STATE OF THE HEART

More than just looking at the physical and biological aspects of sexuality, this Bible study guide has emphasized and has attempted to draw a holistic picture of sexuality as intended by God, the Creator. Because sexuality encompasses the body, mind, spirit, intellect, emotion, and nearly every other aspect of human identity, one violation of sexuality impacts the whole being. Therefore, purity is not only a virtue to have, but the harmonious state of all these aspects working together as God intended. Philippians 4:8 points to a mindset that incorporates the intellectual, the ethical, the emotional, the moral, and the spiritual. This verse admonishes all to have this mindset of purity which encompasses all, including sexuality.

Using the prophetic imagery of a woman as the church (cf. SS. 6:10; Jer. 6:2), Revelation describes a people, regardless of age, throughout history, who would have this purity. Chapter 12 describes this woman as clothed with the pure light of heaven—she represents the true church before (Rev. 12:5) and after the earthy ministry of Christ (Rev. 12:6).

In the highly sexualized world we live in, we are bound to have been exposed to all sorts of impurities out there, from the micro to the mega. How does one retrieve a sense of purity despite a violation, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual? How can Jesus help us live the pure life that 1 John 3:3 speaks of? These are the topics for this week’s study.
Write out 1 Corinthians 6:9–20 from the Bible translation of your choice. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
**FLEE SEXUAL IMMORALITY**

In verse 18 of 1 Corinthians 6, Paul exclaims in an interesting phrase, “Flee sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18)! The Greek verb *pheugo* denotes running away to seek safety. While the verb is used for escaping conquering armies and enemy forces, Paul uses the verb in a phrase interjected in the midst of his explanation of sinning against the body. In a sense, he equates sexual immorality and fornication with the external enemy forces. The tone is not advice, but one of the strongest possible command forms, the present imperative. God, through Paul, gives an order: it is emotive and abrupt.

When it comes to encounters with danger such as with wild animals, the body releases adrenaline that triggers the modes of “fighting” or “flighting.” One either stands up to the menace or escapes as fast as possible. For certain struggles, the Bible gives instruction to fight. James 4:7 admonishes us to resist the devil so that he would flee from us. Second Timothy 2:1–4 uses military language directed to soldiers. Whether it is about the training for spiritual warfare, the strategy of our weapons and enemy tactics, or the knowledge of the weapon of warfare, the Bible is clear that there are conditions for victory and that we are to be on the Victor’s side of the war.

But in the specific battle against sexual immorality, Paul instructs us that we are to flee. This is not a fight to be engaged in; we are simply to run away. This phrase has a parallel with the well-known narrative of Genesis 39, when in his youth Joseph encountered a particular temptation.

Joseph was in a position of responsibility (vv. 4–6) and physically attractive, or “handsome in form and appearance” (v. 6). The sexual temptation to sleep with his master’s wife is found in the following verses. First, she “cast longing eyes on Joseph” (v. 7). Clearly, she was using her charm and weapons of allure, attraction, and appeal to get him to fall. Second, she used an imperative: “Lie with me.” Not only was it commanded once, but verse 10 says the temptation came “day by day.” The temptation wasn’t merely to lie with her but to be with her. Last, the circumstances of the temptation were chosen to make it conducive for Joseph to yield—the servants weren’t around.

Happily, Joseph did not succumb. Genesis records that Joseph “left his garment in her hand and fled and ran outside” (v. 12). In fact, the word for “fled” is found four times in that story. Despite being naked and being misunderstood, he did not go back to reclaim his dignity or justice, but he “fled” sexual immorality. Secrets to his integrity and sexual purity can be found in several verses of the passage. A great question is posed that reveals Joseph’s heart: “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” Though he had many horizontal relationships to think about—father, master, master’s wife, brothers, other servants, Egyptian society—his primary focus was on His relationship with God. He knew that this was not God’s desire, His plan, His will, or His pleasure. The second repeated phrase is found in verses 2, 3, 21, and 23, where the Bible says that “the Lord was with Joseph.” Clearly this is something that Joseph was constantly aware of and treasured this presence, the source of his strength, integrity, and purity.

Joseph’s struggle however is much more than a story about virtue. This one act would have impacted Joseph’s life in Egypt. In turn, this would have snowballed into a very different narrative leading to disastrous consequences not only to Joseph, but also impacting God’s plan for Israel. One seemingly little fall for an individual could lead to a different life course altogether.

Do we know that the Lord is with us and do we flee when we should?
FLEEING TO JESUS

In this hyper-sexualized world, there are practical things Christ-followers can do to flee sexual immorality. While there are pragmatic steps, tips, secrets, or counsel to follow, all these should ultimately point to fleeing to Jesus and being connected with His presence. This may sound cliché, but this connection really is the foundational secret to purity. That being said, here are some practical steps to take.

First, media habits must be mastered. If images of temptation are constantly before our eyes, whether it be social media, videos, websites, books—visuals of any sort—it will impact what we do (Luke 11:34, 35). What we see is what we get and what we will become (Job 31:1; 2 Cor. 3:18). That is why David resolved to put nothing wicked in front of his eyes (Ps. 101:3). Jesus also warns us about the visual, saying that lusting starts with the eyes (Matt. 5:28, 29). Clearly, this does not only pertain to males, but equally to females.

In the physical realm, diet and exercise can do wonders to ward off sexual temptation. Engaging in a plant-based diet increases various abilities of the brain and optimal performance of the body. Not only diet, but also exercise provides equilibrium of hormones, optimal performance of neurotransmitters, and much more. Habits of regularity also provide some homeostasis. These include sleeping at the same time for the same amount, waking up at the same time (even on weekends), eating at the same time, praying at the same time, and having a consistent daily and weekly schedule. Sabbath keeping is an obvious part of this regularity.

The social circles and friends we choose often dictate the types of social situations we end up in. We may need to get out of the circumstances and scenarios that allow for sexual temptations to take root. Some are immediate, as with Joseph and Mrs. Potiphar. Some are general and long-term, meaning perhaps a new job must be taken, complete abstention from sources of temptation, a new apartment or a new city, and even new friendships. Not only are bad relationships to be eschewed, but good ones must be developed and invested in. Accountability partners and mentors are absolutely crucial for spiritual guidance and development. The best partners and mentors are those that we would willingly give access to our personal life, trusting their discretion to chastise and discipline us in a Christlike manner.

Ultimately, purity must be from the inside out and the outside in—all involving the power of God and the human will to choose this power. Our inner world must experience purity on the spiritual and mental levels. Memorizing Scripture, meditating on Christ, and submerging ourselves in spiritual music impacts the way we think. Having God at the center of our lives as our personal Creator and Redeemer allows us to respect individual males and females as His creations. It grants us the strength to want to be pure and the grace to actually be pure.

Last, spiritual strength is developed through prayer. It is not only the amount of prayer, but also the vulnerability you present yourself to God with that matters. If you are tempted, tell God. If you have fallen, tell God. If you love the sin of impurity more than God, you must tell God. If you think you are powerless over a sin, tell God! He knows all this anyway so why not be honest and tell Him? Finally, you can tell God, with all sincerity, that although you don’t love Him as much as you would like, you want to love Jesus more than all these things. Often guilt, shame, blame, hurt, and fear prevent this level of honesty. But this vulnerability and openness in prayer becomes the inception point of where grace works and where you start to flee to Jesus willingly whenever you encounter a spiritual threat.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Matthew 5:8
Philippians 4:8
Psalm 119:9, 11, 37
1 Thessalonians 4:3–8
1 John 1:9
Luke 11:34, 35
1 Timothy 4:12

What other parables come to mind in connection with purity?

IN ALL POINTS

A question that arises is whether Jesus was tempted with sexual sin. There are some that believe that Jesus was tempted with every imaginable sin under the sun from the beginning of time until now. This perspective isn’t without merit, since Hebrews 4:15 does say Jesus “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” Yet, how could all of humanity’s temptations, from the tiniest to the most challenging, be directed at one person (quantitatively speaking, not qualitatively speaking)? What about temptations for women? What about temptations from the modern age? What about temptations that exist today that didn’t exist then? How could the lifetime of one man (presumably about 33 years) be enough time for this level of exposure?

Hebrews 4 and also chapter 2:14–18 establish that Christ was perfect and His provisions for victory are also powerfully perfect for us; that He has wonderful and gracious mercy upon us; that He was a human in our likeness; and that He helps all those who ask. However, the rest of the book of Hebrews is making an emphatic point that Christ was better than all previous archetypes: better than angels (ch. 1–2); better than Moses (ch. 3); better than Joshua and the rest he brought (ch. 4); better than priests (ch. 5–7); and better than the ministry of the earthly sanctuary (ch. 8–10). Chapter 11 highlights those who understood by faith that Christ was better and beyond what humanity could provide, and climaxes in chapter 12 that Christ is our example. Where are we going with this?

Rather than being tempted with every single sin, Jesus, who was in every way human and also in every way God, was tempted with every type of sin—from both His divine side and His human side. Ultimately every sin comes down to serving self or serving God; following selfish desires or following the selflessness of God. In the way that humanity may be tempted to fulfill desires such as hunger and sexuality through selfish routes, Jesus Himself was tempted to fulfill His desires through selfish routes as well. For example, He desired to satiate His hunger. Satan tempted Jesus to use His divine power to create something out of nothing to make stones into bread and prove His identity. There is nothing wrong with satiating hunger. But there is something wrong in using power for selfish reasons or in doubting God’s Word. Another example is God desiring to save the world and humanity. There is nothing wrong with this desire! But Satan tempted Jesus to use His divinity to escape trials and suffering. From His divine side Jesus faced temptations that we will never have as human beings, but He never sinned.

Since He came as a human, “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3), He understands and sympathizes with our temptations because He was tempted also from His human side. When He spoke about the dangers of lust, He must have been tempted “in all points” as a man. How glad we are that Scripture records that Jesus was “yet without sin”! Not even by a thought did He yield to temptation. And just as He overcame, He promises that we may also, by inviting Him into our hearts (Rev. 3:20, 21). As a High Priest who has experienced temptation, He can “sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:15) and grant forgiveness of our past because He did victorious over sin. He as Victor can come to the aid of “those who are tempted” (Heb. 2:18); He as Jesus the Righteous Advocate can impute His righteousness to us (1 John 2:1); He as Author and Perfecter of faith can be the Example on whom we fix our eyes (Heb. 12:2); He as Creator and Re-Creator can create and recreate purity in our lives, regardless of past performance.
THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

“The youth of today may be educated for the fulfilment of high and holy purposes. . . . They are pupils in the school of Christ, learning from day to day lessons of the divine Master.

“It is in youth that the affections are most ardent, the memory most retentive, and the heart most susceptible to divine impressions; and it is during youth that the mental and physical powers should be set to the task in order that great improvements may be made in view of the world that now is, and that which is to come.

“The amount of valuable knowledge that can be acquired by young men and young women can hardly be estimated; but to reach a high standard, they must close the door to the debasing thoughts that Satan would thrust into the mind, and refuse to yield to his temptations. The youth may acquire that which gold cannot buy, by cherishing a pure, strong purpose in endeavoring to be all that God designed they should be. The mind should be trained to dwell upon right themes of thought. They should study the Scriptures, and bring into daily life the divine rules which God has laid down for their guidance. He who has grown old in the service of God may find his mind a blank in regard to the things that are happening about him, and recent transactions may soon pass from his memory; but his mind is all awake to the scenes and transactions of his childhood. O that the youth may realize how important it is to keep the mind guarded, pure and clean, from corrupting thoughts, and to preserve the soul from all debasing practices; for the purity or impurity of youth is reflected upon old age.

“The truths of the Bible, received, will uplift the mind from its earthliness and debasement. If the Word of God were appreciated as it should be, both young and old would possess an inward rectitude, a strength of principle, that would enable them to resist temptation. . . .

“Satan still comes with his temptations to the children of men. He employs every means at his command to conceal himself from view, and this is why so many are ignorant of his devices. A few days since, the question was asked me, ‘Do you believe in a personal devil?’ ‘I do,’ was the answer. ‘Well,’ rejoined the questioner, ‘I do not believe that there is any such being; our evil thoughts and impulses are all the devil we know anything about!’ ‘But,’ I asked, ‘who suggests these thoughts? Whence do they originate, if not from Satan?’ . . .

“Just as surely as we have a personal Saviour, we have also a personal adversary, cruel and cunning, who ever watches our steps, and plots to lead us astray. He can work most effectually in disguise. Wherever the opinion is entertained that he does not exist, there he is most busy. When we least suspect his presence, he is gaining advantage over us. I feel alarmed as I see so many of the youth yielding to his power while they know it not. Did they but see their danger, they would flee to Christ, the sinner’s refuge.

“Aim to be faithful students in the school of Christ, learning daily to conform your life to the divine Pattern. Set your faces heavenward, and press toward the mark for the prize of your high calling in Christ Jesus. Run the Christian race with patience, and rise superior to every temptation, however grievous it may be, that shall come to you. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God; and if you are desirous of taking the first upward step, you will find His hand stretched out to help you. It remains with you, individually, as to whether you walk in the light of the Sun of Righteousness, or in the darkness of error. The truth of God can be a blessing to you only as you permit its influence to purify and refine your soul.” (Ellen G. White, Sons and Daughters of God (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1955), 78, 79.)
Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How could your life change for the better by being more consciously aware of the Lord being with you?

Why does the world want to limit sexuality simply to the physical?

What about fleeing is considered cowardice or weak that we fail to do it in the face of temptation?

What are the long-term ramifications of sexual immorality?

How do YOLO and FOMO play into sexual purity and abstinence?

Why is the discourse on sexual purity imbalanced toward females?

What are other pragmatic applications to uphold purity?

How does meditating upon Christ’s victory over temptation inspire you?