

Monday

Read Matthew 5:27-30

Ray Caldwell spent 12 seasons in the big leagues, mainly with the Yankees, but some time with the Red Sox and Indians as well. He was well known for his alcoholism and commitment to partying, sometimes disappearing for weeks. So well-known for it, that when he was cut by Boston in June of 1919 and signed with Cleveland, he was shocked that there was nothing in his contract about abstaining from such activities. His manager, hall of famer Tris Speaker, explained it was on purpose, and that they wanted him to follow a strict regimen. Pitch, get drunk, sleep it off, come back in a few days for normal baseball practice, and start the process over again.

The regimen seemingly worked. He went 5-1 with the Indians, with a 1.71 ERA. And during that span pitched the only no hitter of his career.

In our passage today, Jesus isn't interested in getting us to control our sexual drives well-enough to keep it together for a couple hours a week. The goal is sexual purity – fidelity in marriage, chastity in singleness – to enhance the big goal: spiritual maturity and faithfulness to God and one another. This is the every-moment task of our lives.

Observe yourself today. How do you try to placate yourself into thinking your sin is no big deal and equivocate that your sin isn't that bad?

Tuesday

Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Continuing on from the thrust of our closing question yesterday, if you have no sin, you have no need of grace. As Paul says in

Romans, we shouldn't sin more so that we can receive more grace, that is a false logic, but on the other hand, if we try to pretend that we aren't sinning we can't give ourselves over to Christ fully and receive his grace for those sins and situations in our lives.

What do you need to give Jesus today? Be specific.

Wednesday

Read Genesis 1:26-31

The goal of holiness can involve sex. Our faith does not call us to abandon sex for holiness like some other religious traditions. In classical Theravada Buddhism, one forswears marriage and all desire when one wishes to become a truly holy person. In Hinduism, the higher and later holiness of the stages of life require forsaking marriage. The God of the Bible commands us to never break or disparage marriage. We do not become more holy by breaking our proper commitments or being unfaithful to one commitment to enhance our faithfulness to another. We are to see our life purpose in fidelity – in faithfulness – to God alone and seek our sexual fulfillment in marriage alone. The pursuit of this holiness is about aligning our wills – our whole selves – to God in Jesus Christ.

And so this command of Jesus is not only about not actually having affairs that people can catch on camera or prove from your text message or such. It is about the condition of your heart and what you do with yourself and your sexuality. Jesus tells us not to stare (or not to obsess in some other way... with our thoughts, longings, etc.) at another person with lustful intent – with the goal of lusting after another person. Looking at someone with lustful intent is different than looking at someone with desire. Not to split hairs too finely, but looking at someone with desire happens, it is the result of a God-given drive. But to start in order to lust after them is a problem because it makes that person an object – we want to use them for our own gratification. This is forbidden in Jesus' ethics because the core of his ethics is to love God with everything that

you have and all that you are and to love others as yourself. Jesus' ethics are about putting God and others before yourself. You can't do this if you turn a person into an object for your own pleasure. This seems like a crazy high standard that many would assume is anti-sex. However, God, as the creator of sex is pro-sex. God very much wants you to have all the sex you and your partner consensually desire. Genesis 1:28: And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth..."

How do you need to change your perspective as a follower of Jesus to see sex as a good part of God's creation?

Thursday

Read Matthew 5:27-30

Jesus' solution to lust is amputation, not Band-Aids. Some things just need to stop and you need to cut out the compromising relationships in your life. Whether you are having an affair, a thing you tell yourself isn't an affair, pornography, trashing romance novels that might as well be pornography, things that aren't actually pornographic but you use for your own lust... whatever... don't weasel around Jesus' solution with technicalities. Jesus' solution is amputation because some things don't heal with a Band-Aid and Jesus says lust is one of them. The American Civil War saw tens of thousands of brutal field amputations, but the doctors new that if they didn't amputate the arm or leg, the soldier would die a slow agonizing death. Amputation was the only thing for life and amputation of lust is Jesus' solution.

It might seem impossible to get control of lust in the way Jesus describes. Remember there is grace. Remember there is joy. Remember that Ray Caldwell completed a game on the mound after being hit by lightning. With God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26)!

Friday

Each week in 2022, we are praying for the most dangerous places to be a follower of Jesus. Please spend today in prayer for Congo and the Christians in Congo. You can get more info, and this info comes from, here: <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

What is life like for Christians in Congo?

The Islamic extremist group Alliance for Democratic Forces (ADF) is responsible for the persecution of Christians in the eastern part of the country, attacking Christians and churches. The violence has resulted in more than a million internally displaced people. Additionally, followers of Jesus are at risk for kidnappings and having their homes destroyed. Converts, both from Islam and from tribal religions, also face pressure to take part in non-Christian religious activities and ceremonies.

Areas for prayer:

- Attacks by Islamic extremists have brought great suffering to the general population, including large numbers of Christians. Please pray for the Lord's provision, strength and hope.
- Pray that those coming to terms with the loss of loved ones would experience the Lord's comfort to them.
- Pray God would touch the hearts of the ADF militants.