



Men Pursuing Purity



Equipping Men

TO LIVE LIVES OF PURITY,
PURPOSE & POWER

By Ron Citlau



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DESERT **Stream**™
P R E S S

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Dedication

*Dedicated to my beautiful wife Amy.
You have sacrificed many dreams to follow Jesus.
You're amazing and I love you.*

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I would like to thank Andy Comiskey for his help with Men Pursuing Purity. Much of the organization and many of the ideas found in this booklet come from him. And beyond that, he is a trusted mentor and friend.



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Men Pursuing Purity equips men to live lives of purity, purpose and power.

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.” (Matthew 5:13)

Whether you are going through this book alone, in a men’s group or in a more formal Men’s Pursuing Purity Group, we are honored that you are using this material. We know how hard it is to break free from sexual addiction. And we know the despair this bondage can cause.

We also know the great hope found in Jesus because we have experienced it ourselves. It’s really true: Jesus sets the captive free.

For that purpose this booklet was written. This booklet is meant to be a practical help in achieving sexual purity and gaining a deeper understanding of who we are as men in Christ. Our hope is that it helps make a way for you to achieve the purity and maturity you desire.

Remember, as with anything worthwhile, gaining sexual purity is hard. Be tenacious and don’t give up! If you continue to run the race, you will find purity and you will be salt and light for a dying and lost world.

May His Spirit be with you as you seek and learn to follow Jesus.



“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” (John 6:35)

The greatest need of the human heart is the need for love – to be loved and to be free to love others. Receiving and giving love are the hallmarks of our humanity. In order to be whole as human beings, we must be able to receive and release love. We truly hunger for love and to give love. But for those bound by habitual sexual sin the call to receive real love or to give it is an impossible one.

I first began my journey into sexual purity seven years ago. During my early adult years, I had used my sexuality in some pretty awful ways. Pornography, fornication, and other sinful uses of my sexuality had really damaged my soul. When I finally gave up control of my life and began following the Lord, I had a lot of things to work out. At the beginning of my journey, I felt unsure; I was wavering; I thought that at any moment I could fall back into darkness.

One moment I would feel okay, the next moment I would feel lust. Sexual lust and its persuasive energy took me to places in mind and action that I did not want to go. I also felt anxiety. It was almost overwhelming. I wanted to get free and I wanted to be a man who loved well; I just had no idea how it was going to happen.

Those of us who are addicted to a sexual activity know the physical power sexuality can have over our bodies. When we repetitively do the same behavior over and over again our physiology changes. “The brain actually adapts and hardens into set ways of handling environmental stimuli. New neuronal grooves are formed. This is the basis for forming helpful habits but also, for powerful addictive habits” (*Falling Forward*, 21).

We have trained our mind to need sexual stimuli to feel “normal.” When I was bound by sexual sin, I would regularly feel an intense pull to act out. My body wanted its fix. If I went too long without sexual release, I would feel intense anxiety. I couldn’t get settled; I couldn’t get

focused. My body needed the chemicals that were released in orgasm to keep its equilibrium.

Most of us get stuck here. The physical demands of addiction overwhelm us. We try to stop but every sexual feeling, thought and opportunity come rushing forth like a tsunami. But actually, the physical component, though powerful, is not the primary reason we stay addicted. Underneath our addiction are hurts and hungers that give our sexual addiction its true power.

As I began my journey into freedom, intense pain started coming up. When I got beyond the physical discomfort of addiction, I found out that I was covering up something in my heart that I didn't like. Self-hatred, shame and emptiness shot out of my soul like geysers that demanded release. Underneath our addiction are feelings of weakness: a perception of being inadequate as men and the effects of how others have hurt us.

Whatever the pain, we humans don't like to feel it. For a time, the misuse of sexuality can cover up the pain in our soul. Sexual addiction acts as a drug, numbing us to the real feelings of the heart. Our world of sex and fantasy helps us escape from the pain of reality. It works (at least in part) for a while; that's why we do it.

As humans, we also have legitimate, essential hungers that need satisfaction. Men who struggle with sexual addiction are hungry for real love, real intimacy. They hunger to connect and to be known in the depths of their being. I recently asked a group of men what they really hunger for. One said he hungered for stability; another said relationship; another hungered to know that he was okay; another said he hungered for the love of a woman. Another said he hungered to know the forgiveness of God.

Men caught in sexual addiction are filling good hungers with bad food. We have become deceived and believe sex is what we actually hunger for and that sex can actually satisfy the hungers of our heart. In truth, sex can never fill the deep hungers of the heart.

We need food that truly satisfies.

These pains and hungers are actually what fuel our addiction. To begin the road to freedom, we must find ways to heal our pain and satisfy our hungers. When we do, we get free.

In John's Gospel, Jesus makes this radical remark: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35). In our pain, we thirst for the "living water" that heals. In our hungers, we are looking for the food that satisfies. We are hungry and thirsty and use sex as our all-purpose snake oil. The problem? Sexual sin only makes us more hungry and thirsty.

In reality, **Jesus is the food and drink for every hunger and thirst of a man.** When we meet Him, and learn to partake of Him, then freedom is not only possible it is inevitable. The primary way that God feeds us and gives us His "living water" is by lavishly loving us.

No matter how bad the addiction has become, no matter how damaged the soul, no matter how far we have fallen, His love is able to restore the very depths of our soul. He satisfies. If we really want true freedom and want to learn to love well, we need His love. You see God's love actually changes our hearts, heals the deep hurts and satisfies the deepest needs we have. He regularly takes broken men like you and me and makes us different kind of men, men who love well because we have been loved well by Him.

One of the ways that God has made real to us His love—His food and his drink—is through receiving prayer from others. He has given us partners in discovering real love. God knows that we need the presence of others in order to grasp the nature of His love. As faithful ones extend their hands to pray for us, God releases His food and drink that really satisfies our hearts.

When we receive prayer, we begin "to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses

knowledge, so that we could be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (*Ephesians 3:18, 19*).

Another way we can receive God's food and drink is by beginning to reach out to trusted others in our isolation. This coming week ask a trusted Christian brother if he would let you call him when you are feeling tempted, when the hungers arise. When we reach out to a brother in the midst of the hunger, God comes quickly to our need, and He satisfies. We get the food we need.

Questions:

- 1) Do you believe God's love can satisfy your hungers? Why or why not?

- 2) Are you afraid of sharing with your brother your weakness and sin? Why?

- 3) Meditate on Ephesians 3:18, 19. Share any reflections in your small group.



Race Notes



If you want sexual purity, you need vision. You can't just stop living in darkness. You have to move into the light. You need to know who you are becoming. Without a clear vision of who you are becoming, you will not make it. "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (*Proverbs 29:18 - KJV*).

You need to know your destiny as a man. And how to realize that destiny. Who or what can help in this journey of discovery? Television? Friends? Wife? Parents? Work? College? Many of us have been seeking the answers to these basic questions for our whole lives. We clamor, we strive, we sleep around; we look everywhere, and yet the answers elude us.

To answer them we need help. The world is not the place to get the answers. And our own answers are limited. Mere introspection will not do it. The cry to know who we are as a man is one we cannot answer ourselves.

Jesus alone knows who we truly are as men. He alone knows our true selves. He is the one with the answers. When Jesus looks at you or I, He looks beyond present circumstances. He looks into the depths of who we really are, and calls forth our true self. What He sees is the reality of who we are in Him. He can and does show us who we are and how to become good men, even when it's hard to see.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus discerns Peter's true self. "And I tell you that you are Peter [or rock], and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (*Matthew 16:18*)." A few chapters later, Peter denies he even knows Jesus. It seems that the rock was quite shaky.

Jesus saw beneath the contradictions to view the true Peter, the real Peter. Jesus saw beneath the arrogance and self-righteousness to his God-given core. And eventually, Jesus' estimation became the reality that Peter lived in. Peter died a martyr's death. Peter was the rock on which the gates of Hades never prevailed.

Jesus does the same with us. He again and again calls out in us the truth of who we are.

God-Centered Masculinity

What does Jesus say to us as He calls us out? As men, there are basic characteristics that God sees and calls out in all of us—God-centered masculinity. These characteristics find their roots in the Bible and in the person of Jesus Christ. To get freedom that lasts, we need a vision of how Jesus sees us as men. And how masculinity dominated by sexuality is diametrically opposed to what God desires for us. Right vision empowers us for the journey. We are not just getting sober. We, like Peter, are being called out into the truth of who we are as men.

First, His call demands us to find our strength in Him. Self-reliance will not do. The only way to become who God has called us to be is by relying on God's strength. You know what I found when I tried to break my sin pattern as it related to my sexuality? I couldn't do it! And I really wanted to. I wanted to be free and to walk in inspired masculinity but when push came to shove I could not make it happen. I found freedom when I found His strength. Not just freedom from sexual addiction, but also the freedom to be the man God has called me to be.

Secondly, His call compels us to follow. "He [Jesus] listened and obeyed" (*Living Waters Guidebook*, pg 165). Real masculinity is about knowing what God the Father wants and doing it in the strength He provides. In my addiction I did what felt good. I was the god of my little world. If I wanted to look at pornography, I did. If I wanted to sleep around, I did. When finally I wanted to get free, God called me into obedience.

God is freeing us to follow Him. We pursue freedom from sexual addiction, so that we might pursue Him more fully. Jesus and His Spirit are not the antidote to your sexual problem; they are the core of ultimate reality. When Jesus calls a man he calls the whole man. It does not work to simply give Jesus a sliver of your life—your addiction—and keep the rest for yourself. To be who God has called us to be, we must work at being obedient to His call for our whole lives.

Thirdly, His call requires sexual purity. "Mature masculinity refuses to be reduced to raw sexual desire in relationships. Instead, maturity

involves being aware of the woman's deeper, personal needs, tempering strength with tenderness to insure that her joy will be maximized" (*Falling Forward*, pg 175). We are more than our sex drives. God-inspired masculinity defines sexuality the way that God has: sex is for heterosexual marriage and no where else. Sexuality is the deepest and most joyful expression of a life-long heterosexual commitment. We can not be strongholds of strength and truth that God intends when sexual darkness permeates our being. We must be pure if we desire to be Christ-like men.

Lastly, His call teaches us to lead like Jesus led. It is part of what it means to be a man. "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall become your servant" (*Matthew 20:25-26 NAS*). As men we have been entrusted with a lot: marriages, children, communities, and churches. Jesus calls us to lead His way, by being servants. "Mature masculinity does not demand service, but sacrifices in order to serve others" (*Falling Forward*, pg 177). When sexuality is out of control, it keeps us from being leaders like Jesus. Instead of being servant leaders, we are driven by our sexual urges. Other people become objects of gratification, the means to fulfill some lustful intent. Instead of using our leadership to build up, we use our masculine power to seduce, overpower and control the other—whether in thought or deed.

God calls us to give up that kind of manipulative leadership and instead take on His style of servant leadership. In my addiction, I would use my power to seduce and control. As the Lord called me up and out of sexual addiction, He demanded that my use of manipulative power be given up for His authority and leadership. To lead well, we must lead like He leads, in love. This is what Jesus intends for God-centered masculine sexuality.

Through the power of Jesus' love and vision of who we truly are, we are enabled to arise into the real self—resolute, truth-filled men. Jesus demonstrated this love in relation to Peter. With penetrating sight, He beheld the true image in him. In spite of Peter's obvious brokenness, Jesus saw in him real masculinity, real strength.

In His wisdom, God realizes that our emergence into the true self must be worked out on the real, hard ground of this life. And that's where we need help. That's where we need other followers of Jesus whom Jesus uses to help remind us who we really; they can help us on the way to have that true self realized in our everyday lives. The truth is—we are still so defined by our sexual sin that we need the encouraging word of others. That word comes from God, but He uses messengers to bless us and remind us of the truth of our worth and high calling as bearers of His image. Alone, I readily ignore the truth; in fellowship, I'm urged onward through holy, human reminders.

It is in community where I hear clearly His call and I learn how to walk it well. In small group, we are going to practice hearing from the Lord for one another. Bless each other with what you see in each other that is godly and true.

Covenant Prayer by John Wesley

I am no longer my own, but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with who you will;
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by you or laid aside for you,
exalted for you or brought low by you.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine, and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven.
Amen.

Questions:

- 1) Get some time alone this week and write out what you believe is Jesus' vision for your life. Be specific and allow the Spirit to show you what He is doing in your life.

- 2) What do you see in your life today that stands in the way of Christ's vision for you becoming a reality?

- 3) Does Christ's call to full obedience scare you or fill you with hope? Why?

- 4) Who do you think is a better master of your life: Jesus or yourself? Explain why?



Race Notes



Admitting Powerlessness

To get free you need to get saved. Get saved? Sounds a little desperate. But relationship with Jesus requires some desperation. It means crying out for the Savior because we've finally realized we can't save ourselves.

Saved from what? The power of our separateness from love, both from the love of God and the love of others. We've already talked about our need for love, and how Jesus in His love knows who we are and wants to define us according to a God-centered masculinity.

But the hard reality is – everyone of us faces a very real obstacle to love. That obstacle is the false self, specifically how the false self is realized in our sexual addiction. In spite of Jesus' loving invitation to us and His vision for us, we resist Him as much as we long to receive Him.

That resistance constitutes the false self. We want our own way – we want to meet our own needs as we will; we want to decide who we are. Just as the true self emerges in union with Christ, the false self arises in separation from Him.

Habitual sexual sin is part of the false self. In sexual addiction, our sexuality becomes a place for the false self to emerge and be in control. Habitual sexual sin is used as an illusion of what it means to be a “real” man. “Modern media puts out streams of images exalting men and women for detached and shallow sexual encounters, while sporting romantic, heroic images of strength and power” (*Falling Forward*, pg. 12). This cultural masculinity helps constitute the false self. We are bombarded with messages from every corner of the culture that says that sexual prowess equals masculinity. These kind of men look at pornography as if it's what “real” men do.

In my addiction, I wanted to be this kind of guy. I wanted to be a “real” man that had sex with beautiful women and was seen as strong and god-like. I worshipped the gods of sexuality in search of this type of masculinity. But the more I sought it, the more I got trapped in the hell of my sexual addiction. The veneer of the false man never satisfied; it only made me more hungry.

You would think that I would have figured out that sex could not fill

the deep, true hungers of my heart. But my sexual addiction promised me ways to secure a powerful identity, and receive a type of love. And as long as sex did all these things, I was never going to let go.

Thanks be to God, this false god was utterly powerless to give what it promised. "Sex is one area in which sex addicts believe they can reclaim some of their power...Sex is not an experience to be shared but rather a prize to be won" (*Falling Forward*, pg. 12). Ever heard the saying: "The man with the most toys win?" For the false self, sex is the means of achieving status. Sex becomes a way of being "cool."

MTV proclaims this worldview. MTV makes promiscuity alluring; it is powerful to me, even now! I can barely watch it without feeling the strong pull to take on the illusion that this is life. I spent much of my youth grasping for that life. I desperately wanted the power and desirability that sexual contact supposedly brought. Each sexual encounter, whether imaginary or real, promised power and the solidifying of my sexual desirability. Truly, I was always left broken and utterly weak. In the end, instead of satisfaction, I found chaos and enslavement.

The false god of sexual sin also promised to meet my need for love. "The driving force behind the sexual addict's compulsion is a desperate need for love. He tends to interpret any kind of sexuality or sexual interest from another as love" (*Falling Forward*, pg. 13). This too constitutes part of the false self. The man caught up in habitual sexual sin believes that he can secure his deepest needs for love solely through sexuality.

I was always a bit of a loner growing up. Yet I had deep hungers for connection, for love. Acting out sexually seemed to fill those needs, at least for awhile. Whether it was pornography, or acting out with another person, the deep hungers disappeared, for a moment. Then, the hunger grew worse. I had to be more sexually active to dull the hunger. Illicit sex does not work as a way to satisfy the deep hungers of the heart. It can only numb us to our true feelings. We need Jesus and His love if we are ever to know real love and satisfaction.

Needless to say, sex outside of the heterosexual marital covenant does not bring all that the culture, the flesh, and the devil says it does. Sexuality left unchecked brings bondage. I sought all of these things—cultural masculinity, power, and love—through sex and I did not get one of them. Instead, I was a slave to a cruel master.

I was a shadow of a man, lost and alone. It was supposed to be so beautiful but it wasn't. When finally God opened my eyes, I looked much more like Gollum of the "Lord of the Rings" than the man that God had called me to be.

All of these manifestations of habitual sexual addiction are part of the false self. They are the opposite of what God intends and desires for us as men. Remember God-centered masculinity? That image of true masculinity is still alive in us because of Christ's vision. Still, the truth of that image, or true self, is veiled by the false.

For the man caught up in habitual sexual sin, the false self prevails. He still believes its lies. The false self and its illusions must be defeated if freedom is ever to occur. The false self is a powerful foe that we cannot defeat by ourselves. We need Jesus.

Jesus alone can save us because only Jesus' love is powerful enough to break through the cold, hard shell of the false self and reclaim the true. We see a powerful glimpse of His authority to raise up the real self in the story of Lazarus in John's gospel. Lazarus had literally died; still Jesus claimed He would raise him up again. Before He actually called the dead man forth into life, He said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" (*John 11:25,26*)

Here Jesus asserts His claim that He is the Lord of life, real life inspired by the Creator and Redeemer of all living things. As you consider your own need for that life in light of the false self, I ask you: "Do you believe that Jesus is the Source of life that can raise you from the dead of addiction and separateness from God and others?"

As you consider your response, consider Jesus' unique qualifications to save you from the false self:

- 1) **He is God.** We can't save ourselves from our sexual addiction, nor can another human being save us. The power of separation from God and each other can only be broken by God. Our only hope lies in the One who stands apart from us as our Creator; He stands above and beyond our status as created beings and thus has the unique authority to break down dividing walls that separate humanity from Himself and from one another.
- 2) **He is man.** Jesus shares our humanity; He knows what it is like to struggle with loneliness and temptation (*Hebrews 4:15, 16*). And yet unlike us, Jesus successfully warred against the temptations of the false self (and its addictions) and its separateness from the Creator. In His life of perfect obedience to the Father, Jesus represents us to the Father as the obedient Son. In so doing, He cancels out the power of our addiction, separateness and our disobedience! Jesus' obedience to the Father is more powerful than our disobedience. We can do nothing to cancel out the power of our addiction; all we can do is cry out to Him and the way that He has made for us. He overcame the tyranny of the false self through His life of radical obedience to the Father; we in turn overcome the false self through radical reliance upon Jesus. Through believing in Him, "He gives us the right to become children of God" (*John 1:12*).
- 3) **In His death on the cross, Jesus died for us.** He took our place. The main consequence for humanity's disobedience was death (*Genesis 2:17*). The end of the false self is death – eternal separation from God and others. Jesus paid the penalty for the sin we committed in our sexual addiction.

In short, Jesus' death on the cross broke the power of hell. That includes the eternal death that awaits those under the mastery of the false self, as well as the hell-on-earth caused by our sexual addictions.

"I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned: he has crossed over from death to life" (*John 5:24*).

- 4) **In His resurrection, Jesus raises up the true self.** The resurrected Christ reclaims the true image from the tyranny of the false self! The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead raises us up from the false self and establishes us in our God-centered masculinity.

“For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also united in the likeness of His resurrection...”
(Romans 6:5 NAS).

Our part

Jesus makes a clear way out of our sexual addiction and the lies that accompany it. He is the way to real freedom, and the way to become the men He has called us to be. What is our part? We need to admit to ourselves, God, and to our brothers that our habitual sexual sin has made our lives unmanageable, and that we are out of control. We call out to Jesus, admitting He alone is the means to our freedom and to our true selves. The cry to Him is the beginning of new life. In the place where death and rebellion have longed reigned, Jesus begins to rule and reign.

There is real hope for those that put their trust in Jesus.

I remember, vividly, the day I gave Jesus my life. Seven years ago, I had had enough and I was desperate for Jesus. I went to a small church admitted my powerlessness, cried out for mercy and recommitted my life to Jesus. I did not get totally free from my addictions that day. But there was a great exchange: my rebellion and chaos for His obedience and life. Today, I am a totally different man because Jesus had His way with me.

As we meet Jesus, encountering His love, we are really changed in the core of our beings. Jesus called out in a loud voice to Lazarus: “Lazarus, come out!” (*John 11:43, 44*) The dead man came forth in the power of the resurrection. So shall we, as we come forth in our true selves and say “yes” to Jesus.

**Prayer of Admitting Powerlessness and
Receiving Jesus as Savior**

“Lord Jesus, I accept You as the only One who can save me from the hell of my addictions, my false self. I believe in your death and resurrection as the only way that I can be saved. I admit Lord that I am powerless over my sexual addiction, that my life is unmanageable, and that I need You. You alone can free me from my addiction and raise up my true self. As I receive You as Savior, I accept the truth that I am your child, destined for heaven.”

Questions:

- 1) Do you feel like you need to get saved from sexual addiction? Explain.

- 2) List the lies of the false self that you believe.

- 3) What is more appealing: the false self or the true self? Explain.

- 4) Do you feel powerless over your addiction? If you do, write out a cry to the Lord for help asking Him for help.



Race Notes



The Cross and Confession

Clean from What? Basically, we're talking about getting clean from the effects of our sexual addiction. The effects of habitual sexual sin have deadened the image of God in us and in those around us. The fact is—even though we are saved, we can still be bound to habitual sexual sin. Our sexual addiction might be deadly but it is powerfully familiar to us. Many of us cannot conceive of a life apart from exaggerated sexuality.

So we feel a tension between the new and old. On the one hand, Jesus has raised us up from the dead, just as He raised up Lazarus. But on the other hand, we come out of the tomb still wearing the old and familiar “grave clothes”—namely our sexual addiction. We want to be free from the grave clothes but are unsure how to get free. This is a battle between the true self and the false, addictive self. Jesus awakens the true self with the power that raised Lazarus from the dead. And He asserts the reign of His love at the center of our being. From that center, which is our heart—the seat of the true self—He helps us identify the “grave clothes” as the essential first step in getting free from them.

So first, Jesus alerts us to what the “grave clothes” are. We may not know. Especially today we have a hard time knowing right versus wrong. Truth has become relative—“if it works for you, fine” is the mindset of our time. As Christians, we discern the truth from the Bible, and from the Spirit of God who convicts our hearts in accord with the truths of scripture. Jesus is faithful to show how our sexual addiction has ruined our lives.

Simply put, His perfect love reveals the destructive ways we try to meet our needs. Life reveals death. When I first began as a Christian, I had no idea how self-sufficient I was. And how destructive being the lord of my own life was.

He showed me how deep the sin ran in my heart. As I entered into the light, Jesus showed me how sexual sin had become a way for me to cope with reality. Matter of fact, I had ceased to live in reality at all and was living in a world fashioned by sexual gods bent on my annihilation. He was faithful to show me how costly the worship of those gods was. He revealed this to me slowly and lovingly but He did reveal it.

He does the same for all of us; He seeks to highlight every piece of grave cloth that hides His best for you and me. Whether our “grave clothes” are habitual lust, masturbation, pornography, fornication, homosexual lust, or adultery, they all hide and distort God’s best for us.

Let’s be clear, sex is good. God made both Adam and Eve with “a yearning to not be alone” (*Genesis 2:18*). One thing that drew them together in paradise was that good desire to join together in sexual union. God did give them some conditions. The first is an exclusive commitment. In scripture, sex seals a lifetime commitment. It is the signature on the contract. Sex comes after the hard work of building a relationship: it celebrates the decision of two persons to work it out together over the course of their lives.

Adam and Eve became one without shame (*Genesis 2:25*). Spiritually, emotionally and sexually they joined together, and established the first marriage. Ever since then, the scripture has ordained no other context in which we are free to have sex. Only within marriage can we be “naked and unashamed.”

The second condition for having sex is complementarity; in other words, that lifetime commitment must be heterosexual in nature. God created man and woman to complement one another in their unique differences as male and female (*Genesis 1: 26,27*). That includes spiritual, emotional, and sexual differences. What woman possesses man knows only in part (and vice-versa). Therein lies the basis for becoming one. Her difference draws out his true masculinity and compels him to reach beyond himself. (The same applies to how woman is drawn out by man.) Intimacy is increased by the others’ difference! United in complementarity, and on the common ground of their humanity, male and female together reveals God image.

So, heterosexual marriage—commitment and complementarity—make up the boundaries for good, godly sex. The witness of scripture and the conviction of the Spirit in our hearts alert us to the grave clothes we assume when we seek satisfaction outside of God’s intent. We have pursued sexuality outside of these boundaries for most of our lives. We have been naked with those we had no right

to be naked with. This dark nakedness deadens the truth of who we truly are. This breaking of the boundary lines is what the Bible refers to as sin.

When we participate in breaking the boundary lines, we violate God's image. We take into ourselves images and sensations that distort our affections, wound our emotions, and numb our consciences. Not only have we actively participated in breaking through the boundary lines that God has established, we in our addictions become physically and spiritually bound to these violations.

The addict is driven by powerful, chaotic sexuality; he chooses the wrong ways to get his needs met. He has been imprisoned to a hell of self, believing the lies that this is real life.

Thankfully, Jesus makes a way for us to be free from sexual addiction and its effects. He made that way on the cross when He allowed His body to be pierced. From His crucified body flows a flood of blood and water (*John 19:34*).

Only the blood and water can cleanse our broken hearts and bodies. Scripture implores us to enter into that cleansing flood in order to be made ready for heaven (*Revelation 22:14*). The sexually unclean will not get into heaven but those who receive the cross' cleansing will live forever. That flood removes the grave clothes, then enlivens the true self (*Ezekial 47:9*). Through it, we are freed to stand before God and man "without blemish and free from accusation" (*Colossians 1:22*).

The cross brings freedom to those bound by sexual addiction. Jesus speaking said, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (*John 8: 34-36*).

No doubt most of us feel like a slave to our addiction. That is why we are here. The cross not only cleanses us, it also frees us. **We become children of God through Jesus and His cross.** There, He takes on the burden of our sin, makes us children of God, and breaks the bondage

of sexual addiction. There we die to the old and claim our true selves. Many of us hear this wonderful message, try to live it and fail. And failure brings discouragement and shame. We want freedom but we don't know the first step. God is faithful to make a practical, real way to freedom. Confession is the first, essential step that we can take to make the truth of Christ's freedom a reality in our lives.

In order to receive the cleansing and freedom we desire and that is available to us, we must take action. We must partake of the flood of blood and water released at the cross. We do this through confession. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). We also need our brothers here. Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes,

In confession a man breaks through to certainty. Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother? Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to the holy God? But if we do, we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sin to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution. (*Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, pg 115-116).

When we bring a brother into our confession, we have a physical representative of an unseen reality. He brings the truth that we have fallen short but also of God's assured grace in our confessed sin. Our brother brings the objective reality of the cross into our every day life.

Confession is more than verbalizing our sin to another; it is a holy transfer, the unseen meeting the seen. When a brother is present in confession, I can know in my depths that I am free and clear from the sin that I have committed.

In confession we proclaim our powerlessness over our addiction and our desire to have God's intention for our masculinity. We cannot get free on our own but we can proclaim to God and to others our powerlessness. This is within our ability. I remember, as I desired and fought to get free, I would say, "God has to do it. I do not have it in myself to

become the man that God desires for me to be.” Stated in isolation this could be used as an excuse to keep on sinning, in community it is a confession of truth that gives God place to pour out His strength.

I confessed my sexual sin with tenacity. I stayed clean. I would fall with pornography and I would call my accountability partner and confess my failure. I confessed my powerlessness to choose what was good and my desire to live as God intended me to live. Freedom from habitual sexual sin starts with the acknowledgement of powerlessness. Confession makes the acknowledgement of powerlessness a reality in our hearts. We have to kill the false self and confess that darkness lurks within. As we do, new power from God is given to us. We begin to find freedom.

Confession ends our isolation. Sin isolates us. Bonhoeffer writes, “He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone” (*Life Together*, pg. 110) I remember my thoughts as I came to reckon with my habitual sexual sin. What would happen when people really got to know me? Would they think I was a pervert? Would they hate me? I felt utterly alone facing the chasm of darkness within. I felt so awful and ugly. I needed another, someone with objective sight, to answer these questions. As I confessed, becoming known to God and another, I found fellowship in the deep places of the heart.

Nothing close to what I feared came to pass. People loved me as I was. I found grace, real grace. I found real connection. As I revealed the dark places to the light, my isolation became eased and God’s healing love started to flow into the deep places of my heart. It is so freeing, so restful when you are known, forgiven, and loved. No longer is there the need to hide and manipulate the truth. Simply, you can stand as you are and receive the free gift of God’s healing love. Confession brings this great freedom.

Perhaps most powerfully, confession brings healing. “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (James 5:16). As I seriously pursued confession, I began to be liberated. God started healing those places of wounding and sickness that sexual addiction was covering. In confession, and prayer, God mysteriously intersects with our soul and heals what has been broken.

As God healed those broken places within me, I was able to more firmly stand in my true self.

In confession, we humbly make clear who we are in our sin and God shows us favor and grace. Not just with some abstract word of love, but with actual healing of the deep places of the heart. In confession, we find that God's grace is rich and abundant, and we find the deep freedom we desire.

We confess, we get clean, and we start getting free. After Jesus called Lazarus out from the tomb and into life, He said to His disciples, "take off his grave clothes and let him go" (*John 11:44*).

In your small group, through confession, you are going to begin the process of allowing your grave clothes to be removed. Your small group leader will guide you in the simple steps to confession. Every Christian functions as a minister here, according to the priesthood of all believers (*1 Peter 2:5-9*).

- 1) Confess the sin specifically. Be concrete, and do not neglect unconfessed historic sins.
- 2) The lay priest binds the sin to the cross (*Matthew 16:18, 19*).
- 3) He pronounces forgiveness over the receiver.
- 4) The lay priest pours water over the receiver as a gesture of symbolic of the deep cleansing work that is occurring on the unseen levels through Jesus' release of blood and water (*Hebrew 10:22*). (This is not holy water but a symbol of cleansing.)
- 5) The lay priest blesses the forgiven man's true self, and affirms the protection and covering that corporate confession has afforded him.

Prayer of confession

“Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience, and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10: 22, 23).

Questions:

- 1) Write out a list of sins you need to confess. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

- 2) If you are afraid to confess to another write why.

- 3) After confession write how you feel.

- 4) This week meditate on Jesus and the cross. And how he has forgiven you. These scriptures might help: *Ephesians 1:6-7; II Corinthians 5:17; Psalm 103:12; I John 1:9; Psalm 32:1-2*



Race Notes



Making Amends and how Jesus Bears our Wounds

To find sexual purity, our very hearts need to be transformed. Jesus desires to make us the kind of men that find sexual sin an unacceptable choice. We must do our part. Two ways of the cross are required of us. The first is receiving healing for the wounds that others have given us. The second is embracing the way of reconciliation. Through the cross, Jesus makes a way for our very souls to be transformed. He wants to remove every piece of “grave cloth,” even the rags that others have put on us.

Receiving Healing for our Wounds

The first way of the cross has to do with the forgiving others for what they have done to us. At the root of the addictive self are wounds others have inflicted upon us. These wounds energize the false self. Our addiction, anxiety, fear and the need to control might all be connected to the ways that others have harmed us.

If we want to be free from addiction and free to become men of God, we must be willing to allow God to show us our wounds. And we must seek to be free from the wounds of others and the effects of those wounds.

What are some of these wounds? There are many, but I’m going to touch on three—neglect, rejection, and abuse. All three are powerful sources of “unlove” that urges us to live in the false, addictive self.

First, some of us may have been subject to various kinds of neglect. These sins involved what others didn’t give us, especially parents. Sometimes there wasn’t enough love in the house. Mom and Dad may have been preoccupied with the pain and brokenness in their own lives, and as a result sinned against us by not being there.

Sins of neglect often set us up for isolation and loneliness that may result later on in overly dependent relationships. We try to make others the mother or father we never had, or at least didn’t get enough of. Such loneliness can also create a vacuum for sexual addiction. In the absence of real sources of love, we become addicted to false ones. A lack of love tempts us to secure love out of the false self.

Rejection from others means that we received this message: “You are unacceptable.” This can come from our families, our schools, churches and our peer group. We accumulate labels and experiences that tell us we are not worthy of love. People sin against us by demeaning who we are, even cursing us! And we start believing the lie.

That lie urges us to settle for less. For the man caught up by habitual sexual sin, at core, he feels and believes he is without value. For me, I had deep feelings of worthlessness; sexuality was a way to feel different than what my internal voice said about me. That voice came from my past—from painful memories. Sexual addiction helped to quiet the voice of self-hatred. Until Jesus met me and started to really bring His presence and healing into my wounds of rejection, there was no way I could be the man God has called me to be. It is the same with all of us, until Jesus bears the rejection, we are not wholly free to pursue God’s intention for us as men.

Similar to rejection is abuse. Abuse involves the misuse of power. It can be emotional, physical, or sexual. In sexual abuse, an adult breaks into a child’s world and destroys its innocence. The child’s view of sex and intimacy becomes distorted. Fear and shame result for some; the one abusive man or woman can lead the victim of abuse to perceive the threat of abuse from all men or all women. Sex can become a way of controlling that fear.

For others, sex, however abusive, conveys love and attention. This is seen especially in the sex addict. This can engender the victim an overly sexualized approach to love and relationships. Sex takes on a far greater role than it should. Having had the protective boundaries around his or her childhood broken, the victim continues to act out his or her sexuality without boundaries. Sex becomes the main ingredient in relationships. The adult victim continues to live out of the wounded, seductive self.

As a young man in high school, I was abused by an adult male seven years my senior. His advances conveyed attention; he made me feel wanted. He taught me how to get my needs met by seduction. Sexuality became the way that I secured attention and love. Before

long, I was fully addicted to the pursuit of this false love and slowly it became a hellish prison.

The sins against us—neglect, rejection and abuse—can readily empower the addictive self and its efforts to secure love falsely. We need Jesus here—the author and finisher of our true masculine selves. He calls us to Himself, that He would bear the sins against us and their effects. Jesus is uniquely qualified to bear our wounds. Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus faced severe cruelty. His disciples neglected and ultimately rejected Him in His time of greatest need. He was mocked, slapped, spit on, and whipped, then died a slow and agonizing death on the cross while continuing to endure public humiliation.

“He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” (*Isaiah 53:3*). Jesus faced intense abuse; His nails-pierced hands and feet, and sword-pierced side, proclaim His profound grasp of human suffering. Through His life of suffering, Jesus becomes an advocate for us the wounded.

But Jesus does more than empathize with our pain; He bore our suffering on the cross. In dying, Jesus “took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows” (*Isaiah 53:4*); He assumed upon Himself the full weight of all sins that have been committed against us! He bore the unbearable, not just personal sins but also the wounds that others have inflicted upon us!

In His resurrection, Jesus imparts to us the same stream of healing and cleansing that we encountered in the fourth lesson. Only now that river of life makes whole our wounded souls... “By His wounds we are healed” (*Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24*). The very wounds that Jesus bore, now made whole in resurrection authority, assure us that our wounds in union with His will result in new life.

A new life, free from wounds and the sins we have committed against others, begins to take root. An emerging freedom and inspired masculinity mark this new life. God’s word takes on new meaning as we embrace the healing He offers: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (*2 Corinthians. 5:17*)

Jesus wants to bear our wounds. We have a place to go with those “grave clothes!” As with our personal sin, we enlist the service of others to help identify and unwrap those “grave clothes.” In the presence of others, He empowers the true self to name and release to Him the deadly offering. He then bears the wound. Some steps in this process include:

- 1) Naming the sin against you. In the presence of others, we need to name the person who wounded us, and the sin (s)he committed.
- 2) Releasing the pain. As already mentioned, talking about our wounds will begin to bring up uncomfortable emotions like anger, sorrow, shame, fear and hatred. As you dare to feel what your heart has contained for years, draw near to Jesus on the cross—identify with Him in His suffering. Place your wounds in His, and allow Him to grieve with and for you.
- 3) Binding the sin into Christ. Here it is helpful for the one praying for you to bind the sin away from you and into Christ. Behold the blackness of the wound as it is transferred onto Christ. Allow Him to bear its weight, that you would bear it no more.
- 4) Loosing forgiveness. In order for the sin to remain bound to Christ, we must forgive those who have wounded us. That simply means that we are releasing our right to serve justice our way; we are entrusting justice to the Just One, Christ alone. Speak out forgiveness for your offender, and know that Jesus releases you from the sin and the sinner you have forgiven.
- 5) Cleansing from the effects of wounding. Often we bear the residual effects of not releasing our wounders to Christ. Bitterness, hatred, and judgements against others often result from those wounds we’ve yet to forgive. Having forgiven, we need to ask Jesus to cleanse our hearts from the effects of those wounds. Confess your sinful reactions to your offenders; let the healing stream that flows continually from the cross have its full effect upon you. Use cleansing water here if desired.

Jesus bears our wounds. As we entrust them to Him, we shed more grave clothes, and are that much better able to love others out of the true self.

Prayer of Truth

“Jesus, help me to deal honestly with the pain in my life inflicted by others.

In Your truth, help me accept the truth of the wounds that continue to bleed. Show me how those wounds can distort reality now. Lead me to the cross. Show me how You have made a place for my suffering to become one with Yours at the cross. Please release mercy for me, and grant me mercy that I might forgive those who hurt me.”

The way of reconciliation

When we sin against others with our sexuality we hurt them and we damage our own souls as well. Christ is quick to forgive us but His forgiveness exhorts us to go to the person we have sinned against and ask for forgiveness. In Matthew 5:23, Jesus commands us to go back to a brother who holds something against us. Why? To be reconciled to him.

As God works His grace into our hearts we are awakened to how we have hurt others with our choices. True repentance brings about holy grief over our sin. The Holy Spirit provokes us to seek to set right the damaged relationship. We do not go back to earn our salvation; we go back because we actually care for the one we have sinned against. As much as lies in our power, we want and seek to make things right.

Going back and asking for forgiveness is no easy thing. Going back humbles us. And it hurts. It is important that you have a trusted Christian brother walk with you through the process. Pray that God would place the right man in your life to walk through this attempt at reconciliation.

These simple steps will be a helpful guide as you walk through the process of reconciliation:

- 1) Write down the sins that you have committed against others.
- 2) Prayerfully go over the list with a mature, Christian man who is going to walk with you through the process of reconciliation.
- 3) Together, decide who you should go back to and what should be shared. (You won't necessarily need to go back to everyone you have sinned against. What is important is that the Spirit leads you as you decide who you should go back to. Also it is important to work out what you are going to say to the person you are seeking to reconcile with. It is an awkward experience, so you'll want to know exactly what you want to say).
- 4) Once you and your brother in the Lord, led by the Spirit, have decided who you should go to and what needs to be shared, PRAY! Prayer is important; you want God to be in it. Once you feel released, go humbly and share what you need to share with the person God has sent you to.

Participating in the discipline of reconciliation brings about deep freedom. Whether or not the person you go back to releases you or not, your heart will participate in a healing time with the Lord. God will touch you with the healing flow of His mercy. The damaged parts of your heart that have been ravaged by your sin will find grace and mercy, new life. Also, those you have wounded will know Christ's redemptive power as they see how you have been changed by His power.

The Serenity Prayer

*God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;
Taking, as He did, this sinful world
as it is, not as I would have it;
Trusting that He will make all things right
if I surrender to His Will;
That I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with Him
Forever in the next.
Amen.
--Reinhold Niebuhr*

Conclusion

As we deal forthrightly with our own sin and the sins of others in light of the cross, we really do change. We become holy and set apart. We start getting free. We start becoming the men that God intended us to be.

Questions:

This week's homework is to work through the steps of forgiving others and making amends. This is a hard chapter, so take your time and give yourself a lot of grace.



Race Notes



Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead in order to secure us in His love. We behold His act of love on the cross, and allow its power to change our hearts. The cross reveals the unchanging truth that God loves us. The cross reveals to us that God's love is more powerful than our sexual addiction. The cross proclaims to us that nothing can separate us from His love. "This is love; not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (*1 John 4:10*).

Jesus reveals to us the Father's love. God wills that His Son make real to us His Father-heart of love. He wants to win us over to His sweet and powerful love. His love both transforms us and allows us to become ones who can love well.

Many of us struggle with God as Father because our human images of "father-love" have been at least inadequate, and often distorted. Andy Comiskey writes:

"I am often painfully aware of how hard it is to love my kids in a way that reveals His heart of love to them. The other day God showed me His heart for us, father and children. My kids were misbehaving badly and I came to discipline them. In their playroom, I found gum on the carpet and old food on the shelf, which rankled me all the more. Following my verbal torrent, two of my four kids requested prayer from me for some fears they were facing. I had to admit I didn't want to hear their requests, let alone submit them to God."

Then the Father nudged me through His Spirit and reminded me of how He listens to me amid all my disobedience. These words came to mind: "Before you call, I will answer, while you still speak, I will hear..." (*Isaiah 65:24*). I surrendered my irritation, and gathered the two in my arms to pray to the God who hears us in spite of our unworthiness. His Father heart is ever turned toward us as His children. Nothing can separate us from His love."

The Father wants us to become secure in His love. Though many of us have experienced fearful exchanges with our earthly fathers, even rejection, He wants us to know at the deepest levels possible that we are accepted by Him. Through Jesus, we have become the Father's own sons. That's one reason why He releases His Spirit into our hearts. The Holy Spirit "testifies with our spirit that we are His children" (*Romans 8:16*). His love establishes itself in our hearts and frees us from the fear that we are illegitimate, "damaged goods," somehow beyond the grasp of His Father-love. "*For you have not received a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as His sons and daughters*" (*Rom 8:15*).

Security in His love has several amazing benefits. We begin to receive His blessing upon our manhood. His love blesses our identity as men. He alone knows our true identity and He alone makes a way for that identity to come forth. His love also enables us to rise out of the false addictive self and stand as men confirmed as sons of favor!

In sexual addiction, I sought identity and security in all kinds of darkness. Underneath the sins, there were deep hungers for affirmation and acceptance as a man. As I received God's love, the deep hungers began to get satisfied. The Father constantly reminds me of who I am as a man and that I am adequate to be that man. When I am tempted to fill the hungers with lesser things, like sexual sin, all I have to do is listen and hear what the Father says: "*This is my son, who I love; with him I am well pleased*" (*Matthew 3:17*).

Out of His affirmation upon our masculinity, we can walk as sons of honor. He makes us honorable because He makes us His own. The scripture says that those parts of the body that are less honorable, God gives greater honor to, through His body! (*1 Corinthians. 12*) He is committed to exchanging our dishonor for blessing.

If we know and experience the truth of what and who God says we are, we will stop acting out in ways that are contrary to the honor that He bestows upon us. As I experienced God's love and honor in the hungry places of my heart, I was able to stand tall and free and to arise in my inspired, God-centered masculinity.

Hearing the Father's words to us is key to start living as He intends. We must make a place to hear the words of life—love and honor—from God. I hear those words as I spend time with Him. In the Christian tradition, this time spent with Him is commonly referred to as disciplines. Disciplines don't make us right with God (only Jesus can do that); they are simply exercises that we can do to experience His love and honor. In the same way that a marathon runner has to practice for months so he can finish the race, disciplines are the inspired means that enable us to hear and experience God's words of love. We then become the men God calls us to be. Disciplines make a place to hear and see the goodness of the Lord.

A few of the disciplines that help us to break free from the patterns of addictive lust are meditation on scripture, prayer, fasting, community, and silence and solitude. (I am in debt to Dallas Willard for all of his books that have taught the value of disciplines in the spiritual life.)

When we read and meditate on scripture, we meet God. If we are ever going to be free, our diseased thoughts need to be transformed by His Love. We might believe that sex outside of the marital covenant is an appropriate way to secure our needs; we might fear God and think God is out to destroy us. We might have seemingly uncontrollable sexual thoughts and inclinations. We might wrongly think that we are unlovable.

All of these thoughts provoke strong emotions. For some, diseased thoughts enable them to be seducers and to easily be seduced. For others, their thoughts fill them with worthlessness. These thoughts, and the feelings that accompany them, can't simply be discarded; they are too strong. We need our minds transformed; we need to know and meditate on the love and honor that God extends to us.

The most essential way to retrain and transform the mind is by meditating on the truth of God's word. You read the Bible, taking small pieces and thinking on it, even memorizing it, and we start thinking the way we are supposed to—God loves us, honors us and His whole being is for us. As we start thinking right, our emotions follow.

Meditating on God's word is an essential way to get our minds off of ourselves and our lesser desires and onto what God is saying and doing in our lives.

Prayer is another essential discipline in which God's love is revealed to us. There are many aspects of prayer. We pray for God's mercy; for His help; we might pray that He would help a particular family member.

One type of prayer that is helpful in breaking the stronghold of sexual addiction is listening prayer. "Listening prayer is a critical practice of healing the soul" (*Falling Forward*, pg 83). Why? Because when we hear God telling us personally how much He loves us, we are forever changed. By His voice, we are able to stand and "experience a new solid-footedness or centering in His love" (*Falling Forward*, pg. 84). In this discipline, we get in a quiet place, with a journal, and we wait for the Lord to speak.

"God's 'speaking' might be done through scriptures, impressions, waves of consoling love, visions or pictures" (*Falling Forward*, pg. 84). God's words of love and favor forever change the course of our lives; they enable us to live the abundant life.

Another discipline that can really bring God's love into focus and help take the power of the false-self away is fasting. In fasting, we declare that Jesus is our food and drink and that He alone can truly satisfy. Fasting can range from not eating for a specific time period to giving up television, so that you can more fully engage with the Lord. I remember when the Internet was a real problem for me. I could not be on the Internet and not look at pornography. The Lord made it clear that if I would fast from the Internet, I would find new freedom. He was right! Fasting was part of the answer God gave me when I decided that I wanted to get free from sexual addiction. In fasting we meet His heart and hear His love and devotion to us.

Another discipline is silence and solitude. "The discipline of solitude is an essential ingredient if we are to change" (*Falling Forward*, pg. 83). In silence and solitude we allow ourselves to get quiet and allow God to love us. In this discipline we don't do anything. We simply rest in who

and what God is. In silence and solitude we enter the reality of God and His love for us. There is a spaciousness and beauty in God that we encounter as we simply sit and be with Him. Try taking small amounts of time and practice meditating on His Presence and experiment with what works for you—where, when and how long.

As I was breaking free from pornography, this was an essential discipline. I would get quiet and focus on the Lord and rest in His presence, in His vastness. As I sat with the Lord, His peace, His centeredness, started to fill by being. The more I was with Him in the quiet, solitary place, the more I was able to stand against temptation. *“Though youths grow weary and tired, And vigorous young men stumble badly, yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength”* (Isaiah 40:30,33, NAS). When we sit and get quiet before the Lord, we get new strength, the strength that comes from knowing that God really loves us. This strength sets us free.

Lastly, we need community. Community is not an optional discipline. If you want to have a vigorous healthy Christian faith full of freedom, you need to walk with other believers who are going the same way you are. In the discipline of community, those around us refine us. But more importantly, the Christian community provides visible reminders of God's love and favor. The flesh and blood of the church—our brothers and sisters—remind us again and again that God loves us and is for us. When we forget (and we forget a lot, I do anyway), they remind us of God's honor and favor towards us.

You know what happens when you start relating with Jesus and allow Him to love you? You get free. **I mean really free.** Addictions no longer have the pull they used to. The deep hungers start getting satisfied. Are we still tempted? Absolutely! Do we still have hard times? Yes! Are we still weak? For sure! But we are learning that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:39, NAS)

As we become secure in the Father's love, our God-centered selves emerge. We start becoming who God always intended us to be—free men who love God.

What do we give back? Worship is the natural response when we encounter God's love and goodness. When God brought me into His family, I was an outcast. I had nothing to bring and nothing to give the Lord. He lavished His love and grace and mercy onto me. Through His love, I have forever been changed. And not only have I been changed but I have been adopted into His family. I am a child of God! He is making me into the image of His son. All I can do is love Him in return. We can't earn His love or make ourselves worthy to receive it. Everything He gives us is a gift. All we can do is avail ourselves to Him, and give Him our praise and thanks for His goodness toward us. We worship Him because He has been good to us. We have tasted and seen that God is good!

There are many ways to worship, or give love back to, God. One of the most common ways is through singing love songs to God. He loves to hear His children adoring Him, pouring out their hearts through song. Music engages our heart—it releases our devotion in ways that the spoken word often cannot. As we sing, our thoughts, affections, and bodies enter into the desires to bless Him for the many blessings He has given to us. The whole man enters into worship. We extend our hands, sway, sing, kneel, shout, lay down, dance, weep, and acknowledge His particular expressions of faithfulness to us. In that way we fulfill the biblical command *“to honor God with our bodies”* (1 Corinthians 6:20).

God loves us and in return we love Him. Freedom grows. Worship also secures us afresh in the Father's great love for us. We receive His love and acceptance and blessing and honor; in turn we worship Him for His goodness toward us and He pours out more of that goodness upon us.

Worshiping God causes us to grow more and more into His image and likeness. The more we devote ourselves to Him, the more we reflect Him. Through worship, sons and daughters of the King reveal Him with increasing clarity.

Through disciplines and worship we find God and we are forever changed—we become men of freedom.

Questions:

- 1) When you hear the word “discipline” do you have a positive or negative reaction? If you feel negative towards discipline, try to write out why.

- 2) What disciplines have you tried? Was it a positive or negative experience? Explain why.

- 3) Take some time, get alone, and ask the Lord what discipline you should practice. Then over the next week, keep a journal as you practice your discipline. (This will help you see the progress you make as you practice your discipline).



Race Notes



Race Notes



God is love: what a great truth! Before we could do anything, He loved us. Even while we were sinners in darkness, He loved us. And His love changes us. As His love saturates us, we begin to become whole. Freedom grows. And as we get free and whole, we can see that Jesus is doing much more than merely breaking off sexual bondage: He is enabling us to love. “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19, NAS). This is a love different than the love we experienced in the darkness. His love, builds up; it creates rather than destroys; its very essence is life-giving.

Learning to love this way can be a challenge. As addicts we have used people rather than loved them. For most of us loving well seems impossible. Yet we are called by the One who has so lavishly loved us to love others. “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another...if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:11,12).

Breaking the chains of habitual sexual sin is an essential step in loving someone (It is hard to love someone well while using them as an object of your lust). From a place of sobriety, we must learn to love. God’s purpose is to create men who love well not who are merely sober. Loving well is the sign of true Christian freedom.

God enables us to love. And there are things we can do to quicken our journey in learning to love. First, as stated in last week’s lesson, we need to enter Christian community. This goes beyond confession; this is living real, everyday lives in the light and love of community. This is more than going to church on Sundays. When I say community, I mean that you share your life with fellow followers of Jesus. As Christian men, our primary focus of our relational energy is first our wives and then Christian community. It only makes sense that we walk most closely with those walking in the same direction we are.

I remember when I first began walking with the Lord. I was living at the house of a Christian brother who had been gracious enough to allow me to stay at his house. After a few weeks of living there, I started getting calls from old friends—friends who I knew would cause me to stumble if I spent time with them. It wasn’t their fault; I was not

strong enough to be friends with them and stay on the journey with Jesus. I remember one day being prompted by the Lord to tear up a list of phone numbers of old friends; I obeyed.

As I firmly left the old and entered the new, Christ blessed me. In Christ's community, I became more solid in Him, able to withstand temptation; I also experienced more fully the love of God and His mercy. And it was in this new community where I began to learn to love others as God intends.

It is the same with all of us. He calls us to leave the old and enter into what he intends.

His community is the learning ground of love. Why? Because it's hard. It's in the fire of community that we learn to love. For those struggling with sexual addiction, the church will be the community where you learn to honor men and women and not use them as objects of lust.

For a large part of my adolescent and early adult life, I continually and regularly sexualized relationships and people. It was the way I connected with the world. When I began really walking with the Lord, I still sexualized relationships, even the godly ones. These healthy relationships brought much goodness but they also provoked my weaknesses and were possible doorways to sin. In response, I could have stayed in my sin or run in fear.

Thankfully, I allowed God to use it as way to teach me to love. Within the community, I could share my weaknesses and sin in a redemptive, safe place. These men provided grace and confronted me in His light. Slowly, I learned to interact with people without having a hidden lust world created from their images. I was learning to love. This redemptive growth never would have happened if I had tried to go it alone.

It is so easy to give up. It is a lot easier to look at pornography or go have sex with an old lover than to learn to love imperfect people. In our world of lust, we can feel pleasure anytime we want. We seem in control. In Christ's community we feel our pain. In Christ's commu-

nity, men and women don't do what we always want. In Christ's, community you end up around people that you would never have been friends with in the world. And in His community people hurt us. It can be quite a challenge just to endure His community.

But we need His church. There we are loved, truly loved. And there we learn to love. I knew that if I wanted Christian community, I had to press through any difficulties and get it. If you wait for others to initiate, you very well might die in the waiting. We are the ones who need love and we are the ones that want to learn to love. God blesses the tenacious.

Press in, find places of life in your church and plant yourself firmly there. And stay, whether you feel like it or not, whether you feel loved or not, until you get what you need. Early on in my journey I had this attitude: I need community and so I am going to get it. I didn't get caught up on the fact that people didn't always pursue me. I didn't leave my church because everyone didn't want to be my friend or because some were less than warm; I pressed in. I needed church badly, so I pursued it ravenously. I didn't do this perfectly but I did it. The result was two-fold: I received His love more fully and I was learning more and more how to love.

Pressing into Christian community and loving the church is easier said than done. Many of us have great shame because of our sexual histories and our current sexual sins and struggles. We think that our past sin and current struggles disqualifies us there. We must learn that Jesus is the reason for our fellowship and He is the basis of our love. His death on the cross qualifies us for relationship, not how we feel. It is important that we fight through feelings of shame, doubt and unworthiness. We have to fight. We must constantly assert the truth of the cross and its power over our sin, shame and doubt, whatever stands in the way. Christ enables us to love.

Every Christian, no matter how broken, has the greater love with which to love others. With the cross before us, we are reminded that life has broken through all the deadly loves of the old self. We live out of the new and true self. However fragile that self may be, it outshines the

false self. The cross reminds us that we are greater than the sum total of our brokenness.

Jesus affirms us continuously in the life that that He won for us on the cross. He love us—the hallmark of the true self is that in light of all its blemishes, that self is loved! Love shines through us and urges us to love others by strengthening their hand in God.

Out of the true self, God calls each of us to bless the true self in others. That means releasing others to Jesus and not trying to conform them to our need. It means looking for what is true and good in others and speaking it out to them. It means daring to speak the truth in love to one caught in sin. It means beholding through eyes of faith what a person can be in Christ, then bearing with them in love until that potential is realized.

Dostoevsky said that “to love a person means to see him (or her) as God created him to be.” (*Quality Friendship*, Inrig, pg. 26) In this way, we participate with the Creator in calling forth the true self in others. We become the humble presence of Jesus, encouraging others onward in Him. As we choose to build others up, we discover an amazing thing—we are being changed into His image and likeness.

We are no longer need-driven and yet our needs are being met. We build friendship in which Jesus is the center. In an atmosphere of love and acceptance, we dare to accept our real need for connection with our male friends. As we grow in good, healthy male friendships, we grow in confidence as men.

That confidence is crucial to our freedom to bless women. Secure in Jesus’ love and blessing upon our gender, we dare approach the other in order to honor her. We may still need healing for old wounds inflicted by women from the past, and strength to press through certain barriers that remain in us toward the other. Still, as we obey Jesus’ call to love woman, we will be changed. In time, old fears and walls will be exposed and removed.

God is faithful as we seek to love others. Though not easy, loving others out of the true self causes us to grow up. We emerge out of immaturity and into real love. God shines through our becoming true bearers of His image as we seek to love others.

Questions:

- 1) Explain your previous experiences with Christian community. Was it negative or positive?

- 2) Consider Proverbs 27:17, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” Consider someone in your experiences at church that has irritated you or you just didn’t get along with. Could it be that the Lord is using that person for His purposes? Explain.

- 3) Do you think community is vital for your Christian faith? Explain?

- 4) Are you now actively involved in Christian community? If not why?

- 5) If you aren’t in Christian community right now, ask the Lord what is hindering you. Then, have a brother pray with you to remove the hindrances.



Race Notes



Is there life beyond brokenness? Many of us are just glad to survive our addictions. To think that there is life beyond our sin is a stretch. Jesus has good news: life is much more than our sexual struggles, weaknesses or even being sober. God is making a people that embody His grace and mercy. He is making a people that live in His story—the redemptive saga whose center is Jesus. And we don't just live in His story but we are invited to be active participants in it. As Jesus said, "*You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world...*" (Matthew 5:13,14).

Most of the time we are so caught up in what is wrong, broken, and out of whack with ourselves that we can never see what is actually going on. We see ourselves in relation to our failures and sin. God looks at our past and our current situations radically different. He has chosen to use us as the ones who show a dying and lost world His mercy. Our pasts and current struggles do not prohibit us from being salt and light. Under the shadow of the cross, we work out our sobriety (remember: we have to do our part). Then His glory transforms our humility and gratitude into salt and light. We are part of the people whom God has decided to show what His love can actually do.

This is our calling, this is who we are. Our primary identity is in Him and the healing He has afforded us. In Christ we are not sex addicts; we are the salt and light of the world.

Now some of us are still in the midst of great darkness, unable to see any hope of ever being salt and light. It is important that you continue the journey of your healing. It might be that you would need to go through an another healing group like *Living Waters*, or *Salt*—places of more in-depth healing and reckoning with your addiction. Tenacity is the key. The enemy wants nothing better than to get you to give up. He knows what is true: giving up is tantamount to bondage. There is no passive road to freedom. Every time you fall down, get back up, confess and work out your salvation. Cleave to Him until you get the freedom and life you desire.

Others of us are getting better, finding a true road to freedom. You have tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord. It very well maybe that God is calling you to minister to those with a similar story as yours. I

remember after gaining much healing and sobriety, I wanted a “normal” life. And I did walk away from ministry...for a while. I got married, went to church, pursued God but the normalcy produced a holy angst in me. I hungered for more than normal; I hungered for more than the white picket fence. I did not want to be remembered as the guy who was “normal.” I wanted a war to fight, a land to conquer. Then Andy Comiskey, founder of Desert Stream, told me about a position open at Desert Stream overseeing a national ministry for men that are bound by habitual sexual sin and asked if I was interested. I realized that at this point in my life God was calling me to be salt and light to the men that had a similar story to mine. My story of redemption is filled with His hope and grace—to hide it would be to hide Him.

There is a life beyond darkness and brokenness.

Not only are we called to minister to others, we are meant to be in relationship with women. We are called to learn to love women as Christ loved the church. Most of us are called to be married in heterosexual covenant. If we are married, we must continue to pursue wholeness with our spouse. And if we aren't married, it means we need to risk. Now for single guys you may need to work out some things before you start dating but this is what God has for you. Marriage is good and you are not exempt at working at it just because of your past. It is God's call upon your manhood. Like everyone else, you have to get in the game; you have to risk.

We who seek love need the Lord of Love—Jesus Christ. Our communion with others necessitates Him. He is present with us as we gather in His name. And He calls us to partake of His very body and blood as the sign and seal that we are one with Him in our desire to love.

Jesus said: *“My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him”* (John 6:55, 56). When we take the bread, Jesus wills that we partake afresh of His broken body—the greatest act of love ever. His brokenness descends into our own as we ingest the Crucified One; then He raises us up anew, Christ resurrected, the source and glory of our wholeness. As we take the cup, we receive the cleansing and healing that is possible

only through His shed blood. That blood has dissolved the walls that separate us from God's love, and that bind us to old failures and wounds. We are forgiven and we can forgive! He has transfused our hearts with a rich and eternal flow of blood that beats true in every believer: Jesus has established us in love forever.

That's why we take communion—to demonstrate that our communion on a human level is founded on the One whose broken body and shed blood is the sole basis for our becoming secure in love.

Secure in the Father's love, Jesus seeks to secure us constantly in that love that we would love others well. That's what communion is all about—becoming established in true love. Through partaking of the bread and wine, we participate in Jesus' prayerful commitment to the Father. Jesus prayed to Him on our behalf: "*Father, I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I Myself may be in them*" (John 17:26).

Prayer by St. Francis de Sales

*Divine Savior, we come to Your sacred table to nourish ourselves,
not with bread but with Yourself, true Bread of eternal life.
Help us daily to make a good and perfect meal of this divine food.
Let us be continually refreshed by the perfume of Your kindness
and goodness. May the Holy Spirit fill us with His Love.
Amen.*

Questions:

- 1) Have you found the sexual purity you were looking for when you started this group? If not, what are your plans in the future to get the purity you want?

- 2) Do you believe that your personal testimony of redemption qualifies you to minister to the sexually and relationally broken? Explain.

- 3) Reflect on communion. Write out the ways that in communing with Jesus' broken body and shed blood you have found new strength and wholeness to enter into relationship with others.





Men Pursuing Purity

Equipping Men

TO LIVE LIVES OF PURITY,
PURPOSE & POWER



By Ron Citlau

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