

One of my favorite Catholic writers, Ronald Rohlheiser, in his great book, *The Holy Longing*, said:

[There is a divorce] in Western Culture between religion and eros. Like all divorces it was painful, and as in all divorces, the property got divided up: Religion got to keep God and the secular got to keep sex. The secular got passion and the God got chastity...But, for now, we live in a broken situation. Religion is perceived as being anti-erotic, anti-sex, anticreative, anti-enjoyment, and anti-this-world. The God who underwrites the churches is then perceived as stoic, celibate, dull, cold, otherworldly, and threatened by sex and by human creativity. The secular world is seen as the champion of eros, sex, creativity, and enjoyment, but is seen as anti-God and antichurch. And we are torn; how does one pick between the two? Ronald Rohlheiser, *The Holy Longing*

We live in a world where there's a deep divorce between the concepts of sexuality and spirituality. And we live in the aftermath of the fallout of that divorce. In our world, there are two predominant visions of sexuality, and I want to contrast the secular vision with the religious vision, and then with the way of Jesus—three different options.

The Secular Vision

The secular vision of sexuality sees that all physical experiences, desires, everything should be met with no opposition. If you feel it, it's good. It's right. It's worthy of your fulfillment. It's an appetite to be satiated, and so anything you feel must be right. The secular world is built on this idea of what some ethicists would call emotivism. If you feel it, it must be true. Therefore, sexual feelings you feel should be satiated with no questions asked, and nothing should prevent you from experiencing those.

The Religious Vision

On the other end, you have the religious vision. This option sees all desire as bad. Any form of physical desire is icky, should be discarded, should be removed. It sees our longings and our bodies as bad. Consequently, the religious path isn't the language of instant gratification that was in the secular vision, but more of repression—repress your desires. That's how you deal with that fire, that holy longing to use Rohlheiser's words. We are to deny, suppress, and push away all of our desires because physical desires seem bad. This leads to all sorts of issues. It leads to hypocrisy in healthy relationships with our body and our desires. It leads to duplicity and secrecy within church leaders. It leads to all sorts of issues that flow from the wrongful posture of repressing all desire.

This wasn't all that different in Jesus' world, where these two visions were also operative. The Roman society functioned on instant gratification. They too had almost the same ethic that we hold in the secular world, that if you feel it, it should be satiated. And in Jesus' time, there were religious elites who held very much the religious view that I just described, that they were to suppress all of those desires. So they would construct all these laws around this, most of which were at the expense of the women in their society. It was to cover them up, to hide them, to not associate with them, so you could suppress those desires.

So these two visions, the secular vision and the religious vision, both fail to hold together the beautiful reality of sexuality and spirituality based on the words of Jesus. So this morning, I really believe Jesus has a word for us. He has something for us to restore and renew that broken divorce that has divided these two integral parts of our lives. We are going back to Matthew 5 and jump into what Jesus has to say.

Jesus' Vision

At the beginning of this sermon series, I preached a sermon about a sermon, and it was all about our posture. How do we, as followers of Jesus, come to approach the words of Jesus? I mentioned in there that there will be times you're tempted to get out ahead of Jesus as opposed to following him. You'll be tempted to assume you know better than Jesus. I would argue this text is the one that will contradict or challenge your perspective.

Could you, for the next few minutes, submit to Jesus your rabbi, and maybe he has a healing word for the broken fissures that we have in our world today. *"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). You'll notice a common pattern here. This is the way Jesus queued up his teaching last week and will for the next four weeks. He has this paradigm where he says, "You have heard that it was said, but I say to you," which was a common practice with rabbis in the ancient world.

So when Jesus says you've heard it said, he goes back to the Old Testament and cites a particular text, and then when he says, but I say to you, that is his interpretation, his teaching of Old Testament scripture. We hold Jesus as our Rabbi, our Savior, the Son of God, so much so that whatever Jesus says in this teaching becomes the authoritative understanding of the Old Testament text.

So Jesus says that you have heard that it was said, you shall not commit adultery. This is a direct quotation from Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18. It's the seventh commandment. And much like our world today, in Jesus' world, adultery was a prominent issue. Adultery, just to name what it is, is having sexual relations with someone other than your

spouse. And Jesus opposes adultery and supports Moses' teaching on that. However, just like the teaching on murder last week, Jesus understands the complexities of the human heart and the root of it is much further than merely the physical acts that take place in adultery. This is what we've been talking about as the deeper righteousness, and here's a simple case.

If you were to ask me, "Hey, Kevin, how's your marriage to Lindsay?" And I responded, "Well, it's been 16 years, and I haven't committed adultery." You would likely and should respond with, "That's an odd thing to say." Because that's not quite the barometer of a healthy, flourishing marriage. Like, of course, that's what you desire, but you would define a marriage in much different terms.

Jesus is pushing beyond that. It's one thing not to murder or not commit adultery, whatever that is; it's one thing to withhold that, but likely you can do that without actually being free. And Jesus is saying there's something much deeper that I want to speak about so that you can experience a level of freedom and flourishing that far surpasses mere behavior modification. Jesus is after changing your behavior; he is after that, just in a different way than the way the religious leaders of his time did.

So that's why he goes on further and says, "*But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart*" (v. 28). The Greek word for look here is the word *blepō*, and just as you imagine, it means looking. But the type of verb it is, the word Jesus uses here is a present participle, meaning it's something that's happening now. So you're looking, but the participle part is the ongoing nature of that look. So when Jesus says anyone who looks at a woman lustfully, that is not the first look, it's the lingering look. It's the refusal to turn away. It's the looking and then returning to look.

This is something I imagine that all of us have maybe experienced, women acutely. Being a father of two daughters and a husband to my wife, I've learned this reality as a man that I didn't see before, that look that lingers, and the impact that it has. You understand what Jesus is getting at. Now, some translations in front of you might have something that says to the effect of, to look and then lust, or it separates the verb look and lust. That's a horrible translation. That is a huge flaw because that would then also suggest that looking at a woman is sinful, and then lusting is also sinful.

Jesus, nowhere in the Greek text and the language that he spoke, made this division. It was the lustful look. The reason that is important is because that first look, that attraction, Jesus is not down on the attraction. To be attracted to another human being is quite natural. It is the human instinct and that first look where you look at someone and appreciate their beauty, there is nothing wrong with that. That is the natural disposition as a healthy functioning part of who you are. It becomes the space in which you deal with how you give that look.

The concept that Jesus is getting at is this lingering longing—the look back. To imagine, to begin to play out in your mind the different scenarios that could take place. Jesus is not talking about the momentary flash of sexual desire that comes when you see a beautiful man or a beautiful woman; that is not sin. What that is, to use biblical language, is

temptation, and it's important to separate sin and temptation. Because what we understand from the New Testament, particularly in the life of Jesus, is that he was tempted far beyond all that we have experienced and yet did not sin. We often associate or conflate these two things, but that becomes problematic.

So what does Jesus mean then by the phrase, "already committed adultery with her in his heart?" What Jesus is getting at here is that lingering look that then begins to plant a seed and cultivate something in your heart that is ready to act should the occasion arise. This is the same logic that he uses with anger and murder. Of course, he views those two things as different. Murder is far worse than anger. Adultery is far worse than lust, but the impacts are there.

What he's saying is there is something within the heart posture, the executive center of the human, that when you give a seed a footing for either anger or lust, it is distorting your soul in such a way that where maybe ten years ago the seed was planted, but it distorted your soul to the point of being that person who would lash out in a violent attack, in the case of murder, or would step into an adulterous relationship.

No one I have ever met has woken up and said, "I want to commit adultery today." It happens slowly over time as you give yourself to lust, that lingering look. Jesus understands the human heart in such a way that it is creating the conditions that would make it easier to commit adultery rather than not. That's the transformation that Jesus is after, by the way. Think of a test case. Think of that scene, that radically unbelievable scene when Jesus is lying on the cross and those officers are nailing him to the cross. Do you remember Jesus' response? Forgive them, for they know not what they do.

We often read that, and think, how could Jesus do that? I would assert to you that it was easier for Jesus to do that than to curse them because he was the person who was ready to forgive and offer his grace. That was the natural outpouring of the person that Jesus was. It was easier for him to forgive than to curse. Roll that back again into the scenario we were just talking about.

This concept around sexuality and lust is that you are becoming a person. What Jesus is getting at is that what lust does is slowly over time form you into the person for whom it is easier to act on that lust rather than to restrain it. Desire is the engine of human life. It's the very reason you got up and wore the clothes you did today. It's the very reason you ate the foods you did. Somewhere deep down below all those choices, all those actions is desire. It is the good, healthy fire that allows you to get up in the morning and enter into life. I mean, think about depression, which robs you of desire. It dulls the world. It numbs you and holds you back from living life because the desire, the flame, seems to be flickering. Desire is a good, healthy thing.

What happens in lust is that it's a desire that then turns inward. The natural inclinations of our body toward sexual desire is not a bad thing. It's a gift from God. What we fail to recognize is that lust becomes a chosen habit. Similar to last week, when we talked about how anger is an emotion that you can't control, but you can influence it. The same thing is true of sexual desire. It is not bad. You can influence it, and create

conditions in your life because if your mind is constantly saturated in sexual material, you will be less likely to be able to, in that moment when you feel that urge, that flash of desire, to resist it, because your mind has been marinating in the possibilities. The desire is not wrong. It's the desire bent inward.

We have to come to see that these things are chosen habits, not the law of gravity. If you are caught in this cycle, which many are, you have to come to accept that this is a chosen habit. I say that not out of shame, but to hopefully offer hope. Because if it's a chosen habit, that means you can transform your habits. There's a grace in this, in which Jesus is saying there's something deeper. Martin Luther, a Renaissance and Reformation writer, had a commentary on this section of Jesus' teaching. He wrote:

We should not make the bolstering of Jesus' teaching too much here, as if anyone who is merely tempted to look at another with lust is eternally damned. I cannot keep a bird from flying over my head, but I can certainly keep it from making a nest in my hair. Martin Luther

That's a helpful image. I can't stop the bird, but certainly I could do something about it when it's trying to just sit there. Craig Keener, a New Testament commentator on this section, defines lust as, "The deliberate harboring of desire for an illicit relationship."

Now, given Jesus' teaching, this illicit relationship can either be the physical manifestation of that or the relationship in your mind. Jesus is very clearly talking about when we look upon a woman or man, but in this context, he's specifically speaking to men. More on that in a little bit. When you look upon a woman to get sexual gratification from her body, that's what lust fundamentally is. And that can come out in an actual relationship or an illicit relationship in your mind.

I want to talk a little bit more about what this desire is or how this operates, particularly this lust, because we have to understand the inner workings of it, and that will be helpful when we come to the teaching of how we break this chosen habit. Lust, like gluttony or any of the other vices, is a desire that narrows your view. It's important to see this. It isn't so much that we desire too much. I would suggest we desire too little. And here's the point. Rich Villodas, in his book *The Narrow Path*, draws this distinction. It's a really helpful framework. He wrote that there are two modes of our sexuality, and lust in particular, is the difference between consumption versus communion.

Communion

You and I were created for communion. God himself is a communal God. This is the doctrine of the Trinity, which I won't attempt to explain, but will elaborate on the implications. The doctrine of the Trinity says that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. These are three expressions or persons of one being, God. At the very center of the entire universe is a community—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Last week, when we did the baby dedications, as I prayed over those two beautiful little ones, I would say in the name singular of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as a Trinitarian expression that's tapping into the core of who God is.

Here's the beautiful part. Think of John's short letters when he says that God is love. His point is that to exist in community is, in fact, to love. So this Father, Son, and Holy Spirit triune connection is the manifestation of love. One is not higher than the other one, not subservient to the other, only in mutual self-giving love. God is constantly God. The God the Father is constantly loving the Son and the Spirit; God the Son is loving the Father and the Spirit. The Spirit is loving the Son and the Father. The very existence, the core of who God is, is communal love.

What's unbelievable about this is that from the overflow of this loving relationship, God creates. He creates you and me. He creates humanity. Out of that, we have been imbued with that because we come out of a community, you were created for community by community, and from community. You are a communal being. That is why your heart, even as the most introverted person in here, of which I'm probably at the top of the list, is built for community. I will suffer without connection to another.

Sexuality is one of the most beautiful expressions of the most beautiful desire that's placed within you to say you long to be connected with God and with others. Of course, we have those desires. You were built for it, which is why the Christian ethic around sexuality that says to repress that is so harmful. It is trying to repress one of the core elements, not only of who God is, but who you are. You were made for communion, and sexuality becomes the place in which you experience that. It's the intimacy, the mutual mingling of souls.

It's this thing in which you connect with another in a way where you are fully known and yet truly loved. This is why the church, although it is distorted, often talks about the sanctity of marriage and needing the covenant vows to say, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, till death do us part. I commit to you because that's the safe place in which this sacred longing can be expressed freely. Liberated from performance, liberated from having to earn the other's love in the covenant of marriage. When marriage is operating the way it should, it becomes the place in which sexuality and that longing for communion can be satiated. You don't desire too much. You need to desire more.

Consumption

What we tend to do when we mess around with sexuality is settle for the physical pleasure of it. But that's why you're often left longing for more, because your soul was made for more. Jesus says, once you lust upon a woman, you've reduced it to the second category, which is consumption. Consumption is inevitably the outcome of lust. Lust is the desire bent inward, and so rather than seeing sexual desire as a way to experience communion with another, lust becomes this twisted desire internally in which you want to consume someone for your own good.

Put simply, lust is the desire for communion that is diminished to consumption. Lust is not too much of a desire.; it's too little. It's a reductionist view of your desire. Lust always deforms the sexual desire, and then it not only dehumanizes the other, but it dehumanizes you because you were created for more. So, if you were created for communion, not consumption, then when you engage in that, you're diminishing who you are. Of course, it also dehumanizes the other because,

in consumption, you're looking to take an object and consume it for your own benefit. It's inherently selfish. It centers on the self, not the communion of two.

When we lust, we want nothing to do with sharing love or giving life, which is the core of that triune communion—constant mutual self-giving love between the Father, Son, and the Spirit, not thinking of themselves as most important, but always of the other. And so when we lust, we don't want anything to do with sharing love or giving life. And if a thought occurs to us, lust says that sexual pleasure is for my pleasure.

Our culture is saturated with what I call the porn epidemic. Here are just a few stats that probably won't surprise you, but are worth naming. Porn sites receive more traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined each month. Thirty-five percent of all internet downloads are porn related. Thirty-four percent of internet users have been exposed to unwanted porn via ads or pop-ups.

People who admit to having extramarital affairs were over 300 percent more likely to admit to consuming porn than those who've never had an affair. At least 30 percent of all data transferred across the internet is porn related. Porn is nothing more than turning something as sacred and beautiful as sexual desire into consumption for the self. Rebecca DeYoung, in her lovely book, *Glittering Vices*, states,

Such depictions of sex reduce it to a performance (bodies plus behavior) that predictably yields a product (pleasure), procurable on demand without respect for particular persons or their full personhood. Such 'sex without humanness' is cold, clinical, and superficial. Lustful sex makes the other person instrumental to my acquisition of pleasure." Rebecca DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*

I was probably ten years old, the first time I saw a picture of a woman without much clothes on. I was at a friend's house, and we were having a sleepover. I wandered into a closet, and there were some catalogs that were just there, and I did what any ten-year-old would do: I began to look, but then I began to look and to look and to look. Because it surged something through my body that seemed new and foreign, it was a good, healthy response.

So I don't know exactly how, but I ended up taking that, tucking it into my bag so I could take it home the next day that began a cycle in which this lust consumed me. Do you know the fallout of that? More than, of course, the addiction and things that can trail from that, but it was the shame. Shame is the natural response that we feel from that, because shame is a relational thing. Shame is a relational problem. The reason that often in our sexual brokenness, we become consumed with shame and guilt is because we were made for communion, and we've reduced it to consumption.

Please hear me. I don't want to communicate this in a way that is trying to add shame to you. I simply want to suggest that there's a different way you can be restored in relationship. You were meant for communion. God is pursuing you. There is no sin, there is no shame, there is no guilt that can separate you from the love of God. As my father walked

with me through that journey, so too, God wants to walk with us, who is a good, loving presence who isn't disturbed by you. He isn't running away from you.

He's like that father on the porch looking out for that younger son. And when he sees the son come to his senses, he doesn't wait for the son to get there. He sprints after him. He throws his arms around his son. He says, let's throw a party. Hear this church, God is a God who no sin, no guilt, no shame, can separate us from.

Often, we hear messages around this topic that are so difficult and so shame-filled, and the church has mishandled this. It has launched people into isolation and guilt. I'm here to tell you that Jesus is not about that. Jesus wants to welcome you home. What is interesting is, I actually see the culture starting to pick up on some of this brokenness. I was reminded of an article I read from the *New York Times*, back in May, from a secular author, called "The Delusion of Porn's Harmlessness."

Criticizing porn goes against the norm of non-judgmentalism for people who like to consider themselves as forward-thinking, thoughtful, and open-minded. There's a dread of seeming prudish, boring, or uncool. More generously, there's the desire not to indict the choices of individuals, women or men, who create sexual content out of need or personal desire, or allow legislation to harm those who depend on it to survive. But a lack of judgment sometimes comes at the expense of discernment. As a society, we are allowing our desires to continue to be molded in experimental ways for profit by an industry that does not have our best interests at heart. We want to prove that we're chill and modern, skip the inevitable haggling over boundaries and regulation, and avoid potentially placing limits on our behavior, but we aren't paying attention to how they're making things worse for ourselves. Christine Emba, *The New York Times*

Our world is starting to see the fracture of this. What would it look like for the church not to heap shame, but to have a welcoming environment that says that we are trying to figure this out, too. Jesus has a word of liberation for us. Sex is not the problem. Desire is not the problem. Frederick Buechner once said, "Contrary to Ms. Grundy, sex is not a sin. Contrary to Hugh Hefner, it's not salvation either. Like nitroglycerin, it can be used to either blow up bridges or heal hearts." What a beautiful way to understand the complexity and nuance of sexuality.

So, what would Jesus have for us if this is the vicious cycle that we find ourselves in? Let's go back to the text and look at verse 29. I would warn you, as you read this, that Jesus is speaking hyperbolically.

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

How do I know this is hyperbole? Because it's the same hyperbole and effect that Jesus is trying to garner from the anger passage. "If you find yourself at an altar. Go back and reconcile with your brother." Remember that going back was 80 miles. He was saying, Go run 80 miles before you come back to worship. He clearly is speaking hyperbole and clearly wants to get the effect of do whatever you can.

Not to mention, in this particular text, when Jesus says to gouge your eye out or cut your hand off, he's not saying to literally do that, because where is the root of the problem for Jesus? It's in the human heart. What he's saying is you'll have to go to extreme measures to root this thing out. He knows that it wouldn't work because you could cut all the body parts off you want, yet the desire that resides in the human heart is still there.

He's after something much more. He's speaking with a satirical energy in which he's recognizing the complexity and the all-consuming nature of lust. But notice the way he brings up this topic of hell. He says, "You will be in danger of hell." The point I want us to see is that it's both a future thing, but also a current thing in the same way that the Kingdom of God is here and in the future. (I talked about hell in my last message.)

Let's just take the hell on Earth experience right now. Well, if you get caught in this vicious cycle of lust that hell on Earth could take the form of addiction, the inability to experience intimacy with another human. The destruction of relationships you care about. The death of intimacy itself. The crippling burden of guilt and shame. Even more tragically, the death of a marriage or a family.

I've witnessed marriages dissolve. Anyone who's experienced this, there's a reason that we feel that shame. Because you don't want to be there. Jesus says this cycle will play out. This will be the experience. It reminds me of when the author of Proverbs said to guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Your life flows from that. Before we get out of the real deep, and I give some more specific things, I do think it's of note that Jesus speaks this particularly to men.

He means that intentionally. There are implications for women, no doubt. But Jesus here says, when you look at a woman lustfully. He is speaking to us men, and Jesus was constantly confronting the male-dominated society in which he lived. He was constantly receiving women as disciples, which wasn't spoken of. It was taboo. It was against the religious norm. He would speak to the Samaritan woman at the well, which was absolutely unacceptable. He continually empowered and affirmed the dignity of women. He entrusted the Easter message to a woman witness, which would've been unheard of and not legally binding. Yet he first declared the resurrected form of himself to a woman.

Jesus was constantly confronting the male-dominated society, and for thousands of years in that age, and I would suggest in many of ours, this issue of lust and sexuality gets placed and deflected onto women in ways that are both oppressive and objectifying. Jesus is clearly saying, to put it overtly clear, "Men, the way to avoid sexual impropriety is to deal with our lust that resides in our heart". Jesus pulls no punches. It is not:

"They wore that thing. Boys will be boys. She enticed me." Nowhere in here does Jesus deflect. He looks right at the men and says that it is our issue to own.

There is more to this lust issue and the way it impacts women. I'm not saying he is trying to exclude women from it, but he is speaking specifically to men. It is our issue to own. We must learn how to deal with the lust in our hearts, which is where I want to turn to in closing.

If it's to be dealt with severely, what are the steps that we could take? What we are after is not to become less sexual but to find sexual wholeness. Sexuality is not the opposite of holiness. That's purity culture, which was fairly toxic and caused a lot of damage to a whole generation of Jesus followers, me included. Sex pursued rightly is not lust.

So there are all sorts of views, and we won't have a chance to go into every one of the nuances, but I want to just suggest a few. Three simple things that you can begin to do to break this cycle, to metaphorically gouge the eye out and cut off the hand. The first, and this will contrast between external and internal things, is that you need to start with boundaries. In the same way that an alcoholic shouldn't meet with someone at a bar, so too, we must create boundaries. There's a natural, common-sense nature to this.

This may mean that you can't watch the movie that all your friends watch. This may mean you need to buy an old school alarm clock and charge your phone across the house in the kitchen. This may mean that you will take on some social pressure. I don't know what it looks like, but you need to start with boundaries. You do, in fact, need to create some distance, some gaps, so that you're not just constantly stepping on the edge just about to just fall over.

It begins with that, but as Jesus said, that will never transform your heart. That is not enough. You'll get around every boundary you place, and so you must set the boundary, but then you must begin to do the deeper, much harder work of transforming our internal self in partnership with the Holy Spirit. Here's the beautiful gift. You are not alone in transforming your heart because you can't do it alone. Jesus has said that the same Spirit that resurrected Jesus is residing in us. So we then partner with the Spirit to transform our internal nature.

Then the next thing is to cultivate a broader vision. I took that phrase from an article by Dallas Willard called "Living Beyond Pornography." It's a lovely article, and he'd play on this concept of desire. He said that what lust does is narrow your vision, and that's where it inherently dehumanizes and objectifies the other. It turns them into something for your consumption. You need a broader vision. And then he contrasts that. He is said to consider yourself wanting to eat healthier. You look at a donut, and the lust for that donut narrows your vision, but his suggestion is that why don't you broaden it a little bit? All of a sudden, when you broaden it, you begin to think of blood sugar and diabetes and all the impacts that come from that. That donut then looks a little less appealing.

May I suggest, to broaden your vision, is to begin to realize that who you are objectifying have a father and mother. They have brothers and

sisters. They have hopes and dreams. They're a human created in the image of God. So, how do you cultivate that? You simply should ask the Holy Spirit, "Lord, would you broaden my vision so I can continue to see people as humans?" Because all of a sudden, and it's not perfect, but it becomes a whole lot harder to dehumanize them.

Pornography and lust demand that you make the other person something less than human. So to restore that, we must have a vision that sees people as people. It's the same logic that plays out in anger. When you begin to see the other as created in the image of God, it's a whole lot harder to say Raca and dismiss them. We must come to see people as God sees them.

Then, after you cultivate a broader vision, the reality is that you must cultivate a deeper love. Because if desire isn't the problem, which it isn't, you have to begin to know how to aim that desire in the right place. Here's Willard from that article I mentioned. "In relationship to pornography, the cure is love—treasuring what is good and what is right. But that is not something you can do just by telling yourself to do it" (Willard)

The reality of the human is you can't not desire. In the same way that you can't not think you have to desire. To desire is what it means to be human. So to cultivate the deeper love is what all of the New Testament talks about. When you begin to love God, and as you cultivate that deeper longing, when you begin to meditate on that which is good, beautiful, and kind, and you begin to immerse yourself into the life of the triune God. And when that love begins to develop, it crowds out the other loves. It begins to push them into their proper order.

So you can't just not do the thing. What I would suggest is that you begin to engage in those disciplines that we talk a lot about here. Not because they're the silver bullet, but it opens up our lives to the love of the triune God. You enter into a season of fasting, of silence, and an oscillation between time alone with your thoughts so you can process what's there beneath the surface in solitude, but then engagement in community where, amidst the guilt and shame, you can feel accepted and loved.

We must begin to cultivate a deeper love because that's the way out of this thing. The answer is, as cliché as it seems,—love, namely God, who is love. And I firmly believe that as your love for God grows, what would it look like to transform those habits to where God and the Holy Spirit do that internal reworking of your mind and heart? So much so that when you see the other, you see a sister in Christ or a brother in Christ, and when you feel that urge, you're reminded that you were made for communion, not for consumption, and it pulls your heart like the needle of a compass constantly pulling North. What could it look like for your heart to be cultivated for that deeper love, to where God meets you, and your heart pulls towards the love of God?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

All this week, as I've been prepping, I've been meditating on Psalm 27. David says, "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek," or some translations have "Desire that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze on the beauty of the Lord, to seek him in his temple."

I usually read that as a like I'm going to muster the courage to only desire that one thing, but sitting with the Lord in this Psalm, as I've been preparing this teaching, I've come to see that what David's tapping into is that every single desire you experience is pointing back to God. Every desire, rightfully ordered, is aiming towards the deepest communion that your heart longs for, to gaze on the beauty of God. To dwell in his temple all the days of your life. That has transformed the way I pray this. I don't pray it now in a way that's like God give me the strength and the courage. It's like, "God, every desire points me back to you. The one thing I desire, the one thing I seek that I may dwell in the house of the Lord."

I know there's a heaviness to this. I feel it. You probably feel it in the air. Every single person in here comes with some level of sexual brokenness, whether that's perpetrated by you or whether that's been perpetrated against you. You know what's fascinating about one of the metaphors that the scriptures use from Genesis to Revelation is about the church's lack of faithfulness to Jesus, the metaphor it uses, is adultery. It's the image that Jesus and God would use to talk about our unfaithfulness. But what's so stunningly beautiful is that the story of Genesis to Revelation is the story of our unfaithfulness, and of God's relentless pursuit during it.

God is coming after us, pursuing us as his beloved, regardless of our unfaithfulness, and we are unfaithful, no doubt. So wherever you are in this conversation with the brokenness that you carry, I want to assure you that God is chasing after you. Jesus welcomes you with open arms regardless of what you've experienced. If you think you are unlovable, you couldn't be further from the truth. Jesus is waiting with open arms to walk with you in a pattern of healing. That's what Jesus is after. That's what he wants—your freedom and love.

© 2025 Central Peninsula Church, Foster City, CA
Catalog No.1492-6FC