

THEME: Love, Sex and Marriage
“Habits that Hurt—Habits that Heal”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber – based on a sermon series by Adam Hamilton
January 26-27, 2013 at First United Methodist Church - Durango

Ephesians 4: 20-32; 1 Thessalonians 4: 3-4

20 But that isn't what you learned about Christ. 21 Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, 22 throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. 23 Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. 24 Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy. 25 So stop telling lies. Let us tell our neighbors the truth, for we are all parts of the same body. 26 And “don't sin by letting anger control you.” Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 for anger gives a foothold to the devil. 28 If you are a thief, quit stealing. Instead, use your hands for good hard work, and then give generously to others in need. 29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. 30 And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

3 God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. 4 Then each of you will control his or her own body and live in holiness and honor...

VIDEO Sermon Starter – Habits the Hurt—Habits that Heal

SLIDE Habits that Hurt—Habits that Heal

Many of you have been sending me stories and antidotes and e-mails during this sermon series and one of you sent me this story of an older couple who were having a conversation. The husband turned to his wife and said, "Whenever I get mad at you, you never seem to get upset. How do you manage to control your temper?"

She said to him, "I just go and clean the toilet."

He replied, "How does that help?"

She said to him, "I use your toothbrush."

Now I know that many of you will begin hiding your toothbrushes around your house in the coming days!

I would like to invite you to take out of your bulletin your Message Notes and your Meditation Moments. There is a place for you to write down the things that you would like to remember and reflect upon in the days ahead. Those of you who are watching online I invite you to take out a pen and piece of paper so you can take notes and then you can download this resource off of our website later. You also will find daily Scripture readings that tie back into today's message as well as questions for you to reflect upon and think about in the days ahead. I hope you will take that home and use it.

Today we continue in a sermon series that we've been doing on love, sex and marriage. Given the circumstances of the last week I felt it was important to flip-flop the next two sermons. Next week we will look at sexual intimacy and today we are going to turn our attention to the habits that hurt and habits that heal as it relates to sexuality and what it means to be human. In this series we have been using three resources to talk about this important area of our lives. We looked at what experts have had to say in the area of relationships and we have each week looked at the Scriptures and turned to God's word for our lives as it relates to love, sex and marriage. Finally, we asked you to fill out a survey and almost 400 of you went online and you told us about your lives and your relationships. We have been using that data as a jumping off point the last few weeks and today I felt it was very important to turn to something that jumped out in the surveys and that is those habits that cause destruction in our relationships.

This is a more serious topic and it seemed more appropriate to deal with today after what our church has been dealing with in the past week. If you arrived late and you did not get the letter that I sent out to the congregation this past week then you may not know that we have had to deal with the reality of a staff person who was arrested last week for inappropriate contact with an underage girl. Ian Walker has been helping to lead our Saturday night worship service and while he is no longer with us on staff, I know there are many of you with questions. You may have read in the newspaper that his arrest involved inappropriate texting and asking for images from younger girls and while our main concern is for any of those allegedly younger victims who may be out there I

would not be a good pastor if we didn't stop and look more deeply at this time as a teaching moment.

In the anonymous survey that many of you filled out you told us the things that were most destructive in your relationships, especially those of you who have been divorced. Today I want to talk about the top three topics that jumped out of the surveys. I can tell you that I didn't want to preach this sermon because these topics are heavy, but I also felt like we need to talk about the threats that are out there if we are going to talk about how to make long-lasting relationships. We have to honestly address these things and we cannot leave them sitting in the closet. Let me share with you the top three reasons for divorce and these were consistent not just in our survey but within our culture and other surveys which is been done. I'll share them with you in reverse order.

SLIDE 3. Abuse

Emotional, physical, verbal and even spiritual abuse was listed as one of the top reasons for divorce.

SLIDE 3. Abuse

2. Addictions

The top addiction used to be alcohol or some form of substance, however its place has now been taken by pornography as the leading addiction which causes divorce and leads relationships to fracture.

SLIDE 3. Abuse

2. Addictions

1. Adultery

The last one is adultery or having a sexual relationship with someone who is not your spouse or partner. We are going to take these in reverse order and see how each of them is a threat to our marriages and relationships. We also will look at what God's response to these things might be and how it is we might find healing in the midst of these powerful forces.

SLIDE Abuse

I was serving a church while I was in seminary studying to be a pastor when there was a story about a family in our community that was splashed across the front pages of the Denver Post. That story has become all too common in today's

world and it seems like not a day goes by where we don't read something like it in the media and some part of the country. A father of three killed his children and his wife and then drove to work and shot himself in the parking garage. What made that story close to home was that the family was in worship at the church I was serving the weekend before this tragedy. I had never met the family or the children but many in our congregation knew them.

I have on more than one occasion visited church members in jail because they had abused their spouse and were involved in domestic violence. I grew up in a home where my stepfather, who was an alcoholic, beat up my mother on more than one occasion and threatened my sister and I several times. Next weekend is Super Bowl Sunday and while most of us will enjoy the day many women live in fear because it is the day on which more domestic violence is reported than any other day in the calendar year. Christmas is number two.

This topic probably merits an entire sermon by itself but I want to be sure as your pastor to take some time in the sermon to talk about emotional and physical abuse. I recognize that these are issues which happen in some marriages and I want to do everything I can to speak into it for just a moment.

Every 10 to 15 seconds in the United States a woman is battered by her husband or boyfriend. 3 to 4 women die every single day in the United States at the hands of their husbands or boyfriends. Abuse happens in more homes than we would like to admit and while often it is the husband or the boyfriend who is the abuser, more and more we are seeing women as the abusers, especially when it comes to verbal abuse. Most times the people around them have no idea that this is going on because the man seems charming. He is often outgoing and endearing and I can say that because my stepfather was very personable and warm when he wasn't drinking or dealing with his anger. I actually heard my friends and my mother's friends sometimes say, "I wish my dad were like that. I wish my husband were like that."

I've seen families where the wife seems like the epitome of a good Christian. She lead Bible studies and knows the word of God by heart. But when you go to their home and take a closer look inside you might hear a woman who belittles her husband constantly. She makes him feel small and is constantly not only complaining but criticizing and tearing him down. You might find a husband who is constantly demeaning his wife or controlling everything that she does. He gives her no freedom and controls every dollar, every hour of her day and every

relationship in her life. I've seen men who caused their wives to continually question herself and she feels enslaved in that relationship. She no longer believes in herself and she is a shadow of the person she once was.

There are husbands and wives who can't control their anger and they end up resorting to physical violence. In those outbursts, there is kicking and punching and pulling of hair. Afterwards, there is great sorrow and remorse. Crocodile tears followed by, "I'm so sorry. I will never do that again." I've seen this pattern repeated over and over again.

The problem is, once you step across that line it becomes easier to step across it again and again. I want to be clear that it is normal that we fight. We learned two weeks ago that a lot of people have great marriages and they fight all the time because friction leads to traction and traction means you're going somewhere. The question really is this, "How do you fight?"

John Gottman is an expert in this field of conflict and he teaches at the University of Washington. He says that he can tell within a few minutes, asking the right questions, whether a couple will get divorced or not to 91% accuracy. It typically has to do with the things that we say to one another when we become angry. Do we simply complain about the issue or do we start talking about how stupid the other person is? Do we say things like, "You're an idiot"? Do we demean the other person and attack their character? That leads down a path which will ultimately destroy a marriage. You might stay together as a shell of a marriage but eventually there is no real marriage left when fighting leads to personal attacks and lots of tearing down and verbal abuse. This is a danger for many of us in terms of how we deal with our anger and our frustrations when we disagree with each other.

We learned in the very first sermon in this series that marriage is a calling. It is a sacred calling from God in which we covenant first with God and then with each other to seek to help the other person. We strive to bless the other person and to encourage them and to seek the best for them. We want to build them up, but what happens when there is abuse in a relationship is that there is tearing down. Little by little, we tear down a person's sense of self-worth and value as a human being when there is abuse.

I worked with a couple a number of years ago and when you look at the husband you would've thought he was almost perfect. He was handsome and

respectful and he went to church every week. Many women thought he would be a great catch and they wished their husband were like him. The problem is that I knew that every time he came home he would tell his wife what a worthless person that she was. He would constantly tell her how lucky she was to be married to him and he would treat her like dirt in the privacy of their home. I watched her shrivel away as a person both physically and emotionally for years until she finally escaped the bondage of that prison. That is not how it is supposed to happen.

We heard these words from the apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:29.

SLIDE ***29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. 30 And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. 32 Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.***

When Paul talks about not using foul or abusive language he uses the Greek word for "putrefy." Imagine that you are cleaning out your refrigerator and you find that Tupperware way back in the back of the fridge that's been there for over a year. You open it up and whatever was in the container has turned to liquid and it knocks you over when you open the lid. Paul tells us not to let that come out of our mouth. This is what it looks like when you are hurting other people with your words.

I am reminded of the story where Jesus is with his disciples and they are criticized by the religious leaders for not washing their hands ritually before they eat. He tells them, "It is not what you put into your mouth that makes you unclean. It is what comes out of your mouth that makes you unclean because out of the abundance of the heart is how the mouth speaks."

We are not talking about times when you might complain about someone's snoring or not cleaning up after themselves. This is about saying things like, "You're stupid. You're an idiot." When you talk in that way you are allowing putrefied words to come out of your mouth and it tells us about what is going on

inside of your heart. If you are speaking words in that tear the other person down then it is time to take a good long hard look in the mirror, and inside your own heart.

Sometimes the church has been culpable in this because of the misuse of a passage that comes from the same book of Ephesians. We talked a bit about this a few weeks ago in that passage where it says that a woman should submit to her husband. We take that verse out of the broader context of this letter that is so beautiful and we don't look at the historical context or the way men and women related to each other. We forget the fact that Paul says at the beginning of that passage that we should submit to one another. We leave behind the fact that Paul says to men they should love their wives and sacrifice themselves for them just as Christ did for the church. Some Christians have focused on that one line and it has seemed to mean to some men and even in some churches that the man has the ability and the right to control the wife and treat her however he chooses. He can treat her as property and she somehow belongs to him.

I want to say to you clearly that this is the antithesis of what Paul is teaching in these passages of Scripture. Sometimes people have stayed in abusive relationships because of how the church has dealt with the issue of divorce. Recently I had a young couple come to me because the man's sister was being abused by her husband. She was being drug through the house by her hair and kicked and beaten up. They tried to convince her to leave that relationship and the young woman went to her parents who then told her that her husband still was basically a good person and the Bible says that God hates divorce.

The Bible does say that God hates divorce. But I want you know that there are some things that God hates even more than divorce. God hates one of his daughters being pulled by her hair through the house, kicked and beaten up. As much as God might hate a divorce, I am sure that God hates the abuse that sometimes happens in relationships even more. I have zero doubt that if that young woman, or any person in an abusive relationship, were to meet Jesus in the flesh today that Jesus would tell them, "I love you so much and you have to get out. This is not marriage. This is not love."

Marriage is not a life sentence to be tortured or tormented. Marriage is meant to be a blessing in which we bless and build up and encourage one another. Our words are meant to give grace to those who hear them and fill them with hope for the future, not dread. Of course we are going to have fights but we

need to do conflict without destroying the other person's soul or hurting their physical body.

If you find yourself in a situation where you are being abused then please come and see one of our pastors or a Stephen Minister. We have them at the end of each service and they are trained in how to help you get out of that situation. Some of them have been in that situation and they know what it's like to be there and they know the joy of the freedom that comes in leaving an abusive relationship. There is a battered women's shelter here in Durango and the location is kept secret to keep women there safe and we would love to help you and encourage you to find that place it that is what you need.

If you are an abuser and you recognize that you don't like yourself when you do these things and you don't want to be that person anymore, come and see one of our pastors and we will walk you through support groups to help you become the person that God wants you to be and not the person every so often that you find yourself becoming. We want you to be free and we can help you and that is what it means to be the church and the body of Christ.

I know that we have many who watch online and get DVDs from us and I want to tell you that if you Google "domestic violence" and the name of your city you will find resources. They can help you but, you need to ask and take that step.

Let's shift gears and talk about the second of this group of three, which is addiction. Addiction is far more common in homes than abuse because when we talk about addiction it seems to be something that can be pleasurable at first. It produces some physiological or emotional satisfaction in our lives, but what we find is that we long to have more of it. When we long to have more of it than we sometimes overindulge, and we find that begins to affect our capacity to live and be the person that God wants us to be.

We find that even after we have overindulged and we feel bad about it for a time, we have this physiological need to go back and get more. Suddenly, we no longer control the substance but the substance controls us. Alcohol abuse used to be the most prominent but that has given way to pornography. Some people struggle with drugs and other people struggle with gambling. Some people can go to the casino and spend \$20 and walk away and never go back. Some people, however, go and they spend 20 and then they need to spend 50 and then they find themselves spending 100. Pretty soon they are hiding the fact that they are

taking money out of their retirement account or the equity in their home because someday they're going to strike it big. They can't quite stop and then when somebody finally finds out, they have destroyed their future because they can't stop. That's addiction.

My stepdad was a great guy when he was sober. His drink of choice was vodka and he would hide it all over the house. I discovered his hiding places and I would take the vodka and dump it out and put water in its place just to irritate him. That probably wasn't a wise choice when I look back at it and it often drove him to do crazy things like drive our car through the garage door and chase my mother around the house with a butcher knife. I would find myself comforting my sister and she cried in her bed. I would tell her it would be okay. But it wasn't okay. He was a great guy but the substance had come to control him.

There is help for each of these addictions through our Celebrate Recovery ministry on Monday nights. The ministry is aimed at helping you break free of that hurts, habit or hang up. You just have to ask yourself a question. Is the pleasure that I experience in pursuing this thing that now has a hold on me and controls me worth hurting the people that God has entrusted to me?

If your spouse says you have a drinking problem then you probably are on the verge of having one if not have one already that is full-blown. The really cool thing is that there is help. You can find freedom. Paul tells us not to go back to being slaves.

I want to talk about one particular addiction which is epidemic today and it now is affecting our kids as early as 11 years old—that is now the average age that a young person in our culture first sees pornography. When we asked in our survey about viewing pornography here is what we discovered.

SLIDE 24 percent of those who responded to our survey said they view porn sometimes or regularly.

When we break these numbers now my men and women however we get a different picture. We find that women only compose a small percentage of these numbers, but over 60% of the men who took the survey said they look at porn sometimes or regularly. That means that there is a majority even among those who took the survey who are looking at pornography on the Internet.

Maybe you're thinking that if everybody is doing it then it must be okay. Maybe you use that statement with your parents, "Well, everybody's doing it!"

And then your mom would say, "If everyone jumped off a cliff then would you jump off a cliff too?"

Let's not kid ourselves and pretend that this is not happening because the reality is that it is. It is at our fingertips constantly and the accessibility is like never before. When I was a young boy in order to get a hold of pornography we had to try and find a stash of Playboy magazine that belonged to one of our friend's dad. Nowadays it is just a click away and everybody's doing it then it can't be that bad, right? Your hand is not to fall off from watching pornography, right? You won't grow hair on your ears from watching pornography, right? The reality is that you will grow hair on your ears but it won't be from watching pornography. Just wait a few years and you'll see what I'm talking about those of you who are under 40.

I have been reading these two books that we now carry in our bookstore, [The Porn Trap: The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems Caused by Pornography](#) by Wendy and Larry Malts and [Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction](#) by Patrick Carnes.

Here are a few of the things that I learned. I'm not trying to scare you but I want you to be aware of the world in which we live. There are currently more than 600 million pages of pornography on the Internet. Most fourth and fifth graders can figure out how to bypass your security software to keep them out of the stuff. One of the struggles I have a pastor is wondering what happens to third and fourth and fifth graders begin to see pornography as the norm for what sexual intimacy is all about. The fastest-growing addiction today according to the American Medical Association is pornography among teenage girls.

Last year the pornography industry made more money than all of the professional sports teams in the world combined. Every major media group has a pornography wing because it is so lucrative, they just don't put their name on it. 20 years ago porn was simply something that you looked when you could sneak a peek from your friend's father's Playboy collection. What researchers have discovered is that today pornography is designed for you to have a relationship with it and it literally changes your brain chemistry. Here these words from the authors of the **Porn Trap**.

Pornography can have as powerful an effect on your body and brain as cocaine, methamphetamine, alcohol, and other drugs. It actually changes your

brain chemistry. Porn stimulates an area of the brain known as the "hedonic highway" or median forebrain, which is filled with receptors for the neurotransmitter dopamine. Researchers had discovered that regular viewing of pornography causes a high and brain chemistry reaction similar to what is caused by crack cocaine. People in porn recovery take an average of 18 months to heal from the damage to their dopamine receptors alone.

Unfortunately, by overloading your brain with pleasure chemicals, porn in reduces your body's own ability to produce and effectively release them under normal life circumstances. A relationship with porn can act like an affair. Without realizing it, maintaining a "love affair" with porn can become more important than staying connected to someone in real life.

Pornography use today compromises almost everyone's ability to relate in intimate, meaningful ways to a real partner. Max, a young man in his early 20s who became addicted to porn as a teenager says this, "Porn distorts sex. There's no real consent, equality, or mutual respect. It teaches you to take but never give love. Porn doesn't truly reflect what's best for you sexually. It's unreal. You can't find any joy or lasting happiness there."

Let me ask you a tough question. Would you keep cocaine around your house so your children could try it and simply say to yourself, "It's just part of growing up." The reality is that we are creatures with a strong libido and especially men and boys are drawn to visual images. It doesn't matter if you are a preacher or a layperson, we are visual creatures and when we see one of these images many times we want to see more.

We are going to learn next week that sexual intimacy releases chemicals that literally bond you to someone else, like with superglue. When we use pornography we get chemicals released in our brains that want to make us cling to pornography which is why it becomes an addiction. We become bonded to porn literally. I want to be clear that I am not judging this because it is simply how our bodies are wired and just like it can be used to do something beautiful in a relationship it can also be used for destruction.

There are several other reasons why it might be good for us to choose not to view pornography. One is because it objectifies women and the question I ask people all the time who get caught up in pornography is very simple. "What if that were your sister or your daughter?"

Another problem is that it paints an unrealistic picture of what intimacy is all about. I was reading a testimony by a woman in her 40s who was a pornography star in her 20s and 30s, specializing in hard-core porn. She has become a Christian and now she campaigns against pornography but she talks about how they would literally do things during a scene for a movie or a video clip and it would be painful to their bodies but they would have to act like it was pleasurable. She talks about how a number of the women would literally go into another room and vomit after each scene because it had been so painful and so gruesome. The reality is that normal people don't do this and we get a false picture of what intimacy looks like.

There also is the issue of power. When you enter into the world of pornography you get an unrealistic sense of power over someone in a relationship. You can control what you watch and how much you watch and then you try to enter into a normal relationship with the human being and you don't have that kind of power and you can't even function. You have the illusion of being powerful and in control of what is happening. Pornography's focus on power teaches a self-centered approach to sex that causes all kinds of problems in real life.

The most startling issue for us however is addiction and you need to know that the pornography industry has a plan for how to get you addicted to their product. Using porn now has a lot in common with gambling actually because of the way pornography is delivered through the Internet. When searching for porn you only get your ideal content—a picture of the "perfect" woman or man, or the sexual act of your dreams—every now and then. This type of set up is called an "intermittent reward system" and it is designed to hook the user just like casino gaming machines.

SLIDE Intermittent Reward System

That's why it can be so easy to be at your computer and look up at the clock and find several hours have past in what seems like just minutes. Online pornography actually is developed to deliver the intermittent reward system that rewards on a variable ratio schedule, meaning you never know just how many photos you will need to look at before you find one you want. The number keeps changing. This is the most potent method for shaping behavior.

After a while we become out of control, seeking to get that next "high." Desensitization comes in as the things that used to excite you no longer excite you. You need something more deviant than what you've been looking at. Pretty soon you need more than just a picture of somebody that you don't know and you try to get a picture of someone that you do know. You want to try what you seen in pictures for yourself and you end up self-destructing. This is what happens when we become slaves.

Tom Ryan was a very successful pastor until he got caught up in the cycle of pornography. He has bravely shared his story and I thought it would be good for you to hear it.

VIDEO Tom Ryan Interview

SLIDE Addictions

The reality is that most of us are not addicts to pornography, but is it doesn't take much to go down that road and end up in a very dark place. This is a very addictive behavior and I want to remind you that even though you can have easy access to this it might be worth your while to make a commitment not to go in that direction so it doesn't hurt you and the people that you love the most.

The apostle Paul talks about *porneo* in the text we read today from 1Thessalonians 4:3-4. *Porneo* is the Greek word for sexual immorality from which we get our word pornography.

SLIDE *3 God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. 4 Then each of you will control his or her own body and live in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion.*

The really good news is that God can set us free. God understands our struggles and our sexuality and why some things are appealing to us and we get caught in traps. The grace of God is available to each of us to bring healing if we will receive the truth that these things can destroy. The meditation is for us to not become a slave to things of this world which can ruin your marriage and your relationships and your soul.

SLIDE Adultery

A study was done several years ago and discovered that this was the number one reason for divorce in 147 different countries around the world. Here in our church you told us that this also was the number one reason given for why

your marriage failed. Adultery usually is a symptom of other underlying causes, but in the surveys you filled out last month, it was the primary cause.

First, let's recognize that the reason, "Thou shall not commit adultery," is a commandment is that because adultery was a problem for thousand years ago. If adultery wasn't a problem it would be commandment number 612 but it makes the top 10 because it was a really serious issue for people. What would help us upfront is if we could recognize that this is a challenge for us as human beings. We have made a commitment in marriage that we are going to love only that person and sleep with only that person and be intimate only with that person for the rest of our lives. That's a long time and it covers a whole lot of moments where you will have to say "no" to something that you could have said "yes" to.

The challenge is that as human beings we are wired to be attracted to other people. You recognize that when you are a kid in junior high or high school or college and you feel this moment of chemistry with another person. It might be physical or emotional attraction but there is a connection that you feel. Sometimes we have this idea that there is only one person in the whole world to which we are going to be attracted to and we just redefine that person. Let me just tell you that is ridiculous and not sustainable. As humans we are going to feel that attraction multiple times in our lives under different circumstances and situations.

We've been married for 10 years and we feel this attraction for this other person and we feel this excitement and chemistry. In our minds we then begin to say, "Oh no, I married the wrong person. They are the one. She is the one. He is the one. Because now I have finally found my true soul mate because now I feel excited like I used to when we were in junior high or with my spouse!"

This happens to me as your pastor. I was at my best friend's house and we were watching television and on came Faith Hill singing her song, "Breathe." I had never seen her before but I had heard the song. I was standing in front of his 60 inch high-definition television set and I was smitten. She was beautiful and my heart started beating fast and I can hardly breathe while she is singing about breathing. Now imagine if I had turned to my friend and said, "I have found the one. I wasn't really supposed to be married to Tami. It's Faith Hill that is my true love. Even her first name is Faith. I should be married to her. Maybe, I should move to Nashville and convince her to leave Tim McGraw and she and I could hook up and be married for the rest of our lives."

Do you see how stupid that is? Yet, this is what we sometimes do. Guess what, having those feelings is normal. Men and women both will have those moments but is not a sign that God wants you to get divorced and marry this other person. Because the reality is that you will marry someone else and then have those feelings again for somebody else down the road. That is just life because we are human beings. We have antenna that go up and we have this chemistry that happens sometimes.

Sometimes it happens when we are on the road and we have temporary amnesia or insanity and we have a hard time remembering that somebody is back home waiting for us. We forget that we have small children at home and those homes get destroyed sometimes when we forget. I have had dozens of people come to my office to confess their infidelity. The story is very similar each time. Sometimes it was a one night stand that didn't mean anything. It was stupidity.

Sometimes an emotional affair develops over time and those emotional relationships are even harder to break. It used to be that the primary place these things would happen is in the workplace or in the neighborhood. Let me tell you how one man described to me. He was working with somebody of the opposite sex in his work life. It was exciting as they worked on shared projects together. Then he would go home and his wife would ask him to take out the trash. She begged him to pick up his mess because she was sick of seeing his clothes laying around. He would sit down to dinner and talk about the exciting things he was working on and after about 10 minutes his wife would say that it was not that interesting to her and could they talk about something else besides his job. Then he would go to work the next day and there will be somebody who talked about nothing but his job and who gave them all kind of attention and affection that he wasn't getting at home. She didn't ask him to take out the trash or clean up his mess. At first it was just friendship.

Then the friendship becomes a little bit more intimate in terms of what is shared. Finally, comes the moment of the "maybe." For this man it looks like this when he said the words, "God forbid my wife would ever die, but if she did..."

They would then start talking about what it would be like. He would confide in her things that he wouldn't tell his wife. Then he said the fateful words, "I find you so attractive. I wish my wife were more like you." It's all downhill from there.

This cycle used to happen in the workplace but today the number one place of being introduced to an affair happens on the Internet and Facebook. We get on Facebook and we connect with the old flame that we had in high school or college. At first it is just good fun as we catch up. After a while it becomes more intimate conversation which is much easier to do on the computer when you are not really looking at each other face-to-face. You say things that you never would say in your right mind when you're with them in person. Pretty soon you can feel an intimacy develop as you look at each other's pictures. You know there is a red flag in these relationships when you try to get on the computer when your spouse is not around or when they are asleep. They walk in the room and you quickly close that window and then go on to something else. When you are saying things on Facebook that you don't want your spouse to know or to see, you are already in trouble

James 1 talks about this cycle in our lives.

SLIDE ***14 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.***

Let's talk about how we might prevent ourselves from entering in this cycle of temptation. You are already doing one of the most important things by being here in church today. We asked you in our survey how many of you have been unfaithful and 7% of you said you had while 24% of you said that you were tempted. That is way below normal and this is one of the times where I was really excited that our church was below average. We are less than half of the national average. I then began to wonder if you were not honest in the surveys. Isn't that terrible that I was thinking that about you?

The University of Chicago did a study recently using the General Social Survey. Some of you are familiar with that study and they found something fascinating. 25% of people who never went to church reported that they had an affair. Those who attend church less than monthly the number drops to 20.6%. Those who attend more than once a month see that number dropped to 17.1%. The people who attend church every single week see that number dropped to 12.4% which is half of what it is for people who never go to church. There is something about going to church that helps us be more faithful.

I think it's because that when we come to church we remember who we are and whose we are. We remember God's will for our lives and we find strength from the power of the Holy Spirit when we worship and pray. We leave worship hopefully encouraged to live our faith every day. I also think that sitting next to someone and worshiping with them is an act of intimacy and when you do that with your mate, it builds a bond.

That is one way to affair proof your marriage but let me mention several others that are even more practical. On a few occasions over the course of our marriage I have had women tell me that they are attracted to me. I don't know why but it just happens when you are a pastor. What I recognize is that people get enamored with the role more than the person who is in the role and I tell pastors all the time that because they are a pastor they are more attractive than they deserve to be. When this happens to me one of the first things I do is that I tell my wife. So if on the off chance you feel that way and choose to tell me please leave your first and last name but not your phone number because I will give that to my wife! That protects me from letting these thoughts go through my brain and it sends a message that I can be trusted.

When it comes to the Internet or Facebook, my wife has all of my passwords. She can look at everything I have online. She could read my e-mail or check the texts on my cell phone. That holds me accountable to know that she can see all of these things. I am never going to say anything in an e-mail or on Facebook that I would not want her to read. I know the young people in our church might not like to hear this but each of you need an accountability partner as well. It should be your parents who can look at your texts or your e-mails but you need somebody to check on you because we all need that, even your pastor.

When Hillary Clinton was the first lady she contacted Billy Graham and said that she would love to have lunch with him. Dr. Graham said, "That would be great. I would love to have lunch with you but be sure to bring a friend because I never have lunch alone with a woman." The press got a hold of this and everybody thought it was really funny that Billy Graham was worried he would have an affair with Hillary Clinton. He's in his 80s and she is the first lady of the United States but here was his rule that he put in place when he was young and he never stepped across that line. It saved him 1000 times from making a terrible mistake.

Do you have those rules in your life? Do you have those boundaries and borders because we all need them?

Maybe the most important way to affair proof your marriage is to remember the consequences. When you get into a relationship like that you almost always forget about the consequences. Almost everyone I have ever talked to who had an affair wasn't talking about what it would feel like AFTER they had an affair. One man shared with me that when he was having an affair, the woman's husband found out first and called his wife before he came home from work. When he came home that day he found his wife curled up in the fetal position, sobbing on the floor. He thought, "What did I do? I love my wife. Why did I do this? It all of a sudden flashed before my eyes that I might not have my kids living with me anymore. I might not share life and grow old together with this woman like I pictured. What did I do?"

For me, I think of the impact it would have on my wife and my children and all the people who have trusted in me. What impact would it have on the church or in my career? I have to ask if it is worth giving up all of that just for that moment of satisfaction. When you recognize the cost it tends to make the choice much easier because it is not just about the moment.

There is much more that can be said about this and we will be doing two sessions on this in the marriage course that we are having on Thursday nights in conjunction with this series so you are welcome to join us for that. I simply wanted to be your pastor who could look at you and tell you that I care about you. I am not up here to stand in judgment, just to remind you that these things can really hurt you.

The last word I want to leave you with is that there is always hope. That is what the gospel is about. God knows that we struggle with all of this stuff and he reminds us that he sent Jesus Christ to save us from ourselves. God says, "I sent Jesus Christ to offer you grace. I am the God of the second chance and there is always hope. I can set the captives free."

This is why the most important thing we can do is to put our trust in Jesus Christ. That's what I'd like to invite you to do now. Would you bow with me in prayer?

SLIDE Prayer

I don't know if any part of this sermon spoke to today. Maybe you don't wrestle with any of these things. But maybe there are other places where you have struggled in life, or you haven't been a person that God wanted you to be. I would like you to begin this time of prayer simply by saying, "Lord, please forgive me for this." Then you might ask for God's help and strength to help you live differently in the future and be free of struggles. You might ask God to help you bless and encourage those around you, especially your spouse, your mate.

"God, we know you love us and you understand the struggles that we face. You understand how we are as human beings and sometimes we say things we shouldn't say and do things we should do. We find ourselves drawn to things that ultimately lead to us being in slavery. We find ourselves entering into relationships we have no business being a part of. Lord, please forgive us and heal us and give us strength.

For those who are walking through an infidelity right now, God I pray that you would help them see hope and even heal the brokenness in those places. For those who are struggling with addictions God, give them hope and help them to take the step they need to take towards healing.

Lord, you can even set free those who struggle with abuse. If there are people in this room who have been abused, bringing healing and bring them to safety. Give them strength to leave and go to a safe place. And for those who have been abusers, set them free from their anger to live as you would have them with.

We offer our lives to you and we thank you, in Jesus name. Amen.

“Habits that Hurt, Habits that Heal”

Theme: Love, Sex, and Marriage

Ephesians 4:20-32, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments for Monday, January 28 – Read Matthew 5: 27-30 – Whatever your relationships, whatever issues they face, wouldn't it be great to learn about stronger relationships right from Jesus? His Sermon on the Mount (as recorded in Matthew's gospel) offered much wisdom in that area. Using “prophetic hyperbole,” Jesus taught the too often ignored truth that faithless hearts (and not just bodies) deeply hurt relationships.

- Adultery = sex with someone other than your spouse, right? Jesus expanded the idea of betrayal (as he did several other areas of life). He said our heart (our emotions and thoughts) can be faithless to our spouse's needs, even without an overt act. How might a deeper commitment to be faithful to your spouse change you at the heart level?
- Jesus didn't favor literally tearing out your eye or chopping off your hand. His hyperbolic images showed how strongly he felt about us living up to our pledges of faithfulness. Has a friendship or situation ever drawn you away from faithfulness to your spouse or to God? What did you learn about yourself? In what ways did it affect the relationship?

Tuesday, January 29 – Read Matthew 5:33-37 – Jesus continued his Sermon on the Mount, teaching crucial values our closest relationships. He stressed the value of honesty in what lies behind our words as well as in the words themselves. Our integrity shouldn't come and go (“I swear I mean it this time”)—it should be a given. “When you manipulate words to get your own way, you go wrong” (The Message).

- Psychologists note that it can be hard to make our questions as well as our statements direct (e.g. at times “do you like this outfit?” may really mean “I need to know that you still love me”). How can you better understand yourself, so that you can more clearly ask your spouse or others you love for what you really need from them?
- Honesty begins with being honest with yourself and God (often a group, counselor, or accountability partner gives us needed help.) How well do you understand the inner or outer forces that most often tempt you to “shade” your words or promises to the people you love the most? How are you doing at being honest with yourself and God?

Wednesday, January 30 – Read Matthew 7:1-5 – Jesus clearly spoke to our religious feelings and acts. But romantic relationships, too, are hurt if one partner judges everything the other person does as “inferior” or

“wrong.” How healing it is when we can address why we feel a need to criticize and judge, and “First take the log out of your eye”!

- It’s not what you have in common with your mate (or friends) that causes conflict, but your differences. What differences bother you? Do you have a balanced view of your mate, seeing flaws and strengths? Do you recall what first drew you together? If you’ve fallen into ‘negative focus,’ what could help you get the relationship back on track?
- Do you tend to feel superior to others much of the time, or do you struggle more with feeling “less than” most other people? What can keep you healthily aware of your own strengths while still being able, in Jesus’ words, to “take the log out of your eye” before trying to correct or “improve” your partner?

Thursday January 31 – Read Matthew 7:7-12 – In this passage, Jesus summed up the big idea he was teaching in the Sermon on the Mount about human relationships. He had told his hearers to love their enemies, be honest, show mercy, and more. Those were not separate, individual rules—they were expressions of the grand principle of treating others as God treats us, and as we would wish to be treated.

- The Golden Rule is not unique to Jesus. Rabbis and Greek philosophers said very similar things. How does Jesus’ example of self-giving love (agape) give bigger, deeper (and more challenging) dimensions to this “rule”? This week, ask God to grow agape love in you, and guide you in opening yourself to one new way to love your mate more fully.
- In law, business or politics (and sometimes marriage), we more often hear that we ought to treat people as they deserve to be treated. But Jesus spoke of treating people as God treats us—with grace and generosity. What good things can happen in a marriage or a home if love and grace replace “deserving” to guide us in mutual love and sharing?

Friday, February 1 – Read Ephesians 4:25-27 – The apostle Paul quoted Psalm 4:4 from the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint). Then, as though realizing that “be angry without sinning” might be just a bit vague (“How do I do that?”), he added this timeless relational advice: “Don’t let the sun set on your anger,” or, as The Message puts it, “Don’t go to bed angry.”

- Anger, in itself, is not bad—it is one of four basic human emotions. Ephesians said we can be angry without sinning. Anger becomes risky when we let it fester and don’t deal with it directly. One counselor said, “Bitterness is anger grown stale.” How good are you at recognizing and then dealing constructively with, your own anger?
- Ephesians joined the subject of anger with teaching about honesty much like Jesus gave in Matthew 5:33-37. Dishonesty often triggers anger—and, if we haven’t learned to deal with angry feelings well, we often try to hide them (“grrr—no, I’m not mad”). When have you seen a failure to honestly face anger be destructive to a relationship?

Saturday, February 2 – Read Ephesians 4: 29-32 – What destroys relationships, and what heals them? This passage lists keys that can move all of us toward being better relationship partners. Treating one another in un-Christ-like ways (“bitterness, losing your temper, anger, shouting, and slander, along with every other evil”) harms relationships badly. Conversely, inviting Christ into your life to change you from the inside out opens you to bearing fruits like kindness, compassion and a heart able to forgive. These are the qualities God works through to bring healing to our relationships.

- Early Hebrew tellers of God’s story said, in Genesis 3:8-19, that the first results of failure to follow God’s ways were denying responsibility and blaming one’s partner (or others). Ephesians, too, urged its readers to focus on letting God grow them into better partners before looking at others. Ask God to guide you as you choose one area from this week’s study to grow in (e.g. facing anger honestly, being more faithful, forgiving, gentle or kind). Trust God to do God’s part as you do your part in healing damaged relationships.

Family Activity: Often we limit the expression of our feelings to happy, mad or sad. Any person can get frustrated when we try and express ourselves and can’t identify or communicate the true way we are feeling. Go online to “feeling faces.” You will find several charts of faces and feelings that can help people communicate more effectively. Choose the chart that works best for your family and print a couple of copies. Bring them to the dinner table and invite each person to select two feelings they experienced that day. Ask each person to share those feelings and why they were feeling that way. Spend time in prayer asking God to help all of you in your family express their feelings in a Christ-like way.