

GOD WITH US

Part 4: The Life and Writings of Solomon *Direction and Drift – Proverbs*

Message 9 – Wisdom and Folly: Purity Proverbs 10-31

Introduction

No topic in Proverbs is addressed with more urgency and graphic imagery than the topic of sexuality. This is because human sexuality IS a powerful *gift from God* that can be used in ways that bring about great good, or great harm in our lives. Sex has been likened to a fire in a home. If you keep the fire within the fireplace, it can bring warmth, light and pleasure. If you let the fire burn out of control, outside of the fireplace, it will bring about destruction. The main message of Proverbs is that *God has created sex for our good*, but we must *enjoy this gift within the bounds He has set*, otherwise *it will bring us harm and sadness*.

The Opening Warning: 2:16-19

Proverbs is set in the context of a father-son discussion. This explains why, when dealing with sexual temptation, the father always uses “the seductive woman” as the example of one who lures the man into immorality. If this were a father-daughter discussion, the example surely would have been “the charming man” who lures the young woman into destructive sexual encounters. In general, then, we should see the female seductress of Proverbs as *any voice of sexual temptation that is seeking to lure us away from God’s path*, regardless of source or gender.

It did not take long for the father to broach the topic of sexual temptation with his son. In the 2nd chapter of Proverbs the father makes the connection between the need for *Wisdom* to avoid the snare of *sexual temptation*:

“Wisdom will save you also from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. Surely her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life” (2:16-19).

It is important for parents to address issues of sexuality with children, and to begin doing so before the children learn about these issues from other sources. There are resources available to help parents begin these discussions appropriately in early childhood, continuing on into the teen years. If parents avoid the discussions, then children are most likely to gather in information from unhealthy sources, leading to a skewed view of the gift of sexuality. Bad/no information eventually leads to wrong choices.

The First Discussion: Beware of Temptation: 5:1-20

The first major discussion on sexual purity comes in ch.5 where the father discusses the lures and dangers of sexual temptation. He tells his son how to steer clear of temptation and, eventually, to develop a healthy and fulfilling sex life in the context of marriage. Several points stand out in this first of three extended discussions:

1. Sexual temptation focuses on the pleasure of the moment, not the consequences of a lifetime.

“My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ear to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths wander aimlessly, but she does not know it” (5:1-6).

Sexual temptation always INVITES but it never WARNS of the consequences. It always exerts a powerful pull that overshadows and blinds us to the long-term implications of going down that path. Sexual temptation “gives no thought to the way of life.” Immediate gratification of desire is the only thing that matters.

2. The wise way to resist sexual temptation is to stay far away from it; maintain safe boundaries and accountability.

“Now then, my sons, listen to me; do not turn aside from what I say. Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you lose your honor to others and your dignity to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich the house of another” (5:7-10).

“Keep to a path far from her.” “Do not go near the door of her house.” Why? Because sexual temptation is such a powerful

force that it can easily overcome our determination and defenses. Thus, the best defense is to *avoid situations where we will be tempted*. This is why the apostle Paul tells us: *“Flee from sexual immorality” (1Corinthians 6:18)*.

Human nature has a tendency to over-estimate our ability to resist temptation. When it comes to sexual temptation, this is the most foolish thing we can do. Instead, we should UNDER-estimate our ability to resist. We should have a healthy fear of falling, such a fear that we are not willing to even stand close to the edge of this cliff. Those who get too close to sexual temptation WILL fall. That is the rule of life that Proverbs teaches. Healthy boundaries are essential when dealing with the opposite sex. To cross those boundaries is to invite a fall with very hurtful consequences.

3. The consequences of falling to sexual temptation are long-lasting; regret being foremost.

“At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, “How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or turn my ear to my instructors” (5:11-13).

Momentary pleasure comes at the expense of lifelong regret and shame. (See article at the end of this section for a case in point.)

4. There are serious social implications to sexual immorality.

“And I was soon in serious trouble in the assembly of God’s people” (5:14).

We have all seen people whose lives, families and careers have been impacted by sexual immorality. This is Wisdom speaking: If you choose to engage in sexual immorality, you will pay a price in the eyes of those you do life with.

If a culture is functioning anywhere close to biblical norms concerning sexuality, marriage, family life, faithfulness, etc. then there will be negative social implications for people who choose to engage in “immoral” behavior. On the other hand, when a culture comes to the point where “immoral” behavior IS the new normal (an “amoral” culture) then there will be much more public acceptance of such behaviors. Those who continue to object to these expressions of sexuality become the ones who feel the pressure of social shame. Righteous Lot was a laughing-stock because he could not change his views to keep up with the ever-changing sexual norms of Sodom and Gomorrah (see 2Peter 2:7).

5. Sexual fulfillment in marriage is God's gift to humanity.

In one of the more graphic passages in Proverbs, the father instructs the son to find a good wife and to develop a mutually satisfying sex life with her. (In that culture, marriages were often 'arranged' and typically occurred at a much younger age than today – early to middle teen years.)

“Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. 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. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer – may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be intoxicated with her love. Why, my son, be intoxicated with another man's wife? Why embrace the bosom of a wayward woman? For your ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all your paths. The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them; the cords of their sins hold them fast. For lack of discipline they will die, led astray by their own great folly” (5:15-23).

Both the Old and New Testaments encourage people to use the gift of marital sex as a protection against temptation (Proverbs 5:15-23 and 1Corinthians 7:2-5). In American culture, however, 'delayed marriage' continues to be the norm. In 1960 the average age for marriage was 20 for women/22 for men. In 2016 the average was 27 for women/29 for men. The result of this trend toward delayed marriage is that there is a much longer time frame during which both men and women must deal with sexual urges in a society that is teeming with sexual temptations AND accepting of a wide variety of forms of sexual expression. A further result is that when men and women do finally marry, they tend to bring into the marriage bed a great deal more baggage from past sexual relationships and experiences, making it even more challenging to develop a healthy sex life within the marriage.

The Second Discussion: Beware of Revenge: 6:20-35

The second major warning passage specifically deals with the sin of adultery – having sexual relations with someone else's spouse. There is *one major message* here: If you engage with another's husband or wife you will stoke the flames of righteous jealousy in the offended spouse and he/she will not let you go unpunished.

“My son, keep your father's command and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them always on your heart; fasten them

around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light, and correction and instruction are the way to life, keeping you from your neighbor's wife, from the smooth talk of a wayward woman. Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes. For a prostitute can be had for a loaf of bread, but another man's wife preys on your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished. People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house. But a man who commits adultery has no sense; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away. For jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse a bribe, however great it is" (6:20-35).

Righteous jealousy is the desire to protect something that is rightfully yours to protect. The Bible says that God is righteously jealous for our devotion. In a similar way, husbands and wives *should* have righteous jealousy to protect the sanctity and uniqueness of their marital devotion to one another.

At marriage ceremonies we often hear these words of Jesus near the end: "What God has joined together, let no man separate" (Mark 10:9). No human being has the right to insert himself or herself into the midst of a holy union between God-husband-wife. This is sacred ground that must be kept holy! This is the force behind the warning from the New Testament book of Hebrews: "Marriage should be honored BY ALL, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral" (Hebrews 13:4). Forgiveness for adultery is certainly available; but lifelong consequences are equally certain.

The Third Discussion: Beware of Death 7:1-27

The final lesson is a story drawn from real life. The father tells of a time when he observed a young man taken in by a seductive married woman. As he foolishly followed the seduction, he failed to see that he was walking down the highway of death.

1. The opening appeal for the son to take heed to these words.

“My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and to insight, “You are my relative.” They will keep you from the adulterous woman, from the wayward woman with her seductive words” (7:1-5).

The father repeatedly precedes his lessons on sexuality with strong appeals for his son to heed his words and warnings. There is too much at stake to take these admonitions lightly. Sexual temptation will easily overwhelm the man or woman who is not living with wisdom *and* determination in this area.

2. The young man who got too close to the temptress.

“At the window of my house I looked down through the lattice. I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who had no sense. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in” (7:6-9).

The young man being observed was either naïve (unaware of the temptation awaiting him) or foolish (willfully flirting with temptation). Given the fact that it was evening and this young man was walking alone in the direction of the house of the temptress, it seems more likely that he was foolishly moving toward what he knew would be an enticing opportunity. He was out looking for some adventure . . . and he found it in the temptress.

What are the modern versions of this story? A young man decides to spend the night with some friends (whose morals are questionable) and finds himself drawn into the world of pornography. A young woman goes to a party (where she knows there will be trouble) and unwittingly accepts a drink with a date-rape drug in it. A woman goes on Facebook to connect with an old high school flame (she is, understandably, feeling lonely). Over time, the casual conversation turns into a full-blown emotional affair. A man begins to notice the new girl at work, the one that makes him feel alive (after all, his marriage has become boring). It is not long before he is scheming for a way to escape with her. The story of Proverbs 7 is playing out every day, right before our eyes.

3. The temptress appears and makes her appeal.

“Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent. (She is unruly and defiant, her feet never stay at home; now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks.) She took hold of him and kissed him and with a brazen face she said: ‘Today I fulfilled my vows, and I have food from my fellowship offering at home. So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you! I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Come, let’s drink deeply of love till morning; let’s enjoy ourselves with love! The man is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon’” (7:10-20).

This temptress uses what Proverbs calls *foolish words* to lure in her prey. Flattery, manipulation, lying and backbiting are her weapons. By the time she is finished with her speech, the young man would *feel like a fool if he said NO*. This is the way that sexual temptation works. The LIE is: This experience will be unbelievable . . . and you will never get caught. The TRUTH is: This experience will be short-lived . . . you will get caught . . . and it will cost you more than you ever dreamed you would pay.

4. The young man walks toward the house of death.

“With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk. All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life” (7:21-23).

This night of pleasure “*will cost him his life.*” The apostle James agreed: “*After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death*” (James 1:15).

5. The closing appeal by the father to the sons:

“Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say. Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths. Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death” (7:24-27).

The path to the house of the temptress was actually the highway to the cemetery. Sadly, the young man did not read/heed the signs.

By Wendy Plump - Dec. 9, 2010

NOT long ago, the friend of a friend spent the night in a hotel room, which is sometimes what you do when you find out your spouse has been having a yearlong affair. His flight was sadly predictable — it's all many of us are capable of after discovering such a betrayal — though I am sure he now realizes that mere movement is not a fix for that kind of agony.

I know this for two reasons: No. 1, I have had an affair; No. 2, I have been the victim of one. When you unfurl these two experiences in the sunlight for comparison, and measure their worth and pain, the former is only marginally better than the latter. And both, frankly, are awful.

I recently offered my cheated-upon view of things to my acquaintance, who has returned every night for a week to that hotel because he cannot bear to look at his wife. A couple of years ago I offered the other side to a friend when she was considering having an affair.

Start, I suggested to her, by picturing yourself in the therapist's office with your betrayed husband after you've been found out (and you will be found out). You will hear yourself saying you cheated because your needs weren't being met. The spark was gone. You were bored in your marriage. Your lover understands you better. One or another version of this excuse will cross your lips like some dark, knee-jerk Hallmark-card sentiment.

I'm not saying these feelings aren't legitimate, just that they don't legitimize what you're doing. If you believed they did, your stomach wouldn't drop on your way out the door to your lover's. You wouldn't feel the need to shower before climbing into the marital bed after a liaison. You wouldn't feel like a train had struck you in the back when your son asked why you forgot his lacrosse game the other day. When you miss a family function because of work, you get over it. When you miss a family function because you were in a hotel room with your lover, you feel breathless with misery.

The great sex, by the way, is a given. When you have an affair you already know you will have passionate sex — the urgency, newness and illicit nature of the affair practically guarantee that.

What you don't know, or perhaps what you don't allow yourself to think about, is that your life will become an unbearable mix of yearning and regret because of it. It will be difficult if not impossible to be in any one place with contentment.

This is no way for an adult to live. When you're with your lover, you'll be working on your alibi and feeling loathsome. When you're with your spouse, you'll be dying to return to your love nest. When you are at

home, everything in your life will look just a little bit out of register — the furniture, the food in your refrigerator, your children, your dog — because you've detached yourself from your normal point of reference, and it now belongs to a reality you've abandoned.

You will be pulled between two poles, one of obligation and responsibility, the other of pleasure and escape, and the stress of these opposing forces will threaten to split you in two.

I met the man I cheated with early in my marriage. He was the beautiful twin brother of a friend, something like a young Errol Flynn. I was entranced. My husband traveled a lot and I took advantage of that, finding myself at my lover's apartment often. But at home with my husband during those ragged months, I was anxious and ill at ease. I should have been focusing on our new house, our new jobs, but my inability to resist the pull of the affair ruined all of that. I could not concentrate on our coupled life and frankly did not care to.

I knew I needed to stop it, but didn't have the will to do so on my own. I had to enlist my husband, to tell him so that we could battle this together. So I admitted to the affair one evening after dinner.

Almost 20 years after that confession I can still remember how the whole world narrowed down to the two of us sitting there, that new truth congealing between us.

Once the affair is out in the open, you will strive mightily to justify yourself. You will begin many sentences with the phrase, "I never meant to — " But one look at the hollow-eyed, defeated form of your spouse will remind you that such a claim is beside the point. You can both get over this, yes. But the innocence will have gone out of your union and it will seem as if a bone has been broken and healed, but one that rain or cold weather can set to throbbing again.

So, now take the other side. You discover your cheating spouse, as I once did, and what you experience is not far removed from post-traumatic stress. It is a form of shock. As your mind struggles to accommodate this wrenching reality, you won't be able to sleep or focus. Your fight-or-flight mechanism will go haywire. You will become consumed with where your spouse is at any moment, even if you see him in the pool with your children.

You will lose your appetite. Stress will blow out your metabolism. You will torture yourself with details known and imagined. You will fit together the mysteries of his daily patterns like a wicked puzzle. Every absence or unexplained late night or new habit or sudden urge to join a gym, for instance, will suddenly make horrible sense. You will wonder why you were so stupid.

But as the writer Paul Theroux says in one of his travelogues, “It is very easy to plant a bomb in a peaceful, trusting place.” That is what the cheating spouse has done. Then detonated it.

Sooner or later your illicit, once-beloved object of affection will become tawdry, wearying. You will come to long for simple, honest pleasures like making dinner with your sons or going out to the movies without having to look over your shoulder.

On the other side, your spouse’s philandering will cease to torment you and instead the whole episode will leave you disgusted and bored and desirous to get out. You will just want to be with someone who does what he says he is going to do, goes where he says he is going to go, and can be found any time you need him because he is not hiding.

I say all this by way of hope, believe it or not. Affairs are one of the adult world’s few disasters that can be gotten over, with a lot of time and kindness. It has to burn out of you over months and months, flaming up and then subsiding as you get used to the fact.

A great deal of comfort will come from your friends, many of whom will offer advice — hate him, leave him, move on — that you should listen to politely and then reject. After all, the consequences of your decisions will be visited upon you, not your friends. They will be only too happy to amplify your confusion, listen to you cry, and then get into the car and drive home to their own intact families.

IN the end your marriage may not need to be trashed, though mine was. The affairs metastasized in our relationship from the inside out. By the time all was said and done, there was little left to save. Our marriage had become like a leaf eaten away by caterpillars, where the petiole and midrib remain with some ghostly connective tracery in between. Not enough to hold even a drop of rain.

I look at my parents and at how much simpler their lives are at the ages of 75, mostly because they haven’t marred the landscape with grand-scale deceit. They have this marriage of 50-some years behind them, and it is a monument to success. A few weeks or months of illicit passion could not hold a candle to it.

If you imagine yourself in such a situation, where would you fit an affair in neatly? If you were 75, which would you rather have: years of steady if occasionally strained devotion, or something that looks a little bit like the Iraqi city of Fallujah, cratered with spent artillery?

From where I stand now, it all just looks like a cheap hotel room, whether you’re in that room to have an affair or to escape from the discovery of one. And despite the sex and the excitement, or the drama and the fix of everyone’s empathetic attention, there is no view from this room that is worth having.