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 First Baptist Vancouver
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 Text: Matthew 5:27-30
 Title: "Protecting Holy Longings"
 (Series: Following Jesus into His Sermon on the Mount)

He loves us. The Preacher on the Mount loves us. It is because He loves us that He preaches His Sermon on the Mount. The greatest Preacher who ever lived preaches the greatest Sermon ever preached because He loves us. This is crucial to be clear about as we follow Jesus into His Sermon on the Mount. As I have been emphasizing, we must never separate the Sermon on the Mount from the Preacher on the Mount. Separate the Sermon on the Mount from the Preacher on the Mount and the Sermon on the Mount is no longer what the Preacher on the Mount intends it to be. Separate the Sermon from the Preacher and the Sermon becomes either frustrating idealism or oppressive legalism. The Sermon is neither idealism nor legalism. The Sermon is life, life as the Giver and Redeemer of Life intends it to be. The Preacher on the Mount loves us and calls us into relationship with Him. Before He preaches His Sermon on the Mount, before He says a thing, He calls us into relationship with Him. "Come, follow Me." He says what He says to us having already established the relationship. He says what He says to make the relationship all He wants it to be.

Or, in terms of the major theme of His Sermon, He says what He says to make righteousness happen; to make right-relationship happen; to make right-related-ness happen. He does not say what He says to shame us. We may feel ashamed. But that is not why He says what He says. He does not say what He says to guilt-trip us. We may feel guilty. But that is not why He says what He says. He does not say what He says to rob us of the joy of living. He says what He says to free us. He says what He says to heal us. He says what He says to restore our souls. He says what He says to integrate our souls. He says what He says to protect the holy longings of our souls.

"You have heard it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart." In this section of His Sermon, Jesus, the fulfiller of the good law of the good God, is drawing out the deeper intent of the 7th commandment, "You shall not commit adultery." The Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day, the Doctors of Theology and Pious Lay Leaders of Jesus' day, felt they were living righteously before the commandment as long as they were not sleeping with other women. Jesus, the Law-giver in our flesh, says, "There is more to it." A lot more! "Whoever looks at another woman lustfully violates the intention of the good commandment." He says what He says because He loves us. Now, would you agree that although Jesus specifically addresses married men, His words also speak to unmarried men, and to married and unmarried women? And would you agree that although Jesus specifically addresses the one who does the looking, His words also speak to the one who intentionally draws the look? That He is also speaking to the one who is doing everything they can to awaken lustful desire?

“You have heard it was said ... but I say to you ...” Again, Jesus does not raise the issues of adultery and lust to rob us of the joy of living. Indeed, as He says the night before going to the cross, “These things” – all His teaching – “These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:11). Jesus does not speak to stomp out pleasure. He raises the 7th commandment because when it comes to the matter of adultery, be it in act or in thought, the whole person is involved and at stake. “Sin is sin,” we say. Yes. But some sin wreaks greater havoc. Adultery – in act or thought – strikes at the core of our being. Jesus speaks to protect the core of our being.

As E. Stanley Jones put it: Jesus is not being ascetic ... He is being aseptic. [*The Christ of the Mount*, 146]. Not prudish but preservative. I think it helps to hear Jesus if we translate His words more literally. Listen carefully. “Whoever **keeps on** looking at a woman **in order to** lust after her.” Did you hear the expanded wording? “Keeps on” and “in order to.” Jesus is not speaking of the appreciative look at a beautiful person. He is speaking of the willful, sustained stare. The look that goes beyond appreciation. It is a fine line, I know! And we know when we have crossed it. We feel it in our souls. Dale Bruner makes the point best: “Looking at a beautiful person is a drive given in creation; staring or leering is a drive given in the fall from creation” [*Christbook*, 183].

Listen to Jesus’ words even more literally. The word rendered “to lust for” is the word *epithumeo*. A strong, intense verb. Yes, it has sexual overtones. But its most basic note is that of possessing [Robert Guelich, *Sermon on the Mount*, 194]. *Epithumeo* moves beyond appreciation to the desire to possess. The authors of the Greek translation of the OT rendered the 10th commandment, “You shall not covet,” as “You shall not *pithumeo*.” Lust goes beyond appreciation in wanting to possess: lust must have the object of appreciation ... if only for a moment. Dr. Paul Mickey of Duke University gets to the heart of the matter. “Lust,” he writes, in his book *Though Marriage*, is any excessive desire, any uncontrollable urge for immediate gratification.

Although sex is an obvious target for lust, it is only one among countless others. The main motivation behind lust is to feel better fast. And that means capturing the object of your lust. Once you’ve got your prey in hand, that’s suppose to relieve you of gnawing desire, to satisfy that desperate need that says, ‘If I don’t have it, if can’t do it, my life will fall apart.’ Lust may involve a craving for food, alcohol, sports, new fashions, job promotions, or many other things. The only common condition to unleash lust is that you want something and believe you’ve got to have it now. The pleasure won’t be deferred for later fulfillment. And if you find you just can’t get what you want, you may become so frustrated that you lose your ability to think and reason clearly.” And you lose any consciousness of the presence and love of God.

So, let me paraphrase Jesus’ words: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever keeps on looking at a woman, craving her for himself, is committing adultery with her in his heart.”

Martin Luther helps us. He says we should not “make the bow string too taut here,

as if anyone who is tempted and whose lust and desire for another woman are aroused would be damned for it.” Luther acknowledges that lustful thoughts come willy-nilly, and that we cannot help that. But, he says, we do not have to invite the thoughts to stay. He quotes one of the early Christian theologians who said: “I cannot keep bird from flying over my head. But I can certainly keep it from nesting in my hair and from biting my nose off!” Again, Jesus is not talking about the appreciative look at one of His beautiful creatures. He Himself takes great delight in the beauty of His handiwork. Right? As I walk through the city and encounter a beautiful woman, I simply say, “Lord ... You do good work!” Which I regularly say of the lady to whom I am married. Jesus’ concern is the willful, sustained stare, the look that goes beyond appreciation to the desire to possess...if only for a moment. **In this section of His Sermon, we meet Jesus the Protector.**

1. He is, first of all, clearly protecting the covenant of marriage. The act of adultery affects the covenant ... deeply. As we all know. But so does lust. Lust shifts the focus off one’s spouse on to another person. Lust then changes the nature of the relationship with the spouse. When we allow lustful thoughts and images to “nest” we become self-absorbed. That is, after all, what lust is: craving self gratification. I become pre-occupied with what I want, and am not able to give myself in servant love. As lustful thoughts and images continue to “nest” they begin “to undercut” the emotional and spiritual bonds that give the marriage relationship staying power (Paul Mickey). Jesus says what He says to protect, and thereby, enhance relationship.

2. He is also protecting the dignity of the other, the dignity of the person being looked at. Lust de-humanizes. The other is no longer a person. The other has become an object, a thing. The woman is no longer valued as a human being; she becomes mere kindling for the fire of my desire (Dale Bruner). This is why many of us find so much modern advertising so offensive. As someone has said, we are being treated like animals in heat. And beautiful women, lovely daughters of the living God, are being exploited, uses as mere means to an end. Jesus says what He says to protect the dignity of persons being looked at, persons He has created and is redeeming.

3. He is also protecting the soul of the one who is doing the looking. The willful, sustained look has implications for the looker. Here is how it works. The lustful look triggers the imagination. And if the imagination is allowed to run free, it begins to massage the will. And if the will is massaged long enough, it capitulates to the imagination. And before we know it, we are acting out what the imagination fantasizes. Repeat the process often enough and it actually forms ruts or groves in the brain. And the slightest lustful fantasy sets the cycle in motion again. You may have heard the old saying: “sow a thought and you reap an act, sow an act and you reap a habit, sow a habit and reap a character, sow a character and reap a destiny” [Jones, 149]. Unchecked lustful looking sets in motion an enslaving sequence. And, if not checked, results in debilitating addiction. Jesus says what He says to protect our souls. He says what He says because He loves us and wants us to have integrated souls.

“If your right eye causes you to stumble, tear 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. 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 be thrown into hell.”

Tough words ... because He is after the welfare of the soul. Does Jesus mean for us to take His command literally? To literally gouge out our eye or cut off our hand? No. For the simple reason that I can fantasize quite well without eyes! Jesus the Protector speaks this way so we hear His call to take a radical approach, to do radical soul surgery. You do not treat cancer with Aspirin and band-aids. You do not treat *epithumia* with half-hearted or gradual measures. Again, Jesus is not stomping on human pleasure and joy. He is not being ascetic. He is being aseptic. He wants to free and heal and integrate our souls. So He calls us to discipline our eyes and hands ... and feet (Matthew 18:8-9). Later in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus will remind us that the eye is the lamp of the body (6:22). If our eyes are clear our bodies will be filled with light. But if our eyes are bad, focused in the wrong places, especially if focused on the things of darkness, our bodies will be filled with darkness. So He calls us to be vigilant about what we choose to let go through our eyes into our bodies, into our hearts. “Cut it out ... cut it off.”

If certain magazines cause us to lust, get rid of them. If certain kinds of novels cause us to lust, do not read them. If certain stores have the problematic magazines and books right there near the check-out stands, do not shop there. If certain television programs cause us to crave, do not watch them. Turn the station. Better yet, in the moment of temptation, turn off the TV altogether. If certain movies even hint that they will arouse *epithumia* do not go. If we are in the theatre and discover the film is problematic, get up and leave. If certain Inter-net sites awaken ... oh mercy. It is one of the major crises of our time. Turn the computer off. “Cut it out ... cut it off.” Is this being too prudish? Maybe. But so what? To paraphrase Jesus, as many have: “It is better to be culturally deprived and preserve a measure or inner purity, than to be culturally-with-it and be eaten up inside.” Jesus’ call to a radical approach is part of His call to be crucified with Him. It is part of what Paul calls “crucifying the flesh.”

I want to now invite my good friend and brother in Jesus, Doug Hills to share with us some of his processing of the reality Jesus is addressing.

The statistics are staggering... but some of us don't need to hear statistics to know about the power that lust and pornography can have in a person's life – we know it personally. I do.

My name is Doug Hills and I'm a member here at First. I grew up in a good Christian home, with good parents who loved God and loved me, and I learned early to love Jesus and to follow him. But I discovered sexual self gratification in elementary school, and I quickly realized the power of using pictures to enhance the physical act. It didn't take me long to realize that I could also use my imagination to incorporate people from my life into my fantasies, and lust, sexual fantasy, and pornography became a regular part of my daily existence.

I knew this was wrong, but I didn't stop. After an extremely awkward talk with an extremely

uncomfortable leader in my church, my feeling that this would never change was confirmed... as was my feeling that there were some things that were just too shameful and too ugly to be talked about. And so, I buried this part of me. Not that I stopped the sin -- it only grew worse and worse over the years. But I learned to hide it well, and so for decades I lived this double life -- the good Christian guy on the outside, and the lust and fantasy active underneath the mask of perfection that I was wearing.

This has all changed in the past two years, and I want to share with you three things that I've learned.

The first is that you don't have to live like I lived. If you're a guy who struggles with lust and issues of sexual purity, you're not alone, and the good news is that it doesn't have to be like that. For the last two years I've been walking with guys and together we're discovering that there is hope, and help, and healing for people like us. God has not given up on us.

If pornography and lust are only the start of your problems, I want you to know that some of us have also acted out in all sorts of ways, and we are finding more grace, and mercy, and forgiveness than we thought was possible. I should also mention that even though we tend to think of this as just a male problem, it's not... and if you are a woman who struggles with lust and sexual purity, you're not alone, and there is hope, and help, and healing available for you too.

The second thing I've learned is that this is important. We sometimes treat lust like it's a victimless sin – that it doesn't really matter as long as it's just in your head. But it does matter, because all sin destroys relationships. Living with indwelling sin hurts our relationship with God. I always knew that sin wasn't good for my life with God, but I never realized just how much sin deadened my spiritual life, sucked my emotions dry, or hardened my heart. Since I've started walking clean, I'm discovering more joy, more peace, and more life with God than I had dreamed of.

If I had time, I could also tell you how living in lust and treating people as objects damages your relationship with all those around you. If I had even more time, I could explain how the damage is greatest with those we love most. And if my ex-wife were here, she would speak of the damage done to her by my lust even more forcefully than I could.

The third thing that I've learned in the past two years, is that I can't do this on my own. I could only get help and find healing when I broke the silence and admitted that I was broken, and confessed that I was a sinner. I've found great support in getting together weekly with other guys who also struggle in this area. We share how we're doing (both our failings and our successes), we learn from each other, point each other to Jesus, and pray for each other. And that's incredibly powerful.

*Now, I *hate* people knowing that I'm not perfect, and going to a group that deals with these issues regularly forces me to swallow my pride. At times that feels like I'm cutting off a hand or gouging out an eye. But it's worth it. For years I let my fear, my shame, and my desire for a good reputation stop me from getting the help I needed. And if you're doing the same, I challenge you to not let these things stand in the way of walking clean.*

I know I'm not the only person here who struggles with lust, pornography, and sexual health. And I know that I'm not the only guy here who would be helped by getting together to walk down the road to wholeness. So, we're starting up a connection group around this issue here at First.

We're going to get some contact information in the First News next week, but I would love to talk to you more about this.

Doug's story illustrates the fact that we cannot follow Jesus into His Sermon on the Mount alone. He calls us to follow Him in community. If you know the ministry of Alcoholics Anonymous you know that the key to making progress is having a buddy you can call on day or night. Just hearing the buddy's voice is often enough to break the spell of temptation. Jesus the Protector. Of the deepest level of our souls. For it turns out that lust is a "cousin" of deeper longings of our soul. Lust is a "cousin" of holy longings. Holy longings built into us by the Creator. It turns out that lust is a twisting of those deeper, holy longings. Lust is the twisting of the longing to feel alive. Lust is the twisting of the longing to behold beauty. Lust is the twisting of the longing for intimacy. Lust is holy longings gone off in the wrong direction. Instead of beating ourselves up when we experience lust, simply recognize that lust is a signal that we have not been listening to the holy longings. I have been too busy to smell the flowers. I have been too busy to enter into genuine fellowship with people. I have been too busy to stop and soak in the mystery and majesty of life.

This is why high-achievers are especially vulnerable to inappropriate sexual fantasy and activity. We have been driving so hard so long that a vacuum has formed in our souls. Into the vacuum comes lust and all its false promises of comfort. And this is why spouses and children of high-achievers are also vulnerable: they have not been pursued or cared for in a long time. Lust is symptomatic of deeper, holy longings gone unfulfilled too long. Since those deeper, holy longings are finally only fulfilled in relationship with the Lover of our souls, lust is symptomatic of the drifting of our intimacy with Him. When I remember this, the spell is broken. And like the prodigal, I turn back for home. And like the prodigal, once again, experience the healing embrace of the waiting Father (Luke 15).

And then I hear again the call of the Holy Spirit to yield my body ... with all its drives and longings ... to Him. Romans chapter 6. "Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts. Do not offer your body to sin. But rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought back from death to life: offer the parts of your body (eyes, hands, feet) as instruments of righteousness." Here Jesus: these eyes are Yours, these hands are Yours, these feet are Yours. I yield my whole body to You. Cause my longing to love You to cleanse and re-direct all other longings.

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