

RE-CREATING YOUR MIND  
IN A CRAZY CULTURE

# SEXUAL SANITY FOR MEN

LEADER'S GUIDE

SMALL GROUP RESOURCE // HARVEST USA



**Leader's Guide**

# **SEXUAL SANITY FOR MEN**

**RE-CREATING YOUR MIND  
IN A CRAZY CULTURE**

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## HOW TO LEAD A MEN'S SMALL GROUP ON SEXUAL ISSUES

Although there's certainly benefit in working through this material on your own, the importance of community in helping us overcome our struggle with sin can't be overemphasized. One option is to go through the workbook in a mentoring relationship, but the best context is a small men's group, with no more than twelve men. Limit your meeting time to two hours, and provide a break halfway through the evening. Start and end your meeting on time.

It's crucial for men to know that “what's *shared* in the meeting, *stays* in the meeting.” Confidentiality is essential in order to build trust. Your men won't be open and honest if the group isn't safe. Throughout the material are repeated reminders for you to set the pace for the sharing. If you're not willing to expose your weakness, no one else will either. Your men will follow your lead. (*Important note:* Although confidentiality is crucial, your men need to be aware that sexual behavior with a minor is an exception. It is an illegal offense that must be reported if disclosed.)

This guide is designed so that you can cover one week of material in your two hours together each week. But if you would like to move more slowly, feel free to divide the week into two sections. This way the whole study will take you twice as long—twenty-eight weeks, instead of the scheduled fourteen weeks. In your time together, allow the reflection questions to guide your discussion. Plan to give a brief synopsis of each day's material leading into the reflection questions. Even if you repeatedly encourage your men to work through the lessons each week, many won't. The leader notes for each daily reading contain discussion points to help you walk men through the material. Also, after the leader notes for each

section, are the “For Reflection” questions (in italics) and answers. In most cases, you won’t have time to discuss all three questions from each day. Pick one or two of the questions that most impacted you that day, or pick the ones you think will be best for your men to wrestle with together.

Challenge your men not to give “Sunday school” answers. Unless they’re willing to honestly reveal the places they struggle with doubt, fear, disappointment, anger, etc., they won’t grow. The workbook will repeatedly challenge them to get real with others—and as facilitator, you need to make sure this is happening in your group.

When leading a discussion group, you need to be more like Miles Davis than Mozart. In other words: Be ready to improvise. Some of the questions will reveal places where men are struggling with their faith. You need to trust the Spirit’s leading and follow him when the conversation goes off-script—as long as the discussion is profitable for searching and exposing your men’s hearts. (But if the discussion moves into airy theological discourse, without any connection to real life, rein it in!) I’m always amazed by the issues God brings to the surface as men work through this material. It is faith-stretching as a leader, training us to listen for God’s voice. We risk losing control, but we’re used by God in ways we couldn’t otherwise imagine.

So if the Spirit’s clearly addressing an issue that’s outside the scope of a given question, step back and give him room to do his work. Use the facilitator notes and answers to help prompt discussion, or to steer things back on track. And may God take all of you deeper as you work through these issues together.

## BEFORE YOU START

Leading a group of sexual strugglers isn’t for the faint of heart! But it *is* a place where you’ll see God work in powerful ways. Because group ministry can be very intense, it’s crucial that you have the necessary support around you.

The first thing you need to remember is: This group isn’t primarily for *you*. God will encourage, teach, and bless you as a leader, but this

group is not meant to be a place of *direct ministry* for you. Prayerfully examine your heart and life to make sure you're ready to lead. Seek the affirmation of wise and trusted spiritual leaders or mentors who know you well.

Second, you need to have accountability and resources outside the group, including spiritual support and oversight from others. A key way to ascertain your readiness for leadership is whether you already have all the necessary relationships and accountability in your life prior to beginning the group. Are you walking in the light with others? Is your life marked by sexual and relational integrity?

Attempting to lead a group before you're ready will be detrimental to your own soul and to the men who attend. Again, a leader can't use the group for his own personal healing. If you haven't begun to grow significantly in these areas, leadership will only exacerbate your struggle. You may be tempted to hide behind serving and helping others as a way of avoiding the Lord's dealing with your *own* heart.

## GETTING STARTED

First, determine a venue for the group. Often, groups meet off church property to give group members a greater sense of safety and confidentiality. If you decide to meet at church, be sure to take steps to preserve participants' anonymity. For example, don't advertise the location/time/day of the group meeting; meet in an out-of-the-way location; and use a separate entrance to the church building.

Next, decide on the frequency of the group meetings. We have found that it's most effective for the group to meet weekly. If this isn't feasible, provide some additional avenue of support for group members between meetings, such as a check-in phone call or e-mail.

How will men find out about your group? Some people will only feel comfortable attending a group where they'll be anonymous, and therefore they won't attend at their home church. Others will feel comfortable at their own church setting, especially if they know the leader is a "safe person." Either way, it's wise to allow other local churches in your area to be aware of the group, and invite them to refer their members.

Along these lines, we recommend a *modified closed-group format*. This means that new members can't simply walk in off the street and join the group. This curriculum isn't built for a drop-in-when-you-want format. There needs to be a gatekeeper who receives calls from men and meets with them prior to joining the group. Ideally, the gatekeeper helps lead the group and is a wise lay leader . . . not a pastor! No matter how warm, approachable, and safe a pastor may be, men are still intimidated to call him directly and discuss these issues. Members should be ready to commit to attending the group for the fourteen-week duration. This will help group members build cohesion and trust. Having new men coming in and out every week will dramatically decrease the effectiveness of your group.

As mentioned above, it's crucial to have necessary oversight. Your church's leadership needs to support you in this work, and give you opportunities to discuss the challenges you're facing as you minister to your group—both in terms of your group and your own soul care.

## GROUP LOGISTICS

Begin each new group cycle by having leaders share the story of God's work of sexual redemption in their life. Over the next few weeks, invite participants to share their stories with the group. This helps group members begin to know one another and gel as a group. It enables them to see the many similarities in experiences, emotions, and fallout from sexual sin—all of which help group members to see they're more alike than they are different.

It's important that group members know their confidentiality is protected in the group, and *by the group*. At the outset of each new group cycle, clearly state the importance of men being free to share, knowing that "what's said in the room, stays in the room." Without confidentiality, your group will be ineffective, because none of your men will be ruthlessly honest. That said, it's important that all the men know that their confidentiality can be broken if they demonstrate that they're a danger to themselves or others—for instance, if there's been a confession of sexual activity with minors.



Along these lines, it's very important that men are sensitive to the nature of one another's struggles. For instance, men dealing with same-sex attraction often feel ostracized in the church. It's imperative to make clear at the outset of the group that all sin is sin. No form of sexual sin is worse than another; therefore, men need to be warned against making disparaging comments.

A way to guard the hearts and minds of the men in the group is to give guidelines for how they're to share about their sin struggles. Some men, having never shared about their sexual temptations and sin patterns, can go to the other extreme and over-share, giving graphic details that leave images in the minds of other group members. Be ready to "throw a red flag" and cut someone off if they're going in that direction. It would be terrible to have men attend your group, seeking freedom from sexual sin, only to be spurred on in their unholy desires and sin as others fan unholy imaginations.

There may be men from other churches or theological backgrounds. Be careful to avoid thorny theological issues that bring division among Christians. Make it clear to your group that the focus is for men to let Christ deal with their hearts, and that debating theological issues may distract them from what's most important. Having said that, there may be times when it's necessary to step in and gently correct unbiblical statements. Pick your battles wisely.

## FACING CHALLENGES

As leader, you must be willing to have the difficult conversations with men in your group. As just mentioned, you may need to gently interrupt men from sharing too much graphic information or from taking the conversation in unhelpful theological directions. But it goes deeper. You must be willing to meet one-on-one with certain men concerning unhelpful and perhaps damaging behavior they're showing in group. Some continually take the conversation off-track in theological directions, or draw attention to their personal problems. If so, you need to help them see how they monopolize the group. Others will talk about pain and trials, but not share honestly about their struggles with sin; in this case,

you need to be willing to ask them direct questions about their behavior. Yet others may share prayer requests focused on the people who've sinned against them, relatives who are sick, or job challenges, but may not want to walk in the light regarding their current temptations. You, brother, need to challenge them that this group is for them to discuss their battles with sexual sin and relational idols—*not* a generic church prayer meeting.

Many people wrestling with sexual sin also have deeply broken ways of interacting with others and are usually blind to their own behavior. You must be willing to speak the truth in love, so they can begin breaking these patterns of behavior and addressing the deeper roots in their hearts.

It's also wise to safeguard men's interactions outside the group. At Harvest USA, we don't forbid members of our biblical support groups from getting together, but they must commit to making group leaders aware of their contact and respect the leader's counsel if told that a relationship outside of group would be unwise at this time.

You may also face the challenge of ministering to someone with a history of sexual contact with minors. Exercise wisdom about bringing men with this history into the group. Many of your men will be survivors of sexual abuse, usually by other men. The presence of a perpetrator can make their time in group extremely painful and unproductive. Even more importantly, many abusers of children have extremely calloused consciences (which greatly exacerbates the above issue). Unless a man has had extensive counseling, demonstrates profound remorse, and shows no signs of blame-shifting, be very hesitant to admit him into the group. You also need to be aware that if sexual contact with a minor has been confessed to you, you are mandated by the government to report it. Even if it is many years prior, you should anonymously contact your state agency to discuss the circumstances. One exception: If someone confesses to viewing child or teenage pornography you are not mandated to report it (unless they're actively engaged in the production of the pornography).

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR ROLE

Remember: It is not your job to fix anybody. The surest way to burn out is to take God's responsibility on your shoulders. But you *do* need

to be diligent in prayer! Because we are dependent on the Spirit of God to transform lives, we must be committed to interceding for the men in our group.

We need to learn to listen well and demonstrate the love of Christ. As men, we want to “fix” things. You are called to prayerfully listen and faithfully point your men to Christ. You will have a natural affinity to some of your men and ministering to them will be “easy.” But others will be much harder to love well and listen to patiently. This is one of the key ways God wants to transform *you* in the midst of leading this group!

Be ready to ask questions about men’s lives, both current and historical. Listen carefully to the beliefs they express about God, themselves, and life expectations. Be willing to enter their experience. Pray for a heart of compassion, especially as you interact with others whose struggles are different than your own. Pay particular attention to the places of pain, disappointment, rejection, fear, and anger. Be willing to model vulnerability by opening up about your own life story and current places of struggle. This study will help your men begin to see ways their worldview is out of line with Scripture. Come alongside and help them see this clearly, especially if their answers to the reflective questions are too superficial.

This study will guide you in helping men identify the idols and motivations behind their sexual sin. It will demonstrate the hope we have in the work of Christ and lead them to establish accountability and structures to safeguard their souls. You can’t force men to grow and change, but you can challenge them with the importance of processing the material openly and honestly, and encourage them to take the practical steps necessary to make lasting life change.

Finally, it’s crucial that we model a dependent trust and repentance. Men need to see how to return to God and rest in the gospel, in the face of their current life challenges. We need to model the centrality of repentance in the Christian life. You can only do this if you’re willing to be vulnerable and honest with your men! Men need you to model what it looks like to rest on God and wait on him in the midst of life’s ups and

downs. And they need to see how you return to him when you fail. This is the most important aspect of your leading.

Brother, God is calling you to a significant work. On your own, you are insufficient for these things, but God promises to give you more grace as you humble yourself and seek his face. Be prepared to see him do amazing things through you—as well as change your own heart through this process!

## **SECTION 1: LIFE IN EXILE**

## WEEK 1: LIFE IN THE WASTELAND

### DAY 1: THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL SIN

It is extremely threatening for most men to walk into a support group because of fear of exposure, shame, etc. It also goes against our innate male tendency toward self-sufficiency. With this in mind, welcome the men to the group and affirm them for taking this huge step toward finding freedom.

Begin your group time by reading Psalm 32, and then pray through its themes, acknowledging the consequences of sexual sin, thanking God for his forgiveness, and asking for faith to turn from sin and embrace him.

Then, take a few minutes to lay down the ground rules for your group. Whatever other rules you have, make sure you include this one: What gets said in the group, *stays* in the group. Period.

Begin the meeting by sharing your own story with the group. Give the broad strokes of your life and share about your personal struggles with sexual sin. Be honest! Don't pretend you're further along in your healing than you truly are. If you have a coleader, ask him to share his story as well. If the men are willing, go around the room, asking them to share their names and the nature of their struggle with sexual sin.

The intent of Day 1, and our entire opening section, is to help the men grapple with the consequences of their sin. Acting out sexually has a price tag that, in our self-deception, we don't see. Most Christian men also labor under a deep sense of shame, because it appears that they're the only ones in church struggling. Examining Romans 7 will help them

realize that all Christians continue to battle with their flesh. The problem is, most people in the body of Christ aren't acknowledging this reality.

Some people may have been taught that Romans 7 refers to Paul's struggle before becoming a Christian. Point out that the language is present tense (this is true in the original Greek text as well) and that he is clearly referring to his experience as a Christian because he talks about the tension in his soul between his delight in God's law and the sin in his members. In Romans 8 Paul makes clear that it is impossible for anyone "in the flesh" (meaning, someone who's not a Christian) to delight in God's law, because apart from the Spirit's presence we are naturally hostile to it.

### For Reflection:

This is the place where your leadership is most crucial. Be ready to answer honestly and thoughtfully. Your willingness to open up your own life and heart will set the tone for the group. The men will follow your lead!

*1. Describe the pain sexual sin has caused in your life. What does it feel like to be a slave of a behavior or desires? How has it affected your behavior around others?*

Encourage men to be honest about their own experience of "slavery" to sexual sin. For example, are they slaves to specific behaviors or thought patterns? This may be a stretch for many, but try to get them to talk about how that feels. At the very least, most men will acknowledge that their powerlessness makes them angry.

*2. What has sexual sin "cost" you? Be specific.*

Have the men give specific examples of things they've sacrificed in order to pursue sexual sin, such as money, time, or relationships. This is an extremely important step, as most of us live under the delusion that we're not hurting anyone, including ourselves.

*3. What "encouragement" can you gain from Paul's struggle with sin in Romans 7?*

Most men have felt all alone in their exasperation over their sin. Paul's experience encourages them that they are not alone. But even

more importantly the men need to see that, in the midst of being utterly confounded with himself, Paul embraces the gospel, clinging to the hope that Jesus has dealt with his sin and still offers forgiveness. Paul knows that he has a deliverer, and so launches into the glorious praise and worship of Romans 8!

## DAY 2: THE REALITY OF GUILT

Day 2 is designed for men to see that: 1) they experience guilt because they're truly guilty of sinning against a holy God; 2) guilt will always come out in our relationships; and 3) their ability to deceive others and "get away with" their sin not only compounds the problem but places them in grave danger.

This is another opportunity for men to grapple with the reality that sexual sin creates all kinds of fallout in their lives. The experience of guilt is palpable. Because of this, we respond in a variety of negative ways toward others—anger that ranges from minor irritability to outright rage, isolation from others, etc. The main point the men need to understand is that their sexual sin is not a victimless crime, even if it doesn't physically involve others. It is deeply destructive to every one of their relationships. Although this is particularly true in marriage, single men need to be challenged with this reality as well.

Finally, most men don't realize that pride is their biggest enemy, the deepest sin of their soul. (That's why our final week focuses on humility.) Today's lesson should help them begin to see that reality. Most men think they're pretty smart. For years, they've successfully hidden their behavior, always turning the tables and pointing their fingers at anyone who questions their inexplicable behavior (late from work without reason, in front of the computer at 2 a.m., etc.).

Your men need to be warned against this grave danger. They cannot pull one over on God and get away with it. The truth is, most men are in your group because they were caught; and even if they weren't, others have been aware of a problem even if they couldn't put their finger on the specific issue. There is no perfect crime. There is no way we can remain in sexual sin and get away with it. God knows. Those who love us know



there's a problem, and only our commitment to deceit keeps them in the dark.

### For Reflection:

*1. Describe your experiences with guilt. How does it break into your life, sending a dark cloud over the places that should be sunny?*

Men should discuss what guilt feels like, and how it impacts their ability to enjoy life. It's important for them to begin wrestling with the reality that sexual sin costs them in all kinds of ways.

*2. What other sinful behaviors are clustered with your sexual sin? Be specific.*

This question should help men to see that they are culpable for more than their lust, and that their guilt goes much deeper than their sexual acting out.

*3. How do you tend to respond to others when you feel guilty? Do you become angry, impatient, or withdrawn? Who tends to be on the receiving end of these behaviors, and how do you see them affected by your behaviors?*

The previous question helped men to see the deeper ways they've broken the first Great Commandment to love God; this question will help them begin to see the deeper ways their sexual sin violates the second Great Commandment, to love others.

## DAY 3: THE REALITY OF SHAME

The goal of Day 3 is for men to realize that they are not only contending with their sinful behaviors and the guilt associated with them, but also with the shame they feel over their sin. Shame occurs when guilt over sin becomes their identity.

Although it goes beyond the scope of this lesson, it's important to note that we often feel guilt and shame because of what others have done to us. This is particularly true of those who have suffered sexual abuse. The shame of being sinned against creates a deeply entrenched, broken sense of identity, often leading to very destructive behaviors. Because of this, it is crucial for men with this history to seek additional counseling and resources.

However, addictive behavioral patterns are much easier to see than the broken relational patterns resulting from shame. The whole idea of intimacy as “being known” might be new to men and require further discussion. Encourage the men to consider the ways they present different façades at work, church, and home.

It’s important for men to wrestle with the reality that shame not only affects their identity but also damages their relationships. If we’re holding back the truth of ourselves—past and present—in any close relationship, it undermines the ability to develop genuine intimacy. The importance of walking in the light is examined at length in Week 12, but it is important for your men to begin wrestling with this issue because it is the *only* path to freedom from our struggle with sexual sin and shame.

### For Reflection:

*1. How does shame manifest itself in your life? Are you outgoing-but-hiding, withdrawn, or something in between?*

The goal of the first two questions is for men to consider the specific ways that shame impacts their relationships. It always results in some form of isolation—sometimes in actual physical isolation, but always in some form of emotional “pull back” and separation.

*2. In which relationships are you most hidden? Why? What forms does your hiding take?*

It is important for the men to consider which specific relationships suffer most, and how. Don’t be surprised if men are reticent to answer or even oblivious to the impact of shame on their relationships. Try to have your own answers ready, just in case.

*3. What do you think would happen if people truly knew you? What are you afraid to lose?*

Men need to face their fear of exposure and count the cost of walking in the light. This will be particularly terrifying for married men whose wives are unaware of their struggle.

*4. On the other hand, what would it be like to be free of hiding—to no longer fear exposure? In what ways would it be a blessing to be “known”?*

The goal is for men to realize that honesty frees us from the cycle of progressive isolation. Bringing their sin into the light means there is no longer anything to hide. Help men to consider the blessings they would experience if they didn't go through life under the dark cloud of guilt and shame in their closest relationships.

## DAY 4: SEXUAL SIN EMASCULATES US!

The goal of Day 4 is to tear down the world's lies about sexual sin and to give a stark, honest picture of the reality. Men need to unlearn the lie that sexual sin is a sign of strength. Rather, they need to embrace the truth that it makes them a slave and completely undermines their true calling as men.

The reality that sexual sin is emasculating is radically countercultural, so expect that men will struggle to accept it. Remind them of what they previously shared regarding their experience of slavery. Living as a slave is completely counter to the experience of strength.

Using the examples given and your own experience, help your men examine the impact of sexual sin on their calling as men. Help them wrestle with the broader implications of their sexual sin and how it undercuts what God says it means to be a man. This is true for both single and married men, but the latter need to see the horrific cost of their sin on their wives and children.

Your men will all be able to identify with the bait-and-switch reality of sexual sin. Because this is God's world and only works his way, pursuing sexual satisfaction apart from his design always leaves us ultimately empty and dissatisfied. Encourage your men to share their experiences of feeling like a donkey chasing the carrot on a stick.

Discuss the contrast between the strength to “stare down an erection” and the weakness of being a slave to one's desires, left to clean up the mess after the fact.

### For Reflection:

1. *What cultural messages have impacted your understanding of masculinity and sexuality? Do you believe your manhood is determined by your sexual activity? Why or why not?*

Your men know the “right Christian answers” to these questions. Get them to dig deeper. Help them consider the ways cultural messages have impacted them. Another way to address this would be to ask what they believe makes sex truly satisfying. It’s likely their answers will focus largely on the physical.

2. *Do you believe that sexual sin is emasculating? How does the man you are in your fantasy life compare to the reality of your experience of slavery? Be specific.*

Lead in vulnerability with this question. Be honest about the shame of your own sin, in contrast to the delusion of your fantasy life.

3. *Describe your own Ephesians 4:19 encounter with the “insatiableness” of certain desires or behaviors. How have you experienced this downward spiral?*

The reality of our insatiable desires is a poignant picture of both our slavery and the folly of our sin.

## DAY 5: JESUS RESTORES OUR MANHOOD

Day 5 begins to recast your men’s expectations of the Christian life. Jesus offers abundant life, but that life is very different than what we expect. The goal is for your men to wrestle with the tension between their desire for sexual sin and the reality that their pursuit of sexual sin has not worked. Jesus’ call to sexual purity seems oppressive to their natural desires, but in their sin they have experienced deeper, far more destructive oppression.

At this point your men should resonate with the reality that sexual sin does not deliver on its promises. Still, it’s important to acknowledge that the Christian life is more challenging than most of us anticipated. Particularly given the sexual and materialistic idols of our culture, some of your men might have a very warped perspective on what is meant by “abundant life.”

Further, all of us face suffering and trials that don't fit with our expectations of what life as a Christian should look like. Some of your men may have been exposed to health-and-wealth teaching, leading them to expect that God promises material, temporal blessing in this life, even though the New Testament makes clear that the Christian life means carrying a cross. Your men need to learn the paradox of the Christian life—that we are called to die to what we want, in order to discover the rich blessings we never knew to ask for.

Hopefully your men will become indignant as they consider what sexual sin has cost them, and be excited to face the hard but rewarding life Jesus offers instead. Discuss the contrast between being emasculated by our out-of-control desires and living in the strength of the Spirit.

When we experience the same frustration Paul expresses in Romans 7, we typically don't respond with worship as he does in Romans 8. It is important for your men to begin considering how they'll respond to God in the face of their sin. Do they remember the gospel and cling to the hope they have in Christ, or do they begin a campaign of good works, excuses, and empty promises? Make it clear that the only way to respond to our sin and grow beyond it is to remember the work of Christ, and the wonder of our redemption. As we'll examine later, Titus 2:11–14 teaches it's the grace of God that enables us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions.

### For Reflection:

*1. How do you define abundant life? In other words, what would make your life really worth living? How might this view lead you to believe that God's "holding out" on you?*

This question should expose some of their deeper, cultural idolatry that unwittingly feeds their discontent in Christ, fanning the flames (and justification) of their lust. Help your men to wrestle with their unbiblical expectations of life.

*2. Do you doubt that Jesus wants you to experience abundant life? Why, and how? In what ways has your experience betrayed the idea of abundant life?*

It is important for men to give voice to the places where they feel life, or God, has wronged them. They desperately need to learn the importance of bringing their hearts honestly before God. Make it clear that you're not suggesting they rage at God. Still, the Psalms are filled with expressions of deep doubt and frustration with the harsh realities of life in a fallen world, and the people of God pouring out their questions and doubt. The Bible is far more honest than most Christians are willing to be. However, the experience of God's people hasn't changed, and your men need to honestly articulate their wrestling before God and their brothers. Remember: "Israel" means "one who wrestles with God."

*3. What would it mean for you to carry a cross sexually? What would you need to sacrifice? Do you believe that Jesus truly offers you life on the other side of that death? Why or why not?*

Jesus taught us to count the cost of discipleship. Likewise, your men need to consider what following Jesus in this area of life will cost them. Help them to consider again the contrast between sexual sin's emasculation and the reality that Jesus will empower them to "stare down an erection." This is real strength and genuine manhood.