

Family Legacy Institute

Tools For Families Building Godly Legacies

The Spiritual Side of Sexual Struggle

By Dr. John P. Splinter

Little Chucky is five years old. He loves baseball more than anything in the world. His heroes are names like Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, Babe Ruth, and Albert Pujols. When he's not sleeping or eating, Chucky is out hitting baseballs in the park across the street from his house. For a five-year-old, he's already pretty good.

His dream is to play pro ball when he grows up. Meanwhile, his second-best dream is to hit a baseball in the center lane of I-70 as it goes through downtown St. Louis. He sees that long flat concrete slab as the primo place to see how far he can actually whack a ball.

One day Chucky mentioned this to his dad. His dad's first response was, "Hey little buddy, I'll go over to the park any day and let you hit balls. It's a much safer place." His dad understands things about freeways, like 18-wheelers, steel, inertia, speed, etc. However, Chucky insisted that the freeway was numero-uno on his list, and said that someday soon he'd just go there by himself if his dad wouldn't come with him. His dad's second response seemed amazingly negative. Dad said, "Chuck, you may *not* play baseball on the freeway ~ not today ~ not tomorrow ~ not ever. If I ever catch you doing it, or hear that you even tried to do it, I'll warm your tail in a manner that it won't cool down for a month ~ and I'll take away your baseball, bat, and glove for three years. Kapeesh?"

Chucky responded, "You're so mean! All my *life* I've dreamed about hitting a long one on I-70. There's no place in the *whole world* better than I-70. You're ruining my life! You don't understand me at all! You're a lousy dad! I hate you! I wish I was someone else's kid!"

So what would you say ~ is Chucky's father a Class A jerk, or a loving dad? Obviously, the latter. Now let's change the story-line. A working knowledge of the spiritual issues inherent in sexuality can provide two essential components in today's highly sexualized culture. First, it provides a navigational tool to help men and women avoid the sexual land mines. Second, this knowledge provides a healing tool for those whose lives have been turned into chaos after stepping on any of these mines.

Both of those are tied to understanding and obeying God's will, and there's the rub for some who feel that God is like Chucky's dad, taking away all the fun. To understand the spiritual issues of human sexuality, we'll briefly review God's instructions. Then we'll look at the strategic methods of God's Enemy (the Devil). The assumption is that Satan is real, alive and well, and highly invested in this discussion. We'll then look at a few examples provided by some of the wise old guys of scripture. Finally, we'll look at God's remedies to rescue and heal us after we run off a cliff.

God's instructions

First, let's get the right picture in our heads. Many look at God as a celestial killjoy, wishing to squash any sexual fun into which they might be so lucky as to fall. Others see God as a mean guy just waiting for us to fail so He can body-slam us to the deck. A better understanding of God, more in keeping with scripture, is as a loving Father ~ a dad who is patient, kind, and hopes to keep us from being badly hurt by the "sexual freeways" of our era, and the lure to come out and play on them.

Obviously, Chucky's dad is a loving guy who's willing to lay down firm boundaries and then enforce them, to save Chucky's life. That's how it is with God's instructions in the Bible. They're basically boundaries, aimed at protecting His children ~ although He's different than Chucky's dad in that God gives us the ability to think for ourselves and decide whether to play on the sexual freeway, or obey Him. Let's look at four of God's boundaries as they pertain to sex.

God shows us the best paths: In regard to human sexuality, God's basic instruction can be captured in seven words: *One man, one woman, for a lifetime*. The first place that human sex is mentioned in the Bible is in Genesis chapter two: ***"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh (i.e., intercourse). The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."***¹

Three thoughts are woven into this text. The first is that of leaving parents and becoming united with a person we love. The second is that the leaving and cleaving had no terminus date – divorce was not intended to be a solution to anything, in God's original plan. This doesn't mean that God dislikes divorced people, but no parent is in favor of something that hurts his children as badly as divorce. The third and obvious thought involves sex! One man, one woman, monogamous in their sexuality, joined for a lifetime.

Disobedience always hurts God's children: The second biblical thought is that the only container strong enough to contain the power of human sexuality, is marriage. Sex is an amazing thing. It's exciting ~ it's bonding ~ it's refreshing. Perhaps most of all, it's powerful. This is why one of the Ten Commandments says, ***"You shall not commit adultery."***² In giving that command, our loving Father was attempting to steer us away from pain, just as Chucky's dad was doing when he prohibited playing baseball on a freeway.

When discussing the power of human sexuality, all other containers than marriage lead to problems ~ often to ruin. They're like Chucky on I-70 as the 18-wheelers whiz past. In addition to the safety and protection of monogamous marriage there are essentially three other broad categories, or types of containers into which human sexuality is sometimes poured:

- Non-marital heterosexual sex ~ adultery, or sex with another opposite-sex adult partner; pedophilia, or sex with a child
- Homosexuality ~ sex with another same-sex partner, adult or child
- Self-sex ~ masturbation, often accompanied by pornography

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Each of these three containers brings their own unique set of problems. Each has the following characteristics in common:

- They tend to be narcissistic (self-focused)
- They lead toward greater problems (depression, disease, divorce, deviance)
- They create shame and secrecy

There's an old proverb that says, "***He who sins against me, injures himself.***"³ No parent wishes for their children to get hurt. All parents strive to protect their children from harm. So it is with God our Father. Better than anybody, He knows about how His wonderful gift of sex can cause massive ruin in a person's life, family, and even career. He wishes to protect us, to the best of His ability (without chaining us to a tree). Naturally, if we still choose to "play baseball on the freeway," sadly, it's on us.

Obedience always brings God's blessing: God's blessing is powerful stuff. There's a terrific promise from God stating that ...***He blesses those who are obedient to him by showing His love to "a thousand generations" of those who love and obey Him.***⁴ Much of God's blessing is found in the legacy we leave to our children and grandchildren ~ stable marriages ~ families with solid values ~ positive modeling to follow in the lives of our parents and grandparents. God's blessing is indeed, multigenerational. Much of that multigenerational blessing is linked to how we handle the issue of human sexuality.

There are here-and-now blessings too – it's not all future-oriented. For example, obedience to God keeps us from the 30 STDs now blasting like a scud missile through our culture. One of them, Herpes, is reported in 25% of American adults today (research from Centers for Disease Control). Obedience also keeps our minds free of the ownership (addiction) of pornography that hunts us down on the Internet. It warms us with having clear consciences, and nothing to hide from spouses or parents. And it gives us wisdom as we face the same temptations as our peers. Blessings.

Notice how simple this plan is ~ three key thoughts. By contrast, God has opposition. The Enemy of God is evil, slick, and powerful. In some ways he's like a well trained attorney, looking for "exception clauses," arguing his case using contrived rhetoric. Here's how he does his thing. As you read the following, keep one word in mind: Chaos.

Satan's Strategic Methods

The biblical origins of Satan are shrouded in mystery. The only reference to His original rebellion against God is found in Isaiah 14:12-15. For purposes of this study we're not going to dive into the old rag of, "Oh yeah....., so who created Satan?" All we know is that at some point, one of the most powerful angels went bad and dragged a bunch of others with him. Thereafter his character is seen in total opposition to God. Here are a few things we know about him.

He's a liar: Christ said, "***He is a liar and the father of lies.***"⁵ So whatever God has to say about sex, Satan will tell you the opposite ~ basically because Satan hates God and he hates God's children. If God says something is good, Satan will say it's bad; if God says it's bad,

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Satan will argue that it's good. Case in point: Ancient King Solomon wrote, "*The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast.*"⁶ Solomon might not have heard of sexual addiction, but he could have been talking about it when he said that the evil things we do end up snaring us and tying us in knots.

Solomon also wrote, "*The prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread.*"⁷ That's a poetic way of saying, 'Sex has the ability to turn you into a commodity.' A commodity is something you buy or sell. Porn is a commodity. Prostitution turns both partners into commodities ~ one selling the commodity of her body, and the other giving the commodity of money. Slaves are commodities. Naturally, Satan doesn't want you to see the backside of that screen. And God doesn't want his beloved kids to be commodities, or slaves.

We're all aware of the whispered messages that God's Enemy puts in our heads in regard to sex. They're all about allure, conquest, fun ~ tasting the juice of forbidden fruit. Satan sneers, "Oops, forgot to mention, the fruit is laced with cyanide. Oh well, hope you enjoyed it, sucker."

He teaches mistrust: The very first time we run into Satan in scripture, we see his basic character at work as he dupes Adam and Eve into believing that God is really holding out on them, and that he (Satan) has a better option. He said, "*God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*"⁸ Notice the seed of mistrust planted in Eve's mind ~ "God isn't telling you all there is to know ~ God knows that if you eat this fruit, you'll be as smart as He is ~ God has an ulterior motive in keeping you away from this terrific, life-changing fruit."

So it is that many believe obedience to God is something like drinking Castor oil ~ it may be good for you, but yeuch...! The problem is that the moment we mistrust God, we're putty in the hands of the master manipulator. We start believing stuff that sabotages our integrity, our character and our relationships. We start building our lives around habits and secrets that rot our souls like sugar on teeth.

He abuses power: In the very first story involving humans in the Bible, we see one of Satan's biggest lures ~ power ~ as he whispers to Adam and Eve, "*You will be like God...*"⁹ That was Satan's quest from the beginning, and he still uses power as bait to draw humans into his sphere of influence. Sexual disobedience to God is like Satan whispering to Chucky, "If you play baseball on I-70, you'll know as much as your dad does about 18-wheelers, speed, and inertia."

He causes us to stumble: The story of Adam and Eve is profound in its depth. It shows Satan using dishonesty and mistrust to trick them into sin. There are many such stories of spiritual trickery in scripture. Judah tried to be slick and had sex with someone he thought was a hooker. It turned out to be his daughter-in-law. He got her pregnant and then nearly murdered her for getting pregnant.¹⁰ Can you taste the cyanide? Samson lost his strength, his eyesight, and was imprisoned as a result of devious Delilah.¹¹ How many men do you know who have lost everything because of a beautiful woman. More cyanide.

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And who could ever forget the picture of King David peeping over the walls of his palace and watching Bathsheba take a bath on the roof of her house.¹² He didn't even stop to taste the cyanide – he just bolted it down. Satan lures us to stumble ~ he laces the forbidden fruit with his poison ~ we drink it ~ and then he walks away laughing as we pay the freight.

He creates weakness: In the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he wrote about addiction. He didn't call it addiction ~ he used a stronger word: Slavery. *“When you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey ~ whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness”.*¹³ If you think this is mere hyperbole, talk to any man or woman who has lost sexual control in their lives. They may have tried to end their slavery many times, but have failed. Satan's cyanide is both highly corrosive, and addictive.

He slanders us: In the first chapter of the book of Job, Satan stands before God. God points to his servant Job and says, *“Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”*¹⁴ Satan's response was to trash-talk Job: “Hey, God, the only reason Job loves you is because you've done so much for him ~ but take away what you've given him and he'll curse you.” That's chutzpa, to stand in the presence of God and bad-mouth someone God likes! Yet that's what Satan does – and he does it to you, constantly.

In another situation Satan was seen in the presence of God, ripping the High Priest, a man named Joshua.¹⁵ In fact, Satan is such a pain in the rear to everyone in creation, that at the end of all time, a shout of joy is raised when Satan, who is called “The accuser of our brothers,” is hurled down into hell.¹⁶ Did you ever wonder why those thoughts of your personal failures keep coming back to haunt you again and again ~ well, now you know. The “Accuser” is doing his thing in your head.

He make us feel alone: I've been a pastor for 35+ years, and I hold two post-graduate degrees in psychology. This means I've listened to a lot of people's tough stuff. One of the most common themes, whether confession or therapy, is that of being “the only person in the world” dealing with this or that problem. Here are the voices of a few hurting people from the past 35 years in my office: The sentence starts with, “I must be the only person in the world who....”

- Just can't stop looking at porn and masturbating
- Has everything one could wish for, wife, kids, and yet craves sex with a stranger
- Has been a Christian for “X” years, and yet is having an affair
- Has been a Christian for “X” years, and still struggles with same-sex lust
- Has been a Christian for “X” years, and caught Herpes
- Thinks the only good sex is painful sex
- Seems to crave sex with people who then abandon me
- Has such a fetish about women's shoes (or whatever)

These are all sexual examples, basically because this booklet focuses on sexual issues. But the principle here is far larger than just sex. Satan makes us feel alone, no matter what our area of brokenness may be. That way he is more able to control us and limit the options we see.

He uses shame: Anyone who works regularly with men or women struggling with sexual issues, knows that shame is a powerful source of anxiety. Many therapists believe it to be the rocket fuel that powers sexual addiction. Satan uses shame to drive us like a 16-year-old boy uses his right foot to drive his uncle's Corvette.

Shame serves a deeply spiritual purpose. It keeps people away from God. We can see this clearly in the first book of the Bible. Satan had just conned Adam and Eve into eating the forbidden fruit. *"Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*¹⁷

Wait a minute. How did they get from taking a bite of fruit, to suddenly noticing nakedness, to feeling shame? Is shame inherent in human sexuality? Actually, it is not, because just a moment before Adam and Eve went to hiding, the Bible says they were *...naked and they felt no shame.*¹⁸ However, there's a principle to learn here. It is that shame is a natural byproduct of sin in general. While it is possible to scar the soul with so much sin that one no longer feels shame, when that happens, the wretchedness that accompanies the scarred life is generally sufficient proof of the principle. Shame is such an ever-present component within sexual sin, that the leading voice in America today dealing with sexual addiction, Dr. Patrick Carnes, identifies shame as being the fuel that drives addiction. Cyanide. Shame.

Satan is no gentleman. He lures us away from God by leading us to mistrust our Father. He seduces us to sin. He hits us hardest at our weakest link when we are least able to withstand the blow. He enslaves us. He slanders us in the presence of God as well as in our own heads. He isolates us from God and from one another. He uses shame to lash us. Next time you think about looking at a porn picture, recall these thoughts first and then ask yourself, "Is this *really* where I want to go?"

OK, enough about Old Slewfoot. Let's look at some lessons from the wise old guys of Bible lore.

The Old Guys' Wisdom

Samson's Strategy: We begin looking at "Old Guys' Wisdom," by reviewing the life of a guy who lost it all to a skirt. Life's hardest lessons are often most the powerful. Consider Samson's strategy. He was a powerful, testosterone driven male whose main weakness was pretty women. His strategy was to see how close to the edge he could get without falling. If you've ever played that game, whether on a rock wall or elsewhere, you've probably learned that it only takes one small slip.... But then, some people like living on the edge, imagining they're able to sustain the position without slipping.

I once had a friend who climbed the Matterhorn, in Switzerland. The Matterhorn is 4,477 meters high, which equates with 14,689 feet. If you've ever hiked a Colorado Fourteener, you have some idea of what that means. The difference with the Matterhorn is that it is 90% technical, meaning you don't walk up the mountain. You climb it, straight up, using harnesses, ropes, pitons, carabiners, crampons, cams, wire stoppers, helmets, quick draws, and the like. My friend told of finding a jaw bone in a crevasse. At first he thought it belonged to an unfortunate mountain goat. Then he saw gold filling in one of the teeth. Samson thought he could live on the edge. As a result, he lost everything. How many men do you know that have lost everything because they hung out at the edge chasing a skirt?

Job's Strategy: Like Samson, Job was a male so he struggled with lusting after attractive females. That's the struggle of most guys. So Job made a promise to God regarding the use of his eyes. Here's what he wrote: *"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl."*¹⁹ There's a difference between looking at a girl, and looking at a girl with lust. If you can't look at a girl without lusting, then you're probably looking at the wrong parts of the girl ~ and you're making yourself weaker in the head. It's a little more difficult lusting after a girl's hair, or her eyes, or her smile ~ you know, basically above the shoulders. That's where men of character learn to focus their eyes. It's a discipline that starts out hard, but gets easier as a man's character bulks up. Any weasel can roam his eyes across a female's body ~ and it's a really weasely-world out there. The question a man must ask of himself has to do with how he wishes his character to develop ~ what he hopes to look like in his own eyes a month or a year from now. Job's character was strong, and it helped him through some very deep water.

Joseph's Strategy: Joseph was an Israeli guy who had been sold by his brothers, into slavery. Talk about sibling rivalry. "Hey little brother, guess where we're sending you for your birthday this year?" As he grew up, Joseph evidently bulked up in both physique and character, because one day the wife of a top Egyptian government official came on to him sexually. As is the case with most rich beautiful women, she was used to getting her own way. When Joseph said "no," she actually grabbed his clothes and started stripping him. Slaves in those days would have worn a single piece of clothing in the form of a knee-length shirt.

So imagine you're a young man with broad shoulders and great abs, and some hot female starts literally ripping your clothes off, telling you she wants your body. This isn't easy stuff for the average guy. One can hear many "average" guys saying, "I couldn't resist – I mean, she practically raped me – shoot, I *tried* to do the right thing, but...."

Joseph's strategy was simple. He ran! I've talked with fraternity guys who have done the "run-naked-across-campus" hazing gig. They claim there's nothing faster than a terrified naked running college freshman. I don't personally have any experience in this matter, but I have occasionally heard sonic booms while visiting University campuses, and suspect they could be caused by naked frat-rats trying to get back to their houses without being photographed, or seen.

The "run-away" strategy is even better than cold showers or push-ups, because it takes you physically away from the source of temptation. Of course, this can be tricky if it's your own car or apartment in which the willing female is waiting while you're pounding down the road. Perhaps the trick is not to get yourself into places from which you're pretty sure you may need to

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run. Duh. But if you goof up and are trapped by some willing female who's ripping your clothes off, the best answer is still pounding shoe leather.

Joseph's strategy was to run. Get away from the source of temptation. If staying away from temptation is the first-best strategy for character building, running is the second-best overall strategy.

David's Strategy: King David should have used Joseph's strategy, but he didn't. David turned a great opportunity for character-building, into a world-class mess-up. He happened to come upon a gorgeous woman taking a bath. No man can blame him for wanting to take a second peak, right? However, another wise old guy, Martin Luther once said, "You can't keep birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from nesting in your hair." Men are natural born wimps when it comes to turning their eyes away from naked ladies. It takes strength of character to avert one's eyes when some great looking female bends over and you can see down her blouse all the way to her belly button ~ oh, and *tell* me you're looking at her belly button....

Any man with blood in his veins can feel the sense of "wo--ah!" that David felt when he first saw Bathsheba. These are moments when our cognitive self needs to take our limbic self by the throat and say, "NO ~ CHILL!," because *there is no good that comes out of second glances*. All they do is make us hungry for third glances. Bio-chemically, the dopamine released in those moments *burns* what we see into our permanent memory structure and we can call up that screen any time thereafter ~ for the rest of our lives. The sex drive is *that* powerful.

Most of us know the story. David invited Bathsheba into the palace for tea and crumpets..., and sex. She got pregnant, so the meaning of her husband changed ~ rather than being a stooge to dupe, he became a problem to get rid of. At the first moment David stood and watched Bathsheba bathing, he never *dreamed* his second glance would lead to an affair ~ the murder of one of his military leaders, Uriah ~ one of his sons (Amnon) raping one of his daughters (Tamar) ~ another son (Absalom) murdering Amnon and then launching a coup d'etat against David ~ David's army turning against him ~ the elders of Israel turning against him ~ Absalom's battlefield death ~ and the traitorous rebellion followed by suicide of his closest advisor, a wise old man named Ahithophel.

David's strategy was to cave to his sexual desires ~ after all, he was a king and kings always get what they want ~ right? His decision decimated his family (rape, murder). His son, Solomon obviously struggled with sex (seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines). Later, Solomon fell into deep depression and said he wished he'd never even been born.

Here's a very important point: Caving in to our sexual desires is like jumping out of an airplane, into the top of a tornado. As we fall deeper into the whirlwind, there's greater chaos, greater destruction ~ and in the realm of sexuality, there is no bottom to the fall. It just goes deeper, faster, and more deadly. Like David, we find ourselves doing things we *never ever dreamed* we'd do ~ yet somehow at the time they make sense to us. Sex caused David's murder of his friend, Bathsheba's husband, to make sense to him. That's how crazy sex can make a person.

Second glances are over-rated, mainly because they're built upon the false promises whispered by Satan. They're like a stair step – the step is always down, never up. Men of character build on the Job strategy. Remember, Satan's a manipulator and a liar. He'll lure you to believe there's something to be gained in second glances ~ just before he sinks his axe into your forehead, rewires your brain, and leads you like a lemming off the nearest cliff.

However, all is not lost in David's story. He did one thing right. He finally came to his senses and confessed his sin to God. If you haven't ever read it, you should read his confession in Psalm 51. It's David's tear-stained, heart-felt cry to God. This is the good news of David's story, because confession is the beginning of healing. It's like vomiting the cyanide.

Paul's strategy: Most people think that Paul never struggled with sex. Most of these naïve people have never really thought about what he wrote in his letter to the church in Rome. See what you think:

“I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I can't. I do what I don't want to ~ what I hate. I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience proves that I agree with these laws I am breaking. But I can't help myself because I'm no longer doing it. It is sin inside me that is stronger than I am that makes me do these evil things.

I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn I can't make myself do right. I want to but I can't. When I want to do good, I don't; and when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. Now if I am doing what I don't want to, it is plain where the trouble is: sin still has me in its evil grasp.

It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. I love to do God's will so far as my new nature is concerned; but there is something else deep within me, in my lower nature, that is at war with my mind and wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. In my mind I want to be God's willing servant, but instead I find myself still enslaved to sin.

So you see how it is: my new life tells me to do right, but the old nature that is still inside me loves to sin. Oh, what a terrible predicament I'm in!”²⁰

So what do you think Paul was struggling with? Shoplifting? Telling white lies? Driving his camel too fast in Jerusalem? Perhaps, but Paul was a single guy and his body produced testosterone just like any other guy's body. Undoubtedly he wasn't chasing chicks, but this text sure fits well with the things single guys struggle with (OK, married guys too). This leads us, then, to the solution he found. We don't know what “it” was in this next text, but *something* really torqued him ~ something grabbed him by the throat and drove him down, because in his second letter to the church in Corinth he wrote this:

“Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will

boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."²¹

Essentially, Paul was saying, "OK, Father, this is my struggle. I hate it, but I can't beat it. So I need to rely on You because in my own strength, I'm toast." Turning to God and begging for forgiveness and help is the ultimate spiritual solution to the failures of our lives. It's not a one-time thing ~ it's like putting a GPS into your car and then following what it tells you to do. That was Paul's strategy ~ following close behind God. There are helpful way-stations on this journey. Let's look at some of them.

God's Answers To Our Failures

Everyone fails God. There are no exceptions. Because of His character, He took this into account before He created the first star. Here are a few of His kind measures to help bring us back to spiritual and emotional health after we run into enough brick walls that we finally catch on that there's a problem.

Believe God's solutions: You'll recall that earlier we showed how Satan leads us to mistrust God. So our healing begins with believing that He is a loving Father, and that He has our very best in mind. Christ said it most succinctly: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; but I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*²² You're bright enough to know who "the thief" is that Christ was referencing. And did you notice the thief's purpose? Read it again, and perhaps ponder how it applies to your sexual life. Then ask yourself, do you want "life to the full," or are you willing to settle for great looking lures laced with cyanide? It's your life.

In another place the Bible gives a wise piece of advice: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."*²³ Sex outside of God's plan and purpose makes our paths chaotic. While we *think* we're getting away with something, what's really happening is that we're being lured into slavery. So the beginning of healing involves believing in God's solutions.

Trust God's presence: Recall that Satan makes us feel alone, and then he limits the options we see. He's a master at this game, actually, and he starts working on us when we're little children. He is the one responsible for our experience of feeling rejected, abandoned, abused, and all those other clinical terms that psychologists look for when treating people whose lives have fallen in the ditch.

Yet we are not alone ~ not ever. God our Father is our constant companion. King David wrote what is probably the most widely known Psalm (#23) in which he said, *"...even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me...."*²⁴ We don't know what "valley" David was experiencing when he wrote this Psalm, but David had some pretty hairy experiences in his life. Yet somewhere along the way he'd learned that he was never, ever alone. Nor are you. Think about that ~ does it change anything?

David continued the thought by saying, “...*your rod and your staff, they comfort me.*”²⁵ That is to say, after taking a ride in the tornado, and seeing the destruction and chaos it wreaks, the boundaries and protection that God provides are like a safe harbor. In our immaturity there are times when we think that taking a walk on the wild side is a fun thing ~ we equate freedom with moral anarchy. But when we begin to see in our own lives the depravity of spiritual (in this case sexual) slavery, the rod and staff feel like safety and protection ~ which is what they were in the hand of a shepherd.

Trust God’s power: Recall what was said earlier about Satan’s abuse of power. He’s forever into abusing power, and luring us to do the same. That’s a lot of what sexual fantasy is all about ~ power. In fantasy we can make a person do anything we wish them to do ~ we have complete 100% power over them. But when we grab the forbidden fruit and take a big chomp, our spirits are injected with the cyanide of evil. By contrast, when we trust God and rely on His power, we are cleansed and refreshed. Here are two examples.

After David’s romp in the hay with Bathsheba, he became a broken man. He realized the enormous and far-flung consequences of his ways ~ the ruined lives and death that lay around him and for which he was responsible ~ and it broke him. Sometimes the *best* thing that can happen to us, is to be hopelessly broken ~ driven to our knees ~ sobbing in hopelessness. It’s good in that it forces us to let go of what got us there. It’s like a hammer trying to pound a steel anvil ~ we are the hammer, and in the end it is we that are broken. God is the anvil. And the pain that flows from disobedience is the evidence that the hammer is in trouble.

Yet, God remains loving. This being so, there’s a fascinating song that David wrote some years after the “Bathsheba incident.” In this song, David says,

“The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I have not done evil by turning from my God. All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight.”²⁶

Knowing that this was written after his murder and adultery, one has to stop and wonder if David had been smoking that funny stuff again. “...*according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me....*” “*I have been blameless....*” Really, David? Are you serious?

What’s neat about David’s song is that it demonstrates God’s power to cleanse us when we repent and begin obeying Him again. God actually can restore us, completely. There’s a terrific metaphor in another of the Psalms. It says, “...*as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*”²⁷ You’re undoubtedly aware that East and West never intersect. You can fly an airplane East from New York all the way around the world, finally landing again in New York, and still be going East. That is to say, when we confess our sins and repent of our evil ways, God truly has the power to restore us.

Over the years as a pastor and psychologist I’ve worked with men and women who have said they wondered if God was patient enough to keep working with them as He cleaned the muck of

sin off their lives. A woman in my office once said, “I try, and fall, and try, and fall. God must be tired of my failures.” In response I always lead people to the following two thoughts:

- 1) **“Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.”**²⁸ That is to say, you can’t out-sin God’s ability to extend grace to you.

and

- 2) **“God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again.”**²⁹ That is, once you begin the journey of obedience to God, He’s going to continue working in you until the job is done. Your Father is invested in you! He cares, and He wants to help you get clean and green. And He’s not going to give up on you, even if you give up on yourself.

Trust God’s forgiveness: Having mentioned God’s power to cleanse us, and His will to keep on working with us until He gets things right in our lives, the next thought is to trust His forgiveness. The Apostle John put God’s forgiveness into a short, easily remembered thought: **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”**³⁰ Call that an iron-clad guarantee, from God. And if you can’t trust God, who can you trust?

The Apostle James correlated confession with healing ~ a fact that has not been unnoticed within the field of psychology. James wrote, **“...confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”**³¹ Sometimes people become sexual outside of marriage, because of pain that has been inflicted on them by others ~ and often that pain happened when the person was just a little tyke. The point of confession is not to assess blame ~ rather, it is to get the monkey of Satan’s slavery off our backs ~ to break the web of secrecy and shame that Satan weaves around us. We’re all victims of Satan’s manipulation, in one way or another. Confession is like a thunder-storm, bringing rain and fresh nitrogen for plants ~ for our parched souls. It clears the air and sets the stage for healing and growth.

Trust God’s plan: Trusting God means trusting His plan and His methods. Sure, you’re always free to wander back into slavery ~ if you wish. However, once freed, most former slaves rejoice to learn more about their Rescuer’s perfect plan and loving ways. That plan is found in scripture. And from one ex-slave to another, I can tell you it’s a good plan. It works. It replaces chaos with peace. It replaces shame with joy. It fills the hunger of the soul.

Trust God’s methods: Some of God’s methods are counter-intuitive. They’re like jujitsu, a hand-to-hand combat method using one’s enemy’s momentum to redirect and overcome the enemy’s assault. Here are a couple of jujitsu spiritual concepts:

- 1) **Forgiveness:** It’s always the most natural thing to hit back when someone strikes us. Retribution helps create boundaries and some feel it helps restore self-esteem. But scripture teaches the following principle, which by the way is one of the most difficult things in the world to do: **“If (someone) sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you**

*and says, 'I repent, forgive him.'*³² One of the heaviest burdens many people carry is that of anger and a desire for retribution. The “old tapes” of our lives often become the fuel that Satan uses to lure us away from God. The personal example of Christ is powerful, as he prayed for the guys driving the nails into his hands and feet, “Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing.”

Forgiveness is the position of greatest strength. By contrast, retribution is a position of weakness, and of ever-increasing interpersonal struggle. Forgiveness is for the other guy; self-forgiveness is for you. It’s freeing in both applications. So do you want to be a slave to your past hurts, or are you interested in the fresh air and bright new day of forgiveness?

2) **Take all thoughts captive:** The Enemy of God wishes us to hide and hold inappropriate thoughts (such as lust). As human beings, we tend to hide and hold a lot of mental stuff that’s not exactly helpful. The problem with hiding and holding bad stuff in our heads is that sin is not static. It doesn’t sit still, like a rock. It is dynamic, like a skunk on the loose. So when being sexually tempted, the counter-intuitive spiritual approach taught in scripture is to drag every thought into the presence of Christ. Here’s the text: ***“We take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”***³³

Here’s how it works. When facing sexual temptation, we immediately begin to pray, “Jesus, you died for all the sin of the world – so you died for my sexual sin as well. Right now I’m being tempted by sex, and I want to bring the source of this temptation into your presence. I ask that you give me the strength to turn away from and overcome this temptation.”

From a cognitive perspective, whatever we put into our brain, will end up influencing our attitude, perception and behavior. You can’t have a skunk in the kitchen, and not have the kitchen smell bad. So the question to ask yourself is, “What do you want to influence your thinking? The Apostle Paul suggested taking every thought captive, to make it obedient to Christ.

Trust God’s love: Most people who struggle with sexual issues, wonder if God truly loves them. For those who are sexually addicted, there’s a very high probability that they faced some sort of significant childhood harm in their lives ~ sexual abuse, physical abuse, verbal abuse, spiritual abuse. In these people’s lives, love often becomes a distorted reflection of their childhood traumas. They may equate love with pain, or with abuse, or with depression, or with rejection and abandonment ~ the list is endless.

The good news is that God loves us, but the problem is that many have no clue as to what love means. To understand what love means, one of the great love stories of all literature is found in the story of the “Prodigal Son.” In that story one sees the love of a Father. It’s a Parable told by Christ, in regard to God’s love for us after we stray and fail. The Prodigal Son spent 1/3 of his father’s estate on parties and hookers ~ you’ve probably heard the story. But did you notice his dad’s response when the boy came home? (The story is found in Luke 15:11-32.)

Another thing to know about God’s love is that it leads to wholeness and emotional stability. There’s a neat verse in Paul’s second letter to Timothy, which says, ***“God did not give us a spirit***

of fear, but a spirit of power, of love, and of self-discipline.”³⁴ The whole sexual thing is profoundly spiritual in nature. Indeed, the sexual arena is host to what some call “spiritual warfare.” Don’t get crazy about that term. In one sense, *everything* is about spiritual warfare. But the sexual arena is like the showcase rendition. It’s where the Enemy of God really likes to shine. So as a means of giving assurance and encouragement to Timothy, the Apostle Paul made this statement about a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline ~ it’s mental health 101.

I love old hymns. Some of the lyrics are so rich, and I cherish memories of being in a small church in Lake Crystal, MN with my grandfather’s hand on my shoulder as we sang many of those old hymns. One of my favorites is titled, “Oh Love, That Will Not Let Me Go.” It’s written using Old English language which in this case embellishes the poetic thoughts presented. Here are the lyrics. As you read them, think about your struggles with sexuality, and then think about God’s amazing, overwhelming, ever-pursuing love for you.

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine’s blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life’s glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

As I write this section of this booklet my heart is absolutely ripped apart in regard to a family tragedy. Simply writing the lyrics, “Oh Joy that seekest me through pain” has caused the dam in my soul to break, and I sit before the computer screen with tears coursing down my face, hands at rest on my lap, a heart overcome with the agony of profound sadness, sobbing. Our whole family is in mourning over a rare medical problem that has struck one of our youngest members. As I write this, a child’s life hangs in the balances with a disease that can cause blindness, Autism, severe mental and physical retardation, and death. Yet through the pain, I know that my Father is near, and that He loves this child with an eternal love that is beyond my ability to

understand. God's love doesn't make the agony go away, but it does provide solace and the knowledge that His love is greater than any of our setbacks. Right now our family needs that solace.

Why am I telling you about this? My point is that we can trust God's love for us, no matter what the tragedy or issue. My struggle today is not with sexuality ~ it's with a seven-month old baby that has been diagnosed with a tragedy. But in either case, the first phrase of that hymn is just as true, "Oh Love, that **will not** let me go." Right now I desperately need God's presence and love. There aren't any other answers ~ there's no place else to go ~ so today I bring my helplessness and agony to God, with tears and sobs. David did the same thing, for different reasons. Both David and I flee to God in trust of His love. You can too.³⁶

Wrap

The sexual side of humanity is a *profoundly spiritual* thing. It's not just body parts and sexual activity. It is an arena in which we either trust and obey God, or we take the hits that come naturally through ignoring Him. The hits of sexuality are some of the hardest of life ~ addiction, divorce, broken children, children born out of wedlock, STDs, character ruin, even suicide and murder. These traits of suffering don't exist because God hates people who don't obey Him; they exist because He made sex to be incredibly powerful, and the Enemy of God adds his poison and then uses it so effectively. Yet our Father loves us and provides wisdom, to help guide us through the sexual pathways of life. And when we run our cart into the ditch and cry out for help, He helps lift us out of the ditch, again, and points us in the direction of Christ.

The consequences of our sin usually don't change because of faith. The pregnant girl is still pregnant. The man with Herpes still has Herpes. The person who lost their marriage because of sexual infidelity is still divorced. *But the meaning of our lives changes.* Our relationships change. Our characters are strengthened. We become healed! And in the end our characters are re-formatted in the image of Jesus Christ. Spiritual character reformation is the essence of sexual healing. And God's healing in our lives prepares us for successful and happy living.

On his tenth birthday, Chucky got a new baseball glove from his dad. He was the starting first baseman on his little league team. His coach one day whispered to dad, "This kid has a promising career in baseball if he keeps it up." After the birthday party, Chucky and his dad did something they loved ~ they took a long walk together. As they walked, they crossed a bridge over I-70 on their way to the Arch grounds park. For a moment, Chucky stopped and looked at the freeway traffic whizzing below. He turned to his dad and said, "I'd have been killed, wouldn't I?" Tears welled up in his dad's eyes as he said, "That was my greatest fear, son. And then I wouldn't have wanted to live because after God and your mother, you are my life." They turned and walked into the Arch grounds, dad with his arm around Chucky's shoulder.

Another son, a fellow named John, once wrote this in regard to God's love for us ~ His arm around our shoulder. ***"God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he (first) loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."***³⁵

References

Unless otherwise specified, all references use the NIV translation of the Bible.

1. Genesis 2:24-25
2. Exodus 20:14
3. Proverbs 8:36 (NASV)
4. Deuteronomy 7:9
5. John 8:44
6. Proverbs 5:20-22
7. Proverbs 6:26
8. Genesis 3:5
9. Ibid.
10. Genesis 38:1-30
11. Judges 14-16
12. 1 Samuel 11:2-3
13. Romans 6:16
14. Job 1:8
15. Zechariah 3:1
16. Revelation 12:10
17. Genesis 3:7-10
18. Genesis 2:25
19. Job 31:1
20. Romans 7:15-23 (TLB)
21. 2 Corinthians 12:7-9
22. John 10:10
23. Proverbs 3:5-6
24. Psalm 23:4
25. Ibid.
26. 2 Samuel 22:21-25
27. Psalm 103:12
28. Romans 5:20-21
29. Philippians 1:6
30. 1 John 1:9
31. James 5:16
32. Luke 17:4
33. 2 Corinthians 10:5
34. 2 Timothy 1:7
35. 1 John 4:8-10
36. The disease is called “Infantile Spasm.” It’s a horrendous diagnosis. Our family was on its face, crying out to God. By His grace, a year later, our entire family rejoiced to know that God had provided a new medication that had pulled our little guy back from the precipice of retardation and death. Today he’s doing very well. We praise God.