

Wisdom and Sex

We're continuing with the wisdom literature and the book of Proverbs and what we will discuss today is counsel from a parent to children, a father to his sons. As you probably gathered from the scripture reading, today our topic is wisdom and sex.

Parents with children in the room, I don't know what sort of conversations or awkward silences you'd like to have on the way home. Kidtown is available for 5th grade and under. If they are older than that then we won't talk about anything today that isn't already constantly in their faces as American kids so they need to hear it.

We're going to read from Proverbs 5 and Proverbs 7, which is one of the most comprehensive sections of scripture when it comes to the biblical vision for sex, for what it is, what its purpose is and what God intends for sex to accomplish, for how we are to think about it and handle it. It's one of the few subjects that Solomon devotes extended airtime to in the book of Proverbs. Most everything else gets the length of a tweet, sexuality gets several paragraphs.

And rightly so. I'm willing to bet there are few things you can name that have taken more people out in their careers, their marriages, their friendships and relationships than sexual foolishness. If not outright sexual evil. We are watching politician after leader after pastor after Hollywood big shot after friend after co worker fail in this area and do a lot of damage in the process. Not just making their own lives worse but almost always making other peoples lives worse as well.

And Solomons heart, just like any good dad, is to help make his son's lives better. That's what he wants. That's his tone. "I want your life to go well, and this topic is crucial for that pursuit."

Proverbs 5

1 My son, be attentive to my wisdom; incline your ear to my understanding, 2 that you may keep discretion, and your lips may guard knowledge. You may have caught this but in the book of Proverbs, Solomon often personifies wisdom itself as a woman. Here he is gonna personify sexual vice as a forbidden woman.

3 For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, 4 but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. 5 Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol; 6 she does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it. 7 And now, O sons, listen to me, and do not depart from the words of my mouth. 8 Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house, 9 lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless, 10 lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner, 11 and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed, 12 and you say, "How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! 13 I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. 14 I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation." 15 Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. 16 Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? 17 Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you. 18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, 19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. 20 Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress? 21 For a man's ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. 22 The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. 23 He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.

Proverbs 7

My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; 2 keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; 3 bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. 4 Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call insight your intimate friend, 5 to keep you from the forbidden[a] woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words. 6 For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice, 7 and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man

lacking sense, 8 passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house 9 in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness. 10 And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart. 11 She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home; 12 now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait. 13 She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face she says to him, 14 "I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows; 15 so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you. 16 I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen; 17 I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. 18 Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love. 19 For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; 20 he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home." 21 With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk she compels him. 22 All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast 23 till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life. 24 And now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. 25 Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths, 26 for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng. 27 Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.

Solomon often paints a picture of wisdom and then contrasts it with foolishness. Here, the warning against foolishness is a warning against disregarding the power that sex has in your life. Power for good, but also power to do a lot of damage.

So notice the different pictures painted. The delight of sex within God's design. And then the dramatic language used for potential damage and destruction when sex is handled outside of God's design.

When sex is what God intended it to be, it has some major positive vibes. Chapter 5: 18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, 19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love. The picture of a deer here is one of delight, joy, blessing, rejoicing. But there's another deer in chapter 7:

22 All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast 23 till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life. This picture is very different. A stag, or male deer, standing trapped, an arrow flying toward it. An ox walking to the slaughter not knowing his life is about to end. A bird stepping into a snare. Delight down one path, and danger down the other.

The imagery Solomon uses is that sexual vice, sin, brokenness, trouble, has a path. It doesn't attack, it lures. It entices. It grabs us and snares us when sometimes we don't even realize what's happening. And the end result can be devastating. All of these promises that end with brokenness.

I am aware that counsel and suggestions to be cautious and wise when it comes to sex, to be careful, to be on guard...all of that can sometimes come across a bit weird and overprotective.

Because of stuff like this I've even heard people say "you Christians are obsessed with sex".

I don't want to try and defend all Christians and I don't even know what other people are saying out there. But I will tell you that this warning and counsel rings true to me. It's a short list of things that people will choose to ruin their lives for. And if sex isn't at the top of it then it's close. We would be very unwise to dismiss the power of sex. It has the ability to capture people in such a way that it can set a course for their life. And with anything powerful, when used properly it can bring about much good. But when used improperly it can be devastating.

Not entirely dissimilar to something like water. To be of help, water has to be in its proper place. It's essential for survival, but let it get into the wrong part of your house and watch the damage it can cause. And if it's out of place, it can't be of use. That's what Solomon says...

Prov 5:15-17

15 Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. 16 Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? 17 Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.

A cistern was a large hole dug into the ground or carved into a rock to hold water. Water is a precious resource in the middle east with its long dry seasons, and each house had to have a way to gather and store water for their families survival. If you don't keep water where it belongs you probably aren't going to live. It needs to be in the right place. And that's the parallel. Sex needs to be in the right place.

Sex is intended to be God's way of uniting a man and woman in marriage—and keeping them united. This design is important, because if you don't understand God's purpose for sex, then none of the restrictions regarding sex will make sense to you.

When God created male and female image bearers, he designed their bodies to go together. It's like he thought, "How could I take these two independent creatures and encourage them to pursue oneness in their relationship? I wonder how I could incentivize their exclusive commitment to one another? Build their trust for one another...teach them to serve and prioritize one another?..." What he came up with could have been a handshake or a high five but instead he created particular body parts with particular nerve endings and functions so that physical intimacy possesses the potential for powerfully intense pleasure. So that significant reward is attached.

And sex is meant to be a way of communicating, "I belong completely and exclusively and permanently to you." Completely. All of me, good and bad. Exclusively. Just you and no one else. Permanently. I am not going anywhere.

You will find if you remove any one of these 3 it no longer works as intended.

If I don't give myself completely, I hide bits of myself, then you don't know the real me. If it's not exclusive, I give myself to others, then you do not have all of me. And if it's not permanent, there is always the threat of you leaving then we are never safe with each other and are always having to keep up appearances to keep each other around. You are never fully with your guard down.

Sex is meant to be a celebration of all of those things being brought before another person, seen, and then this person physically demonstrating "I accept and cherish all of who you are. All that makes you, you. And I give you all of me. You are not going anywhere, I am not going anywhere. You do not have to pretend or keep your guard up with me. I am your cistern and you are mine."

So the physical union becomes a physical expression of a complete union. Only when you step into the covenant of marriage can you do that. And that security, that delight, that joyous commitment is the context into which the little image bearers that sex creates are meant to be brought into. So that children grow up in a stable, loving environment. Because mom and dad belong to each other completely, exclusively and permanently.

This is a high view of sex. A belief that sex is important and powerful and good. The Bible's restrictions regarding sex are not because of a low view of sex. As though sex isn't valuable and

good. It's actually the opposite. You put restrictions on things you value. You protect what you value more, not less.

And listen, everything I just said is increasingly being "discovered." This is an area where science is catching up to the Bible. Neuroscience has discovered that sexual behaviors create pathways in our brain. The release of certain chemicals in our brains during sex work similarly to an opiate. They create a form of bonding, addiction.

The pleasure and bonding chemicals in your brain - Dopamine, oxytocin and vasopressin are all involved in both creating a reward pathway that you want more of (this is an addictive loop) as well as emotional bond between you and another person. In the language of the passage, drinking from a cistern makes you want to return to that cistern. Sex functions a bit like superglue for your marriage. It was created by God to literally be addicting.

On the other hand, it's being found that having sex with multiple partners actually rewires your brain in a way that makes genuine, lasting relationships more difficult.

God designed us to drink from our own cisterns in marriage because he loves us, because he wants our long-term joy, stability and attachment, and he wants us to avoid all the pain that will necessarily come when we go outside of his design.

Ok so, using these chapters, let's draw out some ways that those who are wise will relate to sexuality.

1- Those who are wise...will delight in their spouse.

For those who are married in the room, Scripture's call for us is to delight in our spouse in all ways, to love and cherish, and respect them. But this particular passage highlights that delight specifically in our sexual relationship.

Prov 5:18-20

18 Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, 19 a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.

Intoxicated is the right translation. It means something that captures you so much that it leads you. Some translations use "captivate." Every other time that I could find this word used in Scripture it's negative, because the idea is to be so caught up in something that you are led astray. Here it is the same idea but it's positive. Be drunk with delight in your sexual relationship with your spouse. All of your sexual energy should be directed towards your spouse. And from there, lose your mind, you are having so much fun. Be swept away. Because in this area, the experience of being swept away and all the chemicals it releases in your brain literally leads you back to your spouse. It addicts you to one another. It's an experience of deep pleasure and meaning that brings you back for more.

There is an active movement that is instructed here. Delight in. Be intoxicated. That's not a wish or hoping for a circumstance. Like, I hope you find your sex life delightful. He's telling his sons to do something. Delight in it.

Like, when I drop my kids off somewhere, like grandparents house, I always give them the same three rules. Have fun, no whining, listen the first time with a good attitude. Have fun is the first rule, and I'm not expressing a hope or a wish, like, "I hope you have fun. I hope fun happens to you."

That's not what I am saying. Fun is a choice. Fun is a decision you make, not a circumstance that happens to you. Choose to have fun. Be a good natured, fun person. That's the rule.

That's what's happening here. He's instructing his sons to do something. Delight in the wife of your youth, in context, delight in the sexual relationship you have with your spouse. Be intoxicated. I'm not saying that I hope this happens to you. I am telling you to do it, pursue it, make it happen.

There is a myth sometimes, that good, mutually pleasurable sex should be effortless. That the two of you will come together, and sparks and fireworks will inevitably transpire. That is...not how it works. Mutually pleasurable sex that both of you desire it will require some effort, some work, some intentional pursuit.

There are all sorts of things that individual couples might need to work through as part of that pursuit.

Issues within the relationship, like a lack of emotional intimacy and closeness, unforgiveness. There can be past experiences that affect the present. There can be shame, there can be stress. There can be selfishness, where one person is only trying to get what feels good to them at the expense of the other person.

The list of things you might need to work through could go on and on. The point that I'd like to make is that you are commanded by God to work through it, whatever your list is.

If your sexual relationship with your spouse is not pleasurable, delightful, intoxicating, so that it is desirable, it is an issue of repentance. Now, it should be the most fun repentance ever...but it is a repentance issue nonetheless.

I don't know what all you need to work through. I don't know what resources you might need.

I hope what I am doing here is starting a conversation.

If you want more help on this, I'll give you a resource recommendation. Now, I don't recommend other things this particular author says and does. So I am trusting you with the ability to discern. But this particular resource I do think is helpful.

It's a book called "31 days to great sex" by Sheila Gregoire. It's a book that you work through together as a couple, which I think is great. It's written from a Christian perspective. It isn't perfect because no book other than the bible is. But I do think you would find it helpful. And very fun. Married couples it's up to you, you can decide to work through that book or not but here's the last thing I'll say. If you decide to do the book...you're welcome.

2- Those who are wise...will guard their path.

There are all sorts of warnings and encouragements about this in what we read but I can summarize it with chapter 5 vs 8.

Proverbs 5:8 - "Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house,

Now, I have absolutely nothing profound to say to you about this simply because it should be the most common sense thing you've ever heard.

If you're an alcoholic, is it wise to go to happy hour every day after work? What do you think is gonna happen?

If you're a former drug addict, is it wise to go to a party where all your former drug friends are using?

You're telling me you're watching a tv show where the whole point is sexual tension and sexual energy and then you find yourself struggling to honor God when it comes to your sexuality? That's the least surprising thing I've ever heard. What did you think was going to happen?

Solomon is pleading with his sons who he loves and cares about... "don't even go down the street of the forbidden woman. She lives down at the end of the road but don't even turn down it at all. Stay all the way away from her vicinity. Don't mess with her in any way. Her superpower is drawing people in, enticing, luring. Her traps never look like traps but they are. Get as far away as you can! But instead, we've taken her and put her in our pockets. With internet access to any genre or type of forbidden man or woman of our choosing. So she's with us at all times. She doesn't have to call out to us or go out of her way to find us because we're bringing her everywhere we go. What did you think was going to happen?!

It always reminds me of a friend of mine who was part of our church a while ago. He was an elderly African American man named Willie. He was in and out of addiction and he was just the best. He had a famous saying. "If you hang around the barbershop long enough, you're gonna get a haircut."

I'm not gonna tell you what your inputs need to be and what limits and restrictions you personally need to put in place. They are different from person to person. But what I am saying is, there should be times where you say "I don't watch that because I am trying to follow Jesus. I don't go there because I am trying to follow Jesus." And if you never find yourself saying that... well, what do you think is gonna happen?

3- Those who are wise...recognize the lies.

Chapter 5:3-5

3 For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, 4 but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword. 5 Her feet go down to death;

The voice of the forbidden woman shows its pull through these two chapters. Her words drip honey, her speech is smooth, she pleads and takes away as many reasons for restraint as she can. I've prepared my bed, she says in chapter 7. My husband is gone, he won't return for a while. There are no consequences.

But in the end, she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword, and her feet lead you to death.

We could spend a very long time talking about the common lies and misunderstandings our society today has about sexuality. In fact, we addressed a good many of them in our Embodied series that we did last Fall.

So I'm not gonna even attempt to be thorough and instead just point out one of the many lies that are out there. It's the lie that God's design isn't actually realistic nowadays.

This is too restrictive to say you can only have sex with somebody you're married to. It's unnatural and repressive. We have natural sexual desires, to try and curb those makes no sense. It would be unnatural and repressive to do what the bible says when it comes to sex.

I think that's overly simplistic. We don't think like this with other internal, natural desires. It's a lot like saying, "Don't eat unhealthy foods." I have a desire for funnel cake. It's very powerful. And it comes from the inside. It's a natural feeling. My parents didn't teach me this. I was born this way. But on the other hand, I also have a natural desire to not get diabetes.

The Bible tells us that on the one hand we have sexual desire, we are sexual beings, we have desire for sex, but we also, created into us, have a desire for commitment, intimacy, trust. So, it's no more repressive to say, "Sex is only for marriage," than it is to say, "Curb your desire for funnel cake or it will destroy you," because we're not built to do what all our desires say.

If you just take and eat everything you want to, you'll destroy yourself. If you have sex everywhere, every time, with everyone, you want to, you'll destroy your nature, too, because you were built to have sex in an environment of total safety and complete commitment.

Sex is a way of committing yourself to somebody else. Sex is God's way of softening you, of getting you to trust the person, of getting you to open to the person. For you to open to someone who has not made a promise to you of exclusive faithfulness and commitment leads to breakdown. Sex is a way of opening yourself to somebody, and if you use it outside of marriage you actually have to fight against the very thing that it was built to do.

You have to harden yourself against its softening influence. To use sex outside of marriage, therefore, actually trains you to not trust when the whole point of sex is to get you to completely trust. Sex is designed to celebrate a union that's there and to revitalize the union continually by continually softening you toward that person and getting you to trust more and more deeply and more and more deeply and more and more deeply. It's a way to renew your covenant vows.

If you don't use it in a place where you can trust that person, it works against you.

Resisting my urge for a steady diet of funnel cake isn't repressive. It's freedom. It's liberating. Freedom is the ability to do what's good for me even if it's not what I want to do.

Saying sex is reserved exclusively for a man and woman in marriage is like saying "you shouldn't try to breathe underwater." God made us to access oxygen out of the air, not out of the water. If you try to violate that truth it will lead to breakdown. Same with sex.

4- The wise run to God, not from him.

We live in a world full of sexual brokenness and we've all been affected by it to one degree or another. This instruction is from a father to sons. As sons and daughters, my assumption is that none of us have obeyed fully.

Some of us have lived incredibly foolishly when it comes to these things and we're paying that price. Some of us wonder if there could ever be any hope or freedom from these things, any healing or forgiveness, any shot at changing our story. The good news is yes there is.

There is another son who perfectly obeyed his father's wisdom, including sexual wisdom. He never fell for the lies, he never walked down the path of the proverbial forbidden woman. Jesus lived the perfectly wise life, including perfectly honoring God's design for sexuality.

And his righteousness is available to each of us by faith. Jesus died, not for his sin but for ours. To accomplish our forgiveness and our cleansing. To purchase our ability to run to God with our sin and not from God.

I don't know exactly where everyone is with all this. But don't make your problems worse by running from God. Run to him. Ask him for the forgiveness you need and the wisdom you need to change. Get the cleansing that only comes from him—the freedom that only comes through walking in the light.

And this will actually be the thing that empowers you to fight and flee temptation, when you see that all you have been searching for is found in him. I think for some of you, your inability to sit still and be alone with God is actually driving your sexual sin problems. Your refusal to withdraw and be known and loved by God is a root cause of sexual sin in your life. Since you are not enjoying the acceptance you have in him, you are left to look for it elsewhere. And you are more susceptible to the lies that sexual sin tells you.

When you draw near to him and run to him to get those needs met, the foolishness of sexual sin starts to lose its power. We begin to see more and more that he is wise, he is loving, he is kind, he is sufficient for wherever we find ourselves.