

INTRODUCTION

- Hello. Heavy topic. Acknowledge the children.
- [PRAY] *“How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word”* (Psalm 119:9)
- Matt Hancock, the former MP and Health Secretary, made the headlines in 2021 not for his politics but his private life
 - He was caught on camera having an affair with one of his staff members during the pandemic
 - The CCTV footage shows Matt Hancock, who was married with three children, kissing Gina Coladangelo, who was also married with three children
- In an interview with Steven Bartlett, the host of Diary of a CEO, he talked openly about his affair
 - And what was shocking about that interview is this: he doesn't seem to think it was wrong
 - He talks about regretting breaking the social distancing guidelines but doesn't seem to show any remorse for leaving his wife for another woman
 - In fact, he justifies it by saying, *“we fell in love. And, you know, that's something that was completely outside of my control.”*

- Matt Hancock is not alone.
 - Adultery, having sexual relations with someone who is not your spouse, is sadly very common and, in some surveys, as many as 1 in 5 adults in the UK admit to having an affair
 - The world around us is constantly telling us that adultery is a chance to find love and happiness
 - If you pick up a magazine or newspaper, scroll through social media, turn on the TV or watch a film on Netflix
 - You will see story after story of people leaving their husband or wife for another person being presented as exciting, romantic and life-giving
- Proverbs 6 and 7 offer a very different perspective
 - In these chapters, Solomon warns his son that, rather than bringing happiness and life, having an affair will destroy your life and lead to death

- Now, I don't know many of you but I'm aware that this will be a sensitive topic for some of us
 - Some of us will know of the destruction caused by an affair because we have witnessed this first hand in our own families or among friends
 - For some of us, we might have been the spouse that was cheated on
 - And for some of us, we might be feeling the temptation to be unfaithful or even taking steps towards having an affair
- Solomon is speaking to his son, so these verses are written to a **young man** to warn him against having sexual relations with a **married woman**
 - so if you're a young man, there is a particular warning for you in this passage
 - But there is broader application for all of us, whether you are male or female, single or married, young or old
 - The Bible is clear that any sexual relations outside of marriage is sinful and destructive and, in Matthew 5, Jesus himself warns about the danger of even looking at someone lustfully
 - so if you're a young dating couple and you're tempted to cross the line
 - or you're single and having lustful thoughts about someone

- or you've been married for a long time, and you sometimes fantasise about what it would be like to be with someone else
- This passage has clear warnings for you too: don't give in to temptation, don't let your heart be turned towards someone who you are not married to, chose the path of wisdom not folly
- Remember the book of Proverbs is not just about head knowledge
 - It's about wisdom in action
 - It's about how we live well as children of the King
 - And the key practical question this text addresses is this: How do we avoid adultery? What steps can we take to make sure it doesn't happen?
 - Even if we're not currently experiencing sexual temptation, how do we prepare our hearts so that we resist temptation when it comes?

- So keep your Bibles open as we work through this text together
 - How do we avoid adultery?
 - The first step, in chapter 6 verses 20-24, is to **treasure your Father's word**

1. TREASURE YOUR FATHER'S WORD (6:20-24)

WHAT: KEEP YOUR FATHER'S WORD (6:20-21)

- Kids and teenagers in the room, how many times a day do you think your mum or dad ask you to do something?
 - Maybe it's "finish your dinner", "tidy your room", "make sure you take your jacket"
 - Even though it might not seem like it to you, parents want their children to listen to their instructions because they care and want what's best for them
- And that's what's going on in verse 20:
 - *"My son keep your father's command and don't reject your mother's teaching"*
 - It sounds like Solomon is saying, *"Listen to your parents and do what we say"*
 - But it's deeper than this
 - The word for *"keep"* here is not just about obedience but more like "keep it safe", "protect our teaching", "guard it like it's precious treasure"

- And it goes deeper again in verse 21. He says:
 - *“Always”* - that’s 24/7, 365 days a year, for the rest of your life
 - *“Bind them to your heart”* - commit these commands to memory and let them be deeply embedded in your heart so that they affect how you think and act
 - And *“tie them around your neck”* - put them in places where you can see them and be reminded of them every day
- These are the words of a loving father to his precious son, pleading with him to treasure his father’s command, and particularly the command to resist sexual temptation: to meditate on it all the time so that it impacts his heart

APPLICATION: TREASURE GOD’S WORD

- Now Solomon is not our father but God our Father gives us the same command to avoid adultery, and, in Deuteronomy 11, he gives us similar instructions to imprint His words on our hearts and tie them round our hands
- God wants **us** to treasure **His** word
 - To keep his command
 - To not reject his teaching
 - To always bind it to our hearts
 - To tie it round our necks

- That starts with opening up your Bible and reading it so that you know verses like:
 - Exodus 20: *“You shall not commit adultery.”*
 - Or Jesus’ words in Matthew 5: *“... anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”*
- And more than knowing it, we need to give ourselves reminders
 - By reading it throughout the day
 - Or sticking verses on your fridge, your desk, bedside table or phone background
- And more than memorising it, we need to apply God’s word to our hearts, letting it affect us to the core of our being so that it shapes how we think and act
- We need to ask ourselves these questions:
 - Do I take time to read God’s word? Do I treasure it?
 - Do you try to memorise it? Do you apply it to your heart?
 - We all know that just having head knowledge is not enough
 - It’s only when we delight in God’s word and treasure it in our hearts that it starts to affect how we think and act

WHY: THEY WILL KEEP YOU (6:22-24)

- And here's why this is so important: **because this is what will stop us from giving in to temptation.**
- Look at verse 22
 - *“When you walk here and there, they will guide you when you lie down, they will watch over you; when you wake up, they will talk to you.”*
 - He's using the image of a shepherd caring for his sheep
 - Picture a flock of sheep roaming on the hillside.
 - They're vulnerable to attack.
 - They don't know where to go.
 - They need a shepherd to guide them and protect them.
 - And that's what Solomon's commands do for his Son and what God's commands do for us:
 - as we wander through life
 - when we go to bed at night and wake up in the morning
 - His word guides us, warns us of danger and watches over us

- And verse 23 describes his command as a lamp
 - Imagine being in a dark room, the power has gone out and you can't see anything
 - What would you do?
 - In the past, you might rummage for a candle and a box of matches
 - Now you would probably grab your phone and put the torch on
 - Either way, the light helps you to find your way and avoid danger from tripping over something or walking into a wall
 - That's what Solomon's commands do for his Son and what God's commands do for us: they help us see clearly, light up our path and, even when they correct us, they lead us to life

APPLICATION: GOD'S WORD WILL PROTECT YOU

- Friends, this is the first step in resisting sexual temptation: treasure God's word so that, just as a shepherd protects his sheep and a lamp lights our path, his word will protect you
 - We meet the evil and wayward woman in verse 24 and we will meet her again later in the passage
 - She is a married woman whose wicked aim is to flatter you and seduce you into bed with her

- Remember, there is a particular warning for young men here
- But she is a picture of the sexual temptation that all of us may face in the form of work colleagues, neighbours, friends or strangers we meet
- And all of us need to listen to God's true words rather than the flattering tongue of someone who is trying to lead us astray
- There have been many sad stories in recent years of prominent Christian leaders leaving their spouses and having an affair
 - There is no doubt that, in each of these stories, the fall into sexual sin started with devaluing God's commands and listening to the voice of temptation rather than God's word
- We need to treasure our Father's commands so that when temptation comes your way:
 - When someone catches your eye
 - When see an image online, an advert on TV or watch a film that leads to unhelpful thoughts
 - When you feel your heart drawn to someone who is not your spouse
 - Maybe they laugh at your jokes, show real interest in you or encourage you
 - Maybe they even deliberately flatter you to win you over

- In each of these situations, you recall what God's word says: that, no matter how you feel in the moment, becoming romantically and sexually involved with someone who you are not married to is wrong and does not please God
- Out of His kindness, He has given us his word to guide us and protect us
- This is the first step in resisting sexual temptation: treasure God's word

2. THINK OF THE END RESULT (6:25-35)

- Here's the second step: **think of the end result** in verses 25 to 35. **Think of the end result.**
- Like a good father, Solomon's instructions to his son are clear in verse 25:
 - *"Don't lust in your heart for her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyelashes."*
 - And as a wise father, he knows that adultery doesn't start in the bedroom
 - It starts with the eyes: being drawn to external beauty
 - And it starts with the heart: with lust, being captivated with desire

APPLICATION: WARNING ABOUT LUST

- This is a helpful warning to us to act early when we recognise a problem with our eyes or our heart
 - When you notice someone who is physically attractive
 - When you find yourself looking for longer or taking another glance
 - When you start to dream about them and think of them in a romantic or sexual way
- Act early. Nip it in the bud. Ask God for his help. Confess it to a friend and ask them to pray for you.

THE DANGER OF ADULTERY

- As I mentioned earlier, the world around us so often presents having an affair as something that offers life and happiness
 - That's how Matt Hancock framed it in that interview
 - That's how it's often portrayed in films like the Notebook or Titanic
 - But we get the opposite picture here
- In verse 26, Solomon makes the point that, while a prostitute may charge a fee at the price of a loaf of bread, going to bed with another man's wife leads to death: it will cost you your precious life

- Now, this verse is not saying that it's okay to sleep with a prostitute
- That goes very clearly against the teaching of the Bible
- But the consequences if you sleep with a married woman are different and, as you experience them in this life, will be much worse
- First, the consequences are **unavoidable**. You can't escape them. Look at verse 27 with me:
 - *“Can a man embrace fire and his clothes not be burned?
Can a man walk on burning coals
without scorching his feet?”*
 - The answer to those two questions is a definite “no”
 - If you hug fire, your clothes will be burned
 - If you walk on burning coals, you will scorch your feet
 - *“So it is with the one who sleeps with
another man's wife; no one who touches her will go
unpunished.”*
- As well as being unavoidable, the consequences are **severe**
 - Look at verse 30. He compares the one who commits adultery with a thief and here's the point: people don't hate a poor thief who steals because he is hungry.
 - We have sympathy for him
 - But if he is caught (verse 31), he still has to pay back what he stole and more

- The consequences for the person that steals another man's wife, who commits adultery, are on a whole different level
 - Verse 32: *"The one who commits adultery lacks sense; whoever does so destroys himself."*
 - He doesn't just have to pay back money: his actions will cost him his life. He destroys himself.
 - And instead of getting sympathy, he gets *"a beating and dishonour, and his disgrace will never be removed"*
 - And he will also have to face the fury of the woman's husband who *"will show no mercy when he takes revenge. He will not be appeased by anything or be persuaded by lavish bribes"*
- This is the end result of adultery: it will completely ruin your life
 - It will lead to disgrace and dishonour that will last for ever
 - And her husband is going to come after you and there is nothing you can do to escape his anger
 - No amount of money or bribe will stop him from getting revenge

APPLICATION: THINK OF THE END RESULT

- These are terrifying verses but that's the point
 - Solomon is helping his son, and us, to see the end result of adultery so that we run as far as we can from it
 - He's showing us the cliff that we're about to drive off, so that we slam on the breaks and drive in the opposite direction
- Thomas Brooks, a puritan preacher, wrote these words about how sin may seem attractive, but the deadly consequences are hidden from our eyes
 - He says: *"To present the bait and hide the hook; to present the golden cup, and hide the poison; to present the sweet, the pleasure, and the profit that may flow in upon the soul by yielding to sin, and by hiding from the soul the wrath and misery that will certainly follow the committing of sin."*
- We need to see the hook beneath the bait and the poison in the golden cup
- Adultery will burn you like fire and, when we are feeling tempted, we need to think of the end result
 - Think of the destruction it will cause
 - Think of what you will lose
 - If you're married, think of the impact on your spouse and how upset they will be
 - Think of the effects on your children

- Think of the shame and dishonour
 - Think of what your friends will say
 - Think of what your church family will say
 - Think of what your parents will say when you tell them
- Think of the revenge you will experience from their husband, wife, parents, siblings or friends
 - Think of what they will say to you
 - Think of what they will do to you out of anger
- It may look tempting; it might look like it will bring happiness and a fresh start, but adultery will ultimately lead to disgrace and destruction

3. TREASURE YOUR FATHER'S WORD (7:1-5)

- So how do we avoid adultery? How do we resist sexual temptation?
 - Point 1: treasure your Father's word
 - Point 2: think of the end result
 - And point 3 is the same as point 1: **treasure your Father's word**

- Chapter 7 verses 1-5 make the same point as chapter 6 verses 20-24 to make sure we've really got it
 - *“My son, obey my words, and treasure my commands. Keep my commands and live, and guard my instructions as you would the pupil of your eye. Tie them to your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.”*
 - As we said before, this is not just a call to just obey the Father's instructions
 - But to treasure them, keep them safe, remind yourself of them and let them be permanently engraved on your heart so that they affect how you think and act
- Solomon goes even further here and wants his son to treat wisdom like a sister in verse 4
 - Some people argue that this language suggests even marrying wisdom
 - Like in Song of Songs, where Solomon calls his lover *“my sister, my bride”*
 - Either way, it's a picture of getting close and intimate with wise teaching
 - And *“She”* - that's wisdom – *“will keep you from a forbidden woman, a wayward woman with her flattering talk.*

- The point is clear: treasure your Father's word, get close with wisdom.
 - The words of wisdom lead to life
 - While the flattering speech of the adulterous woman leads to death
 - Chose to listen to Lady Wisdom, keep her close and she will keep you from the adulterous woman.

APPLICATION: TREASURE GOD'S WORD

- And the application for us too is clear: we need to treasure God's commands and get close with wisdom so that we don't give in to temptation
- Take a moment to examine your own life and ask yourself the question: do you really treasure God's word?
 - I'm convicted that I don't value this book like I should
 - I skim read it. I don't prioritise it.
 - I think about other things. I don't delight in it.

- Here are some questions to ask yourself:
 - Do you open your Bible with excitement or groaning?
 - Do you see it as a joy or a chore?
 - What does the way you chose to spend your time say about how much you value God's word?
 - Do you prefer watching TV, playing sport or talking with friends?
 - If you have a spare 5 minutes, are you more likely to scroll on your phone or open up your Bible?
- Friends, if we want to resist the temptation to sin, we need to treasure God's word

4. RECOGNISE THE STEPS IN THE PROCESS (7:6-23)

- Here is point 4 of Solomon's lessons for how to avoid sexual sin: **recognise the steps in the process.**
 - In chapter 7 verses 6-23 he gives us a worked example, a real-life story of where ignoring these commands will lead you
 - It's as if he is saying, "This is not just theoretical. This is a real-life danger"

- We are all familiar with warning messages
 - The warning light on your car which tells you your breaks aren't working
 - The warning sign on a bottle of bleach which tells you to avoid getting it in your eyes
 - But the ones that really get to me are those road safety campaign adverts which warn about the dangers of speeding or drink driving.
 - You know the ones that show you graphic, real-life footage of someone speeding round a tight corner, losing control of the car, crashing into a tree and sadly dying
 - That's what's going on in this section
 - This is graphic, real-life footage of what happens if you engage in adultery
 - And its purpose is to warn us of the dangers and make us learn from this man's mistakes
- Keep your eyes on the passage and we'll walk through the story together
 - Verses 6 and 7. Solomon looks out of his window and sees a young man who is inexperienced and lacks sense. He's someone just like Solomon's son.
 - Verse 8. He crosses the street near her corner and strolls down the road to her house.
 - Verse 9. It's late at night.
 - Verse 10. *"A woman came to meet him dressed like a prostitute, having a hidden agenda"*

- Verse 11. She's loud and defiant. She doesn't stay at home
- Verse 12. Instead, she's out in the street and the squares, lurking at every corner, ready to make a move on somebody.
- Verse 13. The heat is turned up. They meet and "*She grabs him and kisses him; she brazenly says to him,*
- *"I've made fellowship offerings;
today I've fulfilled my vows.
So I came out to meet **you**,
to search for **you**, and I've found **you**.
I've spread coverings on my bed—
richly colored linen from Egypt.
I've perfumed my bed
with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.
Come, let's drink deeply of lovemaking until morning.
Let's **feast** on each other's love
My husband isn't home;
he went on a long journey.
He took a bag of silver with him
and will come home at the time of the full moon."*

- She flirts with him, makes him feel special, entices him with her bed covered in fancy Egyptian cotton and expensive perfume, invites him for a feast of lovemaking all night long and assures him that they won't get caught because her husband is away
- How does he respond?
- Verse 21. They're sad words:

*She seduces him with her persistent pleading;
she lures with her flattering talk.*

He follows her impulsively

like an ox going to the slaughter,

like a deer bounding toward a trap

until an arrow pierces its liver,

like a bird darting into a snare—

he doesn't know it will cost him his life. [PAUSE]

- Here's the take home message of the story: adultery might look appealing, it might give you a rush and seem exciting, but it leads to death
 - He's like an ox going to the slaughter, a deer running into a trap and a bird flying into a snare
 - Each of these animals is going about their lives and then "bam", without knowing it, they are caught and killed
 - She invites him to her comfortable bed, but she's really taking him to the slaughterhouse
 - She promises a feast of love, but she serves up a banquet of death
 - She promises there will be no consequences, but in reality it costs him his life [PAUSE]

APPLICATION: RECOGNISE THE STEPS IN THE PROCESS

- This is heavy story, and it's meant to be
 - It's like those road safety campaigns; it's meant to wake us up to the consequences of adultery
 - But Solomon could have just told us that adultery leads to death
 - But he gives us the details of the events leading up to the affair so that we see the circumstances which make this more likely to happen

- We need to think about the steps in the process and ask ourselves these questions: what's my weak point? Where am I at risk of stumbling?
- Let's work through the steps together
- **First thing: He went close to her house late at night.**
 - Do you put yourself in a position where you are in the wrong place at the wrong time?
 - We need to avoid the places and times of day, where we are more likely to give in to sexual temptation.
 - For you that might be
 - staying late in the office
 - meeting someone for coffee who you find attractive
 - spending a lot of time in the gym because you like the look of somebody
 - going to the pub on a Friday night or
 - cosying up with someone on the sofa when no one else is around
- **Second thing: She was dressing to get his attention.**
 - Verse 10 says she was "*dressed like a prostitute*" and had a "*hidden agenda*" to seduce him
 - Are your eyes drawn to someone because of their physical appearance or the way they dress?
 - Look away. Walk away. You might even have to avoid contact if it's becoming too much.

- **Third thing: She was trying to seduce him.**

- Verse 12 says that she was out in the street, lurking, ready to make a move.
- Not everyone has innocent motives.
- Do you have concerns that someone is trying to pursue you?
- If you're married or they're married, be absolutely clear that you're not interested and keep your distance

- **Fourth thing: She kisses him and flirts with him.**

- She kisses him and makes him feel special by telling him that she was searching for him.
- Have you noticed someone flirting with you or being overly physically affectionate?
- Would people say this about you?
- It might seem like a bit of fun but being overly physical and flirting with someone who is not your spouse is like playing with fire.
- Leave the room. Walk away. Avoid contact if you can.

- Then there's the...
 - **The romantic setting**, with fancy Egyptian cotton and expensive perfume.
 - **The explicit invitation to make love until morning**
 - And the **promise of not getting caught**
- It goes without saying that, if any of us are experiencing temptation in these areas then we're one step away from committing adultery
- Don't believe the lies
- Follow the example of Joseph, when Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him to come bed with her and run as far as you can

5. DON'T LET YOUR HEART TURN (7:24-27)

- How do we avoid adultery?
 - Point 1: treasure your Father's word
 - Point 2: think of the end result
 - Point 3: in case you didn't get it the first time, treasure your Father's word
 - Point 4: recognise the steps in the process
 - And point 5, in verses 24-27: **don't let your heart turn**
 - If you're married, **don't let your heart turn** towards someone other than your spouse
 - If you're not married, **don't let your heart turn** towards someone else's husband or wife

- Here is Solomon's final plea and notice that he says "sons" (plural) in verse 24. He's speaking to a broader audience and wants us all to listen up:
 - *"Now, sons, listen to me,
and pay attention to the words from my mouth.
Don't let your heart turn aside to her ways;
don't stray onto her paths.
For she has brought many down to death;
her victims are countless.
Her house is the road to Sheol,
descending to the chambers of death."*
- Throughout this passage, we've seen that adultery is fundamentally an issue of the **heart**
 - We had an issue with the steering in our car recently, where you would try to drive in a straight line and the car would veer off to the left and you'd have to keep correcting the steering wheel to bring it back on course
 - The same is true of our hearts
 - They are prone to turn in the wrong direction and be drawn towards sexual temptation
 - So Solomon wants us to listen up and pay attention
 - so that we stop our hearts from turning towards someone we are not married to
 - and don't even take one step down that path

- Because, as we've seen again and again in the passage, far from giving life and happiness, adultery leads to death
 - The adulterous woman will lead you by the hand to death, like she has done with countless victims before
 - She promises pleasure and excitement, but her house is the road to hell
- As well as disgrace, dishonour and revenge, the devastating consequence of going to bed with someone who is not your spouse is facing God's judgement forever in "*Sheol*" or hell, a place of pain and punishment

APPLICATION: JESUS SAVES US FROM DEATH

- Many of us will have messed up in this area in some way.
 - Whether it's in the past or the present, there will be people in this room who have
 - watched unhelpful content on TV or online
 - had sexual thoughts about someone you're not married to
 - gone too far with your boyfriend or girlfriend
 - dreamed of being with someone who is not your spouse
 - or even taken steps towards having an affair
 - We are not the obedient children that we should be
 - We fall short of our Father's commands
 - And it's right that we feel the sadness of that

- But this bit is really important, I want to wake you up if you've been nodding off: **our only hope for forgiveness, our only hope to get rid of our shame is Jesus Christ**

- He is the perfect Son who fulfils Proverbs 6 and 7
 - Who treasures and keeps his Father's commands
 - Who bound them to his heart
 - Who did not give in to temptation
 - Who chose the path of wisdom
 - Who was pure in his conduct and had no lust in his heart
- And in John chapter 4, when Jesus meets a woman at a well
 - He knows who she is and what she's done
 - She is a woman who has been sexually unfaithful
 - She has been through five husbands and is now with a man who she's not married to
 - She is trying to quench her thirst in all the wrong places – in sex and men rather than in God
 - And how does Jesus respond to her?
 - He looks on her with compassion, he offers her forgiveness and new life

- That's what his death on the cross makes possible
 - At the cross, Jesus died in the place of sinners and took on the judgment that we deserve
 - He entered the chambers of death in our place
 - He went to the slaughter on our behalf
 - To rescue us from the fire, save us from the snare and give us life

APPLICATION: LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

- The choices we make in life, and particularly our sexual conduct, reveal the condition of our hearts
 - We either choose the path of foolishness and engage in lust and adultery, because we have rejected Jesus
 - Or we choose wisdom and strive to be sexually pure, because our hearts have been changed by Jesus
- The plea to all of you this morning, whether you've been following Jesus for a long time or you're new to church, is to do as verse 24 says: **listen to God's word and pay attention to it**

- **1. First thing: Listen to the invitation to come to Jesus**
 - He invites us to come to Him in His word, no matter how far you have fallen
 - To turn from your life of sin, your lustful thoughts and any ways you have messed up in this area
 - And ask Him to forgive you and take away your shame
- **2. Second thing: Listen to the instructions about how to live your life**
 - This is what will keep us from turning of the path and falling off a cliff
 - Out of His grace, He gives us clear commands, even in this passage, to keep us from destroying our lives
 - And He gives us words to say when we fall into sexual sin, like David's prayer after his affair in Psalm 51
- **3. Third thing: Listen so that your heart is set on God**
 - As you see more of God in His word
 - As you read of His amazing grace towards us
 - Let it warm your heart and turn it towards **Him** instead of turning towards sexual sin
 - Listen to his word so that you grow in love for **Him** and delight to please **Him** so that you're able to say "no" when temptation comes

CONCLUSION

- Adultery promises life and happiness, but it will destroy your life and lead to death
- Listen God's word. Treasure His commands. Turn your heart to Him. Look to Jesus. Chose the path of life.
- Let's pray.