

# Wisdom for Life: Drink From Your Own Well

Proverbs 5:1-23

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on February 23, 2020

## Introduction

- ❖ Today's sermon is yet another apologetic for text-driven preaching (as opposed to topic-driven). Text-driven preaching refers to the practice of systematically preaching through books of the Bible, unpacking whatever is there. And I can pretty much guarantee, that if it wasn't for our commitment to that, you wouldn't hear a sermon on Proverbs 5. Because it's an uncomfortable passage to preach.
  - It was uncomfortable just studying for this sermon. The fact is Proverbs 5 is an erotic chapter with highly sensual language. Some commentaries I read practically made me blush. **My point is that you're only hearing this sermon because we're committed to preaching through books of the Bible and just preaching whatever is there.** If this is God's inspired Word, then it's profitable for us. It's for our edification. And I need to preach it to you, no matter how uncomfortable it might be – for me!
  
- ❖ So let's get into Proverbs 5. **Last week in chapter 4, we saw a continuation of the two-path theology that's so prevalent in Proverbs.** Basically, it's saying there are two paths you can take in life – two ways to live your life. You can take the path of wisdom or the path of folly.
  - Now this binary approach to life is expanded on later in chapters 8-9 with the imagery of two women – Lady Wisdom (8:12) and Lady Folly (9:13). You can choose to follow after one or the other. Depending on which path you take, you'll end up at the house of Wisdom (9:1) or the house of Folly (9:14).
  
- ❖ Last week, we sat in on a homeschooling lesson, which concluded with the father telling his son to stay straight on the path. The ancient path that his father, his grandfather, and countless others have taken – the way of wisdom.
  - We said, last week, that there are many detours branching out from the way of wisdom that look appealing and quite gratifying. The path of promiscuity is one of them. **It's what Proverbs 5 is warning against – it's about the path of promiscuous sexual behavior.** Specifically, it's warning against adultery – against breaking your marriage covenant with a forbidden lover. But the teaching here would apply to married and unmarried people and to any sexual activity outside the bond of marriage.
  
- ❖ **So one of the main emphases in Proverbs 5 is marital fidelity.** The stress is on marital monogamy. A man and woman; husband and wife; a one flesh union; till death do us part. Now there's no doubt this chapter's immediate concern is our lifelong faithfulness to our spouse. **But the underlying, bigger concern in Proverbs 5 is our lifelong faithfulness to wisdom – to Lady Wisdom.** That connects the concerns of this chapter with the book of Proverbs as a whole.
  - So this means you can expect a lot of talk this morning about sexual promiscuity, sexual purity, and sexual pleasures to be enjoyed within the covenant of marriage. But I'll try to connect it all to the bigger concern over breaking covenant with God and pursuing sin and folly – going down a self-destructive path that leads to nothing good. So we're going to look at (1) the deceptive charm of promiscuity, (2) the destructive consequences of promiscuity, (3) and the defensive course away from promiscuity.

## The Deceptive Charm of Promiscuity

- ❖ Let's start in vv1-6 and consider the deceptive charm of promiscuity. The chapter begins with the father continuing to instruct his son. Exhorting the son to listen to his wisdom because it will help him keep discretion and guard knowledge. Now that mention in v2 of your lips guarding knowledge has a double meaning. It refers to your ability to speak wisely, but the next verse reminds us that lips are used – not just for speaking – but also for kissing.
  - In v3, we're introduced to the forbidden woman. "*For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil.*" The word forbidden is more literally translated "*strange woman*". But it doesn't mean she's weird. It means "strange" in regards to either legal or social custom. She's acting outside of social norms. It's inferred that she's either an adulteress or a prostitute. That's why she's considered forbidden.
  
- ❖ Now before we continue, I think it's important to say that a man could also be considered strange or forbidden in the same way. I know it seems to read pretty one-sided. **It sounds as if Proverbs is accusing women of being predatory, and that they're to blame for a man's sexual misconduct.** I understand if this chapter is hard for some of you to read.
  - But that's why we need to read Scripture in its context. **Remember, everything in Proverbs should be read in context of a father giving instructions to his young adult son.** That's the reason why a forbidden woman is singled out and why there's no mention of a forbidden man. But every principle taught is applicable to men *and* women. **So let's not draw false conclusions – that either woman are to blame for a man's lust or that the Bible is regressive or sexist.** Instead, let's take care to read in context.
  
- ❖ So what is the father saying here? **He's saying that promiscuous sexual encounters have a deceptive charm. They promise sweet pleasures but hide a bitter aftertaste.** It's like chocolate-covered licorice. You think you're enjoying something sweet – but just you wait.
  - Listen to vv3-4, "*For the lips of a forbidden woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.*" So her kisses taste sweet and her speech sounds smooth – but it's all a lie. Instead of sweet, she's actually bitter. Instead of smooth, she's actually sharp and biting.
    - This is how sexual temptation works. It holds out a promise of great pleasure. And so we jump into forbidden sexual encounters with great expectations. And it does feel good – it is pleasurable – otherwise it wouldn't be very tempting. **But the pleasures of sexual sins are fleeting.** They quickly leave a bitter taste in your mouth. Leaving you unsatisfied. Leaving you wanting more.
  
- ❖ I'm sure none of this is news to you. We've all experienced the fleeting pleasures of promiscuity. We know the promises that the forbidden woman – or man or website – has to offer are lies. We know they'll leave a bitter taste. **We know these forbidden pleasures fail to satisfy – and yet we continue pursuing them anyways.** That's the definition of folly. Repeating the same behavior – knowing its perilous outcome – but somehow convincing ourselves that it'll be different this time around. The path of promiscuity and the path of folly are one and the same.

- ❖ Now if we keep reading, the father goes on to warn that – if you go down this path – the bitter aftertaste should be the least of your worries. **What waits for you at the end of this path is death itself.** Look at v5, “*Her feet go down to death; her steps follow the path to Sheol.*” The father is warning that a relationship with the forbidden woman leads to death. Later in Proverbs 7:22-23, he issues a similar warning, “*All at once he follows her (the forbidden woman), as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it will cost him his life.*”
  - It's been said that sex is like fire. In its proper place, it's great. It's enjoyable. **When fire is in the fireplace, it keeps you warm and lights up a room. But once it gets outside the fireplace, it can burn down the house.** The point is that sex is meant to be enjoyed. It's suppose to be pleasurable. So enjoy it in its proper place – in the covenant bond of marriage. But once sex gets outside of marriage – then it can burn you. It's destructive. It can cost you your life. That's the father's warning to his son – and to us all.

### The Destructive Consequences of Promiscuity

- ❖ Now if we keep reading in the text, the father extends his warning against promiscuity by now describing its destructive consequences. He resorts back to his two-path theology and warns to stay off the path of the promiscuous. Look at v8, “*Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house.*” He goes on to list negative consequences.
  - **One of the main ones is a loss of vitality and strength.** Listen to vv9-10, “[Don’t go down this path] *lest you give your honor to others and your years to the merciless, lest strangers take their fill of your strength, and your labors go to the house of a foreigner.*” That word “*honor*” means splendor or majesty, but it can also refer to a person's strength or vigor (Dan 10:8). Contextually, it should read that way. **If you stay on the path of promiscuity, you risk losing your vitality and strength.** Your best years will be spent chasing illicit pleasures that leave you with a bitter aftertaste and your strength sapped.
- ❖ **The father also alludes to the loss of productivity or material wealth.** V10 speaks of your labors (the fruit of your hard work) going to the house of a foreigner. By that, he means “a foreign woman”. The same word is found in v20 where the ESV translates it as “an adulteress”, and it’s parallel with “a forbidden woman”. **So the house of a foreigner is the house of a forbidden lover – or any forbidden source of sexual pleasure.** So v10 could be a reference to squandering your resources on reckless living, much like the prodigal son did in Luke 15. He wasted his inheritance on prostitutes (Lk 15:30).
  - Now the merciless or the strangers in vv9-10 could refer to a husband offended by an adulterous affair and any of his family members who support his grievances. There were legal consequences for adultery. And today, you can imagine how a man’s wealth can be sucked dry in hush money, lawsuits, divorce settlements, and ongoing alimony payments.
- ❖ **But more generally, the verses apply to loss of productivity.** We can get so preoccupied with forbidden pleasures that we become less productive in our studies or our work. It affects our minds and concentration. And it begins to show in our grades, our GPA, our performance evaluations. Little do our teachers or supervisors know what’s causing our poor performance.

- ❖ Look where it all leads in v11, “*and at the end of your life you groan, when your flesh and body are consumed.*” If you go down this path long enough, your body will give out. **A promiscuous lifestyle has a short shelf life.** It’s not good for the body and cuts short your length of life.
  - But that imagery of your flesh giving out and groaning in the wake of forbidden sexual encounters – that brings to mind a very relevant passage. **I’m thinking of Psalm 32 – a psalm written by David after his adulterous affair with Bathsheba.** And it was written after he spent (at minimum) nine months in stubborn unrepentance. Because by the time he was confronted by Nathan – and led to repentance by the grace of God – the baby conceived by his promiscuity was born.
  
- ❖ Now during those nine months, you’d think that David would be relieved that his cover-up appeared to be working. Bathsheba’s husband is dead. She’s now married to David. Their baby is born. David is still on the throne. You would think he’d be relieved.
  - But listen to **Psalm 32:3-4**, “*3For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*” **David is lamenting how silence over his sin (his refusal to repent) has led to physical and emotional turmoil.** His inner agony could be felt in his bones. He describes it, in v4, as a loss of physical strength. His vitality has been sapped as in the heat of summer.
  
- ❖ And note carefully how he’s groaning under these consequences – even before he feels the physical and financial effects of his sin. His health is presumably fine. His baby is still alive. His kingdom is still intact. And yet something lies heavy on him – something is sapping his strength and causing his bones to waste away on the inside.
  - **That something is guilt – the guilt of his sexual sins. Guilty feelings are psychological – but as you see here, they have physiological effects.** Guilt is a crushing feeling that weighs heavy on your conscience. You feel like you’re carrying around a heavy set of weights. And every day you continue in sin and unrepentance – it’s like another 10-pound weight is added to your pack. **The longer you keep silent; the more exhausting life gets.** And add to your guilt – feelings of jealousy, hurt, loneliness, regret – you get to a point where you want to give up. All you can do is lay there and groan.
  
- ❖ This is important to stress. Because if the warnings against going down the path of promiscuity only had to do with the loss of health or money or prolonged life – then you might point to certain examples of very promiscuous people who seem to be healthy, wealthy, and die at an old age. They don’t seem to be experiencing any outward consequences. **But don’t discount the psychological effects of sin – the guilt, the regret, the shame – because they’re very real and have real effects on a person, even if you can’t see them visibly.**
  - The father goes there in vv12-14. He tells his son that if you don’t heed these warnings – if you insist on learning these lessons the hard way through painful personal experience – just know that, at end of the path of promiscuity, all you’ll find is shame and regret.

- ❖ They'll be a day when you regret your actions, "<sup>12</sup>and you say, "How I hated discipline, and my heart despised reproof! <sup>13</sup>I did not listen to the voice of my teachers or incline my ear to my instructors. <sup>14</sup>I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation. '"
  - In other words, keep going down this path and you'll regret the day you didn't listen. The day you despised the discipline of your parents or the reproof of your spiritual mentors. **Because one day, the sins you commit in private will be made public.** Just read the paper or watch the news, and they'll be another tragic tale of someone who indulged in private sexual sins – who wallowed in forbidden lust under the cover of darkness. But in every case, light eventually breaks through, exposes sin, and leads to public shaming.
  
- ❖ This is how David's story turned out. His private sins with Bathsheba are public record. They're recorded in Scripture, which has been translated into thousands of languages and distributed around the world. That's how David's story turned out, but public shaming is not how it ended.
  - **The father in Proverbs 5 knew exactly how David's story concludes – because his own life story was tied to it.** Remember, this is Solomon writing to his son, passing along the lessons he learned from his father, David (4:3) His mother was Bathsheba. The child of that adulterous affair was his brother. **He had a front row seat to see his father's kingdom divided.** To see his father and his sins become a public spectacle. Solomon was well-versed in his father's famous sins and public shame.
    - **But Solomon was also familiar with his father's famous confessions of sin and public displays of repentance.** The words of contrition in vv12-14 could very well have been words of David. If we look back to **Psalm 32:5**, David is explicit in his remorse and repentance. "*I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*"
  
- ❖ This is where I want to encourage those who feel very sharply the shame of your sexual sins. I know you feel like you're at the brink of utter ruin. But there is hope. **If you refuse to cover your sins any longer, if you confess them to the LORD – there is a gospel promise of blessed forgiveness, where God will be the one who graciously covers your sin and shame.**
  - Just think of that prodigal son in Luke 15 who squandered his inheritance along the path of promiscuity. **He finally came to his senses while wallowing in the muck and mire of his shame.** He said to himself, "I am at the brink of utter ruin. I didn't listen to the voice of wisdom. And now I've come to the bitter end on the path of promiscuity. But I have a father. I have a home. What am I doing here? Why stay in my sin and shame?"
  
- ❖ So that prodigal got up and went home. And while a long way off, the story says his father ran to him with open arms. His son's face was probably caked in mud and shame – but the father kissed him. He was probably wearing tattered rags, covered in filth and sin – but the father covered him with his robe. **The father didn't shame his son. No, he took that shame and covered it.** Then he rejoiced over his son who was dead but now is alive; who was lost but now is found.

- ❖ Maybe some of you are still long way off from home. Maybe you're stalling. But what are you waiting for? Are you waiting until you clean yourself up? Until you can see some improvements? But you're missing the point of the story. **The world may write you off.** They world may call you damaged goods.
  - **But God the Father runs to you and is ready to embrace you with open arms.** Because Jesus, his Beloved Son, took up our sin and shame on the cross and died in our stead – so that you and I could be received back home.
    - Will you come home? He'll wash you and make you clean. He'll give you a new name and reputation. You'll be a new creation in Christ. It's time to come home.

### **The Defensive Course Away from Promiscuity**

- ❖ So we've considered the deceptive charm of promiscuity and its destructive consequences. Let's focus now on the defensive course away from the path of promiscuity. Now you've probably heard it said – the best defense is a good offense. Well, that's basically what the father tells his son in vv15-20 – **the best defense against the temptations of forbidden sex is a wholesome enjoyment of marital sex.**
  - Listen to vv15-17, “<sup>15</sup>*Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well. <sup>16</sup>Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? <sup>17</sup>Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you.*” So we have this metaphor here where sex is like water, and the cistern or well symbolizes your own spouse. **The point is your sexual desires (“*your springs*”) – should not be scattered abroad among others – but directed exclusively towards your spouse in the privacy of your home.**
    - Or go back to our previous metaphor. Sex is like fire. And as long as it stays in the fireplace, stoke that fire and keep it hot – and it will bless you and your marriage.
- ❖ Listen to vv18-19, where the father gets direct and outright celebrates the pleasures of marital sex. “<sup>18</sup>*Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, <sup>19</sup>a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.*” **The connection is obvious: To drink from your own cistern or well means to find sexual delight in your wife or in your husband – and in no one else.**
  - Now the father goes on to use imagery that fails to carry over into our modern context. Describing a woman as a lovely deer or (quite literally) a graceful mountain goat – just doesn't do it for us. But you get the drift. The man is celebrating the nakedness of his wife, including her breasts, and he does so without any shame.
- ❖ The fact that we get squeamish here shows how we've let our sinful shame to redefine sex as something embarrassing. But sex is a holy gift of God given to a husband and wife for their joy and delight. **There is nothing shameful about sex enjoyed within the covenant of marriage.**
  - That exhortation to “*be intoxicated always in her love*” is interesting because the same word is used in v23 describing someone “*led astray*” by folly. The word has a wide range of meaning, so – even though it typically has a negative connotation – to be led astray or intoxicated can be a good thing in the right context. Think about it. When you're led astray by error, you're so caught up in it you're no longer thinking straight.

- ❖ Well, here in the context of the marriage bed, the Bible is saying to get so caught up in loving your spouse – to be so intoxicated in marital love – to the point where you’re no longer thinking straight. **Where you’re drunk in love with your spouse.** And again, the fact that that sounds weird for me to say probably means our view of sex is still too low.
- ❖ **And that’s what the world accuses us of – they say Christians have a low view of sex.** Secular culture, on the other hand, claims to be sex positive. They would say they’ve reclaimed the goodness of sex over against the oppressive, negative view that we’ve inherited from our puritanical past. That’s the typical narrative.
  - **But I would argue that instead of elevating sex, our sex-crazed culture as actually degraded it.** Sure, we’re living in a day and age where people are much more free to talk about sex and celebrate sex. Where in generations past it was treated as a very taboo and dirty. Where we were very hush-hush about the subject.
    - But just liberating people to talk more openly about sex has not redeemed or restored any dignity to sex. Sure, the culture will say having sex is nothing to be ashamed about. But they mean that in the same way that eating a meal is nothing to be ashamed about.
- ❖ **Our culture treats sex like hunger or any other human appetite.** If you feel hungry, you eat. If you feel sexy, you have sex. And just like you wouldn’t eat one dish for the rest of your life, it’s not natural to have only one sex partner for the rest of your life. Our culture says having lots of sex with lots of partners is natural. It’s nothing to be ashamed about.
  - **But C.S. Lewis argues in *Mere Christianity* that we should be ashamed in the way that our sexual appetite, as a culture, has disproportionately grown way beyond our needs.** He says imagine visiting a planet where people paid money to watch someone eat a mutton chop or a slab of bacon or where people ogled pictures of food in a magazine (or where people stared lustfully at pictures or videos of food on the internet). We would conclude the appetite for food on this planet was seriously messed up.
    - But that’s what we do with sex. **Our culture claims to be sex positive. But instead, it has degraded sex and turned it into a base craving – and a disproportionate one at that.**
- ❖ That’s why I like Proverbs 5. **Here we have a passage that views sex like it’s good. But it doesn’t treat sex like it’s God.** It doesn’t make sex out to be something that’s going to satisfy your deepest need to be love and accepted. That’s God’s job. Sex is his gift to a husband and wife. When the marriage bed is honored and rightly enjoyed to the praise of God and the renewal of the marital union – then that’s the best defense against sexual temptation.
  - In **1 Corinthians 7**, Paul makes the same argument when he says in v2, “*2But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. . . . 5Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*” (1 Cor 7:2, 5)

- ❖ **Now I know that leaves the unmarried feeling like they're missing a key weapon in this fight against sin and temptation.** But that's why Paul goes on in chapter 7:8 to say, "<sup>8</sup>*To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. <sup>9</sup>But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*" So if the pull towards promiscuity is so strong, then maybe you should marry. Especially if you're unmarried and yet sexually active with your partner. You should marry.
  - But let's be clear – **getting married will resolve your sin problem of having sex outside of marriage. But it won't solve your disobedience problem that led you to have sex outside of marriage in the first place.** The solution to your disobedience problem is found in v21. Look there with me, "*For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths.*"
  
- ❖ Friends, the strongest weapon against promiscuity is *not* a satisfying marriage bed. It helps. **But the strongest weapon against promiscuity – any sin and disobedience – is living *coram Deo*.** That's Latin for "in the presence of God" or "before the face of God". That's what v21 reminds us of. All of our ways – all of our paths – are lived out before the eyes of the LORD. *Coram Deo*.
  - **And that's not meant to scare Christians into obedience.** That's meant to comfort Christians – knowing God is there on every path we take. **Married Christians can be comforted** – knowing that the Lord is watching over their marriage. Knowing he's there to help us keep our marriage beds pure. Knowing that his eyes are pleased when we enjoy sex with our spouse.
    - **And unmarried Christians can likewise be comforted** – knowing that the Lord is watching over you in your pursuit of purity. Knowing he's there to satisfy your deepest need to be loved and accepted. Knowing that his eyes are pleased when you enjoy the fullness of life in Christ without marriage or sex with a spouse.
      - Living this way – living consciously before the eyes of the LORD – is how you stay on the way of wisdom and avoid the path of promiscuity.