

How many of you know someone whose life has been wrecked by sexual sin? Maybe you know someone that has struggled with pornography; it's kind of overtaken their lives and wrecked it in a significant way. Perhaps you know someone that had sex before they were married, they got pregnant and then maybe panicked and aborted the child, and now they live with that. Maybe they decided they should marry this person they really don't like? *How am I going to raise this kid as a single parent?*

Maybe you know someone that was haunted with some sexual disease after a one-night stand. Maybe you know someone who was promiscuous before they were married and then they got married and brought baggage into their marriage and now there is this tension of comparing and expectations. Maybe you know someone who has had an affair, and they didn't plan on it, but they all of a sudden one day woke up and they realized their own marriage was in tremendous jeopardy because of sexual sin. I want you to think about that.

I don't know anyone who sets out and says, *"You know what? On my five-year goals this year, I'd like to have an affair within five years or less"*. I don't know anybody who ever does that. I don't know anyone who says, *"You know what? I plan on one day getting addicted to pornography, so that these images on a screen or on a page can consume me and totally pollute my mind"*. I don't know anyone who does that. I've never met anyone who said, *"My one thing this year is AIDS! If I'm going to do one thing this year, I want to get AIDS, baby!"* I don't know anyone who says, *"If I play my cards right, I can fall into some kind of a sexual deal and maybe it will cost me my job, or better yet my marriage, or I can lose the respect of my kids"*. I don't know anyone who thinks like that; and yet, it happens all of the time, doesn't it?

The most common thing I hear people say on the other side of some kind of sexual tragedy is this: *"I never thought it would happen to me."* All of these people lacked **moral margin**.

What do we mean by moral margin?

MORAL MARGIN: PUTTING DISTANCE BETWEEN YOU AND TEMPTATION.

When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

James 1:13-15 (NIV)

enticed: *deleazo* (del-eh-ad'-zo); to entrap, allure, entice, hook.

It means to entrap, to allure, to entice, or very literally it means to hook; it's a fishing term used to catch with bait.

Your spiritual enemy is trying to hook you into something that would cause sin to be born; because sin, when its full grown, doesn't lead to life, but it leads to death. Enticed, lured, baited, hooked; and *I never thought it would happen to me*.

One of the most common questions I get is *“If I’m dating somebody, how far can I go? How far is too far?”* In other words, if there is a line somewhere, I want to know where it is, because I want to get right up to that line and I might do that! *“How far is too far? Is that okay?”* I don’t think of very many areas in your life where you say, *“How close can I get to something that would actually hurt me, without actually getting hurt?”*

For example, I don’t know many people who put three bullets in a gun, and then spin it and say, *“I wonder how many times I can click it and be okay?”* They don’t do that, do they? I don’t know of very many people who put their heads in alligator’s mouths. But normal-thinking people don’t open up an alligator and say, *“How many times do you think I can put my head in here before he chomps my head off?”* People don’t do that!

I’ve never walked up to a poisonous snake and put my hand up and said, *“I wonder how close I can get before I get bitten?”* You don’t do that! But yet, for some reason, when it comes to sexual temptation, people are like, *“How close can I get to the edge without getting bitten?”*

“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.”

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (NIV)

The Bible does not say flirt, the Bible does not say, get close to; but the Bible says flee!

flee: pheugo (fyoo’-go); to run away; to shun; to escape, to distance oneself.

Pheugo from sexual immorality; flee, get out of town, put some distance there, put some margin between you and temptation; *“run Forest run!”* The Bible doesn’t say flee from overeating. It doesn’t say flee from gossips. Notice what it says to flee from. Flee from sexual immorality; run. Don’t ask yourself, *“How close can I get?”* But, **the wise person is going to put significant margin, significant distance between themselves and sexual temptation.**

There is actually a difference between sexual sin and so many other sins (see v. 18). All sins are not the same. All sins separate us from God; but in the eyes of God, all sins are not the same. A very easy, practical argument that all sin is not the same when it comes to practical consequences; all sins don’t cost you the same thing.

For example, if you tell a white lie, that may not cost you anything at all. If you speed, if you go 10 miles above the speed limit and you get a ticket, that may cost you a certain amount of money, but not a whole lot else. If you gossip a lot, that may cost you some friends. But, if you sin sexually, that can cost you your job; it can cost you your marriage; your kids can grow up without a Dad or a Mom; it could cost you your life through a sexual disease; it could cost you your self esteem; it could cost you your reputation. One bad decision sexually could cost you for the rest of your life.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 (NIV)

If you are a believer in Christ, your body is not for you to decide what to do with it. You are actually a house for God, you are a dwelling place for the Spirit of God, and Scripture says, “You should honor God with your body.”

The problem is, the culture is going to tempt you in all of these other ways to enter into sexual immorality, in ways that you would say, “*That’s not even wrong is it? Everybody else is doing it! What’s the big deal? Why do I need margin between me and sex stuff? Isn’t that like the goal? Isn’t that fun? Isn’t that what you are supposed to do?*” No! This sin is different! It sticks with you, it’s painful, it’s emotional, it’s deeply spiritual.

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.”

Ephesians 5:3 (NIV)

The world’s standards are low. But God’s standards are high. So often we might think, “*Well, I’m better than most.*” While God says, “*Not even a hint of sexual immorality.*”

The Greek word translated as sexual immorality is the word porneia, we get our word porn from it. What it literally means is anything that causes arousal outside of marriage. There must not even be a hint of that.

What is normal when it comes to sex? What is normal is pain and regret, and guilt, and shame, and insecurity, and fear, and lust, and divorce. That’s exactly what is normal. Why is that normal? Because if there is a line of what is right or wrong, when it comes to sexual sin and sexual temptation, **the line is in the wrong place.**

What’s going on in the world today, normal, especially when it comes to morality and godliness, and success in relationships; normal is just not working at all.

According to one article, up to 65% of men and up to 55% of women will commit adultery by the age of 40. When you add those numbers together, that means somewhere in the neighborhood of 80% or better of marriages will be affected; that is normal! Why is that normal? Because there is no moral margin and society has said what is normal and we have taken the margin out and we are crossing line after line of things that are really destructive. What is it that happened?

Here’s what we think in our minds; we think ...

- “*Is it wrong to enjoy being with someone? You know, talking to someone of the opposite sex?*” Well, no because the line of adultery is way, way over there, so just talking to somebody, that is not really wrong.
- *Is it wrong to share personal stories with somebody? You know, talk about my wife, my husband, is that wrong?* Well, of course not. Why? Because the line of sexual affairs, that is way, way, way over there; so this isn’t wrong.

- *Is it wrong to anticipate time with this person? I can't wait to be with them and spend time with them? That's not really wrong, is it? Because adultery, that line is way, way, way, way over there, so that's not wrong at all.*
- *Is it wrong to flirt with someone that is not my spouse? You know, maybe. You know, little notes, little gifts, is that wrong to have an emotional connection? Probably shouldn't, but when you compare it to where the line is of adultery, it's way, way, way over there; it's not even close. I mean, that's not that big of a deal.*
- *Is it wrong to start talking about my feelings? You know, I know I shouldn't be attracted to you, but I kind of am, that's what my heart says. I mean is that wrong? Well, no, you've got to be true to your heart, right?*
- *"I never thought it would happen to me!"*

No moral margin! Distance between us and temptation. So, what I want to do is give you some better places to draw the line. Admittedly, these are unusual, but we want unusual results.

BETTER PLACES TO DRAW THE LINE

1. Dress For Spiritual Success.

When you dress, dress in such a way to bring glory to God and not be immodest. Guys at the gym, put some clothes on, you've got big muscles, so you are showing them, have some courtesy and be modest.

Ladies, there are tons of women that are dressed in ways that draw attention to themselves. I have had guys say, *"I can't really worship, because I'm being distracted by this."* Dress for spiritual success.

2. Avoid Dangerous Places.

You are the only one that could know what is dangerous for you. It could be, you know, going to the bars with people after work, or going to the clubs. Or, for you it could be going to the chat rooms. For you, honestly, it could be going to the gym. Visually you can't handle it. You may say, "Well, that's very extreme." Yes it is, because we want extreme results. Whatever is dangerous for you, I would recommend that you avoid.

3. Monitor Internet & TV Activity.

In today's world, on your phone or on your computer, you've got access to more than any normal person would ever want to see. It is all right there, one click away. Put codes on your TV's, iPhones, iPads, etc. (**Open DNS; Covenant Eyes, X3 Watch**)

4. Avoid Time Alone With The Wrong People.

Whoever the wrong people would be for you, stay away from intimate situations. In my world, and on our staff, I would never ride in a car with a woman, besides my wife. It's just too intimate. I would never be in a closed-door setting. In the business world, it's totally normal for a business to send a man and a woman off to an overnight trip together. I say insane. You might as well put the bullet in and do this ... just why? Is it okay? Sure. Is there anything wrong with it? No! Is it wise? No! There's nothing wise about that at all. Avoid even intimate or inappropriate conversations with people that you are with.

5. Guard Your Eyes, Mind, And Heart.

What does that mean? Be careful little eyes what you read. Watch what you watch; television, movies, the kind of conversations you are in. Think about your mind, what you are fantasizing about, the memories, take those thoughts captive, make them obedient to Christ.

“I have made a solemn promise never to look with lust at a woman.”

Job 31:1 (TEV)

Sound extreme? It is! Flee sexual immorality, don't flirt, flee! I've never known a single person who said, “*It all started when I created a moral margin.*” But, I know a lot of people who have said, “*I never thought it would happen to me.*”

I have all of these barriers and margin in my life and more ... because I don't want to live without them. I want Joshua to know that they have a father who is a man of God, who is not perfect, but who is seeking God and who is living pure, by the power of the Holy Spirit. I want Jenna to know that she has a father who does not objectify women, and who treats their mother with honor and respect. I want her to seek after a man like their father, not one that I would never want her to have.

I want Amie to never worry a day in her life about my integrity and my devotion to her. I want her to feel secure and blessed and treasured and protected.

I want the Lord to be honored with my body, with my heart, with my soul, and with my fleeing sexual immorality. It's wise to step back and to honor God with moral margin. Different, weird, yes! Because we want something more than what the world settles for. We want to live and serve and honor and please God.

“Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.

¹³ Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.”

Romans 6:12-14 (NIV)

Let's Pray!

Father, I ask that in this moment Your Holy Spirit would work in our lives in a way that only You can, because I know that there is pain, guilt, and hurt. Lord, I even know that right now there are some that are dying inside knowing what's going on in their lives. I pray that You would minister to us in a way that only You can.

How many of You would say that You probably don't have the moral margin that You could? You just go on though life like everybody else and You realize that there are probably some safeguards that would be wise to put up in Your life? Give us the wisdom to create margin, to put distance between us and temptation.

God, I would pray that everyone who realizes that there are some things that we could do to be wiser. Father I pray that as families we'll talk it over. I pray that parents would gather with their children and spiritually nurture them by talking over some of these principals and not avoiding the real issues of this life, but have the courage to talk directly about them.

I pray that You would speak into the lives of those right now that have actually crossed some lines and are maybe looking at some things that are inappropriate, or thinking of some things that are wrong, or acting out physically in ways that are hurting Your heart God, or potentially destroying the things that they care about most.

I pray that at this moment Your Holy Spirit would convict them and that they would desire true freedom. I ask that they would have the courage not only to confess to You, oh God; but that they would confess to those around them, that they would cry out, and in their humble confession that they would find mercy and help in their time of need.

I pray that they won't be able to continue on in their sinfulness, but You would pursue them with Your grace and Your love and Your mercy. I thank You in advance, that there will be those who are freed from the pain of sexual sin and its consequences, by the power and the glory of Your Son, Jesus. Give them the courage to reach out and ask for help; set them free! In Jesus' name, Amen.

NEXT STEPS

Here are some specific things you can do this week to take a step toward living life with the margin God intends for your life.

If you are struggling with pornography, visit www.xxxchurch.com. This ministry offers great support and recovery programs for those addicted to pornography, as well as accountability software for computers and iPhones. You can also find the accountability software that Pastor Craig mentioned at www.covenanteyes.com.

If you are struggling with any type of sexual sin, God is offering you a chance to get free. Seek help this week from a professional counselor, friend, family member, or accountability partner. Allow them to help you find the assistance you need in dealing with your sin and in finding ways to guard against that temptation in the future.

Discussion Questions:

1. How have you seen your life or the life of someone you know impacted by sexual sin?
2. The pattern of sin is described in James 1:13-15. First, we are enticed and tempted by our own sinful nature and then that temptation leads to sin and all its consequences. Why do you think sexual sin is such an easy trap for most people to fall into? In what ways does the world's view of morality conflict with God's view?
3. In 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and Ephesians 5:1-6 Paul instructs us to not only flee from sexual immorality, but that there should not be any hint of immorality in our lives. What are some of the defenses and safeguards you have in place that help put distance between you and sin? In what areas of your life are you lacking moral margin? How can you go about creating that margin?
4. In Romans 6:12-14 Paul tells us that we should not give in to sin with our bodies, but rather offer our bodies to God as instruments of righteousness. God has called us to a higher standard when it comes to morality. Describe how you have been able to live up to that standard and how difficult it can be striving to live up to that standard.
5. How can people in your small group, friends, family, or spouse help you in living a life with moral margin?

Use these prayer tips to guide your time with God ...

- Confess to God in prayer any areas of immorality that you are struggling with. Ask for His help and deliverance.
- Ask God to help you in defending yourself against immorality in your life.
- Ask God in prayer for strength in guarding yourself from impure thoughts.
- Pray and ask God to reveal to you those areas in your life where you need moral margin. Ask Him to help you achieve it.
- Pray for those you know who are dealing with sexual sin and its aftermath. Ask God to comfort them and deliver them.