

RE-CREATING YOUR MIND
IN A CRAZY CULTURE

SEXUAL SANITY FOR MEN

DAVID WHITE

SMALL GROUP RESOURCE // HARVEST USA



“No aspect of postmodern life is more broken than our sexuality. Nothing brings more wholeness to broken sexuality than the gospel of Jesus Christ. No ministry is more helpful in applying the grace of the cross and the empty tomb to broken sexuality than Harvest USA.”

Dr. Phil Ryken, President, Wheaton College

“‘Line upon line and precept upon precept,’ (Isaiah 28:10, 13) is the searchingly fresh approach David White has taken in writing both the book and the accompanying *Leader’s Guide*. Rather than highlighting a representative collection of truths applicable to this life and death struggle for sexual sanity, David White seeks to build, from foundation to roof, a theologically thorough and helpfully profound approach to this dimension of fighting the good fight in the Christian life. He has given me, and I trust all who read and work through this material, substantive help. Thank you, David.”

Joseph V. Novenson, Senior Teaching Pastor, Lookout Mountain
Presbyterian Church, TN

“Here is what you get in *Sexual Sanity for Men*: Scripture, connecting to real life, given in daily portions (not too much, not too little) from a friend who is open, honest, understands the struggle, and has actually grown in these matters. That means he wrote a guide that you will find very helpful *and* he listens to these words himself every day. It is a great book for all men, especially those who are teetering on hopelessness.”

Edward T. Welch, PhD, faculty member CCEF; psychologist; author of
Shame Interrupted

“Harvest USA is a time-tested ministry that changes lives with the gospel. They know how to speak the truth into your life with gentleness and love. Their skills and expertise have never been more needed by the church. Support it and become involved.”

Dr. Timothy Keller, Senior Pastor, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, NY and author of *The Reason for God*

“It’s about time somebody said it and said it this way! This is a book that will transform a very difficult and painful subject into a walk of faith and

faithfulness that will bring joy, release, and praise. Not only that, the *Leader's Guide* is incredibly helpful, practical, and profound. Give this (and the *Leader's Guide*) to every guy you know, even if you have to wrap it in a plain, brown paper wrapper. They will 'rise up and call you blessed.'"

Steve Brown, Key Life radio broadcaster; author of *Three Free Sins: God Isn't Mad at You*

"I know of no resource that is written to help men who are struggling with sexual sin that is more soundly biblical, drenched with the gospel, and practical at the street level. I am thankful that this resource now exists and will recommend it again and again. Here is a welcome for men to come out of the hiding, to embrace that there is nothing that could be revealed about them that hasn't already been covered by the blood of Jesus, and to believe that God has given them every grace that they need to fight the battle with sexual sin."

Paul David Tripp, President, Paul Tripp Ministries; best-selling author

SEXUAL SANITY FOR MEN

RE-CREATING YOUR MIND IN A CRAZY CULTURE

David White



www.newgrowthpress.com

New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404
Copyright ©2012 by Harvest USA.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*® (NIV®). Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

Cover Design: Faceout Books, faceoutbooks.com
Interior Design and Typesetting: Lisa Parnell, lparnell.com

ISBN 978-1-936768-99-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

White, David, 1970–

Sexual sanity for men : re-creating your mind in a crazy culture / David White.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-936768-99-8 (alk. paper)

1. Sex—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Men—Sexual behavior. 3. Men—Religious life. I. Title.

BT708.W43 2012

248.8'42—dc23

2012027982

Printed in the United States of America

20 19 18 17 16 15 14 13 4 5 6 7 8

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
Introduction	1
Section 1: Life in Exile	
Week 1: Life in the Wasteland	8
Week 2: The Path into the Wasteland	24
Week 3: Thornbushes in the Wasteland	42
Week 4: The Way to the Promised Land	61
Section 2: The Conquering King	
Week 5: The Deliverer	80
Week 6: The Reigning King	96
Week 7: Surrendering to the King	112
Section 3: A New Brotherhood	
Week 8: Welcome to Brotherhood	131
Week 9: Redemptive Community	146
Week 10: Servant Soldiers	162
Section 4: A Transformed Life	
Week 11: Are You Ready to Fight?	180
Week 12: Ruthless Honesty	199
Week 13: Redefining Accountability	214
Week 14: Cultivating Humility	233
Endnotes	247

In loving memory of Sandra Jo White

October 26, 1966—October 9, 2009

God used our marriage to teach me what it means to love.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am extremely grateful to have the two most patient bosses in the world, John Freeman and Nicholas Black. I was deeply blessed by their understanding of the challenges of single parenting, walking through grief, and juggling day-to-day ministry responsibilities while trying to get this project done. Thank you, brothers, for believing in me and gently pushing this to completion.

Harvest USA is grateful for New Growth's partnership with a relatively unknown ministry, and I personally thank Barbara Juliani for your patience with this novice writer.

This book wouldn't exist apart from my colleague, Dan Wilson, who brainstormed this material with me and helped shape the structure. The best material in Section 2 was shamelessly stolen from you.

I praise God for the incredible support of my staff team: John, Nicholas, Ed, Irene, Scott, Ward, Ellen, and Bob. You have laughed and cried with me and consistently point me to the hope we have in Jesus. You are family—serving together is a wonderful foretaste of life in the kingdom.

My extended family (on both sides) has been a great source of comfort and healing in the midst of heartache. I praise God for his sweet restorative work in all our lives and look forward to what is yet in store.

There have been literally hundreds of people praying for me and my girls through this season, many of whom I've never even met. Your prayers have enabled me to persevere through the hardest trial of my life with a peace and joy I would not have thought possible.

I minister to the most courageous men I know. They are willing to face the pain of their pasts, be exposed at their worst in the present, and seek Christ in the midst of it all. Your willingness to allow me to hear your stories and be a part of this journey is an incredible honor. Thank you.

Jim Bergwall, your friendship is the most unexpected blessing to come from my loss. I praise God for your willingness to share life with me and to teach me to pray as I never have before.

Charis and Sydney, you are the sweetest blessings in my life. Being your dad has taught me more about God's heart than anything else I've experienced. I'm grateful to still have so much of Mommy because I have you!

Finally, Jennifer, I am blown away by God's sweet gift of you. More than I could have imagined. A bright, shining light after a long period of deep darkness. I am thrilled you are the wife he set apart for me and I can't wait to see the plans he has for us!

INTRODUCTION

George sat in church, unable to focus on the sermon. He was a mess. The night before, he had encouraged his wife to go to bed without him because “the game wouldn’t be over until *really* late.”

The truth was, he’d been looking forward all day to checking out some porn sites. While mowing the grass that Saturday morning, he had thought his plan through. Now, sitting in church, he felt the guilt and shame. He felt miserable, exhausted from being up so late—he had lost track of time and didn’t go to bed until after 2 a.m. He’s ready to doze off in the middle of the sermon. He was harsh and irritable with his family all morning, resulting in a tense, silent drive to church.

On one level, he hates what he’s done. He looks around and wonders what people would say if they knew, especially since he’s a deacon. He can’t imagine telling his friends—let alone his wife. But even in the midst of his guilt, he knows he enjoyed it. The images continue to swirl in his mind, and he can’t wait to go back. He gets a thrill from porn like nothing else in his life. He could laugh out loud as he compares sitting and listening to a sermon with the adventure and pleasure of the night before. He hates it and he loves it at the same time.

George has been a Christian for a long time and knows how God says he *should* live. And he wants to live for God, to be a loving husband and father. But the pull of his lust is strong, and he can’t imagine his life without it.

Do you know what it’s like to sit in church, feeling guilty? Are there behaviors in your life that fill you with shame? Are you living in the tension of doing things you know to be wrong while being incapable of imagining your life without them?

Sexual sin is a *huge* problem in the body of Christ. If you're struggling with sexual sin, you need to know that *you are not alone in the church*. Age and doctrinal distinctions don't matter when it comes to this issue. Sexual sin is an equal opportunity pathogen of the soul. Men (and women) of every generation and theological bent have been impacted by our decadent culture and the lusts of their hearts. There are pastors going to strip clubs while away at conferences; deacons looking at online teen porn; elders struggling in silence with same-sex attraction, looking at gay porn and having anonymous encounters with men; Sunday school teachers hiring prostitutes and having affairs with unbelieving coworkers. Sexual sin is radically impacting the church, from the man in the pulpit to the unbelieving visitor in the pew, to everyone in between.

Here's the bottom line: You need this book because all of us have a sexuality that has been impacted by the fall and which desperately needs redemption. All sexuality is broken, on some level. None of us go through life with blinders on until we meet that perfect someone of the opposite sex and then live the rest of our lives with eyes only for her, faithfully dedicated to focusing all of our delight and passion on her. None of us live that way, *naturally*. If you're honest, you admit that you struggle with lust in some way. All of us have a sexuality that requires radical *supernatural* intervention! We are all sexual beings in the process of redemption. Therefore, we need to take this area of Christian living seriously.

The other reason you need this book is that sexual sin has the power to utterly destroy your life. I have seen men throw away their families, shipwreck their careers, end up in financial ruin, even land in prison, because of sexual sin. Although their outward behaviors may be very different, all of these men have something in common: At one time they believed they had it all under control. What's even more troubling: Some of them believe they *still* have things under control! We'll talk about this more in Week 1, but for now suffice it to say that sin in general—and sexual sin in particular—is profoundly deceiving. Men destroy their lives because they're utterly blinded by the pleasure of sin and are willing to sacrifice everything rather than lose what feels like life to them.

Every man wrestles with a sexuality in need of redemption. And with sexual sin, the stakes are as high as they can possibly be: marriage, family, friendships, finances, career . . . most significantly, our *faith* is at stake! As we'll discover, sex is about worship, so our rebellion in this area speaks volumes about the depth, maybe even the reality, of our faith.

You are not reading this book by accident. Our sovereign God has, by some means, placed it in your hands, because it's time to deal with these issues in your life. He wants to take you deeper. Nevertheless, no matter how diligent you are, please realize at the outset that you will *never* be free from the battle in this life. I pray that by God's grace you will experience greater freedom from sexual sin than you ever thought possible, but you must be committed to staying in the battle for life. Freedom is not total deliverance from temptation, which is what we wish it would be. Freedom is the increasing ability to choose holiness out of love for Christ, *despite* the relentlessness of temptation! This is the hard truth, but the blessing is that we receive more of Christ as we are committed to the fight!

And this battle is profoundly spiritual. The enemy is deeply invested in keeping us enslaved and ineffective for the kingdom of God. Men often say that temptation gets worse once they begin to attack this issue intentionally. As hard as that is, it's a good sign!

Know this—doing this hard work represents significant growth in your masculinity. No reader is the same: you may be a slacker who has never applied himself to anything, or the CEO of a Fortune 500 company whose entire life has been a strenuous climb to the top. The hard work I have in view has nothing to do with your work ethic. Whether you're an underachiever, overachiever, or someone in between, we all naturally shrink back from the challenge of staring our sin in the face and sincerely owning the worst truths about ourselves. The sad reality is, even as Christians who profess our need of forgiveness in Christ, we resist being *truly known* by others. Rather than being exposed in our weakness, we try desperately to make change alone.

God is calling you out of hiding. He is calling you to face who you are and risk letting others know the man you are trying to conceal. He is calling you to stop squandering your life on short-term, guilty pleasures in order to experience a life of deeper pleasure and joy. Are you ready for the challenge?

THE GENERAL THEMES OF THIS BOOK

At its core, our sexual insanity is idolatry. Like the Israelites who were brought out of slavery in Egypt into the Promised Land, but whose later idolatry and rebellion resulted in pagan capture and exile in Babylon, so our sin also keeps

us in chains, living a joyless and often fruitless “Christian” life. Many of us came to faith with great joy and experienced wondrous freedom over past sexual sin, only to have it slowly creep back and consume us. It’s as if we too entered the Promised Land, but eventually ended up in spiritual exile. This existence falls woefully short of the promises offered to us in the Scriptures. So, we will begin by examining the truth about our sexual sin and its effect on our lives, both physically and spiritually.

We will then move on to examine the work of Christ. Too often the Christian life is seen as “you get to go to heaven when you die,” as if the death and resurrection of Jesus hold no relevance or power for *today*. This could not be further from the truth! The heart of the gospel is that the kingdom of God came into the world. In a word, this is *re-creation*, overturning the effects of the curse of the fall and restoring *shalom* to the world. In Hebrew, *shalom* means peace, not simply in the sense of an absence of conflict, but rather a broad, overarching wholeness and restoration. It refers to a world that is “full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” and where “justice roll[s] down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Isaiah 11:9; Amos 5:24).

This restorative work is why the Bible declares that those who are in Christ are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). Although this will always be incomplete until Christ’s return, it is nevertheless true. Christ died to redeem us from our sin and to establish his kingdom in our hearts and through us to the rest of creation. In this way, Christ’s work of atonement is the reestablishing of the Father’s mandate at the time of creation, to subdue the earth for the glory of our King, the new Adam. All this is to say, the gospel meets us in the here and now, empowering transformation where we live *today*. The true Christian life couldn’t be further from the pie-in-the-sky-when-you-die approach of too many Christians!

Finally, we’ll consider the practical implications of this rich theology and how it applies to your struggle with sexual sin. We’ll spend time investigating how our union with Christ relates to the change process. We’ll uncover the radical way the Bible says we’re supposed to do church, and how the community of faith is crucial to personal transformation. And, of course, we’ll examine the call to personal transformation, which always includes accountability and resisting sinful behaviors, but is actually so much more. God does not call us to a place of “absent sin,” but radical life transformation. He is calling us to

be conformed to the image of Jesus, which means rediscovering what it truly means to be a man and to experience the wonder of that life breaking into our current existence.

We have trouble getting our minds around this reality: The Bible seems to suggest there will be *no sex for all eternity*!¹ Sex points beyond itself to something better. Brother, an orgasm is a fleeting glimpse and foretaste of an infinitely greater, *eternal* pleasure that is beyond our ability even to imagine.

My prayer is that through this book you will discover the wonder of a redeemed sexuality, restored to the pure joy and guiltless pleasure of God's design, but even more, as Paul prayed for the Ephesians, "that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:16–19). May we have eyes to see by faith the infinite joy offered to us and stop selling our birthright for a bowl of soup!²

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The most important thing to remember as you use this book is: You are *not alone*! I hope you'll use this book in the context of community: with a mentor, or in a small men's group. If you don't have anyone at the moment, get started, but please commit to praying for God's provision of Christian brothers to help you process the material. One of the underlying themes of this book is that the Christian life was never intended to be lived in isolation.

Further, know that there are no easy fixes. Your growth out of sexual sin requires work and intentionality. Passively reading this book is not a "magic hammer" that will easily smash your struggle with sin and restore your sexual sanity. You must commit to working through the questions, taking time to reflect honestly, and facing the hard facts about yourself. Little change will come from this book if you do not actively seek to apply its teachings *personally*. The "For Reflection" sections in each chapter are designed to help you bring the teaching down to ground level, where you live.

Each chapter, or week, has been divided into five daily readings. The goal is for you to spend time regularly focusing on this issue. As you read through the material daily, meditate on the Scripture, and prayerfully work through the questions, you'll stay aware of these issues in your life and grow in understanding the inner workings of your heart.

SECTION 1: LIFE IN EXILE

Week 1: Life in the Wasteland	8
Week 2: The Path into the Wasteland	24
Week 3: Thornbushes in the Wasteland	42
Week 4: The Way to the Promised Land	61

WEEK 1:

LIFE IN THE WASTELAND

KEY CONCEPT: Sexual sin brings desolation. It promises excitement and pleasure, but delivers discontent and insatiable craving, often bringing ruin to God's blessings: family, friendships, vocation, and health. It leads to an insane life. What seems like a purely personal sin is always relationally destructive. In our guilt we isolate ourselves or lash out in anger. We compound our sin as we manipulate and lie to cover our tracks. While culture tells us that sexual sin is a sign of our strength, we know the stark contrast between our fantasy life and our struggles to cope with the real world. As Christians, our sin drives us into hiding, and we begin to live wearing a mask. The disconnect between our private life and public façade perpetuates our insecurity.

But there is hope! There is a Deliverer who breaks into this downward spiral, empowering us to face life's challenges with confidence, and replacing our gnawing desires and despair with joy and contentment.

DAY 1: THE CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL SIN

Do you know the experience of slavery? Do you know what it's like to want to stop masturbating, looking at porn, or having anonymous sex, and realizing that you *can't*? You've made hundreds of promises to God and others, but your words increasingly ring hollow—even to yourself. You've tried for years to change, without success, so you know eventually you'll be at it again . . .

Worse, have you suffered from seemingly uncontrollable thoughts? You try to restrain them, but they keep drifting back to certain memories, individuals, or fantasies. They break in constantly, causing distraction. You've tried to pray, fast, memorize Scripture, but nothing seems to work for very long. The thoughts, desires, and attractions come back, leaving you feeling defeated and hopeless. You lose hope that victory over your thoughts is possible.

How has your struggle with sexual sin—in your desires and behavior—impacted your life? It appears so innocuous at first. Perhaps masturbation is a guilty pleasure, but it seems relatively harmless. Using porn or fantasy to fuel your behavior is an obvious necessity. But there is always progression. What starts with swimsuit ads turns into soft porn. Then you want to see more and more. Eventually pictures aren't enough, and the Internet makes video downloads so easy. What began as a pleasant escape from the humdrum routine or pressures of life becomes an obsession. Some men spend hours every day surfing the Internet for new porn. Others pursue connection through chat rooms or phone sex. Many end up doing what they previously thought impossible—seeking out sexual encounters.

This increasing escalation has a price tag. We all have a very finite life, and yet every day men are sacrificing things of infinite value to pursue their sexual desires. The time, energy, and money invested in pursuing sexual sin robs from your family, your future security, your career aspirations, your ability to serve God and others. Even our health becomes a casualty. HIV and other STDs abound. The strain of living a double life results in depression, ulcers, and anxiety.

In Psalm 32, David describes the cost of hidden sin, “For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer” (Psalm 32:3–4). We willingly sacrifice everything most dear to us—spouse, children, career, financial success, even our faith—on the altar of our sexual desires. What has your sin cost you? Are you ready to be restored to sexual sanity?

Even if your struggle hasn't escalated to the degree just described, have you noticed that your desires are taking up more space in your head? Maybe you're able to manage your behavior on a day-to-day basis, but do you invest time carefully planning your next opportunity? Or relishing the memories of your last exploit? How do you respond to others when your carefully orchestrated plan is thwarted? Maybe your behavior looks okay on the outside, but inwardly you're enslaved.

You're not alone in this battle. Every Christian who wants to grow in holiness needs to face the fact that there are places in his life where he is still enslaved by sin.

Paul poignantly describes the experience of every Christian battling against sin:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin. (Romans 7:15–25)

There is a profound sense of slavery and frustration in our inability to overcome our struggle with sin. You can almost see Paul beating his head against the wall in utter exasperation. And the battle is on two fronts. We continue in sin we hate, and at the same time woefully neglect God's calling to love him and others.

Brother, your situation is not unique—it was experienced by the most prolific writer of the New Testament, the eminent apostle who fearlessly took the message of Christ to Rome, the place of ultimate power and opposition to Jesus in the first century. And it has been the experience of every other leader in the church since and every man in the pew! All of us continue to struggle significantly with sin as Christians and sexual sin in particular reduces us to slavery.

For Reflection:

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?

2. What has sexual sin “cost” you? Be specific.

3. What “encouragement” can you gain from Paul’s struggle with sin in Romans 7?

DAY 2: THE REALITY OF GUILT

Do you know the experience of guilt? Sometimes it's acute—a stabbing pain in your gut. At other times, it's a dull, gnawing in your soul; you feel a vague sense of wrongness about life, and when you stop to focus on why, the memory of your sin floods back. You long to be free from guilt, but as your failure persists, the pain continues.

As a Christian, the guilt you experience over your sin is unavoidable. You know the truth. You know how God has called you to live. You know what you should be doing, and what you shouldn't. (In some sense, be encouraged by the presence of guilt. It can be evidence of the Spirit's work, convicting your heart.)

Further, our experience of guilt is compounded because sexual sin is always clustered with other sins. Lies and deceit are the constant companions of sexual sin. We squander time and resources, neglecting our calling as husband, father, son, employee, church member. Sometimes we steal to support our behaviors. All these things deepen the reality of our guilt.

Because we keep our sin hidden, our guilt surfaces in other ways, and impacts our relationships with others. We're irritable and impatient. We become withdrawn and sullen. Sometimes we rage, even scaring ourselves. Even if you manage to hide your behavior for decades, there is always fallout from sin. Sin always infects our relationships with both God and others. Spending the evening looking at porn online will impact who you are at work the next day—for instance, how well you're able to function and interact with others, especially female coworkers. When you stop at the adult bookstore (or bathhouse, etc.) on the way home from work, it affects who you are at the dinner table with your family. When you've spent time at work having a sexual chat online, you're a different man at the home Bible study that night. If you're having suggestive conversations with a coworker, it will affect how you interact with your wife once the kids are in bed. You may be able to hide your sexual sin, but there are always relational consequences.

One more thing: A greater ability to mask these things—to compartmentalize and hide the effects of your guilt—is not an indication of your strength. It doesn't demonstrate how much smarter you are than anyone else. Quite the opposite—it actually shows that you are in grave danger!

Proverbs 26:12 warns, “Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.” This is a stinging indictment. Believing that we can pull the wool over the eyes of others puts us in a worse position than a fool. Further, the book of Galatians, written so we would learn to rest in God’s mercy through Christ rather than our own good works, nevertheless warns, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7–8).

We may be able to “play” others and get away with it, but we can never pull one over on our Creator. If you think you can—if you’ve gotten cocky because you think you’re getting away with it—beware! Even if you fool your wife, your parents, your pastor . . . *God* knows what you’re doing. And he will not be mocked.

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?

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

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?

DAY 3: THE REALITY OF SHAME

Along with the sense of guilt, long-term sinful habits or hidden desires create a deep sense of shame. Shame is what happens when we begin to identify directly with our sin and view it as what we *are*, rather than something we *do*. In the face of mounting guilt and an inability to change, our sinful behavior or desires become a source of personal identity. One brother recounted the shame of being called a “jerk off” as a teen because masturbation had been a central part of his life since early childhood. Since he was secretly enslaved to this behavior, living with profound guilt over it for years, in a very deep sense he believed he *was* a “jerk off.”

The power of shame is in the hiddenness of our behavior or desires. When we keep things hidden in the dark, shame grows and overwhelms us. We were created by God for intimacy—to be known by others—but in our shame, we’re too scared to let others see who we really are, to know the worst things about us. As a result, we live with the nagging sense that if others truly knew us, they would reject us. We become committed to hiding behind a mask and living a lie. We begin to project an illusion for others to see, but this only intensifies the problem. As our hypocrisy increases, so does our shame. As shame deepens, we become more committed to the façade. We enter a relational cycle as destructive and ensnaring as our struggle with sexual sin.

Why is shame so destructive? Because it always results in estrangement from others. Now, this doesn’t necessarily mean you are a social outcast. Many people wrestling with deep shame are the “life of the party.” Everybody knows and loves them, but inwardly they’re hiding, desperately afraid of others discovering their secret. They live with the constant fear of exposure. Although they’re well liked, shame makes them think, “Would they really like me if they knew . . . ?” Inwardly they’re deeply alone because no one truly knows them. The pressure of living a lie is a crushing burden that often leads to depression, seemingly unrelated anxieties, and other destructive behaviors such as self-harm or substance abuse.

For others, their sense of shame leads to both inward and outward isolation. Instead of living a public life that is a sham, they increasingly withdraw from human community both because of their fear of being found out, and the increasing pain of living with others without being truly known by them.

There is a cost to our souls when we live an illusion before others, never being known for who we truly are.

The only way to find freedom from this cycle is to risk exposure. Listen to the promise of 1 John 1:7: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Did you hear the double promise? If we humble ourselves and risk exposure by walking in the light, instead of hiding in the dark in our shame, God promises we will have fellowship—genuine intimacy—with each other. We’ll also get what we’ve been longing for: cleansing from our sin. The only way out of the cycle of sinful behavior and relational estrangement is to allow ourselves to be truly known. Only honesty and vulnerability with others in the body of Christ delivers us from both shame and slavery to sin.

For Reflection:

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

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

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

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”?

DAY 4: SEXUAL SIN EMASCULATES US!

Our culture teaches that our masculinity is directly connected to our sexual activity. It celebrates sexual conquest, mocking monogamy in marriage and chastity in singleness. We are told that real men have sex multiple times a week, have had many sexual partners, use porn personally and to spice up their sex lives, etc. The culture is trying to tell us that these chains are a sign of strength. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Sexual sin does not make us more of a man—it emasculates us! We'll discuss this further next week, but know that your sexual sin makes you complicit in injustice, oppressing those who are weaker—those we are called, as men, to cover and protect. It profoundly impacts our view of others.

Emasculate [i-mas-kyuh-leyt]

verb (used with object)

1. to castrate; to remove the testicles of a male animal
2. to deprive of strength or vigor, weaken adjective
3. deprived of or lacking strength or vigor; effeminate

As a single man, lust affects your ability to engage with others in rich, intentional relationships. Rather than considering how to serve others and lay down your life, lust programs you to view others as commodities, objects that exist for your pleasure. Even if your sin is limited to fantasy and masturbation, you are training yourself in broken, selfish sexuality. Your experience of self-centered sex shapes your expectation for the marriage bed, radically undermining God's design for spouses to serve each other sexually, focusing on the other's pleasure rather than their own. Should God provide a spouse, you will expect sex to be primarily about your pleasure.

For married men, lust robs you of the ability to love your wife and children. You brought selfish expectations of sex into marriage and have taken matters into your own hands when it failed to satisfy. Because sexual sin is such a source of "life" for you, those you are called to love and cherish, shepherd and protect, become an annoyance. They are reduced to obstacles, keeping you from the pleasures you crave.

In the end, sexual sin sucks life and vitality from us. This is part of what is in view when 1 Corinthians 6 describes sexual sin as against our own body. Perhaps more than any other form of sin, it leaves us utterly drained spiritually.

Far from demonstrating our power, sexual sin is a profound revelation of our weakness as we are enslaved to our behaviors and desires. As my colleague Dan says, “A real man can stare down his erection.” In other words, he is not a slave to his desires. A real man, empowered by the Spirit, is stronger than his lust.

Further, and in a tragically ironic sense, our pursuit of sexual sin ultimately robs us of our ability to truly enjoy sex, to experience sexual satisfaction. Ephesians 4:18–19 touches on this reality: “They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.” (The fact that Paul is describing pagans in this verse is very significant, and will be discussed during Week 2.)

The Greek word translated as “greedy”—*pleonexia*—literally means a “desire to have more.” It is referring to utter insatiability. The NIV translates this as “having a continual lust for more.” When we abandon ourselves to indulging in our sexual pleasure, disregarding God’s calling and the vows we’ve made to spouses, the result is slavery. Like a donkey chasing a carrot on a stick, the harder we strive to experience sexual satisfaction, the more it eludes us—even as our reckless pursuit of sexual contentment takes us into deeper and darker perversions. This is what is in view with “every kind of impurity.” It means that we will meet with the law of diminishing returns. What once satisfied us no longer does, and we need to go further into the mess to experience the same thrill.

All of us know the brutal experience of sexual sin’s bait and switch. You look forward to acting out, carefully putting together the plan. In the moment the act seems glorious, everything you were hoping for. But then . . . it’s over. Instantly, the fantasy evaporates and you are left alone with the mess. There could not be a more stark difference between the man you are in your fantasy and the one reaching for the tissue box. But only one of them truly lives in reality . . .

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?

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.

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

DAY 5: JESUS RESTORES OUR MANHOOD

We'll discuss this in greater detail later on, but realize right now: Jesus' mission is to make us real men! He wants us to be free from enslaving desires and behaviors. He doesn't want us to be emasculated men, but "strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy" (Colossians 1:11).

Jesus invites us to joy and contentment as we learn that the Christian life is best characterized, not by what we *don't* get to do, but by the abundant life Christ offers us. God wants to give us more, not less. Our flesh, the world, and the enemy would have us believe that God is holding out on us, but these are vicious lies against the God who, in love, both created and redeemed us. Jesus describes this contrast poignantly in John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." Brothers, God is not holding out on us in calling us out of our sinful behavior and desires—he wants to give us *life*! He offers to liberate us from our bondage and bring us to sexual sanity.

The irony is, Jesus promises to give us what we're hoping to find in sexual sin. Sex has become an idol for us, but the reality is that our idols are counterfeits that make huge promises, but always fail to deliver. They promise life, but bring only destruction and loss of what is most valuable. They promise excitement and contentment, but eventually lead to emptiness and despair. In a tragic demonstration of the truth of John 10, sexual sin robs us even of the ability to experience sexual fulfillment. As we examined yesterday, we are left only with a "continual lust for more." Pursuit of sexual sin leaves us sexually insatiable and unsatisfied, filled with yearning and discontent.

But here's the rub: Often the Christian life doesn't fit our expectations. It doesn't *seem* like an abundant life. We experience everything from minor disappointments to horrific trauma—even as Christians—that seem to belie the promises offered by Jesus. There are reasons we turn to sexual sin. The challenges of life in a fallen world cause us to question God's goodness and faithfulness. We're tempted to live like orphans, taking matters into our own hands and looking for contentment and comfort wherever we can find it.

But Jesus was straight with us. He *told* us that the Christian life would involve taking up our crosses, denying ourselves, and laying down our lives

for his sake and glory. Although some make the declaration, “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life,” this really needs to be qualified. When Jesus invites you to follow him, he hands you a heavy cross—with splinters—that you’re expected to throw up on your shoulder, carry up a steep hill, and when you get to the top . . . they’re going to kill you.

But, Jesus’ promise to us is that there’s a resurrection on the other side of that death. We are called to deny ourselves because the reward he offers is greater than our desires. He says that if you try to save your life you’ll lose it, but if you lose it for his sake, you’ll find it.

You know the experience of slavery. Sexual sin has robbed you of life and strength—your manhood. Jesus is calling you to a hard road, but a much better road than the one you’ve chosen to travel—and with a far greater destination. The road of sexual sin leads to all kinds of death, but the road Jesus calls you to walk leads to life now and life forever. As you follow him on this road, you’ll begin to experience greater life, joy, strength, and even sexual contentment. Only Jesus can give you what your heart is ultimately longing for!

We began this week by looking at Paul’s utter frustration with his sin in Romans 7. But for Paul, it didn’t end there. He doesn’t stop in a place of despair, but cries out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24–25).

Paul remembers the hope of the gospel, even in the midst of being confounded by his sin. And he goes on from that place of struggle to write one of the most glorious passages in all of Scripture, Romans 8, which radically focuses on what God accomplished for us in Christ and the incredible promises held out to us in the gospel. This is perhaps the most beautiful picture of repentance in the Bible. In the face of his sin and utter inability, Paul begins to *worship*. He reminds himself not only of the forgiveness we have in Christ, but the amazing fullness of our redemption. He begins by declaring “There is therefore now no condemnation” (verse 1) and finishes by proclaiming that nothing can “separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (verse 39). Throughout this chapter, Paul rehearses the mercy showed to us, the outpouring of the Spirit who intercedes for us because we don’t even know how to pray for ourselves, the promise that God will complete his work bringing us to glory, and on and on. In the face of his sin, Paul reminds us

of the fullness of life offered to us. He lays hold again of Jesus, gets on his feet and back into the battle against sin.

Jesus wants you to experience freedom and joy. He promises you abundant life and—in the midst of the battle against sin—wants you to discover in him what will truly satisfy your soul. He wants to free you from slavery and show you what it *truly* means to be a man!

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?

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?

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?