

Matthew 5:27-39

Challenging Lifestyle – How to Keep the Fire in the Fireplace

PRAY

One of my favourite events at my kids sports day is the high jump.

My twins have just started year 5 so the competitors have been 8/9 ish the last couple of years.

It's a hilarious watch because they basically have little to no technique. They run towards the bar and then just hurl themselves at it and hope for the best!!

Some get away with this at the lower levels, but as the bar gets higher and higher, this strategy really doesn't work. It takes thought, intentional practice and technique to get over it!

The sermon on the mount is a bit like the high jump event – because Jesus takes the well known 10

commandments that Moses received and he raises the bar.

Last week we looked at anger – which is the bar raise from the commandment 'Do not murder'.

This week Jesus tackles the 7th commandment 'Do not commit adultery' and raises the bar ***'But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'***

Ok – that is a high bar.

It's a tough one because it moves the expectation from an outward and obvious action – to something that is inside us.

In our thoughts, hearts and imaginations. It's easily hidden. We think we can get away with it and no one will know.

But Jesus takes it very seriously. His use of hyperbole might be a bit graphic with all its talk of

gouging out eyes and cutting off of hands – but it shows how important it is to Jesus that we deal with this ruthlessly though not literally of course.

So what is Jesus getting at? Do we all need to walk around with blinkers on so that we never look at anyone?

Those who know Greek better than I do say that this is not about seeing someone who is beautiful to look and thinking ‘wow, she looks great’.

The tense gives a sense of a lingering look, a fixed gaze.

Because lust actually isn’t really about beauty.

I said last week that many things that we call ‘sins’ - the way we mess up and fall short of God’s best – are corruptions of something good and something that is a gift.

Lust can be seen as a corruption of two things – sexual desire and our creative imaginations.

Despite our bad press in this area as Christians – **sexual desire is not a bad thing.**

There’s a whole book of the bible call Song of Songs that celebrates the gift of sexual desire.

Far too often in church, we have confused lust with sexual desire and made a God given gift seem dirty or shameful.

It is a beautiful thing – but it is also a powerful thing.

Sexual desire is a gift from God to be given to another. To give our whole bodies, minds and spirits to another person is the most vulnerable thing we can do. To be totally seen and known in all our naked vulnerability. It is the deepest intimacy human beings can experience with one another.

That is why God’s ideal is that two people only enter into that kind of relationship in a **secure, loving, lifelong covenant.** Where for better or worse, you have publicly committed your lives to each other till death parts you.

We call that kind of relationship marriage.

Lust on the other hand – is not about a self-giving vulnerability.

Lust is about a desire to possess.

Thomas Aquinas said lust is like ***a lion who sees a stag and thinks of nothing else but the meal it's going to enjoy.***

It really is the age old human temptation – **see, desire, take.**

Just like Adam and Eve in the garden who saw the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – who knew that God had told them it wasn't theirs to possess and yet they were unable to resist the temptation to see, desire, take.

It's hard to avoid in our consumer culture that actively encourages us at every turn to see, desire, take.

We are told that sexual desire is **a need to be relieved.** But it's not – actually.

Many people live beautiful, exciting, full vibrant lives and are celibate.

Jesus himself lived a full human life and yet never had sex.

If we treat sex as a need to be relieved, we are basically treating other people as something we use for our own relief, our own personal physical satisfaction.....like a toilet.

It's interesting that Jesus puts all the responsibility on the person who is doing the looking and **none** on the person who is being looked at.

Too often the church has put the responsibility on women. Caveat - I know lust is not a problem for all men and that plenty of women struggle in this area.

BUT – it is mostly women in the church who are told to dress modestly, who are victim blamed and asked what they were wearing when they were assaulted.

There was an exhibition that toured around called **'What were you wearing?' POWERPOINT**

It had interviewed victims of sexual assault and rape and asked them about what they had worn at the time of the offense. As you can see from the picture – there was nothing 'provocative' about the outfits.

Yet women have been treated over and over again like sirens who flaunt themselves at men and the poor men are the victims, tempted beyond what they can bear.

Jesus doesn't give us that option here. **All the responsibility is on the one who looks. Who sees, who desires, who takes.**

But of course, not every lustful thought ends up in sexual assault – but that doesn't mean that lust isn't damaging to ourselves and to others.

Lust that treats others as an object will spill out. How we treat others or talk about women.

Men and women were both made in the image of God, and called to rule the earth as equal partners – not for one party to be treated like an animal or an object.

This includes men and women that are on the other side of a screen.

An estimated 50% of children will have seen some kind of pornography by the time they are 13.

28,258 users are watching porn every second.

One survey said that 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women said they watch porn at least once a month.

It's a hidden thing – it's in hotel rooms, bedrooms, studies, in our hearts and minds. It's the corruption of our creative imaginations and our sexual desire.

Like any other addiction, some of us are more prone to temptation in this area than others. And it is not an addiction that marriage cures... or advancing age.

The enemy loves to keep this sort of thing hidden – because that's where shame can fester. Shame makes us feel like we are wrong – rather than a conviction of guilt from the Holy Spirit that we have done something wrong.

So what can we do to get over this high bar that Jesus sets? Just hurling ourselves at it doesn't work. If we struggle in this area, we need to be more intentional and figure out some techniques to help.

Nicky Gumble in the book Challenging Lifestyles gives some helpful tips. **POWERPOINT**

Firstly - Repent.

Psalm 51 is the psalm that David wrote after he succumbed to the temptation of lusting after Bathsheba. God's own description of himself that Ian quoted last week is that he is abounding in love and mercy. We can **RECEIVE** his forgiveness when we

mess up in this area. The letter to the Hebrews says that Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are. He understands our temptations and we can come to

Secondly, as Jesus points out – drastic action might be needed. We may need to guard our eyes on what we look at and get **RID** of unhelpful things in our lives – tv shows, internet sites, books. We know what our limits are and what we find unhelpful. Be ruthless and cut this stuff off.

We need to **RELATE** well to one another. Healthy, rounded, strong friendships can enrich our lives in so many ways. Real friendships with people leave little room for the imagination to take over and see the person as just an object on which to project our fantasies.

Strong friendships also offer the opportunity for accountability. Maybe there is a Christian friend who we can talk to and bring our struggle out of the hidden dark depths of our inner beings and out into the light. Someone we trust and who can help us non-judgementally. Practically, there is accountability

software such as Covenant Eyes that you can put on your computer or your phone that sends to another trusted friend, what you are accessing online.

Xxxchurch.com is an online community that helps people who are struggling.

Finally we can be **REFILLED** with the Holy Spirit. The indwelling of the Spirit and his power helps us to live the **life in all its fullness** that Jesus promised us.

The Spirit LOVES to help us be more like Jesus, to embody the image of God more and more. **To set us free from the things that bring us shame and drag us down and cause harm to us and to those we love.**

In communion, in prayer, in worship – we can ask God to fill us again with his Spirit and to give us what we need to aim for the high bar we are called to in this area.

We all mess up without him – but with God we can scale any wall – or indeed the high jump.

May we pray.