Rock Valley Bible Church (www.rvbc.cc)

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October 13, 2019 by Steve Brandon

Ponder Your Paths

Proverbs 5

1. Her Feet Go Down to Death (verses 1-6)
2. Don't Go Near Her Door (verses 7-14)
3. Drink Your Own Water (verses 15-20)
4. Don't Die for Lack of Discipline (verses 21-23)

As most all of you know, this past Wednesday, Don passed away on Wednesday after a long battle with dementia. As a pastor, it has been a delight to come alongside Bonnie during these difficult days of watching Don deteriorate. For several years now, things have been very difficult for her, as Don's Parkinson's disease and dementia have run their course. In the past months and weeks it has been especially difficult for her, yet she has been faithful to love him until the end.

On Thursday, she wrote on Facebook, "My dear husband went to be with his Lord yesterday. We had a great 58 years together. Many blessings from God."

These are very tender words. One of the most tender scenes that I will remember for the rest of my life was when Yvonne and I visited her last week. As Yvonne and I were talking with Bonnie, she took her hand and lightly set it on Don's chest, tenderly stroking his chest, giving him any little comfort that she could. It was a subtle expression of love that I found especially encouraging, that after 58 years of marriage, Bonnie was still demonstrating her love for her husband.

As Yvonne and I were heading off to bed last night, I commented to her on how long their marriage lasted. 58 years! That's a long time. I said, "We aren't even half-way there, Yvonne" (we have only been married for 27 years). As we prayed together last night, I prayed that we might make it 58 years in our marriage. To make it 58 years, the Mundells must have weathered a lot of little storms in those years, and a few big ones.

Well, this morning, as we open our Bibles, we are going to see Solomon urging his

son to avoid one of those big storms that could come up in a marriage: adultery. Our text is Proverbs, chapter 5. In this chapter Solomon will warn his son against sexual temptation, and be warned, there is some explicit language here, which I will deal with as best as I know how.

So let's read the passage together.

Proverbs 5:1-23

My son, be attentive to my wisdom;
incline your ear to my understanding,
that you may keep discretion,
and your lips may guard knowledge.
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.
Her feet go down to death;
her steps follow the path to Sheol;
she does not ponder the path of life;
her ways wander, and she does not know it.

And now, O sons, listen to me,
and do not depart from the words of my mouth.
Keep your way far from her,
and do not go near the door of her house,
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,
and at the end of your life you groan,
when your flesh and body are consumed,
and you say, "How I hated discipline,
and my heart despised reproof!
I did not listen to the voice of my teachers
or incline my ear to my instructors.
I am at the brink of utter ruin
in the assembled congregation."

Drink water from your own cistern,
flowing water from your own well.

Should your springs be scattered abroad,
    streams of water in the streets?
Let them be for yourself alone,
    and not for strangers with you.
Let your fountain be blessed,
    and rejoice in the wife of your youth,
a lovely deer, a graceful doe.
    Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight;
    be intoxicated always in her love.
Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman
    and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?
For a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD,
    and he ponders all his paths.
The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him,
    and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.
He dies for lack of discipline,
    and because of his great folly he is led astray.

My message this morning is entitled "Ponder Your Paths." This phraseology is mentioned twice in these verses. The first time comes in verse 6, where it is said of the forbidden woman that she does not ponder the path of life, that her ways wander and she does not know it. This is talking about the evil, seductive woman. She goes on her way without thinking about her life. She is only thinking about the present, not the future, and she doesn't realize the destruction that awaits her. The second time this phraseology appears is in verse 21, where we read that a man's ways are before the eyes of the LORD, and he ponders all his paths. That is talking about the Lord, seeing everything and knowing everything. The Lord ponders our paths, and so should we.

We saw this phrase in our text last week as well, in chapter 4, verse 26.

Proverbs 4:26
Ponder the path of your feet;
    then all your ways will be sure.

It is the admonition to watch where you go and carefully think about what you are doing. That is what all of chapter 5 is about. It is really an illustration of how we all should ponder our paths, especially as it relates to our sexuality and our faithfulness to our spouse.

Now, people often think that the Bible is an old book with no relevance to our lives today. But Proverbs 5 is very applicable to us today, especially with the rise of the internet and all of the temptations that come with it, many of them sexual. We need to think long and hard about how we will avoid these temptations. We need to think long and hard about the consequences of falling to them.

Before we go further, I want to pause and offer a word of hope for anyone in this room who has already fallen into adultery, or who fears they may someday. Know that there is hope in the gospel of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul speaks of those who will not inherit the kingdom of God, including adulterers and the sexually immoral. And yet he continues, "And such were some of you. 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" (1 Corinthians 6:11).

Adultery is devastating. When two become one flesh and that union is torn apart through adultery or divorce, it is like ripping flesh from the bone, so painful it is. But there is forgiveness. There is hope beyond even this sin.

This past week, I ran across two articles written by Ray and Jani Ortlund. They have been married for 48 years, and he has been a pastor for much of their married life. The articles, one written by each of them, shared the same subtitle: “A Letter to a Would-Be Adulterer.”[1] In these letters, Ray and Jani wrote to plead with the one who was thinking about forsaking their marriage in the pursuit of adultery, seeking to persuade them away from the terrible mistake they were contemplating.

In many ways, this is what Proverbs 5 is. It is a letter to a would-be adulterer. In fact, I could have entitled my message this morning, “A Letter to a Would-Be Adulterer.” Because that’s what Proverbs 5 is. It is Solomon persuading his son away from making a terrible mistake.

I love how Jani opens her letter. She writes,

> Although we haven’t met, I know at least one thing about you. I know you didn’t enter your marriage thinking, "How can I ruin this? How can I bring pain to this man, and our families, and our friends?" You began your marriage hoping it would become a life-long love story, filled with deep joy and satisfaction. And yet here you are today, thinking about things you never thought possible.

This is the reality of sexual temptation, it can come upon you quickly, if you don't "Ponder Your Paths." My message this morning is that you would think about these things, long before something would ever begin.

Jani Ortlund continues,

> Adultery often begins in your imagination. You cultivate an emotional affair and then fantasize about the sexual possibilities. All of this goes uninterrupted by godly repentance.
>
> Soon you begin lusting after the attention of another man. Then you find yourself flirting with him, developing an emotional support structure with him.
>
> We always have a higher tolerance for our own hidden sins, but none of us can caress a secret world of lust and fantasy without defiling our soul (Mark 7:23). Ultimately, adultery, like all sin, is a heart issue. This is where it all begins.

Solomon begins chapter 5 with a description of the source of the temptation. This woman is identified in verse 3 as "a forbidden woman." In the New International Version she is called "an adulterous woman." The New Living Translation calls her "the immoral woman." Literally, she is the "strange woman," as the King James Version translates it (you can see this in the footnote of the ESV). She is strange in the sense that you ought not to have her, because as the context dictates she is immoral and wicked, and following her ways will lead to death. Which brings us to my first point.

1. Her Feet Go Down to Death (verses 1-6)

Solomon begins in verse 1 with his usual admonition to his son:

> Proverbs 5:1
> My son, be attentive to my wisdom;
> incline your ear to my understanding,

There is nothing particularly different here from what we have seen before. Compare this with chapter 4, verse 20.

Proverbs 4:20
My son, be attentive to my words;
incline your ear to my sayings.

Practically the same thing. So again, children, I would encourage you to listen to what Solomon has to tell us this morning. Solomon's words here are applicable to daughters as well as sons. Though the temptation in chapter 5 involves a sinful woman seducing a man, the principle is equally applicable the other way: what is said of the woman can easily be said of a man.

She is described in verse 3. Her speech is attractive. Solomon says her lips "drip honey," and her speech is "smoother than oil." In other words, she tells you the things you want to hear. She strokes your ego, whatever it takes. But not all that is sweet in the mouth is sweet in the stomach. Verse 4 tells us that her speech is really a sugar-coated poison pill:

Proverbs 5:4-5
but in the end she is bitter as wormwood,
sharp as a two-edged sword.
Her feet go down to death;
her steps follow the path to Sheol;

That is my point: "Her Feet Go Down to Death (verses 1-6)."

This is not the first time Solomon has said this. Look back at chapter 2, where in the context of the blessings that wisdom will bring he writes.

Proverbs 2:16-19
So you will be delivered from the forbidden woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth words,
who forsakes the companion of her youth
and forgets the covenant of her God;
for her house sinks down to death,
and her paths to the departed;
none who go to her come back,
nor do they regain the paths of life.

Nor will this be the last time we see this woman. We will see her again in chapter 6, and again in chapter 7. Each time the message is the same: men, there are women out there who will use their lips and their flattery to get you, but wisdom

will see their destination and wisdom will refuse their call. What is sad is that these women don't even know what they are doing. She does not ponder the path of life; her ways wander, and she does not know it (verse 6). In full consciousness, they can seek to seduce men into their traps, not even knowing that what they are doing is wrong.

To this, Solomon gives counsel to his son in verses 7-14.

2. Don't Go Near Her Door (verses 7-14)

The counsel is simple. If you are on a dangerous ledge overlooking a cliff, don't go near the edge. If there is a fence between you and the lion in the zoo, don't climb the fence and enter the pen. It will mean your doom. Look at what Solomon says.

> Proverbs 5:7-8
> And now, O sons, listen to me,
> and do not depart from the words of my mouth.
> Keep your way far from her,
> and do not go near the door of her house,

In other words, stay far away. Perhaps you have heard of the "Billy Graham Rule," the practice among Christian leaders of avoiding spending time alone with women to whom they are not married, as a display of integrity, a means of avoiding sexual temptation, to avoid any appearance of moral compromise, and to avoid being accused of sexual harassment or assault.[2]

In Billy Graham's day, he and his ministry companions were working in Modesto, California. They agreed to what became known as "the Modesto Manifesto," resolving to avoid any situation that would have even the appearance of compromise or suspicion regarding women, finances, interactions with local churches, and publicity. Graham made a point of not traveling, meeting, or eating alone with a woman other than his wife Ruth. His biographer Grant Wacker observed that over the years Graham received intense media scrutiny, but hardly anyone accused him of violating any of those four principles. Mike Pence follows the same rule today and has been mocked and maligned for it as old-fashioned. But no one can accuse him of violating these principles. He stays away from the door. This is exactly what Solomon is calling his son to do: don't go near her, don't get close to her.

The reason is simple. It will consume your strength and fill you with regret. Look at verses 9-14.

> Proverbs 5:9-14
> 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,
> and at the end of your life you groan,
> when your flesh and body are consumed,
> and you say, “How I hated discipline,
> and my heart despised reproof!
> I did not listen to the voice of my teachers
> or incline my ear to my instructors.
> I am at the brink of utter ruin
> in the assembled congregation.”

Jani Ortlund writes in her letter that"“Adultery brings misery at so many levels. It brings the adulterer shame. It introduces betrayal into your legacy. It shows your children that your personal pleasure is more important than their security. It brings sorrow to your Christian community.”[1]

I heard a story this week of a man who was committing adultery while traveling for work. When he was away, he cultivated a relationship with another woman. What it brought him was not pleasure but an exhausting burden: the lying, the deceit, the manipulating of money to cover his tracks. It consumed all of his energy and resources, pouring his life into something that was eating him alive.

This is what Solomon is trying to show his son. Sexual sin affects the body, brings deep regret, and results in shame and ruin before the assembled congregation. As Jani Ortlund puts it,

> Adultery is a mature sin, a deliberate sin. You may ‘fall in love,’ but you walk yourself into bed with that man. In all our years of ministry, I have never had one woman come to me and say, ‘I am so happy over this affair. It’s even better than I imagined!’ And so as an older woman, I have one word for you: Don’t! Don’t go there. Don’t go there in your mind. Don’t go there in your heart. Don’t go there with your body.[1]

Sexual sin never fulfills on its promise of pleasure. Oh, it may be sweet in the moment, but it will be bitter in the end. Wisdom is the ability to look at the end of the matter and live today in light of it. It is no accident that Billy Graham ministered for 60 years in America without even a hint of sexual impropriety, while every year a new crop of Christian leaders fall to adultery. When you hear of the next scandal, realize that the leader didn't simply "fall" into sin. He began by failing to ponder his paths: no safeguards, no boundaries, no fleeing of temptation, no understanding of where it all ends. A compromise here, a compromise there, and then the disgrace. This is what Solomon is urging his son to avoid.

This is similar to what Paul wrote. Paul told Timothy, "flee youthful passions" (2 Timothy 2:2). Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality."

In verse 15, Solomon transitions to the better way: by pursuing your own spouse.

3. Drink Your Own Water (verses 15-20)

> Proverbs 5:15
> Drink water from your own cistern,
> flowing water from your own well.

In other words, find your delight and satisfaction in your own wife. You don't need to go elsewhere for love and pleasure; seek it at home. You don't need to go to your neighbor's house to get a glass of water when you have all the water you need from your own faucet. Further, you don't need to give water to all your neighbors: "Should your springs be scattered abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be for yourself alone, and not for strangers with you" (verses 16-17). Verse 17 is speaking about the exclusivity of the marriage bond. Jesus, quoting Moses, said.

> Matthew 19:5-6
> "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.

When two people are married, they promise to be faithful to each other and are to find their joy in each other. Verse 18: "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in

the wife of your youth." This is where Ray Ortlund picks up his own letter to a would-be adulterer.

> The Bible says, 'Rejoice in the wife of your youth' (Proverbs 5:18). One powerful safeguard against adultery is pretty obvious: happiness in your wife that lasts a lifetime.
>
> Proverbs 5:18 does not say, 'Rejoice in your young wife.' No wife can remain young for long. Proverbs 5 wisely points out that she is 'the wife of your youth.' However long you both live as husband and wife, she will always be that girl.
>
> Look at her. She is that girl you married back when you both were young. The passing years have no power to change that tender reality. She is still that girl who gave herself to you on your wedding day. She is still that girl who put herself in your arms. She gave herself to you. She could not have been more vulnerable. She could not have been more honoring toward you. Remember that. Dwell on that. Marvel at that.
>
> Think back even further to how the two of you started out. Remember what happened when you began dating, and fell in love, and got engaged. The wonderful, crazy romance you experienced together was one of life' s great privileges. It wasn't just your hormones at work. It was "the very flame of the Lord" (Song of Solomon 8:6), a sacred fire he himself ignited for your joy and his glory.
>
> What you two had going back then — you can have it back, and even better, because you're more mature now, more focused, more settled. But the way you two used to walk and laugh and talk and dream together, because you just liked each other — go back there again. Your youthful romance was no foolish illusion. It was real. It hinted at the ultimate reality, the eternal love story of Christ and his bride (Ephesians 5:31–32). Your love story is worth fighting for."[1]

Not only that, but marital love is pleasurable. Verse 19 says that we should be "intoxicated always in her love." Husbands are to be drunk in the love of their wives, not as angry drunks, but as happy ones. Solomon begins his love song in the Song of Solomon with these words of the bride.

Song of Solomon 1:2
Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine.

For all the pleasures that alcohol might bring, marital love is greater. But Solomon is quick to point out that a man should not be drunk in the love of any woman other than his wife. “Why should you be intoxicated, my son, with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?” (verse 20). In light of all that has been said, this is a rhetorical question: 1. Her Feet Go Down to Death. She brings nothing but regret, shame, and ruin to your life. It makes no sense. That is why we need to ponder our paths.

Finally, let’s look at our last point this morning.

4. Don’t Die for Lack of Discipline (verses 21-23)

Proverbs 5:21-23
For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the LORD,
and he ponders all his paths.
The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him,
and he is held fast in the cords of his sin.
He dies for lack of discipline,
and because of his great folly he is led astray.

We see here again that Proverbs is more than mere human wisdom. We live our lives before the eyes of the LORD. He looks upon the evil and the good. He ponders our paths. The LORD is looking down upon us and testing our ways. If we follow in his ways, his blessing will be upon us; if we rebel against him, his curse will be upon us. This includes our relationship with other women. This includes our computer usage. He watches every click. Sadly, there are many who are ensnared in their sin, who are led away, and who will die for it.

Think again about Don and Bonnie and their 58 years of marriage. Do you want that legacy? Or do you want a fleeting pleasure that reaps only destruction and hardship?

Ray Ortlund closes his letter by reflecting on the long view of marriage.

When Jani and I married in 1971, we were just two people. But now we have grandchildren, with more on the way. At present trends, our family alone could grow to 52,488 people in ten generations. That's a city about the size of Flagstaff, Arizona. And it's all our fault! We bear some responsibility for these thousands along our lineage.

Jani and I often pray that, to the tenth generation, God will clearly and publicly set our family apart to himself. We pray that our children and grandchildren, and on and on, will be solidly converted, and love Jesus, and believe the Bible, and take a stand for Christ with integrity and courage in their generation. They're going to need that courage, we are sure. Our part right now is to live with that very integrity and courage, so that we might become an inspiring example for them in the future.

You and your wife can leave your own legacy — not in money, but in vast spiritual resources. Your life together can tell a powerful story of the faithfulness of God in good times and bad. Who wouldn't be strengthened by looking back and seeing in their own family history that God is real, God is able, God is good? Do not deny future generations the riches they will so urgently need far out in the unforeseeable future. Whatever else you and your wife might or might not accomplish, build this treasury that even the tenth generation can draw upon.

However cute that woman might be that you're tempted toward, ask yourself if your legacy is worth destroying for a moment of stolen pleasure. Your sin will quickly turn into a bitter aftertaste you'll be spitting out of your mouth for the rest of your life. But God is positioning you and your wife to bless the generations yet to come. Embrace the vision! Don't throw your legacy away![1]

Ponder your paths!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on October 13, 2019 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] Jani's article is entitled, "Only Love Prevents Adultery: A Letter to a Would-Be Adulterer." You can read it here: https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/only-love-prevents-adultery. Ray's article is entitled, "Rejoice in the Wife of Your Youth: A Letter to a Would-Be Adulterer." You can read it here: https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/rejoice-in-the-wife-of-your-youth.

[2] “Billy Graham Rule,” Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billy_Graham_rule.