Before I was in full-time ministry I was in financial planning for several years. Someone had given me the name of a man that lived out in the country. They told me this guy was wealthy but didn’t have anyone working with him on his investments. But they warned me not to be surprised by his property, that he was a bit of a recluse and lived alone. As I drove up to the man’s small white framed farmhouse it was not well kept. The shrubs were overgrown all around the house and completely covered the front door. His property and barn looked cluttered and old but there was a brand-new pickup parked out front. I went to a side door on the house and an older unshaven man came to the door and invited me to step inside. As I did I was taken back by the condition of the home. Papers stacked everywhere, the shades were pulled down and the kitchen counters were overflowing with anything and everything you might imagine, But the smell…well it was not good. He wasn’t interested in my financial help and to be honest I was kind of relieved. As I drove away that day, I couldn’t help but wonder how someone could tolerate such nasty conditions. And yet when people live around garbage long enough, they no longer feel like it’s bad, if fact they often get comfortable with it. It starts to feel normal. Unfortunately, even many Christians have filled their minds with so much garbage that it doesn’t seem like garbage anymore. Today I want to talk about the problem of lust. Now for those of you who are our guests today we are starting this new year off with a 5-week series called Creatures of Habit, changing our old ways. You see if there is an area of our life that we haven’t surrendered to the Lord it can quickly become a bad habit. And a bad habit can then turn into a spiritual stronghold that keeps us from experiencing all that God has for us. And that’s why it is so important for us to acknowledge these issues and decide to deal with them. Gal. 5:16NLT. And one way to get rid of a bad habit is to replace it with a good habit or spiritual discipline. Spiritual disciplines are **basically those regular practices that produce spiritual fruit.** Now the word lust means an insatiable craving to gratify your fleshly desires by seeking to satisfy a legitimate desire in an illegitimate way. Or… you could just simply say it means ‘strong desire’. We can actually lust for any number of things, for instance we can lust for money or possessions, we can lust after food, we can lust after prestige or recognition, but today we’re going to talk about sexual lust. Now I don’t know about you, but I’ve struggled with every one of these 5 habits at one time or another in my life. And to one degree or another I think most people have struggled with lust before. As one pastor said, “It’s depressing to realize that most of us are like the rest of us.” Since I’ve defined what lust is, let me tell you what it’s not. It’s not noticing someone’s appearance. It’s normal to notice a beautiful person of the opposite sex. Billy Graham once said, “the first look is not what gets most of us in trouble it’s the second and third that usually causes the problem.” Author John Maxwell defined lust this way, “lust is a thought that I entertain, cherish, or hold on to, that if I did what I was thinking it would clearly be sin.” Many people have bought into the age-old lie, “it’s okay to look but just don’t touch.” Someone said that thought is simply action in rehearsal. If you rehearse the idea of inappropriate actions over and over again in your mind it’s only a matter of time before you will act those things out. James 1:14-15NIV Friends we give birth to sin when we start rationalizing our behavior. We are only excusing our behavior when we call flirting with a co-worker innocent fun. We are only excusing our behavior when we say the swimsuit addition only comes out once a year. We are only excusing our behavior when we sprinkle our conversation with sexual innuendoes. Rom.1:26-27NIV Now like every other boy in the late 60’s I loved to look at the pictures in National Geographic. But my first introduction to porn was in the 7th grade when a boy found a pornographic picture his father had and brought it to school. I can still remember the confused feelings I struggled with. I felt guilt and yet at the same time it stirred up an adrenaline rush like I had not felt before. That same year another kid gave me a romance novel and showed me several descriptive sections in the book. I kept that book for a while under my mattress. So at the age of 12 I had experienced lust from the visual as well as the imagination. But parents this is what I want you to consider, my experience was over 50 years ago, if you wanted to look at Porn back then you had to go looking for it. But today, kids don’t have to go looking for it, it’s everywhere. From the lyrics on the most popular songs to the iPhone they carry in their pocket, pornography is everywhere. According to Guard Child, 70% of children 7 to 18 have accidently encountered online pornography, often through a web search while doing homework. In 2012 Tru Research conducted online interviews with over 2,000 teens, ages 13-17. 32% of teens admit to intentionally accessing nude or pornographic content online… and 43% of those said they do it on a weekly basis. 44% of teens admitted thy have looked at something online of which their parents would not approve. (only 28% of parents were aware of this). Another study found that 87% of college-aged men and 31% of college-aged women use pornography. Listen to what the U.S. Department of Justice said, “Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions..” According to a cover story by Time magazine April 11, 2016, 46% of men (almost half) and 16% of women ages 18-39 intentionally view pornography in any given week. Reliable estimates peg pornography as a 100 billion global industry with $10 to $12 billion of it coming from the U.S. alone. Listen 12% of all content on the internet is pornographic and 25% of search engine requests are pornography related. And if you are an employer you might be surprised to hear that 20% of men and 13% of women admit to watching porn online at work. Of course, we try and justify or legitimize it by calling it adult entertainment. What scientists have long understood is that the brain is actually our primary sex organ. In other words, it’s sexual lust that goes undeterred. Let me share a couple of interesting facts about lust. First it does not deliver what it promises, we would expect to experience psychic ecstasy but instead we experience guilt, emptiness, and a sense of loneliness. Perhaps the most deceptive aspect of lust is that it has an insatiable appetite, the more you try to satisfy it, the more intense it becomes. For instance, that same Time magazine article I quoted before, cites a 2014 MRI study from the Max Planck Institute which revealed that habitual porn use may have an effect on the brain. Repeated exposure to porn appeared to cause the brain’s reward center, called the Striatum, to be less and less responsive. In other words the brain becomes desensitized, requiring more and more stimulation to achieve the same level of pleasure. Similar to the way cocaine and other drugs effect the brain. Lee Strobel said pornography won’t spice up your sex life it will poison it with false comparisons. The New York Times told the story of a 34-year-old woman who discovered that her husband, a minister, had an online porn habit. She said, “How can I compete with hundreds of anonymous others who are now in our bed… in his head? She said our bed is crowded with countless faceless strangers, where once we were intimate.” The fantasy world of pornography is like this big carnival pulling people in every day with promises of great thrills only to place them on a lonely roller coaster of excitement and emptiness, arousal and anxiety. In fact most the people engaged in porn live with this overwhelming fear… fear that they will be exposed and feel the shame. Fear that someone will see me for who I really am. Afraid that if they talk to someone about it and that person breaks their confidence… they might lose their marriage or their job. So you continue to keep it a secret. And I think it goes without saying that pornography will hurt your relationship with God. People who indulge in porn often feel the need to hide from God because of their shame and guilt. So they stop praying because of the guilt, they harden their heart so as not to feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Listen no matter what you’ve been involved in up to this point, God is waiting to help you get back to a healthy relationship with Him and with your spouse if you are married. But to get their you’ve got to make a serious commitment to break this habit of lust. Look what Jesus had to say about it. Matt. 5:27-29NLT. So is there any question about what Jesus thinks about lust? Now He doesn’t literally mean for me to pluck out my eye as a punishment for my sin, but He does want us to do whatever it takes to break the habit of lust from our life. Listen friends He is not condemning our natural interest in the opposite sex, He’s warning us when we move from interest to active fantasizing about illicit sexual behavior we have crossed the line. I know some Christians have read the restrictions about sexuality and concluded that sex is a bad thing. That is absolutely not true, God is the author and designer of sex… He created it to be a good thing between a husband and wife something that expresses your love for your spouse and connects you not only physically and emotionally as well as spiritually. God gave us this wonderful gift and yet it’s so powerful that if we step outside of his boundaries it can implode and create all kinds of pain. Okay let me quickly give you 5 things you can do to break the behavior of lust in your life. #1 you need to acknowledge your vulnerability. Paul cautioned believers to be careful if you think you stand lest you fall. It’s so easy to get blindsided when you think you’re not vulnerable to sin. Listen when we put our guard down what we think is a minor little issue can quickly grow into habitual behavior. So don’t reach out for that inappropriate touch and don’t click on that web site. Paul said in Ephesians 5:3NIV Did you notice that… there should not even be a *hint* of sexual immorality. Well what would you consider a hint? Well I would certainly think looking at that porn web site or that annual swimsuit edition or reading that erotic romance novel would all be somewhere south of the hint mark. It reminds me of the story of the wealthy couple who were hiring a chauffeur. It came down to 4 applicants. She called the men to her balcony and pointed to a brick wall alongside the driveway. She asked the men, “How close do you think you can get to that wall without scratching my car?” The 1st guy said he could get within a foot of the wall without damaging the car. The 2nd guy said he could get within 6 inches. The 3rd guy said he believed he could do it within 3 inches. The 4th guy said, It doesn’t matter how close I can get because I’m going to stay as far away from that wall as I possibly can. You see this guy understood the point was to protect the car. Friends the same thing is true with lust. Instead of seeing how close you can get, you need to do everything you can to protect you soul! #2 Be aware of the consequences. I mean look around, all of us know of examples where people have had a train wreck because they ignored lust in their life. I’ve had friends that ignored their struggle with lust and ended up in sexual sin. Some of them lost their families and a few even lost their jobs. Not to mention if you are a Christian your witness will be damaged, your relationships hurt, your personal life will become guilt ridden, your future plans might be destroyed and you may only get to see your kids every other weekend. Seriously is it worth it?? Job 31:1NLT Have you made that kind of a promise to yourself? Some of you might be saying Steve I understand what you’re saying but I’m single, so it doesn’t matter. Oh my friends, it does matter! Single or married… lust is sin and if it leads you to sex outside of marriage you have done damage to your relationship with this person as well as with God. #3 Avoid all areas of temptation. In other words, decide you are going to get rid of the things that are tempting you. If you’re looking at pornography on your computer, then put some safeguards to give you accountability. Covenant Eyes is one program I would recommend. They will send an e-mail to your accountability person if you look at porn. And you can have them block porn on your phone or computer. I think it is also wise for you and your kids to put your computer in a public setting. And just like an alcoholic needs to purge their home of all alcohol, someone struggling with lust need to purge their home and workplace of all sources of stimulation that provoke your lustful thoughts. And then what kind of influence are your friends? It doesn’t matter how innocent it may seem, if your friends joke about porn or how hot that girl or guy is, or flirt with the opposite sex, they will influence you in a very negative way. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10:12NIV #4 Accept Godly Counsel. In other words, come up with an accountability partner of the same sex that will hold you accountable. Somebody that’s not afraid to ask you the hard questions. Alcoholics Anonymous has a slogan that says, ‘you are only as sick as your secrets’ Here are some question you can ask each other. Has your interaction with the opposite sex been honoring to Christ? Did you overstep any lines? Have you been participating in anything that you know is sin? The bottom line is if you cannot break this habit of lust in your life then for goodness sake get professional help before it is too late. #5 Allow God to give you the victory. Friends don’t lose heart over setbacks, simply learn from your past mistakes. But I will also tell you one of the things that will help you get victory over lust is a daily time with God. Ps. 32:5NLT. Do you know who wrote that Psalm? King David whose lust grew into sexual sin. And yet he repented, and God forgave him, later he became known as a man after God’s heart. Now understand he still had to face some consequences for his sin, but God forgave him as He will you. I heard about a father who was watching from the kitchen window his 4-year-old son trying to lift a big rock out of his sandbox. He watched him struggle for a long time but it was just too big for him to handle. Finally, the father came outside to find his son crying. He asked him what the problem was and his son said I can’t get this rock out of my sandbox. His father said have you used all of the strength that’s available to you? Yes cried the son, and I still can’t get it out. His dad said, but you haven’t asked me to help you. And together they lifted the rock out of the sandbox. Friends we cannot conquer lust on our own. But we have a father who is waiting and wanting to help us if we will only ask.