

CONTENTS

A Matter Of Perspective	2
The Lures That Attract Us	4
<i>The Lure Of Personal Freedom</i>	5
<i>The Lure Of Instant Gratification.</i>	13
<i>The Lure Of Easy Answers</i>	19
Steps To Fulfillment	28
Searching For Answers.	30
Finding Forgiveness	32

RESISTING THE LURE

Recognizing The Dangers Of Sexual Temptation

Some of our most important choices are made not in the rushing waters of desire but in the quiet “upriver” waters of reflection. Such thoughtfulness is essential if we are to be prepared for the powerful currents of sexual temptation.

In the following pages, *Our Daily Bread* managing editor Kurt De Haan helps us see our sexuality as one of our Creator’s most beautiful and fragile gifts. In these pages we find counsel that is not offered to condemn us in our mistakes, but to protect us from further harm.

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A MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE

A 30-year-old tourist was admiring the power and beauty of the Niagara River—until he lost his footing. On a hot July afternoon, John either didn't see or decided to ignore the danger signs, and he waded out into the cool, inviting waters upriver from the falls.

John ventured out too far, though. His feet slipped and he became caught in forces he couldn't overcome. After being swept along in the rapids to within a minute of going over the falls, he managed to grab hold of his last hope—a partially submerged rock—and he held on for dear life until rescuers were able to reach him.

Others who've been caught in the current haven't been as fortunate—and

they've gone over the falls, plunging 180 feet to the rocks and churning water below.

Visiting Niagara doesn't have to be such a dangerous experience. When viewed from a different perspective, we can appreciate in safety the awesome beauty of Niagara Falls. The cool mist and thundering waters can be seen, heard, and felt from viewing areas on either side of the chasm or from the tour boats in the river below. We could even take an elevator to the observation decks of the nearby 520-foot-tall Skylon Tower.

These are dramatically different ways to view and experience Niagara—being swept along out of control down the rapids and over the falls, or appreciating the sights and sounds of this natural wonder from a place of safety.

We also have some very different ways to view and

enjoy the wonder of our God-given sexuality. We can see and experience it safely and without regret. Or we can enter the waters of temptation without fully understanding or caring about the dangers to ourselves and others.

That's why this booklet was written—to help us become better able to recognize and respond to sexual temptation before we have gone too far and are swept along by powerful passions.

But just as important, if you have already entered dangerous waters or have felt the pain and regret of being caught in temptation, please keep reading. There is help and hope, not only for past mistakes but also for the future.

We don't have to keep making the same mistakes. An ancient proverb states:

“A wise person senses danger and takes action

to avoid trouble”
(Prov. 22:3).

We can grow in wisdom by learning how to see the lures of sexual temptation from the perspective of the One who made us. With His

***A wise person
senses danger and
takes action to
avoid trouble.***

wisdom and with His help, we can learn how to recognize the danger signs. And we'll discover better and ultimately more fulfilling ways of experiencing our sexuality as our Creator intended for us to do.

We need to begin by clearing up some of the misunderstandings we might have about sexual desires. With better insight into ourselves, we can find a path to true freedom and lasting joy.

THE LURES THAT ATTRACT US

Why do we make choices we later regret? What is it that leads us to violate what makes good sense, hurting ourselves and others in the process? It's not a lack of intelligence, nor can we put all the blame on others. In part, the answer is that behind our self-defeating choices there are usually wrong assumptions that put us at risk and keep us from seeing beyond the lures that hook us.

Like a fishing lure that makes a trout think he's getting his favorite meal, half-truths and deceptive statements about our sexuality hide the "hooks" that can catch us.

Of course, we are more intelligent than fish—usually. Sometimes, though, we trade the future for the

moment. As a result of our short-sightedness, we make it more difficult in the long run to find the kind of intimacy and pleasure our God made us to experience. Like a fish, we are deceived by a lure we didn't really understand.

The temptations are not new. First-century followers of Christ in the seaport city of Thessalonica faced many of the same choices we have today. We see their struggles reflected in a letter written to them by a spiritual leader who cared deeply about their well-being. The apostle Paul wrote:

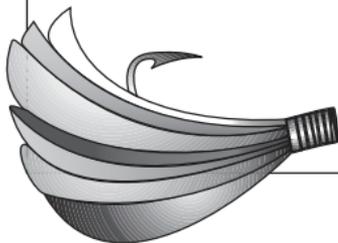
Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of

God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit (1 Th. 4:1-8).

These words are just as timely and important today as they were in the first century. They show that God Himself is concerned that His people learn to see the dangers hidden behind wrong assumptions. In the

pages to come, we'll explore those statements in greater detail as we look at the lure of personal freedom, the lure of instant gratification, and the lure of easy answers.

THE LURE OF PERSONAL FREEDOM



THE LURE OF PERSONAL FREEDOM

No one needs to convince us that bank robbery, shoplifting, and murder are wrong. It makes sense to have laws against actions that violate the well-being of others. Whether we're talking about rules of the road or regulations of commerce, we know we need laws to keep us from

endangering ourselves and one another.

But not everyone agrees where to draw the line for sexual behavior. Some suggest that certain rules are unnecessarily restrictive. And we may have questions about specific situations. Is it wrong for a man in the privacy of his own home to enjoy a sexually explicit magazine or video? Is it really so bad for a woman in an unhappy marriage to enjoy the intimate company of another man who brings her joy? Is it necessary for an unmarried young couple to avoid sexual intimacy even though they love each other and have taken precautions against pregnancy or disease? Is sexual involvement between two consenting adults hurting anyone?

The way we answer these questions will reveal whether we understand the

far-reaching spiritual and relational implications of our sexual choices. Before looking at what God has said, let's look at some common opinions.

What Many Believe

- "I'm the only one who knows what's right for me."
- "Safe sex doesn't hurt anyone."
- "Everyone is doing it."
- "I'll lose the relationship if I don't have sex."
- "To deny sexual expression is unnatural."
- "Premarital sexual activity is okay as long as you don't go all the way."
- "Sexual experience before marriage is necessary to see whether we are compatible."
- "The Bible's standards are outdated."
- "God isn't against sex outside of marriage—He's only opposed to unloving behavior."

What's Best For Us?

Let's begin by looking again at what the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4. He called attention to several principles that can help us identify dangerous thinking.

1. Biblical statements about what is best for us come from God. Paul introduced his comments by saying, "You know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus" (v.2). Paul began this way because he wanted them to realize that his words about sexual relationships were not rooted in his own personal preferences. Nor was he merely reflecting his culture or what his friends believed. The teaching Paul passed along was from our Creator and was given through the authority Jesus had given to him as an apostle. He spoke of his instruction as "the will of God" (v.3). And again,

in verse 8, he said that "he who rejects this does not reject man, but God."

This is where we need to feel the full weight of what is happening when we pursue the lure of temptation and go our own way. It's easy to assume that our personal sexual choices have nothing to do with our belief in God.

We cannot reject what God says without rejecting God Himself.

It's easy to reason that we still believe in God even though we practice sexual behavior that is not consistent with the standards of the Bible.

But this is where the lies we are inclined to believe need to be exposed. We need to realize that we cannot reject God's law without rejecting Him and His influence over our lives.

His laws are expressions of His love and wisdom. When we try to separate sexual issues from our relationship with Him, we are attempting the impossible.

When we try to separate sexual issues from our relationship with God, we are attempting the impossible.

We must be careful, therefore, not to dismiss sections of the Bible we don't agree with. Even though we all have a tendency to go our own way, and even though the world around us encourages independent thinking, we need to remember that God knows what's best for us.

Seeing that the principles of the Bible come from a

source of wisdom far above and beyond ourselves is an important reminder of our accountability to God. It is crucial to realize that we answer to God not only for His sake but for our own. No one understands us better than He does. No one cares more about us. No one is in a better position to see the long-term implications of sexual choices. No one has a better understanding of why the Bible gives guidelines about something as personal as our sexual behavior.

2. God warns about sexual dangers. God doesn't have a "they're only human" attitude about our sexual behavior. In 1 Thessalonians 4:3, Paul said, "This is the will of God, . . . that you should abstain from sexual immorality."

The Greek word translated "sexual immorality" is *porneia*,

which Paul uses to refer to the full range of unhealthy sexual behavior outside of the one-man-with-one-woman marriage relationship. Sexual immorality, therefore, includes premarital relationships, adultery, homosexual acts, prostitution, incest, rape, and even lust and obscene speech. (Leviticus 20 lists a wide variety of sexual acts that violate God's intent for our sexual expression.)

Why does God place these limitations on us? Again we need to keep in mind that our Creator's boundaries are for our protection.

Imagine a river that flows peacefully through a city and farmlands. The river provides water for citizens and industry and helps to irrigate the farmers' crops. Sports fishermen enjoy catching the fish. Children enjoy swimming and playing

in it. But then the rains come—lots of rain—so much rain that the river becomes a raging torrent. The swelling river surges over its banks and floods the city and farmland alike. Homes and businesses are damaged or destroyed, crops are washed away, and families mourn the drowning of a parent or a child.

In many ways, our sexuality is like the river we just described. Within its God-ordained boundaries, it can be beautiful and provide joy for men and women. But when we make choices rooted in our own blind desire, our sexual energy rages over its banks and creates havoc in our lives and in the lives of others.

God wants the best for us. His standards are meant to protect us, not to spoil our pleasure.

3. God designed sexual intimacy to be a beautiful part of a marriage

relationship. Paul spoke of using our bodies in ways that are honorable and will please the Lord (1 Th. 4:4). We do that when we reserve sexual expression for marriage. Hebrews 13:4 states, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure” (NIV). The Greek word translated *bed* refers to sexual intercourse.

The relationship between husband and wife provides opportunity for the fulfillment of sexual desires. In fact, the apostle Paul said that a husband and wife owe it to each other to fulfill their partner’s needs (1 Cor. 7:1-9). For a spouse to selfishly withhold sexual pleasure from a mate opens the door to temptation (v.5).

In the original creation account, God stated His intent for a man and woman to leave their parents and join together as “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). This one-flesh

relationship was designed to involve physical and spiritual intimacy within the safety of a commitment to each other (Mt. 19:5-6). Too often, though, in our hunger for a close and loving relationship we may pursue sexual intimacy as a means to that end. In the process, we can be blinded by the rush of hormones so that we end up ignoring the profound spiritual implications of our actions (1 Cor. 6:15-20).

4. We cannot afford to look to the culture for principles of sexual behavior. The apostle said that we are not to use our bodies “in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (1 Th. 4:5).

It is no secret that our culture has become obsessed with a blind pursuit of sexual pleasure. To the disappointment of many, this unbridled attitude toward sexual expression

has not satisfied anyone. The irony of twisted sexual appetite is that the more you feed it, the more it craves. Sexual desire has a way of overriding common sense and driving us to use others for our own pleasure (by Internet, videos, magazines, music, or personal encounters).

One reason our culture cannot offer us healthy guidance is that it has forsaken God's wisdom for gods of convenient excuses and immediate personal gratification. Chapter 1 of the New Testament letter to the Romans outlines the downward spiral that occurs. It happens over and over whenever we rebel against God's standards.

5. Sexuality is a matter of the heart. Paul warned about a heart blinded by sexual desire (1 Th. 4:5). And Jesus taught that sexuality is first and foremost a matter of the

heart (Mt. 5:27-30).

Proverbs 4:23 states, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (NIV). Jesus said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Mt. 15:19). Our thoughts are the starting points for our actions.

*The more
you feed unbridled
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the more it craves.*

To compound the problem, messages of the heart can be misunderstood. We may know that lust and love are very different, but the distinction may not be so apparent when you're the one caught in the heat of a relationship. A man and a woman might call their sexual activity "making

love,” but that doesn’t make it love. The word *love* is often a euphemism for selfish desires.

Lust uses people and treats them as sexual objects. Under its control we take advantage of another person for a temporary sexual high. This is what Paul meant when he talked about not defrauding one another (1 Th. 4:6).

The surrounding world can feed us the lie that we can have an unselfish and truly loving sexual relationship outside of marriage. Yet it is self-deceiving and short-sighted to think that our temporary satisfaction is more important than pleasing our God and doing what is best physically and spiritually, both now and later, for us and the other person.

6. *Sexual pleasure isn't everything.* According to 1 Thessalonians 4, the

more important values are pleasing God, treating our bodies with honor, and not taking advantage of others (vv.1-6). We certainly do not want to downplay the God-given pleasures and joys of a healthy sexual relationship, but we also must not go to the extreme of making sexual pleasure a god. Paul wrote as one who knew that a person can live a happy and fulfilling life without a sexual relationship.

If we pursue sexual pleasure as the path to happiness, we will be disappointed.

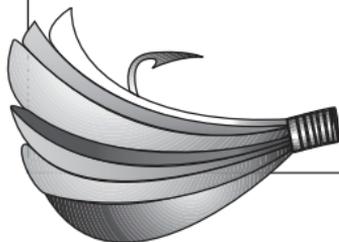
Unfortunately, unmarried individuals are often led to believe that they are living a second-rate life if they are not involved in a sexual relationship with someone. Marital intimacy can be so

idolized that single people feel that they are less of a person. Yet Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul, and countless other men and women have shown that life can be good and fulfilling without a sexual relationship.

The apostle Paul even wrote about the advantages of the single life for those who want to devote themselves completely to the service of God and others (1 Cor. 7:32-40).

If we pursue sexual pleasure as the path to happiness, we will be disappointed. Instead of finding satisfaction, we are more likely to become addicted to enslaving passions and practices. King Solomon, for example, became a dissatisfied and unhappy man—even though he had 700 wives and 300 women he used as sexual partners (1 Ki. 11:3; Eccl. 2).

THE LURE OF INSTANT GRATIFICATION



THE LURE OF INSTANT GRATIFICATION

“Because I said so, that’s why!” How many times did we hear those words as we were growing up? Maybe our parents or teachers gave that answer to our persistent “Why?” because they didn’t want to take the time to explain. Maybe they knew we wouldn’t see the wisdom of putting off some pleasure right now in exchange for a long-term gain. In any case, we may have gotten the impression that they were just trying to keep us under their control.

The statements of the

Bible about sexual principles may also seem to be unnecessarily restrictive. But as we will see, there is far more to the Bible than “just because I said so” answers. The truths of the Bible can protect us from the long-term, damaging effects of pursuing the lure of sexual temptation.

What Many Believe

- “Sexual activity among consenting adults doesn’t hurt anyone.”
- “An affair can help, not hurt, a marriage.”
- “My sexual behavior doesn’t have any effect on my usefulness for God.”
- “I won’t go too far.”
- “I can get out of this relationship whenever I want.”
- “I’ll never get caught.”
- “God is all-forgiving and He understands, so He won’t punish me for the way I am.”

What Are The Consequences Of Misdirected Sexual Desire?

The apostle Paul mentioned two major effects in his letter to the Thessalonians. He wrote:

No one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified (1 Th. 4:6).

This one verse gives us two big reasons to avoid all forms of sexual sin.

- It produces victims.
- It invites God’s correction and judgment.

Let’s study each of these ways our behavior affects us, others, and God.

1. Sexual sin produces victims. The people involved—even though they may be willing participants—are victims. They have been wronged, used, abused, deceived, and robbed.

For example, the couple who engage in premarital sex enter into an experience that is safe and healthy only within the boundaries of marital commitment. They burden themselves with guilt about their lost virginity. They deprive each other of the joy of giving to their

“If we choose to sin, there will be evil results. We can’t avoid them. We can be forgiven, but that doesn’t change the results.”
—Ray Stedman

future marriage partner the precious gift of an intimacy that was intended to be preserved for marriage alone.

A person who commits adultery wrongs not only

the sexual partner but also spouses and families. Contrary to the myth that a secret affair can strengthen a marriage, adultery does nothing but eat away at trust and intimacy.

A man who views pornography wrongs others by seeing them as sex objects instead of people of God-given value. His purchases of sexually explicit material support the exploitation and degradation of women. If he’s single, he fills his mind with images that damage and depreciate the way he relates to the women in his life. If he’s married, he carries those same images into the marriage bed. Furthermore, the outside sexual stimulation will cause him to be more preoccupied with his own desires than with the needs of his wife.

Men and women who engage in self-stimulation are seeking instant

gratification as an end in and of itself. While masturbation is not explicitly warned about in Scripture, it is often accompanied by a preoccupation with sexual lust and fantasy. Feeding the mind with self-centered sexual thoughts has the effect of creating a greater appetite for additional stimulation.

A man or woman who engages another person of the same gender in a sexual act not only crosses boundaries of natural affection but also crosses the line into a lifestyle that contradicts God's design for men and women (Rom. 1:26-27).

Proverbs 5 through 7 describes several ways sexual immorality victimizes people. It produces death (5:5), loss of honor (v.9), regret (vv.11-13), misplaced loyalty (vv.15-20), and it reduces a person's value

to that of a piece of bread (6:26).

The Bible gives many examples, but King David's sin with Bathsheba is as memorable as it is heartbreaking. His sexual disobedience produced several victims: David himself, as he became trapped in his own guilt; Bathsheba, as she was taken from her husband; Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, as he was killed by David's orders; the baby, who died; and the Lord, as the heathen used the incident to blaspheme Him (2 Sam. 11-12).

2. Sexual sin invites God's judgment. Crossing sexual boundaries not only produces victims, but it also insults God. First Thessalonians 4:6 states that "the Lord is the avenger" when people are victimized by immorality.

God does not take our sin lightly. He sees clearly

the damage that we are doing to ourselves and to one another. He knows that because we reap what we sow, no one gets away with anything. Galatians 6:7 states, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that

Crossing sexual boundaries not only produces victims, but it also insults God.

he will also reap.” We can be sure that either in this life or the life to come, God’s justice will be perfectly executed. That’s sobering.

How does God deal with those who commit immoral acts? From the Bible and practical experience we see several methods God may use to execute His justice:

- loss of spiritual usefulness
- painful memories
- the plague of a guilty conscience
- sickness and sexually transmitted diseases
- death
- imprisonment for sex crimes
- loss of friends and family relationships
- loss of rewards in heaven

In the aftermath of his sin with Bathsheba, even though the Lord forgave David when he repented, judgment still followed (2 Sam. 11–12). God said that during David’s rule the nation would always be at war, his own family would rebel against him, his wives would be taken and defiled, and the child who was conceived through the adultery would die (2 Sam. 12:9-14). This does not mean that this is always how God judges adultery,

but in David's case, perhaps because of his leadership role, the Lord took this course of action.

In Genesis 39 we read about a young man named Joseph who resisted temptation because he feared God and the consequences of displeasing Him more than he feared people. When Potiphar's wife tried to seduce him, Joseph said, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9). In the short term, Joseph's life became miserable because Potiphar's wife was furious and had him falsely imprisoned for attempted rape. But Joseph had a clear conscience and experienced God's blessing in prison and after his release (Gen. 39-50).

Most of us remember Sodom and Gomorrah, two towns whose citizens were notoriously immoral. God

destroyed them with fire (Gen. 19).

The apostle Paul spoke of keeping his body under control, so he would not become disqualified for the prize of faithful service (1 Cor. 9:27). And he wrote to Timothy that a person who wants to be used of God must be purified (2 Tim. 2:21).

***Sex in
the right setting
results in joy.
In the wrong
setting, it
produces pain.***

The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote that God disciplines His children (12:1-11). We can be sure that if we fall into sin He will take action to confront us with the awfulness of it.

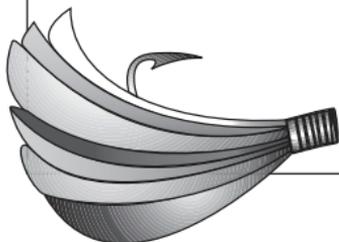
Why does God want

sexuality in purposeful and honorable ways? Here's a partial listing that includes some of the above points. Can you think of other reasons?

- to please God
- to protect the name of God's family
- to help and not hurt those we care about
- to honor our wife/husband
- to keep from becoming victims
- to reflect God's goodness
- to show a proper understanding of sin
- to make us useful for God's service
- to protect our future happiness

Clearly, God's rules are for our best interest. His standards show His love for us, and help us to show our love for others. Sex in the right setting results in joy. In the wrong setting, it produces pain.

THE LURE OF EASY ANSWERS



THE LURE OF EASY ANSWERS

If a water pipe under your kitchen sink were leaking, what would you do? Put a bucket under it? Ask the TV repairman for advice? Try to fix it with a band-aid? Ignore it and hope it will go away? Wait until it begins to flow out into the kitchen and down the hall? Find another place to live? File a lawsuit against the pipe manufacturer? Complain to your legislator?

The above solutions aren't realistic—in fact they're ridiculous. Yet we often try to deal with sexual tensions and problems in

much the same way. We look for and settle for answers that don't really get at the root problem. And sometimes we even believe lies about the solutions to our sexual needs and problems.

What Many Believe

- “The answer is to just say no.”
- “God made me this way. There's no reason to fight it.”
- “I just need to try harder.”
- “If I deny my sexual feelings, they'll go away.”
- “Satan's lures are too powerful to resist.”
- “I'm too weak (my flesh is too strong). I can't fight the constant pressure from the world.”
- “No one else is like me or experiencing what I am experiencing.”
- “The solution is more education and ridding ourselves of sexual superstition.”

- “I know when to stop. I can stop anytime.”
- “I don't need anyone else to help me overcome my problems.”
- “The devil made me do it.”
- “My needs are stronger than other people's.”
- “I'm a victim of my environment.”
- “God can never forgive me.”

What Answers Meet Our Deepest Needs?

The apostle Paul pointed us in the right direction when he wrote, “God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Th. 4:7-8). These statements give us two parts of the answer. In essence he tells us:

- Remember your purpose.
- Remember who lives in you.

1. Remember your purpose. “God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness” (v.7). When God sent His Son to die for our sin, and when He gave us His Spirit to free us from its power, He wasn’t giving us a license to go on in our self-destructive ways. (Read Romans 6:1-14 and 1 John 1-2.)

It would be unthinkable to tear down a condemned house, lay a solid foundation, and then build a house that looks good on one side but resembles a shack on the other. So too, it is illogical for a follower of Christ to try to use his life for both God-honoring and self-gratifying purposes.

We have been set free from slavery to sin (Rom. 6:19-23). Why would we voluntarily choose to live in bondage to self-destructive behavior? The only reason is that we don’t understand

how much damage we are doing to ourselves and to others.

The writer of Hebrews 12:1-2 reminded us of the goal we must keep in mind and how that goal should affect our behavior. He said:

Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

From these verses we can come up with four helpful reminders.

- Sin weighs down, so throw it off.
- Sin ensnares, so watch out for its traps.
- Jesus is your example, so follow Him.

- Endurance results in reward, so keep on!

God has transformed every believer into a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). Because of what Jesus did for us, we have been declared right with God, free from any moral flaw that could keep us from heaven (vv.17-21). We are now called to be God's representatives in this world and to bring

“We must be firmly and thoroughly convinced of the sinfulness of sin if we are to avoid the seductions of our culture.”

—R. C. Sproul

others to faith in Christ. How can we do that if we allow sexual impurity to

contradict our message?

Jesus referred to us as salt and light in the world (Mt. 5:13-16). Salt that becomes contaminated is worthless; a lamp that is hidden under a bowl cannot give light.

We are to be different, separate from the world, not part of it (1 Jn. 2:15-17). Although we must live among nonbelievers, we must not adopt the world's view of life and sexuality.

Above all else, the purpose of our salvation is for us to know God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said in a prayer, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn. 17:3). And the apostle Paul could say of the accomplishments of his life, “I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil. 3:8 NIV). The

consuming passion of Paul's life was to know Christ better and to be more and more like Him: "I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection" (v.10 NIV). If we have that kind of desire to know Him, it will crowd out other illicit desires.

A recognition of God's goal for our lives can help us to see temptations and sexual purity in the right light. And once we do, we will recognize that we need a lot of help to reach the goal of Christlikeness. In the next section we will discover where we can find that help to resist the lure of sexual sin.

2. Remember who lives in you. God "has also given us His Holy Spirit" (1 Th. 4:8).

R. C. Sproul, in his book *The Mystery Of The Holy Spirit*, writes, "The Holy in His name calls attention to the focal point of His work

in the economy (plan) of redemption. The Holy Spirit is the Sanctifier. He is the

"One of the first steps in handling temptation is to see it as an opportunity to test our loyalties."

—Erwin Lutzer

One who applies the work of Christ to our lives by working in us to bring us to full conformity and the image of Christ" (p.115).

God gave us the Holy Spirit when we placed our faith in Jesus Christ and accepted God's gift of eternal life (Jn. 3; Rom. 8:9-17; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Jn. 4:13). Our bodies are now the dwelling place of the Spirit of God.

The apostle Paul asked, "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you,

whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Cor. 6:19). He specifically warned that because we are spiritually united to Christ, it’s unthinkable to use a body indwelt by Him to unite sexually with a prostitute (vv.15,17). The use of our bodies in a way that glorifies God (v.20) rules out any immoral practices.

To succeed in the fight against temptation, we must actively cooperate with God’s Spirit. We cannot win by being passive.

The Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives accomplishes more than identifying us with Christ. Not only does the Spirit give

us spiritual life when we are born again (Jn. 3), but He also works to conform us to the likeness of Christ. We need the help of the Spirit if we are to break the grip of lust, run from temptation, experience release from a sordid past, tear away from an immoral relationship, and maintain sexual purity. He is our divine Helper (Jn. 14:16-17; 16:7-14).

But how do we experience the help and strength of the Holy Spirit? Do we gain self-control merely by a one-time prayer? Does God supernaturally deliver us so we don’t feel any more self-defeating urges? The truth of the matter is this: We live in fallen bodies and in a broken world that is hostile to the wisdom and purposes of our Creator. In addition, we are engaged in a spiritual life-and-death struggle against the seductive forces of our spiritual enemy, Satan

(Eph. 6:12). To succeed in the fight against temptation we must actively cooperate with God's Spirit. We cannot win by being passive. The

**“Walk in the Spirit,
and you shall not
fulfill the lust of
the flesh.”**

—Galatians 5:16

Bible not only talks about the work of God in us, but it also speaks of the actions we must take to remain spiritually healthy. In Romans 6, Paul wrote:

Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin,

but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God (vv.11-13).

We must choose to side with God and do what is right. We must take steps of faith and express allegiance to God's standards of what is true and right. We must reject Satan's lies about finding sexual fulfillment.

God's Spirit will begin to work in us when we realize our desperate need of Him. That's what true faith is all about. Just as we received the gift of salvation by faith, so now we must continue to live by faith in dependence on the Spirit (Gal. 3:2-3; 5:16; Col. 2:6). Faith is dependence on the strength of our almighty God. When we exercise faith and give our bodies to God (Rom. 6:13), the Holy Spirit works in us to produce purity and the kind of life that pleases

the Lord. The apostle Paul said, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16).

What Jesus taught in the Beatitudes sums up much of what we’ve been talking about (see Mt. 5:1-10). He said that the kind of people who enjoy God’s approval are those who are poor in spirit (realizing their spiritual bankruptcy and their need of God’s mercy and grace), those who mourn (recognizing sin’s awfulness), those who are meek (self-controlled), those who hunger and thirst to be right with God (focusing on wanting to please God), those who are merciful (reflecting God’s mercy), those who are pure in heart (single-minded in purpose), those who are peacemakers (mirroring peace with God), and those who are suffering persecution because they have decided to do what is right.

Perhaps one more analogy will help us to see the urgency of taking action, no matter what the cost. A gentle river flows through the center of the city where I live. Fishermen claim their favorite places along its banks and others wade out into the shallow rapids below a short dam. The

We need more than a quick fix. We need radical heart surgery.

usually picturesque and tranquil scene, however, turns ugly whenever a heavy rainfall hits. Because of rapid city growth and a drainage system that combines street drains and sewer pipes, the water filtration plant can’t handle the increased volume during a heavy rainstorm. As a result, the river becomes an

open sewer. A warning goes out to the fishermen and to towns downstream.

The problem won't go away just by ignoring it. Patching up the current system won't help either. What is needed is a whole new approach, an expensive alternative to the current method.

Our battles with sexual purity may be like that water filtration plant. Things work well unless a strong temptation comes along, and then all sorts of bad thoughts and actions flow out of our lives. We need more than a quick fix. We need radical heart surgery.

In this booklet we have emphasized the truths of God's Word—truths about God's standards, truths about the consequences of immorality, and truths about how to attain sexual purity. It is our prayer that you will make a new commitment to seek God, to know Him

better, and to walk in newness of life in Jesus Christ.

In this life, you and I will continue to have battles with temptation. We will not always win because we will in some way believe a lie. But the good news is that God wants to forgive us and help us to grow more and

“Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

—Romans 13:14

more Christlike. It's a process. But our goal is to know Christ and to be more like Him every day of our lives, until we see Him face to face.

The following pages offer practical steps you can take to become more like Him.

STEPS TO FULFILLMENT

How can you find forgiveness, deliverance from sinful thoughts and practices, resist temptation, and develop healthy habits so you will please God with your sexuality? The Bible offers several important truths to help.

1. God made you as a sexual person (Gen. 1:27). Recognize sexual desire as a wonderful God-given fact of life. But also realize that how you respond to sexual desire shows whether you have chosen to follow God's route to fulfillment or your own (Gal. 5:16-19).
2. Think about what is really going on in your heart when you choose a form of sexual expression that God has said is out-of-bounds.

Admit that in rejecting God's ways you have actually rejected God for the sake of being able to have immediate, though short-lived, sexual pleasure. Confess that you have been pursuing your own selfish gratification, and accept His forgiveness (Heb. 10:22; 1 Jn. 1:9).

3. Take steps to change your thought life (Ps. 119:11). Remember that when Jesus faced temptation He chose to call on the words of Scripture (Mt. 4:1-11). The written Word of God is the "sword of the Spirit," one of our defenses against Satan's attempts to harm us (Eph. 6:17).
4. Ask for and rely on God's help (Mt. 6:13; 7:7-11; Lk. 18:1; 22:40; Rom. 8:26-27). Don't trust your own ability to resist temptation (Heb. 4:16).

- Discover that self-control is found by choosing to let the Spirit of God control you (Eph. 5:18).
5. Realize that faith in the Lord may mean a willingness to experience discomfort for a while rather than to enjoy short-lived pleasure (Gen. 39; Heb. 11:25).
 6. Realize that God has provided a way for you to escape every temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). Look for it and take that route!
 7. Keep in mind that real love will not allow you to fulfill your sexual desires at the expense of others (1 Cor. 13:4-7; 1 Th. 4:6).
 8. Don't put yourself in situations where you know temptation will be great. Don't ever plan on sinning or making it easy to fall (Rom. 13:14).
 9. Seek the help and encouragement of other believers who can support you in your desire to be faithful to the Lord (Heb. 10:24-25; Jas. 5:16).
 10. Don't become complacent or overconfident when you have a victory over sinful desires. Always be on guard (1 Cor. 10:12).
 11. Take radical action against impurity. Don't toy with it and take halfway measures (Mt. 5:27-30). Think of what encourages lust or makes indulging in immorality so convenient, and then change your patterns of behavior.
 12. Keep your eyes on the example of Jesus (Heb. 3:1; 12:2-4). Believe that in time, choosing His ways will enable you to see the wisdom of His point of view.
 13. Develop a close relationship to Jesus, and He will develop His character in you (Jn. 15:1-17).

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

This four-part study is intended for either personal or group use. The questions are offered as thought or discussion starters as you read the suggested Bible passages.

STUDY #1: MIND AND BODY

Mind

- Why is our heart condition so important? (Prov. 4:23).
- Why is lust so harmful? (Mt. 5:27-28).
- What makes a person unclean? (Mt. 15:10-20).
- What are “things of the Spirit”? (Rom. 8:5).
- How do we gain a new mind? (Eph. 4:17-24).
- What are good thoughts? (Phil. 4:8).

Body

- Why does God have high standards? (Lev. 11:44-45).
- Whose slave should we be? Why? (Rom. 6:11-19).

- Why not indulge? (1 Cor. 6:13-20; Eph. 5:3-7).
- What did Paul do? (1 Cor. 9:27).
- What changes should occur? Why? (Col. 3:5-10).

STUDY #2: TESTED AND ENCOURAGED

Tested

- How did Joseph respond when tested? (Gen. 39).
- Does it matter that God sees? (Prov. 15:3,11).
- What can we learn from Jesus? (Mt. 4:1-11).
- What hope is offered? (1 Cor. 10:12-13).
- What tempts us? (Jas. 1:13-15)

Encouraged

- How do friends influence us? (Prov. 4:14-15).
- What will keep us from sin? (Prov. 7:1-5).
- How do we “walk in the Spirit”? (Gal. 5:16).
- What are God’s resources? (Eph. 6:10-18).
- How do these truths help? (Heb. 4:15-16).

- How are we to be different? (1 Pet. 1:13-21).

STUDY #3: RESULTS AND RELIEF

Results

- How did lust lead to sin? (2 Sam. 11:1-5).
- What are sin's results? (Prov. 7:22-27; 9:17-18).
- How does our behavior reflect our attitude toward God? (Rom. 1:18-25).
- How can actions be self-destructive? (Rom. 1:26-27).
- Why are people insensitive to sin? (Rom. 1:28-32).
- How are we to treat sinners? (1 Cor. 5:9-13).

Relief

- How did David find relief from guilt? (Ps. 32:1-5).
- What is the value of confessing sin? (Ps. 51).
- What does God ask us to do? (Jas. 4:8-10).
- What does God promise to do for us? (1 Jn. 1:9).
- Why does God forgive us? (Acts 10:39-43).

STUDY #4: MARRIED AND SINGLE

Married

- What was God's original intent? (Gen. 2:24-25).
- Why was this a command? (Ex. 20:14).
- Why did God condemn adultery? (Lev. 20:7-10).
- What's contrasted? (Prov. 5).
- What was to be taught? (1 Cor. 7:3-5).
- What should be our attitude? (Heb. 13:4).

Single

- What can we do to strengthen ourselves against temptation? (Ps. 119:9-16).
- What mistake is warned about? (Rom. 13:14).
- Why would anyone choose singleness? (1 Cor. 7:32-35).
- Why have self-control? (1 Cor. 9:24-27).
- What is God's will? (1 Th. 4:3-8).
- What must we do when tempted? (2 Tim. 2:22).

FINDING FORGIVENESS

The words *pure and natural* may be appropriate to put on a bottle of crystal-clear spring water, but it would be false advertising for you or me to wear that label. Sexual purity isn't natural. It occurs only by God's cleansing process; and we won't stay healthy without filtering out false ideas.

What about you? Are you dealing with inappropriate thoughts and actions in your life, and calling on God to help you make choices daily that will cleanse your mind and your life? Are you immersed in the truths of God's Word so that you can detect the lures and escape the trap of Satan, your spiritual enemy?

If not, you can make a decision right now to move in a new direction. Decide to trust Christ more than your

feelings. Ask God for a trusted and godly friend who can help hold you accountable. Most of all, cultivate your relationship with God. Hunger and thirst for righteousness. Learn that the Lord will fill you with joy as you live with Him.

Perhaps, though, you are burdened by the guilt of your past. If so, remember, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9). God will forgive you, if you ask.

Jesus died on the cross for your sins—all of them. He allowed Himself to be bound to a cross so you could be free. Believe the truth, put your faith in Christ, live in moment-by-moment dependence on Him, and experience the joy of a life that is pure and supernatural.

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