

Hot Potato, Hot Potato

Strengthening Your Purity – Flirting with Fire – Proverbs 7

It seems like kids have all the fun.

Sometimes I wish I was able to go back to being a kid. It seems like life would be a lot less stressful and busy. Kids get tired at night because they played so hard during the day. Sounds like a good thing.

What was a favorite childhood game that you played?

The toy industry comes out with new games every Christmas and convinces you that your child needs the game. A walk down the game aisle will show that there are a lot of games out there, but many of them are remakes of previous games. It makes me wonder how much money I would have made if I had just patented some of the games we played back in the day.

I am sure there would have been a safety recall for one game, Hot Potato. I could think of many different fun ways to play it, but it would not be safe. I do think there is a water balloon version which works well. The idea of the game was to continue to pass around a ball or bean bag while music played. The item was imagined to be hot and the person holding the “hot potato” when the music stopped was out. The same idea is used in word games, charades, and others. The person holding the “Hot Potato” lost. Eventually, all but one person would get burned.

It reminds me of the old axiom, “If you play with fire, you will get burned”; and many of us play hot potato with our sexual purity.

The father in Proverbs seven is explaining this principle to his son so as to strengthen his son’s sexual purity. He has first encouraged his son to become strong in the word, then learn life’s lesson from others, and then commit to do righteousness. Now this father is explaining the principle of “hot potato”; if you play with fire long enough you are going to be burned.

Why is flirting with someone other than your spouse a dangerous activity?

Back one chapter in Proverbs 6:25-29, the author is asking rhetorical questions about playing with fire. The conclusion is that a man who flirts with a woman who is not his wife will be punished; he will be burned.

Fire can do intense damage. It can burn the nerve endings so that there is no feeling. It can leave scars or cause disfigurement. Just one touch can have a lasting effect, but whatever the case, when we play with fire we will be burned and the more we play with it the more intense and lasting the damage will be. What are some of the consequences to flirting with fire or sexual immorality?

“Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her capture you with her eyelids. For on account of a harlot one is reduced to a loaf of bread, and an adulteress hunts for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned? Or can a man walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched? So is the one who goes in to his neighbor’s wife; whoever touches her will not go unpunished.”

Proverbs 6:25-29

The word used for *passing* in verse eight is the Hebrew *‘abar*, which means “to cross over”.

The father in Proverbs takes the opportunity to explain to his son that he should not play with fire. He helps his son see what it means to flirt with fire. Take a look at verse eight.

Remember that we are watching a man who has not made the commitment to do right. This man is “passing through the street near her corner, and he takes the way to her house.” It is a small description, but as we have seen in previous studies the Hebrew text is full of meaning.

The action word used here, *passing*, has the understanding of crossing over. This young man did not just haphazardly walked past this woman’s house, but intentionally changed his direction to cross over and meet this woman. We cannot begin to understand his motivations, but we know that he did not have a mind to do right. Something caught his eye and he changed directions to get closer.

Are you guilty of this same action? Have you ever changed where you were going or what you were doing so that you could flirt with fire? Men, have you ever changed positions to get a “better” look at a woman? Women, have you ever shared a little more intimately with a listening male?

Why are actions like the above dangerous to our sexual purity?

That is not all this man did. He did cross over to get a closer look, but he also “takes” the way to her house. The Hebrew word and construction help us to see this is a regular thing. This man changes his direction for this woman on a regular basis. It may have been “innocent” at first as they enjoyed conversation. He may walk by her house to talk and listen because later on we see her husband takes business trips. She is lonely and needs a listening ear. He is uncommitted and does not sense the danger.

They are both playing with fire and they will be burned.

If it were simply this verse and we did not have the rest of the story it would not seem like he was acting all that foolish. It would not seem like he was playing with fire. He is just going by a woman’s house on a regular basis to visit. People do this all the time. A married man regularly treats his secretary out to a business lunch for the two of them. A woman gets the neighbor to help out continually with little things in the house because her husband is gone a lot. There may be the best motives in mind, but the enemy has a way of turning good motives into bad passions.

Have you ever done something for someone that was misinterpreted as a flirtatious act? How did you respond?

Just to set the record straight, this father is explaining to his son the consistency of the young man’s actions. This young man is consistently playing with fire. He is regularly flirting. This is much different than the person who makes the mistake once and then steps away.

There is an interesting thing about fire. I have a fire pit at my house and sometimes we can get the fire roaring pretty well. I could stick my hand in the fire and be burned; there is no doubt about that. I could also stand close to the fire and still be burned even though I am not touching the fire. It is a more gradual burning, but there is still the danger. Therefore, I continue to back up until the sense of being burned is gone.

Imagine if we took that same perspective with sexual purity. Rather than asking "how close can I get before I am burned?", we should be asking "how far away do I stand in order to be safe?" This perspective would strengthen our sexual purity and keep us from being burned.

The best way to win at this game of Hot Potato is not to play.

What do you need to do in response to this lesson?

