

The Will To Discipline

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[0 : 00] I think it was Billy Graham who said that there are three keys for effective communication of the gospel. The first is repetition, repeat, repeat, repeat.

The second is repetition, repeat, repeat, repeat. And the third is repetition, repeat, repeat, repeat. So I will.

So when the gospel grabs hold of an individual or a community, something happens. When God's good news for the world announced by and about Jesus of Nazareth grabs hold of an individual or a community, something happens.

What is the gospel? What is the good news Jesus came into Galilee and Judea announcing? The good news is the time is fulfilled.

The kingdom of God has come near to you. The kingdom of God has come near. The kingdom of God has come near. It's incredibly good news. In Jesus, the future is spilling into the present.

[1 : 10] In Jesus, heaven is invading the earth. In and because of Jesus, heaven's light is invading earth's darkness. Heaven's joy is invading earth's sorrow.

Heaven's power is invading earth's weakness. Heaven's health is invading earth's brokenness. Heaven's freedom is invading earth's addictions. Heaven's love, the love of God, is invading earth's hostilities.

Heaven's life, the life of the triune God, is invading earth's death. In and because of Jesus, the kingdom of God has come near. Heaven's love, the kingdom of God has come near.

Now, when that gospel, when Jesus and his kingdom grab hold of an individual or a community, something happens. Something has to happen. We are changed.

Oh, we are not made perfect, at least not yet. But we are changed. We are gospelized. And that is what Jesus' sermon on the mount is finally all about.

[2 : 11] It's about the power of his gospel to change lives. In his sermon, Jesus is simply describing the new kind of humanity birthed by his gospel.

It is as though Jesus were saying to us, When heaven invades earth, there emerges a new breed of men and women. And that new breed of men and women looks like this.

If you are able, will you stand for the reading of the gospel? It's Matthew 5, 27 to 30. And it's the first, it's the second, sorry, second of six times that Jesus says, You have heard it was said, but I say to you.

Hear the word of God. You have heard it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart.

And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out. Throw it from you. It is better for you that one part of your body perish than that the whole body be thrown into hell. If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off.

[3 : 17] Throw it from you. It is better for you that one part of your body perish than for your whole body to go into hell. Spirit of the living God, you inspired Matthew the tax collector to write these words down long ago.

And now we pray that in your mercy and grace, you would cause these words to come alive in us as never before. For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please be seated. I debated about whether to work this part of the Sermon on the Mount into the series because I thought maybe there are two or three other guys in the church who might need to hear this.

And it didn't feel right to preach to just two or three guys, you know. I thought maybe we should just have a small group over here and I could just meet with a small group and we could talk about this

text. But I decided it would be an okay exercise if the rest of you listened in on this little small group exercise.

Is that okay? We're all in on this, aren't we? Can you imagine the powerful healing that would take place in our world today if just this part of the Sermon on the Mount were believed and acted on?

[4 : 30] There would no doubt be an immediate negative impact on the economy. Especially here in Southern California. But there would no doubt be a long-term healing of the soul.

Especially here in Southern California. In this text, Jesus, the fulfiller of God's good law, draws us into the deeper intent of the seventh commandment, you shall not commit adultery.

The Pharisees and scribes of Jesus' day, the doctors of law and the pious laypersons of Jesus' day, felt that they were okay with this commandment and therefore with their wives as long as they did not sleep with another woman.

Jesus, the gospelizer, Jesus, the good newsizer, remember that as we go along here today. Jesus, the good newsizer, says, No, there's more to it. I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust after her has committed adultery with her in his heart.

I say to you that whoever lusts after a woman has already violated the marriage covenant. Now, before going any further, let me make three qualifying statements.

[5 : 38] First, although this saying is specifically addressed to married men, Jesus' words also apply to unmarried men and also to married and unmarried women.

Jesus' concern here is the integrity of the one man, one woman for life principle. His concern is therefore whoever violates it, man, woman, married or unmarried.

Second, although this saying is specifically addressed to the one who looks, Jesus' words also apply to the one who intentionally draws the look, the one who is looking for the look.

Jesus' concern here is also for the one who does everything possible to awaken desire in the life of another person to whom he or she is not married. Third, although the saying is very hard-hitting, Jesus does not say what he says here to condemn us or to rob us of the joy of living.

Let me say that again. He does not say what he says here to condemn us or to rob us of the joy of living. He says it to heal us and thereby to ensure authentic relationship.

[6 : 52] I like how E. Stanley Jones puts it. Jesus here is not being ascetic. He's being aseptic. Not ascetic, but aseptic. He does not come to stomp out our pleasure or to stamp on our pleasure.

He does not come to abolish our drives or needs. He comes to fulfill and he comes to lead us in the only realization of those needs and those drives. And Jesus speaks so bluntly here because when it comes to this matter of adultery, be it in act or be it in thought, our whole person is involved.

Our whole person is at stake. Sin is sin, we say. That's true. But some sin wrecks greater havoc.

This sin strikes a deep blow. It strikes at the core of our being and Jesus speaks this hard word to restore us.

You have heard it was said, you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Let me translate Jesus' words more literally here and listen carefully.

This is what Jesus says. Whoever keeps on looking in order to lust after her. You notice those two emphasis, keep on and in order to.

[8 : 12] Jesus is not here speaking about the appreciative glance at a beautiful woman. Rather, he's speaking about the willful, sustained stare, the look which goes beyond appreciation.

It's a fine line. We all know when we've crossed it. Dale Bruner writes, looking at a beautiful person is a drive given in God's good creation. Staring or leering at that beautiful person is a drive given in the fall of creation.

Now this word translated lust for is the Greek word *epithumeo*. And *epithumeo* is a strong, intense word. Yes, it has central overtones, but its most basic note is that of possessing.

Possessing. *Epithumeo* moves beyond mere appreciation to the desire to possess. The authors of the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible rendered the 10th commandment, you shall not covet as you shall not *epithumeo*.

You see, the problem with *epithumeo*, the problem with lust is that lust must have its object, have it now, if only for a little while. Dr. Paul Mickey of Duke University Divinity School gets at the heart of it the best.

[9 : 27] He writes, lust is any excessive desire, any excessive desire, any uncontrollable urge for immediate gratification. Although sex is the obvious target for lust, it's only one among countless

others.

The main motivation behind lust is to feel better fast. And that means capturing the object of your lust. Once you've got your prey in hand, that's supposed to relieve you of the gnawing desire. It's supposed to satisfy that desperate need that says, if I don't have it, if I can't do it, my life will fall apart. Lust may involve a craving for food, alcohol, sports, new fashions, job promotion, or many other things.

The only common condition to unleash lust is that you want something, believe you've got to have it, and got to have it now. The pleasure won't be deferred for later fulfillment.

And if you find you just can't get what you want, you may become so frustrated, you lose your ability to think and reason clearly. Certainly we lose our consciousness of the presence of God. So let me paraphrase Jesus' words this way.

[10:30] You have heard it was said, you shall not commit adultery. You shall not violate the marriage covenant. But I say to you, that whoever keeps on looking at a woman to crave her for himself, has already committed adultery with her in his heart, he has already violated the marriage covenant.

Now, the words of Martin Luther help us at this point. Luther says, that we should not, should not make the bowstring too taut here, he says, as if anyone who is tempted and whose lust and desire for another woman are aroused and would be damned for it.

Luther acknowledges that evil and lustful thoughts will come into our mind willy-nilly. We can't help that. But he argues, we do not have to invite the thoughts to stay.

Luther quotes an earlier church historian who said, I cannot keep a bird from flying over my head, but I can keep the bird from making a nest in my hair or from biting off my nose.

Again, Jesus' concern is not the appreciative look at a beautiful creation. I believe that Jesus himself takes great delight in the beauty of his creation. I think it would be appropriate.

[11:45] I think Jesus would say to a beautiful woman, whoa, did I do a good job. Or to a handsome guy, you're good looking.

That's not the problem. Jesus' concern here is the willful, sustained stare, the look which goes beyond appreciation appreciation to the desire to have and possess, if only for a moment.

Now, in this hard saying, we meet Jesus the protector. And I love him for it. Jesus the protector. I almost decided to call the sermon by that title, Jesus the protector.

In this saying, Jesus is first of all protecting the sacred covenant of marriage. The act of adultery affects marriage, but Jesus is saying, so does lust. Why?

Well, for one thing, lust shifts the focus off of one's spouse onto another. And for another, lust changes the nature of the relationship. When we allow lustful images and ideas to nest in our minds, we become self-absorbed.

[12:52] Lust, after all, is essentially self-absorption and self-gratification. I become preoccupied then with meeting my own needs, and I'm no longer then to act out of servant love.

No longer able to act out of servant love. As lustful images and ideas are allowed to nest in our minds, Dr. Mickey says that it starts to undercut the emotional and spiritual bonds that must be present if there is to be a wholesome relationship.

So Jesus speaks this way to protect the sacred covenant of marriage. But in this saying, he's also protecting the dignity of the other. The dignity of the one who is being looked at.

You see, lust dehumanizes. The other is no longer a person. The other now has become an object, a thing. The woman is no longer a valued human person in front of me, but now she has become the mere kindling for the fire of my desire.

Which is why so many of us have problems with the modern advertising the way it is now. This is why so many of us find it so repulsive. For one thing, the advertisers treat us as though we were animals in heat.

[14:03] I'm not an animal in heat. And for another, and it's more important, beautiful women, lovely daughters, the king of kings, are exploited.

They're turned into mere means to an end. Lust dehumanizes. I can still remember the experience I had in Manila. One afternoon, I went over to the polo club.

One of the perks of being the pastor of the Union Church of Manila was membership at the polo club. And I went over to the polo club to swim in its beautiful Olympic pool. I walked to the table, I sat down, and I took out a book to read.

And as I was reading my book, within the first few minutes, I was beginning to feel very, very uncomfortable. I turned around and I saw this young man, I judged to be about 20 years old, staring at me. I nodded politely, which usually takes care of it.

But he kept staring at me. No, he was, actually he was leering at me. I thought, well maybe he's been to Union Church of Manila, recognizes I'm the pastor, and wants me to recognize him. So I nodded to him again, and the stare intensified.

[15:08] And I felt creepy, as though my skin were creeping all over me. So I picked up my book and hid behind the book. And I tried to read, but I couldn't read because I still felt looked at.

And I peeked over the edge of my book, and this guy was leering at me. About five minutes later, I then calmly got up and walked down to the steps of the pool. And I jumped in and began swimming my laps.

By the third lap, I began to feel very conscious again, self-conscious. And I began to feel that creepiness. It just, ugh, this creepiness on me. And I stopped, and there he was, sitting on a chair, which he had pulled over to the edge of the pool, looking at me.

And I felt exposed. I felt naked. I felt violated. I finished a couple more laps, and then as I was coming to the end of my last lap, I heard this splash, this big splash behind me, turned around, and saw the guy swimming in my lane toward me.

I calmly got out of the pool, walked over to the bench, picked up my big towel, and wrapped it around myself, and began drying myself. He swam to the edge of the pool, and just looked at me.

[16:20] And although my body was now fully wrapped in that towel, I felt undressed. And in that moment, I came to appreciate, as never before, the dehumanizing power of the lustful look, indeed the violating power of it.

And I came to have new respect for Jesus, the protector. He speaks the way He does to protect the dignity of the other. And in this saying, Jesus is protecting the soul of the one who is doing the looking.

You see, the willful, sustained look has profound implications for the looker. The lustful look triggers the imagination. Know what I mean? The lustful look triggers the imagination.

And if the imagination is allowed to run free, it slowly begins to massage the will. And if the will is massaged long enough by the imagination, it will inevitably capitulate to the imagination and begin to act out the fantasy.

There's an old saying, it goes like this, sow a thought and you reap an act. Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character.

[17:45] Sow a character and you reap a destiny. The willful, sustained looking sets in motion an enslaving sequence.

Dr. Mickey, whom I quoted earlier, makes an observation with which I think all of us would agree. He writes, in my counseling experience, an extramarital sex act is rarely the first expression of lust in a person's life.

On the contrary, it's usually the last. Dr. Mickey speaks of what he calls the domino effect. Five dominoes. And I think they get at what Jesus is getting at in this text.

Domino one. You begin to fantasize about some sort of illicit extramarital act. Watch daytime television. And you'll get a good dose of it.

Begin to fantasize about some extra marital illicit act. This could happen after you've received some stimulation, like from a program or from a movie or from some soft porn, pornography that comes through the mail now, or any other kind of stimulation.

[18:50] Domino one. Domino two. You become preoccupied for periods of time with this fantasy and begin to engage in forms of self-gratification.

Domino three. Your sexual fantasy life and periods of self-gratification begin to increase in scope. And that's mainly because you're becoming desensitized.

The initial pleasure now is not enough and you need more. Domino four. You begin to look around for more sexual excitement outside the home. Usually it begins as subtle voyeurism.

Usually channel surfing. Then domino five. Finally. Looking just can't satisfy you anymore so you decide that this time you'll take a little action.

Often half-consciously you begin to look around for an opportunity and lo and behold the opportunities come your way. Whatever happens, he says, is we have taken the decisive step from fantasy to action.

[19 : 53] In Jesus' heart saying, Jesus is protecting our souls. He's protecting our souls. He's stepping in at the very beginning of the process and he's saying, you've got to deal with it at the first domino in your thought life.

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one member of your body than to go, your whole body, to go into hell. If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off, throw it away, it is better for one part, you lose your one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

They're tough words because it is at the beginning that this battle is won or lost. Now, does Jesus mean for us to take his words literally? Are we to literally gouge out our eyes and cut off our hands? There was a time in history, I guess, church history, where people thought so. I don't think so. Because as a matter of fact, I can do this fantasy thing with my eyes closed very well, thank you. I don't need my eyes open to do it.

What Jesus is doing here is calling us to take a radical approach to the problem, to do radical surgery. You do not cure cancer with a band-aid or with an aspirin. And you cannot cure, we cannot cure, this epithumia, this powerful thing called lust with half-hearted or gradual measures.

[21 : 17] Again, Jesus is not being here ascetic. He's being aseptic. He wants to heal and free us. If your eye or your hand causes you to walk down the lust road, cut it out and throw it away.

He's calling us to discipline our eyes and our hands. He's calling us to be vigilant about what we allow to go through our eyes into our minds and into our hearts.

If certain magazines cause you to lust, get rid of them. Do not buy them. If certain novels cause you to lust, get rid of them.

Do not buy them. If certain stores sell these problematic magazines and novels right there at the check stand where you see them, either go through the check stand with your back toward them or don't shop at the store anymore.

If certain television programs cause you to crave after another human being, don't watch them. Switch the channel or better yet, turn the set off.

[22 : 28] If certain movies even hint that they are going to arouse epithumia in you, don't go. And if you're in a movie and it starts to happen, leave.

If certain video stores fuel the fire of lust, don't go there. Now, is this being too prudish?

Maybe so. But to paraphrase Jesus, it's better to be a prude than to perish. Cut it off.

He says, cut it off. Cut it off. If a certain relationship is igniting these kinds of things in you, cut it off. If certain cafes or restaurants are intentionally trying to set up an ambiance that ignites sexual fantasies, don't go there.

If certain cultural events or expositions trigger inappropriate craving, don't attend them. Is this being too prudish? I don't think so.

[23 : 37] Let me paraphrase Jesus again in the words of John Stott. It is better to be culturally deprived and preserve a measure of inner purity than it is to be culturally in tune and being eaten up inside.

We may miss some of the gusto, but we'll be alive spiritually. Jesus is telling us that there's only way to combat the power of lust and it's the hard way.

It's the radical way. Gouge out your eyes. Don't look again. Cut off your hands. Don't touch again.

Cut off your feet. Don't go there again.

Don't touch again. May I pass on to you three things that have helped me take the radical way. I don't always take the radical way.

But these three things, if I can keep them in my mind, help me do it. The first thing has been very liberating for me. It is to realize that lust is a cousin of deeper longings.

[24 : 43] Lust is a cousin of deeper holy longings. Lust is simply the twisting of those deeper longings. Lust is the twisting of the holy need to feel alive.

Lust is the twisting of the holy need for intimacy, the need to be held, and the need to experience beauty. Lust is holy longings gone off and gone awry.

Lust is simply a signal that I have not been listening to those deeper longings. When lust comes, it doesn't mean I'm supposed to beat myself over the head. It means that I'm to recognize that I've been too busy.

I've been too busy to enjoy life. I've been too busy to enter into caring dialogue with other people.

I've been too busy to experience the mystery and majesty of life.

This, by the way, is why high achievers are especially vulnerable to the power of lust. We've been driving so hard so long that we have slowly but surely created a vacuum in our soul into which lust and all of its false promises will run.

[25 : 54] That's why also that the spouses and children of high achievers are also vulnerable to this. They haven't been pursued. They haven't been cared for for a long time.

George Barna says that love-famished people are easily easily fall into the snare of lust and its dominoes. The point is lingering lust is simply asymptomatic of the deeper holy longings going unfulfilled and thereby awry.

And since that deeper longing is finally fulfilled only in a relationship with the living God, lust is symptomatic that I have drifted out of intimacy with God.

and when I remember that, the spell is broken and I turn around and head home and like the prodigal experience the open arms of the waiting father.

The second thing that helps me choose the radical way is to realize that the kingdom life is not solitary life. Kingdom life is lived in community. I think that AA, Alcoholics Anonymous, is one of the finest models of spiritual formation in our time.

[27 : 06] I think it's a picture of what the church is supposed to be. In AA, everyone has a buddy and when one is tempted to take a drink, he or she can call that buddy and just hearing the voice of the partner can break the spell of the need for the drink at that time.

I need a buddy to help break the spell of lust in this sexually super saturated era. That's what the emphasis of promise keepers was about.

We can't make it alone. We need to be together in this. We're not going to make it alone. Get a buddy. My best buddy is my wife. When I can muster up the courage and say to Sharon that a wave of lust is crashing over my soul, instantaneously, the spell is broken.

My guess is that those big public figures we know about who have fallen in the last years didn't have a buddy and they were trying to fight this alone.

Get a friend. Third, the third thing that helps me choose the radical way is keeping before me the call of the Holy Spirit. The call of the Holy Spirit to yield my body to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[28 : 27] I can't tell you the number of times I can hear Romans chapter 6 verses 11 and 13 come rushing into my brain. Count yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ. Do not let sin raid in your mortal body to obey its lust.

Do not offer your body to sin but rather offer your body to God as those who have been brought back from death to life offer the parts of your body to God as instruments of righteousness. The Holy Spirit calls out every day and we have to choose to respond every day.

Many times just saying the words Jesus, these eyes are yours. These hands are yours. Breaks the spell and I'm brought back to sanity.

When the gospel grabs hold something happens. When heaven invades earth and we welcome Jesus and his kingdom something happens.

Grace happens. Forgiveness happens. Cleansing happens. Power happens. The will to discipline happens.

[29 : 40] I can't keep the birds from flying over my head. By the grace of God I can keep the birds from building a nest in my head.