

CHAPTER 5, SESSION 16: LEARNING TO LIVE WITHOUT LUST

CHAPTER CHALLENGE

Even within a group that has developed strong trust, it is difficult to speak honestly about our experiences of lust. Particularly in mixed-gender groups this challenge will be present. While it is not necessary for participants to talk openly about all their struggles, it can be damaging to the group if people are not willing to share at some level. The silence of the Church is the easiest path when it comes to this topic. As the leader, don't push anyone to talk about their struggles; however, tell the group they should feel comfortable speaking openly about any of the subjects that are covered by this series. Those who do not struggle with a particular issue should not judge another person because of their struggle, but instead should stand beside them prayerfully encouraging them along the way. Be sensitive to anyone who seems to be unusually quiet, you may want to visit with them after class.

Again, as with each chapter, the point of the chapter is to turn our attention to what will bring us wholeness and health in our relationship with God, others and even ourselves. Cultivate this inner awareness in any way that you can.

SUPPLIES

- ☞ A chime or bell for the “Experiencing Transformation” activity
- ☞ For prayer station #1 you will need a table with lit candles set on it, inkpads, a pad of paper, baby wipes for removing ink from hands, several photocopies of Psalm 139:1-18 and three or four copies of the instructions for the table
- ☞ For prayer station #2: photocopies of Matthew 14:22-33 and the reflection questions
- ☞ For prayer station #3: a table with lit candles and photocopies of the Instructions and Meditation

WELCOME

Remind folks of the dates, location and cost for the silent retreat. This is also a good time to inform the group of the final plans for the closing retreat.

RECITE COLOSSIANS 3:1-17 TOGETHER

Then begin the silence.

5 MINUTES OF SILENCE

PRAYER TO END THE SILENCE

You may say the following prayer, a prayer of your own or simply say “Amen” to end the silence.

Loving God, when you look at us you see us as we truly are—immense spiritual beings who were created to reign with you in your kingdom. So often we settle for lesser images of ourselves and others. We look upon others as objects for our pleasure. Set us free, O Lord, to see others and ourselves as you see us. Amen.

SOUL-TRAINING [15 minutes]

If you are in a group of six or more people, divide into small groups of three or four. Use the questions below to help you process your experience of fasting from media.

1. Were you able to fast from media this week? If so, describe what you did and how it felt.
2. What connections were you able to see between the media fast and lust?
3. What did you learn about God or yourself from the media fast?

ENGAGING THE CHAPTER [25 minutes]

THE MAIN IDEA OF THIS CHAPTER: is that lust (*epithumia*) is the creation of a false image or persona wherein we objectify that persona or image in an attempt to fill a deep need for intimacy, which can only be met by our union with God in his kingdom.

Read through the following questions before you begin discussion. Note any questions you especially want to discuss. Depending on your group size and the conversation, you may not have time to discuss all of these questions.

1. What messages have you heard at church about sex? What has been implied about sex through silence?
2. On pages 91-92 the author connects *epithumia* and adultery, and he notes that in both cases, “valuing the other as a sacred being is tossed aside.” Do you agree or disagree with the comparison between lust and adultery? If you are comfortable, explain.
3. The author explores “*Epithumia* for Women” on pages 92-93. In what ways do you agree or disagree with the author’s observations?
4. Near the end of the chapter the author makes several points about how living in the kingdom of God is the cure for lust:
 - ☞ “In the kingdom we know who we are and whose we are. The need to feel loved, to be important, and to be sacred and special is met in our oneness with Christ” (p. 95).
 - ☞ “When I set my heart on things above (the kingdom) I discover that I am part of something thrilling and exciting—the divine conspiracy—and everywhere I turn God is at work. Now I have the drama I seek and I have a place to channel my energies” (p. 95).
 - ☞ “Finally, because I know who I am and am secure (God is good and desires my good) I am free to see others in a new way. I no longer see them as objects to exploit but as real persons who God dearly loves” (p. 95).
5. What is your reaction to the triangle of appropriate physical intimacy (p. 96)?

BREAK [5 minutes]

This week’s “Engaging the Word” is included in the “Three Prayer Stations” activity.

EXPERIENCING TRANSFORMATION—THREE PRAYER STATIONS [45 minutes]

For this experience, you will need to create three prayer stations that explore topics from the chapter. The first station addresses our identity as “one in whom Christ dwells.” The second station invites participants to catch a vision for something bigger than their sexual desires. The third station encourages participants to see others the way God sees them.

The stations can be set up in a large room (gym or fellowship hall) so the music and readings don’t distract the others or in separate rooms that are near to each other. As the leader you will need to have an appropriate way to notify the group when there are 5 minutes remaining and when the time is over (a chime works well). Following the time at the prayer stations, leave about 10 minutes for the group to come back together and share their experiences.

Give these instructions to the group:

Living in the kingdom of God begins to diminish our lust by addressing three different issues: first, we come to see ourselves as ones “in whom Christ dwells” —deeply loved and valued by God. Second, we catch a vision for something bigger than our sexual desires—the kingdom of God is active and dynamic all around us, and we have been invited to participate in that action. Third, we come to see others as God sees them—not as sexual parts designed and assembled for our pleasure but as spiritual beings with an eternal destiny in God’s kingdom. This session’s experience involves three prayer stations that look at these three sources of healing.

The prayer stations can be done in any order, so feel free to go to the station that attracts you most. If you don’t complete all three prayer stations in the given time, that is alright.

PRAYER STATION #1—OUR IDENTITY

The author writes, “The need to feel loved, to be important, and to be sacred and special is met in our oneness with Christ” (p. 95). One of the most powerful passages of Scripture to solidify our identity as a beloved and sacred child of God is Psalm 139. At this station, set a few lit candles on a table with several copies of Psalm 139:1-18. Participants are invited to read the passage as many times through as they would like using *lectio divina*. After this time of silent prayer and fellowship with God, they can touch their fingers and thumbs to the inkpads and leave their unique fingerprint on the pad of paper in the center of the table as a symbol of their uniqueness and sacredness.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TABLE

For this prayer station, you are invited to discover your identity as described by the psalmist in Psalm 139:1-18. Read this text using the steps of lectio divina. First, read the passage all the way through, just getting a feel for the passage. Read the passage a second time inviting God to reveal any words or phrases for you to chew on. Spend a few minutes in silence repeating that word or phrase over to yourself. Read the passage a third time asking God why the previous word or phrase was drawn to your attention. Spend a few minutes in silent conversation with God, asking and listening, as you discover God’s word for your life. Following this conversation, spend time savoring God’s presence with you.

When your time of silence feels like it has concluded, go to the table and touch your fingers to the inkpad, and then leave your unique fingerprint on the blank paper in the middle of the table as a celebration of your sacredness.

PSALM 139:1-18 (NIV)

O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.	even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.
You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.	For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.
You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.	I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.	your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.	My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.	When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,
Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?	your eyes saw my unformed body.
If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.	All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,	How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!
even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.	Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.
If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,”	When I awake, I am still with you.

PRAYER STATION #2—CHANNELING DESIRE TOWARD SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL

For this simple station you will need photocopies of the Scripture passage Matthew 14:22-33 with photocopies of the reflection questions. Because the Scripture revolves around a boat and water, you may want to develop a nautical theme for the station.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE TABLE

The desire within us that leads to lust is an important part of who we are. As Rob Bell writes, “It’s not about getting rid of desire. It’s about giving ourselves to bigger and better and more powerful desires. . . . Life is not about toning down and repressing your God-given life force. It’s about channeling it and focusing it and turning it loose on something beautiful” (p. 95).

This station is a reflection on how God is inviting you to step out of the boat and move into a new and bigger dream for your life.

Begin by reading Matthew 14:22-33 (NIV).

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?”

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Then journal your answers to these questions:

- ☞ What is Jesus inviting me to do?*
- ☞ What is the boat that Jesus is inviting me to step out of?*
- ☞ What fears keep me from moving into the bigger dream?*
- ☞ What simple, measurable step could I take to respond to Jesus’ invitation?*

If you have a sense of calling from God, pray for the courage to respond.

PRAYER STATION #3—SEEING OTHERS DIFFERENTLY

For prayer station #3, set the instructions and meditation on a table with candles lit for ambience.

INSTRUCTIONS AND MEDITATION

This prayer station is a meditation from the book Jesus, the Son of Man by Kahlil Gibran. It is based very loosely on the interaction between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Do not focus on the biblical accuracy of the meditation, but instead focus on the truth that is revealed. The meditation invites us to imagine the relationship that Jesus offered to women. Read it prayerfully allowing your imagination to picture the conversations.

It was in the month of June when I saw Him for the first time. He was walking in the wheat field when I passed by with my handmaidens, and He was alone.

The rhythm of His step was different from other men’s, and the movement of His body was like naught I had seen before. Men do not pace the earth in that manner. And even now I do not know whether He walked fast or slow.

My handmaidens pointed their fingers at Him and spoke in shy whispers to one another. And I stayed my steps for a moment, and raised my hand to hail Him. But He did not turn His face, and He did not look at

me. And I hated Him. I was swept back into myself, and I was so cold as if I had been in a snow-drift. And I shivered.

That night I beheld Him in my dreaming; and they told me afterward that I screamed in my sleep and was restless upon my bed.

It was in the month of August that I saw Him again, through my window. He was sitting in the shadow of the cypress tree across my garden, and He was as still as if He had been carved out of stone, like the statues in Antioch and other cities of the North Country.

And my slave, the Egyptian, came to me and said, "That man is here again. He is sitting there across your garden."

And I gazed at Him, and my soul quivered within me, for He was beautiful.

His body was single and each part seemed to love every other part.

Then I clothed myself with raiment of Damascus, and I left my house and walked towards Him.

Was it my aloneness, or was it His fragrance, that drew me to Him? Was it a hunger in my eyes that desired comeliness, or was it His beauty that sought the light of my eyes?

Even now I do not know.

I walked to Him with my scented garments and my golden sandals, the sandals the Roman captain had given me, even these sandals. And when I reached Him, I said, "Good-morrow to you."

And He said, "Good-morrow to you, Miriam."

And He looked at me, and His night-eyes saw me as no man had seen me. And suddenly I was as if naked, and I was shy.

Yet He had only said, "Good-morrow to you."

And then I said to Him, "Will you not come to my house?"

And He said, "Am I not already in your house?"

I did not know what He meant then, but I know now.

And I said, "Will you not have wine and bread with me?"

And He said, "Yes, Miriam, but not now."

Not now, not now, He said. And the voice of the sea was in those two words, and the voice of the wind and the trees. And when He said them unto me, life spoke to death.

For mind you, my friend, I was dead. I was a woman who had divorced her soul. I was living apart from this self which you now see. I belonged to all men, and to none. They called me harlot, and a woman possessed of seven devils. I was cursed, and I was envied.

But when His dawn-eyes looked into my eyes all the stars of my night faded away, and I became Miriam, only Miriam, a woman lost to the earth she had known, and finding herself in new places.

And now again I said to Him, "Come into my house and share bread and wine with me."

And He said, "Why do you bid me to be your guest?"

And I said, "I beg you to come into my house." And it was all that was sod in me, and all that was sky in me calling unto Him.

Then He looked at me, and the noontide of His eyes was upon me, and He said, "You have many lovers, and yet I alone love you. Other men love themselves in your nearness. I love you in your self. Other men see a beauty in you that shall fade away sooner than their own years. But I see in you a beauty that shall not fade away, and in the autumn of your days that beauty shall not be afraid to gaze at itself in the mirror, and it shall not be offended.

“I alone love the unseen in you.”

Then He said in a low voice, “Go away now. If this cypress tree is yours and you would not have me sit in its shadow, I will walk my way.”

And I cried to Him and I said, “Master, come to my house. I have incense to burn for you, and a silver basin for your feet. You are a stranger and yet not a stranger. I entreat you, come to my house.”

Then He stood up and looked at me even as the seasons might look down upon the field, and He smiled. And He said again: “All men love you for themselves. I love you for yourself.”

And then He walked away.

But no other man ever walked the way He walked. Was it a breath born in my garden that moved to the east? Or was it a storm that would shake all things to their foundations?

I knew not, but on that day the sunset of His eyes slew the dragon in me, and I became a woman, I became Miriam, Miriam of Mijdel.
—Kahlil Gibran from *Jesus, the Son of Man*

GO IN PEACE [5 minutes]

Conclude by having one person in your group read aloud this quote by Lauren Winner from her book *Real Sex*, page 159:

The process of *metanoia* is not merely a process of growing into a list of do’s and don’ts, but rather an increasing recognition that you have earned nothing that you have—not your life or your body, not grace, not salvation. It is a process of learning to live thankfully (or, if you will, eucharistically).

FOR THE COMING WEEK

At the end of this session’s “Experiencing Transformation,” participants can remain in silence for as long as they like and leave when they are ready. For this reason before you begin the meditation, discuss what needs to be done this coming week:

- ☞ Read chapter 6, which explores how living in the kingdom is the cure for lying.
- ☞ The soul-shaping practice for the week will be a day without words.
- ☞ Prior to the next session, you will have the silent retreat.