

Flirt or Flee

Under Pressure: Pt.3

Well, for the past few weeks we have been talking about the incredible concept of margin. Because we live in a culture that encourages us to push everything in life to the limit until there is no more margin. And where there is no margin there is stress and anxiety and no emotional headroom and our relationships suffer and we suffer. We were not designed to live our lives constantly under pressure. And so when there's no margin, it can be very painful.

Margin is the space between where we *could* be and where we *ought* to be. So margin is having money left over at the end of the month. Margin is having the time to do the things that you know are the most important. If you have margin in your life emotionally it means you can experience *stressful events* without being *stressed out*. But when all the margin is squeezed out, life can be miserable.

And today, I want to talk about what is maybe the most important topic within this series. I want to talk about developing and maintaining moral margin. And when I talk about moral margin, I'm talking primarily about morality as it relates to our sexuality.

So today I want to talk a little bit about what our culture encourages us to do sexually and morally and at the same time see what God would have us do in that area. And I want to start with something that we've said at every stage of this series, obvious as it may be, but *everybody* has moral limits. Everybody has limits, especially as it relates to sexuality.

And, here's the interesting thing, as we begin this discussion; everybody would agree with me that there are limits morally. No matter how progressive, out on the edge a person may be, even they, if you pushed them hard enough would say, "Well, now *that* shouldn't be allowed." See, the question isn't "are there limits?" - everyone agrees that there are. The question is "*Where* are the limits? Where should the limits be? What is the best line to draw as we limit ourselves morally and sexually?"

The limits are there, the question we have to ask ourselves - and it's the same question we've asked over and over in this series - is "Will we adopt the limits and standards that our culture *pushes* us to, or will we step back from that line and allow ourselves to be governed by limits that our Heavenly Father *leads* us to?" Each week we've said that, as we follow God, He's going to lead us to a life of margin and that is especially true in the area of our morality. We get to choose...but we all will live with limits.

Now, the thing that makes this so confusing, and yet makes this message so necessary, is that our culture constantly sends us two competing messages. Every single day of our lives, we're sent two messages. Give me your remote and let me flip around and I will find you examples of both of these messages just about any time of day.

One message is, go as far as you can possibly go. Take it to the limit morally. Experience as many things as you can, don't miss out on anything, look at everything you can look at, go as far as you can go. But at the *same time*, our culture also tells us that if you cross certain lines – and the lines are always shifting - you're going to get your hands slapped. You're going to get canceled. I thank God for the #MeToo movement. I think it is God's judgement on sexual sin and exploitation coming home to roost. But it's the direct result of the mixed messaging.

Go as far as you can go, but if you cross certain lines, you're going to get sued. Go as far as you can go, but if you cross certain lines, you're going to lose your job. Go as far as you can go, but if you cross certain lines, we're going to put you on the talk shows and the gossip rags and talk about how disgusting and morally reprehensible you are.

You see how it works? On the one hand, culture baits us to the very edge. And yet at the same time, if we cross certain lines, culture chastises us and punishes us. It's like, we're constantly aware of the dangers of teen pregnancies and nobody thinks that's a good idea for High Schoolers to be having babies. But what do we do? We market everything to teenagers with a sexual hook. It's like we bait them sexually and then when a girl shows up pregnant, we're like "*Tisk*, you should have known better." It's a mixed message.

Or you hear about a guy who's abusive in a dating relationship or forces a girlfriend to go so far, and we say, "What a horrible person." But at the same time, he grew up in a society that constantly baits him in that direction. Baits him with images and stories and expectations of how a woman is supposed to treat him or what a woman is suppose to do on a date. Is he responsible for his actions? Yeah. Absolutely. Understanding is not excusing. But you have to understand that he grew up in a society where they're being baited to the very edge morally, and then when they go over the line, it's like, "Well how could you ever get that idea!?"

In our society, we still have negative attitudes towards men who run around or are unfaithful to their wives. But at the same time, men live in a culture where they're constantly baited to the edge of sexual boundaries. So we live in this world amidst a constant barrage of mixed messages. Go as far as you can go...but don't get pregnant! Go as far as you can go...but don't break the law! Go as far as you can go...but don't mistreat her! Go as far as you can go...but don't get addicted! That's the culture. That's the *tension* that all of us live with morally.

And then, to make matters worse, all of us are wired in a way that we want know where the limit is so we can live as close to line as we can. We operate that way in every facet of our lives. If you're driving down the highway and the speed limit is 65, you don't drive 55. You go right to the line. If you're like me, you've heard that cops don't ticket under 10 mph over so you set the cruise on 74. We have some police officers that attend the church, so that's just a *hypothetical* illustration. But isn't that the temptation?

In every facet of life, isn't the question "Show me where the line is, so I can live *as close* to the line as I can." If you have a curfew and you have to be home at midnight, you don't shoot for 11:00, you time it so you get there right at midnight or maybe just a few

minutes beyond. If you're counting calories, you don't waste them, right? You're going to eat right up to the line, maybe a little over. That's the temptation. Wherever the line is, our tendency is to go right up to it and *live* there.

Here's the problem; in terms of the speed limit, if you go over it 5-10 mph, no huge consequence. In terms of your curfew, if you're a few minutes late getting home, no big consequence. If you go over a few calories on your diet, no big consequence. You go over a few dollars over your budget, no huge consequence. But you cross certain lines *morally* and you pay the rest of your life in some cases. You cross certain lines *morally* and kids grow up without a dad in the home. You cross certain lines *morally* and you lose your job. You cross certain lines *morally* and you lose your self-esteem and your reputation.

And society says, "Come on, come on, get as much as you can, do as much as you can!" And we live on the edge. But the problem is, with no margin – with no room for error – the slightest mistake – one bad night, one little temptation where you didn't say "no" – one little thing can make all the difference in the world.

And so your Heavenly Father, because He loves you and because He loves me says, “You know what, you already know this from common sense, but I want you to have moral margin. I don’t want you to live on the line. Because when you live on the line, there’s no room for error and making a mistake morally can cost you for the rest of your life. It can leave a scar that you will bear for the rest of your life. You could lose what you value most in life because you were living on the line to begin with and then you went just a little bit too far.” If you are a follower of God, if you are a Christ follower, then it would make sense that someone who loves you is going to call you back from the line to live a life of moral margin.

So if you were God and you were going to inspire someone to write on this topic, what would *you* inspire them to say? "Go for it? Have a good time? Wait till you're ready? Drink responsibly and have sex responsibly?" If you were going to give the world a message as it relates to sexuality and sex, what do you think God would say? What do you think God, who has invited *you*, think about this, the God of the Universe that wants such an intimate relationship with you that He has invited you to call Him “Father”. What would a father who has your best interest in mind say about this subject?

2000 years ago, which is amazing when we look at the complexity of this text, 2000 years ago, the Apostle Paul, who was planting little churches all around the Mediterranean Basin, writes to a church in Corinth. He'd already been there visiting, in fact he'd been there a couple times maybe, so he's taught everything that we're about to read and then he writes them a letter to remind them of what he taught when he was actually with them.

And here's what he says, **1 Corinthians 6:18**, "*Flee from sexual immorality.*" The Greek word for “flee” is “*pheugo*”, let’s all say that, it’s kind of cool. *Phuego*. It’s “flee!” Now, my Spanish speakers know that *fuego* means “fire”. So the Greek and the Spanish make a good pairing when it comes to our topic this morning. When it comes to sexual boundaries, when you see the flames...when you see the *fuego*, it’s time to *pheugo*!

“Flee from sexual immorality.” And before you roll your eyes, come on, this is exactly what every husband wants his wife to do. This is what every wife wants her husband to do. This is what every fiancé wants their fiancée to do. This is what every big brother wants his little sister to do. This is what everyone who cares about someone, and loves someone, wants them to do. That when it comes to sexuality, they want them to at least be very, very, very careful, and there are some things you want them to *flee* from.

But we are in a culture, and we are in a world that sets us up not to flee from, but to flirt with. And again we become hypocrites, and again we allow ourselves to be baited to the very edge of disaster then we step off and we feel shame. Or other people step off and we condemn them.

And so the Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says “Look, look, I'm not a prude, I'm not against sex.” I mean, come on, Christians believe God *created* sex, I could give you a whole theology of sex that would blow your mind. It's not that we think sex is bad. Just the opposite. When I was in that Hollywood museum last week I got to see one of the four pairs of Dorothy's ruby red slippers in all the world. But did I get to try them on? No! They were behind glass, there was a security guard sitting right there – boundaries - they put margin between me and those shoes. Because they were cheap? Of course not; because they were *incredibly valuable*.

Your sexuality is an incredibly valuable part of who you are. And God has given us this extraordinary, extraordinary gift, but with this extraordinary gift, He gave us guidelines and that's why we're talking about it. And the Apostle Paul has this insight that is *mind blowing* not because it's so unusual - because we immediately latch onto it - what's so mind blowing about it is that he knew this 2000 years ago.

And here's what he says, (v.18) “*Flee from sexual immorality! All other sins...*” And Paul immediately puts sexual sin in a category all of its own. That it is *uniquely* - he knew this - it is uniquely damaging. It's possible to fully recover financially. It's possible to fully recover academically. It's possible to fully recover from physical burnout. But when it comes to sexual sin, it's *not* the case. Forgiven? Absolutely. Fully escape the consequences? Never. The damage is done. And often times - come on you know this - often times it's generational damage. It undermines *future* intimacy. It impacts *future* relationships. It has a way of continuing to resurface in area after area, after area.

And then there's this - in case you're pushing back, “Oh, the church just overemphasizes sex.” – I know, I know, but come on let's be honest, sexual sin - and I'm going to define it just a second - but sexual sin will make you a liar and a secret keeper for life, unlike anything else. You'll admit your past bankruptcy, you'll admit, “Yeah when I was in my roaring 20's I got a DUI, just wanna get that out on the table.” You'll admit all kinds of things...sexual sin will make you a liar and secret keeper for life.

And so the Apostle Paul - it's amazing he knew this, 2,000 years ago - he said, "Look, this is not unforgivable. This has *nothing* to do with God accepting you and loving you. I'm just telling you the *consequences* of sin in this particular arena are different than every...single...other...area."

And you know what? You know that and I know that, and we don't have to look far to understand that, that somehow we're all able to move on beyond just about anything else, but things that had happened *to* a person sexually or that a person *participates* in sexually, for some reason, it follows us and follows them around, oftentimes, their whole life.

And again, it's not a forgiveness issue, it's the *nature* of sexuality. Here's what he says, (v.18), "*Flee from sexual immorality, all other sins a person commits are outside the body but the person who sins sexually.*" And I want to come back to that in a minute, "...sins against their own body."

Now, what does "sin sexually" even mean? If you're new to church or don't like church or somebody's making you watch this, this is really, really important. "Sin sexually", what does that mean? In the New Testament, the New Testament is the part of the Bible that records what *Jesus* taught, the part that the *followers* of Jesus wrote after He left this earth.

In the first few books, Jesus lays out a whole new perspective on God's law. Basically, sin is anything that goes against God's law. And in the Old Testament part of the Bible there were *a lot* of laws.

But somebody once asked Jesus what was the most important law and he said two things. That if you do these two things, you will fulfill *all* the rest of the law. And the first one was to love God with all your heart and soul and strength and mind. And so there are ways to sin against God that violate loving Him. We call those things "idolatry" – putting something else besides God in God's place. That's sin.

But then Jesus said there was a second aspect to the law and that was to love your neighbor as yourself. So Jesus said you keep those two laws – love God, love one another – and you will fulfill the whole law. You won't sin. But it's this second law that gives us the kind of sin we're talking about today. Not idolatry particularly, although our sexuality can certainly become an idol. But because sex is a "one another" activity, when it goes rogue, it become a "one another" sin.

And so in the New Testament, this aspect of sin is always defined by hurting, stealing from or dishonoring another person. That's a biblical definition of sin. It's hurting, stealing from, or dishonoring another person. That anytime I put me before you to your detriment, that's a sin. Anytime you put you before me to *my* detriment, that's a sin. So the problem with sexual sin is not that God is so holy that He clutches His pearls and says, "Oh that's so gross, I'm so scandalized!" No, God doesn't blush. He's all seeing and all knowing. No, the problem is when God sees one person take from another person, defraud another person, dishonor another person, steal from another person, hurts another person...*that's* considered sin and here's why.

Because every single person you ever have the potential to hurt is loved by God. And see, just like, as a father, you cannot be okay with me if you mistreat one of my children...see, you can't jack with one of my kids and just sit there on Sunday singing worship songs like everything is fine. If you mistreat one of my children, *you and I* have an issue. Likewise, anytime you steal from, hurt, or take from another person, you have offended your Heavenly Father...not because He has such a low tolerance for pain, but because He *so loves* the person you offended or hurt or stole from.

And so for Christians, our standard of living is what we call the "platinum rule". You've probably heard of the "golden rule" - "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." That's a good rule. But this is *higher* than gold. The platinum rule is, "I am to treat you the way God through Christ has treated me." And if you're a Christian, you're to treat me and the people around you the way that God through Christ has treated you.

So sexual sin is anytime you do something to potentially hurt another person - again, not because God is embarrassed, but because God loves the people *you* potentially hurt and God loves *you*. And God doesn't want you to hurt you or anybody else.

And here's the thing, come on. When you take this extraordinary gift that was designed for an exclusive, one of a kind, covenant relationship with another person, and divvy it up among a whole bunch of other relationships, you not only hurt those people, but you hurt yourself. When you take *from* someone something that was intended for or promised to someone *else*, you sin against that person. That's what sexual sin is.

Again, it has nothing to do with God having something against sex. It has everything - and please don't miss this - it has everything to do with how much God *loves* you and *honors* you and *cherishes* you...and honors and loves and cherishes the person beside you, and the person behind you, and the people that you work with and do life with.

That's why this is a big deal, that's why it's a big deal to God because the *consequence* of sexual sin is so different and God loves you too much to keep His mouth shut. And He says this, "...*Whoever sins sexually actually sins against their own body.*" Paul says, "Come on, when you sin sexually, not only do you hurt or take from another person, you hurt *yourself*, you betray yourself, you undermine your own potential for future *intimacy.*" So Paul says, "This isn't a category of one, this is a whole different thing, this is precious, it's fragile, it's powerful and you need to guard it."

And then as Paul is writing, it's like he's getting ready to send this to the church in Corinth and then he thinks, "You know what, maybe they forgot." Because he had already been there and told them all this stuff. "Maybe they forgot. Maybe some people arrived late, maybe there are some people who are going get this letter that weren't there when I was originally teaching this stuff. Maybe they don't know what I know that they need to know to know what a big deal this is."

And so he says this, (v.19) "*Do you not know?...*" In other words, there's something you may not know that if you knew it would impact your behavior. "Do you not know?" There's something that perhaps no one ever told you or no one ever explained in such a way that it made any sense to you. In other words, there may be something that if you knew it, it might impact the way you manage and handled your sexuality.

And again, what's so powerful is, this is not another consequence, this isn't about consequence avoidance, he's covered that. There is a much *grand*er reason that you should flee sexual immorality. And here's what he says, and he's speaking to Christians, so if you are not a Christian, you're not accountable for any of this but it's kind of fascinating if you ever become a Christian, this may become important. Paul says, (v.19a) "*Do you not know that your body,*" - your physical body - "*is a temple...*" - Your bodies, every single person's body is a temple - "*...of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?*"

And now Paul - this is so brilliant - he shifts the conversation away from consequence to identity. Essentially he's saying this, "Do you not know? Do you not know who you *are*? Do you not know *what* you are? You are a temple." And most of us go, "So what? What's a temple even?" Most of us the only time we've been in a temple was a tourist attraction somewhere, right?

And plus temples are sacred and in our culture *nothing* is sacred. To which Paul would say, “Aah, but *you* are.” In fact, you are more sacred than the most sacred site anywhere on the planet because the Holy Spirit of God dwells in you. You *are* - whether you want to be or not, whether you knew it or not - you are a sacred **image** bearer. You are fine and you are fine-tuned for a relationship with God and a relationship with others.

That you didn't just *happen*. You were *designed*. You were designed and fine-tuned for intimacy with one another person. You're no mere mammal and neither is the person that you live with, and neither are the people that you work with, and neither are the people that you are sitting beside. That God's Spirit resides in you. And you know why that's a big deal? Because the value of a **container** is determined by what it **contains**.

See, if you stole my wallet, I wouldn't be concerned about my wallet. But I would be concerned about...what? What's *in* my wallet. How many of you have ever had to replace credit cards and driver's license? Yikes! In other words, if somebody robbed me and said, “I want your wallet but you can keep everything in it.” It's like, “Not a problem, take my wallet and you have a nice evening.” My wallet isn't valuable it's what's *in* it, and this is true of everything. It's what a container contains that makes it valuable.

And your Heavenly Father says, “You contain the image of God.” You are extraordinarily, extraordinarily valuable and so is every single person you've ever come eyeball-to-eyeball with. Paul says this, (v.19b) “*You are not your own...*” To which we say, “Yes I am! I'm an adult, I'm a senior in high school, I'm a free agent, it's my body I can do whatever I want to.” Paul says, “No, no, you're not you own.” And be *glad* you're not your own because ownership determines value as well. The thing that makes a container valuable is what it contains but ownership determines value as well.

I was in the Guitar Center up north on Anderson Lane the week before last. They have a wall of Fender Stratocaster guitars that range in price from \$700 (on sale) to \$1,500. One of the guys in the worship band plays a Fender Strat; classic guitar. You can even buy used guitars at the store and save a buck or two. But, I saw one used Strat at Guitar Center – and I mean beat-up level used - that cost *more* than a new one. Much more! In fact, it's purchase price was \$623,500! Here I took a picture of it...well, of course! “Anthony, you didn't tell us it was Stevie Ray Vaughn's own guitar. Duh!” That guitar is worth so much more than the others for one very simple reason...because of who owned it.

And do you know what Paul is saying? This is so powerful, “That you are owned by your Father in heaven, which gives you extraordinary, extraordinary value.” (V.20a) “*You are not on your own, you were bought with a price.*” How much? Hey the value of a thing is determined by what it'll bring. You can put any kind of price tag on anything you want, but the value of a thing is determined by what someone is willing to pay for it. And Paul said that the essence of the Gospel is, that when God sent His son into this world to die for your sins, that meant *that's* how valuable you are to God.

“Therefore,” he says, “Therefore, in light of the selfishness of sexual sin, in light of your extraordinary value and your fine-tuned potential for intimacy, in light of all that,” he says, “Therefore...” here's the application, (v.20b) “*Therefore honor God with your body.*” Honor God with your body. This is the New Testament sexual ethic, “Honor God with your body.” Honor God with your body and honor the other bodies around you because they are so valuable to your Father in Heaven.

That's why this is a big deal. It's not just consequences, we know about the consequences; it's because those of us who believe there's a God in heaven believe *every single person* bears the image of God and deserves our *utmost* respect. Not because of their behavior but because of whose image they bear.

Now if you're listening to this going, “Oh I didn't know that. I just thought Christians were embarrassed about sex.” That's why Paul said, “Do you not know?” because you did not know and now you know. And knowing is half the battle – G.I Joe! What if you saw every person around you that way? What if you saw *in them* what Paul says is in them? It would impact the way that you treat them.

But fleeing immorality requires margin. This doesn't just happen, because again everything in culture mitigates against us. So here's what I want to do for the next few minutes - just to bother you - I want to make some suggestions as it relates to moral margin. How to protect your fidelity if you're in a relationship or you want to be in a relationship or maybe you just got out of a relationship.

I want to talk about how to do this, but here's what I want to say ahead of time, if you *hate* my suggestions, if you think these suggestions are so narrow-minded and “Anthony you're *so old*”, or if you think they're just from some other world or some other generation that's okay, you can ignore the next few minutes. All I ask is this, that when I'm done - and when you're done being upset with me and frustrated with me - that you sit down and establish some boundaries in this area of your life. Ahead of time – not just in the moment of passion.

So here's some suggestions. The first one is, **Talk about it**. If you're married or you're engaged or you're dating somebody and it's a serious relationship, you need to talk about this. And here's what I mean. You need to talk about what you're comfortable with as it relates to your fiancé, your husband, your wife...your partner's relationship with other men and with other women. You need to decide *together*. You need to know what she thinks and she needs to know what you think. You need to know what he thinks and he needs to know what you think.

That you should decide *together* what is appropriate behavior in the office. What is appropriate behavior in terms of the workaday world and friends, you just need to talk about it. You should, and I feel strongly about this, that you should avoid traveling or eating alone with potentially problematic people. And you say who are the problematic people? You *know*...you already know! I don't have to define them for you, you know who the potentially problematic people are. It's because when you get to the office, you can go left or right and you always go left 'cause he's right there on the left, or she's usually in the break room - that's a problematic person.

You know who the problematic people are and so you need to set some moral boundaries. And the boundary is not, "Don't have sex with my co-worker." No, that's called your wedding vow! That's not a boundary, because there's no margin between you and the edge of the cliff. You need to decide as a matter of conscience, "These are the moral boundaries that we are comfortable with." And maybe some of those boundaries are person specific.

And maybe some of them are just gender specific. And I will be the first to admit that it is tricky. Back in the 50's, the Billy Graham Rule came to be named for the famous evangelist's policy of not traveling, eating or meeting alone with any woman who wasn't his wife. Of course, back in the 50's the glass ceiling for women was made out of *concrete*. Women could barely rise out of the secretarial pool. That's not the case today and thank God for it. God did not invent the Patriarchy, human sin did.

All of us in positions of authority - including me - need to make sure that these kinds of boundaries don't impede upward mobility for anybody, but especially women in our organizations. I am very pro women in ministry. Which means I have and will meet with women about ministry matters. But be smart about it. It doesn't have to be over dinner. It certainly doesn't have to be a get-away retreat. But you set some guidelines that are acceptable to you and your spouse.

And let me just add; ladies, this is not your fault. They used to foist all of this on the “female temptress”. That is BS. The workplace mess is our fault. Men. I mean, when is the last time you heard about a woman losing her job or being sued because she kept sexually harassing men? I'm sure it's happened. But I can't think of any. When's the last time you've heard about a *man*...? Are you kidding? I was in Hollywood last week, I kept looking down at the sidewalk and saying, “I can't believe they haven't chiseled out *his* star!”

Adam and Eve both sin, but men are responsible for most of *these* particular problems. Ladies, this has nothing, nothing, nothing to do with saying something negative about women. It's just the reality of what happens when you throw people into intimate environments with no protective boundaries. That's why we have a rule at the church...you should know about this. This is *my* rule. We're not a large church, we don't have the luxury of a large mixed-gender counseling staff. And yet, people need spiritual advice, people need godly counsel, that's part of my job description.

And so when a woman wants to meet with me about a relationship issue, I'll meet with her...*once*. The next time, her spouse or partner joins us, or I refer her to a professional counselor. I mean, I'm trained as a

pastor not a therapist anyway – I don't really do *any* longterm counseling. Now, ladies if you want to come in and discuss the historical ramifications of the theology of the Trinity, come one in! We can sit in my library with the door open and I will read you some Athanasius.

But if it's got to be close the door and talk about what's going on in your personal life...*once*. I'm sorry, that's just the moral boundary I have set in place. Why, because meeting twice is sin? No! But it's *margin*. It's a boundary maker way, way, away from the edge of the cliff. And if you knew how many pastors *I know* whose career-ending affairs started in a counseling session...you would say, “Thank you, pastor, for setting some moral margin in your life and in our church.”

The point is simply this, we know the environments that create intimacy between people. I don't have to explain that to you, you know that. If you're in a committed relationship, and especially if you're married, you should talk to your spouse, you should talk to your fiancée about the problematic people, and you should have this discussion and you should establish boundaries.

Now, I realize sometimes life comes at your fast and maybe there's a situation that requires a slight adjustment – a one off – to the boundary. That's ok, that's why there's margin built in, you see? But when those things happen, that leads into the second thing I suggest, which is you **Tell them about it**. Tell him about it, tell her about it. Always. You don't ever need to keep a secret in an important relationship and when you find yourself thinking about keeping a secret that should set off your conscience.

Any time there's something in you that hesitates being honest about your relationship with another person, that should set off red flags in your heart, your mind. You haven't done *anything* wrong, you haven't done anything bad, but there's a tingle in your conscience. You need to develop the habit of talking about the uncomfortable things. Let me brag on my wife for a minute, because she is really good at this.

Deanna is my greatest ally in my quest for moral margin. I tell her when I'm feeling vulnerable; she knows my weak spots. When I see someone that catches my eye I tell her. “Really?” Yep, it creates an instant accountability and by getting it out into the light it withers any hold that it might have on me in secret.

Let me give you a recent real world example...so we can *all* feel uncomfortable! On my flight out to LA last week, I was very fortunate and my aisle seat had an empty seat in between me and the window seat. Had myself a little margin! And in the window seat sat an attractive young woman with a particular feature that caught my attention. “What feature would that be, Pastor?” That is none of your business! And I had three hours to just sit there.

And a thought went through my head; “I'm going to have to tell Deanna about this.” And then another thought quickly followed, “Don't do that. You haven't done anything wrong. You don't want her to think you're a perv. I mean my goodness, how embarrassing to be a 50 year old man who notices that sort of thing. My God, you're a pastor for crying out loud. You're basically a eunuch.” Well, I am as God made me, sir. But I didn't tell her right away – I met my sister in baggage claim and I wasn't going to say it in front of her!

But funny thing, I would find myself thinking about this woman. Not fixated, not gross. But we had a pleasant chat...about how much she enjoyed going to Vegas! Red flags, red flags. So when I got the chance, I just mentioned it to Deanna. How was your flight? “Well, now that you mention it...!” And you know what? Instantly dissipated. Didn't give it another thought. In fact, when I was writing this illustration, I had to *really* think, “Hmmm, what *was* it that got my attention.” No, that is a lie.

But listen, fantasy is like a mushroom; it grows best in darkness. So expose it to the light. If you don't have that kind of vulnerable and open relationship with your spouse, please get there. You may have to go to counseling to get there – there may be some work involved up front - but it is so worth it. Involve your spouse.

And if you're not there yet – and that does not happen over night, we've put in 27 years of vulnerability to get to this point, and we're *still* working on it – here's the third suggestion, **tell somebody**. When you feel your heart and your desire drifting toward a specific person that's really an out-of-bounds person, you need to tell somebody. You may not want to tell your husband or your wife initially – ok, get a girlfriend, ladies; get a bro, guys - but you've got to tell somebody. And again here's why; because oftentimes, speaking of it diffuses it. Speaking of it diffuses it, and secrets are never healthy to carry around. It's very hard to maintain moral boundaries without accountability.

So what is the wise thing to do to set some moral margins and protect the most important relationship in my life? And one more issue, by the way, and that of course is social media. Come on, when it comes to affairs, and illicit relationships, and emotional involvement, social media is a gateway drug.

You know that, right? In fact, in some ways, social media is *worse* than actually meeting with someone privately for dinner or for coffee, because with social media - you know how this goes - you just begin to idealize that person because you're only getting the highlight reels. Then you begin to fantasize about that person, then you begin to romanticize the relationship, and you haven't even had any kind of physical contact. But by the time you do, everything is so amped up, everything is so unrealistic.

So all of those areas where you need to have boundaries - moral margin . If you are married, again or in a significant relationship, you need to talk about all of this because the point of it is this, the point of moral margin is to light up our consciences before we hurt others or ourselves. Those rumble strips along the edge of the highway – you've drifted onto those - they don't put those on the edge of the embankment. It's too late by then. No, they put them several feet away...because that's margin. Moral margin should light up our conscience; in other words, it should make us sensitive to something - not because we've *done* something - but because we are *drifting* in a potentially troublesome direction.

Now, if all of this seems so extreme, or maybe this is your first time, you haven't been to church in a long time, and you're going, "Wow, I didn't know they talked about this kind of stuff in church! I didn't fall asleep one time today." But if this seems *so* extreme, I just want you to remember this, come on, you're adult, you know this. Dangerous environments call for serious measures.

You say, "Well, Anthony, is it really all that dangerous?" Let me ask you a question then I'm done. Married couples, engaged couples, real quick, I just want to ask you. What in our culture equips you and supports you when it comes to remaining faithful? What in our culture equips you to remain faithful and backs up your decision to remain faithful? Advertising? No. Media? No. Television? No. Books? No. Unless you're reading Christian romance novels...and you're not!

What in our culture? Where in our culture do you feel the wind in your sails to support you, keeping your eyes on the road and right between the guardrails of fidelity? Perhaps the only place you're hearing the kind of stuff we're talking about today is church. Which means outside of church, it is a dangerous world you live in if you are committed to fidelity.

Singles, same question. Who and what? Who and what encourages you and equips you to live responsibly when it comes to your sexuality? Where in society are there people saying, "I just want to breath life into you, I want to speak truth to you, I want to make sure that if you ever get married you're going to be so equipped..." Who's doing that for you? Nobody. It's the opposite, other than perhaps the church – and we don't talk about it here all that often.

Who else is doing that? That's why I say, it's a dangerous environment, it requires serious measures. And come on, do you think that you'll look back in five years and regret establishing moral margin around your fidelity? Do you think five years from now you'll look back and go, "Oh, those stupid boundaries, I got into so much trouble, I have so many regrets..." No. If you establish margin now, five years later you'll look back and think it's one of the best decisions you ever made. So you gotta decide; Flee or Flirt. Flee honors God. Flee honors you. Flee honors your kids, your future kids, your grand kids, and flee honors others, but flee requires intentional decision making.

So we just set some boundaries that ding your conscience while you're still in the safety zone. If you don't like these – come up with some that work for you. But do it together. Think about it. Talk about it. Do something about it. Will you be intentional, proactive, in order to continue to be at a place where God can use you and bless you and protect you from those things that would tear your life apart?

“Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but the person who sins sexually sins against their own body.”

Let's pray...