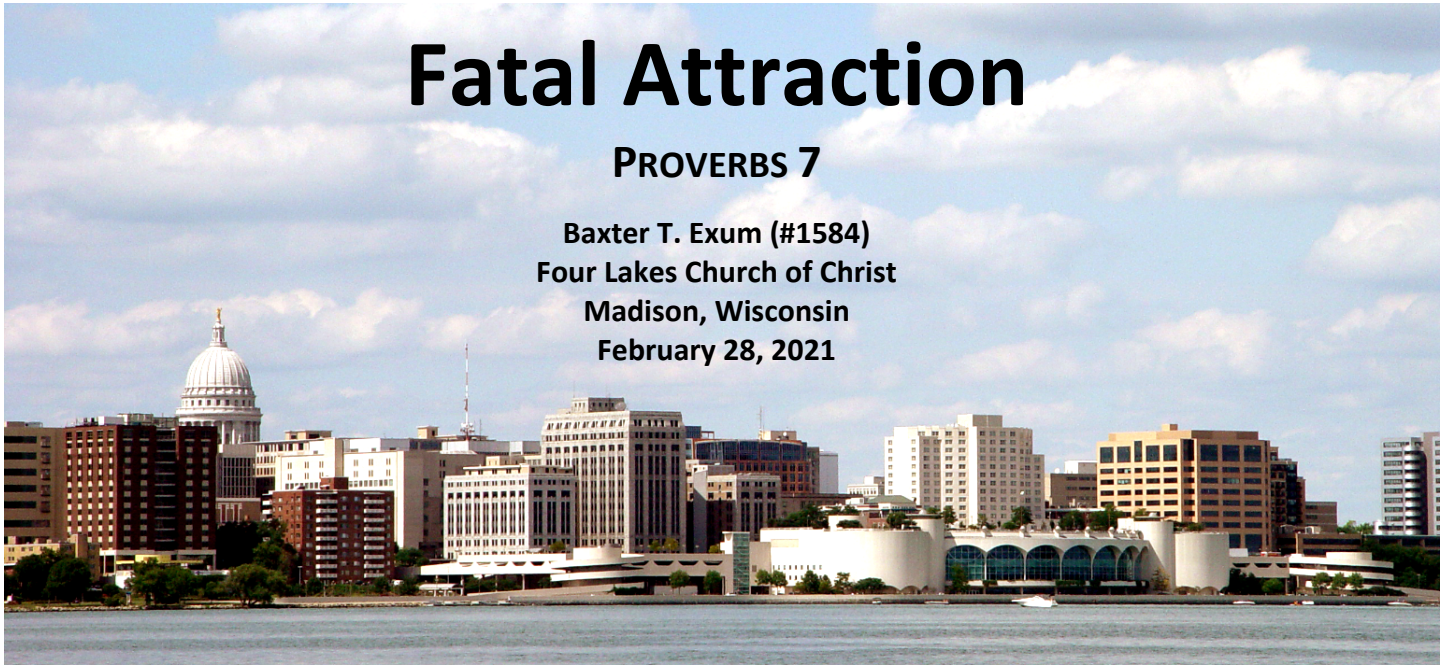


Fatal Attraction

PROVERBS 7

Baxter T. Exum (#1584)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
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*****COVID-19 SPLIT SERVICE*****

It is good to see you this morning! I hope all of you have the elements for the Lord's Supper (either from home or from the table in the back room), as John will be leading us in the prayers for the Supper after our study. And then, following the Lord's Supper, Caleb will be leading us in, "Yield Not to Temptation" (#798). I am very thankful to Josh and Caleb for filling in with the teaching and preaching over the past week and a half. I enjoyed camping along Lake Superior, and I enjoyed having some extra time to read and study (especially since I wasn't able to attend the Freed-Hardeman lectures this year). Yesterday, as my wife got the numbers together for the bulletin, she looked at the YouTube stats and noticed that those numbers doubled last week. What in the world happened? Maybe somebody shared the link on social media? And then we realized: Caleb preached last week! And then we also realized that Caleb's dad shared his lesson online, and that explains our huge YouTube audience last week. We appreciate Caleb's good words in last week's lesson.

I need your help with something today! It has been nearly two years since I've asked for sermon ideas from everybody. We had a short series last year based on requests from our phone audience, but it's time to open this up to everybody again. If you have something we need to cover in sermon form here at the Four Lakes congregation, I would love to hear from you. If you have a question, a favorite passage, a scripture that might be helpful for all of us to study together, please give me a call or send an email. The church number is 608-224-0274, and our email is fourlakeschurch@gmail.com. Nearly everything we study here goes back in some way to a question or request. One of the most difficult aspects of preaching is choosing a topic or text. So, I need your help, and I would love to hear from you. I am also still looking for pictures of you and your family watching the livestream. Several of you have sent in pictures already, and I'll be sharing the first of these this coming Wednesday, but if you would like to take a pic right now and send it to me, I would appreciate it.

In terms of news, I would like to invite all of you to join us online this coming Wednesday as we wrap up the book of Luke. That's significant, but even more interesting to me is that we are wrapping up a verse-by-verse study of the entire Bible that has spanned nearly 21 years. We started with the book of Acts when we moved here back in April 2000, and we have studied pretty much a chapter a week since that time, and we only have about ten verses left. If the technology part works out, we hope to have a special guest to read the last two passages for us. And then, after our study, I'd like to make a few observations concerning some things I've

learned personally teaching through the Bible over the past 21 years. I also have a few pictures from those early days when we studied in the Busses' living room. I hope you can join us for our study of Luke 24:44-53 this coming Wednesday.

As we begin, we want to make sure we communicate the fact that God wants everybody to be saved. The bad news is: We've sinned, and sin separates us from God. The good news is: God loves us so much that he sent his Son as a sacrifice. He was crucified, he was buried, and he was raised up on the third day. We respond to that good news by believing it, by turning away from sin, by confessing our faith in Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with him in baptism. And once again, we have several examples today, starting with Harriet, who was baptized last week at the Hazel Park congregation just outside Detroit. This is where Brian Sherrell preaches. Brian and his family work with us at camp every summer. So, we are thankful for Harriet and her decision.

We also have a picture of Jonah Simon baptizing a man in Tanzania. This picture comes from the Christian Chronicle. Tanzania is located on the eastern edge of Africa, just south of Kenya. And Liza, the man being baptized, started attending worship with his Christian wife not too long ago. We are thankful for the good example of strong Christian women and the influence they have on their husbands.

And then we also have Shemah, who was baptized just a few days ago in Grenada. Some of you might remember that we had a member here in Madison from Grenada, sister Ann. And when a hurricane came through a number of years ago, we helped pay for a new roof for their church building down there. I'm not sure whether this is the same congregation, but we are thankful for Shemah and his good example this week. And we share these images by way of encouragement. Even in a pandemic, God is still good, and his people are still reaching out with the good news. And if we can help you in some way, if you have any questions or concerns, if there is some way we can serve you, we hope you will get in touch.

This morning, we are returning (very briefly) to our ongoing study of the book of Proverbs, a book written by King Solomon as he passes along some practical advice to his sons. We started this study several years ago, and we have been coming back to it sporadically. Today is one of those days, and today, we come to Proverbs 7. I would invite you to be turning with me to Proverbs 7. In Proverbs 7, we have King Solomon looking out the window of the palace with his young son there at his side, and he teaches some valuable lessons as he observes what happens on the streets below. I'm referring to what happens here as a "Fatal Attraction," and that description will hopefully make sense as we work our way through this passage. Today, then, let's look at Proverbs 7 together (we will split it up in smaller chunks so you can see it on your screens at home), and then we'll go back and make some observations. Let's start with the words of King Solomon in Proverbs 7...

- ¹ ***My son, keep my words
And treasure my commandments within you.***
- ² ***Keep my commandments and live,
And my teaching as the apple of your eye.***
- ³ ***Bind them on your fingers;
Write them on the tablet of your heart.***
- ⁴ ***Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"
And call understanding your intimate friend;***
- ⁵ ***That they may keep you from an adulteress,
From the foreigner who flatters with her words.***

- ⁶ *For at the window of my house
I looked out through my lattice,*
⁷ *And I saw among the naïve,
And discerned among the youths
A young man lacking sense,*
⁸ *Passing through the street near her corner;
And he takes the way to her house,*
⁹ *In the twilight, in the evening,
In the middle of the night and in the darkness.*
- ¹⁰ *And behold, a woman comes to meet him,
Dressed as a harlot and cunning of heart.*
¹¹ *She is boisterous and rebellious,
Her feet do not remain at home;*
¹² *She is now in the streets, now in the squares,
And lurks by every corner.*
¹³ *So she seizes him and kisses him
And with a brazen face she says to him:*
¹⁴ *"I was due to offer peace offerings;
Today I have paid my vows.*
¹⁵ *"Therefore I have come out to meet you,
To seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you.*
¹⁶ *"I have spread my couch with coverings,
With colored linens of Egypt.*
¹⁷ *"I have sprinkled my bed
With myrrh, aloes and cinnamon.*
¹⁸ *"Come, let us drink our fill of love until morning;
Let us delight ourselves with caresses.*
¹⁹ *"For my husband is not at home,
He has gone on a long journey;*
²⁰ *He has taken a bag of money with him,
At the full moon he will come home."*
²¹ *With her many persuasions she entices him;
With her flattering lips she seduces him.*
- ²² *Suddenly he follows her
As an ox goes to the slaughter,
Or as one in fetters to the discipline of a fool,*
²³ *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.*
- ²⁴ *Now therefore, my sons, listen to me,
And pay attention to the words of my mouth.*
²⁵ *Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways,
Do not stray into her paths.*

- ²⁶ *For many are the victims she has cast down,
And numerous are all her slain.*
²⁷ *Her house is the way to Sheol,
Descending to the chambers of death.*

As we allow the word of God to challenge us this morning, I want us to go back and make some observations, paragraph by paragraph...

I. ...starting with Solomon's description of the NAÏVE YOUNG MAN in verses 6-9.

The word Solomon uses here often refers to being "simple," and it seems that the word goes back to the idea of being "open-minded," a reference to a "wide open space." His mind is "open." The ESV and the NIV both refer to the **"simple."** The Message refers to the **"mindless crowd."** We need to realize, though, that it is not necessarily a sin to be "naïve" or "simple." And I say this, because (in verse 7) this particular young man is not the only **"naïve"** person in this situation. He just happens to be the only one who acts on his open-mindedness. In verse 8, this naïve young man **"passes through the street near...[the] corner,"** of this off-limits woman we will learn about in just a little bit. He **"takes the way to her house."** So, this young man is in a place where he should not be. And not only that, but he's there at a really bad time, **"In the twilight, in the evening, in the middle of the night and in the darkness."** Isn't that ominous? I'm getting a bit nervous just reading those words. It almost sounds like a horror movie. We have some tension in these verses. We know what's about to happen. We see it coming. But, unfortunately, the young man does not; because, not only is he **"naïve,"** not only is he **"young,"** but he is also **"lacking sense."** And Solomon is using this young man as an example to teach his son a lesson. And the lesson is: The choices we make often have a direct impact on the temptations we face. And this young man right here is making some terrible decisions. In fact, what is about to happen here is completely avoidable.

And the same thing is true for us today. The things we do and the places we go can put us in great danger. And this applies in so many ways. The example here is rather extreme (walking down to the prostitute's house in the middle of the night), but the principle applies in other areas. If my weakness is out-of-control eating, I probably shouldn't get that 5-pound bucket-o-cheeze-balls at Costco "just in case," because, if it's sitting there on the counter in my kitchen, my chances of surviving that temptation have been terribly handicapped. I've done that to myself. If my issue is not being content with what I have, I probably shouldn't open the Amazon app when I am bored. I am asking for trouble. Sometimes we might need to take some drastic action to avoid temptation altogether. This is what Jesus says as he suggests cutting off our hands or plucking out our eyes. He uses a drastic action to illustrate a very real danger. Avoid temptation! Don't be alone with this person. Delete those bookmarks on the private browser. Avoid the bar after work. Don't spend the night at his house or at her house. See the danger of **"passing through the street near her corner...in the twilight, in the evening, in the middle of the night and in the darkness."** Don't go there! Often, the wise have learned this by experience. It's one thing to be tempted, but quite another to tempt ourselves, and this seems to be exactly what this young man is doing. He is putting himself in a very dangerous situation. What happens next is avoidable, but unfortunately, he never sees it coming.

II. And this leads us to the next major character in this chapter, the PREDATOR (and we see her described in verses 10-21).

She's pictured as an experienced older woman, dressed like a prostitute, prowling, out to get somebody. And when she finds this naïve young man, she pounces, attacking through all five senses – with the eyes (the way she's dressed), with touch (seizing him), with taste (the kisses), with smell (the myrrh, and aloe, and cinnamon), and with hearing (the flattering words)! It's a full-on assault! Notice how many times she uses the word **"you"** in verse 15, ***"Therefore I have come out to meet you, to seek your presence earnestly, and I have found you."*** This is all about **"you."** You are the most important person in the world to me right now. This is what a lot of men need to hear.

On top of this, the woman seems to anticipate objections. Some of you know that my grandfather was a salesman for Wheeling Steel (out of Wheeling, West Virginia), and I remember him saying many times that you can't make a sale until you have an objection. His point was: If somebody doesn't care, you'll never sell them anything, but if they think of a reason NOT to, that's something he could work with. And here, this woman seems to be anticipating objections, "Oh, you're worried about what God might think? Well, it just so happens that I'm on my way home from sacrificing to God in the temple, therefore I have come out to meet you" (in verses 14-15). In other words, "Young man, you are the answer to my prayers! It is God's will that we be together." The other aspect of this is that in Leviticus 7:15 the people were specifically commanded that when they made a peace offering, the flesh of the sacrifice was to be eaten on the day of the offering. Nothing was to be left over. So, the woman might be saying, "I've just offered this lamb (or whatever), I need to eat it today, and I sure would hate for any of this good food to go to waste. Why don't you come over and help me out a bit?"

In verses 16-18, the woman uses the angle that she's ready for this, "It sure would be a shame for all of this preparation to go to waste!" I am prepared! And in verse 18: We have no boundaries with any of this. No limits! We can do whatever we want to do. The only thing that matters here is that we have fun!

And then, in verses 19-20, she answers any possible objection to this young man getting murdered by her husband. Some translations catch this and others don't, but she almost seems to depersonalize her husband by referring to him as ***"the man."*** And the NASB indicates this with a footnote; literally, ***"the man is not at home."*** And so, she's saying, "Don't worry about him. He's on a long journey. I know, because he took a lot of money. He won't be home for a while." In other words, "What I'm suggesting here is completely safe. Trust me! Nobody will ever know." Doesn't Satan say the same thing today? Whatever it is, this sin is safe, this sin is completely normal, and there will be no consequences whatsoever. And, in fact, even God approves of this thing.

And finally, we have the reminder (in verse 21) that this woman truly is a predator, ***"With her many persuasions she entices him; with her flattering lips she seduces him."*** As Peter warns us in 1 Peter 5:8, ***"Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."*** There is some prowling going on in this passage.

So, we have two characters at this point: The naïve young man facing off against an aggressive and more experienced woman. Perhaps I should have made this disclaimer sooner, but this isn't a matter of men being the innocent victims and women being dangerous, but rather, in context, this is a warning from a father to his son. And I'm assuming that if Solomon had been speaking to his daughter, the roles probably would have been reversed here, because in reality, many of us know from experience that this goes both ways, doesn't it? We've seen this: One person taking advantage of another. And the real warning comes in what happens next...

III. ...as Solomon warns his son about the RESULTS of this encounter, as the young man suddenly finds himself TRAPPED (in verses 22-23).

And to me, the word **“suddenly”** really stands out in this chapter. We see it coming, but the young man does not. It’s almost as if he’s surprised by what happens here. He’s wandering, she’s looking, and **“suddenly”** he follows her, resulting in a series of disturbing pictures – like an ox to the slaughter, like a fool put in handcuffs, like an arrow through the liver, and like a bird caught in a trap. In each case, the end is a complete surprise. In the same way, the naïve young man wanders right into this scenario, and has no idea that it will cost him his life.

Solomon’s point in sharing this is to try to encourage his young son to anticipate the consequences. Isn’t this what parenting is all about? We are trying to get our kids see what might happen. Don’t get tricked, don’t get surprised, but try to anticipate the results of certain behaviors. Try to see where this is leading. If you do this, this might happen.

With experience, we know that the road to sin is usually pretty long with many opportunities to change our minds. We know that the best time to stop is usually not after wandering into someone’s house, **“In the twilight, in the evening, in the middle of the night and in the darkness.”** If we make it that far, that’s as good a time to stop as any, but it’s best to avoid that scenario altogether. This story would have been so much better if it had ended way back up in verse 7, **“And I saw among the naïve, and discerned among the youths a young man lacking sense,”** ...and the young man went home and went to bed. That would have been a much better ending here. As it is, though, he wanders in the dark and meets this woman and then he is **“suddenly”** caught in a trap.

Sin is often a process more than a one-time event. We might compare it to buying a car. We see what other people are driving, we start thinking about it, we do some research, we stop by a dealership, we take a test drive, and **“suddenly”** we find ourselves signing a stack of papers. It didn’t start with the papers, did it? No, it started months ago when we first started thinking and then looking. The same is usually true with sin. The point is: The young man is suddenly trapped, but it really wasn’t quite as sudden as it first appears.

IV. In verses 24-27, King Solomon closes with a WARNING.

This is the “So what?” section. This is where he begs his sons to listen. Please, pay attention! He’s warning: Do not turn aside to sin like this. Learn from this young man! And he closes with the reminder that this woman has done it before, and she will do it again. Greater men than you have fallen. Before you go down a road, make sure to think very carefully about where that road is leading. Look at the end before you start.

And this is the voice of experience, isn’t it? Like his own father (David), King Solomon has also fallen for off-limits women. And again, this is the king speaking. And so, he’s not really blaming the women, but he’s telling his son not to go there. This is on you! You have the power to choose one way or the other. Your worth as a person is not tied to what these women think about you.

And the same is true of us today. As we are tempted to wander, Solomon is begging us to take the long view. He’s begging us to think very carefully about where this path we are on is leading. Anticipate the consequences. This warning (this basic thought) is repeated several times in the New Testament – in 2 Timothy 2:22, where Paul says, **“Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”** And also in Romans 13:13-14, where Paul says, **“Let us behave properly as in**

the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” We have some warnings, then.

- V. **And this brings us back to the beginning – I know this is a bit unusual, but here at the end, we come back to the opening verses, and I’m describing this as AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION.**

We know the old saying that “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This problem can be avoided altogether, Solomon says, if his son will only listen, if his son will only keep his words. And in this case, these words are not just wise words from a dad to his son, these words are also inspired. These words come from God himself. Solomon is doing just as God commanded through Moses in Deuteronomy 6, ***“These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.”***

We are to keep the word of God close to us, protecting it just like we protect our eyes. We wear his word like a ring on our fingers, written on our hearts. His word is to be place we go for trusted advice, like we might go to our own sister or a close friend. Wisdom is a sister who watches over us and protects us, just as Miriam looked after Moses in the Nile. By the way, this is a GOOD reference to women in this chapter! The word of God is personified as a sister. And the point is: Staying close to the word of God and treasuring it helps us avoid temptation completely. Paying attention to the good women helps us avoid the evil women.

We’ve talked over and over again about how to read the Bible more, but just in case you’ve missed it, I want to introduce something a friend of mine is doing out in Yorba Linda, California (on the west side of Los Angeles). Jason Haygood grew up in Whitewater, Wisconsin, I baptized him as a teenager, he went to Freed-Hardeman, and now he’s preaching in California. Just a few days ago, he started reading one chapter of John every day, live on Facebook. I’ve been reposting those on our Facebook page. If you want one more dose of the word, this is one way of getting it. I told him that that is the biggest Bible I have ever seen. It might be the camera angle, but that Bible is huge! In these daily videos, Jason makes just a few introductory comments and then he reads a chapter from the word of God. King Solomon would approve of that! The word of God protects us from sin.

Conclusion:

And this seems to be Solomon’s conclusion before-the-fact. He starts with the solution: Keep the word close! And then he illustrates by showing his son what can happen if we wander. And that’s where we leave it today. We come together to encourage each other. We come together to study the word together. We come together to remind each other.

As we close, let’s go to God in prayer:

Our Father in heaven,

You are the great and all-powerful God who knows our weaknesses. This morning, we are thankful for your word. We are thankful that we can come together to study it. Thank you for Jesus, and thank you for making a way for us to be forgiven. Today, we ask for wisdom and

courage to make good decisions. We pray for our children, that they would be surrounded by good friends.

We are thankful for good news this week – for numbers that seem to be heading in a good direction, for a new vaccine that seems to be on its way. Here in Madison, we pray for our teachers and students as they make the transition back to in-person learning. We know that our own members who teach and assist are doing your work as they serve “the least of these,” and so we ask that you protect them and give them strength and calm endurance as they represent you in this community.

Thank you for hearing our prayer. We come to you in the name of Jesus. AMEN.

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com