

REMARKABLE DISCOVERY! SEXUAL SIN DESTROYS LIFE!

By Steve Zeisler

A couple of years ago, the movie 'Fatal Attraction' caused a stir across the nation. I did not see the movie, but I remember much of the discussion about it. It told the story of a man who attempted to have a sexual fling that he thought would be over in a weekend. It turned into a nightmare as his partner in adultery determined to pursue and destroy him.

We have come in our series of studies in Proverbs to a story of fatal attraction, if you will, in chapter 7. This is not R-rated; the details are not given in any way that's graphic. But the story is the same. It's an account a father will tell his son. It's important for the son being taught by his father, and for us reading the Scriptures provided by our heavenly Father, to hear this painful story and then to learn its lesson, to be warned by it. Proverbs 7:6 is where it begins:

For at the window of my house
I looked out through my lattice,
And I saw among the naive,
I discerned among the youths,
A young man lacking sense,
Passing through the street near her corner;
And he takes the way to her house,
In the twilight, in the evening,
In the middle of the night and in the darkness.

And behold, a woman comes to meet him,
Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart.
She is boisterous and rebellious;
Her feet do not remain at home;
She is now in the streets, now in the squares,
And lurks by every corner.

So she seizes him and kisses him,
And with a brazen face she says to him:
"I was due to offer peace offerings;
Today I have paid my vows.
"Therefore I have come out to meet you,
To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you.
"I have spread my couch with coverings,
With colored linens of Egypt.
"I have sprinkled my bed
With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.

"Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning;
Let us delight ourselves with caresses.
"For the man is not at home,
He has gone on a long journey;
He has taken a bag of money with him,
At full moon he will come home."
With her many persuasions she entices him;
With her flattering lips she seduces him.

Suddenly he follows her,
As an ox goes to the slaughter,
Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool,
Until an arrow pierces through his liver;
As a bird hastens to the snare,
So he does not know that it will cost him his life.
Now therefore, my sons, listen to me,
And pay attention to the words of my mouth.
Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,
Do not stray into her paths.

For many are the victims she has cast down,
And numerous are all her slain.
Her house is the way to Sheol,
Descending to the chambers of death.

The story is one that the father could see played out on the streets in front of him as he sat in his home by a window. There's latticework of some kind outside the window. The home has a bit of a barricade around it, if you will. It's a place of warmth, we can imagine, on the inside. Father and son are speaking, and the story unfolds.

The Fool

There are two characters in the story. The first one we're introduced to is a naive youth. He is hanging around with a group of his contemporaries, some gang of equally naive youths. The setting suggests that he is mostly influenced in his life by those like himself rather than by those who have attained maturity. You may remember the story of Solomon's son Rehoboam, who chose to rebel against the Lord and against all that was right when the kingdom became his own, because he listened not to the advice of the older, wiser heads but to that of the young Turks who surrounded him.

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One of the things I pay most attention to as a father to my children is knowing who their companions are, having some sense of what things their peers are suggesting to them, praying that they choose good friends, and doing everything I can to steer them away from those who aren't a healthy influence. Beyond that, I try to provide wise guidance myself as their father, and I urge them to have relationships with other people who are older and wiser and who love the Lord, so they won't hear just from their contemporaries.

The young man now begins to walk away from the crowd of companions, and there's a bit of aimlessness about his walk, isn't there? He's passing through streets, not going any particular place that he's aware of. His very drift in life, his hazy focus on things, leads him into a situation where the danger increases. His feet take him where he ought not go. The ominous observations in verse 9 bring a sense of drama to the story. "In the twilight, in the evening, in the middle of the night and in the darkness." Twilight becomes midnight, half-light turns to no light. The young man has come further into the darkness in a place where he is going to face an adversary he is no match for, and he doesn't realize it.

If you've been in a casino, you'll recognize the same kind of phenomenon in the environment they build for gamblers, especially compulsive gamblers. There are never windows in a casino. The interior lights never change. Attempts are made to deliberately hide from the individual any observation that it is growing darker outside, or that his circumstances are getting worse. There are never clocks in a casino that might cause you to notice what's happening to you. Every effort is made to muffle any warning about what is coming.

And this young man doesn't see what's happening to him, either. This morning Craig Duncan read the powerful final paragraph of 1 Corinthians 6. It's filled with a call of warning by the apostle Paul to wake up, be alert, see what's happening! Three times the phrase, "Do you not know," is used. Verse 15: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?" Verse 16: "Do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her?" Verse 19: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price...." Yet this young man has no warning going off in his mind. There is no wisdom that has been instilled in his heart that might call out to him. It goes from twilight to midnight; it's getting darker, and he will soon be overtaken.

The Seducer

The second person in the drama is the seducer, a woman who is the precise opposite of the young man. Whereas he is described as naive, in verse 10 she is described as cunning. She knows exactly what she's doing. She is focused like a heat-seeking missile on a target that she has every intention of using for her own purposes. She is going where she intends to go for reasons that she is well aware of. She has made preparation in her home; her bed, the couch for caresses, the perfume, the coverings from Egypt have all been made ready long before she encounters the young man. Whereas the young man wanders through the streets, she lurks purposely at every corner. She has a strategy.

The heart of her strategy is to communicate to the naive soul in her clutches, "You are special, you are unique! You are wonderful, desirable!" Everything she says leads him to believe that her intense interest in him is based on some remarkable quality of his own. It flatters him. Later we'll hear the father warn his son not to let the adulteress flatter him with her words. It is this flattery and desire she expresses for him, phony and deceitful as it may be, this intense interest that she shows in him, that snares him.

And she immediately grabs him and kisses him. It's the first thing she does when she sees him, as if he were so irresistible, so physically desirable that she had no choice. She is swept away by the physical magnificence of our young fool! In verse 15 she makes the point directly: "Therefore I have come out to meet you, to seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you (O magnificent one)!" That's heady stuff for a young man. All of us want to be wanted. We all long to be desirable, to be sought out, approved of, affirmed, and longed for.

The Seduction

Now, she has a number of other things to say that surround that central message of his desirability to her. One is, "It's festival time, party time! It turns out that I was just in the temple---funny coincidence that we should meet on just such an occasion---and I paid my peace offering." The prescription in Leviticus is, having done that, to take the meat that's left over, bring it home, and share it in a festive atmosphere. So she says, "I was just throwing this party as it turns out, and then I found you, O delight of my eyes." So she's created an environment in which what can they do but party? That's the prescription for the evening.

She makes some other points that are very important, too. She begins to allude to the caresses, the drinking their fill of love, the anointed bed, the coverings from Egypt. She is physically very seductive; the promises of erotic delight are drawn powerfully by her. And lastly she says, "We'll get away with it---we can't possibly get caught. My husband's gone on a long journey. He took a lot of money. He won't be back until the full moon. So we have this extraordinary opportunity, and you're an incredibly attractive man! It turns out everything is in place. What else can we do but to give into such an opportunity?"

She is brazen, confident. She dresses seductively, we're told here. She dresses like a harlot, in the most eye-catching and seductive way that she can. The young man who doesn't know any better is overwhelmed by the offer.

When I was young, our family moved fairly often. When I finished elementary school, we moved to another town, and I entered junior high. I finished junior high, and then we moved again and I began high school. After two years, we moved to yet another town, and I finished high school there. So during the period when I

was going through adolescence, becoming interested in girls and gaining social skills, we kept changing environments. I'd end up in a new school, make new friends, try to join a social group, and hope to be both attractive and attracted to someone, and then we'd move again. By the time I was a junior in high school I had many more questions than answers about the whole area of male-female relationships. But I did play football, and enjoyed success as an athlete in the new school I entered in the fall of my junior year.

Now, there was a girl in that high school who, I later realized, had become sexually active at an early age. She had learned by the time she was seventeen to confidently use her sexuality, the way she dressed, the way she talked, to get what she wanted in life. I was new to the school, a varsity football player, and she decided to add me to her collection, and my relative naivete made me vulnerable. She knew exactly what she was doing. She used a combination of physical attractiveness, confidence, party atmospheres cleverly arranged, and other subtleties. It was very enticing. I think the only thing that kept me from making some very bad choices then is that I had become a Christian six months earlier. The Spirit of God himself warned me, or protected me from dangers I was unaware of. But I remember it all very clearly. I can recall settings we were in, feeling the pull of sexual temptation very powerfully.

An Ox To Slaughter

The young man in our story is dealing with something more dangerous than a teenage temptress. This woman is not a contemporary of his. She is older, married, hardened, somebody who knows exactly what she is doing. He is no match for this woman in any sense. The word that stands out in all of the story is "suddenly" (verse 22). The persuasions, the suggestions, the opportunity add up; all of it comes together, and suddenly he decides to go with her---as an ox goes to the slaughter. Now she has power over him. Whether her goal is money, social standing, or something else, having achieved ownership she can use him for her own ends, discard him at whatever point she chooses to, and do it again to someone else. He's filled with a sense of his own desirability and imagines a sexual fantasyland. He's like an ox being led to the slaughter.

Now there are a number of lessons that we ought to draw from this story. The first is the lesson that the father teaches at the end. Sitting in the house now, they're looking out the window together, watching what's going on. He says, "Recognize what happens at the end of the story. Don't just be taken in by the offer at the beginning." It is the clear and abiding wisdom of Proverbs that you have got to know where the road is going to lead before you can decide whether a course is right or wrong for you.

A Wise Father

Another observation we can make is to contrast the two adults in the story, the father and the woman. If you were to dramatize this story, you'd have the father sitting in his home behind a window with some kind of latticework across it. He is looking out into the street and sees some distance away the young man, who walks farther away, down another street, and into a house. He can't really have heard the words of the seductress. Now stop and consider: How does the father know what the woman said? Well, he knows what she said because he's lived long enough to have been there himself. The father knows what the world is like because he's a mature man. He's had to live in the real world, and he's encountered real seductive opportunities and dealt with them himself. He knows the pull of them, the desire. He is in his home with a grown son and he's a wise and righteous man. But he is also the beneficiary of God's grace, which both protects and cleanses us in the midst of a sinful world.

He should be directly contrasted with the woman in the story. Like the father, she too is savvy; she knows what the world is like. But their sexuality has turned into something different for each of them. The father has used his capacity for intimacy to make a marriage, to have children, to build a home. His love for his wife, as we saw in chapter 5, has been carefully cultivated. The possibilities of sexual attraction have led to real love, real intimacy, real growth, and real joy.

The woman, also born with a capacity for attraction and intimacy, has become hardened by the choices she's made. Maybe she was victimized once. Maybe she naively listened to an offer and somebody used her. And a hardening process began. Instead of appealing to God's mercy for renewal, she chose to become more and more hardened. There's no love in her life, no love for her husband, no love for her victims, no relationship

that lasts. Sexuality has become a weapon, a source of power for the destruction of other people, and ultimately of herself as well.

**Wisdom (Christ) is a living person
who draws alongside us as our companion,
affirms us, and strengthens us**

We don't frequently encounter someone who's deliberately aggressively seductive like this. There are many adults who aren't consciously trying to use one another, but feel the pull of sexual attraction. Adolescents usually experience these feelings first in a mutually confusing way. Most often we aren't in exactly the setting depicted in this story. But we are always making choices in these areas of our life that are either going to be life-producing or hardening, one or the other. We are inclining ourselves more and more either to be like the father in the story or to be like the woman.

Now let me make another point just in passing. Seducers are both male and female. Those who are seduced are both male and female. This story is one a father is teaching his son, so he's talking about a dangerous woman. But obviously, in real life, men can be manipulative, hardened, hurtful, users of women just as easily as women can be of men.

A Secure Foundation

The most important lesson of all, in my opinion, is to recognize that the young boy was vulnerable precisely because he wasn't sure that he was attractive. The vulnerability that she played on most powerfully was his uncertainty about his own value or self-worth, his not having some clear sense that he knew who he was, that he could value himself, and ultimately that he was certain that God loved him. The clearest antidote to this kind of strategy is to be able to say, "It doesn't matter to me whether you think I'm the most special thing on earth or not, because ultimately I derive my sense of value or worth from the Lord." The offer of the seducer loses much of its power if an individual has a deep and abiding sense of God's steadfast love. The best thing we can give to young people in our lives is certainty that no matter whether anybody else dotes on them or not, they are the deeply cared for child of their heavenly Father. And his companionship never ends, his approval can't be taken away. These certainties strengthen us against the pull of temptation.

Finally, let me note that naivete returns in life; it isn't just a period you go through once. You are naive about these matters when you are a young person first discovering your sexuality. But at some point in your life, when, for example, your children have grown, your career has plateaued, and it's not clear that you're ever going to go any farther than you've gone, when you feel yourself on the downside of the hill instead of the upside, you encounter new vulnerabilities. Just because we've learned how to handle what Paul calls "youthful lusts" doesn't mean we're ready for the time when we feel older and unattractive. Someone who flatters us in that setting may powerfully test defenses we once thought were secure.

Let's read the first verses of chapter 7. We skipped them before we read the story of the fatal attraction:

My son, keep my words,
And treasure my commandments within you.
Keep my commandments and live,
And my teaching as the apple of your eye.
Bind them on your fingers;
Write them on the tablet of your heart.
Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"
And call understanding your intimate friend;
That they may keep you from an adulteress,
From the foreigner who flatters with her words.

Notice what the father is saying to his son. The best way to be defended all your life, beginning now, is to

have a companion, to have this sister, this intimate friend, wisdom drawn as a human figure. Recall the words of 1 Corinthians 1:30: "By his doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God...." Wisdom (Christ) is a living person who draws alongside us as our companion, affirms us, and strengthens us.

Furthermore, the father is suggesting that it is the eyes and the hands of the young man that particularly need to have wisdom applied to them for this kind of problem. He focuses on vision ("apple of the eye") and the hands ("your fingers") because those are the "gates" through which sexual temptation primarily advances itself. Jesus made the same point in the Sermon on the Mount. If your eye makes you stumble, pluck it out; if your hand makes you stumble, cut it off (not literally, obviously). (Matthew 5:29-30.) But deal ruthlessly with the information gained from what you see and what you touch if you would be well-defended against sexual sin.

This father knows what the real world is like. He is not just teaching his son pious platitudes; he is aware that these dangers exist in the world. There is no way you can protect your children forever from having to go out into a world like this. He knows what the brazen woman is like, but he also knows what the alternatives are, and he's given his son wisdom, direction, choices, and strength to face what's out there.

These are words that will continue to apply to us as we grow older, because we keep entering new stages in which we are unsure of ourselves, in which we have new vulnerabilities. Yet the same answers continue to hold true. It is the presence of our loving Lord himself, Wisdom who is a person, who can be known and cared about, that is our firm defense.

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