

Challenging Lifestyles Session 5
Matthew 5:27-30 – Sex in the 21st Century

Resource: 'Challenging Lifestyles' by Nicky Gumbel, Chapter 5

Timing: 40-50 minutes, leading into ministry

Buzz groups: Suggestions are boxed, pairs or groups of 3-4 will work best

Illustrations: Suggestions are noted, but your own ideas and stories are preferable

Focus: Major on the one or two points most relevant to your group

Icebreaker: Who was the first person you can remember having a crush on as a child?

Introduction

Recap last time on *How to Handle Anger*, and introduce *Sex in the 21st Century*
Our culture is probably the most sex-obsessed in history. What did Jesus say about it?

An overall biblical framework is very useful to give an overview on issues like this:

Creation: sex is good – God's idea, his beautiful gift to us

Fall: sex is complicated – we've all made a mess of it, often painfully so, but we're not alone

Redemption: sex can be restored – forgiveness and healing is possible and covered by the cross

Glorification: sex is not an end in itself – it points to something else and singleness is perfectly valid

So what does Jesus say about it in Matthew 5:27-30?

1. Be radical (v.27-28 '*... you have heard that it was said... but I tell you...*)

The Point: Being a Christian means living counter-culturally

Jesus refuses to restrict God's view of sex to physical practice.

God looks to our heart, inner life - applies to everyone, man and woman, married and unmarried.

Sex outside of marriage is the social norm, pornography is mainstream, adultery widely accepted.

A *Sunday Times* survey found that 40% of couples cite net porn as a problem.

A traditional Christian approach to sex is often regarded as shameful, unhealthy and unusual.

Illustrate: Tell a personal story of your own radical, counter-cultural, decisions in this area.

Application: It takes courage to swim against the tide – decide now to encourage a friend who is.

2. Be romantic (Matthew 19:5-6, see also Genesis 2:24)

The Point: Secure, enduring love and life-long commitment is the most romantic context for sex

Marriage is a life-uniting event that sex witnesses to and celebrates.

Graham Tomlin: "It's [sex is] the mysterious, ecstatic union of two created beings who are bound together inextricably in a lifelong, permanent bond...we're on holy ground."

Illustrate: Find a celebrity quote about sex before marriage, or tell your own testimony or view.

Application: *The Marriage Course* is a great way of addressing this point issues for couples.

Buzz groups: What might your friends who aren't Christians say sex is for? On the basis of what we've discussed so far, how would you respond?

3. Be repentant (v.28)

The Point: We have all fallen short in this area so there's no room to judge one another

It's never too late to ask for and receive forgiveness, even if we've sinned very badly in this area. Repentance is also positive and proactive – it means stopping the sin and getting help. God offers true freedom for those who repent (John 8:36; Romans 8:1).

Illustrate: King David sinned badly in this area, but repented (see 2 Samuel 11-12).

Application: Saying sorry about things to God but keeping them private often doesn't end the power of sexual sin. We often have to ask friends for their help to stop and prevent sexual sin too.

4. Be ruthless (v.29-30)

The Point: Sexual sin starts in the heart, not physical acts, so it's there we have to start resisting it.

Jesus' words here aren't literal! Self-harm won't help, but moral self-denial will. It's not wrong to appreciate beauty and be attracted, but it is wrong to entertain sinful thoughts. Jesus is not trying to wrap us all up in guilt, but to see this area as a spiral going up or down. Graham Tomlin writes: "Lust is like eczema: the more we scratch it, the more it itches."

Illustrate: Tell a recent personal story of when you gave in to temptation over something really trivial, perhaps amusing. Draw the parallel between that and sexual sin, and how you could stop it.

Application: Free online tools (e.g. CovenantEyes.Com) can monitor your web use and email brief reports of it to your accountability partner. These are a great way that friends can help each other.

5. Be role models (v.13-14 '*... you are the salt of the earth... you are the light of the world.*)

The Point: We're called to be positive and distinct, showing that purity is possible and practical!

The church has high standards in this area to make it easier for people trying to live this way. Humans can survive without sex, but not without good, upright, intimate relationships. We are called to be just such a community - this applies to everyone, whether single or married.

Illustrate: Share about the life of a Christian known personally to you, who modelled something great about Jesus to you through their relationships, whether single or married.

Application: Think of three people you're currently aware are watching you to see whether you live out the Christian message. Decide now to let them know more about this area of your life too.

Conclusion

It is not easy to be a radical, romantic, repentant, ruthless role model in the whole area of sex! We need to ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to enable us to live in full freedom.

Ideas for Ministry

- Do just that: ask the Holy Spirit to come and minister to the group in this area. He may then assure some of forgiveness over past sin, may challenge others over an area of temptation or struggle in their current life, and may enable some to repent for the first time and help them determine to live differently. People can turn to threes to pray for each other more specifically.
- Help people to repent and experience freedom from past sin. Hand out scrap paper and invite people to note any sexual sin, then to shred them in a shredder at the front. Then all worship.