

Lust

Believe it or not, Marilyn Monroe and Hugh Hefner are buried *side-by-side*. In 1992, Hefner found out the spot next to hers was available, and reportedly said, “I’m a believer in things symbolic... [so] spending eternity next to Marilyn is too sweet to pass up.” Which means Hugh Hefner might be the only person who has continued actively being a creep, while dead. But he was right about one thing: their bodies lying next to each other is indeed symbolic.

Marilyn Monroe was the *first-ever centrefold* in the first ever edition of the now infamous *Playboy* magazine, created by Hefner. But it wasn’t her *intention* to be in *Playboy*. Marilyn actually *posed* for the photos used a few years *earlier* when she was desperate for money. A photographer promised her he could make her unrecognizable in the photos, so no one would know it was her—a promise he was ultimately unsuccessful at keeping.

He *paid her just \$50* for a two-hour session. Now, \$50 in the 1940s and 50s is much more than \$50 is now. But it’s still basically *nothing*—especially when you consider that Hugh Hefner would go on to make *millions* off of those photos—both from the success of that edition of the magazine and the *Playboy* empire he built off of it in the years to come. And to make matters worse, Hefner neither *paid for* the use of the photos nor sought Marilyn’s consent to publish them. But they were published just the same.

Marilyn Monroe *shocked the world* when the news broke of her death at the age of 36. And while people still speculate on the *cause* of death, the most likely explanation is suicide by overdose. Marilyn struggled with her mental health throughout her career, reportedly telling her psychologist and those close to her that she felt “worthless,” and that she felt people were only *nice* to her for what they could get *out* of her. In her words, life “wasn’t worth living” anymore. At one point she is said to have told a lover, “I feel passed around, I feel *used*. I feel like a *piece of meat*.”

But perhaps the *most baffling thing* to most Americans at the time was this question: *how could this happen to her?* I mean, she was an *icon*. How could a woman who was so *revered* and so *desired*, not want to *live* anymore? Marilyn Monroe, in many ways, was the quintessential sex symbol. She was the center of men’s fantasies. She was who many women wanted to *be like*, or at least who they wanted to *look like*. So how could someone like *that*, with *that* status, *not* want to go on living?

Well, truth be told, the *answer is fairly simple*. But it’s something we tend to forget in a hypersexualized society. **The answer is in understanding that being *desired* is not**

the same thing as being *known*. Being *envied* is not the same thing as being *cherished*. It's that having people *fantasize* about your *body* is not the same thing as having people *recognize* your *personhood*. And maybe put most succinctly, it's that *lust* is not the same thing as *love*. In many ways, I think **Marilyn Monroe might have been the first public casualty of the Sexual Revolution**. Her story stands to show that, among other things, lust can *kill* people, sometimes quite *literally*. And it does. And while Marilyn Monroe and Hugh Hefner are now long *gone*, their stories and legacies—and the movements they represent—loom large over history to this day. And as their *bodies* lay in the cemetery side by side, we are reminded that there are *villains* and there are *casualties* of the Sexual Revolution, whether our society is ready to acknowledge that or not.

Turn with me, if you have a bible, to **Matthew chapter 5**. We are in week 3 of a series called *Killjoys*, where we are looking at some of the most common enemies to our life and joy in Jesus, and what to do about them. And *today*, I want us to talk about *lust*. So for that, we're going to go to Jesus' most infamous teaching on the topic: Matthew 5, verses 27 through 30. We're going to work our way through that passage here in just a few minutes.

But **you all heard it read** just a moment ago. **The language in it** seems *extreme*: “gouge out your eye, cut off your hand.” These words from Jesus about lust, at least to most people living in the 21st century, probably read as anything from overly prudish to absurd. It's hard for many people today to *fathom* how Jesus could teach something so seemingly anti-sex and sexual desire. It's teachings like these that lead *some* to say that the bible has nothing of value to add to our culture's current conversation around sex and sexual ethics. But I want to try and show you this morning that *nothing* could be further from the truth. Jesus' words here, as odd as they may read to us, are actually deeply *needed* and profoundly relevant—both in *his* day and *ours*.

But **first**, we need to set them in their context. **To understand what Jesus says** here and *why* he says it, we need to understand the *framework* for sex that he is operating *out of*. Jesus was steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures of his day—what you and I call the *Old Testament*. Those Scriptures held that sex was actually a *beautiful* thing. That it's a *gift* from God to be enjoyed. **In fact, there is an entire book in the Old Testament made up of erotic love poetry, celebrating sexual intimacy between a husband and a wife. It says some things that would probably even make us “liberated” modern Americans blush. The Scriptures, regardless of what you may have heard about them, are decidedly pro-sex.**

But those **same Scriptures also make it clear** that **sex has a specific purpose, and therefore a specific context that it belongs in.** Sex, according to Genesis 2, is a way of becoming “one flesh”¹ with another person. Specifically, someone of the opposite sex that you’ve committed your life to through marriage. Sex is a way of giving yourself to that person in a safe context of trust, and mutual affection, and selflessness. Biblically, *marriage* is joining your life to another person mentally, emotionally, spiritually, financially; it’s saying to the other person that you belong to them, and they belong to you, with *nothing at all held back*. And *sex*, in that context, is communicating that same reality with your *body*. It’s becoming one *physically*.

And **because that’s what sex is**, the bible does teach plainly that *no* sexual activity should happen *outside* of that context. The reason being that **sex outside of that environment would be saying something with your body that is decidedly not true of the rest of the relationship.** **Physically, you would be saying ‘all of me is yours** with nothing held back.’ But in *reality*, there’s actually a *good bit of you* that you’re holding back. **You are functionally saying “I like you enough to do *this* with you, but not *more* than this. And even when it comes to who I do *this* with, I like it with you *right now*, but I would really prefer to keep my options open in case I would rather do it with someone else in the future.”** We can try to be *coy* about all of that if we want. But that is essentially what we’re doing when we take sex *outside* of a marriage context. And the bible just views that as a very *dishonest*, very *disjointed* way to go about a relationship with another person.

So I think **a lot of people are confused on this**: some people believe that Christians are just prudes. That we all agree sex is *fun*, but Christians for some arbitrary reason have just decided that you should only have *fun* with *one person* for the rest of your life. But that’s not it. It’s actually that Christians fundamentally disagree on the *purpose* of sex, and therefore practice it *differently*, than the rest of the world. And I would argue that whether you agree or disagree with the *ethic*, the *logic* behind it is sound: don’t do something with your *body*, that *isn’t* true of your *life*.² **God doesn’t make arbitrary rules. Integrity matters, even and especially** when it comes to something as important as sex.

So all of that brings us back to what **Jesus** says about *lust* in **Matthew 5**. **The reason Jesus’ warnings are so intense in this passage is because in them, he’s not actually warning people against sex. Really, he’s warning people about the opposite of sex.** The mindset Jesus warns against here, at its *core*, actually *undermines* everything sex is *supposed to be* about. And **because Jesus and the bible**

¹ Genesis 2:24

² This language is borrowed from New York pastor Timothy Keller in his book, *The Meaning of Marriage*.

are *pro-sex*, they are *anti-anything* that destroys and *undermines sex*. And a *lot* of that can be summed up with the word “lust.”

So let's take a look at what he says. Take a look with me in chapter 5, starting in v. 27:

[27] “You have heard that it was said (meaning, in the *Old Testament*, it says...), ‘You shall not commit adultery.’

The word **adultery** in the bible, *strictly speaking*, refers to a *married person* engaging in sexual activity with anyone they're *not married to*. But we know from *elsewhere* in the bible that the same logic would apply to a *single* person, since *any* sexual activity they participate in would be outside of marriage. So the *Old Testament* law prohibits *all* of that. But *next* Jesus is going to show us the intention *behind* that command. Continue with me in v. 28–

[28] But I say to you that *everyone who looks at a woman (or, we could infer, at a man) with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her (or him) in [their] heart.*

So apparently, the *purpose* of this *Old Testament* command **wasn't just to prohibit** sexual activity with someone you're not married to. It was also to divert people away from *lust*: from looking at another person with the intention of *lusting after* them. The word “*lust*” in the bible refers to **any strong, overpowering desire for something that isn't yours**. To use a *different* bible word, it is in essence to *covet*: “to really, really *want* something that doesn't *belong* to you.”

Generally, this word *lust* is actually used to describe the desire for *things* that aren't yours. **In other words, you can lust after more money, or a better job, or a different standard of living or house or neighborhood.** In fact, **every other time the word *lust* is used in the New Testament, it refers to a desire for an object, not a person.** And I think that's *telling*. Because ***lust* in regards to people is when you take another human being, and you turn them into an object.** When you make them simply a means by which to satisfy *your* desires or *your* fantasy. It's when you effectively strip the humanity away from another person and view them simply as someone who can supply something that you happen to *want*. It's the sexual *commodification* of other human beings.

Now the **primary thing Jesus has in mind** here is obviously objectifying people *sexually*: gazing at a person you're not married to because you are *physically attracted* to them. But that said, I don't think *lust* is *always* sexual in its expression. **Lust is also when you**

spend time comparing and contrasting *your spouse to other people's spouses*. It's when you entertain thoughts in your mind about how much better your life might be if you were married to a different person, or a different *type* of person. It's when you dwell on how much more *fun* or *thoughtful* or *romantic that other person is*, than *your spouse* is.

If you're *single*, it's when you envision marriage as primarily a *thing* to make *you* happy, rather than another *person* to give your life to. For *all of us*, it's when we think about a spouse or future spouse as a person who exists to "meet our needs," whether those are sexual needs, emotional needs, or something else. *All* of those things are also types of lust, even if they *aren't* explicitly *sexual* in their expression. Because **with all of those, whether you realize it or not, you are still objectifying another person; you are still using them as a means to your end.**

But to be sure, in this passage, Jesus is at least *primarily* talking about *sexual* objectification. He's talking about the decision to take a person with a story and a soul and a past and a future—someone with needs of their *own*—and boil them down to a collection of body parts that you enjoy looking at, fantasizing about, or using for your own enjoyment. So to make sure we're clear here, let's list out some examples of *lust*. *Lust* would include viewing any type of *pornography*. If it is sin to "look at a person in order to lust after them," porn has made that sin into an international *pastime*. So looking at *porn* is *lust*.

But lust is also when you click over to that *Explore tab* on Instagram and start scrolling, pausing a little longer on all the posts with physically attractive people in them. It's when you stop long enough on the more suggestive videos on TikTok, to the point that your For You Page knows exactly the type of thing that you like and keeps feeding it to you. It's when you see *that person out for a run* or at the gym with very few clothes on, and you choose to take that second or third or *seventh* glance back at them. Lust is *fantasy*, it's *hypersexualized* movies and TV shows and podcasts and books.

Lust is also the *mindset that fuels* pretty much *all hook-up culture*. It's when you're swiping through your *dating app* of choice and primarily asking the question in your mind, *would I or would I not like to hook up with this person on the screen?* It's having a *friend you hook up with* periodically because dating is just too complicated and you both need a release. We could go on with examples, but **lust is anytime that we turn another person—someone we know, or someone on a screen—into the object of our gaze, fantasy, or pleasure.** *That* is what Jesus warns against.

Now here's *why I said earlier* that all of that is the *"opposite" of sex*, and this is so *important* for us to understand. **If sex is becoming "one" with another person with**

nothing held back, *lust* truly could not be further from that idea. Lust has the exact *opposite intention*. *Lust* is taking what you want from another person, while holding lots of yourself back. Sex gives; lust takes. Sex is sacrificial, lust is consumeristic. Sex humanizes the other person, lust objectifies and commodifies the other person. In nearly every measurable way, lust is the polar opposite of sex as God intended it. And that is precisely why Jesus can be anti-lust, and yet pro-sex. Because lust and sex are not the same thing—in most ways, they’re actually opposites. Does that make sense?

Now all that said, here’s our problem: there are few things more deeply integrated into our modern society than lust. I’m not exaggerating when I say that lust is nearly everywhere we look. I’ve been watching a good bit of Vols basketball lately, because apparently I like torturing myself. And as I’ve been watching the games, I’ve noticed in the commercials that we now use lust to sell pretty much any product. You’ll see a commercial that is 28 seconds of a man with a six pack and no shirt on from different angles, and then at the very end it’ll say *Gio: fragrance for men*. And it leaves you going, “wait—does the cologne create the six pack? Because I’m not really a cologne kind of guy but if it’s that easy, I am willing to douse myself in cologne.” Or you have the commercial with a man and a woman in what appears to be the early stages of foreplay—can I say foreplay in church? I just did, I guess. But it’s them making out for the whole commercial, and then at the end it says “the new Lexus RX350.” And you’re like, “I’m not even sure there was a Lexus in that commercial.”

Lust is everywhere in our society. It’s almost like we don’t know how to hold people’s attention, sell products, or function much at all without it. We are being disciplined in dozens of different ways, whether we realize it or not, to objectify other people as a normal way of life. // Now to all of that, some people might say, “what’s the big deal?” Right? “Sex is a natural, human, healthy desire. What’s the harm in a little fantasy? What’s the harm in getting a little turned on by seeing an attractive person? Is that really something we need to be so on edge about?”

Well, I’ll just give you some of the data and let you draw your own conclusion. Here is what we know, so far, about lust. First, lust destroys intimacy: studies are now showing that specifically, the more porn a person watches, the more crushingly unrealistic their expectations are about sex with a real person, and the less tolerance they have for the imperfect realities of a real human relationship.³

Lust also fuels sexual violence: there are over 50 studies out there that directly link porn consumption to acts of sexual assault.⁴ Lust actually decreases the frequency of

³ From Regnerus and Uecker, *Premarital Sex in America*. Available [here](#).

⁴ From Foubert’s “fact sheet,” found [here](#).

sex people have: most every survey done is showing that the further we get into the so-called “Sexual Revolution,” the *less* sex people are actually having.⁵ Which doesn’t sound like a wildly successful revolution, if you ask me. We talked about this some a few weeks ago, but lust **contributes to** widespread problems with **body image issues**: the more our society idolizes men and women that meet our near-*impossible* cultural standards of beauty, the more the other 99.9% of us struggle to see our *own* bodies as beautiful and desirable.

Lust is having a profoundly **negative impact on children**: the most recent data I could find shows that children are having their first encounter with porn when they are *ten* years old. That’s *elementary* school. **Some high schools are adopting “porn literacy” classes because students are entering into sexual relationships thinking that the porn they watch depicts realistic sexual relationships (which it pretty much never does).**⁶ We are having to reactively teach our high schoolers *not* to follow the cues they see in porn so that rates of sexual assault and violent sex acts in our schools don’t skyrocket.

And *finally*, **lust harms women**. More and more, we’re seeing articles in mainstream magazines that claim to help women “have sex like men.” By which they *mean* “flippantly and *meaninglessly*.” Here’s a couple *actual* headlines I’ve seen: *How to bio-hack your brain to have sex without getting emotionally attached*, and *Here’s what to do if you start ‘catching feelings (for the person you’re sleeping with).*⁷ Some of these articles advise women to try *substances* like cocaine or meth before sex, or to focus their thoughts on a different person during sex to avoid becoming attached to the person they’re hooking up with.

Any therapist worth their salt will tell you that what is being advised there is called *dissociation*: a mental disconnect between your mind and body and/or surroundings. And dissociation is *generally* a psychological response to *trauma* that you receive counseling to *unlearn*; not a method you *advise* people to participate *in*. So just in case you’re wondering how sexual liberation is going for *women*, there it is: we’re at the point where we are teaching women harmful psychological methods to help them have meaningless sex. Lust *harms* women.

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And really, those are just a *handful* of the negative effects lust is having, *right now*, on our society. I could probably give you another *ten*, at least, if we had time. **But here’s my point. As a society, we can keep playing this game** where we pretend that lust is fun and exciting and harmless and natural. Where we tell jokes about it and write plotlines to TV

⁵ Read more on this [here](#).

⁶ *What Teenagers are Learning From Online Porn*, New York Times, 2018.

⁷ Articles [here](#) and [here](#).

shows out of it. Where we use it to sell products and magazines. But the reality—the data, *sitting right in front of us*—tells us a *profoundly* different story. Lust *harms* people. Not because sex is bad. But because sex as God intended is *good*, and lust is the *opposite of that*. Lust trains us to see other human beings as *objects*. It trains us to ignore the image of God in other people and instead, *use* them. And as we try to mention *often* around here, **anytime we ignore the image of God in another person, harm and destruction always follows. To others, and to ourselves. God doesn't make arbitrary rules.** He *knew* that all of this would result if lust goes unchecked in a society. Which is why he says what he says about lust.

So all of this **is precisely why Jesus instructs us to do whatever it takes to root out lust from our hearts.** On that, pick it back up with me in v. 29-30. Look back with me at those two verses.

[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.

So first, it's worth clarifying that Jesus is **not being literal** here. Just felt like I should mention that before you get out the scalpel and the saw. Jesus isn't seriously advocating for *amputation* and *disfigurement* as a strategy against lust. Jesus is simply using *hyperbole* to get his point across. But that's **anything but a cop-out**. Because if Jesus is willing to use such *extreme* language to grab people's attention, that should tell us something about how **serious** he thinks this stuff is. As a communicator, you don't incorporate something like *amputation* into your teaching for no reason. Jesus wants to be clear that **in the fight against lust, we need to be willing to take drastic, even extreme, measures.** If sexual sin is *this* destructive, we need to take a "no holds barred" approach in our efforts to fight it.

So let me just try and give you some examples of the types of things this might include for us. Maybe it looks like **making certain shows or movies off-limits** for you. If you are easily given towards lust, there are going to be some things you just have **no business watching**. And I'll add—I don't *just* mean **the shows or movies** that show a lot of **skin or have a lot of sex scenes in them**. You might *also* want to consider avoiding the shows where most every **plotline** makes light of sex and encourages the objectification of other people. There are plenty of shows out there that show very little skin, but are still *disciplining* you to think about sex in really unhealthy ways. Now, is it inconvenient to avoid shows like this? Sure. But that might be what's required to "cut off your hand."

Or maybe it's **pursuing accountability on your devices**. For most of us, our phones, tablets and computers are the **access point** when it comes to porn, certain apps, or just an unhelpful use of social media. Because of that, I know of men and women that have installed either accountability software on their devices, or just activated restrictions on them and had their spouse, friend, or roommate set the password for it. Maybe that's what you need to do. I know men specifically, right now, that are straight rockin' an old school flip phone because they want to be serious about the fight against lust. To this day, if I want to install an app on my phone, I have to get my wife to type in a passcode. Is that inconvenient to me? You bet it is. But that might be required to "cut off your hand."

Or maybe it's **using discretion about dating apps** you're on. I realize at this point it's probably **unrealistic to think** that nobody in our church will be on dating apps. It can be a way to meet people; I get it. But with that being said, *please* be aware of what they might be teaching you to believe about sex and about other people. Some of them—not all of them, but *some*—whether you realize it or not, are literally *training* you to objectify people—and then *shop* for people based on their appearance. And if you don't think that is having an effect on how you think about yourself, about other people, and about sex—I think you're being naive. So if you're single and use dating apps, practice asking yourself "is this encouraging me to see other people as holistic, complete human beings—people made in the image of God? Or is it encouraging me to consistently objectify other people?"

Lastly, I'll be honest with you: the **first and most important way** to "cut off your hand" if lust is present in your life, is to **tell someone**. The thing about sexual sin is that it *thrives*—and I mean *thrives*—in the dark. The longer you struggle with it without anybody knowing, the more enslaving and sometimes, *darker*, it will become. So **if you want to get serious about the fight against lust, one of the most fruitful things you can do is tell another follower of Jesus about it, today**. Sin begins to starve when you bring it into the light. Be completely honest about it. Don't just say "I struggle with lust"—say "I struggle with lust and here's what it looks like. It's *this* TV show, it's *this* access point to porn, it's *this* social media network or *this* dating app. And I need your help fighting its presence in my life." If you don't know where to start, start there. *Tell* someone about it and ask for their help.

So hopefully, all of those give you **some ideas**. And I'm sure there are a lot more where those came from—hopefully you can get into all of that as we discuss this teaching in our LifeGroups. But at the end of it all, here's the commander's intent: **do whatever it takes to fight the presence of lust in your heart**. Even if it's complicated, even if it's unideal, even if it's inconvenient—do it anyway. That's kind of Jesus' *point*. It's pretty inconvenient

to not have a hand. Pretty *unideal* to not have an eye. But his point is that **sex is important enough, and lust is destructive enough, that it is more than worth some inconveniences in your life.**

So as we approach the end of this teaching, I'll just tell you this. **As a pastor, it is so difficult to teach on sex.** One, just because of how *heavy* it is. But two, it's difficult because when it comes to sexual sin and shame, there are really **two different messages** people need to hear, depending on where they're at in the process. **One is the message Jesus gave us today: cut off your hand. Gouge out your eye. Do whatever it takes to fight sexual sin in your life.** Some of us have gone too long treating lust and sexual sin like it's not really that big of a deal. And because of that, it is wreaking havoc on our lives, whether we want to admit it or not. So, the message *some* of us need to hear is "let's wake up and let's get to work." Sex is far too important, far too powerful to approach *flippantly* and *carelessly*. That's one message.

But there's **another message** that I know some of us need to hear. *Some* of us have been effectively "cutting off our hand" for *years* of our life. We're taking every precaution we know to take against lust, and it still haunts us. You've been taking it as seriously as you know how to take it, and it's still there. **It feels like no matter what you do, you can't fight that lingering glance. You can't get past that porn habit. You can't control the places that your heart and mind wander in certain moments.** And because of that, *some* of us are just *wrecked* by feelings of shame and failure over sexual sin in our life. And I think most of us know by now that there is no shame quite like sexual shame.

So **if that's where you're at** this morning, I want you to hear something even more important than "cut off your hand." You ready? I want you to look right at me when I say this: **God's affections for you are not dependent on how effectively you rid sexual sin from your life.** They're *not*—that's not how God operates. I want you to look at a verse on the screen with me. This is **Romans 5, v. 8.** It says this:

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were still sinners. There's something I need all of us to hear today, and God knows I need to hear it more than anybody: **Jesus did not die for the future version of you. He did not die for the new-and-improved you, the spiritually impressive you.** He didn't die for the version of you that no longer struggles with things that are embarrassing to confess. **It is so incredibly easy for some of us to believe that Jesus is putting up with us now, because one day we'll be something impressive.** But that's not the case according to Romans 5. According to Romans 5, while we were

yet *sinners*, Christ died for us. Every single one of your sins were *future* sins when Jesus died on the cross. Which means no sin is too big, no sinful life pattern is too difficult, no secret is too dark for the Spirit to bring healing *right into the middle of it*. And his affections for you do not change in the meantime.

I'll tell you a little about **my story**. The **first time I saw porn**, I was in middle school. A friend of mine came over to the house and said, "you've gotta see this website," and before I could say anything, he had pulled it up on the browser. And what I didn't know at that time, is that that experience would kickstart a decade-long *addiction* to porn. For some of middle school, *most* of high school, and into my first couple years of college, porn was a *regular* part of my life. And I still remember, my junior year of college, meeting Jesus and thinking "oh this should fix my porn problem—since he's not cool with it and all." And you may be surprised to discover that at least for most people, becoming a Christian does not in fact instantly fix a porn problem.

And so I went through **years of being prayed with**, and prayed over. Asking for healing from it and having *others* ask for healing on my behalf. And I would love to say that there was this big moment where someone prayed over me, and I just experienced immediate, total freedom from it—that happens for some people. But it didn't happen that way for me. Instead, what it required and is still requiring is **years of "cutting off my hand."** Years of inconveniencing myself, in order to pull out the roots of sin in my heart and mind.

And while I've **seen a ton of freedom** from porn at *this* point in my life, what I've also discovered is that the roots of porn go a lot *deeper* than porn. Years of using porn creates patterns in your heart and mind that don't just magically go away. It creates patterns of thinking about other people and about sex that don't just vanish. So while porn is not the main issue anymore, I am still regularly *plagued* by things and thought patterns in my mind that all those years of looking at porn left behind.

And if I'm just completely honest, there are **moments where I just feel so defeated** by the fight against it all. Moments where I feel so frustrated that it often feels like I'm doing everything I know how to do, and some of those thought patterns still remain. Those ways of thinking are still there. And because of that, there are a lot of moments where I still just feel like a colossal *failure* when it comes to the fight against lust in my own heart, no matter what I'm doing to fight against it.

But it's in those very moments that what I need to hear is Romans 5, v. 8: *Kent, while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you. And if he didn't bail on you then, he's not gonna bail on you now. If he wasn't disgusted by you then, he's not disgusted by you now. If he didn't leave you on your own then, he's not gonna leave you on your own now.*

// So **just in case some of you are, like me**, inclined to believe that God's love for you rises and falls based on your fight against lust—or just sin in *general*: can we just today, once and for all, put that lie to rest?

The beauty of the good news of Jesus is that his affections for us always and forever remain the same. He is not caught off-guard by what you're struggling with. He is not saying about you, "man—I really thought they would've kicked that porn habit by now. I really thought they'd be done with *lust* and *sexual sin* by now." Jesus sees you, right now, in the depths of your sin, in the depths of our fight against it—and says, "I love you *right now*. You are my son, my daughter, *right now*. In you I am well pleased, *right now*. Not once you get it together. Not once you stop struggling with this. *Right here and right now*." And starting from there, I will *love you into freedom* from your sin. That's the good news.

That's what the **cross and the resurrection** were all about. We're called to fight against lust, for sure—but God's affections for us are not based on how successful the fight is. They're based on what has already been accomplished for us on the cross. And once you know *that*, if you're willing to fight, the power and shame of sexual sin do not stand a chance.

So **in just a few moments** we're going to respond in worship to all of that. You'll have the opportunity to sing about it, celebrate it. You'll have the opportunity to go to the tables and remember Jesus' body and blood that makes all of this possible. If you're a follower of Jesus, that is part of how we tangibly remember the incredible reality that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. So if you ascribe to that belief, you're invited to head to the tables and remember that as we celebrate it all together.

Let me pray for us.