

Series: Making Life Work In A Screwed Up World

October 2, 2011

BEAUTIFUL, POWERFUL...AND POTENTIALLY LETHAL!

Proverbs 5; 6:20-35; 7:6-27

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1. Just some clarification at the beginning might be helpful; we're going to be talking about what Proverbs has to say about sex. So—the rating is probably at least PG13. I don't want any angry emails! Proverbs is pretty blunt and explicit—so I'm going to have to pass that on. Are we okay?

-As I began work on this message a few weeks ago, there was controversy in the media about suggestive lingerie being marketed and sold to pre-teen girls—like we're talking ages 7-11. I thought, "This is so far into the stupid zone—why is it even an issue?" But it is. I don't know if there's any area where our society needs wisdom more desperately than when it comes to our sexuality.

-I think most of us know that the act of sexual intercourse between a man and a woman is one of God's most amazing, exciting and mysterious gifts to humankind. It is the only act between a man and a woman that has the power to create a living, thinking, feeling person—with a soul that lives forever! Maybe that's why Proverbs says:

There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a young woman.
(Proverbs 30:18-19 NIV)

-Sexuality, when it's used as God intended, is something that expresses love, passion, and intimacy more profoundly than anything else on this planet. So wisdom in this area of life first comes from the understanding that sex was God's idea. Let's say it together—because I think we sometimes forget. **Sex was God's idea!**

2. But when sexuality just gets turned loose? Watch out! And that's pretty much what happened 50 years ago in something called, **The Sexual Revolution**. Anyone here ever heard of that? The basic premise was, "Who in the **world** put all these weird, restrictive, uptight rules around something as cool as **sex!**" So, people pretty much threw away what God had to say on the issue.

-My guess is that this change in social ethic is at least partially to blame for the horrendous stats in our world on STDs, AIDS, abortions, predatory behaviour, rape, and overall brokenness. Would you agree that we live in a **very** screwed up world? I see a **lot** of sexuality; what I **don't** see is happiness, peace and freedom. So--where are you going to go to get advice on this **powerful** drive that we all feel—and find guidelines--help? In our culture, people turn to all kinds of places. Some turn to Hugh Hefner and Larry Flynt. Some turn to **Vogue**, or Lady Gaga, or Jerry Springer, or Dr. Ruth.

-I'll tell you where a lot of people don't go. They don't go to God--the One who created it. Why? Well, at least **one** of the reasons is that our society is obsessed with sex—and sometimes it seems that the only message that comes from the church is, **NO! BAD! DON'T!** Honestly, God's message has been many times misrepresented.

- a. Augustine, one of the earliest scholars in the church, said sexual intercourse for any other reason than having children was shameful. Another early religious leader found reasons to outlaw sexual intercourse between couples on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and Mondays. That made Tuesdays and Wednesdays hot nights in the parish! Philip Yancey has calculated that if married couples followed the church calendar, there were only 44 days in the year that we open for sex. Sounds like a nightmare, doesn't it? Some of you are saying, "Where can I get one of those calendars?!"
- b. This, friends, was **never** God's intent! In fact, when God surveyed all of creation the **only** thing He saw that was **not** good—was that the man He had created was **alone--incomplete**. His response was to that aloneness was **Eve**. -What do you think Adam's first words were when he saw Eve standing naked before him? "I'll bet she has a wonderful personality? I wonder if she's the one for me? Maybe not." Actually, there's all this power and intensity and poetry wrapped up in what was a kind of pun in the original language: "WHO-O-O-A! MAN!" And God's assessment of a man and a woman, one flesh, in each other's arms was...**very good!**
- c. But there **is** such a thing as a prude in our world. Maybe you've met one. Remember **Church Lady** from SNL? Well, that's **church lady**—not **God**. The wisdom of God says:

Enjoy the wife you married as a young man! Lovely as an angel, beautiful as a rose—don't ever quit taking delight in her body. Never take her love for granted! (Proverbs 5:18-19 MSG)

-In fact, read the Song of Solomon—it will make you **blush!** It is **not** talking about the ecstasies of spirituality; it's the honest celebration of sex between a man and a woman.

God's verdict on sex is that it is **very** good. Say it with me: **Sex is VERY good!**

- d. I'll tell you **specifically** when God has a problem with how we use this incredible gift of making love; it's when we use it recreationally and selfishly—instead of within the protective boundaries of both **love** and a **commitment protected by public promises**.

-Now, can we just be honest? The sexual revolution came out of the assumption that humans fit into the same category as animals—and that the sexual drive is simply a basic appetite meant to be satisfied whenever you feel it. I have never, however, seen an animal feel ashamed and used; I have never seen an animal emotionally broken because they were raped. I think we're **all**

smart enough—and have **seen** enough and **experienced** enough to know that we are **not** animals.

-I think what the Bible says about sex carries truth that resonates with everyone—unless they don't want to hear it. The sexual act is **profoundly** exhilarating—but it is **also** profoundly emotional **and** spiritual. Two souls touch. In speaking to people who, like our culture, thought that having sex was like eating a meal says:

There's more to sex than mere skin on skin. Sex is as much spiritual mystery as physical fact. As written in Scripture, "The two become one." (1 Corinthians 6:16 MSG)

-This passage makes it clear that if you're married, the sexual relationship between you and your spouse is not separate from your spirituality. For us to make it all that it's intended to be, it will take learning and sensitivity to the other person—mainly because the messages we've gotten from our culture have been so bizarre.

It's a **very** complex area of life—and it's **not** about someone else giving me **what** I want... **when** I want it.

3. When Lori and I got married 34 years ago, I read all the Christian books I could find on how to please a woman in marriage. After a romantic wedding, lots of pictures, and a reception with a **long** program, we headed to the honeymoon suite I'd found in Niagara Falls for \$50 a night. You know, two huge purple hearts on the headboard, red velvet curtains. But, I'd read the books—so I **knew** how to please a woman. After two days there, we headed for the wonderful honeymoon get away place I'd found near North Bay. It was a cabin—**not** a cottage--make your own meals, no shower or bath—but we **did** have an outhouse! Did I tell you that Lori got cornered by a skunk one night when she was coming out? But...I digress. We did, however, have a speedboat—and the fishing was wonderful... I **thought** I knew what any woman would want. North woods. Cool nights. Grilling steaks on a hibachi. Did I mention...**cheap?**

-But it's okay—I was going to become a pastor, I'd read the books, and **I** knew how to please my new bride! It was in **that** setting where she asked me to shake out the rug—and I gave my memorable answer—quoted to me **many, many, MANY** times since...say it with me—"That's **your** job!"

- a. Now, is there anyone here besides me whose honeymoon did **not** go exactly as you had planned? Love, sex, romance, intimacy—is **like** that. Intimacy, in particular, is based on **trust** and **caring** and **servanthood**...and particularly on **faithfulness**. Not just **making** promises in a romantic setting--**keeping** them. That's what's behind what Proverbs says here:
Enjoy the wife you married as a young man! ...Don't ever quit taking delight in her body. Never take her love for granted!
(Proverbs 5:18-19 MSG)

-Notice the perspective here—for husbands and wives—it’s assuming that the reader or listener has been married for a while. Pleasure isn’t wasted on the young!

It reminds me of a story about this elderly couple lying in bed after watching a romantic movie. She says, “You know, when we were first married you used to snuggle up next to me every night.” So, he grumbles a little—but rolls over next to her and snuggles up.

-But then she says, “You know, when we were first married, you would hold my hand as we snuggled.” So, he mutters a little more—something about arthritis—but takes her hand. And then she says, “You know, when we were young and first married, you would nibble on my ear!” Well, she throws back the covers and groans as he gets out of bed. And she’s hurt—she says, “Where are you going?” He says, “To get my teeth!”

-To find the love and joy and intimacy that sexual love promises—it means taking delight in the person you’ve given yourself to—even if it means getting your teeth!

- b. So, maybe I just need to use up my PG13 rating and say it: Sexuality, the sexual organs, orgasms, sexual intercourse, breasts, buttocks--are nothing to be ashamed of or embarrassed about. God never intended us to be non-sexual. God created us with—with all the curves and straight lines, muscles and softness that make us men and women. And **God** also created us with a craving for intimacy, passion—and tenderness. In **His** image!

-And sexual desire is not a mistake--you know, something God thought up when He started to run out of good ideas. Let's be clear; God created men and women to be sexually attracted to each other and there is nothing dirty, sinful or shameful about that!

-And the sex act, the passionate meeting and clinging of two bodies was intended by God to be one of the most powerful experiences humans can have. So powerful, in fact, that it needs to be protected by vows—so that two people would exclusively belong to each other. This powerful attraction was intended to motivate two people to communicate, forgive, grow—and create a safe place for the children they would create.

4. Given what I’ve said so far, does anyone have an idea on why God would put such high guardrails around sex? It’s a good—but extremely **powerful** drive in us. It is **so** powerful that we will endanger our souls, our freedom—and everything we want for our lives to satisfy it.

-What do we do with forces that are good and essential—but **powerful**? Think about fire. We need it to heat our homes, cook our food—and, of course, the most necessary thing—fix our hair. Does anyone here build a fire in the middle of your living room to stay warm on a cold night? Or cook food? Not if you actually have a brain. See, we **all** know that a fire keeps burning until it runs out of fuel. Water is

essential to life—but if you’ve ever had a leak in your pipes—you know how destructive it can be when it gets outside of **where it’s supposed to be**.

-God’s wisdom says, “This is how to use your mouth, your money, your opportunities **wisely** so you don’t play the fool!” Something as **powerful** as our sexuality needs restraints. Walls. Let it run in whatever course it chooses--and watch out! The language of Proverbs is **very** blunt:

Can a man scoop a flame into his lap and not have his clothes catch on fire? Can he walk on hot coals and not blister his feet? So it is with the man who sleeps with another man’s wife. He who embraces her will not go unpunished...the man who commits adultery is an utter fool, for he destroys himself. (Proverbs 6:27, 29, 320 MSG)

- a. Now, remember—Proverbs was likely a wisdom manual for young men in the palace. What it says is for men and women. And the **consistent** message all through the Bible is that sex is reserved for marriage between a man and a woman.

-It would be **very** easy to float downstream on this; to think, “Yeah, well, this is all antiquated Middle Eastern thinking. God is cool with **safe sex** between two consenting, committed people. After all, you can’t be expected to **control** yourself!” Really? Like God changed his mind? I’d say we’ve bought into our culture’s thinking. Paul summarizes biblical teaching like this:

It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.

The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 NIV)

- b. So. The question from our culture like ours is, “Why does this part of life seem to have such high walls around it—when everything in us **fights** it?”

The warnings are **not** about disease and unwanted pregnancy—so condoms and anti-biotics don’t solve the problems. The issue is that we are **spiritual beings**—not animals. We have **souls**. What happens our bodies affects our souls. Sex is **inevitably** a spiritual experience—whether or not we are willing to acknowledge it.

-When you engage in sexual intimacy, in a very real way you are coming as close as is humanly possible to touching that person’s soul. And that’s why Proverbs would say, **If you’re not married to someone, keep your hands off their soul!**

- And ***I think deep inside we know that!*** If we're ***honest*** with ourselves—we would admit that if someone we marry has had sex with too many people to count—it's ***not*** like they've eaten at a lot of restaurants. I've never heard a woman who's been molested or raped talk about it like someone stole her lunch.

- c. Something else I've heard a lot. "What's the big deal about reserving sex for marriage? It's ***just a piece of paper!***" Think about this in a few other contexts. If you're in management, try not paying your employees for a month—and when they complain, say, "Hey—a paycheck is just a piece of paper! We can work together without a piece of paper!" Or, if go through 4 years of schooling at U. of T. and, at the end, they say, "You don't need a diploma to go get a job. After all, it's just a piece of paper." Try pulling the ***piece of paper*** thing with a police officer when you stopped. License? Registration? Insurance? Just ***pieces of paper!***
- d. Marriage is ***not*** just a piece of paper. It's a promise of the most solemn, self-giving kind that humans are capable of. It's a vow—of commitment and faithfulness—before God, before the society of which I am a part, and before my friends—that I will be accountable for my pledge. I took a vow; I made an oath; I gave my word!

5. Think for a few minutes about some of the public humiliation that's gone on in our world over the past few years. Anthony Weiner, Bill Clinton, Arnold Schwarzenegger...the list goes on and on. Am I just weird—or do you also find it strange that this stuff would even be newsworthy in a culture whose official position is, ***Anything goes!*** And why would high level, smart people lay ***everything*** on the line if they instinctively know that to get caught is to potentially lose ***everything!*** When you start these patterns of behaviour ***before*** marriage, you are a fool to think that it's just going to stop on it's own ***after*** marriage.

-Let's just talk in practical, common sense—***conventional wisdom*** terms. You hear it all the time; having unprotected sex in a culture like ours is risky at best—dangerous at worst. Right? Yes, we have more protection than we ever have—but ***most*** people know that these controls are ***not*** risk-free.

-Second, sexual desire, by its very nature, is ***not*** something we handle strategically. ***That's*** why in a world that ***knows***—AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, herpes, and unwanted pregnancies are ***still*** happening in record numbers. When passion rules—wisdom goes out the window.

-Third, sexual habits are addictive and become ***deeply*** ingrained in our behaviour—very quickly. And they don't just go away. Pornography, multiple sexual encounters, under-age sex is ***not*** about love; it's about ***lust***. And love doesn't stop lust. People do stupid, risky things ***after*** marriage because they do stupid, risky things ***before*** marriage.

-And because sex is powerful, the memories of these sexual images or encounters ***stay*** in our minds. If a person has been sexually active before marriage, their partner would have every right to ask, "Were you having sex with me—or with one of the other

75 people you've had orgasms with?" That may sound crass—but it's **true**. Faithfulness starts **before** marriage—not after.

-Now, **to me**, the consistent teaching of the Bible—given by the Holy Spirit—is not prudish, weird or uptight. It **just makes sense** when it comes to giving this gift of sex its full potential for happiness—and preventing heartache. It doesn't take away from our dignity—it **gives** us dignity; it says, "You are **not** animals! You **can** control yourselves! You **can** make wise decisions!"

-And that's precisely where you and I have a decision to make. Proverbs says that **fearing God**—respecting what the Giver of life has to say about it—is the beginning of wisdom. If you ignore it? Well, the only other way to learn is **the hard way**. There's a terse warning in Proverbs—about how sexual immorality promises all kinds of things—but delivers pain:

In the end you will groan in anguish when disease consumes your body. You will say, "How I hated discipline! If only I had not ignored all the warnings! Oh, why didn't I listen to my teachers? Why didn't I pay attention to my instructors? I have come to the brink of utter ruin, and now I must face public disgrace."
(Proverbs 5:11-14 NLT)

6. So, where does living by this wisdom need to start? Well, it's **not** when you've got your hands all over each other in some dark hallway at the high school—or on the living room couch.

What kicks in when things are heated up is, "This is normal," "I can't help myself," "It's okay because I'm in a committed relationship;" "Stuff happens to **other** people—not me!"

-Proverbs lays out a **very** interested scenario. Read with me:

I saw some naive young men, and one in particular who lacked common sense. He was crossing the street near the house of an immoral woman, strolling down the path by her house. It was at twilight, in the evening, as deep darkness fell. The woman approached him, seductively dressed.

Can anyone guess what happened?

He followed her at once, like an ox going to the slaughter.

He was like a stag caught in a trap, awaiting the arrow that would pierce its heart. He was like a bird flying into a snare, little knowing it would cost him his life. (Proverbs 7:7-10, 22-23 MSG)

Because this is directed to young men—it refers to a temptress. In real life—it goes both ways, doesn't it?

- a. How many of you think this was just an unfortunate chance encounter—like, it **just happened!**

I'm sure, if this guy was married, that's how he would explain it to his wife, right?

But it **wasn't** coincidence. First of all—it appears as if he's been down this street before. He **knows** who lives here and he's been **thinking** about her!

-Something else—it's dark enough for him to see her—and her to see him—but what they have in mind isn't obvious to others. In sexual temptation—people prefer darkness over light.

- c. Jesus clearly said that sexual immorality starts before you take your clothes off. He says that when you look at someone for the purpose of lusting after them—you've already started down the path of unfaithfulness. If you want to stay **off** that path—you need to be honest about what you're doing—and do radical surgery on the influences that are leading you to a place of regret.

7. So, what about us? Well, first we have to decide whether what God says about sexual behaviour is right and true and leads to life. I want you to check your thinking: Is using foreplay and sex for recreational purposes just harmless fun—or, as it says here, will it lead to deep regret. Really, does it deliver what it promises and make relationships less complicated—less hurtful—or **more** complicated and hurtful? Proverbs says that if you just do what feels natural, there will come a point when you will say, **Behold, I have played the fool!** Have you ever made a decision about **who's right**—or are you playing it by ear and keeping your options open?

-If you have decided that Jesus is actually right in what He says—that sex is exclusively intended for marriage--then **radical surgery** makes sense.

- a. It starts with radical surgery on what we consume—and I'm not talking about food! There's a passage I've referred to before from Philippians—and it represents the **law of exposure**. Paul is writing and says:

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. (Philippians 4:8 NIV)

-The law of exposure, put in it's simplest form is, **garbage in...garbage out**. What expose yourself to—in terms of what you watch and read and listen to and talk about—or text—you think about.

And, over time, what you think about—you act on. It's that simple. Radical surgery may mean radically limiting—or being accountable to someone—for what you watch and listen to.

- b. Second—and I risk offending **everyone** on this—but I'm just gonna go for it. It has to do with how we dress in a culture that's been **skank-ified**. Proverbs, speaking to the issue of discretion—or modesty—is quite blunt:

A beautiful woman who lacks discretion is like a gold ring in a pig's snout. (Proverbs 11:22 NLT)

-Want me to define modesty? **Don't advertise anything that's not for sale.** No one likes to be treated as something to be consumed—but if you **advertise** yourself as kind of a butter tart on a plate what do you expect? See, there's not a **thing** wrong with looking attractive—and you can look attractive without looking “consumptive!” Enough said.

- c. Third—and I think this fits with the one above—**If you're not looking for another husband or wife—STOP SHOPPING!** Stop flirting, stop looking, stop commenting, stop searching—because it will only create heartache and jealousy and confusion.
- d. Another guideline—keep the **wall** in good repair! Remember what Proverbs says in the context of talking about laziness—a man who owns a vineyard—but is too lazy to keep the wall that protects it in good repair? There are moral walls—and most of us know where they are. In speaking about these sexual boundaries, Proverbs says:

Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. (Proverbs 5:16-17 NIV)

And we dismantle them by compromising in small ways—in what we watch, by flirting, by crossing lines of touch we know are wrong, by things we fantasize about. And one day the rest of the wall crumbles—and we find ourselves where we never thought we'd be.

-Anyone remember Hurricane Katrina several years ago? The problem New Orleans, as you know, was partly the immense amount of water—but mostly the fact that the levy's didn't hold—and the entire city was filled up like a giant bathtub!

- e. One final thing. Be careful with your conscience. Proverbs says:

“This is the way of an adulterous woman: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, ‘I've done nothing wrong.’ (Proverbs 30:20 NIV)

-To understand how graphic this is, **eating** her is a euphemism for sexual intercourse...and the **mouth...?** Okay, you get it. Do you see the problem? This is a person who's blown off how God says to handle our sexuality—and potentially ruined a marriage—and says, “Not me! I haven't done anything to be ashamed of!”

-The worst thing in life, friends, is **not** feeling guilty for the things you do; it's burning off the nerve endings in your conscience so that you **never** feel guilt—or much of anything. And when that happens, you lose the center line down your highway. You do things—not because they bring life and joy—but because you're addicted to them. **And, inside, you don't like the person you've become!**

-Let me repeat; sex is **not** a matter of two bodies coming together. It involves, in some profound way, the merging—the sticking together--of two souls. When

you have sex with someone, there is a part of you that cleaves—and **stays**. You keep doing that—cleaving and leaving—and you will get to the point where it can't help but damage your soul.

-Here's the question I believe we have to answer in a culture like ours; is our freedom to do what we want sexually **so important** to us—that we would trade our safety, our future—and our soul for it?

Q & A

8. I know that what I've been talking about this morning brings up **all** kinds of regret—and shame. Guilt has to do with our actions—and is intended by God to lead to grace and forgiveness. Over time, if we beat out the lights on the dashboard of our heart that are warning us about how we live—guilt goes beyond behaviour—and leads to shame. Shame is about **who we are** as a person.

-Want to know who you are? You are a person created in the image of God—made to live with character and self-control—and to be whole. You were not made to be used—you were made to be loved. And wherever you are—God offers a way back. He is in the business of not just forgiving us—but restoring our dignity—and giving us the power to say **NO** when we need to say **NO**—and **YES!** when we need to say **YES!** And the question this morning is—will you say your first **YES!** to Him?