



worldoutreach
SCHOOL OF LEADERSHIP

SERIES TWO

MODULE SEVEN: MANAGING SEXUAL DESIRES AND DRIVES



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SESSION ONE: MANAGING SEXUAL DESIRES AND DRIVES (PART ONE)

In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul called for Timothy to ‘...set an example for the believers in...purity’. One of the foremost areas of purity is that of sexual purity. In our highly sexualised culture, this requires extraordinary and vigilant self-control.

Next to self-preservation, sexual desires are the strongest drives we have as human beings, but Scripture teaches that these desires must be controlled. Exercising self-control over our sexual passions is the way by which we maintain sexual purity. In fact, Paul wrote that believers must ‘abstain’ and ‘flee’ from sexual immorality in all its forms.

Sex is a good gift from God the Creator. We have been created as sexual beings. It belongs to the essential human makeup.

God’s designed purposes for sex:

- **Procreative (generative) or reproductive** aspect of sex. It is the created way to reproduce offspring.
- Sex has been created to be an **intimate pleasure within the marriage relationship**. The book of Song of Songs depicts this sexual arousal, desire and consummation (7:1-8:4). Foster writes that: ‘If Genesis affirms our sexuality, the Song of Songs celebrates it. Karl Barth has called the Song of Songs an expanded commentary upon Genesis 2:25...’
- Sex **signifies and seals a personal life-long union to monogamous marriage**, being the ultimate *physical* expression of intimacy.

Tragically, the Fall distorted and twisted human sexuality. Rather than just having the potential of sexual *fulfilment* through the intimacy of marriage, the Fall brought the potential for sexual *perversion* and problems through immorality. Any breach of God’s original intention brings inescapable consequences. Therefore, human sexual energies need to be rightly channelled and carefully controlled.

To biblically reflect on sexual self-control, we will centre our discussion on 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.

Paul begins his discourse on sexuality by linking sexual purity with the will of God. Paul wrote (1 Thess. 4:3), ‘It is God’s will that you should be sanctified...’. What is sanctification? In Scripture, the word sanctification can mean ‘set apart, holy, separated, or purified’. In the Old Testament, it was a *ritual* consecration – a ‘cleansing’ to signify separation from the unclean in preparation for religious observance. In the NT, it is the idea of progressively becoming more holy, or being in the *process* of character transformation into the likeness of Jesus.



The word sanctification covers every area of our lives, but Paul singles out one area that was obviously troubling him about the church in Thessalonica: sexual immorality. (1 Thess. 4:3) *'It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid **sexual immorality..'***

The term sexual immorality (*porneia*) covers every kind of sexual intercourse and, by implication, sexual activity:

- fornication (sex before marriage)
- adultery (sex outside of marriage)
- homosexuality (sex with someone of the same gender)

Paul is clear: If we want to do God's will, then we must abstain from *all* sexual immorality through the exercise of self-control.



SESSION TWO: MANAGING SEXUAL DESIRES AND DRIVES (PART TWO)

In fleshing out the whole area of controlling our *body*, we'll refer to 1 Corinthians 6:18-20. Corinth was the centre of the worship of Aphrodite – the Greek goddess of sex and beauty. This cult sent prostitutes out to roam the streets at night.

Against that backdrop, in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20, Paul implores his Corinthian readers to 'flee' from sexual immorality. What reason does Paul give for fleeing immorality? '*All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body*' (6:18b). What does '*sin against his own body*' mean? Verse 19 helps us to understand: '*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; (20) you were bought at a price...*'

In essence, the flow of thought of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 runs along the following lines: The blood of Jesus was the ransom price to purchase our life from slavery to sin and Satan; we were ransomed from a life of idolatry and immorality; when we surrendered our life to Jesus, he made his home within us by the person of the Holy Spirit; the body is God's temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells, therefore it is not our own but God's. God purchased it by the blood of the cross - '*...you were bought at a price*' (6:20). The implication is that our bodies are not our own to do with as we wish in the matter of sexuality.

Back in the study passage for the module in 1 Thessalonians 4:4 Paul stated this sexual self-control must be in stark contrast to the prevailing culture: '*...learn to control his body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God...*' (vv. 4-5). We must not live our lives in complete gratification like the world around us which has no understanding of God's ways, God's word and God's sexual ethics. We are not to be like the world around us. We are to be different. We are to live by the highest sexual ethics – the ethics of the kingdom.

Practical suggestions for how to control our bodies

How can we control our bodies in a holy and honourable way? Here are a few practical suggestions:

A. Exercise self-control in our thought-life (what we think about)

Sexual self-control begins with regulating what we're thinking about in our minds. In Matthew 5:27-30, Jesus taught that the true meaning of God's command not to commit adultery was much wider than just abstaining from acts of sexual immorality. He clarified and qualified it by adding that not committing adultery also included avoiding the lustful look or imagination: (Matt. 5:28) '*...anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart*'. His point was that immoral thoughts are also sin, not just the acts themselves.



B. Exercise self-control in our eyes (what we look at)

In this same passage (Matthew 5:27-30), Jesus went on to give a powerful key in how to control our thoughts. He said that we must be ruthless in what we look at and how we look at people we are attracted to. *'If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell'* (5:29). In simple terms this means that if temptation comes to us through what we look at or how we look at someone, either don't look or stop looking inappropriately or lustfully. We must exercise self-censorship over what we look at. We all know the difference between looking and lusting. As John Stott commented, 'Heart adultery is the result of eye adultery'. So, the best place to begin controlling our bodies is by controlling our eyes. Job claimed he had learned this (31:1): *'I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl'*. Self-control requires us to monitor how we look and what we look at.

'Pornography', wrote John Stott, 'is offensive to Christians (and indeed to all healthy-minded people) first and foremost because it degrades women [and men] from being human beings into sex objects, but also because it presents the eye of the beholder with unnatural sexual stimulation.' Self-control involves exercising rigorous censorship over what a leader feeds their mind on. Therefore, pornographic movies, pictures, websites or explicit reading should be strenuously avoided.

C. Exercise self-control over our hands (what and where we touch)

Referring back to Matthew 5:27-30, we note in verse 30 that Jesus said, *'And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.'* Jesus' point about hands is very much the logical application of his point about eyes, namely that if temptation comes to you through what you touch – don't touch! Don't touch anything or anywhere that is inappropriate or immoral.

D. Minimise places of temptation (what and where we go)

In a cross reference to Matthew 5:27-30, Mark's gospel records that Jesus also said, *'If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell'* (9:45). In a similar vein to the other references to eyes and hands, this means that if temptation comes to you from places you go ('if your foot causes you to sin') – don't go there! It is better to amputate some places from our life than open ourselves to temptation and the possibility of judgment. No one can dehumanise their sexuality, but they can minimise the places of temptation.

As Stott notes, Jesus' command to amputate 'troublesome eyes, hands and feet...' is not advocating '...literal physical self-maiming, but a ruthless moral self-denial.'

E. Normal, healthy sexual relations in marriage

For married people, part of controlling one's own body is normal, regular love making within the marriage.



SESSION THREE: MANAGING SEXUAL DESIRES AND DRIVES (PART THREE)

1 Thessalonians 4: 6 contains a sobering warning: *'...and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.'* Immorality means that we have defrauded the other person. Sexual immorality is complete selfishness. It is selfishly using the other person for our own gratification. It is taking advantage of them. There is a consequence of this defrauding (4:6): *'The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you'*

1 Corinthians 6:11 and other Scriptures underline that forgiveness is available for sexual sinners. For example, the woman caught in adultery and dragged before Jesus found grace and mercy, and David found forgiveness after his adultery with Bathsheba. Further, Luke 7:36-50 records the story of *'...a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town'* seeking Jesus out. She couldn't retrieve her wrong choices up to this point, but she made the all-important choice to take her failures to Jesus where she found forgiveness and wholeness.

Practical advice to leaders about sexual self-control.

For single (unmarried) leaders: Make the resolute choice to stay pure in your sexuality. In today's permissive culture, sexual purity (chastity or abstinence) is scorned and ridiculed, but, in the church, it should be celebrated and honoured.

Singles (not in a relationship). Sexual purity as a single is evidenced by abstinence from sexual activity. This does not just mean abstinence from actual sexual acts, but also from sexual imagination, lustful looks and looking at (or reading) sexually inappropriate material on the web, social or any other media. This will require singles: to keep their hearts, minds and eyes pure before God; to regulate how they look at someone to whom we are attracted; to guard their mind; and to exercise rigorous self-censorship over what they watch, read and listen to.

Singles in a relationship. If, however, you're in a relationship, work hard to keep it pure. Let me repeat, we can't dehumanise our sexuality or sexual desire, but we can minimise the opportunity to get into trouble. Take preventative action, like not being alone together in vulnerable places. Establish clear, non-negotiable boundaries in the relationship, and build in accountability measures with other single people or an older couple. Pray together. Surrender your lives and relationship to the Lordship of Jesus.

For married leaders: Part of controlling one's sexual desires is, as mentioned, normal, regular love making. Married people should make sex a priority and seek to satisfy their partner, not just gratify themselves.

Sexual purity in marriage is evidenced by absolute fidelity, which is complete faithfulness. Faithfulness is not just the absence of adultery; it is fidelity of heart, mind and eyes. As we've seen, Jesus spoke about eye-adultery and sexual fantasy in our minds being evidence of adultery in one's heart.



Adultery is destructive and there are strong warnings in Scripture against it. At the end of an extended warning against adultery (Proverbs 6:20-29), Solomon concluded with (v. 29): *'So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished'*.

For single-again leaders or those from a sexually active background: Find a place of repentance and forgiveness with God over past sins or mistakes. Guard the entrances of sin by knowing your vulnerabilities, so you can guard against temptation. If there has been some spiritual residue from people you've been involved with, then go to some mature people and be prayed over in Jesus' name.

Before you marry again, deal with the fallout from previous relationships. Forgive those who have hurt you. Seek professional counselling if you feel that the 'baggage' from

