

Gleaning Wisdom from the Proverbs, #4

The Threat of Sexual Suicide Proverbs 5-7

--CEFC 10/14/18; 8/24/97; 3/1/87

We live in a sex-saturated society.

Sex is used to sell everything from blue jeans to automobiles to deodorants.

It's everywhere--

in the movies, on television, on billboards, and all over the internet—
in texts and tweets and pop-up ads.

You simply cannot escape its powerful presence in our American culture.

And never has sex become more accessible in the various media that permeate our world.

I remember some 20 years ago bringing my concerns to our county supervisor
about a news shop—Anna and Dales it was called—

that was opening very near us on Columbia Pike.

I, along with others, were objecting to its opening

because of all the pornographic magazines they were going to be selling,
that would surely be enticing to teenagers.

Now everything that was in that shop can be available

in the palm of the hand of any child with a smart phone or tablet.

We are part of a culture that spends more money each year on pornography
than country music, rock music, jazz music, classical music,

Broadway plays, and ballet combined.

Sexually explicit images are everywhere.

And at the same time, never has there been such confusion about sex in our culture.

It is interesting to note that for about 1500 years, up until about 1950,

Western culture had a basic consensus on the sexual organization of society.

The consensus was often broken, certainly,

and it did change somewhat through the years,

but the basic goal, that of lifelong, monogamous marriage,

and the chief taboos--incest, adultery, divorce, and homosexuality--

they remained fairly stable.

But since the sexual revolution of the sixties,

the moral code that has prevailed for so long in the Western world

that spelled out the basic ground rules for acceptable sexual behavior

has been overturned,

leaving a great void in its place.

wrote that “The core of happiness in life is sexual happiness,”
 and authored a book describing his philosophy
 aptly titled *Salvation through Sex*.²
 Without a doubt, sex has become a dominant idol of our age.

We may bemoan the degradation of our society in this area,
 but the truth is, though the particulars might change,
 there really is nothing new under the sun.
 The ancient pagan world was filled with fertility gods
 and temple prostitutes.

And the book of Proverbs testifies that the challenges and temptations
 we face in the world haven't changed all that much in three thousand years.

There was no virtual sex on the internet in ancient Israel,
 but the allure of illicit sex was every bit as real,
 and every bit a threat to the well-being of people
 and the health of society.

The purpose of the teaching of the Proverbs, as we have seen before,
 is not to bind us with rules and regulations that take the joy out of living,
 but to offer us the way of wisdom that leads to the joy of real life.

And this morning we want to see how that wisdom applies
 to this very important area of our sexuality.

We'll look at this instruction in both its negative prohibition
 and its positive instruction,
 so that we can rightly find God's gracious way of life
 in this sexually saturated society.

And in the end, we'll see how this realm of human sexuality
 points us to a much deeper reality—
 our relationship with God himself.

Turn with me to the book of Proverbs,
 and we will be looking at various passages in chapter 5-7.

I begin with the words of Prov. 6:20-24—

**"My son, keep your father's commands
 and do not forsake your mother's teaching.
 Bind them upon your heart forever;
 fasten them around your neck.
 When you walk, they will guide you;
 when you sleep, they will watch over you;
 when you awake, they will speak to you.**

² Cited in Percy, *Love Thy Body*, p. 133.

**For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light,
and the corrections of discipline are the way to life,
keeping you from the immoral woman,
from the smooth tongue of the wayward wife."**

The message here in chaps. 5, 6 and 7 of Proverbs
is couched in terms of the temptations
presented by a character variously referred to as the *adulteress*,
the *immoral woman*, the *wayward wife* or, literally, "the foreign woman."³

The form of this instruction is that of the father urging his son
to hold on to the teaching he has received from his parents.
So it comes with the male perspective in mind.

But it is important to recognize that this "woman" in these chapters is not a real woman,
any more than Lady Wisdom we've been talking about in Proverbs is a real woman.
This foreign woman, the immoral adulteress, is one guise of Madam Folly,
whose voice calls out to us all,
inviting us to her seductive feast that leads to death.

This text is not about women seducing men,
for we know that in real life it is almost always men
who use their power to abuse women.

The adulteress, the wayward wife, in these passages
personifies the temptations of illicit sex itself--
that is, sexual activity outside the proper bonds
of the marriage relationship.

She is the goddess of sex.

And ultimately, as we will see,
this "foreign woman" represents that voice that calls us to turn away from the Lord
and to go after foreign gods.

So, the chief admonition of this section that the wise father gives to his son is this:

*Shun the seduction of the wayward woman--
And by that he means, flee from the allure of illicit sex.*

If you are to follow this admonition,
the first thing you need to recognize
is that this wayward women--
this personification of illicit sexual

desire—

she can be very seductive.

Turn back to chap. 5--

look at v. 3--

"the lips of an adulteress drip honey,

³ נְכַרְיָהּ --2:16; 5:20; 6:24; 7:5; 20:16; 23:27; 27:2,13.

and her speech is smoother than oil;"

God has made us as sexual beings--
and there is no doubt that there is something attractive, something alluring
about this wayward woman of illicit sex.

She sounds good to us--
her words seem sweet like honey.
Like the forbidden fruit of the garden of Eden,
she is pleasing to the eye and desirable.
Like a powerful drug, she offers delightful pleasure,
and an immediate sensation of intimacy and love.

With smooth words she will tell you that there is nothing wrong
indulging your lusts
and expressing your affections sexually--
Isn't that what "making love" is all about?

"What is marriage anyway?" she will say.
"Why should a mere piece of paper in the form of some marriage license
make any difference?
No, go ahead--enjoy the moment.
What can it hurt?"

"Don't listen to your parents," she will say,
"they don't know what they're talking about!"
"Don't bother yourself with what the Bible says;
something that feels so right can't be wrong."

"Just this once," she says.
**"the lips of an adulteress drip honey,
and her speech is smoother than oil;"**

It's true--
and we have to be aware of that truth.
We have to be aware of the fact that illicit sex will look attractive to us.
And that attractiveness, that seduction,
will only become more intense when the flames of emotion start burning,
and the hormones start flowing—
and especially when a person's moral judgment is clouded by alcohol—
and suddenly her arguments become more and more persuasive.

If you do not have your mind completely made up on these issues,
if your sexual values have not been firmly established
before you come into the sphere of her seduction
then you are as good as gone--
I tell you, you haven't got a chance.

This is illustrated so clearly in Proverbs, chap. 7—
The wise father tells us a story of a young man who falls into a deadly trap.

Prov. 7:6 **At the window of my house
I looked out through the lattice.**
7 **I saw among the simple,
I noticed among the young men,**

a youth who lacked judgment.

8 He was going down the street near her corner,
 walking along in the direction of her house
 9 at twilight, as the day was fading,
 as the dark of night set in.

Watch you! You can see it coming!

This young man appears to be just wandering around aimlessly—
 and he just happened to be in the neighborhood of the town brothel.
 This guy is playing with fire here!

Prov. 7:10 Then out came a woman to meet him,
 dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent.

11 (She is loud and defiant,
 her feet never stay at home;
 12 now in the street, now in the squares,
 at every corner she lurks.)
 13 She took hold of him and kissed him
 and with a brazen face she said:
 14 “I have fellowship offerings at home;
 today I fulfilled my vows.
 15 So I came out to meet you;
 I looked for you and have found you!
 16 I have covered my bed
 with colored linens from Egypt.
 17 I have perfumed my bed
 with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.
 18 Come, let’s drink deep of love till morning;
 let’s enjoy ourselves with love!

There’s the invitation—she makes it as attractive as it can be.
 Then she adds this--

19 My husband is not at home;
 he has gone on a long journey.
 20 He took his purse filled with money
 and will not be home till full moon.”

Don’t worry! No one will ever know!

21 With persuasive words she led him astray;
 she seduced him with her smooth talk.
 22 All at once he followed her
 like an ox going to the slaughter,
 like a deer stepping into a noose
 23 till an arrow pierces his liver,
 like a bird darting into a snare,
 little knowing it will cost him his life.

And when we talk about illicit sex--
sex outside of the God-given boundaries of marriage--
we have to understand the consequences.

Her words may sound as sweet as honey,
but honey comes from bees,
and bees carry a powerful sting.

And in this age in which we have seen the ravages of a disease like AIDS,
the truth of these words of the Proverbs have never, ever been so evident.

5:5--**Her feet go down to death;
her steps lead straight to the grave.**

Sexual promiscuity can kill you, quite literally.

And don't talk to me about safe sex--
there is no such thing as safe sex.

Even if you could protect yourself from HIV, and herpes and syphilis
and gonorrhea and other sexually transmitted diseases—
which, according to the CDC, are at a record high in the U.S.
for the fourth year in a row,
with nearly 2.3 million cases diagnosed in 2017⁴—
even if you could protect yourself from physical harm,
you would still be exposing yourself to emotional and spiritual harm.

For sex is not something we do--
it is a part of who we are.

You see, we are created by God as bodily creatures.
God could have created us like the angels,
but he didn't.
We don't just have bodies,
our bodies are intrinsic to who we are.
We cannot separate our bodily existence from our persons—
they are inextricably linked.
God has created us as an integrated whole as body and soul—
we are a psycho-somatic unity.
When the Son of God became a human being he had to take on a physical body.
Our ultimate destiny is not as disembodied spirits in some ethereal heaven—
our future hope is resurrected glory in a new body animated by the Spirit
in a new heaven and a new earth.

Our bodies are part of the good world God created,
with wisdom as his side.

⁴ <http://time.com/5379165/std-rates-sex/>. 70% of new cases of syphilis are of men having sex with other men.

Our bodies are to be valued as a part of who we are,
designed with a divine purpose in mind.

And in our bodily existence we are created as sexual beings--
you are male, or you are female--there is no generic brand.
The Son of God did not just become a non-binary human being,
he was a man, born of a woman.

And what's the very first question that is asked when you hear that a baby has been born--
Is it a boy or a girl?
God designed as sexual beings.

So sexual activity is more than a mere bodily function--
it is an intensely personal act.
It is an expression of who we are as persons created in the image of God.

The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6,
contends that even the most casual of sexual coupling makes two people "one flesh."
1Cor. 6:16 **"Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute
is one with her in body?"**

For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."
Even though the prostitute and her client consider this a purely business transaction--
there is still something profoundly personal that takes place--
the two are joined together--body and soul to each other.

This is why Paul says--
**"Flee from sexual immorality.
All other sins a man commits are outside his body,
but he who sins sexually sins against his own body"** (1 Cor. 6:18).
He means that sexual activity is not external to you--
it affects you to the very core of your being.

When you think about it—
Isn't this why there is so much attention given to
and so much condemnation of
sexual abuse—
and rightly so!
I applaud the attention given by the #MeToo movement
to this horrible form of violence against another person.
Because of this profound nature of our sexuality
sexual assault is far worse than mere physical assault.
We all know that to be true.

Sexual union is an expression of a mysterious reality--
the union of two persons.
That's why it is only appropriate in the context of the covenant of marriage.

As C. S. Lewis put it,
those who have sex outside of marriage

“are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual)
from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it
and make up the total union.”⁵

Beware!

Sexual experience entails memories, and images and feelings
that last forever--

Often there are emotional scars as well--
and all of these are brought into a marriage relationship
and can hinder the formation of unity with that one other person.

And even in relationships that end up in marriage,
sexual activity can be harmful.

Contrary to the popular wisdom,
living together doesn't help prepare a couple for marriage--
just the opposite is the case.

Studies have shown that the divorce rate is lower among those who waited
to be involved sexually until their wedding day.

Marriage is one shoe that you cannot try on before you wear it!⁶

Why is that?

That's true for a variety of reasons,
but a primary one is the simple fact is that the best predictor of success in marriage
is a couple's commitment to marriage itself--
and sex before marriage diminishes that significance.

But it's not just your own hurt that is involved here--

There is the other person involved in the relationship that is hurt.

There is the future husband or wife--either yours or your partner's--
who may be hurt.

There is the child that may be conceived that is hurt.

If it is an adulterous relationship,

there will be another wife or husband who is hurt.

There are parents whose values you have spurned who are hurt.

And there is the social order of society as a whole that is hurt--

as the integrity of marriage is undermined

and women and children particularly suffer the consequences of divorce

or simply of parents never marrying

and men abandoning their responsibility as fathers.

There is no such thing as "free love."

It always comes with a cost.

Sex is never just a matter of what happens between two consenting individuals.

It always has a social dimension.

5:7 Now then, my son, listen to me; do not turn aside from what I say.

⁵ Cited in Percy, *Love Thy Body*, p. 137.

⁶ McMannus, *Marriage Savers*, p. 92.

**Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house,
lest you give your best strength to others
and your years to one who is cruel,
lest strangers feast on your wealth
and your toil enrich another man's house.**

Shun the seduction of the wayward woman--

She sounds attractive,
but in the end, hers is the way of death.

Don't mess up your life,

for in following her paths you will be left

with nothing but ruin and regret--

5:11-- **At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent.**

You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction!"

For one thing you can be sure of--

whatever you do—

even if it be done in the most private of places--

whatever you do is done in the presence of God himself--

5:21 **"For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD,**

and he examines all his paths.

The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him;

the cords of his sin hold him fast.

He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly."

Shun the seduction of the wayward woman--

her ways lead to death.

6:26 **"the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread,**

and the adulteress preys upon your very life.

Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?

Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?"

There are always consequences for our actions.

Keep that ever in mind,

for as Mark Twain once said,

"There are several good protections against temptation,

but the surest is cowardice."

That's the negative side of the wisdom of Proverbs--

and I'm afraid that sometimes that's all anyone ever hears

when they turn to the Bible.

To them the Bible seems to be full of "Thou shalt not's"--

"Don't do this" and "Don't do that."

And perhaps this is most commonly perceived in this area of sexuality--

The Christian church has been seen to be totally repressive and negative

with regard to sex.

And sometimes the church has been,

And the Proverbs reflect that, beginning in v. 15 of chap. 5--
with language that is quite expressive.

**"Drink water from your own cistern,
running water from your own well.
Should your springs overflow in the streets,
your streams of water in the public squares?
Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers.
May your fountain be blessed,
and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.
A loving doe, a graceful deer--
may her breasts satisfy you always,
may you ever be captivated by her love."**

Here the writer describes the sexual relationship
using "the metaphor of secluded wells and fountains,
[creating a wonderful walled garden]
in contrast to the wasted springs of promiscuity."⁷

Two things are assumed in this passage that make sexual love a thing of beauty--

The first is exclusivity--

**"Drink water from your own cistern,
running water from your own well. . . .
Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers."**

The sexual relationship is designed to be an exclusive relationship.

In that relationship you are giving of yourself at the deepest level,
and you cannot give of yourself completely to more than one person.
Every sexual experience outside of marriage
"adulterates" the unity of husband and wife.

And Jesus knew that this exclusiveness applies equally to our hearts and minds
as well as to our bodies--

he who lusts after another woman, he said,
has already committed adultery with her in his heart.
For he has lost the exclusivity of desire that marriage demands,
and in which the sexual relationship belongs.

And isn't this exclusivity part of the very definition of love itself.

If a man says to a woman, "I love you"
and then gets involved with another woman,
the first woman will call him a liar.

The one thing she won't let him say is,
"Oh, well, can't you see--I love the other woman, too."

The words "I love you" demand that the love be exclusive--

⁷Kidner, *Wisdom*, p. 22.

when you say "I love you" in a romantic relationship,
you are saying, "I love you and you alone."

Sure, there have been societies that have practiced polygamy,
and it even appears in the Bible.
And some are promoting polygamy today—
and with the confusion about sex and marriage in our society,
I'm not sure how it can continue to be outlawed.

In fact, I remember reading a report
that the Utah chapter of the National Organization for Women
(none of whom were Mormon, by the way) was endorsing polygamy
as a solution for the problem of working mothers.

"It seems like a pretty good idea for professional women,"
said the vice-chairman of the Utah NOW.

[They] can proceed with their careers and have someone at home they can trust
to watch their children,"
"It solves the day care problem."⁸

But according to Jesus,
God's design from the beginning
has always been one man and one woman joined as one flesh.
The exclusiveness of sexual love,
avoiding all comparisons and divided loyalties, demands it.

The second assumption regarding the proper context for the sexual relationship
is that of *permanence*--

**"May your fountain be blessed,
and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.
A loving doe, a graceful deer--
may her breasts satisfy you always,
may you ever be captivated by her love."**

**"The wife of your youth"--
that is, your one wife--
the one you had from the beginning--
she is to be your desire and delight until the end.
God's design for sex is in a relationship that is permanent.**

To be involved sexually on anything less than a permanent basis
is what we commonly call promiscuity.

Again, think about what it means when you say, "I love you" in a romantic relationship.
No one ever says, "I love you," and then adds,
"and I'll probably love you for a month or a year."
No, when you say, "I love you" you are also saying,
"I love you, and I will love you forever."
In our minds, there is always a timelessness to love;

⁸Washington Times, 8/14/97.

we can think of it in no other way.

The proper context for sex is a permanent relationship--
a relationship of real love.

An exclusive and permanent relationship--
this is the context that God has designed for sexual love.

I like the way Tim Keller puts it:

“Sex is God’s appointed way for two people to say reciprocally to one another,
‘I belong completely, permanently, and exclusively to you.’”⁹
And isn’t that what marriage is about?

Doesn't this make a lot of sense--

If sexual union is an expression of the deepest sharing of our own person--
a sharing that makes us vulnerable,
in which our fragile egos are exposed,
and our bodies can be naked without shame,
then doesn't it need the security of full and complete acceptance and love.

It should come as no surprise that studies indicate
that couples that are married and are committed to their marriage
have the most satisfying sexual relationships.

You see, the Bible doesn't prohibit sex outside of marriage
because it has a low view of sex,
as if it were some dirty or shameful thing.
The Bible prohibits sex outside of marriage because it has such a high view of sex.
It is a wonderful gift--
not to be squandered, but to be saved and to be savored
in its proper context.

Sex is an expression of such self-giving love
that only marriage is appropriate for it--
for until you are married--
until you have actually committed yourself before God and man
to one another exclusively and permanently,
the sexual act is speaking a lie.

Until you have forsaken all others till death us do part,
the words "I love you" are shallow and hollow.

Women, girls, don't be foolish.

If a guy ever says to you
"If you love me, you'll go all the way,"
you say back to him,
"If you love me, you'll go all the way--"

⁹ Cited in Percy, *Love Thy Body*, p. 137.

all the way to the wedding altar--first!"
It's got to be that way.

Sex outside of the exclusive and permanent bonds of marriage is a lie.
It speaks of a relationship of love that does not exist.

Rejoice in the love of the wife of your youth.

Sexual love in marriage is a wonderful thing--
it's worth waiting for.
Don't let anyone ever tell you otherwise.
I've never heard any married couple wish
they had had more sexual experience before they got married,
but there an awful lot who wished they had had less.

Sexual love within the secure confines of marriage--
this is the wonderful wisdom of God.

How I wish I as your pastor could communicate to you
just what hardship and heartache
you can save yourself and what joy you can experience,
if you but take this wisdom to heart.

We live in a society that is committing sexual suicide--
but God wants to rescue us from that--
his way is a better way--
his is the way of wisdom,
his is the way of life.

Beware of this goddess of sex—this adulteress, this foreign woman.
For just remember what happened to Solomon—
with his hundreds of wives and concubines.
this wise man became a fool—
and in the process, he became an idolater—
going after foreign gods.

For the marriage relationship
becomes one of the central models,
a central metaphor,
for our relationship with God.
That's true in the Old Testament and the New Testament as well—
most famously in Ephesians 5 where Paul speaks of the husband-wife union
as a "**profound mystery**,"
pointing to the relationship between Christ and his church (5:32).
And what is the grand picture of Christ's coming in glory—
it's the picture of a great wedding feast.

Marriage matters as a model of what it means to know God through Jesus Christ—
 for that, too, is to be an exclusive and permanent bond of love—
 a personal union that is to bring great joy.

Have you made that commitment?

May we give our all—body and soul—to Jesus Christ,
 for he has given himself—body and soul—to us.
 May we live in the wisdom he offers us.

Prayer--

**"For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light,
 and the corrections of discipline are the way to life,"**

A time of confession before God--

you have ignored the wisdom of God and done things your own way--
 you have listened to the seductive words of the goddess of sex
 and you have fallen into her grip--
 you have engaged in activity that you shouldn't have.
 You have not preserved yourself pure before God,
 for your marriage mate alone.

Confess that before God right now in your heart--

1John 1:9--

A time of commitment before God--

commitment to follow the wonderful wisdom of God
 in this area of sexuality.
 All sexual activity is to be reserved for the security of the marriage relationship.

Those who are married--

reaffirmation of the exclusive and permanent covenant relationship
 you have made with your husband or wife.

For everyone else here--

Those who have been married but are no longer--
 or for those who have never been married--

a commitment to chastity--

a commitment not to lie by giving of yourself sexually to anyone
 with whom you have not made

the exclusive and permanent commitment of marriage.

This is not an easy commitment to keep in our sexually saturated society--
 but by God's grace and with the support of God's people it can be done
 and it must be done--
 for to do otherwise is nothing but self-destroying.

Jesus said, I have come that you may have life
 and have it in all its abundance--
 trust him to give you life in abundance
 as you entrust your sexuality to him
 and live in conformity to his wisdom.

Closing Song: #382 *Be Thou My Vision*

Benediction

1Ths. 5:23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.
 May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless
 at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Gleaning Wisdom from the Proverbs, #5
Oct. 21, 2018

“The Threat of Sexual Suicide”

Prov. 5-7

We live in a sex-saturated society. And in this environment, the wisdom for living offered by the book of Proverbs has never been more relevant. In the face of the threat of sexual suicide, the wise father of Proverbs provides sound advice for discovering *life*--

I. Shun the Seduction of the Wayward Woman

A. Recognize the seductiveness of her ways.

B. Recognize the destructiveness of her ways.

There is no such thing as “safe sex”

II. Rejoice in the Love of the Wife of Your Youth

God’s Good Design for Our Sexual Lives--

A. An Exclusive Relationship

B. A Permanent Relationship

**"For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light,
and the corrections of discipline are the way to life,"**

Response Questions:**"The Threat of Sexual Suicide"****Proverbs 5-7**

1. "Sex sells!" Why is sex so prevalent in advertising, and what are the subtle ways that advertisers use this theme to sell their products?
2. How is so much of our society's moral confusion the result of separating our "personhood" from our bodily existence? Why is it so important to recognize that we don't just have bodies, but our bodies are an essential part of who we are?
3. How are exclusivity and permanence central to a Christian understanding of marriage?
4. What is wrong with saying that sex should be OK as long as two people consent to it?
5. Mark Twain once said, "There are several good protections against temptation, but the surest is cowardice." How does fear help protect you from sexual temptation?
6. Where does this sermon specifically expose sin or unbelief in your life? How does it specifically call you to change your thinking, redirect your affections, alter your behaviors, and trust your Savior?