

*Purity and Marriage: Proverbs*

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This morning we're going to talk about purity and marriage. I'll use three exhortations to guide our study through these themes in Proverbs: flee temptation, find a godly spouse, be faithful to your spouse.

The book of Proverbs was put together specifically with young men in mind. This is apparent in the repeated exhortations to "my son." Much of what is written here was originally intended as material for a father to teach his son. So some might wonder, "Well, what if I'm not a young man? How does this apply to me?" Well, the book obviously has a wider intended audience than it did in its original context. That's true of whole Bible. Each book of the Bible was written with a particular audience in mind, a specific historical context. Romans, for instance, was written by Paul to the church in Rome. But all of these books were also inspired by God and intended for all of His people throughout the ages. So when we come to the books of the Bible we consider the original context and then also consider how it applies to our own situation. And it doesn't take much work to apply the Proverbs to all of our situations, whether you're a young woman, or an older man or woman. So as we read these proverbs that instruct young men how to flee temptation and how to find a godly wife and how to be a faithful husband, we'll broaden out these statements to understand the application for others as well.

**Flee Temptation**

*"My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge. For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but 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; she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it." (Proverbs 5:1–6, ESV)*

The message for all of us is to flee temptation. Speaking to young men, these verses describe the allure of sexual temptation by the forbidden woman. This temptation may present itself in various ways. It may be a young lady who is flirtatious and dresses immodestly. It may be the cover of a magazine in the

grocery store. It may be a commercial on TV or an image on the internet.

As we broaden this out to apply it to all of us (men and women, young and old, single and married), we recognize that we are confronted daily with images and messages that seek to tempt us with what is forbidden. God created physical intimacy to be enjoyed by a husband and wife in the lifelong covenant relationship of marriage. Outside of marriage, sexual activity is forbidden. The world mocks that vision of purity. The world calls that oppressive and boring and archaic. But the world lies to us.

Do you remember the large spoon I held up three weeks ago and talked about how, when you look at that spoon, it makes things look different than they really are? It made my face look really wide or upside down. I was talking about wisdom and folly. This is a specific aspect of wisdom and folly. There are wise ways to deal with sexual desire, and there are foolish ways. And so many of the influences in our world try to make things look different than they really are. Many people are sending a very foolish message about sex. It's a message that sounds fun and exciting and pleasurable, but it's devastating. It leaves so many people in a world of hurt.

My prayer for all of you this morning is that God will show you so powerfully (more powerfully than the world could impress its message upon you) that He loves you so much, and He wants you to be so happy, that He gave these wise instructions to protect you from harm and preserve your purity so that you might have far greater pleasures than anything the world offers.

Augustine, who lived in the 300s A.D., and who I'm going to be talking about more next Sunday, is a great example of someone who left a worldly lifestyle, by God's grace, and found far greater joy in a life of following the Lord. He was living with his girlfriend and had a child out of wedlock. He was in bondage to that lifestyle of immorality. But as God was drawing Augustine to Himself, Augustine felt the fierce battle between the pleasures of sin and pleasures of purity. The pleasures of purity won out, praise be to God. And I hope you, too, will have a vision for purity that will help you to fight temptation and flee temptation, so that you can enjoy the blessings of God.

I also want to say at the outset this morning that there is forgiveness for past sins. Maybe you've really messed up. Maybe you've sinned sexually, and therefore you feel like you'll never be able to experience God's blessing on your life. Look to the cross, friend. Don't wallow in grief. It's appropriate to have sorrow for

what you've done, but don't live there. Lift your eyes to see the redemption that comes through Christ. Confess your sin, repent of your sin, fight against present temptations, and find great comfort in the forgiveness we have in Christ.

Consider some of the warnings in Proverbs chapters 6-7.

*“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?”* (Proverbs 6:27–28, ESV)

That's an important warning to flee temptation. Don't flirt with temptation. Don't minimize the devastating effect of falling into temptation. You might have a certain standard in your mind, a certain line that you're committed not to cross. And you might think that anything else is OK as long as you don't cross that line. A teenager who has been brought up in church might think, As long as I'm still a virgin when I get married . . . Or a married person might think, As long as I don't commit adultery . . . And that kind of reasoning can be used to justify all kinds of wickedness and impurity. And to think that way is just as foolish as going up to a bonfire (like the one at the Moyers last Sunday) and thinking, I can pick up one of those burning logs, and it won't hurt me. That's insane. And similarly, to think that you can watch sensual movies and listen to sensual music and hang out with folks who are talking about who's sleeping with who, and it's not going to affect you – that's insane. You're going to get burned. So beware. Be careful who your friends are, like we talked about last week. And be careful what you're exposing yourself to by way of media. Don't think you can walk on coals without scorching your feet.

The whole matter of purity is not just about outward behavior. It's about the heart. As Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, *“everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”* (Matthew 5:28, ESV) So we need to engage the battle at that level. It's not just about what you do with your body. It's about what's going on in your mind, in your thoughts, in your heart.

Fleeing temptation starts in your heart. You must guard your heart. You must guide your thoughts toward things that are pure.

*“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* (Philippians 4:8, ESV)

And where your mind goes, there your actions will go also. As you guard your thoughts, as you meditate on Scripture, then you will have much ammunition to battle the temptations when they come. Like Joseph did when Potiphar's wife was trying to seduce him. He had the right frame of mind. He was thinking about God. He said, How could I do this great wickedness and sin against God? (Genesis 39:9) And Joseph fled out of the house. That's a concrete example of the instruction from 1 Corinthians 6 to flee sexual immorality. That's exactly what Joseph did. And it's exactly what we should do as well. Don't play with fire. Run away from it!

Look at what the proverbs say about the fool who does not flee temptation, but rather walks right into the trap.

*“With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. 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.”* (Proverbs 7:21–23, ESV)

That sounds a lot like Jesus' warning: "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell." (Matthew 5:29, ESV)

My question for us this morning is, Are we going to recognize how much is at stake when it comes to fighting for purity? Jesus is not saying that you're actually supposed to gouge out an eye, but He's saying you need to fight hard, you need to make sacrifices, you need to give up some things, whatever it takes, to avoid and resist the temptations that come our way. Get rid of the internet if you have to. Get rid of your TV if you have to. Confess your sexual sins to trusted Christian friends. Ask for accountability. Some of these measures may seem as painful as cutting off a hand or gouging out an eye, but it's worth it. Fight, by the power of the Spirit, to kill the momentary pleasures of sin and pursue the never-ending pleasure of following Jesus.

I want to speak to parents now for a moment about how we need to be attentive to our children and shepherd them well as they grow up and as these temptations begin to appear. How can we protect their purity and prepare them for marriage, if God would have them to be married someday? How can we help our kids fight and flee temptation? Well we need to realize that "The Talk" shouldn't be just one talk. It should be a series of many conversations. And I think some of these conversations with our kids need to start relatively young, even in the elementary years.

There are some good resources out there that can help you with this. *The Squire and the Scroll: A Tale of the Rewards of a Pure Heart* is a good book for a dad to read through with his young son. *The Princess and the Kiss: A Story of God's Gift of Purity* is great book for a mom to read with her young daughter. The ministry of FamilyLife with Dennis Rainey has some great materials for talking to your children about purity. One of them is called Passport2Purity, designed to be used when a young person is entering the teen years. There are lots of resources you can find to help you. But a good place to start is right here in Proverbs. Simply talking through some of these verses we're looking at this morning and trying to have age-appropriate conversations that will keep the dialogue open.

And I would exhort the children here, too. Listen to your parents. Listen to Proverbs. Listen to everything God's Word has to say about these things. You need godly wisdom to help you deal with the temptations that are coming your way. So don't resent the fact that your parents want to help you and teach you. They're just trying to keep you from grabbing ahold of that burning log. They're trying to keep you from walking off to be slaughtered like an ignorant ox.

There was an interesting news story I came across last year about a guy who attempted an armed robbery. What he didn't realize, though, was that the man he was trying to rob was a mixed martial arts fighter. Here's what the news report said, "A mugger in Chicago clearly didn't know his potential victim very well. Police say 24-year-old Anthony Miranda tried to mug a man in Chicago's Southwest Side neighborhood on Dec. 2 after asking the victim for a lighter. When the unidentified victim said he didn't have a lighter, Miranda produced a gun and ordered the victim out of the car. Once out of the car, the victim, later revealed to be a mixed-martial artist, began pummeling the surprised Miranda. While receiving his beating from the MMA fighter, Miranda accidentally shot his own leg, inflicting a serious wound to his own ankle. Once out of the hospital, Miranda will face charges of armed robbery and aggravated discharge of a firearm."<sup>1</sup>

As I think about that incident it makes me think of all the ways that people think they can just play around with sex, and they think they're not going to get hurt. People think they can do what they want, when they want, without any consequences. They're like the adulteress in Proverbs 30:20 who treats sex as casually as eating a meal, and says, "I have done no wrong."

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<sup>1</sup> WORLD magazine, January 14, 2012, page 17.

I say this to young people especially, if you think you can experiment with the ways of the world and not get hurt, you're fooling yourself. You'll end up shooting yourself in the foot, just like this guy did. Sex is more powerful than you can imagine. It has the potential for amazing pleasure and fulfillment and intimacy in its appropriate, God-given context. But violate God's plan and design, and you will regret it.

### **Find a Godly Spouse**

Now, the pursuit to guard your purity is not ultimately about self-denial. It's about saving yourself for something very wonderful. Purity will bring far greater satisfaction in the long run, whether you remain single or someday get married. If you do get married, as many of you young people will, here are some things you should look for in a spouse.

The description of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is helpful in many respects. It sets an example that women can aspire to. It is also a good exhortation for men to praise those women in our lives (a wife, mother, sister, daughter) who fear the Lord. And I certainly count myself very blessed to have a wife who fears the Lord. God has been very good to me to allow me to be married to Stacy. We read this passage at the dinner table a few nights ago, and I told the kids how fortunate they are to have a Proverbs 31 mom. And I told them that they should be standing up to tell her how awesome she is, like it says in verse 28. So that's another great application of this chapter. And then this chapter is also very helpful for any single person who is hoping and praying to be married, because this gives a description of the kind of person you should be looking for.

Let's consider a few characteristics briefly. The description is of the virtuous woman, but we can also think of many of these characteristics in terms of what a woman should be looking for in a man.

First of all, she is trustworthy. Look at verse 11, "The heart of her husband trusts in her . . ." Her husband trusts her. He is never worried about her faithfulness to him. He never has to wonder if she is using their money in dishonest or foolish ways. As you are getting to know someone who would be a potential spouse, you must consider if the person is honest and trustworthy. Does he or she have a track record of following through on their word?

Second, she is a helper to her husband. Verse 12, "She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life." Verse 23,

“Her husband is known in the gates when he sits among the elders of the land.” It seems odd that right in the middle of this passage about the woman who fears the Lord there’s a verse about the husband. But it makes a point about the woman’s commitment to her husband. Her work at home and service to her husband benefits his reputation and success. He is a better man because he is married to her. And in verse 28 he praises her because of her virtue. You should look for a person to marry who is going to encourage you and work alongside you in a complementary manner. A married couple should be stronger together than they would be apart.

Third, she is a hard worker. This is seen throughout the passage. Look, for instance, at verses 13-16, “She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her maidens. She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.”

The godly wife and mother works efficiently in managing her household. She redeems the time. She is so dedicated to the success of her husband and children that she works and plans and prepares food and provides clothes. As Titus 2 says, she is “busy at home” or “working at home.”

It also appears that this woman is doing some work outside of the home. In verse 16 she considers a field and buys it. In verse 18 she perceives that her merchandise is profitable. In verse 24 “she makes linen garments and sells them; she delivers sashes to the merchant.” I think the emphasis we need to see in this passage is that the woman who fears the Lord works hard to serve her husband and care for her family, and those are the core commitments that motivate her work, whether it’s guiding the myriad of tasks at home or selling some of her merchandise to earn extra income. Whatever she’s doing, her focus is on her husband and her family.

This is an important thing to talk about as you are approaching marriage. A dating couple, engaged couple, should talk very seriously and candidly about their understanding of the roles of the husband and wife in the home.

The Bible teaches that there are distinct roles for the husband and the wife. Proverbs 31 doesn’t speak directly to this, but other passages do, like Ephesians 5. God calls the man to be the leader, the protector, the provider. He needs to make sacrifices for his wife. He needs to go out and work hard to provide for his family. And God calls the woman to respect her husband, submit to him, support him, and be mainly engaged in the work of raising

children and caring for the home. Unfortunately, our culture does not have a whole lot of respect for childrearing and homemaking, but that labor of love is tremendously influential and utterly important.

So as you think about the possibility of marriage someday, these are things to consider. And it's very important to be on the same page about what your roles are and what your priorities are. And it's important to know that the person you're going to marry is a hard-worker. It's going to take hard work on the part of the husband and the wife in order to make the marriage work and in order to raise a family in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Fourth, she helps those in need. Verse 20, "She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy." This woman looks to the needs of her family, but she also looks to other needs around her. She is generous and hospitable and helpful. In verse 26 it says, "She opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue." She looks for ways to help others, both in practical, tangible ways, and also in emotional and spiritual ways. She is a sage, and others will seek out her wise counsel and benefit from it. You want to marry a person like that—someone who is not just consumed with their own selfish activities and entertainments, but who delights to help others.

Fifth, she is not overcome by worry. Verse 25 says, "she laughs at the time to come." This woman fears the Lord, and out of her fear of the Lord flows wisdom and kindness and hard work. And because of these things she can look to the future without being overcome by worry. The virtuous, godly woman will trust in God, and in His providential plans for her. And therefore she won't be consumed with fretting over the details of the future. She will laugh at the time to come.

This gets at the core characteristic that you should look for in a spouse. Does this person fear the Lord? Is this person a believer? Don't compromise on this point. Don't enter into a marriage where you're going to be unequally yoked. Christ must be the foundation of the relationship, and then you can both look to Him, trust in Him, and laugh at the days to come.

Here are a few other words of wisdom that pertain to looking for a spouse. [These are printed on your worship folder.] "*Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.*" (Proverbs 11:22)

Guys and girls need to heed this word. Don't just look at how a person looks. Don't just consider appearances. You have to look at the character of the person.



*“An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who brings shame is like rotteness in his bones.”* (Proverbs 12:4)

Don't take marriage lightly. The marriage union is life-long. You're making a covenant with that person, till death do you part. So choose wisely. Choosing a godly spouse will be like a crown to your head, but choosing an ungodly, foolish spouse, will be like rotteness in your bones.

*“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the LORD.”* (Proverbs 18:22)

This is the blessing that a good marriage can be.

And the next verses describe the life-draining burden that a bad marriage can be.

*“It is better to live in a corner of the housetop than in a house shared with a quarrelsome wife.”* (Proverbs 21:9)

*“A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand.”* (Proverbs 27:15–16)

So think and pray and seek counsel about the characteristics you should be seeking in a potential spouse, and then resolve in your mind that you're not going to settle for anything less. You should be looking for someone who is godly and mature, someone who studies the Bible and is a member of a church and accountable to other believers, someone who is a hard worker, who is responsible with money, who is honest, kind, self-controlled, someone who can admit their faults, confess sin and seek forgiveness.

If you're in a dating relationship you should introduce this person to as many friends of yours as possible, including your family and your church family. See if anyone has any red flags. This is what humility looks like in a dating relationship. Don't think that you know better than everyone else. Invite the counsel of others.

### **Be Faithful to Your Spouse**

Lastly, and briefly, everyone must also have a vision for faithfulness in marriage. We must all flee temptation. Those who desire to be married should find a godly and wise spouse. And then as you enter into the covenant of marriage you must do so with a commitment to faithfulness.

"Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. [This is encouragement to enjoy God's design for marriage. But then here's also a warning] Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin." (Proverbs 5:18-22)

Do you see that? There is delight, there is intoxicating love to be enjoyed in God's plan. Depart from that plan, though, and you will be like a prisoner to your sin. You'll be held fast in the bonds of sin. Some of you know exactly what that feels like and you may be experiencing that right now. You need Christ to free you, redeem you, forgive you.

Hebrews 13:4 says, "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled [that is God's ideal, that is God's beautiful design held out before us, that's the honorable and pure passion we should pursue, but then here's a warning as well], for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous." There's the carrot and the stick. In this fallen world, God redeems His people through the blood of Christ and He gives us clear instructions about how we ought to live. His instructions are for our good (I hope you hear that!). He wants us to know the happiness of what He designed for us. So He presents His great promises, and also His warnings.

There's so much more that could be said in a sermon on purity and marriage. These are very important topics, and a lot to try to cover in one sermon. But I hope that we can all benefit from what we've seen here in Proverbs. I hope we will all be striving to live wisely, as singles, as those who hope to married someday, as those who are dating or engaged, and as married couples. May God be glorified as we delight in the good instructions He has given us. After all, He made us in this way. He came up with the idea of sex and marriage. He created us as male and female. And it's all for His glory, to be a picture of Christ and the church. For all of us, single and married, the intimacy we most need and desire, is found in a relationship with Jesus. I hope we will all find that today.