

Derek and Amber began their marriage so full of promise. They were excited to move to a new city for Derek's new job. They bought a house and enjoyed that first year of marriage with all its surprises. But then Derek's job took him out of town more and more. He would often leave on Sunday afternoon and come back late Friday. So Amber had to go through the week alone in a new city with few friends. She began to talk with this guy at work who was really kind. She appreciated his attention especially on those days when Derek couldn't call home. Eventually their relationship grew into more than work. They got more and more involved until she ended sleeping at his place on some nights. When Derek came home on weekends, he sensed something different but he couldn't figure out what.

Levi and Erin had already been married 5 years when their first child came along. They were so excited to bring this little one into their lives. Baby Jenna turned their world upside down. She was followed in rapid succession by a brother, sister and another brother. Levi and Erin suddenly found themselves with 4 children 6 and under. It was so busy. Erin often flopped into bed at 9 PM exhausted from a regular day of parenting. Levi loved her. But as the busyness continued, they seldom had time for each other. He would often watch TV or work until 11 or 12 at night. Though their house was filled with little ones and life, he was sometimes lonely. So he sought comfort in his loneliness by going to certain websites. He knew how to cover his tracks digitally so that Erin would never know. He felt guilty after and resolved to stop. But whenever he was tired or they'd had a fight he ran to this outlet for relief. He was sure it didn't do much harm and he would stop once they had more time for each other.

Dan and Diana had been through 20 years of marriage. They raised their 3 children well and now all were gone or in college. When they sat alone at the supper table, they realized how far they had drifted from one another. They had stayed together for their kid's sake. But now they were strangers. They mutually decided to divorce. It was agreeable and respectful. They didn't fight and tried to minimize their kid's pain. Within a year it was done. They went their separate ways.

Ron and Rhonda had been through difficult marriages. Both had been divorced with children. They looked after their kids and fulfilled all those responsibilities convinced they would never marry again. But one New Year's Eve each went to the home of a mutual friend for a party. They hit it off and found new life and joy. Soon they planned their wedding. They married in the Spring. Ron and Rhonda were both Christians. They thought it best to find a new church

to worship in together. But when they arrived at this church and people found out they had been divorced and remarried, they shunned them. Ron and Rhonda came home confused wondering what they should do.

Sam and Shauna have been married 16 years. They have two children and a nice home. From the outside it looks like they're just a regular family. But inside their home they struggle mightily in their marriage. Their fights have become more heated recently. Neither has sought refuge in someone else's arms or some website. But when they attended the wedding of their niece last summer, they sat in the ceremony and marveled at the joy the bride and groom had for each other. They wondered where that had gone and if they could ever see it again.

And lastly there's Lena. She has persevered in a difficult marriage for 20 years now. Her husband drinks a lot. He doesn't respect her or make much time for her. They attend church but behind closed doors, they struggle mightily. She knows God's design for marriage. She hears of other wives who experience fulfillment and affirmation in their marriages. She wants to work on things and make them better. But he will have none of it. He sees no problem and if she keeps talking about it, he'll leave her.

All are ordinary people who started out with great hopes on their wedding days. Yet today, they live with the difficult realities in their lives. Some of you have lived these stories. You've been or you are one of these couples. Or you're been a child in one of these marriages. Or you know someone who is going through something like this.

The question that faces you today is "where do you go from here?" Well I'm here to tell you today that Jesus has teaching that brings clarity and life that brings hope for people in any of these situations. Today as we continue through His teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Last week we talked about Jesus' reinterpretation or extension of the law "you shall not murder." We saw Him emphasize that it is not only refraining from killing someone that's important. It's what in our hearts towards others. We cannot think we're okay with God if we haven't murdered someone we struggle with but we still hate them or are angry with them. Jesus then moves on to talk about people's attempted solutions to marriage difficulties. We will see what He says about these "solutions" and what He offers instead of them.

Some of you may think this has nothing to do with you today because you are too young to get married or far from it or believe you never will get married. But you must consider how your actions today may impact a marriage in the future – yours or another person's future marriage. If you hear Jesus' words and truth today, you can gain some protection from possible future pain. If you are not married and can't see yourself getting married, you can still

positively impact other married people by hearing what Jesus says and encouraging others with His truth and wisdom.

So I hope all of us will in some way commit to hearing Jesus' words today.

So we will walk through each of the situations I mentioned and consider Jesus words that address them. Then we will look at pathways to hope for anyone who is or has come from those situations.

Matthew 5:27-32 ESV

[27](#) “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ [28](#) But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. [29](#) If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. [30](#) And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

[31](#) “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ [32](#) But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Derek and Amber were our first couple. Remember Amber was alone 5 days a week in a new city with few friends. She eventually got together with this guy from work sometimes even staying over at his apartment. What Amber was doing is called adultery. It is the physical union between a married person and someone other than their spouse. **What does Jesus say about adultery?** Very simply – Matthew 5:27 – **“You shall not commit adultery.”** Jesus quotes the 7<sup>th</sup> of the 10 commandments. Adultery was considered a very serious offense in ancient Israel because it broke the union that reflected the relationship between God and His people. God often used the image of adultery to picture the people's unfaithfulness to Him. Worshipping another God was considered spiritual adultery. God originally designed marriage to be permanent and life long; monogamous meaning you only were committed to one other person and beautiful. God created sex. God intended that this gift be enjoyed by His people through marriage. But when a married person gives that gift to someone outside their marriage, they have violated their vows. Adultery was so serious that God wrote against it with his own finger when He gave the 10 commandments to His people. So everyone knew in ancient Israel that adultery was a sin against God and the marriage partner. What Adulterous Amber did was wrong according to Jesus.

Next we come to Levi and Erin – remember they had four young children and little time for each other. Levi would look at porn on nights he was tired and lonely. He did not commit physical adultery with anyone. So was he ok in Jesus' eyes? “I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with

her in his heart.” **What does Jesus say about lust? It is committing adultery in one’s heart.** There is a great difference between love and lust. Love considers the other person. Lust is all about getting something for oneself. Love considers the other as a person. Lust sees others as objects for one’s own pleasure. The word used for lust here means a prolonged looking or imagining of something sexual towards someone who is not a spouse. So to protect marriage and purity, it is not enough to maintain physical purity while entertaining impure thoughts. Purity in marriage includes exclusive devotion to one another in every aspect of life. This commitment excludes wanting another person or giving oneself in any way to another person. Looking lustfully at another breaks the bond of oneness that a man has with his wife or a wife with her husband. This also speaks for the unmarried – imagining something sexual towards someone married to is lust. Any sex outside of marriage is wrong in God’s eyes. That includes sex before marriage be engaged people or those dating. Sex is to be reserved for the wedding night & beyond.

Lust can happen with another person that you know at work or school or in the neighborhood or in some social circle. It can involve looks, texts, emails, suggestive words or actions. Or it can happen on a screen – TV, Computer, Tablet, Movie Theater, Phone, Magazines or Pop up ads. This temptation can also happen at football games, swimming pools, summertime and the beach. Jesus says to look in this way is committing adultery in the heart. That’s where any sin begins. We have some desire and give in to a temptation to fulfill in a way outside of God’s boundaries. We entertain in our minds and we act on it with our eyes.

We might think that Jesus is overstating things here. Or he’s getting worked up over something that’s not that big of a deal. Everyone does this. But His words in the next verses reveal Jesus’ seriousness. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out. If your right hand causes you to sin cut it off. The right eye was considered the good eye and the right hand the most skilled hand. (Sorry lefties). Was Jesus saying that people should literally mutilate their bodies to prevent themselves from lust?

Well I really don’t think so. I was trying to imagine how you would go about doing this. If you wanted to gouge out your eye, you’d probably use your right hand to do it. Then you’d use your left hand to chop off your right hand. But what if your left eye and left hand caused you to sin? You’d have to gauge out your left eye with your left hand. But then you couldn’t see to chop off your left hand and you couldn’t do it anyway because you had no right hand.

So I'm pretty sure Jesus used this powerful image to make His point. Lustful thoughts are so dangerous that you must take drastic measures to protect yourself from them. Or we must be willing to make drastic sacrifices. This may include ending a relationship or stopping some favorite activity. Jesus says "be willing to give up something cherished if it will give you a greater opportunity to resist sin." Take this seriously. Notice Jesus does not say "if you lust you are going to hell." It is you are in danger of hell if you are comfortable with lust. Because that could indicate a heart that is far from God. And though you play at being a Christian, you're real heart desire is to satisfy your sin. Lustful Levi sinned when he visited those websites. So Jesus rejects both adultery and lust as "solutions" to marital difficulties.

Next we come to Dan and Diana. They were married for 20 years. After all the kids move out and they have nothing further in common. So they get divorced. What does Jesus say about this? It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give a certificate of divorce.'

This certificate was talked about in Deuteronomy 24. It was given to the woman by her husband. He could decide to divorce her and give her a certificate. But it was not supposed to be an easily done deal. A husband had to write a certificate of divorce based on finding some indecency in his wife. So he couldn't divorce her for any and every reason. This certificate gave some protection to the woman. In Moses' time, a woman without a husband was destitute indeed. She had basically three options. She could starve to death with no provider. She could go into prostitution. Or she could marry again. But how could she prove that she was not a prostitute? The certificate of divorce gave her that protection. But the law forbade her original husband from marrying her if she became available again. This double restriction – the certificate and prohibition of remarriage - discouraged hasty divorces.

Notice the law does not encourage or require divorce. Nor does the certificate make the divorce right. It simply puts boundaries on the practice of divorce. God intended life long loyal marriage to be the only pattern of union between men and women. God hates divorce. Without exception, some sin contributed to it. God does not command divorce, commend it or bless it.

By Jesus' time things had gotten really out of hand. Remember the 3 primary Pharisaic schools that interpreted Scripture? The school of Shammai held a pretty strict interpretation of the law. They agreed that only on grounds of indecency was divorce permitted. But Hillel opened the door much wider. Any cause of complaint was acceptable including burning the dinner. By giving a certificate of divorce they kept the law externally. But He's most concerned

about hearts. Why would a husband divorce his wife for any and every reason? He had a problem deep in his heart. He was willing to dissolve something God considered sacred because of his own irritation or lusts for another. So Jesus reinforces the restriction against divorce.

**What does Jesus say about divorce? Anyone who divorces their spouse except for sexual immorality makes them an adulteress.** Jesus lays the responsibility primarily on the man here. Divorce on a whim basically forced a woman into another marriage. But since God doesn't recognize divorce on the grounds of burnt supper as valid, a remarriage is actually putting her into an adulterous situation. Why? Because basically God rejects the validity of divorce for reasons other than the ones we find in Scripture.

God desires husbands and wives who face marital difficulties to turn to Him and come humbly before Him. He desires that couples confess hardness of heart and come to Him for healing and forgiveness. He does not desire divorce for anyone. According to Jesus, Dan and Diana had no valid reason to get a divorce. They got divorced because they believed that they had nothing in common.

Next we come to Ron and Rhonda. They had both been divorced and then remarried. They went to a church and as soon as people found out they were divorced they treated them as outsiders. Why might this happen? Well many Christians are aware of God's commands against divorce. They may only know that God hates divorce. So they conclude no divorce or remarriage is permitted in His sight. And to accept someone who has been divorced and remarried somehow condones sin therefore they reject such a person.

But we've already seen an exception clause for divorce. Jesus states that it is permissible to divorce one's spouse if they have been involved in sexual immorality. The word is porneia from which we get our English word pornography. Graphe are pictures. Porneia is sexual immorality. Pornography are pictures of sexual immorality. Jesus permits divorce. Sexual immorality is a reality. But notice He does not require it. Many Christian couples have recovered from the damage of porneia in their marriage by leaning on the Lord and His people and coming together to heal and strengthen their marriage.

Jesus provides one exception clause here. The Apostle Paul provides another one in 1 Corinthians 7:15. There he talks about believers married to unbelievers. Likely the believer became a Christian after they got married. Now the

unbeliever does not accept the faith. There Paul says “if the unbeliever leaves, let them go. A person is not bound in such circumstances.

Many New Testament commentators wonder if Paul himself was divorced because of his new found faith in Christ. He describes himself as single in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7. Yet he was a Pharisee under Gamaliel. They were expected to marry and have children. We don’t know for sure.

What if there is violence or abuse in the marriage or towards the children. Such abuse is a fundamental violation of marital vows. It goes against everything God expects of marital partners especially the husbands. In such cases, drastic steps must be taken. The Christian community is divided on this only in whether or not this is grounds for divorce. Everyone agrees its wrong. The ESV Study Bible article on this states *Some interpreters have argued that repeated instances of physical abuse should be seen as an additional legitimate ground for divorce. Others would respond that many other means should be used to bring the abuse to an immediate halt, including separation (for the eventual purpose of bringing restoration along with the complete cessation of the abuse), church discipline, confrontation and counseling, police action, a court order, and other kinds of intervention by church members, family, and friends. But these would stop short of adding a reason for divorce that neither Jesus nor Paul specified.*

In all of these situations – sexual immorality, unbeliever leaving and possibly abuse, attempts to reconcile should be the first step. But if all attempts fail divorce is possible. But it’s not mandatory. Then the innocent parties in those situations would be free to remarry. So the people that discouraged Remarried Ron and Rhonda in attending their church perhaps did not know about the exception clauses and didn’t show any grace to even get to know Ron and Rhonda.

So we have seen Jesus address Adulterous Amber, Lustful Levi and Divorced Dan and Diana. **He rejects adultery, lust and divorce for any reason as “solutions” to marital challenges.**

The last two couples, struggling Sam and Shauna and lonely Lena, we will address in the Hope section.

## Hope

First, I want to talk to those who are not married or are in their first marriages. What is necessary to protect your marriage from leaning towards adultery, lust & divorce? We need to start with our heart desires. **Find fulfillment for your deepest desires in Christ.** The world tells us that God is a cosmic kill joy. He doesn’t want us to have any fun.

He doesn't want us to experience any pleasure or satisfaction. So if you're a Christian, you can look forward to a drab life of self-denial, little joy and no parties. But if we've adopted that view of God, we don't understand God and all He wants for us. Joni Eareckson writes on this. She says

*This is hard to believe, but pleasure is not earth's invention. God invented every delight, and each delectable sensual experience. It is natural to wonder whether or not in heaven our cravings will be satisfied. Will the pleasures of heaven really be that pleasurable? Consider this unusual but excellent analogy by C.S. Lewis:*

*Our present outlook might be like that of a small boy who, on being told that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure, should immediately ask whether you ate chocolates at the same time. On receiving the answer "no," he might regard absence of chocolates as the chief characteristic of sexuality. In vain would you tell him that the reasons why lovers don't bother about chocolates is that they have something better to think of. The boy knows chocolate: he does not know the positive thing that excludes it. We are in the same position. We know the sexual life; we do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for it. Hence where fullness awaits us we anticipate [loss].*

*Earth has conditioned us to think heaven is a place of less, not more. But enraptured in heaven's joy, we won't think about carnal pleasures because we will have something better, something far more pleasurable to consume us. The delight I experience with my husband Ken is merely a hint, a whisper--a bite of chocolate--compared to the resounding joy that, in heaven, will sweep me away in a deluge of ecstasy.*

**Hide God's Word in your heart – Psalm 119:11<sup>11</sup>** I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

**Build a fence around sin and temptation – Matthew 5:28-29** That's what Jesus talk about the right hand and right eye is all about. Don't try to get as close to sin as possible without actually sinning. Instead build a fence around it so you don't even get near it. Reduce the likelihood of temptation.

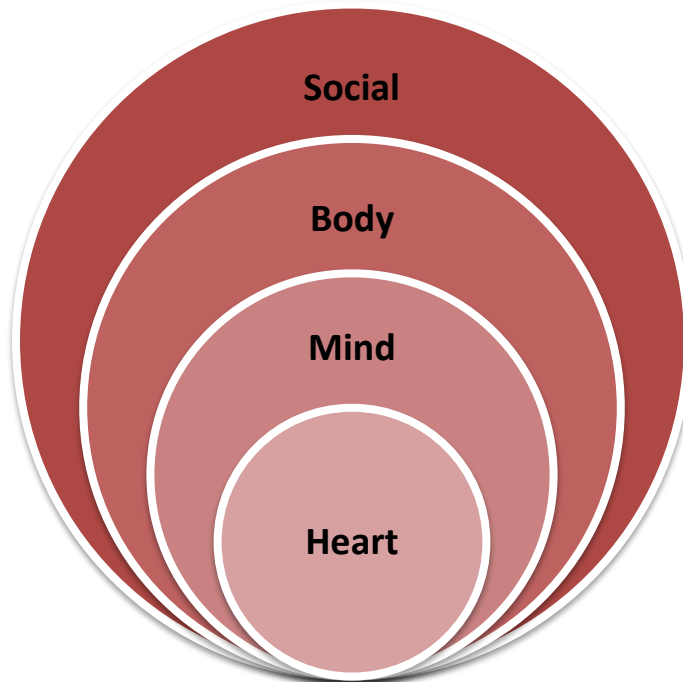
**Lean on other believers in supportive one another relationships** James 5:16 - <sup>16</sup>Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. This is where I would put the hope factor for struggling Sam and Shauna. Instead of trying to figure out their



marriage alone, they need to depend on other believers for encouragement. We look to God. We hide his word in our heart. We build fences around sin. We include others in our journey for encouragement.

**Receive Christ to change your heart.**

We cannot do all this apart from Christ. Our deepest problem is a hard heart or a wicked heart. We need changed hearts.



We need new hearts. We can only receive a new heart through Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on our behalf. In Christ Alone our hope is found. When we are given a new heart it begins to change our desires. We obtain a new heart by putting our trust in and upon Christ.

Some here have been involved in the sins talked about or got divorced for reasons outside of God's revealed will. Or you're remarried and it's maybe not according to exactly what the Bible talks about here. First of all, you need to remember and all of us need to remember, none of these are the unpardonable sins. The only unpardonable sin found in the New Testament is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. All other sins can be forgiven and paid for on the cross. **Repent from past sin and receive the Lord's forgiveness**

**Move forward today by investing in your current marriage OR by seeking help for your struggling marriage.** God provides for His people to carry out His will, includes remaining pure before marriage & while dating. Though difficult in our sex saturated culture, it is not impossible to pursue purity through our entire lives or to stop some impure behavior.

1 Corinthians 10:13 – No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”

Lastly, I want to speak to Lonely Lena. She represents people here who are in a difficult marriage situation and you desire improvement. You want to work on it. You want to pursue reconciliation. But your partner doesn't want anything to do with that. Some of you here currently face a divorce you don't want to see happen. I honestly don't know what it's like to be in your situation. But the least we can do today is pray for you. We want to encourage you that you are not alone in this body. We want others to gather with you to support you as you seek Him. You can come forward to pray during our last songs or after the service. Anyone who wants to acknowledge before God your need of Him or your desire to take a step forward in faith, I invite you to come.