

## “Necessary Sins” / #4: Lust / July 7, 2019

**Key Texts:** Matthew 5.27-29; Romans 7.18-19; 1 Corinthians 10.13; Philippians 4.8; Psalm 139-23-34

**Key Words:** Lust, Temptation, Battle, War, Sexual Desire, Appetite, Sin, Rationalize

**Summary:** We wrap up the series on “Necessary Sins” by talking about lust - every good man’s battle. It’s a war with extremely high stakes, a war we often choose not to fight, and a war we cannot win without God’s help.

First, I want to reiterate what Tater said earlier. I’ll be talking about the sin of “lust” this morning. And I’m going to be somewhat straightforward. I figure for some of you this will be at least PG-13; although I think it’s more like PG 11 or 12. Anyway, we have some great kids classes happening downstairs if you want slip out and drop them off.

Now Vern Huber is our Connections Pastor, and he is a bit of a dork. If you were here last week you’ll know he preached, and, well, he pretty well hosed me. You see, we’re in this series we’re calling “Necessary Sins.” There are some sins nearly everybody would call evil, always wrong, never right. Rape: always evil; murder: always wrong; abusing a child: never right. But there are other “sins” we think are more respectable, more understandable, maybe even “necessary” sometimes. I kicked the series off by talking about lying. Is it wrong to lie to protect someone, or a little white lie to protect yourself? Then I talked about anger. Now anger is not always wrong; in fact, there are times when it is required, but way too often we cross the line. Now, Vern told you that I preached those two sermons because I am good at both: I am a good at lying, and I’m good at anger. He’s Right, but he’s still a dork! And then last week Vern preached on gossip. And because of what he said about me, he pretty much proved he’s good at gossip.

But Vern made it sound like we assigned the themes to whomever was best at it. And this week’s theme is lust! And I don’t want you guys thinking that I’m going to preach about lust because I’m so good at it! I can assure you guys that I don’t know much about lust personally ... just what I read in books. Although I was the one to preach the sermon on lying. Anyway, I just sat down with Vern last week and he told me what to say.

Now, if you are a Jesus follower you need to lean in hard. We’ll be looking at some pretty important stuff for all us Jesus followers. But if you are not a Jesus follower, this stuff will probably sound pretty weird to you. In fact, it

might give you one more reason to push Jesus away. In fact, some of the Jesus followers in the room might be tempted to reconsider. But, actually, this stuff will work for those of you who are not Jesus followers yet, too, as weird as it sounds. Because our Creator has a pretty good idea about what works best ... for all his kids.

So ... do you remember the first time you lost some of your ... innocence? Maybe you were a kid, and your opposite sex friend wanted to play doctor. Or you were walking through the mall and all of a sudden you were dying to know what Victoria's Secret really is. Or, maybe your innocence was stolen from you by someone who should have protected you, someone you trusted.

You see, something changes; something shifts. I remember a cartoon I saw years ago ... it was pretty funny. This little boy is riding in his car with his mom, when a convertible goes by. Some cute chick is standing up in the convertible, and showing off - topless. And the kid points and shouts to his mom: "Mom! She's not wearing a seatbelt!" The innocence of early childhood. Then something changes.

For me it was in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I'm not sure exactly which. But I do remember it was on the playground of Monroe Elementary School, in San Jose, California. It was during recess, near the corner of the building, right next to the basketball courts. And one of my friends had brought one of his dad's Playboy magazines. And we all gathered around ... and we proceeded to read all the articles. And you're like: "There are articles?" Now, how is it that nearly everybody in this room remembers, in detail, the first time you saw pictures like that? It's seared in your brain, isn't it? ... Except for us holy men.

Fast forward to my freshman year of Bible College ... still relatively innocent, I suppose. I went down to the Navy Base in Oakland where my two best friends from high school shared a room in the barracks. They opened the door, and the room was wallpapered, floor to ceiling, with pictures that made Playboy look tame. Holy cow! I knew I shouldn't look! But I was captivated! And I was studying to be a preacher! And all of a sudden Romans 7 came alive. The apostle Paul talks about how powerful sin is. He says, "I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway." (Romans 7.18-19) Ever been there? Felt that?

You see there's this pattern so many of us guys - and perhaps even some of you ladies - fall into.

- First the temptation. You're tempted to do what you know is wrong.
- And then there's the rationalizing, and the justifying.
  - "I probably shouldn't, but I'm single, and it's not going to hurt anyone."
  - Or, "If my wife didn't have headaches all the time, I wouldn't have to."
  - Or, "It's not like I'm actually cheating ... physically."
- And then the temptation morphs into sin. And there's this weird mixture of excitement ... and shame. In the moment, it feels so good. Afterwards, for a Jesus follower, there's intense shame.
- And then you promise God, "I'll never do it again, God." "If you help me God, I'll never do it again."

And a few days later, you are tempted again, and the rationalizations start again, and you give in, and the excitement, and the shame, and the promises. And some of you who are extra holy are sitting there thinking, "What's he talking about?" While the normal people sitting next to you are like, "I know exactly what he's talking about."

Because it is ... nearly ... every good man's battle. I'm going to say "nearly" because I'm going to give some of you the benefit of the doubt. Maybe you haven't battled lust like this, or you don't ... anymore. But most guys do! And I'm going to call it every "good" man's battle, because those who are not good don't fight their lust. They just roll in it. Good men are the ones who fight it! And more and more, I think, it is becoming a battle for a whole lot of good women. Good women - because good men, and good women want to fight the temptation to lust. And, unfortunately, it is becoming a battle for nearly all of our kids ... once they get old enough to understand ... which is way younger than some of you parents think. You see, we live in a culture where the incitements to lust are ubiquitous. And we live in a culture where lust is excused and even encouraged; and where those who fight for sexual purity are considered quaint ... or flat out mocked. Guys, being a serious Jesus follower will make you look weird, sometimes! So be it!

Because here it is; this is from Jesus ... and we are "Jesus followers," right? Jesus said, "You have heard the commandment that says, 'You must not commit adultery.' (That's an Old Covenant rule.) But I say, anyone who even looks at a woman with lust (or any woman who looks at a man with lust) has already committed adultery with her (or him) in his heart." (Matthew 5.27-28) That's pretty straightforward, isn't it? Which means, for us Jesus followers, we need to clarify what lust is, and we need to fight it. Because here's what's at stake.

Here's what Jesus says next. He says, "So if your eye—even your good eye—causes you to lust, 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." (Matthew 5.29) Now Jesus didn't mean that literally. The early Christians weren't known for their eye patches. What he meant is this: This is serious stuff. Lust will corrupt you; and lust will corrupt your ability to love God's kids; and lust will drive a wedge between you and God. So don't blow this off!

Now listen, before I go any further, I need to clarify two things about God, because some of you are going to be thinking that God must be some cosmic prude ... and he's not! First of all, guys, God is way smarter than we are. Do you buy that? He's God! Our Creator knows more about everything than we do. God knows what works, and he knows what doesn't, way better than we do. Second: God is absolutely good. God wants the very best for his kids, he wants the very best for you. Do you believe that? He wants you to have a great life! Do you trust that? Now, think about it, guys: if God is smarter than we are, and if God wants only the best for us, then his ways will always be better than our ways. We will never outthink God. And doing life his way will always lead to a better life than doing life contrary to his way. You can trust him. Do you buy that? So ... when you understand what God wants for you, just do it! Whether you understand him yet, or not; whether you agree with him yet, or not. He's God!

So, here's what I'm going to do. I'm going to start by talking about what lust is and where it comes from. And then I'm going to talk about the war with lust every Jesus follower is going to fight, and how to win that war. So, what is it, and where does it come from?

Well, one reason virtually every man struggles with lust is that a powerful sexual desire was planted in us by God. You see, strong sexual passions are normal; that's how we were made by God. It's right there in the creation story. God introduces Eve to Adam. She's standing there naked. And a good translation of what Adam says next is something like, "Holy cow God! You did really good!" That powerful sexual desire is planted in us by God, and it is blessed throughout Scripture. It probably played a role in your creation. It probably played a role in the creation of your kids.

You see, sexual desire is not a bad thing, it's an appetite planted in us by God. Some things are just wrong. We feel guilt because we've done something wrong, we've sinned. There is anger because someone has sinned. Greed is

self-centered sin. All jealousy is stirred by some sin. But sexual desire is an appetite, it is ... God given. It's kind of like the appetite of hunger: you can feed your hunger, but eventually you'll be hungry again. Well, you can satisfy your sexual appetite today, but the desire is going to come back. That's the way God made us. You don't eliminate a God-given appetite, instead you try to control it, to manage it, to keep it from controlling you.

This appetite we call sexual desire is not a bad thing; in fact it's a great thing, it's a wonderful gift from our God. Do you buy that? But it is such a short distance between sexual desire and lust. In part, because Satan is masterful at taking what is meant for good and using it to harm. Satan loves to twist something good into something destructive.

- He takes our appetite for food and twists it into gluttony.
- He takes our need for rest and twists it into laziness.
- He takes our desire for fun and uses it to get us to neglect our work, and our family.
- He takes so many good things and turns them into addictions.
- And he is great at taking sexual desire and twisting it into lust.

One of the ways he does that is through confusion. Part of our problem is that there is so much confusion about when legitimate sexual desire crosses the line into lust. We are not sure which thoughts are okay, and which thoughts aren't.

- Is it okay to notice that girl is absolutely gorgeous? Some wives would say, No! But not to notice would require that we either be blind or brain-dead.
- Is it okay to notice her cleavage? Is noticing her cleavage the problem, or does the problem come when we allow our eyes to linger there, or our minds to linger there?
- Is it appropriate to tell a girl - who is not your wife - that she looks great? Is it a compliment, or is it flirting? Is it sweet - or, in our world, is it harassment?
- It has even become difficult to understand what is appropriate with our daughters. Is it okay to romp, and wrestle, and play games, and tease?
- And when have questions like these, we're not sure who we can talk to, or how much we should say, or how much we should reveal about the war that rages inside us. It's confusing.

So, when does it morph from a God-honoring playfulness, or a God-honoring appreciation of beauty, or even a God-honoring sexual desire into a God-dishonoring lust? When, from God's perspective, does cross the line? Because,

bottom line, it doesn't matter where we think the line is. We're Jesus followers. What matters is where he says the line is.

Let me start here. How do you know it's lust? Piece 1: Guys, temptation isn't sin. In our world our eyes are going to see things where they shouldn't linger. That's temptation. But if we let our eyes linger, we are going to cross the line from temptation to lust. I don't know when that happens exactly, but if our eyes linger too long, we'll cross the line. If we don't redirect our minds, we are going to cross the line from temptation to lust. Temptation isn't the sin, it's what we do with it, it's what we do next. Martin Luther said that we can't keep the birds from circling overhead, but we can keep them from building a nest in our hair (thus the shaved head).

Second piece. How do you know it's lust? Sometimes we think that thinking it is okay as long as we don't act on it. But God doesn't agree. How about this, if what you are thinking about would be a sin if you actually did it, you've crossed the line. That's what Jesus was saying in Matthew 5. Under the old covenant, adultery was a sin. But just thinking about it ... that was not necessarily wrong. But under the new covenant: "Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart," Jesus says. (Matthew 5.28) Which means, I think, if it would be a sin to do it, it would also be a sin to let keep thinking it.

Third piece: How do you know it's lust? Well, even good sexual passion can become a sin when we let it become an obsession. Anything good thing can become an obsession, and when it does, it becomes sin. Eating food isn't a sin; obsessing over food is gluttony. Taking a nap isn't a sin; in fact it's one of God's greatest gifts. Obsessing over your "rest" can morph into laziness. Wanting sex isn't a sin; obsessing over sex is. Because, any good thing can become a God thing. Some people become so obsessed with sex that it gets in the way of their living God-honoring lives at home, at work, at church. That's sin.

Fourth piece: How do you know it's lust? Well, sexual passion becomes a sin when we start to use people or abuse people for our own gratification; when it's all about me, no matter how it affects you. Listen, whether it's with your thoughts, or your actions - we Jesus followers don't use people our abuse people for our own gratification. You hear this line with kids: "If you love me." It's one of Satan's finest lies. "If you love me, you'll gratify me, even if you don't want to. If you love me, you'll satisfy me even if it compromises your life with God, even if it brings you guilt and shame, even if it drives a wedge

between you and your family.” “If you love me.” Girls, if some jerk uses that line on you, slap him in the face and walk away. He doesn’t love you. He cares more about himself than he cares about you. He’s sinning against God and he is sinning against you.

Fifth piece: How do you know it’s lust? Sexual passion become sin, even in your mind, when it leads you to engage in anything dishonoring to God. I know, sometimes our world doesn’t like calling sin “sin”; but it’s not their call.

- We pass out condoms to our kids and call it “safe sex.” It’s not “safe sex,” it’s lust, it’s. We’re telling our kids to blow off a God-honoring purity.
- We cohabit (justifying it with a dozen other excuses). We claim that it’s smart. It’s giving in to lust; and God calls it sin.
- A man feels sexual desire for another man; a woman feels sexual desire for another woman. And we rationalize that a person has to follow his ... lust. And if anyone disapproves, we reprimand them for their intolerance. Well, God calls it sin. We are not animals; we don’t have to “follow our hearts ... our lusts,” because our hearts will take us to some very dark places.
- We kind of frown on adultery, kind of, but only until marriage partners weary of each other. We feel that sexual desire for another, and rationalize our lusts. But God just calls it sin.
- We celebrate what God calls “immoral” on our TV, in our movies, in our music. We revel in our lust, we are exhilarated by it. We call it liberation, freedom. God calls it sin.

You see, the Word of God is crystal clear on some sexual sins.

- There is no sex outside the marriage bed.
- There is no living together before marriage.
- It doesn’t matter what you feel, you don’t choose a lifestyle that God prohibits.
- Porn is wrong.

God is clear on some of these things. It doesn’t matter whether we agree with them or not, God is smarter than we are. We’ll never out-think him, we’ll never out-smart him. And God is perfectly good. All he wants is your best, right? In the end, God will always be right. Do you buy that?

Okay, let’s move on. Nearly every man, and possibly a whole lot of you ladies, and without doubt most all our kids are going to fight a war ... to keep a God-given appetite from morphing into sin. So let’s talk about that war. And because we live in a world that pushes God away, and because we have an

enemy who keeps trying to push us away from God - there will be some tough battles ... some of which we will lose. Thank God for his amazing grace! But before getting to some strategies for winning this war, I want to make 4 observations. I am going to make these very simple, and very short.

- Observation #1: Our battle against lust will be lifelong. As long as we live in this world, it's a war we are going to fight. The difference between a good man and a bad man is not that a good man has won the war. The difference is that good men keep fighting, and bad men quit fighting it. Some guys stop fighting for purity; they stop trying to be God honoring. Guys, we Jesus followers can't quit - this is a lifelong battle.
- Observation #2: This will be a lonely battle. All of us guys are fighting a war, but very few of us want to talk about it. Most of us feel too much shame. We don't realize that other good men struggle just like we do. Guys, we're in this together. There is nothing you are battling that others in this room haven't struggled with too. We feel alone, but we're in this together.
- Observation #3: Any man - any man -- can lose this war. Any of you, all of us ... can lose this war. I have seen men far better than me fall. None of us is so strong, or so pure that we cannot fall. In fact, that kind of pride is so dangerous. Every one of us can reach a point where we will sell our souls, abandon our families, and throw away everything we stand for because we drift down a path that takes us farther and farther away from God. Any man, any woman can lose this war, so we have to guard our hearts.
- Observation #4: Any man - any man - any man - can win this war with God's help. I've seen guys who were pretty far gone find victory in God. Here's God's promise: God says, "There is no temptation you will ever face that you cannot defeat in the power and wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 10.13) With God's help, we can control our sexual passions, because we are men, created in the image of God, not animals. We have strong appetites, strong passions, but God gave us a free will, and he gives his Holy Spirit to live in us, so we can choose to do right even when we feel like doing wrong. Any man can lose this war, but with God's help, every one of us can win, too.

So, how do we win? Let's get down to where the rubber hits the road. It's going to be a war, and the stakes are high. How do we win? Here are some suggestions.

#1: Be honest. If you are struggling with lust, be honest. Be honest with God, be honest with yourself. Don't excuse your sin, don't rationalize your sin, just be honest.

#2: Don't feed your lust. If you struggle with lust when you listen to certain kinds of music, quit listening to that kind of music, dork!. If you struggle with lust when you watch a certain kind of TV show, or a certain kind of movie, than quit watching that kind of TV show, or that kind of movie, dork! This isn't rocket science. Quit feeding your lust. If you drift to certain sites on the internet when you are surfing alone at night, don't surf alone at night, dork! Cut out anything in your life that feeds your lust. Because this is serious stuff, guys. This can hurt people you love and it can drag you away from God.

#3: Use diversion. The Bible says, "Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable." (Philippians 4.8) Which means: if you struggle with impure thoughts, put your mind on something else. And one of the best ways to use diversion is to use Scripture. Find a Scripture that gives you strength; and when temptation comes, pull out your Scripture. God can use his Word to break the power of temptation.

#4: Find a confidant. This one is tough, we guys don't like anyone to know how we struggle. But most of us won't win this war on our own. We need to find a solid friend who will listen without judging, and who will hold us accountable. There is also some software you can put on your computer that will hold you accountable. If that might help you, and you can't find a solid accountability program, send me a note, and I'll send you a couple links.

#5: Count the cost. Look around and see what kind of damage sexual sin has caused people you know, and would cause people you care about. Be honest, think about the damage your sin will cause people you love. And ... think about what your sin will do to your life with God. Count the cost.

#6: Last strategy, and this one is actually the most important - Pursue God. Too often we try to be all tough and self-sufficient. Guys, there are some sins stronger than we are - and lust is one of them. If you want real power, pursue God. It's going to take his strength, his wisdom, his transforming power to win this war. ... ..

So ... guys ... Do you trust him? Do you trust that God is smarter than you are, and that all he wants is your best? Do you trust him? Lying, anger, gossip, lust ... We push back on God basically because we don't trust him. We treat them like they are "necessary sins" because we don't trust him. Will you trust him?

We have wrapped this little series around two incredibly challenging verses in the book of Psalms. David says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts." Which is a weird thing to say to God, because God already knows. He doesn't have to search or test: he already knows everything - everything about me, everything about you. You can't hide anything from God. But what David is saying is this, "God I want you to know. I want to be an open book to you. In fact, he says, "Point out anything in me that offends you." Wow! God, don't just convict me about the stuff I know is wrong in me, show me stuff that I'm blind to, that I justify, that I excuse. Because, listen: there are things in you that you think are okay, but God doesn't! Do you really want to know what those things are? Because sometimes those sins we don't recognize are the ones that can do the most damage! So, David says, "Point out anything in me that offends you, (because I want you to) and lead me along the path of everlasting life." (Psalm 139.23-24) Because that's what's at stake.

One of our elders is in that Prayer Room over there, and he's been praying for every one of you. Praying that as God's Spirit nudges you, you will have the wisdom and the courage to respond. We are going to pray the same thing right now. And if, when we are done, you want to pray with him, or any one of us, we're going to be hanging out down here after the service. Let's talk.

Or: The blue "I Have Decided" card in front of you. ... to follow Jesus; to be baptized; I want to talk to a minister. Name and phone / email on it, drop it in one of the boxes in the passageway between the worship center and the foyer as you leave, or hand it to one of our guest services team, and we'll give you a call.

Let's pray ...