



Firm Foundations

Following the way of Jesus

Honouring Each Other and Relationships

Date: Sunday 27th June

Speaker: Andrew McNeil

Key Verses: Matthew 5:27-32

Talk Summary:

The reason that lust, divorce and our sexuality as a whole are important, is that they affect people and people matter to God. If you've ever been on the receiving end of any unwanted interest or sexual harassment or you've navigated the pain of divorce as a child or an adult those are deeply painful realities and Jesus deeply cares.

We are in a time of profound cultural change and confusion. A dominant cultural narrative is that sexual restraint is unhealthy, even damaging. "You define what works for you." is a common attitude. Expression and self-actualisation are seen as the best strategy. It's clear that some things are not working. [Ofsted](#) reports that sexual harassment has become "normalised" among school-age children.

The Bible shows that our sexuality needs to be wisely handled and complete sexual freedom doesn't really lead to freedom. Restraint is for our benefit. We learn to manage our appetites in other areas and it's the same with our sexual appetites and desires. Jesus says that the line for restraint isn't just about acting out. He's concerned with the realm of our thoughts and imaginations as well.

Lust is the desire to have someone for the purpose of self-gratification. Jesus is not dealing with that first spark of attraction. Jesus is talking about the second look, the leering look, the wilful sustained stare that goes beyond appreciation. Jesus is challenging these men and all men not to objectify women. Objectification is the act of thinking of or treating a person as a mere object of sexual desire. It's dehumanising. Jesus is radically leading the way in a movement to honouring women (and honour one another).

It's easy to harbour lies or behaviours that are at odds with the Bible's teaching on sex. When talking about lust, or sexual choices contrary to Jesus' teaching, we must challenge the lies we contemplate.

I don't feel guilty: Our feelings are distorted. It's possible to engage in a sinful act and not feel bad about it. That could involve lusting after someone else, porn use, or acting out sexually. What Jesus says about things is the standard, not your feelings.

I deserve this: You may feel entitlement. "I've been doing so much for everyone else I'm entitled to some things that work for me." You may be tempted to justify escapist or risky sexual activity as a "reward" to yourself.

I'm not hurting anyone: Much porn use is perpetuating abuse as many thousands in the porn industry are modern day slaves. Do you really want to perpetuate that? Don't kid yourself that you're not hurting anyone.

God will forgive me anyway: Our choices change us. Over time, you care less and less about receiving forgiveness. There is an internal dullness which grows the more we sin.

I am in control: The nature of a habit is you need something more extreme, more frequent to give you the same thrill. That leads to the realm of addiction.

This isn't changing me: Fuelling lust or exposing yourself to sexually explicit images affects how you view sex, relationships, and people.

Jesus says you can't compartmentalise your person. Verses 27-30. The eyes, the heart, and the body are connected. What you entertain with your eyes gets into your heart. What you focus on in your heart will be worked out in your body. We see in our sexuality a signal that we are made for oneness. The deep longing of the soul is to be known and to be loved and in the Bible God uses marriage and sex is a metaphor of covenant love - Intimate knowledge of God.

Marriage and Divorce. In the Old Testament, divorce was being used as a way for men to opt out of their obligations and responsibilities. God speaks into that situation with countercultural safeguards to protect marriage and the women who were culturally vulnerable.

There are grounds for divorce in the Bible. Marital unfaithfulness is a ground; abandonment by an unbelieving spouse is a ground; many churches would add domestic / abuse violence as a ground. Divorce was only ever a divine concession and a way to limit and prevent even more pain. Even when biblical grounds for divorce exist, divorce is not the only option as God is committed and present in a covenant relationship even when enormous pain and obstacles are present as well.

We are called to be a community of deep compassion, recognising that many of us have pain in our stories from broken relationships. Invest in the marriage you are in. Cheer on others. In times of pain, resist the temptation to take sides. Let's take the side of marriage, by being a safe place for people to get help when things are tough.

Worship

Worship is not just singing, it is thanking God for who he is and what he has done and is lived out through a life of trusting obedience. Discussing this together is an act of worship.

(Small group worship resources can be found at bvc.so/sgworship)

- What are you thankful for this week?
- Where has God been at work in your life?
- When have you taken risks in faith and obedience this week?

If you have a time of singing you can skip the above questions but please do ask this question each week:

- What has God been speaking to you about this week? *(Go around the group quickly don't spend a long time on it)*

Discussion Questions (choose some which are most relevant to your group)

If possible, consider creating space for the men and women to talk separately for part of the evening. We covered a lot on Sunday!

1. If married, how do we practically “Invest in the marriage you are in”?
2. Support the marriages of others. There’s great power in being cheered on. Who has cheered you on toward godly relationships and what did that look like?
3. He is not shocked by anything you have done, not just because it is already known to him but because the pull of it, the magnetism of the fantasy, the strength of the emotion that led you there, is part of his own experiences. “He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward.”- Hebrews 5:2. Whether your sin was a calculated choice or a simple mistake, Jesus is gentle with the worst of us. *Gentle and Lowly. Dane Ortlund*

What do you appreciate in that quote? How does it expand your picture of Jesus.

Witness

We want to be investing in authentic relationships with those who don’t know Jesus yet and inviting them to anything where they might meet other Christians and Jesus. Pick one of the below each week:

- How would you share what you have learned with a non-church friend?
- What church events coming up would your friends appreciate an invite to?

Resources

1. [Sozo](#) - Prayer ministry within Birmingham Vineyard.
2. sexualdiscipleship.com - Navigating sexual issues with Gospel-centered truth.
3. [Care for the family](#). - A Christians charity that exists to strengthen families. Lots of resources, advice and help for parenting.
4. [Naked Truth](#) - A Christian-based organisation providing online support groups, books, courses and resources for those wanting to overcome porn use. Some free resource some paid for.
5. [Covenant Eyes](#) - A Christian organisation offering a range of articles, forums and tutorials, as well as a blog, eBook and a screen accountability service. This is a paid for service.