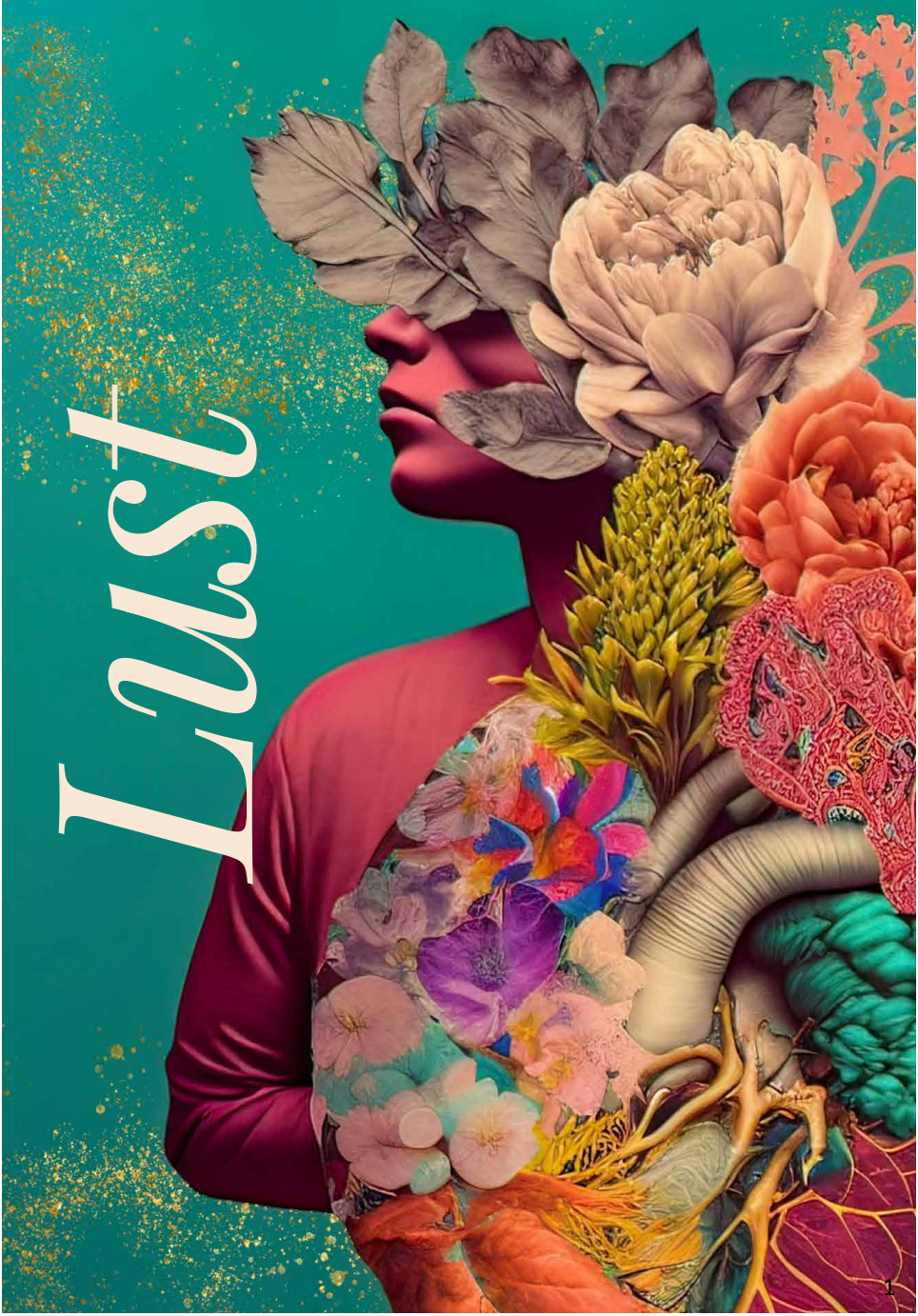
GLITTERING ILLUSIONS

Lust



Lust

SCRIPTURE

Galatians 5:1, 19-25 + Luke 6:43-45

"Sex is sinful to the degree that, instead of drawing you closer to other human beings in their humanness, it unites bodies but leaves the lives inside them hungrier and more alone than before."

FREDERICK BUECHNER, *WISHFUL THINKING*

Our sexuality is one aspect of how we are created in the image of God—we are designed for connection, intimacy, and life. Sexual desire expressed in healthy ways embraces the fullness of our humanity, strengthening our capacity to give and receive love and enhancing our relationships with both others and God. Yet like the other vices in this series, our sexuality is a fountainhead which can bring forth life or destruction.

Lust distorts our sexuality by turning desire toward our own gratification rather than the mutual giving and receiving of love. Its focus becomes the pursuit of power or pleasure apart from relationship, treating another person as a means of satisfaction rather than as a whole person to know, honor, and love. Lust makes us susceptible to the temptation to use or be used, even if the sex is consensual, even if the sex takes place within marriage, even if no sexual event happens. Lust draws us toward possessing or consuming what we desire rather than learning to love what is beautiful in a way that honors its inherent worth.

When we misuse our sexuality, it "dim[s] our view of beauty and damage[s] our ability to love." We live in the illusion that we can separate our sexuality from our humanity, dehumanizing both others and ourselves. Lust offers an imitation of the intimacy we were created for, but it can never satisfy our deepest longings. It becomes an attempt to make a "good thing fill gaps and needs in our hearts that only God can fill." When we seek gratification through lust's shallow expressions of desire, we can lose sight of what our hearts truly long for: to be intimately known and loved.

So how do we remain connected to the fullness of how God created us and live out our sexuality in a way that recognizes the good gift God gave us, fostering true intimacy?

Practice

PAUSE + REFLECT
RECEIVING GOD'S LOVE

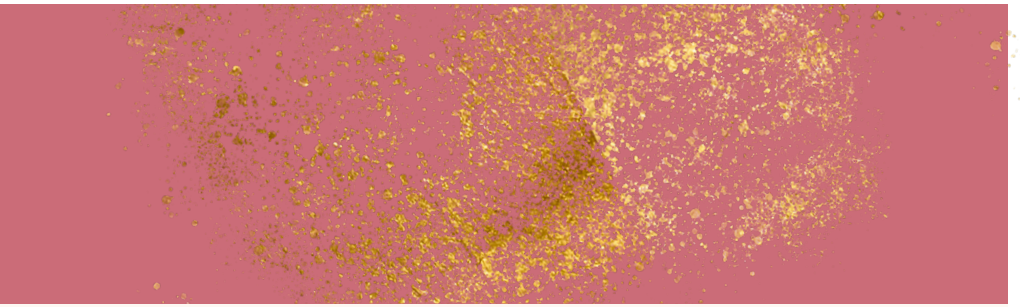
PAUSE + REFLECT

Bishop Erik Varden wrote, "To do something beautiful for its own sake, for the intrinsic delight of it, without the thought of gain: this, I'd say, is a way of beginning to truly live rightly in this world."

Temperance is the practice of moderation and self-restraint in our behaviors, speech, appetites, and desires. As we grow in temperance, we learn to take joy in the things and people that do not belong to us or do not directly benefit us. We become freer to appreciate the goodness and beauty of others without making them responsible for satisfying our longings.

Ask yourself: If you continue along your current path of sexuality—whether toward vice or virtue—what might life look like in one year, five years, or twenty years? Are your current patterns leading you toward the intimacy and fulfillment you long for, or leaving you feeling isolated, alone, and disconnected from yourself, others, and God?

Some practical suggestions:
Pay attention to your daily and weekly rhythms. When are you most susceptible to lustful thoughts or behaviors? Is it late at night when you are tired, after a stressful day,

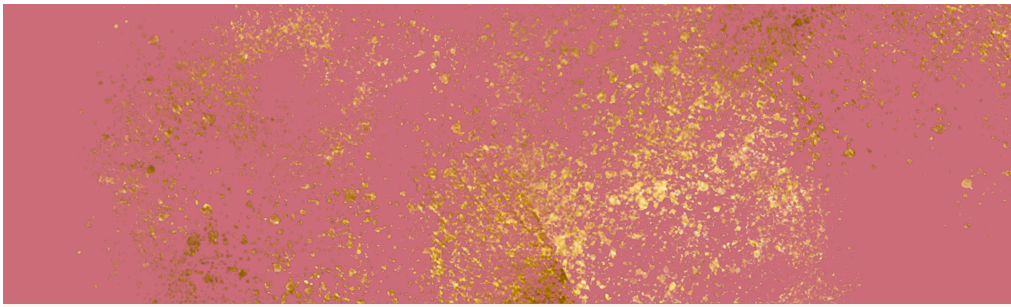


in moments of loneliness, or when you feel emotionally depleted? Observe, welcome, and name with God what you experience, and invite Him to help you become aware of what is happening in those moments. What are you longing for? What are you feeling or trying to protect? Invite God to meet you in the midst of whatever you discover.

Consider fasting, if it is safe for you to do so. Fasting can help us practice making intentional choices rather than automatically responding to every appetite. With the Spirit's help, we can learn to experience desire without being ruled by it. As we rely on Him, we grow in self-control—the fruit of the Spirit.

While creating practical boundaries and intentional habits to reduce the temptation toward lust are helpful and necessary, true transformation and freedom involve much more than behavior management. Our deepest need, therefore, is not simply to manage our behavior but to be restored in relationship.

The good news is that we don’t struggle alone. God walks with us and invites us to bring Him our struggles and unmet longings so He can satisfy us and heal us with His love. As



we receive His love, we can grow in the freedom to see and love others wholeheartedly rather than treating them as a means to our own satisfaction.

RECEIVING GOD'S LOVE

Lust tends to *grasp* and *take* in the hope of feeling satisfied and whole. God's love, however, invites a different posture—one of *receiving* without any need to perform, achieve, or earn. His invitation is to simply *allow ourselves to be loved.*

Each day this week, spend a few minutes simply being with God. Quiet your body and mind and invite Him to sit with you. Notice what it feels like to be with God in the discomfort of the quiet, achieving nothing, saying nothing, bringing nothing but your willingness to receive His love. Offer this simple prayer: ***God, I long to receive your love for me.*** As thoughts come into your mind, simply acknowledge them, hand them to Him to hold, and recenter your focus on receiving His love. You might experience peace, distraction, or very little at all. You don't need to strive to produce a meaningful spiritual experience. Simply continue to be present to the God who loved you first.

At a later time, reflect on your experience of receiving God's love in the quiet and consider:

- How did it feel to be with God without needing to earn, prove, or secure His love?
- What makes receiving God's love difficult for me?
- What might my desires reveal about my longing for connection, comfort, or being loved?
- What might change if I lived from the assurance that I am already loved?

REVIEW THE PRACTICES



Continue growing in intimacy with God through the practices offered throughout this series. This week, make space to receive His love by meditating on Zephaniah 3:17, Ephesians 3:16–19, John 15:9–11, Jeremiah 31:3, 1 John 4:7–21, and Psalm 36:5–9.

Pastoral Word

+ NEXT STEPS

"The sexual drive is a drive to life. When it is oriented toward wholeness, of oneself and of other humans, toward personal relationship, it gives birth, whether in the context of singleness or marriage..."

Chastity, perhaps a word with negative connotations today, offers a beautiful perspective of love; it is "not a rule book of don'ts but...forming our hearts to love wholeheartedly what is beautiful and good." Chastity refuses to use another person in the name of pleasure, prioritizing and honoring their good over personal gratification. It invites us to consider what it means to love others in a way that honors who they are, rather than looking to them to satisfy our own desires.

There is much hurt, deep pain, and shame connected to lust and its consequences, whether due to choices we have made or harm that has been done to us. Each of our personal stories is unique, and we do not have to navigate these painful places alone. As Ann Voskamp reminds us, "Shame dies when stories are told in safe places." Our Pastors, Prayer Team, and Care Team would be honored to come alongside you to create space for you to begin sharing

your story, whatever it holds. If you would like to connect with a counselor or spiritual director, we would love to help you take that step toward experiencing the freedom and healing that comes through being seen, known, and loved.

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Do you have a trusted friend you can share with?
- Attend our Generational Healing Service November 15.
- Consider meeting with a Spiritual Director. Information is available outside the Place of Prayer.
- Schedule a session with our Care and Prayer team using the QR code.

*Quotes taken from *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* by Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung.



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