

Sex within Marriage

Week 6 in Our Weekly Study of Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians

Orchard Park Wesleyan Church

Week of October 14, 2018

Day 1

Sex Within Marriage: The Purpose and the Blessing

"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed."

Genesis 2:24-25 ESV

This week, we will study God's design for sex within marriage and use 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 as our guide. Although this is a short passage, it will lead us to uncover many of God's thoughts about marriage and sex. I don't pretend to be an expert teacher on the subject, but I am praying that God will use what He gives us to study this week to enhance and deepen our marriages, to mightily deepen our relationships with Him, and to encourage those who aren't yet married to wait for the gift of sex within the boundaries of marriage. There is great blessing in what God designed, and I hope that each of us takes that to heart this week.

Before we start talking about the blessing of sex in marriage and what it should look like for those who follow Jesus, let's understand what initiated this part of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians.

Please read 1 Corinthians 7:1-7.

- Fill in the blanks:

“Now regarding the _____ in your letter. Yes, it is good to abstain from sexual relations.”

1 Corinthians 7:1 NLT

Last week, we studied Paul’s admonishment to this church concerning sexual sin; at least a good portion of the Corinthian believers were touting their right to use their bodies as they pleased—indulging in sexual sin and bragging of their freedom to do so! Now we see just the opposite view taken in chapter 7. If there’s one new thing we can assert about this church based on our study so far, it’s that the Corinthian church had an unbalanced understanding of Christ’s teachings. Many swung hard toward permissiveness, and at least some swung hard the other way.

Flawed understanding and arguments abounded within this church because they let worldly culture influence (and sometimes outright define) their stance on social issues instead of clinging to scriptural teaching. We, too, are in danger of the same errors when we are not regularly seeking—and accepting—answers in God’s Word. Knowing how He feels about certain issues is the only way we can maintain His perspective in a world that claims to know better.

Chapter 7 begins with Paul addressing “the questions in your letter.” Some within the Corinthian church had apparently, within one of its previous written exchanges with Paul, adopted the viewpoint that even sex within marriage was something to be avoided; no sex was the best sex. Although Paul sees celibacy as a gift (v. 7), he needed to correct the opinion that abstinence was the only holy approach to sex. In fact, as we’ll discover today (and even as we discussed a little last week), God designed sex within marriage to be a thing of beauty and blessing for His people.

Please read Genesis 2:18-25 and Matthew 19:3-6.

- In your own words, how would you explain God’s intention or purpose for marriage?

- What characteristics of a godly marriage do you see within these verses that contribute to that/those purpose(s)?

We’ll discuss monogamy tomorrow, but let’s note that God sets the boundaries for marriage right away in Genesis 2. He created one man and one woman. That is the only acceptable marital relationship to Him because it is the only one He chose to create and bless.

Let’s talk about a few more blessings and purposes we can find in these passages:

- **“Then the Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him” (Gen. 2:18).** God created a relationship based on companionship, help, and mutual blessing. He knew what would be “just right” for the man—someone to support and help him. And He knew what the woman would need—someone to love and protect her. Each partner complements and completes the other.

“This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one” (Gen. 2:24 and Matt. 19:5). As we talked about last week, God created marriage to be the most intimate of human relationships. One reason for this is to give us deep companionship, as we studied above. Another is because the intimacy of that relationship points toward the relationship He wants with His people. Christ is our Bridegroom, and He knows each one of

- us more intimately than we know ourselves. He wants us to want Him in the same way so that we can experience the blessing of the oneness in spirit we already have with Him. Someday, He will come for His bride, and our relationship with Him will reach its perfection. Through our own earthly marriages—especially when they function according to His design—He gives us a taste and a foreshadowing of our perfect marriage that is to come.
- **“Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame (Gen. 2:25).** This verse, though seemingly simple at first, gives us tremendous insight into God’s design for marriage and sexual intimacy. Within marriage, sexual intimacy is innocent, and we should anticipate and enjoy it. Proverbs 5:18 and the whole book of Song of Solomon add to this. In fact, the anticipation we feel for Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:25 runs throughout all of Song of Solomon, right up until the end of chapter eight when that anticipation is realized in the consummation of the marriage in 8:5-14. So also are we intended to enjoy our own sexual relationships within marriage.

Consider: No doubt marriage is difficult sometimes. Two imperfect people with different thoughts, preferences, and temperaments are living together in an imperfect world. But regardless of the difficulties we face, God intends for us to experience His blessing in our marriages. Where do you see that most easily in your own relationship? Which of God’s purposes or blessings is more difficult for you to see? Where do you need to realign your thoughts or ideals about marriage so that they mirror God’s?

Pray: Ask the Designer of marriage to take His rightful place at the center of yours. Give Him your hopes, your hurts, and your desires, and ask Him to show you the riches of His blessings as He intended them within this most special relationship.

Day 2

What Should Sex Within Marriage Look Like?

“But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband.”

1 Corinthians 7:2 NLT

Yesterday, we considered why God created sex and took a broad view of both its purpose and intended blessings. Today, we'll seek a scriptural understanding of what sex within marriage should look like. What are some of the characteristics of our sex lives that will honor both God and our spouse? How can we consciously pursue these within our own marriages?

List all that you can find concerning God's design for marriage and sex within these passages of scripture:

Genesis 2:24

Matthew 19:4-5

1 Corinthians 7:2

Ephesians 5:3-5

Ephesians 5:21-23

I'm going to work a bit backward today and save the foundational items within these verses for last. Also, since we already learned yesterday that God designed our sexual relationship within marriage to be a source of blessing and enjoyment, we're going to skip over that today; but we can surely include enjoyment in the list that we make today. So, based on the passages above, what else does God say should characterize our sexual relationships within marriage?

Purity. Right before Paul specifically speaks to husbands and wives about their unique relationship in

marriage in Ephesians 5, he speaks to the entire group of Ephesian believers about living lives marked by love. So anything that he says here to the whole group is applicable to the marriage relationship, too. Right away, Paul identifies sexual immorality and impurity as qualities that should never be found among God's people; he condemns "obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes." What do most of these prohibited items have in common? Sex!

Our culture is absolutely obsessed with sex—so much so that the privacy, the purity, and the mystery of it is all but gone. This calloused attitude threatens how we perceive one of God's most intimate and personal gifts to us. The marriage bedroom must be kept pure—and so should every other area concerning sex. By this, I mean how we talk about sex with each other and with friends, what we watch or listen to, what we read....All of this shapes our thoughts about sex; all of it can either lift us higher toward God's ideal for us in marriage or it can propel us deeper into a distorted view of a beautiful gift.

Self Sacrifice. After Paul tells the entire Corinthian church to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ," he shifts gears and speaks specifically to husbands and wives. Here, he instructs husbands to love their wives self-sacrificially, with Christ as the example; he instructs wives to submit to their husband's authority. Regardless of whether you are the husband or the wife in your marriage, God requires a certain amount of self sacrifice in the relationship. We're going to talk about this more tomorrow, but for now, let's accept that in marriage—and even in the sexual expression of marriage—the other person and his or her needs rank above our own.

Monogamy and Intimacy. Of the five scriptures we read today, four of them speak specifically to the marriage relationship; woven into all four is the common thread of intimacy and monogamy. From the very outset of creation, God built His plan for marriage and sex on these two characteristics.

Sex cannot occur without some degree of intimacy. Even when engaged in sinfully, outside of God's prescribed boundary, sex is an inherently intimate expression—but it is only when we surrender to *God's* design for sex that we are free to experience the full measure and benefit of that intimacy. This is *why* He designed marriage to be monogamous. It is absolutely essential to a healthy, thriving sex life. Without it, there is no foundation of trust upon which to build and nurture all of the other characteristics that mark a godly sexual relationship and bring blessing to both husband and wife. In other words, when monogamy is disregarded, trust is destroyed—and intimacy, purity, and uninhibited enjoyment are peripheral casualties.

Since we don't live in a polygamous society, we might think we have this area well surrendered to God's design. Maybe many of us do—and praise God for that! But the culture that surrounds every one of us *has* allowed polygamy to creep in; it's just been rebranded with a different name and a more acceptable status.

According to an online article from the internet security company, Webroot, approximately 40 million Americans regularly visit pornographic websites; one third of this is women. The percentage of young people—both male and female—who have a favorable opinion of pornography and regularly indulge in it is rapidly on the rise. This is a problem in our culture, but it is widely accepted as a normal form of entertainment and satisfaction.

So if it is so widely accepted, can we really call it a problem? The same article mentioned above also cites a study done by the Barna Group in which they found that "pornography use increases the marital infidelity rate by 300%." Yes, this is a problem. Anything or anyone that we allow into our sexual relationship within marriage threatens to steal our affection from the one for whom it is intended. Bluntly stated, it's cheating.

Last week, we studied that intimacy within marriage was created to mirror the type of relationship that Christ wants with us. Just as we must subject every thought to Christ's authority so as to guard against building up strongholds of sin that threaten to replace God's position in our lives and destroy our intimacy with Him, so we must also guard our marriages against outside influences that would threaten to replace our spouse's position. So "each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband." Just one.

Consider: Take an honest look at your sex life within your marriage. Does it follow God's pattern? Where are you doing well? What needs attention?

Pray: Thank God that He designed marital sex with trust and intimacy at its core; thank Him that He cares about this part of your relationship with your spouse. If you're both experiencing His blessings here, thank Him for that and ask Him to continue to pour that out. If this is a part of your marriage that needs His intervention, invite God to do just that. Ask Him to increase your desire for each other, to forgive and heal any wrongs that have been done, and to rebuild your trust and intimacy with each other. If there is sexual sin in your marriage relationship, confess it to Him now, and ask Him to help you overcome it.

Day 3

Really Loving Your Spouse

"As the church submits to Christ, so you wives should submit to your husbands in everything. For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her...."

Ephesians 5:24-25

As just about any married couple can attest, sex always extends beyond the bedroom. Before you start to think I'm getting a little racy, let me clarify. Intimacy within marriage is physically expressed through sex,

but it begins with our attitudes and actions toward each other during the regular and mundane activities of every day. Really loving our spouse in an intimate way requires that we move beyond thinking of sex just as the physical act but as the sum total of how we think, behave, and act toward our spouse. We need to learn how to love each other and build intimacy in the moments of boredom, busyness, stress—even conflict—that we encounter each and every day. This is a lesson just as much for me as it is for any of you.

Please read 1 Corinthians 7:4, Ephesians 5:15-33, and 1 Peter 3:1-7.

- What does Paul tell the whole Ephesian church to do (v.21)?
- What instructions are given to wives in Ephesians and 1 Peter?
- What instructions are given to husbands?

We saw last week that God designed people and created a purpose for us. We learned this week that He created marriage and has a purpose for it. So just as each of us has a specific role or calling that God gives to us in order to fulfill our purpose of glorifying Him in our individual lives, so also does He assign roles and responsibilities within the marriage, family, and society. He designed men and women with different needs, different desires, and different responsibilities to fulfill. The differences are complementary—but only when we are surrendered first to Christ and willing to live out our marriages according to His design.

In Ephesians 5:21, Paul instructs the Ephesian church to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” This is a general call to submission, as we pointed out yesterday, and its exact nuance gives plenty of opportunity for discussion. Some argue that this verse promotes mutual submission to such a degree that there is no hierarchy within marriage, families, society—that all Christians are to submit to each other equally. However, to take that point of view, one would have to ignore the verses that follow in which Paul gives specific examples of the types of authority and submission that God institutes. There is a hierarchical order of authority, even in marriage. That being said, each partner is called to a certain amount of self sacrifice, as we’ll see in just a few moments.

First, let’s consider Paul’s and Peter’s instructions to the wife to submit to her husband. Most of us probably have some familiarity with these verses; they cause no shortage of offense in women and abuse by men when handled inappropriately. But, when understood as they are intended, this marital advice serves to create an environment in which love, respect, safety, and even intimacy will flourish.

Wives are called to submit to their husbands “in everything” and “as to the Lord.” That’s no small task! But it’s also not an undignified one. So many of us struggle with this command because surrendering control is counter to our nature and our culture. But when we have a good understanding of what our submission really is and what it does, we can’t help but want to cooperate. Before going any further, we women need to confidently believe that our Heavenly Father loves us—and He also esteems us. God values us equally with men (1 Peter 3:7), but He requires different responsibilities from us.

The Greek word for submit in Ephesians 5:24 is from two words, *hupo* and *tasso*, meaning “to subordinate; reflexively, to obey -- be under obedience (obedient), put under, subdue unto, (be, make) subject (to, unto), be (put) in subjection (to, under), submit self unto.” It probably means pretty close to what you thought it meant. However, as we understand the definition, we also need to fully understand the charge. God’s Word does not command husbands to make their wives submit; instead, it tells wives to “submit themselves” to their husbands. This is an important distinction because it both protects women from abuse and puts the responsibility for our own attitudes and behavior into our hands. It is a willing and deliberate act of *giving* the authority that we sometimes have, and to which we often cling, to the person for

whom God intends it. In so doing, not only do we honor God's plan for our marriage, but we honor, encourage, and build up our husband by fulfilling his God-given need for respect and helping him live up to his God-given responsibility as the leader.

Any woman who has chosen to willingly submit to the authority of her husband will tell you that this is no act of weakness. It takes strength and trust to defer to him and relinquish control. It takes faith to know that God is working out His plan through our submission and a husband's authority.

Let me be careful to add, though, that submission doesn't mean that we women don't have a voice, an opinion, or wisdom to offer our husbands. God created us to be our husband's helper, and there are plenty of stories in God's Word that lift up strong, intelligent women. I think of Abigail in 1 Samuel 25. The Bible describes her as "sensible;" the ESV uses the word "discerning." She was not just smart; she was wise.

Her husband, Nabal, made a terrible mistake and insulted David and his men. David, in his anger, was ready to wipe out Nabal and everything he had. When the servants reported the exchange between the men to Abigail, she quickly and decisively ran out to meet David to make amends. She wisely brought gifts and pled on behalf of her husband. Her

attitude and speech were humble. Did Abigail sin by giving what Nabal refused to give? No, she used the wisdom that God put in her to make a decision to help and protect her husband's life. She placed her own life in the hands of the angry future-king to plead for her husband and their household. She was no doormat; she was a strong woman and a good helper.

We women have an incredible amount of influence in our marriages. We can either use it to undermine and tear down the men God has raised up in authority, or we can use it to help build them up, support them, and encourage them to be godly leaders.

Men, I won't write as much to you, but I will say that God calls you to a great responsibility. I think most of us women, if we give it pause enough, don't envy your position. As the leader in your home, you set the tone for your family; you represent Christ to your family; and you answer to Him for how you handle that authority. When we wives are hard to love, you are called not just to love us in a vague or general sense but rather to be understanding and to love us self-sacrificially. Your standard is Christ Jesus Himself, and while you'll never love perfectly like He did, you have His example to follow and His Spirit to empower you beyond your natural capacity.

Jesus sacrificed Himself for the benefit of His bride. As the One in total authority over His church, we're told in Ephesians 5 that He also sacrificed everything in order to display His great love for the church and to purify her for Himself. In Mark 10:35-45, Jesus spoke of the same. James and John asked Christ for seats of honor next to Him on His heavenly throne. In response, Christ called the rest of the disciples to hear a lesson about leadership within God's Kingdom—that it requires servitude and self sacrifice. The same applies to leadership within the family.

By following Christ's example and loving your wife with everything you have—surrendering yourself to her needs and leading with the heart of a servant—you fulfill your wife's deepest needs and build trust with her. There is nothing more attractive to a godly woman than a husband who reminds her of her Savior. Her desire to submit to you will grow; her role and responsibility become joyful tasks; and you've just contributed to her obedience and purity as Christ did for His church.

Our culture tells us that sex is the standard and the goal; that if our sex lives are vibrant and passionate, our relationship must be, too. Our culture has it backward. Real intimacy is built by sacrificially loving each other according to God's design for marriage. Each of us gives up selfishness when we surrender to God's role for us—and in so doing, we build a solid foundation of love, rooted in Christ, and growing in intimacy. We depend upon our spouse to meet some of our deepest needs, and we give up our own natural desires to meet theirs. Rest assured that when this kind of love flourishes within marriage, a deep and vibrant sex life will be the natural expression of it.

Consider how your attitudes and actions toward your spouse influence your emotional—and consequently, physical—intimacy. How are you regularly treating your spouse? Are you fulfilling God's role for you, or are you grabbing for what you think you deserve?

Pray for God's Spirit to empower you to live out your marriage in love and according to His design. He gave you your responsibilities; He can help you fulfill them.

Day 4

Your Body is not Your Own

"The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife."

1 Corinthians 7:3-4

Today's devotional will build upon yesterday's. We're talking about our physical responsibilities to our spouse in continuation of the theme of self-sacrifice. Don't let my phrasing scare you. Rather than being a painful endeavor, self-sacrifice as it concerns our bodies and sex within marriage always benefits and builds up the giver, too.

Please read 1 Corinthians 7:3-6.

- Who fulfills the wife's sexual needs?

- Who fulfills the husband's?
- To whom does the wife give authority over her body?
- To whom does the husband give authority over his?

The first thing we can notice from these verses is a beautiful sense of exclusivity and reciprocity. The husband depends upon his wife; the wife depends upon her husband. The husband willingly gives to his wife; the wife

willingly gives to her husband. Even the flow of the sentence structure is symbiotic. These verses depict a relationship that works in perfect unity and in which each spouse is healthily dependent upon the other—a picture of the beauty of monogamy and selfless giving.

In a perfect marriage, this interdependence would come as effortlessly as the flow of the language makes it seem. When Christ receives His Bride, our relationship with Him will be this beautiful. It is something to look forward to for eternity—and it is something to work toward now in our marriages on earth.

Within 1 Corinthians 7:3-6, the needs of husband and wife are represented pretty equally. Those of us who are married know that this is seldom the case in everyday life.

- What needs within your marriage require you to give more?
- What needs within your marriage require more from your spouse?

Sexual need. This is the main point of Paul's teaching to the Corinthians in our text today, and it's a very real area of inequality in many marriages. Paul didn't mince words in his instruction here (but then again, did he usually?). Since the husband-wife sexual relationship is mutually exclusive, each partner should be entirely dependent upon the other for sexual satisfaction. But this can become an area of tension when one partner's need exceeds the other's.

Notice that “sexual needs” is plural in verse 3. Different people have different amounts of need; we even have different *types* of sexual need. Within the framework of purity and what married sex should look like as we studied on Day 2, a spouse is responsible for fulfilling *all* the sexual needs of the other spouse.

Verse 5 pointedly addresses one common problem of inequality within marital sex: frequency. Oh, wouldn’t it be nice if husband and wife always wanted sex at the exact same time and with the same frequency? If you have that in your marriage, then praise the Lord! I don’t know many for whom this is the case. But because the wife gives her husband authority over her body and the husband does the same for his wife; because the wife is the sole source of sexual satisfaction for her husband and he is the same for her; because Paul bluntly tells married couples not to deprive each other, if your spouse is in the mood and you’re not, you need to put his or her needs above your own and get in the mood! This, though, brings us to our next point.

Other physical and emotional needs. Sexual needs should not outweigh every other need and cause one spouse to feel a regular, dutiful, cold obligation to the other. Considering what we studied yesterday and how to really love our spouse, we need to consider our spouse more than we consider ourselves. If you’re in the mood but know that your spouse is exhausted from a particularly tough week and has a headache—and it’s not a regular occurrence—don’t put him or her in the position of being asked to meet your sexual need! Consider their need for physical replenishment, and save the passion for later.

The same would apply to emotional need. If your spouse feels emotionally distanced from you and would appreciate a connection before becoming physically intimate, meet that need for him or her first. Be there for each other; help each other; and be sensitive.

- What is another way that you might honor your spouse’s authority over your body?

If we are completely dependent upon each other for sexual fulfillment within marriage—and we give authority over our body to our spouse—we need to be thoughtful in how we care for that body. A spouse surrenders all of his or her sexual needs to the other alone; how that should motivate us to keep ourselves physically healthy and attractive! I’m not suggesting that we obsess over our appearance, nor should we have unrealistic goals for ourselves. However, taking good care of yourself by eating healthily, staying active, even deciding to wear what you know your spouse likes to see you wear, can make a positive difference in the level of attraction and enjoyment you have for each other.

Consider: How are you honoring your spouse’s authority over your body? Are you giving yourself to him or her joyfully? Are you respecting other physical or emotional needs? Do you consider your spouse when making choices concerning your health and appearance?

Pray: Ask God to help you identify ways that you may honor your spouse through your body. If you’re struggling with attraction, ask God for help with that! He wants you to enjoy each other.

Day 5

Fleeing from Temptation

Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves

more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

1 Corinthians 7:5

I told you we'd be studying some of 1 Corinthians 7:1-7 multiple times this week. Today, we're taking a second look at 7:5 and considering sexual temptation. I would love to say that being married and having a godly, Christ-centered marriage is a guaranteed way to avoid all temptation to sexual sin, but that's just not the case. Each of us wrestles with temptation sometimes, and considering the frequency with which God addresses sexual sin in His Word, most believers will likely face this particular temptation at some point or another. Therefore, it's important that we understand how to face it victoriously.

Although you've already read this verse several times this week, please re-read 1 Corinthians 7:5, above. There are a couple things in this verse to which I'd like to draw your attention. First, let's understand the seriousness of the threat. In this verse, Paul is addressing Christian married couples—more specifically, those who would walk closely enough with the Lord that they would consider setting aside a specific length of time to refrain from sexual activity in order to consecrate themselves wholly to the Lord in prayer. This is the only circumstance under which Paul condones abstaining from sex within marriage, and both husband and wife must agree to abstinence. This is a strong Christian *couple*; they are united in love for each other and in love for the Lord. Yet Paul warns them to make sure they “come together again” because if they deprive the relationship of sex for too long, Satan will come after them with temptation to sexual sin.

I am struck by Paul's statement that Satan himself will tempt the couple, but when we consider the threat that prayer poses to the kingdom of darkness, we can understand why. Our prayers cause movement in the heavenly realms (James 5:16); you can bet that the enemy is threatened, enraged, and will do anything he can to sabotage and break down our communication with our Father. He'll target us when we're most devoted to God, and he'll strike when we're weakest in our flesh (see Luke 4:1-13).

This brings us to the second point herein: that sexual fulfillment in marriage is essential to fighting temptation. Paul tells the Corinthian church that any agreement to refrain from sexual activity must be “for a limited time.” It has to end, and regular sexual intimacy must resume, or the temptation will come.

So now that we have a healthy awareness of the reality of temptation and one way to combat it, let's consider two more defenses we have.

1. Please read 2 Samuel 11:1-5 .

- What did kings generally do in the spring?
- What was David doing this particular spring?

These verses tell us that kings typically went to battle in the spring but that David stayed back this year. He likely didn't stay back to attend to more urgent purposes because in verse 2, we see him getting up from his couch in the late afternoon. He sees Bathsheba, and he wants her. Then he asks about her. Then he takes her.

Beth Moore takes a closer look at this scene in her study on the life of David, *Seeking a Heart Like His*, but for our purposes today, let's focus on the two major safeguards we can take away from this sad story.

We need to stay focused on our God-given responsibilities. The old saying, "An idle mind is the devil's playground," holds water! When we're bored, our minds wander. And since we know that our natural desires can be tainted by sin, giving an unstimulated mind too much freedom is dangerous. God gives us rest as a gift, and leisure time is important, but too much leads to boredom and wandering thoughts. In order to safeguard against this, we need a healthy amount of work and purpose. Each one of us has some kind of God-given responsibility in our life. Whether it's a regular job, taking care of kids or parents, serving the community, or any combination of these, God uses our responsibilities for His purposes and also for our protection. David ignored his responsibilities for a time, and his mind found other things with which to occupy itself.

We need to ask God to control our hearts and guard our thoughts. Praying Psalm 19:14 is something David learned to do, and it's something I've taken into practice, too. David also wrote Psalm 37:4 as an encouragement to keep God at the center of our desires. Why? The desires of our hearts—good or bad—make their way to our minds. The bad ones can make it there despite of the safeguards we put on ourselves. God is the only one who can replace our evil desires with righteous ones. He wants our hearts and minds to belong to Him—so if we ask Him for such, He will surely give it.

2. Read 1 Corinthians 6:18, Genesis 39:6-12.

- What was Joseph's final response to the advances of Potiphar's wife?
- What did he leave behind?

Both 1 Corinthians 6:18 and our reading in Genesis 39 tell us the same thing: when faced with sexual temptation, *run*. You may someday find yourself in a position of temptation where it would be unwise to stay and try to redirect your thoughts. Joseph was.

I remember reading Chuck Swindoll's book *Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back* several years ago. He asserts that a powerful Egyptian officer likely didn't have an unattractive wife. Potiphar's wife petitioned Joseph "day after day," and he stood strong against the temptation. One day, she caught him alone and made her petition physically, and Joseph ran so fast that he "tore himself away," leaving his coat behind. Had he stayed and tried to resist in that intense moment of alone time, his mind may have lost out to his body. His only recourse was to do what Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:18: *Run*.

Consider: None of us wants to be in a difficult position of temptation, but many of us will someday find ourselves there. How are you safeguarding yourself now? Where do you need God's help?

Pray: *God, I ask for Your help in my own areas of weakness. "Let the words of my mouth and the desires of my heart be pleasing to You, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer." More than anything, I ask that You would help me to delight more in You so that You will give me the desires of my heart. Reserve my sexual desire for my spouse alone. Thank You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

Jennifer L. Skinner