

SEXUAL DESIRE...GONE BAD!
Matthew 5:27-30

I. INTRO

- A. You need to know—when I plan a honeymoon—I PLAN A HONEYMOON! Lori's and mine didn't start out too bad—it was the honeymoon suite in a motel in Niagara Falls. Yes, it was a suite—like, it had two rooms. But the **bedroom!** We're talking a king-size bed with two big purple vinyl hearts making up the headboard! And red velvet curtains the whole way around the room. To think back on it...well...
1. I'm sorry to say—it didn't get better. What we could afford—and what we got—was a backwoods cabin near lovely North Bay. When we got there at sundown, the key broke off in the lock—and I had to break in through a window! Running **cold** water, no shower—and an outhouse. But hey, we were young and in love! Until Lori almost stepped on a skunk coming out of the outhouse one night. I heard this rustling in the forest—and then she made this Olympic-sized jump—right onto the porch!
 2. But the fishing was good. And we both liked to fish. That's good, right? And we caught nice fish. And the reason we caught them is because fish are not like humans. Fish--especially pike, like the ones in this picture, are like appetites with eyes. Throw a colored piece of metal like this with a hook on it out there—reel it in—and there's absolutely no discernment. **Bam!** There's no real food in sight—but they'll hit it—grab it and **run!**
-They're dumb. They spend their lives in school—and they're still stupid. And they don't think about the direction of their lives at all. "Hmmm. Fred went for one of those and went flying off, and **never came back!**" I mean, you'd think they'd notice the hook or the line or something. But do they? Nope! They just live for the next meal.
 3. Well, good thing fish are dumb—cause fishing saved the honeymoon. Boy, it's a good thing **we're** not just appetites with stomachs and eyes, isn't it? **We're** not dumb enough to go for something that's not real—and get reeled in! Right? **Right?**
- B. Well, actually, that's not what we see. A prominent politician on the fast track to an important somewhere—**known** to be tough on prostitution—who gets exposed as a customer in the very business he's prosecuting. A TV preacher who regularly blasts sexual sin from his pulpit—apparently has a rated X side to his secret life.

-In some way, we can sympathize; these sexual desires we experience as humans are **powerful**. And there's no way to put them on a stainless steel table and do autopsies—or bypasses—or liposuction. Sometimes we think, "How can **this** be from God when I'm tempted to do **that?**"

-According to Jesus—there is something that takes really good desires—and gets them **way** off track. Jesus calls it, simply, **lust**. Has anyone ever heard of that word—or are you just totally mystified? It seems to me that we all pretty much know what **lust** is—but no one talks much about how to deal with it. So, today, we're going to!

II. WHEN WHAT'S REALLY GOOD...GOES REALLY BAD!

- A. Given how powerful—and widespread sexual desire is, Jesus actually didn't say a lot about it. But what He says gets right to the core issue:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:27-28 TNIV)

1. In the process of doing research for her book, **The God Factor**, Cathleen Falsani interviewed someone you might call the "King of Lust:" Hugh Hefner—founder of the Playboy empire. He told her, "I was raised in a setting in which [sex] was for procreation and the rest was sin." Later in the interview, he said, "Our family was Prohibitionist, Puritan in a very real sense...Never hugged. Oh, no. There was absolutely no hugging or kissing in my family. There was a point in time when my mother, later in life, apologized to me for not being able to show affection. That was, of course, the way I'd been raised. I said to her, 'Mom, you couldn't have done it any better. And because of the things you weren't able to do, **it set me on a course that changed my life and the world.**" (Sex God, p. 60).
 2. What was the problem in Hugh Hefner's upbringing? His parents had believed the lie that humans were created as angels—beings without bodies and without sexual desires. That sexual desire is wrong. And nothing could be **further** from the truth! The Bible says that at the creation and wedding of the first two humans, the bride and groom were naked and unashamed. And God himself walked the bride, Eve, up the aisle! Imagine a wedding like that! -The Bible is actually rated "R"—it is a very sexually explicit book. Solomon, in describing his lover and bride in the Song of Solomon, starts with her hair, face and neck—and keeps heading south. The poetry about the sexual attraction and longing between a man and a woman is downright steamy! I don't know where Hefner's parents got their view of sex—but they **didn't** get it from the Bible! Sexual desire is **not** wrong.
- B. See, sin is always the twisting of one of God's good gifts—like sexual desire—into something destructive. For example, self-esteem is a **good** thing. How does it get twisted? Well, into pride and arrogance and narcissism. When sexual desire gets twisted from self-giving love into a form of selfishness—lust is the result.

1. We see this subtle twisting right at the front end of the story of humanity. The Devil makes sure that Adam and Eve, the first two people, are separated from each other. They have access to **everything**—except one tree. Guess what becomes the center of attention in this particular temptation? And the Deceiver prompts the question, "Gee! Why would God make something **so** desirable—off-limits? Doesn't seem fair to **me**—but, hey, I'm just a snake!"

-And that's how temptation baits every hook. "God's holding out on you! How unreasonable can Someone be? Either He's got ulterior motives—or some writer was having a bad day. How could a Good God make such a **good thing** off limits? How **unreasonable** is **that?**" Well, they bit—and so do we. They had **no** idea of the chaos their rebellion would bring—and **neither do we!**

2. When you think about sex, it's quite profound. To create a man and woman, you could say that God split the first Adam. And sexual desire is this giddy longing to be reconnected—to connect physically, emotionally and spiritually in a profound way that brings pleasure and makes the two—**one**. This connection is **so** deep—that it carries the potential of creating a human being with a soul that lives forever. It's impossible to over-estimate the power of what happens when two humans connect in this way.

-But it's so important to understand that, though we crave the physical pleasure—the driving force behind sex is to be deeply and mysteriously connected with another person. To fully belong to them in a way that **must** be protected by unconditional love. When God restricts this union to a public, lifelong covenant between a man and a woman, He's not being a prude—or being weird; He is guarding the intimacy and vulnerability of this relationship.

-Sexual desire is one of the most **powerful** driving force in life. Everything powerful—needs careful guidelines to protect it—and to protect others. For example, fire—would fall into this category. We use fire a **lot!** It runs our cars, cooks our food, heats our homes. Fire is **good!** But turn it loose—and it can kill everyone you love and steal everything you own. So—it's kept confined.

-Here's the problem we face in keeping sex and sexual desire in the place God intended. Our world knows how powerful sexual desire is—and uses it indiscriminately. It deals in lust and sex like banks deal with money. The internet and TV, in particular, use sexual content to raise their ratings—and as a marketing tool to sell just about everything.

-Question. Has anyone here recently heard **anyone** talk about sexual restraint or a person being a virgin until they get married in a positive way—outside of a gathering like this? When the Bible's perspective on this is brought up—and it's implied that human beings are even capable of sexual restraint—there's kind of this smirking, collective rolling of the eyes response. People think, "Are they naïve or **what?**" But no one smirks when the issues of abortion, rape, child molestation, STDs or AIDS are raised. Jesus said that adultery is only a symptom of a problem that goes way deeper. And that problem is sexual desire that is out of control.

III. BEYOND ANGELS AND ANIMALS

A. Let's just be clear what lust **isn't**. Lust isn't noticing a person of the opposite sex—or even seeing them as attractive. Lust isn't having sexual desires.

-It's **the prolonged look**. It's following the contours of a person's body either wishing that you could be with them, touch them or be sexually involved with them. It's intentionally looking at a person—other than your spouse—to get a sexual charge out of the experience. It's fantasizing about—or imagining a sexual or romantic experience with a person you find yourself emotionally attracted to.

-These days this happens wholesale in just about any location imaginable. And these days it's happening, increasingly, among both men and women. It happens almost anywhere—but especially through internet porn sites and chatrooms. It has done—

and will continue to do—a boatload of damage. It wastes time, hurts relationships, ruins families, brings shame and regret—and it’s incredibly addictive.

- **Playboy, Sex And The City** and Dr. Ruth say it’s just normal—**have fun!** And it does come naturally, but Jesus said it’s wrong—that it’s committing adultery with someone in your heart. So—why would He call something that comes so naturally—wrong?

1. Simple question. Who are you thinking about when you look or think about another person “lustfully” as Jesus calls it? You’re not really thinking about them. If you’re married, you’re certainly not thinking about the person you’re married to. If you or I do this—we’re thinking about satisfying **ourselves**. The other person, to us, is an object. They cease to be a living breathing person made in God’s image—with dreams, hopes and plans.

-See, our calling as followers of Jesus is to love others as God loves them. You can’t love someone—and **use** them. A human being is more than collection of interesting body parts. Lust reduces another person to the equivalent of a bag of potato chips where you consume what you want, then throw away the bag. See, **that’s** the real problem—mentally and emotionally reducing a soul to something you consume—regardless of their soul.

2. I have this little pen and pencil holder that I keep and use in my office. I treasure it! What makes it beautiful to me is not the materials or the artistic design. My daughter Kelly made it when she was little. I love it—because I love the one who created it. How we treat any creation reflects we feel about the creator. When someone bears the dignity and beauty of God’s image as each human does, my responsibility is to **love and value** them.

-And when I love and value people, I become a partner with God in redeeming and restoring and bringing goodness to my life—to others lives—and to all life on this planet. That, friends, is the good life! The life of blessing that God longs to pour into every person’s heart—including the lives of those we are tempted to reduce to a body—or something to consume that will serve my needs.

3. Because lust destroys how we see others, lust also destroys us. In fact, lust promises what it can **never** deliver. It sometimes starts with curiosity. We think, “Hmmm! I wonder about that? “Try that! Look at that! Explore that!” And, like the fish after the lure—we believe a lie—and we’re hooked.

-Lust, just like this fishing lure, is a lie. Whether it’s lust for more stuff, more clothes, more food, more attention or more money—it promises what it can’t deliver. At first it’s, “I’m free to look, to desire, to fantasize.” But ultimately there comes a point where we want something—and we can’t conceive of being content without it—and then it owns us!

-And when something owns you—whether it’s food, wine, money or sex—you and I have given traded one of life’s most precious gifts—**freedom**—for slavery.

a. Over time lust does frightening things to the human conscience. You don’t have to look far to see that. Lust has the potential to turn human beings into predators; where there’s this instinct on how to capture and use those weaker than themselves. Lust lies--and, like drugs, it takes a bigger and bigger hit and more and more explicit stuff—there’s this frightening downward spiral that people don’t see—till they’re **in** it!

- b. Ultimately—misguided and misused desire of **any** kind creates the loss of sensitivity and enjoyment. The Bible calls it being **given over to sensuality**. Remember the song by The Rolling Stones, **Can't Get No Satisfaction?** Over time this deep need becomes like a bottomless pit. You throw stuff into it—and it echoes as it bounces off the walls. It owns us. Leaves us wanting more—whatever it is.

-We go back to the fridge and eat the **whole** box. We go to the store and buy one in **every** color. We go back to the website and watch **every** clip. And every time it leaves us emptier and lonelier and hungrier and more depressed—and more ashamed. (Bell, **Sex God**)

-As I mentioned, we live in a world that makes a joke of lust. People actually say things like, “Well, it’s okay to go **shopping**—just so you don’t **buy** it and take it home!” But with lust, you **do** take it home! The experience is forever recorded in sensurround—the images and emotions and sounds and smells are burned into our minds. We think about what we see—dwell on it. And we become what we think about. It’s called the **law of exposure**—and it’s **real!**

-Jesus warns about lust, not because he’s a prude. He warns us because he knows this is not a game. He knows if we stay on this track, it ends in destruction and shame. It’s a trap. It twists your heart. And it treats people—human souls—as **its**.

-The tragedy is that is that sexual desire is a longing for connectedness—something only love can bring. And people keep hammering the sex button—like a trained rat--hoping that a little intimacy will dribble out!

4. Let’s read what Jesus said one more time: **"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."** (Matthew 5:27-28 TNIV)

Now, I want to be clear about something. Jesus is **not** saying here is, “Hey—you’ve already committed adultery in your mind, you might as well go do it with your **body?**” The act of adultery has all the wrong associated with lust—with a whole other boatload of trouble and heartache.

-Friends, we just really, **really** need to be clear about something—especially in our world. Adultery is always—**always** wrong. It’s destructive. Even if you hear Debbie Boone crooning in the background, ...**It can’t be wrong—when it feels so right!**

Sometimes it **feels** right to a teenage driver to drink and drive fast with a carload of friends on a dark road.

-Hear me on this: **No one wins!** If we won’t believe God’s tender warnings on it—then there’s only one other way to learn that he’s telling the truth. It’s called **the hard way**. It’s...well...**hard!** Jesus isn’t angry; he’s not red, face sweating, pounding on a pulpit out there on the mountain. He’s just saying, “I want you to have **life** and **make a difference!** The way you’re taking is the way of shame

and deceit. If you will be my apprentice—and let me teach you and lead you—I really do have the power to bring life. So...choose life. **PLEASE choose life!**

- B. So, what's the solution? Jesus goes on to give what appears to be some **startling** advice. Let's look at it again:

If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.” (Matthew 5:29-30 TNIV)

1. Now, what Jesus said here sounds quite violent and bloody. And **painful!** I wonder if Jesus may have been taking a jab at a small group of Rabbis in his day who felt that the best way not to sin sexually was to never even **look** at a woman. So, if a woman was walking their way, they would literally shut their eyes. They were called the **bruised and bleeding rabbis** because they kept falling down and running into things. No joke—that's true.
-If everyone followed Jesus' advice, at least half the population would be blind. And blind people with stumps for hands are still quite capable of lusting, I would guess. There must be some truth here that Jesus is getting at besides lopping off body parts.

-He explains his words by saying, **It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.** Let's talk about the first century Jewish view of Heaven. Rather than seeing it as a kind of pleasure palace we go to in some far-off galaxy—they saw Heaven as the realm **all over** where what God wanted done was done all the time. It's perfect--where everything is as **God** intends it to be. And that realm can intersect this planet.

-That's why Jesus would talk about the fact that, in Him, God's Kingdom has come here and intersected all the kingdoms here. That's why Jesus, as I've mentioned before, would teach us to pray, **“Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.”**

-The problem is that here on earth, God has temporarily allowed for the existence of other kingdoms; other authorities. That means that it is possible for us—for every human—to do what they want to do. We can choose to live in the will of God under His leadership. Or...we can rebel and choose to live some other way.

-The ultimate realm where things are not as God wants them to be—both now—and for eternity—is hell. This is a place of anarchy—where humans are not treated as God intended for them to be treated.

We have an expression that goes like this, “We just did it for the hell of it.” Which means? It was pointless. Random. Meaningless. We have another expression. When something is really awful, dehumanizing and emotionally or physically painful—for example, a concentration camp, or a workplace—we say, “It was **hell on earth.**”

-Don't get me wrong—I'm not spiritualizing Heaven and Hell—or turning them into allegories or parables. They are **very** real. I'm simply saying that Jesus'

language spoke of both present and future realities. And what was happening in the present had huge implications for what the future would be like.

-The bottom line is—it is clearly possible, because of Jesus, for Heaven to invade earth. And it is **also** possible for hell to invade earth. And when humans are in any way stripped of their dignity and seen as objects without souls or personalities to be possessed and used—guess which has invaded? To have **my** wife or **my** daughters treated like objects—some **thing** to be possessed, consumed and thrown away would be hell on earth.

2. Jesus came to offer us a whole different way of life—that **brings** life and peace and grace and meaning. It's the place where God is making **all** things right—as they **should** be. Where souls are found, and people restored, where peace and grace and blessing comes into homes and offices and communities. That's what Jesus is about; that's what we're about. The title of this series is, **Who Gets The Blessing?** We do—when we become conduits of restoration and hope and eternal life.

This was the new community—the new humanity—Jesus gave, where **everyone** has value; where the ground is level; where all divisions between race and gender and socio-economic status end. Forever. The blessing of God is always based on love.

-But there is **another** choice. Lust is based on selfishness and self-interest—and worse. Lust destroys us and all it touches. Jesus is saying, “You can't use and degrade people I love-- live like hell—and have the blessing of Heaven.” If we choose to live like hell—and we **can** make that choice—we end up with a **hell** of a life—and forfeit the good life only God can give.

3. So, is Jesus saying, “**Just say NO!** Stop lusting!” The core message Jesus brings to everyone is that we need to repent—we need to rethink **everything**. If we will—and if we will come to Him for strength and power and forgiveness—we can **choose** to live a new way. A way that both honors and loves God—and honors and loves others.

-In fact, the basis for everything Jesus says here is, “Love God with all you are” and “Love others as yourself—in the same way you would like to be loved.” And that's a huge challenge, isn't it? When we travel for any length of time on a trail, we create ruts. Ruts get deep, don't they? How do you get out of them?

- a. The first thing we have to do is stop lying to ourselves. “What I'm doing is okay for **me**.” I'm always surprised when I hear this. Sometimes followers of Jesus get quite narcissistic about truth—that God customizes morality for them. It's like what the Bible says about Jesus is solid, but when it deals with how we handle our sexuality we start waffling and making exceptions. And it's the same old lie the Devil told Eve, “Has God **really** said...?”

-The Bible is quite clear on the power of sex—and where the guardrails are. It always has been clear. And we are **free** if we choose, to defy God on this issue. But it's not honest to excuse it by playing games with truth. If you're going just do what you want—then say, “I'm just going to

do what *I* want!" Don't try to make the Bible say something that fits your lifestyle.

- b. When we stop lying to ourselves, it will be much easier to unmask the lies that all misdirected sexual desires and behaviors are based on. We are not angels—as Hugh Hefner's parents believed. We have been given sexual desire—and need to learn to manage it!

-The lie on the **other** side, when it comes to sexual behavior is, "I just can't help myself! I just do what comes naturally!" When we say things like that—we put ourselves on the same level as animals. Ever been in the barnyard? I mean, animals have **no** self-restraint—and there's no shame when it comes to mating in public! They don't have to worry, "What will **humans** think?". They're animals.

-Putting yourself on the same level as an animal—with no self-control—is a horrible thing to do. We aren't! We were made in the image of God—with dignity. Sex between humans has a spiritual depth to it—a connection on a level that is way, **way** profound. To think less—to think you just **can't** control yourself is a lie. It's a lure with a hook in it.

-To move from darkness to light in the sexual area of life, we have see the lies behind the things we crave. We have to ask things like, **What does it promise? Can it deliver? Is this craving really about something else that's missing in my life? Where is the good in this person or this thing—and how is it being distorted? Have I been here before? What was it like? Where did it lead? Have I given in before? Did it work? What will the moments after, the morning after...the week after be like? What is the real price tag on this? (Bell, Sex God)**

-And if you're serious about exposing the lies—you probably need to pray, **God, gives me eyes to see the lies!**

-You may need some help in this area. Sometimes our desires are really confusing—and we need the help of others, maybe a Christian counselor—to understand what's driving us.

4. You may think you're stuck. Trapped. You've tried to get free—but it seems impossible to change. Getting trapped happens. All the time. You won't be free from whatever has its hooks in you—until you find something you want more. See it's not a matter of repressing your sexual desires—or getting rid of them. That will never happen. It's a matter of you and I giving ourselves to bigger desires.

-Remember Jesus' story about the Kingdom—the leadership and kindness and grace of God—being like a person who finds a treasure in a field—and sells **everything** to buy the field—because the life God offers is **that good! That blessed!**

-In this passage, Jesus gives a powerful word picture for something I've found helpful over the years. The image is that of radical surgery. **No one** wants that

kind of surgery where they lose a finger, a foot, a leg. But it's preferable to the alternative. Death.

-There are times in our lives when the only way to be free from something—is to do radical surgery. If a person's an alcoholic, where do they need radical surgery? Alcohol. If a person's addicted to drugs, what needs radical surgery? Drugs—and, very likely, the friends they hang with.

-When it gets into the sexual arena, it **may** be the internet, or the places you go to, or the satellite TV, or the beach, or Starbucks. It may even be your job. People say, "Oh, I don't think I could do without that! I'll try harder!" And in the past **trying harder has been...effective?** Is there an area of your life that may be painful to lose—but radical, drastic action may save everything your **really** want—and give you something much better. A **whole** life. A life without shame and deceit—without sneaking around—without worrying who will know—who will find out. How **badly** do you **want** to be free?

5. One of the biggest sources of help in getting and staying free is accountability. The truth about me is that I'm goofed up sexually—and so are you. All of us are tempted. All of us have fallen. All of us struggle. All of us have felt shame and been deceptive and said "Yes" when we should've said "No"—and "No" when we should've said "Yes." Followers of Jesus who pretend otherwise do so because they're afraid. Or too proud to admit it.

-I'm not saying this to justify our junk; I'm just saying **Welcome to the human race!** I can safely guarantee you that if you revealed the deepest, most shameful sexual secret in your life this morning—and everyone here had taken truth serum, **someone else** would have to say, "Me too!" When the secrecy lid gets pulled off of our lives—and someone says, **Me too!** all of a sudden, there's hope. No one has this sexual desire area nailed—at least until the nails are in the coffin! In fact, my guess is that when Jesus got to this point, every guy in his group of disciples immediately sensed, "Oh, oh! Jesus knows! Maybe He'll throw me out."

-Something I need to say. Pornography is **extremely** addictive. And there is help available. There is a group of Christ-followers dedicated to helping set people free; their website is **XXXCHURCH.COM**.

-My promise to you is that Jesus **never** withdraws his love and power based on our flaws and scars and stumblings. He promised He would **always** forgive, **always** wash—and, better yet—set us free!

IV. A MONUMENT TO LUST; A MONUMENT TO LIFE

- A. This building, as most of you know, was once a monument to lust—known as **Friction**. Everything that is **wrong** and destructive about lust in our world probably happened here. When we bought it—all the windows were boarded over, the interior was painted black—and pink. Mirrors **everywhere**. The only light, apart from spotlights, came from ultraviolet bulbs. Black lights. Where only light colored stuff showed up—and everything else was dark.

-In the dark—with the music pulsing and all the glitter—this place looked pretty cool. But when the light came on—**real** light—it was a dirty, smelly broken place. It needed

guted—and we prayed that all the sadness and all the brokenness that this place had caused would go. And it did. What God is doing here is a celebration—a parable of new life. Here’s the parallel. Jesus bought us—and when we agree to the transaction—He **transforms** us and replaces our shame and darkness with light and power.

- B. And God’s power is greater than any force of darkness—any habit—any form of slavery. We are **not** animals, looking for a place—**any** place to mate! We are the children of the Most High God—made in his image. He has promised that there is **no** sin too dark to forgive; **no** life too crooked to straighten; **no** slavery too strong to break. He’s **more** than ready to give us power and freedom and grace. But we have to ask!