

What Is Your Goal in Life (Moral Purity)

by Nigel Lee

God's goal for our life is to be holy and pleasing to Him, and to learn self-control in the body.

Duration: 57:15

Scripture: Matthew 4:19, Matthew 4:23

Topics: "Purity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the importance of living a disciplined and controlled life. He refers to Matthew chapter 5, where Jesus calls his disciples to follow him and become fishers of men. The preacher also mentions the miracles performed by Jesus, highlighting how they demonstrate his authority and control. He emphasizes the need for discipline in various aspects of life, including sleep, food, exercise, love, and emotions. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the disciples' attentiveness as they listen to Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount.

Transcript

Our Father, we sometimes find struggle in understanding your word, but more often we find our struggle, honestly, is in obeying. We do pray that as we think of some of the stories of the men of Scripture, that you would turn our ears into eyes, that we might see ourselves and see what you're trying to say to us. We do pray that you would speak to our hearts, and by your word, your sharp sword, you'd cut away that which is unclean and cancerous in our life.

Oh, what relief when we know that cleansing work of the sword of your word. And although we may shy away from the sharp edge, Lord, we want to be wholly yours without reserve. We pray that you'd speak through your Scriptures to our hearts tonight.

In Jesus' name, Amen. How many of you, put up your hands, believe that God actually brought you here to this conference, God led you here? That's a fairly high score. Those actually on OM, the musical team, I think they reckon that Leo brought them here.

Now, those of you who believe that God has brought you here to this conference and for these messages, how many of you believe that you can trust God to be really good to you? That's encouraging. God's really loving and good. Now, how many of you, put up your hand, believe that your idea of love includes pain? Not so sure about that.

Does love include any pain? Sure it does. Sure it does. I had a certain amount of pain this morning when my alarm clock went off and I have to leave my wife and kids.

I'd been home with them one day, having been away all last week. One tends to get pushed into situations where there's pain along with love. Now, I want to read the scriptures tonight with those ideas fresh in your mind.

Loving God does involve some pain. His love for you involved a tremendous amount of pain. But you do trust him.

You've told me, you've testified that you trust God wholly and he's a good God. Turn to 1 Thessalonians. 1 Thessalonians 4, verse 3, first of all.

It is God's will, says scripture, it is God's will that you should be holy, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn, learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God, and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure but to live a holy life.

Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. It's God's will that you should be holy and that you should learn. It's not an automatic, instant perfection.

You should learn how to live in a way that is holy and honourable, controlling your body. Matthew chapter 5. Matthew chapter 5. Some of you will be subliminally learning German during these sessions. You hear the German translation going on all the time.

Some of you know it already, especially the Germans. Matthew chapter 5, verse 27. Now we've moved over to the Sermon on the Mount.

The Lord has said in the previous chapter, calling the disciples to him, I will make you fishers of men if you follow me. You walk in my steps, you learn of me, I will turn you into fishers of men. And then you remember how later in the chapter the Lord performed three miracles.

Right at the end of chapter 4. He healed a man who was demon-possessed. He healed a man who was epileptic. He healed a man who was paralysed.

Each of those three diseases, three problems, not diseases all of them, but three areas of problem, they're to do with loss of self-control, aren't they? The demon-possessed man. Lost control of his mind and therefore his being to the devil. The man who is epileptic at times goes out of control.

His mind no longer controls the way his body works. The man who is paralysed obviously has lost control of his body. And very simply, verse after verse, Jesus healed one, then the other, then the other.

Manifesting his control. The authority of his kingdom. And the disciples are watching.

Peter, Andrew, James, John. Jesus has just said, you come into my kingdom. Repent because the kingdom is at hand.

You come follow me. I will make you fishes of men. And then he demonstrates the authority of his kingdom.

The authority of his word. And then we begin on the Sermon on the Mount. With all this fresh in our mind.

And the disciples listen. Now what do you think's going on? Do you think the disciples, as they first heard the Sermon on the Mount, that they were made to feel uncomfortable? Convicted perhaps? That the Lord was getting a little bit close to the bone? Touching their hearts? You often don't hear the Sermon on the Mount preached on. I think it's because it gets very close to where we're really at.

The Lord is saying in effect, you let me control you. If you let my word begin to govern you, I will be actually making you fishes of men. If we've come to terms with the Lord, in the question of our tongue, our relationship with our enemies, whether we want revenge, this matter of lust from verse 27.

God's word begins to control us. And change us. Each paragraph has one simple instruction.

The Lord is actually making us fishes of men. Because men and women are drawn to people who know God. They're drawn very often to those whom they sense have already obeyed the Lord in the deep recesses of their own heart and mind.

Folks sense it. They know very often. God says, I will make you fishes of men.

Verse 27. You've heard that it was said, do not commit adultery. But I tell you, that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. Throw it away. It's 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 sin, cut it off. Throw it away. It's better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

We'll come back to that later. Turn over now to 1 Corinthians chapter 6. 1 Corinthians 6. Just a few verses there. Verse 9. Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.

Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor homosexual offenders, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed.

You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. And you can imagine the Corinthians when they first hear that letter.

They're nodding. They're nodding. Some of them may be even with tears in their eyes as they remember the goodness of God to people like them.

They were on this road that Paul has spelt out. A road to hell. But now they have been washed, sanctified, justified in the name of Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

What do you think God's great goal for your life is? What's he going to do eventually? I mean, many of the things that we do are not really ends in themselves. They're just means to another end. Supposing you went down to the bottom end of the garden through the snow and there was a caveman.

You see? An early O.M. caveman. And he's making a spear. And you ask him, why are you making a spear? To kill deer.

Why are you going to kill deer? Feed myself and family. Why are you going to do that? What are you going to do then? What's the point of it all? To live. What will you do if you live? Make spears.

And so on. Round and round, you see. What is the goal of life that is the ultimate goal? Not just the means to another end.

See, O.M. isn't the goal of life, is it? You haven't finally arrived at O.M. Now I know I'm on O.M. Now I can die and go to heaven. You may do. You may think you nearly are doing.

Being on O.M. isn't the goal of life. Learning about evangelism isn't the goal of life. Passing your O.M. driver's test isn't the goal of life.

Learning to survive on O.M. food isn't the goal of life. Leading somebody else to Christ isn't the goal of life. Getting married isn't the goal of life.

Becoming an O.M. leader is certainly not the goal of life. What is the goal of life? We need to stop and ask ourselves that sometimes. To step back from a question and say, well, what is the ultimate reason why I am doing what I am doing? Do you ever do jigsaws? My kids are into jigsaws.

You always do the outside of the jigsaw first, don't you? The straight bits, because they're easier. The corner bits first, then the straight bits. And then eventually you work into the blue sky and the green grass, the difficult bits at the end.

Now, what is the outside frame of the goal of life for you? What is God ultimately trying to do with you? You see, God has made galaxies. He's flung them into space. He's put people on the planet.

Why? What's the point of it all? Ultimately, what is He trying to do? God wants a family. God wants a family. God wants people just like you.

And gradually and with your cooperation He will make you like Him. In characteristic, in nature. I mean, you grow up in your family to be like your parents, don't you? That's, I mean, that's physically true.

I could line your parents up down one wall and I could line you up down the other wall and probably have a good chance of putting you together. We grow up to be like our parents. So it is in the spiritual family.

Let me tell you something I've told one or two people before. When I was a kid, about the age of ten, before my voice came down here somewhere, you see, thank you very much, my voice on the telephone used to sound exactly like my mother. It was identical.

People couldn't tell the difference. Now my father was a church pastor and various ladies would ring up my mother with terrible distress about their marriage problems and difficulties and I would have the most interesting time just answering the telephone, you see. I'd say, hello? Oh dear, I am sorry to hear that.

What you must be feeling? And this ten-year-old boy would listen for a while, you see, until he got bored. There were all these ladies, marital problems and deep distresses and how the husband was treating her and how he didn't understand her. This middle-aged married woman, you see, pouring out her troubles to this ten-year-old boy, you see, thinking it was the mother.

Now, it's inevitable that my voice must sound like my mum, not like yours, because of heredity. I have a kid now who just loves to stand in front of people and talk to them, you see. She takes after her mother,

you see, like I do.

Now, in the same way, in the family of God, we grow up to be like our Father. That is God's great goal. He will one day have His family gathered around and they will be like the Lord Jesus Christ, all together, one great body, having wanted God more than anything else in life, having spent time getting to know God on this earth, having become like Him.

God says in Genesis chapter 15, verse 1, to Abraham, I am your shield and I am your exceeding great reward. Abraham, don't think about the land I'm calling you to. Don't think about the property that you may one day get, the flocks and the herds that you've got.

I am your reward, knowing me. God says in Exodus chapter 19, verses 4 and 5, you've seen what I did to the Egyptians. And you've seen how I have borne you on eagle's wings.

God has actually carried His people on eagle's wings and I have brought you, He says, I have brought you unto what? To a land flowing with milk and honey? No. I have brought you, says God, unto myself. Unto myself.

In Hosea chapter 6, verse 6, the Lord says, I desire mercy, not sacrifice, the knowledge of God. That's what God wants in us, far more than burnt offerings. Let not your hearts be troubled, says the Lord.

You believe in God, believe also in me. The Lord said, I go to prepare a place for you. If I go to prepare a place for you, well, I will come again for you, and I will take you to be with myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.

It's God's great goal to have us made ready in life now that we might be with Him. Now, we want to talk tonight about purity of heart, and especially in the sexual and moral area. And again, I want to be very frank, because the scripture says that the pure in heart see God, and it's good, you know, to be able to talk honestly, frankly and honestly in a gathering like this.

We're friends, we face exactly the same problems, whether we speak or whether we listen, we're ordinary human beings. One of the great revolutions of the 20th century has been that we can discuss this kind of a thing completely openly and normally. We no longer live in an era where we sort of turn a blind eye to what the Bible says about sexual morality and purity of heart for the Christian believer.

There was an era years ago where certain passages of the Bible would not be read, especially to people of your age. Well, I want to encourage you to read the whole Bible. Interesting bits.

many of you are going out on teams, and you come on OM, and you hope that God is going to work in your life. You're going to go out and preach the gospel. And yet, you know, we must face certain facts before we go.

Simply being a Christian and being in Christian work does not mean that our own private problems of sexual temptation, lust, worry, anxiety, that they somehow disappear. That you no longer get problems of masturbation, problems of being attracted to pornographic literature, problems of being tempted in the bodily, physical area yourself regularly so that it's almost the most despairing thing you face in your life. Many, many Christian young people live defeated lives in this area.

And they don't know what to do about it, except somehow close a door and hope nobody knows. But God knows. God is interested in our salvation utterly.

Not that we should hide certain areas away from Him and pretend that they don't exist. But that God should be allowed into those areas to see us just as we are, mucky though we may be. And that we come to Scripture and say, God, I want to be saved utterly.

I want to be as holy as it is possible for a human being to be. This side of glory. Now, in your word, God, give me some answers.

You've made me as I am. You've given me your word. Where does it help me? Show me.

Is it 2 Chronicles? Is it Nehemiah? What is it? What's going to help me to live a life of purity that I might relate to you in the light, with real deep satisfaction, not with a guilty conscience hiding part of me away? Anyway, think of your own life in the coming year, sharing the gospel. You're going to talk to individual after individual about God's power to change lives. Is He changing yours? God's power to forgive.

Are you glad of His forgiveness in this area too? God's resurrection power to make people different. When you say those words, will it be with a secret sense? Well, of course, in my case, this is the one area that is still defeated. Let's not go out like that.

Let's come to terms with Scripture and know what Scripture says, and begin to learn to bring our body under control, our mind under control, so that we may grow up to be like Him. You see, we shouldn't be naive about the first century, those early believers, those Corinthians, those people that heard Christ speak. When Paul wrote the first epistle to the Thessalonians that we've just read, he was writing from Corinth, Corinth perhaps, what we may call the red light district of the Mediterranean.

People came from all over the Orient to mix with the thousands of temple prostitutes that swarmed all over the hill of Aphrodite, there in Corinth. I imagine Paul looking out of his window, even as he writes this letter. Maybe at night, and he can see the lights burning all over the hill, this Mediterranean hillside.

He knows what's going on. He knows what a city God has placed him in, to minister and to preach the truth. And there in those verses we read, it's God's will that you should be holy.

The Lord wants you to live a holy life. Secondly, from verses four to five, we read that the Lord wants us to learn self-control in the body. Verse six, the Lord talks to us about judgment.

The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you, says Paul. Fornication was widespread in the first century. The great majority of Christians who came from a Gentile background into the early church would have known fornication and adultery in their own experience because it was widespread.

The moral atmosphere in the Roman Empire was appalling. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman emperors were known, open, practising homosexuals. Divorce was common.

A man could command his wife to go, and she had to go. And there was no redress. Jerome in the fourth century writes of observing a marriage, and the woman is getting married to her twenty-fourth husband, and she is his twenty-first wife, I think.

There were appalling moral standards. The attitude to women in the first century was degrading. It was wrong.

It was unjust because the light of God's gospel hadn't begun to penetrate into some of these dark corners of society. And yet it was into this world, this kind of a world, that Jesus came. Jesus, our Lord, who had actually revealed at the start of Scripture his blueprint for marriage, that men and women are made for each other, and that a man or a woman will leave their home, leave their family, cleave to each other, commit themselves to each other, become one new unit.

It was God's idea. The Lord who'd given us our bodies, given us our sexual desires and capacities and abilities, the one who's created our imaginations, the one who has made us with such a deep tender ability to relate to one another in friendship, in love, that God who made us as we are with the most beautiful ability to love and to be loved, that God came into this world, into all its mess, saw the broken marriages of his day, saw the cruelty and the hardness of heart that had come into people's homes in his day. What has he got to say to us, as we live in a world that is disintegrating, a world where some horrific modern diseases now result from sexual immorality? What does God have to say to us? Jesus is totally realistic.

Matthew 5. The Lord says again and again, the key is your heart. The key to your own life of purity is your heart. I don't believe for a moment we're to take the Lord literally when he starts talking about chopping hands off, pulling eyes out.

I mean, can you imagine the Christian church? Boop, boop. Hmm. You know, I only get two chances and both my eyes are gone.

My right hand offends me and I turn up in church one morning. No, he's talking about the heart. The emphasis throughout the sermon is on the heart and your heart being right before the Father.

The Lord says here in Matthew 5 that it's not wrong to look at another person, it's wrong to look and lust. And the Lord says, cut off what causes you to stumble. Now, think of that.

Think of your own experience. Where are your problem areas? You do the analysis on yourself, gently, lovingly. Where do you stumble? Is it in what you allow your imagination to play with? Is it the kind of magazines that you've been in the habit of reading or those little films or television things that you've been watching? Books that you've read? Particular places that you like to go? Particular friends? Whatever it is that causes you to stumble, says the Lord, cut that away.

Cut it away. So that you will not be caused to stumble. You've heard that it was said, don't commit adultery, I want to deal with your heart, says the Lord.

I tell you that if you look at someone else and begin to exploit them selfishly in your own mind, you are already committing adultery. Simple solution to that is to get used to cutting off what causes you to stumble. That evil stimulus, that thought pattern, that habit in the regular way your week runs.

Deal with it, says the Lord. Don't be naive. You know, we're involved in a revolution as Christians.

We may call it, some people call it the revolution of love. Others call it the revolution of saltiness. We are to be like salt and light in society.

Our own lives are to be different. Salt is a preservative. It has to be different from what's around it, otherwise it's no longer salty.

You and I are to be walking in the footsteps of Jesus as salt and light in the world in which we live. Salt needs spreading around. Again and again the Bible will show the effect of people becoming just like the surrounding, prevailing society.

Think of David. You know the story of David and Bathsheba? 2 Samuel chapter 11. David should have been out at war.

The army had gone out, but he was easy on himself. He was taking his ease. He felt very sleepy one afternoon.

He went to bed on the roof of his house. The sun was just beginning to dip a little bit in the heavens. David gets up, stretches himself, goes over to the roof corner, takes a glance down into the next door garden.

There is Bathsheba, the stupid girl, stark as in the garden. Sorry, without any clothes on. Bathing.

Now look, men and women are completely different. I don't, you know, I didn't come all this way just to tell you that. But they're different in what turns them on.

Men are turned on sexually and emotionally by what they see. It's the way they are. That's why in the newsagent shops, newsagents put the girly magazines at sort of men's eye height.

You know, it's always along that sort of height. You don't have to go looking down here. You just stand at your normal height.

To avoid them you'd have to walk into the shop on your knees. I've said this before sometimes too. Manufacturers of motor cars, they know this.

Have you ever noticed in the car magazines, if they want to sell you some new Porsche or BMW, they'll always drape a couple of girls across the front. Naked girls. And the silly fellow who buys the car thinks he gets the girl with it, you see.

When did you last see the ladies' magazines trying to sell washing machines to the housewives by having a fellow in his underpants sitting up? Doesn't happen. The manufacturers know the difference. But you know, we sometimes forget or we choose to forget.

Men are turned on sexually by what they see. Women often differently. More by the way they're treated or touched.

Now, we need to bear this in mind as we're living in brother-sister relationships together. If in the regular weekly team prayer meeting on your team in this coming year, you girls always find the same fellow in the prayer meeting looking at you. You know, you might begin to think after a little bit, why'd he do that? What's he got in his mind? The way you're being treated.

But you also need to be careful about the way you dress. Just as a matter of living with brothers. We're all in the same family now.

Calculate so as not to offend the other person. David saw Bathsheba. At what point do you think David realized that he was beginning to go wrong? Do you think it was only after Bathsheba had conceived? Do you think it was perhaps about the time that he called Bathsheba to his own house? David, a great man of God.

A man who's written psalms that have blessed us all deeply. A poet. A military genius.

A great godly man of all the ages. A man in touch with God. At what point do you think he realized that he was beginning to go wrong? When he carried on looking.

You know, you can't help what you see with your first look. We'd have to walk around with our eyes shut, wouldn't we? You can control your second look. David began to gaze.

And David began to want. And successively he was led into lust, then into adultery, then into lies, then into murder. And the last verse of that chapter said that what he'd done had displeased the Lord.

The man was broken. Wept. Fasted.

Rebuked. God dealt with him. Because he went beyond the boundary of his own conscience.

Now the scriptures are completely realistic about that. A couple of chapters later you see what breaks loose in David's family. Amnon and his half-sister Tema.

He began to lust after her. He decided to scheme to get what he could. Pretended to be ill.

Said he wanted Tema to bring food up into his bedroom. Dismissed all the other servants. Locked the door and raped her.

Raped his own half-sister. Do you think, you know, he began to hear violins in the background and the stars began to sparkle for him? Not at all. Verse 15 of the same chapter says that immediately after he had raped her, he began to hate her.

You know, our emotions, when we sin, begin to go on wild swings. And what he wanted half an hour before, he now began to hate. Oh, the destruction, the corrosive destruction that takes place in people's self-respect.

In their emotions. In their relationships. When we begin to disobey the Lord in our own heart.

And yet, think of John chapter 4. That woman who had lived with a number of different men. She'd married some of them. She was now living with a fellow that she hadn't married.

The Lord had come to sit down by that well and that woman of Samaria came out and it's a story not just about the woman's thirst, but about God's thirst too. The thirst of God for a relationship to her. He says the Father is seeking such as you to be his worshippers.

Even though the woman was probably illiterate, almost certainly immoral, lived a life of very little, but a series of short-term physical relationships. Yet the Father, God himself in heaven, was wanting someone like that to be amongst his company of worshippers. The opening verse of that chapter almost says the Lord must needs go through Samaria.

There was no must needs about it. The Lord could, like all the other devout Jews, have gone all the way round Samaria. That's what they all did.

They used to walk the long way round, lest they set foot in tainted soil. But it says the Lord must needs go through Samaria. Why? Why? Because he loves people whose lives are in a tangle, people who are carrying around a weight of guilt, people who see no hope for their future because of what they've done in the past.

The Lord must needs, out of sheer love, go and sit down, tell that woman about his thirst, and open up her understanding of her own spiritual thirst. Because that is the kind of God that is our God. Now Paul, in counselling, in 1 Corinthians 6 and verse 12, has two questions.

I want to pass them on to you. 1 Corinthians 6 verse 12. Anything or everything is permissible for me, but not everything is beneficial.

Everything is permissible for me, but I will not be mastered by anything. Can I ask you some personal questions? Paul says, of anything, is it going to be helpful to my Christian growth? And secondly, will it begin to control me? Look at your own habits, your own life, your relationships. Is everything there helpful to your Christian growth? Is there anything there that's beginning to control you? Come into the counselling room with the Apostle Paul.

Sit down with him. He smiles at you, because he loves you. Paul was such a lover of men and women.

How people believe that Paul was an angry, hard-to-live-with old man, I don't know. Because he's talking on almost every page of the Scriptures about the love of God being poured out upon him and working through him. Paul would love you.

But he'd want to know, very personally, about your own life, your own recent past, what it is that you've come on OM, perhaps, to get away from. Is there anything there that you need to deal with, need to face? Is there anything there that does actually control you and you're ashamed about it? Are there things in your life that are not helping you to grow like the Lord Jesus, God's ultimate objective? And you begin to tell Paul about your problems. Tell him about your feelings.

Maybe you've been nurturing lust for for years. Maybe there's unforgiven sin. Something that happened years ago, maybe, or only months ago.

You've never really felt assured that the Lord has heard you in asking for forgiveness, or has been willing to forgive. You still feel that it's a it's a black cloud between you and him. Maybe some of you have been carrying around an irrational thing, but it is a terrific worry about whether or not the Lord would have someone for you to marry.

And you're wondering whether you'll ever find them. And that just weighs on you day in and day out. It's not helping your Christian life.

It's beginning to control you. For some of you, maybe, it's a problem of homosexuality. We don't.

In OM we're not so foolish as to imagine that people with feelings in those areas never, never come into the kingdom of God, never come on OM. Every year we've had opportunities to talk with and befriend, pray with, help those who've come into OM with homosexual problems. Sin, in some way or other in the

past.

Maybe that's the thing that's hindering your Christian life. Maybe, for some of you, there have been past experiences, some of you girls, perhaps, particularly, raped or abused, perhaps by your stepfather. And it's something that makes you feel dirty in the presence of God every time you pray and every time you think about it.

Folks come on OM from all sorts of backgrounds. We're pretty much like the Corinthians. Paul could say of them that they came from a pretty distinct collection of backgrounds.

And yet, we want you to face the Lord on these things. Perhaps to spend time with someone who can just talk through with you what happened, your feelings, pray with you in confidence. Or maybe you don't need to talk to anyone, you just need to be reminded by scripture again tonight that there is forgiveness because that is the central message of our Bible.

God doesn't expect you to deserve his love. He knows you never can. God doesn't draw a line and say I'm not prepared to pay any more for you.

He's paid all that needs to be paid, that you might come back into close relationship with him. He doesn't want you hanging about outside the door feeling somehow unworthy, unable to come any closer to him. God But you were washed.

You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. I want to ask you to get right with the Lord if there's anything in this message that's been touching your conscience and your heart tonight.

Don't go to bed without seeking someone out and just praying with them. Oh, the relief. To get into the light.

Perhaps make an appointment tomorrow to see someone and talk over a particular problem in order that you can know that one of us, we go through the same things. We stand with you. We pray with you.

We accept you. We love you as God loves you. We'll share with you again from the Scriptures how sure and secure the forgiveness of God is.

You know, I sometimes because I have a questioning sort of mind I think why didn't God arrange life differently? Why has God at the stage when so many of us have the greatest amount of sexual energy why are we unmarried? Because for one reason or another, sometimes God's call, we're not married. You know, in the last hundred years there's been some real changes in the age of sexual maturity. You know, a hundred years ago only 13% of 16-year-old girls had reached puberty.

Nowadays the figure is 97%. People are getting sexually mature younger and younger and younger. It's six months younger every generation that follows.

Seems like an enormous gap is opening up. An era of our life we aren't economically able to get married. God doesn't seem to be leading us to get married and yet we have all these struggles that the church is often not preaching about.

How am I to live through the gap time? When I need to be loved. I need to show love. I've got feelings I don't know what to do with them.

How can I live through the gap era? Why has God, let me put it this way, why has God given me the gift of an ability to relate to others the ability to sexually express love and left me with this gap to live through? Well if God has given you a gift it's for the same reason that he's given you every other gift. Think of some of your other gifts. Musical gifts.

Preaching gifts. Evangelistic gifts. God has given you all kinds of talents.

We've seen a bunch of people using some of their gifts and talents tonight. Supposing some of you have a gift of evangelism. I want to tell you something about your gifts.

They're temporary. You won't always have them. Don't think you're going to do any evangelism in heaven.

Won't be any need. Have any of you got any gifts of bible teaching? Well I can tell you, you won't be doing much bible teaching in heaven. Hmm.

We'd all have shut up, wouldn't we? Listen to the Lord. Your gifts are temporary. Gift of tongues.

Gift of prophecy. Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 13 These things are for a time only. One day we will see the Lord face to face.

Gifts are purely temporary. But your character is what lasts forever. God is far more interested in your character than in your gifts.

Character is eternal. In fact, your spiritual gifts and every other gift that you've been given is given to you so that your character can grow in a certain direction. Because that's what he's interested in.

If God gives you gifts in evangelism you'll get involved with people. You can't help it. And people are a pain in the neck.

Lovely, dear, lovely God-created people. But they don't have to become irksome sometimes. And you're going to have to learn patience and that's good for your character.

You're going to have to learn more of love. More of laying down your life for other folk. Because of the gift of evangelism.

If you have the gift of being a Bible teacher, you may have to stay up late at night studying the Word of God, praying over its meaning, wrestling with what it actually says. Everyone else can go to bed, why has God given me the gift of being a teacher? Why can't I have something easy like being a helper or something? And so God gives you the gift of being a helper and nobody appreciates you. You're endlessly serving behind the scenes and nobody's got a good word for you.

And you think, why couldn't God give me a different gift? Somewhere I can get appreciated. Like being a ruler or an administrator or something. And you try a bit of administration in the team or the church and everybody disagrees with you.

Useless. Every gift that there is, spiritual gift, gift of gift of talent to use for the Lord, it has inbuilt into it its own education program for your character. Now that shouldn't surprise you.

Why should that surprise you? I mean, you're used to your parents giving you presents when you were kids. But the parents often give presents that develop the kid in a certain way. See, my wife comes from a

long line of Scottish engineers.

So at the age of three, my dear son gets a toolbox for his Christmas. I want to give him a hockey stick. Parents give their children piano lessons.

You know, the kid's delighted, piano lessons. Or the parents buy you a year's subscription to some educative magazine. It's the last thing you want.

You'd rather have had the money and gone to the disco. Parents give gifts that somehow sort of push you in a certain way. Have you ever noticed that? Gifts that mould your character in a certain way.

God is exactly the same. God gives the gift of sex, the gift of marriage. Let me tell you, marriage teaches you patience.

Among other things. Maybe I should spend the whole of this evening talking about marriage. You know, some of you single guys, you know, you move around the world, got your suit, you know, all your possessions in a little suitcase, and you're on the go, you're going to reach the world for Christ, and it's marvellous being on a whim, and you're free as a bird, and you get married.

And you suddenly find you're loaded down with so many bags and cases, suitcases, bits and pieces. You know, you used to be able to travel just a little bit, and now it takes you, you know, about 18 trips just to load the car. Life has become cluttered and slower.

And there's wet nappies everywhere. And God's gift of a wife is actually teaching your character something. It works the other way for the wives as well, I can tell you.

The gifts that you have are so that you can grow in character. The same it is with the gift of sex. God has given you these gifts, and left you in the gap period a little bit, so that you can learn one or two things.

You can learn how to begin to control your mind so that you don't think selfishly about other people. So easy to get a kind of blue pornographic movie show running in your mind every night you men. And God wants you to learn how to control your mind.

God wants you to learn bodily self-control. He wants you to learn how to be unselfish in your treatment of other people. This is why masturbation is so hollow and so ultimately unsatisfying.

Because it usually involves you in the sin of lust. It's empty. You're training your mind in selfishness every time you do it.

No wonder that you get that inner revulsion again and again and again. Oh, why am I like this? It's because the Holy Spirit is recoiling at the way in which you're allowing your mind to use someone else in your imagination as we so often do for our own purely selfish pleasure. God wants us to be pure in heart.

God has left you in that gap so that you can learn how your mind can be brought under more and more of God's Holy Spirit control. There's all kinds more that I could say on that. We learn to respect one another, to serve one another.

Let me come to the end because of time. God is working on your character. Let me summarise.

God has put you in your present situation so that he can bring tensions, pressures, joys into your life so that you can learn to walk in his footsteps. Let me give you the Chinese takeaway summary at the end. Seems like people are moving out fast.

Bye-bye. Are these all the people that won the quiz? First of all, let's be honest with the Lord. You know, you imagine yourself alone with the Lord.

If you could ask the Lord about problems in your heart that you've never ever been able to ask anybody, would you begin to open up on this? He's kind, he's loving, he understands you, he cares. Let's be honest before the Lord. You know, that woman in John 4, she had to face her own moral sin and failure before she could ever understand that sitting beside her, so close, not far from her, was the God of Heaven who had come for her into Samaria because he loved her.

As Paul put it, he loved me and gave himself for me. But we must be honest with him. Secondly, there must be repentance.

If God is convicting you of real sin, as I was explaining earlier on this morning, with specific conviction, you know, we must repent. We must turn. Don't imagine when you became a Christian that was the last of repentance for you.

Whenever God convicts, whenever God is trying to deal with us in reality, we're going to have to repent. Turn around. Repentance is a description of what coming to God actually is.

It's not something you do so that you can come to God. Repentance is actually coming to the Lord. For some, it's painful.

It's a bit like going to the dentist as a child. Remember what it was like when you went to the dentist? Do you remember when you used to get a pain in your tooth when you were a kid? And you knew that if you told your mother about it, she'd take you to the dentist. And if you went to the dentist, there was all that drill business.

Ah! And so what you used to do is try and hide it. You think, well, it'll go away tomorrow. I'll put a bit of toothpaste on it.

I'll clench my teeth tight tonight. But it just gets worse and worse. And finally you say, I've got this pain.

And mum takes you to the dentist. Do you remember that feeling that you used to have when you used to come out of the dentist? When it was all over? Like floating on air. I haven't got to go back there for months.

Months and months. Oh, it's wonderful. I can eat sweets tomorrow and there'll be no problem.

You know, when you come back to the Lord, what a joy there is. In finally telling Him all that you know about yourself. And saying, Lord, this is me.

Teach me, Lord. Because unless you do, I shall stay this way forever. Teach me the way through my problems of lust.

My guilty conscience. Lord, take it away. You know all about it.

I am sorry. I want to turn. I want to go Your way in future.

There are two different kinds of feeling sorry. In 2 Corinthians 7, verse 9 and 10, we read there's two different kinds of repentance. There's a dead repentance that somehow doesn't lead anywhere.

It's just feeling sorry. And there's a godly repentance. Where you come to the Lord, hand over the problem, expose it in the light, ask for forgiveness.

Accept it on the authority of His word. Get up and go on. Thirdly, don't feed your problem.

Lust is a hungry thing inside you. Don't feed your problem. Learn to discipline your mind about what you're thinking about.

Don't feed it. Fourthly, I think we must all gradually, as Paul puts it in 1 Thessalonians, learn to live a disciplined life. Discipline in how much sleep we take, how much food we eat, our regular commitment to bodily exercise.

You know, there's discipline in love. In learning to love someone else very closely, there's discipline. Discipline to keep your mouth shut sometimes.

Discipline to express kind words when maybe you're feeling frustrated inside. Discipline in just waiting for the other person, being patient and kind with them. Learning discipline now.

Discipline in the control of your emotions, the control of your reactions. It's the greatest key to a happy marriage in the future, if God should choose to lead you that way, that I know. I wish someone had told me that, had sat me down and beat that into my skull until I'd finally got hold of it.

And then we'd have had fewer tears in my marriage. Not my tears. My poor wife, whom I have hurt more times than I can remember with my own impatience because I hadn't learnt the discipline of keeping my mouth shut.

And learnt the discipline of loving. Only God can teach me that. But God is so willing, because it involves me learning to walk like He does.

Let us commit ourselves to the discipline of true biblical love. And finally, remember God's acceptance of you now. Don't ever doubt.

Whatever I've said tonight, if it's stirred up memories, stirred up feelings of things that you're going to perhaps have to seek the Lord about, or even seek counsel about, remember that God does love you. There is nobody anywhere, ever in the world, who goes beyond the reach of His love. Paul is praying for the Ephesians in Ephesians chapter 3, and he prays that they may know the height and the depth, the breadth, the length of God's love.

It's so wide, God's love. It will encompass anyone. God's love is so long, it will last for eternity.

God's love is so deep, it can reach right down and scoop up lovingly the person who feels themselves to be the most abject wretch in creation. God's love is so high, it will raise you up to Himself. God is a God who loves you, and seeks your cooperation in the growth of your Christian life.

If you bring Him your feelings, your doubts, your worries, your frustrations, walk in the light with Him, turn from all sin, God will make you fishes of men, as His own beauty and sensitivity is formed in your character that you might be like Him. Let's pray. Thank you, O God, that everything you've ever shown us about yourself would lead us to respect and trust you.

To know that you're good and kind in all your ways. Lord, we want to determine to know nothing but Christ. We want to know the fellowship of His sufferings, and the power of His resurrection.

Lord, work in our lives. Thank you, O God, for the gift of singleness for the time being. Thank you that you're seeking to bring much into our experience in these years now.

Thank you for the gift of marriage where you've given that. O God, thank you that you never get a gift wrong, like we sometimes do at Christmas. That you deal with us according to your loving purposes for eternity.

And you're a God of forgiveness from start to finish. We worship you and praise your name.

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