

# Protecting Holy Longings

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Preacher: Darrell Johnson

[ 0 : 00 ] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

He loves us. The preacher on the mount loves us. It is because he loves us that he preaches his sermon on the mount.

The greatest preacher who ever lived preached the greatest sermon ever preached because he loves us. This is so crucial to be clear about as we follow Jesus more deeply into his sermon on the mount.

As I have been emphasizing, we must never separate the sermon on the mount from the preacher on the mount. When we separate the sermon on the mount from the preacher on the mount, the sermon on the mount is no longer what the preacher on the mount intended it to be.

Separate the sermon from the preacher and the sermon becomes either this frustrating idealism or this oppressive legalism. The sermon is neither idealism nor legalism.

[ 1 : 18 ] The sermon is life. Life as the creator and redeemer of life intends it to be. The preacher on the mount in his love for us calls us into relationship with him before he preaches his sermon.

Before he says anything, he has called us into relationship. Come follow me. He says what he says, having already established this relationship.

And he says what he says to make this relationship all that he intends it to be. Or in terms of the major theme of the sermon on the mount, he says what he says to make righteousness happen.

He says what he says to make right relationship happen. He says what he says to make right relatedness happen. Jesus does not say what he says to shame us.

We might hear him and feel ashamed, but that is not why he says what he says. He does not say what he says to guilt trip us. We might feel guilt, but that is not why he says what he says.

[ 2 : 34 ] He does not say what he says to rob us of the joy of living. He says what he says to free us. He says what he says to heal us.

He says what he says to restore our souls. He says what he says to integrate our souls. He says what he says to protect the deep, holy longings of our souls.

You have heard it was said you shall not commit adultery. But I say to you, whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

In this section of his sermon, Jesus is drawing out the full implications of the seventh of the great commandments. You shall not commit adultery.

The scribes and the Pharisees of the day felt that they were living righteously before this commandment as long as they did not sleep with any other women. Jesus, the lawgiver in our flesh, says there's more to it than that.

[ 3 : 41 ] There's a whole lot more. Whoever looks at a woman lustfully violates the intent of this great commandment. Jesus says what he says because he loves us.

Now, the text is obviously addressed to married men. But would you agree that it also addresses unmarried men?

And would you agree that it also addresses married and unmarried women? And would you agree that although the text is specifically addressed to the one who does the looking, Jesus is also speaking to the one who is drawing the look?

That he's also speaking to the one who is doing everything they can to awaken the lustful look? You have heard it was said, but I say to you.

Again, Jesus does not say what he says about adultery and lust to rob us of the joy of living. He's not robbing us of the joy of living.

[ 4 : 48 ] Indeed, as he says the night before he goes to the cross, These things I have said to you, these things meaning all of his teaching, These things I have said to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be made full.

Jesus does not speak the way he does to stomp out human pleasure. He raises the seventh commandment. Because when it comes to the matter of adultery, whether it be the act or the thought, The whole person is involved and at stake.

Sin is sin, we say. Yes. But some sin wrecks greater havoc. Adultery, the act or the thought, strikes at the core of our being.

And Jesus speaks to protect the core of our being. As E. Stanley Jones says, Jesus here is not being ascetic. He is being aseptic.

Not ascetic, but aseptic. He's not being prudish. He's being preventative. Now, I think it helps always if we translate his words more literally.

[ 6 : 08 ] We read it in any translation and we sort of get the point. But if we can press it to a little more literalness, I think it really helps. Listen carefully. Whoever keeps on looking at a woman in order to lust after her.

Whoever keeps on looking in order to lust after her. Did you hear that expanded wording? Keep on in order to. Jesus is not speaking of the appreciative look at a beautiful person.

He's speaking of the sustained stare. The look that goes beyond appreciation. It's a fine line, I know. And we know when we cross it, we can feel it in our soul.

Dale Bruner makes the observation. Looking at a beautiful person is the drive of creation. Staring or leering at the beautiful person is the drive of the fall of creation.

So we need to listen to Jesus even more literally. The word rendered to lust for is the Greek word *epithumeo*. And *epithumeo* is a strong, intense verb.

[ 7 : 22 ] Yes, it has sexual overtones. But its basic note is that of possessing. *Epithumeo* moves beyond appreciation to the desire to possess.

The authors of the Greek Old Testament translate the 10th commandment. You shall not covet as you shall not *epithumeo*. *Epithumeo* goes beyond this appreciation of another person or another thing to this place of wanting to possess.

*Epithumeo* must have the object of its appreciation. If only for a moment. Dr. Paul Mickey of Duke University gets to the heart of it best.

Lust, he writes in his book *Tough Marriage*. Lust is any excessive desire, any uncontrollable urge for immediate gratification.

Although sex is an obvious target for lust, it is only one among countless others. The main motivation behind lust is to feel better fast. And that means capturing the object of your lust.

[ 8 : 31 ] Once you've got your prey in hand, that's supposed to relieve you of gnawing desire 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 craving for food, alcohol, sports, new fashions, job promotions, or many other things. The only common condition to unleash lust is that you want something and believe you've got to have it now.

The pleasure won't be deferred for later fulfillment. If you find you just can't get what you want, you may become so frustrated that you lose your inability to think and reason clearly.

And often lose any conscious awareness of the presence and love of God. So let me paraphrase Jesus' words like this. You have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery.

But I say to you that whoever keeps on looking at a woman craving her for himself has committed adultery with her in his heart.

[ 9 : 37 ] Martin Luther helps us as he typically does. He says, we should not make the bowstring too taut here as if someone is tempted and whose lust and desire for another woman are aroused would be damned for it.

Luther acknowledges that lustful thoughts come willy nilly and often we cannot control them. Luther just goes on to say we don't have to invite those thoughts to stay. Luther just goes on to say we don't have to wait. He quotes an ancient church theologian who says, I cannot keep a bird from flying over my head.

But I can keep the bird from forming a nest in my hair or biting off my nose. Again, Jesus is not talking about the appreciative look at one of his beautiful creatures.

Would you agree with me that Jesus himself finds great delight in his own handiwork? As I walk through downtown and a beautiful woman comes my way, I simply say, whoa, Lord, you're really good.

As I say of my wife regularly. Jesus' concern is the willful, sustained stare.

[10:53] The look that goes beyond appreciation to now wanting to have this beautiful woman for myself. In this section of the sermon, we are meeting Jesus the protector.

Jesus the protector. And I love him for this. He is, first of all, clearly protecting the covenant of marriage. The act of adultery affects the covenant deeply, as we all know.

But so does lust. Lust shifts the attention off one's spouse to oneself. Lust then changes the nature of this relationship.

When we allow lustful thoughts and images to nest, we become self-absorbed, which is just what lust is about. It's all about craving self-gratification. I become preoccupied with getting what I want, and I'm no longer free to act in servant love.

As lustful thoughts and image continue to nest, they undercut the emotional and spiritual bonds that are needed for a robust, healthy marriage. So what Jesus says here is protecting the covenant of marriage and thereby enhancing it.

[12:08] He's also protecting the dignity of the other. He's protecting the dignity of the one who is looked at.

Lust dehumanizes. The other is no longer a person. The other has now become an object or a thing. The woman is no longer valued as a human being.

She is now mere kindling for the fire of my desire. This is why many of us in our time find so much modern advertising so problematic.

This misuse of the beautiful creatures God has made, making them just a means to an end. I often think that, as someone has said, that many of these advertisers just look at us as animals in heat. And a beautiful woman, lovely daughter of the living God, is now exploited and is mere means to someone else's end. And Jesus says what he says here to protect the dignity of the person who is being looked at.

[13:13] He is also protecting the soul of the one who is doing the looking. The willful, sustained look has implications for the looker.

Here, I think, is how it works. The lustful look triggers the imagination. And if the imagination is allowed to run free, it then massages the will.

And if the will is massaged enough by the imagination, the will will capitulate to the imagination. Say that again.

The lustful look triggers the imagination. And if the imagination is allowed to run free long enough, it begins to massage the will.

And then when the will has been massaged by the imagination long enough, it capitulates to the imagination. And before long, we know that we are acting out what the imagination fantasizes.

[14:16] Now, repeat this process often enough. And I'm told by a neurologist that it actually forms ruts or grooves in the brain matter.

And then only the slightest little bit of lustful image triggers this whole cycle again. You maybe have heard the old saying, Sow a thought and you reap an act.

Keep sowing the act and you reap a habit. Keep sowing the habit and you reap a character. And keep sowing the character and you reap a destiny.

Unchecked, lustful looking sets in motion this enslaving sequence. And if not checked, it results in debilitating addiction. So Jesus says what he says to protect the soul of the one who is looking.

He says what he says because he loves us and he wants to have us have an integrated soul. So he says, Tough words.

[15:48] Because what is at stake is the wholeness of the soul. Does Jesus mean for us to take this command literally?

Does he mean for us to actually pluck out our eyes and cut off our hands? No. For the simple reason that I can fantasize without eyes. I can close my eyes and do that.

Jesus, the protector, speaks this way because he wants to he wants to make sure that we hear his call, his call to a radical approach when it comes to this to do radical surgery.

You don't treat cancer with an aspirin or a bandaid and you don't treat epithumeo health halfheartedly or with gradual measures.

Again, Jesus is not stomping on human pleasure and joy. He's not being ascetic. He's being a septic. He wants to free and heal and integrate the soul.

[16:51] He calls us to discipline our eyes, our hands and later in Matthew's gospel, our feet. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will remind us that our eyes are the lamp of our body.

And if our eye is clear, our whole body will be full of light. But if our eye is bad, that is, if it's focused in the wrong direction, if it's focused on the things of darkness, then our whole body will be full of darkness.

So he calls us to be vigilant about what we choose to let go through our eyes that then affects our hearts and our bodies. Tear it out.

Cut it off. If certain magazines cause us to lust, get rid of them. If certain novels cause us to lust, do not read them.

If certain stores have the problematic magazines or novels right there at the checkout counter, don't shop there. If certain television programs cause us to crave, do not watch them.

[17:58] Turn the station or better yet, in those moments of temptation, turn the set off altogether. If certain movies even hint that they are going to arouse epithumia, don't go.

And if we're in the theater and discover that the movie is going to lead us in this direction, get up and leave. If certain internet sites, mercy.

We're talking about a major crisis in our culture. Turn the computer off. Bury it somewhere. Tear it off.

Cut it off, says Jesus. Now, is this being too prudish? Maybe so. But so what?

To paraphrase Jesus, as many have, it is better to be culturally deprived and preserve a measure of inner purity than to be culturally with it and be eaten up inside.

[19:02] Jesus' radical call here is all part of his call for us to be crucified with him. It's all part of what Paul calls crucifying the flesh.

I want to. I want to. I want now to invite two good brothers. Neil Redenhow and Doug Hills. They're on a different side here.

And I invited them to come and share how they're processing this part of the Sermon on the Mount. Neil, are you first? And then Doug? That's over here.

My name is Neil and this is Doug. And we just wanted to share with you a little bit about one expression of lustful desires. And I'd like to share a little bit about pornography and share some statistics with you.

There was a recent survey of an evangelical Vancouver church. And out of the 18 men between the age of 20 and 30, 16 of those 18 said that they have asked God to help them stop looking at pornography, but have found that they've gone back to it again.

[20:15] The same survey was given to a Christian camp in B.C. And of the 43 male staff members, 37 of them said the same thing, that they have asked God to help them stop looking at pornography, but have gone back to it.

A pastors.com internet site surveyed 1,350 pastors. And the results were that 54% of those pastors said that they've looked at pornography in the past year.

And then an internet filter review that looks at who uses internet sites found that one out of three viewers of pornography are women.

One out of three. And this isn't just a male thing. This is for men and women. And the statistics are sobering. But probably many of us don't need to hear the statistics to know that there's a problem. Probably many of us know this problem personally. And maybe some of us know what it's like to come to a worship service on Sunday morning, numbed and ashamed because of what we've been looking at last night.

[21:33] Or maybe you know the feeling of thinking that no one would want to be around me and they would reject me if they knew what was in my mind or on my computer screen.

Maybe you know what it's like to feel this secret sin eating up inside. And to make a commitment to God that you'll never, ever, ever look at pornography again, only to break that commitment over and over and over again.

Many Christians feel that they are bound and powerless over pornography and that there's no hope and they'll be like this for the rest of their life.

But that is not true. And the Holy Spirit is setting us free. The Holy Spirit is setting me free and the Holy Spirit is setting Doug free. Neil just said that many of us don't need statistics to tell us about

the power that lust and pornography can have over a person.

Many of us don't. I don't. I know about that personally. And today I get to share a little bit of my story with you and to tell you some of the things I'm learning.

[ 22 : 57 ] As I process this. As has been mentioned, my name is Doug Hills. I'm a member here at First. I grew up in a good Christian home. I had parents that loved me and loved God.

I still have parents that love me and love God. It's a blessing. So early in my life, I learned to love God too. And I chose to follow Jesus.

But also early in my life, when I was still at elementary school, I discovered sexual self-gratification. And I quickly learned that I could use pictures to enhance the physical act.

So magazines or catalogs or TV or later the Internet. And it didn't take me long to figure that I could use my God-given imagination to incorporate images from my daily life or people from my daily life in my fantasies.

And so from a very early age, pornography and lust and sexual fantasy became a regular part of my daily existence.

[ 24 : 07 ] Now, I knew this wasn't right. I'd grown up in the church. I knew that this was not something that you were supposed to do. But I didn't stop. And after an extremely uncomfortable talk with an extremely awkward church leader, I came away understanding that some things were just too ugly and too shameful to be talked about.

Some things were just too dark to be dealt with. And as I came away from that talk, I felt that there was nothing I could do about this, that I just had to accept that this was the way it had to be.

And so I buried this part of me. Not that I stopped the sin. I didn't. It just grew worse and worse over the years. But I learned to hide it really well.

I knew how to put on an exterior of the Christian guy that had everything together. While inside the lust and the fantasy was active under my mask of perfection.

And so this double life of deceit and deceptiveness was who I was for decades. It's a horrible way to live.

[ 25 : 29 ] The good news is that that has all changed in the last two years. And I get to share with you three things that I've learned over these past couple of years.

And the first is good news. If you are a guy who struggles like me with lust, sexual purity, it does not have to be like that.

Over the past two years I've been walking with a group of guys. And together we are discovering that there is hope. There is help.

There is healing for guys like us. That's good news. God has not given up on us. And he loves us too much to leave us in the place where we've put ourselves.

Now some of you today may be thinking, lust, pornography, that's only the start of my problems.

[ 26 : 33 ] I've got good news for you too. Because in our circle, some of us have acted out in all sorts of ways. And we are finding more grace and more mercy and more forgiveness than we had thought was possible.

Good news is also available for women. Because as Neil said, this is not just a guy problem.

Although we tend to think of it that way. And a lot of women struggle with this.

So if you're a woman here today that struggles with lust and sexual purity, the good news for you is that there is hope and help and healing available for you too.

I realize this is an uncomfortable topic, so I'm not expecting an amen at this point. But this would be a good point for an amen. The second thing that I've learned is that this is important.

Far too often, we tend to think of lust like the scribes and the Pharisees did. That as long as we just don't act out with another person, it's just a minor thing.

[ 27 : 46 ] It doesn't really count. We tend to think that as long as it's just in my head, it's a victimless sin. And I'm here to add my testimony to the fact that it's not.

Sin damages relationships, and this sin destroys our relationships. This sin damages our relationship with God.

I always knew that living with indwelling sin was not good for my relationship with God, but I never knew just how bad it was until I started walking in purity.

And then I started to see how much my heart had been hardened by it. How much my emotions had been sucked dry. How much my life with God had been deprived because of the sin that was in my heart.

And the good news is that as I am walking clean, I'm discovering way more joy and life and peace in the spirit than I had thought was possible.

[ 28 : 52 ] But that just helps me realize how much that sin damaged my relationship with God. And it's not just our relationship with God that's damaged.

Sin damages our relationships with others, and lust destroys our relationships with all those around us. When I look at a woman lustfully and treat her as an object just for the gratification of my own desires, she stopped being a person to me, somebody I want to possess like an object, that changes the way that I deal with all of the people around me.

And that hurts all of my relationships. If I had time today, I could talk about how the sin of lust damages most the relationships that are closest to us.

So our families and our spouses. And if we had a lot more time, and if my ex-wife were here today, she could speak much more forcefully than I could about the damage that my sin has done to her. It is important to deal with our lust because it damages us and our relationships. The third thing that I've learned over these past couple of years is that I cannot do this on my own.

[ 30 : 30 ] I could only get hope and find healing when I broke my silence and admitted that I was broken and when I confessed that I was a sinner to other people.

I find and I have found great support in meeting with guys on a weekly basis who also struggle in this area. And week by week, we meet and we share our struggles and we share our successes and we share our failures.

Week by week, we point each other back to Jesus, back to the cross. Week by week, we learn from each other and pray for each other. And that has been extremely healing for me.

It's helped me get and stay clean. I am an extreme introvert and I absolutely hate people knowing that I am not perfect.

So, you know, this right now is a little uncomfortable for me. But so is going to group week by week and saying, I am a broken sinner who always is in need of God's grace and mercy.

[ 31 : 47 ] And so I know that there are people here today who were hearing my first two points and saying, it does not have to be like this. It can be changed and saying, that's good news.

And hearing the second point and hearing it said, it is important that it be changed because it damages us and going, yeah, I know that. And then I got to this third point where I said, I need help with this.

I need to break the silence and talk to people about that. And you're thinking, ooh, maybe not. I'm going to take this secret with me to the grave because I don't want other people knowing about that. I understand that feeling. But I also know that I let my fear and my shame and my desire for a good reputation stop me from getting help for years.

that's a horrible choice to make. And so if you're in that place today, I want to challenge you not to let your fear or your shame stop you from getting the help that you need.

[ 32 : 51 ] I know that I am not I know that I am not the only person here who struggles with lust and pornography and sexual temptations.

I know that. And I know that I am not the only guy here who would be helped by getting together with other guys to together learn how to walk clean.

And so because of that, we are starting a connection group here at First Baptist based around this issue. A place for us to come clean with each other.

We're going to get some contact information in the First News next week. And there's lots of these little blue pieces of paper around the church. in Pinder Hall, in the Foyer, some of the ushers have them.

If you see one of these, I encourage you to pick it up. It will tell you how to get in touch with Neil or I and how you can get more information about this. Before this gets in the First News, the email addresses, and just in case you are not all that brave to pick up a blue piece of paper, I'm going to encourage you to contact me anyways.

[ 34 : 07 ] My email address is really simple. It's my last name, a period, and my first name at gmail.com. So, hills, H-I-L-L-S dot D-O-U-G at gmail.com.

I would love to talk with you more about this and share with you a little bit more about how you can enter more fully into the life that God wants for you. One more thing that I will say, if you are thinking, I want this, but I'm not sure if I want this, if I want to be this open and vulnerable with people at first.

This is my church. I go here. I'm not sure I want people to know that. I encourage you to talk to me. Even if we don't get you plugged in with the connection group that we're doing here at First, I know of lots of other groups that are meeting about this issue in the city and I would love to get you plugged in with one of them as well.

Thanks for listening. Thanks, Mark. So I thought, guys, what we could do, these are all around the building, as Doug said, if every guy got it, even if you're not struggling and put it in your pocket, then it'd be cool to have the blue card.

All right? All right? That way, nobody has to be ashamed. Everybody's got a blue card. One more thing to wrap this up.

[ 35 : 47 ] I think the thing that helps me the most is to realize that this lust is a cousin of deeper, holy longings. Lust is a cousin of holy longings that the Creator has built into us.

It turns out that what lust is is twisting those deep, holy longings. Lust is the twisting of the desire, the longing to feel alive. It's the twisting of the desire to behold beauty.

It's the twisting of the desire to experience intimacy. Lust is holy longings gone in the wrong direction. So, that says to me that when we experience lustful feelings, we don't beat ourselves up. As you know, that just creates greater shame and guilt, we don't beat ourselves up. We just let the lust signal to us that we've not been listening to the deeper longings.

I've been too busy to smell the flowers. I've been too busy to have authentic friendships with people. I've been too busy to soak in the mystery and majesty of life.

[ 36 : 59 ] This, by the way, is why high achievers are most vulnerable to sexual fantasy and activity. We have been driving so hard, so long, that there's this vacuum in the soul and into the vacuum comes lust with all of its false promises of comfort.

This is why the spouses and children of high achievers are also so vulnerable. They've not been pursued and cared for for a long time. Lust is symptomatic of the deeper holy longings gone unfulfilled too long.

And since those deeper holy longings are only fulfilled in a relationship with the lover of our souls, lust is symptomatic of the fact that we've moved out of intimacy with him.

And when I remember this, the spell is broken. I turn around, go home like the prodigal, and like the prodigal, once again, experience the healing brace of the waiting father.

And in that embrace, hear the call of the Holy Spirit to surrender my body again to Jesus. Romans chapter 6.

[ 38 : 18 ] Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts. Do not offer your body to sin, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought back from death to life.

Offer the parts of your body, your eye, your hand, your feet, as instruments of righteousness. Hear, Jesus, these eyes are yours.

These hands are yours. These feet are yours. to the best of my ability, I surrender my whole body to you.

And may my longing for you heal and reorient every other longing. Amen.

The safest space in the whole universe is in the kingdom of God. Because in the kingdom of God, you can be a sinner. And you're embraced by the king.

[ 39 : 26 ] That's my desire, and I'm sure a lot of your desires for our churches in the city. That the churches would be known as a place where it's safe to be a sinner and to find the embrace of the healing king.

If you need to pray about anything, there are folks over here who would love to serve you in that way. Doug, Neil, others are available. You may have other needs, too. And guys, the more I thought about it, I think this will help if everybody puts a blue card.

And it gives us the freedom for people to come into the light. So, receive as benediction the word with which Abe called us to worship at the beginning.

Come to me, all who are weary and who are overburdened, carrying burdens you do not need to carry. Come to me and take my yoke upon you and learn from me, because I'm gentle and merciful at heart.

You'll find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. Amen. Amen.