



weekend

resource guide for the week of 29 April

Matthew 5:27-30: “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. 29 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. 30 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.”

The “Battle of Lust” in the heart of America burst on the scene in July 1976. Jimmy Carter, presidential candidate, stood on the front steps of his home in Plains, Georgia and confronted the world with 4000 years of Judeo-Christian morality as he confessed his struggle with lust to reporters: “I have looked on a lot of women with lust. I’ve committed adultery in my heart many times. This is something that I recognize offends God... I have done it, yet I know God forgives me when I confess it to Him.” This simple confession was ridiculed in headlines around the world provoking millions to snicker and parody what was commonly perceived as antiquated puritanical notions.

Carter’s admission was no less controversial in the Christian community. Christians responded with shock and surprise. Some expressed that the candidate lacked propriety — one is not supposed to talk about these things. Others felt that he had embarrassed his family and friends, hurt his image, and jeopardized his presidential hopes. Some responded with pastoral advice regarding disciplines and prayers that would remove his struggle for all time. Still others simply exhorted him to have more faith.

Since 1976, on that humid summer day in Georgia, the smoke has cleared and we can see that the battle is over— lust has conquered American culture. Lust is presumed normal — in fact lust is profitable. Its mastery over our society is evident everywhere. Income from pornography has dramatically increased year over year. Presidents, congressional reps, senators, movie moguls, business leaders, pastors, are just a few of the high profile examples in recent months.

79% of men 18-30 watch porn at least once a month AND 76% of women 18-30 do so also. Consider these stats from one of the most popular porn sites alone:

Enough porn was watched in 2016 on this one website that all the data would fill 194,000,000 USB sticks. If you put the USB sticks end to end, they’d wrap all the way around the moon.

In 2017 alone, this porn site got 28.5 BILLION visits. That’s almost 1,000 visits a second, or 78.1 million a day—way more than the population of the entire United Kingdom.

In 2016, 91,980,225,000 videos were watched on this site. That’s 12.5 videos for every person on the planet.

Also, more than 4,599,000,000 hours of porn were watched on the site in just one year. That’s equal to 5,246 centuries.

There is reason to hope because the good news of the gospel remains — Jesus came to save us from our sin. His gospel is strategic. It attacks the root so that lives may be free from the tyranny of sin’s brokenness. The same cross that saves us from the condemnation of sin also possesses the ability to rescue us from the power of sin. The key is that we must recognize and despise lust for what it is— *sin!*

Followers of Jesus Christ must not confuse what is “normal” with what is “acceptable” as the world around us does. While a society may attempt to engineer her values, God establishes our virtues and He has spoken out against lust. Why? Because it disorders and disorients the heart by causing it to crave what it cannot have. This uncontrolled sexual preoccupation will chisel away at your integrity and over time it will numb your ability to feel and experience intimacy. Women and men become objects, imaginations become voyeuristic, and sexual fulfillment rather than faithfulness become our ambition in life. Integrity in Christ must not ignore the purity of our sexuality. Lust is not a victimless crime. It starts with one victim as it twists, corrupts, and dulls a sensitive soul before it expresses itself and harms others. Look at the moral wreckage of our culture and ask yourself, is lust *really* victimless?

Here are six practical steps for combatting lust in our lives:

1. Pull out and destroy any pornographic material in your possession. Have a friend or spouse put a porn filter on your computer that they administrate. They can also set your google search settings to “safe”. This may interfere with some search results but you will survive! If you absolutely need unlimited searching for work or research and you know you have “issues” then integrity mandates you have a friend/spouse be with you during this time.
2. Keep your computer in a public location and certainly not behind locked doors!
3. Stop feeding your fantasies. Deliberately distract your thoughts with other ideas or activities. Boredom is your enemy! Exercise and fellowship is your friend!
4. Be accountable to your spouse or another friend. Join a mentoring group or bible study with others. If this is an addiction then be honest and join a support group. Men we have one at Faith called Iron Men which Dirk Smith leads.
5. Seek out healing prayer and/or get professional help. Do not underestimate the power of God to deliver you nor the practical assistance a skilled counselor can offer you.
6. Finally, pray, receive, relish, and bask in the victory of God’s grace. Remember there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set us free from the law of sin and of death. (Romans 8.1,2)

Enjoy your LifeGroup!



Getting to know one another better...

What is your first memory of having to share something you prized? Was this an easy or painful experience? Do you think sharing comes easy for you?

Acts 2.42 - 47: The birth of the “next generation”...

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord’s Supper), and to prayer.

A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity— all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

What? (does the Bible say)

Reread this passage. Close your eyes for a moment and imagine you are there gathering with those first believers. What do you think you would see? Experience? What is compelling to you? Describe the fellowship of the believers in this young church you “see”.

List the habits/priorities of these first believers after their hearts were “pierced through” (cf. 2.37)? Which habits most resonate with you?

Why do you think the early believers enjoy the “favor of all people”?

Now what? (how will I think based on what this passage says)

What is the most challenging aspect of this text for you? Why?

What's the most encouraging aspect of this passage for you? Explain.

Do you think you have ever witnessed a miracle? Explain.

When do you most enjoy spending time with other believers?

Is the celebration of Communion meaningful to you? Why or why not?

What is the biggest obstacle standing between you and deep, genuine relationships with other believers?

So what? (difference will this passage make in how I live)

What contemporary challenges inhibit or obstruct your LifeGroup/Faith Community from embracing the characteristics/priorities of those first Christian gatherings?

How can you encourage your LifeGroup/Faith community overcome some of the contemporary challenges we face in imitating this early Christian community?

How can your daily prayers help bring about spiritual renewal in your LifeGroup/Faith Community? How can your LifeGroup encourage prayer for your LifeGroup/Faith Community outside of our regular gatherings?

How might you more fully devote yourself to the study of the Scriptures and prayer? How might your Life-Group encourage you?

My prayer requests (write in advance what you want your group to pray for...)

Praying for my group...