

# Smashing Idols

## Week 4 | Sex

*Lisa Scheffler, author*

You can learn a lot about how a culture views the world from the popular media it consumes. Since our culture has no shortage of songs, TV shows, books and movies that revolve around sex and romance, it's not hard to spot some common themes.

One is a desperate need for romantic love. The movie *Jerry McQuire* gives us a succinct summary of this ideal. Having separated from his wife, Jerry shows up one night asking her for another chance. At the end of his impassioned speech, he tells her simply, "You complete me." For many in our culture, the desire to find "the one" becomes an all-consuming quest because they can't imagine feeling whole without a romantic partner.

Another theme that courses through the culture's collective stream of consciousness is an unapologetic pursuit for sexual pleasure. Whether it's within the confines of a committed relationship, or intentionally apart from one, sexual fulfillment is treated as essential to the "good life." The number of songs, TV shows, movies, and even game shows that promote this idea is astounding.

Pastor and author Tim Keller often says that idolatry is taking a good thing and turning it into an ultimate thing. For many people, that's what they've done with sex. Because it binds people together, offers intense pleasure, and has the potential to bring new life into the world, sex was designed by God to be a powerful and meaningful act. But the Creator's gift of human connection and intimacy becomes twisted in the hands of false gods. When sex is taken outside of God's good design and made into an idol, people will use it in all kinds of destructive ways. They will hurt themselves and others.

This week we're going to take a hard look into the way we think about sex and whether or not it's an idol that we need to smash.

## Day 1

In the beginning God designed sexuality to be an essential part of what it means to be human. According to Genesis 1 and 2, he created male and female in his likeness and gave them the sacred task of multiplying and filling the earth, and ruling over his creation. The sacrificial love of God, his desire to create life and the union found within the Trinity were all reflected in the oneness of the original couple. The relationships in the Garden, between the man and woman, and between God and the pair were exactly as they were supposed to be.

At least for a while. Until the couple rebelled against God.

This is the narrative the Bible teaches, and it helps us make sense of the wrongs human beings commit in and through their sexuality. Humanity has gone off on its own, resisting God's will and insisting that we know what's best for ourselves. We've deconstructed God's design for human sexuality, and the results haven't been pretty. Broken marriages, pornography addictions, sexually transmitted diseases, sexual harassment in the workplace, rape and sexual abuse, sex trafficking, not to mention all the people who feel victimized or ashamed because of a dysfunctional sexual relationship. Perhaps it is because our sexuality is close to the core of who we are that sexual sins can leave us crushed and broken. We can hurt each other, we can hurt ourselves, and we can hurt our relationship with Christ when we sin sexually.

Let's look at how Paul handled a strong exhortation to stop sexual sin in his letter to the Colossians. Notice how Paul addresses the church's sinful practices *after* he reminds them of who they are in Christ.

## Read

### Colossians 3:1–5

*<sup>1</sup>Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Keep thinking about things above, not things on the earth, <sup>3</sup>for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup>When Christ (who is your life) appears, then you too will be revealed in glory with him. <sup>5</sup>So put to death whatever in your nature belongs to the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, shameful passion, evil desire, and greed which is idolatry.*

## Ask yourself

- What “things” should Christians seek? Why?
- What is true of believers now? What will be true of us in the future?
- What things should you put to death? Why?

## Reflect

When we place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, Redeemer and Lord, we are born again into the Kingdom of God as a new creation (John 3:3; 2 Corinthians 5:17). All the disordered desires and sinful habits we possess don't have to control us. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we begin a life-long process of becoming like Christ. We will have to fight hard against sin, and some idols will be hard to smash, but neither the sin nor the struggle against it defines us. A beloved child of God — that's who we *really* are.

Approaching any discussion of sin, especially sexual sin, without remembering who we are in Christ can place too much emphasis on the behaviors we are supposed to avoid, rather than the identity we are supposed to embrace. If we are good at following God's commands in this

area, we can become smug and judgmental, looking down on others who struggle. If we often fail, we can be crushed by thinking that our ability to remain sexually pure equals our acceptance by God.

As Christians, our charge is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. We are to worship the Lord with all our hearts, minds, souls, and strength. We rejoice that we are united with Christ in his death, resurrection and second coming. “To concentrate the mind on the character of Jesus Christ, on that unique blend of love and strength revealed in the Gospels, is to begin on earth to reflect the very life of heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

Having established where the Christians should place their focus and why, Paul directs them with stark language to kill the behaviors that run contrary to their new life in Christ.

- Sexual immorality: any intercourse outside of marriage
- Impurity: the contamination of character because of immoral behavior
- Shameful passion: uncontrolled sexual urges.
- Evil desires: natural sexual desire corrupted by sin. This goes beyond sexual temptation which every adult will experience. “Sin begins when the idea of illicit gratification, presented to the mind in temptation, is not at once put to death, but is instead fondled and cherished.”<sup>2</sup>
- Greed, which is idolatry: these are general terms, but here greed may refer to unchecked desire for physical pleasure or to crave what one cannot have. “In Jewish teaching *greed* is often combined with *idolatry*, because whatever is the object of greed (in this case, more and better sex) has replaced God at the center of one’s life.”<sup>3</sup>

Paul says to kill these thoughts and behaviors. Cut them off at the root. All these behaviors are part of the old life and the fallen world, which Christians have been rescued out of. That’s not who we are.

## Pray

Let’s begin this week with communal prayer. Pray this as part of a family of believers and a member of Christ’s body.

*Almighty God, Source of life and Creator of all,*

*You have raised us to new life in Christ. We do not have to be slaves to sinful sexual desires and disordered loves. Help us grasp and live out this truth. We submit ourselves to you. Spirit, transform us.*

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright (1986). *Colossians and Philemon: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 12, p. 136). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>2</sup> Wright, p. 138.

<sup>3</sup> Wall, R. W. (1993). *Colossians & Philemon*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

*May we find our identity in you, Lord Jesus. May your love satisfy us and give us hope, even as we struggle to reject the idols of this world and turn to you.*

*We love you Father and praise you for your grace, Amen.*

## **Talk about it**

You will benefit from discussing God's Word with others. The "talk about it" questions are good to answer on your own, but even better to discuss with someone else.

- Discuss how Paul describes sexual sin. What could it mean to "put them to death"?
- How can meditating on who we are in Christ help us resist sexual temptation?

## **Day 2**

*Lisa Scheffler, author*

This week we are focused on breaking free from the idol of sexuality. We can hurt each other, ourselves and our relationship with Christ when we ignore God's design for sexual behavior.

Holding to a biblical view of sexuality in 21<sup>st</sup> century America is challenging, and not just because sexual images and provocative messages provide near constant temptation. Our culture often tries to make behavior that the Bible would call sexual immorality seem like the most reasonable thing to do.

For example, pre-marital sex is now considered a normal part of serious dating so a couple can be sure they are "sexually compatible" before they get married. Living together is thought to provide a proving ground for marriage and decrease the chance of divorce. Even pornography is considered beneficial by some because it supposedly adds spice to one's sex life. There is still a social stigma against cheating on your partner, but only if they expect monogamy. The current thinking seems to be, as long as adults are engaging in consensual behavior, anything goes as long as you are being "true to yourself." Not surprisingly, these justifications fit with our culture's emphasis on pragmatism and an individual's right to live in whatever way they think will make them happy.

Several thousand years ago arguments for polygamy probably seemed convincing too if you take into account the priorities of the ancient near east. There was a desire for lots of children to work the land and increase the family's wealth, along with an emphasis on having boys to carry on the family line. Marriages could be politically advantageous and solidify agreements between tribes. To a man of means, having multiple wives could have seemed like the best choice he could make for his family. That doesn't mean the practice was approved by God. If you read the Old Testament you'll see that polygamy often brought strife and destruction to the families involved.

The point is this: any culture at any point in history can justify breaking with God’s design for sexuality. As the cultural values change, so will the ways in which sexual attitudes and behaviors deviate from God’s plan. So how do we turn from the gods of sexual immorality when our culture provides easy justifications?

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul was fighting a sexual practice common in the culture of that city. Worship of the local gods often included sex with temple prostitutes. As we look at this passage, let’s consider the reasons Paul gives for turning from idols and worshipping the one, true, God with our bodies.

## Read

### 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

*12 “All things are lawful for me”—but not everything is beneficial. “All things are lawful for me”—but I will not be controlled by anything. 13 “Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both.” The body is not for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. 14 Now God indeed raised the Lord and he will raise us by his power. 15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Should I take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Or do you not know that anyone who is united with a prostitute is one body with her? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” 17 But the one united with the Lord is one spirit with him. 18 Flee sexual immorality! “Every sin a person commits is outside of the body”—but the immoral person sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God with your body.*

## Ask yourself

- The quotations in verses 12 and 13 are likely slogans or catch phrases that were popular in Corinth at the time of Paul’s writing. What do you think they mean? How do they relate to sexual behavior?
- What does Paul say about a believer’s body in verse 15?
- How does Paul describe the bodies of believers in verses 19 and 20?

## Reflect

Paul carefully ties moral principles to rich theological concepts. Paul makes it clear: what Christians do with the body is determined by what God has done for them. Biblical scholars believe that the slogan, “I have the right to do anything” may have been a distortion of Paul’s earlier teaching that the gospel freed Christians from following the law of Moses. Corinthian Christians may have twisted Paul’s meaning into an “anything goes” attitude. As a rebuttal, Paul responds with two qualifications we can use whenever we are faced with a “gray area,” particularly a sexual one.

For example, in youth groups everywhere, the question of “how far is too far” is often nervously brought up by embarrassed teenagers in discussions of sexuality. Or how should Christians respond to movies, television, books, video games or websites that contain sexual content?

Paul helps us with those questions. Firstly, is it beneficial? Will an action reflect and encourage a whole-hearted, loving devotion to God and a sacrificial love that puts another’s needs first? Secondly, can it control you? Is this behavior something that is mastering or enslaving you?

The second slogan Paul attacks is, “Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away both” (verse 13). It may have been assumed that indulging one’s sexual desire was no different than indulging an appetite for food. In the popular view of the day, the body was seen as temporary and corrupt, whereas the soul was thought to live on. Therefore whatever you did with your body was thought to be irrelevant to you spiritually.

Paul counters these distortions with the Christian idea that the physical body is important to God. Like Jesus, our bodies will be resurrected. God not only has an earthly claim and purpose for our bodies, but a future one as well. As creator and sustainer, he knows best how we can fulfill his intended purpose for us now and forever. Furthermore, our bodies are united to Christ and express his presence in the world. <sup>4</sup>

These realities lead him to make two commands in verses 18 and 20. We are to flee sexual immorality and honor God with our bodies because sexual sin affects our relationship with God.

Marvel at the reality that your body is a temple for the Holy Spirit. Where once only the male priests of Israel were able to approach God on prescribed days and only after all the appropriate sacrifices had been made, we have his presence living within us all the time. Jesus Christ gave up all the privileges of heaven, lived among us, died on the cross, paid the penalty for our sins and now gives us his Spirit to reside within us.

Why would we not worship and serve God alone with our bodies? He only wants what’s best for us. Why would we allow the temperamental, dehumanizing, self-serving rationales of our culture to sway us? Why would we not sacrifice momentary pleasure for the Savior who sacrificed everything for us?

## **Pray**

Maybe you’ve never thought of your body in the way Paul describes here. Thank God for your body. Praise him that after death, you will be resurrected as Jesus was. Commit your body to God. Ask the Spirit to teach you what it means to worship God with your body.

## **Talk about it**

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<sup>4</sup> Johnson, A. F. (2004). *1 Corinthians* (Vol. 7, p. 101). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- Discuss how our culture views the human body. How does it differ from the way Paul describes it here?
- Discuss how Paul's teaching helps flee sexual immorality and honor God with our bodies.

## Day 3

*Lisa Scheffler, author*

Christianity gives us a beautiful and complete vision of what it means to be human. As we've seen so far this week, we are not slaves to the appetites of our bodies and what we do with our bodies matters. In Christ we are on our way to becoming gloriously, fully human — united with the Son, indwelt by the Spirit and one day resurrected by the Father. One way to turn from a false god is to worship the true God with our bodies.

This idea is incredibly liberating in a time and culture that often treats people in such dehumanizing ways. Notice the way that the bodies of women, and increasingly men are portrayed in popular media. The poses are suggestive, facial expressions submissively blank or overtly seductive. Sometimes only the most sexually stimulating parts of the body is shown, reducing the model to something less than fully human — faceless, soulless body parts. They are no longer a person, but a commodity to be desired and possessed. It is a visual representation of what lust does to another human being.

This week we are looking at how we can hurt each other, ourselves and our relationship with Christ when we turn to the idols of sexual sin. Today we will focus on how even sins we commit in our mind can be destructive by looking at Jesus' warning about lust in the Sermon on the Mount.

The law of Moses provided the Jewish people with instructions about sexual conduct. All sexual behavior outside of marriage was condemned. But God is always concerned with more than our outward behavior. In the passage below, Jesus speaks not only against a certain act, but the inner workings of the heart that can lead to it.

### Read

**Matthew 5:27–30**

*27“You have heard that it was said, ‘**Do not commit adultery.**’ 28 But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to desire her 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! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body thrown into hell. 30 If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away! It is better to lose one of your members than to have your whole body go into hell.*

## Ask Yourself

- How does Jesus define adultery in a way his audience probably wasn't expecting?
- How does Jesus use hyperbole (exaggeration) to show the seriousness of this sin?

## Reflect

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals the standards of God's Kingdom. It is not enough to avoid violating his laws, one must embrace and reflect the King's heart. Sexual integrity begins in the heart with a deep love for God and for other people. The body lives out what the heart desires.

Jesus quotes the seventh of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14) but challenges his listeners to include among adulterers those who look "at a woman to desire her." Commentators point out that the words used here "look ... to desire" are translated as "covet" in other verses, and for his listeners, likely brought to mind another commandment, "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that belongs to your neighbor" (Exodus 20:17).<sup>5</sup>

What Jesus is describing is not simply being attracted to someone, but allowing that attraction to swell into an illicit desire to take or possess them. By turning another person into an object of your passion and desire, you are reducing them to a thing to be used for your sexual gratification, even if it never goes beyond your thoughts. You're dehumanizing them.

God's design for sexuality insists that it cannot be "all about me." In marriage, sex should be as much, if not more, about loving, cherishing and pleasing the other person as it is about receiving love and pleasure for oneself. But so often we treat others as utilitarian, a means to our sexual ends.

Pornography is perhaps the most flagrant and obvious example of the kind of "looking to desire" that Jesus talks about. The viewer is the consumer and the bodies of others are products. We are not seeing them as real human beings created in the image of God. Anytime we treat someone as a sexual object we are acting in a way contrary to the command to love others as we love ourselves.

Pornography can threaten marriages — present or future. Even if we are not married, the mindset these fantasies create can be carried into a future marriage. These fictional depictions of sex will always be unrealistic. The expectation for a real person to look or behave like the performers on a screen or the characters in a novel can crush our spouse. The unrealistic, selfish, or distorted views of sex that are created by porn and erotica can tarnish real intimacy in a marriage. Both spouses will suffer. Fantasies are appealing because they will always be

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<sup>5</sup> Keener, C. S. (1997). *Matthew* (Vol. 1, Mt 5:27). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

free of the difficulties of real human relationships. But they are not going to fulfill or shape us the way a real marriage does.

The other danger in entertaining sexual sin in our minds is that we might follow through to action. Fantasy can turn to justifying and planning. When nourished wrongly, sexual desire can lead us away not only from our spouse, but from our Savior. The drive for sexual fulfillment can consume us to the extent that we look to sex for the deep affirmation that should only come from God.

Perhaps that is why Jesus uses such extreme and drastic language to warn his listeners. So in response, be drastic if you need to be. Flee temptation. Prayerfully and humbly seek God's help to uncover the root of your struggle, particularly if your temptation has become overwhelming. When are you most vulnerable? Maybe it's when you're lonely, bored, stressed or feel rejected. If you are married, maybe there are deeper issues in your marriage that you need to address with your spouse. Also consider seeking help from a trusted Christian friend or join a Christian support group like re:generation or Re|engage.

Sex holds out the promise of deep affection, acceptance and love, because that is precisely what it was designed to give within a marriage covenant. But even as good as marriage can be, it is just a foretaste of the true and complete love and acceptance we find in Christ. He knows all of our sinful thoughts, our disordered desires and illicit longings. Every one. But he died for us anyway. He alone can answer the deepest cries of our heart because only he loves us completely. The more we allow him to meet our needs through prayer, his Word and being a part of a loving, authentic Christian family, the less tempted we will be.

## **Pray**

Today, praise God for your mind. Thank him for the ability to worship him with your thoughts. Repent of lust and commit your thoughts to God. Pray that you will see others as fellow image-bearers, loved by God, and not as sexual objects. Ask God for the courage to get help if you are struggling with an addiction to pornography.

## **Talk about it**

- Talk about how sexual sins we commit in our thoughts can hurt others, ourselves, or our relationship with Christ.
- How can we worship God with our minds?

# **Day 4**

*Lisa Scheffler, author*

When God creates Eve and brings her to Adam, he is overjoyed to finally have the ideal companion. He recognizes how uniquely suited she is to him and says, "this one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:23). Then the writer of Genesis includes this

detail: he writes, “The man and his wife were both naked, but they were not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25). After Adam and Eve commit the first act of rebellion against God and “their eyes were opened” to sin, the exposure and vulnerability of their nudity before each other and God becomes a source of fear. Their nakedness becomes something they want to cover (Genesis 3:10).

Marriage was ordained by God as a unique covenant between a man and a woman where love, acceptance, peace and security would be given. But as soon as sin came into the world, vulnerability brought fear. Instead of feeling safe in the presence of one’s spouse, there can be insecurity. We can fear being hurt or judged. Physical intimacy should feed and be fed by other forms of intimacy: emotionally, intellectually and in our thoughts and actions. But sometimes in our marriages, it doesn’t work that way.

This week we have talked about sexual sin and its effects. The Bible teaches that sex is reserved for a husband and wife. Unfortunately, that doesn’t mean that sexual sin cannot occur within a marriage. For some people, their sexual relationship with their spouse is not the source of the joy, union, and pleasure that God intended it to be.

If Christians are instructed to love each other selflessly and sacrificially, how much more should we apply this command to our spouse? If Christian love is patient, kind, humble, truthful, hopeful, faithful and persevering, then surely, we should strive for our marriage to display this kind of love (see 1 Corinthians 13). We might find many conflicts over sex easier to avoid if we worked to apply these principles and tried to put the other’s needs before our own.

Nevertheless, Paul does give some specific instructions to Christians in 1 Corinthians that helps us see what a sexual relationship should look like in marriage.

## Read

### 1 Corinthians 7:3–5

*3A husband should give to his wife her sexual rights, and likewise a wife to her husband. 4It is not the wife who has the rights to her own body, but the husband. In the same way, it is not the husband who has the rights to his own body, but the wife. 5Do not deprive each other, except by mutual agreement for a specified time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then resume your relationship, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

## Ask Yourself

- Who has rights to each other’s body according to Paul?
- What reasons does Paul give for abstaining from sex in marriage?
- Why should the abstinence be temporary?

## Reflect

The first thing we should notice in this passage may be obvious, but still worth mentioning. Sex is a normal and expected part of married life. A healthy marriage will include regular sexual intimacy. Both partners should recognize this and willingly give themselves to their spouse for their mutual pleasure and the reaffirmation of their marital union. An exception to this pattern would have to meet three qualifications. Couples can abstain from sex if it's mutually agreed to, temporary and for prayer.

This passage seems pretty straightforward. "Let there be sex!" But unfortunately it can be misused in two ways.<sup>6</sup>

First of all these verses can be used as a hammer for one partner to beat the other with.<sup>7</sup> "You owe me more sex! The Bible says so!" But there is no room for a self-fulfilling demand in this passage. As we learned in 1 Corinthians 6, ultimately the bodies of both partners belong to the Lord.

Secondly, both partners gave up the rights to their bodies when they got married. In Paul's day the idea that a woman might have authority over her husband's body was revolutionary. A man cannot demand that his wife have sex because she controls his body. Not only does coercion, intimidation, or manipulation have no place between two people who belong to the Lord, Paul makes it clear that the authority over the body runs both ways. While this passage may encourage couples to have regular sex, one partner's rights cannot trump another's.

The second misuse is highlighted by Paul's warning that a couple should "come together so that Satan may not tempt" them because of a "lack of self control." This warning can be used to manipulate a partner into more frequent or varied sexually activity using fear. An unfaithful spouse should never use verse 5 to say, "See, if we'd had more sex, I wouldn't have been so tempted." There should never be an accusation, implied or stated, "If you had loved me better, I wouldn't have looked for it elsewhere." Marriage should be a reliable, safe, and secure relationship. No partner should ever feel they have to secure their spouse's faithfulness by being more available or innovative in the bedroom.

Sex can be treated like a commodity. We trade other things to get sex or trade sex to get other things. It shouldn't be that way in marriage. Sex should never be used to dominate or manipulate either through demanding it or withholding it. Sex isn't about me, it's about us. There may be times that a couple needs to abstain from sex for medical reasons, extreme stress or fatigue. At those times we respect our partner's bodies and pray. There may be a time in a marriage when the couple needs to sacrifice marital intimacy to seek the Lord. But most of the time, we need to meet each other's sexual needs not out of duty but love.

Imagine if we applied to our sexual relationships in marriage the ideas of Christian love so often put forth in Scripture. We should strive to outdo each other in showing honor (Romans 12:10) and to count the other as more significant than ourselves (Philippians 2:3).

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Parnell (November 14, 2013) "When the Sex Should Stop"  
<http://www.desiringgod.org/blog/posts/when-the-sex-should-stop>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## Pray

Marriage is a beautiful and unique union that can be nourished by physical intimacy. Two people, each united with Christ, join together. It should be a place of love, trust and acceptance as each partner seeks to grow in their relationship with Jesus, and toward each other. For those who are married, if it is not that way in your marriage, start with an honest, humble prayer for God's help and forgiveness.

Pray about ways to open up the lines of communication with your spouse. Confess that you have not always put their needs ahead of yours and express your desire for deeper intimacy in your marriage. Recognize that a lack of physical intimacy is often fed by hurts or frustrations in other parts of the marriage, so prayerfully investigate those possibilities. Seek help from trusted Christian friends or a counselor if it is needed. Consider joining our Re|Engage ministry. Don't let your marriage fall apart, but work at it so it will be the blessing to you, your spouse and to God that it was intended to be.

## Talk about it

- What are your reactions to Paul's instructions? How could they help married people navigate difficulties with their spouse?

## Day 5

On Day 5 of the Engage God Daily, we spend some time digesting what we've learned during the week and inviting the Spirit to transform us. For some, this week's study may be the first step in seeking greater help and accountability. But all of us should be committed to pray for ourselves, our families, our fellow Christians who may be struggling, and our world where so many are being hurt by sexual sin. Take some time today to seek God. Confess, repent and rejoice that all our sins are forgiven in Jesus.

## Reflect

*The pursuit of purity is not about the suppression of lust, but about the reorientation of one's life to a larger goal.* – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Working through our own sinful attitudes about sex and obeying God's commands regarding sexual purity are essential to growing in our relationship with Christ. But it's not something we take on in our own strength. The Holy Spirit lives within us and wants to empower us to set aside all the destructive beliefs and sinful habits so we treat our sexuality as the gift it truly is.

As we saw in our study of Colossians 3, we must "put to death" sexual sins. But that is a defensive strategy. Is there anything we can do to prevent the idols of sexual sin from luring us in the first place? As Bonhoeffer says in the quote above, we can reorient our life to a larger goal. What if we came away from this study with a desire to worship God more completely,

love each other more devoutly, and see the gospel spread throughout a world that desperately needs Jesus?

Historians tell us that from the beginning, a major difference that “set apart the new and strange sect called Christians from the rest of their culture was their strange sexual ethic.”<sup>8</sup> Early Christians did not participate in prostitution, sexual exploitation of slaves or the poor, divorce, or adultery. Most pre-modern cultures enforced sexual restraint on women, but Christianity placed the same restraint on men. To the Roman culture, Christians held a “bizarrely exalted view of marriage as reflecting the image of God himself.”<sup>9</sup> Not only that but held up lifelong celibacy as an equally exalted state of life.

Their emphasis on sexual purity, was a way that the early church showed their rejection of Roman idols and their complete devotion to Christ. The lives of Christians made an impression on people because they saw something different in the followers of Jesus and were attracted to the gospel. Perhaps that could be the “larger goal” that we reorient our lives toward.

Let’s review the steps we’re going to be taking each week:

1. **Recognize.** Under the Spirit’s guidance, we’re going to identify the idols of our hearts and recognize how God meets the need we’re trying to satisfy with an idol.
2. **Repent.** We’re going to turn from that idol — release it and repent of it. In the words of Deuteronomy 12:3, we’re going to smash our idols!
3. **Revere.** We’re going to turn to God. We’re going to worship God with our whole hearts and ask the Spirit to grow our faith. We’re going to gratefully receive the abundance that God offers us in Christ.

## Pray

*Father,*

*Show me how I can commit myself, body, mind, soul, and spirit, to worshipping you alone. I commit myself to you and repent of sexual sin. I desire the freedom and peace that comes from following your design for my sexuality. Guide me to become a person with sexual integrity.*

*Give me compassion for those who are struggling with sexual sin. I want my life to represent your grace and truth.*

*Jesus, it’s in your name I pray, Amen*

## Talk about it

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<sup>8</sup> Pascal-Emmanuel Gobry (September 3, 2014) “Why so many Christians won’t back down on gay marriage” <https://theweek.com/article/index/267244/why-so-many-christians-wont-back-down-on-gay-marriage>

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

- Discuss with a trusted friend or family member your biggest takeaway from this week. Ask for them to pray for you and help hold you accountable as you commit to smashing idols in your life. If you need help, our [re:generation or Re|engage ministries](#) will welcome you.

## **Coming next week**

Next week we're wrapping up our series by smashing the idol of entertainment.