

LORD

Our fall discipleship series focuses on the Ten Commandments. Not only what they teach us not to do, but what to do. Jesus is Savior and Lord. Once we know Him as Savior, it's time to begin to allow His lordship in every corner of our lives. I can easily recognize Jesus as "Lord" in some abstract way. He's Lord of the universe. He's Lord of all history. But it gets harder when I think about His lordship in my own life. Is He really my master when I'm thinking about my relationships with my family? Is Jesus my first consult and guide when I'm arranging my finances? So much of discipleship is simply about loving Jesus more—more than desires of the flesh, more than money, more than what my neighbor has. The Ten Commandments are a great measure of our hearts. Do we love Jesus more than these? Jesus is Lord.

I have located the job that requires the most patience of any job in America: the person scooping fish at the pet store. We have an aquarium in our house, which means lots of trips to buy (replace) fish. I watch with amazement as the pet store guy follows these little kids around from tank to tank armed with a net and bucket while the kids go around, this one, no, that one, no, what about ...? Then when they finally make a choice, it's not a type of goldfish, it's a particular goldfish. "Not that one! The cute one over there, no, back there, behind the rock, in the corner—that's the one!" I'd lose it. "Listen kid, the net goes in the water—whatever comes up, that's your next fish, got it?" If you want a job that will exercise your patience, these goldfish dippers are the Arnold Schwarzeneggers of patience, just patiently guiding these kids toward what they want. What do you want? Do you know? Let me help you.

Do you know what you want? Do you know what you desire? Your desires can pull you in all sorts of directions. God makes a claim on our desires. Our culture sets no limits to love. Love has become a god. Whatever desires we have, they are part of our identity and must be respected by all, no matter where those desires lead. God claims authority, even over our desires. And this is very good news because only God knows what will truly satisfy our deepest desires. See, correct me if I'm wrong, but what you and I truly want is not that our desires are affirmed; what we want is for our desires to be fulfilled. We want to be satisfied. At peace. Whole. Loved and loving and at home in our own bodies. Only the God who made you knows the way to that kind of peace; only the God who created you knows what you truly need to be satisfied. Patiently the Lord guides us. Do you want this? Are you sure? Jesus lovingly leads us to what we truly need when we let Him be Lord of our desires.

Well, we're talking about adultery here. The seventh commandment is this: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). Now, don't worry. This is an all-ages sermon! You don't need to run to the doors. At least, not for the kids' sake. God says don't commit adultery. Just to define terms, what's adultery? As the Bible uses and defines that term, adultery is when someone engages in physical intimacy with a person who is not their spouse. With this commandment, two words in Hebrew, "don't adultery," by this statement, really by this one word "adultery," God is defining *negatively* what He has already defined and given to us as a gift *positively*—and that's marriage. People in the ancient world, just like in every time, had all kinds of patterns for intimacy. I'm not going to go into all that, I just want you to know there is nothing new under the sun in this area. So when you get into these contemporary discus-

sions and people start talking about a new understanding, a new awareness of human intimacy and human needs—there's nothing new here. People have always found all kinds of ways to use their bodies to give and receive love. God's way has always been a departure from the common ways. God's way has always been a call to a different, distinct way of life from what the world expects or even encourages.

What is God's way? It begins in the creation narrative. God makes Adam. Then God declares out loud what is obvious—it is not good for Adam, man, to be alone. So God puts Adam to sleep, returns Adam to non-being almost and creates Eve out of the side of Adam. Now Adam and God are satisfied. Adam is able to say, here is flesh of my flesh; God is able to say, this is another in my image. Male and female in the image of God. Then comes the quintessential marriage verse: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This verse is quoted again and again throughout the Bible whenever marriage comes up straight through the prophets, straight through Paul's letters, straight through the Gospels where Jesus Himself quotes it. This is God's way: one man and one woman together in marriage experience the joy of physical intimacy in the bounds of their covenant. Every time something else is attempted in the Bible, things go wrong. That's the definition of adultery.

This is the gift God has given: marriage. The seventh commandment is God saying, "Use this gift the way it was created." The old illustration is the hearth, the fireplace. Fire is a wonderful thing. It warms the home it brings joy and health, but it is only a wonderful thing when it is in the fireplace. When it jumps the limits it does destruction you would not believe. Adultery is jumping the limits, jumping the fence. God called His people to a covenant of marriage, a different way of life, even when their desires, cultural expectations, moral norms were all different from this; God called for one man and one woman to commit to one another for life. People started to get the idea that if they could pull that off, they had the seventh commandment in the bag. Then came Jesus.

You know, we can be so ugly. We can be so smug and prim when our lives seem to fit together in just the right way. Should there really be a sense of superiority, we who are married—we whose lives seem to just fit the model like a square peg in a square hole, and our inclinations were balanced in the right direction, and we found a spouse, and the covenant was made and nothing ever threw it all out of whack—should there really be a sense of superiority over others whose lives just aren't working out like that?

Jesus takes us all to task, in effect saying: just because you're legal doesn't mean you're right. "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28). I didn't jump the fence, I just looked over the fence. Nope. It's your heart that matters. You've got a heart chasing the wrong thing. Your desire, your mental anticipation of a physical experience outside of marriage—you've already jumped the fence; and you're no better than another. Who then will stand before the Lord?

I won't go into all the statistics on cheating and extra-marital affairs. You can look them up. But according to Jesus' definition—there's an awful lot of adultery going on. I'll just say this quickly, but Jesus has anticipated the digital age. The advances in technology and communication have impacted this particular area in ways church leaders through the centuries could never have imagined. It is a disembodied, digital adultery. It's easier than ever. And the damage is the same, the physiological chemical reactions are the same—that's why the addiction factor is enormous—the corrosive impact on the soul and on human relationships, actual human relationships like your wife or your future wife or your future husband; these are all the same. Jesus anticipated it. Wherever your eye turns, it matters.

But there is not a hint of defeatism in Jesus. He doesn't just throw His arms up and say, "Oh well." No. Jesus makes a claim over our desires. He urges us to fight on toward purity. If you've got desires pulling you over the fence, out of the garden, out of God's ways, Jesus wants you to fight on for purity. Look at this, "If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell" (Matthew 5:29-30). Now, before anyone goes dismembering themselves—that's not what the Lord is after here. Jesus is saying this is serious. It matters. He didn't just die for your soul, He died for your body and mind and all of you. It matters that you're pulled into corrosive habits and feeding destructive desires. When are you going to get serious about it? Because this is serious business. Let me translate this: if that app on your phone causes you to sin, delete it. It's better to live without it than face the corrosion of your soul. If that cable channel causes you to sin, cut it. If that hotel stay for work drags you into self-destruction, change it. Get a roommate. Better to listen to a guy snoring all night than to fall into

self-destruction. Here's the deal, Jesus is trying to say to us, "I know, I know, I know. I know the temptation, I know the addictive qualities, I know how habituated and normalized sin has become in your life—listen now, you can be free." But get serious.

Years ago, my dad took me on a trip to Nepal. He was there to participate in a conference on the environmental impact of trekking in the Himalaya's. I was there to take up space. We went on a safari riding elephants and looking for tigers; and our tents were right around the corner from where the elephants were kept. I noticed there were no fences for the elephants. The elephants had these cuffs with chains tied to a small iron stake hammered in the ground to keep them there and that was it. I was curious about this as I thought about lying down in a tent right around the corner from a herd of elephants. I asked the guide, "What keeps these elephants from pulling that stake up from the ground?" Do you know what he said? "An elephant never forgets. When he was little we staked his leg to the chain. He could not pull it up. Now, even though he is large, he will never try. He will never try." Are you chained to an unhealthy addiction that rots your soul and injures your relationships? Are you tied to a desire that pulls you away from God? When's the last time you tried that chain? Jesus is building strength in you. Jesus intends to make you free. He has a better life for you.

Jesus is Lord of our desires. He is not dispassionate about these things. He knows the deep need, the deep thirst, the aching hunger to love and be loved, to feel warmly and passionately with our bodies, He made all that. He is, in fact, uniquely qualified and uniquely invested in getting you to the true satisfaction of your desires. Let me show you who the Bible says God is: "You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing. The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them" (Psalms 145:16-19 ESV). This is the Lord. He cares about what you want. He knows what you need. Proverbs 13:12 says, "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (Proverbs 13:12 ESV). A tree of life. That's a big thing; the Tree of Life is a huge thing in the Bible. That's what we lost when we fell away from God in disobedience and original sin. That's what we were separated from when we were cast from the Garden. The Tree of Life is what our souls long to come back to in the deepest way, and this verse says a desire fulfilled is a tree of life. What's a desire fulfilled?

Have you ever desired something, ever wanted something and pined away for it or worked and saved for it, then acquired it, but then found it was good,

but you know, it wasn't everything you hoped it would be? That's not a desire fulfilled. That's getting what you want. Getting what you want and a desire fulfilled are two entirely different things. You can get what you want, and get nowhere, but a desire fulfilled is a tree of life. A true desire, a true need, a need and desire and hunger of your soul—when that is fulfilled you taste the tree of life. Jesus is Lord of our desires in that Jesus intends to alter your desires, to make you want what is truly worth wanting. Then it's not about resisting what you want because you want paltry and even destructive things. It's not about chasing things that only partially satisfy. It's about diving deep into what you want because Christ has shaped your desires toward godly things. That's what it means to have Jesus as Lord of your desires. It means whatever my desires, I submit them to Jesus and trust Him to be the Lord of my deepest wants and needs. That, by the way, is what we are doing here in worship week after week. Together, we lift up the glory of the Lord, we acclaim godly things, we sing to the glory of the One who is worthy of praise; and what we want changes a little. What we desire changes a little, away from the useless desires and toward the desire that, when met, is a Tree of Life.

There is a place of freedom. There is a Tree of Life. Remember when Jesus, in John chapter 8, met a woman caught in adultery? I'm among those who think the whole thing was set up, by the way. It was a conspiracy of the Pharisees. Where was the man, you know? Probably in the crowd holding a stone. They all wanted Jesus to stone this woman caught in adultery. But Jesus, do you remember, Jesus turned to them and said, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7 ESV). One by one the stones fell from their hands, hit the sand with a thud and they walked away. "Jesus stood up and said to her, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, Lord.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more'" (John 8:10-11 ESV). No more shame, only grace and the call to a better life. How could Jesus say such a thing? How could Jesus issue such scandalous forgiveness? Because Jesus knows there is a place of freedom. There is a Tree of Life. He, Himself would reunite hearts to the Tree of Life and the desire fulfilled, Jesus would ascend to the tree of death, the tree of curse, the tree of Calvary, where He died to cover our sins and free us from death, and there the Cross would become for us the Tree of Life. Can you trust this One, even with your most intimate, most personal, deepest desires?

STUDY GUIDE

LORD • Exodus 20:14; Matthew 5:27–30

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read aloud the passages for the week: Exodus 20:14 and Matthew 5:27–30. Silently reflect on what you heard. Underline phrases that seem meaningful.

- How have advertisers and Hollywood managed to turn sex into a product to consume? What are some of the consequences our society is experiencing because of its view of sex?
- A strong cultural belief is that our desires are part of our identity and must be respected and honored by all. To what extent should love or desire determine our morality? What other factors should influence our decisions?
- What was your primary source of sex ed? (parents, school, etc...) What lies were you led to believe because of some of these influences?
- Pornography teaches people to divorce a human body from personhood. Read Psalm 139:13–18. How does David view his body? What is God's view?*
- Re-read Matthew 5:27–30. What do you think about Jesus's instructions for avoiding sin? Would this effectively restrict sin?
- This command is designed to reorient God's people and to point to a life of freedom. How does a call to faithfulness in marriage and a warning against lust point us towards a fuller way of living?
- This command reminds us that God claims authority over all aspects of our being, even our desires. What would it look like for you to truly submit your desires to the Lord?

OUT:

Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

This weekend is CityServe. Pray for those serving and being served, for logistics, and that our city would be blessed by Christ.

IN:

Connect With the Family of God

Share with a close friend or someone you trust your response to the last question. Share a concrete step you will take to trust Jesus with your deepest wants and needs. .

*Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 128.