



THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

LUST AND PORNOGRAPHY



HEATH LAMBERT

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1

SCOTT AND JESS

The saddest people I have ever known are the victims and perpetrators of sexual sin. When I entered ministry, I did not know I would spend countless hours sitting with broken people overcome by the damage of sinful sex. I know more painful stories than I could ever tell or you would ever want to hear. But I would like to serve you and your pursuit of purity by sharing just one.

One of the most tragic stories of sexual sin I know involves a married father of six. From every external appearance, the man I will call Scott was living a model life. He was a highly successful businessman with a beautiful wife and a half dozen wonderfully smart children they were homeschooling. He and his wife, Jess, were respected lay leaders in their church and were constantly surrounded by friends. Then, one morning, Jess's world fell apart.

Scott was out of the country on business when Jess received a text message from him. She opened it up to discover a graphic video of Scott with a prostitute. Scott had intended to send the video to his business partner down the hall from his hotel room, but sent it to his wife accidentally. That was the moment everything changed.

The next several weeks were a dizzying array of terror and tragedy as Jess discovered that the man she thought was her husband did not actually exist. She became aware that the father of her children rarely went more than a day without spending hours looking at pornography. She uncovered a perverse competition with two of his coworkers where they would leave town and try to capture the most vile sexual acts on video with prostitutes. She discovered that he had been unfaithful with countless women over their entire relationship together and that his first illicit sexual encounter was on the night they got engaged with one of her friends.

Jess was overwhelmed, discouraged, and disgusted. She didn't know how to think or act. She reached out for help to some friends and was trying to make sense of a life she did not recognize. Then things got worse. Late one night, she and Scott were supposed to be talking about how to proceed with the exploded remnants of their marriage, but nobody knew what to say, so they sat in silence. The kids were in bed, and it was raining

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outside. The doorbell rang, and neither Scott nor Jess could imagine who it could be. When they both made their way to the front of the house and opened the door, Scott swore. It was Tamara.

Jess had no idea who this woman was, but Scott did, and he was dumbfounded as she began speaking. Tamara stood on the front porch as she explained to Jess that she and Scott had met online at a place for married people looking to have affairs. She said they had been together for months and were in love. She shared how Scott wanted to leave Jess and the kids and be with her, but he was too scared to speak up, so she was coming to do what he would not. In her hands was a packet of material, including pornographic pictures of the two of them and printouts of text messages where he proclaimed his love for Tamara and his disgust for his wife.

It was a lot of information to share in just a moment or two, but Tamara wasn't finished. When she completed her information download, she began her appeal. She looked at Scott and begged him to get his things and leave with her. She said she knew he didn't love Jess, and now that things were out in the open, he was free to do what he wanted. In that moment, Jess suddenly became resigned to the way things were. She moved out of the doorway and sat down on a bench in the foyer. Her high school sweetheart and one of his mistresses were each standing on either side of the front door as the wind blew rain into her house. She looked at her husband and said, "Well, Scott, what are you going to do?"

Scott is facing a decision and must make a choice. It is a moment of decision that comes to everyone confronting sexual sin. It is a moment of decision that you will face throughout your life. Scott's moment of decision might be more dramatic than yours, but it is no less stark. It is the choice between wisdom and righteousness on the one hand and folly and sexual sin on the other.

2

PROVERBS AND PURITY

The Proverbs portray wisdom in the personal terms of a parent pleading with a son to pursue righteousness and good judgment:

- “My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding” (Prov. 5:1).
- “And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth” (Prov. 5:7).
- “My son, keep your father’s commandment, and forsake not your mother’s teaching” (Prov. 6:20).
- “My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you” (Prov. 7:1).
- “And now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth” (Prov. 7:24).

Wisdom comes in terms of the close personal mentoring between a loving parent and a child facing the harsh choices of a sinful world.

The personal appeal of this wisdom is based on what is calculated to bless the life of the young man who would listen, “The commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life” (Prov. 6:23). The mentor in Proverbs shares his insight, not in an effort to be controlling, nor in an effort to keep his listener from pleasure, but to help him know life and joy. Wisdom is for the lasting good of him who would follow it.

A particular focus of this life-giving wisdom has to do with a person called the adulteress or forbidden woman: “For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life, to preserve you from the evil woman, from the smooth tongue of the adulteress” (Prov. 6:23–24). As the teaching of a father to his son, it refers, rather obviously, to a woman. But if the teaching were from a mother to her daughter, it would include the same prohibition about a forbidden man. The text refers most obviously to a physical person since physical presence was most obviously required for adultery in the ancient world. But the biblical teaching against lusting in our hearts requires us to identify this forbidden person as any image in our mind (Matt. 5:28). Of course, the advent of internet pornog-

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raphy also means that the forbidden woman must also be identified as any pornographic image on our screens. The forbidden woman in Proverbs is, therefore, a reference to every expression of sinful sexuality.

In the book of Proverbs, wisdom appeals to young men to keep away from this forbidden woman. But the appeal does not come in isolation. The forbidden woman also makes an appeal. As loudly as wisdom screams to run away from this woman, the forbidden woman screams to follow her. This appeal to follow wisdom or the woman is the choice that confronted Scott that day at his front door. It is a choice that confronts you. Will you walk in wisdom or pursue sin? The appeal of wisdom as it beckons you to follow is to help you understand the twisted and sinister arguments of the forbidden woman. In Proverbs 5–7, a wise and godly mentor speaks to young men trying to decide whether to follow righteousness or folly by clarifying what it is about this forbidden woman that is so tempting and what it is that is so deadly. In what follows, we will unpack these arguments so that we can clearly see what is going on and what is at stake as we all confront the forbidden woman in whatever form she takes.

When we talk about the temptations of the forbidden woman, we mean that there is a sinister appeal of sinful sex. Proverbs 5:3 says, “The lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil.” Proverbs 7:21 says, “With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him.” The point is that in a fallen world, sinful sex is appealing; it draws us in. The appeal of sinful sex is both strong and dishonest.

3

THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE FORBIDDEN WOMAN

It is crucial to understand that the appeal of sinful sex is strong. As men, we are wired by God to be sexual creatures. In a sinful world, this wiring is broken, and we are drawn to sexual realities that God hates and that are bad for us. It is neither wise nor holy to deny the truthfulness of this reality. The appeal of sinful sex is strong — and it is dishonest. Sexual immorality makes a promise of joy and pleasure that it cannot keep. The wise man in Proverbs unpacks the smooth talk so we will recognize it when we see it and have a better chance of following wisdom. Let me highlight just three realities of this smooth talk.

1. Sinful Sex Looks Beautiful

In warning against the temptations of the forbidden woman, the wise man of Proverbs warns against the apparent beauty of sinful sex: “Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes” (Prov. 6:25). These words are as important as they are honest. You could imagine a very pious-sounding mentor talking about the temptations of sinful sex and making an argument that any kind of sinful sexuality is ugly. But what makes sexual sin so tempting is not that it looks ugly but that it looks so beautiful.

The wise man in Proverbs is honest. He doesn’t make the case that sinful sexuality is ugly. He makes clear that there is much beauty in the corrupt world of sinful sex. But he also wants us to understand that this beauty stands to entrap unwise and ungodly men when he writes, “do not let her capture you with her eyelashes.” The argument of Proverbs is not that forbidden women are ugly but that they are dangerous.

Any beauty possessed by forbidden women is both real and misleading. This is where Scott’s story is so instructive for us. Scott was sexually involved with countless women throughout his life. One of the realities that so tempted Scott to sin with these women was the physical beauty that tempted him away from his wife, family, and faithfulness to the living God. Change for Scott did not involve getting him to believe that what he found

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pretty was, in fact, ugly. Change meant helping him to see that the beauty he observed was real beauty that was tempting him to do something bad.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, Circe is the goddess living on the island of Aeaea. On his way back from the Trojan War, Odysseus and his men stop at the island and are enticed by the tempting beauty of Circe. Once in her grip, she uses her knowledge of the dark arts to transform most of the men into swine. The lesson Odysseus's men learned the hard way is not that Circe was ugly, but that she was evil.

To the men reading this, the reality about the forbidden woman in your life, in your mind, or on your screen that tempts you is that they really are beautiful. But that is only half the truth. The whole truth is that wherever you find her, the forbidden woman is dangerous and will destroy your life. It has happened to countless men before and can happen to you as well. The call of wisdom is to open the eyes of your heart and see past the surface beauty of the forbidden woman into the horrible consequences that she holds for anyone deceived by appearances.

2. Sinful Sex Promises Interest

The wise man in Proverbs is trying to mentor a young man into wisdom. As he focuses on helping the man grow in the kind of wisdom that would flee from sexual immorality, he gives a dramatic portrayal of a foolish man in pursuit of sexual sin in Proverbs 7:6–9. This young man is acting like a fool (Prov. 7:7) by being near the home of the forbidden woman after dark (Prov. 7:8–9). The young man demonstrates his folly by intentionally being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There is a powerful and practical lesson here for anyone wanting to grow into the wisdom of purity. When you are where you are supposed to be at a time you are supposed to be there, it is much harder to sin. You'll find it easier to commit sexual sin when you are alone or when you are with corrupting influences at a time and place where bad things happen. Another biblical example of this comes from the life of King David. In order for David to be able to sin with Bathsheba, he needed to be away from his soldiers in his palace at the time when kings went away to war (2 Sam. 11:1).

The question is why anyone would engage in behavior that is so clearly foolish. The wise voice in Proverbs gives a very helpful answer. The young man is drawn to the forbidden woman because of what she wears. Proverbs 7:10 says she is "dressed as a prostitute." The wise man does not describe the articles of clothing, and he does not need to. Everyone knows that clothing communicates. There is a difference between the outfit a bride wears to her

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wedding ceremony and the one she wears to the honeymoon suite. That difference has to do with communication. A bride's outfit on the day of her wedding communicates the beauty and importance of the marriage ceremony. The bride's outfit on her wedding night communicates the gift of sexual intimacy she is sharing with her husband. The prostitute's outfit is meant to communicate that same sexual intimacy in a dramatically corrupt context.

The young man is not only drawn to the forbidden woman by what she wears but also by what she does: "She seizes him and kisses him" (Prov. 7:13). The aggressive physical affection of the forbidden woman is highly desirable to the man in search of sinful sex.

Closely related to what the forbidden woman wears and what she does is what she wants. The woman is recorded as saying, "I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you" (Prov. 7:15). Do you hear the fixation on *you* from the woman's mouth? The allure of the forbidden woman that draws the man near is the promise of desire. Men in search of sinful sex not only have sexual desire but want to be sexually desired. The clothing, behavior, and words of the forbidden woman communicate a desire for the man that he receives as an addict does illegal drugs.

The only problem is that it is not real. The woman is putting on a show. Proverbs 7:11 says, "She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home." Proverbs 7:19–20 makes clear that she has a husband. The point is that the interest the woman communicates to any particular man is something she communicates to lots of men. He holds no particular value for her. There is nothing special about him. When a man falls for the promise of sexual interest from the forbidden woman, he is believing a lie.

3. Sexual Sin Promises Secrecy

Another principle temptation of the forbidden woman is the one of secrecy. The woman appeals, "Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love. For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home" (Prov. 7:18–20). When the woman says that her husband has gone on a long journey, that he has taken lots of money and will be gone for a month, she is communicating a sinister promise. She is saying that their sin will be safe from prying eyes, and no one will ever know.

Secrecy is a key ingredient of most sexual sin. Most men who sin sexually do it with the promise of not being discovered. This was certainly a huge element of Scott's sin. All of his porn viewing, philandering, and prostitute purchasing was calculated to happen in the dark without his wife's knowl-

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edge. Secrecy was required. When he blew his own cover and accidentally texted his wife the evidence of his perversion, the lid was blown off his secret life, and he had to stop.

The secrecy promised by the forbidden woman, like the desire she works so hard to communicate, is a lie. It is the nature of sin to be discovered. This is actually a promise in Proverbs, “Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is he who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; none who touches her will go unpunished” (Prov. 6:27–29). The promise is that our entanglements with the forbidden woman lead to punishment. The decision is whether we will believe the twisted promises of the forbidden woman promising secrecy or the wise promises of the Bible promising exposure.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. In what ways have these false promises of sin appealed to you? How are you tempted to believe them?
2. What truth can you use to counteract those false promises?

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THE TEMPTATIONS OF THE FORBIDDEN WOMAN

The temptations of the forbidden woman of sexual sin are powerful. The sinister promise of sinful sex is that a beautiful woman is interested in you and that no one will ever know. The wise mentor exposes these soul-destroying lies to reveal the life-giving truth that this woman, in reality, is not truly appealing but is dangerous and deadly. At the very beginning of his teaching about this woman, he says, “In the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol” (Prov. 5:4–5). At the very end of his instruction, he observes, “Many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death” (Prov. 7:26–27).

The wise man describes the temptations that are obvious when you only look at the forbidden woman. As he moves to unpack her dangers, he asks us to take a longer and closer look at this woman. He asks us to peer below the surface temptations to the reality underneath. When you notice more than her appearance, her feigned sexual interest, and her deceptive promises, you see a woman who will lead you on a path to destruction. We learn many things about her dangers, but let’s consider three.

1. Entrapment

You see the entrapment of the forbidden woman in the promise of the wise man that, “The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin” (Prov. 5:22). Sexual sin promises freedom but delivers bondage. You must believe this if you would grow in the wisdom of sexual purity.

This reality is exactly what Scott refused to understand. Scott was enticed by the spurious promise that freedom could be found in sexual sin. Countless prostitutes on his trips out of town seemed a benefit. Numerous girlfriends provided a sense of sexual satisfaction he did not think he could get from his wife. His online harem of internet pornography seemed to open a world of sexual delights not provided by the marriage bed. These were stupid and obvious lies. He learned the truth the hard way that night, standing between his wife and mistress at the front door of his house. Trapped in this moment,

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he came to see that sexual sin had bound him rather than set him free.

The wise man of Proverbs holds out this truth that the forbidden woman will entrap every person who goes near her. We will all learn this truth one way or the other. You can learn it the easy way by listening to the voice of wisdom and staying away from sinful sex. Or you can learn it the hard way by ignoring the voice of wisdom, running to this forbidden woman, and allowing the trap to spring around your neck.

2. Disgrace

Another dangerous consequence of the forbidden woman is the disgrace she ensures to the person who pursues her. The sobering words of Proverbs 6:32–33 make this so clear: “He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away.”

The truth being communicated here is more profound than you may realize at first. The warning is built on the very important reality that our reputation is important, and everyone wants a good one. This reality is endorsed in Scripture when Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold.” We all know our reputations are important, and we are all in pursuit of a good reputation. We can engage in that pursuit wisely through acts of faithfulness and righteousness. Or we can be reckless, foolish, and unrighteous.

The logic of sinful sex plays off the importance of that good reputation with the promise of secrecy that we discussed earlier. The forbidden woman whispers in our ears that we can engage in these vile acts and no one will ever know. She woos with a promise that wicked deeds done in private will not have a public impact.

The voice of wisdom cuts through the lie with a jarring diagnosis for anyone who would believe it, “He who commits adultery lacks sense” (Prov. 6:32). You must know that the path toward the forbidden woman is the path of wounds, dishonor, and disgrace. Scott thought he could outrun this reality. He thought he could keep his mistresses, prostitutes, and pornography together with his reputation as a good, Christian, family man. His experience is only one tragic demonstration that God’s Word always proves true.

3. Destruction

I began this discussion on the consequences of the forbidden woman by talking about how dangerous and destructive the woman is. The Bible is abundantly clear that sexual sin will destroy you. Here, I want also to make

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clear that sexual sin will destroy others. Proverbs 6:34–35 talks about the jealousy and pain of the husband of this forbidden woman. This man is a reminder that sexual sin damages not just those who commit the sin but everyone in the radius of those who do.

Scott's story is an example of this destruction. Everywhere you look in his life, there is the carnage from his wickedness. Most obvious are his wife, children, friends, and extended family, who were permanently wounded by his immorality. Harder to see is the pain and the carnage from his mistress standing at the front door, that woman's husband, and all her children. Harder to see are the other women nobody ever heard of and whose names Scott couldn't even remember. Harder to see are the countless stories of Scott's prostitutes that he bribed into sin and wickedness.

Your story of sexual sin is an even more personal example of this destruction. The promise of sexual sin is a selfish one that will feel so wonderful, and no one will get hurt. The true reality is that everyone touched by your sin will incur pain. Who is your sin hurting or threatening to hurt? One of the problems with pornography is the dishonest claim that it is a victimless crime. Such foolish arguments overlook the close interaction between pornography and the sex trade. Such foolish arguments overlook that whenever we look at pornography, we create demand for a fundamentally corrupt product that leads people to do things in front of a camera that the God in whose image they are made says ought not to be done and for which they will be judged. In this horrible bargain, everyone is responsible for their own sin, including you. How many people that you have never met will be destroyed forever in hell because of their sins that you were delighted to stare at on the screen of your phone?

The point of all this is that, though the temptations of the forbidden woman are strong, they cannot counteract the truth that sinful sex destroys everything and everyone it touches. The wise man of Proverbs is appealing to you to refuse to believe the lie of sin, to embrace the truth of wisdom, and to run away from foolishness and toward sexual purity.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. In your own experience, can you think of how sexual sin has left you entrapped, disgraced, or destroyed?
2. Since sexual sin wreaks so much havoc on our lives, why do you think it remains so tempting?

5

OUR RESPONSE TO THE FORBIDDEN WOMAN

The wisdom that moves from sexual sin to purity does not only require knowledge about the temptations and consequences of the forbidden woman. It also requires clarity about how to respond to her. The wise man does not only warn us about this significant problem, he also gives instruction about how to avoid it. Of the many wise instructions that are offered in the book of Proverbs, I will focus on three.

1. Do Not Go Near the Forbidden Woman

Earlier, we observed that one of the mistakes of the foolish man slipping into the clutches of sin is that he was someplace he never should have been: “I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man lacking sense, passing along the street near her corner” (Prov. 7:7–8). This man knows where this dangerous woman is and stupidly goes near her. This is the opposite of what should happen.

The foolish logic of sin encourages men to observe the words, appearance, and behavior of the forbidden woman, be enticed, and move towards her in eager expectation of the forbidden delights she promises. In our personal experience, we see the immodest clothing and longing glances of such women; we see the posts on social media inviting us to the webpages of immoral people, and we are enticed and decide to get close. Such a move is the opposite of what wisdom teaches. We will grow in wisdom only when we begin to see those sinister signals inviting us closer as a warning, crying out for us to flee in the opposite direction.

The move to run far away from such a powerful temptation will seem counterintuitive to our sinful instincts at first. That is why the wise mentor of Proverbs spends so much energy describing the powerful temptations and ruthless dangers of this woman. We must remember these dark realities when sin seeks to draw us in. The presentation of beauty is a trap: “All at once, he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life” (Prov. 7:22–23). The wise truth that we all

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must learn is that we draw near to the forbidden woman at our peril.

The best way to move away from the forbidden woman is to move toward the lovely wife. Right in the middle of his warning about sinful sex, the wise man of Proverbs urges to embrace godliness and righteousness in the purity of marital sex (Prov. 5:15–21). This teaching is important because it makes clear that God is not opposed to sex in general, only the sinful kind. God loves sex that is faithful and pure. That is how he made it to be. That is why God promises so much joy to those who focus their sexual passions in the context of marriage. One of the most effective ways to turn away from faithless sex is by pursuing marriage.

This pursuit of purity will be a challenge for everyone because of our sinful interest in faithless sex. It will be more challenging for those who are not married. Obviously, if you don't have a wife, you cannot invest your sexual passions in her. It would also be fundamentally selfish, unhelpful, and damaging to pursue marriage with anyone for the mere reason of sexual fulfillment. Still, that is an encouragement to young men to grow in love, responsibility, godliness, and the kind of maturity that faithfully pursues a worthy woman. This exhortation comes from a father to his son, who is likely still unmarried.

2. Do Not Live a Life of Hiding

Proverbs 7:9 says that the foolish young man in pursuit of sexual sin goes near the house of the forbidden woman, "In the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness." I have observed throughout this field guide that the foolish man walking into the trap of sinful sex is called out by the pure man of wisdom for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. But there is another lesson to learn from passages like Proverbs 7:9. That lesson does not only have to do with the location of the one in pursuit of immorality, but with his intention. The man goes looking for sin at a time of night and darkness. The man is hiding in the dark in an effort to conceal his sin from others.

The Bible makes repeatedly clear that a life of sin thrives at night in the dark in order to conceal, and that righteousness happens in the openness of the broad light of day (cf., John 3:20; Rom. 13:12–13; Eph. 5:11; 1 Thess. 5:8). There is more than a moral analogy behind such teaching that darkness is to sin as light is to righteousness. There is also a moral exhortation that sin happens through deceptive concealing, and righteousness happens through transparent revealing: "Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

I have been emphasizing Scott's story, but I have many more stories to tell

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than just one. In fact, my entire ministry is a catalog of such stories — some are less extreme than Scott's, but some are worse. There is a powerful lesson I have learned over the years from these men and women, regardless of the extravagance of their sexual transgression. That lesson is that sexual sin is never the first step in someone's destruction. That terrible reality is always preceded by a desire to conceal. When you listen to the stories of someone in the throes of the destruction of sexual sin, there is always a moment when they decided to turn away from living in the open light of righteousness and decided to live in the deceptive darkness of sin.

The appeal of wisdom is to turn from a deadly desire to conceal and run to the freedom of a life lived honestly and in the open. Your desire to cover and conceal will not help you. It is destroying you. I know you feel ashamed to talk about the actions you're taking and the thoughts you're thinking. I know you are overwhelmed at the thought of coming clean with someone you love and trust. I am appealing to you to listen to wisdom. Just like Scott, the day is coming when your sin will be revealed. Every day you hold off your open confession, you are stockpiling more and more transgression to be revealed when you finally come clean. That means that things get worse from here, not better. You should turn from a deceptive desire to conceal, pray to the Lord right now, and find someone you can talk to immediately.

3. Do Not Desire the Forbidden Woman

As you encounter those first two exhortations, you may think they sound pretty tough. It may feel impossible to imagine confessing your sin to someone. You may find it unimaginable that you could stay away from the beautiful appeals of the forbidden woman beckoning you to draw near. I assure you that such exhortations are nothing compared to this one. We find this most difficult and important exhortation in places like Proverbs 7:25: "Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths." Here, the Bible teaches that we must not even *want* the forbidden woman.

The Bible is clear that all of us are driven and guided through our lives by our hearts. The language of the heart, in this sense, is not meant to communicate a physical organ that pumps blood throughout our bodies. Instead, it refers to the immaterial part of who we are — our soul that actually motivates and guides our physical bodies. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life." The idea is that everything we do in our lives is motivated, guided, and initiated by our hearts.

We recognize the operations of our immaterial heart by desire. You can discern what motivates everything you do by asking what you were wanting that led to the action. You prayed because of a strong desire for spiritual strength

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in a desperate situation. You yelled at your friend out of a desire to express your anger in a disagreement. You posted that arrogant comment on social media because you wanted everyone to see that you are correct and those who oppose you are wrong. You get the point. You and I are always motivated by desire. In Proverbs 7:25, we read that foolish men stray into the path of forbidden women only after they have desired them in their hearts.

This truth reveals our fundamental problem. We are tempted and destroyed by sinful sex because we want it. The appeals of the forbidden woman work on us because we desire her. The forbidden woman is guilty of grievous sin, but her sin cannot make us do anything we do not want. James 1:14 says, “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.” We get in trouble with sinful sex because we are broken and sinful, wanting what God rejects and rejecting what God desires.

This truth makes things worse than they were at first. Solving our problem with the forbidden woman of sinful sex will never happen through altering our external situation. Mere changes in our environment will never be enough to steer clear of the clutches of sexual immorality. The dark desires of our heart mean that the changes that matter most must happen inside of us.

When we figure out how to make these changes, this fundamental problem will become our fundamental solution. The bad news is that the temptations of the forbidden woman work on us because we want what she is selling. The good news is that when our hearts change, and we have no desire for the destructive delights of sinful sex, the temptations will be powerless against us, and we will be free to live in wisdom, righteousness, and purity. The question we must answer is: how could we ever change our hearts to want different things? Part of the answer is found in truly listening to the warnings of the wise man in Proverbs. When we really come to believe that the temptations of the forbidden woman are the path to destruction, it will diminish our desire. Unfortunately, our sinful desires are so strong that we need more help than this. It is to that help that we turn in our last section.

Discussion & Reflection:

1. Out of these three instructions about sexual sin from Proverbs, which one do you need to implement immediately?
2. Is there anyone to whom you owe confession for sin? In what ways is there darkness in your life that needs to be brought into the light?

6

JESUS, WISDOM, AND THE FORBIDDEN WOMAN

All of the wisdom in the book of Proverbs comes from Solomon. He was the great king of Israel who was gifted by God with miraculous levels of wisdom: “And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt” (1 Kings 4:29–30). But as wise as Solomon was, there was someone even more wise. Jesus says, “The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here” (Matt. 12:42). Several realities make Jesus greater than Solomon.

First, Jesus is the fountain of Solomon’s wisdom. When the Apostle John describes the coming of Jesus into the world, he says, “The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:9). The Bible teaches that human beings are made intellectually ignorant because of the damage of our sin (Eph. 4:18). But Jesus is the true light which illumines the thinking of every darkened sinner. That means anything we come truly to know is the gift of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God. Solomon was not able to gain his wisdom on his own but was a beneficiary of the grace of the pre-incarnate Son of God extending knowledge to him.

Second, Jesus is the goal of Solomon’s wisdom. The Apostle Paul prays for believers that our “Hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col. 2:2–3). Just one important teaching from this passage is that all wisdom finds its goal in Jesus, meaning all true wisdom leads ultimately to him who is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:30). If wisdom does not align with the teaching of Jesus, it is not wisdom. Because Jesus is the fountain of all wisdom, it means that we will find that wisdom ultimately through a personal knowledge of him.

LUST AND PORNOGRAPHY

Third, Jesus perfectly lived out wisdom in a way that Solomon could not. Solomon was a truly wise man. But the stain of sin in his own heart placed a limit on his ability to follow his own counsel. Nehemiah 13:26 says, “Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such foreign women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin.” The man whose wisdom we have surveyed in this chapter wandered from his own counsel about the forbidden woman, but Jesus’ life was marked by the complete freedom of sin, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weakness, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

Fourth, Jesus creates the wisdom in us that Solomon describes. Solomon’s words are rich with wisdom as he rightly describes the dangers of forbidden women and strongly urges us to flee from their temptations. But because we are sinners, our hard hearts have no power to obey these righteous words. Sin makes us want things we should not want and emboldens us to disobey God’s truth rather than obey: “I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment produced in me all kinds of covetousness” (Rom. 7:7–8). But Jesus does what the law could not do and gives us the power to obey the truth by believing in his life, death, and resurrection (Rom. 8:3–4). The bad news about our sinful hearts is that we cannot obey the wisdom of Solomon on our own. The good news about Jesus is that his powerful grace equips us to obey wisdom and become wise in him: “Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight through the Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever” (Heb. 13:20–21).

What all this means is that if you want to grow in wisdom and holiness, you need more than the words of wisdom that Solomon shares. You need the Savior, Jesus, to whom Solomon points. Jesus is the personification of wisdom. He is perfect righteousness that accomplishes the moral purity you never could. He is the perfect sacrifice for sin who cleanses your transgression through his blood shed on the cross. His resurrection power gives you the ability to move towards righteousness from the corruption of sinful sex. If you want to be wise and pure and avoid the death and destruction of lust and pornography, you need to trust in Jesus. The more you trust in him, the more you will grow in purity.

I wish I could say that the story about Scott had a happy ending, but it didn’t.

FIELD GUIDE

That stormy night, he managed to squirm out of a difficult situation, promised Jess he would do better, and ultimately sought counseling with her. I got to know them when they came to me for help. The early weeks of counseling seemed promising as Scott apparently came clean about his sin, and Jess was willing to stick with him to work on their problems. In the long term, however, Scott was unwilling to change. He never ultimately turned from his double life and never turned from the forbidden women that seemed to bring him such joy. In the end, he divorced his wife, abandoned his family, and is now growing old alone, apart from everyone he used to know.

Scott's is a true tale that illustrates the wisdom of Proverbs. As sad as it is, I pray that you will listen to his story and listen to the ancient words that point to the path of life centuries before Scott chose the path of destruction. More than that, I pray you will run from the forbidden woman into the arms of Jesus who loves you, died for you, prays for you, and gives you his own purity as you trust in him.

Discussion and Reflection:

1. Why is Jesus our only hope for real heart change when it comes to sexual sin?
2. Who can you reach out to in order to have accountability and encouragement to fight the temptation of sexual sin?



THE
MENTORING
PROJECT

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