminated. You say, whoa, I need the internet. Jesus would say you are not ready to follow him. You are not taking it seriously enough. Cut out an eye and a hand. Without high walls, you'll fall again. Prov 6:25-28: "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; for the price of a

prostitute is only a loaf of bread, but a married woman hunts down a precious life. Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?" Buy Covenant Eyes, or another filter, blockers, software. High walls will not change the heart but they can guard it as you do the work of heart change.

7. Wield the Sword. Memorize Scripture. Meditate on this passage or Eph 5 or 1 Thess 4. Read *Finally Free*.

8. Put off put on. Remember Ephesians 4? Put off your old self, renew the mind, and put on the new self. You see, it is not enough to merely kill sin. It must be replaced. John Piper writes, "We must fight fire with fire. The fire of lust's pleasures must be fought with the fire of God's pleasures. If we try to fight the fire of lust with prohibitions and threats alone – even the terrible warnings of Jesus – we will fail. We must fight it with the massive promise of superior happiness. We must swallow up the little flicker of lust's pleasure in the conflagration of holy satisfaction." Put off lust, and put on purity. 2 Tim 2:22: "So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart." Rom 13:14: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." Eph 5:4: "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving." Put off selfish lust and put on love. Realize the object of your lust is a made in the image of God. We should be sickened by the entire industry. Most of the workers, especially the women get sick after a scene.

9. Look to Jesus. The nature of this sin carries with it an added layer of guilt and shame so be reminded of the glory of the gospel. Jesus is not ashamed of you, he loves you. He is for you. He died for this sin. The enemy would have you wallow in guilt and shame. Listen to my favorite Luther quote: "When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: 'I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? By no means. For I know One who suffered and made a satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where he is, there I shall be also.'" Look to the gospel. Remember the NC: cross and Spirit. This gospel of Matthew doesn't end here. It is headed somewhere. To a hill called Calvary where we learn there is power in the blood and that Jesus paid it all. If you have trusted Christ, you are forgiven. If you haven't, you can be. Turn to Christ. Rom 8:1. Look to Christ. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace." **5:8.**