

## The beautiful life series

# The lure of lust

### (Pre-recorded)

Today we are taking about lust. The reason we are doing this, is because we are going through the sermon on the mount, in Matthew chapter 5, where Jesus is going to reveal how our sexual brokenness and sin is robbing many people of the beautiful life God wants for us.

Last week we looked at the issue of anger, this week Jesus moves to dealing with lust. So let's get right into the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 5:27; ...

Jesus said;

**“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’**

I am sure most of us would say - Yes Jesus, we agree - adultery is a bad thing to do. But then Jesus does what he does best, and he raises the standard further, and he says;

**<sup>28</sup> But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.**

According to Jesus, looking lustfully at a woman, or a man, is equal to committing adultery in your heart. So let me make this clear, if you are a Christian, if you are a follower of Jesus, you have to agree, that surrendering to the sinful desires of lust, is wrong, and not only is it wrong, but it is also very dangerous. Why do I say that? Because Jesus goes on to say this;

**<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to stumble, 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. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.**

Crumbs! Jesus' advice here seems pretty extreme! In fact, there have been times in history when Christians actually took these words literally! But do you

really think Jesus was being literal in his analogy and suggesting some kind of self mutilation?

I am kind of hoping not. Right? Because if he was, I can tell you this, there are going to be a lot of one-armed cyclopes walking into church next week!

“Hi there Neil, how you doing?” “I’m well thanks Bob, just been battling to really see what’s going on around here... and I wish I could still clap in worship!

So... no, I don’t think Jesus was being literal, but rather he was speaking figuratively. I think he was saying “You’ve seriously got to do everything that you can to stay away from sin that will harm you.” He is demonstrating how extremely seriously we need to take sin in our lives.

If looking is a problem, stop looking, if touching is a problem, stop touching, if going somewhere is a problem, don’t go!

Many people say lust is no big deal, but I would argue that anything that could land you in hell is a pretty big deal. I’m sure you are with me on that.

In the book of James chapter 1, verse 14-15 it says;

**14 but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.**

This is written by James, the little brother of Jesus, and he says, that temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away.

This weekend I plan on doing some fishing at the mens camp. There are some bass that have a date with me and my bait. I’ve got some lures that I know they cannot resist.

This word used here for ‘entice’ is actually a fishing term, it means to entrap, to allure, or to hook.

- **So let me ask you - How have you been hooked?**

I know that we each have our own stories, and there are many different stories, different struggles, but common to many of them, is that it often it starts with a moment of vulnerability, and then you get exposed to some type of sexual impurity.

This was my story. I vividly remember being in Grade 8 in boarding school, when late one night during prep time, while all the guys were quietly are all sitting at our homework desks, the housemaster was fast asleep at his desk,

when a magazine literally came flying through the air, over the top of my high wrap round book shelves. Curious, I opened it up, and there in front of me where pictures of women completely naked. As a naive young man, I was both shocked, enticed, and hooked in some way.

Here's the sad truth - a similar story has played out in so many peoples lives. And I know some would say, "Ag, come on Neil, it's not such big a deal, all men battle with lust!"

I want to be real clear here, lust is not just a man's issue. This is a human being issue. Though men may be more easily tempted in some ways, women are also hooked in different ways.

In fact, according to some studies, about one in six women - and this includes Christian women, struggle with an addiction to pornography. For many years I was a youth pastor, and in the lives of the young people I worked with, I found these stats to be accurate, and steadily rising.

If you have children, sexual health research, estimates that 64% of thirteen to twenty-four year olds intentionally watch pornography at least once a week.

Parents, this is something that should get your full attention.

By the time children become teens and young adults, 62% of them will have received a sext. A sext is a sexually explicit image via text message, and 41% will have sent one.

And if all that were not enough, the average age of initial involvement in prostitution for girls, is estimated between 14 and 18 years of age.

Doesn't that break your heart? This data should concern you. What's even more concerning is that the world in which we now live, means it is just getting easier and more accessible. It's no longer a hardcopy magazine, it's no longer if you have a nice computer, you can take even the most basic type of cellphones today and get into anything and everything.

Consider some more statistics;

Porn use will nearly double the probability of a couple getting divorced.

Approximately 35% of all internet downloads are porn related. Porn sites receive more monthly traffic than Netflix, Amazon, and Twitter combined. Porn is a \$97 billion dollar industry.

About 57% of pastors and 64% of our youth pastors, struggle, or have struggled, with pornography.

It should be clear that this is not a small or isolated problem. So it should come as no surprise that Jesus addresses it.

When it comes to lust, Jesus draws a very clear line. Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully, has already committed adultery with her, in his heart. Let me ask you;

- **Where do you draw the line?**

You will remember from last week that I described how the Pharisees tried to work out how close to the line you could go, without actually breaking the law. I think we have all done that to some extent.

How close can I go before I have gone too far?

You see, it's entirely the wrong question. Because Jesus, he is looking at our hearts, and he said that adultery and sexual sin starts way before anything physical happens. It starts in our hearts and minds. It can start with a simple lustful look.

It is not the look that is a problem, it is the lustful look. God is not expecting us to walk around with blinkers on never looking at anyone else, but it is when that look feeds your imagination, sin starts to creep in. So,

- **How do you deal with lust?**

In Psalm 119:9, the Psalmist asks a question as old as time, and still as relevant as ever;

**“How can a young person keep his way pure?”**

And the answer...

**“By living according to your word.”**

Today, so many people don't want to do that, or choose not to do that, or get misled into misunderstanding what God's word teaches about sex and our sexuality. But in reality, it is pretty simple.

Sexual sin, or '*pornea*' is the word used in the bible to describe sexual sin in all of its forms. And there is no lack of clarity

1 Corinthians 6:13; **“The body is not meant for *porneia* but for the Lord.”**

Verse 18; **“Flee from *porneia*. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body”**

Ephesians 5:3; **“But among you there must not be even a hint of *porneia*, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people”**

1 Thessalonians; **“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid *porneia*.”**

So, how do we get rid of pornea - sexual sin in our lives?

After many years of working through my own spiritual journey, and trying to help other men and women walk in integrity in their sexual lives, I have seen some of the most incredible victories and transformations take place, as people surrender to the will of God for their lives, as they repent, restore, and walk in the power of the Spirit, redeeming the beautiful sexual plan that God has for our lives. Because God has made us as sexual beings, male and female, in his image.

But can I just say, the church as a whole has not always done the best job in walking with people, and discipling people in the way of Jesus and in helping them to find victory over temptation and lust.

I have been reading an interesting book on this subject called “Unwanted.” By Jay Stringer, I will share some of his insights here.

Too often, many of the ‘lust centred’ approaches have proven ineffective.

If all you do is ‘treat’ sexual brokenness with ‘lust management’ techniques, it is like trying to eliminate lust by managing our sexual lives with a tourniquet!

We spend years of our lives trying to stop the flow of lust through averting our eyes away from beautiful people, slapping rubber bands on our wrists when we have sexual thoughts, and asking for accountability partners, and trusting in expensive blocking software. I think we can all agree, this is not what God had in mind for sex and his community.

The fact that more than half of Christian leaders have struggled with pornography should be indicating that many of our strategies have proven ineffective.

Often the struggle to succeed in purity, just results in more pain, futility and disappointment. And the big problem, is that the underlying issues that drive the sexual lust do not get examined.

So let me ask you a question, for those of you who are struggling with lust.

- **How many of you have ever asked God to help you understand your lust?**

Have you said, God help me to understand why I am struggling with this? What is really going on here? You see friends, rather than a lust centred approach, we need a 'God centred' approach!

So if you're still struggling with lust, I would encourage you to ask God to help you understand where it is coming from. It is a spiritual battle, is it some kind of deeper issue from your past that you have not resolved?

Imagine looking out at your lawn and saying, that's it, I am sick of all of these weeds growing in my garden. This year, I am committing to annihilating these weeds once and for all. Then you walk out with a small pair of scissors from your kids school pencil case, and you start cutting the top of the weeds off, a couple of cm's above the soil. It's absurd, right? But many of us make this mistake in dealing with lust.

Friends, if all you do is you buy software to block porn, how much is that really going to help you? You have to figure out what is fuelling that lust in your life. Ask God to show you. He is going to help you.

I find it so interesting how many people I have tried to help, have rejection and abandonment as the roots of their sexual lust struggle. When we ignore our God-given desire, to be loved and accepted, we should be on high alert for the ways we will be lured into sinful sexual behaviour.

In 2017 there was an article written in a newspaper titled "The biggest threat facing middle aged men isn't smoking or obesity. It's loneliness." We live in a day when we have never been so lonely, and at the same time, had so much access to pornography. I have to believe that the evil one schemed for this association.

For those who have known loneliness, evil can seduce us to pursue sex as our most important need.

Added to this, there is an unspoken rule in many homes and churches that sex is not to be talked about, unless the conversation serves to put the fear of God into children and young people about their participation in sex before marriage, or to protect them from the dangers of sexual predators.

Talking about sex solely in the context of prohibition, and danger, only sets a child up to get confused. A child needs to hear sex talked about in a way that honours the natural, God-given changes and desires that will accompany them from childhood to adulthood.

I also find it fascinating, how for so many people, anger is the root of their struggle with lust. It should come as no surprise to us, that in the sermon on

the mount, Jesus connects anger and lust. First he deals with anger, like we did last week, and then he deals with lust. What's the connection?

Well, simply put, lust and anger are related. In the book of James chapter 4 it teaches us that desire, if not satisfied, will often give birth to anger. Lust and anger are the primary tributaries that flow into the river of unwanted sexual behaviour.

I have never met someone who struggles deeply with lust who is not also battling with unaddressed anger. You can lust for pornography, but in the background, you might be angry at your spouse for not being sexual enough.

Lust is important to address, but it is like a car battery; lust starts the engine, but we need anger to fuel our drive through unwanted sexual behaviour. Our preoccupation with lust and our avoidance of anger may be central to why many have not found freedom.

Treatment plans that exclusively focus on 'lust management' like blocking software, accountability groups, trauma focused therapy, attachment theory will only go so far in maturing people. These plans contain dangerous 'partial truths' that set people up to keep failing sexually, because the other half of the equation is left to fester in hiding.

Want to find out why you're so compelled to pursue unwanted sexual behaviour? Figure out what's made you so angry!

Ask God to show you. Ask him to help you understand what's really going on.

In the Old Testament, there is a fascinating comparison between two men, Judah and Joseph. Their stories follow one another in Genesis 38. They are told in neighbouring chapters, but the difference between these two men is worlds apart in their approach to lust and sexual temptation.

Judah was a widower, who clearly had issues he had not resolved, and he fell into lust and slept with someone who he thought was a prostitute, but was in reality, was Tamar, his own widowed daughter-in-law. He left his seal and staff with her as a pledge of payment.

Joseph on the other hand, was a servant in Potiphar's house, when Mr's Potiphar, tried her very best to seduce him and sleep with him! Day after day, Joseph faced the temptation offered by Potiphar's wife. In the end he had to flee from her. He left his coat in his haste to get away.

The comparisons and difference between the two stories are fascinating. Both men faced temptation, but one ran towards the line, and the other ran in the away from the line.

The Apostle Paul, when he talked about sexual immorality, he didn't say; "Fight it!" He said; "Flee from it!" "Run for your life!" Keep a big distance between you and sexual sin or pornea.

So whose standard are you living by my friend?

Jesus said;

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Matthew 5:8)**

As I close today, I want to briefly touch on divorce and sticking to our word and integrity.

#### • **What about Divorce?**

In Matthew 5, Jesus moves on from adultery and lust, to the really tricky topic of divorce.

I can never do this subject justice in a few brief moments, and I know that no one gets married thinking they will divorce. This is also a sensitive nerve for many of you who may have been through a divorce, but it is important to talk about, because marriage is important to Jesus.

Where there is divorce, there is usually lots of hurt, and broken people. The backdrop to Jesus' teaching here, is again, the common teaching among the Jews at the time. There were two schools of thought, one which taught that divorce was only on the grounds of adultery, and then a more popular teaching that taught that grounds for divorce was wide open if there was any 'unseemly' problems with the woman. It was extremely wrong and wide open to misinterpretation and abuse. The Pharisees asked Jesus about this in Matthew 19;

**"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?"**

This could have been that the husband didn't like her cooking, or he felt she was growing old and unattractive. So it was against this shocking permissive society that Jesus spoke his words on Divorce in Matthew 5:31;

**"It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.'<sup>32</sup> But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her the victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.**

What was at the heart of this? The Pharisees' focus was divorce, whereas Jesus' focus was marriage. Here is what I want to emphasise: Marriage matters to God and divorce is not something to be taken lightly. May the Lord

give us the grace to fight for our marriages, to keep our vows, and to remain faithful to one another, growing in love.

Following on from the issue of lust and divorce is a matter of integrity – which I think underpins all that Jesus has said about our relationships.

- **Be a men and women of integrity**

Matthew 5 verse 33;

**“Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’<sup>34</sup> But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne;<sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.<sup>36</sup> And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.<sup>37</sup> All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.**

Jesus said stop playing games. Stop trying to jump through loop holes. Just have integrity. This applies to so many areas in our lives, but especially to relationships like we have just been looking at.

So friend, do you have integrity in your relationship with your spouse? Do you have integrity in your relationships with other people? Do you have integrity in your secret thought life? Or are you trying to hide things that are secretly eating you up inside?

As I close,

- **God knows we need help!**

Jesus’ standards can seem overwhelming for us. But God made us, and God knows us, and God can help us!

I don’t think there is many of us, who set out as followers of Jesus, to see each day how we can mess up, but yet at the end of each day, I’m sure most of us have failed in some way to meet God’s standards. I want to end with the words of Paul in Ephesians chapter 5;

**“So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.<sup>17</sup> For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.<sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.<sup>19</sup> The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality (That’s pornea), impurity and debauchery;<sup>20</sup> idolatry and**

**witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.**

**I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.**

We know how close temptation is to us each day. Thankfully we have the Holy Spirit to be with us, and to help us. It won't be easy, but with God, it is possible.

Sexual brokenness can never be redeemed by our own efforts. But through the forgiveness of Christ, the help of the Holy Spirit, we can set our hearts to aim for a beautiful life blessed by God, where purity, integrity and marriage are valued. Where Godly partnership, beauty, belonging, and restoration become the right foundation for our sexual lives that bring honour to the Lord. Amen.

### **Closing Prayer**

### **Credit & Footnotes:**

- In this message I borrowed content from the book “Unwanted: How sexual brokenness reveals our way to healing.” By Jay Stringer.