

Talking to yourself

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[0 : 00] Morning everyone. So today's reading is from Proverbs chapter 7. My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you.

Keep my commandments and live. Keep my teaching as the apple of your eye. Find them on your fingers. Write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, you are my sister.

And call inside your intimate friend. To keep you from the forbidden woman. From the adulteress with her smooth words. For at the window of my house I have looked out through the lattice.

And I have seen among the simple. I have perceived among the youths. A young man lacking sense. Passing along the street near her corner. Taking the road to her house in the twilight.

In the evening at the time of night and darkness. And behold, the woman meets him dressed as a prostitute. Wily of heart. She is loud and wayward.

[1 : 00] Her feet do not stay at home. Now in the street. Now in the market. And at every corner she lies in wait. She seizes him and kisses him. And with bold face she says to him.

I had to offer sacrifices. And today I have paid my vows. So now I have come out to meet you. To seek you eagerly. And I have found you. I have spread my couch with coverings.

Coloured linens from Egyptian linen. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.

Come, let us take our fill of love till morning. Let us delight ourselves with love.

For my husband is not at home. He has gone on a long journey. He took a bag of money with him.

At full moon he will come home. With much seductive speech she persuades him.

With her smooth talk she compels him. All at once he follows her. As an ox goes to the slaughter.

Or as a stag is caught fast. Till an arrow pieces its liver.

[2 : 02] As a bird rushes into a snare. He does not know that it will cost him his life. And now, O sons, listen to me. And be attentive to the words of my mouth.

Let not your heart turn aside to her ways. Do not stray into her paths. For many a victim has she laid low. And all her slain are a mighty throng.

Her house is the way to Sheol. Going down to the chambers of death. Well, good morning everyone.

I'm really thankful to Simon for his introduction earlier on. I guess it's actually true that I do spend a lot of time talking to myself with nobody listening. But I should point out, as you evaluate what Simon said about me, that his response to one of those safety slides where the guy was hanging out of the building cleaning the window on the 32nd floor was that the only issue Simon could see was the guy didn't have a shirt on, so he was going to get sunburned.

So, factor that in as you evaluate Simon's comment about me. Question to get us going this morning as we want to jump into this familiar and perhaps foreboding chapter.

[3 : 24] Why do people find themselves doing that which they know is not good for them? We would typically say, well, it's a bad habit.

And that's true. But then the question becomes, why are habits so compulsive? Especially when they're destructive.

To help us understand this, I want to introduce a personal thing. I want to introduce you to my habit of comfort eating or what I would like to see as the idol of comfort eating.

Now, we might think idols are images of a god that some remote tribe might worship. And that's true.

But idols are actually much more immediate and much more personal. All of us, I believe, have idols. We worship many idols. Some of them we know about. Some of them we haven't even discovered yet.

[4 : 33] So, the question is then, personally, why do I overeat? Well, again, I might just say, well, it's a habit. It's a habit I've developed because it's been part of the culture of my family or because I like food.

And I do. But why do I continue to overeat when I see myself getting fat? When I know it's bad for my health long term?

And when Alison constantly says, stop eating. You don't need to eat. Now, I've tried to tell myself, just say to myself, stop eating.

You don't need to eat. But strangely, when I do that, it actually increases the craving for food. It increases the craving to the point where I actually dominate.

I can't think of anything else except food. It's really weird. I can sit there watching TV thinking about what I could be getting to snack out of the cupboard. That's how compulsive it is.

[5 : 44] That's how dominating it is. A couple of years ago, just in a random conversation, Rob Patterson made a comment to me that totally opened up a new perspective on eating for me and has helped me actually start breaking the habit of comfort eating.

He suggested to me that eating can be an idol. That is, eating is something that can be done to achieve a goal buried deep in my thinking.

So the eating isn't for the eating's sake. It's for what the eating promises to deliver to me. So from that point, I was forced to admit I was a comfort eater.

My mom has been a comfort eater over her years, and I always wanted to say I wasn't like my mom at that point. But I was forced to say I was a comfort eater. That is, eating for me is a coping strategy.

It's a go-to behavior because I think it will deliver a goal or an outcome that I believe I need or want or desire. And that associated with eating is a sense of feeling as if I've got a space to unwind, to feel relaxed, to feel sort of comfortable and safe, to feel satisfied in the midst of a day when there might have been turmoil all around me.

[7 : 11] I withdraw and I eat. And so it's no surprise then, I can also detect in my life, that the greater the stress in my life or work or relationships, the more likely I am to overeat.

And so I want to say it in these terms, that the idol of overeating demands ever-increasing sacrifices from me. That is, I find over the years that I've had to eat more and more to get the same outcome, to get the same results, to get the same level of satisfaction.

And so it becomes a habit. But it's more than a habit. It's an idol. It's something I worship. It controls me. And it controlled me regardless.

I sacrificed that idol, regardless of the cost to my overall health and a growing belly. And so as a Christian then, I realized that I was trying to find in food something that I could only properly find in God.

And so my idol ended up being a cheap substitute for real satisfaction. And that was obvious.

[8 : 36] It didn't give me lasting satisfaction. Now, this process of thinking, these idols exist in so many areas of life.

And if you're not an overeater like me, perhaps you're a binge alcohol drinker. Perhaps you're a binge Netflix user.

Perhaps you binge social media. Perhaps you binge electronic gaming. Or perhaps you binge at the shops and shopping.

Perhaps for you it's work. Or being outstanding in your career. Maybe that's your idol. Maybe that's the thing that you sacrifice everything for.

Because you hope it will deliver the outcome of satisfaction and fulfillment. Perhaps your idol is simply being happy. Being married.

[9 : 38] Being beautiful. Being beautiful. Being needed. Being liked. All of these things can get a hold of us and cause us to sacrifice again and again at ever more increasing cost.

Simply to get that which that thing promises delivered to us. And we push aside or sacrifice whatever we need to sacrifice.

And that might be people. At one point. It might be relationships. At another point. It might be money. It might be time. It might be our health. All of which will be sacrificed as we chase the goal which the habit or action promises to deliver to us.

Now, coming closer to the passage. I want to suggest this morning that sex easily becomes an idol. We ask the question, why do people keep doing wrong things?

Keep showing unfaithfulness in this realm of how we use our sexuality when we know so jolly well that the results are destructive? Very destructive.

[10:53] I suggest it's much more than just saying to ourselves, well, don't do that. Do this. We've got to see sex and sexuality from a new perspective.

I suggest this morning we've got to see it as the potential of being an idol which we're serving. Because it promises something that we think we need. Now, sex, of course, is a good thing. Make that, hear that very clearly. Sex is God's idea. It's built into the very fabric of every single one of us in all its pleasure. But it easily becomes an idol.

Something we crave because we believe it delivers something we think we need or want or desire. That is, in the case of sex, it promises to deliver intimacy.

And intimacy is something we all desperately want. And intimacy is a feeling of being loved. A feeling of being valued. A feeling of fulfillment. A feeling of being loved.

[12:01] A feeling of being loved. A feeling of being loved. A feeling of being loved. A feeling of being loved. A feeling of being loved. A feeling of being loved. All of those things are built into the idea of intimacy. And as people, as individuals, we desperately crave that.

And so if we're not careful, then sex can become that idol and the desire for sex can start to dominate us like an addiction.

And that addiction can happen whether you're married or in a de facto relationship or whether you're in a serial monogamy situation where you say faithfulness is really important but you don't mind changing partners every 18 months.

or the classic affair having sex with someone you're not married to or just one night stand or pornography whether it's male pornography visual or female pornography emotionally driven.

In any of these situations, sex can become an idol. That is something that takes a hold of you and starts to dominate your whole pattern of thinking. It's a demanding idol.

[13:15] Pushing a person to sacrifice whatever is required to achieve the outcome it promises and the person desires.

even though all the evidence says that it actually delivers destruction and hurt. Not true intimacy. Not a lasting reality of being loved and valued and happy. Now, with that perspective on craving intimacy and the alternatives of true and false intimacy which Martin opened up last week from chapter 6 and those that true and false intimacy correspond with wisdom and foolishness and with the importance of talking to myself about the temptation to settle for false intimacy let's, with all that in mind let's jump into chapter 7 with what I hope is a new perspective this morning focused on what I'm now wanting to call the idol of sex.

Now, another question to step up your thinking. Why do people opt for sexual unfaithfulness and betrayal even when they know from the experience all around them that it's so destructive self-destructive and destructive to everyone who's betrayed?

Make the question personal. Proverbs warned repeatedly about the awfulness of unfaithfulness and betrayal. But I wonder how you've been engaging with that over past weeks as we work through this series.

[15:03] Is it something that you think well that's a problem for somebody else and you might actually have names in your mind but it's not an issue for me.

It's not something you're going to get caught or I'm going to get caught in. Is it a temptation that you think you're immune to?

Or even worse perhaps is it a temptation that you recognize but you think you're strong enough to resist without too much fuss? C.S. Lewis I come across an interesting quote from C.S. Lewis and it says this we often say that a man and you could read a woman in there as well because it works in reverse we often say that a man driven by lust wants a woman but strictly speaking he does not want a woman.

What he wants is a pleasure to achieve his inner goal of being loved or happy for which a beautiful woman is simply a necessary piece of apparatus.

In some ways it's a confronting statement isn't it? And it's profound. So I'll read it again. We often say that a man driven by lust wants a woman but strictly speaking he does not want a woman he wants a pleasure to achieve his inner goal of being loved or happy for which a beautiful woman is simply a necessary piece of apparatus.

[16:47] He would lose his sin he's saying the idol of sex has got a hold of this person and it's the pleasure that they're craving and seeking in a sense the woman's irrelevant or at best just a tool.

Now of course as I said before the reverse may be said for a woman. Lust for both men and women is the expression of a heart idol a genuine craving for true intimacy of being loved and accepted and valued while settling for a false or substitute intimacy through sex.

and again it has to be a false intimacy because true and lasting intimacy can only be found in God. So when we come into this picture here and we're about to look into the details of it so in practice adultery that's talked about here and right through it Proverbs adultery is both a picture of unfaithfulness and betrayal in practical relationships marriage relationship that's spoken about here it's immediate and earthy and real and human it's both that and simultaneously a picture of unfaithfulness and betrayal in our relationship with God that the two are essentially and fundamentally the same because each situation of unfaithfulness is chasing what something else other than God offers us chasing chasing after love and acceptance and validation in things or relationships other than that which we have with God this passage is incredibly confronting in its description of what I'm calling the slippery slope the slippery slide of seduction in verses 6 through to 23 and here's the point you see adultery doesn't happen randomly in a vacuum there is always a process of small steps that are taken sometimes the process as a whole unit happens fairly quickly sometimes and most often

I would venture to suggest most often that process happens rather slowly over a long period of time but it is a process and the scenario here is that of a young bloke he's depicted here the term as being simple and that in Proverbs is a sort of poetic descriptive term it doesn't mean he's lacking intellect far from it it means he's naive he's inexperienced in life and yet at the same time willful unwilling to accept instruction in life and he drifts into temptation here led by his thinking and feelings convinced that he is in control of events when all the time this woman has him in her hands and moulding him like putty and the process is this working through the verses fairly quickly here the first thing is verses 8 and 9 imagining imagining what is on offer is what he's doing and so he that imagination takes him to hang out near where she lives and he takes him there after dark his imagining is already driving his actions to move towards this woman he's already moving towards her physically and verse 10 it says behold in other words it means surprise surprise he moves here and he hangs out near her house and guess what oh he bumps into her just randomly and they're off and running and when they do meet she's dressed really provocatively and her body language is saying hey

I'm available with an overpowering sexuality and at the very first stage whatever he might think she has taken control compartmentalizing verse 13 is the next stage and by the way this isn't absolute I'm just trying to put words in here to help us see how this process works compartmentalizing verse 13 they embrace and kiss the first movement of a monorail that will end in sexual intercourse and in the same moment in verse 14 she presents herself as being a godly person and a genuine worshipper of God so picture the moment she embraces this guy and kisses him and he embraces her and kisses her so it's a mutual thing and then what's the conversation well actually you should know

[22:15] I've just been to the temple I've just actually done my duty as a worshipper of God I've offered my sacrifices compartmentalizing is living with a massive disconnect in life between our what we would call our ordinary life or my life and my spiritual life thinking that one offsets the other because I go to church because I say my prayers because I read my Bible because I do all these things well I'm obviously an obedient servant of the Lord and so over here I can find space to do and find my satisfaction in a different way now that's a really really shocking reveal but it's a very common position for people to find themselves in because it allows them next thing to rationalize or normalize their intentions and so they can say in the same breath with no apparent conflict in their minds that okay

I'm a serious minded obedient servant of God now let's plan to have illicit sex together and then there's personalizing verse 15 and you can just hear these words so now I have come out to meet you to seek you eagerly and I have found you you are the person I've been looking for all my life only you can meet my needs and give me the satisfaction I've craved all my life and you can feel the bloke going weak at the knees and it resonates with both their idols both of them are craving intimacy she wants him values him delights in him and in turn he believes that only he can make her happy and then there's one more which

I actually missed out I don't know if it's Freudian slip or the Lord trying to tell me something but the next one I have in my notes here is titillation verses 16 to 18 if you don't understand if you don't know the word you'll know the practice and she says I spread my couch with coverings and then she starts to describe the situation come let us take her fill of love till morning let us delight ourselves titillation is in her flirtation and I can tell you now that all logic has gone from this guy's brain because in his senses he's already there he's already in her bed he can smell it he can see it he can feel it because she's described it for him and her words are fanning into flame his sexual urges the train is running at 100 miles an hour and there's no stopping it now and then finally minimizing verses 16 17 and 18 well actually we can do this

I'm on top of this and nobody will know we won't get caught all the details have been covered but verses 22 and 23 in reality there's always a huge cost but by this stage this guy is so driven by his senses that he just walks into our bed falls into our bed like a dumb animal it's a shocking reveal isn't it and it's a wonderful portrayal of how an idol takes hold of us and causes us to sacrifice whatever we need to sacrifice to get what it promises us so what's the secret of staying on the track of wisdom and true intimacy well again

I've just got three or four headings here trying to gather together the text and remember the text is poetry it's picture language so none of this is meant to be taken in absolute sense including the word death it's not as if the bible is saying anybody who commits adultery automatically is guaranteed to death and go to hell it's a picture of how serious it is in God's economy and persisted in it will lead to death actual death and destruction and hell but it's a picture of see the seriousness of it see that you're standing on the abyss and move away from it so what's the secret of staying on the track of wisdom and true intimacy well the first one I'm suggesting here is talk to yourself talk to yourself about what is really important and true now it's commonly said that talking to yourself is the first sign of madness that's ridiculous firstly because we're always talking to ourselves it's just that sometimes when we talk to ourselves we just fill our mind that we talk to ourselves rubbish but we're always talking to ourselves in Proverbs talking to yourself is the first sign of wisdom when you're talking to yourself about God's commands the key is to speak wisdom to ourselves or as [28:27] Martin Lloyd John says it the key is to preach God's word to ourselves to our own hearts verses 4 and 5 say to wisdom you are my sister and call insight your intimate friend and then verse 5 that will keep you from the forbidden woman from the adulteress with their smooth idols fruits or smooth words what will keep you from idols of any sort valuing and that's the picture of verse 4 valuing God's wisdom like you would a loving sister who's not afraid to look you in the eye and call you out and say you've been an absolute idiot I've thankfully only got one sister for that reason three brothers but only one sister and one I think is enough for any family but I can have that discussion with you later so yeah or at least one of my sisters anyway I'll just stop now okay value wisdom like a loving sister value wisdom like a close friend and again a close friend is a picture of somebody who will actually speak the truth in love to you who will call you out when you're being an idiot who will say look you're not thinking straight you need to say it like this second strategy put a fire awareness plan in place now we're very much in tune with fire awareness plans we all the bushfires last year and the devastation of it last week in chapter 6 verse 27

Martin talked about the verse can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned playing with false intimacy is like playing with fire it's like lighting a fire in a dry bushland setting on a hot windy day it's just not going to end well it will get out of control and it will consume you and so verses 1 and 2 and 4 the time to prepare for a wildfire is now ahead of time when you're calm when you're in control of your senses when your passions are under control when you're saying things straight when you can actually read God's word and see the implications and feel the import of it that's the time to put your fire plan in place not when the fire is licking at your door not when in this situation when you're actually in the embrace of this woman and kissing her passionately that ain't no time to try and formulate a plan well what should I do now hmm keep your inner landscape fixed and healthy verse 25 again this repeated thing through Proverbs let not your heart and that includes your attitudes your thinking and all those sort of things let not your heart turn aside to her way do not stray do not just endlessly wander into her path because you've not maintained a healthy inner landscape you've not guarded your attitudes and your thinking make the Lord cultivate a healthy heart make the Lord the object of your desire and source of delight don't overestimate your ability to resist temptation don't underestimate the power of sex and seduction you can't play with it without getting burnt don't allow yourself to wander aimlessly in life but lastly

and this is a bit of a negative one this is one from Eeyore if nothing else works use fear as a motivation fear of the carnage verses 26 and 27 if nothing else works just try and fill your mind with a fear of the carnage that unfaithfulness brings it's not the best motivation but it's far better than none because fear makes even the most self-reliant self-confident and that's what this young man is here as he's depicted here that's what the foolish man is he's self-reliant he's self-confident he thinks

I'm in control I can do this I can go to this point and stop safely and enjoy it up to this point but not get myself into danger fear makes even the most self-confident willful people more cautious and therefore hopefully more thoughtful in their life actions life decisions so friends as always and as always as is always the conclusion in proverbs experiencing the slippery slope of foolishness and destruction or staying on the track of true intimacy comes down to a very simple factor a very simple choice and that is who is your standard of beauty of desirability of delight of love of satisfaction proverbs and the scripture generally tell us that wisdom equals getting

Jesus because Jesus is the wisdom and righteousness of God 1 Corinthians getting Jesus is to get true intimacy full acceptance with God steadfast love eternal love total validation and that all results in expressing wisdom in our life decisions expressing the mind of Christ in all points in all facets in all categories of life including our sexuality now at first glance wisdom may not look as appealing as the picture portrayed in this chapter of a woman who's dressed to kill as we say dressed provocatively and just oozing sex and sexuality that seems to grab our attention that looks so appealing but man it's poison wisdom may not at first glance look that appealing but it delivers it delivers true intimacy it delivers the acceptance value and love we crave unfaithfulness on the other hand or foolishness is chasing our own form of wisdom and it's settling for the false intimacy of idols they promise delight but ultimately deliver destruction it may seem more attractive but it embodies everything that is against how God's people are defined and from here I think

[35 : 53] I'll finish with this from here I think we can see our best defense against temptation to unfaithfulness you see when we think of the Lord Jesus it was our unfaithfulness at every point in life which forced the father to put him on the cross and kill him it doesn't get any more the carnage doesn't get any bigger than that does it he experienced the ultimate carnage of unfaithfulness he lost everything because of our unfaithfulness he suffered everything because of our unfaithfulness he bore the brunt of the anger of God who is our aggrieved lover because we betrayed him in unfaithfulness repeatedly he bore the shame and the judgment of all our unfaithfulness smeared onto him and quite literally he went down to the pit of hell because of our unfaithfulness why to free us from our sin to set us free from a lifetime of unfaithfulness to set us free to righteousness so the best temptation the best motivation to avoid temptation to unfaithfulness

I keep saying to myself now as of a temptation to eat again look to Jesus for that which you're craving at the moment don't think food's going to give it to you and remember the cost the carnage that Jesus has endured because of your previous unfaithfulness and Calderwood don't trample on his costly love Lord help me never to give in to the temptation to unfaithfulness let me pray Lord unfaithfulness just defines our response to you even Lord now as Christians when we have the reality and the joy of knowing we've been renewed from the inside out and that we have your Holy Spirit specifically given to help us express the mind of

Christ even then Lord we find ourselves I find myself just going back to the old promises the old empty promises that there is a delight and a satisfaction in things or places other than you Lord forgive us Lord forgive me and help us Lord to find you to make you our source of delight and satisfaction and joy and to make you the standard of beauty in Jesus name I pray Amen