Overcoming Lust
The Battle Within

Momentum Ministries

Devotional Series

Fox Valley Church of Christ
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<tr>
<th>Genesis 1:26-27</th>
<th>Made in God’s Image</th>
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<tr>
<td>God made man in His image. The word “image” (Tselem) means to be a representative. We are made to be like God in many ways and to represent Him. God designed us to be filled with His presence and to radiate that presence to the world. Because we are made to be His image bearers, and sin keeps us from being that, we have an unquenchable desire for something more. We have a tendency, through temptation, to fill the void left from not being God’s image bearers through things and people rather than God. Relationships not built on glorifying God will fall into co-dependencies of abuser or perpetrator; victim or aggressor; user or used.</td>
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<th>Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28</th>
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<td>Lust and hate are assaults against the dignity and purity of the soul as well as sin against God. A desire to destroy or a desire to use are perversions of God’s image that he placed in us at the creation. The same dangerous desires are present in murder and anger, as well as adultery and lust. Because sins against the soul are just as real and dangerous as sins of action, murder and hate and adultery and lust are no different in the eyes of God and in the damage that they do to our souls.</td>
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<th>James 4:2</th>
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<td>When we cease to be God’s image bearers, we are left with an insatiable desire for more. This can only be fulfilled through a restoration in purpose, but in the meantime we attempt to fulfill our desires through schemes and devices that will satisfy our needs. We do in an attempt to be. We use things or people to fulfill our own needs which only God can fill. This attitude opens us up to anger and vengeance as we seek to bring judgment on those who have blocked our path to satisfaction. Because things can never satisfy our desires, we will always feel less-than-satisfied by others, so anger is always a potential danger. Uncontrolled anger will eventually become an attempt to destroy that which stands in our way.</td>
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<th>Romans 1:18-32</th>
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<td>While anger is how we deal with those who stand in the way of our desires, Lust is an avenue that we go down in an attempt to avoid the emptiness of those desires, left from not being God’s image bearers. Titus 3:5 says that as we become Christians we undergo the “washing of rebirth.” The word “rebirth” in that verse literally means “back to Genesis.” Thus, apart from Christ we are constantly searching for things that will give us a “Garden of Eden” completeness. Lusting is an attempt to gain that “back to Genesis” fulfillment apart from God. It is a misguided attempt to retain what was lost through sin. When we lust, we diminish the humanity of the other person in order to subside the intense loneliness that we feel. We also gain a certain satisfaction from being in control over our own pleasure and over someone or something else. What we fail to realize is that we not only drain the dignity and humanity out of the object of our lust, but we deeply diminish our own humanity and dignity. Lust and anger are the attempts to use someone else to gain back a completeness that makes us feel like we are in the Garden of Eden again. Anger is our response to those who would block our path to fulfillment, while Lust is an effort to obtain that “Garden of Eden” feeling. In part, lust is a desire of a co-dependent for union with another. Any sort of lust (whether sexual or non-sexual) is the desire to find something that will complete what is missing in our soul.</td>
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<th>2 Corinthians 5:16-21</th>
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<td>We are all born into a world where sin has cut us off from realizing our intended purpose as God’s image bearers. We are stuck in a war that has been encouraged by the forces of evil to become either perpetrator or victim of anger and lust; a war to become a user or among the used. As Christians, we are called to live differently. We are to be fulfilled through our relationship with Christ and to be fulfilled in Him. We must learn to see the de-humanization of others for what it is, avoid it, and seek God for our true fulfillment that only He can provide in the first place. It is as we learn to lay down our lives and be conformed to the image of Christ who is our life, that we will once again be restored as God’s image bearers.</td>
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## Scripture Study Format

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<tr>
<td>List Scripture that you will examine according to the pattern of 2 Timo-thy 3:16.</td>
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What is the command or principle that is given in this Scripture? How does this apply to your life?

How have you failed in this area in your life? How is God convicting you in this area right now?

What is the biblical response according to the Scriptures?

What is my specific plan for dealing with this same situation in the future? Give a step-by-step plan of attack. Take special notice and follow this plan when you go through this situation again.

### Sample Scripture Study

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<td>James 1:19-27</td>
<td>Anger does not bring righteousness. Our tongues are usually the outlet of that anger.</td>
<td>I got angry at my co-worker last week for something he said that I thought was demeaning to me. I did not give him a chance to explain himself, nor did I keep a tight reign on my tongue. I made an attempt to get even by de-meaning him.</td>
<td>We are called to listen to others fully and not blow up and get angry. The Bible is clear that inappropriate anger is sin. When we get angry with people, most of the time it is because they have annoyed us. Getting angry in this fashion is in direct contradiction to the Word of God. We must be sure to control our mouths and not say things in anger. Anger is not a demonstration of God’s righteousness.</td>
<td>1. Pray for God’s guidance and assistance when it comes to controlling my anger</td>
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<td>2. Go to my co-worker and ask for their forgiveness for my actions without bringing up their actions.</td>
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<td>3. Get input from other disciples about my anger and advice they may have to control it.</td>
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<td>4. Review Scripture regarding anger and lack of self-control</td>
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<td>5. Resolve that when I feel myself getting angry in the future, I will first go pray about my feelings. Then I will take some time to think about (or even write down) what it was that triggered my anger and why I thought it was okay for me to get angry.</td>
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**Suggested Verse:** Matthew 5:27-28 or James 4:2 (You may choose to do both)

### Points to Ponder

1. What are situations or triggers that often cause me to fall into lust?

2. When I give in to lust, what benefits do I think I will receive from giving in to my lustful thoughts?

3. How do I respond when I am tempted by lust?

4. What things make me struggle with losing my temper and giving in to anger?

5. How do I respond when I feel like I am losing my temper? How should I respond?
When God created us we were made in His image. Bearing the image of God is what sets humans apart from animals. It makes us a class higher and completely separate from the beasts.

From the very beginning, the game plan of Satan was to get human beings to put ourselves and our desires first. To do so keeps us from properly reflecting the image of God. Human being were made expressly for the purpose of carrying God’s image, so when we are kept from doing that by sin, we become less than human. This is perhaps why the Bible is full of descriptions of those who have become consumed by sin, as beasts. In this passage we see that man must now provide for himself as a beast of burden, complete with the mark of sweat on his forehead.

We see an example of this in the life of Nebuchadnezzar, who was, like Adam, given the power, strength and glory of ruling a kingdom. Yet, due to his pride, he was judged and became a beast. His sin stripped him of his human qualities, especially as related to the ability to bear God’s image. Although most people don’t experience anything quite this dramatic, it is still a clear picture of what sin does to our spirit. It strips us of our true humanity.

In this prophecy of Christ’s crucifixion, those who have become consumed by their sin are called “dogs,” “bulls of Bashan,” and likened to “roaring lions.” What we must remember is that every human being outside of Christ has become, in a sense, like a beast.

It was common language among the Old Testament prophets to describe pagan nations as terrifying beasts making war against the people of the Covenant. The enemies of God have become beasts rather than human beings. We see the same concept throughout the book of Revelation as the enemies of God are depicted as great beasts that rise from the land and the sea, and sinners as those who accept the mark of the beast on their forehead.

Unclean beasts were a picture of sin for the Old Covenant Jews, teaching them about sin. To eat an unclean animal was to eat of the Satanic lifestyle. Eating an unclean animal caused one to be less than human as they became unclean themselves.

Psalm 8 is a beautiful description of the majesty for which man was made. Yet, when we look at it carefully we realize that it does not really sound like any human beings that we know. It was quite common for Jesus and the New Testament writers to refer to this passage when speaking of Jesus. Why? Because Jesus was the true and only one who lived up to this description. He is the true human being.

The only way for us to grasp the status for which we were made is to die to ourselves and enter into the life of Christ. To do anything else is to worship self, rely on self, and to give in to Satan’s ploys. Satan has always tried to induce humans into worshiping themselves, stripping themselves of God’s image. The Magazine Gnosis, a publication for Satanists, said, “If there’s anything horrifying in Satanism’s teachings it’s that there are principles that most people live by most of the time, usually without admitting it even to themselves.

The thing that we need to remember is that we often convince ourselves that we are doing things for God, but we’re not. Aaron gave lip service to God, but the fact is that Israel was about to give in to their own desires, worship a being other than God, and become like beasts. We must never forget that sin robs us of our humanity. When we give in to sin, we become like the beasts of the field. This is especially true of lust. It leads us into self-gratifying behavior that in no way displays or reflects the image of God.
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**Suggested Verse:** Ephesians 4:1

**Points to Ponder**

1. What, specifically, does it mean to you to be made in God’s image?

2. What are five specific ways that Christians are called to represent the image of God to others?

3. In what areas do you most fail to represent God’s image?

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<td>Genesis 2:4-25</td>
<td>God put human beings in the Garden of Eden, a place which was beautiful, perfect, and designed for the pleasure of human beings. God made things for man that were pleasing to the eye and all of the other senses. When we are in a right relationship with God as His image bearers, we are made to take pleasure in the things that God has made for us. The key is that only in a proper relationship with God, can we properly enjoy and not abuse the things that God has created for us.</td>
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<td>Exodus 20:4, 5, 17</td>
<td>God made us to like things in their proper place, when they are subject to His will in our lives. Sin corrupts those things, though, and moves us beyond appreciating pleasurable things to a place where we want to possess them. Lust turns good things into objects of worship. Lust, in a sense, is idolatry. Attraction to pleasurable things is a gift from God, but sin twists that into lust. All sin is a perversion of something good that God has given us. Evil is like rust on a car. It can only exist as a perversion of the good, it cannot exist without the original object. We are to represent and possess the image of God in our thoughts, emotions, and wills; we are not to represent or possess people or things.</td>
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<td>Ephesians 4:22; Galatians 5:16-18; Romans 12:1-2; Colossians 3:1-4</td>
<td>We have to learn to replace inappropriate desires with Godly ones. We are told in Psalm 37:4 that if we delight in God, He will give us new desires in our hearts, desires that are in keeping with His will. Our desire to please God must outweigh our desire to please ourselves. As we increasingly recognize that we are to keep dead the old self that we crucified when we laid down our life and entered into Christ’s will, we will find that our minds are renewed. Part of renewing the mind in this area is to do the work to determine why we desire to lust. Why is this more important to us than pleasing God? What positives do we think we will get out of engaging in lust? Only when we ask ourselves these questions can we begin to orient ourselves to a proper thought process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matthew 22:30; Ephesians 5:25</td>
<td>Marriage is not a permanent condition. It will not last into the age to come. In the Old Testament, God used the Law to point ahead to the need for Christ, while at the same time it taught them about Christ. In the same way, marriage is a pointer to the relationship that we will have one day with Christ. Through marriage and the intimacy of a marriage, we are to learn about our relationship with God and intimacy with Him. When we pervert the institution of marriage through improper sex outside of marriage and lust, we are perverting something that is supposed to teach us about our relationship with God. This is indeed dangerous ground.</td>
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<td>Luke 9:23-24; Matthew 22:37-39; Genesis 2:18</td>
<td>Uncontrolled lust, pornography, masturbation, etc., are cheap substitutes for the true intimacy for which God designed us. These are all clear badges of someone who has not died to themselves and are not living the life of Christ. We have entered into Christ’s life (Romans 6:2-4), so when we engage in self-gratifying behavior, we are stealing that which belongs to Christ. Our lives have been bought at a steep price, so we must be careful not to live for things that please our fleshly natures. Lust is a spiritual problem not a physical one.</td>
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<td>Matthew 5:29; Matthew 6:9-10</td>
<td>You may be at a point where you feel that you can’t help lusting or stop doing it, but that does not make it acceptable in God’s eyes. Just because we get used to it, does not make it okay. We must never weary in the battle to put lust to death in our lives. The call for disciples is nothing less than to bring God’s will into reality into our lives each day. God’s will being done perfectly is heaven. Thus, we can either realize a piece of heaven in our lives each day and spread it out to those around us, or we spread a piece of hell.</td>
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<td>Galatians 2:20</td>
<td>Because we have entered into the life of Christ, we are called to speak truthfully (Ephesians 4:25), to build others up (Ephesians 4:29), to die to self (Ephesians 5:1), and not to be ruled by any passions, desires, or emotions (Ephesians 4:31) in any relationships, especially marriage.</td>
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It is not through self-discipline, removing ourselves from temptation, or even human accountability that will give us ultimate victory over lust and other perversions of the flesh (although, if used properly, they are helpful tools along the way). It is only a mind and heart that is purified by being constantly washed in the Word of God. We must train ourselves through the Word to be godly. Washing in the Word and obeying it is what will give us ultimate victory. True intimacy with God is the only thing that leads to holiness.

1 John 1:6-9; 1 Timothy 4:7

Washing in the Word

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Points to Ponder

1. What are healthy outlets for sexual desire?

2. What are the consequences in my life (or potential consequences) of sexual desires in my life that I allow to go outside of the God-ordained plan?

3. Spend some time considering the potential consequences in your life of Matthew 5:28 and Matthew 5:32.

4. Ask your spouse what it does to their confidence, trust and sense of self-worth when you give into consuming lust.
Feelings, Faith and Forgiveness

Overcoming Lust, Part 4

Hebrews 10:38-39

Living by Faith

The call for those who live according to God’s covenant (the righteous) is to live by faith rather than feelings or emotions. It feels normal for us to react to life based on our feelings and emotions that are often ruled by our fleshly natures. Emotions tell us what we feel and our will tells us what we want. Left unchecked, our will follows our emotions. This leads us to behavior which is determined by how we feel. Living by faith is quite different. Faith is believing in and living according to God’s promises, even if they have not yet come to fruition. Living by faith is living according to God’s Word based on the premise that all He promises will come to pass. There are three primary components to living by faith.

1. We are to realize that we have died and must live the life of Christ. This means that we turn over and commit everything to God. God expects us to take His promises at face value and to live by them as though we really believed them. Truly living by faith is to live triumphantly.

2. We are to deny our old self. Our feelings, emotions, and desires tend to reflect the selfishness of our flesh rather than the will of God. If we are to live by faith we must learn to recognize wayward feelings of the flesh for what they are and turn from them. This takes much mental effort, but it is something that we must do.

3. We must ask God for strength as we go about living the life of Christ. The primary difference between the old and new covenants is that in the new covenant we have the transforming power of the Spirit available within us, allowing us to live the life to which we have been called. We need to acknowledge God and His Spirit in all of our ways throughout the entire day. We must pray without ceasing and appeal to God for forgiveness when we fall down. When we obey Christ’s commands, He promises that God will give us victory and empower us to live the life of Christ. This takes the effort of obeying, the discipline of denial, and faith that God is faithful to His promises.

Hebrews 11:1, 39

Faith in God’s Promises

In these two verse we are told that faith is being certain of what do not see. We are told that the great heroes of the Old Testament were commended for living by faith even though they had not received what God had promised. They still lived their lives according to God’s promise, knowing that they would receive those promises because God was faithful. They were, as verse 1 states, sure of what they hoped for. The question is for what were they hoping? They were hoping that God’s promises would come about. They were sure that they would. Abraham was credited as the father of faith because he was sure that God had the power to do what He promised (Romans 4:21).

Romans 6:7, 18-20

Victory Over Sin

God’s Word tells us that we have been freed from the power of sin. If we are obedient to God, we will gain victory over it and become complete in the life of Christ. Yet we must live as though that is true. We must persevere in that promise even if we have not yet seen it. When we begin to think that we will never gain victory over certain sin in our life, we are living by fear rather than faith.

Matthew 18:21-22

True Forgiveness

We are called by God to forgive one another with the same kind of patient forgiveness that God has given to us. One of the great dangers when it comes to lust or pornography in a marriage is that the other spouse is so hurt, that they find it difficult to forgive. As Christians we are called to forgive others for the sin, but we need to remember that in order for someone to truly offer forgiveness they must first come to grips and feel the hurt of what we have done. This often takes some time and we have to allow them time to do that. The worst thing that one who is guilty of lust can do is to demand immediate forgiveness of those around them without giving their spouse time to forgive in a truly godly manner.

Romans 5:8; Ephesians 5:25

We are called to love our spouses as Christ loved the Church. How did He love the Church? He died for each of us while we were still sinners. This is the principle that is so difficult for us to remember. We often want only to love those who we feel are deserving of our love. We don’t feel like loving those who have sinned, especially in the area of consuming lust; we feel that they are undeserving of our love and forgiveness. Yet, it is those most undeserving of love and forgiveness that need love the most. We must attempt to apply Christ’s standard of loving others while they are undeserving; this is the true marker of love and forgiveness.
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**Suggested Verse:**
Ephesians 5:25

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**Points to Ponder**

1. What is the biggest obstacle in your life to you demonstrating complete faith in every area of your life?

2. Are there any areas in your life that have yet to be freed from the power of sin? What are they?

3. Which is a greater motivator in your life, fear or faith?

4. When you have sinned against others do you expect them to quickly forgive you and for them to move on or do you give them time to be hurt by what you have done so that they can truly forgive you?

5. When others sin against you do you truly forgive them or do you hang on to what they have done?
One aspect of overcoming lust that we often ignore, overlook, or diminish is the importance of confession. It can be embarrassing or even humiliating to confess the true depth and frequency of our sin, especially when it comes to lust. We must confess our sins to God so as to recognize his sovereignty and stand before him in all truth and humility. What we often discount, though, is the necessity of confessing our sins to other men. The importance of confessing our sins to one another is not only so we may help one another, but so that we may realize that we must fear God more than what others think of us. The primary purpose of confessing our sin to one another is not for accountability reasons but it is to put ourselves and others in their proper place before God. Thus, confessing our sin to other human beings has everything to do with our relationship before God.

For the remainder of this study, read and meditate on the following verses. Note the different aspects of confession to God, but also the public nature of many of the references. How does the heart of the individuals in each of these verses compare or differ from your heart to repent and confess?

1. Leviticus 5:5
2. Leviticus 26:40-42
3. Numbers 5:6-7
4. 1 Samuel 7:6
5. Ezra 10:1, 11
6. Nehemiah 1:4-9
7. Nehemiah 9:2-3
8. Psalm 32:5
9. Psalm 38:18
11. Daniel 9:20
12. Matthew 3:6
13. Mark 1:5
15. 1 John 1:9
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**Suggested Verse:**
James 5:16

### Points to Ponder

1. How often do you confess your sin to other people?

2. Are there certain sins that you just cannot bring yourself to confess to others? Why do you think that is?

3. When you confess to others, do you truly confess everything, or even then do you try to spin things to make yourself look a little better? If you do that, what do you think motivates you to do that?

4. Have you ever tried to justify to yourself that you didn’t need to confess certain sins to others? Was your argument a biblical and true argument?

5. When you confess your sin to God are completely honest or even then do you try to shade things slightly to make yourself look better?
All human beings have fallen into sin and come into bondage to it. When we enter into the life of Christ we are set free to become the full human being that God wants us to be. We can once again represent God and begin to bear His image. In the early days after the end of the Civil War, many slaves that had been freed continued to live the same way they always had because they didn’t know how to take advantage of their freedom. In the same way, many Christians remain bound to the bondage of sin, habits, and thought patterns.

We are freed from sin by remaining in our position in Christ, not by blaming other people or the circumstances in our life. Inferior people attempt to impress others to cover up their own feelings of inadequacies. Inferiority can only be overcome by righteousness and the life of Christ. When we are in Christ we are freed from all inferiority and all sin. It no longer has a hold on us.

When we pray we exercise the power of Christ in our life. Prayer allows us to gain victory over emotions and will by being ruled by the peace, quietness, and assurance of Christ. The fruit of Christ will blossom despite the adversities we go through or the temptations we face.

Jesus defeated the dominion that sin and death had over human beings. Yet, we must enter into His life in order to take advantage of that freedom. We must be full of Christ not full of ourselves. Sin is what makes us inferior, causes us to feel inadequate, and makes us full of fear. We need to realize that in Christ we are free. Because we enter into Christ we can have victory and be like Him (1 John 4:17).

When we live our lives through Christ, we are more than conquerors. Realizing the position that we are in will allow us to realize that we are to be subjugated to nothing. When elephants are very small they are chained to a stake. They learn that they cannot pull the stake out and so they stop pulling on the chain. Once they are full-grown, they could easily pull the stake out of the ground, but they never even try because they became convinced when they were young that they could not be free. Thus, they stay chained to a stake that they easily rip out. So it is with our ability to have victory over sin. When we realize who we are in Christ, we will realize that sin has no hold over us.

We are placed in Christ because of the will of God and the choice to die to ourselves and enter into the life of Christ at baptism. God predestined a people for Himself that would enter into the life of Christ. What do we have “In Christ” according to Ephesians 1?

In order to stand in the freedom afforded us in Christ, we must realize that we have choices to make. Before we enter into Christ we have no choice but once we have done so, we have freedom to choose. We can choose to either live according to our own desires and satisfy our fleshly natures or we can live according to the Spirit and do what He desires. It is really a realization of who we are in Christ. Have you ever stopped to think that whenever you give into selfish desires of the flesh, you take the life that belongs to Christ and engage in that act with His body? How does that change your mentality about sins of the flesh?
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### Points to Ponder

1. How does being in bondage to sin contradict the fact that, as a Christian, you have entered into the life of Christ?

2. How often do you lose control over your emotions?

3. Do you agree or disagree with the statement that a large part of uncontrolled lust is caused by uncontrolled emotions and desires?

4. What emotions and desires do you feel when you engage in lustful behavior?
Honor and Holiness

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

The Revised Standard Version of verse 4 probably captures the intended original meaning of this verse the best. It says, “that each one of you should know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like heathen who do not know God.” Thus, we see that the biblical definition of lust is sexual desire that dishonors and uses its object and disregards God.

The passage is saying that we should take a wife from a mind set of holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust. There is a contrast that is given between these two states of mind. The passion of lust is the opposite of holiness and honor. Sexual desire is a gift given by God. It is good if used in the intended way; it has its proper place. It must always be bridled by two controlling bits. First is honor towards other people. Second, is holiness toward God. When we lack honor for other people and holiness before God, our sexual desire turns to lust.

When we look at the God-ordained roles in marriage, we see that it involves a man and woman making a life-long covenant with one another. A marriage involves two people sacrificing, loving, and serving one another. In a godly marriage, sexual desire becomes the servant and spice of the covenant bond of mutual honor.

Dwelling in lust on another person is using them to satisfy our sexual desires, without having to enter into the self-sacrifice of a covenant bond. It is an attempt to use someone else’s body as an object for your pleasure, while denying them as a whole person worthy of honor. Lust is sexual desire minus the commitment to honor the other person.

If we look at this passage again, we see that it says to take a wife in holiness, not in the passion of lust. Holiness has to do with being set apart for and by God. Thus, verse 5, says “not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God.” Truly knowing God and standing holy before Him keeps sexual desire from becoming lust. Verse 8 says, “Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.” Paul is saying that the one who rejects this teaching on honor of others and holiness before God is really rejecting God. At its core, the root issue in lust is regard or disregard for God. Holiness is the ultimate regard for God, while lust is just the opposite. It is sexual desire that has disregarded God. God has given us sexual desire and instructed us how to use it. When we disregard His will, our God-given desires are perverted into lust.

The constant message of the world is that lust is normal and even healthy. As Romans says, the heathens who have disregarded God approve of those who do evil. Does God share in this attitude? Obviously not.

Verse 6 of Thessalonians 4 warns us that, “in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.” Obviously God takes our sex life, both in action and in thought (Matthew 5:28), rather seriously. The consequences of lust is not something to be taken lightly or disregarded. Often times, when we fall into lust, we are too ashamed to put it out in the open and make serious attempts to overcome it. This action is another display of showing disregard for God, as we demonstrate that we fear men’s opinions and their consequences more than the Holy God of judgment and righteousness.

We should be truly sobered as we reconsider verse 5 which says that men who act in lust and disregard for God, don’t know God. If we live a life consumed by unrepentant lust, what does this verse mean for us? If we act like those who don’t know God for too long, we will become like them.
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### Points to Ponder

1. 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says that we should “be sanctified” and “avoid sexual immorality.” What does it mean to be sanctified? What does it mean for you to avoid sexual immorality?

2. Verse 7 says that we are to live holy lives. Holy literally means ‘to be set apart’. In the area of sexual lust, what does it mean for your life to be set apart.

3. What does verse 8 mean to you personally?

4. Are there any areas to which you have grown so accustomed to lust and sexual temptation in our society that you actually approve of it by not taking action against it?
Paul, in chapter 6 of 1 Corinthians, begins to address an extremely important example of his overall argument against the Corinthians: they have arrogantly not realized what kind of people they are supposed to be in Christ. An extremely important part of that issue, especially in a port town like Corinth, was sexual immorality. Paul has a question here that lies just beneath the surface of his writing from here all the way through to chapter 15. The question is simply: what is the body for?

In verse 12, Paul begins an imaginary dialogue with the Corinthians. Their imagined utterances are in quotes in the NIV, while his responses follow the words in quotes. Paul repeats a couple of sayings which were evidently popular in Corin at the time, and that the Church had actually started using and living by. Paul takes advantage of these little sayings because they clearly capture the deceived mindset of many in the Corinthian Church at the time.

The first saying is that “everything is permissible.” There is a sense in which Paul agrees with this because Christianity is about freedom, but they were forgetting that there is always a balance in the Christian life. Many things are technically permissible, but are they beneficial? This is a question we must always ask. In claiming their ‘Christian freedom’ they were actually signing up to a new master. Paul wants them to realize that precisely because Christianity is about freedom, they must be careful to never allow something outside of Christ to give them orders, whether it be appetites, habits, culture, or the desire for pleasure and comfort.

The second saying was being used as an excuse for immorality. If “food is for the stomach and the stomach for food”, then it only follows logically that sex is for the body and the body for sex. Although he is addressing sexuality here, the core subject is still the nature of Christian freedom. Sex is an important aspect of that, however, because it is one of the biggest ways that Christians corrupt their freedom. Understanding the purpose of the body has everything to do with the Resurrection. Because Christ was raised, so will those who are in Christ. At baptism, we became part of Him and took His life. Our bodies are the Lord’s, and are no longer ours. To take the body of Christ and unite it to anyone outside of the body of Christ is a category mistake (Paul uses the example of a prostitute as the worst possible scenario, but any sex outside of its intended use is no better). This does not, of course, mean that sex with anyone within the body of Christ is acceptable, God has created sex for marriage and marriage alone. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 in verse 16 to make the point that sex is a union of two bodies. Christians, though, are resurrection people whose bodies belong to Christ now. What we do with our bodies now matters, because there is a correspondence between our bodies now and in the ‘age to come’ (Paul will explain this in chapter 15).

The believer is united with Christ and cannot rightly be united with anyone else. Although this is a spiritual unity, it is still impacted by what we do with our bodies, because the body and the spirit are intertwined. It is simply not true that one can do something with their body that does not effect their spirit. This can all be boiled down to one principle: does what you are doing with your body glorify God? Every relationship we have and everything we do with our bodies should glorify God. If it does not, then we have wandered outside of our intended purpose.

Jesus made it clear that we cannot simply reduce passages like this to apply to the act of sex. In Matthew 5, he stresses that what we do in our hearts and minds is just as dangerous and just as real as our actions. Although Paul, in this passage, is directly addressing the Corinthians when it comes to the practices of sexual immorality, certainly his words apply to consuming lust as well.

What is interesting is that Paul does not simply lay down a hard, fast rule in this area. The problem with laying down rules is that people follow them for a short time and then began to think of ways that they can slowly get around them. Instead, Paul wants them to be Kingdom people. This takes thought and effort, and a willingness to wrestle through the issues. He wants them to learn to think in a Kingdom way so that they will make the right decisions all of the time.

Paul offers the advice to cut and run when it comes to sexual immorality. There is no point in playing with fire. The wise thing is to follow the example of Joseph in the Old Testament and flee. The next statement...
What is the Body for?, Continued

is a bit difficult to understand, partly due to the fact that the NIV has added the word ‘other’ that does not appear in the original language. It would appear then, that Paul’s point is that immorality is like all sin and is something even more. The reason that sexual sin is something more is that it is the act of uniting our bodies, which belong to Christ, with something that is outside of the body of Christ. Just as the Church is the Temple of God, so is the individual body of the Christian. There simply cannot be impurity in the Temple. To make this point clear, Paul gives them another important reminder. Just as they should be constantly celebrating the final Passover, so should they always remember that the freedom they have came at the extremely high cost of the blood of Christ. Our lives should be an eternal Passover celebration that honors God.

Paul tells us that we should flee things that might pull us into sexual immorality or sexual lust, yet he does not offer any hard and fast rules in doing that. Why? Because there can never be enough rules to cover every situation. In addition, when we are simply following rules, we tend to do just that without giving much thought as to what we are doing or why. Following rules often gives the illusion that we have solved the problem, but that is usually not the case. When it comes to lust, we should try to avoid obvious things that can serve no purpose other than indulging our sexual desires such as pornographic or inappropriate internet sites, but that doesn’t solve the problem. We still can find ourselves lusting after other people in innocent places like the mall or even church. Avoiding triggers of lust is good but we cannot stop there. We must deal with the core issues of honoring other people and holding God in high regard. Without doing that, we will never truly begin the battle to overcome lust.

We must also consider the fact that Paul feels that because Christians have been freed from the tyranny of sin that we must be extremely careful to not let anything master us. Have you allowed anything in your life to gain mastery over you? Identify any things that you have allowed to gain an improper role of mastery in your life. Once you honestly identify and assess these areas, you can begin to deal with them properly.
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**Suggested Verse:**
1 Corinthians 6:18-20

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**Points to Ponder**

1. Are there any things in your life that you have defined as permissible that are not really beneficial?

2. Is there anything in your life that has mastered you? Is there anything that would be easy for you to be mastered by if you’re not extremely careful?

3. Paul talks about the extreme example of a prostitute, but are there anything to which you have united the body of Christ inappropriately?

4. What does it mean for you to know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit?
When I was younger, dieting was viewed quite differently than it generally is today. Dieting is still done with great fervor, but most people understand, at least in theory, that a proper diet must be done wisely with healthy, balanced meals, and accompanying exercise. When I was younger, however, it was much more common for people to diet by simply starving themselves. They began to view eating in general as the enemy and would avoid it all together. The problem with that is that two major things were working against that. One is that the body thinks its starving and so hangs onto its fat reserves rather than burning them. The second is that the human will can only hold up against our natural inclinations for so long. What usually happened is that the starvation diet would crash and burn in the midst of a great binge of eating.

In Corinth, there were apparently at least two camps of thought. Some Christians were claiming total freedom and doing whatever they wanted with their bodies. They believed that what was done with the body had little if any effect on the spirit, so why not do it all. There was another group, however, that seemed to be following the line of thinking of many pagan philosophies of the day that included the belief that the body was inherently evil. All pleasures of the body needed to be avoided because they inhibited the development of the spirit. The eventual goal, in this philosophical line of thinking, was for the soul to be free of the body after death. This was the view that Plato espoused, but it is not at all biblical.

Throughout the book of Corinthians, Paul addressed the first view with several examples, now he turns to the second viewpoint. He does so by answering a question that had arisen amongst at least some in the congregation. They had written Paul an earlier letter asking several questions and now he is going to give his answer. To fully understand his answer, though, it will help to realize that the Roman (and therefore Corinthian) view of marriage was as an arrangement of status and public image, especially for the rich. The Roman emperors greatly encouraged marriage among all people. Marriage, however, was not a very advantageous situation for women. They had very little rights within a marriage and the prospects of unmarried women were very limited in this society. Divorce could be had with a simple declaration of such. This meant that a good marriage was considered to be one that was harmonious. Pleasure was often sought outside of marriage.

In answering their question on marriage, then, Paul is dealing with both the societal view of marriage as well as a pagan-infused Christian philosophy that was teaching that sex and pleasure, even within a marriage, was wrong and should be avoided. Paul’s overall point is obscured in the NIV translation of verse one which actually says “It is good for a man to have no sexual contact with a woman.” He is quoting what the Corinthians have written him. In theory, Paul agrees with this statement, to a degree, but his full answer is that just as starvation diets don’t really work, neither does this philosophy. Bodies were ultimately made to glorify God, but God also made them to have sex. Sex within a marriage is glorifying to God and should not be avoided. The one trying this starvation approach will find themselves exploding in inappropriate ways as evidenced by the apparent visits some had made to prostitutes (see chapter 6) or even the many well-documented problems that Roman Catholic priests have had with sexual matters in modern times.

In this short section on marriage, Paul sets many societal assumptions on their head. His declarations that each spouse literally has ‘authority’ over the body of the other, and that women were free not to be married if they so chose, are quite remarkable and are thoughts that appeared nowhere else in the ancient world. Paul affirms that sex within a marriage is a good and God-ordained thing. Withholding from it in no way enhances one’s spirituality or brings one closer to God. If both parties agree to abstain for some special period of prayer or a spiritual retreat, then both must agree and it needs to be for just a short time. If they try to completely abstain from sexual relations within their marriage they will find, just as the diets, that both their physiology and the power of their will to overcome temptation will be working against them.

Many readers have misunderstood Paul’s remarks in verse 6 regarding a concession as referring to Paul saying that marriage is a concession to keep people from sins of sexual immorality. That’s not Paul’s point at all. The concession to which he is referring is the fact that they may still feel the need to withhold from marital sex for a short time to focus on their spirituality. Paul believes that these are not mutually exclusive activities. Thus, the need for short and mutually agreed-upon sabbaticals are a concession that are wise advice, they are not something that must be done as a command from God.
Paul’s words in verse 7 have also been often misunderstood. Paul’s point here is that chastity, the freedom from the need to be married is a gift that enables some to focus more directly on the work of the Kingdom. But we must understand that Paul believes that marriage is also a gift. Each has their own gift, his language is inclusive not exclusionary. He is saying that his personal preference is for the gift of being single but at the same time, he realizes that it is neither possible, practical, or even preferable for all people to have that gift. In the same way, I have occasionally said that I wish that everyone had the gift to teach, yet I realize that in the reality of the Church this is not possible, practical, or ultimately preferable. Paul sees each believer in the community as gifted by God in some way, and it is the responsibility and privilege of each person to use those gifts for God’s own purposes.
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**Points to Ponder**

1. How does it change your behavior to know that your life belongs to Christ, that your soul belongs to God, that your body belongs to your spouse and that you are a temple of the Holy Spirit? Discuss how each of these aspects differ from one another and how each one specifically impacts your behavior and how you think about yourself.

2. Why is realizing that your body belongs to your spouse such an import determiner of your behavior?

3. If your body belongs to your spouse, what does it mean when you engage in acts or consuming thoughts of lust?
We are in a spiritual battle at all time, whether we realize it or not. The battle of overcoming lust is part of that battle. When we look at this passage carefully, we realize that the armor of God has to do with the knowledge of the Word of God. Hosea 4:6 tells us that God’s people are destroyed through a lack of knowledge. What we need to remember is that knowledge and its proper use is what wins battles. Thus we must know what the Word of God says when it comes to the battle against lust. Because most of the battle against lust is in the mind, we need to know what the Word of God says concerning our thought life.

Our thought life is the only place that Satan can gain access to our spirit. He attacks through the fiery darts of Thoughts, Ideas, Concepts, and Suggestions. Through these T.I.C.S. Satan attempts to influence what we think. Once we give control of our thought life over to the things of Satan, we will find ourselves in deep trouble. Every action that we have ever taken is a result of T.I.C.S. In order to properly fight a battle, we must know the terrain on which we are fighting. The battle of lust is won and lost in our thought life.

Satan is prowling constantly looking for someone to devour. He cannot, however, drag us off without our permission. Lions generally find a prey that has separated from the pack, thus giving an opening for the attacker. For us, we give Satan an opening by not controlling our thought life.

In this passage Isaiah, in speaking against the King of Babylon, compares the King to Satan. In so doing, we learn some valuable information about Satan’s motives. Satan once had an exalted position in heaven but he was cast down to the earth. Why? He did not control his thought life. While in heaven, Satan began to let his thoughts become distorted. He makes five “I will” statements that each display the distorted thinking that he was allowing to take control of his mind. Satan did not control his thought life. His thinking was distorted and he allowed himself to entertain those thoughts. His heart was darkened. The next step was the self-deception of thinking that he could be like God. As a result of the self-deception, Satan began to worship himself, a created being, rather than the living God. Finally, God gave him over to his self-deception which led to Satan thinking that he could somehow overthrow God. This attempted rebellion led to Satan being punished, cast out of heaven, and thrown to earth.

It does not take too much speculation to assume that it wasn’t too long after being cast down to earth that Satan began to ponder what had led to this result. It was those “I will” statements. Satan just did not control his thought life. Now God had become his enemy, but he already knew that he could not really attack God. So, he went after the thing that was most like God and closest to His heart; mankind. In the Garden of Eden, Satan planted T.I.C.S. in the mind of Eve that led her to a distorted way of thinking. When David saw Bathsheba bathing, it was Satan’s T.I.C.S. that burrowed into his mind and led to the kind of wrong thinking that eventually resulted in the visible action of adultery and murder. Satan is a quick learner. It did not take him long to learn that T.I.C.S. would be his most valuable weapon against man. Once he distorts our thinking, the rest is relatively easy.

Every poor choice that we have made in our life goes back to T.I.C.S. That we acted on. Martin Luther said that it is impossible to sin without first thinking wrongly about God. When we begin to think that our thought life is unimportant or doesn’t matter to God, we begin to think wrongly about Him. If we don’t control our thought life, we will be devoured. Lust always has its roots in uncontrolled thoughts.

The god of this age is certainly Satan. Satan has managed to keep our minds veiled from the truths by his T.I.C.S. This becomes a viscous cycle when people don’t realize that they are under Satan’s control because they are blinded, and because they are blind they don’t know they’re under his control.

We are called to constantly put off our old ways of thinking and defend ourselves against Satan’s T.I.C.S. The last thing we want to do is to neglect our mental activities and become enemies of God in our mind. Paul says that this is the very real condition of those who are not in Christ: “Once you were
alienated from God and were enemies in your minds as shown by your evil behavior” (Colossians 1:21). We literally become the enemies of God when we don’t control our thought life. Because of the resulting danger that comes with distorted thinking, God is as concerned with our mental sin as our physical sin.

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**Points to Ponder**

1. Are there any areas in your life where you are vulnerable to Satan getting into your thoughts and separating you from others emotionally?

2. What unrighteous thoughts are you most likely to accept as okay and to dwell on in your thoughts?

3. What inappropriate line of thinking do you accept that triggers consuming thoughts of lust or actions of lust?

4. When we allow ourselves to dwell on lustful thoughts, what are the aspects of the old nature that we are giving into?
Mind Control, Pt. 2
Overcoming Lust, Part II

| 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 | We must guard our minds. This is why Paul tells us here to “take every thought captive.” God doesn’t program our minds with instinct like He does animals. He gives us the free will to think and to choose. We can either control our thought life or leave it open to Satan’s T.I.C.S. To truly take every thought captive, we have to carefully examine each thought and measure it according to the Word of God. The fact is that Satan’s T.I.C.S. will come. We can’t keep thoughts from coming; having an evil thought pass through the mind does not make us evil or mean we have sinned. As the old proverb says, though, “you can’t keep the birds from flying overhead but you can keep them from nesting in your hair.” We can’t control the attacks on our thought life but we do make the decision to examine and disregard those thoughts or let them stay around in our head and consider them valid.

| Philippians 4:8 | Think on These Things

| 1 Peter 1:13 | Anyone who would suppose to follow Christ and be His disciple must be prepared for spiritual battle; “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled” (1 Peter 1:13). The battle must be fought in the right place; this is a huge aspect of proper preparation. The real spiritual battle is fought in the thought life not at the level of actions.

| Romans 12:2 | Transform your Mind

| Romans 10:4-5 | Take Every Thought Captive

| Romans 10:4-5 | A football team begins an average drive for a touchdown on its own 20-yard line, a full 80-yards away from a score. Most defenses, even the bad ones, will keep a team out of the endzone, more often than not, from this distance. Imagine, though, how a team would do if they allowed the opposing offense to begin each drive on the 1-yard line, just one yard away from a score. Even the best of defenses fail more often than they succeed in these goal-line-stands. The defense may be able to make a valiant goal-line-stand occasionally and keep the team out of the endzone, but more often than not the offense will score a touchdown.

| Romans 12:2 | The person who would be Christ-like must fight with different weapons than does those who follow the way of the world (2 Corinthians 10:4). The person who has learned to transform and control their mind will be able to test what God’s will is. The person whose thinking has been corrupted by Satan’s T.I.C.S. will not be capable of discerning or following God’s will. An uncontrolled thought life will lead to an uncontrolled eternity.

| Romans 12:2 | So it is with the mental spiritual battle. To attempt to fight the spiritual battle against lust at the level of action is to give Satan the ball on the 1-yard line and hope for a good goal-line-stand. The battle must be fought where it begins, in the thought life, when the thoughts first come. Any physical sin signifies a spiritual battle that was already fought and lost in the mind. Satan loves us to physically act out on our sinful thoughts, but he still wins if we simply entertain and enjoy his T.I.C.S. and don’t control our thought life.

| Philippians 4:8 | In all of his writing about the importance of the mental aspect of the spiritual battle, Paul does not leave us without guidelines to be successful in this battle. The most complete of these is found in Philippians 4:8. Paul says: “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Right here Paul has given us the standard about which thoughts to reject and which to hold to. He lists eight separate criterion for examining thoughts. Is the thought, (1) true; (2) noble; (3) right; (4) pure; (5) lovely; (6) admirable; (7) excellent; (8) praiseworthy?
Every thought that goes through our minds should be examined according to the biblical definitions of these concepts. If a thought violates any of these eight standards then it must be rejected. That is an important detail to comprehend. It is not good enough if a thought meets only one or even two of the criterion that Paul gives us here. It is very easy for a thought to sink into our mind that is true. For instance, it may be true that someone you see is attractive, or even that they are attracted to you, but that does not make that thought noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy.

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**Points to Ponder**

1. Do you truly take every thought captive?

2. What line of thinking do you tend to allow free reign without taking captive?

3. Are you more likely to fight inappropriate thoughts immediately when they come, or do you wait and dwell on them for a while before combating them?

4. What area of your thought life is the least transformed and renewed?

5. What are some thoughts that you allow yourself to focus on that are true but don’t match up to the other seven criterion on Philippians 4:8?
As we have seen, the mind is the battle field of temptations like lust. It is also true that the Word of God is the weapon that we have been given to fight this battle. We must not only know where the battle is being fought, but also have our primary weapon in that battle. These verses make it clear that the Bible is not a lifeless book, but an active weapon that will give us victory when we engage the enemy. The Word of God is God-breathed and is useful in every area of our lives.

The Bible cuts through all the false messages and lies that our world and our sin generates. It reveals our true desires and rebukes us, showing us the right path. It corrects our selfish, fallen thinking, and rips the mask off of sin, revealing it for what it really is. It counters the lies and false promises of lust and reveals the true promises of God. Psalm 119:9-11 tells us, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.” The remainder of this study will look at some of the specific lies that we fall prey to when it comes to lust, and the Scriptural responses to those lies.

Lie # 1

*Lust isn’t a big deal*

This is simply a dangerous lie. No sin is unimportant. Jesus said that lust is the same as the committing of adultery. It is Job, though, that best describes the destructive nature of lust. In Job 31:11-12 he says that for him to lust unabashedly, “would have been shameful, a sin to be judged. It is a fire that burns to Destruction; it would have uprooted my harvest.” The NLT version has Job saying, “For Lust is a shameful sin, a crime that should be punished. It is a devastating fire that destroys to hell. It would wipe out everything I own.” It is easy for us to lust after things or other people, because we think we can do it without anyone noticing. We thus rationalize that lust is not a big deal. Just because we have grown accustomed to a sin, does not make it any less horrific in the sight of God. Let’s not fool ourselves. Impurity and lust will incur the wrath of God (Colossians 3:5-6).

Lie # 2

*Fantasizing is okay as long as I don’t act*

This another damaging lie. What we do in our mind and heart does matter, as Jesus made clear in Matthew 5. Not only because sins of the heart and mind are sins in and of themselves, but because they will, after a time, lead to sins of action as well. Fantasizing on lustful things also sets up unrealistic expectations in our life and causes us to be unsatisfied with what God has given. In Romans 8:6, we read that the “mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” The old saying says that “we are what we eat,” but more accurately, we are what we think. We are to be clothed with Christ in everything we do, there is no area of our lives that should be a playground for the flesh and be off limits to Christ (Romans 13:14). When we dwell on desires of the flesh, we will reap things of the flesh and sin; when we dwell on the desires of the Spirit will reap things of the Spirit (Galatians 6:7-8).

Lie # 3

*Radical action is unnec essary*

We can often convince ourselves that our patterns of lust might go away with a few small steps. Radical and immediate action, we tell ourselves, isn’t necessary. Yet Jesus said that it was better to gouge out an eye rather than remain in sinful states like lust and go to hell (Matthew 5:29-30). Jesus was speaking hyperbolically here, but the point is clear. When it comes to sin like lust, radical action is necessary. We must take the sin seriously and do whatever it takes to remove it from our lives.

Lie # 4

*It’s my body*

It’s not our life, our soul, or our body, despite the fact that we often act that way. Our bodies belong to Christ (Galatians 2:20). The soul belongs to God (Ezekiel 18:4). Our bodies (if we’re married) belong to our spouse (1 Corinthians 7:4). Whether we are married or not, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. We have been bought with a price, and sins of lust and immorality dishonor God (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

Lie # 5

*I can’t control my lust*

Those who enter into the life of Christ because they have believed in Him, are promised victory over the world, including all of the temptations that the world has to offer. 1 John 5:4 says that “anyone born of God overcomes the world.” We truly can do all things through Christ, who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).
The Lies of Lust, Continued

Lie # 6

A few looks won’t hurt

Proverbs 6:25-27 says: “Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?” Indulging in lust is playing with fire. We fool only ourselves if we think we can engage in any form of lust for very long without it affecting us or acting out on it. We should be wise and set nothing vile before our eyes (Psalm 101:3) or our mind’s eye. Once desire has been conceived, it leads to sin, which leads to death (James 1:15).

Lie # 7

Adultery or lust won’t hurt me in the long run

Proverbs 5:3-5 answers this lie quite clearly: “For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave.” Similarly, Proverbs 5:8-11 says, “Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your best strength to others and your years to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich another man’s house. At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent.

Lie # 8

Sin is better than what God promises

Satan always operates by offering things that he can’t really provide or aren’t as good as they seem. Psalm 84:10-12 says, “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked. For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless. O LORD Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.” The things Satan promises are like junk food compared to the true fruit of God. Junk food seems good for a short time, but it destroys our body in the long run. God’s ways will fill us with true eternal pleasure (Psalm 16:11).

Lie # 9

Indulging in lust will satisfy me

Like most other sins, lust is a sin of insatiability. We always need more and more because it can never fulfill us the way that it promises. The desire for sin is nothing but a misinterpretation of our longing to be completely united with God. Lust, pornography, and masturbation will never satisfy us. Only God will. As Lamentations 3:24-26 says, “I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.’ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.”


**Points to Ponder**

1. Rank in order, the top three to five lies discussed in this section that you have fallen prey to in the past, or are currently struggling with?

2. Why do you feel that you have been vulnerable to those particular lies?

3. How does the Scripture(s) given help you to change your thinking about those areas?

4. Are there any other Scriptures you can find that help to counteract any of the lies from today’s study?
God’s original plan for man in the Garden of Eden was that he would have dominion over God’s creation and work for God as His representative in that creation. In this set-up, man would represent and work for God and God would provide the basic needs of man. One of the results of sin was that man could no longer represent God and must, then, work for himself. Man would have to provide for his own needs. We tend to think of self-sufficiency as a good thing, but it is actually a sign of rebellion against God. When we try to meet our own needs apart from God and His will, we are demonstrating the clear signs of sin.

The problem with being left to our own devices is that we have a heart that is depraved by sin. If we allow ourselves to be led by our own needs, desires, and wants, we will be led down a road of rebellion rather than righteousness.

When we enter into the life of Christ, we restore our life back to a proper relationship with God. When we focus on living the life of Christ and His Kingdom, we are restored back to a Garden of Eden state. Thus, we will find ourselves in a relationship where we work for God and He provides for our needs. At a very basic level, things like dwelling on lust and masturbation are an attempt to meet our own needs and a sure sign that we are not relying on God to meet our needs as we should.

A sure sign of an inappropriate prayer life is one that focuses on one’s own needs. As we pray we must not fall into prayers which become dominated with what we need and want. The model of prayer that Jesus offered up for His followers is far more focused on God and the coming of His Kingdom. If we pray for that and realize that, our needs will be met because God knows what we need. There is always a danger in becoming need-dominated. We will always be looking for something to meet that need. As we change our focus to accomplish God’s purposes and bring about His Kingdom, then our needs will be met as a by-product of returning to the intended Garden of Eden state.

We have a choice between trusting God to supply our needs or we will trust in someone or something else to supply our needs (which are largely a creation of our own desires). The world tends to be dominated by their own needs which causes man to trust in external things to become their God. We were created to worship that which supplies our needs, so what does it mean when we supply our own needs? Emotional and intellectual needs are a part of that need-domination. We put these type of needs on other people and expect them to fulfill these demands. Jesus called His disciples to take the Garden of Eden approach where we “take no thought” or “don’t worry” about our life, but seek God’s will in order to please Him.

When we are in a restored relationship with God, we will rely on Him to meet our needs. We are to not worry about all the things that are so easy to worry about, but we are called to focus on God’s will and trust that He will take care of our needs as a result of being in a restored relationship with Him. It comes down to a matter of faith in God. These are promises of God and faith is living as though God’s promises were absolutely true, even if we can’t see how He will do it.

When God is our leader, He is our deliverer and security. He will provide our needs. If we see life from His perspective, His will, and not our needs and wants, we will realize that we have nothing to worry about.

We will be filled to the fullness of God, when we truly allow Christ to dwell in our hearts. What does Paul mean when he says that God can do more than we imagine? He does not mean that God will make us rich and more successful than we ever thought. He means that the life of Christ is more fulfilling and will meet
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Suggested Verse: Matthew 6:33 or Matthew 6:24-26

Points to Ponder

1. Do you rely on God to provide for your needs or do you tend to think that you need to do it yourself?

2. Do you fully live by the exhortations of Matthew 6 to not worry about anything, to seek God’s Kingdom first, and to trust God to provide for your needs in His way? If not totally, how might your life look differently if you did?

3. When you pray, do you tend to focus on your needs and desires or on God’s will and His Kingdom advancing?

4. What are the things that you are most likely to worry about?

5. How do you think being overly focused on your own needs, even in your prayer life, is connected with the struggle against lust?
2 Samuel 5:12-13

Working for self

By the time we reach 2 Samuel 11, David is about 50 years old and has been king for around 20 years. He had already shown himself to be a man of great faith. He was a man of God, a writer of Psalms, a giant slayer, a faithful shepherd, a mighty warrior, and an unequaled leader. Yet, what is about to happen in David’s life is evidence that no one is ever above the ability to sin. We can never reach a spiritual level where we are beyond temptation. As we look at verse 12, we see that David has realized that he owes everything to God. He must never forget God for it is God that has established him as king over Israel for the sake of God’s people.

Yet, in verse 13, we see the chinks in David’s obedience begin to develop. He took more and more concubines, despite God’s clear command against this (Deuteronomy 17:14-17). Perhaps David thought that his passions would be satisfied by a full harem of women, but that is never the case. Giving into our desires does not satisfy them but stimulates them. It is one of Satan’s great lies that he has convinced humans that we can abate our desires by satisfying them. No, David’s sin did not start the night he saw Bathsheba. The ground work in his thinking was laid long before the monumental act that would send his life spiraling out of control. It is just as Emily Dickinson once wrote:

Crumbling is not an instant’s act, a fundamental pause;
Dilapidation’s processes are organized decays.
‘Tis first a cobweb on the soul, a cuticle of dust,
A borer in the axis, an elemental rust.
Ruin is formal, devil’s work, consecutive and slow
Fail in an instant no man did, slipping is crash’s law.

One of David’s problems was that he was in the position of a mighty King, beyond any accountability. No one challenged him on his disobedience to God; how could you challenge such a powerful and great man? His lust in compiling concubines showed that his heart had hardened to the Lord, even if it was in just one area. His lust quietly began to erode his integrity.

This lust and his seeming success made him vulnerable in two ways. First, he began a pattern of allowing lack of control into his life. Second, he was vulnerable because people always are when things are going really well. When things are going badly, we become dependent. Dependent people don’t get proud, they rely on God. Pride happens when things are going well.

2 Samuel 11:1-2

Bored to Death

As chapter 11 opens, we find David in bed, not in battle. This suggests that he was already developing a pattern of seeking comfort and fulfilling his own desires. David left himself with too much time on his hands, unaccountable and vulnerable to indulging himself beyond the borders of wisdom. In this heightened state of vulnerability, David sees a “very beautiful” woman bathing. This was too much for even David to handle. He had already started down a slippery slope and was now ripe for the fall. We can’t lay all of the blame on David, however. We must realize that Bathsheba must have known that people could see her. She engaged in alluring and tempting behavior.

David, though, is clearly the aggressor here. He gave in to his desire. When we allow ourselves to be overcome by desire, God becomes rather unreal to us. He loses reality to us, and all that we can perceive as real, is our desire. It is not usually hatred for God that gets us, but forgetfulness of God. We begin to wonder, “If this is what I really desire, can it really be a sin? Isn’t it permissible to fulfill and appease my desires?” This is often what we can think at the time of temptation. That is why the biblical command during those times is to flee. Flee from fornication, idolatry, youthful lusts, lusts of the world. There is no safe resistance when we get to this point other than to flee and think about it later. If we do not run, we will fall.

2 Samuel 11:3-4

Standing Alone

When David inquires about Bathsheba, his servant replies with a subtle hint. It would have been normal to mention the father of the woman, but quite unusual to mention her husband. The servant knew what David was up to, and was trying to drop a subtle hint that this was inappropriate. This alerts us to two
things. The first is that David did not have anyone around him to whom he had made himself accountable. This is especially important at times like this because, at this moment, God was not nearly as real as David’s desire. The second thing is that David was quickly overwhelmed by his desire because he had not taken care to put himself in a sound position. He was ignoring the wisdom of the Lord.

Notice that David had completely fallen quite quickly and sent Bathsheba home without another thought. No doubt, he thought that would be the end of it. That’s how Satan works through temptation. He never reminds us of all of the potential downsides. We only think of the fun, the excitement, the ecstasy, the satisfaction, the stimulating adventure of stolen desires. He never shows us the pain caused to others, the life-changing consequences, or the irreversible damage done by our actions.

The narrator of 2 Samuel skillfully leads us into an understanding of the situation with the subtle word “send”. We quickly realize that this simple word isn’t just an ordinary verb. It is the signal of David’s exercise of impersonal and self-gratifying power. He “sent” Joab (v. 1); he “sent” to inquire about Bathsheba (v. 3); he “sent” for Bathsheba (v. 4); he “sent” word to Joab to “send” Uriah so Joab “sent” Uriah to David (v. 6). After completing his cover-up, David again “sent” for Bathsheba to marry her (v. 27).

Yet, two other uses of the word “sent” let us know that David wasn’t nearly in as much control as he would have liked. In verse 5, we are told that Bathsheba “sent” word to David that she was pregnant. Then we are told that Joab “sent” David news about the fighting (v. 18), subtly letting him know, through the messenger, that he knew exactly what David was up to. Bathsheba’s child and Joab’s observant mind had escaped David’s control. That’s the way lust always works. It leads us into temptation, thinking we are in control of the situation but we never are. The narrator lets us know that God is aware and ultimately in control of the situation as we are told that “The Lord sent Nathan to David” (12:1). David’s sin would find him out, it always does (Numbers 32:23).

Nathan skillfully draws David into an impersonal tale of lust and the abuse of power. Notice David’s disdain and anger for the perpetrator, until Nathan pronounces, “you are the man.” This is how the gospel works for us. It’s never really about someone else’s sin. It’s always about you and me. It’s always specific truth rather than generic truth. The true gospel is never an impersonal commentary about societal woes; it is always about specific pain, specific trouble, specific sin. David gets all worked up about someone else’s sin, someone else’s abuses, someone else’s unchecked lust. He gets more and more religious and self-righteous until the true word of the Lord hits home. “You are the man.” Once David allows the Word of God to hit him personally, he realizes that he has sinned. He stops giving out his opinions on others and turns the focus onto himself. He is the one in trouble. He is the one who needs God.

David’s response to Nathan is “I have sinned against the LORD.” He has recognized his sin and is full of hope. This may seem like a sentence of condemnation but it is really a sentence of hope. Why hope? Because it is a sentence full of recognition of sin and a sentence full of the God of mercy. We often think that our primary role as Christians is to avoid sin, and certainly we should attempt to do that. But the reality is, that our primary role is to recognize sin. There’s a lot of self-deception in sin and a great desire to avoid the realization of it in our lives. Recognizing our sin takes true humility. We need to become seasoned sin detectors in our own lives and open ourselves up to the gaze of other reliable Christians who have the freedom and discernment to detect our sin and point it out to us. Each detection of sin brings us to the throne of grace, so our approach to sin should not be characterized by threats, warnings, and self-condemnation, but honesty and a desire to bring it out into the open.

This is David’s response to the exposure of his sin. This is the heart that we need to have when it comes to our sin. We must trust in God’s grace and mercy and desire to bring our sin into the open so that it may be washed away by God.
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**Suggested Verse:**
- Psalm 51:4


### Points to Ponder

1. Do you see any signs of independence and isolation already developing your life?

2. Who are the people with whom you have developed deep relationships? How often do you go to that person and ask them to speak the truth about what they see in their life? Who are the Nathan’s in your life?

3. Are there ever times when your desires seem more real to you than God does? What should you do when that happens?

4. Why is it important to understand Psalm 51:4, that all sin is against God?