



SEXUAL DETOX

A GUIDE FOR THE MARRIED GUY

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INTRODUCTION

It isn't easy being a guy today. Maybe it never has been easy, but today the challenges to guys who want to be holy, who want to honor God with their minds and bodies, seem tougher than ever. You live at a time and in a culture that seems given over to sex. It is all around you and you can hardly avoid its lure.

Everywhere you go today you are faced with temptations and, if you are like most young men, have begun to give in to them. Perhaps you have only just begun looking at pornography or perhaps you've been doing so for many years. Perhaps you are struggling with masturbation, not really wanting to indulge yourself but finding that it's a whole lot tougher to quit than you would have thought. Perhaps you are finding that, more than ever, sex is filling your mind and impacting your heart.

This booklet is intended primarily for young, married men. I want to use this short guide to help you discover God's plan for sex and sexuality. I want to help you track down the lies you have believed about sex and I want to help you replace them with truth that comes straight from God, the one who created sex for us.

PORNIFYING THE MARRIAGE BED

I often thank God that I grew up in the years before the internet was in every home; I'm not sure that I would have handled it very well. It's not like I'm ancient, either, but my thirty-three years do mean that I was born and raised in a pre-internet world. It is difficult to quantify or even qualify how the world has changed since the web tied us all together into this strange and elaborate network of bits and bytes. There is scarcely an area of life that has remain untouched by it. We do not have the old world plus the Internet; we have a whole new world. Even something as flesh and blood as sex has been radically altered in this digital world.

Teenagers in the 90s (when I was growing up) were not a lot different from teens today. We wanted the same things—we just had to work a little bit harder to get some of them. If we wanted to see pornography (and we did, of course), the process usually involved at least two kids working in tandem, one of whom would distract a shop keeper while the other would try to steal a magazine from the rack at the back of the store. He would have to take it from the rack, shove it down his pants and walk out of the store without being spotted. It was dangerous, high stakes work that, if it went wrong, could easily involve a really awkward visit between your parents and the police. Times have changed.

Today, as you know, a guy needs only to turn on his computer and, within two or three clicks of

the mouse, he can have unlimited access to unlimited amounts of pornography. Today it is actually far more difficult to *avoid* pornography than it is to find it. It would be literally impossible for one person to watch all of the pornography being created today; there would not be enough hours in the day or days in the year. Not even close. Needless to say, teens, and teenaged boys in particular, are quick to take advantage of this pornographic feast. Even pre-teen boys are being drawn into the world of porn. From the first awakenings of a boy's sexuality, he is being inundated with pornographic images. These are not simple images of naked women as they may have been a couple of generations ago, but are hard-core images that often extend to what is base and degrading. The sexuality of a whole generation of children is being formed not by talks with their parents, not by reading the kind of book I was given as a young man, but by professional pornographers who will do anything, *anything!*, to fuel the increased desire for increased depravity.

This is the very nature of sin, isn't it? Sin is always progressive in nature. If you give it an inch, it soon seeks to take a mile. Sin is never content, but always seeks and desires *more*.

Have you ever been scared by your sin? Perhaps there was a time that you saw how a particular sin was taking you over. Maybe you had thought you were in control of your sin but suddenly found that, almost in an instant, it had in-

creased to the next level. You were no longer in control—sin was leading the way and you were more and more just along for the ride, obeying the impulses of the flesh. This is a terrifying place to be and I believe everyone has experienced it at one time or another.

I know beyond doubt that many, many young (and middle-aged and old) men can testify to the power of pornography in taking over. The first glimpse of porn may be fleeting—intriguing but short-lived. A naked body is all the eye needs to see and it provides plenty of fuel for a while. But before long the heart craves more. What was once satisfying is now boring; what was once gross is suddenly desirable. Along the way, a person's whole perception of sex is changed. No longer is sex simple intercourse between a man and a woman. Instead it becomes a series of acts, even acts that are in some way uncomfortable or degrading. Pornography teaches that sex is everything *but* intimate person-to-person, body-to-soul contact between willing spouses. And, as they say, life soon imitates "art." Young men enter into marriage with their minds full of pornographic images and their hearts filled with the desire to fulfill pornographic fantasies.

A short time ago I read an article by a woman who considered herself a feminist. She insisted that she enjoyed sleeping with men and thought little of sleeping with a continual succession of men. Yet she shared what for her was a growing concern. More and more, she said, the men she slept with had no real interest in her at all. They simply wanted her to act like a porn star for their benefit. They were using her to do little more than act out their pornography. There was no tenderness, no

desire for shared intimacy, and certainly no love. They simply used her body as a means to a very immediate end. This, she saw, was very quickly becoming the new norm. She was disgusted by it but saw that her feminist worldview gave her no real recourse, no effective means of explaining her disgust, her discomfort. What seemed clear is that a generation of men, drowning in a cesspool of porn, has a new set of expectations for what they want from women. They want women to subdue their own selves in order to act like porn stars. The women walk away used, feeling like little more than prostitutes.

In the bestseller *SuperFreakonomics* Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner spend almost an entire chapter investigating the economics of prostitution. They make many interesting observations, not the least of which is based on comparisons in the relative pricing between sex acts in the past and sex acts today. It seems that the taboo nature of certain acts has always claimed a certain premium. Yet "taboo" is a moving target. What was forbidden in the past, and hence what was expensive, is today so mainstream that the price has fallen substantially. What was once the most expensive act is today among the least expensive. Acts that were once taboo because of their exceedingly intimate or vulgar and degrading nature are now accepted as legitimate forms of sexual expression in any relationship. What would by any other standard be considered "normal" is now too undesirable, too boring. It has been replaced by the invasive, the degrading.

Pornography is inherently violent, inherently unloving. It is a perversion of sexuality, not a true form of it, and one that teaches violence and deg-

radation at the expense of mutual pleasure and intimacy. It is about conquests, about conquering. It is the very opposite of God's intention for sex. It tears love from sex, leaving sex as the immediate gratification of one's most base desires. It lives beyond rules and ethics and morality. It exists far beyond love. And yet countless young men, even Christian young men, are coming into marriage bringing with them all of this pornographic baggage. Having seen thousands of sex acts in a pornographic setting, they load the porn star expectation upon their wives. The young husband assumes or demands that his wife will be willing to do anything, that she will do it all with the proper joy and encouragements, and that she will be as willing and eager and skilled as the women he has seen on the screen.

My great concern with young married men today (which is really more a concern for their young wives) is that they may perhaps inadvertently or perhaps intentionally pornify the marriage bed. They may bring impurity to the pure, selfishness to the selfless. Having given themselves over to pornography, they have had their whole perception of sexuality altered, shaped by professional pornographers. They may soon be imposing on

their young brides the impossible expectation of a porn star. With the vast majority of young men having been exposed to pornography (at least 90% according to recent studies), with a large percentage of them having been addicted to it and with many enjoying it still as they enter into marriage, they need to have their understanding and their expectations reset according to the One who created sex.

When a person has become addicted to drugs, he has to go through a process called *detoxification*, or *detox* for short. In detox the person's body is cleansed of the drug that he has become dependent upon. It is a difficult process of letting go of the old realities and embracing a new normal.

Many men need a kind of sexual detox before they can be equipped to be the kind of pure, loving, attentive, sacrificial husbands that God calls them to be. In this short booklet, geared specifically to young married men, I hope to help you reorient your understanding of sex, both in the big picture and in the act itself, according to God's plan for this great gift. I am going to help you detox from all the junk you've seen, all the lies you've believed.

Q&A

1. Let's get this one out of the way up-front. Have you ever seen pornography? Yes or no?
2. That was a pretty simple "yes or no" question, so let's ramp it up a bit. How did you first see pornography and how old were you? How many times have you seen it since?
3. When was the last time that you saw pornography? Did "it find you" or did you go looking for it?
4. Have you ever been frightened by your sin? When? How did you react?
5. Have you found that the things in pornography that interested you or excited you at first continue to interest and excite you? Or have your tastes changed? Be honest with yourself.
6. Do you think that your mind, your heart, your expectations of your wife have been changed or affected by pornography?

BREAKING FREE

When I meet a young man today, a young husband, I pretty much assume that he is into pornography, or that at one time he has been. It is sad but true. The sheer accessibility of pornography almost guarantees that every young man will find it; and once it has been tasted, it is difficult not to indulge. I know that the issue of pornography is spoken about so often in Christian circles that it is in danger of becoming cliché. But it is a reality we cannot avoid or overlook. The purpose of this booklet is not to say, “quit porn” as much as it is to say, “look what porn is doing to your heart.” I hope that this message will help you first see that you do need to quit looking at porn and, second (and even if you’ve already broken free) that you need to find a new way of looking at sex. Just quitting, while it is the right thing to do, is not enough. You need to replace the lies with truth.

I would not want to get through this study without first distilling one of the great lies about pornography and then pleading with guys to find freedom from the clutches of pornography.

Marriage Will Make it Go Away!

I’ve spoken to young men who feel that the answer to their reliance on pornography and their addiction to masturbation is marriage. “If I just get married, I can have legitimate sex and all of this sin will just go away.” This may seem a logical assumption but it is tragically flawed. It assumes

a measure of equality between illegitimate, selfish sex and legitimate sex within marriage. It assumes that the bad can simply be replaced with the good, as if there is a 1-to-1 relationship between the two. Give the guy a legitimate outlet for his desires and he will no longer desire the illegitimate, right? Legions of men and their hurting wives will testify that it does not work this way at all. Maybe you can testify to it yourself. Pornography and sex within marriage are completely different things.. Yes, when you marry you may find that at the beginning you are well satisfied with your wife and find fulfillment in sex with her. But sin may still be lying dormant. If the sin has never been dealt with, it is likely to come back—to make a reappearance. It may be weeks or months or even years. But sooner or later, if that sin has never been repented of, never been put to death, it will rear its ugly head once more. Perhaps it will be at a time when your wife travels for a few days or when you travel out-of-town and find yourself alone in a hotel room in a strange city. Perhaps it will be after the birth of your first baby when there is that waiting time where for several weeks or a couple of months you cannot have sex. But it is very likely that the sin will come back to haunt you and to hurt both you and your wife.

You need to put sin to death! You cannot simply mask over it, cover it up, and believe that this is the same as actually dealing with it. It’s like those people you hear about on the news who murder

someone and then stuff the body into a wall or put it in a box in the basement. Who is dumb enough to think that this will actually work? The body is going to start to stink and sooner or later everyone will become aware that something is dead and rotting. It is like this with sin. You can box it up in favor of something legitimate, you can put the box in the basement and throw a blanket over it, but sooner or later that box and the death it contains is going to stink. You won't fool anyone in the end, least of all the One who sees to the depths of the heart. "Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord; how much more the hearts of the children of man" (Proverbs 15:11). Do not ignore your sin!

Deal With It!

If you want to be a good and godly husband, if you want to be able to treat your wife the way she deserves to be treated, you need to stop looking at pornography right now. As in, this instant. Today. And then you need to reshape your understanding of sex, replacing the distortions with pure truth. "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming" (Colossians 3:5,6).

But you already know that you need to stop. There aren't too many Christian husbands out there who are looking at pornography and who don't know that they need to quit. The problem isn't with knowledge—it's with desire and ability. Every Christian guy who looks at porn wants to stop, but many of them want to stop just a little bit less than they want to keep going. And so sin prevails. The only way you will stop is if you be-

gin to see the monstrous nature of the sin you are committing. You will only stop if the sin is more horrifying to you than the perceived goodness of the enjoyment of that sin. You will need to hate that sin before you can find freedom from it. Obviously pornography is a sin that is first and foremost a sin against God. God hates pornography as he hates any distortion of his good gifts. You know this already and have been told so innumerable times. In this booklet I am trying to show you some of the secondary effects of pornography and, most notably, the fact that pornography reshapes your very understanding of sex, of manhood, of womanhood. I want you to hate and fear this as you ought to hate and fear the sin itself. I want you to know that you cannot be a loving husband, an effective husband, a godly man as long as your mind is filled with the lies of pornography. You need to break free, you need to detox.

God is infinitely more willing to deal with your sin than you are to commit your sin. You may love this sin and be committed to it, but if you are a Christian, God is more willing than you are to overcome it and destroy it. He will grant grace for you to put sin to death. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9).

Breaking Free

Time and expertise would fail me to outline a plan for defeating pornography in this booklet. You can find all kinds of good information online and in books. Check the back of this booklet for some recommended resources that will help you. But, as good as those resources may be, I would not recommend *starting* at either one of them. If you

truly want to overcome pornography, go to your pastor. There is barely a pastor in America who is not helping someone deal with the fight against pornography. Take your willingness to talk to somebody about your problem as a sign that you are actually, finally, willing to deal with it. The local church is the ideal context for battling this kind of sin since in the local church you will find the authority and the support to help you fight and, ultimately, to help you win. If you want to overcome pornography, truly overcome it, you will be willing to humble yourself and talk to someone about it. Though God may occasionally suddenly just remove a person's desire to look at pornography, it is much more likely that it will be a long and difficult process of seeing just how deep inside this sin has gone and slowly drawing out the infection.

Now I know there are some people who do not have this kind of access to their pastors—the kind that can say, “I need help!” If that is the case, find a trusted, mature, Christian man (make sure he meets all four of those qualifiers) to whom you can talk. Do not talk to your eighteen year-old buddy and agree to some sort of accountability. That is not likely to work. Go to a Christian man whom you love and respect and tell him what you are dealing with. It will be humbling and humiliating in all the right ways. But I pretty much guarantee that he will empathize with you and will be both willing and eager to help you fight and vanquish this sin.

Starting the Detox

As I said in the previous chapter, pornography, like any other sin, comes with a kind of cascade effect. If you have been looking at porn for any length of time, I am certain that you can identify with this. You will know that the things that interested you at the beginning, that got you going, now seem pretty bland. And the things that were once gross are already beginning to intrigue you. This is the way sin is. This is the way sin always is. It will always demand more of you. And meanwhile, while you've been certain that you've been controlling your sin, it has been controlling you. It has reshaped your mind and your heart in certain ways, and has even shaped your understanding of your own wife! You are looking at her through the eyes of a pornographer! Would you want Hugh Hefner staring at your wife's body, looking it up and down? And yet there you are looking at her through his eyes—through the eyes he and others like him have given you through your consumption of their pornography.

What you need to do is to borrow God's eyes and prepare yourself to look at your wife through that lens, through that filter. You need to replace lies with truth. And God has given you the Bible so you can do just that. Through the Bible we are able to borrow God's eyes and to see the world as he sees it. And so in the next chapter we will form a Theology of Sex, seeking to understand the purpose of sex, of purpose of sexual desire and even the purpose of unequal sexual desire.

Q&A

1. Do you believe that pornography has done something to your heart?
2. Before you were married, did you ever find yourself thinking that your problem with pornography and masturbation would just go away if only you were married? Did it?
3. Do you believe that masturbation and pornography are detrimental to a sound marriage? Do you believe that they may be detrimental to *your* marriage?
4. When it comes to sexual sin, are you more committed to your sin or to obeying God?
5. Do you have pastors that you are able to turn to when struggling with this sin or any other? How about older men who may be willing to mentor you?
6. If you are still looking at pornography, are you willing *today* to go and talk to your pastor or your father or a mentor about your problem?

A THEOLOGY OF SEX

What did God create first: hunger or food? Did God make man hungry and then invent food to fill the need? Or did God first invent food and then give man an appetite which would motivate him, drive him, to pursue that good gift? Where you or I might invent a need before the ability to meet it, God sees the end before the beginning. He creates good gifts and only then does he create a need for them; he does not create a need for which there is no fulfillment. The topic of this chapter is, simply, sex, and I want to offer a brief theology of sex and of sexual desire. I want to help you see why God created sex, why he created sexual desire, and why he has given sexual desire in unequal measure.

Sex

God gives us sex because it has unique power in drawing a husband to his wife and a wife to her husband. He knows this because he is the one who invented it! He made it so that it is far more than the sum of its parts. We could describe sex in terms of body parts and hormones, but we would not be any closer to understanding it than if we were to describe a cake only in terms of its ingredients—flour and milk and eggs (or if we were to describe the Lord's Supper making reference only to eating bread and drinking wine). Sex goes far beyond merely the physical and instead extends to the emotional, the spiritual. It is through sexual union that two are made one, that they are bound

together; there is a mystery to it that can only really be compared in impact to the union of God's people to God as they are grafted into him.

God gave us something remarkably powerful and was wise to place strict boundaries on it. He has every right to do so because he is the one who has created sex and who has given it its function. Sex, then, is to be shared only between a husband and a wife, and cannot be extended to others either before marriage or during marriage (Matthew 5:27,28). Sex must not be stirred up or awakened until the time is right (Song of Solomon 8:4). Sex is to be practiced regularly throughout a marriage (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). Such boundaries are not intended to inhibit freedom but to *enhance* freedom. When we use the gift as God intends it, we gain great joy and freedom in it. When we abuse the gift, we ultimately suffer for such abuse.

The purpose of sex, then, is to provide a unique means through which a husband and wife can know one another, serve one another, express vulnerability before one another, give and receive. No other area in marriage offers so much to gain and so much to lose. No other area in marriage so closely grafts the couple together. And no message could be further from what is shown in pornography!

Many theologians have attempted to get at the deepest meaning of sex. "Sex is a picture, a metaphor, to point us to the joys of heaven," they might say. And perhaps this is so. But I don't find that the

Bible tells us this clearly. Neither am I convinced that we need to find some deeper meaning in sex in order to affirm its goodness. Sex is inherently good because it was created by a good God. We do not need to construct a complex theology around it as if it is only good in some kind of secondary sense. It is perfectly good in and of itself. Even if its ultimate meaning is no deeper than pleasure and mutual fulfillment, it is good because God is good. He could easily have decreed that sex be an integral part of every marriage and then made it inherently unpleasurable. He did not. Instead he made sex almost transcendent in its pleasure. At its best, sex really transcends most of life's other pleasures in its uniqueness, in its joy, in its freedom and vulnerability. And in these things, sex draws a husband and wife together in a completely unique and unparalleled way.

When you understand this you must also understand why sex is meant to be enjoyed *only* between a husband and wife. You understand why God forbids pre-marital sex (fornication), why he forbids extra-marital sex (adultery) and why he even forbids selfish sex (masturbation). All these things make a mockery of the real thing. All these things abuse his good gift.

Desire

Along with sex, God created sexual desire. As a young man I, like so many others, battled with the inability to express my awakening sexual desire and even remember crying out to God to ask why he would give it to me. So often sexual desire is a heavy burden. The answer to my questions came only later.

There are some who say that sexual desire is

meant only to motivate procreation—that the desire to have sex will draw a husband and wife together with the happy and ultimate result of conception. Here C.S. Lewis applies a helpful corrective (in *Mere Christianity*). He affirms that the biological purpose of sex is procreation (and let's not lose sight of this important purpose to sex) but draws a helpful parallel to the appetite for food. The biological purpose of eating is to repair the body and though some people are given to over-indulgence, we find that the appetite goes only a little way beyond its biological purpose. A man may eat twice as much food as his body needs for its biological purpose, but few will eat even that much. When it comes to sex, though, the appetite far exceeds its biological purpose. If the sexual appetite *matched* its biological function either a person would only desire sex a few times in a lifetime or he would have thousands of children. Does this not teach us that God desires that we have sex for reasons beyond procreation? The only other alternative is that this appetite is a product of sin and ought to be suppressed. But no, this cannot be. The Bible is clear that legitimate sexual desire, desire within a marriage and a desire for one's spouse, is legitimate before God.

God gives a man sexual desire, a sexual appetite, because he wants him to have sex with his wife. Can't it be just that simple? And what's more, he gives him a strong appetite that surpasses any kind of biological purpose because he wants the couple to have sex a lot. After all, the only admonition in Scripture regarding the frequency of married sex is to permit a brief pause with a defined end and even then only for the specific reason of dedicating time to prayer (see again 1 Corinthians

7) and still even then only if it is mutually agreed upon. In fact, the Bible goes so far as to say that a wife's body belongs to her husband—that he has authority over her body—and a husband's body belongs to his wife—she has authority over his body. The ruling principle is that husbands and wives are to have sex often and not to refuse one another this special gift.

Sex is such an integral part of the relationship of husband to wife and wife to husband that God has given the desire to participate in it, to enjoy it. This sexual desire motivates a man to pursue a wife and to marry her so together they can enjoy sex. This desire motivates a man to keep pursuing his wife even after they are married. Without this desire, this appetite, it would be far easier for us to avoid carrying out our God-given duty to have sex (and lots of it) and through it to experience intimacy and unity (and lots of it). So God gives the desire that is meant to be fulfilled in only that way. If we did not experience pangs of hunger we might not eat. If we stopped eating, our bodies would stop repairing themselves and we would die. If we did not experience sexual desire we might not have sex. And if we stopped having sex, our marriages would suffer and die. Sexual desire, then, is a gift of God given not to torment but to motivate obedience. When a husband inevitably feels sexual desire it is not an invitation to pornography and masturbation, but a nudge toward pursuing his wife.

Unequal Desire

Yet sexual desire, the appetite for sex, is not given in equal measure. It is typically given in greater part to men. Why is this? The answer, I'm con-

vinced, goes right to the heart of the husband-wife relationship. God commands that men, husbands, be leaders. Men are to take the leading role while women are to follow. God intends that men take leadership even in sex and, therefore, he gives to men a greater desire for it. This way men can lead their wives, taking the initiative, taking care to love their wives in such a way that they wish to have sex with their husbands. Generally speaking, a man finds intimacy and acceptance through sex while a woman needs to first experience intimacy and acceptance before she can be prepared to enjoy sex. And so God gives the man a sexual appetite so he can in turn provide for his wife's needs *before* she provides for his. His sexual appetite cannot be separated from his leadership. If the woman were to lead in this regard, if she were to always be the sexual instigator, the husband would be far less likely to pursue his wife and seek to meet her unique needs. Do you see the beautiful dance here? The husband has a desire that only his wife can meet, a desire for his wife; therefore, he takes the lead in seeking to fulfill that desire. He does this by meeting the desires of his wife that will, in turn, cause her to see and appreciate and eventually fulfill his desires. And then, in that act of consummation, God grants a grace that surpasses the mere union of flesh and blood.

As the husband leads, the wife is called by God to submit to her husband's leadership even in the marriage bed. As in other areas of life, she is called to defy leadership only if her husband demands of her something that would violate her conscience or God's law. We can see this as a responsibility of the wife but we must also see it as a particular responsibility of the husband. He is to lead in such

a way that his wife will have no reason to refuse him. He must be sensitive to her needs, to her desires. He must acknowledge the times where, for one reason or another, she would find it exceedingly difficult to give herself to him and must keep from cajoling her into acts that would make her uncomfortable or leave her feeling violated. He needs to exemplify leadership as a servant even here in the bedroom. His first thoughts must be for her. A husband may tend towards being either a bully or a push-over in the bedroom—to abuse leadership by domination or abdication. He must do neither.

If Adam and Eve enjoyed sex before their fall into sin (I'm under the impression that the Fall happened soon after Creation but that there was some time between the two events; therefore, they must have enjoyed perfect sex for a while.) there must not have been an occasion where Eve refused Adam because there was never a time when he was not thinking first of her. What reason would she have to refuse? But after they sinned, when Adam stopped thinking first of Eve and when she began to rebel against his leadership, this is when sex became a struggle. And it remains a struggle today. I know that most husbands and wives will testify that they have had more fights and arguments about sex than about anything else. The most special means of grace to a husband and wife has become the greatest cause of strife. And

this is exactly as Satan intends it. Though Satan hates any kind of pleasure, he will still use it for his ends. His plan is that people should have as much sex outside of the marriage relationship and as little within the marriage relationship as is possible. His plan is to mask, to hide, the true purpose of sex behind the pleasure it brings simply as a physical act. It is a clever plan and one that has been proven effective time and time again.

Do you see how pornography distorts all of this? Pornography makes a mockery of the purposes of sex, sexual desire and unequal sexual desire. Where God says the purpose of sex is to build unity between a husband and a wife, pornography says it is about fulfilling any perceived need with any partner, willing or unwilling. Where sexual desire is good, given to cause a husband to pursue his wife (and a wife her husband) pornography says it cannot and should not be controlled. All of the messages of pornography go directly against God's purposes.

We may not understand exactly what sex does within a marriage, but we can trust that God has his reasons for inventing it and commanding it. Sex is a call for a husband to pursue his wife and to lead her, as a servant, into a deeper understanding and appreciation of this gift. It is a call for a wife to serve her husband, trusting him and trusting that God's gifts, when used as he intends them, always bring good.

1. In your own words, describe the purposes for which God created sex. Have you ever thought before about why he saw fit to create it?
2. Do you believe that God can create pleasurable things simply because he delights in the pleasure they bring to us? What examples, other than sex, can you think of?
3. Have you ever been frustrated or angry with God about the fact that he has given you sexual desire?
4. As a married guy, what message is sexual desire sending you? What is the purpose of sexual desire in your life?
5. In what ways does pornography make a mockery of God's intention for sex?
6. Do you believe that it is Satan's plan for you to have as much sex outside of marriage and as little within marriage as possible? In what ways would this be a victory for him?
7. Do you believe that God can give you what you need to completely refrain from sexual sin?

“ *It is God's desire that every Christian couple, including you and your wife, regularly enjoy the best, most intimate, most satisfying sexual relations of which humans are capable. We're talking really, really good sex. Marital intimacy is God's gift to those who enter his holy covenant of marriage. And what a gift it is! With the obvious exception of the gospel itself, this strikes me as some of the best news man (and woman) could ever receive!*

—C.J. Mahaney

SELF-CENTERED SEX

I suspect my childhood is typical in that I heard many rumors about the physical effects of masturbation. I was told that people who did it lost their hair, grew hair on their palms, went blind or, worse still, just went crazy. But as James Dobson has said, “If it did [cause such afflictions], the entire male population and about half of females would be blind, weak, simpleminded and sick. Between 95 and 98 percent of all boys engage in this practice—and the rest have been known to lie.” My parents certainly never told me such lies and neither did any of my teachers or youth leaders. Yet these rumors were passed from boy-to-boy on the playground, usually long before any of us had ever given serious consideration to sexuality. We did not know what the act was, but we did know the terrifying repercussions.

While these rumors are unfounded, they continue to be passed from boy-to-boy simply because masturbation is a topic that breeds guilt and shame. It encourages worry that a person will be found out, that his shame will be exposed. Yet there is no physical reason to deny oneself this sexual pleasure. As Josh Harris writes in *Sex Is Not The Problem (Lust Is)*, “masturbation isn’t a filthy habit that makes people dirty. It only reveals the dirt that’s already in our hearts.” The physical act of masturbation simply points to a deeper problem within. So while it is not filthy and does not make a person filthy, there can, however, still be a mental and spiritual toll as guys struggle with

feelings of guilt, remorse and shame because of their habits. This may be a convincing reason for some people to avoid participating, but for many it is not. Guilt alone is not enough of a motivator for many of us to curb our sinful behaviors.

Purity of Mind

The most common reason given why people should not masturbate is that it pollutes the mind. Sexual gratification is not merely a physical act, but one that engages the mind. The act brings far less guilt than the accompanying fantasies, the pictures in the mind that are an inevitable part of the experience. These fantasies run rampant during acts of masturbation. This type of fantasy can be dangerous in at least two ways.

First, as most adults have learned the hard way, reality is rarely as wonderful as fantasy. Many people create expectations for sex in their minds that the reality cannot meet. I dare say that rarely has a teenage boy created a fantasy in which his partner gently and lovingly rebuffs his advances because she is too tired. Neither has he concocted a fantasy in which she declines participation in a particular act because she finds it uncomfortable or distasteful. The fact is that fantasy can create unhealthy and unrealistic expectations of sex.

Second, fantasy will rarely involve legitimate sexual partners just like sex scenes in movies rarely involve married couples who can, before God, legitimately have sex. A teenage guy has no legiti-

mate reason to pursue sexual fantasy because he has no God-given partner with whom he can consummate such desire. While it is perfectly legitimate for a husband to dream of a sexual encounter with his wife, masturbation may encourage him to fill his mind with thoughts of other women, or even to gaze at pornographic material to fuel his mind.

Fantasy is dangerous when left unchecked. Masturbation is wrong when it violates the Lord's teaching about moral purity. "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28). Fantasy can also be dangerous when it creates unrealistic expectation.

Some will protest that when they masturbate it is merely a physical act and one they do to relieve stress or boredom. They will insist that they do not succumb to thinking inappropriate thoughts. In his book *When Good Men Are Tempted*, author Bill Perkins writes, "It appears to me that masturbation is amoral. Under some circumstances it's acceptable behavior. On other occasions it's clearly wrong" (page 122). He goes on to provide three tests which will gauge whether a particular instance is right or wrong: the thought test (whether the act is accompanied by inappropriate fantasies), the self-control test (whether the act becomes obsessive) and the love test (whether it leads to a person failing to fulfill the needs of his spouse).

James Dobson teaches a similar view of masturbation. When I was young my parents gave me his book *Preparing for Adolescence* and I remember this teaching well. He believes that every boy (and most girls) try it and that the guilt brought about by the act destroys many children. Thus he

believes parents should rarely speak to their children about it, and if they do, to reassure their children that such practices are normal. Here is what he says on his web site:

It is my opinion that masturbation is not much of an issue with God. It is a normal part of adolescence that involves no one else. It does not cause disease. It does not produce babies, and Jesus did not mention it in the Bible. I'm not telling you to masturbate, and I hope you won't feel the need for it. But if you do, it is my opinion that you should not struggle with guilt over it. Why do I tell you this? Because I deal with so many Christian young people who are torn apart with guilt over masturbation; they want to stop and just can't. I would like to help you avoid that agony.

This response is very nearly humanistic. The way to avoid the agony of guilt is not to ignore sin, but to focus on the gospel. Dobson feels that this is an issue young people should not be expected to agonize over. Speak honestly and openly to young people, though, and they will tell you that they do want to talk about it and that they do want to be reassured that it is wrong and that they can and must overcome it. The guilt they feel is not irrational but is good guilt—the kind that is brought about by sin and intended to help correct it.

Like Perkins, Dobson does not engage in a biblical examination of this particular topic. Like Perkins he concludes that masturbation is amoral because there is no specific bible passage that allows or condemns the practice. On a web site I came across these words: "If masturbation is a sin, then it's a little odd that Scripture would leave the be-

liever guessing about its moral status.”

Yet, as we will see, the Bible is not silent and does not leave us guessing. While Scripture may not mention masturbation explicitly this simply points to the fact that it speaks so much and so thoroughly about sexuality that there is no need to speak about masturbation (just as Scripture speaks so thoroughly about murder and the value of human life that there is no need to speak explicitly about abortion). The Bible’s teaching on sexuality proves that masturbation is sinful whether it is an act accompanied by sinful fantasy or an act that is purely physical.

God’s Purpose in Sexuality

We have already learned that the purpose of sex is to provide ultimate intimacy between a husband and wife. There is no greater expression of vulnerable intimacy between human beings. A close examination of the Scripture’s teaching on sexuality will uncover no reason to believe that God ever intended sex to be a private pursuit. The heart and soul of sexuality is the giving and receiving of sexual pleasure. Sex is intended to be a means of mutual fulfillment where a husband thinks foremost of his wife, and the wife thinks foremost of her husband. As they fulfill each other’s needs, they have their own needs fulfilled. It is a beautiful picture of intimacy! As any married couple can testify, the more selfless the sex, the better sex becomes. The more each spouse seeks to please the other, the more fulfilling and gratifying the act becomes. It is beautiful in that regard. As we might expect the opposite is also true. Sex that is completely selfish is sex that is demeaning and unfulfilling (rape, an act of utter sexual selfishness, may

be the ultimate expression of selfish sex).

Sex is so important to a marriage that the Bible forbids us from neglecting it. “Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control” (1 Corinthians 7:5). This deprivation can refer not only to time but to activity. A man should no more deprive his wife over a period of time than he should deprive her by private sexual activity. As married couples can attest to the importance of sex, I’m sure most can also look to times when they neglected this activity and can testify to the difficulties it caused in their marriage. God intends for husbands and wives to have sex with each other and to do so regularly.

And this, the mutual giving and receiving which lies at the heart of God’s purpose for sexuality, is exactly what masturbation does not and cannot provide. It strips sexuality of its divine purpose of mutual fulfillment. It takes an act that God intends to build relationship and makes it an act of selfish isolation. Masturbation and fantasy attempt to create a false intimacy rather than the true intimacy between a husband and wife that God has built into the marriage relationship.

Continuing again in 1 Corinthians we read, “The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Corinthians 7:3-4). A man’s body does not belong to himself, but to his wife, and ultimately to God. A wife’s body belongs

to her husband (and to God). Likewise, a single woman's body belongs to her future spouse and is to be kept pure for him. Neither spouse has the right to express sexuality apart from the other. When the Bible tells a man that he is to express his sexuality exclusively with his wife, why do so many interpret this to mean that he is free to express his sexuality without her?

How Bad?

By now I think it should be clear that masturbation is a sin—one that ought to be repented of and one that Christians need to fight against. Sadly, though, for many Christian men, it becomes an issue that begins to define their spiritual state. Some people feel such guilt for this act that they begin to question their salvation and begin to see themselves only through the lens of this sin. There is no doubt that this is a serious sin, but it should not be given so much prominence that people can see nothing past it. Josh Harris writes wisely, "When we inflate the importance of this act, we'll either overlook the many evidences of God's work in us or we'll ignore other more serious expressions of lust that God wants us to address."

Pornography

I want to add a brief word here about pornography. I do not need to tell you about the connection between pornography and masturbation. Despite this connection many discussions of pornography shy away from also discussing masturbation. Yet the whole point of looking at pornography is to fuel sexual fantasy and to culminate in masturbation or another selfish form of sexual expression. People do not look at porn and then walk away

to wash the dishes! Few Christians would argue that pornography is acceptable and yet countless numbers are attracted to it or ensnared by it. Like masturbation, pornography is inherently self-centered. It creates a false intimacy between an anonymous person in a magazine or on a screen and the viewer. It provides escapism and release, but requires no effort and no self-denial. It creates a selfish, self-centered, self-focused perversion of the true, sacred act. To combine masturbation and pornography is to compound sin-upon-sin.

Not A Selfish Pursuit

Do you see, then, how masturbation denies the very purpose for which God created sex? Sex was not meant to be a selfish pursuit. It was not intended to focus a person's thoughts on himself and his own needs. Rather, sex was designed as a means of fulfilling the Lord's command to esteem another higher than yourself. The pleasure of sex is not meant to be enjoyed in isolation, but to be enjoyed while providing that same pleasure to another. Masturbation cannot fulfill God's design for sexuality, and thus has no place in the life of one who calls himself a Christian.

Gospel

For those who struggle with this sin, take heart, for there is hope. Do not find reassurance in the cold comfort that "everyone does it." Take comfort instead in the good news of the gospel. The blood of Jesus was shed for sins like this one and the power of the Holy Spirit has been given to us so that we can overcome it. This is not a sin that is beyond the power of God. You *can* be set free from it.

Q&A

1. Though masturbation does not bring about bad physical effects, many guys who masturbate still wrestle with guilt and sadness. Can you identify with this? If you have masturbated in the past, did you experience feelings of guilt?
2. Is it possible to have a sinless mind even while masturbating? Is there an argument to be made that the physical act is harmless and that it is only the accompanying fantasies that are wrong?
3. Do you understand why masturbation can be referred to as “self-centered sex” or “selfish sex?” In what ways does the solo nature of masturbation go against God’s plan for sex?
4. The Bible tells us that a man’s body belongs to his wife. How does this impact the discussion on masturbation?
5. Do you want to stop masturbating? Or is it a sin you enjoy so much that you would be very disappointed and unwilling to give it up?
6. Do you believe that Christ is willing to forgive you for this sin and that, through his Holy Spirit, he is both willing and able to free you from it?

“*Sharing the pleasure of intimacy is the most satisfying human experience possible, and sexual pleasure reaches the highest level in a caring, loving, lifelong relationship. That’s true because the most sexually excitable part of our body is our mind, and over time with one partner, the full, intimate connection of two hearts, souls, and bodies can occur.*

—Harry Schaumburg

DETOXIFICATION

The purpose of this series of articles is to lead men through a kind of sexual detox. The messages about sex taught in society and especially in pornography have left a whole generation of men with false views of the meaning, purpose and act of sex. In previous chapters we have attempted to piece together a bit of a theology of sex, showing why God gave us sex, why he gave us sexual desire and why he gave sexual desire in unequal measure to men and women. Now that we have seen what sex is, let's see what sex is *not* and then begin to show how you can love your wife through the act of sex. Now that we understand the meaning and purpose of sex, we are left asking, how does a husband express his love for his wife in the bedroom? This is where we will get to what I know you probably really want or need to know—what should I do and what should I not do in bed?

First, though, let's pause briefly to look at the negative side of sex to see what sex is not.

Sex Is Not...

Sex is not ultimate. You might not know this from society and certainly not from pornography, but sex is not the ultimate thing. Sex is a good and great gift of God, but it is not an ultimate thing. Within marriage and without there is a tendency to make sex into more than it is, to allow it to be a kind of idol. Our idols are always good things to which we give too much importance. Sex is just

that kind of good thing that can be made into too big a thing. A good gift of God can begin to supersede the God who gave it. Few things in life lend themselves to idolatry with greater frequency, with greater power, than sex.

Sex is not to be trifled with. Sex is too powerful to be trifled with. It is near-impossible for a person to trifle with sex and not get drawn into it in a more complete way. It is just too powerful, too captivating. A boyfriend and girlfriend who begin to have sex will very rarely be able to stop, even if they really do want to. A boy who begins masturbating will rarely be able to just quit. As you probably know, a person who begins looking at pornography will soon want to find more and more of it. Of course this is part of the design of sex—God means for it to be alluring and desirable and almost irresistible. But outside of its proper context it is captivating, leading to imprisonment to sin. So sex must not be trifled with. It must be avoided entirely outside of its proper context and then fully embraced within marriage. There is no room for anything more or anything less.

Sex is not primarily about you. Wives may well testify that they have a better understanding of this concept than do their husbands. Yet even then, sex is not ultimately about your spouse. Sex is about God. While a husband may be motivated by desire to pursue his wife and have sex with her, he should be motivated ultimately by an obedience to God's command that a husband and wife

enjoy sex frequently. While a wife may be motivated by a desire to please her husband or to avoid a fight, her primary or ultimate motivation should be obedience to God. Even if you have no desire to have sex, have sex for your spouse's sake. Even if neither you nor your spouse have a desire to have sex, have sex for God's sake out of obedience to him.

The Problem With Focusing on Acts

I've been saying that pornography has given you wrong ideas about sex and you're wondering exactly what that means. So here is the big question: what is normal sex? How do *normal* people *normally* express *normal* sexuality? That is the kind of question you might be tempted to ask, but it is probably the wrong question. Normal is a moving target, one that may move from couple to couple, culture to culture, time to time. The better question is this: what is God's design for sex? This is the broad question that will lead us to an answer that may even include particular acts and exclude others. Yet I would not wish to get too hung up on particular sex acts as it might serve to distract more than it would help. And I hope that this question can take us back through the rest of this booklet, constructing that theology of sexuality. If you have not yet read those chapters, this would be a good time to pause and to do so.

The principle we as humans always want to ask is "how far can we go?" But the better, more biblical question when it comes to sex is "what pleases her?" Of course even this good question must be asked with an awareness that there are things that God expressly forbids and others that he expressly commands. There are firm boundar-

ies. Sex is to be only and ever between a husband and wife. To introduce anyone else into the relationship, whether physically or only graphically as in through shared pornography, is a perversion of the one-to-one nature of sexuality. Sex is to be done in love, not in anger (which means that a man can rape his own wife if he violently forces himself upon her. What a violation of sex this is!) Sex, as with everything else in life, is to be done with self-control, not with a reckless lack of self-control.

Within these God-given boundaries, given for our good, there is tremendous freedom. It is a freedom to explore, to discover, to play, to say "yes" or "no" or "never again." But it is a freedom that may need to be sanctified, to be made holy, especially for those who have had their understanding of sex shaped by pornography. The things that supposedly arouse porn stars are very likely *not* the things that will arouse your wife or that will make her feel loved and treasured instead of demeaned in your lovemaking. Why? Because *the things you have seen in pornography are things that are created to incite lust in those who are already hardened against what is good and pure. They are acts designed to arouse the hardened heart, not the tender heart* (I italicize that because I want you to get it, to think about it.). Do you understand what I am saying here? Most of the stuff you see on the screen when watching pornography is not stuff you should ever try to do or to inflict upon your wife. Magazines and advice web sites (both Christian and non-) are full of questions about what constitutes normal sexual behavior. When I see the questions people are asking, it is not difficult to know which people have been looking at pornography. The questions they

ask are essentially “Is it okay if my wife and I play out this pornographic act?”

Sex is tender. Do you see tenderness in pornography or do you see violence? Sex is sweet. Do you see sweetness in the pornography you watch or is it degrading? Sex is selfless and giving. But isn't pornography all about the getting and about the conquest? Is it not about having my needs met now? Sex has boundaries. But doesn't pornography suppose that anything I feel or anything I desire is acceptable simply because I desire it? Pornography scoffs at boundaries.

But Can't I...?

If I were to give you a list of do's and don'ts, this would be the place to do so. I could draw up a long checklist with checks in some boxes and x's in others. “Yes you can do that, yes you can do that, no you can't do that.” In some ways I think it would be helpful but, at the same time, it would undoubtedly reflect *my* conscience, *my* strengths, *my* weaknesses. It would unavoidably be legalistic in some ways and licentious in others. What one couple finds blissfully enjoyable may be repulsive for another. One person's freedom is another person's captivity. That is one of the strange realities of the way God has made us—he has made us different and has even given us different consciences. So there is great freedom within marriage to explore, to try new things and to enjoy things that are mutually pleasurable.

Instead of that long but ultimately disappointing and useless checklist, let me offer the following guidelines and leave you to fill it in some day with your wife. Here are some useful questions to ask.

What is your heart in this? Any act we take, whether in the bedroom or anywhere else, is motivated by the heart. So there is more value in asking, “what is in my heart that I want to do this?” than “is this particular act wrong?” Jesus taught his disciples that it is what comes from within, not external things, that defile a man (Mark 7). All evil things, whether adultery or covetousness or sexual immorality, come from within. So you need to have a tender heart and be willing to look into your heart to seek out your motives. Do only those things that are motivated by a love for your spouse. Avoid things that are motivated by any kind of sin.

Is this the act of a conquerer or of a servant? You know full well that many of the acts within pornography are acts of conquest, not acts of love and service. You know that in pornography the pleasure of the man is generally far greater and far more genuine than that of the woman. Do not subject your wife to acts that would make her feel like the mere means to an end, that would make her feel like she has been conquered instead of loved and nurtured, like she has been defiled instead of treasured.

Does this bring pleasure to one or to both? One of the purposes of sex is to bring mutual pleasure. At its best, sex allows both spouses to give and receive at the same time and through the same acts. It is unique in that way, and uniquely powerful and fulfilling. There may be times when there is some inequity in the giving and receiving of pleasure, but always each spouse should be seeking greater pleasure for the other, not for him or herself. Do not always pleasure yourself at the expense of your spouse; never commit acts which

are pleasurable to one and distasteful to the other.

Does this trouble your conscience or your spouse's conscience? The conscience is a special gift of God and one that he commands us to heed (Titus 1:15). Where God gives us all the same law through his Word, he gives each of us a conscience that is all our own. We are required to heed this conscience and not to violate it. Do not violate your conscience with regards to certain acts and do not cajole your spouse into violating her's.

Can you thank God for this? It is difficult to thank God for things that we have done in violation of law or conscience. When considering particular acts, it is worth considering whether you would be able to thank God for them. Do nothing for which you could not thank God.

In many cases these guidelines may be disappointing as they convict you that certain porn-fueled fantasies may have to go unfulfilled. You

will find that there are things you have seen on the screen that you've been wanting to try out, but that these things would violate some of those guidelines. Some of what is normal in pornography is forbidden by God and is a sin against him and a sin against your spouse. But if you trust God you will know that he will give grace not only to get over it—actually, to get over yourself—but also to find greater pleasure in greater, purer things. Scores of committed couples will tell you that they have found great and growing pleasure in years and decades of what according to pornography would be very boring sex. The years of sex with one another have proven far more interesting, far more alluring, far more satisfying than any pleasure they found in running wild. Do you trust God that this can be the case for you and for your bride?

Q&A

1. Have you ever trifled with sex, awakening desire for sex before the proper time and context?
2. What is the potential risk in focusing on a list of acts when considering what is permissible in sex?
3. In the article I said that the acts you see in pornography are designed to incite lust in the hearts of people who are already hardened against God's true design for sex. Do you believe that this is true?
4. Which of the five guidelines in this chapter stood out to you the most as being foreign to the acts you have seen in pornography?
5. Which of the five guidelines made you realize that some of your thoughts and expectations of sex have been impacted by pornography?
6. Do you believe that a lifetime of "normal" sex with a single partner can be more fulfilling and more interesting than acts fueled by pornographic fantasy?

FREEDOM

I know your struggles because not too many years ago they were my struggles. It was not long ago that I was a young man and then a young husband, fighting (and sometimes not fighting) against lust and pornography and all the rest. There was a time when it wooed me and drew me and sought to captivate me. And yet today I can say that pornography does not have power over me the way it once did. God delivered me from the desire to indulge. I can understand your struggles and also assure you that it is possible to find freedom.

There were a handful of Scripture passages that were foundational to my understanding of sex when I was young and considering marriage and when I was young and newly married. They were instrumental in my determination not to succumb to the allure of pornography.

The first of these is one of my favorite passages in the whole Bible. Proverbs 5:18-19 says, “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.” I love the sweetness of this passage. It calls a man to always find joy and satisfaction and intimacy in the wife God has given him. It calls him to recall the delight he had in the days when he and his bride were innocent and newly married and calls him to live out of that delight. He has no right to go elsewhere, no right to “drink from another cistern,” to use Solomon’s

terminology. And why would he ever want to? The verse both celebrates the gift of sex and the exclusivity of it.

When you marry you will know that God has provided for you the wife of your youth. You are to be intoxicated in her love and not with the body or the heart of another woman or endless series of women. Every time you look at pornography, every time you give in to lust, you are diminishing your ability to be intoxicated in her love, to find your joy and satisfaction in her.

Just a few verses later in that same passage come these sobering words. “For a man’s ways are before the eyes of the Lord, and he ponders all his paths. The iniquities of the wicked ensnare him, and he is held fast in the cords of his sin. He dies for lack of discipline, and because of his great folly he is led astray.” Men who refuse to be intoxicated in the love of their wives, men who find delight in the bodies (or images of the bodies) of other women, are committing acts of great foolishness. This is not foolishness that is akin to silliness, but the kind that puts a man in danger of death. It is a moral foolishness that leads to spiritual destruction. Their foolishness, their lack of discipline, their lack of concern for their sin, leads them to the paths of death. There are consequences to your sin. When you sinned before marriage you brought into marriage all kinds of baggage—all kinds of sexual history that may now impact you and your relationship to your wife.

When you were eighteen or twenty you may have thought that the occasional look at pornography, images to fuel your masturbation, would have no consequences. You were wrong. Even then as you did those things you were sinning against God and against your wife. You were piling up sin that may now make it more difficult for you to be an effective leader and an effective lover. You thumbed your nose at God's grace. How much more so now if you continue to do those things though you are married.

Another verse, and a bit of a strange one, I know, is Genesis 26:8. This is the story of Isaac and Abimelech. You remember that Isaac, like his father before him, traveled through a strange land and feared for his life. As a coward he denied his wife rather than risk his life. But then Abimelech looked out of a window and "saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife." That word laughing is obviously a difficult one to translate and versions of the Bible render it quite differently. When I was young I read a commentary that said, rightly, that it could be translated as *sporting*. Abimelech looked out of his window and saw Isaac and Rebekah doing something that made him realize that they were clearly not brother and sister; yet he also knew Isaac's character well enough not to accuse him of anything immoral. Isaac and Rebekah were sporting, they were playing, flirting, undoubtedly just enjoying young love (though perhaps in an inappropriate setting). Somehow that captured a kind of freedom and innocence that I wanted to have with my wife. A freedom and openness that I knew we could not have if we were sinning sexually against one another.

The third verse was 1 Peter 3:7 which com-

mands, "Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." Here I realized that my relationship with my wife had huge spiritual importance. If I am not showing honor to my wife, my own prayers (not hers!) will be hindered. As the leader of my home I need to keep growing spiritually and in order to do this I need to be faithful in prayer. I can only do this, I learned, if I treat my wife as she deserves to be treated. Were I to give in to lust and porn and all other kind of sexual sin, I would be devastating my family. I would not be the only one to suffer. How could I bring that kind of pain and devastation upon the people I love most?

The final passage was 1 Timothy 5:1,2 which reads "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity." I saw here the connection between the women of pornography and God's command that I treat all young women as sisters. How could I do that if I was leering at them on the screen? And how could I leer at anonymous young women on the screen and then assume that I'd be able to then turn off that lust and treat other young women in my life as sisters? Giving in to lust in one area would impact every area. God commanded me to see young women not as sexual objects but as sisters. I had to treat them in all purity, in my heart, in my mind, in my life.

These verses, though they may be a bit of an eclectic collection, challenged me deeply and reset my mind. I memorized them, pondered them, called them to mind and lived by them. And any

desire to pursue lust melted away. I know it was a work of God because he worked through his Word, just as he says he will. In its place he gave me a great (and still-growing) love for her and increased joy and satisfaction in my relationship for her. I would not want it any other way.

Conclusion

My encouragement to you in this is to find a biblical basis for purity, a biblical basis for avoiding pornography. Some men can turn away from pornography by an act of the will. Some can do it by constructing walls of legalism and forcing themselves to live within those boundaries. But it is best, I'm convinced, to find freedom through the Word of God. We need to fight sin with God's truth; we need to replace the lies we want to believe with what God says is true. Perhaps some of the verses that God used in my life will help you; perhaps he will help you find others. But in any case, go the Bible and find there both the foundation for purity and the wisdom that can help you

moment-by-moment.

Some of the saddest emails I have received through my online ministry came from women who are older than you are and perhaps even old enough to be your mother. They told tales of utter devastation—of husbands who got into pornography when they were young and who never cared to give it up. And here they are, all these years later, still damaging themselves and their wives and families. The choices they made as young men threaten to tear apart their families today. They never gave up their sin. The women, the ones God calls these men to be intoxicated in for all of their lives, live with gaping holes in their hearts, longing for their husbands to step in and fill them up. Could this be your wife some day?

The fact is, God does not give young husbands free passes when it comes to sin; he does not allow you to run wild for a time and just “get away with it.” Sin carries with it consequences whether you sin at eighteen or eighty. Turn from your sin today. Pursue freedom. Pursue Christ.

1. In your heart, do you hope to have a long and sweet and normal sexual relationship with your wife? Or do you feel that you will be unfulfilled without attempting the kind of deeds you may have seen in pornography?
2. Have you ever found yourself believing that what you do now, as a young husband, does not really matter very much in the big picture of life? Do you believe that sins you commit today could have consequences for you and for your family many years from now?
3. Do you believe that the Bible offers not only big-picture help and guidance but also help and guidance in the moment-by-moment challenges of life?
4. Were any of the passages that proved helpful to me at all helpful to you? Which ones and why?
5. What Scripture verses do you intend to use as a goal or a measure of your desire to have a successful and God-glorifying sexual relationship with your wife?

Q&A

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Books

Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is) by Joshua Harris - This book is a valuable read for any man, married or single. I've read it on my own and read it as part of a men's group. In both cases it was well worth it.

False Intimacy by Harry Schaumburg - This book, written by a man with decades of counseling experience, looks to the struggle of sexual addiction, including homosexuality, cybersex, etc. Also consider *Undefined* by the same author.

It's All About Me: The Problem with Masturbation by Winston Smith - Part of a series of booklets published by CCEF, this one goes into some detail about the problem of masturbation and the way to overcome it.

Sex, Romance and the Glory of God by C.J. Mahaney - A good guide to being an effective leader and a godly Christian husband.

When Sinners Say 'I Do' by Dave Harvey - This is an excellent book to read aloud with your wife as together you grapple with the inevitability of sin and conflict.

Web Sites

Boundless is a web site for young adults and singles. It is a ministry of Focus on the Family that features a wide variety of excellent contributors. boundless.org

Young Married Life, also by Focus on the Family, provides wise counsel for young couples. focusonlinecommunities.com/community/marriage/youngmarried

Stone Gate Resources is the counseling ministry of Harry Schaumburg. If your marriage is in serious need of serious help, you may wish to look at the site and talk to Harry about intensive counseling. stonegateresources.org

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