

Purifying A Polluted Culture

A Bible Study

by Sharon Stults

Just a brief note about how I write Bible studies. It is not my goal to provide you with answers. I will attempt to guide you in certain directions as Holy Spirit leads me, but you must hear from him too especially on these complex morality issues. My purpose is to challenge you with questions so that you will search matters out for yourself. My hope is that this study will also provoke conversations and debates between you and other believers. All of us need to better understand God's wisdom, insight, and instruction on how to live as a Jesus-follower who changes a morally polluted society, not just adapts to it as Lot did.

Case Study One- The Corinthian Church

You'd be hard pressed to find a city more steeped in sexual immorality and perversion than Biblical Corinth. Today it would be like the infamous red-light districts of the Netherlands. The city was an ancient trade center and attracted a variety of people from all over the world including Romans, Greeks, and Jews. At the center of civic life was the worship of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of procreation and pleasure. Thousands of prostitutes, male and female, made themselves available to travelers from all over the world. Corinth became so well known for prostitution that the saying, "She's a Corinthian woman," evolved to describe any woman with loose morals.

Into the heart of this place flowing with the waters of moral corruption marched the apostle Paul one day, under the direction of Holy Spirit. God saw the corruption of Corinth, but he also saw opportunity. By sending Paul there and establishing a church, the gospel could be carried all over the world without Paul ever leaving Corinth. Travelers passing through heard his preaching and his teaching and carried the Truth back to their homelands. In time, the fledgling church Paul started, also began infecting traveling merchants and seamen with the gospel. They then carried it like a virus, all around the world. It was especially important to Paul that the gospel spread by the Corinthian church reflected the true teachings of Christ and not the moral failures of the Corinthian believers.

Read: 1 Corinthians 5 (I suggest reading it in the NLT as this direct translation gives you the full force of Paul's outrage and anger at what was going on in the Corinthian church.

1. What sin was happening in the Corinth church that had Paul so upset? Something that "even pagans do not do."

2. How did Paul feel about the church's response to this sin in their midst?

3. What steps did Paul insist the church take to deal with this problem?

4. What is your response to Paul's instructions? Be honest. It's just you and God working on this study together.

5. How would Paul's instructions for handling sexual immorality in the church roll out in your church? Describe what you think your church's response should look like if a leader or pastor is exposed in an immoral relationship that many members know about?

6. How do you think a situation like this affects a community around a church when the facts become known in that community?
 - a. If the situation is handled the way Paul instructs?
 - b. If the situation is not dealt with but tolerated?

To ponder: One day, my daughter did a load of laundry that came out of the washer dirtier than when it went in. She discovered that her son's pants pockets were filled with dirt, now mud. She rinsed out the mud and re-washed the load then spoke to him about cleaning out his pockets before he put pants in the hamper. I think too many believers are hiding dirt in their own pockets, polluting other believers around them, and then doing tremendous damage to the cause of the kingdom when the dirt comes out in the wash. We as God-followers are going to need to take care of our own dirty laundry I think, before we have the creds to engage with the world about theirs.

For it is time for judgement to begin in the family of God. I Peter 4:17.

Case Study #2- Joseph

Some people drop from hero to zero within minutes or days. Some people experience that more than once. Joseph was one of those people. From favored son who apparently didn't work much, to Egyptian slave. From respected estate manager to accused rapist and prisoner. The dramas, intrigues, and betrayals that God used to propel Joseph to power, I see as a series of tests preparing Joseph for his important role in history. For a great book on this idea check out "[Dreams to Destiny](#)," by Robert Morris. One of the tests God put Joseph through was the purity test. He used the wicked wife of Joseph's boss, Potiphar, to create the test environment. The immoral and wicked standards of our culture confront us today at every turn just as Potiphar's wife relentlessly pursued Joseph. God-followers who publicly resist and expose evil are often lied about on various media platforms and then their livelihoods and families are savaged by the cancel-culture mob, just as Potiphar's wife destroyed Joseph's reputation and life. As King Solomon said, "There is nothing new under the sun."

Read: Genesis 39

1. What was Joseph promoted to in Potiphar's house. Why did Potiphar promote him?
2. What benefits did Potiphar's house reap while Joseph worked there?
3. Rewrite, in your own words, what Joseph said to Potiphar's wife when she first propositioned him?
4. Speculate how Joseph might have felt under the stress of this sexual harassment. Have you ever experienced that personally anywhere? If so, how did you feel when that was happening?

5. Do you think there was anything else Joseph could have done to create a different ending to his time in Potiphar's house?

6. Do you think Joseph knew he was risking his career and reputation when he refused the wife's immoral invitations?

7. How far do you think God-followers need to be willing to go to stand up against immorality? Use Matthew 16:25 to help you reflect on this. Can you think of some modern-day Josephs?

8. What does the end of the chapter say about the relationship between God and Joseph once he landed in prison? Do you think you'd be able to stand on this truth if God landed you in a similar situation with ruined reputation and career? What verses come to your mind that teach this same truth?

To ponder: Sadly, if God-followers are going to start saying a loud "No," to the drek being dumped into our culture from the godless, we better be prepared to suffer for it. Commentator Matthew Henry eloquently expresses the final truth of this chapter, so I leave you with his words. *"Joseph's master believed the accusation. Potiphar, it is likely, chose that prison, because it was the worst; but God designed to open the way to Joseph's honor. Joseph was owned and righted by his God. He was away from all his friends and relations; he had none to help or comfort him; but the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy. Those that have a good conscience in a prison, have a good God there. God gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison; he trusted him to manage the affairs of the prison. A good man will do good wherever he is and will be a blessing even in bonds and banishment. Let us not forget, through Joseph, to look unto Jesus, who suffered being tempted, yet without sin; who was slandered, and persecuted, and imprisoned, but without cause; who by the cross ascended to the throne. May we be enabled to follow the same path in submitting and in suffering, to the same place of glory."*

Case Study #3- Noah

When we think about the worst immorality in our culture, we are also able to think of the millions of righteous, faithful God-followers that live within it, holding back and pushing back the swell of sin that wants to consume us as a nation. Imagine if you were the only righteous person on the entire earth right now. Extract all the other millions of believers from our culture equation and I think you are left with a world as evil as the one Noah lived in. A world so consumed with 24/7 evil thought, speech, and behavior that God decided to destroy it. Imagine the weight of that decision. All the people, creatures of the seas and animals that God individually and uniquely designed, gone. All the wonder of the physical world he designed with such love and care, it's flora and fauna, mountains, and meadows, gone. Imagine just how evil Noah's world had to be for God to destroy it all. In a world uglier than we can understand lived righteous Noah who found grace in the eyes of God. For one hundred years this man preached God's message of salvation probably amid horrific harassment, intimidation, and mocking. No one believed him. No one listened. No one repented. Still, Noah continued to build the ark faithfully, offering people a chance to repent before it was too late.

Read: Genesis 6

1. Write down the specific phrases you find in the chapter that describe the moral condition of Noah's world.
2. How would you compare Noah's world to our current culture? How are they the same? Different?
3. What do you think verses 5-8 mean? What kinds of feelings and thoughts do you think God has about our modern culture?

4. What character qualities do you think Noah possessed that kept him going for so many years on such an unusual project in which only his family supported him?

5. What character qualities do God-followers need today to come out from behind the church walls and start confronting evil in our culture?

6. Noah built a massive boat in a world that had never seen rain. It made no sense at all to the common mind. Do you think there might be some small and grand projects God may ask us to do to demonstrate the greatness of God and man's need of a Savior, an ark?

7. Beyond his family, Noah led no others to faith in God and yet he just kept building and living out his faith in front of a mocking, skeptical world. What do you think the message in that is for you and me?

To ponder: Noah is listed with the hall of faith heroes in Hebrews 11 and is also called a "preacher of righteousness," in 2 Peter 2:5 even though he saw no results from his ministry. Commentator Matthew Poole says this about him. *"The work of building the ark was laborious, costly, tedious, dangerous, and seemingly foolish and ridiculous; especially when all things continued in the same posture and safety for so many scores of years together; whereby Noah, without doubt, was all that while the song of the drunkards, and the sport of the wits of that age. So, it is not strange that this is mentioned as a heroic act of faith."* What heroic acts of faith may God call us to perform to purify our culture or prevent moral pollutants from continuously flowing into our society? Personally, I think it's going to take a lot of Noahs. I'd like to be one. How about you?