

# SESSION 4

## READY WHEN SEX DESTROYS

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### ***The Point***

God has set a high standard for sex that we're expected to uphold.

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### ***The Bible Meets Life***

Sex is a gift from God, but our sin nature has led to a selfish and distorted view of this gift. Sex outside of God's original design is destructive. Our culture lies to us about sex, but the Bible calls us to be obedient to God's plan and purpose where sexual intimacy is concerned. God calls us to be countercultural and to live within the freedom of His perfect design.

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### ***The Passage***

Ephesians 5:1-10

# WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

## ***Ephesians 5:1-10***

- <sup>1</sup> Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children.
- <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.
- <sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints.
- <sup>4</sup> Coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks.
- <sup>5</sup> For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God.
- <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things.
- <sup>7</sup> Therefore, do not become their partners.
- <sup>8</sup> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—
- <sup>9</sup> for the fruit of the light results in all goodness, righteousness, and truth—
- <sup>10</sup> discerning what is pleasing to the Lord.



## THE SETTING

Paul went to Ephesus on both his second and third missionary journeys, ministering there three years the second time. Despite his relatively long stay in Ephesus, Christianity faced serious challenges from other religions and philosophies of the day. He wrote this letter to once again lay out the basics of the faith and to reestablish the believers in the truths and fundamentals of life in Christ, regardless of the prevailing social norms around them.

# ENGAGE

(15 MINUTES)



ITEM  
12

**Leader Pack:** Use the *Called To Be Different* poster during the session to point out that God expects us to live differently than the world lives.

## GET INTO THE STUDY

**ENGAGE:** Begin the session with one or more of the **Engage Options** on the next page. (This is optional. If you'd rather skip the **Engage Options**, just begin with the first discussion question.)

**SAY:** Sex outside of God's original design is destructive. God calls us to be countercultural and to live within the freedom of His perfect design.

**DISCUSS:** Call students to discuss the question, "If you could be any celebrity, who would you be?"

**GUIDE:** Call attention to **The Point**. Explain that this is the key idea to keep in mind throughout the session.

THE POINT

*God has set a high standard for sex that we're expected to uphold.*

**READ:** Read and summarize **The Bible Meets Life** for your group.

By the time we reach adulthood, we like to think we've moved beyond wanting to be like other people—but that's not the case. Just look at hairstyle and fashion. We still try to look like the groups we identify ourselves with. Children and students especially are prone to identify with top athletes or pop stars. The problem is that students tend to imitate the whole package. This means that, unfortunately, they don't just strive to reach the same level of athleticism or talent, but they often end up embracing an athlete's or celebrity's whole lifestyle. I developed a friendship with someone who once played minor league baseball. In a moment of transparent conversation, he shared with me his journey. He said, "When I began playing baseball, I got a real buzz from the crowd and I started pursuing sexual relationships with women in different cities where we played. My life revolved around these sexual encounters. But I woke up one day and I was numb. A tiny piece of my soul was torn from me that I left with each of those women and I can never get it back. I'm tormented by guilt, and I don't know how to have a real relationship. I'm asking God to heal me." My friend would acknowledge nothing in that lifestyle was worth imitating. But the Book of Ephesians points us to Someone who is worth imitating. When we seek to imitate Christ, we discover a life of purity.

**PRAY:** Transition into the session by praying that your students understand the freedom that comes from living within God's perfect design for sex.



# Engage Options

## ► Lead with Action

Ask your students to create a list of attributes they want in their future husband/wife. Give your students a few minutes to come up with their lists. Carefully select from volunteers to read a few of the lists in front of the group. Say, **"We have high standards for our future spouses because they're important to us. Likewise, God has set a standard for sex because it is important and will impact our lives in a powerful way. Let's discuss sex and the reasons God set the standard He did."**

**OPTION:** Share with your students your own godly standards for a spouse, or if you're married, tell your students the characteristics that you love and appreciate about your spouse.

## ► Lead with Atmosphere

On big red "brick" building blocks, label the block with actions we do that create barriers between spouses. Say, **"Christians often play a game of how close can they get to sex without crossing the line. Every time we venture into a grey area we place a building block between us and our future relationship with our spouse. A look at pornography (place a block in front of you), going too far with a girlfriend or boyfriend (place a block in front of you), (keep going until you have quite a few building blocks in front of you) all creating images that you will battle in your head for a long time if not a life time. You must depend on the Lord to help you remove these blocks. God has set a high standard for a reason. Following His standards, though difficult at times, will be a tremendous blessing in the end."**

**OPTION:** Place different warning signs all over the room. Explain to your students that the Bible warns us about the dangers of sex outside of God's design.

## ► Lead with Media

Search Internet for "The Sex Talk – Skit Guys." Say, **"On three everyone get out your giggles so we can get serious about discussing God's design for sex."**

## STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point: God has set a high standard for sex that we're expected to uphold.*

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, be imitators of God, as dearly loved children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us, a sacrificial and fragrant offering to God.

<sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and any impurity or greed should not even be heard of among you, as is proper for saints. <sup>4</sup> Coarse and foolish talking or crude joking are not suitable, but rather giving thanks.

—EPHESIANS 5:1-4

### EPHESIANS 5:1-4

**SUMMARIZE:** Give students an overview of the following:

Paul calls on us as followers of Christ to live counter-culturally because we are citizens of a different kingdom. We have experienced the transforming power of the gospel and now have new life in Christ. And that new life results in a new walk and a new lifestyle.

This new lifestyle is a lifestyle of love. Christ's love is our standard for living. That means we should become like Him in all areas of life. **We are to love others in the way He loves us.**

This standard of love applies to sexuality, as well.

God created sex to provide physical pleasure, procreation, relational intimacy, and to be a spiritual object lesson of Christ and the Church. God wants us to enjoy deep love and great sex—at the right time, with the right person, and in the right relationship. But sex outside of God's design ultimately leads to destruction. That's why Paul gives us such a strong warning in Ephesians 5.

There should not even be a *hint* of sexual immorality. Sexual immorality is not something to be taken lightly or flirted with. Paul called us to put up strong guardrails. The path of devastation for many people began with a single visit to one inappropriate website, one inappropriate conversation with a friend, or one inappropriate message on social media.

Paul also wrote about our language and conversation because what comes out of our mouth reveals what's in our hearts. We are not to engage in coarse or obscene language, which literally means "shameless talk." Paul also prohibited "foolish talking." The word *foolish* comes from the Greek that we get our word *moron*. We should not engage in stupid, moronic talk. And we shouldn't engage in "crude joking."

**SAY:** These kinds of behavior and talking "are not suitable" at any time for those who are called to walk in love and light.

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, "What do our words and behavior reveal about our hearts?"



# Commentary

## EPHESIANS 5:1-4

Ephesians 5 opens with Paul's command for the Ephesians to be imitators of God as His dearly loved children. Although the command might have seemed outlandish at first glance, He encouraged them as dearly loved children of God to strive to be like their Heavenly Father, just as an earthly child would want to be like his or her father. This exhortation provided a strong contrast from the self-indulgence reflected in previous and following verses to the example of God the Father, the perfect embodiment of which is the sacrificial love of Christ.

Paul gave a more specific command when he called them to walk in love based on the example of how the Messiah also loved us and gave Himself for us. Fragrant offering is a concept borrowed from the Old Testament (Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18) to denote God's approval of man's sacrifice. Paul employed it to describe the living sacrifices of Christians (see also Phil. 4:18). Because we have received His perfect love, seen most clearly through His plan of salvation, we should strive to imitate that love by sharing it with people, starting with other Christians.

In sharp contrast to that which pleases God, Paul once again listed characteristics that must be excluded from the Christian life—namely sexual immorality, impurity, and greed. Sexual immorality (*porneia*, from which comes the English word pornography), was so prevalent in pagan Gentile society it probably presented a repeated temptation for the Ephesians. The Greek term refers to non-marital sexual relations, most specifically adultery and prostitution. Impurity may refer to unbridled sexual behavior and is combined in other letters with sexual immorality (2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; 1 Thess. 4:3,7). However, Paul spoke here regarding any impurity, a much broader category embracing every form of impurity. Paul told them that such things should not even be heard of among them, indicating that Christians should not even mention such sins in ordinary conversation. To speak of them in any fashion other than condemnation might promote them, as modern media frequently demonstrates.

Paul raised the bar of Christian propriety another notch as he continued his letter by condemning coarse and foolish talking or crude joking as not suitable for Christian living. While these terms could include sins ranging from profanity to speech that is a waste of time, the context heightens the possibility of these sins being related to sexual immorality. Instead of giving only prohibitions for speech, Paul summoned the Ephesians to giving thanks. In the New Testament, thanksgiving constitutes the proper consistent attitude of believers (1 Thess. 5:18) and a missing mark of unbelievers (Rom. 1:21).

**TIP:** Remind students that purity doesn't only mean that God asks us to be a virgin until we get married. God desires purity in all areas of our lives, including our speech and actions.

## STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point: God has set a high standard for sex that we're expected to uphold.*

<sup>5</sup> For know and recognize this: Every sexually immoral or impure or greedy person, who is an idolater, does not have an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God.  
<sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty arguments, for God's wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things.

—EPHESIANS 5:5-6

### EPHESIANS 5:5-6

**DISCUSS:** Lead students to discuss the question, “How do some people justify their sin?”

**SUMMARIZE:** Explain to students the seriousness of sexual immorality.

Paul underscored the seriousness of sexual immorality by talking about God's judgment on sin. A life of impurity and immorality will have consequences.

That's why in verse 6, Paul told us not to be deceived. As a pastor, I deal with people all the time who have been deceived when it comes to sex. They thought that secret sexual behavior could never harm them or the ones that they love. They thought looking occasionally at pornography wouldn't hurt them, but they ended up addicted. God's standards are always in our best interest.

Regardless of your past, the truth is that all of us were once captive to sin, but the transforming power of the gospel has set us free and broken the bondage to sin. The truth is most Christian students know what the Bible says about sexual immorality and know right from wrong. The challenge is allowing God's standard to win out no matter what. Will you allow His authority in your life to be the top priority? Will you allow the truth of His grace to be sufficient?

But God's grace doesn't give us a free pass to sin. He doesn't just turn His head and look the other way. In fact, Titus 2:11-12 says grace that teaches us to say “no” to all ungodliness and worldly passion and “yes” to living righteous, upright lives.

**SAY:** God is serious about sin because it is against His holy nature, and He knows how much it will harm us and keep us from the good life He wants to give us..

**DO:** Direct students to complete the **Action Point**, “A High Standard.”

#### A High Standard

Name the last five movies you have watched. Did those movies match up with God's standard for sexuality?



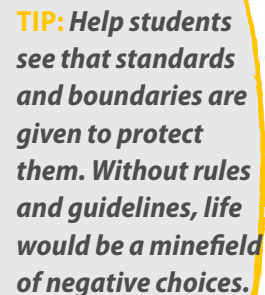
# Commentary

## EPHESIANS 5:5-6

In verse 5, Paul took the sins of verse 3 (“sexual immorality,” “impurity,” and “greed”) and explained that the people who practiced them would not have an inheritance in the kingdom of the Messiah and of God. To give a practical comparison, a gentleman may step in the mud, but he will regret it and get out of the mud. On the other hand, a pig will build his life around wallowing in the mud because he likes it and cannot function without it. (Eph. 2:2). In this context, such a person is a slave to sexual sin and not a slave to righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18).

Although Paul rejoiced with the Ephesians concerning the inheritance God’s saving grace would provide (Eph. 1:11,18), verse 5 warns against certain practices that do not match a Christian profession. Surely Paul gave these exhortations to church members because of the temptation, both then and now, to return to their former way of life. We should not be surprised to read that the kingdom belongs to both Messiah and God. No temporary carnal pleasure is worth embracing in exchange for our kingdom citizenship.

Here Paul explained that, despite what false teachers might say, God’s wrath is coming on the disobedient because of these things. Although Paul did not clarify who tried to deceive them with empty arguments, God’s Word remains unchanged. Even in our modern society, some people illegitimately carry the title “Christian” and spread the false doctrine of sexual promiscuity as “God’s gift” to mankind. While sex is certainly God’s gift, it should only be received and enjoyed within the bonds of marriage (Gen. 2:24). In Colossians 3, Paul included all three of the sins mentioned here in a list of lifestyles that will bring God’s wrath on the disobedient (Col. 3:5-6). In both books (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5), he equated greed with idolatry. He also noted that although these sins were part of the Colossians’ past, they had died and their lives had been hidden in the Messiah (vv. 3,7). From a Jewish perspective, fornication and sexual lust were linked with idolatry. A person can be greedy for sexual gratification just as he is greedy for wealth and power. Such a person has chosen to worship the creature instead of the Creator (Rom. 1:25).



**TIP:** Help students see that standards and boundaries are given to protect them. Without rules and guidelines, life would be a minefield of negative choices.



## STUDY THE BIBLE

*The Point: God has set a high standard for sex that we're expected to uphold.*

<sup>7</sup> Therefore, do not become their partners. <sup>8</sup> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light—<sup>9</sup> for the fruit of the light results in all goodness, righteousness, and truth—<sup>10</sup> discerning what is pleasing to the Lord.

—EPHESIANS 5:7-10

### EPHESIANS 5:7-10

**SAY:** Paul urged us to follow God's standard for sexuality. That means we don't think like the world thinks or live like the world lives. We don't view sex the same way they do. Why? Because we were once darkness, but now we are light. No two things could be more opposite than darkness and light.

**SUMMARIZE:** Explain to your students how to help someone who is not living according to God's standard of sexuality.

Our desire should be to find out what pleases the Lord (v. 10). When we engage in sexual immorality we are living to please ourselves. But Christ-followers are motivated to please God.

So how do we help someone who is not living according to God's standard of sexuality?

- 1. Don't have a self-righteous attitude.** Your sin may not be exactly the same as another person's, but all of us are sinners.
- 2. Love unconditionally.** A relationship grounded in love earns us the right to speak into someone else's life.
- 3. Pray and look for the right opportunity.** Ask God to soften your heart, soften the other person's heart, and provide the right opportunity to talk.
- 4. Honestly but gently share God's standards and desires.** Help the person see God has established these standards of purity for our own good—because He loves us.
- 5. Follow up and continue to offer help.** Send an e-mail, write a note, or make a call to let the person know you want to walk with him and do anything you can to help.

**DISCUSS:** Ask students to answer the question, "How can we encourage each other to pursue purity in all things?"

# Commentary

## EPHESIANS 5:7-10

After forbidding the Ephesians to even talk about sexual immorality and its related sins (vv. 1-4), and after explaining God's condemnation of those sins (vv. 5-6), Paul exhorted the Ephesians not to become their partners in sin. Merely avoiding association with practitioners of these sins was not enough. Because the Gentiles had become partners with the Jews in the promises of Christ, they must not become partners in the sins of the pagan world around them. Since the two partnerships are mutually exclusive, one must choose whether to embrace sin or righteousness as a lifestyle choice.

Here Paul resumed his contrast between believers' old sinful lives and their new lives in Christ. He took a step beyond the familiar biblical contrast between lost people living in the dark and believers walking in the light (John 8:12; 1 Pet. 2:9; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:9) to explain that the Ephesians had embodied both characteristics. They were once darkness, but they had become light in the Lord. Consequently, they needed to live according to their new identity by walking as children of light with a new Father.

Because they had received a new nature, they needed to produce the fruit of the light, namely all goodness, righteousness, and truth. God's gracious gift of salvation must be met with our human responsibility of obedience. Goodness is also found among the gifts of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22. Although the exact definition is not given, it could possibly be defined as "generosity" or "good works."

Walking in the light creates believers who are discerning what is pleasing to the Lord. The Greek term translated "discerning" often referred to the testing of metals to verify their authenticity or to determine their purity through an examination process. Paul's words bring to mind his exhortation to the Romans to avoid worldly conformity in exchange for the transformation that comes through renewal of the believer's mind. As a result, they would know God's "good, pleasing, and perfect will" (Rom. 12:2). Similarly, Paul implored the Thessalonians to "test all things" and "hold on to what is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). Knowing and doing the will of God remains the Christian's lifelong pursuit and will only be achieved by walking as children of light. As long as we walk with God we will avoid impurity. On the other hand, any form of impurity can cause us to hide from God—as Adam and Eve demonstrated in the Garden of Eden (see Gen. 3).

**TIP:** Students must understand that sexuality is not to be approached with our (or the world's) standards of what we think is right and good for us. The truth is that only God's standards are what is right and good for us.



# IMPACT

(10 MINUTES)

## APPLY IT

**SAY:** Consider applying one of these steps as a way to fight sexual temptation for yourself and for others.

**READ:** Ask for a volunteer to read aloud a few ways students can take what they have learned and **Apply It**.

**TIP:** *Some students in your group may be sexually active. Keep them accountable to the truth of God's Word, but also remind them that He desires to restore purity in their lives.*

- ▶ **Pray for someone that you know who is living contrary to God's view of sex.** You may feel powerless to help that person embrace God's view of sexuality, but you can trust God to work in his or her life.
- ▶ **Be a champion for purity.** Sit down with a parent or a student ministry leader of the same gender and have an honest conversation about God's standard for sexual purity.
- ▶ **Discuss Ephesians 5:1-10 with a trusted friend.** Share your personal convictions and commitments about how you will relate to the opposite sex to maintain sexual purity.

**GUIDE:** Lead students to consider which of the three suggested responses to the Bible study most closely applies to them and their current circumstances.

**ASK:** Which of these responses do you personally need to focus on most as you live this session out? Allow time for responses.

## WRAP UP

**PRAY:** Close in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to help your students be a model of sexual purity.

**ASK:** Ask students about last week's **Live It Out** options. Discuss any responses and encourage students as they choose to apply the Bible to their lives.

**GUIDE:** Encourage students to complete one or both of the **Live It Out** activities for the week. Let them know you will discuss them next time you meet.



For **free online training** on how to lead a group visit  
**MinistryGrid.com/web/BibleStudiesForLife**

# LEADER LIVE IT OUT

*Before the session, challenge yourself to grow with your students through this Live It Out.*

## Lordship of Christ | Acts 2:36

The “lordship” of Christ is a term that means we as Christians put Jesus Christ as the authority of our lives. When we make decisions, we should ask ourselves, “Is this what Jesus, as my ultimate authority, would want me to do?” “Am I trying to serve the Lord, or am I trying to serve myself?” When it comes to the area of sexuality, it can be challenging to pursue purity when culture tells you to do whatever you want, do whatever makes you feel good. Culture yells that you’re your own boss, but Christ-followers should recognize God as their ultimate authority. Think about an area of your life that maybe you’ve not let Christ be Lord of. Spend some time journaling about how that area of your life would look different if you let Christ be the authority over it. Make a commitment to ignore culture’s lies and listen to God’s Word, allowing Christ to be Lord over this particular struggle.

Notes:

# ONE CONVERSATION™

*Use these discussion starters to help foster a spiritual conversation with your family.*

**Scripture:** Ephesians 5:1-10

**THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE:** Sex is a gift from God, but our sin nature has led to a selfish and distorted view of this gift. Sex outside of God’s original design is destructive. Our culture lies to us about sex, but the Bible calls us to be obedient to God’s plan and purpose where sexual intimacy is concerned. God calls us to be countercultural and to live within the freedom of His perfect design.

## STUDENTS

**THE POINT:** God has set a high standard for sex that we’re expected to uphold.

- Talk to your student about sex and God’s call to purity.

Discuss the following quote: “Instead of attempting to become pure by trying harder, you acknowledge that you are already pure in Christ because of His sacrifice on the cross for you.”<sup>1</sup>

—Clayton King

1. Clayton King, “Pure By Position,” ClaytonKing.com, [cited 5 May 2014]. Available from the Internet: <http://www.claytonking.com/blog>.

**LIVE IT OUT:** Your student has been encouraged to do one or both Live It Out activities in the Personal Study Guide. Here are some suggested ways to help your student:

*If your student chooses to do **Lordship of Christ**:*

- Ask your student how Christ being his/her Lord changes the way he/she lives.
- Help your student be accountable to this challenge.

*If your student chooses to do **Pop Quiz**:*

- Ask your student to interview you about biblical sexuality.
- Encourage your student to pursue biblical sexuality.