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The Way to Grace: The Sermon on the Mount Series
2 Samuel 11-12

Dealing With Lust in an Age of Sensuality

I want to begin today's talk about purity of heart by sharing a little story with you.

I think at the beginning when you are pacing the floor in the magazine store or considering having a sexual relationship with a boyfriend or beginning to get the inkling that this relationship may lead to an affair, I think that if you are a committed Christian the Holy Spirit gives you a moment of maybes when you really can see that you are hanging in the balance. You are standing on top of the ski jump and holding onto to the gate. If you push off one way or the other, you are going to go down. You are going to go down like some great Olympic skier, in style, or you are going to go down more likely like the guy in the Wide World of Sports who went cartwheeling over the side. But once you decide to push off, you are going down.

These moments of maybe can feel elongated. Have you ever had one of those moments, that second of "am I going to open up this" seems like it is going on for ten minutes. Am I going to push this thing away and disinfect it with some moral Holy Spirit given Lysol, just pour Lysol all over my thought life and purify it, or not.

I have shared this story before when I was doing my series on Restoring Sexual Sanity. But I had a moment of maybe when I was teaching at OSU. I was in my office. A female student of mine came into chat. She was sitting on a chair next to the edge of my desk talking with me about her grades. We were just chatting. At a certain point in the conversation she stood up, basically lay across my desk, looked up and looked me in the eye

and said, “Professor Nathan, I would do anything, and I mean anything, to get a better grade.”

Freeze-frame that in your mind for a moment. Get the picture? Is that both stimulating and frightening enough for you?

Now why do I raise the issue of sexuality often with us here in the church? First of all, because the Bible talks about sex a lot. You know, God is not ashamed of sex. He doesn’t cover his eyes when a husband and wife have sex. God doesn’t blush. Jesus didn’t blush when the topic came up. In fact, the Bible devotes a whole book to sex and that is the Song of Solomon. There are some very explicit discussions of sexuality and sensuality throughout the scriptures. So, if you want to be biblical, you really have to deal with sexuality.

In addition, it has always been my desire to have a church of people who are able to be real with each other and not play church. I know to some degree that is a pretty lofty goal since we are all incurably religious and we all love to look better than we are. There was only one person who didn’t try to look better than he was and that was Jesus Christ. Everyone else always wants to look better than they are. I know it is a lofty goal to try to build a church in which people are able to be real with each other, but can we try—just for today? Can we just drop the bologna just for today and acknowledge to each other that we are all sexually broken? That this is an area of struggle for every one of us, and that living in a culture that is filled with sensuality only aggravates our brokenness?

Let me put it this way. I wasn’t raised in a church. I wasn’t raised around religious people. I didn’t learn to play the game of religion until I was an adult. Unfortunately, I have learned to play real well over the last twenty years. But the reason why I became a Christian is because I was looking for a real change in my life. I saw in myself some very ugly broken things that I wanted to have really changed by God, things that I discovered I could not fix

on my own. It has always seemed to me that if Christianity couldn't deliver on the promise of really changing us, I mean not just helping us to play church with each other so that we look nice on Sunday, but if Christianity can't deal with the problem of real change, dealing with the stuff that really binds us up, captures and enslaves us, then it is really not worth doing.

I talk about sex here at church because it is biblical. I talk about sex here at church because it is relevant and this is an area where we all need to have change and healing to one degree or another. I talk about sex here in church because this is one of the 2-3 most obvious features of American life in the 90's. When I get up here on Sunday morning, I am not interested in shooting every little bunny rabbit that runs by. I want to shoot the really big game, in other words. I don't want us, as a church, to major in trivial matters that don't affect anything in our lives and won't create any real change. Friends, many of you have been through that in church. You have spent years studying the irrelevant, the inconsequential. You have heads full of information, but there has been no transformation. You may know a lot but you may not look more like Jesus this year than you did last year.

Jesus had an amazing way of cutting through all the bologna, all the externals, and all the window dressings. He gets us to think about what we are really like. Not in terms of our masks, or knowledge, or intellect, informational base. He says, "Blessed are the pure in heart..." This is the goal of following Jesus. It is to have a changed heart. It is to be a different kind of person.

Some of you know that biblically the heart is not a collection of ventricles and valves and veins. In the Bible the heart is the inner most part of your being. It is the spiritual center of your life – your passion and your desire. We use the word "heart" that way when Tony Bennett sang, "I left my heart in San Francisco." He didn't mean he left a two-and-a-half

pound piece of pulsating bloody muscle or that he had a gaping wound in his chest. He left his passion, his greatest desire. God alone can see your passions and desires more clearly than you can. And Jesus says that this inner part of you, that concerns your whole view of life, your whole set of inner attitudes, the way you make decisions and discern truth and devote yourself to various pursuits – this inner person of yours that is so gunked up with sensuality, that is so stained by sexual sin, that is so marred by over stimulation and selfish gratification – this inner person needs to become pure.

The word “pure” in the Bible can mean one of two things. It can mean authenticity, being real, being sincere. And it can also mean being clean. And, frankly, I think Jesus means both when we are dealing with the issue of sensuality. I think we Christians first of all have to become authentic and real, not hypocritical. We need to stop feeding each other a bunch of lies about how well we are all doing.

But it is not enough to be honest and authentic. Jesus wants to clean us our passions. He wants to change us on the inside. I am talking today about Dealing With Lust in an Age of Sensuality.

This evening [morning] we are going to be looking at a very familiar story to students of the Bible. It is the story of David’s sin with Bathsheba. They have done a number of major motion pictures on it; perhaps you have caught one of them.

It says, “In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.”

Up until modern times men did not fight wars in the fall and winter. In fact, the month of March was named for the war God, Mars, because people would go to war beginning at the end of March. That was particularly true in Palestine where the rainy season ended in

the spring, and so the roads would be in good condition and there would be grass and fodder for the animals to eat as troops and weapons were being transported.

The story goes on to say, “One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, ‘Isn’t that Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?’ Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, ‘I am pregnant.’”

Now I want you to consider with me what the occasion of this sin was because sin doesn’t rise from nowhere. If you want to deal with sensuality and sexual brokenness, you need to consider the circumstances in which sexual sin arise. In David’s life, it was when he reached his highest point. He was in comfortable middle aged, about 50 at this time, which tells you that lust and sexual desire is not something confined to teenagers. It is a total lie that sexual brokenness goes away with age. It doesn’t. And at age 50 he was at the high point of his life. David had just experienced incredible successes in battles. He was very wealthy and very secure. And I believe that a major occasion for falling precisely when you are on top of the heap, when you are at the pinnacle, when things are going well because there is an illusion of invulnerability. God is with me. All that I touch is being blessed. I can do no wrong.

One of the things that causes me to shudder is when I hear people say something like, “It could never happen to me.” If you look at someone else’s sin and shake your head and cluck your tongue and say, “This could never happen to me,” friends, you are putting

yourself right in the cross hairs of the enemy's gun sights. I think God withdraws his grace when we have that kind of attitude.

And, of course, along with invulnerability there is idleness. It says, "David remained in Jerusalem and one evening he got up from his bed." One of the main roles of Middle Eastern kings was to lead their troops into battle. David had always led the army before. But this time he wanted a break. It is time for me now to enjoy a little personal indulgence. I have been serving, I have been working, and I have been helping others. Now it is Miller Time. It is time for me to relax even if it means lounging around in bed all day while others to my work.

It is not for nothing that the wisdom of the ages has said that idle hands are the devil's playthings. We are too sophisticated to believe that in America in the 90's. But the unoccupied life, a life that is not devoted to and busy with the work of God, provides an open door for sexual sin. I have seen that in my life and you have probably seen it in your life. The fact that I have a routine with a certain order to it; I get up at a certain time in the morning, read the Bible, pray, get to work, etc., etc. keeps me out of a lot of trouble. But destroy my routine and put me alone by myself in another city, with no planned activity for a few weeks, and something not so nice will fill the gap. You have heard the old expression that nature abhors a vacuum and quickly runs to fill a vacuum. Well, your sinful nature abhors a vacuum and quickly runs to fill a spiritual vacuum. That is why Jesus said that after a deliverance from demonic powers, when the house is unoccupied if it is not quickly filled, seven worse would enter in. You must have a routine, a pattern, activities and relationships that keep you out of trouble.

Of course, not only does this text suggest the occasion when sexual sin arises, we also have the rationalization of sin. "He sees a beautiful woman bathing." In the Middle East

when it is hot people would often bath outside. David had a large palace so he was able to look out over the city from his roof. And rather than turn his head or flee from immorality, it says that David sent someone to find out about her.

I am not interested in having sex with her. No, no, no. I just want to find out about her. Maybe she is unmarried. Maybe I can add her to my collection of wives, David thought, that I already have. It is possible that she is unmarried.

And then when he discovers that she is married, he is told, “Isn’t that Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” She is a noble woman. Eliam was the daughter of one of David’s chief advisors. It says, “David sent messengers to get her.”

Too bad, she is married, but I just want to talk with her and spend a little time having conversation. Get to know her a little better. She might have some intriguing views on world politics and military campaigns. Maybe she could give me advice on how I could be a better husband to my wives. Afterall, there is nothing wrong with conversation. It is all so very innocent. I don’t have any other motives here.

And then it says that she came to him and he slept with her. The point, by the way, of stating that she had purified herself from her uncleanness and then she went back home and said that she was pregnant was that the Bible was saying that she had just gotten over her period. So she was not pregnant by her husband when David slept with her. Her husband was out in the field. Jewish women would go through a ritual purification of bathing after their periods. And then David slept with her. She conceived as a result of their act of intercourse.

You say, “How does sin happen?”

There are occasions for sin. But sin is not just purely circumstantial. It always involves this deeper matter of the heart rationalization where we communicate lies to ourselves and open ourselves up to ever increasing sensuality. Just like David did.

“Oh, I am not affected by watching explicit sexuality in a movie. The fact that I pop a video in and watch a 2-hour video in which there is explicit sexuality and nudity doesn’t affect my heart at all. I am as clean and pure of heart after I watch as I was before.”

The fact that you watch MTV and the videos are sexually explicit and the lyrics of songs that you listen to are sexually explicit and drenched with sensuality that really doesn’t affect you. Maybe you are one of those who reads Playboy just for the articles.

We all understand rationalization regarding the issue of sex, do we not?

“Oh, I was just going to visit him at his apartment at Friday night because I was in the neighborhood. It was all so very innocent. I just wanted to pop in and say ‘Hi’. Stop in and have a cup of coffee.”

Friends, it is not just circumstantial. It is not externals. We sin sexually because of the internal lies we tell ourselves. It is all the rationalizations. My wife doesn’t understand me. We haven’t been getting along for years. Our sexual life is just about nil. We have these unmet needs. Sex doesn’t mean anything any way. It’s just our bodies – purely biological – nothing spiritual there.

I have needs. All men view sex this way. All men sexualize every relationship with a woman.

I heard a counselor say the other day when he hears that from a client, he looks the client in the eye and says, “I don’t.” All men do not sexualize every relationship with women. We just rationalize and lie to ourselves.

This relationship with this sister is purely spiritual. We just encourage each other and pray for each other. Sure, every time we get together there are a hug and an embrace and touch. But all of those signs of affection and intimate sharing are not going to lead anywhere.

Again, can we cut the bologna and agree together that the biblical statement that says, “The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked” applies to us. It applies to the way that we approach sex. That our reasoning processes, our thoughts, our ambitions and drives are all distorted. We have all rationalized away our impurity.

The Bible then describes how David tries to cover up this sin. He hatches a 3-phase scheme. In the first phase he calls Uriah, Bathsheba’s husband, back from the battlefield and tries to get him to sleep with his wife. It says in v. 6, “So David sent this word to Joab: ‘Send me Uriah the Hittite.’ Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were, and how the war was going.”

Is this not absolutely true to life? Lets talk about everything other than the thing that I am really concerned about. And then in the midst of all of this talk, David says, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” Actually, this is euphemism for sleeping with your wife. Feet in the Bible are sometimes a euphemism for the sexual organs.

So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the palace with all of his master servants and did not go down to his house. He slept, but not with his wife.

And it says, “When David was told that Uriah did not go home, he asked, ‘Haven’t you come from a distance? Why didn’t you go home?’ Uriah said, ‘The Arc and Israel and Judah are staying in tents and my master Joab and my Lord’s men are camped in the open fields.

How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing.”

Uriah the Hittite’s words must have stung David because what David was hearing from Uriah was, “David, I wouldn’t do legitimately what you did illegitimately.” I won’t sleep with my wife because I have certain kingdom commitments. Why would you sleep with someone who wasn’t your wife and violate all of your kingdom commitments?

Phase I is over. David can’t persuade Uriah to sleep with his wife, so Phase II of the plan is set into operation. David says, “Stay here one more day and tomorrow I will send you back. So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his servants. He did not go home.”

Uriah drunk was a better man than David sober. Remember, he was a Hittite, not a Jew. Not the one that God had selected out and put his favor on and blessed and encouraged. He wasn’t to be the forefather. He was a Hittite.

Is it not the case that sometimes people outside the community of God’s people actually acts in a way more righteous than God’s people do? And sometimes, if you are like me, you have gotten a wake-up call by some statement of righteousness by a person who doesn’t even pretend to be a Christian. And yet they might say something like, “We really ought not to be speaking about this.” Maybe someone who doesn’t pretend to be a Christian is actually a much better worker than you are at the job. They work harder and are more productive. Maybe someone who doesn’t pretend to be a Christian is doing a better job of raising his or her children than you are. Their children are more obedient and more respectful, more helpful than your children are.

Phase III in this chain of descent is found in v. 14: “In the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, ‘Put Uriah on the front lines where the fighting will be fiercest. Then withdraw from him so that he will be struck down and die.’”

The awfulness of David’s scheme is that he makes this good man carry the message that will bring about his own death.

You say, “How did David get to this place from being a person who was really devoted to God to becoming a man who in his obsession to cover up his sin hatched a plan to kill another good man?”

You know, I think we simply do not appreciate the corrosive nature of all sin, but particularly sexual sin. No one gets up in the morning and says, “I think I will go out this morning and have an affair and then cover it up with murder.” People start out with a baseline comfort zone in the way that they deal with sin. According to the Bible, God says that the nature of sin is such that as we continue to sin (and in this case I am talking about sexual sin) we continue to quench the Holy Spirit in our lives (and this applies to committed Christians) and we sear our consciences, we dull our consciences, so that what was originally a very uncomfortable thing to do becomes more and more comfortable. Sexual sin starts out as a terrible anxiety provoking experience. Our baseline comfort zone is violated. But as we continue to sin and set our hearts against God, we quench the Holy Spirit’s voice, and we sear our consciences after a while that reaction fades.

We establish a new comfort zone. And if you don’t repent of that new comfort zone, you drift farther and farther out.

I read a magazine article of a guy’s whose experience in sexual sin describes this establishment of a new comfort zone so well. He says, “When I was 17 I decided to buy my first pornographic magazine. This was a fearsome thing for me to do. I remember going to

the local drugstore that had a little magazine section. I waited and waited to make sure that no one was looking. I picked up the magazine so that no one could see what it was. Then I stood around and wandered back and forth until I screwed up the courage to pay for it. Just as I walked toward the counter, the man behind the counter left and a woman took his place. I quickly turned around. I must have spent 45 minutes in that store trying to buy that magazine. But I finally managed to buy it.

“As time passed, I bought a few more. Then I noticed something. I wasn’t rolling up the magazine anymore. I just picked it up and walked to the counter and bought it. As a matter of fact, I started to buy two. I still bought them only when the man was there. But after a while I didn’t care who was behind the counter. Eventually, I was even able to chat with the woman when I paid for the magazines.”

The corrosive nature of sin is such that we establish new comfort zones and we get harder and harder. What was formally unthinkable and anxiety and guilt provoking to us becomes more and more thinkable and then acceptable and casual. See, I have often pictured sexual sin like the dropping of a bowling ball on the roof of a 10-story building. And the illusion is that the roof will stop the bowling ball, the sin will stop at roof level. But this bowling ball has so much weight that it just crashes through the roof and hits the 10th floor. And if it is not stopped there, it crashes through further to the 9th floor and then to the 8th floor and will not stop falling until it has broken through all the floors and into the basement and down even further.

Each of us must come to grips with the fact that as we open the door to sexual sin, we become more capable of doing monstrous things and that our hearts are no different than the hearts of adulterers or molesters or worse.

Let me illustrate it a little differently to push the question back to the issue of the heart, not just your behavior sexually, but your heart. See, I believe that what occurs in people's lives when you see significantly moral compromise is that we have been making compromises in our souls, in our choices, for years before the big fall. You simply cannot live forever with a divided heart. Jesus said that either we serve one master (he was talking about money) or we serve another master, namely God. But you cannot serve two masters in your heart. And many of us believe we can and we carry around lust in our hearts on a continual basis, thinking that it won't grow and we won't have this corrosive affect.

I often picture lust in my life being like toxic waste from a nuclear power plant. It is just the dump that forms a little storage tank in the secret place of my soul. And then the enemy comes along and lies to me and says, "Well, this nuclear waste that is sitting there will remain safely encased in my heart. After all, Rich, it glows and provides a certain amount of comfort and warmth and thrill inside. You have this secret little internal life going that you can tap into that gives everything a nice warm glow."

But there is a problem with toxic waste. And the problem is that it doesn't remain forever in the container. It just starts eating through the walls. If it is not cleaned out, after a while that waste is going to seep out.

So you contain your lust inside and then after a period of time, it seeps out into emotional attachments. And then it will seep out further into physical attachments. And further still.

Another way to think about it is the oak tree that blows over in the woods. It doesn't blow over by one giant gust of wind. The oak tree was likely eroded at the center for a very long time before it fell over.

One of the great reasons to try to avoid sexual sin and the cultivation of lust in your life at all costs is because you come to the fearsome recognition that you are just like everyone else and that sin has an extraordinarily corrosive affect on your soul. If only we would say no, this is off-bounds to me; we would listen to the Holy Spirit and say, “No. This is not for me. This is not something God has given me at this time in my life. I have made other commitments and if I open up to this, there are going to be some very long term damaging consequences.”

Well some of us have given way to the corrosive affects of sexual sin and sensuality. I can guarantee you that if you have given way, the enemy has come along and put in your mind powerful lies to keep you locked into a pattern of frustration and hopelessness where you just keep running on the same track of confession and temptation and sin and guilt and confession over and over again.

One of the great lies that are put in your mind is the lie that says that you can’t change. It is a lie believed by ourselves, frankly, it is a lie that we believe about others. I can’t change and they can’t change. Parents of teenagers, listen to me. Never say, “Well, I just must expect my teenager to be rebellious. It is just the way it is through the teen years. They will grow out of it. You can’t argue with hormones. You can’t fight with biology.” Even committed Christian parents sometimes say what essentially boils down to the denial of the gospel is not powerful enough or big enough for my teenager. Jesus Christ is too small or the teen years are too strong for the purifying power of Christ in my son or daughter’s life. They can’t change.

And this lie of helplessness and hopelessness, of course, is preached daily to people struggling with homosexual temptation, folks struggling with pornography addictions, to people who feel just unclean, not as the result of their own sin, but as the result of sexual

abuse. I am always going to walk around stained, feeling ugly inside, feeling dark inside. I can't change.

I believe that in the church in the United States because we are so addicted to religious appearance and so little concerned about the heart and real change in the heart that millions of committed Christians sit in church each week having given up on the possibility that they can change. They sit and listen and nod and smile. And internally, they are saying, "For me, change is a myth. Christianity does not work in this area of my life."

There is another lie, of course, about change that many of us have bought into. I have and you have if you have been a committed Christian for any length of time. That is change will come quickly. I call it the Zap Method of Change. God will zap me in this area that I have struggled with for years. I will go here or there and get zapped. Instantaneously, I will be different and never struggle in that area again.

Now, I am not saying that that doesn't, on occasion, happen. Nor am I saying that on occasion that the problem has been aggravated by demonic infiltration. That when demonic infiltration is broken and relieved that a person doesn't experience a greater degree of freedom and liberty than they knew before.

But I would suggest to you, particularly in the area of sensuality that our quest for instantaneous change as committed Christians is really no different than what the multi-billion dollar self-help industry offers in our country. Go to the bookstore and look over the myriad of titles of self-help books. I can guarantee you that you will never see a self-help book that says, "Fifteen Effort-Filled Painful Slow Ways to Change". You will never see "Six Very Difficult, Very Strenuous Steps to Change Performed Only By the Highly Committed."

You know the word that you are looking for in self-help books don't you? It is the word "easy." Four easy steps; four quick and easy... Those are the words that we all want and that are what we want in our sexual lives as well. Quick and easy.

I was talking with a fellow here in this church that oversees one of our groups for people who want to Pursue Sexual Wholeness in a disciplined way. He said to me on the phone, "Rich, the one thing that I always say to guys is change will be harder than you think. It will take more effort than you think. And it will be slower than you think. But it will happen."

We want the zap method. 25 years of sin? We'll take care of it in 25 seconds.

Well, I think the same thing is true when dealing with lust in an age of sensuality. We are not going to be zapped out of this sensual age. And it is not a matter of trying to get cleaned up that will win the race. There needs to be some radical changes across the board in the whole way that we approach life if we are in the words of the apostle Paul to live as shining lights in the midst of a corrupt and crooked generation.

Now, I have been talking today about real change. Not looking good in front of everyone else. But the kind of change that Jesus is talking about when he says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Real change, first of all, focuses on the heart. And I think that you see something here in the Lord sending Nathan to David. In the same way that David sent a message to Joab, the Lord sent a message to David. In 2 Samuel 12 it says, "the Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, 'there were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the little ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.

David burned with anger and said, ‘As surely as the Lord lives the man who did deserves to die. He must pay for that lamb four times over because he did such a thing and had no pity.’ (By saying that he must pay 4 times over, David was prophesying regarding himself. He paid 4 times with the death of 4 of his sons.)

Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man.’”

That may be the most powerful statement in the entire Old Testament – Nathan’s statement to David, “You are the man.”

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says, ‘I anointed you king over Israel. I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah and if all of that had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with a sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore, the sword will never depart from your house because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’”

Do you understand what Nathan the Prophet is doing in confronting David? He is aiming at his heart. He told that little parable of the ewe lamb to tenderize David’s heart. Then he probes and pricks and stabs David’s heart further by pointing out how much God had given him and he could have had more had he only asked. But he had God’s provision wasn’t enough. God’s grace was not sufficient. He had to steal. He just had to.

I am not concerned today about external conformity, about looking good. I am concerned about the heart. That is why, by the way, that I think these moral abstinence programs at various schools as well as those adopted by various churches are good, but they don't go far enough. My goal for my kids and your kids is not just that they would grow up to abstain from sex until marriage. That is fine. But abstinence is just a starting point in considering the moral purity that we ought to have as Christians. God is interested in our kids' hearts. So many of our teenager's relationships are not good, not biblically healthy, even though they are abstaining from sexual intercourse. Just because your child is abstaining and is still a virgin doesn't mean that they have a God-honoring relationship. Just because your child is a virgin, doesn't mean that they are not self-centered, or radically consumed with themselves, or manipulative.

You want to understand, friends, that in our own lives and in the lives of our children, God is aiming at the heart. He wants to clean out the toxic waste. This requires community.

The second thing that I see in the relationship of Nathan to David is that there needed to be a relationship for David to change. Real change happens in the context of community. That is why I love what is happening in the group that is meeting here called Recovering Sexual Wholeness. In fact, we have a new group just starting. Going through a workbook together in which they have the opportunity to pray with each other and challenge each other, confront each other, encourage each other. That is real Christianity, friends. Without a Nathan in your life, someone, committed Christian friend with whom you can just open up to and say, "This is my brokenness. This is where I live. This is how I am living." It is highly unlikely that you will ever really change.

Real change begins with faith. You must reject the lies that say you cannot change, that you are too broken or that Jesus is too small. The gospel has real power. He that is in us is

greater than he who is in the world. It says in Col. 2 that God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all of our sins. Having canceled the certain code with its regulations that were against us and stood opposed to us, he took it away nailing it to the cross. Having disarmed the powers and the authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Sexual purity is not just a command, it is a hope. A hope for change. I know these theological truths can stay up here with yes, yes, Jesus disarmed the powers and his cross is powerful. I know those truths can stay up here in the heavenlies somewhere. But as they are applied to your life, in the context of community, as you believe that you can change and you reject the lies, the wonderful truth that God in us is strong can have a real effect. Something so simple as Jesus is big enough for this problem can have a real life-changing impact in your life.

The fourth thing, of course, is that real change requires the word of God. Jesus said in John 17, “Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is true.”

Morning by morning we need to have our minds literally soaked with viewpoints and thought processes that are different than the messages and words of our sensual culture. Friends, you cannot do battle against the sensuality of this age unless you are filling up your mind with the word of God.

I have often repeated various Bible verses to myself in the midst of temptation. Verses like Job 31:1, “I have a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.” Or the verse that we are just reading, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” Lord, that is my desire. I want to feel your presence. I want to know your touch in my life. Grant me a pure heart.

Or Psalm 119:9, “How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”

This is a slow difficult process. We are talking about real change. But real change is gradual. Real change means daily training. Changing the whole way we look at life. What we are after, our ambitions, what we think will satisfy us, giving us eternal perspective. That requires the word of God.

And real change requires prayer, a prayer that our hearts would be purified. But let me give you a prayer that is guaranteed to pour Lysol all over a relationship and disinfect it very quickly. Say that you find yourself against your will emotionally enmeshed with another person. You haven’t done anything yet, but you find yourself attracted to another person. Let’s say that that person is off-limits. They are not single or you are not single. That person is off limits. You know this is going to result in disaster if this goes any farther. I want to cut this externally by avoiding the person and by not rationalizing, but internally I want to get rid of this attachment. How do you pray that out of your heart?

Well, I have found the prayer, “Lord, change my heart toward this person” to be like watered down milk. It has absolutely no power. There is a disinfecting prayer that has always absolutely killed lust in my life. The prayer that David Brainard prayed. David Brainard is a missionary to Native Americans back in the 18th Century. He prayed this way: “Lord, make me absolutely unattractive and repulsive to other women.”

If you find yourself emotionally attracted to, wrapped up in a distorted relationship with someone who is off limits to you, you pray this prayer: Lord, make me absolutely unattractive and entirely repulsive to that other person physically.

I guarantee that will kill lust in your life down to the very roots. Because it will deal with one of the core issues of lust and that is personal pride. The notion that someone else finds you attractive and witty, clever and appreciates you even if they are off limits.

Do you understand, friends, that if you give yourself to a healing process where real change comes into your life in the area of your sexuality, it will dramatically increase your level of confidence before God? It will dramatically increase your level of confidence in being able to speak the truth in love to another person. Jesus was so very confident. He could look someone in the eye and with absolute confidence speak to a person about an issue of sin or deal with challenges. He was able to deal with that because his heart was clean. Because he knew that he was in right relationship with the Father.

Do you understand that if you engage in a process, I don't say get great victory now; I mean give yourself to a process of change so that your heart becomes pure, and you will gain what is most valuable. You will gain a deep relationship with God.

That is what I want. I want to defeat lust in this age of sensuality. I hope that is what you want too. Why don't you stand?

You know, there are many of you today who would say, "Rich, I really want to change not just externally. I really want to change on the inside."

Friends, real change begins by having a personal relationship with God. God took on human flesh and was born into this world as Jesus Christ. He lived among us, taught us, but fundamentally, the thing that God did was that he allowed himself to hang on the cross to pay for our sin and to deal with all the things that we have done wrong in our lives – sexual brokenness, as well as in our brokenness in other areas. He hung on the cross for our sins. And it wasn't only that he could forgive us, but when Christ was raised from the dead and ascended into heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit back into the world to change us. There are

some of you today who want to change. It may be in the area of your sexuality. Or it may be in some other area. You say, “This is an area that I would like to change for good.” A relationship, an attitude. That begins by having a personal relationship with God.

Let’s pray.