



Love

VERSUS LUST

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LUST.

It certainly is an ugly word. Most of us don't want to think about it, much less learn about it. The term invokes a sleazy feeling, something dark—alluring yet wrong.

There is good reason for that. If “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10), then certainly lust is its secret ally. It is base and degrading. Lust turns people, things, and even ideas into objects to possess or acquire to satisfy a craving. But if we already know that, why do we need to know more about it?

Because if we can better understand what lust really means, we can learn how to shape our thoughts, feelings, and actions so that we can avoid and overcome its manifestations. This will lead us to a closer association to the Holy Spirit, which purifies our thoughts and intentions and strengthens us. And that will lead to a much happier, peaceful, and joyful life.

Defining Lust

We tend to think of lust primarily as having inappropriate, intense feelings of physical attraction toward another person, but it is possible to lust after or covet just about anything: money, property, objects, and, of course, other people (see Guide to the Scriptures, “Lust”).

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DEFINING LOVE AND LUST

Love is ennobling; lust is degenerating. Love embraces truth; lust embraces lies. Love builds and strengthens; lust destroys and weakens. Love is harmonious; lust is discordant. Love brings peace; lust brings conflict. Love inspires; lust deadens. Love heals; lust debilitates. Love energizes; lust combusts. Love illuminates; lust darkens. Love fills and sustains; lust cannot be satisfied. Love is intimately connected with promise; lust finds its home with pride.

Lust compels a person to seek to acquire something that is contrary to God's will. It encompasses any feeling or desire that causes an individual to focus on worldly possessions or selfish practices—personal interests, desires, passions, and appetites—rather than keeping the commandments of God.

In other words, desiring things contrary to God's will or desiring to possess things in a manner that is contrary to His will is lust, and it leads to unhappiness.¹

The Danger of Sexual Lust

Although we have been cautioned against lust as a form of coveting generally, in its sexual context lust is particularly dangerous. The Savior cautioned: "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

Ancient apostles warned extensively against lust in this sense. As just one example, the Apostle John said, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:16; see also verse 17; Romans 13:14; 1 Peter 2:11).

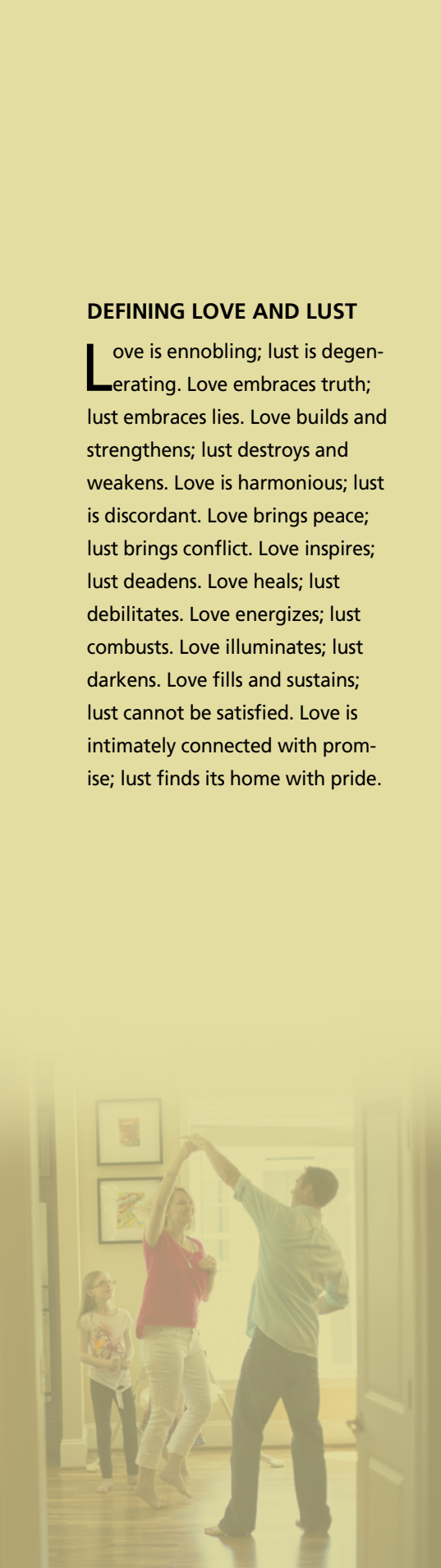
And the warnings continue today.² Elder Jeffrey R. Holland of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explains: "Why is lust such a deadly sin? Well, in addition to the completely Spirit-destroying impact it has upon

our souls, I think it is a sin because it defiles the highest and holiest relationship God gives us in mortality—the love that a man and a woman have for each other and the desire that couple has to bring children into a family intended to be forever."³

Allowing lustful desire to germinate has been at the root of many sinful acts. What begins with a seemingly innocent glance can grow into sordid infidelity with all its disastrous consequences. That is because lust drives away the Holy Ghost and leaves us vulnerable to other temptations and vices and the wiles of the adversary.

The tragic choices of King David are a sad example of how powerful and deadly this emotion can be. David happened to see Bathsheba bathing and lusted after her. Lust yielded to action, and he had her brought to him and he lay with her. Then, in a misguided effort to hide his sin, David ordered Bathsheba's husband to be stationed in battle where he was certain to be killed (see 2 Samuel 11). As a result, David lost his exaltation (see D&C 132:38–39).

David's situation may seem extreme, but it certainly proves the point: lust is a powerful temptation. Surrendering to it can cause us to engage in things that no one in their right mind would do. The fact that it is so insidious, so easily aroused, and so effective at tempting us to turn from the Holy Ghost and yield our will to something forbidden makes it all the





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more dangerous. It can be triggered by viewing pornography, listening to explicit lyrics, or engaging in inappropriate intimacy. At the same time, lustful feelings can prompt an individual to seek pornography. This cyclical relationship is extremely powerful and dangerous.⁴

Lust of a sexual nature degrades and weakens all relationships, not the least of which is one's personal relationship with God. "And verily I say unto you, as I have said before, he that looketh on a woman to lust after her, or if any shall commit adultery in their hearts, they shall not have the Spirit, but shall deny the faith and shall fear" (D&C 63:16).

As Elder Richard G. Scott (1928–2015) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles taught, "Sexual immorality creates a barrier to the influence of the Holy Spirit with all its uplifting, enlightening, and empowering capabilities. It causes powerful physical and emotional stimulation. In time that creates an unquenchable appetite that drives the offender to ever more serious sin."⁵

What Lust Isn't

Having considered what lust *is*, it's also important to understand what it is *not* and to be careful not to label

appropriate thoughts, feelings, and desires as lust. Lust is a *kind* of desire, but there are also righteous desires. For example, we can desire good and appropriate things that will help to accomplish the Lord's work.

Think about:

- **The desire to have money.** In and of itself, desiring money isn't evil. Paul didn't say that *money* is the root of all evil. He said, "the *love of money* is the root of all evil" (1 Timothy 6:10; emphasis added). Jacob's teachings add additional clarification: "Before ye seek for riches, seek ye for the kingdom of God. And after ye have obtained a hope in Christ ye shall obtain riches, if ye seek them; and ye will seek them for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted" (Jacob 2:18–19).
- **Having appropriate sexual feelings toward your spouse.** Those God-given feelings help strengthen, fortify, and unify a marriage. But it *is* possible to have inappropriate feelings toward a spouse. If we seek fulfillment only for our own sake, or only to gratify



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our own cravings or feelings, we might be slipping into lustful desires, and that can be damaging to a marriage relationship. The key to seeking and maintaining appropriate physical intimacy in a marriage is pure and loving intent.

The important principle is to seek things for the right purpose—to build God’s kingdom and increase goodness in the world. In contrast, lust encourages us to step outside of appropriate boundaries, where our desires can debase God, objectify people, and turn objects, wealth, and even power into monstrosities that warp our sensibilities and damage our relationships.

Why We Often Yield to Lust

Given how damaging and dangerous lust is, why is it so tempting and so prevalent? Why do we so often let it overpower us? On the surface, it may seem that selfishness or lack of self-control are at the heart of lust. Those are contributing factors, but the deep root of lust is often emptiness. Individuals may succumb to lust in a vain attempt to fill a vacancy in their life. Lust is a false emotion,

a poor substitute for genuine love, true value, and enduring discipleship.

Proper emotional control, in one sense, is a condition of the heart. “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Wherever we place our mental and spiritual focus will over time become the driving force behind our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Whenever we feel ourselves tempted to lust, we need to replace that temptation with something more appropriate.

Idleness can also cause lustful thoughts. When we have too little going on in our lives, we tend to be more susceptible to evil influences. As we actively seek to be anxiously engaged in good causes (see D&C 58:27) and strive to use our time productively, we will be less prone to lustful thoughts or other negative influences.

As Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles explains, the desires we choose to adhere to affect not only our actions but also who we eventually become: “Desires dictate our priorities, priorities shape our choices, and choices determine our actions. The desires we act on determine our changing, our achieving, and our becoming.”⁶

In other words, we must guard not only the emotions that we allow ourselves to engage in but also the thoughts that precipitate or are caused by those feelings. As Alma taught, if our thoughts are impure, “our thoughts will also condemn us” (Alma 12:14).

The Antidote: Christlike Love

Lust isn’t inevitable. Because Heavenly Father gives us agency, we have power over our thoughts, feelings, and actions. We don’t have to pursue lustful thoughts and feelings. When temptations arise, we can choose not to go down those paths.

How do we overcome the temptation to lust? We begin by developing a proper relationship with our Heavenly Father and choosing to serve others. And we engage in daily religious behaviors, including prayer and scripture study, which invite the Holy Ghost into our lives. Ultimately, the secret ingredient is Christlike love—pure, sincere, honest love, with a desire to build the kingdom of God and to keep an eye single to His glory. That love is possible only when we have the companionship of the Holy Ghost.

Removing lust requires heartfelt prayer where we ask God to remove those feelings and provide, in their place, charitable love (see Moroni 7:48). This is made possible, as all such repentance is, through the grace

of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.⁷ Because of Him, we can learn to love the way that He and our Heavenly Father love us.

When we continually focus on our Heavenly Father, when we live according to the first and second great commandments—to love God and our neighbors as ourselves (see Matthew 22:36–39)—and when we do all that we can to live as He has taught, pure and honest intentions influence our lives with greater and greater intensity. As we unite our will with the will of the Father, the temptations and effects of lust diminish, replaced with the pure love of Christ. Then we are filled with a divine love that replaces the base desires of this world with the beauty of building the kingdom of God. ■

NOTES

1. See Dallin H. Oaks, “Joy and Mercy,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1991, 75; and Thomas S. Monson, “Finishers Wanted,” *Ensign*, July 1972, 69.
2. For just a few examples, see Doctrine and Covenants 88:121; Spencer W. Kimball, “President Kimball Speaks Out on Morality,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 94–98; Neal A. Maxwell, “The Seventh Commandment: A Shield,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2001, 78–80; Russell M. Nelson, “Where Is Wisdom?” *Ensign*, Nov. 1992, 6–8. For more scriptural warnings against lust, review the following topics in the Guide to the Scriptures: Adultery; Carnal; Chastity; Covet; Fornication; Homosexuality; Lust; Sensual; Sensuality; Sexual Immorality.
3. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Place No More for the Enemy of My Soul,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2010, 44–45.
4. For more on this topic, see Dallin H. Oaks, “Recovering from the Trap of Pornography,” *Ensign*, Oct. 2015, 32; *Liahona*, Oct. 2015, 50.
5. Richard G. Scott, “Making the Right Choices,” *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 38.
6. Dallin H. Oaks, “Desire,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2011, 42.
7. See, for example, D. Todd Christofferson, “The Divine Gift of Repentance,” *Ensign or Liahona*, Nov. 2011, 38–41.

FIVE SUGGESTIONS FOR A PURE LIFE

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland gives five suggestions for how to regain and maintain a pure life:

1. Separate yourself from people, materials, and circumstances that will harm you.
2. Seek help.
3. Develop and exercise self-control to eliminate bad influences.
4. Replace lewd thoughts with hopeful images and joyful memories.
5. Cultivate and be where the Spirit of the Lord is.

From “Place No More for the Enemy of My Soul,” *Ensign or Liahona*, May 2010, 44–46.

