

WHAT LIES BENEATH

GOING DEEPER
DISCUSSION GUIDE
March 23, 2014



Discussion Guide

The House on Haunted Hill

Proverbs 6.20-35; Matthew 5.27-30;

Colossians 3.1-6

Connecting:

45 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a way of connecting with one another so that you might partner in the work God is doing in your lives.)

- In what ways did God move in your life this week? In what ways did you respond to him?
- What was your biggest challenge this week? In what ways, if any, did you invite God into this challenge?
- How honest have you been with us? (Graciously thank group members for their honesty if they answer that they have held back.)

Getting Started:

10 minutes

- If you could pick one sexual issue to be addressed by the Church, which one would you choose? Would you elaborate?

Diving Into the Text:

60 minutes

(The following questions are intended to provide your group with a simple road map through the text. Feel free to use these questions in ways that best fit your group and the dynamics of your own meeting.)

- Use the notes to explain the context and background of the texts and God's intention for sex.
- Read Proverbs 6.20-35 aloud, slowly.
- What warnings and instructions does this father provide for his son?

- In what ways, if any, does the father use fear as part of his approach? Why might he choose this tack? How effective do you think this approach might be? Could you elaborate?
- Do you find this father's approach to be similar or dissimilar to the way you were taught about sex? What was the outcome of the approach used with you?
- Read Matthew 5.27-30 aloud, slowly.
- What do you hear Jesus saying about the connection between sex and the heart?
- While Jesus seems to be stressing a connection between sex and the heart, many have interpreted Jesus' call for action to involve the creation of physical boundaries and structures. Have you heard such interpretations or engaged in such an interpretation of Jesus' words? Would you explain?
- How effective are physical boundaries and structures in addressing sexual issues, really?
- React to the following statement: "The heart issue that drives people to engage in sexual activity outside of the bond of marriage is an attitude which views other people as objects to be used."
- Read Colossians 3.1-6 aloud, slowly.
- In his discussion of life-change, Paul touches upon the proper role of sex and argues that the proper way to address it is by realigning one's heart. What might it look like to address sexual issues as heart issues? What might it look like to focus upon Christ in an intentional manner as Paul directs?
- In your understanding, how might addressing sexual issues as heart issues be more or less effective than external approaches? Would you elaborate?
- How might a group create a safe environment which encourages the realigning of one's heart?

Context and Background

Sex and God

Sex is God's wonderful gift to people, a gift meant to help people grasp the oneness, mutuality, and exclusivity intended for them in their relationship with God (Genesis 2.22-25; Ephesians 5.28-33; 1 Corinthians 6.12-20). While all male-female relationships are inherently sexual stemming from the reality that we are created sexual beings, because of the importance of sex and God's intentions for it, God limited the expression of sexuality in the form of sexual intercourse to the marriage relationship. Only in keeping sexual intercourse within this exclusive relationship marked by mutuality and oneness can sex point to that which it was intended (Exodus 20.14; Matthew 5.27-30). God's limiting of sexual intercourse to the marriage relationship is not intended to limit the expression and experience of physical pleasure, but is intended to protect people from the dangerous activity of engaging in sexual expression contrary to its intended designs. When sexual intercourse is brought outside the bounds of the marriage relationship a person cannot experience exclusivity and oneness thus bringing about physical and emotional harm (Proverbs 6.20-33). Relationships which are formed sexually cannot be easily broken (Matthew 5.31-32; 19.1-12) and create relational shockwaves for the entirety of a person's life. However, when honored and protected within the proper boundaries of marriage, sexual intercourse can provide much pleasure as well as emotional and spiritual fulfillment (Proverbs 5.15-19; Song of Songs)

The Text

Proverbs 6.20-35:

I know. . .but it is not enough

In Proverbs 5-7, a father relays his wisdom concerning sexual purity to his son. This father counsels his son to delight in sexual intercourse within the bounds of marriage (Proverbs 5.17-19), but warns him to refrain from engaging in sexual activity outside of the marriage relationship (Proverbs 5-7). The father is honest with his son, noting how enticing the prospect of engaging in sexual activity outside of the marriage bond is

(Proverbs 5.1-3; 7.6-21). However, he encourages him to hold tightly to the wise teaching his parents have handed off to him (Proverbs 6.20-23). The father exhorts his son to avoid sexual intercourse, which includes lustful desire for other women, because such activity will have dangerous and disastrous outcomes. To engage in such activity is likened to playing with fire (Proverbs 6.26-29). Such activity results in the reality of being burned! Further, such activity will not only bring harm but a sense of deep shame upon those who behave in this manner (Proverbs 6.30-35). While the father's arguments are solid and honest, informing his son of the deep distress he will experience if he engages in sexual activity outside of marriage, that the father feels he must keep reiterating his points is interesting. It seems that the father feels he must outline the issues and then repeat them for emphasis, almost as if he is not being heard by his son. The repetition of the same points seems to imply that the father understands that simply knowing these truths is not going to be enough to protect his son.

Matthew 5.27-30:

I enforce. . .but it is not enough

In Jesus' mountaintop sermon, he touches upon the issue of sexual purity. Jesus reminds his audience that God has specific designs for sexual intercourse. Specifically, God intended that sexual intercourse be kept within the bond of marriage (Exodus 20.14). However, Jesus expands upon this command to highlight God's intentions. In God's mind, sexual intercourse begins within the inward parts of a person rather than resting in his actions. Jesus' teaching here rests on his understanding that all action originates within the heart (Proverbs 4.23; Matthew 12.33-37; 15.17-20).

Thus, purity in our outward actions must begin with purity in our hearts. Jesus emphasizes that a person is responsible for addressing inward impurity by excising it from his life. However, Jesus' words have often been interpreted quite literally, sometimes hyper-literally with disciples mutilating their bodies in an attempt to maintain sexual purity. Modern literal interpretations involve the use of pornography-blocking software and accountability partners as well as physical steps to reduce the exposure to tempting situations. While these are not inherently bad or wrong, they seem to miss Jesus' point, a reality underscored by the often abysmal failure of many of these external approaches to sexual purity. If Jesus' intention is to teach that the issue of sexual impurity begins in the inward parts of a person, then his remedy must somehow address these same inward realities.

Colossians 3.1-6:

Heart issues require heart surgery

In Colossians 3, Paul addresses the process of change for those who are followers of Jesus. Change involves the movement from one way of living to a new way of living, a journey that involves putting off old ways of being and replacing them with new ways of being. Interestingly, the first old ways of being mentioned by Paul focus upon sexual purity: sexual immorality, impurity, and lust (Colossians 3.5). That these come first in his catalogue of vices indicates the prevalence and seriousness of this issue in his culture. Paul does not veer from the trajectory of Scripture but notes that sexual impurity, as well as greed, leads to the experience of God's wrath (Colossians 3.6). Paul's understanding of wrath is that people experience the just consequences of their actions (Romans 1.18-32). What is important to note is that Paul does not release the followers of Jesus from the responsibility of addressing their old way of being, but he does not provide rules for changing their behavior. In Paul's mind, such rules would have been powerless in bringing change (Romans 8.3).

Rather, Paul encourages the Colossian believers to realign their hearts, focusing them on Christ himself. The realignment of one's heart, specifically the choice to focus upon Christ, requires intentionality and effort on the part of the Christ-follower. However, the outcome is that this effort leads to the putting off of old ways and their replacement with new ways of being, resulting in more and more the peace of Christ ruling in their hearts (Colossians 3.15).

Application:

God made us sexual beings. Therefore, sex and our sexuality is one of the most prominent and important parts of our daily lives. In short, sex and our sexuality is important, so important that God protected the experience of sexual intercourse by placing it within the marriage relationship. However, because sex is such a large part of who we are, the temptation is to allow it to flow beyond its intended place which creates relational, emotional, and spiritual distress. Although we know this by experience and through teaching, such experience and teaching is powerless to keep sex within its intended boundaries. Additional attempts to wrangle sex through external measures are similarly frustrated. While some might argue that what is needed is stronger teaching or more rigid structures, the real issue lies within the heart. Our sexual issues are really heart issues. When we begin addressing our hearts, realigning them by intentionally focusing them upon Christ, we will discover that our sexuality and sex finds its proper place.

Want to know how this looks in real life? Check out Blake's blog at BlakeShipp.blogspot.com



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