



# New Hope For Sexual Integrity

(Revised & Expanded 2024)

By Darrell Brazell

[www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com)





© Copyright 2025

Unless otherwise indicated, Bible quotations are taken from the New International Version of the Bible. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society

All names of people in this manual have been changed (unless noted) to protect the identities of the brave individuals who share their stories

[www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com)

New Hope  
For Sexual Integrity



# Table of Contents

## Introduction

Index of Handouts, Worksheets and Special Items .....	p. 7
My Story and the Story of New Hope .....	p. 9

1. Getting Started .....	p. 13
2. The Six Dailies .....	p. 29
3. A Road & Two Ditches .....	p. 63
4. How Did I Get Here? .....	p. 93
5. The Fellowship Of The Forgiven .....	p. 109
6. Motivations, Consequences & Rewards .....	p. 121
7. Personal Boundaries .....	p. 129
8. Personal Recovery Plan .....	p. 149
9. Masturbation .....	p. 157
10. Abstaining From Masturbation .....	p. 163
11. Same Gender Attractions .....	p. 183
12. Attachment .....	p. 193
13. The Immanuel Process .....	p. 205
14. Telling Your Wife About Your Struggle .....	p. 215
15. Telling Others About Your Struggle .....	p. 221
16. Recovery With Your Wife Part I: The Boy And The Lion .....	p. 225
17. Recovery With Your Wife Part II: "His Reality—Her Reality" .....	p. 237
18. Recovery With Your Wife Part III: "What Can I Do?" .....	p. 245
19. Recovery With Your Wife Part IV: "What About Sex?" .....	p. 259
20. Holidays, Helladays & Other Joyous Family Occasions .....	p. 267

## Conclusion

Where Do I Go From Here? .....	p. 277
--------------------------------	--------



# New Hope For Sexual Integrity

## Index of Handouts, Worksheets & Special Items

Sexual Addiction Screening Test.....	p. 23
Internet Sexual Addiction Screening Test.....	p. 24
A Covenant To Contend .....	p. 26
Legal Issues.....	p. 27
Cherry Cobbler, Desire, Temptation, Lust .....	p. 36
Who Is She To Me? .....	p. 39
Appreciation Wall .....	p. 50
Phone Call Tips & Procedures.....	p. 51
Sexual Integrity Meeting Agenda.....	p. 54
Three Circles Plan .....	p. 56
Recovery Goals .....	p. 59
Sponsor Guidelines .....	p. 60
Resources For Pornography & Sexual Addiction .....	p. 61
90 Day Checklist.....	p. 62
Breaking Sexual Bonds Prayer.....	p. 72
My Identity In Christ.....	p. 76
Sexual History Inventory.....	p. 78
Using Outside Counselors For Sexual History Inventory.....	p. 89
Post Affair Safety Plan.....	p. 90
Definitions Of Typical Wounds.....	p. 106
Suggestions For Building Joy Strength.....	p. 119
Recovery In Seven Days: A Parable .....	p. 121
Defining Slips & Crashes .....	p. 125
Boundary Worksheets .....	p. 134
Personal Recovery Plan (Blank Summary) .....	p. 153
"Goodbye My Old Friend" .....	p. 172
Writing Your Story.....	p. 204
"Jesus In A Strip Club" .....	p. 208
Immanuel Prayer Journaling (One Page Guide).....	p. 214
The "Secret Sexual Basement" .....	p. 245
Recovery Meetings With your Spouse.....	p. 250
Integrity Abuse Behavior Lists .....	p. 252



# Introduction: My Story and the Story of New Hope

## My Journey

I have heard of Alcoholics saying they were addicted from the very first drink they took. I understand that feeling. I have never struggled with alcohol, but I have struggled with addiction. Many times, I think it might have been easier if my drug of choice were alcohol, marijuana or something more typically addressed in our culture. Those addictions are somewhat socially acceptable, and it is relatively easy to avoid places of exposure. For me, however, the drug I used to medicate my pain was the drug of pornography and masturbation. Once in my mind, my drugs (images, fantasy, etc.) were always available.

When I discovered pornography at nine or ten years of age, it was as if someone threw gasoline on a fire. At that time in my life, my father was traveling a lot on business and when he was home, I was often the scapegoat for his frustrations. His harshness and emotional unavailability, combined with my family's multiple dysfunctions left many of my emotional and relational needs unmet.

My struggle escalated my senior year in high school when I realized I looked old enough to purchase my own materials. I'm sure the first time that I walked up to the convenience store counter with a magazine in hand the cashier probably thought he was about to be robbed by a first time thief. I was shaking so badly I could hardly hold the magazine. I practiced what I now realize was a binge and purge cycle. I would buy a magazine, use it a time or two, then, the first time no one was home, I would take it out to our trash barrel and burn it in a ritual of repentance.

The whole time, I honestly loved God. I cannot tell you how often I begged Him to take away my struggle. I cannot tell you how many times I vowed I would never go back. Yet, time, after time after time, "like a dog returns to its vomit, so this fool returned to his folly." (Prov. 26:11) This cycle created an incredible sense of guilt and shame. I wanted to tell somebody, but I could not bear the thought of sharing my shame with anyone.

I went to a Christian college to become a minister. I thought surely if I gave my life to God, I could overcome the struggle. While at

school, I rarely gave in to the pornography, but masturbation became so ritualistic I could not go to sleep at night without a release. My junior year, I talked an incredible young woman into marrying me. I naively thought getting married would solve my problem. However, it made it worse as the person I cared about more than anyone in the world lived with me and had the opportunity to see all my shortcomings. The fear of being discovered as the fraud I believed I was terrified me in ways I can't begin to describe.

I was able to keep my problem at a "maintenance level" for a number of years. I would only act out with pornography when my wife was out of town. Even then, it usually was not porn, but R-rated movies with sexual themes or content. As always, there was an intense sense of guilt and shame and the vow not to return. In 1995, I got a new laptop with Internet access and my struggle exploded. Suddenly, I did not have to risk someone recognizing me at the video store. I didn't have to drive 30 miles to get materials where it was "safe." No, in the safety and anonymity of my home or office, I could download anything I wanted.

On two different occasions, I confessed my struggle to my wife. Both times, I hurt her greatly, but she forgave me and believed my sincere promise that I wouldn't go back. My resolve, however, would only last a few days or maybe a couple weeks. I wanted desperately to share my struggle with someone, but who? Part of my struggle was that I was a minister. To whom could I confess? If I shared my struggle with one of my elders or someone in my church, word could get out and I could lose my job. On top of everything, I was supposed to be the spiritual guide for my community of faith. What does it say when the "spiritual guide" is consumed by his own sin?

The struggle with my addiction and shame left me emotionally numb. I regularly withdrew from people. I would connect enough to try to help them if they were struggling, but always kept myself a safe distance from everyone around me. I believed if they knew what was really going on inside of me they would be horrified, so I hid behind my own numbness.

On a couple desperate occasions, I confessed my struggle to fellow ministers. I received the

following responses: “You know it’s wrong, so don’t do it anymore.” And “I’m in it deeper than you. The only thing we can do is depend on God’s grace to work in spite of our sin.” Obviously, neither answer offered me any hope.

In 1999, I decided I needed a new challenge in ministry, so I started job hunting. Looking back, I realize I was not really looking for a new challenge: I was looking for a fresh start. I naively believed that if I went to a new church and established an accountability group I could control my struggle.

I came to a new church committed to not fall back to my old ways. I was more serious about my commitment to purity than ever before. I took the Internet browser off my laptop so the only thing I could do was email. I put out a sign-up sheet for a “men’s accountability group” and fully intended to share with them my struggle. However, my elders—who in the church organization to which I belonged at the time, were also the men who had the power to fire me—signed up to be part of the group. I wanted to tell them about my struggle, but I could not find the courage to risk disclosure. The group, for obvious reasons, floundered and eventually died.

The move was more difficult than I could have imagined. I traded a very loving, grace-oriented church for one that was struggling to get off the ground and had little real understanding of grace. I felt incredibly insecure. On top of my church situation, my marriage was also in serious trouble. In the numbness of my addiction, I had distanced myself so much from my wife and then two-year-old daughter that my wife had chosen to try to make life good without me. I truly believed I was completely alone.

I thought I was “in control” of my struggle with pornography. I had determined to go a year without a slip. I figured once I had a year behind me; once I could speak of it in the past tense and in “before coming here,” I could safely begin telling a few others. However, a few months after we moved, my wife went out of town and I fell flat on my face. I was devastated. My shame returned with a force I cannot describe. Honestly, I wanted to die and if I had had any life insurance, I probably would have staged an accident so that I could escape and still provide for my wife and daughter. I could not bear the thought of confessing to her again. I wondered if this was the end of my marriage, my career and

my ministry. I wanted desperately to tell someone, but again, who? I felt ashamed, worthless and trapped.

I knew I had to tell my wife, but I could not find the courage to come clean. For the next two months, I carried my shame like a ball and chain. Finally, as she was getting ready to leave town again, I broke down and told her I needed her to change the password on her computer. I knew if I were home alone with an unprotected computer, I would spend the whole time back in the pigpen. By the grace of God, she did not walk out of the marriage. However, we both knew we had to find an answer.

The next week, I was at a gathering of ministers where a man shared his struggle with pornography and how he was finding freedom. A few weeks earlier, I had picked up the book *Pure Desire* and the testimony of someone who found a way out combined with a good resource was the beginning of my recovery. A couple months later, an individual confessed his struggle with pornography to me and we covenanted together to meet weekly and work through a workbook designed to help men find freedom from this struggle.

I will not lie to you, the next year was the most difficult and painful year of my life. The hold that sexual addiction had on my heart and my life is something that only someone whom God has delivered from this struggle can truly understand. However, by the grace of God, I have walked in purity now since February of 2000, and I know I do not ever have to go back. I can also tell you that God has rebuilt my marriage. My wife and I like each other again even to the point we would both say we are each other’s best friend. We enjoy being together and God is showing us what it means to have real intimacy and the kind of joy He intends for marriage to bring. Of course, we still struggle, but now we struggle together instead of apart. He has given my wife and me a new start and a new understanding of life. I am a living testimony to God’s ability to transform, to heal and deliver.

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever! Amen!” (Ephesians 3:20)

## **The Birth of New Hope Ministries**

New Hope is a direct result of my journey. In the spring of 2001, I began my first group for men wrestling with sexual addiction issues. At the first meeting, five of us met in a room in the basement of the church I worked for and told our stories. One young man never came back. Another quit a couple months later. However, God continued to work in our lives and send others. Week after week, we shared where we were as well as discuss the content of various recovery books. We saw some healing and a lot of struggle. I read everything I could get my hands on and became a student of sexual addiction and recovery. I tried to bring as much of what I could into our group as well.

The group continued to grow and we moved from meeting once to twice a week. My church situation unfortunately continued to deteriorate. Ministers and churches are often much like spouses as they have a great tendency to choose one another out of matching dysfunctions. I had come to this new church incredibly dysfunctional, as a man addicted to sex, so it should not be surprising that the church also had much dysfunction. As I grew and began walking in the newfound freedom of not hiding in my shame, my leadership became more and more uncomfortable. Honestly, they did not really like some of the changes happening in me. They especially did not like me addressing the problem of pornography and sexual sin from the pulpit.

I had told them about my struggle about a year into my recovery and their initial response was supportive. However, when some complained about me speaking frankly about sexual matters, they asked me to stay away from the subject. This created considerable tension as I knew first-hand the pain of wanting a way out but not knowing where to turn. There were many other issues as well. While I grew up in this particular denomination, I had rejected its legalism and isolationism in college. However, for many reasons, even though I longed to move into more freedom, I had never felt God's release to move away from my heritage.

In the summer of 2003, I clearly sensed His release as my leadership and I were at a complete impasse. Much of our struggle centered on my ministry to men in the arena of sexual addiction. By this time, the groups had grown to about

twenty men. I had a couple individuals I thought could take over for me, so I resigned from the church that had brought me to Lawrence, Kansas and began job hunting.

I sensed God calling me to start New Hope Fellowship even before I resigned from my previous church. However, I could not hear his voice because it made no sense to me. How could I start a new church in the same town as my old church without drawing a line in the sand that said, "Choose them or choose me." Therefore, I began sending out resumes to which I received no response

In the meantime, I continued running groups and meeting with men and couples in painful places. Men continued to find us, and if anything, I was doing more real ministry while unemployed than I had as a full-time minister. I continued to hear God's call to start a new church based on brokenness and recovery, but I had vowed in college that I would never split a church.

At this point, one of my group leaders, who was still a member of my former church, came over after a congregational meeting with shocking news. He said the church had made the decision to "disband and disperse." One of the elders had talked about that possibility when I resigned, but I thought it was unthinkable and really had not given it a second thought. As soon as I heard their decision, I heard an almost humorous voice, "Okay, Darrell, now what's your excuse?" At that moment, I knew God was calling me to start New Hope Fellowship. We had our first official service, January 11, 2004.

My dream was to grow a church to support the recovery ministry I knew God had called me to lead. I even told a ministry friend of mine that if we were not larger than my old church within a year's time, it would be a complete failure. Well, a year later, we probably averaged 8-10 people each Sunday for church and that included my wife, my two kids and me.

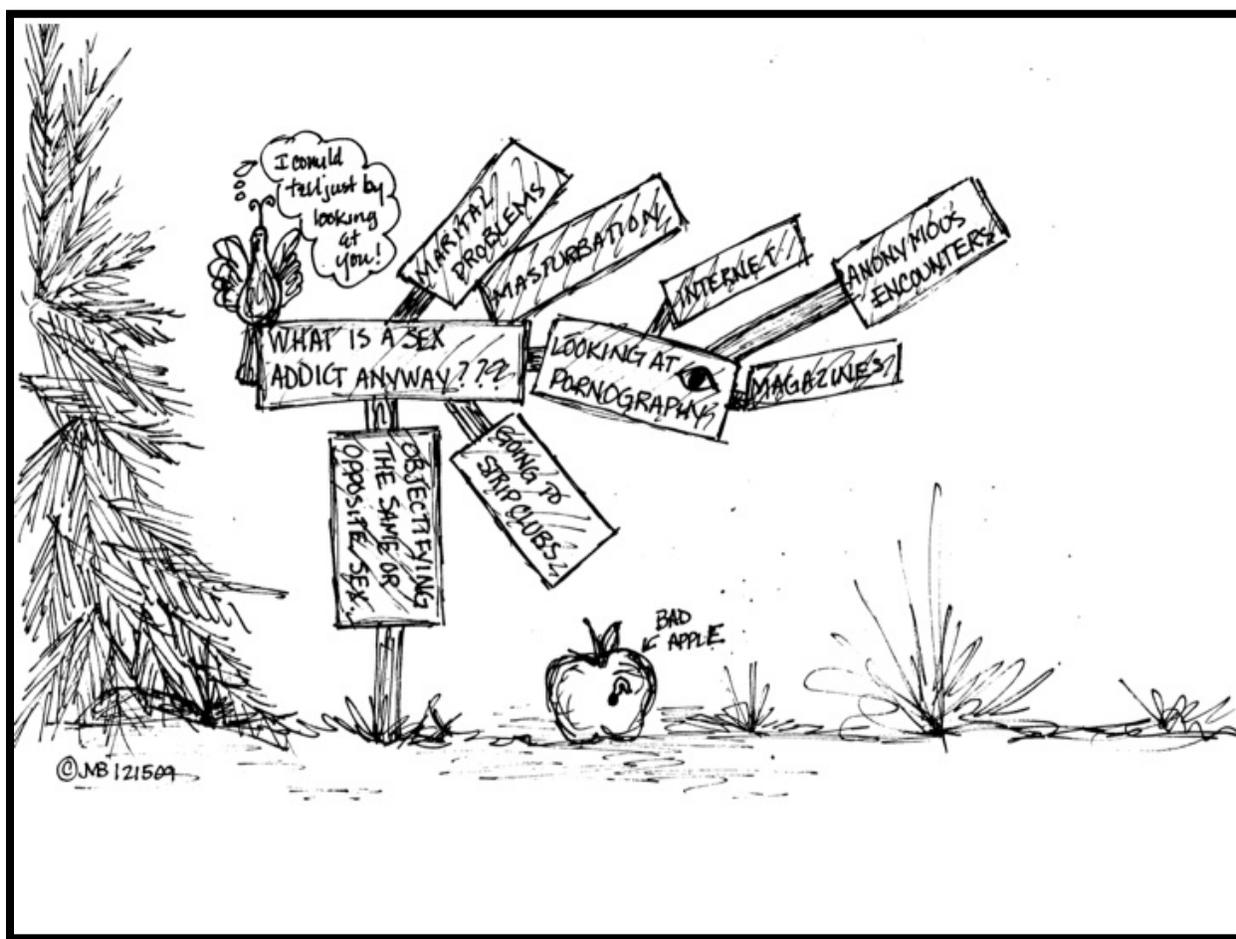
To say this was painful and confusing would be quite an understatement. However, God never wastes our pain. He used the smallness of New Hope to bring real community to my family and to me. He used the disappointment of preaching to sometimes as few as three adults to strip away many layers of my false self. He also used my extra time (after all a church of a dozen people does not require you to go to the hospital or do many of the typical "ministry duties" very often)

to continue to minister to men and couples who were in painful places.

Today, the church itself is still small. At times, the smallness continues to feel like a knife in my gut. However, God has granted me great peace about our size and clarity of my calling as one who proclaims His freedom in the sexual arena. While the church remains small, I believe its impact is great. Our recovery groups continue to reach new men and some who once were part of our group have moved on to start their own groups in other places using our materials and the things they learned while with us. I also receive calls and emails from individuals across the nation and even other parts of the world

looking to use this manual as a foundation for groups of their own. I am truly awed at what God is doing out of my brokenness and our small beginnings.

The manual you have in your hands is my personal labor of love. As I once again edit this introduction, it has been over twenty years since I started writing. Though it is far from perfect, I truly believe God has given me words and insights He wants to share with others. I pray you will dive in. I pray God will use it as an instrument of healing in your life. He is the great physician and I pray this manual can be one of the many tools He will use in your life to set your captive heart free.



**A note about the “Toons”** in this manual: John was a vivacious man with deep wounds, a deep love for Jesus and a deep love for his brothers in recovery. Each week during our “Big Group,” time, he would doodle a “toon” as we discussed the chapter contents. John passed away several years ago, but thankfully, he lives on through the incredible gifts he gave us in his illustrations. I pray they will bless you as they have us.

## 1. GETTING STARTED

---

The movie “The Shawshank Redemption,” has a powerful image that can help you as you begin this journey of recovery. The main character, Andy Dufresne, has been falsely convicted of murdering his wife, and has spent almost twenty years digging a tunnel through his cell wall into an equipment area. On the night of his escape, he busts a clay sewer pipe that eventually leads him to freedom. Red, a prisoner of over thirty years, in awe of his friend’s accomplishment, narrates his escape:

*Andy crawled to freedom through 500 yards of s\*\*\* smelling foulness I can’t even imagine, or maybe I just don’t want to. Five hundred yards... that’s the length of five football fields, just shy of a half a mile.*

The power of the scene grips me every time I watch it. Andy crawls out of the pipe, strips off his sewage-soaked prison clothes and stands in the cleansing rain—arms outstretched, devouring the sweet taste of freedom for the first time in almost twenty years.

The same thing is true for the path of recovery. It begins with a 500-yard crawl through the raw sewage of our lives. Many, upon getting their first whiff, crawl back to the familiarity of their prison cell, unable or unwilling to face the pain of looking back on what they have done and what has been done to them. A few brave souls climb into the sewer line unsure whether or not they can make it to the other end, but determined never to return to the prison cell of their addiction. Every inch is painful—yet they continue the journey—because they believe at the end of the pipe, there is cleansing and there is freedom.

As one who has made that journey, I can tell you confidently, there is freedom, there is cleansing and there is hope. I will also tell you that as hard as the journey may be, the worst day in recovery is better than the best day in the addiction. I pray you will choose to climb into the pipe and endure whatever you must in order to experience the cleansing rain on the other side.

### **Embracing Reality Opens the Door to Hope**

If you are working through this manual for yourself, you have at least acknowledged you might have a problem with sexual issues. This is the essential first step. However, acknowledging you might have a problem but not doing anything about it is just as harmful as staying in denial. I have counseled many men through the years who admit they have a problem, say they desperately want help but don’t want to do anything differently (i.e. the work of recovery) than they have done in the past. At this point, I haven’t seen a single man get healthy by simply doing what he has done before. If you continue to do what you have done in the past, you will continue to have the same results.

There is, however, hope. *Tremendous hope!* Your life can be different. Jesus Christ can set you free from the bondage of sexual sin. We can honestly say that the men who come to us and do the work we ask them to do all make progress. Some continue to struggle. Some even continue to act out in very destructive ways... *for a while.* However, we have found those who do the work and build relational connections eventually get traction and make huge strides. They make these connections by consistently attending group meetings, doing regular check in’s—via our online groups and phone calls—as well as dealing honestly with their lives through interaction with the materials we recommend.

Right now, you stand at a critical point of decision. You are the only one who can decide whether you will commit to recovery, no matter

the cost. Will you commit or will you be like the men who begin the journey but give up when the trail starts going uphill? To help you make this decision, I want you to imagine the following situation: Imagine your doctor has run tests and determined you have a dangerous form of testicular cancer. What runs through your head when he tells you:

*I have good news and I have bad news: The bad news is you have a cancer that if untreated will leave you impotent in two months, and then dying an incredibly painful death within two years. However, the good news is if you follow an aggressive form of treatment, in 18 months you will be alive, healthier than you have ever been and on the road to recovery. As a bonus, your sex life may also improve dramatically.*

Of course, the bad news is the aggressive treatment will be physically and emotionally painful. It will cost more than you can imagine and require a serious commitment of your finances, your time and most importantly, your whole-hearted effort.

So, what do you do? You say, “OK, Doc, when do we start?” You clear your calendar. You mortgage your house, sell your car or even get a new job. You do whatever it takes to live and to preserve your life and that part of your manhood.

### **The Cost of Addiction**

The reality of sexual bondage is that it is even worse than a physical cancer because cancer can only destroy the body and not the soul. Sexual addiction destroys your relationship with God and rots your soul and does far more harm to your wife, children and others than you have any idea. No, God doesn't turn his back on anyone. (Think about it: Jesus even accepted Judas' kiss instead of turning away.) However, people trapped in sexual addiction inevitably cauterize their desire and ability to hear from and connect with God. It will also kill your marriage. Your wife may or may not divorce you. She may not even complain that something is wrong, but your marriage will continue to die. We've had many couples talk about how, prior to recovery, their marriage was only a farce. It was two

people going through the motions, pretending they were fine even though they were both dying agonizing deaths of isolation.

It is also critical for you to know that your secret sexual behaviors have and are impacting your wife in ways that may not become clear for a significant amount of time. She has likely sensed something was wrong and may have even asked you on occasions, “Are we OK?” or said things like, “We just don't seem to connect well, is something wrong with me?” She may have even asked directly, “Are you having an affair, looking at porn or doing something you are hiding from me?” You need to know that every time you deflected her questions and/or outright lied to her, you have forced her into an impossible place of choosing to believe you or to believe what her gut is telling her.

If she chooses to believe you, she loses connection with herself. She forces herself to ignore an incredible amount of information being transferred between her gut and her brain that is sometimes called “The second brain.” Her whole being knows something is wrong but you keep saying, “Everything's fine.”

This process does incredible damage to anyone. Current research on wives struggling with various forms of betrayal trauma is finding tremendous correlation between that trauma and a whole host of health issues. (See Barbara Steffens *Your Sexually Addicted Spouse*, Sherry Keffer's *Intimate Deception*, and writings and podcasts by Dr. Omar Minwalla. My 2022 podcast on “The Secret Sexual Basement” is a good introduction to these concepts.)

If you have, or someday hope to have children, you must also realize sexual bondage prevents you from connecting with them in the ways they desperately need. We have had men argue about this, but we see the deadness in their eyes and know their kids see it as well. Remember, a child invariably interprets a parent's deadness in the light of “there must be something wrong with *me*.” This subjective interpretation by the child is part of the reason sexual addiction so often passes down generation after generation. Obsessing about pornography and sex propels its captives to shame and prevents them from connecting with anyone, let alone a son who desperately needs a father to affirm his budding manhood or a daughter who needs him to delight in her beauty. Current research, much like the research on adult

children of alcoholics, shows sexual addiction leads to a whole host of problems for children as they grow up with parents who are addicted, dysregulated, disconnected and, therefore, unable to truly connect with their children. You cannot underestimate the damage you will do if you continue to live an addictive life.

Ironically, if you choose to remain in your addiction, even your sex life will suffer and die a painful death. Oh, you may have countless sexual encounters with yourself and even others, but every time you engage in solo sex or non-relational sex (even if it is with your spouse), a part of your heart dies and the cancer spreads. This slow killing of the heart is one of the reasons addicts always need stronger stimuli.

When a boy first sees a picture of a nude woman, it sends him into orbit. Twenty or thirty years later, after he has feasted on pornography, sexual promiscuity and other acting-out behaviors, he finds himself looking for incredibly perverse and sometimes even illegal material or activities because the regular stuff just doesn't do much for him anymore. Like untreated cancer, a sexual addiction is a certain course of death.

### **The Cost of Recovery**

Facing the reality of recovery from an addiction is also difficult. You will not get out of the noose of sexual addiction easily. Developing an intimate relationship with God must always be your first priority. However, recovery is a crucial part of the process of sanctification and is actually part of making God the number one priority in your life. Sexual fantasy and gratification are two of your primary idols. Recovery from sexual sin is a process of looking beyond these idols to discover your deeper desire for intimacy with God. Therefore, you must make sacrifices. You must make group meetings, check in's, counseling appointments, working on materials and phone calls as important to you as doctor visits, chemotherapy and radiation treatments are to a cancer patient.

Recovery will also require you to spend money on materials, counseling, travel expenses, childcare, etc.. *It will be worth every single penny you spend!* It never ceases to amaze me how, as addicts, we always found whatever we needed to act out, yet in recovery we allow even the smallest hurdle to stop us. In recovery, we

need to apply the same drive we used in our addiction and be willing to do whatever it takes. Think about it this way: it didn't matter how broke you were, if you wanted to buy porn in any form, go to a strip club or anything else, *you found the money*. No matter how busy you were at work or with family responsibilities, when you wanted to act out, *you found the time*. Yet, ironically, the two most common excuses we hear for not doing recovery are: *"I don't have time"* and *"I can't afford it."* ("It" being buying a book, paying to see a counselor trained in sexual addiction issues, gas to drive to another town to attend a support group, etc.)

You must decide at the very beginning of your recovery that your heart is worth spending the time, energy and money necessary to get healthy. *And it is!* In fact, one of the best things you can do at the start (or re-start if that is where you are) of recovery is to take out your calendar and clear it for the first three months: schedule group meetings, counseling appointments, phone calls and a daily time for working on recovery materials before you start adding any other appointments, tasks or activities. If you attempt to squeeze recovery into your already busy schedule, other activities will sabotage your good intentions.

You may object and say, "But I have a job, responsibilities at church and all my kids' activities!" Yes, but if you had cancer would any of these things keep you from doing whatever is necessary for your healing? Besides, what good is a job if you lose your marriage and live your life disconnected from God and others? Do you think your church wants you bingeing on porn during the week but wearing a robe and singing in the choir on Sunday rather than taking the time you need to break free from your sin? What good is attending your son's baseball games if, whenever you are alone with him, you are an emotional zombie because your shame won't allow you to look him in the eye? Similarly, how does your physical presence benefit your son if you miss his triumphant un-assisted double play because you were locked in a trance on the voluptuous woman sitting on the bleacher in front of you? What good is attending your daughter's ballet recitals if all you ever do is criticize her because you despise yourself and end up projecting that on her?

You may object and say, "I don't do those things." Maybe . . . maybe not. However, if you

do not address your sexual addiction, your children will suffer greatly because of your sin. The collateral damage of a sexual addiction is great enough that the price of your temporary absence from other activities pales in comparison. No, you do not want to miss all their activities and no, you don't want to completely disconnect from your church. However, missing some or even a significant portion of these activities *for a season* and taking a sabbatical from church responsibilities to pursue recovery is the best thing you can do for yourself as well as for your family, your church and even your employer. Taking a break now may be the key that will enable you to connect later.

### **The Cost of Accepting Help**

In addition to making recovery a top priority, you must also commit to following instructions. This is a difficult thing for all men, but especially addicted men. In his book, *Don't Call It Love*, Patrick Carnes spends two entire chapters talking about the "Master of the Universe" syndrome. He talks about how almost every addict believes he is somehow different and often above everyone else. We have seen this play out in many different but tangible ways. One way we have seen it most clearly, however, is in following instructions. We have had a number of men come to us and look at what we ask them to do as if it is a menu at their favorite restaurant. They look down the list and, in essence, make comments to themselves like . . .

- *I like the sound of the book Pure Desire, so I think I will order one of those and use it for an appetizer.*
- *Phone calls? Well, I'm not really much of a phone person. That sounds like eating broccoli and cauliflower. Besides, it could get messy, and I don't want to bother anyone. Moreover, if I start calling people, they might call me at inconvenient times.*
- *Group meetings? Well, I can see some value in them, but multiple times each week. . . . I don't think so! That must be for the guys who are really screwed up. I'm sure if I come to two or three groups a month I will be just fine.*

We have had many men approach recovery this way and, to this date, none of them has made any real progress. Thankfully, some have hung around long enough to see other men follow instructions and make huge strides; seeing others change has led to a willingness to "work the program." Amazingly enough, once they start doing what we have asked them to do, they also begin to make progress.

I must admit, however, part of me cringes as I write this because I know it could come across as if I think we have a magical formula and everyone's recovery follows the same path. Nothing could be further from the truth; we continue to learn more every day. In fact, one of the reasons I have always printed this manual in relatively small batches is the knowledge that whatever I write today will need to be modified next week, next month or next year when God reveals more to us. We also know there are other schools of thought. We know our methods and values differ from others who have helped many grow to healthier places. We have learned and even incorporated things from them. Nevertheless, what we have experienced is that part of the recovery process is for the individual to lay down his pride and humbly submit to those God has placed in front of him on his recovery journey.

### **Mutual Commitment**

We commit to not lord it over you and we do not ask you to "check your brain" at the door. However, we do ask you to check the part of you that wants to be in control and thinks you know what is best because that is your flesh (see Romans 7) that led you to your addiction in the first place.

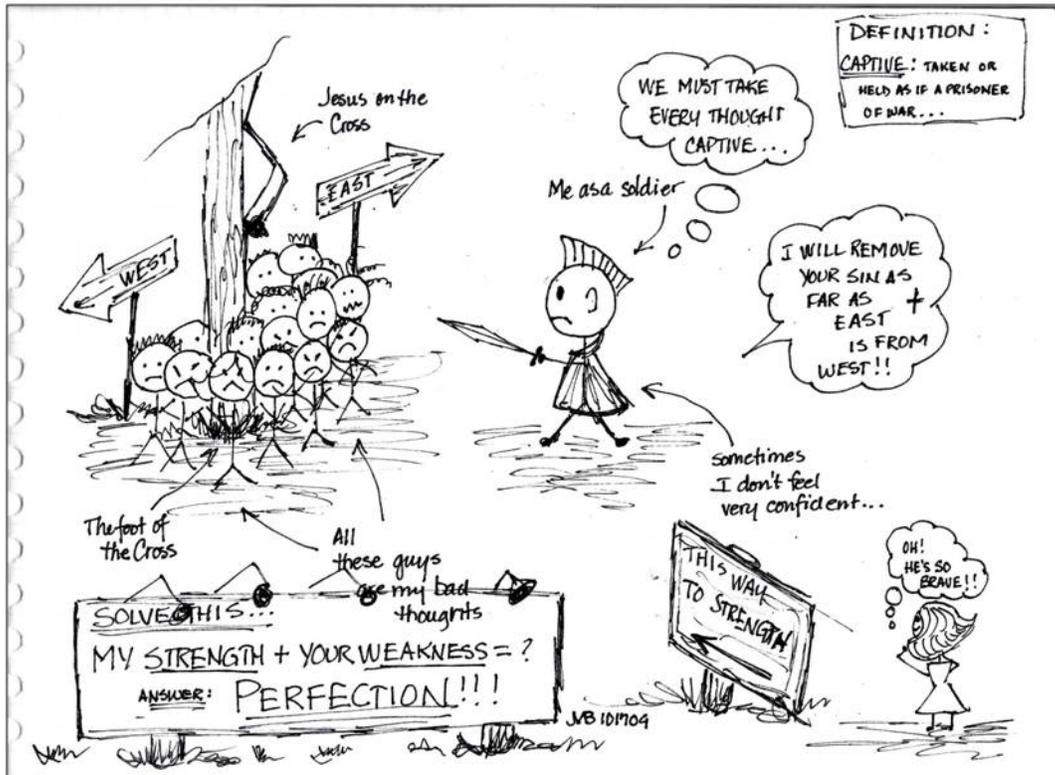
Because of our tendency to believe we always have a better way, whenever I meet with a new group member, I often encourage him to pray and ask God if He wants him to be part of our ministry. If he hears the answer "yes," then I ask him to commit to trust God by trusting us and doing what we ask for at least the first six months of his recovery. Those who have humbled themselves and done this have found healing and freedom they never imagined possible. God honors those who trust Him enough to humble themselves and walk in submission.

## Important Reminder

Before we move on to the first set of "Application and Journaling Questions," I want to remind you how incredibly important it is for you to take the time to write out answers to each of these questions. Reading a manual but not

answering the questions is like reading about exercise. By reading, you might learn a few things about jogging, but you will still be fat and out of shape unless you get off the couch! So get off the couch, take up your pen and write.

Take Every Thought Captive!



## Application & Journaling Questions

1. Have you come to the realization that you have a major problem with sexual issues? If yes, what events, circumstances etc. led to this realization? Are you ready to call it an “addiction”? Why or why not?
2. When have you acknowledged your problem in the past but did nothing about it or failed in your attempts to change? What pitfalls do you see from your previous attempts to change?
3. Applying the cancer analogy to yourself, how much time per week would you commit to treatment if you knew it would save your life and your sexual virility? How much money would you be willing to spend?

---

Prior to completing the questions below, take the screening tests “Sexual Addiction Screening Test - 25 Questions” and “Internet Sexual Addiction Screening Test” found in the “Handouts and Worksheets” section.

4. What do your responses to these screening tests say about your struggle with sexual issues?
5. How do you respond to the following statement: “Your sexual sin is as damaging to your heart, to your relationships and to your soul as cancer is to your physical body”? Do you believe this? If yes, what evidence do you see to that effect? If no, what will it take for you to see the collateral damage?

6. How much time have you spent in sexual struggle? Seriously, take the time to add it up. In a typical week, (or maybe your worst week) how much time have you spent on the following:

- a. Looking at pornography \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Fantasizing about sexual things \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Destroying the evidence? (clearing history files etc.) \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Acting out through solo sex or with others \_\_\_\_\_
- e. Obsessed with the battle trying to not act out but wanting to \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Total hours per week \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Hours per week times 52 weeks per year \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Hours per year times number of years in the struggle \_\_\_\_\_

7. What does the amount of time you have spent struggling with sexual issues say to you about the amount of time you will need to commit to recovery?

8. How much money have you spent? Take the time to make a rough estimate (be careful to not minimize) on each of the following categories and then total it up.

- Materials (Magazines, Internet, Videos, Memberships, etc.) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Cable TV, pay-per-view, etc. \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Strip Clubs \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Professional sex services \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Medical tests and treatment for STD's \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Legal fees (including divorce) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Divorce loss \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Child support \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Missed opportunities (college, job promotions, business ventures) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Working in a job beneath your abilities \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Loss of creativity and energy \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Guilt spending (to make you or partner feel better) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Geographical moves (running from your addiction) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Emotional/financial immaturity due to addiction \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Losses by trusting untrustworthy people (scams/investment) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Other \_\_\_\_\_ \$ \_\_\_\_\_

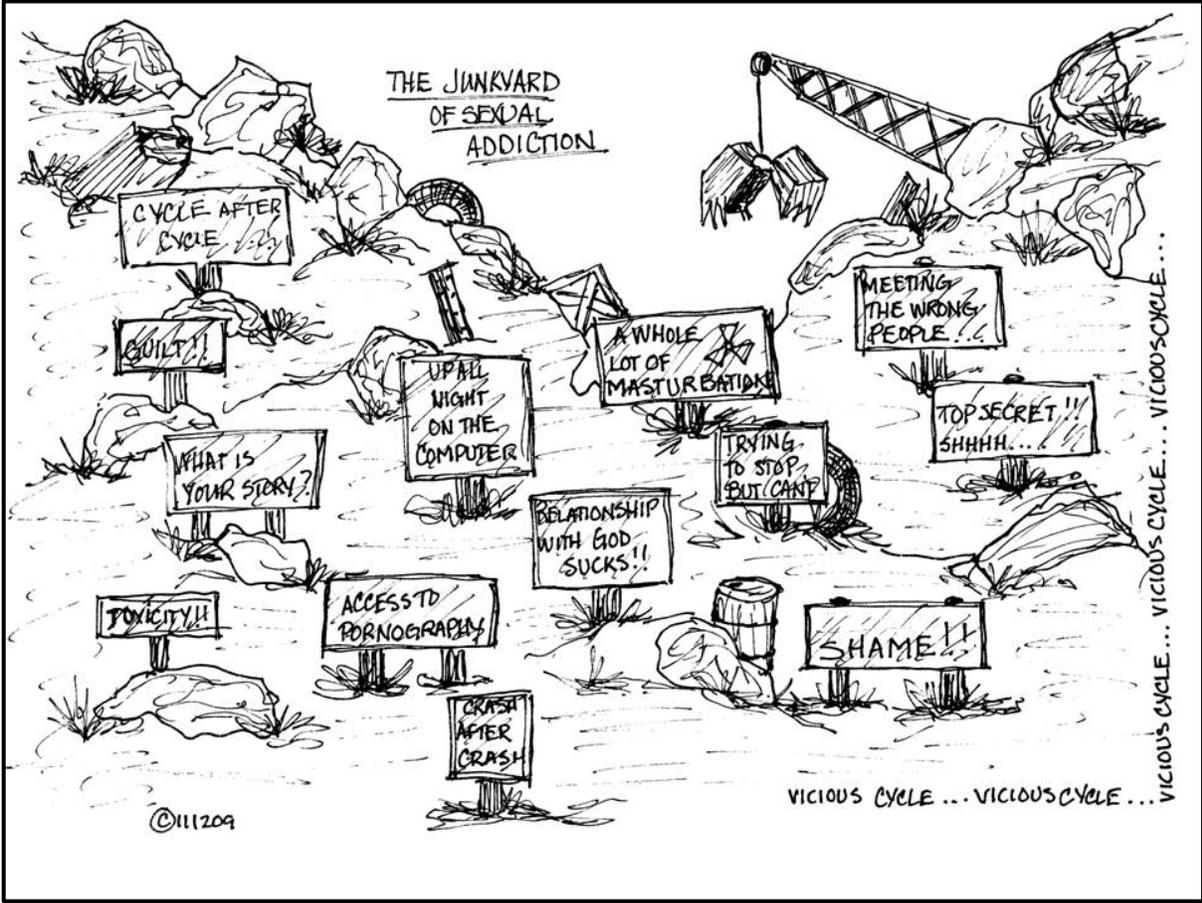
TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(Cost list adapted from Doug Weiss *101 Freedom Exercises*. Discovery Press, 2000 p.58)

9. What does the amount of money you have spent say to you about the amount of money you will need to commit to recovery? What does it say about how much you will save once you are free?
  
10. If you are married, which statement below do you think is the real status of your marriage?
  - a. Happily living the dream we envisioned.
  - b. Struggling some but a good marriage for the most part.
  - c. Struggling and fighting almost constantly.
  - d. Estranged roommates living in the same house, sleeping in the same bed, co-managing children and life responsibilities.
  - e. Adversaries who hold the pretense of marriage but in reality constantly combat, undermine and oppose one another.
  - f. On the way to divorce court.
  - g. Other: Please Explain
  
11. How would your wife describe your marriage? (If you have the courage, ask her.)
  
12. What has been your wife's emotional and physical health been like during your marriage? What wells up inside of you when you hear that her issues could have connections to your acting out?
  
13. If you have children, how well do you really connect with them? Do they experience the joy of knowing that you delight in them, or do they mostly experience your criticism, anger and frustration?
  
14. Do you see the necessity of clearing your calendar for the next 100 days to focus on recovery? Are you willing to commit to that? Who will you tell about your commitment?
  
15. What is your general disposition towards instructions?
  - a. Instructions are for the weak minded; I can figure things out on my own.
  - b. Instructions are only for when I'm desperate. (I'll try to do things on my own and if it doesn't work, then I'll read the instructions).
  - c. Instructions are my friend! I read and follow as best as I can.

16. What reservations do you have about following the “instructions” laid out in this manual, by your sponsors and by your leaders?
  
17. What is your conviction towards following instructions in recovery? In other words, not what do you usually do, but what do you believe God is calling you to do as you begin this journey?
  
18. How does the escape scene from “The Shawshank Redemption” strike you? What parallels can you see from your own story? What “sewage” are you most afraid to face? How much do you long for the cleansing rain? (Note: watching Shawshank could be a very valuable thing for you to do as it makes many powerful points for life and for recovery. It is rated “R” primarily for prison rape scenes. If that might be a trigger for you, then ignore this suggestion. )

# Handouts and Worksheets



## Sexual Addiction Screening Test - 25 Questions<sup>1</sup>

1. Were you sexually abused as a child or adolescent?	Yes	No
2. Do you regularly purchase romance novels or sexually explicit magazines?	Yes	No
3. Have you stayed in romantic relationships after they become emotionally or physically abusive?	Yes	No
4. Do you often find yourself preoccupied with sexual thoughts or romantic day dreams?	Yes	No
5. Do you feel your sexual behavior is abnormal?	Yes	No
6. Does your spouse (or significant other(s)) ever worry or complain about your sexual behavior?	Yes	No
7. Do you have trouble stopping your sexual behavior when you know it is inappropriate?	Yes	No
8. Do you ever feel bad about your sexual behavior?	Yes	No
9. Has your sexual behavior ever created problems for you and your family?	Yes	No
10. Have you ever sought help for sexual behavior you did not like?	Yes	No
11. Have you ever worried about people finding out about your sexual activities?	Yes	No
12. Has anyone been hurt emotionally because of your sexual behavior?	Yes	No
13. Have you ever participated in sexual activity in exchange for money or gifts?	Yes	No
14. Do you have times when you act out sexually followed by periods of celibacy (no sex at all)?	Yes	No
15. Have you made efforts to quit a type of sexual activity and failed?	Yes	No
16. Do you hide some of your sexual behavior from others?	Yes	No
17. Do you find yourself having multiple romantic relationships at the same time?	Yes	No
18. Have you ever felt degraded by your sexual behavior?	Yes	No
19. Has sex or romantic fantasies been a way for you to escape your problems?	Yes	No
20. When you have sex, do you feel depressed afterwards?	Yes	No
21. Do you regularly engage in sado-masochistic behavior?	Yes	No
22. Has your sexual activity interfered with your family life?	Yes	No
23. Have you been sexual with minors?	Yes	No
24. Do you feel controlled by your sexual desire or fantasies of romance?	Yes	No
25. Do you ever think your sexual desire is stronger than you are?	Yes	No

**Total**    \_\_\_\_ Yes    \_\_\_\_ No

“Most sex addicts tended to get higher scores. In fact 96.5% scored thirteen or more. So if your score was above thirteen your answers parallel other addicts. There are some who do score in the 10-13 range. This may mean you have done some things you regret or it may mean you are in early stage addiction”

<sup>1</sup> Only slightly modified from the screening test by David Delmonico, published on the Internet at [www.sexhelp.com](http://www.sexhelp.com) (1999)

## Internet Sexual Addiction Screening Test<sup>2</sup>

1. I have some sexual sites bookmarked.	True	False
2. I spend 5+ hours per week using my computer for sexual pursuits.	True	False
3. I have joined sexual sites to gain access to online sexual material.	True	False
4. I have purchased sexual products online.	True	False
5. I have searched for sexual material through an Internet search tool.	True	False
6. I have spent more money for online sexual material than I planned.	True	False
7. Internet sex has sometimes interfered with certain aspects of my life.	True	False
8. I have participated in sexually related chats.	True	False
9. I have a sexualized username or nickname that I use on the Internet.	True	False
10. I have masturbated while on the Internet.	True	False
11. I have accessed sexual sites from other computers besides my home.	True	False
12. No one knows I use my computer for sexual purposes.	True	False
13. I have tried to hide what is on my computer or monitor from others	True	False
14. I have stayed up after midnight to access sexual material online.	True	False
15. I use the Internet to experiment with different aspects of sexuality (e.g., bondage, homosexuality, anal sex, etc.)	True	False
16. I have my own website which contains some sexual material.	True	False
17. I have promised myself to stop using the Internet for sexual purposes.	True	False
18. I sometimes use cybersex as a reward for accomplishing something (e.g., finish a project, stressful day, etc.)	True	False
19. When unable to access sexual material on line, I feel anxious, angry, or disappointed.	True	False
20. I have increased the risks I take online (given out name, phone number, met people offline, etc.)	True	False
21. I have punished myself when I use the Internet for sexual purposes (e.g., time-out from computer, cancel Internet subscription, etc.)	True	False
22. I have met face to face with someone I met online for romantic purposes.	True	False
23. I use sexual humor and innuendo with others while online.	True	False
24. I have run across illegal sexual material while on the Internet.	True	False
25. I believe I am an Internet sex addict.	True	False

**Total**    \_\_\_True \_\_\_False

Experts in sexual addiction say 19 or more “True” answers are definite signs of sexual addiction; 9-18 indicates “problematic behavior.”<sup>3</sup> It is important to note however, these tests merely look at the problem from a “compulsivity” standpoint ( i.e. has it progressed to the point of being classified as an “addiction” by clinical standards?). Jesus has a much higher standard:

*You have heard that it was said, “Do not commit adultery.” But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:27-28).*

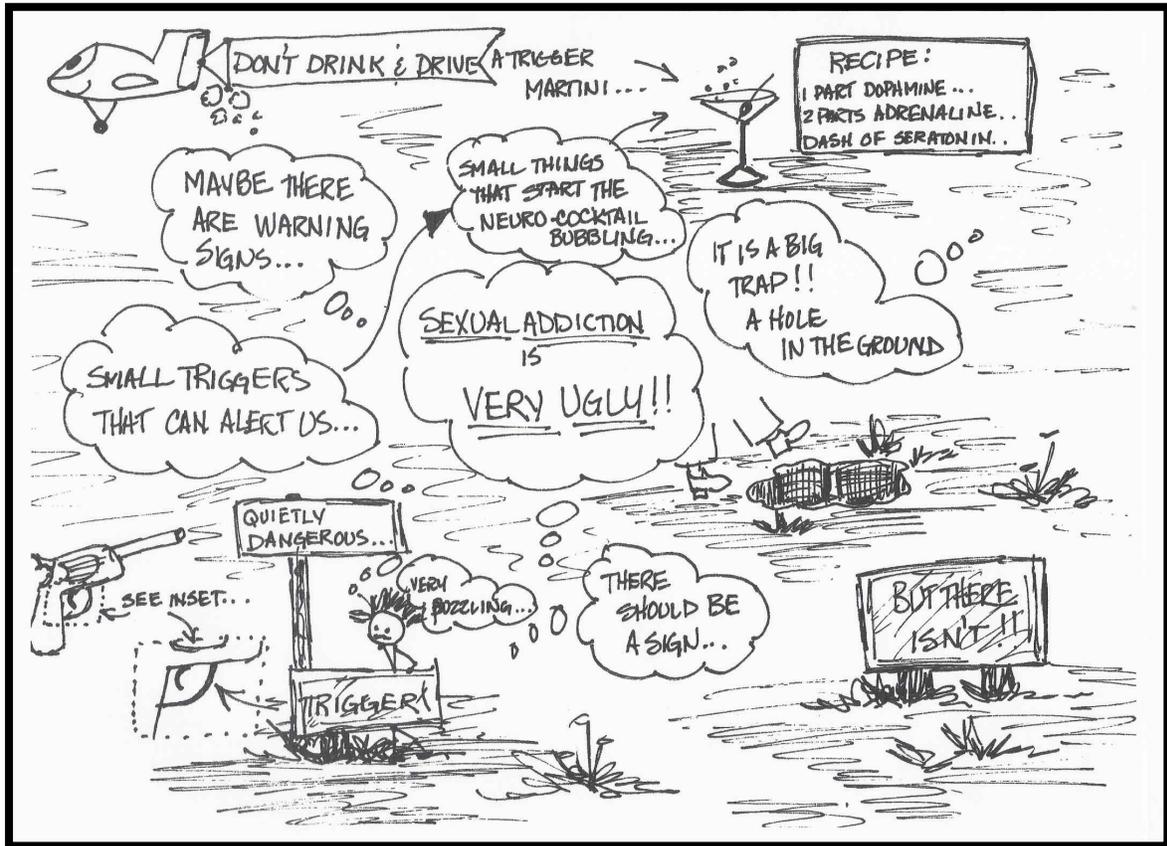
If you answer “True” to even a few of these questions, odds are this is a struggle you need help to overcome. You cannot escape sexual addiction by yourself; any attempt to handle it on your own will merely compound the shame, which actually drives the addiction.

<sup>2</sup>Only slightly modified from the screening test by David Delmonico, published on the Internet at [www.sexhelp.com](http://www.sexhelp.com) (1999)

<sup>3</sup> Carnes Delmonico, Griffin & Moriarity. *In The Shadow Of The Net*. Halzedon: 2001, pp. 26-28.

**Critical:**

It is important to note that many men score themselves much higher on these tests after they have been in recovery for a while. No, they didn't regress and have new things to own. They just thawed out enough to recognize questions they should have answered differently when they initially took the test. **Therefore, please don't naively believe that a "low score" on these tests means this material doesn't apply to you.**



# A Covenant To Contend

## The Courageous Fight For Healthy Sexuality<sup>4</sup>

---

There is a battle going on within me. As much as it pains me to admit it, that battlefield is my sexuality. I realize the outcome of this battle not only holds my life in its hands, but the life of those I love and care for. I now choose to participate in the battle for Godly character and integrity not only for my soul but for my family, friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, and above all else, my God.

I am beginning to understand I cannot win the battle myself. I am coming to see the Biblical truth of, “we are members one of another.” Therefore, I surrender to His wisdom, turn to the leadership of the church, and submit myself to the process of the renewing of my mind.

### Things I Can Do:

- Attend a small group **at least** weekly. (Many have found great strength in attending multiple groups, especially early in recovery.)
- Write out my definition of sexual purity and share it with my small group.
- Pay close attention to what I look at; what I listen to; what I set my mind on.
- Take responsibility for my thoughts and actions.
- Verbally describe my feelings.
- Make contact with a group member(s) on a daily basis.

### I Can Accept:

- Healing is a miraculous process over time.
- Healing requires feeling the pain and learning from it.
- I am a day or an hour away from the same old habit.
- A lapse does not stop the healing process but will have consequences.
- I have become skilled at lying to others and myself.
- I do not live in isolation; my choices affect others.
- My secrecy keeps me in bondage to sin.

### I Will Commit To:

- A willingness to change – and following through.
- **Total confidentiality!** I discuss only **my** experiences outside the group.
- Rigorous honesty with God, my small group and myself.
- Building my knowledge base (books, tapes, videos, seminars).
- Reading scripture and praying.
- A biblical standard of sexual purity in my life.
- A goal of 90 consecutive days of sexual purity. (This does not automatically mean abstinence see Chapter 10, Truth #7).
- **Following instructions!** We do not believe we have all the answers or the only path for recovery. However, we willingly share what we have learned in our own journey of recovery and ask you go to God and ask Him if He is calling you to be part of this ministry. If the answer you hear is “yes” then we ask you to do what we ask you to do even when it doesn’t seem necessary or relevant to you.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

---

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from “Appendix B: A Covenant To Contend” original Pure Desire workbook, p. 69.

# Legal Issues

Through research, experience and consultation with other ministries and legal counsel, we have developed the following policies for our recovery groups. If you have questions about how these might apply in your specific circumstances, please set up an appointment with the recovery director.

1. **Matters of legal consequence must not be discussed in group settings.** They belong in individual and couple counseling sessions with a pastor, a counselor or a lawyer. The reason is this: things shared with clergy, lawyers and counselors are protected while things spoken in a group are not. For example, if a man shares with his check-in group he did something illegal and is tried for that offense, group members could be forced to testify. This is a protection both for the offender and for group members as the first question on the stand would most likely require the witness to state he is in a sexual addiction recovery group with the accused. Examples of legal issues include but are not limited to the following:
  - **Sexual contact with minors including but not limited to any touching of private areas of either the minor or the adult**
  - **Cyber or phone sexual contact with minors.** (Police are constantly conducting stings in these arenas)
  - **Any issues of exposure or voyeurism (Flashing & Peeping)**
  - **Child pornography**
  - **Rape or any form of coerced sexual relations**
2. **Individuals with *current* legal issues are not permitted in the groups.** However, pastors and counselors can counsel with these individuals if they so desire. Again, this is a protection both for the individual and for others in the groups. Legal issues that have been resolved, i.e. prior convictions or previously tried offenses do not automatically prevent participation in the groups. However, they must be disclosed and evaluated prior to attending. Disclosure may require the individual to pass a polygraph exam before attending meetings. Failure to disclose will absolutely require a polygraph exam to attend groups and/or individual counseling.
3. **If legal issues come up in a group, we ask everyone to take the initiative to shut down the conversation.** Yes, it is important individuals share their struggles. However, they must not jeopardize others and must therefore deal with these issues in counseling. Do not feel like a “leader” must be the one to shut it down as it affects everyone, and the “leader” might not have picked up on the issue. Also, do not assume if something happened 10, 20 or even 30 years ago it is no longer an issue. There are few “Statutes of Limitation” in regards to the abuse of children.
4. You need to understand some legal issues require reporting and some do not. Some group leaders and members are “**Mandatory Reporters**” which means if they believe another individual, especially a minor, is in current danger or has already been legally harmed, they are required to report to appropriate authorities. Also, those who are not “Mandatory Reporters” can and often do report such issues.
5. Child pornography and voyeurism issues do not automatically require reporting. However, they are serious and have legal ramifications. Therefore, if this is part of your history you should discuss it individually with a pastor, a counselor or a lawyer and not with the group.
6. Most inappropriate sexual contact with a minor occurring before the perpetrator was 17 is not prosecutable, and therefore, falls under the umbrella of hidden shame that can and should be talked about in the group context.
7. If legal issues arise or exist in an individual’s history, leadership reserves the right to require a **polygraph exam** in order for individuals to remain in the group

Thank you for understanding our desire to protect all participants in our recovery ministry. If you have any questions about these guidelines or about how they apply in your specific situation, please call or schedule an appointment with the recovery director.



## 2. THE SIX DAILIES

---

Many years ago, on a sports radio show, a local golf pro described a typical lesson in a way that illustrates an important truth in recovery. He said something to the effect of:

*The first thing I always do is have the person hit a few balls at the driving range. I tell him not to try too hard to make a perfect shot, but just hit the ball like he normally does. Usually, I notice something about his stance or his swing that needs some tweaking so I show him how to re-position his feet or turn his body a certain way and tell him to hit a few “my way.”*

*Invariably he will hit three or four strokes and turn back to me and say, “That really feels awkward, I think I like my old way better.”*

*To that, I always reply, “Were you happy with the results you were getting with your old way?”*

*He, of course, shakes his head “No” because after all, if he were happy with his results, he wouldn’t be paying me.*

*So I tell clients, “Anything new feels awkward at first. It will take time for your mind and body to adjust to your new ‘normal.’ However, once you have done it this new way long enough, it will feel natural and your old way will feel awkward and unnatural.”*

The exact same principle applies to recovery. New behaviors always feel strange. However, the question you must ask yourself about your old ways is, “How are they really working for me?” If the answer is, “Not very well,” then it is time to try some new ways, even though they feel strange and unnatural. (See Smarter Every Day’s “Backwards Bicycle” video on YouTube for an amazing example of this principle.)

### Position Yourself for Healing

If you are reading this second chapter, I trust you are moving towards committing to recovery. You have decided the cost of your path of addiction is greater than the price of recovery. I hope you have also heard God’s promise to walk with you every step of the way. But now, what do you do? What is your responsibility on the road of recovery? What can you do to participate in your own healing?

First, you must recognize recovery and healing are supernatural works. Ultimately, God is the healer and we must be totally dependent upon Him and yet actively pursuing our recovery at the same time. God wants to heal us, but He will not violate our free will and will not remove our sin without our permission. It is also rarely an instantaneous or even quick process. Yes, I have heard about some individuals who claim that God convicted them of their sexual sin and were “delivered” by simply confession and

prayer. However, in walking with men fighting this battle since the turn of the millennium, I have never seen it play out that way. I have also seen many men try countless prayers and other “magic bullet” short cuts without success. Therefore, I believe recovery is not about quick fixes but about hard work and deep dependence on a God who does heal but who is much more interested in transformation than sobriety.

So, how do we give God access to our hearts, and what can we do to participate in our healing? Again, I will go back to the cancer patient analogy. A good cancer patient makes all his doctor appointments, spends many hours each week receiving treatment and giving his body time to heal. The doctors and the drugs do the bulk of the treatment. However, if the patient doesn’t make himself available, the treatment is useless.

The same is true in your recovery; God will do the healing, but you must make yourself available to Him. One of the most basic ways of

making yourself available is to do what we call the six dailies: Pray, make phone calls, read & reflect, attend meetings, focus on appreciation and doing a formal “Check In.” This is not rocket science, and it does not require you to have a degree or even a highly trained set of skills. It simply requires you to do each activity every day. The men we have seen do these positive behaviors have consistently made huge strides in their recovery. The men who do them sparingly make minimal progress. Since they are so crucial, I will explain them in detail.

### **Six Dailies: #1 Pray (Morning and Night)**

As obvious as prayer may be, many often overlook it. Trying to walk out of a sexual addiction without prayer is like trying to run a power tool without a power source. However, many men have felt alienated from God for so long that prayer seems artificial if not impossible. Don’t believe Satan’s lies. God is always “glad as glad can be” to be with you. (Remember, your sin is no longer a problem for God; on the cross, Jesus paid the price for every sin.) Therefore, even when it feels strange, even when it feels forced or artificial, begin every day in prayer asking God for the strength to walk in purity today. Many of our men have found their morning shower time to be a great time to pray. Others have committed not to get out of bed until they have asked for God’s strength for the day. Find a reminder that works for you and make your morning prayer an essential part of your day. Again, it doesn’t have to be complicated but can be as simple as the following:

*Dear God, thank you for this day. Please give me the strength today to live according to your ways in all things but especially in the sexual arena. I know it will be a battle, and I know I cannot do it on my own. Please give me the strength to fight and to not return to my old ways of acting out. Please give me the tools and weapons I need as well as the courage to use them. Remind me you are by my side and you are more powerful than my enemy.*

Beginning your day in prayer acknowledges your complete dependence upon God, sets a tone

for recovery and starts your feet moving in the right direction.

Then, at the end of your day, before you go to sleep at night, take a few moments to pray again. Like the Morning Prayer, it is a reminder you cannot travel this road without Divine assistance. If you made it through the day without acting out sexually or engaging in any deceptions, then it is an opportunity to thank God for giving you the strength to be sober for that day. If you had a sexual slip or a crash or any deceptions, it is an opportunity to confess your sin and experience God’s forgiveness. Either way, taking the time to talk with God at the end of your day is a crucial part of your recovery.

### **Six Dailies: #2 Make Phone Calls**

While it is often the hardest recovery behavior for men to make into a habit, making phone calls is also one of the most essential. Phone calls are lifelines to men drowning in the sea of sexual addiction. In *Don’t Call It Love*, Dr. Patrick Carnes surveyed over 1500 individuals who had been in recovery for three or more years and one of the things they listed as common elements of those who had progressed was “learning to use the telephone.”<sup>5</sup>

Everyone seems intellectually to get the idea of making a phone call at “crisis times.” However, understanding the concept and actually making calls are two very different things. In addition, we have seen that men who wait until they are in “crisis” never make the call for two primary reasons. First, they can’t because by the time they realize they are in crisis, they are already too far into the ritual to stop as their attachment center has been hijacked by their drug of choice. (This will make more sense after reading later chapters.) Second, they can’t call because they haven’t made the relational connections that would empower them to reach out to someone.

Therefore, we encourage men to make a phone call *every single day*. Yes, we know it seems awkward at first. Yes, we know you do not really even know what to say. However, you can take a lesson from one of the men in our very first group. A few days after coming to his first meeting, he called and said: “You told me I needed to make phone calls, so I’m calling you.

---

<sup>5</sup> Patrick Carnes. *Don’t Call It Love* p. 217.

I don't have any idea what to talk about so you'll have to coach me through it." This man is one who joined our groups and never had another major crash. If you want to get healthy, make a phone call every single day. (See Phone Call Tips later in this chapter.)

### Six Dailies: #3 Read and Reflect

A third essential part of your recovery is taking the time to read and reflect on recovery materials. Spending time every day reading something will help focus your mind on recovery and give you insights into your real struggles. Many find doing this early in their day (like the Morning Prayer) helps set a tone for recovery. Some discover they are able to concentrate better in the evening while others use their lunch break. Just find a time that works for you!

It is also helpful to set realistic goals for time spent reading and reflecting. If you say you are going to read for an hour every morning and journal for an hour every night, odds are you will fail to meet your goal and shame will use that failure against you. However, if you do not set any goals, then you probably won't read or journal very much. Some get bogged down thinking if they don't have large chunks of time it isn't worth anything. While large chunks are invaluable, smaller bites are also helpful. One practice I encourage is to commit 10 minutes every morning to read, 10 minutes every night to journal and at least an hour block once or twice a week to dive into materials and longer times of journaling. The short times help you stay focused daily and the extended times help you work through significant portions of material in order to understand your struggle, your identity, and most importantly, God's heart towards you.

Find what works for you and carve that time out of your schedule. Again, if you wait until you have spare time, Satan will make certain you never have a moment to breathe, let alone time to read or reflect. You must make recovery work a priority or it will not happen on a consistent basis.

A second critical aspect of reading recovery material is that you desperately need to put new perspectives in your mind and heart. A man who truly wants to change will seek out materials written by people who have been changed. There is much you can learn from those who have traveled the road of recovery ahead of you. No, your path will not be identical to theirs, but it will

have more points of familiarity than you realize. Reading the personal stories of men like yourself—seeing both the glory and the depravity in their lives—will help you see both in your own life. You can learn from their failures and their victories and find both encouragement and positive challenges along the way. Men progressing in recovery will begin to build a library of materials that have been helpful. The reading list at the end of this chapter is part of my library of recovery. I would encourage you to always be reading something that guides you on your lifelong journey of recovery.

Often, men do okay with reading, but they don't take the time to reflect and journal about what they read. The problem with this approach is reading without reflecting makes it incredibly easy to keep recovery principles on an intellectual plane rather than allowing them to penetrate to your heart. Writing, whether it is in the form of journaling or even just answering questions like those in this manual, opens unique pathways in the mind and heart that often lead to tremendous breakthroughs.

One of the resource materials we use is John Eldredge's *Wild at Heart*. Over the years, I've known many men who have said they read the book and they got a few good things out of it. When I ask them if they did the *Field Manual* that goes with it, they often say, "Well, I bought it and I've looked at some of the questions, but I've never taken the time to write them out." To that, I usually say, "Then you haven't done *Wild at Heart*." I then understand why they only "got a few good things out of it." The men who have actually taken the time to wrestle with the questions in written form invariably speak of the tremendous life changing impact of the material. Yes, Eldredge asks good questions and addresses incredibly important themes, but part of the impact is that for the first time in many men's lives, they truly engage themselves in a meaningful dialogue.

It may be helpful at this point to understand a little about the right/left division of our



brain.<sup>6</sup> The left side of our brain is the file cabinet that holds everything we know through verbal logic. The right side of our brain is experiential. A simple analogy to use is the idea of a dog. The left side of our brain has a file that contains everything we know intellectually about dogs. It knows names of different breeds of dogs, what they eat, what they do, etc. The right side of our brain contains the information we know by experience. The right side of your brain remembers the soft silky feel of petting your neighbor's dog, the joy of playing with a litter of beagle puppies and the warmth of snuggling next to your collie on the floor. It especially remembers any fearful or painful encounters. For example, if a pit bull attacked when you were five, then even the sound of distant barking brings right brain feelings and memories to the surface. What is important about this distinction is left-brain "knowledge" is completely inaccessible to us when the right side of your brain malfunctions. The brain is a five-stage hierarchal system and the left side is level five. Therefore, if something goes wrong in levels one through four, (which reside in the right side of our brain) we lose our ability to access information in the file cabinet.<sup>7</sup> That explains why a pastor or other dedicated Christian who knows countless scriptural reasons not to act out sexually seems to forget everything he knows when he is under stress, afraid or dealing with attachment pain. (We will look more closely at attachment pain in future chapters but for now just think of it is the deep ache in your soul that you often feel but for which you don't know the source.)

Reflection through journaling is one of the most effective ways to engage the experiential, right side of your brain. Thinking about your thinking, especially through the discipline of journaling, opens unique pathways. Reading only puts information in the left side of your brain. However, taking the time to write out answers to reflection questions, journaling and practicing other forms of self-attunement, builds

---

<sup>6</sup> The hemispheric descriptions of the brain in this manual are oversimplifications as both sides are involved in many processes. However, understanding the difference between informational knowledge and experiential knowledge is incredibly helpful.

pathways that begin to make information available when you most need it.

As I stated in the very first chapter, reading a manual but not answering the questions is like reading about exercise. You might learn a few tidbits about running, but you will not get in shape unless you get off the couch. Even if school was difficult for you, even if you think you cannot write and make any sense, force yourself to write. Don't worry about spelling, grammar or punctuation. Don't even worry if what you write makes sense to anyone other than you. Just write. Try different methods. Some find using a pen and paper allows their thoughts to flow more naturally. Others do much better at a computer or even on their phone. Do whatever works best for you, just find a way to both read and reflect. Then, trust that God will use the process to move you forward on your journey.

#### **Six Dailies: #4 Attend Group Meetings**

Doug Weiss puts it very well in *The Final Freedom*: "In AA there is an old expression that says, 'There are three times when you should go to a meeting: when you don't feel like going to a meeting, when you do feel like going to a meeting and at 8 o'clock.' It is not a matter of how you feel about it. It is how you behave about it."<sup>8</sup> *Missing group meetings and progressing in your recovery are inherently contradictory.* You cannot walk out of your addiction alone. You tried isolation for years with little to no success. Therefore, you must concede that you desperately need connection with others who understand your struggle. Phone calls are great, but face-to-face interactions are even better. In fact, face-to-face connections can provide the "joy strength" you need to literally grow the control center of your brain. This control center is the part of your brain that has veto power over your impulses. (See Chapter 5 "The Fellowship of the Forgiven" for more on this crucial part of your recovery.)

Group meetings provide opportunities for the honest face-to-face connections that are crucial to the recovery process. They are also

<sup>7</sup> Ed Khouri & Jim Wilder "Thrive Tract 4 Conference On Addiction and Recovery" July 31, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Doug Weiss: *Final Freedom* p. 52.

opportunities for you to see others on the path with you. Think of it in terms of climbing a mountain. You may be in the bottom of a valley and not able to see your next landmark. However, if you can look on the trail ahead of you and see other men on the same journey, you can look to them for encouragement. You may even be able to call out to one of them and ask, “Can you see it?” He may not be able to see it either, but in a good group, he will be able to call out to others in front of him until someone can see the landmark and relay the message, “We are on the right trail.” There are also times where you don’t believe you can take another step. However, having someone walk beside you and offer his support often empowers you to keep trekking upward. That is part of why mountain climbers do not ascend alone. They understand how important it is to have others on the journey with them. The same thing is true in recovery. You desperately need others in front, behind and beside you on the way.

What does that mean on a practical level? It means if you want to get healthy, *at the very least*, you need to attend one group every week. Many of the men in our groups who made the greatest strides attended multiple groups during their first year of recovery. In early recovery, it would be ideal to attend a meeting every day. While this may seem impossible, it is doable. Because of Covid19 many groups, including New Hope’s, went to online video formats. While in-person groups certainly have the greatest opportunity for connection, online video groups can provide daily opportunities to connect with brothers in recovery. For information on New Hope’s online groups go to [www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com) and click on the “Online Meetings” box.

You can also create “mini-groups.” For example, partner with someone and meet once a week outside of group for lunch, breakfast or whenever you can to share the struggles of life and pray for and with each other. These connections will not replace your primary meetings, but they can go a long ways in supplementing your meetings and building the joy strength you need to overcome your addiction. If you want to get healthy, you must make group meetings a priority. (For a description of our group meetings, see “Sexual Integrity Meeting Agenda” later in this chapter.)

## Six Dailies: #5 Appreciation

Focus on appreciation. Appreciation is a powerful tool that can help us out of our “funky places.” I first learned this many years ago when I told my kids, “Tomorrow we will all share something we appreciate before dinner.” After all, why should that be a Thanksgiving only kind of tradition. Well, the next day, I was in a foul mood. My brain was just off, and I wanted to get dinner over with, get the kids to bed and put an end to a difficult day. As we sat down to dinner, I remembered my proclamation of the previous day. Ugh! Appreciation was the last thing I

### Appreciation Exercise

1. **Ask** the Father to show you something you can appreciate.
2. **Spend** 2-3 minutes talking with Him about whatever comes to mind.
3. **Name** It (Three words or less)
4. **Write** the name on your Appreciation Wall
5. If possible **Tell** someone about it.

wanted to do in that moment. However, I knew my then 11-year-old daughter would remember I said it, and not doing it would come back to haunt me. So, I asked if anyone had any appreciations they wanted to share. Of course, there was no response, so I knew I had to go first. My appreciation was incredibly lame, merely a rote, going through the motions, kind of thing. No one else came up with anything, but at least I had done what I said I would do! Now here is the interesting part. About ten minutes later, I noticed we were enjoying our dinner. My “funk” left, and I enjoyed being with my wife and kids again. What made the difference? Simply talking about something I appreciate. The same principle holds true even as we are sliding down the silicone funnel of our addiction.

I know it is difficult to do when you are in your “funk,” however, ask the Father to show you something you appreciate. Seriously, just throw up a quick prayer, then talk out loud to God about whatever comes to your mind, and finally give it a name. For example, now I can call the experience above “appreciation dinner” and even without telling the whole story, I can think of the name, and appreciation begins to grow. If possible, you can

strengthen the appreciation even more by calling someone and telling them your appreciation story. Make sure you tell them the name you gave it as that will give them something to remind you of easily when you talk to them in the future. The process of thinking about appreciation, talking about it and naming it will have a dramatic effect. It may not always kick in immediately, but it will make a difference. The reports I receive from the men in my groups about this little exercise are amazing. It is also a basic Biblical concept. Think how many times scripture uses the phrase “Give thanks” or something similar. In Philippians 4:8, Paul says “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” Bottom line: *Appreciation works!*

### **Six Dailies: #6 “Check In”**

Finally, the last, but certainly not least of the six dailies, is to do a formal check in with someone. This can overlap with attending a group, making a phone call, or meeting with someone one-on-one. What is important is for you to go through the complete “Check in” process as outlined on the “Sexual Integrity Group Meeting Agenda” page in the “Handouts & Worksheets” section at the end of this chapter. Doing a good check in every single day will help keep you on track and possibly do more for your recovery than almost anything else you can do.

### **Choose a sponsor**

Using a sponsor can be one of the most helpful ingredients in your recovery. While you are the only one who can be responsible for your recovery, a sponsor can help direct you and give you support in your journey. Many times men honestly don’t know how to pick or what to do with a sponsor. In order to help you choose the right sponsor, see the “Sponsor Guidelines” handout in the “Handouts and Worksheets” at the end of this chapter.

### **Mistakes and Failures Are to Be Expected**

The reality of the road to recovery is that it is generally fraught with many failures. No, this does not mean that everyone in recovery gets a free pass to act out occasionally. However, it

means that making mistakes, even if they include acting out, does not mean you are a failure and doomed to live the rest of your life in your addiction. This is often a revelation to those in recovery as they have generally lived under the oppression of the lie that all failure is catastrophic. We learned as small children that whenever others discovered our failures, severe consequences and toxic shame quickly followed. Ironically, God’s design is just the opposite. His plan is for our parents to help us learn that failure is a crucial part of life. Jim Wilder describes this process in *Living With Men*:

***Making Mistakes.** Around Dad things are always going wrong. The boy learns that Dad smiles when he tries and misses. Together they laugh at mistakes. Together they test the limits to see what is possible today. Together the boy learns to stretch his limits but also how to set limits as well. He can clearly see the difference in power between himself and his dad. He can’t do everything Dad can--not yet.*

*Because his father cares, a boy can see that his efforts mean something, even when they fail. It will come as no surprise to the reader that men are failure prone in most of their efforts. For a baby boy to grow up into a man, he must also get good at failure. One of the essential ingredients of a good childhood is the opportunity to fail without being penalized. Freedom to fail is a big part of preventing sexual addictions. When a boy grows up with freedom to fail he will allow real relationships to nurture his soul instead of living in fantasy or self-generated sexuality.<sup>9</sup>*

It is important to point out the difference between recovery and sobriety. Many times, men are on the road to recovery but continue to stumble with sobriety. However, it is essential we recognize that some individuals require a significant amount of recovery and healing before finding sobriety. Be encouraged: God is at work, even when we fall

### **Consistency is the Key**

As simple as these positive behaviors are, they will feel strange and “unnatural” at first. Remember the golf lesson analogy in the beginning of the chapter? Or did you watch “The

---

<sup>9</sup> Wilder. *Living With Men* p. 75

Backwards Bicycle?” Do not allow the strangeness of new behaviors to deter you. It is essential you don't give up on these new behaviors before they have time to sink in. Real change in our brains is possible, but it requires consistent and focused effort. **Commit to doing the six dailies for the first 90 days of your recovery and see what a difference they make in your life.** Put the checklist at the end of this chapter up in a prominent place and check each of them off every day. You will be amazed at the results. Also, if you have slips or crashes, make a mark in the margin. What many of my men

have seen is their slips and crashes usually occur on, or shortly after, times where they have boxes without check marks. They will do great for a week or ten days and then start missing phone calls and then not read and before they know it, they have two or three days without doing anything and the next thing they know, they return to old acting-out behaviors. The six dailies will not magically prevent you from acting out or heal you. However, like taking medical treatments, they put you in a place to receive the healing you desperately need.

## Cherry Cobbler, Desire, Temptation, Lust

When I was growing up I loved my grandmother's cherry cobbler that she made in her special "cobbler pan." I don't know how often she made it, but I know it was never "too much." I have fond memories of sitting at her table eating hot cherry cobbler with vanilla ice cream. To this day, I can't say I've found any dessert I'd rather eat.

When I married my wife, Debbie, she noticed that we never saw my grandmother, up until she physically wasn't able, that she didn't have a cherry cobbler waiting for me.

When she passed, Debbie acquired the cobbler pan and set out to replicate Grandma Tate's cherry cobbler. I can't tell you for sure if it is exactly the same, but I can tell you there is still nothing I'd rather have for dessert than my grandmother's, and now Debbie's, cherry cobbler with vanilla ice cream.

Now I want you to think about what happens in my brain when I discover cherry cobbler is on the menu. If I come home from work and have no idea Debbie has made a cobbler, I guarantee you that as soon as I walk in the door (or more likely even while still in the garage) my olfactory system would recognize the smell and before I cognitively realize the smell is cherry cobbler, my brain will have already started releasing dopamine in my reward/pleasure center.

I wouldn't have had to ask for it. I wouldn't have had to be looking for it or even anticipating it. The instant I got my first whiff, my desire would start building. If you think about it, it hits on multiple levels. First, it hits my palate because I love the taste as sugar, fat and the tart cherries are an almost perfect combination for my taste's arousal template. But second, it would also have a powerful pull because of the fact it brings back fond memories of attachment connections with my grandmother.

Now, what in the world does this have to do with the age-old battle of lust? A great deal, because the operation involved in the brain is remarkably similar. I'll explain more shortly but first I need to flesh out what I see as a huge problem in the Christian community and especially in Christian sexual addiction recovery circles.

Years ago, I was at a large gathering of men seeking information and tools on how to "win the battle with lust" when one of the keynote speakers, a prominent voice in Christian recovery at the time, pointed to the exit signs in the auditorium and said something to the effect of:

"You see those signs above the doors? That is how you need to see every woman you encounter who is not your wife. Every woman other than your wife is nothing but trouble for you and you need to move away from her as quickly as possible. You need to exit the situation."

I remember cringing in the moment as God had used numerous women in my life as part of my healing journey. I understood where he was coming from, but experientially knew it was wrong.

So where does that admonition come from? I can't say for sure in his life, however, it falls right in line with the very popular "discipline" taught to Christian men of "bouncing their eyes."

In *Every Man's Battle*, the authors give the following instruction "You can win this battle by training your eyes to 'bounce away' from sights of pretty women and sensual images. If you 'bounce your eyes' for six weeks, you can win this war."<sup>10</sup>

Now for men fighting with addictions to pornography and the constant objectification and lusting after women, that sounds like an amazing solution. However, it is way too simplistic, assumes the problem is just one of

---

<sup>10</sup> Arterburn, Stoeker and Yorkey, 2000. P. 125.

habit and completely misses the humanity of women.

I acknowledge there are times, especially in early recovery and challenging situations, where it is a necessary practice. However, does it really solve the problem of lust? And even if it does, what are the unintended ramifications?

Sheila Gregoire, in her fabulous book, *The Great Sex Rescue*, includes the following story from a young woman in her critique of the practice:

I was on a Christian-based tour, and my sister and I got into the elevator with two other couples from the group. We said hi and smiled; we didn't know the couples, but we did know one thing. The men were both pastors. So it was a bit more pointed when each of them offered up a short, formal "hello" before physically turning their heads and refusing to look at me. No eye contact. Barely an acknowledgment. I was wearing a floor length sleeveless jumpsuit with a square neckline. Not tight, not low-cut. But I don't think it would have mattered either way. I wasn't a person, a human, a woman, a sister in that elevator. I was a potential stumbling block, an object. I was a walking, talking collection of tempting body parts. I was the enemy. It was dehumanization at its finest.<sup>11</sup>

One inherent ramification of "bouncing your eyes" is that it makes all women the enemy. It objectifies them—just in a different way. It says, "Your presence is dangerous to me and nothing good can come from my seeing or being around you." Again, it paints all women as "Exit signs."

The other problem is that it puts men, committed to faithfulness, in a constant state of fear in their encounters with fifty percent of earth's population. Guess what happens when

we operate in "fear mode?" We lose access to the control center of our brain. In fact, just imagine you are deathly afraid of spiders. What happens if a spider is just over your left shoulder, and someone assures you it is a harmless spider and tells you that if you don't look at it you will be okay? Even if you trust the person and think their advice is good, how long do you think you will be able to not look at it?

Surely that isn't what God intended when he created Eve as a representative of Himself and as a partner for Adam. (FYI, the word translated as "helpmeet" by many translations is an incredibly rich word that Scripture uses in reference to God more than it does to women. Maybe that should tell us something!) I would encourage each of you to do some study on the Hebrew word, *Ezer Kenegdo*. (my favorite translation is "The help that opposes.")

So how does a man honor his wife and deal well with his own desires when in and amongst the opposite sex? Well, let's go back to the cherry cobbler. I think one of the reasons this subject has become so problematic in Christian (and especially Christian recovery circles) is because we don't have a healthy understanding of natural human desire.

God created each one of us with "wanters." I know my former English teachers would likely cringe at that "non-word," but I think it's helpful. God created us to want. He created us to desire. Yes, our wants and our desires, when unchecked and not handled well, have gotten all of us in trouble at various points.

However, desire—wanting is not evil. In fact, I believe our desires are part of what God uses to draw us back to him. Without realizing it, what we most deeply desire is intimacy with God himself and all other desires fall short of providing complete satisfaction. Again, I could write much more here but back to cherry cobbler and how men see women.

---

<sup>11</sup> Gregoire, Sheila Wray; Gregoire Lindenbach, Rebecca; Sawatsky, Joanna. *The Great Sex Rescue* (p. 92). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

When I walk into my house and catch the wonderful aroma of cherry cobbler, my brain goes through the following pathways:

1. **Noticing.** I recognize the house smells different than usual and without even consciously thinking about it, I know what that smell means.
2. **Desiring** or wanting. Because of my love of cherry cobbler and the attachment it provides me to my grandmother and now my wife, I cannot help but want to dive in. But here is the critical part.
3. **Decision:** As much as I love her cherry cobbler, I could still walk into the kitchen and tell my lovely bride, “Oh wow, that smells so good, I am sure I could eat the whole pan. I appreciate you making that for me, but I’m committed to watching my calories and avoiding sugar so as much as it pains me, I’m going to have to pass and let you save it for our company instead.”

Now, my wife would tell you that she isn’t sure I could make that choice and while I will tell you it would be incredibly hard, I know (in part because of having lost over 50 pounds in the past) that when I set my mind to it, I can even resist the temptation of cherry cobbler.

So, now I hope you are seeing where I am going. A similar process is at play whenever we face a temptation to lust or seek sexual dopamine hits from anyone other than our spouse. (Side note here: While men tend to be more visually stimulated than women, attraction—via visual or other pathways—isn’t a struggle limited to those with a Y chromosome and the same principles hold true when feeling the pull regardless whether stimuli is visual, emotional or comes in other forms.)

I think it can be helpful to slow the process down to see how it plays out in our brain. (For simplicity’s sake, I’ll describe it from the perspective of a heterosexual man with a

history of sexual objectification of women.) First, a man notices a woman that hits his arousal template.<sup>12</sup> It is important to see that the noticing has already started activating the brain’s reward center *even before* he is consciously aware that he is noticing. Then second, his “wanter” begins to engage just before he enters conscious awareness of noticing, and he then begins to feel the pull of attraction.

I believe these two steps are below the waterline of conscious awareness and are out of his “control.” It might help to picture steps coming out of a swimming pool. Noticing is the bottom step, and the initial pull of attraction is the second step—just below the surface.

What comes next, however, is what I believe is the critical place of decision that determines whether we go down the path of objectification and lust or the path of personhood, respect and honoring every person as a unique image bearer.

Unfortunately, many men, especially those who have devoured pornography and other forms of objectifying women, believe they have no choice but to continue onward down the path of lust. I personally believe this is an extremely low and even animalistic view of man. We are humans, we are not beasts. God made us different than the animals, and one way he made us different is that we are capable of not pursuing every desire.

In twenty-five plus years of walking with men in their struggles with lust, I have had many say something very similar to what a 55-year-old man said in group one night: “I don’t believe it’s possible for me to look at a pretty woman and not go to lust.” I knew he had two grown daughters, so I began probing:

“Are your daughters attractive?”

He responded, “Of course, they are beautiful.”

---

<sup>12</sup> Arousal templates are a complicated combination of biological, environmental and other factors that cause us to be attracted to specific types of individuals. These

are generally formed early in life. Like our tastes in food, we can grow appreciation for things outside our templates, but core templates are usually set for life.

I continued, “Do they have the female body parts you struggle with objectifying on other women?”

“Well, yes, of course they do,” he reluctantly replied.

“Do you lust after and objectify them?” I asked gently.

“Of course not!” he replied defiantly as he started to take offense.

“Why not?”

Quite agitated he replied, “Because they are my daughters!”

At that point, I smiled and said something to the effect of, “See you can look at a woman, even a woman you consider beautiful, and see her as a person to be known and loved rather than an object to be consumed. You are a human. You are not a beast.”

I believe God created our minds with the ability to create healthy categories for the women in our lives. We see this in I Timothy 5:1-2 where Paul tells a young Timothy, “Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, *with absolute purity.*” (Emphasis mine) I truly believe if Paul were writing to my 55-year-old group member he would have said, “Treat older women as mothers, women close to your age as sisters, and younger women as daughters, *with absolute purity.*”

We have the ability, as Godly men, to train our brains to see every woman we encounter as either a mother, a sister, a daughter, or a wife. Now obviously the last category is a category of one. A faithful man can have many mothers, sisters, and daughters, but only one wife.

Categorization in this way empowers a man to offer a simple prayer whenever he notices the beauty of a woman:

“Jesus, who is she to me? Is she a mother, a sister, a daughter, or a wife?”

Assuming he’s married, I’m quite confident the answer he will sense will always be “a mother,” “a sister,” or “a daughter.” Once he has a sense of who she is to him, then he can pray, “Jesus, show me how to be this (mother’s, sister’s, daughter’s) protector and

not go down the road of consuming her like a predator.”

Thinking and praying this way reminds us that we have two very different pathways available in our brains. We have a protector pathway, and we have a predatory pathway. (See *The Pandora Problem* by Dr. Jim Wilder for more on these two pathways) The predatory pathway is the one most of us learned from our earliest days from other men, boys and of course the media. That pathway says a woman’s beauty is something for our devouring, our consumption. This pathway also teaches us to put women into categories, only the predatory categories are “hot or not,” and “vulnerable or not.”

We have been conditioned that it is normal and even expected as men to “ogle” women. Many observed their father and other male role models gawking, whistling, and even making rude and demeaning comments about and to women. One man recently told me his father often said, “If she didn’t want this kind of attention, she wouldn’t dress that way.” We have all seen scenes in movies, television and other media normalizing such entitlement behaviors. When anyone, especially a woman, complains, the response is often, “Don’t be a prude” or “Come on, boys will be boys” and other justifications. The result is a conditioning of our brains to believe the objectification of women is normal and acceptable.

However, the good news is there is a better pathway that we can train our brains to use—the pathway of the protector. The protector pathway is one where we invite Immanuel (Jesus’ name meaning “God with us”) to empower us to make the conscious effort to see each woman, and especially anyone we are tempted to objectify, as a whole person, in the proper category of: mother, sister, or daughter. One way to access the protector pathway is to offer up the simple prayer, “Jesus, who is she to me? Followed by “What does it mean for me to be her protector?”

I believe this deliberate, prayerful action helps a man move out of the pathway of consumption and objectification, the pathway of seeing a woman as body parts, into the

protective pathway of seeing her as a unique and real person. However, it takes focused and deliberate attention to train the pathways of the brain to go down this route because we previously trained them for the predatory pathway. It doesn't just happen because you read this and decide, "I want to do that."

The reality is that you have been on the other pathway so many times that it is like a six-lane freeway that your brain takes without noticing. The neglected protector pathway, however, is currently just a footpath through tall grass that must be consciously looked for and chosen. Therefore, it is going to take focused, committed effort to retrain the brain. I also believe that men must be in community with other men where they regularly share their struggles and victories in this arena to make this transition. It's one more reason that daily check ins are critical.

The answer to the problem of consumptive objectification is not the avoidance of all women or even the bouncing of our eyes. The answer is the purposeful training of our brains so that we see the true beauty and humanity of every woman as we acknowledge and appreciate who she is to me. Because a man can see the beauty of his daughter and thank God for making her a beautiful woman, he can also learn to see other women in the same light. I am quite confident every man can learn this skill, but learning it requires hard work and brothers in recovery who are also committed to learning together.

It is also critical to address the difficult reality that some men have struggled with seeing their own daughters through sexual and objective lenses: I believe this struggle is still a struggle of not seeing clearly who she is. Because of his wounding, his early sexual conditioning, and other factors, he fails to see her as a daughter to protect, but instead as an object to consume. It is a struggle—almost always going back to childhood trauma that included confusing sexual boundaries, experiences, etc.—that individuals must

address directly and learn the pathway of what does it mean to be a protective father who sees his daughter correctly.

Therefore, just as I have learned that I can even choose to pass on cherry cobbler, I have also learned that I can see a beautiful woman, even one who many might say is dressed "immodestly,"<sup>13</sup> and see her as a mother, sister, or daughter, and most importantly, as a daughter of my Heavenly Father and humanize her rather than objectify her.

Now, this is understandably terrifying for wives of men who have been hurt deeply by their objectification of female beauty after promising to "forsake all others."

Because of this reality, I need to write this next section first to wives and secondly to husbands:

Ladies, when your husband chose to seek and indulge in sexual pleasure through the images, thoughts, fantasies, and even actual interactions with others, he harmed you in the deepest way imaginable. The attachment center is the core on which God designed our brain. We have learned that babies need attachment more than they need food. When you married your husband, he became your primary attachment as you moved away from your mother and your father and bonded to your husband. The sexual intimacy you enjoyed together helped seal that attachment as a form of "super glue." In fact, the Greek word Paul uses in Ephesians 5:31 is *Kallao* which means "glued together."

The reason his looking at porn, having affairs and/or objectifying women hurts so badly is because your brain and your body bonded to him and believed his words when he promised to "forsake all others" on your wedding day. Your discovery of his choosing of others—and the layer upon layer of deceptions that usually go with that discovery, created a deep primary attachment trauma in your mind, body and heart. I know I cannot begin to imagine how deep that pain goes, and unfortunately, even genuinely broken men are

---

<sup>13</sup> The 1 Timothy 2:9 verse often used to tell women to "dress modestly" is about not dressing in a way that

flaunts wealth or position rather than about sexual modesty.

limited in their ability to see that pain. In my trainings with Dr. Minwalla, I have often heard him say “The hardest thing for the human psyche to do is to honestly see the harm we have caused to someone we love.” The tendency of the human heart is to look away from harm, not towards. Sitting in this reality is an excruciatingly lonely and painful place for most who have been harmed this way.

My prayer for you in this place is that you will experience what Hagar discovered when she ran away from Sarah. I pray you will experience the God who sees you. (Gen. 16:13)

Jesus certainly understands what it feels like to be betrayed by someone close to him, and while myself and others can only get a glimpse of your pain, I hope you can experience God seeing you in this place. I also pray that your husband will begin to see you here as well. No, he will never understand fully, but I pray he will gain greater insight that will break his heart in ways that bring deep repentance.

Now, back to the difficult reality of your husband’s noticing, feeling the pull of arousal and then the choice between seeing women as “mothers, sisters or daughters, i.e., human” or objects for his lusts and sexual gratification.

The reason I believe it is important for you to understand this process is to help protect your heart from the enemy’s lies. Let’s say you see a woman you think hits your husband’s arousal template. What happens to you inside? Do you start comparing yourself or feel “less than?” Now let’s say your husband is with you when you see this woman. What do you feel on those occasions? The enemy loves to hit us with toxic shame. He would love for you to see your husband notice the woman and for you to instantly believe it’s further proof that he doesn’t want or care about you. This is an incredibly common and painful struggle that is a result of your primary attachment trauma (his choosing others through pornography, fantasy, and even possibly emotional and/or physical affairs). For some, it also taps into core beliefs and experiences of not being chosen, not being beautiful and/or not “being enough.”

If the enemy can convince you that your husband even noticing or feeling a pull of

attraction to another person is more proof that he doesn’t really want you, then the pain you will experience in everyday life will be much greater than if you understand the natural pull of attraction. It also prevents you from seeing how your husband’s choosing to see women as human beings rather than sexual objects is a form of choosing you.

Husbands: We must have great compassion for the pain our struggles have caused our wives and ask Jesus for the strength to “hold space for their pain” in these places. We must accept and understand that the concepts above are extremely difficult for many to accept. However, you must commit to a process of change that honors your commitment to your wife to “forsake all others.” She is your bride. She is the one you have chosen. She is the one you promised your Heavenly Father that you would “love, honor and protect.”

Although you created this pain in your wife’s heart, you cannot heal this place. Her healing is something she is going to have to find in and through God’s comfort. Yes, your faithfulness can certainly be part of what God uses, however, her pain is too deep for you to fix. Your primary jobs are to attune, validate and hold space for her pain, pray for her and of course not pour additional salt in her wounds by continuing down the paths of lust, objectification and/or deception or any other predatory actions towards women.

Unfortunately, you cannot avoid the paths of lust, objectification, and deception by simply bouncing your eyes and/or avoiding the entire female population. You must remember, noticing, even feeling the initial pull of attraction, is not lusting but a normal part of being human. However, the next steps are critical: You must, in every encounter with every “tempting” person in your life, ask Jesus “Who is she to me?” and “How can I be her protector?” Allow Him to remind you who you are, without making any agreements with the enemy’s lies that say you are a “pervert” because you noticed. You are going to notice, but you are not a beast, and you can choose the path of the protector rather than the predator.

## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. Describe a time in your life where you have cried out to God asking him to take away the burden of your sexual struggles. What was/is good about that cry? What was/is inherently missing?
2. Of the “Six Dailies,” which ones seem the most difficult for you? Why?
3. How do you feel about approaching God every morning? Does that sound like an easy thing to do, Do you think, “I get to have a conversation with my loving Father” or does it sound difficult, i.e. “How can I talk to him after all I have done or the many ways I think He has let me down?”
4. What is your conviction about why you need the “Morning Prayer” time?
5. At what stage of your morning routine do you need to commit to keeping your Morning Prayer time?
6. List any legitimate reasons for not praying in the morning:
7. List your most likely “lame excuses” for not praying in the morning.
8. How many “check in” phone calls are you currently making each week? How many do you believe you need to make?

9. When is the best time during most weekdays for you to make a check in call? Weekends?
  
10. List any legitimate reasons you have for not making a phone call on any given day.
  
11. List your most likely “lame excuses” for not making a phone call on any given day.
  
12. Where do you keep the phone numbers of the men in your group? If they aren’t programmed into your cell phone, why aren’t they?
  
13. Have you experienced a time where you called someone when you were struggling and felt stronger after the call? If yes, what do you remember about your decision to make the call, the conversation and its impact?
  
14. List two people ahead of you in recovery you feel most comfortable calling, two people at a similar place and two people behind you.
  
15. How do you think your week would be different if you talked to all six of these individuals once a week?
  
16. Have you made any phone calls where you felt dismissed, rejected or tolerated? (Or maybe multiple phone calls and only got voice mail.) What lies did Satan throw at you in the wake of those calls?
  
17. Who are the “night owls” in your group? Who would you feel the least uncomfortable calling at midnight? Who are the “early birds?” Who would you feel the least uncomfortable calling at 6 AM?

18. Do you need to make any changes to your cell phone plan? What changes will you commit to make?
  
19. Which is harder for you: allowing a call from a group member to go to your voice mail because it isn't a good time for you or answering a call when you just don't feel like having a "recovery conversation?" Why?
  
20. When is the best time during a normal weekday for you to read recovery material? When is the best time to reflect by writing? How about on the weekends?
  
21. Many men have found it helpful to commit to not doing something they enjoy if they haven't been in their recovery materials for the day/week. Examples include: "I won't watch any TV if I haven't done my recovery work for the day." Or, "I won't play golf on Saturday unless I had a good week in my materials." Is there anything you are ready to commit to along these lines? Who are you going to tell about that commitment?
  
22. List any legitimate reasons you have for not reading and reflecting on any given day.
  
23. List your most likely "lame excuses" for not reading and reflecting on any given day.
  
24. Why is it a good idea for you to go to a group meeting when you do not feel like going?
  
25. How difficult is it (or would it be) for you to go to group after a slip or a crash? Why? What truths do you need to remind yourself of, if and when, you are in that situation?

26. How can you relate the mountain climbing illustration in the section on attending meetings to your experience to this point? Who can you see in front of you giving you hope? When have you experienced someone coming back for you or coming along side you when you were discouraged?
27. Realistically, how many group meetings can you attend in most weeks? What is your bare minimum: “I need to be at \_\_\_\_\_ groups each week to survive?” What is your maximized thinking: “I will thrive and do my best in recovery if I attend \_\_\_\_\_ groups each week?”
28. Practice appreciation right now: Try the following simple prayer and then write down any appreciation Jesus brings to your mind.

*Dear Jesus, Please bring to my mind something I can appreciate. Remind me of a time when I felt your presence or a gift you have given me or anything else I can focus my mind on and experience genuine appreciation.*

Now give a name to your appreciation story: \_\_\_\_\_

Now write a “Thank You” to Jesus about what the appreciation He has given you.

*Dear Jesus, Thank you for . . .*

Finally, write a response from Jesus to you about your “Thank You.”

29. In what ways does the “this doesn’t feel very natural” response of the golfer fit how you feel about your new recovery behaviors?
29. How well has your “old way” worked for you in the battle for your sexuality?

30. How do you relate to Darrell's "Cherry Cobbler" story?
31. When and how have you received the message that women are "dangerous?"
32. If you have tried to use the "bouncing your eyes" method of avoiding lust, how well has that worked for you? When has it helped and when has it not helped?
33. What does Sheila Gregoire's story about the young women in the elevator raise in your heart for the women?
34. How has the fear of beautiful people affected you? What happens inside you when you see someone you find attractive?
35. What are your thoughts about the statement "God created each one of us with "wanters."
36. What does the three steps of "Noticing, Desiring, Decision" speak to you in your struggle with lust?
37. How can you relate to the man who said, "I don't believe it's possible for me to look at a pretty woman and not go to lust."
38. What are your initial thoughts about the "Who is she to me?" concept?

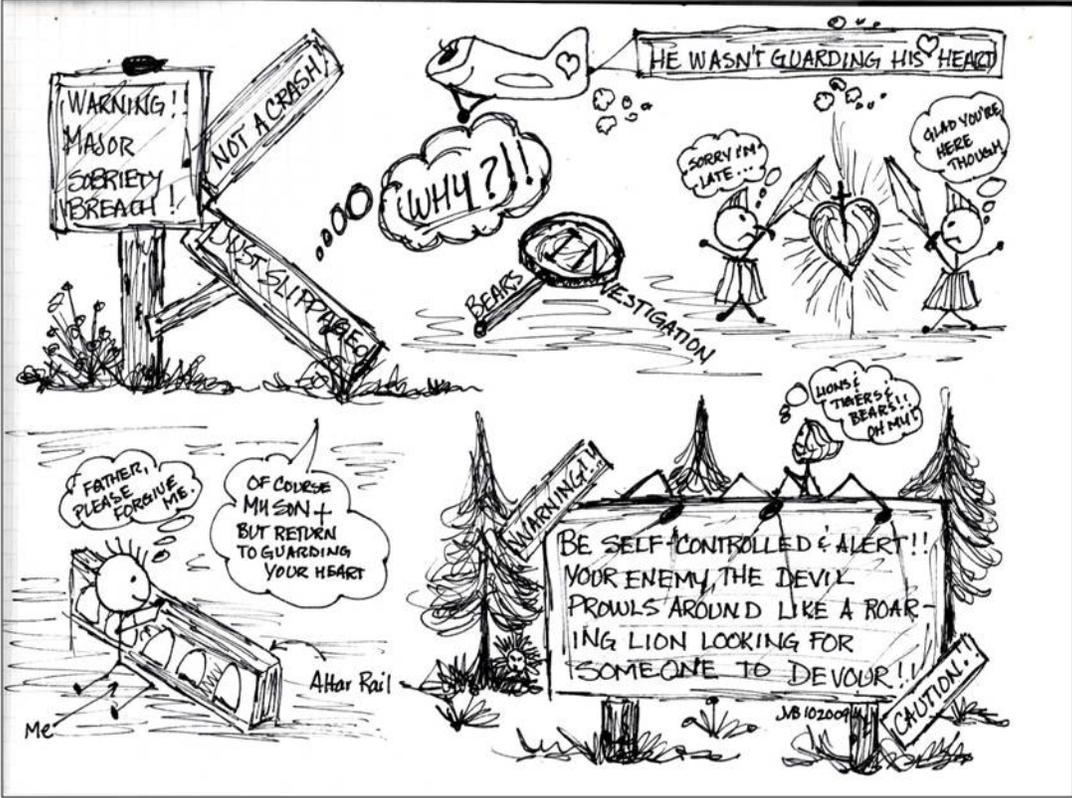
- 39 Describe times when others modeled that it is normal or even expected for men to ogle women?
- 40 Think of a woman, whom you have struggled to objectify, and then take a minute to pray, asking Jesus, “Who is she to me?” Write whatever you sense him saying? Then ask him, “What would it mean for me to be a protector of this mother, sister, or daughter?” Again, use the space below to write whatever comes to your mind as you ask Jesus about her.
- 41 Repeat previous questions with a second woman.
- 42 Repeat with a third. (Yes, we are working on training your brain to notice and take the pathway through the tall grass rather than the highway. The more your practice, the easier it will become to notice the turn off and to start taking it.
- 43 How do you think your wife will respond to these concepts?
- 44 What will help you attune to her very natural fears of you seeing a beautiful woman? (Not how can I fix it, but how can I understand her fear and the pain she experiences in light of my past consumption of women?)
- 45 How have you seen Dr. Minwalla’s statement “The hardest thing for the human psyche to do is to honestly see the harm we have caused to someone we love” play out in your own life?
- 46 What is it like for you to recognize that you cannot heal the pain you have caused your wife?
- 47 What does it mean for you that “You are going to notice, but you are not a beast, and you can choose the path of the protector rather than the predator?”

# Choose Your Reality: A Life Of Addiction, Or A Life Of Recovery



# Handouts and Worksheets

Guard Your Heart



## Appreciation Wall

Write down the name of your daily appreciations. Once you have a list created, see what happens to your frame of mind when you read through it out loud and/or in conversation with the Father.

1.	_____	25.	_____
2.	_____	26.	_____
3.	_____	27.	_____
4.	_____	28.	_____
5.	_____	29.	_____
6.	_____	30.	_____
7.	_____	31.	_____
8.	_____	32.	_____
9.	_____	33.	_____
10.	_____	34.	_____
11.	_____	35.	_____
12.	_____	36.	_____
13.	_____	37.	_____
14.	_____	38.	_____
15.	_____	39.	_____
16.	_____	40.	_____
17.	_____	41.	_____
18.	_____	42.	_____
19.	_____	43.	_____
20.	_____	44.	_____
21.	_____	45.	_____
22.	_____	46.	_____
23.	_____	47.	_____
24.	_____	48.	_____

## Phone Call Tips & Procedures

### Making Calls

1. **Keep group phone numbers with you at all times.** Don't be bashful. Ask for what you need. Ask men in your group if they are willing to share their number with you and offer yours to them. The best thing is to enter group members' numbers into your phone so you always have them on hand. Most men look for any excuse not to make a call so eliminating the need to find a number helps tremendously.
2. **Always ask if the person answering has time and is in a place where they can talk.** If you know you have a difficult issue you need to wrestle with, be up front from the beginning and let the person know it may take a while. If all you need to do is "check in" then communicate that so they will know it will be a relatively short phone call.
3. **The most important thing is to break out of your isolation.** Sometimes the person on the other end of the call may have some very important or insightful things to tell you; sometimes he may say little or nothing of significance. Regardless of his response, God will use your openness as a pathway to healing. A number of years ago, I had a friend who was a computer specialist so whenever I had problems I would call him up for advice. It got to be funny as I went through a stretch where I called him on at least five or six straight occasions where, as I explained the problem to him, I discovered my own solution. I'd always thank him for his help and he would laugh and say something to the effect of, "I didn't do anything." Yet, the reality is I would have still been stuck if I had not picked up the phone and called him. The exact same thing happens in many of our interactions with one another. We often discover things about ourselves as we attempt to describe our struggles to someone else. Many times, what gives us clarity is simply breaking out of isolation and talking outside our own head. We also experience a taste of community simply by knowing someone cares enough to listen.
4. **Check In On Deception & Entitlement.** It is critical that you check in daily on how you are doing with these two areas. Have you followed up and done what you said you were going to do? Have you shaded the truth in interactions with your wife, co-workers or even strangers in any way? Have you bought yourself something or skipped out of work early because you "deserved it?" Have you resented your wife because she isn't responding in ways you believe you are entitled to have her respond? Entitlement and deception are huge parts of our acting-out cycles, and addressing them at every point they surface will pay great dividends.
5. **Share your core emotions.** One of the most significant things we can do each day is identify and then share with at least one other person our core feelings. Because we haven't learned how to handle our emotions, we have turned to addictive things, i.e. porn, sex, food, etc. to help us artificially regulate our emotions. Initially, many don't have a clue what they are feeling. However, forcing ourselves to look at a list of core feelings and choosing one or two helps us begin the process of identifying them which in turn helps us learn how to manage them and even to discover what incredible gifts they are for us. We suggest using the following: **Anger, Fear, Hurt, Sad, Lonely, Shame, Guilt & Joy.**
6. **Share any and all deceptions & IAB's** (See p. 248). Whether you have told a "white lie" to your boss or looked your wife in her eyes and lied to her or even just deceived through omission, you must bring it into the light. Deception is a core issue for almost every man in this struggle. Bringing every deception into the light is an essential part of the process of healing.
7. **Call whenever the thought hits you.** If you think you should make a call, do not talk yourself out of it. At one point in my struggle to find deeper healing in my marriage, I noticed I would often have a passing thought of, "Maybe I should call someone." Many times, I talked myself out

of the call. “No, I’ll be OK. I can handle it.” Every time I chose not to make a call, I ended up in a fight with my wife or in a bad place later that day. Finally, I made a commitment that whenever I even a passing thought to call someone I would. I was honestly shocked at what a difference it made. Do not ignore these promptings.

8. **Realize you will get different reactions, responses and results with every person you call.** We encourage men to call three different types of people. Calling someone who is ahead of you in recovery will help you see a glimpse of the path. It also has the greatest potential for giving you the insights you need right now. Calling someone who is in a similar place as you are gives you someone with whom you can commiserate and with whom you know understands your pain. Calling someone behind you often gives you a glimpse of where you have come from and a greater appreciation of what God is doing in your life. Realize also that you will “connect” with some men better than you will others. As you make phone calls and share in group times, you will find men with whom you feel safe and from whom you find great support. You will also find men who are unable to connect over the phone (some are unable to connect in any context, but especially over the phone). Do not take it personally—just call someone else. You may catch them at a bad time or on a bad day or it just may be their nature. It may even be they aren’t really in recovery, but just going through the motions to appease their spouse or others. Regardless, don’t buy the lie that their response is justification for you to not call.
9. **Don’t take unanswered calls personally.** Because of the sheer number of men in the groups most must set healthy boundaries around their phones. If you call at a time when they can talk, they will answer. If it is not a good time, they will let it go to voicemail. If you leave a message, most will return your call when they can. If you do not leave a message, they will trust you were making a daily call and found someone else with whom you could “check in.” If your call is a crisis call, do not hesitate to leave messages with many men. Someone will eventually call back and the act of leaving messages may help you break out of your isolation.
10. **Make phone call appointments.** One of the most common excuses for not making calls is, “I don’t want to bother anyone.” Much of this fear can be alleviated by asking in group meetings who would be willing to make a phone appointment at a good time for you. For example, simply saying, “I’d like to schedule a phone call at 7:15 AM on Mondays and Thursdays. Is that a good time for anyone?” is likely to get you several options. In fact, it might connect you with someone else who is struggling to make phone calls and become a mutually beneficial relationship. Men also find appointments beneficial because they end up having consistent conversations with the same individuals, which builds relationship and aids in accountability.
11. **Learn other’s schedules:** Find out who are the “night owls” and “early birds” in your group. For many men, late at night and early in the morning are the most common times of struggle. They will often tell me, I knew I needed to talk to someone, but I did not want to wake anyone. Sometimes, you just must run the risk. However, if you know Jeff from group is single and rarely goes to bed before midnight, it will be much easier to call him late, and if you know Gary gets up at 4AM for his commute then calling him at five doesn’t seem daunting anymore.
12. **Use Texts To Set Up Phone Calls, But Not To Replace Them.** Texting is a great way to find a phone call when you need one right now. I.e. you have been hit with a trigger or temptation and know you need a connection but don’t know who is available. A “I really need a phone call right now, who is available?” text sent to five or more of your guys will likely get a quick response. However, it is important to remember that texting while providing some connection doesn’t provide as much as hearing a voice and talking to someone on the other end, so don’t try to skimp on your connection by trying to just use text when you really need a call.

## Receiving Calls

1. **Assess the situation quickly.** Remember, the person calling may simply want to check in or they may be calling at a crisis point. Understanding the difference early in the call will help you respond appropriately so don't be afraid to ask the nature of their call.
2. **Be honest about your availability to talk.** If you only have ten minutes, say so up front. If it is not a good time, ask them if you can call them back. Sometimes you may be in a place where you can listen, but not really give much feedback. For example, I've received calls while traveling in the car with my wife and children. Obviously, that isn't a time for me to talk about some of the specifics of sexual sins, temptations and struggles. Therefore, I have often said, "I can listen (on my headset) but can't say much." Many times, this is what a person really needs. They simply need to break out of their isolation by sharing what is going on inside of them.
3. **Learn to use caller ID.** You do not have to answer every call you receive. If you are not in a good place to talk, let your voicemail take the call. If the person needs to talk, it is his responsibility to leave a message and/or call someone else.
4. **Return calls at your first opportunity.** When someone leaves you a message, understand how difficult that may be for him and call him back as soon as you can. Remember, you and the men in your recovery group are in a battle against a horrific enemy and you desperately need to remain connected with them. They need you and you need them.
5. **Use distinctive ring tones.** If your phone has the capability, enter a special ring tone for guys in your group so you will know, without looking at your phone, if the call is coming from one of your brothers in the battle. (It's also helpful to give your wife her own ringtone)
6. **Turn off the phone** at the appropriate times. You do not have to live in bondage to your cell phones, and it is inconsiderate to answer them during group meetings, church services etc. You do not have to be available at every moment. (No, this does not apply if your wife is pregnant and about ready to deliver or if your child is home alone. You can, however, keep your phone on vibrate or so the ringer does not disturb others.)
7. **Help the caller focus on appreciation.** If someone calls who is struggling, one of the best things you can do is to help him reflect on something for which he is grateful (see daily #5 above). Make sure you listen first and don't immediately ask him what he appreciates as he will feel dismissed and unheard if you jump too quickly to appreciation. However, if you can help him find something he appreciates, talk about it and name it, you will help him tremendously.
8. **Ask the caller what core feelings they are experiencing.** Identifying feelings of anger, sadness, loneliness, fear, shame, guilt, hurt and joy helps us to begin to accept that we are emotional beings and that our emotions are God given and therefore good. It also helps us to see we aren't alone in our emotions. Your asking him about his emotions validates them and also provides an opportunity for him to experience someone attuning to him and his emotions.

## Sexual Integrity Group Meeting Agenda

### Big Group Time: (60 minutes)

Open Sharing: Time for group members to ask questions or share things they have read, learned or experienced during the previous week. Sharing should focus on scripture and recovery materials used in our ministry. Outside materials are OK on occasions but should not be brought up continually unless the specific materials have been encouraged by group leaders.

Group Leader Sharing: Usually one of the group leaders will have something to share in the light of recovery or will lead a discussion of a section of this manual or other recovery material.

Personal stories: When someone comes to their first group, we generally have two or three individuals “tell their story,” i.e. tell their history of addiction, how they ended up in the group and about God’s work in their life to lead them to freedom. We then allow the new person to tell as much of his story as he feels safe to share. If a leader asks you to tell your story, please try to keep it to ten minutes or less. (Writing out your story can be very helpful for getting the critical elements and can also be an incredibly valuable recovery exercise.)

### Check in Time (45-60 minutes)

Break up into groups of three or four men.

Each person shares the following:

1. **What is my “take home point”** from the big group discussion. One of the incredibly valuable things about being in a group is putting yourself out there by sharing your thoughts, struggles, etc. However, in the big group, that is often very difficult for many. However, in a group of three or four, you can have greater courage and your sharing will be beneficial both for you and for the others in your group.
2. **Current struggles:** where are you really at today? What emotions, frustrations and difficult situations are you currently facing? For Example: “My wife and I have been in a huge fight and I’m really angry” or “Work has been incredibly stressful this week and my boss has been all over me” or “I’ve had the best day of my life.”
3. **Core Feelings:** Check in on what you are feeling right now and/or during your day. While there are many good feeling lists, we think it’s helpful to use one of these eight feeling words: Angry, Hurt, Lonely, Sad, Afraid, Shame, Guilt or Joy.
4. **What recovery work have you done in the past week?** How did you do on the “Six Dailies” this week? For example: “I worked through chapters 3 & 4 in this manual, made a phone call every day and this is my second group meeting this week.”
5. **Any sin that needs to be confessed,** both sexual sins and non-sexual sins as all sin has a way of “entangling” and leading us into isolation from God and from others. You must address sexual slips or crashes from the previous week directly. While it seems safer just to say, “I crashed on Tuesday night,” we believe specific confessions, (“I surfed porn online for three hours and masturbated four times” or “I woke up from a sexually explicit dream, continued the fantasy and masturbated”) opens our hearts to experience real fellowship and the healing God offers. “But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:7-9). “Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (James 5:16).
6. **Are there any sexual sins, deceptions or other IAB’s** (Integrity Abuse Behaviors. See p. 252) I need to bring into the light? (Especially “Am I clean with my wife?” or “Am I holding any secrets?”). **If I have been deceptive in any way,** what I have done (or will I commit to do) to correct any deceptions? This includes direct deceptions through lying or indirect deceptions through omission. This applies to all relationships but especially in your marriage.
7. **Where has “entitlement”** thinking, crept into my words, attitudes or actions since my last check in?

8. **How did I do with last week's goals and what are my recovery goals for the coming week?** For example: "I hope to complete Chapter 6 in the *Wild At Heart Field Manual*, make a phone call every day and go to group on Thursday and again on Sunday."
9. **What is one thing I have read, learned or experienced** this week that has been helpful to me. (Yes that does require reading and learning. You need it for your journey, but you also need it so you will have something to contribute to your group meeting.)
10. **Close by praying together**, allowing each person who wishes to pray for the other men in the group and for his own needs.

**Daily Check In:** One of the most powerful things you can do for your recovery is make a commitment and then follow through by doing a daily check in using the points above. Whether that check in is done in an in-person group, a zoom group or a phone call will depend on your specific circumstance. However, daily checking in on these critical matters will help you find your path to freedom.

## Three Circles Plan

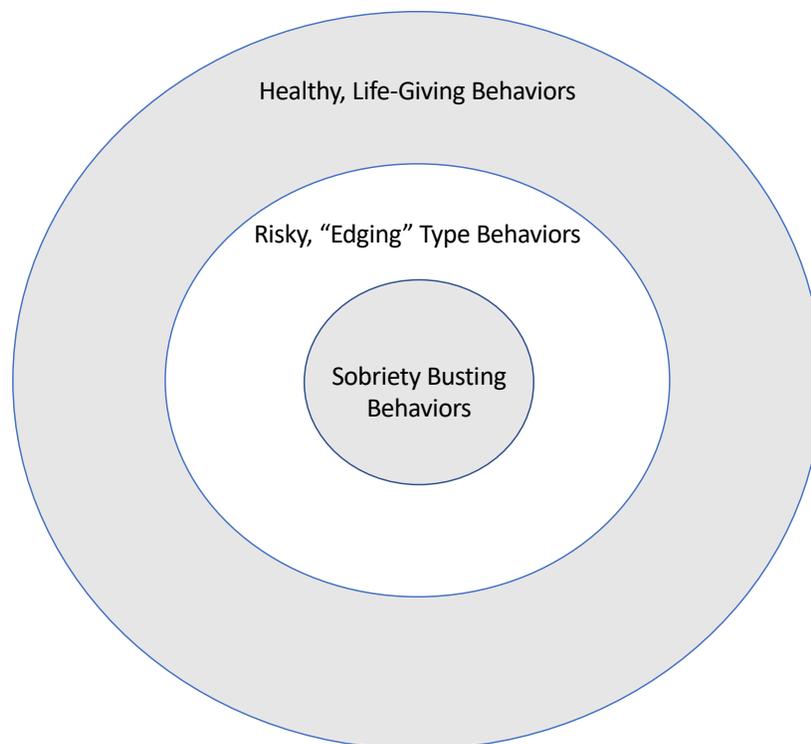
Even very early in the recovery process, it is essential clearly identify what you are wanting to avoid as well as what is helpful and good for you. One tool that many in different schools of recovery have found helpful is the “Three Circle Plan.”

**Step One** of this plan is an exercise using three concentric circles. The innermost circle contains your “Red” acting-out behaviors that you have identified as your core sobriety behaviors. I.e. if I do any of these things, then I will acknowledge that I have lost my sobriety and also need to start my “day count” over.

The next circle, think of yellow for warning, consists of things that, while I don’t consider “sobriety busters,” I know they are wrong, and/or have me on a dangerous path towards relapse. These could include things such as staying up too late, mindlessly channel surfing on your television, or exploring sports or news sites, social media, click bait, etc. You will also find it helpful to list things that aren’t necessarily wrong or even in your control but that bring added temptation to you. I.e. encountering provocative women in public.

The outermost circle, i.e. green areas, are the good and healthy things I do. I.e. Keeping my six dailies, exercise, walks with my wife, playing games with my children, working in my recovery materials, going to counseling, journaling, etc.

Take some time now to create your own personal “Three Circles Worksheet” by drawing three circles on a large piece of paper and then writing your own examples in the circles. Identify as many specifics as you can but recognize this is a dynamic document that you will come back to often and especially when writing your “Personal Recovery Plan.” (In chapter 8)



If you know you struggle with multiple areas of compulsivity, you can also certainly add those items in your inner circles. Many, however, find it helpful to do a separate plan for each struggle. I.e. one for sexual acting out, one for gambling, one for alcohol, one for spending, etc.

**Step two** of your “Three Circles Plan” is to create action plans for what you will do if you participate in or experience any behaviors you listed in either of the inner circles. In other words what is my plan if I recognize I have done or encountered something from my “yellow” circle. What are the specific steps I will take regarding with whom I will share, when I will share, and what I will do to learn how to not repeat that specific behavior. You will need a separate plan for your inner most circle that will require stronger actions. (Chapter 8 of the personal plan will be helpful here.)

Once you are done with your plan--both steps, share it with your sponsor and your counselor and ask them to help you see other specifics you may have missed. Once you have received their input and made your own adjustments, share it with your wife as she will likely have insights into you and your areas of struggles that even your sponsor and counselor will not have. (FYI many couples will need a couples’ session with a skilled counselor for this discussion)

Please note, it is important in this process that your plan remain YOUR plan. What that means is your sponsor, counselor and even your wife will have helpful input, however, they are consultants for you. It must remain your plan. Otherwise, if you put things in your plan out of appeasement, you will either give yourself unspoken permission to cheat on those aspects or you will resent the person who suggested them which will lead to other issues.

Many will find this to be a difficult conversation with their wife. I.e. if she believes you need to have “Reading Sports Websites” in your second circle because there are often inappropriate ads, pictures, etc. but you believe you can read articles about your favorite teams without going down those rabbit holes, then you will be in a quandary. “Do I put that in my plan so that she feels better, or do I risk having a fight with her because I don’t include it?”

Our suggestion would be keep your plan as “Your Plan,” however, do another list of things you are willing to give up, (at least for a time) not because you believe you have to in order to stay safe, but because you understand these things bring up a lot of fear for her. This will allow you to serve her in love by giving up certain activities as a consideration. Voluntarily giving things up that scare her will help build trust and show that you are committed to loving her as Jesus loved the church. When you chose to voluntarily give things up out of love, you will be much less likely to move into resentment than if you see them as unnecessary boundaries imposed by her. The chart on the next page will be helpful in seeing this distinction clearly.

What I need to do (or not do) for my sanity and sobriety	What I'm willing to do (or not do) to help her feel safe and to rebuild trust

## Recovery Goals

(In recommended order though everyone's path is slightly different)

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Completed \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_ Establish a specific time for recovery work. Write that time down here \_\_\_\_\_  
(20 min. per day recommended **minimum**)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Develop habit of keeping the 6 dailies (see Chapter 2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Create a "3 Circles Initial Recovery Plan." (See chapter 2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Complete the sexual history inventory and go over it with a counselor or someone with the training and experience to handle it well (see end of Chapter 3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read the text of *New Hope For Sexual Integrity* by Darrell Brazell.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Watch to "Protector or Predator: Addressing the Harms of Deceptive Sexuality"  
[www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com).
- \_\_\_\_\_ Choose a sponsor and check in **at least** twice a week. (See "Sponsor Guidelines" next page)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have your "Full Disclosure Meeting" with your wife. (See "Disclosure" pages at [www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com))
- \_\_\_\_\_ Work through the application questions in *New Hope For Sexual Integrity*
- \_\_\_\_\_ 90 days of sobriety. (Date God empowered you to make 90 day mark)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Create and use a Personal Recovery Plan (See Chapter 8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Listen to Darrell's "Power of Joy" series. (<http://newhope4si.com/poj>)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read *Unwanted* by Jay Stringer
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read *Pure Desire* by Ted Roberts
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read *Joyful Journeys* by Dr. Jim Wilder et al. and begin using the Immanuel Journaling method on a consistent basis.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read *The Life Model: Living From The Heart Jesus Gave You*
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read *Going Deeper* by Eddie Capparucci
- \_\_\_\_\_ Listen to Darrell's series "POJ2--Maturity 101" available at [www.newhope4si.com/poj](http://www.newhope4si.com/poj)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Develop and implement a Couple's Recovery Plan (See Chapter 18)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do *Wild At Heart Field Manual*<sup>14</sup> by John Eldredge. If you have read the book but not done the workbook, you have no idea what incredible insights you are missing
- \_\_\_\_\_ Write your life story (See chapter 12, question 23)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do *The Way Of The Wild Heart/Fathered By God* workbook by John Eldredge. (2 versions of same book but titled differently)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Read *Intimate Deception* by Dr. Sheri Keffer
- \_\_\_\_\_ Listen to Darrell's series "POJ3--Attachment" series available at [www.newhope4si.com/poj](http://www.newhope4si.com/poj)
- \_\_\_\_\_ If there is any possibility of childhood sexual abuse read *The Wounded Heart* by Dan Allender and work through the companion workbook. It would also be good to see a counselor regularly who is both gifted and trained to help you deal with your trauma. (This is also true for everyone in recovery as a good counselor is worth his or her weight in gold.)

---

<sup>14</sup> **Critical note:** While I highly recommend watching the movies Eldridge recommends as part of the workbook, you need to prioritize honoring your boundaries and likely watch the movies with someone so that you will skip nudity and sexual scenes. Two of the movies he recommends, "Legends of the Fall" and "Titanic" are ones I suggest skipping entirely due to the sexual content.

## Sponsor Guidelines

Learning to use a sponsor can be one of the most helpful ingredients in your recovery. While you are the only one who can be truly responsible for your recovery, a sponsor can help direct you and give you support in your journey. Many times, men honestly do not know how to pick or what to do with a sponsor so here are some guidelines:

### Choosing a sponsor

- 1) Choose someone who has at least 6 months of sobriety. (One year is preferable; however, sometimes that is difficult.) If there are a lot of new people in your group you may need to find someone to “partner with” as sponsors may not be available.
- 2) Choose someone with whom you “connect” at least on some levels. The addict in you may object saying you don’t connect with anyone. That may seem to be true; however, as you get to know others and begin lowering your defenses, you will find connections.
- 3) Ask if he would commit to being your sponsor for the next three months.
- 4) Ask for a convenient time for you to call on at least twice a week: I.e. make a recurring appointment for Tuesdays & Fridays at 11:30 for a 20-minute phone call or meet somewhere for coffee. Remember, if he is a sponsor for multiple people, he will have others who need him, so you will need to respect his time and his schedule.
- 5) Many have found it helpful to do a daily check-in call with their sponsor. While your sponsor may not be able to answer a call every day, many have found it helpful to leave their daily check-in on their voicemail.
- 6) Always remember it is your responsibility to be honest and address the issues you need to address. A sponsor is not an “interrogator” whose job it is to drag the necessary information out of you. It is your responsibility to share what you need to share. Don’t use the cop-out excuse of, “Well, he didn’t ask about . . .”

### Check In

- 1) Share where you are now: i.e. how your week is going, joys, triumphs, struggles, etc.
- 2) Confess any slips or crashes you had during the previous week.
- 3) Share any “close calls,” and places where you feel the “pull” to return to addictive behavior.
- 4) Share any and all deceptions.
- 5) Share what you have read, worked through, etc. during the previous week.
- 6) Share any goals you have for the coming week, i.e. “I plan on working through Chapter 3 in the *New Hope for Sexual Integrity Manual*.”
- 7) Do a “Feelings Check” with the core feelings of Anger, Fear, Hurt, Sad, Lonely, Shame, Guilt and Joy.
- 8) Share how you did with your goals from the previous week.
- 9) Share any pitfalls you see in front of you, i.e. “My wife is going out of town for the weekend, so I will be home alone from Friday until Monday.”
- 10) Share any prayer needs you might have.
- 11) Ask your sponsor what you can pray about for him. (Remember, sponsors have needs also and praying for him helps you by getting you out of your isolation.)

## Additional Resources For Pornography & Sexual Addictions

*Unwanted* by Jay Stringer.

*Pure Desire* by Dr. Ted Roberts.

*Wild At Heart Field Manual* by John Eldredge. Not about pornography specifically, but a powerful book to help men understand who they are in Christ. (**Critical note:** While I recommend watching the movies as part of the work, you need to watch the R rated movies with someone so that you will skip nudity and sexual scenes. Two of the movies, “Legends of the Fall” and “Titanic” I suggest skipping completely as the sexual content is too much for most men in recovery.)

*The Life Model: Living From the Heart Jesus Gave You* by Jim Wilder et al. is a great introduction to recovery and the stages of maturity. It is compact but loaded with rich insights.

*Joyful Journey* by Dr. Jim Wilder et al. Fantastic little book that will introduce you to a form of Journaling that will transform your relationship with Jesus and provide great help in your recovery.

*Scarcity Brain* by Michael Easter. Not about sexual addiction but a very informative and entertaining look at the way our brains get hijacked by reward loops. His *Comfort Crisis* book is also a great read.

*Body Keeps The Score* by Bessel A. van der Kolk. An amazing book that helps us understand how our traumas and neglect from our past affect our present and some methodologies that have been found to help resolve the traumas and the neglect.

*The Way Of The Wild Heart* book and workbook by John Eldredge. (Thomas Nelson 2006). A continuation of the work of *Wild at Heart*. His stages of life for a man are remarkably similar to those laid out in the *Life Model*. *Fathered By God* is essentially the same book with some edits and retitled.

*Going Deeper* by Eddie Capparucci. Excellent look at the different types of inner child within us that drive our struggles.

*Healing The Wounds Of Sexual Addiction* by Mark Laaser. (Previously titled *Faithful & True*) One of the first books on sexual addiction from a Christian perspective. Excellent introduction to sexual addiction and to some of the basic principles of recovery.

*The Road To Grace* by Mark Genung.

*The Betrayal Bind* by Michelle Mays is an excellent book for understanding more of our wife’s experience as well as providing insights into our own struggles.

*Intimate Deception* by Dr. Sheri Keffer is a painful, but essential read for any man seeking to understand the real impact his deceptions and acting out has had on his wife.

*Resilient* by John Eldredge. Chapter 5, “The Assurance of Abundance” is worth the price of the book and the rest is good as well.

*Don’t Call It Love: Recovery From Sexual Addiction* by Patrick Carnes. Insights gleaned from surveying 1500 sexual addicts who had at least 3 years of recovery. The reflections of those walking in freedom are powerful and compelling.

*Dopamine Nation* by Anna Lembke is a great read with tremendous implications for recovery.

*Out of the Shadows* by Patrick Carnes. Secular book, but the first major book on sexual addiction.

*In The Shadows Of The Net* by Patrick Carnes et al. Takes many of the principles from *Out of the Shadows* and updates and applies them to the internet. Excellent resource!

*The Pornography Trap* by Ralph Earle Jr. & Mark R. Laaser. (Beacon Hill, 2002). Good basic introduction to the dynamics of sexual addiction with an emphasis on its effects on clergy.

*The Wounded Heart* by Dan Allender. If there is any possibility of sexual abuse in your background, this book is a “must read.” He also has a workbook many have found to be incredibly helpful.

In recovery, you will want to read everything you can to understand your addiction and to understand what you must do to stay clean and to continue to heal and grow into the man God intended when He created you.

## 90 Day Check List

Day	Pray	R&R	Call	Meet	Appr	C.I. <sup>15</sup>
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						
21						
22						
23						
24						
25						
26						
27						
28						
29						
30						
31						
32						
33						
34						
35						
36						
37						
38						
39						
40						
41						
42						
43						
44						
45						

Day	Pray	R&R	Call	Meet	Appr	C.I.
46						
47						
48						
49						
50						
51						
52						
53						
54						
55						
56						
57						
58						
59						
60						
61						
62						
63						
64						
65						
66						
67						
68						
69						
70						
71						
72						
73						
74						
75						
76						
77						
78						
79						
80						
81						
82						
83						
84						
85						
86						
87						
88						
89						
90						

<sup>15</sup> C.I. stands for a “Formal Check In” as outlined previously in the section describing meetings.

### 3. A ROAD & TWO DITCHES

---

An essential part of your recovery is to honestly face your sin. However, facing your sin provides three very different choices I call **Denial, Despair and Desperation**. In order to picture these choices more clearly, imagine a narrow road with a steep bar ditch on each side. Imagine Desperation is the narrow road leading to recovery and Denial and Despair are the opposite ditches. Obviously, the goal is to drive safely on the road without sliding off into either of the opposite ditches. Satan doesn't care which ditch he pushes you into as long as he can keep you off the road. He knows pushing you off into denial or despair leaves you in a major crash or at least stuck and unable to move forward in the journey. I use the term "desperation" to describe the road because I believe it is only when we are desperate that we truly cry out to God. Whenever we think we can handle it on our own, we typically attempt to live life by the flesh rather than depending on the supernatural power we so desperately need.

Initially, Satan pushes toward the ditch of denial. He knows as long as you don't really see your sin, as long as you think it isn't really that bad, you have no motivation for real change or that any motivation you have is focused on how to fix yourself. Because, after all, if it isn't really that bad then: "I just need a little improvement, a little more self-control. I don't need a complete overhaul; I just need a tune up." However, when circumstances, pain, and the conviction of the Holy Spirit begin to sink in, Satan knows his plan for your life is in grave danger. He knows if you ever get to desperation, you might turn to God. Therefore, he tries to keep you in denial or, when you start seeing the ugly truth, he attempts to send you to the other ditch of despair. He tries to send you to a place where you believe you are hopeless and there is no point in trying to move forward. Despair, however, is a delicate place for Satan because he knows despair and desperation are very close to one another. He knows if he pushes you too hard in despair, you might realize the hopelessness of your situation outside of God's intervention. It is as if he wants to take you right to the edge of the cliff of despair but make sure you never fall off because he knows if you fall, you might land in desperation and cry out to God who always hears and responds to his children.

#### **The Ditch of Denial**

We slide into the denial ditch anytime we refuse to clearly see the horrific nature of our sin or the catastrophic effects it has on ourselves and those around us. Much of the damage is plain to see, but we find a myriad of ways to close our eyes and ignore the evidence. The first portion of this chapter addresses several ways we live in denial of our sin.

#### **Outright Denial**

There are times we act out the principle: "Don't confuse me with the facts; I've already made up my mind." Sometimes, even when the most blatant and obvious effects of our sin stare us in the face; we choose to simply deny they are

there and hope everyone else will join us in our denial. This happened from the beginning. After Cain killed his brother Abel, God confronted him with the question: "Where is your brother, Abel?" Do you remember his response? "I don't know, am I my brother's keeper?" Think for a moment about the denial that is evident in Cain's response. Here is God, the omnipotent creator of the universe asking him where his brother was. God saw Cain kill Abel. He knew exactly where his body was but He gave Cain the opportunity to confess and come clean. Yet Cain responded with, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Did he really think God would join him in his denial? Instead of responding in confession and brokenness,

Cain responds defiantly, denying he has any knowledge of his brother's whereabouts.

Too often, we do the same thing. Someone asks us if we have done something we said we would do, and instead of honestly admitting we dropped the ball, we say "yes" and hope they don't find out the real truth. At some point, almost every man I've counseled with has admitted to flat out lying to his wife about his behaviors. "No, I wasn't looking at porn. I was up half the night reading sports stories or working on our finances." The amazing thing is sometimes we become so adept at lying to others we begin to believe (on some levels) our own lies. It has been well said that *the first person an addict deceives is himself*. It is also critical for us to begin to see the incredible damage this does to our wife as she must choose whether to believe us and stay connected or risk the loss of connection with her primary attachment by believing her gut. Dr. Kevin Skinner who founded Bloom for Women, and who has done numerous surveys, says that the greatest damage done to wives is the gaslighting and other forms of deception that makes them question their own reality.<sup>16</sup>

### **Comparison Denial**

"I know my heart wasn't exactly right, but it isn't as bad as . . ." We look at others around us and instead of going to brokenness over our sin or the hardness of our heart; we justify it by looking at the seemingly worse sins of others. Men who only look at "soft-core pornography" or "swimsuits" justify themselves by saying or thinking, "At least I'm not looking at the hard stuff like most men." Others, who spend countless hours looking at pornography, compare themselves to men who have affairs or hire prostitutes and say, "At least I've never physically cheated on my wife." Often, to ease their toxic shame, they list all the good things they do like taking their kids to the park, going to recitals, school plays etc. and say, "I'm doing so much more than my father did" and use the comparisons as justifications for not looking deeper to the core issues of the heart.

### **Minimization Denial**

One of the most common forms of denial is to admit only a small portion of the problem. Almost every man I've worked with, including myself, started off by only admitting to the "tip of the iceberg." I can't tell you how many men have confessed they had a problem with looking at porn "occasionally" and yet when pressed, or sometimes later as they progressed in their recovery (or faced an imminent polygraph) admitted to looking at porn for several hours a day, multiple days per week. Others admit to looking at porn but minimize the fact they have progressed to the point of chat rooms, phone sex, strip clubs and other acting-out behaviors where they have actual contact (via phone, chat, email or even in person) with "real women."

The minimizations also come out many times in check in groups. A man will confess to having a "crash" but often, unless pressed, will not own up to the fact it wasn't a onetime thing or a momentary mistake but hours online or buying or renting X-rated movies. I receive "Covenant Eyes" reports for a number of men. Over the years, there have been several instances where individuals have crashed, and while they admitted having a crash, they were surprised when I pressed them with the fact it was not just a crash but a binge. When I asked how much time they spent, they would answer something to the effect of, "I probably spent about an hour in the pig pen." The report, however, showed they spent four hours or even more. Someone might say, "Well, at least he confessed to having a crash." Yes, and in a sense that is progress. However, when we minimize our confessions, not only do we not break the shame, we add to it. Satan knows if he can get a man to confess but hide the extent of his sin, he will still have a huge club with which he can beat the man at will. He whispers lies like: "Sure, they offered you God's forgiveness, but do you think they would have if they knew how bad it really was. What if they knew you were still lying to them even while confessing?" You must, therefore, break through denial with truth. Yes, it is often ugly and embarrassing. Yes, it is painful. However, only the truth can set you free.

---

<sup>16</sup> Darrell is in a "Lunch and Learn" group hosted by Dr. Kevin Skinner and has heard him say this on multiple occasions.

## Justification Denial

This is where we say things like: “I know my heart wasn’t right, but under the circumstances . . .” “If you would have been in my shoes, you would have done the exact same thing.” Or, “If you would have been hurt the way the way I have been hurt, you would have medicated also.” In I Samuel 13, the prophet, Samuel, told Saul that in seven days he would come to Gilgal and offer the sacrifice. Saul, however, saw the Philistine army gaining strength every minute he waited. He also watched as his men grew more and more afraid with every passing moment. Finally, on the seventh day, he takes matters into his own hands and offers the sacrifice. After all, you can’t go into a battle without first appeasing God, right? Then, just as he lights the fire, Samuel arrives. When Samuel confronts him, he responds by saying, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord’s favor. So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.’”

Can you hear the justification? Can you see how his “justification” allows him to stay in denial and not face the reality of his sin. From a pragmatic perspective, what Saul does makes perfect sense. Samuel (and God for that matter) had not arrived in time. The battle is going to be lost even before it starts. Of course, Saul takes matters into his own hands. If he does not, they will lose the battle. Or will they? Obviously, God and Samuel thought things were going just fine. Could it be God wanted to teach Saul the battle doesn’t belong to the one with the most soldiers and that a handful of fearful men fighting on God’s side can easily defeat an uncountable host? Could it be God was planning on His arrival at just the right moment, just in time to save the day?

We see Saul’s justification denial even more clearly two chapters later when God instructs Saul to destroy the Amalakites. “Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.” The instructions are clear. He is bringing Divine judgment on the Amalakites for the way they treated the Israelites on their way out of Egypt. Saul, however, spares their king, allows the men to save the best of the livestock and “everything that was good.” When Samuel catches up to

Saul, (who had gone to Carmel to set up a monument in his own honor) Saul has the audacity to greet him with, “The Lord bless you, I have carried out the Lord’s instructions.”

I can’t help but imagine Samuel choking on Saul’s words as he replies, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle?” Saul is so far in the ditch of denial that even when confronted with overwhelming evidence of his sin, he justifies his actions, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we completely destroyed the rest.”

Question: When do you think Saul thought up the part about sacrificing them? My hunch is it came to him in the moment. I personally think this story is a prime example of a “master of the universe” making it up as he goes. After all, worship sanctifies everything, right? Whatever wrong I do, I can pay for it by doing something good. Our flesh reasons: “I know this business deal is a little bit shady, but it’s too good to pass up and I’ll make a ton. I know what I can do; I can give twenty percent instead of just a tithe. That will make up for something won’t it?” It did not for Saul and it does not for you and me.

Saul, as we often are, is so far down in the ditch of denial he cannot even see the road, let alone speak the truth. Then, as if things are not already bad enough, look at how he responds when Samuel presses the point. Samuel interrupts Saul’s defense by saying, “Stop! Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night.” He continues by telling Saul how God anointed him as king and sent him on mission to destroy the Amalakites and concludes with very pointed questions, “Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?” Yet, even when caught red handed, instead of admitting his sin and asking for forgiveness, Saul continues to try to convince Samuel to join him in his denial:

*But I did obey the Lord . . . I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.*

Even when confronted with the facts, Saul maintains his innocence because he is deep in the ditch of denial. Reading the story, it is hard to imagine how he can maintain his defense. Doesn't he know everyone can see the truth? Doesn't he realize his sin stands out like a black stain on a white shirt and there is no justifying his actions? No, he doesn't because he is so deep in his denial of justification, that it all makes perfect sense to him. He honestly cannot understand why no one sees it the way does. He is the king, and as the king, he expects everyone to accept his justifications. He is the "master of the universe." After all, he did not take any of the plunder, the men did and they did it for worship.

The painful question we must ask ourselves is, "How often do I act like Saul?" How often does my sin "make sense?" How often is my heart in an ugly place, but I simply accept it. "After all, anyone in my position would likely do the same thing. Anyone hurting as much as I am hurting would surely reach for something to numb the pain!" I cannot tell you how many times a man has sat in my office and "justified" looking at pornography by blaming his wife. "She always rejects me." "She's never in the mood." "A man has needs you know." Single men have often justified their lusts by blaming God. "If He would just provide a wife, then I wouldn't have to do this anymore." We justify the hardness of our heart by blaming our circumstances instead of going to brokenness and honestly facing how wretched and ugly is a heart that stubbornly refuses to turn to the God who passionately wants to meet us in these painful places.

### **Denial of Momentary Reality**

Another form of denial we often overlook is when we take a momentary slice of time and say or act as if that moment is the reality of life as a whole. A little over a year before I started recovery, my wife and I went to a marriage counselor because she was struggling with a lot of anger and resentment towards me (not at all surprising considering the state of my addiction) and I was struggling with feeling rejected, abandoned etc. When the subject of pornography came up, I admitted I had struggled some in the past but claimed it was not an issue now. Well, the reason it was not was because I was job hunting and in a twisted, addicted mindset knew God would not give me a good ministry position

if I was acting out with porn. At the time, I declared it was not a current issue, it had only been a few weeks or maybe a month at the most since I had used pornography. I have also encountered similar things with so many other men I've learned whenever a man says he has struggled in the past, I always ask him to quantitatively define what he means by the past. I cannot tell you how many men have admitted they have only been clean for a month, a week, or one man in particular who admitted he hadn't looked at any porn since last night so he thought he was good today.

Men in recovery often also wrestle with what does it mean to be honest about the struggle of their past when they are in much healthier places. One man in recovery relayed the following story:

*I remember a situation where a friend was angry and hurt over her boyfriend's vehement defense of his pornography collection. His collection was so extensive it brought disdain even from men who I knew were in deep bondage to sexual addiction. (However, I suspect the addict within them maintained a reverent awe of this person for having so many incredible options available for engaging the depravity of his flesh. I know the addict within me did.) He dismissed her hurt, her anger, and her heart by saying all men have a collection like his and she needed to just "get over it and accept the facts." I ended up in a conversation between her and another female friend where she was uncharacteristically vulnerable. She relayed her pain and distress over the fact she cared deeply for her boyfriend and at the same time could not dismiss her pain over his calloused behavior. At a particularly difficult point both women turned to me and asked, "Is this true. Do ALL men have a collection?" I wanted so much to tell her his desire to value his porn over her was stupid and abusive, that any man who valued pixels and paper over flesh and blood was at best a fool, but I couldn't—because of my own shame over how often I lost the battle against the siren song of pornography, and because I believed my identity was the "Chief Fool." Therefore, my only attempt to comfort*

*came out, "I don't have a collection." While this was true at that moment, it would not have been true many other times, including less than two weeks prior to this conversation. I attempted many times to take solace in my attempt to give aid, but never found any satisfaction.*

Yes, it is a terrifying thing to admit your struggles in situations like this. However, you cannot choose to remain in hiding and walk in the light at the same time. You must be willing to break through the part of your denial that wants to apply the reality of the moment to your entire life. Yes, it is a good thing that in the moment you do not have a collection of porn magazines, videos and computer files. However, to speak and act as if you would never do such a thing is a form of pretense that drives your need to hide, and that need to hide will eventually draw you back into the dark places of your past.

### **The Danger of Denial**

The Danger of Denial (in all its forms) is that it prevents us from seeing how desperately we need a savior. Think about Saul's context: When confronted with his sin, he in essence says, "OK, I don't need forgiveness, I don't need confession, I just need a good reason for why we kept these animals." How many times are you in a similar place? How often are you confronted with your sin and instead of going to brokenness and confession, you start looking for excuses and justifications? In our toxic shame, we look for any distraction that keeps us (and others) from looking at the totality of our mess.

In the ditch of denial, we only see the tip of the iceberg. We see it in terms of behaviors and externals rather than in terms of the heart. The danger is thinking that all we need is a little more discipline, a little more prayer, a little more focus. We just need to work harder. We just need to read our Bible more, pray more, do more good works and everything will be great. However, the reality is none of those things can atone for our sin any more than Saul's offer to "sacrifice" the plunder could atone for his sin. The reality

is we must face our brokenness and the danger of denial is that it keeps us from seeing the mess. Not seeing our mess prevents us from seeing how desperately we need a savior.

### **The Ditch of Despair**

On the other side of denial is an equally dangerous ditch, the **ditch of Despair**. As I said earlier, Satan doesn't care which ditch you are in, just as long as you aren't on the road. Many times, Satan sends you to despair when something finally breaks through your denial. Maybe it is a painful fight with your wife. Maybe it is losing a job because someone turned you in for looking at pornography at work. Maybe it is a major crash after weeks or even months of white knuckling it and not acting out. You finally see the ugliness of your sin, the ugliness of your old heart and Satan seizes the opportunity to drive you right past desperation off the cliff into despair and shame. Here is the scary part: Despair often looks like desperation. When someone starts saying things like, "What a wretched man I am" they sometimes sound like they are on the brink of repentance. In fact, they may be, if they can finish the sentence the same way Paul did in **Romans 7:24-25**: **"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—Through Jesus Christ our Lord!"**

### **The Difference Between Guilt and Toxic Shame<sup>17</sup>**

Unfortunately, many times when we say, "What a wretch I am" it is not about desperation, but about despair. It is not about honestly facing our guilt; it is about swallowing our shame. We must always keep in mind the difference between guilt and toxic shame. Guilt says I have sin I need to deal with, i.e., "I acted like a jerk last night to my wife." Toxic shame says, "I am a jerk and my actions last night prove it." I know these messages sound very similar, but they are as different as night and day. Guilt is about what I have done; toxic shame is about who I am. Guilt always has a solution: confession and the

---

<sup>17</sup> There is a form of "good shame" that is confusing to many. When I use "shame" in this manual, I am not referring to healthy shame messages that help us learn to live in community with one another. I am

referring to "Toxic Shame" messages that attack our identity. For a discussion of "Good shame" and "toxic shame," see *Joy Starts Here*.

cross of Christ. Toxic shame is a lie Satan speaks to me. It is a lie he speaks about my identity. Guilt has a solution. The blood of Jesus washes away any and every sin brought to the cross. I can go to God, and I can go to my wife and confess my sin. Even if my wife is unable to forgive me, God has promised His forgiveness. Satan, however, knows if he can get me focused on my shame, if he can get me to agree with him, “I’m such a jerk,” he can get me to act like the jerk I believe I am. After all, I must live up to my reputation. It is, therefore, crucial to realize toxic shame and despair are ultimately acts where we refuse to take God at his word. Toxic shame and despair are not problems of self-image; they are a lack of faith in God doing what he said he would do. Toxic shame is refusing to believe what God has said about my identity in Christ.

### Our Identity in Christ

Think about it this way, what does scripture say about our identity? What does scripture say about **who I am in Christ?**

“I am a new creation” (II Cor. 5:17)

“I am a temple for the Holy Spirit” (I Cor. 6:19)

“I am redeemed from the curse of the law” (I Peter 1:18)

“I am a saint” (Rom. 1:7; I Cor. 1:2; Phil. 1:1)

“I am holy and without blame before Him in love.” (Eph. 1:4)

“I am victorious” (Rev. 21:7)

“I am complete in him” (Col. 2:10)

“I am free from condemnation” (Rom. 8:1)

(See a more complete list in the “Handouts and Worksheets” section at the end of this chapter.)

When you begin to take God at his word, when you begin to believe you are who He proclaims instead of who Satan whispers you are, you begin to live in strength and victory. When you are in the ditch of despair, the last thing Satan wants you to do is to allow scripture to tell you your identity. He knows if you ever start getting a clear picture of your true identity, you won’t live in the gutter anymore.

We must realize **in Christ, I am no longer defined by my sin, I am defined by my savior.** My identity isn’t what I have done. My identity is not my fallen, broken nature. My identity is Christ. I am who He says I am. That is what it

means to be Christian. That is why I am so hesitant to call men I work with “sex addicts.” That isn’t their identity. Every so often, we have someone come to group who introduces himself as if he were in an AA meeting. “Hi, my name is “Joe” and I’m a sex addict.” Now, while there is great value in admitting where you are at, there is no value in claiming an identity of sin that Jesus Christ has already paid for and removed. *You are not a sex addict. You are a child of the king who struggles with sexual addiction.* Is the struggle powerful? Does it consume much of your life? Absolutely, and it is essential you face the horror of that reality. However, your struggles do not define you. You are not your sin. You are a redeemed son of the King. Does this minimize the struggle? No! It claims the redeeming power of the blood of Jesus Christ and puts Jesus back in his proper place as Lord over all your struggles, no matter how deeply rooted they may be.

The denial ditch says, “It’s not really that bad.” The despair ditch says, “It is so bad that nothing, not even Jesus can handle the problem.” The truth, however, says, “Yes, it is that bad—in fact, it is even worse than I realize. The good news, however, is Jesus’ sacrifice is an overpayment no matter how bad my sin might be.” Living in despair by accepting shame is a denial of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. It is saying to God “The cross is not enough. My sin, my shame is too much to forgive, too much to change.” Paul says in Romans 8:1 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Therefore, **to accept toxic shame is to refuse to take God at his word.** Shame—believing a lie about your identity—is an insult to God and invariably leads to greater sin and the downward spiral of despair.

### The Danger of Despair

While the danger of denial is to believe I don’t need a savior, **the danger of despair is to believe there isn’t a savior.** I can’t tell you how many men I’ve worked with who believed they were scum and therefore acted like scum. However, when we begin to take God at his word, when we can begin to listen more to who God says we are then who Satan says we are, then, and only then, can we begin to become who God created us to be. Someone might say, “Yeah, but what about my sin. What about the

wretched way I treated my wife this week? What about the fact that even right now—reading this material—my primary concern isn't knowing God but trying to figure out how to use God to stop my pain?" Well, that leads us back to the road, to the third choice we have whenever we see our mess.

### **Finding and Staying on the Road of Desperation**

*Desperation is different than denial because in desperation we honestly face the horror of our sin and know we cannot do anything about it. We understand we cannot solve the problem by working harder. We cannot solve the problem by reading more scripture. We cannot solve the problem by going to church. We cannot solve the problem by cleaning up our act, and we can't solve the problem by going to the compulsive places we have gone in the past. The only thing we can do about the problem is confess how ugly it really is and admit only God can clean up the mess. In fact, the New Testament word for "confess" is a word that literally means "to agree with" and therefore carries the meaning that we agree with God that our sin is wretched and ugly. When we confess our sin to Him and to others, we say: "God, I see the ugliness of my sin. I agree with you it is against your nature and your glory, and I'm laying it before you because it is wrong, and I don't want to be there anymore."*

Second, we need to see *desperation is different from despair because even while facing the horror of our sin, we trust our savior can redeem*. In desperation we see the sheer horror of our sin, realize it is insurmountable to us, but in faith cry out, "Oh, God, please have mercy." In faith we cry out: "God, I know this is ugly, I know this is wretched, I know this is horrible, but I also know your son gave his life and his blood for me and your son's blood cleanses me like no bleach ever known to man. It washes me whiter than wool; it cleanses me like hyssop." At this

point, God takes me, and he purifies me right in the middle of my mess. There is nothing in the world that can reach down into the depth of my soul, cleanse me, and take hold of me, nothing except the love of Jesus Christ, the power of the Spirit and the embrace of the Father.

In desperation, we realize God is the only solution. All my strength, all my wisdom, all my effort is futile, but God's intervention is amazing. In desperation, I can look at the most wretched things in my heart, feel incredible pain and remorse for my sin, yet abandon myself to God as the only hope of survival, let alone salvation. That is Paul's point in Romans 7:24-25: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—Through Jesus Christ our Lord!" As long as you and I hold out any hope in anything other than Christ, we are not truly desperate, and we have not faced the depth of the real issues in our lives. If I believe the answer to my problem is for my wife to love me better, or for my kids to not rebel, or for my income to increase, or any other circumstance in my life to change, then I am not truly desperate, and I will not turn to God and experience his deliverance.

Desperation is an incredible opportunity to encounter God. Remember, it was when the people of Israel had Pharaoh and his army chomping at their heels and an ocean in front of them that they discovered God could part the sea. It was when the disciples knew their boat was about to be swallowed up by the storm that they discovered Jesus has the power to silence the storm by commanding it to "be still." Fortunately for us, it is in the times of desperation we discover just how great, how mighty, and how personal God really is in our lives. But this discovery requires a willingness to be broken, a willingness to ask him to pry our fingers off the things and people we are holding on to in our attempt to make this life work. I pray you find the road of desperation.

## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. What evidence have you chosen to ignore, deny, pretend doesn't exist, etc. that should have pointed you to your need to deal with your issues?
2. What outright lies have told to your spouse, friends etc. in order to deny your problem or deny the extent of the problem? List and describe the events around at least three.
3. What lies have you told so often or so well that even you have begun to believe them?
4. In light of the "Comparison Denial" description, how have you compared your actions and motives to others in order to avoid facing the real devastation associated with your sin?
5. How would the addict of your false self finish the following: "Well, at least I haven't . . ."
6. In light of the "Minimization Denial" description, how have you minimized your sin or the consequences of your sin to others? To yourself?
7. What feelings does the thought of a complete confession invoke from within you? Terror, relief, anxiety? Explain and elaborate.

8. In light of the “Justification Denial” description, list and describe some ways you have justified your sin.
  
9. Read I Samuel 13:1-15 and 15:1-31. What parallels can you see between your history of addiction and Saul’s actions, denials and justifications?
  
10. How would the addict of your false self finish the following: “I know what I did wasn’t right, but anyone going through \_\_\_\_\_ would have done something similar.
  
11. When and how have you blamed your wife (or lack of one) for your addiction?
  
12. What do you need to confess and apologize to your wife concerning the way you have consciously and unconsciously blamed her?
  
13. How and when have you used the “denial of momentary reality” to minimize your struggles?
  
14. How has denial (in all its forms) served to protect you from seeing your desperate need for a savior?
  
15. When have you attempted to use busyness, church work, bible study or even “spiritual disciplines” as a solution for your struggle? How long did it work for you? What is the inherent problem with trying to “work” your way out of your sin?

---

Questions 16-19 require completion of your sexual history inventory that is included in the “Handouts and Worksheets” section.

16. One of the primary purposes of the “Sexual History Inventory” is to help you break through your denial about the extent of your struggle and the damage it has done and continues to do in your life. What did you learn about your struggle through completing the sexual history inventory?
17. Another purpose of the inventory is to give you the opportunity to confess “everything” to a counselor, friend, or group leader and escape from the bondage of secrets. Assuming you have done that, what do James 5:16 and I John 1:7-9 say about the condemnation Satan hammers you with concerning your past. (If you haven’t gone over your inventory with your counselor, take the time right now to schedule an appointment. Caution: You need to meet with a counselor before disclosing everything to your wife. See the “Disclosure” page at [www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com) for guidelines.)
18. Most men in our groups have found a prayer from John Eldredge’s *Wild At Heart Field Manual* to be very helpful in breaking some of the soul ties created through sexual acting out. Now would be a great time for you to pray through it as well.

*Lord Jesus, you made me a sexual being and made sexuality to be good and holy. Forgive me for abusing your creation, for all my sexual sins with [her name]. I took something that was not mine to take and I gave away something that was not hers to have. Forgive me, Lord. I bring all these sins under your cross and your atonement. Wash us both with your blood. And by your cross I break all soul ties and all bonds with [name] which were created through those sexual acts. For by your cross I am crucified now to [her name] and she is crucified to me (Gal. 6:14). I release her to you totally, and ask you to restore her to you. I once again present my body and my sexuality to you as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1) to be your holy temple. By the cross and blood of Jesus, I cancel all claims that Satan has gained to me through my sins (Col. 2:13-15). Jesus, restore my strength, restore my heart, restore my sexuality in a holy bond with you, and you alone. I pray this in the mighty name of Jesus.*<sup>18</sup>

19. How hard is it for you to hold on to the reality of your forgiveness and the truth that God will use your confessions to bring healing and transformation?

---

<sup>18</sup> John Eldredge. *Wild At Heart Field Manual* p. 184

20. When have you experienced the ditch of “Despair?”
  
21. Use a struggle from the last few days to illustrate the difference between guilt and shame.
  
22. Complete the “My Identity In Christ” exercise at the end of this chapter. How did you feel while saying those things to yourself? Which of those statements are the most difficult for you to believe? Why? (Please don’t skip this assignment as many have found it to be one of the most significant assignments they have done in their recovery journey.)
  
23. Commit to doing this exercise at least once a week for the next two months and see what kind of difference it makes in your recovery.
  
24. Do you see yourself as a “sex addict” or as a Christian who struggles with “sexual addiction”? What significance do you see in your own life in making this distinction?
  
25. Describe a time in your life when accepting your shame, i.e. believing a lie about your identity, has led to a spiral of sin and despair.
  
26. What would it look like in your life for you to face honestly the horror of your sin and at the same time hold on to the sufficiency of Christ’s payment for your sin?

27. When have you experienced God's intervention during a time of desperation? Describe what you felt, thought and learned during that time.
28. Take the next 15 minutes and write a prayer that begins, "Dear God, I am so desperate for you and your intervention in my life. . . ."



## My Identity In Christ

(Only slightly modified from "Appendix A" in the Pure Desire workbook, p. 67)

Read these statements out loud to yourself, speaking your name. Use emphatic expression to reinforce exactly who you are in Christ. You might even consider doing this in front of a mirror.

1. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am God's child for I am born again of the incorruptible seed of the Word of God which lives in me and abides forever (I Pet. 1:23).
2. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am forgiven of all my sins and washed in the blood of Jesus Christ (Eph 1:7; Heb 9:14; Col 1:14; I John 2:12; I John 1:9).
3. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am a new creation (II Cor. 5:17).
4. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am a temple where the Holy Spirit lives (I Cor. 6:19).
5. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am delivered from the power of darkness and Christ brings me into God's kingdom of light (Col. 1:13).
6. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am redeemed from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13).
7. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am blessed (Deut. 28:1-14; Gal. 3:9).
8. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am a saint (Rom. 1:7; I Co. 1:2; Phil. 1:1).
9. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am holy and without blame before Him in love (Eph. 1:4).
10. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am established to the end (I Cor. 1:8).
11. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have been brought closer to God through the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13).
12. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am victorious (Rev. 21:7).
13. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am set free (John 8:31-36).
14. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am strong in the Lord (Eph. 6:10).
15. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am dead to sin (Rom. 6:2, 11; I Pet. 2:24).
16. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am more than a conqueror (Rom. 8:37).
17. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am a co-heir with Christ (Rom. 8:17).
18. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am sealed with the Holy Spirit of Promise (Eph. 1:13).
19. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am in Christ Jesus by His doing (I Cor. 1:30).
20. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am accepted in Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:7).
21. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am complete in Him (Col. 2:10).
22. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am crucified with Christ (Gal. 2:20).
23. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am alive with Christ (Eph. 2:5).
24. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am free from condemnation (Rom. 8:1).
25. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am reconciled to God (II Cor. 5:18).
26. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am qualified to share in His inheritance (Col. 1:12).
27. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am firmly rooted, established in my faith, overflowing with thankfulness (Col. 2:7).
28. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am a fellow citizen with the saints and of the household of God (Eph. 2:19).
29. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20).
30. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am in the world as He is in Heaven (I John 4:17).
31. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am born of God and the evil one does not touch me (I John 5:18).
32. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am His faithful follower (Rev. 17:14).
33. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am overtaken with blessings (Deut. 28:2; Eph. 1:3).
34. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am His disciple because I have love for others (John 13:34-35).
35. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am the light of the world (Matt. 5:14).
36. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am the salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13).
37. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am the righteousness of God (II Cor. 5:21; I Pet. 2:24).
38. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am a partaker of His divine nature (II Pet. 1:4).
39. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am called of God (II Tim. 1:9).
40. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am chosen (I Thess. 1:4; Eph. 1:4; I Pet. 2:9).
41. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am an ambassador of Christ (II Cor. 5:20).
42. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works (Eph. 2:10).
43. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am the apple of my Father's eye (Deut. 32:10; Ps. 17:8).
44. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am healed by the wounds of Jesus (I Pet. 2:24; Is. 53:5).

45. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am being changed into his image (II Cor. 3:18; Phil. 1:6).
46. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am raised up with Christ and am seated in heavenly places (Col. 2:12; Eph. 2:6).
47. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am beloved of God (Col. 3:12; Rom. 1:7; I Thess. 1:4).
48. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am one in Christ! Hallelujah! (John 17:21-23).
49. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have the mind of Christ (Phil. 2:5; I Cor. 2:16).
50. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have obtained an inheritance (Eph. 1:11).
51. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have access by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18).
52. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have overcome the world (I John 5:4).
53. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have everlasting life and will not be condemned (John 5:24; 6:47).
54. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have the peace of God which transcends all understanding (Phil. 4:7).
55. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have received power, the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
56. I, \_\_\_\_\_, live by and in the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2).
57. I, \_\_\_\_\_, walk in Christ Jesus (Col. 2:6).
58. I, \_\_\_\_\_, can do all things in and through Christ Jesus (Phil 4:13).
59. I, \_\_\_\_\_, shall do even greater things than Jesus did (John 14:12).
60. I, \_\_\_\_\_, possess the Greater One in me because greater is He who is in me than he who is in the world (I John 4:4).
61. I, \_\_\_\_\_, press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God (Phil 3:14).
62. I, \_\_\_\_\_, always triumph in Christ (II Cor. 2:14).
63. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have my life hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).
64. I, \_\_\_\_\_, play with a stacked deck in my favor. (Rom. 8:28) (Even things that appear to be curses, God turns into blessings for me.).
65. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have original glory, as an image bearer, created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27).
66. I, \_\_\_\_\_, have been given a new heart that is good, that wants to be pure and to walk in God's ways (Ez. 36:25-27; Jer. 31:31-34).
67. I, \_\_\_\_\_, am God's child. My sin has been paid for by the blood of Jesus and therefore God is always "Glad as glad can be" to be with me (II Cor. 5:21).

An incredible Bible study is to simply take the time to read and journal about each of these passages in their context. God will bless you in powerful ways when you take the time to do this. You might even begin to realize as Ireneaus said many, many years ago, "The glory of God is man fully alive." You have the image of God at the core of your being. When you are truly yourself, truly who God created you to be; you reflect God's glory in incredible ways. It is time to abandon your addictive life and begin to live out of your glory as an image bearer.

John Eldredge and others have used the following quote that powerfully illustrates this truth in our lives.

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.*

*We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?*

*Actually, who are you not to be?*

*You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.*

*It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.*

*And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.<sup>19</sup>*

---

<sup>19</sup> This quote is often erroneously attributed to Nelson Mandela. However, though I do not agree with everything promoted in her material, proper credit for this quote must go to Marianne Williamson. *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of "A Course in Miracles"* pp 190-191.

## Sexual History Inventory

**Warning: We strongly discourage going through this with your wife.** We believe in full disclosure. I.e. we believe she needs to know the “breadth and depth” of your sexual sins against her. However, some of the specific details in this inventory may be more than she needs at this time. (See “Disclosure” at [www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com) for more information about a facilitated full disclosure that uses this inventory as a starting place for helping you write your disclosure document.) It may be helpful to photocopy these pages so they can be shredded or destroyed once you have finished the process.

Many times men are not aware of the historical factors that fight against them in their recovery. Your personal sexual history plays a significant role in your current struggle and honestly facing your history is a huge step in your fight for freedom. The purpose of this questionnaire is three fold: 1) To help you see the full range of your sexual struggles; 2) To provide a clear picture for those assisting you; and 3) To break shame’s powerful grip that comes with hidden secrets. When you find the courage to share your answers to these questions with a counselor or another individual you will have brought most of the darkest areas of your life out into the light. Please resist the temptation to lie or minimize, as the more honest you are in your answers the more helpful this will be for you. This document will not be shared with anyone else and does not ask for your name. It will simply be used to understand where ground zero really is and to begin the process of rebuilding your sexual behaviors, attitudes, and understandings.

What year were you born?

When and how did you learn “the facts of life”?

What did your parents teach you about sex?

At what age did you begin to discover your sexuality, e.g. body changes, first erections etc.?

Did you have anyone to talk to about your discoveries?

Did anyone ever touch your penis or your bottom in ways that now seem “strange”?

Did you see any women nude or topless as a child? If yes, how often and what were the circumstances?  
(e.g. “until I was nine, my mother would allow me in the room while she showered, dressed, etc.”)

Do you have any childhood memories of touching a woman’s breast, vagina or bottom?

Do you have any childhood memories of being asked to touch a woman’s breast, vagina or bottom?

Do you have any childhood memories of touching a man's penis or bottom?

Do you have any memories of being asked to touch a man's penis or bottom?

At what age were you first exposed to pornography?

When and how were you introduced to masturbation?

How many times per week did you masturbate?

At age 8 \_\_\_\_\_ At age 12 \_\_\_\_\_ At age 14 \_\_\_\_\_ At age 16 \_\_\_\_\_ At age 18 \_\_\_\_\_

As a boy, did you ever experiment sexually with other children? If yes, in what activities did you participate?

- Group masturbation (only on self)
- Group pornography watching/sharing
- Mutual masturbation (stimulating each other)
- Simulated intercourse with clothes on
- Simulated intercourse with clothes off
- Oral sex
- Anal sex
- Other: Please explain

How old were you when you first remember these activities?

How often did this occur?

How old were the other children?

What sex were they?

As a child, did you ever use any objects, (pillows, stuffed animals etc) for simulated sex?

As a child, did you ever have or attempt to have sex with any animals? If yes, how often?

How old were you when you started dating?

How old were you the first time you touched a female's breasts, vagina, or bottom beneath her clothes?  
How old was she?

How old were you the first time a female touched your penis? How old was she?

How old were you the first time you ejaculated during sexual play with someone else?

How often did ejaculation occur during non-intercourse activities?

How old were you the first time you had intercourse?

How old was your partner?

How long did the relationship last?

How many times did you have sex with that first partner?

How did the relationship end?

Have you ever initiated sexual touch or activity with someone who was asleep, intoxicated or unable to give consent? If yes, when? With whom? How often?

How many individuals were you sexual with prior to marriage? (Sexual in a broad sense including masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, etc.)

How many times have you been married?

Answer each of the following questions, for each of your marriages:

(If you have multiple marriages, please just use numbers for each one, i.e. 1. I was 18. 2. I was 24, 3. I was 31 and do this for all questions related to your marriages.)

How old were you when you married?

What was your sexual involvement before marriage? (e.g. regular petting, mutual masturbation, intercourse, oral sex, other.)

How long into the marriage did personal masturbation resurface?

How long into the marriage before you started looking at pornography?

What has been the nature of your pornography? (Write the number 1 for things you did once or twice, 2 for things you used occasionally and 3 for things that are or were a regular part of your acting out.)

- Swimsuits
- Soft-core (Nudity)
- Hard-core (Showing penetration)
- Magazines
- Sexually explicit books and other forms of “story porn”
- Videos/DVD’s
- “R” or even “PG-13” movies with skin or sexual scenes or themes
- Going to porn shops/theaters
- Internet pictures
- Internet movies
- Story porn or “erotic literature”
- Trading or exchanging pictures/video files with others
- Exploring “friends of friends” or even strangers on Facebook or other social media sites
- Posting pictures of self on dating or other sites
- Posting provocative, nude, or sexual pictures of self on websites
- Male homosexual pornography
- Lesbian pornography
- Cross-dressing or transvestite images, video, etc.
- Sexually oriented chat rooms, discussion boards etc.
- Live web cams (only watching)
- Live web cams (watching and showing yourself)
- Cybersex with others on line
- Pornography depicting rape and/or violent acts
- “Snuff” porn (Porn depicting murder & sex combined)
- Legal “barely 18” porn designed to look like child pornography
- Child pornography
- Pornography—story, picture or video focused on incest
- Celebrity pornography
- Video game pornography
- AI and/or Virtual reality pornography
- Animal pornography
- Sadomasochistic pornography
- Nursing/breast milk/diaper pornography
- Bodily fluids/waste pornography (smear on face, body, etc.)
- Frotteurism (unwanted touching) pornography
- Gore, blood, wounds pornography
- Torture pornography
- Manga pornography
- Hentai/Henta pornograph

How did your pornography use progress over time?

At your worst place, how much time per week did you spend looking for or at pornography? When?

At your worst place, how many times per week did you masturbate? When?

Did anything in your pornography use shock or scare you? If yes, what?

Do you currently have any pornography files on any of your computers or other devices?

Are you willing to give someone access and permission to do a scan on your computer for any files? If yes, who and when?

Do you currently have any pornographic magazines, DVD's, or videos? If yes, where are they?

When you had pornographic materials, where did you hide or keep them? Have you revealed this hiding place to your spouse?

Have you ever been to a strip, nude or topless establishment? If yes, answer the following:

When was your last visit to a strip, nude or topless establishment? (Month)                      (Year)

How much did you usually spend when going to a strip, nude or topless establishment?

What is the most you remember spending?

How much do you estimate you have spent in these clubs in your adult life?

While in a strip, nude, or topless establishment. . . (If yes, approximate dates and frequencies)

Have you masturbated?

Has anyone touched your penis?

Have you ever been masturbated by someone else?

Have you ever touched a woman's breasts?

Have you ever touched a woman's bottom?

Have you ever touched a woman's vagina?

Have you ever exposed yourself?

Have you ever engaged in oral sex?

Have you ever engaged in intercourse?

Have you ever ejaculated on yourself?

Have you ever ejaculated on someone else?

Have you ever had contact with a stripper or other worker outside the club? If yes, describe the nature of that contact?

Complete the following: During my life, I have visited a strip, nude, or topless establishment not more than \_\_\_\_\_ times.

Have you ever participated in voyeurism, “window peeking?”

If yes, when, where, how often and when was the last time?

Have you ever watched someone have sex? If yes, when & how often?

Have you ever played with yourself or masturbated while peeking?

Have you ever taken pictures or video of someone without their knowledge or consent for sexual stimulation? If yes, when and how often?

Have you ever intentionally touched someone’s breasts, bottom or genitals without their consent? (Including while they were sleeping or intoxicated) If yes, when & how often?

Answer the following questions for each of your marriages: (Again use numbers to differentiate between your marriages.) If yes, when & how often?

While married . . .

Have you repeatedly fantasized about having sex with anyone else?

Have you propositioned anyone else?

Have you posted on or looked at singles or dating sites on line or elsewhere?

Have you been propositioned?

Have you kissed anyone else?

Have you touched any other woman’s breasts?

Have you touched any other woman’s vagina?

Has anyone else touched your penis?

Have you touched anyone’s penis?

Have you been masturbated by anyone else?

Have you masturbated anyone else?

Have you engaged in oral sex with anyone else?

Have you engaged in intercourse with anyone else?

(If the answer to any of the above questions is yes, please go back and give approximate dates and details, i.e. how many times, how many different people etc.)

While married have you ever had an “emotional affair?” Use questions below to look deeply. One or two “Yes” answers do not automatically mean an emotional affair, but they would bring the possibility to the surface. If yes, please elaborate. (If same sex attracted, include men)

- Are there or have there been any communication (phone or video calls, texts, e-mails, social media messages, etc.) between you and another woman or women, that you have deleted or otherwise intentionally hidden from your wife?
  
- Are there any interactions you have with women in any part of your life (church, work, hobbies, etc.) that you know would make your wife uncomfortable if she was present with you?
  
- Are there any ways you interact with a woman or other women that you would handle differently if your wife were present with you? Do you flirt, offer compliments, or otherwise give out or seek inappropriate attention with other women?
  
- Do you share intimate details about your life, maybe even things you don't share with your wife, with any other woman or other women?
  
- Do you have a relationship with a woman that your wife has asked about or been bothered by, where you've downplayed or minimized her concerns?
  
- Do you have desires or “needs” you feel aren't being met within your marriage, so you seek to have them met through a relationship with another woman?
  
- Do you find extra pleasure in “playing the hero” with any woman or women?

**If you have had a physical or emotional affair during your marriage, be sure to complete the “Post Affair Plan” that follows this inventory.**

What is your current pattern and frequency of masturbation?

How many times in past 24 hours?

How many times in past week?

How many times in past month?

How many times in past 6 months?

Have you ever masturbated in a public restroom, i.e. at work, a mall, theater etc? If yes, where, and when?

Have you ever masturbated in a public place? If yes, where, and when?

Have you ever masturbated someplace where the chance of someone seeing you added to the “thrill”? If yes, where, and when?

Have you ever masturbated anyplace where you knew someone could see you? If yes, who, where and when?

Have you ever attempted to restrict your breathing while masturbating?

Have you ever called a phone sex number? If yes, how often? When was the last time, and how much money have you spent on phone sex?

Have you ever stood nude in front of a door or window where someone could see you?

Have you ever been involved in a sexual act in a public place (including public restrooms)?

Have you ever exposed yourself to anyone you were not involved with? If yes, when, where, and how many times?

Do you feel any sexual attraction to members of your own sex?

Have you had any sexual experiences with a member of your own sex? If yes, please elaborate.

Have you ever had an ongoing sexual relationship with a member of your own sex?

Have you ever licked or sucked a penis?

Have you ever engaged in anal sex?

Have you ever attempted to pressure your wife or other partners to engage in anal sex or any other sexual acts they were uncomfortable with?

Has your wife or other sexual partners complained you were too “pushy” in regard to sexual issues?

Has anyone ever taken nude photographs of you?

Have you ever made a video of you having sex?

Have you ever made a video of anyone having sex?

Have you ever taken nude or sexual photographs or videos of anyone?

Have you ever secretly photographed or made a video of anyone changing clothes, going to restroom, having sex, etc.?

Have you ever watched a sexual partner have sex with someone else?

Has anyone ever watched you have sex with someone?

Have you ever been involved in a threesome or group sex?

Have you engaged in wife or sexual partner swapping?

Have you ever secretly but intentionally brushed against a woman’s breasts?

Have you ever gone to a public place and deliberately brushed against a female’s breasts, bottom, etc.?

Have you ever stolen, searched for or smelled someone else’s underwear?

Have you ever used verbal or physical threats to get sex?

Is there anything in your sexual history you are afraid to discuss with your sponsor, counselor etc? If yes, please explain.

Is there anything in your sexual history you think might be illegal? If yes, please describe.

Have you ever choked your sexual partner during sex?

Has a sexual partner ever choked you during sex?

Have you ever committed forceable rape? (Forced sexual activity, date rape, etc)

Have you ever been accused of rape?

Have you ever been physically abusive to a member of the opposite sex?

Have you ever been accused of sexually touching someone you shouldn’t?

Have you ever been accused by a family member of sexually touching them? If yes, please explain.

Have you ever sexually touched a family member (including brothers, sisters, cousins, etc.)?

Has a family member ever sexually touched you (including brothers, sisters, cousins, etc.)?

Have you ever had sexual contact with a family member (sister, step-sister brother, cousin, etc.)?

Have you ever had sex with a prostitute? If yes, in what sexual acts did you participate?

Since becoming an adult (in relation to anyone under the age of 18 and three or more years younger than you) have you ever done any of the following? If yes, please give month and year of the event and the age of the minor. (Warning, your counselor may be required to report. However, these kind of secrets will keep you in bondage)

Touched a minor's vagina

Touched a minor's penis

Attempted to masturbate a minor

Exposed your penis to a minor

Had a minor touch your penis

Attempted to have a minor masturbate you

Masturbated a minor

Had a minor masturbate you

Engaged in oral sex with a minor

Had intercourse with a minor

Complete the following statements:

During my lifetime I have had not more than \_\_\_ adult (over the age of 16) sexual partners.

During my lifetime I have had not more than \_\_\_ sexual partners who were under the age of 16.

During my lifetime I have had sexual contact with not more than \_\_\_\_\_ prostitutes.

Have you ever misused or been addicted to any illegal drugs or prescription medications? If yes, what, how long and when was the last time you used?

Do you struggle with alcohol? If yes, briefly describe your history.

Complete each of the following statements:

I have consumed not more than \_\_\_\_ alcoholic beverages during the past 24 hours.

I have consumed not more than \_\_\_\_ alcoholic beverages during the past 7 days.

I have consumed not more than \_\_\_\_ alcoholic beverages during past 30 days.

I have consumed not more than \_\_\_\_ alcoholic beverages during past 90 days.

Have you ever combined your struggle with drugs or alcohol with your sexual struggles? If yes, please describe how and when.

Have you ever had sex with someone who was too drunk or too high to actively participate or to know what was happening?

Have you ever been part of an abortion or had a partner lose the baby during the pregnancy? If yes, who, when, and what has been the impact of that on you?

Is there anything else in your sexual history you think might be relevant to your recovery or anything else you have never told anyone, or you would like to confess and bring into the light?

## Using Outside Counselors For Your Sexual History Inventory

If you choose to use a counselor outside of New Hope to go over your sexual history inventory, please follow the procedure below.

1. Ask your counselor if he/she is willing to do this for you.
2. Complete your inventory and give it and a copy of this page of the manual to him/her at least a week prior to your scheduled appointment.
3. Meet with your counselor and answer any questions completely and honestly.

Dear Counselor,

Thank you for your valuable work in the lives of individuals seeking healing, restoration, and recovery. As part of the recovery process, your client has completed the “Sexual History Inventory” included in the *New Hope For Sexual Addiction* manual and needs a safe individual to help process his history. For the protection of the group, we also need verification he has completed this process and to your knowledge there are no current legal issues that would present a known danger to him or to others in the group. As you are probably aware, things spoken to counselors, pastors and lawyers have “legal privileges” that things spoken in group settings do not. Therefore, we must do everything we can to protect other individuals in the group from being drawn into legal proceedings in which they are not involved nor have any prior knowledge.

Examples of current legal issues that could be problematic would include, but are not limited to, issues of child pornography, sexual contact with minors, (physical, cyber or telephone) and pending criminal charges of any kind.

What we ask of you is to read through his completed inventory and then discuss with him all areas of concern. We trust you are capable of recognizing areas such as childhood sexual abuse, early exposure, and major shame areas. As far as legal issues, we understand you can only verify the things he shares with you. It is his responsibility to be forthright and not your responsibility to “uncover.”

After completing the interview, we ask you to sign this sheet and mail it directly to his recovery director. (He should provide you the address.) Please also include a brief note on your letterhead as confirmation. If you need a “release of information” document from your client, we of course support that as well.

If you would like to know about the context of this inventory, please send an email to [info@newhope4si.com](mailto:info@newhope4si.com). We will be happy to send you an electronic version of the manual for your perusal and or use with other clients.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, met with \_\_\_\_\_ and went through his sexual history inventory on \_\_\_\_\_ (date). During this interview, he did not reveal any current legal issues that, in my opinion, would prevent him from participating in your recovery groups.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Post Affair Safety Plan

If you have had an affair of any kind, physical or emotional, it is critical that you work out a safety plan for how you will handle interactions in the future with individuals with whom you have had improper relationships. Please note that you likely will need a trained counselor to help you and your wife work through your plan as there are many painful triggers involved. Also note that one core principle is that you need to process any encounters (even chance encounters) with previous acting-out partners with someone immediately, and before attempting to share with your wife, as a protection for her. Below are some suggestions individuals and couples have found helpful.

1. End all contact. Yes, we know that is sometimes difficult and may even seem impossible in certain situations. However, whenever lines have been crossed, the chances of crossing them again in the future are greatly magnified. In addition, the terror this creates for a spouse is more than anyone should have to bear, and as the offending spouse you must put your wife's need for safety above other considerations. If this means finding a new job, moving to a new neighborhood and/or changing churches, do it. It really is that important.
2. Protect your wife from any hint that the consequences of ending all contact are because of her "insecurities." You violated your vow to "forsake all others" by introducing someone between you and her. Any and all consequences that come as the result of terminating contact are because of your actions and not because of your wife's inability to trust, insecurities, etc. You must own that reality first for yourself and secondly in every communication you have with your wife around this subject.
3. Take the responsibility and initiative, while including your wife, in the written communication ending the relationship. You do not need to have a "final goodbye." You do not need to "let your affair partner down easy." You simply need to end it. If your wife is willing (and able as this would be a very difficult place for most), you can do that with a phone call where your phone is on speaker and your wife is in the room. In this case, stick to a very simple and concise script similar to the following:

"Hello, this is \_\_\_\_\_. Please know you are on speaker and my wife is here with me. I need to let you know that our relationship was wrong. I am married and I hope to save my marriage. In order to do this I need to have absolutely no further communication with you. Please know I will not reply to any phone calls, texts, or any other messages from you. I am sorry for the harm I have done to my wife, my family, myself and to you by engaging in our inappropriate relationship. Goodbye."

Do not try to "wing" this call. Write out a script that your wife also approves of and stick to the script. While this may sound harsh and even painful for your affair partner, you must focus on what is most important—the protection of yourself and your wife. You are not harming your affair partner by ending the relationship abruptly, you harmed her when you began crossing those lines.

If terminating contact via email, text, or any other form of messaging, write out a similar script as above and have your wife's approval before sending. If your previous partner replies in any way, follow the plan you create below for any contact.

If any former partner contacts you in any way, have and follow a plan for responding. Below are some suggestions. Determine with your counselor, sponsor, and wife what needs to be included in your plan.

- Do not answer your phone if you suspect it might be a previous acting-out partner.
- Do not answer your phone if you do not know who is calling you and that they are safe for you. Let the call go to voicemail and deal with it accordingly.

- Do not delete any message left by previous acting-out partners! This might seem like the “safe” thing to do in the moment. However, if you delete the message, and your wife wants to read or listen to it, your having deleted the message will create more fear for her.
- Immediately upon receiving any message, contact your sponsor and/or recovery partners to let them know he/she has reached out to you.
- Within \_\_\_\_\_ number of hours (agreed upon ahead of time by your wife) let her know you have received a message and that you have talked it out with your sponsor/recovery partners and give her the option of reading the message.
- Reply only if your wife wants you to reply with something to the effect of “As I stated when ending the relationship, we cannot have any contact and any further attempts to connect will be ignored.”
- Change your number, email address, social media account or whatever form your previous partner used to contact you. Side note: social media is risky for anyone in recovery and especially dangerous when there have been inappropriate relationships.
- Remove yourself from all forms of social media.
- Have wife or recovery partner change password on email account, social media, etc., and only check those accounts on scheduled times with wife or recovery partner present. (I.e. if you used an email account that could have important messages for legitimate things come through.)

In your written safety plan determine how you will respond if you have a chance encounter with previous partner. That is, if you run into her at the grocery store, conference, movie theater, sporting event, etc. (do not assume that because the acting-out partner lives in another city, you don’t need this part of your plan.) Here is our suggested plan:

1. Upon seeing him/her, immediately leave the store, venue, etc. If driving be sure to go a different direction.
2. Call your sponsor and/or other recovery brothers immediately. Call through your list until you actually speak to someone. Explain what happened, how you handled it and process your core feelings about the encounter. Ask them to pray for you and for your wife.
3. Within \_\_\_\_\_ number of hours (determined by your wife’s pre-discussed need) tell her about the encounter, how you handled it, and answer her questions without defensiveness. Understand she will likely be triggered and upset, but try to remember that her pain is due to your actions in the past and not because of the chance encounter.
4. Process with yourself, your support network, and your wife if you need to avoid that location going forward and if yes, for how long.
5. Consider what changes you need to make to your normal routines, i.e. stores you visit, routes you drive, classes you attend, etc.

Note that some of the suggested courses of action may be helpful and even necessary even before receiving a message or having an accidental contact with a previous acting-out partner.

THANKSGIVING!!  
A TIME FOR FAMILY.

1. THE SEATING PLAN...



## 4. HOW DID I GET HERE?

---

Jeff, one of the men in our groups describes his early experience vividly:

*I still remember the day I discovered my father's stash of pornographic magazines. I was about thirteen and we were moving. As my mom and I packed up some things in the garage we found a satchel. When we opened it, all I saw was a brief glimpse of a woman's breast before my mother quickly closed the satchel and put it in a box along with some of my dad's other things. I don't remember her reaction, (other than the fact she tried to get the box in the truck as quickly as possible) because I was completely focused on memorizing the location and exterior of the box. When we arrived at the new house, I made certain I saw that box come off the truck and carefully watched as my father put it in the attic. The very next time I was home alone, I went straight to the attic and began devouring my father's magazines.*

*The secrecy added to the excitement and the shame. I was terrified my father would discover I had found his stash. I was afraid he would be angry—violent outbursts at me were quite common—and I was also terrified he would either get rid of it or at least put it someplace I could not find it. Therefore, every time I got down his satchel, I always made sure I kept the magazines in the exact order I found them. I also made certain to put the satchel back in the exact same place, in the exact same position. This ritual of secrecy is one I recreated on a frequent basis. I was a “latch key kid” at the time so I learned to medicate my loneliness through the excitement of the sexual materials. Discovering the satchel also drove me to explore every possible hiding place which led to finding more magazines, pornographic video tapes, and even sex toys. These discoveries destroyed my image of my father who was a leader in the church and presented himself and his family as “model Christians.” We looked good on the outside, but I knew the secret, and that secret was a burden I carried in silence.*

*Day after day, I used his materials to fuel my growing addiction. Instead of dreading being home alone, I began to look forward to it and resented the occasions when someone else was in the house. Pornography and masturbation became my only true friends, companions and even family. My father's secret had become my secret, “my precious” and it was destroying us both.*

### Understanding The Starting Point

When I first met Jeff, he had not connected this incident as being a starting point for his addiction. He was like most men are when they first come for help, wondering “How did I get here?”

Imagine you went to sleep in your own bed one night and woke up the next morning in the middle of a dark forest in a heavy fog. You have absolutely no idea where you are or how you got there, let alone how to get home. Unfortunately, this is often how individuals, like Jeff, feel when they first come for help. They know they are in a dark place and while they may know some of the things they have done on the way, they

rarely have a clear sense of the path that led them there. No, understanding where things went wrong will not automatically take them back home; however, it is often an important part of the recovery journey. It is often a part of understanding one's own story which in turn begins to make real change possible.

So, how did we end up here, lost in the darkness of sexual addiction? Let me suggest three primary reasons: 1) lack of relational joy; 2) family dysfunctions; 3) pain.

## The Brain-Joy Connection



In order to understand the first reason, it is helpful to understand a little about the way God designed the human brain. Current research, aided by advancements in X-Ray technology, provides concrete evidence that joyful relationships powerfully impact the human brain. The right orbital pre-frontal cortex depends on joyful connections to fire the chemical processes that build the actual tissue of this crucial portion of the brain. Modern, secular scientists have determined this right orbital pre-frontal cortex is the “control center” that empowers us to override our impulses. They have defined “joyful connections” as “being with someone who is truly glad to be with me.”<sup>20</sup> This means every time you experience being with someone who is truly glad to be with you, that connection adds to the brain tissue of your control center which is the part of your brain that has veto power over your cravings. (We will explore this more in Chapter 5 “Fellowship of the Forgiven” and Chapter 12 “Secure and Insecure Attachment Styles.”)

This process is so critical that joy is the only emotion an infant will seek on his own initiative.<sup>21</sup> You have undoubtedly, though probably unknowingly, participated in this building process with children you knew, as well as the cute baby in the cart in front of you at the grocery store. Jim Wilder calls the process “Climbing Joy Mountain.” It is where you make eye contact with a child and smile. He smiles back and it escalates until he breaks out in a laugh, a giggle and, then eventually turns away. He turns away because his control center has had all the stimulation it can take for the moment. When he has rested enough to “climb” again, he will look back to see if you are willing to play more. This pattern of alternating joy and rest could be called “brain weight training.” Each repetition builds tissue in this extremely important part of the child’s brain.<sup>22</sup>

It is also important to note that “joy connections” cannot be faked or met in any form other than the direct face to face connection

between two individuals. Your left side (and especially your left eye) always communicates the true emotions emanating from the right side of your brain. This results in non-verbal connections passing from your right brain to the right brain of the other person. Simply put, authentic “joy connections” do not result from the words you speak; they result from the non-verbal communication expressed through your face. This communication takes place at the rate of six cycles per second, which is faster than your ability to be consciously aware you are communicating, let alone what you are communicating.<sup>23</sup> In other words, in the time it takes you to become aware you are angry; you have already communicated your anger to the other person, received their emotional response to your anger, and started transmitting your response to their response.

Therefore, parents who are always pre-occupied with work, social media, phones, digital devices or anything else for that matter don’t really connect with their children. They may say the right words, but their children are more in tune to the non-verbal messages they communicate about being bothered, annoyed and even angry at the child’s interruptions. While no one can connect with a child all the time, every child needs regular emotional connection from their parents and other adults in their world.

### Lack of Relational Joy

This connecting process has huge implications for understanding how we got lost in the first place. While we can grow the control center of our brain throughout our lives, its primary growth takes place during early childhood. The first two years are especially critical, and we are ultimately dependent upon the adults in our world for this connection. If a mother can regulate her emotions (because she has a well-developed control center), and if she is relationally available, she will naturally pass this to her child. If, however, she is angry, afraid, or absent, (either physically or emotionally) the child’s development will be greatly stunted.

---

<sup>20</sup> Jim Wilder. “Recovery From Sexual Addiction” video conference.

<sup>21</sup> Jim Wilder. *Living With Men* p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Wilder. “Recovery From Sexual Addiction” video conference.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Colwyn Trevarthen, a research psychologist and brain scientist, conducted an experiment where he had parents maintain an unexpressive face while their young children attempted to communicate. At first, the infants responded by *increasing* their attempt to communicate. Next they became agitated, then disorganized and finally withdrew. After establishing this pattern, he placed them in a closed-circuit television lab where the children could look at their parents' face on a screen at the same time their parents looked at their face through another screen. In this second stage, the parents responded to their children as if they were playing right in front or even over them. The children reacted by accurately responding to the parents' emotional states. However, in the third stage of the experiment, the infants watched a one-minute delayed recording of their parents giving the same positive responses as they had in the second stage. The parents smiled, laughed, cooed or whatever made the child respond before, only this time they were not in sync with the child but were on a one minute "tape delay." The result was incredibly significant. While the infants received positive and even emotive expressions, they responded the same way they did when their parents gave no response at all. They increased their attempts to communicate, became agitated, then dis-organized and then finally withdrew. The deter-mining factor was not whether the responses were positive or negative, but whether they were in sync with the child.<sup>24</sup>

This is incredibly significant to parents because we all know how easy it is to be absorbed in ourselves and occasionally say "good job" or nod our heads or maybe even give a laugh in the attempt to make our children think we are with them when we are only tolerating their presence. It also explains why many of us, while knowing our parents were with us physically, have many of the same symptoms as those whose parents were physically absent. Our parents were in the room, but they were unable to synchronize with us. This lack of synchronization and joyful connection left us with significant deficits in the control center of our brains.

<sup>24</sup> Siegel & Hartzell, *Parenting From The Inside Out* p. 96.

Too often, a child learns his desire to connect, his desire to "climb Joy Mountain" leads to the painful reality of disappointment. He seeks joy, but his smiles are not met by other smiles. His emotions are not reflected and joined, but instead ignored and dismissed. He seeks to climb Joy Mountain but the adults in his world are too busy trying to survive or get ahead to slow down long enough to connect with him. The result is he ends up with a void he seeks to fill in a myriad of ways.

### Storm Warning



Very early in life, many discover pornography, sexual fantasy, masturbation, and even other forms of sexual acting out serve to ease the pain of not having people in their world connect with them. They also discover sex can be a counterfeit source of the very joy they so long to receive. Think of it this way: What a boy needs is the experience of others who are "glad as glad can be" to be with him. He needs the smiles and the right brain to right brain connections that would build his joy center. Pornography, however, provides something that feels similar, but fails to

produce the growth he needs. Remember, right brain to right brain connection only occurs in face-to-face relational interactions: pictures on a page or unsynchronized images on a screen cannot trigger the processes that build the brain tissue of the control center. However, images, fantasy and sexual behaviors powerfully stimulate the pleasure center of the brain which distracts him from his true need. Also, what seems to communicate, “I’m as glad as glad can be” to be with you to a boy more than a beautiful woman appearing naked as the object of the boy’s delight? It is close, but no cigar. It provides excitement, pleasure, and chemical activity in the brain, but not in the right place. It becomes candy for the brain: lots of calories, but no protein. It feels good but has no sustaining power.

The discovery of this counterfeit joy often leads a boy to develop an orgasm centered sexuality. He experientially learns orgasm floods the pleasure center of the brain with dopamine, endorphins, enkephalins and other chemicals that feel good and thus distract him from the pain he feels from being unconnected. God intended this flood of pleasure to occur in a face-to-face encounter with his bride so he would joyfully bond with her. The isolated boy, however, becomes bonded to a fantasy instead of a person. Satan thus twists the very gift God intended to be a pinnacle of joyful connection and uses it to further teach a boy he is ultimately alone. He experiences the powerful feelings and sensations of sex but finds no one with whom he can connect. Lack of relational joy is one of the primary paths most of us took into the forest of sexual addiction.

### **Family Dysfunctions**

A second path into this forest is often the repetition of family dysfunctions. At least two thirds of the men we have worked with know their father had issues with pornography and sexual addiction. Many of the rest have reasons to suspect issues even when they don’t have specific knowledge. Often the passing of the addiction baton takes place when a young, impressionable boy discovers his father’s stash of pornography. The boy is naturally intrigued by the beauty of the female body. His own body reacts strongly to the visual stimuli and to the

intense emotions of the sexual feelings. This is often compounded by the fact his father’s stash was hidden and therefore secret and/or dangerous. Even though his father never said anything about staying out of his materials (after all, it was a hidden secret for most of the fathers as well) the boy knows intuitively no one can know about the stash or about his use of it.

A boy, however, doesn’t have to find his father’s pornography to be harmed by his father’s addiction. Some of our men learned of their fathers’ issues with sex long after leaving home. They never looked at his magazines or watched his videos, and yet the struggle was passed down almost as directly as the color of his hair and the shape of his chin. One of the reasons for this is because of the way a sexual addiction leaves a man in a fog, unable to connect to his wife and his children. A father in the fog of any addiction, but especially the shame of a sexual addiction, is much like the parents in the third stage of Trevarthen’s experiment who were a minute behind. He may attend his son’s games. He might even get on the floor and help him build a fort with Lincoln Logs, but in his distraction and his shame, he doesn’t really connect. He is a minute behind and unable to synchronize with his child. His child interprets this as rejection and suffers the loss of the connecting time that builds the very brain tissue he will need to say no to his cravings. Also, as you have probably noticed in yourself, shame and addiction invariably lead to angry outbursts and/or a boiling rage that is often just below the surface. This unaddressed hurt and anger, even when “under control,” screams loudly to a child who pays far more attention to the non-verbal cues than he does the spoken words.

**Note to fathers:** This is one more reason why it is absolutely vital you deal with your addiction. Even if you have your computer and your materials locked down like Fort Knox, even if your children never discover your struggle, if you stay in your addiction, you will do great harm and set them up for sexual and other struggles of their own.

While a father's sexual struggles are the most apparent family dysfunction contributing to sexual addiction, a mother's issues can also have very damaging effects. I've counseled with several men who witnessed their mother attempt to solve problems and mask pain through sex. They saw her make sexual advances toward her husband (or other men) to find validation, skirt around conflict or avoid unpleasant realities. They heard her talk about sex in ways that cheapened it and broke important boundaries. Many had mothers who did not have good boundaries regarding bathing, the bathroom and dressing which led to boys seeing them in various states of undressed even into adolescence. In some cases, the inappropriateness even went to the point of a mother crossing physical boundaries and having sexual touch or encounters with her son. Obviously, this is incredibly harmful and requires extra healing. We learned about our sexuality from our parents, even if they never said a word about it. We learned what they modeled and in far too many cases what they modeled was anything but healthy.

Siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, and other extended family also play a significant role in laying the foundation for sexual issues. A young boy with a promiscuous older sister listens through bedroom walls and peaks through cracked doors while she acts out with her boyfriends. Uncles and big brothers are notorious for having a stash of porn and even for openly sharing it with younger boys. It is also incredibly common for cousins to introduce the younger ones to things like masturbation and oral sex. Parents tend to drop their guard around family and leave their children unattended and unsupervised for significant periods of time. Parents who are too protective to let their children have sleepovers with the neighbor kids rarely think twice about what "the cousins" might be doing in the family room downstairs during the night.

Family dysfunction comes in many forms and all of them make a child vulnerable to sexual issues. Even if you have no reason to suspect sexual addiction in your family of origin, you undoubtedly are aware of other issues. Many of our men grew up with an alcoholic mother or father. Many remember significant issues of

physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. A rigid religious home, while sometimes looking good on the outside, inflicts incredible damage. While we do not want to send anyone on a "witch hunt" concerning their family of origin, we believe it is essential to honestly face the reality from which we came.

One thing that is often helpful in breaking the denial is to look at the issues we are aware of in others in our family. If you have a sexual addiction, your older sister struggles with

sexual identity issues and your younger brother is addicted to meth, it is incredibly unlikely you came from even a remotely healthy family. Sometimes it isn't this obvious. Often, addicts come from families of co-dependents, and codependency on the surface often looks good and even "normal." Codependents are caretakers who pick up everyone's problems and seem to always "do the right thing" even though the pull beneath their efforts is an ugly attempt to meet their own needs and desires. Looking at issues in our siblings and in their spouses can help us realize things don't really match up with the rosy picture we so often paint of our family of origin. A phrase we use quite often in our groups is, "Normal is what we know, no matter how screwed up it is, and we spend our whole lives trying to get back to normal." Just because *things seemed "normal,"* doesn't mean they were good.

### **Pain Relief**

A third primary reason we ended up lost in the forest of sexual addiction is we learned early in life that sex is a powerful pain medication. In *Don't Call It Love*, Patrick Carnes somewhat humorously points out "the time-honored excuse for not having sex is having a headache. Researchers, however, find that sex gives significant symptomatic relief of migraine

**Note to parents:** If you know your father had sexual issues and you have sexual issues, what do you think the odds are your brother or sister came out of the same household unscathed? What does that say about the perception of safety because "after all, they are family?"

headaches. Similarly, research into arthritis finds that sex gives relief in a number of the more painful forms of that illness.”<sup>25</sup> A few pages later, he quotes Harvey Milkman and Stanley Sunderwirth: “The relationship between endorphins and orgasms was demonstrated by a group of neuroscientists who showed that the level of endorphins in the blood of hamsters increased dramatically after several ejaculations. This finding would account for the well-known decrease of pain during and after sex.”<sup>26</sup>

Sex is a powerful pain-relieving drug that eases both physical and emotional pain. Using sex to medicate often becomes an individual’s primary way to cope. He uses it initially to address the attachment pain mentioned earlier, and then continues to use it throughout life to ease the pain of living in a fallen world. This becomes especially evident when dealing with trauma and abuse.

### The Many Faces of Abuse

When I mention abuse, many often assume that doesn’t apply to them. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve heard people say things like, “I had a pretty good family and at least I wasn’t abused.” Then, in the same meeting talk about the time when they were four and their father, in a fit of anger, held their head under the bath water long enough they came up coughing and gasping for air. Again, “normal is what you know” and many times our “normal” sounds horrific to those with the benefit of viewing things from a different perspective. Abuse is far too often thought of as the bad things that happen to other people.

Dan Allender in his book *The Wounded Heart* describes this reluctance to face and admit abuse quite well:

*I had always been amazed at the reluctance to face the data [the presence of sexual abuse] head on until I had an encounter with a good friend. I had been involved in working with abused people for over a year when I conducted a seminar on the topic. At the seminar I was asked by several people if I had ever been abused. My answer was always no.*

*The good friend who heard me teach asked the same question. I answered in the same manner. He probed and asked if I had ever been in a situation where I felt sexually uncomfortable, awkward, or debased. My answer was so quick it surprised me: “Well, of course.” He asked me the details, and in moments, I recalled forced masturbation at a camp I had attended as an adolescent, a homosexual invitation I turned down in Boy Scouts, and a sexual assault that occurred at a football camp. He looked at me with stunned sorrow and said: ‘Doesn’t that fit your definition of sexual abuse?’ I was dumbfounded. It was not that I had entirely forgotten those events, but I would never have allowed them to be labeled with a word that might open the door to further exploration. **There is a deep reluctance to begin the process of change by admitting that damage has occurred.**”<sup>27</sup>*

One tool we have found helpful for breaking this denial and begin looking honestly at the ways we have been harmed is a list and description of “Wounds” from the Open Hearts Ministry workbook *My Journey*. It is included in the “Handouts and Worksheets” section at the end of this chapter with their permission. Many find reading a list of wounds and abuses eye opening and often painful. If that is true for you, please don’t run from the pain. The pain was there before you identified it. In fact, it is often the very force driving your addiction and the real issue beneath the rage you feel. Having definitions and descriptions of this pain, while difficult, can begin the healing process of bringing it into the light and allowing the fresh air of God’s grace to begin its amazing work.

Think of it like a puncture wound. If you bump into a rusty nail and it penetrates two inches deep into your thigh, what will happen if you just stop the bleeding and put a band aid over it? The surface may heal, but there will very likely be an infection underneath. Over time, the pain will increase and when you finally see a doctor, the first thing he likely will do is cut open the wound and clean out the infection. Then, he

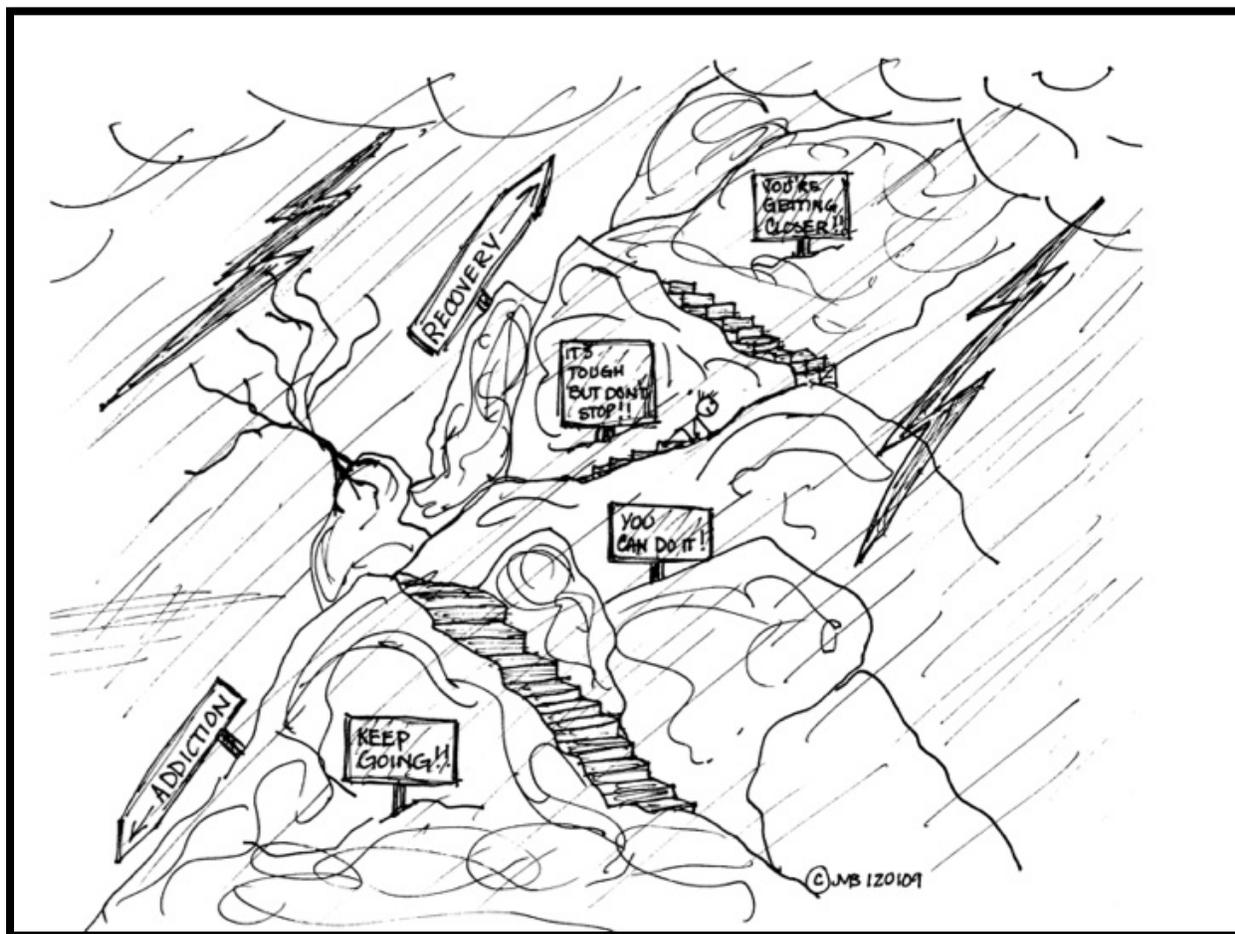
<sup>25</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Don’t Call It Love*, pp. 22-23

<sup>26</sup> Patrick Carnes, *Don’t Call It Love*, p. 31

<sup>27</sup> Dan Allender, *The Wounded Heart* p. 47 (Bold emphasis added)

will pack the wound so that it heals from the inside out. The same thing is true in our lives. We all have wounds and most of us have spent our lives trying to stop the bleeding and putting band aids on the surface. To those who don't know us well, we might look like we are fairly well together. However, the pain inside constantly comes out sideways through our addictions and our sinful, self-protective ways of relating to others.

Therefore, the path that led us into our sexual addiction must be explored. That exploration is often painful and difficult. However, Jesus promised there is freedom in the truth. Beginning to understand how you got lost in the forest of sexual addiction will pay great dividends as you journey out of the forest and into the light.



## **Application & Journaling Questions**

Important: The content of this chapter is weightier and likely more difficult than previous chapters. Please take the all the time you need to process the material and answer these questions. Please do not hurry.

1. How does the imagery of waking up in a dark forest in a heavy fog connect with your experience of sexual struggles?
2. When have you felt a “joy connection” with another person?
3. What memories do you have that provide insight into your father’s level of connection with you, your siblings and/or other children? I.e. is your memory of your dad one of a “Shadow Dad?” He was there, but usually reading the paper, absorbed in television, work or something else?
4. What memories do you have that provide insight into your mother’s level of connection with you, your siblings and/or other children? I.e. do you remember your mother actively engaging you or do you remember her running ninety miles a minute attempting to keep the house together, clothes washed, food on the table and working a part time job?
5. How do you see the idea of turning to pornography as a “counterfeit” joy connection played out in your childhood and early adolescence? How about now?
6. What do you know about your father’s struggle with sexual issues?

7. If you discovered your father's pornography, how does your story compare to Jeff's?
  
8. How have you interpreted your father's "disconnection?" As a rejection of you? As his issue? Do you think your interpretation is correct?
  
9. What do you know about your mother's struggles with sexual issues?
  
10. In what ways can you see her struggles impacting you?
  
11. Do you have any memories of sexual encounters, experiences etc. with family members? If yes, describe what you remember.
  
12. Other than sexual issues, what other dysfunctional ways of relating do you see as you look back upon your family of origin?
  
13. What struggles, addictions etc. are you aware of in your siblings and/or their spouses? How are they similar to yours? What does the presence of these struggles combined with your own struggle tell you about your childhood home?

14. How does the expression, “Normal is what you know, no matter how screwed up it is” apply in your family?
  
15. When have you been consciously aware of using sex as a form of medication?
  
16. What connections can you make with the quote from Dan Allender’s *The Wounded Heart*?

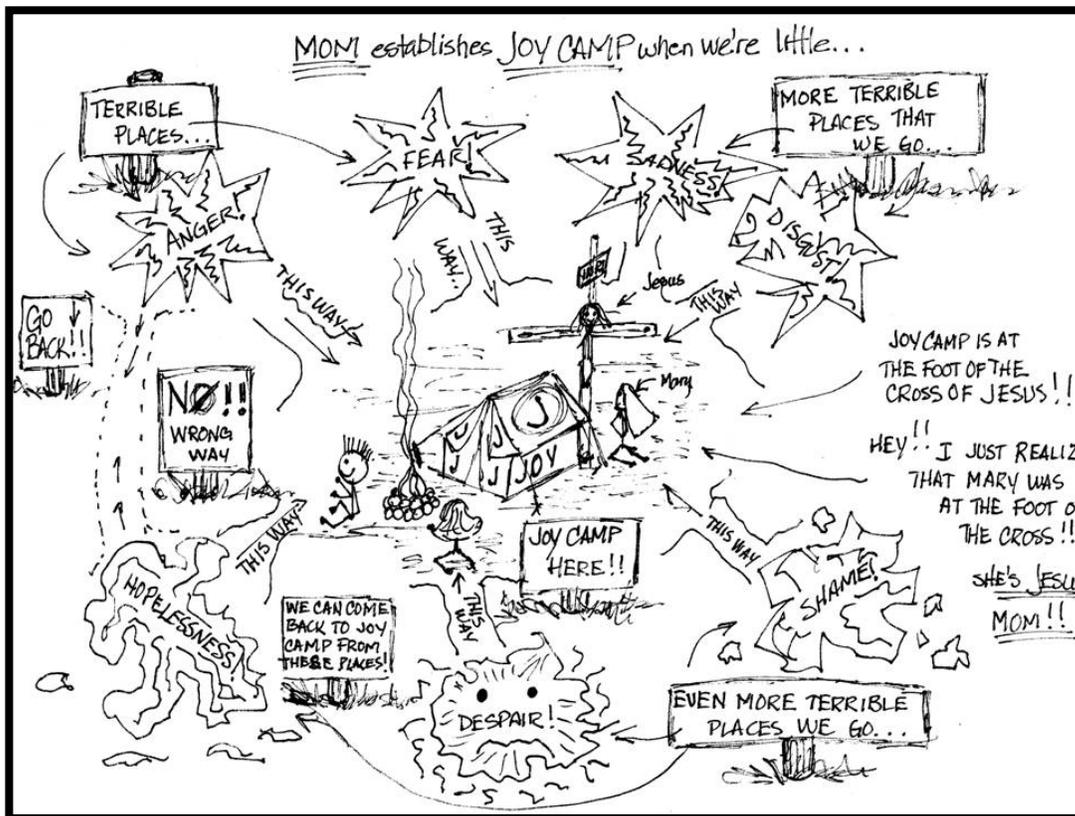
---

Prior to completing the questions below, read the handout  
“Definitions of Typical Wounds” in the “Handouts and Worksheet” section.

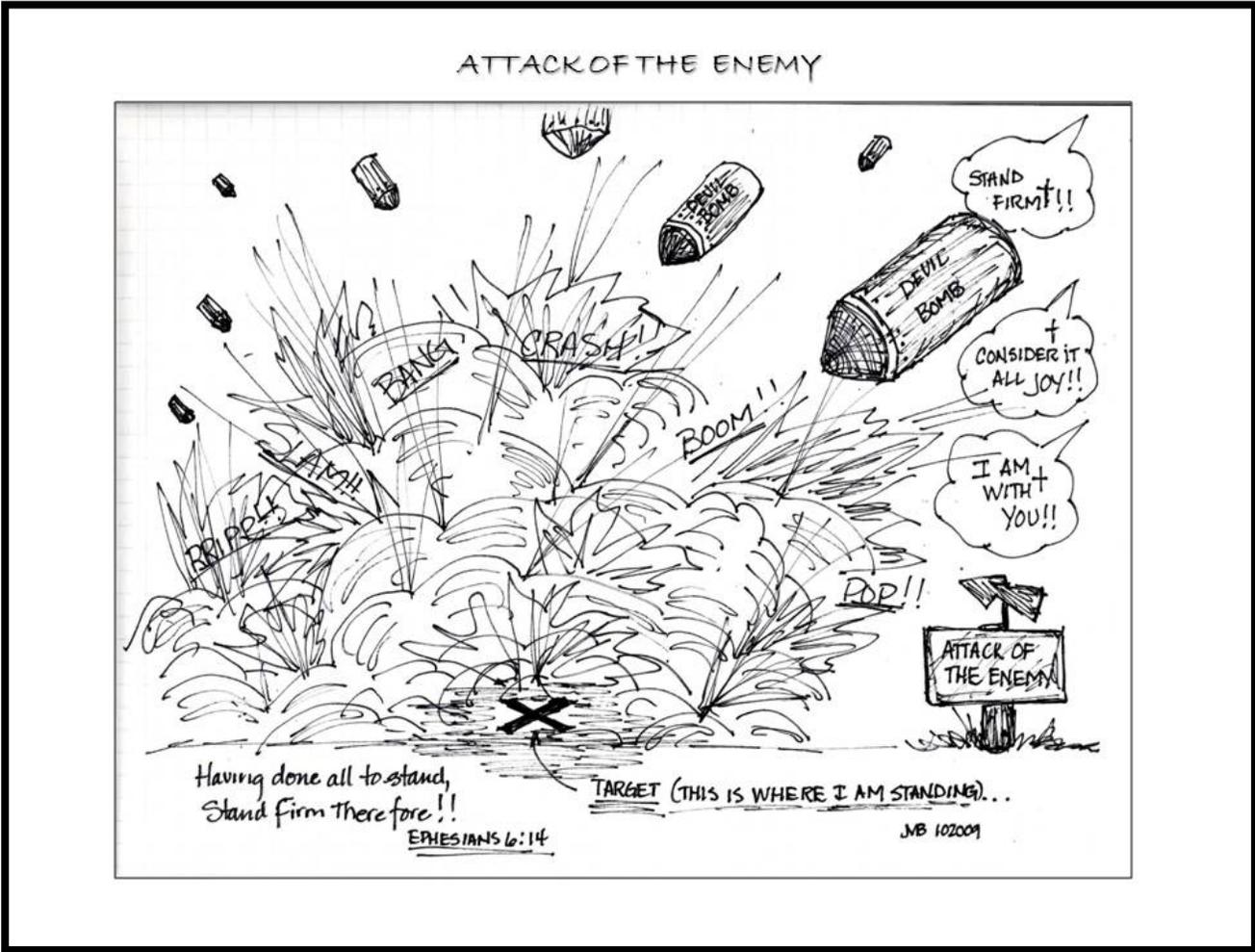
17. What was your initial reaction to reading the list and description of different types of wounds?
  
18. Re-read the description of “Abandonment.” Describe any memories or evidence you have of “abandonment” in your life.
  
19. Re-read the description of “Betrayal.” Describe any memories or evidence you have of “betrayal” in your life.”
  
20. Re-read the description of “Emotional Abuse.” Describe any memories or evidence you have of “emotional abuse” in your life.”

21. Many times the “passive emotional abuse” (or “type A” traumas as described in the Life Model materials) are more difficult to identify. With “active” or “type B” trauma you have specific memories of specific events which allow you to talk and pray very specifically about the abuse. It is difficult to miss what you never had. However, many times, seeing someone receive something we didn’t or even reading about what we missed brings an ache in our soul to the surface. When have you experienced such an ache? Which of the examples listed seem painful to you?
  
22. Re-read the description of “Physical Abuse.” Describe any memories or evidence you have of this in your life.
  
23. Re-read the description of “Sexual Abuse.” Describe any memories or evidence you have of “sexual abuse” in your life?.
  
24. Re-read the description of “Visual Sexual Abuse.” What memories or evidence do you have of “sexual abuse” in your life? What memories do you have of watching anyone of the opposite sex undress, bathe etc. in your presence late enough in your life that you can remember it? Are there any memories of anyone being sexual with themselves or someone else that you observed?
  
25. Re-read the description of “Verbal Sexual Abuse.” Describe any memories or evidence you have of “verbal sexual abuse” in your life.
  
26. Re-read the description of “Psychological Sexual Abuse.” Describe any memories or evidence you have of “psychological sexual abuse” in your life.
  
27. Do you have any history of being abused by your spouse physically, emotionally or sexually? If yes, please describe.

28. Are you aware of any history of “Satanic Ritual Abuse?” If yes, we recommend you connect with a counselor trained in this area before attempting to dive into your trauma. This is a good idea with most trauma, but especially with SRA.
30. Re-read the last two paragraphs of the chapter text and then take a few minutes to write whatever comes to your mind in reference to the image of a doctor re-opening a wound in relation to the things in your life that have hurt you.



# Handouts and Worksheets



## Definitions of Typical Wounds<sup>28</sup>

**Wounds come in a variety of shapes and sizes. You might think of abuse as a very strong word that refers only to a narrow group of experiences that are the experience of a few. Take a look at the following definitions. Does this change how you perceive abuse? Does it change how you look at what happened in your own story?**

**Abandonment** involves being disregarded, ignored, forsaken or discarded. All human beings are biologically hardwired to attach to another human being. Attachment includes the need to bond, connect, belong and be loved. Physical abandonment can be experienced when a child feels left alone through divorce or death, when working parents leave a child [home alone or] with a caregiver and when everyone in a family is too busy to connect or when physical needs are neglected. Emotional abandonment occurs when a child feels that a parent or caregiver does not value or accept them or neglects or dismisses their emotional and developmental needs, causing a child to lose a sense of who they are, what they feel or what they need.

**Betrayal** can be defined as the breaking of any implied or stated commitment of care. It is experiencing a closed heart from someone who is either positionally responsible or has communicated that they will provide care and love. Betrayal attacks the dignity of another in its failure to love well, leaving the person betrayed to feel marred, marked, manipulated or ignored. Anger, contempt, loss of trust, loss of faith, numbness and apathy (who cares?) are often connected to the experience of betrayal.

**Emotional Abuse** may be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal abuse includes defensive anger, which is used to threaten, intimidate or distance another. It may include name calling, cursing, criticism, continual blame-shifting, threats and the use of "zingers" as well as being argumentative, changing the subject, withholding support, humiliating, shaming, dominating, controlling, forgetting, denying and rewriting the past.

Nonverbal abuse occurs through emotional abandonment. It may be experienced in

degrading gestures such as "flipping the bird," the silent treatment, looking down and shaking one's head, refusing to acknowledge someone when he/she enters the room, turning one's back to another when support is needed and/or appropriate. Economic unfairness may also be a form of nonverbal abuse as well as the unspoken use of "male privilege."

Emotional abuse may be active or passive. Active emotional abuse (of the type listed above) damages because of its presence. Passive emotional abuse damages because of its absence. The following are examples:

- Not being cherished and celebrated by one's parents simply by virtue of one's existence.
- Not having the experience of being a delight.
- Not having a parent take the time to understand who you are -- encouraging you to share who you are, what you think and what you feel.
- Not receiving large amounts of non-sexual physical nurturing -- laps to sit on, arms to hold, and a willingness to let you go when you have had enough.
- Not receiving age-appropriate limits and having those limits enforced in ways that do not call your value into question.
- Not being taught how to do hard things - to problem solve, and to develop persistence.
- Not being given opportunities to develop personal resources and talents.

**Physical Abuse** is any kind of physical harm from hair pulling, squeezing, hitting, slapping, pushing, and kicking to use of a weapon to injure and/or kill. Not being given adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical and dental care.

**Sexual Abuse** involves any contact or interaction whereby a vulnerable person (usually a child or adolescent) is used for the sexual stimulation of an older, stronger, or more influential person. (It should be noted here that the stronger or more influential criteria may be real or perceived. Sexual abuse may even occur between two same age children when one child

---

<sup>28</sup> Used by permission from Open Hearts Ministry (www.ohmin.org) and taken from their "Discovering

the Heart of a Leader Workshop." It is an adaptation from their *Journey Guide* p. 12.

is compliant in nature and the other is the leader.)

Sexual abuse is much broader than forced, unforced, or simulated intercourse. It includes any touching, rubbing or patting that is meant to arouse sexual pleasure in the offender. It may also involve visual, verbal, or psychological interaction where there is no physical contact.

Sexual abuse may also include the abuse of a submissive adult by a person in a position of power, such as a priest, pastor, therapist, boss, doctor or teacher. It may also include forced sexual contact, manipulated or through threats when the aggressor is a romantic interest, colleague, co-worker, spouse or any other known person.

**Visual Sexual Abuse** may involve exposing a victim to pornography or to any other sexually provocative scene, including exposure to showering, intercourse, or various states of undress.

**Verbal Sexual Abuse** involves an attempt to seduce or shame a child by the use of sexual or suggestive words. (Occasionally, however, this shaming may be unintentional. The child internalizes the words that a careless adult uses toward her and grows up bearing that false image.)

**Psychological Sexual Abuse** includes interactions where a child is regularly used to play the role of an adult spouse, confidant, or counselor.

**Spiritual Abuse** is the misuse of Scriptures to manipulate, control, or demand submission. Male authority may be misused to justify inappropriate behavior or deny another the right to attend church or engage in worship. Legalism (non biblical rules) demanding performance to attain a good status in the church is non biblical

and gives a false sense of self-righteousness. Any minimizing the pain of the wounded as unspiritual, needing to pray more, read the Bible more rather than entering their pain can feel re-abusive. Ministries to the wounded need the protection of church leaders. Failure to believe reports of abuse in the church and not valuing a person's voice, regardless of age or gender, gives entrance to abuse.

**Spousal Abuse or Battering** can be defined as follows: A pattern of coercive behaviors used to establish control over another person through fear, intimidation, emotional abuse or social isolation; often including the use of or threat of physical or sexual violence.

Spousal sexual abuse involves any contact or interaction whereby a vulnerable person (the spouse) is used for the sexual satisfaction, control or revenge of the other spouse.

**Satanic Ritual Abuse** includes abuse from families who have been involved in the occult (sometimes for generations), people who have been pulled in as children themselves and are programmed to be perpetrators and people from secret lodges, often from the wealthy, educated segments of society. These abusers hide in churches, professions, lodges, and community service organizations. They derive their power to perform supernatural acts by calling Satan to manifest himself in the group rituals, meetings, and ceremonies. Their intent is to gain power through harming and killing the innocent. The most innocent would be an unborn baby. All that they do is a designed perversion of Christianity. The leaders are addicted to evil, engaging in progressively more evil activities. They misuse alcohol and drugs to dull their consciences and the pain of what their addiction demands that they do. Their consciences become seared. They serve Satan.



## 5. THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE FORGIVEN

---

The movie “Braveheart” powerfully portrays a scene where William Wallace arrives just before the Battle of Stirling as the men of Scotland begin to break ranks and flee. From a human perspective their departure makes perfect sense. The British army has them outnumbered at least five to one. They have superior weapons, training and the outcome seems inevitable. Yet Wallace has a different vision and draws the men together through the following dialogue:

*Man in crowd – “That’s not William Wallace. They say he’s seven foot tall.”*

*Wallace – “Yes, I’ve heard. Kills men by the hundreds, and if he were here he’d consume the English with fireballs from his eyes and bolts of lightning from his arse. I am William Wallace, and I see a whole army of my countrymen here in defiance of tyranny. You have come to fight as free men and free men you are. What would you do with that freedom? Will you fight?”*

*Old soldier – “Against that? No. We will run and we will live!”*

*Wallace – “Aye, fight and you may die, run and you’ll live. At least a while. And dying in your beds many years from now, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that, for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell our enemies that they may take our lives, but they’ll never take our freeedom!!!”<sup>29</sup>*

This scene stirs up something very deep with most men. We all long for freedom and we all long to know there is something strong and courageous within us. I had the privilege of speaking to group of men where I showed them this scene and then gave them my version of this moving speech:

*“I am Darrell Brazell, and I see a whole army of my brothers in Christ here in defiance of Satan’s sexual tyranny. You have come to fight as free men and free men you are. What would you do without freedom? Will ye fight?”*

*Man in audience– “No. The enemy is too great. We will hide and we will survive!”*

*Darrell – “Aye, fight and you may die, hide and you will survive, at least a while. But dying in your beds many years from now, isolated, alone and miserable, would you be willing to trade all the days from this day to that, for one chance, just one chance to come back here and tell the enemies of our Lord that they may take our lives, they may take our reputations, they may even take our positions in our workplaces and our churches, but they’ll never take our freeedom!!!”*

### **The Need for a New Battle Strategy**

I see a scene very similar to the Braveheart scene. I see myself standing before an army of men assembled to fight an impossible battle. In

fact, I think the army in front of William Wallace had a much easier foe than you and me. We constantly face the assaults of billboards, commercials, emails, scantily clad young women, and the relentless sexually charged

---

<sup>29</sup> “Braveheart” is an incredible movie with many powerful recovery themes. However, like many “R” rated movies, it does contain some nudity and sexual images. Do not watch it or other such movies without being with someone who knows your struggle and who will hit the “scene skip” button on the remote. See boundaries chapter.

imagery of our culture. Even when we close our eyes to the external assault, Satan attacks with the endless slide shows of images and memories from our past.

I know many have made vows of purity before. I know you have said “This time I will fight.” You have read books, attended large men’s events and left convicted you needed to change. However, a day, a week, a month or even a year later, you found yourself back in the same pig pens you vowed you would never visit again. So today, instead of feeling like William Wallace, you feel a lot like the guy on the second row. You want to fight, but you carry a shovel, not a sword. You want to fight, but you want to live and those things seem inherently contradictory.

The good news is you can fight; and not only can you fight . . . you can win. The enemy is great, but our God is even greater. However, you can’t win by fighting the way you have fought in the past. You can’t win by fighting by yourself. Your only chance to survive, your only chance for victory is to lock arms with other men and stand together no matter what the enemy sends your way.

The goal of this chapter is to lay out a new battle strategy. This new strategy is based on two passages from the Bible. The first is from I John 1:7 which says, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” The second is from James 5:16, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.” These two verses provide an essential framework for any “Fellowship of the Forgiven.”

### **The Promise of Victory**

Before we proceed with details on how to execute the battle, let’s first be reminded of the inherent victory ahead of us. I use the word inherent because I John 1:7 ends with the following promise, “...the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” The word “purifies” comes from the realm of the assayer and has many powerful implications. For example, if you lived in John’s day and dug up a hunk of gold, you would take it to the assayer who would put it in the fire. As it melted, the

gold would sink to the bottom and the impurities would rise to the surface. Now, if you don’t know anything about the process, you might become irate and ask incredulously, “What have you done to my gold?” The assayer would just laugh and tell you to hold on and watch. Then, he would take a mesh screen and skim it over the surface to remove the impurities. Every pass of the mesh would reveal more of the true beauty of the gold.

This is what John promises as an outgrowth of walking in the light. As we live transparent lives, as we stop hiding our mess from one another, guess what happens. Our junk starts coming to the surface and it isn’t pretty. In fact, I’ve been known to scream, “God, get me out of the heat.” I may ask for a giant spoon to stir things up so I can see a little gold again. However, if I trust the process, if I trust the assayer, then God removes the impurities and reveals more of the true beauty he placed within me.

At this point, many people want to argue and say, “But you don’t know how much mess is in my life?” No, you are right, I don’t. However, I do know how much glory is beneath the mess and no amount of mess can destroy that glory. You were created in the image of God and no sin, no shame can remove your glory from the core of your identity.

A friend of mine spent several summers as a child with his grandparents. On Sundays they went to a small country church where they practiced what is known as “one cup communion” (i.e. they all drank from the same silver chalice). At some point, his grandparents moved and took the goblet with them. Unfortunately, someone put it on a shelf in the barn and neglected it for many years. When his grandparents died, they had a family auction (using play money) of all the household items and my friend went for the express purpose of getting the silver chalice. When he got there, he saw it on a table covered with tarnish, pigeon poop and many years of neglect. However, the mess on the surface didn’t deter him because he knew the treasure beneath. He won the auction and brought the chalice home. He cleaned off the pigeon poop, polished away the tarnish and placed it as the centerpiece on his fireplace mantel. It is one of his most prized possessions because of its beauty and its connection to his grandparents.

That is a powerful illustration of what God wants to do with your life. Yes, the tarnish and the pigeon poop are real. Satan has done an incredibly ugly number on our lives. However, the damage is on the surface and the core of who we are is that we are sons of the King of Kings. Others may look at us and only see the mess on the surface, but God sees beneath the stains. He sees his child and longs to release the beauty and the power of his creation. So, with the promise of victory undergirding us, it's time to discuss strategy and execution.

### **Victory Requires Transparency**

Victory requires transparency. I know this firsthand because I spent twenty plus years trying to find victory on my own. I tried everything I could imagine to break free from my addiction. I tried prayer. I tried more discipline. I tried punishing myself when I failed. I even went as far as removing the Internet browser from my laptop so the only thing I could do was email. Yet, I still crashed. So, what finally made the difference? Doing the one thing I was terrified to try: opening up and being honest about my struggle with other men. Coming out of hiding turned out to be a huge key in my recovery from a sexual addiction. When I finally opened up and started being brutally honest with a few safe men about my real struggle, I discovered victory.

Since that time, God has graciously allowed me the privilege of leading groups for men who wrestle with pornography and sexual addiction. One thing I have learned since I started doing this in 2001 is the surprising truth that the common element in the lives of the men who get healthy and the missing element in the guys who do not is real relational connection.

What do I mean? Well, we have had guys come to us who have devoured the materials but remained in isolation. Some of these men have learned enough to white knuckle it for a few months or in a couple rare cases almost a year. However, we have yet to see a man truly walk into freedom who didn't build significant relationships. On the other hand, we have had men who struggled with the materials. They didn't do well in school, so reading, journaling etc. are difficult for them. However, they learned to come to group once, twice, three or even more

times a week and make at least one phone call every day. Well guess what? They started getting healthy. They began experiencing freedom.

Now, that wouldn't be surprising if we really understood the basic truths of the verse from 1 John quoted earlier, **“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”**

Some people think “walking in the light” means getting it right; if we do it right like Jesus did (WWJD), then we have fellowship with one another. However, look at verse 8, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

“Walking in the light” isn't about getting it right; it is about getting it out in the open. “Walking in the light” means living a transparent life. It means we are who we are and we stop trying to prevent others from seeing the truth of our reality. **It means we don't wait for people to discover our mess, we tell them about our mess.**

### **Victory Requires Radical Grace**

Now, it is important to note that truly walking in the light is only possible in the context of radical grace. You can only have the courage to live transparently after catching a glimpse of God's complete forgiveness. Understanding God's complete and total acceptance empowers you to inch out from within the shadows to reveal yourself to others.

If what you reveal to others is met with acceptance and grace, you will find it much easier to inch out a little farther. That is the real power of a good recovery group. When you finally find the courage to confess part of your sin and instead of receiving judgment, receive grace, your heart begins to come alive and you long for more.

Unfortunately, far too many have experienced judgment instead of grace and out of their hurt have vowed to never come out of the shadows again. If this is you, don't let Satan win that easily. The fact some Christians don't understand grace doesn't mean grace does not exist. However, the only way you will discover radical grace is to take the risk and come out of hiding.

Therefore, to help us find the courage to risk disclosure, John gives two incredible promises

to those who courageously walk in the light. The promise of true fellowship and the cleansing that comes from the blood of Jesus. Let's focus on the first promise, true fellowship. "If we walk in the light... we have fellowship with one another." The irony of stepping out into the light is, while it is one of the most terrifying things we will ever do, it is also one of the most endearing things we will ever do.

It is terrifying because we think if anyone truly sees me, if anyone truly sees my mess, they will be repulsed and reject me. Yet, it is endearing because when we are open and honest about our sin, something Divine within the hearts of compassionate believers invariably rises to the surface.

I will never forget a time in our men's group when a man started telling his worst pig pen experience. He told us something he had never told anyone else in the world. When he finished, the next person did the same and we went around the room with guys saying, "I've never told anyone this before. . ." The stories were horrific. Satan's destruction in our lives was incredibly evident, but do you know what we all felt? We all felt and realized we were standing on Holy Ground. There was a bond and a connection in the room that could be felt by every single man. That was over fifteen years ago, and to this day, I can still remember it clearly. I remember praying. "God, you are so amazing. You can even use the manure of our worst sin and shame and turn it into a gift of grace connecting us to one another and breaking through our isolation."

That is real church. That is real fellowship, and it has nothing to do with eating, working together or any of the lesser ways we so often attempt to create fellowship in our modern and misguided church. True fellowship, true connection, true community comes when we lay down our masks and walk in humble transparency with one another. It is an incredibly powerful and beautiful thing.

### Victory Requires Confession

Let's look now at the other key verse from James, "**Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.**" An essential part of every group meeting is "Check in Time" (see "Sexual Integrity Group" description at the end of Chapter 2, "The Six Dailies") where each man

has an opportunity, in a small group of three or four men, to confess any slips, crashes or other sexual sins and especially any deceptions, and then to be prayed for by the men in his group. If you notice carefully, James doesn't say confession brings forgiveness, he says it brings healing. Jesus purchased my forgiveness at the cross and applied it to my account the instant I put my faith in Him. Healing, however, is a mysterious process God works in different ways. James describes one powerful form of healing that comes as a byproduct of living transparently—confessing our sins to one another. Confession, however, requires a context of community.

We see the healing power of the community in the fact we sometimes have men come to groups week after week (or sometimes multiple times per week) and repeatedly confess to acting out with pornography or masturbation and/or lying about it. We pray for them and encourage them any way we know how. Honestly, we sometimes feel like we are at a complete loss as the crashes continue to mount and nothing appears to help. Unfortunately, some men at this stage become discouraged, start missing group meetings and eventually disappear. Thankfully however, things are not always as they appear because we also have men who (even while crashing regularly), stay connected, make phone calls, and continue coming to groups, who eventually find traction and start moving forward in their recovery. God's ways often seem mysterious to us, and we never know when something is finally going to connect in a way that leads to freedom.

### Victory Requires Time

Very few battles are won quickly, and this battle is no exception. Jim Wilder provides insight into this process when he says he is often asked by other counselors why clients will meet with them for months or even years before finally sharing some great pain or trauma, that once it is out in the open, provides the counselor with incredible insight into the individual's struggles and path for healing. His answer is that counselors should not be surprised because you can only face as much trauma as you have joy strength to face. Often, what an individual needs is time in relationship, building up joy strength

so he is strong enough to look under the hood at the real issues.<sup>30</sup>

*Particularly for those who are in recovery, it is essential to be in authentic, joy-producing relationships that can build joy strength and assist in returning to joy. If a person in recovery is not empowered by joy, it may be impossible to face the pain that is part of recovery. In fact, the amount of joy strength available needs to be higher than the amount of pain. Therefore, building joy through life-giving relationships is often the first part of recovery.<sup>31</sup>*

I believe this is what happens in our groups. Men come and for the first time in their lives find a place where they can be truly



honest about who they are. Instead of the usual male banter about sports, work and all the one-upmanship that comes with typical male posing, they have conversations about feelings and openly admit their deceptions and failures. They find relationships based on sharing the real struggles of life. While it often scares the daylights out of them, it also begins building and repairing incredibly neglected places in their hearts and even in their physical brain. As we noted previously, advances in modern brain science have shown the key element in building the control center of our brain is relational connection. Even “non-Christian,” secular scientists have said relational joy (defined as being with someone who is truly glad to be with me) is the key ingredient for building actual brain tissue in the right orbital prefrontal cortex.<sup>32</sup> This portion of our brain is:

*...extremely important for a wide range of processes, including autobiographical memory, self-awareness, response flexibility, hindsight, and the regulation of emotions. These are the very processes shaped by attachment. The development of the prefrontal cortex appears to be profoundly influenced by interpersonal*

*experiences. This is why our early relationships have such a significant impact on our lives. However, this important integrating part of the brain may also continue to develop throughout the life span, so we continue to have the possibility for growth and change.<sup>33</sup>*

This helps explain why the men who make phone calls, do regular check ins, connect in groups, and build genuine relationships start getting healthy. They literally grow the control center of their brains, so they are more able to regulate their emotions and be themselves even in times of stress, fear and pain. It also sheds light on why Scripture speaks so much about joy, fellowship, and community. God knows for us to be healthy and have the strength to live free from addiction to sinful ways, we must connect with our brothers and sisters in Christ in joyful ways.

*Having enough joy strength is fundamental to a person’s well-being. We now know that a ‘joy center’ exists in the right orbital prefrontal cortex of the brain. It has executive control over the entire emotional system. When the joy center has been sufficiently developed, it regulates emotions, pain control and immunity centers; it guides us to act like ourselves; it releases neurotransmitters like dopamine and serotonin; and it is the only part of the brain that overrides the main drive centers—food and sexual impulses, terror and rage.<sup>34</sup>*

### **Victory Requires Community**

Satan also understands the power of community and constantly battles against it. Often after a man has a crash, he hears messages like, “Don’t tell anyone.” “Everyone else is doing great. They will think you are a loser.” “They are going to finally tell you to leave and not come back because you aren’t serious and haven’t really repented.” “Don’t go to group tomorrow. Wait until next week when you can at least say, ‘I had a crash last week, but I’ve been

<sup>30</sup> Jim Wilder: “Joy Bonds” video conference

<sup>31</sup> *Life Model* p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Jim Wilder: “Recovery From Sexual Addiction” video conference.

<sup>33</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Mary Harzell, M. ED. *Parenting From The Inside Out* pp. 24-25

<sup>34</sup> *Life Model* p. 23.

clean for eight days now.” He plays on a man’s pride, fears of rejection and ultimately shame to try to keep him separated from the very place where he can humble his pride, find acceptance and freedom from his shame. No, making a phone call or going to group after a crash is never easy, but it is the path back to the road of recovery. Don’t allow shame to convince you that you have crashed too hard or too many times to ever show your face there again. If your group understands the grace and heart of God even a little, their response will always be a genuine, “Great to see you. We are glad you are here!”

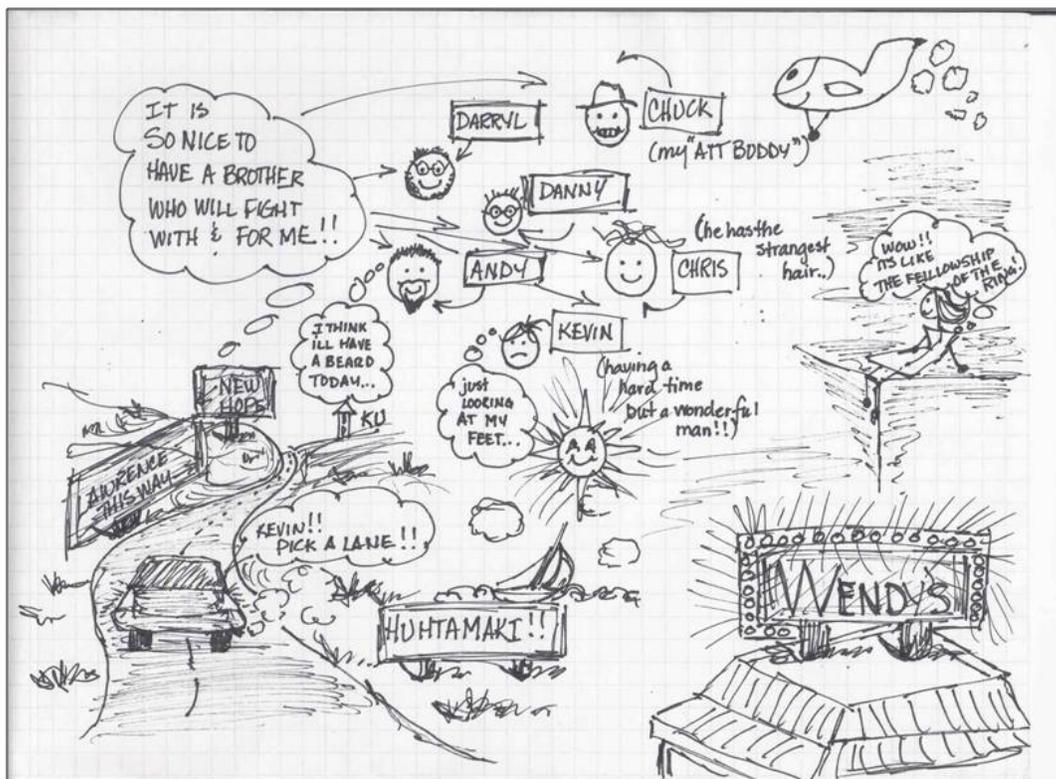
The movie *Seabiscuit* is an incredible parable about the power of community. Four broken individuals come together and build a community centered on a horse. As they live and work together, their wounds come to the surface and threaten to destroy the relationships. However, in the process of working things out with the horse and with each other they find individual healing and a group identity that

builds a bond much deeper than most physical families. The movie closes with Red speaking this powerful line:

*Everybody thinks we found this broken-down horse and fixed him . . . but we didn't. He fixed us. Every one of us. . . And I guess, in a way, we kind of fixed each other too.*

Red gives the horse way too much credit. It wasn't the horse. It was the relationships, the community of four broken people locking arms and loving one another. If you haven't seen the movie, or even if you have, get together with some guys from your recovery group and watch it and talk about the healing each character experiences through the bonds of the community. (You will need to fast forward through part of one vague scene, but with other guys in recovery with you, that will be easy to do.)

### Brothers That Will Fight



## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. What does the Braveheart scene stir within you? What connections can you see to your battle with sexual addiction?
2. When in your past have you vowed to fight the fight of purity and failed? Does anything give you hope this time can be different?
3. What has been your understanding of “walking in the light?” What fears surface in the context of transparency? What hopes rise to the surface in the context of real fellowship?
4. Have you experienced judgment and/or rejection related to your sexual struggles? If yes, when and what impact has that had on you? If no, is that because you have never really risked disclosure or because you were blessed with safe people?
5. Have you ever experienced “radical grace?” If yes, when and how? If no, what does the concept stir in your heart?
6. Prior to joining the men’s group, what was your understanding of “fellowship”? How has your understanding of “fellowship” in I John 1:7 changed since joining the group?
7. Prior to joining the men’s group, who could you truly be honest with? Who knew your struggles, fears and joys? Who knew your worst “pig pen” experiences?

8. How does the image of the assayer apply in your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Which is more difficult for you: working through materials or making relational connections? Why? What are you doing to actively pursue relationships?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Describe how you felt the first time you confessed your sexual sins to another man (or group of men) and allowed them to pray for you?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. What role do you see James 5:16 playing in your recovery?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. How difficult is it (or would it be) for you to come to group the day after a crash with pornography, masturbation or other sexual sins? What “thoughts” go through your head?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. If you could quantify your joy strength on a scale of 1-100, where do you think it would be right now? Where was it when you started the group? If it has increased, what do you credit for the increase? If you think it has dropped, what do you blame for the decrease?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
14. Other than the sexual content, how do conversations with others in recovery differ from your conversations with other men in your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
15. How does the information about the “control center” of your brain strike you? Is it surprising to you to learn that at any age in life you can actually grow brain cells by experiencing relational joy?

16. How have you seen Satan battle against your attempts to experience true community?
17. Many men have dropped out of group for a while and then called or showed up and were surprised we were genuinely glad to see them. They expected demeaning lectures about not taking recovery seriously or even the possibility of rejection. How does it strike you when someone is glad to see you even if you have crashed or walked away from recovery for a period of time?
18. If you have watched the movie Seabiscuit, which character do you relate to the most? Why? What parts of your stories are similar, different?

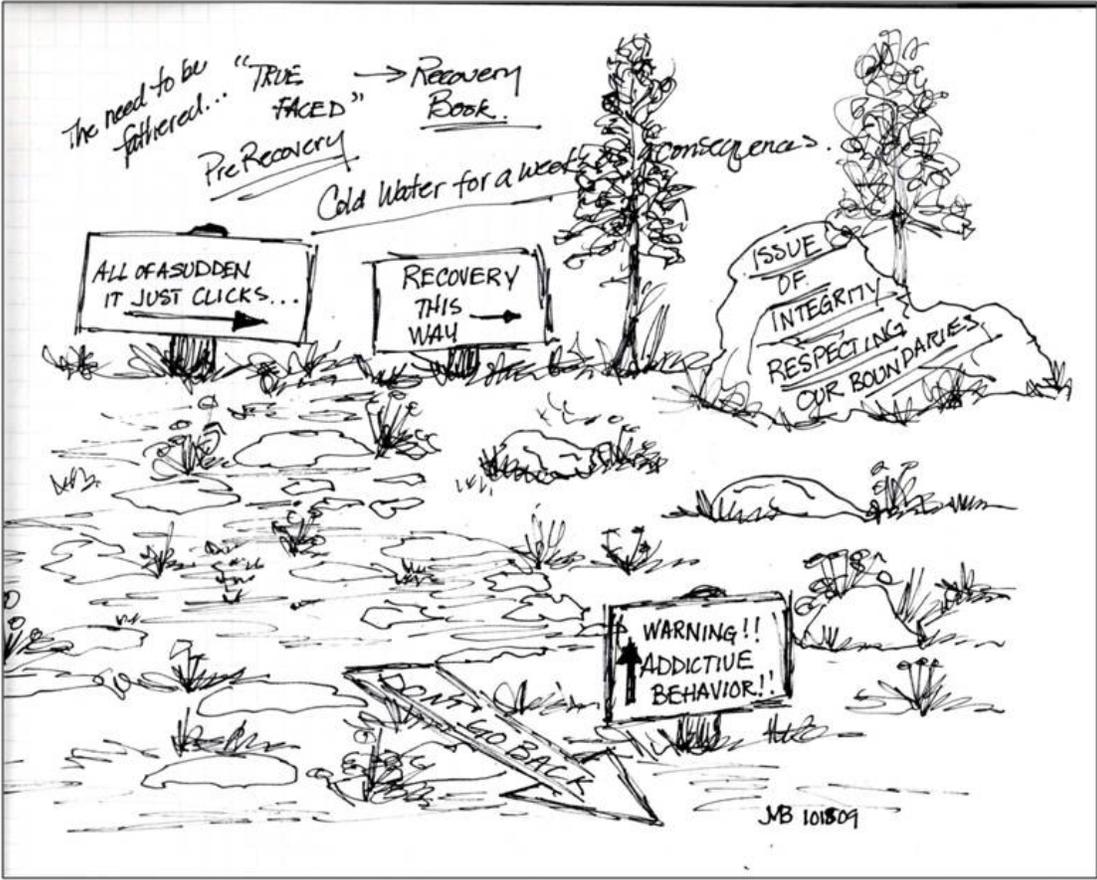
---

Prior to answering the remaining questions, read  
“Suggestions for Building Joy Strength” in the “Handouts and Worksheets” section”.

19. Which “suggestions” seem easy for you to incorporate into your group experience? Why?
20. Which “suggestions” seem difficult for you to incorporate into your group experience? Why?

# Handouts and Worksheets

All of a Sudden Recovery Just Clicks

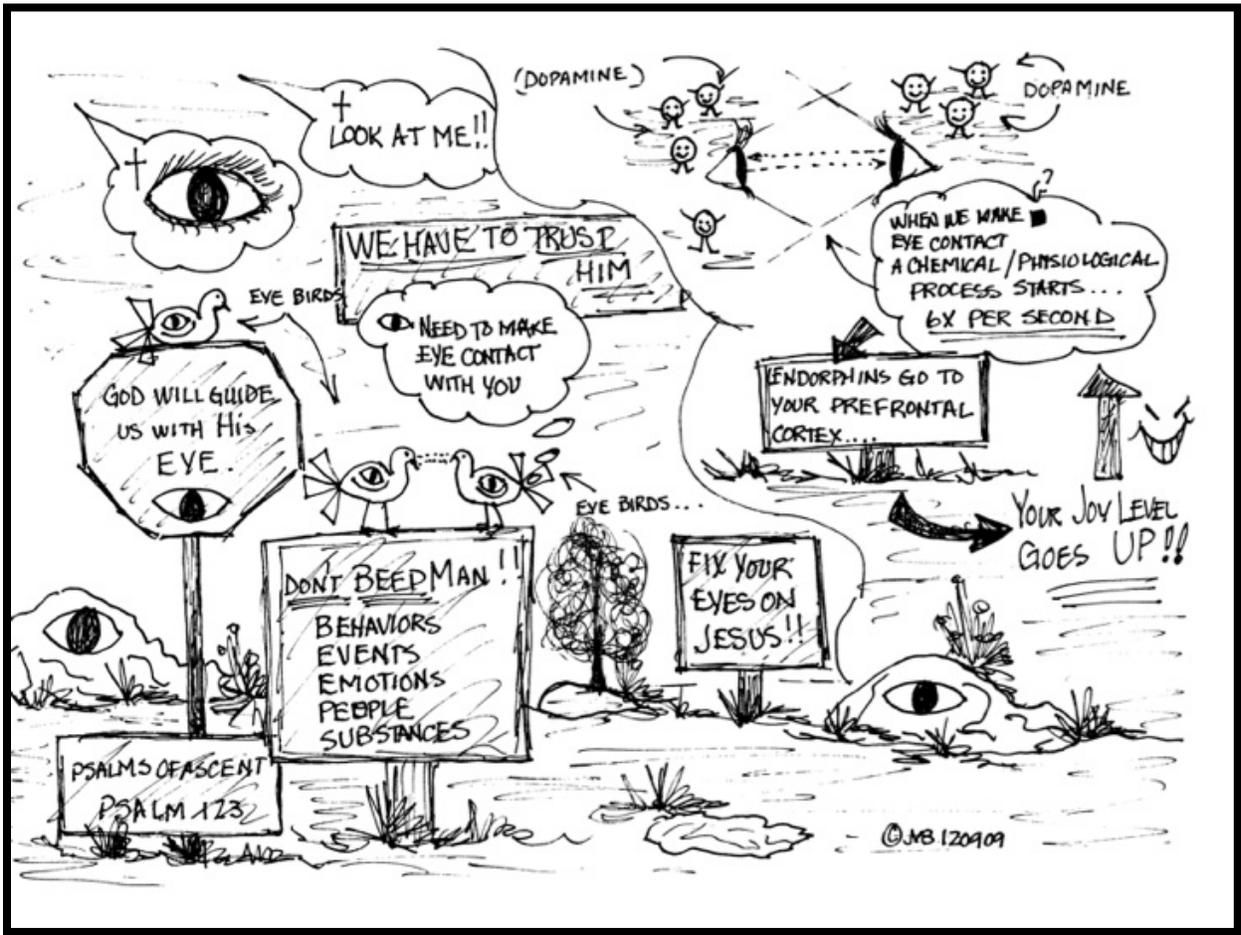


## Suggestions For Building Joy Strength<sup>35</sup>

1. Make group meetings a very high priority. Go to multiple groups per week if at all possible, especially during early recovery.
2. Share your appreciations. Appreciation is a powerful tool to awaken and spread joy. When you do your daily (or even better yet multiple times a day) appreciation exercise, you can experience a joy connection with God. When you share it with someone, you will create a joy connection with them and likely stimulate appreciation in their mind. If an appreciation is about someone, sharing it with them almost always has a significant joy boost both for them and for you.
3. Make a “check in call” every single day to someone in your group and/or attend one of the online check in times.
4. Connect with others from your group for lunch, coffee or even a round of golf, a good movie, or some other enjoyable activity. Yes, it is good to check in, but it is also good just to do something or talk about things you enjoy. You could also connect with someone and work through a lesson together like it was a group assignment from college.
5. Don’t be afraid to smile and laugh. Yes, group times are often heavy and sometimes even depressing. However, there are moments, comments, stories etc. that are just down-right hilarious. Enjoy them and enjoy one another; laughter is a healing activity.
6. Smile and greet one another with joy. Remember the old TV show, “Cheers”? Remember how they would greet one of the “regulars” when he came into the bar? Go ahead and risk saying loudly, “Norm! Great to see you!”
7. Be intentional about eye contact. Many times, especially when someone is down about a crash or struggling with shame, they will look at the floor, ceiling or anyplace other than at the people with whom they are talking. Since joy is communicated most powerfully through eye-to-eye contact, intentionally encouraging it can be very helpful. At times I have even pointed this out to individuals by saying something like, “John, you don’t have to look at the floor. We are glad to be with you even though you are in a bad place, and you need to see that in our eyes to really believe our words.”
8. Ask questions that invite others to tell you truthfully how they are doing and what they are thinking. Listen carefully without interrupting.
9. Make a commitment to get to know the others in your group. Work to understand their fears, wounds, joys and especially their glory.
10. Treat one another with dignity and respect. When disagreements arise (which they will) do everything in your power to leave on good terms so both parties feel affirmed.
11. Use touch when appropriate. Bear hug greetings and even strong handshakes are awkward for some; however, they can help break down defenses and build joy strength.
12. Don’t be afraid to bless someone in surprising ways. A gift, a card, a book or offering to help with a project can touch someone’s heart, lighten their load, and build joy connections for everyone.
13. Play a game together. Meet up or stay around after group to play board games. While playing, laugh, talk and genuinely enjoy one another’s company.

---

<sup>35</sup> This list is a modified version of a list in *The Life Model* p. 24.



## 6. MOTIVATION, CONSEQUENCES AND REWARDS

---

### Recovery In Seven Days: A Parable

**Day One:** I was walking to work, minding my own business, when I suddenly realized I was in a dark place playing in the water of raw sewage. I was filthy, wet, cold and confused. I don't know how it happened, when it happened, how long I had been there—let alone how to get out. After much searching, I finally found a ladder leading me back to the surface.

**Day Two:** I was walking to work, minding my own business when I suddenly felt myself splash into the water of raw sewage. I was filthy, wet, cold and confused. I don't know how it happened but at least this time I knew it had just happened and I remembered from yesterday how to get out.

**Day Three:** I was walking to work, minding my own business, when I suddenly felt myself falling into a large open manhole and then falling ten feet into the sewer. I was filthy, wet, cold but not as confused as the previous days. I still didn't know how it happened, but now I knew that I had fallen in an open manhole, and I knew the way out.

**Day Four:** I was walking to work, minding my own business, when I happened to notice an open manhole cover. I remember thinking, "That's dangerous, someone could fall in" right before I walked into the hole, fell ten feet, and splashed into the raw sewage. I was filthy, wet, and cold but now I understood what I had done, and I knew the way out.

**Day Five:** I was walking to work with a vague sense that I might be headed for trouble, when I looked ahead of me and noticed an open manhole cover. Remembering what had happened the previous four days, I changed my course slightly so that I could walk around the edge of the hole instead of falling in. However, as I walked around the edge of the hole, I tried to look down to see how deep it was, lost my balance and fell in. I was filthy, wet, and cold but not as confused as the previous days. I knew I had fallen in an open manhole, and I knew the way out.

**Day Six:** I was walking to work, contemplating the events of the previous five days, and looking intently for the person-eating manhole. Sure enough, I spotted it from a half block away. Only this time, instead of skirting the edge, I gave myself a good three feet of clearance and walked around the hole. I was so excited that I didn't fall in that I started dancing a jig of celebration and the next thing I knew I had fallen back in the hole. Thankfully, I knew the way out.

**Day Seven:** I was walking to work, remembering the events of the previous six days and looking intently for the man-eating manhole. When I saw it from a half block away, I quickly crossed the street and walked on the opposite sidewalk. It was indeed a glorious day!

### Our Failures and God's Redemption

This parable is my version of one that is often used in AA and other recovery circles. I use it because it helps us understand how, in recovery, God uses our failures for redemptive purposes. In fact, one of my favorite recovery

book titles is Craig Lockwood's, *Falling Forward: The Pursuit of Sexual Purity*. As was noted in Chapter 2, the reality of recovery is that it is generally fraught with many failures along the way. It is important to remind ourselves of the certainty of our missteps, mistakes, and outright failures along the way and of the

certainty of God's redemption before we delve into this chapter on rewards and consequences. Otherwise, we will apply the truths of this chapter erroneously and we will hinder rather than help our process.

### **The Value of Rewards and Consequences**

I must admit when I first heard an addiction therapist talk about personally imposed consequences for negative behaviors, I cringed because I thought it would just become part of the shame, work harder, crash again cycle so typical of addictions. However, when I watched Jim Wilder's "Recovery From Sexual Addiction" videoconference, consequences and rewards began to make more sense. Wilder makes a great case for the fact, that "addiction is the catastrophic failure to reach adult maturity." If you are not familiar with Wilder and The Life Model principles, please don't be offended by this statement as maturity levels and personal value are separate issues. After all, when do we see the value of an individual more than when we hold a newborn infant?

The reason Wilder's point about maturity convinced me consequences and rewards could be an important part of the recovery process is because one of the required tasks to move from the child to the adult level of maturity is learning to do the hard things. An infant, and even most children, do only what they *want* to do.<sup>36</sup> One of the keys to helping a child learn to do the hard things is to give him motivation, reasons, and rewards for sticking with and accomplishing difficult tasks. The same is true for addicts who are stuck in child level maturity.

Therefore, one key to help you stop acting out behaviors is to develop a system of personal rewards and consequences that encourages doing the things you truly want to do (i.e. recovery) and provides immediate, negative consequences for the things you do not want to do. (i.e. not doing your six dailies) No, you do not want to live the rest of your life based on rewards and consequences; you want to grow into adult level maturity where your actions stem from your identity in Christ. However, in early recovery, motivations can be the difference between freedom and bondage so don't allow

your pride, (i.e. "I'm not a child, I don't need a carrot on a stick") to keep you from setting healthy, non-shaming, non-punishing, consequences for negative behaviors and for giving yourself legitimate rewards for recovery related behaviors.

It is helpful for you to think through your rewards and consequences clearly and establish a written plan. The goal of this chapter is to provide some principles we hope will help you in that process.

### **Motivation Ebbs and Flows**

Most men are highly motivated when they first start recovery. Typically, they have been caught by someone (wife, boss, or others) or they have crossed another line they said they would never cross, and the pain is so bad they know they must change. Initially they profess they are willing to "do whatever it takes" to change and get healthy. It is helpful to take advantage of this initial motivation with as much recovery work as possible while the motivation level is high because it is usually only temporary. The further they get from the pain of a crash the less motivated they become. That is why self-imposed consequences and rewards can be incredibly helpful. They help strugglers find the time, energy and focus to do the things that open them up for God's healing and transformation process.

### **Inappropriate Understanding of Consequences**

**Consequences must never be about shame.** When we first started encouraging our guys to use consequences, one man decided if he acted out again he would print and wear a large button saying "Ask me about my sexual addiction." Needless to say, we talked him out of that because toxic, (identity based) shame is one of the primary weapons of our enemy and heaping toxic shame upon ourselves is counterproductive. Consequences must motivate, not tear down. You cannot shame yourself out of a shame-based addiction. God does not shame you so don't do it to yourself.

---

<sup>36</sup> E. James Wilder "Recovery From Sexual Addiction" video conference.

**Consequences must not be a form of “self-flagellation.”** Often, as a man begins to set consequences, especially for acting out behaviors, he will see them almost as a “spanking” for bad behavior. “I messed up so therefore I must punish myself because I am a bad boy.” While the distinction between natural consequences and punishments are difficult to maintain, it is essential to keep them separate. If you are constantly looking over your shoulder anticipating the next blow, you cannot walk in real freedom. You may curtail some specific forms of acting out, but the struggle will come out someplace else as fear can only motivate temporarily.

**Consequences must not be a form of “penance.”** Sometimes men will look at their consequences as payments to atone for bad behavior. That is a form of legalism denying the fact that the only payment that can atone for sin is the sacrifice of Jesus. You can pay all the penance in the world, but it will not remove your sin, nor will it mitigate or lessen the impact of that sin. While some men understand this concept in relationship to God, they often see acts of penance as a way to earn their wife’s forgiveness. For example, if she sees him pay this painful consequence, then she will feel sorry for him and not inflict her punishment. This approach, however, reveals two major issues. 1) It reveals the mistaken belief he can purchase her forgiveness. The reality, however, is forgiveness can never be earned, it can only be given. Nothing he does will ever make up for the hurt he inflicts upon his wife through sexual sin. Yes, she can choose to forgive, but this is her choice and process, not a transaction that can be obligated by paying a steep enough price. 2) It reveals a deep-seated codependency. It reveals that he sees the disharmony with his wife as the primary problem and reconciliation with her as the desired solution. While disharmony is a problem and reconciliation is a good thing, the primary problem is the impact of sin on his understanding of his relationship with God. If he continues to live estranged from and avoiding God, does it really matter if he is “reconciled” to his wife?

**Consequences are not a substitute for healing.** Early in our marriage, my wife and I had a beagle who knew it would get a spanking every time it got into the kitchen trash. There

were times we would watch her from the other side of the room and see her look at the trash, look at us, and then look back at the trash and knock it over. It was as if she were thinking: “I know I’m not supposed to do this, I know I’m going to get a beating for it, but my nose thinks that in the two seconds it takes you to get from the couch to me, I just might find something worth the beating.” Unfortunately, this is often how our flesh works. We know there will be consequences. We know we will only be able to enjoy the trash for a moment, but we think it might just be worth it. It is only when we allow God to bring the necessary healing into our lives that we can recognize the garbage for what it really is. Consequences can help, but they are not the answer. We must deal with the broken part of our hearts that sees the garbage in front of us as a prize of greater value than sitting at God’s banquet table.

### **Appropriate Understanding of Consequences**

**Personal consequences are better than external consequences.** Addicts want to believe their actions do not have consequences. However, it is axiomatic that every action has a reaction. Even when we think we have “gotten away with it,” the ripple effect of our sin often creates tidal waves in areas where we don’t even see the connection. One of the most obvious consequences is the damage done to a man’s marriage. I have worked with many men who knew if they acted out again, they would lose their wife and possibly their children. While that motivated them enough to initially dive into recovery, it often became fertile soil for resentment. It also allowed shame to constantly weave the message: “If you screw up, your wife is going to hammer you.” This makes her out to be the “bad guy” and accentuates the lie that life is about “getting everything right.” If you depend on your wife, your sponsor, your accountability partner, or anyone else to be your personal, behavior policeman, you will eventually resent and, at least subconsciously, blame him/her for removing something “good” from your life. If, however, you set your own personal consequences—and follow through with those consequences—the rebellious part of your flesh has much less with which to work, and Satan’s lies lose some of their power.

**Consequences are better sooner than later.** Generally, self-imposed consequences will be most effective when they are closely connected to the negative behavior. Think of it this way, in the past, whenever you looked at pornography, focused on a sexual thought or fantasy or did anything else sexually, your brain immediately began releasing dopamine, adrenalin and other chemicals in the reward center of your brain. Over time, your brain connected inappropriate, sexual thoughts and actions with pleasure regardless of whether it had negative consequences as those consequences usually did not come immediately. Therefore, anything you can do to help you short circuit the dopamine reward system will help your brain let go of its old patterns.

### **Developing a System of Personal Rewards**

**It is essential to use your valued currency.** For many men this naturally is money. If a man decides acting out with masturbation will cost him \$100, he will have extra motivation to make a phone call instead of going to the bathroom to relieve the stress. It is also helpful if the money goes to someplace or someone they would never give to otherwise. For example, “Felipe,” is a graduate of the University of Missouri who absolutely despises the athletic teams of the University of Kansas. Therefore, if he tells a lie or has any form of deception, he has chosen to send \$50 to the KU athletic fund. Another group member is a staunch Republican, and his plan requires him to send \$20 to a hated Democrat any week he doesn’t make a phone call every day or misses a day of reading and reflecting. For other men, time and “sweat equity” has a much greater impact. Dr. Weiss tells about one of his clients who established a consequence of digging a three by three-by-three hole in his yard if he acted out. The first offense would be in the back yard and the second in the front. The man was a yard fanatic and after digging a hole in his backyard, he was motivated enough he didn’t have to dig one in the front. Another man committed to walking to work for a week—rain or shine and he hates to walk! Be creative and find something that costs you enough that it truly motivates.

**Use different currency values for different levels of offense.** For example, if you have a

personal boundary that says you will not watch television between the hours of 11 PM and 6 AM, but watch until midnight one night, you have not been true to your word. While it isn’t the same as acting-out sexually, it also cannot be ignored. It is an affront to your integrity and these kinds of “slips” often lead to major crashes. Therefore, if your consequence for a crash is \$100 to the Republican Party, a good consequence for a “slip” might be \$25 to the Republican Party. While consequences for slips should be less than consequences for crashes, be careful the consequence still has enough bite to impact your motivation level.

**Focus on recovery behaviors.** The longer I work with individuals, the less concerned I become about “slips and crashes” and the more concerned I’ve become about doing the “6 Dailies” and being brutally honest in all situations. I see over and over that when a man gets serious about his recovery behaviors and telling the truth regardless of the consequences, acting-out issues melt away. Lately, I’ve been telling all my coffee drinkers to focus on whichever daily they struggle with the most. For example, if a man struggles to make his phone calls, I have him commit that for the next ninety days, today’s phone call earns tomorrow’s coffee. What we’ve seen is that when a man makes this commitment, he typically misses about two or at the most three days of coffee in the first couple weeks and then completes the ninety days with very few misses. Hopefully, by that time, the phone calls have become both a part of his routine and his relationships have grown to where he wants to talk to his band of brothers. You can do the same with things other than coffee, we’ve just seen it works best on coffee drinkers. ☺

### **Rewards and Consequences Work Together**

**Use rewards as well as consequences.** My wife and I have two very different approaches to life. She is a pain avoider, and I am a pleasure seeker. (I know this is an oversimplification, but for illustration purposes it helps.) She isn’t an addict, but if she were, I know as a pain avoider, consequences would bear a huge weight for her. I, on the other hand, am much more like the beagle I mentioned earlier. I often think the pleasure I might receive could be greater than the

pain I am certain to receive and, therefore, take the risk. Some might be tempted to think my thought process is a character defect and makes recovery impossible. However, addicts are just as likely to be pleasure seekers as pain avoiders and God has victory available for both. It may sound childish to reward yourself for completing the “six dailies” every day for a week. However, if it helps motivate you to make your goals, don’t be afraid to use it. If you are struggling to make phone calls, read material, go to meetings or praying then take a \$100 bill, put it in an envelope and consider it spent. If at the end of a specified time, you have met your goal, spend \$100 on something you’ve wanted but wouldn’t go out and buy. If you haven’t met your goal, send it to an individual or institution you don’t care for. Decide on something specific you want to buy and write it as well as the consequence on the outside of the envelope, then put it someplace you will see every day. You could also do the same by making a voucher for a day off next month. If you meet your recovery goals, you get to use that day for something you enjoy. If you don’t, you commit to using that day to pick up trash on the side of the highway, clean out the garage or something you don’t want to do.

### **Defining Slips, Crashes & Sobriety**

We have found it helpful for every individual in our groups to have clear definitions of “slips,” “crashes” and “Sobriety.” These definitions must be personal because everyone’s struggle, while similar, is also unique. The “Three Circle Plan” from chapter two is a great beginning place. We use the term “crash” to describe any inner, red circle action that violates one’s

definition of sobriety. I.e. if a man’s baseline of sobriety is “No pornography and no masturbation” then he should consider either of those activities a crash. A slip would consist of actions that, while not breaking sobriety, are still problematic and/or sinful and are part of his middle yellow circle.

It is also important to note these definitions may change over time. Often, as a person progresses in recovery, he realizes other behaviors are just as damaging and/or compulsive as the things that initially drove him to seek help and recovery. Sometimes actions deemed as compulsive or destructive early in recovery can be viewed as acceptable later in recovery. (Major note of caution: Do not change your definitions without consulting with your sponsor, group leader and/or your counselor.)

The following chapter on personal boundaries will help clarify some of these areas. For now, however, please take the time to write out your own personal definitions. (Questions 13 & 14 in the “Application and Journaling Questions”)

**This is an extremely critical step!**

**It is also important to remember intimacy with God and recovery are the goals.** *Sobriety* is a signpost on the journey but losing your sobriety does not mean you have lost your recovery. Slips and crashes have consequences. However, if you learn from them, they can become a significant part of your recovery. Romans 8:28 even applies to our sin. “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose.” We must be willing to submit to God’s plan of restoration, but the good news is that through the blood of Jesus, God can and does redeem all things.

## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. What natural consequences have come from your sexual sins?
2. What external consequences do you fear could come if you continue to act out sexually?
3. When are you able to “do the hard things?”
4. What motivates you to do difficult tasks?
5. How have you seen your motivation rise and fall during the course of your recovery work?
6. What do you value more, your time or your money?
7. What currently motivates you to “do recovery?”
8. When have you attempted to “punish” yourself into acting properly? How has that backfired on you?

9. When have you attempted to pay “penance” for your sexual sins? What does that say about your understanding of God and your wife?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. If you had \$100 you could spend on yourself, your wife, your kids or anyone you know, what would you love to buy? (Don’t write what you think you should buy, but something that would really make your heart rejoice.)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. What would be a legitimate goal to accomplish that would be worth celebrating with the \$100?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Take some time to pray and ask for God’s leading to establish a healthy motivational system for helping your recovery progress. Then supply a consequence or reward for each of the following:
  - a. If I go 30 consecutive days of making phone calls, praying, going to meetings and reading material every day, I will reward myself by . . .
  
  - b. If I fail to pray, read, make phone calls or go to a meeting more than twice in one week, I will \_\_\_\_\_ for each day I don’t do these recovery behaviors.
  
  - c. When I make 90 days of sexual purity I will reward myself by . . .
  
  - d. If I have a “slip” (see defining slips and crashes at the end of this chapter) I will impose a consequence of . . .
  
  - e. If I have a second “slip” within one month I will impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_ and increase it by \_\_\_\_\_ for each additional occurrence.
  
  - f. If I have a “crash” (see defining slips and crashes at the end of this chapter) I will impose a consequence of . . .
  
  - g. If I have a second “crash” within one month I will impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_ and increase it by \_\_\_\_\_ for each additional occurrence.
  
  - h. When I make one year of sexual purity I will reward myself by . . .

13. **Personal Definition of Sobriety:** At this point in my understanding, sexual sobriety means I will abstain from the following behaviors:

14. **Personal Definition of “Slips.”** While you could never make a complete list of things that could and should be considered a “slip,” listing things you know are issues in your life can be very helpful in staying accountable, nipping slips in the bud, maintaining sobriety and progressing in your recovery.

## 7. PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

---

Being a parent of two children has taught me a lot about the need for boundaries and about their need to change over time. When my daughter was eight and my son was almost four, we lived on a cul-de-sac in a great neighborhood with two kids their same age across the street. Needless to say, the cul-de-sac was often a racetrack of bicycles, wagons, scooters and whatever else they can find to ride. My daughter was old enough that we allowed her to play and ride out front whether or not we are outside. Of course, we would check on her regularly, but she had considerable freedom. However, we required our son and the neighbor boy to play in our fenced back yard unless one of us could be outside to keep an eye out for them. Like all younger siblings, my son had already decided “it isn’t fair.” In one sense he was right. However, when his sister was four, we didn’t let her play out front by herself either, and when he was older; he had similar freedoms.

The principle also holds true on the path of recovery. We must set healthy personal boundaries to protect ourselves and others from the inherent dangers presented by our culture and by our addiction. These boundaries change over time. If you are just starting recovery, it would be helpful to imagine yourself as a small child who has just learned to walk, climb, and get into all kinds of trouble. Obviously, you need lots of protection. Obviously, you need fences that keep you locked out of unsafe places. As you grow and mature in your recovery and in your walk with God, you will be able to venture out beyond many of these protections. Some fences, however, will need to remain for a lifetime. For example, one of my personal boundaries is “I will not enter a strip club.” That is a boundary I will not ever “grow out of.” On the other end of the spectrum is the shopping mall. For many men in early recovery, a shopping mall simply has too much visual stimuli—everything from the life-sized posters on the windows at the lingerie store to the many women in flimsy blouses, tight skirts etc. While many men would love (out of their disdain for shopping) to set up a lifetime boundary against going to the mall, the reality is some time we all must go back. However, a temporary boundary, i.e. the first 90 days of recovery, would be helpful to many.

The pages that follow are principles we have learned from our own journey and from the mistakes and victories of others as well.

### **Better Safe Than Sorry**

Start off tighter than you think you need. Our addictive personality always wants to “live on the edge” and hates to give up any freedom. Many times, men will say, “I’ll start with my boundary here and if I crash then I will tighten it.” The problem with this approach, however, is it takes a crash to find out the boundary wasn’t tight enough. A good analogy for this would be driving on ice. You could say, I’ll set my speed boundary at 60 mph and if I have a crash, then I will lower it to 50. How much damage would you have to do before you found your safe driving speed? How many times do you have to act out sexually, hurting yourself and others before you find what truly is safe?

### **Better Firm Than Flimsy**

Boundaries are meant to be firm and consistent. Never move a boundary in the “heat of the moment.” If a boundary can be changed whenever you feel like it, it isn’t a boundary. I remember a speaker at a youth rally when I was in high school making a very applicable point. He said, “Don’t wait until you are in the back seat to decide ‘how far is too far.’ If you do, you have already decided nothing is too far.” It is also important to wait 24 hours after talking to your sponsor before changing any boundary. This gives you time to think about it as well as consider the feedback of someone who cares for you and knows your addictive tendencies.

## **Learn from the Fellowship of the Forgiven**

Hopefully by now you have developed relationships with one or more men who have traveled further down the road of recovery than you have. Listen to them and learn from their experiences. You don't have to fall into the same pits they fell into; you can learn from both their failures and their victories. Talking through boundary issues with your sponsor and/or at group meetings is very helpful.

Realize that even if you don't have an immediate crash, violating a personal boundary often sets you up for a crash down the road. That is why it is so important to talk to your sponsor and others in recovery whenever you break a boundary. Often, men will break a seemingly minor boundary on Monday and then have a crash on Thursday and not see any connection until they talk about it at group or with their sponsor. Many times, Satan will give us just enough slack between the action starting the process and the crash itself that we don't see the connection between our actions and the pain that follows. It is essential we live in the light, not just about our "crashes" but also about the times we violate our own boundaries.

Share your boundaries with others close to you. If you create boundaries but never tell anyone what they are, you always have an "out" for not keeping them. However, if you tell members of your recovery group and your sponsor then you have others who can hold you accountable to keeping your word. They won't be your personal policemen, but they will be able to hold your feet to the fire when you break your boundaries. You should also share your boundaries with your wife for several reasons. First, it will be an encouragement to her to know you are taking positive steps to walk in healthier places. Second, she will be less likely to sabotage your recovery by asking you to do

things she isn't aware are your "triggers." Third, while you should never ask her to be your policeman or even the one who holds your feet to the fire (that's what your recovery group is for) simply knowing she knows your boundaries will often be just the added incentive you need to stay inside your fences.

## **A Means to an End**

Remember that *external controls are essential, but they are not the answer*. You cannot set enough boundaries to keep you from acting out. You must deal with the root issues beneath your actions. The addict within your false self will always find ways around the boundaries if the root issues go unhealed. However, don't allow the addict to use this truth to say boundaries are worthless. If you have easy, unaccounted access to sexual stimuli, odds are high you will relapse. While there will always be stimuli outside your ability to control, most men discover when they are faithful to control the things they can, the things they can't become more manageable.

## **Personalize Your Boundaries**

Like consequences and rewards, boundaries are also very personal in nature. Some things that cause one man to struggle don't even register on another's radar screen. That is why it is essential you take the time to customize them for yourself. There are multiple exercises in the "Handouts and Worksheets" section designed to help you set healthy boundaries in a few areas of common struggle. The discipline of creating and holding to these boundaries will also help you set boundaries in other areas these exercises do not address.



## Internet, Social Media & Email Boundaries

As someone who struggles with sexual stimuli, (i.e. you have a Y Chromosome) you must always consider the Internet as a loaded weapon. Handled correctly, it can be a very effective tool for many things; handled incorrectly, it can be an instrument of death. Having an unprotected computer in front of you is like playing “Russian Roulette” or like an alcoholic with a drink in his hand saying, “I’m just holding it for a friend.” The following are various boundary levels for protecting yourself from Internet porn and cybersex. It is important to remember strong boundaries initially can be the difference between sobriety and the pig pen. You will be much better off in the long run setting strict boundaries (especially early in recovery) and staying sober than soft boundaries and continual relapses.

1. **No Internet under any circumstances.** This sounds harsh, but you really can live without it and sobriety is worth more than a few sports stories, live stock quotes, etc.
2. **Supervised Internet.** Your spouse or someone who knows your struggle must be physically in the room with you. This generally requires a password or other type of lock on the computer or on the Internet connection as a general “I won’t use the computer” rarely works. It also requires a willingness to surrender your “right to be upset” when they have other things to do or cannot be physically in the room with you.
3. **Extremely limited access.** You can set the “Parental Controls” or use various software programs to limit Internet use to a few very specific web sites. The “administrator” can still have full access to the Internet by using their password. Problems: 1) Whoever has password must be diligent about turning the password back on after using. 2) You must refrain from creating excuses to have your spouse or whoever has the password from unlocking the computer.
4. **Limited access.** There are programs available that only allow you to go to their approved websites plus any sites the “supervisor” adds to the “approved sites list.” Many Internet Service Providers offer “Parental Controls” that can be set at various levels of accessibility.
5. **Monitored Internet.** Several programs will monitor all Internet activity and send reports to an “accountability partner” about suspicious activity. The strength of this approach is while it doesn’t stop you from going anywhere, it does bring all activity into the light.
6. **Filtered Internet.** There are also “filter” programs that limit sites you are allowed to access. The problem, however, is filters don’t catch everything and this often becomes a challenge (i.e. “can I find a site the filter doesn’t catch or a way around the filter?”).
7. **Always Use An Ad Blocker** One thing many find extremely helpful is using an advertisement blocking add-on with their Internet browser. These run seamlessly in the background and eliminate most ads from popping up in new windows, appearing as banners or even as “Suggested Posts” in Facebook and other social media.
8. **No boundaries necessary.** The fear of being caught, respect for others or other reasons make acting out seem impossible. (Be careful and wise. As you cut off other sources, computers that were once safe may become new temptations.)
9. **Router Level Filtering.** Open DNS, Circle, and other products allow monitoring and filtering on the router level. This isn’t a complete solution, and should be used with other forms of filter and/or accountability as devices can be used other places or even off a neighbor’s Wi-Fi. However, it can be especially helpful if you have children in the home.
10. **No boundaries & continual bondage.** Just thought I’d remind you do have a choice. It isn’t a very good one, but it is still a choice.

## Social Media Boundaries

Facebook, Twitter Linked-In, Pinterest, and other “Social Media” avenues have been the source of countless crashes both for individuals in recovery and for those who do not yet realize they have a problem with sexual addiction. Social media has been a starting place for affairs, pornography slips, binges, and likely most damaging, a counterfeit source of community that leaves individuals isolated yet thinking they are connected. The commercial with the girl who is concerned because her parents only have a few “Facebook friends” that shows her huddled around her computer screen while they are out with real friends is a great illustration of this dynamic. Social media has also been the source of countless wasted hours that could have been

used for recovery, real face-to-face connection and other productive activities or even rest.

With that said, social media is a reality in our world today. It isn’t going away and there are times where it is both beneficial and, in some cases, even necessary. (Though many who think their job, or finding one, depends on social media might find it isn’t as essential as they believe.) I highly recommend a complete avoidance of all social media until you have six months of sobriety. However, if you choose to use social media, please use the questions in the worksheet section to help you establish firm boundaries.

## Email Boundaries

Another place individuals often have difficulties is with their email. Unfortunately, spam is a reality of life online. Porn spam is most insidious, in part because it hits in your arena of struggle, and in part because pornographers have been on the cutting edge of Internet technology since its inception. They constantly find ways around filters and into your inbox. However, there are things you can do to limit your exposure.

One of the most important things is to turn off pictures in your email. Every email program I have used (both pop and web based) has a way to do this though you may have to do a search to learn how. Once they are turned off, you can still access pictures, but you will have to take an extra step and make a conscious choice. It won’t stop you from going to the pig pen if you so choose, but it will prevent the pig pen from being brought to you.

Another helpful safeguard is to set your spam filter on a high setting. Yes, this will potentially cause you to miss a few emails. However, it is much better to miss an occasional

legitimate email than to have a crash because spam started you down a dangerous path. It would also be helpful to think through how and when it is safe for you to look through your spam folder. Early in my recovery, it wasn’t safe at all. Even the subject lines of porn emails were enough to put me in a bad place. While I didn’t act out by opening those emails, they caused much unnecessary struggle. I eventually discovered I was better off not even scrolling through the list looking for emails I needed to rescue.

You also need to develop a habit of emptying your trash folder or “double deleting” all porn spam emails. You may be in a good place to delete a spam at one moment and then later give in to the pull to go cyber dumpster diving. Consistently emptying your trash folder is a helpful preventative.

Of course, if all this sounds too complicated or risky, you can disconnect from the Internet. Remember, it is better to be “out of the loop” than to be “out of the house.”

## Internet Boundaries Worksheet

My history with pornography on the Internet has included the following activities:

- Swimsuit models, body building etc.
- Sexually explicit stories, articles, fantasy
- Soft-core porn (Nudes)
- Hardcore porn (Penetration)
- Chat
- Games: those with sexual under or overtones, fantasy or role playing
- Other:

In the past I have had gone to inappropriate sites on the following devices:

- My personal computer/devices
- My spouse's computer/devices
- My work computer/devices
- My kids' notepad, gaming system, etc.
- Internet connected cell phone
- Public computers/devices (i.e. libraries, churches, etc.)
- Other devices: co-workers, friends, relatives etc. (List below)

Using boundaries #1-10 from a few pages back, what restrictions will you place on each of the following?  
(multiple #s are OK)

- My personal computer/devices
- My wife's computer/devices
- My work computer/devices
- My kids' notepad, gaming system, etc.
- Internet connected cell phones
- Public computers/devices (i.e. libraries, churches, etc.)
- Other devices: (List below)

How much time will I allow myself to be "on-line" each day?

How much cumulative time in a week?

What times of the day/night do I need to avoid the Internet?

What times of the day/night are safe for me to be on the Internet?

Who will I talk to before making "exceptions" or changing any boundaries? (check all that apply)

- No one: I am the master of my universe
- A group member
- My sponsor
- My spouse
- My counselor
- Other:

If I look at inappropriate material while honoring my boundaries, I will . . . (check all that apply)

- Keep it to myself, wallow in the shame and repeat the cycle over and over.
- Contact my sponsor immediately
- Increase my boundary and communicate to my sponsor, my spouse and others who need to be “in the know.”
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other:

If I violate a boundary but do not look at any inappropriate material, I will . . . (check all that apply)

- Keep it to myself and question the need for boundaries in this area
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other:

If I violate a boundary and look at any inappropriate material, I will . . . (check all that apply)

- Keep it to myself, wallow in the shame and repeat the cycle over and over
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other:

Before reducing any Internet Boundaries, I will discuss it with the following (check all that apply)

- No one; I am the master of my universe
- My sponsor
- My spouse
- My counselor
- Other:

## Social Media Boundaries Worksheet

My history with social media has included the following: (Put one X for having used and a Y for any that have been part of your acting out behaviors.)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Facebook
- \_\_\_\_\_ Twitter
- \_\_\_\_\_ Pinterest
- \_\_\_\_\_ TickTock
- \_\_\_\_\_ Instagram
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9GAG
- \_\_\_\_\_ Snap Chat
- \_\_\_\_\_ Google Hangout
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other: Please list

Place a check beside each boundary below you commit to keep in regard to social media. Again, as with most boundaries, you are better off beginning with more and tighter boundaries than you think you may need and then reducing them as you grow stronger in your recovery.

- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not use any social media until I have at least \_\_\_\_\_ months of sobriety. (Highly recommend at least six months to a year of sobriety)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will only use social media when my wife, sponsor or other safe person is reading with me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will only use social media that I share with my spouse, that she reads regularly and has the password. I.e. have a Ken&Barbie Jones Facebook page rather than a Ken Jones page.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not make or accept any “friend,” “follow” or other connection request without first clearing it with my wife and/or sponsor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not click on any “People You May Know” or other connection “suggestions.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will only read my newsfeed and not click on any links when reading by myself. (News sites and other things linked in social media have an incredibly high tendency to have suggestive links and pictures even in legitimate stories.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not explore anyone’s link who is not already in my “Friends” list, circle, etc.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will immediately delete, de-friend, un-follow, or do whatever it takes to remove anyone from my page who posts any material that causes me to struggle.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will only check social media when I am on a computer in a public area.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will always keep an “Adblock” plugin to keep unsolicited posts off my page.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will only check my page(s) \_\_\_\_\_ times per day during the following times \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not delete any posts, messages, etc. prior to sharing them with my spouse and/or sponsor.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not use Snapchat or any program or social media that automatically deletes or removes posts. I will only use media where I can have accountability.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not use any “phone” or other mobile device for social media.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I will not use any social media if I have not made a real life (voice-to-voice or face-to-face) connection with someone in my recovery network.

Before reducing any Social Media Boundaries, I will discuss my decision with the following (check all that apply) and, as with all boundaries, I will wait at least 24 hours after discussing any change before making them.

- \_\_\_\_\_ No one; I am the “Master of My Universe”
- \_\_\_\_\_ My sponsor
- \_\_\_\_\_ My spouse
- \_\_\_\_\_ My counselor
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other:

## Television Boundaries

Long before I had any real understanding of the depth of my struggle, I understood television was a huge pull for me in the sexual realm. We didn't have cable because I knew if I had easy access to R-rated movies and the things offered late at night I would be in trouble. However, even "over the air," fuzzy TV is not safe. Every man I have worked with struggling to get out of sexual addiction has expressed difficulties that often started with television. Today, even family shows, and sporting events are often challenging because of sexually provocative advertisements. For many, the "sexual tease" of a lingerie ad is just enough to start his mind down a slippery slope leading to acting out. Remember, Paul says in II Corinthians 10:5, "We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against

the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

We have realized taking every thought captive requires us to set healthy boundaries around our television habits. Through the years, we have had individuals who gave it up completely during early recovery, and they found that was a tremendous blessing. Others have learned to set clear boundaries and have done well. Unfortunately, some have crashed repeatedly until they either gave up the fight for purity or else learned the hard way they can't stop on ice at 60 miles per hour. Please use the questions that follow to help you make wise decisions concerning your television habits

How has TV been part of your acting-out history?

How would "taking captive every thought" change your TV viewing?

I will talk to \_\_\_\_\_ concerning my TV habits (Check all that apply)

- No one; I don't watch TV
- No one; I am the master of my universe and what I watch is my business.
- My sponsor
- My spouse
- My counselor
- Other:

I will place the following boundaries on TV (Check all that apply)

- None, I don't believe it is relevant to me
- Limit myself to \_\_\_\_\_ per week
- I will only watch after doing my recovery work for the day
- I will not watch until I have made \_\_\_\_\_ days of sobriety
- I will not watch alone
- I will cancel cable and not reconnect until I have made \_\_\_\_\_ days of sobriety
- I will set the V-Chip on the TV to block out shows rated above \_\_\_\_\_
- I will not channel surf (usually this requires leaving the remote on the TV as it is physically impossible for a man to have a remote in his hand and not flip channels)
- I will only watch shows I have predetermined to watch (selected by a guide not by surfing)
- I will only watch specific shows (Listed and shared with someone from my recovery group)
- I will not watch between the hours of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

If I violate a boundary and have a crash within one week of breaking the boundary, I will . . . (check all that apply)

- Keep it to myself, wallow in the shame and repeat the cycle over and over
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Discuss it with my recovery group at the next meeting
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

If I violate a boundary but do not have a crash, I will . . . (all that apply)

- Keep it to myself and question the need for boundaries.
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Discuss it with my recovery group at the next meeting
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

Before changing any TV boundaries, I will discuss it with the following: (check all that apply)

- No one: I am the master of my universe.
- My sponsor
- My wife
- My counselor
- Other:

## Movie/Video Boundaries

At one time, my grandmother legalistically believed going to movies was inherently sinful (and that was back when movies were incredibly clean compared to what they are now). Today, some even use movie clips in sermons at church. Obviously, times have changed. Movies are part of American culture as well as a significant part of many people's lives. Movies can simply be a form of entertainment that stimulates our imaginations, our hopes, and our dreams. Sometimes they can even awaken good and healthy parts of our hearts and be part of the recovery process. Often, however, the sexual content becomes obstacles for those attempting to heal from sexual struggles.

They are a struggle on two primary fronts. First, even some of today's PG-13 movies contain "brief nudity" and many R rated films would have been classified as X-Rated in the not-so-distant past. Especially in early recovery, even a hint of nudity, sexual innuendo or provocative scenes can start a individual back

into downward spirals. Second, movies become stumbling blocks when we use them to "escape" in unhealthy ways, i.e. to avoid real struggles and live in the realm of fantasy or distraction.

It is also common for movies to be a gateway to pornography. A man may start out watching something as innocent as an old John Wayne western and then progress to something questionable and end up watching hardcore pornography. It is especially common in "pre-recovery" and even in early recovery for a man to start on Netflix or a movie website looking for something legitimate only to find himself drawn as if by a "Star Trek" tractor beam to the adult content or to something that will obviously have "a little skin." For these and other reasons, it is essential you take an honest look at your history, patterns and struggles and make wise and healthy boundaries concerning what movies you watch, where you watch them and with whom you watch them.

How have movies and video been part of your acting-out history?

Describe a time when you thought you were in a "good place" but found yourself watching something for the purpose of sexual gratification. (i.e. you pulled up Netflix to watch "Star Wars" and ended up watching something very different.)

I will talk to \_\_\_\_\_ concerning my movie habits (Check all that apply)

- No one; I don't watch movies
- No one; I am the master of my universe and what I watch is my business
- My sponsor
- My spouse
- My counselor
- Other:

I will place the following boundaries on video sources (Check all that apply)

- None, I don't believe this is relevant to me
- I will not enter any establishment or go to any site that rents or shows "adult" films
- I will have my wife (or my sponsor) set the parental controls on all online sources and players. (computers, tablets, smart phones, gaming systems, etc.)
- I will not use any online video sources (Amazon, Netflix, Hulu, etc.)
- I will only use the following online video sources: \_\_\_\_\_
- I will not enter any video store alone
- I will call \_\_\_\_\_ before entering and upon leaving any video store
- Other:

I will place the following boundaries on movies and video (Check all that apply)

- None, I don't believe it is relevant to me
- Limit myself to \_\_\_ videos per month
- I will only watch a video after doing my recovery work for the week
- I will not watch any video until I have made \_\_\_\_\_ days of sobriety
- I will not watch any video alone
- I will not watch any rated PG-13 movies or video
- I will not watch any rated PG-13 movies or video alone
- I will not watch any rated R movies or video
- I will not watch any rated R movies or video alone
- I will not watch any unrated, NC-17 or X rated movies or video
- I will not watch any movie or video without checking with someone who knows my struggle, has seen it and says it is "safe."
- I will not watch any movies or video with "Brief nudity" or "nudity" in the rating box\*
- I will not watch any movies or video with "Sexual situations" in the rating box\*
- I will not watch any movies or video between the hours of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

\*While certainly a good beginning place, don't blindly trust rating designations. Parental reviews at [www.pluggedinonline](http://www.pluggedinonline) and [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com) are great resources for pre-screening movies

If I violate a boundary and have a crash within one week of breaking the boundary, I will . . .

- Keep it to myself, wallow in the shame and repeat the cycle over and over
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Discuss it with my recovery group at the next meeting
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

If I violate a boundary but do not have a crash, I will . . . (all that apply)

- Keep it to myself and question the need for boundaries
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Discuss it with my recovery group at the next meeting
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

Before changing any movie boundaries, I will discuss it with the following: (check all that apply)

- No one: I am the master of my universe
- My sponsor
- My wife
- My counselor
- Other:

## Travel Boundaries

One very difficult place for many men in recovery is when they travel either for work or for pleasure. Very few things stir up the addictive juices like being in a different town, staying in a hotel and having unaccounted for time and money. Even something as simple as a two hour lay-over opens the possibility of purchasing an adult magazine, calling phone sex lines, or even soliciting a prostitute. An overnight or weeklong stay opens a myriad of unhealthy choices. It is therefore essential you plan ahead and do everything you can to prepare for the attacks and opportunities Satan will place in front of you.

I personally marvel at the men in our groups who travel frequently for business and have learned to take whatever measures they need to protect themselves. Most of what follows comes from the experiences of these men. Many of these tips can be “undone” relatively easily. However, “undoing them” requires specific action and a conscious choice to act out rather than accidentally stumbling onto something or allowing the fog of addictive deception to lead you blindly.

1. Only stay in hotel rooms with your wife or with another Christian man who knows your struggle. (Don't, however, assume staying with someone makes other boundaries unnecessary. Many men have crashed while their wife was at the gift shop, in the shower, or even asleep in the same bed.)
2. Call ahead and have the TV removed from the hotel room.
3. Do an appreciation exercise before or immediately after entering your room and call someone to tell them your appreciation.
4. When you first enter the room, unplug the TV and remove the batteries from the remote. You can even take the remote and/or the batteries to the front desk.
5. Set the V-Chip or other parental controls on the TV to not allow any shows rated R and TV-MA, that contain nudity or sexual situations etc.
6. Disconnect the co-ax cable from the TV.
7. Only watch specific shows, i.e. the news, Sportscenter, Monday Night Football, etc. Place the remote on the TV and only change to specific channels, i.e. instead of clicking through the channels, enter 36 to go to ESPN or 13 to go to FOX.
8. Never channel surf. Absently flipping through channels is a disaster waiting to happen. Leave the remote out of reach.
9. Call someone from your recovery group every time you enter your room and have them pray for and with you for protection.
10. Stay out of the hotel sports bar and other drinking establishments.
11. Honor your Internet boundaries: You may want to set a boundary that you will only use your laptop in the hotel lobby or other public places.
12. Honor your TV and movie boundaries: You may want to have an even stronger set of boundaries while traveling.
13. Carry only an emergency cash supply and give an accounting of every penny to someone upon your return. (Today, you can purchase anything and everything with a credit or debit card. The advantage of the cards is they can eliminate secrecy.)
14. Have all interaction with female clients, co-workers, customers etc. in public places.
15. Call and talk honestly with someone from your recovery group if you sense any attraction.
16. Stay out of any store that sells pornographic materials.
17. When driving, do not get off on any exit where there is a porn shop, strip club or other adult business within sight.
18. Drive in the left lane when approaching a right exit where you know there is a sexually oriented business.
19. Call someone when you leave and at every stop. Be accountable for your travel time.
20. Make wise choices about where you go after the workday is over. It is very common for men on business travel to go to bars, strip clubs, sports bars known more for their waitresses clothing (or lack thereof) and other such establishments to “unwind.” It will be much more difficult to say “No” if you are already in the car rather than at the hotel or someplace with an easy escape.

21. Be careful about accepting gifts, meals and favors from clients, salespeople etc. as this can leave you vulnerable. Honor your company's policy explicitly. If you accept a seemingly innocent gift, it may leave you feeling obligated when they ask you to go with them to the strip club, bar etc. Unfortunately, the wining and dining of clients sometimes includes sexually oriented business and favors.
22. Set and maintain healthy boundaries concerning alcohol. Remember, alcohol lowers your inhibitions and therefore your ability to maintain healthy boundaries.
23. Submit a formal request for limited or no travel for the next six months.
24. Resign and find a new job that does not require travel. This sounds extreme, but Jesus said, "If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off." If you cannot maintain healthy boundaries in your current position,

it is better to face financial consequences than to continue to act out and harm yourself, your spouse, and others.

25. Stay connected to God and to others, especially to your brothers in recovery. The most important thing you can do to stay healthy is walk in the light and stay out of isolation. With cell phones there is no excuse for allowing Satan to isolate you even when you are on the road. Plan ahead. Make phone appointments with your sponsor and others in your group. Call someone before breakfast, someone at lunch and someone before going to your room for the evening. Be honest with them about any pulls you feel and allow them to minister to you and to pray over you. The power of brothers locking arms in battle is much greater than even the siren call of the hotel TV.

Take a moment to pray asking God to show you which of these boundaries you need to apply to your own travel. Then re-read the list and circle those you sense God's calling to put into place until you have achieved 90 days of sobriety. After 90 days of sobriety, repeat the process for the next 90 days. If after six months, God has granted you the grace to maintain these boundaries and to stay sober, you will probably be in a place where you will be able to establish your boundaries for an extended period. Again, do not lower any boundaries without talking through it with a sponsor and giving yourself at least 24 hours.

I will talk to \_\_\_\_\_ concerning my travel boundaries (Check all that apply)

- No one; I don't travel
- No one; I am the master of my universe
- My sponsor
- My spouse
- My counselor
- Other:

In addition to the boundaries circled above, I will keep the following when away from home:

In addition to the boundaries circled, I will keep the following while driving or flying:

If I violate one of these boundaries and have a crash within one week, I will . . . (check all that apply)

- Keep it to myself, wallow in the shame and repeat the cycle over and over
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Discuss it with my recovery group at the next meeting
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

If I violate one of these boundaries but do not have a crash, I will . . .

- Keep it to myself and question the need for boundaries
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Discuss it with my recovery group at the next meeting
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

Before reducing any travel boundaries, I will discuss it with the following: (check all that apply)

- No one; I am the master of my universe
- My sponsor
- My wife
- My counselor
- Other:

## Chemical Boundaries

Men who struggle with pornography and other sexual addictions often also struggle with alcohol, marijuana, cocaine or other chemicals. We have had several group members who have even been in treatment programs, counseling and recovery groups for chemical addictions who found freedom from the chemicals but continued to struggle with the sexual issues. We have also seen men who do not believe they have a problem with any “chemicals” but end up having

slips and crashes connected with alcohol consumption and/or chemical use. In recovery, it is important to remember alcohol (and many other chemicals) lower your inhibitions and can lead you to do things you wouldn’t normally do. Therefore, alcohol consumption must be monitored carefully as it makes it more difficult to maintain boundaries. It should also be monitored closely if it is used to “take the edge off” or to avoid feelings, emotions etc.

What is your pattern of alcohol consumption? How often? How much?

What is your history with other chemical drugs including prescription medications?

Do you drink/use chemical drugs when you want to celebrate? If yes, how often do you want to celebrate?

Do you drink/use chemicals when you feel depressed, want to take the edge off or had a long day? If yes, how often do you feel these things?

Can you think of any times when a crash followed within a day or two of having a drink or two or more (or other chemical use)?

How frequently do you consume alcohol or use chemicals while acting out?

What connections do you see between your chemical use and your history of acting out sexually?

Put a check mark on each of the following boundaries you believe you should apply to yourself for the next 90 days and an X for any you believe should apply for life.

- I will not drink any alcohol
- I will not smoke, snort or take in any form any illegal chemicals
- I will not drink more than \_\_\_\_\_ in any 24 hour period
- I will not drink more than \_\_\_\_\_ in any 7 day period
- I will not drink anything stronger than \_\_\_\_\_
- I will not drink alone
- I will not drink with \_\_\_\_\_
- I will only drink with \_\_\_\_\_
- I will not drink away from my own home
- I will monitor my drinking by making notes in a journal and if there appears to be any connection between drinking and slips, crashes or even times of intense struggle, I will stop all drinking for 90 days.
- I will talk to my sponsor before taking the following prescription medications . . .

I will talk to \_\_\_\_\_ concerning my chemical boundaries (check all that apply)

- No one; I don't use any drugs or drink alcohol
- No one; I am the master of my universe
- My sponsor
- My spouse
- My counselor
- Other:

In addition to the boundaries above, I will place the following on myself when staying away from home:

In addition to the boundaries above, I will place the following on myself while driving or flying:

If I violate one of these boundaries and have a sexual crash within one week of breaking the boundary, I will . . . (check all that apply)

- Keep it to myself, wallow in the shame and repeat the cycle over and over
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Discuss it with my recovery group at the next meeting
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

If I violate one of these boundaries but do not have a crash, I will . . . (check all that apply)

- Keep it to myself and question the need for boundaries
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Discuss it with my recovery group at the next meeting
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other:

Before reducing any chemical boundaries, I will discuss it with the following: (check all that apply)

- No one; I am the master of my universe
- My sponsor
- My wife
- My counselor
- Other:



I will place the following boundaries on "gaming." (check all that apply)

- None, I don't believe it is relevant to me
- Limit my gaming to \_\_\_\_\_ time per day and \_\_\_\_\_ time per week
- I will only play games after my recovery work is done for the day/week
- Eliminate specific games: (Could be due to content or tendency to consume)
- Limit my gaming to specific games:
- I will not game between the hours of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_
- I will not play any computer games
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

If I violate a boundary and have a crash within one week of the violation, I will (check all that apply)

- Keep it to myself, wallow in the shame and repeat the cycle over and over
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

If I violate a boundary but do not have a crash, I will . . . (check all that apply)

- Keep it to myself and question the need for boundaries
- Discuss it with my sponsor immediately
- Discuss it with a group member immediately
- Impose a consequence of \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: Write out and attach to this document any specific action plans

Before reducing any Gaming Boundaries, I will discuss it with the following: (check all that apply)

- No one; I am the master of my universe
- My sponsor
- My wife
- My counselor
- Other:

Other boundaries I need to set concerning my gaming habits:

## 8. PERSONAL RECOVERY PLAN

---

Some of what follows will look familiar as it was included in previous chapters. While it might seem redundant, we believe you will find this chapter very helpful. The goal is to review your definitions and boundaries to revise them and to put them in a single, easy to read document which can be shared with others.

It might also be better to create this on your computer so that you can easily revise it as you grow in your recovery. Referring to previous questions and worksheets will also be helpful.

### **Example Summary**

Below is an example summary. The “Handouts and Worksheets” section presents a template to help guide you in creating your own summary.

#### **Personal Definition of Sobriety**

My base line of sobriety can best be summed up by “no pornography, no masturbation and no deception.”

Pornography is defined as looking, watching or reading anything for the purpose of gaining sexual pleasure from anyone other than my spouse.

Masturbation includes any touching or stimulating of myself for the purpose of arousal or sexual pleasure, including but not limited to, orgasm.

Deception is defined as any intentional misleading or outright lying about anything whether by commission or omission. I consider it a “slip” if I correct a deception within 24 hours and a crash if I do not.

#### **Proactive Boundaries**

##### **Prayer**

I commit to praying each morning and each evening and at other times as I am prompted by the Spirit who lives within me.

##### **Phone Calls**

I commit to calling someone from my recovery group every day that I am not in a group or have a face-to-face encounter with someone in recovery.

I also commit to call someone whenever I find myself struggling with extra temptation, pain, stress, conflict, or fear.

##### **Reading Recovery Materials**

I commit to read at least 10 minutes each day and carving out a 30+ minute block at least once each week.

##### **Reflecting**

I commit to answering questions and/or journaling at least 10 minutes each day and for at least one 30+ minute block every two weeks.

I understand this is a “right brain” activity that will greatly aid my recovery.

##### **Group Meetings**

I commit to attending two in person groups and two online check in groups each week until I reach six months of sobriety and then at least one in person group and two online check in groups each week until I reach one year of sobriety.

I understand face to face interactions are essential for building joy strength and developing the control center of my brain.

### **Face-to-Face**

I commit to at least one 30 minute, outside of group, face-to-face meeting with someone from my recovery group each week.

I commit to at least one 30 minute face-to-face meeting with my sponsor every two weeks.

### **Other**

I will carve out some time each week to do something I enjoy, e.g.. hike in the woods, ride my bike, exercise, work in my shop, etc.

## **Protective Boundaries**

### **Internet**

I will install and keep active Covenant Eyes on my personal and work computers. I will have reports sent to Jeff and Bob each week. I give them permission to hold me accountable by asking me anytime there are questionable items on my report. If I have any problems, I will initiate confession and not expect them to drag it out of me.

I will not access the Internet on any other computers.

I will not surf the net but will only look for specific, non-sexual information unless my wife or someone who knows about my struggle is in the room with full view of my computer screen.

I will not access the Internet between 10 PM and 6 AM without my wife in the same room and fully awake.

### **Social Networking**

I will only have a shared account with my wife.

I will not reply to or click on any Facebook or other social networking links or any solicitations that I do not know are 100% safe.

I will not peruse "Friends of friends" search for or click on anyone's profile.

I will only read my newsfeed twice per day.

### **Email**

I have turned off the pictures on my email accounts and will only turn them on for emails I know are safe.

I have my spam filter set on high and will not access my bulk mail folder

I will immediately double delete any porn spam that makes it into my inbox

### **Television**

I will not watch any TV if I have not done my recovery work for the day.

I will not watch any TV after the 10PM news without first clearing it with my sponsor

I have had my wife set the V-Chip on the TV for TV-MA, R and "sexual content." If I discover the pass code, or find the TV unprotected I will tell her immediately.

I will not channel surf.

I will not watch any shows that I know have a strong sexual content or feature scantily clad women.

### **Movies/Video**

I will not go to a theater or video rental store by myself

I will not scroll through online video listings by myself

I will not watch any NC-17 or X rated movies/videos under any circumstances

I will not watch any R or unrated movie/videos without my wife or a Christian man who can help me make certain to use the scene skip button at the appropriate times.

I will only watch online movies and video content on Netflix as the history cannot be deleted and my wife knows how to check the history.

### **Travel**

If alone, I will unplug the TV upon entering my hotel room and leave it unplugged for the duration of my stay.

I will not watch TV when I am alone or when my wife/roommate is asleep.

I will not visit or patronize any establishments where servers or performers are either scantily clad, full or partially nude. If I find an establishment to be a problem, I will leave immediately.

### **Chemical**

I will not drink more than the equivalent of two beers in any 24 hour period.

I will not take any chemicals or medications that are not medically prescribed to me, nor will I take them for any purpose other than what they were originally prescribed.

### **Gaming**

I will not spend more than 30 minutes a day gaming. If I find myself playing two or more days in a row, I will talk to my sponsor about my need to “check out.”

### **Other**

I will not work more than 50 hours per week without first talking over the need with both my wife and my sponsor.

I will not take on any additional responsibilities at my church, my service organization or my kid’s school or athletic activities without first talking with my wife and my sponsor.

I will not make any exceptions to these boundaries until at least 24 hours after talking it over with my sponsor.

I will bring any “attractions” I feel to anyone other than my wife into the light with my sponsor or another man in recovery within 12 hours of recognizing the attraction as well as asking Jesus the question “Who is she to me?” (See content in chapter 2)

### **Consequences for not doing “Six Dailies”**

If I haven’t done my recovery reading and reflecting during the day, I cannot turn on the TV.

If I go more than one day without a phone call, I will send \$25 to the Republican Party.

If I miss more than two days of journaling in a week, I will not watch any TV or videos for one week.

### **Consequences for slips**

1<sup>st</sup> slip \$25 to the Democratic Party

2nd slip (within a month of the first) \$50 to Democratic party.

### **Consequences for crashes**

\$100 to Democratic party

I will not approach my wife sexually until at least thirty days after I have confessed it to her. I will first confess and process the crash with my sponsor before confessing to her.

If I relapse with Internet Pornography, I will disconnect completely until I have at least ninety days of sobriety.

### **Rewards for making goals**

9 holes of golf on a Saturday after two weeks of keeping all my proactive boundaries

### **Rewards for maintaining Sobriety**

\$100 mad money when I reach 90 days of sobriety

Trip to Colorado after reaching 1 year of sobriety

### **Emergency plan in case of a crash**

I will call my sponsor and/or another leader to confess my sin as soon as possible and within 12 hours.

I will confess crash to my wife after processing with sponsor.

I will attend next possible group meeting regardless of inconvenience and share it with my check-in group.

I will journal for at least 30 minutes about the stressors, triggers and fears preceding the crash.

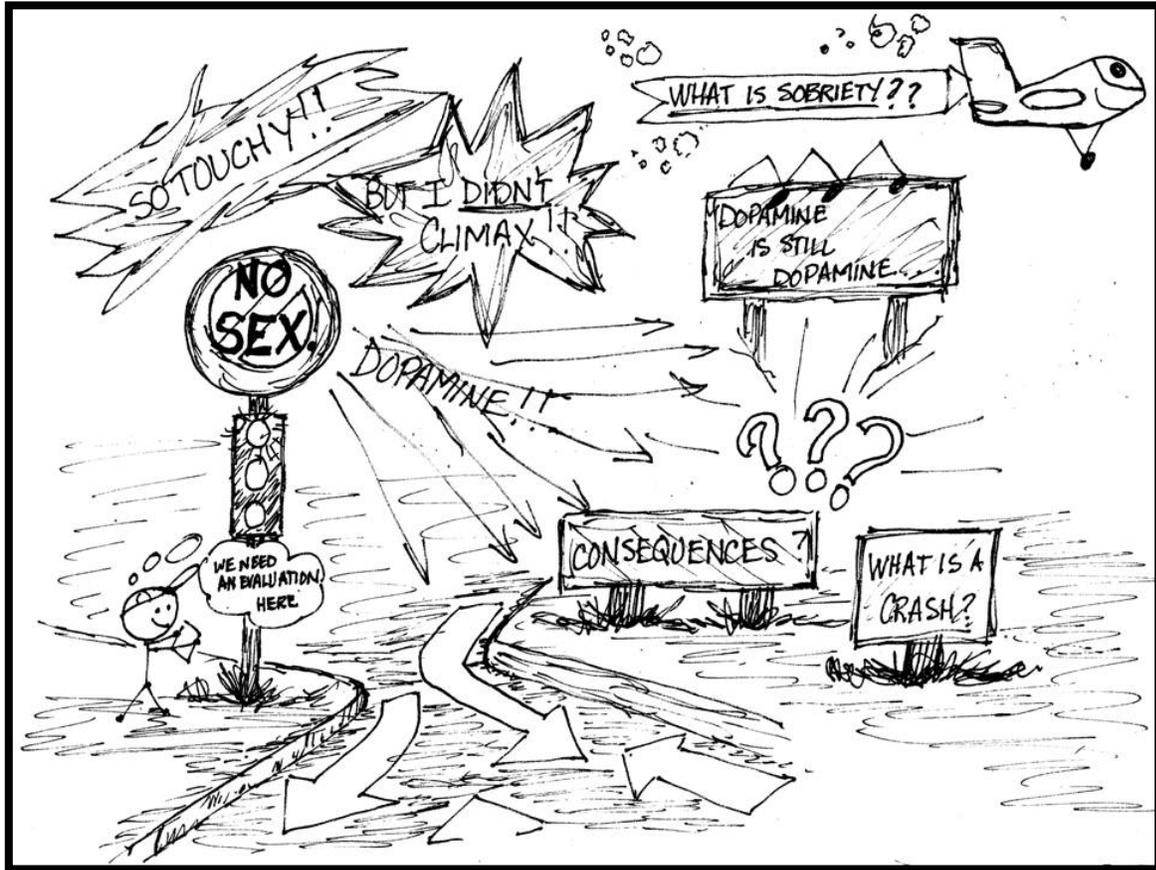
I will re-evaluate both proactive and protective boundaries and share in writing any changes made with sponsor, group members and my wife.

### **Revising This Document**

I commit to reading over and revising this document on a once-a-month basis until I have a year of sobriety. After a year, I will read and revise on at least a quarterly basis.

If I lose my sobriety at any time in the future, I will return to a once-a-month basis.

# Handouts and Worksheets



# **Personal Recovery Plan**

**Personal Definition Of Sobriety**

**Proactive Boundaries**

**Prayer**

**Phone Calls**

**Reading Recovery Materials**

**Reflecting**

**Group Meetings**

**Face-To-Face**

**Other**

**Protective Boundaries  
Internet**

**Email**

**Television**

**Movies**

**Travel**

**Chemical**

**Gaming**

**Other**

## **Consequences And Rewards**

**Consequences for not completing the 6 dailies**

**Consequences For Slips**

**Consequences For Crashes**

**Rewards For Achieving Goals**

**Rewards For Maintaining Sobriety**

**Emergency Plan In Case Of A Crash**

**Revising This Document**



## 9. MASTURBATION

---

Don's story is typical of what I often hear:

"I had come to the place where I accepted masturbation as a 'necessary evil.' I couldn't escape Jesus' teaching about lust so I was very careful to not fantasize about anyone other than my wife, (except of course for the times I went off the deep end and binged with pornography) and honestly thought I was protecting myself and doing her a favor by relieving the sexual pressure. I had bought into the lie I had to have a sexual release at least daily. My routine was to masturbate in the morning while she was in the shower and intermittently at other times. I was quite proud of myself because I had gone months without looking at pornography (well, there were a few slips, but they were so much less than what I had done in the past they seemed inconsequential).

I thought my system was working—that is until my wife left town and I had a three-day pornography binge. However, despite the major crash, I didn't make the connection between pornography and masturbation until I heard another man talk about how they had been connected in his life. That night the Spirit of God convicted me that while I couldn't say it was always wrong for everyone, I knew it was wrong for me. By the grace of God, I haven't masturbated since. Amazingly enough, once I stopped masturbating, the tractor beam of pornography no longer overwhelmed my self-control and I haven't crashed with pornography either."

### The Controversy

The subject of masturbation is always difficult. First, the closest scripture gets to a direct reference to masturbation is in Genesis 38:9 where Onan "spilled his semen on the ground." However, the text seems to imply the issue wasn't masturbation, but his refusal to have children bearing his brother's name. The question about masturbation is especially clouded because well-respected and even nationally known Christian counselors and teachers have said things like, "there is nothing wrong with it unless it becomes excessive." However, the problem with "excessive" is it is a relative term and most men I've talked to believe it applies to those who do it more than they do.

We have had many men come to our groups who initially thought we were crazy because we had voluntarily given up the right to masturbate and listed not masturbating in our personal definitions of sobriety. However, many of those men have since come to the same place. They also have discovered greater levels of freedom than they ever imagined possible.

### The Reality

Understanding some of what happens in the brain at the point of sexual climax helps explain the connection. During arousal, the body releases endorphins and enkephalins which are two of the chemicals our brains desire most intensely. They are sometimes released during running or other high aerobic activities. Research shows that when a runner gets to a place where his body is in just the right amount of pain, it floods the brain with endorphins and enkephalins and creates an opiate-type chemical and a "buzz." The result is the brain wants to do it again and again. The body also releases these chemicals through creativity, expression, as well as intimate connections with others. Orgasm releases an especially high volume of dopamine, endorphins and enkephalins. Over time, habitual masturbation develops neurological pathways causing the brain to literally become "chemically



addicted.”<sup>37</sup> That is why most men experience physical withdrawal symptoms like nervousness, headaches, fatigue, irritability etc. as they “kick the habit.”

It is also important to note sexual release stimulates the brain’s pleasure center which is the same place stimulated by cocaine and heroin. “A noted laboratory experiment with rats shows this immense power. First, rats were habituated to heroin. Next, an electrode was placed in their brains that when activated, stimulated the sexual pleasure centers of the animals. The rats were then given two choices: touch a button that would give them heroin or one that would sexually stimulate them. They consistently chose sexual stimulation over heroin, one of the most addictive drugs known, with extremely uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms. In another experiment, rats were deprived of food for a week. They were then put into a cage with their mates and food. Every rat chose to mate rather than eat the food.”<sup>38</sup> No, we are not rats. However, the same process works in our brains as well.

Jim Wilder points out the portion of our brain controlling our genitals is immediately adjacent to the brain’s bonding center. Therefore, the purpose of our sexuality is to “synchronize” energy states, emotions, etc. with another person who is “glad to be with us.” “The problem with masturbation . . . is that it is synchronizing energy with nobody.” This leads a man to bond with himself, his fantasy, or other non-relational entities which in turn leads a man to further isolation and compulsion.<sup>39</sup>

Patrick Carnes illustrates this well:

*When a person goes to a strip club, views a porn movie in a theater, or takes part in some other kind of voyeuristic or exposing activity, it’s usually not possible to have an orgasm at the moment that the activity is taking place. People generally return to a car or their home and masturbate to the memory of the event. One of the attributes of the Internet that makes it powerful is it is*

*possible to have an orgasm while watching a stripper or “spying” on via a voyeur cam in the safety of your own surroundings. The sexual activity and orgasm suddenly become linked. In addition, the computer and its location become sexualized too. Going to the computer, turning it on, logging on to the Net, taking part in online sexual activities, and orgasm all become fused into a very powerful ritualized activity.”<sup>40</sup>*

Doug Weiss tells the story of a client who could only masturbate with his cowboy boots on. When they explored his story, they found he discovered masturbation while living in an old farmhouse. His family heard him and made fun of him. His solution was to put his boots on, go outside and masturbate while looking down at his feet.<sup>41</sup> Through this repetitive orgasm centered sexual activity, he became sexually bonded to his boots. This process is often the source of fetishes which seem strange to everyone except those bonded to the objects.

### **Its Impact on Our Relationships**

God created our brains so sexual release would be an important part of the bonding process with our spouse. In Ephesians 5:31, Paul writes, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” The word the NIV translates as “unite” comes from the Greek word *Kallao* which literally means “to glue together.”<sup>42</sup> God designed sexual union between man and wife to be “super-glue” that bonds one flesh to the other. Satan, however, has twisted God’s good by introducing other objects, people and even fantasy into this intimate experience. The result is we bond to whatever we are looking at or involved with at the point of climax.

Masturbation also feeds our fear of intimacy and relationship. I’ve even seen a bumper sticker saying, “Porn . . . it’s cheaper than dating.” How sad is it, that this is reality for many men? Some are single because through pornography and

<sup>37</sup> Douglas Weiss, *The Final Freedom* Discovery Press, Fort Worth, 1998, pp. 18-21.

<sup>38</sup> Carnes, *In the Shadows of the Net*, p.205.

<sup>39</sup> E. James Wilder. “Recovery From Sexual Addiction” video conference.

<sup>40</sup> Carnes, *In the Shadows of the Net*, p.65

<sup>41</sup> Doug Weiss, “Ministering to the Sexually Addicted” lecture. October 21, 2005 in Overland Park, Kansas.

<sup>42</sup> K. L. Schmidt, “*kallao*” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* III p. 822.

masturbation they have learned they can have false intimacy without risking relationship. Many married men live relationally isolated in part because their addiction to “solo sex” has isolated them even from the one they promised to “love, honor and cherish.” One man confessed in group that he remembers fantasizing about something happening to his wife and thinking he would be better off because he got more enjoyment out of masturbation than he did sex anyway. If his wife were gone, he could take care of himself without all the conflict and frustration of the relationship.

Many years ago, C. S. Lewis addressed the issue in a powerful way:

*For me, the real evil of masturbation would be that it takes an appetite which, in lawful use, leads the individual out of himself to complete his own personality in that of another and turns it back; sends the man into the prison of himself, there to keep a harem of imaginary brides.*

*And this harem, once admitted, works against his ever getting out and really uniting with a real woman. For the harem is: always accessible, always subservient, calls for no sacrifices or adjustments, and can be endowed with erotic and psychological attractions which no real woman can rival. Among those shadowy brides he is: always adored, always the perfect love, no demand is made on his unselfishness, no mortification ever imposed on his vanity. In the end, they become merely the medium through which he increasingly adores himself.<sup>43</sup>*

### **Its Impact on Our Sex Life with Our Spouse**

Another problem with masturbation is it conditions the body for quick release and the mind for a narcissistic focus on self. When a man masturbates, he generally does so quickly because of a fear of “being caught” and because his goal is the release of the dopamine, endorphins and the enkephalins on the pleasure center of the brain. Since he is the only one he seeks to please, he learns to go through the arousal and climax process quickly. Once he

marries and has intercourse with his wife, he may find it impossible to hold off orgasm long enough to satisfy his wife. Some men are so self-focused they are not bothered by the brevity of the encounter. They get their needs met and that is all that matters. Other men struggle with feelings of shame and/or inadequacy because of their inability to please their spouse. Either way, the result is often the same. An event God designed to bring pleasure and connection between a husband a wife ends, not in a place of joy, but a place of failure, shame, and isolation.

Once a man conditions his body this way, he may continue to struggle with control even after he has broken the masturbation habit. Fortunately, there are exercises to help a man learn to maintain control, but they are beyond the scope of this manual. You can find them, however, in *Intended For Pleasure* by Ed Wheat and *The Gift of Sex* by Clifford & Joyce Penner. I must, however, give one important note of caution. These exercises require regular and active participation by your wife and are inherently sexual in nature. Very, very few couples in early recovery are in a place where they can navigate the extremely tumultuous waters of this activity. (Not to mention the fact that reading a book about sex, even God honoring marital sex, can be a trigger for many men.) It should be saved for a time after both husband and wife have been in recovery for at least a year.

### **The Joy of Freedom**

In the next chapter we will cover very practical and specific guidelines to help you abstain from masturbation. For now, I’ll close with “Jim’s” story as a way of encouragement and preparation for the next chapter. Jim’s battle and victory provide a vivid illustration of how masturbation and the battle of abstaining from it play out in “real life.”

*About a year into my recovery, my wife and I decided to do a total abstinence period to give her some time to heal and not feel any pressure from me about sex. I had no idea how important this time would be for me or how tied I really was to the belief*

---

<sup>43</sup> Laurie Hall: *An Affair of the Mind*, pp. 115-16 quoting C. S. Lewis to a Mr. Masson, March 6,

1956, Wade Collection, Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill.

*that sex was my greatest need and that I would die if I did not have regular sexual release. The first ten days or so were surprisingly easy. After all, because of my wife's menstrual cycle, travel, houseguests, and other "complications" we had gone that long on numerous occasions. However, starting about the second week, literally all hell began to break loose. I woke up at 3AM from a dream where I was in my old office watching a slide show of images I had downloaded to my computer. I was so aroused I was ready to release and afraid any movement or pressure would do me in. Everything within me screamed "just get it over with." "You know you are too far gone to not finish what you have started."*

*The condemnation poured in like a flood. "You know you want to do it." "You'll never break free because this is just who you are." And the worst was an almost audible voice saying, "I didn't use anything new, I only used what you had placed in your mental hard drive." The last one almost did me in because I started thinking about the pictures in my dream, and I could vividly remember downloading and masturbating to them about two years earlier. Thankfully, however, I had just enough sense to cry out to God. No, the erection did not suddenly subside and no, victory wasn't immediate. However, over the next hour or so, as I laid in bed praying and begging God for the strength to not act out, the crisis passed and God delivered me.*

*The very next night was an almost exact repetition of the night before only in addition to the condemnation, Satan added messages of deception and justification.*

*"No one will know: your wife is sound asleep and you don't have to tell anyone."*

*"It isn't like you are having an affair or something."*

*"If she were meeting your needs like scripture says she should, you wouldn't be in this place."*

*"Everyone knows 99% of men do it and the other one percent lie about it."*

*"You barely survived last night, how are you going to survive this night after night after night?"*

*And finally, "This will go on forever."*

*The last message, however, is where the enemy tipped his hand. I knew it wouldn't go on forever because my wife and I had agreed to a thirty day "sexual fast," not to a life of celibacy. Thankfully, that awareness, combined with God's gracious comfort, got me through another night.*

*A few nights later, I woke up soaked as I had experienced my first "wet dream." Since I started masturbating around the age of 11, I had never gone long enough without a sexual release to require my body to "take care of itself." Looking back, I now realize it really was a landmark of victory; however, at the moment, all I could feel was shame. I felt dirty. I felt like I had just crashed and Satan flooded me with his messages of condemnation. On top of everything, I had to clean up. I vividly remember crying as I tried to go back to sleep, "God, is this pain ever going to go away." The next day, however, I was able to talk and pray through the night's events. God showed me I am not responsible for my dreams. I hadn't crashed. I wasn't starting over, and for a while, things got better.*

*The next several nights were "uneventful," and I started to think I had survived the assault. In fact, while going to sleep each night was still a struggle and I desperately wanted to "renegotiate" with my wife, I was able to go to sleep without acting out. Several mornings, I remember waking up almost "giddy" and honestly surprised not only that I hadn't died but at how good I felt. You aren't supposed to feel this way when you "aren't getting any," but I did, and the freedom felt incredible.*

*About a week later, the attacks returned. I had several more sexually explicit dreams and always woke up just before the point of release. It was difficult and felt much like the first week, only slightly easier. I knew I didn't have to give in and knew if I "stood in the middle of the pain long enough, God would show himself to be enough."*

*Of course, Satan knows just how and when to ratchet up the pain another notch. After about a month of abstinence, I felt*

*pretty good about myself and, at the same time, incredibly aroused by even looking at or thinking about my wife. That is when the physical pain kicked in. My lower back began to ache and my testicles started throbbing. Honestly, it felt like they were going to explode. They were so full and hard it hurt when I walked. On top of that, I had intense and even painful erections that would last for hours and not go away no matter what I did. Thoughts raced through my head:*

*“The only solution to this problem is to either have sex with my wife or else take matters into my own hands.”*

*I may have even asked her to end the fast early and put me out of my misery. Thankfully, she didn't because it was only by surviving the “misery” that I learned sex did not have to control me.*

*To make matters even worse, a day before we had planned on resuming physical intimacy, my wife told me she wasn't ready to end the fast. I must admit, I was hurt, angry and felt both cheated and punished. Entitled thoughts like, “Does she have no clue how hard this is for me?” and “Wait one second, we had a deal. You owe me!”*

*rattled through my brain. I don't remember how much I protested, but what choice did I have?*

*I could have possibly pressured her into caving in—and looking back at where I was at the time—I probably tried. However, we weren't intimate for at least three more weeks and that was a tremendous blessing for me. No, at the time, it didn't feel like a blessing. However, especially since we didn't have an official “ending point” as it was my wife's nebulous, “When I'm ready, I'll let you know,” I learned that even without sex, I could be Okay. Yes, I was frustrated. Yes, I was hurting, but I was alive, and I could even function during my day. I experienced a level of freedom I never knew existed.” Today, several years later, I still long to be intimate with my wife, however, during the times (because of her struggles, travel, or other circumstances,) where we aren't physically intimate, I know I will be okay. While they are still difficult, they pale in comparison because I now know I will not die. I also know my desire for sexual intimacy is a healthy desire and no longer a compulsive need. I pray you find the same freedom!*

## Application & Journaling Questions

1. When and how did you discover masturbation?
2. In a typical week, how often did you masturbate at the following ages?  
8-10 \_\_\_\_\_ 11-13 \_\_\_\_\_ 14-16 \_\_\_\_\_ 17-19 \_\_\_\_\_ College \_\_\_\_\_
3. How quickly into your marriage did masturbation resurface?
4. What is your current frequency of masturbation?
5. How have your patterns of masturbation changed since marrying?
6. When do you feel the pull to masturbate? What triggers are you currently aware of?
7. Is your wife aware of your masturbation habit? What have you done to “hide” it from her? What does your need to “hide” it from her say about its legitimacy?
8. What mixed messages have you received concerning masturbation?
9. How have you “justified” masturbation to yourself? To your wife?
10. Do you feel convicted to abstain from masturbation? If “yes,” for how long? If “no,” will you consider a 90 day fast from masturbation to see what kind of hold it has on you?
11. Take 15 minutes to simply journal about any connections you see between your story and “Jim’s” story. Don’t edit your thoughts; just write in your journal whatever comes to your mind.

## 10. ABSTAINING FROM MASTURBATION

---

If you believe God has convicted you to abstain from masturbation (or other sexual activity or fantasy), you need to be prepared for an all-out assault on your mind, body and spirit. Since sexual climax releases large doses of dopamine, endorphins and enkephalins in the pleasure center of your brain, and since you (assuming you are like most of the men in our groups) have been masturbating regularly for many years, your body will fight against you in many ways. This battle is incredibly intense. One individual stated in no uncertain terms: “I have now experienced withdrawal from four addictions, including cocaine. By far the worst withdrawal was from my sexual addiction.” This was a common refrain among a survey of over 2000 individuals who had been “in recovery” for at least two years.<sup>44</sup> However, despite the intensity and duration of the battle, God will deliver you if you turn to Him.

### Preparing for the Battle

This chapter presents several very practical truths that will help you in your battle. Please read them carefully. Then, as always, spend ample time answering the questions in the “Application & Journaling Questions” section. Answering the questions will help you apply truth to your own struggle and to continue working on the right side of your brain through attunement. I cannot overstate how important it is to understand the intensity of the battle before you and the necessity of taking appropriate steps to be prepared for it. Without this understanding, the most common reaction is to be overwhelmed when the intensity of struggle barges into your life and to then sink into despair and acting out. Being aware of the battle may not make the battle itself easier, but when it comes (and it will), you will have already made the decision to stand and face the battle “come what may” and you will be prepared with the necessary weapons to fight well and victoriously.

### Truth #1: You Will Not Die

While this may seem a little dramatic, the first and most important thing you must understand when walking out of an addiction to masturbation is you will not die. In fact, you won’t even explode or go crazy. Part of learning to not masturbate is actually a childhood task of learning how to tame your cravings. In an ideal maturation process a boy will learn to overcome the voice inside his head that says he will die if he doesn’t get whatever he craves at a given moment. This process is a physical skill of taming a small portion of the brain called the nucleus accumbens.

Addicts have notoriously poor impulse control because they have never learned to tame “this small cluster of nerves in their brain that screams loudly ‘we are surely going to die’ if we do not get what we crave.



Learning to tame the nucleus accumbens means learning to delay gratification, resist our appetites and withstand our drives. Disciplines like fasting and moderation in our eating and pleasures teach us to tame the nucleus accumbens.”<sup>45</sup> When a two-year-old lies on the floor and pitches a fit because he can’t have ice cream right before dinner, he demonstrates he does not have control over his nucleus accumbens. When a 40-year-old man gives in and masturbates after three days of abstinence, part of what he is dealing with is an untrained nucleus accumbens. It is a learned skill but the only way to learn it, is to do it. You cannot tame your nucleus accumbens by reading about it. You must do without and struggle through the lies. Many men, consciously or at least sub-consciously believe if they don’t have a sexual release every X number of days, they will die .

---

<sup>44</sup> Patrick Carnes: *Don’t Call It Love* p. 223

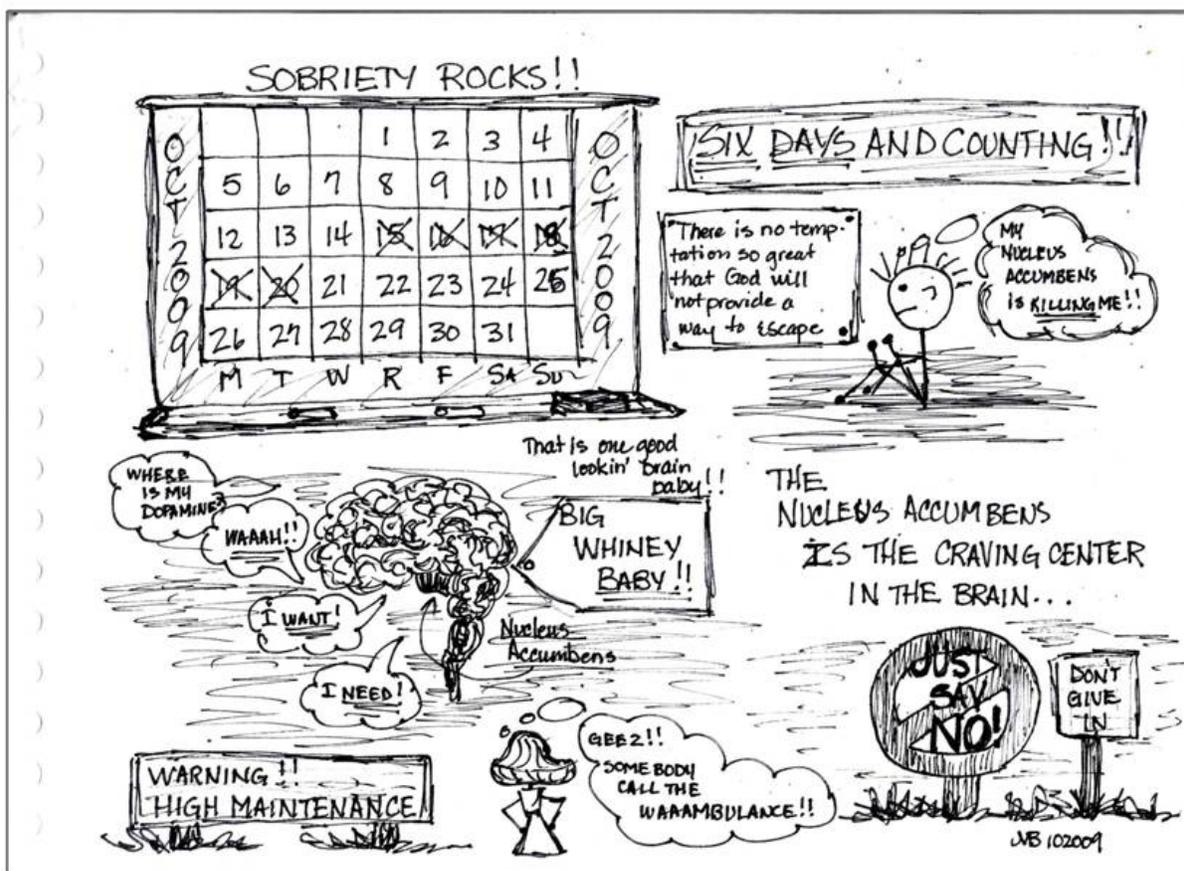
<sup>45</sup> Raymond Jones & E. James Wilder “Catastrophic Failure to Reach Adult Maturity and the Onset of Addictions” p. 1

If they believe that number is two, the only way they will learn on a heart level it is a lie is by going more than two days. If they believe that number is 30 days, the only way to diffuse the lie is by going past 30 days.

It is common for men to get trapped in specific cycles. We have had many men do well for about 30 days and then crash, 30 more days and then crash again. There are many factors involved, but the cycle is often the same. Immediately after a crash, the pain of their actions is enough that they are highly motivated. They make phone calls, attend group meetings, read materials, spend time journaling, praying, etc. After a few weeks—as the memory of the

pain fades—they slack off on “recovery behaviors” and before they recognize the cycle, cave into their nucleus accumbens as it cries out, “if you don’t relieve yourself, you are going to die.” Sometimes men avoid facing the pain of their cravings by prodding or pressuring their wife into sex, not for the purpose of connection, but simply for a release so they don’t have to face the pain of the unfilled craving. The reality, however, is you can only find true freedom by fighting through the pain, you cannot go around it. One of the mantra’s we use in our groups is, **“You must stand in the middle of the pain long enough to discover God is truly enough.”**

Sobriety Rocks!!



## Truth #2: You Will Suffer Physical Symptoms

In addition to the pain of taming the nucleus accumbens, most men also suffer physically as their body adjusts to not masturbating. If a man masturbates or has a sexual release daily, his body conditions itself to produce enough semen for daily ejaculations. When a man goes from a daily release (or multiple daily releases) to a less frequent pattern, (i.e. when his only outlet is intercourse with his wife), his body continues to produce the amount of semen he has conditioned it to produce. The result is literally like building a dam on a stream bed. The fluid backs up and begins to apply pressure in all the wrong places. While it is uncomfortable to talk about, we always see relief on the faces of new men in the groups when someone further down the road talks about feeling like his “testicles were going to explode.” In addition to the testicular pain, many also experience lower back pain due to pressure on the prostate. While it is uncomfortable, the good news is, over time, your body will learn to adjust to your “normal” frequency of sexual intimacy, even if your normal is total abstinence. However, some of these symptoms may return when you do not have a sexual release for a period of time. The fact that the symptoms return, however, does not give credence to the lie that a man must have a regular sexual release. Part of growing in our maturity is learning to suffer well.

In Ephesians 5:25 Paul writes, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” The price Jesus paid to give himself up for his bride included more than a little suffering. It was, and is, a mark of his love for her. During the times your wife is unable to meet your desires, God calls you to suffer well for her sake. It can be painful. However, to grow into true manhood, you must learn how not to be controlled by pain. You must learn to endure suffering—even the physical pain that comes from not having a sexual release—in a way that brings glory to Christ. Don’t deny it. Don’t pretend it doesn’t hurt, and by all means, don’t try to deal with it alone. As uncomfortable as it may seem at first, you will find great encouragement and support when you

talk about it in your recovery group. In addition to group times, pick up the phone, call someone and talk through the pain. If they are ahead of you in recovery, most likely they will know exactly what you are talking about and can offer you words of hope because they are also striving to learn to suffer well.

## Truth #3: You Will Suffer Chemical Withdrawals



Patrick Carnes addresses this directly in his book, *Don’t Call It Love*. “Many ask how sex can be an addiction when no drug is ingested. Drugs, in fact *are* involved—in the form of naturally-occurring peptides such as endorphins which govern the electrochemical interactions within the brain. These peptides parallel the molecular construction of opiates like morphine, but they are many times more powerful. We know that when experimental rats are habituated to morphine or heroin, they will go through much pain in order to obtain more. However, when the pleasure centers of the brain are stimulated, releasing endorphins, rats will go through even more suffering than they will for morphine or heroin.”<sup>46</sup>

Therefore, since the release of endorphins and enkephalins in the pleasure center of your brain is a chemical reaction, the constant repetitive nature of masturbation literally creates a chemical dependency. In fact, Carnes study found many who wrestled with both a chemical addiction and a sex addiction said the withdrawal symptoms from the sexual addiction were the most difficult to endure. While the initial physical symptoms were less severe, the overall withdrawal experience took longer and hurt more than withdrawals from the chemical addiction.<sup>47</sup> One man on an Oprah Winfrey show put it in graphic terms when he said, “I have been through withdrawals from alcohol, cocaine, and nicotine and none of them compared to withdrawals from sexual addiction.”<sup>48</sup>

The withdrawal symptoms include a variety of experiences including, but not limited to the following: Headaches, irritability, fits of anger, fatigue, inability to sleep, sleeping too much,

<sup>46</sup> Patrick Carnes: *Don’t Call It Love* p. 22

<sup>47</sup> Patrick Carnes: *Don’t Call It Love* p. 25

<sup>48</sup> Oprah Winfrey Show. May 6, 1999

loss of appetite, increased appetite, nausea, heart rate increases, shortness of breath, heightened sexual desire, decreased or even no sexual desire, chills, sweats, and some even experience body shakes similar to those experienced by alcoholics and drug addicts.<sup>49</sup> Like all withdrawal symptoms, there is no way around them; they must simply be endured until they fade away.

#### **Truth #4: You Will Be Attacked By The Enemy**

Satan hates freedom and any movement you make to walk out of the bondage will meet stiff resistance. I am not one who typically sees a devil behind every bush. However, over twenty years of walking with men as they move into freedom from sexual addiction has made me a strong believer in Satan's active involvement in our lives and world. I could write many pages describing the strange and unexplainable circumstances and opportunities that have suddenly presented themselves to men right as they are starting to make progress in their recoveries.

Below are a couple stories to help you catch a glimpse of the spiritual assault. "Jeff" was about 50 days into recovery when he and his wife went to see family for a holiday. On their way home, they stopped at a rest stop and each went to the appropriate restroom. On Jeff's way out, a prostitute met him face to face and solicited him on the spot. Prior to that moment, he had never been that close to a prostitute, let alone solicited by one. Now, when he is at a watershed stage in his recovery, she stands in front of him and basically offers to go back into the restroom with him to "meet his needs." He was caught completely off guard. By the grace of God, however, he had his cell phone in hand and made a call with her standing right in front of him. A moment later, his wife walked out, saw him standing with a prostitute, and it was only God's mercy that allowed her to see he was making a phone call and not engaging the woman. That encounter, however, haunted him for many days and Satan continued to heap messages of condemnation as well as the temptation to masturbate to the memory of what "could have

been." Thankfully, Jeff continued to talk through the event, the messages of condemnation and the temptation with group members and at group meetings until its power faded.

In his addiction, Peter occasionally acted out by going to a strip club about an hour away from his hometown. His job had high visibility in the community, and he was a leader in his church so he was always terrified of being caught. On his last visit to the strip club, he had a conversation with one of the workers. Ironically enough, the conversation turned to spiritual things and Peter felt convicted about his sin while at the same time drawn to encourage the young woman to seek out her faith.

When he got home, he purchased and sent an outreach book to her explaining the gospel in very simple terms. He mailed it to the club with her name on it. He has no memory of writing anything more than something like "I pray this will help you in your journey to know God" and cannot believe he would have been stupid enough to leave his phone number or anything that could be traced back to him. He even said that if he would have done anything, he would have put an untraceable email address he sometimes used. Three months later he was making some very significant strides in his recovery, including his longest period ever without masturbating and getting ready to move out of his shame by telling a few key people in his life about his struggle.

It was at this point the attacks came in full force. First, he had a dream where the young woman from the club was calling his name and asking for him. The very next day, while he was encouraging someone else in his addiction, he received a text message on his cell phone asking, "What do you do for a living?" This was especially surprising because he didn't do text messages. Here is his account of what happened:

*When I saw that it was from the same area code as the strip club, I caught my breath. Somehow I just knew they were connected. A couple of minutes later, I received another message: "Well, you gonna answer, or do I have to point you out?"*

---

<sup>49</sup> Patrick Carnes: *Don't Call It Love* p. 224 combined with experiences of those in our groups.

*I text back: "Who is this?"*

*A couple of minutes later: "Answer the question"*

*Still not sure if this was serious or not, I answered, "I'm a secret agent."*

*The reply: "This ain't no game. You in my business, and you shouldn't be."*

*I still didn't want to admit anything, so I text back, "How have I offended you?"*

*"You meet a girl from a shake joint a while back?"*

*Again, I responded, "How have I made you angry?"*

*The response: "So you go from [your town] to [my town] so no one will know?"*

*Now, I had told a few people, so I text back two words: "People know."*

*After this, there was at least an excruciating hour before I heard anything, then I received... "What was the name of the book you sent her?"*

*I responded: "What is the purpose of these questions?"*

*And that was the last I heard from the text messenger. I tried to call the number but didn't get an answer. Needless to say, the whole event freaked me out. It was three months after my initial encounter at the club, during a week when my life's ministry and recovery were both starting to hit a consistent stride. I seriously feared that everything was about to come crashing in around me. By the grace and mercy of God, however, He turned it into an opportunity to reach out to my sponsor, and the guys in my group.*

I could also write about men in our groups who have stumbled onto pornographic magazines while taking a walk to clear their head after a fight with their wife, or even while picking up trash as a consequence for acting out. Just last night a man told how he was traveling last week and when he checked into his hotel, he had them turn off all the movie channels on his TV. That was great the first night, but when he arrived at his room for the second evening, he had a voice mail message saying "We fixed the problem on your TV. All the movies should work now." Another man told me when he went to Promise Keepers and checked into his hotel room, he and his roommate turned on the TV and it was already on the porn station with a naked

woman immediately on the screen. If you don't believe in Satan's active involvement in our world, simply spend some time with individuals actively seeking freedom and note the strange "coincidences" that attempt to sabotage recovery efforts.

Therefore, as you make progress in your recovery and especially as you gain important territory you must realize Satan will step up his attacks on you. While you cannot anticipate the specifics of his attacks—he is a master at ambushing his victims—you must prepare yourself for whatever he throws at you. When I played football in high school our coaches constantly implored us to "keep your head on a swivel" when running down the field to cover kickoffs. They would make the point very graphically during film sessions as they showed someone getting plastered because he focused his eyes so intently on the player with the ball, he never saw the blocker coming from another direction. The same principle holds true in recovery. Satan will attack and you must keep your head on a swivel looking for his attack.

The good news, however, is God's protection is more powerful than Satan's attack. John tells us "The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world" (I John 4:4). Satan attacks primarily by deception. He is never stronger or more powerful than our God. He will constantly attempt to convince you otherwise. He will threaten you with his power that is infinitely stronger than your power outside of Christ but powerless at the name of Jesus. He also can never resist an opportunity to take a big swing at you. But don't miss this important truth: Whenever Satan throws his biggest punches, he leaves himself most vulnerable to God's counterpunches. Whenever you are under attack, look for the opportunity that God wants to step into. Look for Him to reveal Satan's lies in your life and to bring healing to the wounded places. Satan always attacks your vulnerabilities, and his attacks can be a great diagnostic for the very places God wants to heal. Even if his punch lands—even if you crash—don't give up hope. Instead, trust our God is a redeeming God and "know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). The "all things" of that verse even includes your sin. Some of the greatest victories our men have found in their recovery work have come

immediately after being pummeled by Satan's attacks and even in the aftermath of some of their worst crashes. Our God is much greater than our enemy and our victory is assured by the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

### **Truth #5: You Will Experience Sexually Explicit Dreams**

One common way Satan attacks men in early recovery is through their dreams. I do not know a single man who has broken free from a sexual addiction that Satan did not attack this way. I have had a few men claim they weren't having any dreams, but it later came out they weren't being honest with me or the group and were still acting out. The dreams seem to follow a typical pattern. Within a month from the time a man stops masturbating (assuming he isn't using intercourse with his wife for the same purpose and frequency—see #7 below) he will usually wake up in the middle of the night from a sexually charged dream. Often the dream will be about women he has seen in his pornography, fantasized about in real time, or acted out with in some manner. He will wake up right before the point of climax and everything within him will scream to "finish the job." Satan then heaps messages of condemnation and hopelessness like, "This is what you really want" and, "You'll never get out of this."

At this point, it is crucial you learn to fight well. First, you must pray. This is a Satanically charged attack against your recovery and the only way you will have the strength to overcome is by asking God to intervene. Second, you must not touch yourself as it may only take the slightest touch to push you over the edge. Third, you need to do whatever is necessary to diffuse the sexual energy. Some have found it helpful to get out of bed, go into another room and read, journal, pray or do something that takes your mind off the images and sensations of the dream. For some, leaving the bed is too dangerous because they won't act out with their wife in bed with them but will if they go into another room. (Again, it is helpful to have a battle plan ahead of time rather than making decisions in the heat of the moment.) Fourth, you must talk about the dream with someone as soon as possible. There are times this can be your wife, however, please be very careful and make certain she is in a place to help you and not in a place where she will feel

condemned or pressured to use her sexuality to make you okay. If you talk to her, don't burden her with the details; just say something to the effect of "I've just had a sexually explicit attack dream, would you please pray with me."

You definitely need to talk about it with a sponsor or group member as soon as possible. If you do not talk about it, the images and sensations will continue to pop into your mind for days to come and will, at the very least, cause unnecessary struggle and most likely lead to a slip or a crash. Obviously, when you talk about your sexually explicit dreams, you need to be careful to not trigger the person you are talking to by giving unnecessary details. Talking about your dreams doesn't require the details as much as it requires you to talk about the feelings, pulls, etc. that come because of the dreams. Finally, you must remember you are not responsible for your dreams no matter what Satan throws at you. Yes, sometimes a dream is a consequence of our sexual acting out in the past; sometimes it is even a re-enactment of previous sin.

However, if that past has been confessed and washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, there is no condemnation for it. Satan knows that, but he is the master of manipulation and deception. He doesn't care if there is any real condemnation, he only cares that you feel condemned. It is also helpful to pray specifically about the dreams before going to sleep. One prayer many men have found especially helpful is the prayer:

*Lord, please protect me from any sexually explicit attack dreams tonight by showing me the way of escape. If Satan attacks this way, please empower me to fight with your weapons and not my own. Please wake me up enough that I can fight by faith rather than swinging wildly in the fog of being half asleep and half awake. Please remind me in the moment of waking that you have promised a way out.*

Remember, scripture tells us: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it" (I Corinthians 10:13). While it seems strange to us that God would allow Satan to attack a man coming out of a sexual addiction with sexually

explicit dreams, we can know God will not allow more than a man can bear, and He will provide an escape. We can also know when a man chooses God's escape, he will discover more about himself and about God's power to protect and deliver.

Many men also experience non-sexual dreams that leave them in a place of great fear, terror, or dread. We call these "intimidation dreams" and believe they are Satan's attempts to scare us back into old paths. Satan knows whenever we act out of fear, we lose connection with our true identities and act for the sole purpose of "survival." For many men, sexual acting out has been a way to feel powerful and a medication to numb the pain that comes with fear. Again, the answer to this attack is to turn to God and turn to your brothers in Christ. You don't have to live out of fear when you truly understand Jesus has won the victory. Talking through these dreams with others is often especially helpful as they can see the attack more clearly because they are not the ones being shot at.

#### **Truth #6: You Must Avoid All Inappropriate Touch**

It is not uncommon for men to define masturbation in the strictest sense of masturbating to the point of climax and not consider it a problem if they stop themselves before reaching a climax. While it is certainly better to stop than to finish, starting the process invariably causes problems. An acquaintance of mine is a polygraph examiner who does tests on sexual offenders as part of their "continued therapy and monitoring." He brought home the importance of this point the day he told me a common practice among pedophiles is to masturbate to the point just before climax and then stop. This leaves them in a heightened sexual place that helps lower their inhibitions enough to go ahead and find or move forward with a victim. That got my attention as I had not made enough out of the issue of "inappropriate touching." Some might protest, "If the flood of dopamine, endorphins and enkephalins comes at the point of orgasm, what does a little stimulation hurt?" Well, the reality is all sexual fantasy, touching etc. releases those same

chemicals. Orgasm releases a greater quantity, but the other activities stimulate the same processes in the brain. It is also a deceptive and slippery slope of determining how much touch is too much. The best approach is to limit touch to the functional necessities.

#### **Truth #7: You Must Avoid Using Your Wife Addictively**

You should never use your wife addictively. No, I am not saying making love to your wife is a form of acting out. It is a gift from God. However, in early recovery, especially while fighting withdrawal symptoms, it is very difficult to know whether you want to "make love" or whether you just "need a release." In one of Patrick Carne's surveys, a man put it quite bluntly when he said, "I realized I was just masturbating in my wife's vagina."<sup>50</sup> God intended sex to be an intimate form of communication where husband and wife share their joy of being together. In fact, I believe the most important message a man can communicate to his wife during physical intimacies is the message, "I am as glad as glad can be" to be with you. When sex is need driven, it isn't about sharing joy but about getting a fix. The problem for a man in early recovery is those messages are so mixed up in his own mind, they are very difficult for him to understand himself, let alone communicate to his wife.

Sex with your wife in early recovery can also create a problem because it triggers the same chemical processes as acting out. The difference, however, is there is at least the possibility of a connection with your wife. This potential goes unfulfilled, however, whenever a man disappears into his fantasy world. Most men who use pornography struggle, even months into recovery, with replaying slide shows, movies, and encounters with other women on the video screen of their minds during physical intimacy.

When a man uses fantasy while being sexual with his wife, it is especially damaging because it leaves him disconnected from her and continues to bond him to whatever he is visualizing. Because of these factors, we recommend every man who struggles with sexual addiction go through a 90-120 day total abstinence period at some point in his recovery.

---

<sup>50</sup> Patrick Carnes: *Don't Call It Love* p.

We've noted for a long time that a man who comes to us either single or whose wife is so hurt that sex is not on the radar screen, usually breaks through the physical aspects of the addiction quicker and more thoroughly than the man who continues being intimate with his wife. When you look at it from the chemical addiction standpoint, the reasons are obvious.

The problem, however, is the struggle for freedom is about much more than breaking the chemical addiction. For all addicts, healing is also about having needs for love, acceptance, touch, and other early childhood or even infant level needs met by others around them. When a wife is able to give herself to her husband in vulnerable sexuality, it is a powerful form of care that meets some of those needs. However, it is also an incredibly dangerous form as the addict has often sexualized most or all his needs. Raymond Jones puts it quite well when he says, "Addiction is a way of meeting legitimate needs in illegitimate ways."<sup>51</sup> He needs touch—he demands sex. He needs unconditional acceptance—he sees sex as the only way she can show true acceptance. The sexualizing of needs may also feed the addict's desire to have his wife be the one who meets all his needs. The reality, however, is no single individual can make up for the missing affections of early childhood; the needs are simply too great. The pressure to meet these needs through sex is especially painful for a woman who understands, even partially, how deeply his sexual sins have wounded her.

On the other side of the coin is the reality that when a wife is unable or unwilling to sexually give herself to her husband, Satan invariably uses that as a club to continue to pound home the message the husband is not "loveable." Therefore, the timing of the abstinence period is something each couple must determine by God's leading.

In I Corinthians 7:5 Paul writes: "Do not deprive each other [sexually] except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." We are not wise enough to know when the right time is for an abstinence

period. Our souls are too complicated for formulas or human wisdom. However, God knows what we need, and if we will trust Him to lead us, He will tell us when the time is right. However, if your wife is so hurt by your acting out or by the pressure you have put on her to make you Okay through sex that she cannot be sexual with you, then you need to accept where she is as God's answer. You also need to accept the possibility that it may be much longer than even the 90-120 days we have suggested because wounds this deep do not heal on a pre-determined time table.

### **Truth #8: You Must Lock Arms With Your Brothers in Battle**

Hopefully by now you have recognized the steady drumbeat pounding out the need for community. Even in this chapter, the beat goes on; you must lock arms with your brothers in battle. Lone rangers quickly become combat casualties. Just as one soldier cannot defend the attack of an entire platoon of the enemy, you cannot fight this battle alone. One of the most difficult and yet most liberating skills men must learn is how to connect with other men, especially those in his recovery group. The men who learn to make daily phone calls, meet with one another outside of group and truly open up in meetings eventually find freedom. The men who make excuses like, "I'm just not much for talking on the phone" or, "I don't want to bother anyone," rarely break free from the cycle of addiction. Neither do those who fail to make the adjustments necessary to make group meetings a priority, or who, when they come to groups, fail to talk openly and honestly about the temptations and struggles they face daily.

Some may stop acting-out sexually, but they generally just swap addictions. They may not masturbate, but they eat, work, play or do something else just as addictively. They also stay disconnected from their wife, their children, and others. One of the failed tasks of maturity that left us open to addiction in the first place is the failure to establish a group identity.<sup>52</sup> Connecting with a group of fellow strugglers is

---

<sup>51</sup> Raymond Jones & E. James Wilder "Catastrophic Failure to Reach Adult Maturity and the Onset of Addictions" p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> E. James Wilder: "Recovery From Sexual Addiction" video conference. Wilder asserts that sexual addiction is the result of "catastrophic failure to reach adult maturity." Developing a group

often the first place where many men discover true fellowship, acceptance, and connection with others. Learning to relate to and connect with others is a skill our community, i.e. parents, family, church, schools, etc, should have helped us learn in childhood.<sup>53</sup> However, most of us lived in some form of shame that kept us isolated, believing there was something inherently wrong with us. Walking in the light (see Chapter 5 “Fellowship of the Forgiven) with our brothers in Christ and locking arms with them in battle creates an immediate and powerful sense of community that begins the repair work necessary to take the next steps of maturity.

Walking out of a sexual addiction is one of the most difficult and yet rewarding things you will do in this lifetime. It is our hope and prayer the truths in this chapter will help you in this incredibly difficult but critical battle.

### **Truth #9: You Must Grieve The Loss Of Your Comforting Friend.**

While this may sound strange to you at first, you will find great encouragement and even strength when you appropriately grieve the loss of this primary coping mechanism in your life. A statement I find myself making often in group and in individual sessions is “Those who do well in recovery are those who learn to grieve well.” This statement applies in many areas, but it certainly applies here. For many, masturbation has been one of if not the primary way they have medicated painful things and as a result it became their “best friend.” A “Goodbye Letter” one of the men wrote years ago poignantly illustrates this point.

Take a few minutes to slowly read his letter and allow yourself to be curious about the points, phrases and concepts that impact you. Then take some time and write your own “Goodbye Letter.”

---

identity is one of the required tasks of the adult stage.

<sup>53</sup> James G. Fiesen, E. James Wilder, Anne M. Bierling, Rick Koepcke, & Maribeth Pool: *The Life Model* p.53

## *Goodbye My Old Friend*

*I find that music inspires me. I will hear a song and it will stir something deep inside of me. I believe that the Holy Spirit inside of me uses music to minister to my wounded heart. A song will often come to me out of nowhere. This recently happened to me.*

*You see I am getting ready to say goodbye to a couple of old friends. I have said goodbye more times than I can count. Yet each time I say goodbye I fall back in with these friends. On Saturday an old song came to me. I hadn't heard it in years and yet it played in my head as clear as can be. The song is by Simon & Garfunkel and something about the music resonates with me deep down. The words do not directly line up with what I want to say but the mood of the song really does. The song is Sound of Silence. Two of the verses that hit me are,*

*Hello darkness, my old friend, I've come to talk with you again  
Because a vision softly creeping, left its seeds while I was sleeping  
And the vision that was planted in my brain, still remains  
Within the sound of silence*

*Fool, said I, you do not know, silence, like a cancer, grows  
Hear my words and I might teach you, take my arms then I might reach you  
But my words, like silent raindrops fell, and echoed in the wells of silence*

*I have had these friends in my life for the better part of thirty years. They first visited me when I was around nine years old. I had just come through a very traumatic time in my life. I lost my grandmother and we moved to a different city and school where I was nobody, and no one wanted me. I was alone. I still had my family, but no one there knew how to help me with my pain. So, I made a few new friends. They offered a promise that I would never be alone and that they would show me how to take care of any hurt that ever came my way. They did not ask for anything in return. They just wanted to spend as much time with me as they could. I was in just the right place to receive their tender affections. I bonded with these friends, and we became inseparable. Now it would not matter if other people rejected me. I had friends and they showed me how to defend against the wounds the world was going to throw against me.*

*Within the next couple of years my new friends showed me that everyone would turn against me. By this time, I believed everything they whispered into my heart. It did not matter if people turned against me. I could not be hurt. I had friends that would never leave me or abandon me. They showed me how to staunch the blood loss from the wounds my family threw my way. They taught me how to harden my heart against the cruel words of others. They helped me sharpen my own tongue so I could fight back. They taught me how to isolate so completely that no one would ever get to my*

heart. I was a good student. I just wanted someone to be with me. They were true to their word, they never left me. I am now over forty years old and my old friends are still with me.

Many people I know have friends that they regret having. My Mom has a childhood friend that was a big part of her life. She even made Suzie her first child's godmother. Unfortunately Suzie became very messed up later in life and became a friend my Mom was not so happy to have. They do not speak any more and I am not sure my Mom will ever speak to her again. The difference between my mom's old friend and mine is that my old friends are not so easy to avoid.

Unlike the songwriter who names his old friend darkness, my friend's names are Masturbation and Isolation. In short order Masturbation would introduce me to Pornography and Sexual Fantasy while Isolation would bring along Fear and Shame. This group of companions worked together and soon had me locked into a viscous cycle. Pornography would lure me in with intense feelings of pleasure, Fantasy would keep me there and masturbation would release me. Shame that I was doing something I knew was wrong would bring about Fear of what others would think and this would welcome Isolation into my life. Then the cycle would start all over again.

Satan came to visit me as a child and introduced me to these friends. I willingly let them in. Satan found a way to catch a hold of my heart and mind. I did nothing to resist him and everything to welcome him in. I accept responsibility for letting these guys come in and stay. However, like the old saying "fish and guest smell after three days", these old friends have far exceeded their welcome in my life. I find that I must say goodbye to my old friends.

If I am being completely honest, a part of me is not so sure it is a good idea to let these friends go. I am used to drawing comfort from them in the midst of pain. When I am lonely or tired or just bored, they entertain me. These companions have been with me longer than most and know me in a way that no one else does. These guys will not go quietly. I find this statement from Paul to be true for me as well,

I have discovered this principle of life—that when I want to do what is right, I  
inevitably do what is wrong.     Romans 7:21

I know these old friends are no good for me. They come to visit and leave me a wreck. They have kept me from good relationships with others and have kept me alone and isolated my whole life.

I must be in a Simon & Garfunkel kind of mood because another of their songs comes to mind. "I am a Rock" paints a picture of what it is like to live with these types of friends.

A winter's day In a deep and dark December;  
I am alone,  
Gazing from my window to the streets below  
On a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow.

*I am a rock, I am an island.  
I've built walls, A fortress deep and mighty,  
That none may penetrate.  
I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain.  
It's laughter and it's loving I disdain.  
I am a rock, I am an island.*

*Don't talk of love,  
But I've heard the words before;  
It's sleeping in my memory.  
I won't disturb the slumber of feelings that have died.  
If I never loved I never would have cried.  
I am a rock, I am an island.*

*I have my books  
And my poetry to protect me;  
I am shielded in my armor,  
Hiding in my room, safe within my womb.  
I touch no one and no one touches me.  
I am a rock, I am an island.*

*And a rock feels no pain;  
And an island never cries.*

*These lyrics speak to the part of my soul that has embraced isolation. While it keeps me away from the pain it also keeps me away from the thing that can heal the pain. I realize now that for me to let these two friends go, I must find new ones to spend time with. I must be open to feeling the pain and crying when I get hurt. I must seek out others who can help me through the pain and not bury it beneath more pain. So, as I begin the process of saying goodbye to these old friends I must cry out to my Lord and ask him to help me. I am afraid of the pain. I am afraid of being hurt. I am worried that there is no one out there who will love me for me.*

*When God created man, He said that it was not good for him to be alone. I do not think that He was only talking about the companionship of a good woman. I think He was also talking about friends. I now know that if you don't have good friends then bad ones will find you.*

*Goodbye my old friend.*

*P.S. - Tuesday*

*I said goodbye a couple of days ago. As I feared my old friends did not take it well. Despite me saying never come back around they tried to visit me this morning. I was tempted to take them back. I knew that their open arms would comfort me in a way that I liked very much.*

*Thankfully I have one friend who has stuck with me for many years and in this moment, He spoke to me. He did not promise to take away my hurt or ease my need with some quick fix. He simply reminded me why I walked away from these old friends*

*One of the differences between this friend and those is that he does not push me to make a choice. He has told me time and again that he will never choose for me or even force me to make a choice. He has been faithful through many years. This morning I celebrated with him after I firmly told my old friends they were not welcome. It was a sweet time with my true friend. Thank you Lord.*

*P.P.S. - Wednesday*

*I am afraid that the door to my soul is a revolving one when it comes to these old friends. They came to visit last night and I let them in. Saying goodbye is harder than I thought it would be. Holy Spirit help me to find a way to bar the door of my soul from these old friends. Help me understand why I let these friends back in when it does not make any sense to. Help me to remember that I am worth saving. Help me to remember that your sacrifice was not for nothing but that you did it so I could be free from these old friends.*

## Application & Journaling Questions

---

The questions below refer to “Truth #1: You Will Not Die.”

---

1. Outside of your struggle with sex, where else can you see evidence that you have not tamed the craving center of your brain? Describe at least three areas where you have poor impulse control or cave into the message, “you will die if you don’t. . . .”
2. How long without a sexual release does it take before you start to feel a compulsive need for a release?
3. Describe how you see that compulsion manifest itself in your behavior, thoughts and attitudes?
4. Looking back on your crashes, can you identify any specific frequency patterns? Do you (or did you) crash every week? every two weeks? once a month?
5. What is the longest you have gone without a sexual release?
6. How does the mantra “*You must stand in the middle of the pain long enough to discover God is truly enough*” strike you? How and when do you see it applying to your recovery?

---

The questions below refer to “Truth #2: You Will Suffer Physical Symptoms”

---

7. Describe how your body responds to the pressure build up from abstaining from masturbation.
8. How have you, or how would you respond if you were in a group meeting and someone started a discussion by saying, “I remember when I first started recovery, I thought my testicles were going to explode?”

9. What does the idea of “learning to suffer well” conjure up for you?
  
10. What is your current frequency of sexual intimacy with your wife? How do you want to respond if she needs a break from sex for her own healing? If she has asked for a break, how have you responded?
  
11. List the men you are going to call or talk to when the physical symptoms start to “apply pressure in all the wrong places.”

---

The questions below refer to “Truth #3: You Will Suffer Chemical Withdrawals”

12. What light does the comparison of the chemicals released in sexual activity to drugs like morphine, heroine and cocaine shed on your struggle with sex?
  
13. What does the quote from the man on the Oprah Winfrey show say to you about the level of determination, work and commitment you will need to really do recovery?
  
14. Using the list in the last paragraph of the text, what physical symptoms have you already experienced?
  
15. What have you done to attempt to “go around” the symptoms rather than going through the pain? How have those attempts worked for you? (If you can, a great song to listen to in order to help you reflect on this truth is Derrick Webb’s “We Come To You.” It is on his “I See Things Upside Down” CD.)

---

The questions below refer to “Truth #4: You Will Be Attacked by The Enemy”

16. What was been your view of Satan’s involvement in your life before starting recovery?
  
17. How is your understanding of his attacks changing as you pursue recovery?
  
18. What strange “circumstances” have you already faced in your battle for freedom in the sexual arena?  
Do you see them as attacks or simply part of life?
  
19. What personal fears do you believe Satan will (or has) attempt to capitalize on in his attacks on you?
  
20. Satan often attacks us by attacking those close to us or convincing them things are not true about us?  
Have you experienced this? If yes, please describe.
  
21. One of the greatest fears for many men in recovery is that they will be exposed. Take a moment and imagine what it would really be like if your sins were broadcast on the local news. What would really happen if everyone knew the worst about you?
  
22. How could God use your “exposure” for redemptive purposes?
  
23. If you were “exposed,” what would that do to Satan’s leverage of “the fear of exposure?”
  
24. What does I John 4:4 say to you personally about Satan’s attacks?

---

The questions below refer to “Truth #5: You Will Experience Sexually Explicit Dreams”

25. Have you experienced a “sexual attack” dream? If yes, what fears, feelings and emotions did you experience?
  
26. What messages of condemnation did you hear?
  
27. What messages of deception did you hear?
  
28. How did you handle the dream and the subsequent effects?
  
29. What is your plan for the next time you have a sexually explicit or implicit dream?
  
30. What does, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man” say about your fellow group members in regards to the dreams?
  
31. What does “God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear” tell you about the intensity of the dream and the subsequent effects?
  
32. What does, “But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” say about the feelings of inevitability that so often accompany this kind of an attack?



(Speaking of light, one thing that is helpful is to always have a light on in the room and to focus on eye contact and loving conversation with your wife. Staying connected to her will prevent you from going to fantasy as you can't connect and fantasize at the same time. See Chapter 18.)

39. What does a 90-day total abstinence period sound like to you? (It is OK to be honest as it sounds like death to many men.)

40. How have you “sexualized” some of your basic needs?

41. How does the quote “Addiction is a way of meeting legitimate needs in illegitimate ways” apply to your story?

42. How and when have you asked your wife to make you OK through sex?

43. When your wife says “No” or when you aren't sexually intimate for a period of time, what messages does Satan hammer you with?

44. Where is your wife in regards to her need for an abstinence period? Are you willing for her to read this and then to discuss it with you? If yes, when will you ask her to read it?

---

The questions below refer to “Truth #8: You Must Lock Arms With Your Brothers in Battle”

45. What men in your life have you really opened yourself up to? Who knows your true fears, struggles and maybe even more importantly, your true glory?

46. How has your struggle with sexual issues isolated you from relationships with other men?
47. What excuses do you make for not making phone calls? After each excuse write the truth that counters the excuse.
48. What adjustments do you still need to make in order make group meetings and connecting with other men in the group the priority it needs to be?
49. Have you written your “Goodbye Letter” to masturbation yet? If not, do it now!

---

Final Question

50. You can't work on everything at once so pray and ask God what specific things he wants you to focus on where you are right now in your recovery. In your journal, list whatever comes to your mind and ask him for clarity about what to do with the list.

## 11. SAME GENDER ATTRACTIONS

---

*To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’*

*But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’”*

*I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.*

Luke 18:9-14 NIV

### **An Alarming Story**

Last Sunday, two men went to church to pray. The first was a respected member of the community and a deacon in his church. The second was a man who had embraced the homosexual lifestyle. The first man arrived early dressed in a three-piece suit with a smile on his face and a cross on his tie. He stood at the front door greeting people as they arrived. Most church members looked up him to as an example of what all good Christians ought to be.

On this particular Sunday, it was his responsibility to offer the prayer of consecration for the communion service. He, unlike many others, took this responsibility seriously. He had spent much time during the week thinking about how the bread and the wine were physical reminders of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. He focused on how Jesus had freely given his life so that our sins could be forgiven, allowing us to approach a Holy God. At one point during the week, he even wrote out his prayer, word for word, because he wanted it to be perfect. However, as he thought about it, he decided reading the prayer would be too formal and stiff, so he memorized it. When the service was about to begin, the deacon made his way to the front of the auditorium, to the deacon's bench just below the massive cross decorating the stage.

The second man, Alex, came dressed in an old worn-out shirt and a pair of faded blue jeans with holes in the knees and in the seat. He arrived

ten minutes late so he could slip in unnoticed. He came in the back door and eased his way into the auditorium into an empty section. He quietly made his way to a place where he could have a pew of his own because he knew he had no right to be in such a Holy place. When he sat down, he pulled out a hymnal and buried his face in a frail attempt to hide. When he looked up, however, he saw the deacon seated on the front pew in his three-piece suit enthusiastically praising God in song. As Alex studied the deacon, he recognized him. Two Saturdays prior to this day, the deacon stood on the side of Main Street holding a protest sign and shouting scriptural condemnations at the marchers in a gay rights parade. Alex was one of the marchers. In a moment of mutual anger, Alex and the deacon squared off in a heated exchange of emotional words and threats. Two weeks and a day later, Alex squirmed in his pew and looked for a graceful way out of that man's church. However, providentially—at that precise moment—two other visitors arrived and sat on the end of the pew blocking his only discrete exit. He had no choice but to sit and hope the deacon wouldn't see or recognize him.

When it was time to celebrate the Lord's Supper, the deacon solemnly approached the pulpit to pray. Before he prayed, however, he addressed the congregation with a reminder of the incredible sacrifice Jesus had made so that

sinner *"like us"* could be forgiven. As he finished his reminder, he saw Alex and remembered him. His mind raced. His blood pressure soared. His face grew flush. He wondered, "Is he here to make a scene?" "Is he here by himself, or are there others scattered among the congregation?" His heart burned with indignation. He had heard the radical gay rights group "Act Up" had interrupted church services in New York by throwing condoms and syringes. He thought, "How dare they come to my church?" "How dare they plan a protest during our worship? Who do they think they are?"

Then, in the midst of his rage, he remembered he was supposed to pray. Gaining his composure, he bowed his head and began repeating the words of his memorized prayer, "Dear Heavenly Father, Hallowed be Thy name," but then he stumbled. He was so shook up he couldn't remember the rest of his prayer. He intended to thank God for sending Jesus. He intended to ask God to draw our minds and our hearts back to Golgotha, to the night Jesus was betrayed, to the night He was beaten, whipped and nailed to the cross. Instead, all he could think of was the face of the young man who had stood toe to toe with him two weeks earlier.

So he continued his prayer, "God, I thank you that you gave me parents who taught me the difference between right and wrong. I thank you that from my youth I studied your word. I thank you that because I have known your word I didn't stumble like others. I thank you I am not a thief or a liar or a sexual pervert. I thank you I have learned to not forsake the assembly and come to worship you three times a week. I thank you I have learned to faithfully give ten percent of everything I earn. I even give ten percent of my tax return. But most of all dear God, I thank you I am not like the homosexual who has dared to enter this Holy Place today!" Then, realizing how unrelated his prayer was to the breaking of the bread, he concluded by hurrying through an often repeated phrase, "Let us take this bread in a manner pleasing to you, in Jesus Name, Amen."

Thankfully, Alex didn't hear the deacon's prayer. He only heard his comments before the prayer. He heard the message of the gospel that Jesus died so that sinners *"like us"* could be forgiven. It was a message he had heard and

accepted as an adolescent but had rejected a few years later. So while the deacon stood stumbling over his prayer to the congregation, Alex fell on his knees and sobbed his own prayer, "Oh, God, please have mercy on me, a sinner who desperately needs forgiveness." When the communion tray came to him, he resisted and whispered, "No, I'm not worthy." However, the other visitor who had also come in late passed the tray and whispered quietly, "It is your willingness to confess your unworthiness that makes you worthy." So Alex, hesitantly, broke off part of the communion bread and with a shaking hand placed it in his mouth. He closed his eyes and began to pray again. "God, I cannot believe that you would allow me to share in the body of your son. I cannot believe that after everything I've done, you still love me and invite me into your presence."

As Alex continued to pray and to wrestle with his unwillingness to allow God to forgive him, another man offered a prayer for the cup. He said, "Father, please help us experience the reality of cleansing. Help us, as we drink this fruit of the vine to experience the reality of the blood of your son entering our lives and washing away all our sins. Help us experience the true meaning of communion."

By the time the tray came to Alex, his beard was soaked with tears. The visitor next to him smiled faintly and gave Alex a look of encouragement as he handed him the tray. Alex took a cup of wine and held it to his lips. Reluctantly, he tipped it back and allowed the wine to flow into his mouth. He had never tasted anything so sweet. He could taste God's love. He could feel the warmth of God's presence, and as he swallowed, he sensed God's forgiveness rushing through his body and his soul.

That Sunday morning two men came to a temple to pray, a deacon and a man who had embraced homosexuality. The homosexual struggler left as a new person. He had returned to the faith of his youth and found the forgiveness he thought he had lost forever. The deacon, however, also left, but he remained the same person. He left self-righteous, arrogant and untouched by the finger of God.

## Understanding the Similarities

I have met with many men married to women who struggle with unwanted same gender attractions. Some have plugged into our groups and done well.

As I have counseled with these men, read what I could and observed their interactions, I have become even more convinced than ever that our men's groups are a great place for their recovery. I have spoken with numerous Christian counselors whom I respect, and one thing stood out in their comments: "The most important thing a man who struggles with same sex attraction needs is healthy, non-sexual relationships with other men."

Ironically, that is the exact same thing we have found most helpful for men wrestling with heterosexual addictions. Those who attend groups consistently, make phone calls and build relationships outside of the groups make huge strides in their recovery. Are there differences? certainly! I freely confess that I have much to learn in this area to more fully grasp the differences that are there. However, at its core, I believe the sexual addiction that a man who struggles with unwanted same sex attraction has is just a twist of the sexual addiction that heterosexual men have, and that most of the same principles apply in the struggle for freedom. In my experience, the common background for men who struggle with attraction to other men is they grew up in a home with a physically or emotionally absent father and an over involved mother. They often experienced childhood sexual abuse and for a variety of reasons grew up in the world of women with little to no positive emotional connection from men in their lives.

Hopefully, by now you can see where the parallels exist. Most men I work with grew up with emotionally and/or physically absent fathers and many have childhood sexual abuse issues. The roots are remarkably similar. In fact, if you compared the early life trajectories of heterosexually addicted men with those with unwanted same gender attractions, I think you would likely find only two or three degrees of separation instead of the ninety degrees that many assume. Therefore, it should not surprise

us that recovery for those whose pornography of choice is male would follow a similar path.

It is important to note that I am not saying everyone who struggles with homosexuality has a sexual addiction as we have defined addiction in this manual. There are many who wrestle with unwanted same sex attractions who are not sexually addicted. However, when someone with same sex attractions is sexually addicted, the steps for recovery are very similar to those for a heterosexual. Regarding healing the wounds and trauma, even though there is just that two or three degrees of separation, if you struggle with unwanted same sex attraction, you may want to seek additional ministry with counselors and/or ministries who are knowledgeable in the nuances that make this struggle unique.

We also highly recommend you experience a significant level of sobriety from your addictive and/or deceptive behaviors prior to digging too deeply into your traumas as the deeper you dig the more likely you are to experience significant temptation. Stopping the addictive/deceptive behavior is great—but not the only goal. To continue growing in your relationship with God and freedom from your unwanted attractions, you will need to allow God to heal the core trauma wounds that left you vulnerable to that struggle.

## The Reality of Our Fallen Condition

As we have worked over the past twenty plus years with men wrestling with sexual addictions, we have worked with many who, at least on some levels, wrestled with unwanted same gender urges and behaviors. In fact, I would estimate ten to twenty percent of the men, with whom I have gone through their sexual history inventory, (see Chapter 3) have reported some form of current same sex attraction and many more have had sexual encounters with other men or boys in their background. This is often a huge shame issue many have never shared. For some, it is a primary source of their shame and/or addiction.

As you can readily see, this presents a delicate issue in our recovery groups. Unfortunately, even in groups for sexual brokenness, we sometimes encounter individuals who have a similar attitude as the deacon in the story above. In fact, in the first couple months of our first group, “Jeff” joined our ministry. He was in our community for a just few months but wanted a place to connect about his sexual issues. He was married but struggled with same sex pornography and had also acted out with men a few times in college. He dove into recovery and was doing well. At the same time, we had an individual who had been in the group from the beginning who called and said something to the effect of, “We shouldn’t have ‘those’ kind of guys in our group. God says their sin is an abomination and you should not allow him to come back.” This was especially ironic since he had no sobriety, was refusing to come clean with his wife and was only making token efforts at recovery.

He became defensive when I pointed out that choosing pixels on a screen over the reality of his own wife and using masturbation as a drug to medicate his pain was also an abomination to God. He finally played what he thought was his trump card when he said, “Well, if you aren’t going to ask “Jeff” to leave, then I’m not coming back.” I replied, “I’m sorry, we’re going to miss you. Let me know if you change your mind.”

Unfortunately, he hasn’t returned. I pray he has found help both for his sexual addiction and for his Pharisaic, religious addiction someplace else. The good news, however, is that “Jeff” did incredibly well. In fact, when he left at the end of the summer, he had several months of sobriety and was making huge strides in his recovery.

I have learned much since this situation with Jeff. The reality is we must face the fact that we are all fallen human beings with our own unique experiences and unique ways of dealing with our traumas and insecurities. With that reality in mind, it should come as no surprise that having a group which includes both “straight” men mixed with men who are sexually attracted to

men can create some awkward, uncomfortable, and even potentially volatile situations. To prevent as many scenarios like the one I just described as possible, the pages that follow present some guidelines and suggestions for handling these connections.

Regardless of which group of men you identify with, as you read the remainder of this chapter, I encourage you to recognize the realities below. The bottom line is sin is sin, grace is grace, and our need for Jesus to rescue us from our fallen condition is the common bond amongst us all.

### **Reality #1: Everyone Needs a Safe Place to Develop Relationships**

One of the reasons I think Sexual Integrity groups are a great place for men struggling to break free from same gender pornography is because most of the men in our groups do not struggle in this way. Several years ago, I attended a conference by one of the groups who minister to those struggling to break free from same gender attractions and learned that not only do they not encourage any connections outside of group meetings, but they also actually discourage them and ask their members to only see each other in group sessions. Of course, when I thought about it, it made perfect sense. It is the same reason I would not allow a woman struggling with a sexual addiction to attend our men’s sexual integrity group. It is fire and gasoline in the same location. However, it is also incredibly counter-productive when we remember the single most determinative factor in whether a man moves toward freedom from his sexual addiction is building strong relationships with other men.

Here is where a good Sexual Integrity group can be a lifeline for you if you struggle in this arena. You can come, share your struggles, learn to construct healthy boundaries, and build relationships with men who are “safe” because they will not return any attraction that you might develop towards them.

## **Reality #2: We Are All Equal at the Foot of the Cross**

To the heterosexual men, I encourage you to remember that heterosexual sins and especially their accompanying deceptions are just as offensive to God's holiness as homosexual sins. It was just as necessary for Jesus to go to the cross to redeem me for moving outside my marriage in my lust for women and then gaslighting her and others about it as it was for Him to go to the cross to redeem Jeff for going outside his marriage in his lust for men.

Likewise, same sex strugglers must realize that for some of the straight guys in the group it will be their first intimate friendship with someone who is open about same gender struggles. Just as you have your issues, they will have theirs. This is by no means a free pass to the straight guys to offend you verbally in any way. It is, however, an invitation to you to accept them where they are and to realize that you can bring both knowledge and healing into their lives regarding this struggle.

## **Reality #3: Our Stories Our Similar**

As stated previously, there are many parallels to our stories. If both groups of men will take the time to hear each other's stories and compare them to their own, they will find their commonalities far outweigh their differences. Other strugglers' hurts and wounds are very similar to yours, and you can find great encouragement and support as you join with one another. If someone from the "other group" shares an experience similar to yours, it might be helpful to specifically point that out when you share. For example, make a simple comment such as: "Hey, John, that really caught my attention when you mentioned that experience with your mom tonight. Your story reminded me of a similar experience with my mom....". The more these similarities are verbally pointed out in your group, the more all men will benefit and learn.

## **Reality #4: Everyone Needs Release From Shame**

Everyone needs to bring their hidden shame into the light. We've discovered that sometimes those who react negatively to individuals who

struggle with homosexuality have homosexual attractions, activities or abuse in their background. It may have been a one-time experimentation in Jr. High or being led or coerced into sexual activity with an older brother, cousin, or friend or even just a secret fear that others think he could be gay. As stated previously, ten to twenty percent of the men with whom I have done sexual history inventories have some ongoing struggle and even more have at least one incident in this arena. If that is true for you, don't listen to Satan's lie that you are alone. Bring it out in the light and talk about it with your counselor, your sponsor and in your sexual integrity group. As you talk about it, God will set you free from the grip that the shame has on your heart. It will also help you have compassion for those who currently struggle in this arena.

It is also necessary that those with unwanted same sex struggles recognize that when they encounter friction from a straight man, that man is most likely being triggered by his own shame and insecurity. Also, keep in mind that your own insecurities and shame may cause you to read attitudes and judgments into situations when there is none. This is especially true for those who have experienced abuse in the church because of same sex attractions.

## **Reality #5: Everyone Needs to Set Appropriate Boundaries**

It is important for every man to be honest with himself about his comfort level. I have had many heterosexual men tell me things like, "Jeff's story doesn't bother me, but I'm worried about how it impacts some of the others in the group." Be honest about the fact that sitting in a check-in group with another man who talks openly about his attraction to a male co-worker or confessing an illicit encounter is an uncomfortable place for many heterosexual men. It is OK to be uncomfortable but trying to deny your uneasiness only magnifies your struggle to remain present and connected. It may help to keep in mind that those men struggling with same sex attractions might be uncomfortable listening to straight men going into details with their check-in. In either case, if anyone is uncomfortable, please talk about it with others who are ahead of you in recovery and with your leader. I would advise waiting until you have

those discussions prior to determining if it would be helpful to share your struggle with the other man. The last thing we want is for anyone in the group to be a source of shame to someone else in the group.

If you continue to be uncomfortable with hearing any man's struggles, whether they are same or opposite gender oriented, it is perfectly acceptable for you to set appropriate limits on phone calls, meetings outside group etc. The same rules apply to everyone. If you can only handle one phone call per week, be honest about your limitations even if you think you should be able to handle more. This applies to those struggling with same sex attractions as well. If you are uncomfortable with another man's sharing, please know that you have the same right and obligation to yourself to set the boundaries that are healthy for you.

#### **Reality #6: Everyone Needs to Exercise Wisdom When it Comes to Attractions**

Regardless of whether your attraction is toward women or men, you must be sure to deal honestly and wisely with attractions. If you find yourself "attracted" in any way shape or form to anyone other than your wife, you need to deal with it directly. Attractions are strange things. They often pop up when we least expect them which can even include your integrity group. If you attempt to deny or keep an attraction in the dark, it will only grow stronger. However, when you bring unhealthy attractions into the light, they often mysteriously fade away.

I know there have been occasions where I felt a pull of attraction to women with whom I have counseled, worked with, or was connected to, and one of the "voices" in my head invariably said, "Whatever you do, don't tell anyone. After all, you are married, and you are a leader." However, when I've talked about the attraction with another man, invariably I've discovered deep things about myself and found the pull losing its power.

A few critical words of caution: 1) Do not talk about your attraction to the person with whom you are attracted. That is a recipe for disaster. If they happen to share your attraction the conversation could be the spark that starts a forest fire. If they do not share the attraction,

they may feel awkward and uncomfortable around you. 2) Talk to your sponsor and/or other men in your group about your attractions. It usually would be better to not name names but to just say you are struggling with feeling a pull towards someone who isn't in this check-in group. It also helps to do this as quickly as possible after recognizing an attraction. The longer you let it simmer, the more power it gains. 3) Avoid all one-on-one interactions and maintain healthy boundaries with those with whom you feel the pull of attraction. It would also be wise to avoid being in "check in" groups with individuals with whom you feel the pull of attraction.

#### **Reality #7: A Word Specifically to the Heterosexual Men**

Don't allow Satan to use your fear of being the object of someone's attraction to keep you from connecting. Yes, it is possible that your befriending a man who struggles with same gender attraction could result in him becoming attracted to you. In fact, if you build much of a relationship with him, it may even be likely as he might have a history of relationships turning sexual, just as you have with women. However, if you do not struggle with same gender attraction, then you could be a safe person for him to begin building a new history with men. In fact, if he becomes attracted to you, and you can work through that with him, you may become an incredibly important key in his recovery. He may learn through you that real male relationships can and do exist without becoming sexual.

#### **Reality #8: A Word Specifically to Those with Same Gender Attractions**

Beware of sparks and gasoline. If you struggle at all with same sex attraction, you need to set extra strong boundaries with others who also struggle this way. You and "Jeff" do not need to have a daily phone call and you certainly don't need to meet outside of group sessions. If any sexual contact ever does occur with a group member, it needs to be confessed to the group leader and steps taken to attend group on different days or different locations and to sever all contact.

## Application & Journaling Questions

The following questions are for both groups of men.

---

1. How do you identify with the “Deacon” in the opening story?
2. How do you identify with “Alex”?
3. When have you been the “Pharisee”? When have you been the “tax collector”?
4. Do you have any same gender attractions or experiences in your background? If yes, what are they and how have you dealt with them?
5. How do you see your own personal sin compared to the sins of others in the groups or in this chapter?
6. What do you think about the chapter’s contention that sexual integrity groups are a great place for men who wrestle with same gender attraction as part of the sexual addiction?
7. Is there any hidden pull or activity you need to bring into the light with your counselor or recovery group? If there is, what are your fears about bringing it into the light?
8. When have you felt an attraction to someone besides your wife? How did you handle that attraction?

9. What is your plan for handling attractions when they come up in your future. (Notice the question is not “if,” but “when.”)

---

The following questions are for the heterosexual men in the group.

10. What feelings come to the surface when you think about hearing a man share his struggle with same sex attractions? (Not what do you think you should feel, what do you really feel?)

12. What fears do you have about having a man who wrestles with same gender attraction in your recovery group?

14. How would you react if you sensed a man had an attraction for you?

15. What is your comfort level for having friendships with men who struggle with same gender pulls?

16. Who can you talk to about your fears of connecting to them?

17. What boundaries do you need to set with individuals who struggle in this arena?

---

The following questions are for the men struggling with same gender attractions.

18. What feelings come to the surface when you think about hearing a man share his struggle with heterosexual sexual addiction?

19. How does the typical background for men who struggle with heterosexual sexual addiction compare with your own background? How can this comparison help you appreciate another man's struggle?

20. What fears do you have about men who may have reservations about "homosexuals" being in "their" recovery group?

21. How would you react if you sensed hostility of any kind from any men in your group?

22. What boundaries do you need to set with individuals who struggle in this arena?



## 12. ATTACHMENT

---

It only makes sense that a triune, three in one God, would create man with an inherent need for relational connection. After all, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are relational beings who have been in perfect unity and connection for all eternity. The Genesis accounts of creation constantly point to relational connections that reflect God's triune nature. First and foremost, we are created in the image of God: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). There is something deep within the DNA of every human that reflects God's relational glory and creates an inherent need for relational connections.

From the story of Eden, we can see God intends for each of us to be securely attached to Him and to one another. However, the entrance of sin into the world sends mankind into a tailspin that primarily and specifically targets man's relational connections.

First, the fall severs Adam's secure attachment with God. Instead of running to him, he hides from him. Think about the day before the fall: How do you imagine Adam responding when he hears God walking in the garden? I picture him getting excited and running to God like my once five-year-old often would when he heard me come home from work. Yet, what does Adam say the next day when God asks him where he is? "I heard you in the garden, and I was *afraid* because I was *naked*, so I *hid*" (Gen. 3:10 italics added). Notice the emergence of fear, shame and hiding. Instead of excitement and joy, he trembles in fear. Instead of a confident sense of his identity, he is ashamed of his nakedness. Instead of running to God, he runs from Him and hides among the bushes. (By the way, which side of the bush do you crouch behind when attempting to hide from an omnipresent God?)

Second, the fall severs Adam's secure attachment to Eve. Notice the difference in his words about her: When Adam first sees Eve, he cries out in joy, "Bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman for she was taken out of man" (Gen. 2:23). Now, I know that may not sound like music to our modern ears; however, scholars tell us in the original Hebrew this is beautiful poetry. It is literally the lyrics to the first love song. Yet in chapter three—from his hiding place behind the bush—he refers to her as, "That woman you gave me" (Gen. 3:12). Do you hear his contempt? Do you hear him also blaming God? Do you see the stark change from the joy he expresses in chapter two?

The detachment continues as they pass their relational brokenness down to their children. Cain kills his brother, Abel. Lamech, Cain's descendent, kills two men and brags about it. It becomes so bad in chapter six that God grieves creating man. It pains him to see his children, formed in His relational image, living so far beneath who he created them to be.

Obviously, we could go on and track the continued effects of the fall throughout scripture and history to our very day. However, the point I want to focus on is this: ***God created us to have secure attachments with Him and with one another, but the effects of sin in our world have made secure, relational attachment the exception rather than the norm.***

### Four Models of Attachment

Current understanding of attachment theory can be helpful in seeing both our struggle and our need for deep healing. Psychologists and others who study human relationships use the term "attachment" to describe the bonded connection

between parent and child and then other relationships. They have also determined that the care and nurture a child receives leads him to follow a primary model of attachment measurable by the time the child is two or three

years old.<sup>54</sup> While clinicians sometimes use different nomenclature, it is generally agreed there are four basic attachment styles for which we will use the titles: Secure, Distracted, Dismissive and Disorganized. (Daniel Siegel and others use the terms Secure, Ambivalent, Avoidant and Disorganized<sup>55</sup>).

## Secure Attachment

Secure attachments models come from individuals who had parents or other primary caregivers who successfully met their needs for attuned and joyful connection as small children. They knew as infants their cries would be heard and their needs, both for joy and quiet, would be met. They knew as children the safety of their father's arms and the comfort of their mother's lap. No, their parents were not perfect—none are—however, they gave them the internal confidence to find the rare balance of interdependent relationships and to stay out of the ditches of independence and codependence. Secure attachments may also be enjoyed from and by those who experienced a much different childhood, but who later sought and received deep emotional healing. I will address this concept later in the chapter when talking about “earned-secure attachment.”

Again, it is helpful to remember what a child most needs for healthy emotional development is the attuned and alternating rhythm of joy and quiet. As we touched on in chapter four, we enter our world with a void in our brain. Our right orbital pre-frontal cortex develops through joyful connections. Being with others who are genuinely glad to be with us triggers chemical processes in our brain that literally build brain tissue. Being glad to be with someone cannot be faked or created through words or forced actions but is instead communicated non-verbally through right-brain to right-brain connections. These connections are transmitted through the left side of the face and especially the left eye, and they feel incredibly good. In fact, they feel so good that joy is the only emotion an infant



will seek on its own initiative. Synchronized attachment, therefore, is an essential building block for emotional health.

Jim Wilder describes this process in *Living With Men*:

*When a baby wants to attach, he looks for eyes, he moves, he makes sounds that to a good mother mean “my baby wants me.” His attachment light is on so hers comes on too. When her baby has had enough for the moment he looks away, gets quiet and lets her know he needs quiet now. Mom follows his lead and needs. His attachment circuits and hers go on and off together. His basic evaluation at level two of his control center is “this is good.” With that, life is good and he is secure.<sup>56</sup>*

Chris Coursey asserts that this process builds secure attachment:

*A secure attachment forms through plenty of synchronized interaction between mother and child. This strong bond grows when mom responds to her child's signals in timely fashion. Mom synchronizes with child, builds joy and provides rest at the appropriate times. Mom downloads her brain structure and mental state as well as enhances baby's emotional regulation ability through shared attunement. Shared attunement is the alignment of states of mind between mother and child. Attunement is expressed through facial expressions, tone of voice, body gestures and eye contact. Joy is produced when mom's face lights up, expressing I am delighted to be with you! Joyful exchanges establish a secure bond with baby that will travel a lifetime. As a child reaches full capacity of joy, she will look away, or gaze avert. Breaking eye contact stops right hemispheric communication and says, ‘let's rest!’ Healthy mothering understands this need for rest, and will respect the need.<sup>57</sup>*

This is the way God designed for us to build secure attachments. It is a process He intends to

<sup>54</sup> Ed Khouri “Co-Dependency” lecture at THRIVE Track 4. August 1, 2007

<sup>55</sup> Daniel Siegel. *Parenting From The Inside Out* pp. 103 ff.

<sup>56</sup> Wilder. *Living With Men* p. 39

<sup>57</sup> Chris Coursey “Attachment—Life's Connections” article p.3 at [www.thrivetoday.org](http://www.thrivetoday.org)

occur thousands of times before we are even able to walk.

### **Insecure Attachment Styles**

Unfortunately, mothers and other care givers are often not available and/or synchronized. They may be physically or emotionally absent as they are occupied with their own fears, depression, anger etc. For example, if your father was an addict with an explosive temper, odds are high your mother lived fearfully of his responses and revolved her world around him. Most likely, her primary focus was not you, but her attempts to keep him from being angry. Her primary concern was avoiding the pain of his rage. Therefore, your natural cries for connection may have been misinterpreted as “my baby demands something I don’t have” instead of “my baby wants me.” Instead of a call to joyfully connect, your mother may have felt the pull of the shame of her own inadequacy. Instead of seeing you through the eyes of heaven and being glad to be with you, she may have seen your need as a demand she couldn’t meet. Therefore, you saw her fear and/or shame and naturally interpreted it as a form of rejection. After all, while your attachment lights shined brightly, her shame covered hers with a dark veil. This attachment disconnect is excruciatingly painful and leads the child to develop life-long coping strategies centered in an insecure attachment style.

### **Distracted/Ambivalent/Anxious Attachment**

Distracted Attachment (also called ambivalent or anxious attachment) is an insecure model of relating where a child has some joyful connection but not the consistent and healthy rhythm of joy and quiet needed to establish secure attachment. Because he has some connection, he learns how good it feels when his attachment lights connect to another’s. However, in this dynamic, connection is not synchronized with the child. Instead, it is about the parent’s need and is therefore—from the child’s perspective—inconsistent or undependable. As a result, he learns *connection is like water in a desert which must be sought*

*after and taken wherever it is available.* Therefore, he develops a relational style where his attachment lights are “always on.” After all, “I can’t miss any opportunity to connect.” While the pain of having his lights on and no one connect to him is great, the fear of missing a connection is greater than the pain of no connection.

As you can imagine, or relate to, this leads to a painful identity that is highly needy and is always looking to attach to receive comfort for distress. It can be typified in the expression, “*Come here! Come here!*” Those with distracted/ambivalent/anxious attachments generally have high affect and often use high drama. They are stuck in a high arousal state of response to people and relationships.<sup>58</sup> When they are afraid or feel insecure, they want to be close and use connection as a coping strategy. They are frequently in crisis and often use “neediness” or “distress” to manipulate others for attention.<sup>59</sup> In relationships they are the initiators and pursuers. Whenever there is conflict, they feel a tremendous burden to repair and reconnect even if it requires accepting blame or consequences they don’t believe are legitimate. “I’d rather take the fall than remain separated or alone.”

Unfortunately, their desperate need for connection often sabotages the very connection they deeply desire. They may take the blame for an argument or apologize out of their need for connection even when they don’t believe they have done anything wrong. This is dishonest and often prevents the other party from feeling the rupture and taking responsibility for their actions. Yet despite apologizing, they still feel the resentment, which often comes out in the form of a demand for more and/or deeper connection. This may (especially to a dismissive) feel smothering and bring a reactionary response of “GO AWAY” which in turn sends the distracted/ambivalent/anxious into a tailspin, further accentuating the downward spiral. The result is great pain. “It is hard to live life when always distracted by the possibility of attaching to someone—or something!”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Wilder & Khouri “Restarting 6”

<sup>59</sup> Ed Khouri “Co-Dependency” lecture at THRIVE Tract 4. August 1, 2007.

<sup>60</sup> Wilder & Khouri “Restarting 6”

## Dismissive/Avoidant Attachment

This insecure attachment model grows out of scarcity of connection and the subsequent avoidance of pain. It is the child who grows up with even less attuned, emotional connection than a distracted. He learns very early in life the excruciating pain that comes from turning on his attachment lights and having no one connect to him. The pain is so great that those who grow up with dismissive and/or unavailable caregivers learn it is better to leave their lights off than to get their hopes up . . . only to be disappointed. It is the child who cries in his crib, but no one answers. It is the child who pleads with her parents to connect only to find them dismissive and therefore too busy with work, religion, hobbies, other relationships, or their own pain to really connect. Daniel Siegel describes a dismissive formative experience in *Parenting From The Inside Out*:

*When she cries from her playpen, her father doesn't notice at first. When her crying becomes more insistent, he looks up from his newspaper, but returns to finish the article before going to check on his daughter. He's feeling irritated at the interruption, looks at her in the playpen, and says, "Hey, what's all the fuss!" Thinking she might need her diaper changed, he puts her on the changing table, changes her in silence, and then puts her back in the playpen and returns to the paper. She continues to cry, so he decides that she may need a nap and he places her in her crib. She continues to cry, so he gets her blanket and her pacifier hoping they will calm her, and he closes the door, thinking that she will just take a little time to settle down. She doesn't and it's now forty-five minutes since she initially started to communicate her need for food. "Maybe she's hungry," he realizes, looking at the clock and noticing that it's been over four hours since she's eaten. He gets a bottle ready and she finally calms down when he sits down to feed her.*

*In this scenario, the baby has learned that her father doesn't always read her*

*signals well. First, he has trouble even hearing her, and then he doesn't understand what she wants. He doesn't seem to pay attention to the subtle cues of her communication. Finally, after she's been in distress for quite a while, he gets it right. Overall, repeated patterns like this teach the child that her father is not very available for meeting her needs or connecting to her.*<sup>61</sup>

**While a distracted/ambivalent/anxious sees connection like water in a desert, a dismissive/avoidant—as an outgrowth of repeated experiences of being missed—sees connection as only a mirage.** “It doesn't really exist so why bother chasing after it.” This leads to a painful identity with low affect and an avoidance of relational connection. Those living out a dismissive model of attachment also have a preponderance of negative emotions and use withdrawal as a coping strategy. They struggle to synchronize with others and decide life is safer and feels better alone.<sup>62</sup> “Deep down I know I will be rejected, so it is less painful to stay in my isolation.” In relationships they are often the avoiders and the pursued. They are likely highly competent or even workaholic but generally operate from a sense of duty and not joy.<sup>63</sup> When there is conflict, they may seem fine with the rupture and show little or no desire to repair. They also have a difficult time apologizing as they struggle to see from another's perspective.

As you can imagine (or relate to) the result is greater isolation. However, despite how things appear, a dismissive still longs for relational connection. The longing to connect and experience joyful relationships is so deep within our DNA that even the most extreme dismissive cannot fully shut off his attachment lights. Therefore, it might be better to say he has a dimmer switch pulled down to its lowest possible setting than to say he has turned off his attachment lights. There is light, it is just very dim. Like a distracted, the characteristics of a dismissive, (typified in the expression “GO AWAY!”) create a downward spiral that pulls him further and further from the joyful

<sup>61</sup> Daniel Siegel, *Parenting From The Inside Out* pp. 108-109.

<sup>62</sup> Ed Khouri “Co-Dependency” lecture at THRIVE Track 4. August 1, 2007

<sup>63</sup> Wilder & Khouri “Restarting 6”

connections he so desperately needs and fearfully desires. The result, once again, is great pain.

### Disorganized Attachment

The last insecure attachment model, disorganized attachment, is the most painful form of insecure attachment. It is like a distracted attachment in that it grows out of a parent—child relationship where there is some connection. It becomes disorganized when the relationship with the parent/caregiver is also the source of fear and/or great intrusion.<sup>64</sup> For example: if your mother is an angry and abusive alcoholic when drinking and a kind and doting mom when sober. As a child you would learn that her connection feels great and at the same time, her rage and abuse scare the daylights out of you. As you grow older, you would try to read the situation. If mom has been drinking, you avoid her. However, as a small child, you don't have the skills to negotiate that path and instead develop a disorganized attachment style. Another less extreme example is if your mother regularly missed your needs for quiet. For instance, if you just woke up from a nap, instead of allowing you time to warm up to her, she overwhelmed you with instant connection and, in essence, forcibly turned on your attachment lights through high energy facial expressions, voice tones, tickling etc.

These confusing messages produce a child who is afraid of his own attachment lights. He develops a chaotic response of turning them on, hoping someone will connect, and then turning them off, afraid someone might connect. Jim Wilder points out three things that can make a child afraid of his own attachment light: 1) His attempts to attach to his mother sometimes make her angry; 2) they are sometimes met with too much positive response that leaves him overwhelmed, and 3) when Mom responds in such a way that he sees her fear instead of her delight.<sup>65</sup>

As an adult, a disorganized, like a distracted says, "COME HERE, COME HERE," and is often very needy. However, unlike the distracted, once someone moves towards them,

an involuntary response of terror takes over screaming, "GO AWAY! GO AWAY!" This attachment style is especially prominent among victims of childhood abuse as 80% of abused children have disorganized attachment.<sup>66</sup>

It is easy to see why this attachment style leads to great pain. A disorganized sees and pursues connection like water in a desert, but as soon as they get their first taste, they spit it out and convulse as if it were battery acid. This leads to relationships that are often hostile, aggressive, controlling and especially difficult. Disorganized individuals struggle with unregulated emotion followed by withdrawal. They often repeat abusive patterns of behavior and have the highest likelihood of clinical problems and domestic violence.<sup>67</sup>

Side note: if your spouse has a disorganized attachment and violent tendencies, you need to understand you can't stop his or her rage by being a good enough spouse. He or she is often triggered simply by the feeling of being needed or of being asked to attach in any way. This could be something as simple as needing grocery money or small affections. Their automatic response of terror may explode into rage as a protective attempt to stop the pain. This pattern is especially likely if you have a distracted or disorganized attachment yourself. *You can't stop the violence by being a better wife, trying harder, not making him mad or "Biblical submission."* If you are in this kind of relationship, you and your spouse must find help or it will continue or very likely deteriorate even more.

### Insecure Attachment and BEEPS

The result of all three insecure attachment models is pain. This pain is at the deepest level of our brain, and, therefore, not something of which we are consciously aware. It is the source

<sup>64</sup> Daniel Siegel, *Parenting From The Inside Out* pp. 104-105

<sup>65</sup> Wilder *Living With Men* p. 40

<sup>66</sup> Wilder & Khouri "Restarting 6"

<sup>67</sup> Wilder & Khouri "Restarting 6"

of many of our erratic and irrational behaviors as we do many things to medicate our pain. Ed Khouri and Jim Wilder in their “Restarting” video series have developed a very helpful acronym for understanding how we cope with attachment pain, BEEPS. “BEEPS are attachments to **B**ehaviors, **E**vents, **E**xperiences, **P**eople or **S**ubstances that are used to regulate emotions, increase pleasure or decrease pain.”<sup>68</sup>

This broader definition of addictive behaviors is very helpful in recovery because it is easy to become so focused on a symptom—e.g. sexual addiction—you fail to deal with the root issues. If your only goal is to stop acting-out sexually, you may be able to use behavior modification techniques, high accountability, or other external measures to alleviate the targeted symptom.

However, if you do not deal with the attachment pain issues, you will simply swap addictions. For example, you may not look at porn, but you may gain twenty pounds as you use ice cream as your primary “BEEP.” It is why some AA meetings have a stronger concentration of cigarette smoke than the local bar. “Attachments to BEEPS help us medicate—to artificially regulate—positive and negative emotions as well as pain.”<sup>69</sup>

When we do not have secure attachments, our souls ache and that ache is like a car’s warning light saying there is a problem. Imagine you are driving in the middle of nowhere at night and the “Low Oil Pressure” light comes on. You have no safe place to stop and are terrified of being stranded. What happens if you momentarily stop your car, reach up under the dash and pull the plug on the warning light? Well, you might feel better as you drive away without the light glaring at you, but you have done nothing about the real problem.<sup>70</sup> BEEPS function in a similar fashion. They turn off our warning lights but do nothing to address the real issues. They are counterfeit attachments that “take the place of secure attachments to God and significant others.”<sup>71</sup>

God created the human soul with a deep abiding need for secure attachment. BEEPS are Satan’s distractions that keep us from feeling our pain, addressing it and finding the healing we

need to function properly. We will never find true and lasting recovery if our primary concern is turning off the warning lights. We must instead be willing to open up the hood and dive in deeply to the very engine of our souls.

I think it is helpful at this point to create a short list of common BEEPS to raise our awareness of the many creative things we use to avoid dealing honestly with our attachment pain issues:

**Behaviors:** Work, House Cleaning, Religious Activity, Performance, Shopping, Dressing Provocatively, Rescuing, Gambling, Computer Or Video Gaming, Reading, Internet Surfing, Television, Viewing Pornography, Masturbation, Partying, etc.

**Events:** Internet Addictions, Thrill Seeking, Religious Roller Coaster Rides, (i.e. Seeking The Spiritual High), Day After Thanksgiving or Christmas Sales.

**Experiences:** Success, Competition, Sex, Power & Control, Preaching, Teaching or Other Experiences of Religious Power.

**People:** Non-Joy Building Relationships: Short Term, Serial and/or Activity Only Relationships; Codependent & Coaddictive Relationships.

**Substances:** Alcohol, Drugs (legal or illegal), Caffeine, Carbohydrates, Ice Cream, Chocolate.

Obviously, this list only scratches the surface as our minds are incredibly creative in finding ways to “medicate to regulate.” One analogy we use in our groups is BEEPS are like the “Bop A Mole” game at children’s arcades. Every time you knock one down, two more pop up. Many people choose an approach of looking for less offensive BEEPS rather than the more difficult course of true recovery. Personally, I’m thankful my struggle manifested itself in something so personally horrific that I was willing to start the painful road of recovery. If my struggle would have been workaholicism or something less offensive, I would never have faced many difficult things in my life. In fact, as a minister, I would have been stroked if my

---

<sup>68</sup> Wilder & Khouri “Restarting 1”

<sup>69</sup> Wilder & Khouri “Restarting 1”

<sup>70</sup> Jim Wilder “Recovery From Sexual Addiction” DVD conference.

<sup>71</sup> Wilder & Khouri, “Restarting 6”

primary BEEP would have been working too much. Yet, without directly facing my attachment-pain issues, my life would have continued to spin out of control no matter how successful it might have appeared on the surface.

### **What Can Be Done to Heal Our Insecure Attachments?**

There is much more that could be said to describe insecure attachments and BEEPS. This is just a short introduction. However, I hope it is enough to help you at least acknowledge you need help in this area. If you are reading this chapter in *New Hope For Sexual Integrity* you are most likely either in recovery for a sexual addiction or married to a sexual addict. Either way, the odds of you having a secure attachment as your primary model are very slim. Therefore, the question we must all ask is what can be done to heal our insecure attachments?

Thankfully, there is hope. God understands our painful situation and wants to lead us into healthier places where we reflect more of his relational glory. It is, therefore, possible to move from an insecure attachment style to what attachment theorists call an **“earned-secure” attachment style**. “Studies have shown that individuals can move from what was an insecure childhood attachment to a secure adult attachment status.”<sup>72</sup> This “earned-secure” attachment is the outgrowth of deliberate relationships, both therapeutic and personal, where individuals learn to process old wounds and transform their defensive approaches of isolation to intimacy. Two of the primary ingredients are relational connections and a deepening self-understanding. As we connect securely to others and as we understand and articulate our own story, we find incredible healing.<sup>73</sup>

This is one of the reasons telling your story is such a powerful part of recovery. In our groups, we have noticed stories often change significantly between the time a man tells it at his first meeting and when he tells it after significant time in the groups. It is not uncommon for a man telling his story the first time to be almost incoherent as he jumps from one isolated memory to another. It is also quite

common for him to focus exclusively on either a few negative memories or the opposite defensive avoidance of, “I had a good childhood, I’m not sure when I started screwing things up.” Sadly, it is often the very men who at first adamantly defend their parents, who eventually tell some of the most heartbreaking stories as they gain the strength to be able to look honestly at their lives.

Through the recovery materials, hearing other’s stories and through personal journaling and reflection you can begin to remember and put together a cohesive story that brings together both the reality of your experience and the narrative you use to describe this experience. This coherence is a crucial part of healing. If you are in denial of your reality, you are powerless to choose differently and will unknowingly repeat the patterns handed down to you. Again, Siegel says it well:

*A deeper self-understanding changes who you are. Making sense of your life enables you to understand others more fully and gives you the possibility of choosing your behaviors and opening your mind to a fuller range of experiences. The changes that come with self-understanding enable you to have a way of being, a way of communicating with your children that promotes their security of attachment.<sup>74</sup>*

Now the question is, how do we accomplish this movement from insecure to “earned-secure” attachment? The short answer is we move from insecure attachments to secure attachments by experiencing secure attachment with God and with others and by honestly facing the truth of our life’s story. We must put ourselves in situations and relationships where we experience God’s amazing love in our lives. This is obviously difficult in the context of human relationships as very few people have secure attachment styles and most prefer to live in denial rather than face the truth.

---

<sup>72</sup> Siegel, *Parenting From The Inside Out* p. 123.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p. 124.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, p. 123

## **Insecure Attachment: Both Sin and Symptom**

While this movement is difficult, I believe it takes place when we intentionally build relationships based on joy (see Chapter 5) where God does amazing things. He uses these relationships to grow the prefrontal cortex of our brains and to move us away from the extremes of our insecure characteristics to the strength of who he created us to be. This process is not a quick fix but a life-long journey of sanctification. It is also a process where we must become aware of and face the ugliness of our broken relational styles even if they do not express themselves in obvious external sin.

Dr. Larry Crabb brought the point of internal sin home to me many years ago in his “Inside Out” video when he posed the question, “What is the greatest sin?” In my religious background that usually meant divorce, adultery, or some sexual perversion. However, Crabb asked a follow up question: “What is the greatest commandment?” Of course, being a Bible Bowl whiz kid, I knew that answer: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself.” What caught me completely off guard was Crabb’s conclusion. If loving God and loving your neighbor are the greatest commands, doesn’t it make sense that the greatest sin is the refusal to love God and others? Ouch!

That puts my dismissive withdrawal or my distracted manipulation in an entirely new light. They are no longer just necessary survival mechanisms but instead sinful forms of self-protection. They aren’t relational quirks; they are sinful strategies I use to refuse to love. The good news, however, is once I see my sin, I have the opportunity to confess and repent. No, I probably can’t change it immediately, but I can acknowledge it, confess it and through brokenness allow God’s healing process to take root in my life.

Therefore, if my primary insecure attachment style is distracted/ambivalent/anxious, I can begin to acknowledge my sinful inclination to seek my security through the affectionate responses of my wife. I can repent of my anger directed towards her for the times she is not able to receive me the way I demand to be received. In my times of desperation—instead of chasing her

around the house or the bedroom seeking her to make me OK—I must instead be willing to stand in the middle of my pain long enough to discover that God wants to meet me there and show me the sufficiency of His incredible love.

It also changes the way I look at my dismissive wife’s struggle. Instead of seeing her withdrawal as a personal attack and rejection of me, I can see her struggle and her pain and have mercy for her. I can see shutting down is not what her heart desires but what her pain dictates. I can see (most of the time) it isn’t a conscious decision of the will but an involuntary impulse of conditioning. By the power of His Spirit living within me, I can choose to stay with her without chasing her. I can offer the comfort and love of my silent presence as I simply hold her rather than demand she tell me what I want to hear or do what I want her to do.

If my primary insecure attachment style is dismissive/avoidant, I can begin to acknowledge my sinful inclination to seek my security in the safety of isolation. I can begin to see my withdrawal and my shutting down not as the justified responses of someone who has too much put on him but as a sinful form of self-protection. I can repent of my anger directed towards my distracted/anxious/ambivalent wife with her constant need for attention and affirmation. I can face my fear of not being enough, of not being worthy of love and by faith (through Spirit-empowered intervention) turn up the dimmer switch of my attachment light, trusting that even if no one attaches to me, God will not abandon me but will meet me in that painful place. By faith I can ask for the strength to initiate and move towards my wife. I can even apologize for the negative “GO AWAY” message my withdrawal speaks so loudly. I can ask God to open my eyes to see her perspective and not just my own. By the power and strength of His Spirit living with me, I can face the terror in my soul that screams “run away” and instead stand still to give and receive love with my anxious/distracted and needy wife.

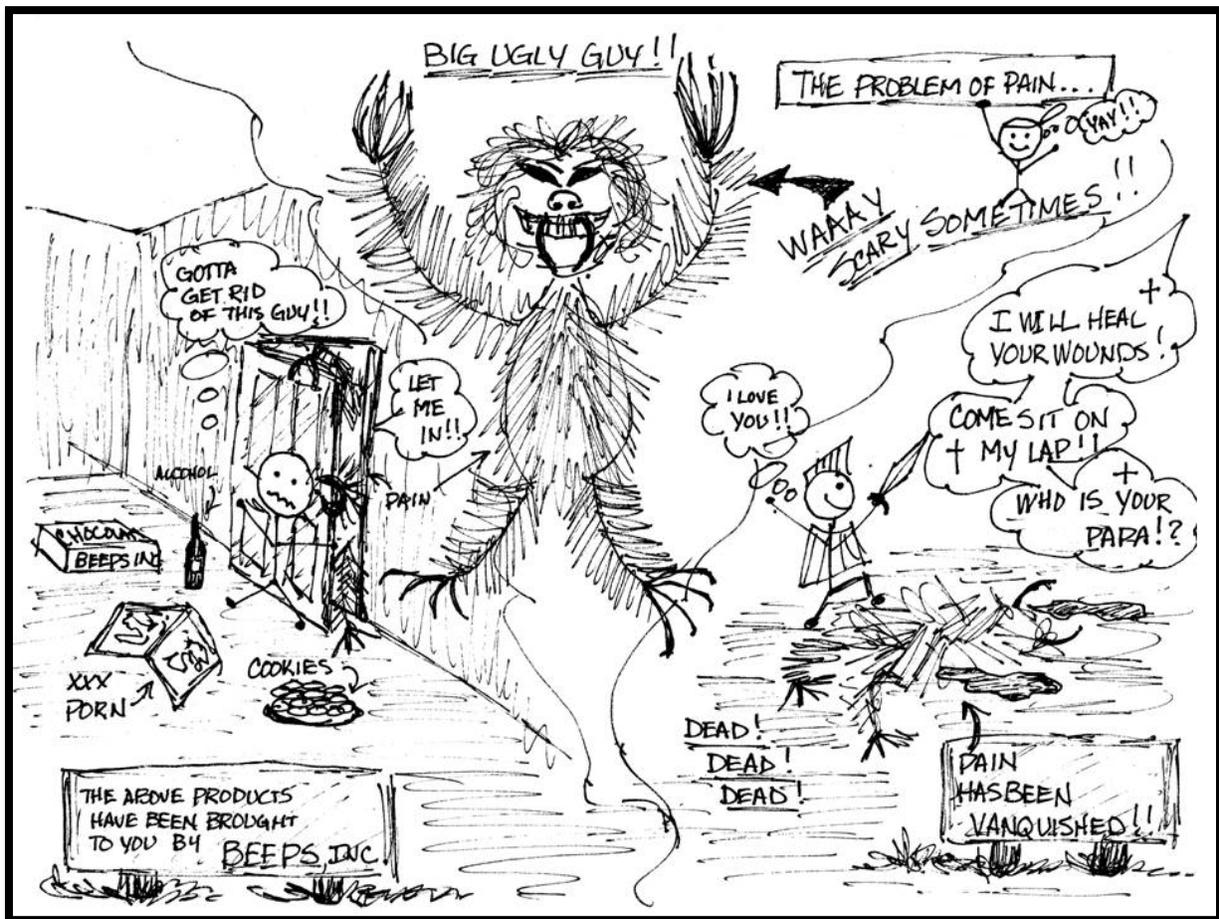
As a disorganized, I can honestly face the painful reality of my past. I can trust God to give me the strength to remember and talk about the abusive and painful things done to me as a child. I can remove the denial, stop making excuses, stop minimizing what really happened and share with safe individuals, who truly want to care for me, what really happened. I can repent of the

angry ways I have responded to others in the same way my parents responded to me. I can begin laying down my view of God that sees him as angry and capricious like my earthly father. I can lay down my demand that God stop the pain and instead trust He is able to use the pain to bring deeper healing in my life and greater glory to His Son. I can begin to see the redemptive threads interwoven in my story in the midst of the painful realities. I can recognize and repent of my tendency to push God and others away whenever they get close. I can begin sabotaging my sabotage and stay put even when everything within me screams “run away” or “attack.”

No, it will not be easy, and it will require divine intervention as well as a community that

loves and supports me even in the middle of my mess. In reality, that is what God designed the church to be: a hospital for wounded sinners and to use the title from one of Crabb’s books, “The Safest Place On Earth.” Unfortunately, very few churches come anywhere close to meeting this description. However, God is faithful and if you allow him to lead you, he will guide you to a community (maybe a new church, maybe a small group, maybe your recovery group) where you can experience his grace through the flesh and blood of others who are traveling a similar journey.

(In 2025, Darrell presented an “Attachment Models in Addiction, Recovery and Betrayal Trauma” seminar where he greatly expands on this content and addresses the trauma partners experience through deceptive sexuality. Go to [www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com) for the video from this seminar.)



## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. Take some time to read Genesis chapters 1-3. What relational words, images and connections stand out to you?
2. When have you felt like Adam, trying to hide behind a bush from an omnipresent God?
3. Do you know anyone you think has a primary model of “secure attachment”? If yes, what are some traits and characteristics you admire about this person?
4. When have you experienced the relational joy of “being with someone who is glad to be with you”? Describe how your body feels during those encounters. What impact do those encounters have on you afterwards?
5. What do you know about your mother’s state of being during the especially formative first few years of your life? How able was she to be the “good mother”?
6. What aspects of the “Distracted Attachment” can you relate to or see at play in your own life?
7. What aspects of the “Dismissive Attachment” can you relate to or see at play in your own life?
8. What aspects of the “Disorganized Attachment” can you relate to or see at play in your own life?

9. What aspects of the “Distracted Attachment” can you see in your spouse’s life? (If you are not married, answer this and the next several questions in light of those you’ve dated or with whom you have had close ongoing relationships.)
  
10. What aspects of the “Dismissive Attachment” can you see in your spouse’s life?
  
11. What aspects of the “Disorganized Attachment” can you see in your spouse’s life?
  
12. What role do you see your attachment style and your spouse’s attachment style playing in your being drawn together in the first place?
  
13. Describe the downward spiral that takes place as your insecure attachments collide?
  
14. What does the acronym “BEEPS” add to your understanding of your addictive issues?
  
15. What are your primary BEEPS? Secondary?
  
16. What does the thought of giving up your BEEPS do for and to you?
  
17. Where do you experience a taste of real community? What are some of the places and relationships where you experience God’s incredible love in your life?
  
18. What does Larry Crabb’s point about the greatest sin say to you about your self-protection?
  
19. In light of your attachment style, what specific behaviors, attitudes and resentments do you need to confess and begin the journey of brokenness?
  
20. How does understanding a little about your spouse’s attachment style give you more grace for him/her?

21. How “safe” is your church? Can you honestly describe it as “The Safest Place On Earth”?

22. Where are your “safe places”?

23. **Journaling Assignment:** Write the story of your life, as you know it today in light of these attachment issues. Break it up into the following stages and either do it on a computer or else use a separate sheet of paper for each stage so you can add more as other memories come to mind.

Pre-Birth: What do you know about your parents emotional and relational states while you were in the womb?

Infant: What do you know about your parent’s ability to welcome you into this world? What do you know about their ability to bond and connect with you? What do you know about their ability to synchronize to you and your needs?

Childhood: What are your earliest memories, joys, triumphs, traumas etc.?

Elementary School: What was life like at home, at school, on the playground etc.?

Jr. High: Ugh! What a wretched time for most of us. However, take the time to write what you remember and ask God to show you what is significant in your story.

High School: Who were you? What roles did you play in your family? What did you share with your parents about school, dating etc.?

College/Young Adult: What was your life like when you tried to go out on your own?

Adulthood: What are the significant relationships, both good and bad, in your life? What are your achievements, failures etc.? What are the hurts you face on a regular basis?

Don’t be afraid to write a novel. Who knows, it could be the next best seller. ☺ It might never be read by another person, and yet if it helps you tell a coherent story for your life, it will pay huge dividends in your recovery. Revisit your story often continuing to add the significant details that your recovery brings to the surface. Make it a multi-year project and see the incredible things that come out over time.

Finally, find someone (or a group) with whom you feel safe sharing your story. Don’t just give them a printout. Instead, tell it to them in your own voice. It will be a great blessing to them as well as bring deeper healing in your own life.

**Side Note: This assignment is one of the most important tasks in this recovery manual. The growth we have seen in individuals who are writing their story is phenomenal! Do not shortchange yourself by not beginning to write your story.**

## 13. THE IMMANUEL PROCESS

---

As Jesus ascends into heaven, he says, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20

### Introduction to the Immanuel Process

One of the most effective tools we have found for dealing with trauma, (both Type A and Type B) and attachment pain is what Dr. Karl Lehman calls, “The Immanuel Process.” Dr. Lehman ([www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com)) is a board-certified psychiatrist who has used many therapies ranging from psychotherapy to Theophostic prayer to the medical approach including pharmaceuticals.<sup>75</sup>

After much experience with various approaches, Dr. Lehman has developed a methodology that leads individuals in prayer and processing to find connections with Jesus where they experience the reality of “Immanuel.” Immanuel, of course, is one of Jesus’ names meaning, “God is with us.”

Dr. Lehman bases the Immanuel process in part on Jesus’ words at the end of Matthew’s gospel. As Jesus ascends into heaven, he says, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). From this verse and others, we can intellectually know Jesus is always, “glad as glad can be” to be with us. Unfortunately, we are often like the disciples on the road to Emmaus who have Jesus with us but no awareness of His presence. In Luke 24, the gospel tells us Jesus engaged two of the disciples in a lengthy conversation as they were leaving Jerusalem. They, however, had no idea Jesus was the stranger with them until, “...their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (verse 31). In verse 16, Luke specifically tells his readers, “they were kept from recognizing him.” Another critical part of this story is verse 32 where the disciples ask, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?”

From these passages, we can see several foundational principles of the Immanuel process. First, a common—if not the most common—experience for Christians is having Jesus with us but not having any awareness of his presence. We may know intellectually Jesus is always with us, but experientially we have little or no sense of his presence.

Second, we are often prevented from perceiving His presence by things of which we are completely unaware. Luke doesn’t tell us what prevented the two disciples from recognizing Jesus. It could have simply been the fact they believed Jesus was dead and weren’t looking for him. They may have been so absorbed in themselves they failed to look closely at the stranger walking beside them. It may be something spiritual: God may have supernaturally kept them from perceiving or Satan may have caused them to look through distorted lenses. While we don’t know the specific hindrances to their perception, Luke clearly says, “They were kept from recognizing him.” The same thing happens in our lives as things outside our awareness often prevent us from recognizing Immanuel’s presence.

Finally, we can see that God must open our eyes in order for us to accurately perceive Jesus’ presence. The disciples didn’t finally recognize Jesus because they added up all the information and came to the logical conclusion it was him. No, they recognized Jesus because, “...their eyes were opened.” Then, once their eyes were opened, they were able to look back on their experience with him and recognize how their hearts came alive in his presence, “Were not our hearts burning within us?” The end result was

---

<sup>75</sup> Dr. Lehman describes his journey in an article, “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who is With Us ~ Part I: A Psychiatrist’s Journey --

A Brief Introduction to the Immanuel Approach.” The article is available at [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com).

the transformation of a memory. Prior to recognizing Jesus' presence, all they could perceive was a conversation with a stranger. Once recognizing him, they felt the empowerment and thrill of being with Jesus. The same thing happens in our lives when we allow God to open our eyes to see how Jesus—Immanuel—is truly with us even in very isolated and painful memories.

If scripture is true, if Jesus' promise in Mathew 28:20 applies to you and me, then there has never been a time in our lives when Jesus was not with us. Now, there are many, many times we are not aware of his presence, but our lack of awareness does not negate his actual presence.

Here is the amazing thing: once we accurately perceive his presence, He begins transforming even the most painful and traumatic memories and experiences. This has tremendous implications for our recoveries. Think about it: most acting-out behaviors are the result of our attempts to relieve pain. In a form of idolatry, we choose to medicate rather than trust God can meet us in our pain and show us a different way.

As we have noted previously, much of our pain comes from negative past experiences (Type B Trauma) and from the absence of good things (Type A Trauma). However, when we begin to allow Immanuel to reveal himself to us in the memories of our past, we find great healing that brings the pain relief we desperately desire, and even more importantly, brings us closer to Jesus. Growing closer to Jesus builds secure attachment which helps heal the insecure attachments we looked at in the previous chapter. Can you see how this can be a powerful upward spiral counteracting the downward spirals of trauma and addiction?

If you can envision this upward spiral, you may ask, "How does it work?" Dr. Lehman has a wealth of information on his website, in his book *Outsmarting Yourself* and in *The Immanuel Approach For Emotional Healing & Life*. However, for the purpose of this manual, I provide a basic description below.

### **Basic Steps of the Process**

This section provides of listing of the basic steps of the Immanuel process. Obviously, there is much detail that could be added to each step.

We refer you again to Dr. Lehman's works for further detail.

### **Recall a Time of Appreciation**

The Immanuel process begins with a time of appreciation. In prayer, ask Jesus to show you times you have experienced His presence, felt especially close to Him or have received or experienced something from him for which you can be grateful. As he brings things to your mind, take a few moments to simply soak in those thoughts and memories. Try to remember what you felt like, what happened. If you are praying with someone, share your thoughts, feelings, etc. If you are by yourself, talk them through out loud and/or by journaling. Dr. Lehman calls this a "warming up time" as contemplating about and talking through appreciation helps turn on the relational circuits in our brains and makes further connections with Jesus flow more easily.

### **Refresh Your Perception of His Presence**

In the context of appreciation, ask Jesus something to the effect of "Jesus, please refresh my perception of your presence and of my positive connection with you so that they are real and living in the present." Speak out loud or write anything that comes to your mind and allow Jesus to strengthen your connection to him.

### **Perceive Jesus' Presence**

Next, simply ask Jesus to show you a time in your life where you are ready to perceive his presence. For some, an image or memory immediately appears. Others sometimes experience the frustration of receiving nothing. If a memory appears, ask Jesus to show you his presence in that memory. Some see a visual representation of Jesus while others simply have a sense He is there. Receive both with thanksgiving and trust that Jesus can and will use the memory to draw you more securely to Himself.

### **Stick with the Process**

If you draw a complete blank or if you receive an image or memory but cannot sense Jesus' presence, ask Him to show you what is preventing you from perceiving Him. Pray aloud, "Jesus, what is blocking

me from perceiving your presence?” If an image comes to mind, ask Jesus about that image; that is one of the neatest things about this process. You don’t have to be afraid of anything; you just have to be open to the idea that Jesus wants to be with you. If a frightening image comes to mind, ask Jesus if he wants you to pursue that image. If he does, you can trust you are ready to face that memory.

### **Allow Jesus to Lead the Process**

If He takes you to another memory, then you can trust He knows what you need to see, hear or remember. The goal of this prayer is not getting an answer for something but experiencing Jesus’ incredible love and acceptance by simply being in His presence. As memories, words and images come to your mind, simply continue to take them through the “Jesus filter” by asking the question: “Jesus, what do you want to show me or say to me about this?”

### **Filter Out Any Lies**

Since Romans, 8:1 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” you can know if something condemning comes to your mind, it isn’t from Jesus but an attack of the enemy that you must dismiss. Instead of accepting it, ask Jesus to show you the truth Satan is trying to prevent you from seeing with his attacks of condemnation. Again, you don’t have to “figure things out,” you must simply trust Jesus to take you on a journey and most importantly trust Him to open your mind to the reality that he wants to be with you.

### **Experience His Love**

Most people, if they stick with the process, experience a memory or an image where they feel the presence of Jesus. Sometimes His presence takes them on a journey touching old wounds. Sometimes He takes them to seemingly insignificant events. However, the common thread is He takes us on journeys to open the eyes of our hearts to the experiential reality that He likes being with us. Most of us can quote John 3:16 or sing, “Jesus loves me, this I

know...” but that is primarily intellectual knowledge in the left side of our brain. However, when we spend time with Jesus in Immanuel prayer, we begin to experience His love in ways that move us toward secure attachment with Him, which in turn, empowers us to move away from our insecure attachment models.

### **Listen to Jesus**

Once you have a connection with Jesus, ask questions like: “Is there anything you want to say to me in this place?” “Jesus, who am I to you?” or “Jesus, what is your heart towards me?” and “Are you glad to be with me?” Ask anything you would like to know.

### **Linger in His Presence**

Don’t be in any hurry to leave “Immanuel Places.” Enjoy your time with Jesus. Stay, soak, ask more questions. Pay attention to how you feel as you sense His presence. Many find they sense his presence, but realize there is still distance. Don’t be afraid to ask Jesus to come closer. Ask him if you can experience more of Him in this place. When you think you are done, double check with Jesus before leaving. For example: “Is there anything else you want to show me or speak to me before I leave this place.”

### **End with Thanksgiving**

End your time by thanking Jesus for what He has shown you. Close your prayer time by praising Jesus for the experience, for the closeness you feel with him and for the truths he speaks to your heart.

### **Don’t Give Up!**

If you try Immanuel prayer and don’t seem to go any place, keep trying and keep asking God to show you what is blocking you from experiencing His presence. It is also often very helpful to have someone lead you through the process. If someone leads you, their job is to keep asking you the questions, “Where is Jesus?” “Can you perceive His presence?” If the answer is no, then they encourage you to ask Jesus to reveal to you whatever is preventing you from sensing His presence. Your job is to

report whatever comes to your mind no matter how irrelevant it seems in the moment. Often, as you verbalize your thoughts, the connections begin to make sense. If they don't, stay focused and persistent by asking Jesus what it means.

### **An Example of Following the Process In A Facilitated Session**

Immanuel prayer can be a powerful and healing place. We have seen it impact hearts and lives in incredible ways. Here is one example that can encourage you and help you have a picture of the process. "Tom" had intermittently attended our men's groups for about three years. When he first attended, he had difficulty even talking in the small check in groups, let alone speaking up in the big group time. He had struggled with sexual addiction for many years. He was finally beginning to make some strides and remaining consistent in coming to groups when he had a huge crash by going to a strip club. In a very low place, he went back to something he had done many years earlier. He discovered the clubs even more intoxicating than in the past as he purchased many lap dances and experienced the physical touch and counterfeit joy of conversations with young women who were attractive and "friendly" to him.

While powerfully intoxicating in the moment, the experiences left him in great pain and filled with deep shame. In his shame, he found himself returning periodically and at one point having thoughts of suicide. He had also started meeting regularly with me for counseling. I explained Immanuel prayer to him and he was willing to give a facilitated session a try. In the first meeting, he went to a very safe "feel good" kind of place and he and I were both encouraged. The following week, we began by starting in his "safe place with Jesus." I encouraged him to spend a few moments there just enjoying and experiencing Jesus' delight in him. Next, I told him to ask Jesus where He wanted him to go today.

I saw him physically tense up as he said, "I am getting an image from the strip club." My first thought was that Satan was trying to distract him or bring condemnation, so I prayed aloud, "Jesus, by your blood and by your resurrection, we declare Satan has no authority here and there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Please do not allow Satan to distract or

condemn." I then instructed him to ask Jesus again where he wanted him to go.

His response was, "I'm still in the strip club with the young woman who was nice to me." While I was somewhat surprised he was still there, by God's grace, and I believe His prompting, I hesitantly asked the critical question, "Do you have any sense of Jesus' presence there?"

Immediately Tom perked up a little and said in a surprised tone, "Yeah, He is right there . . . just above her."

"Hum. . . What is He like? Is he upset or angry with you?" I asked.

"No, He seems sad, but still glad to be with me, just like in the previous memory."

I paused and silently asked Jesus what to do; the only thing I could think of was to have him ask Jesus questions. I instructed him to ask if there was anything He wanted to say to him.

Immediately a tear started trickling down Tom's face as he replied, "Jesus said,

***'I know you are here because your pain is great. However, what you need is not her, but me.'***

We were both blown away. I believe Tom felt much like the woman in John 8 when Jesus told her to, "Go and sin no more." Tom felt seen, heard, and understood. He knew Jesus saw his sin and his pain but did not condemn him. He instead offered the solution for his sin. The solution, of course, was learning his deepest need was not sex or a woman but Jesus himself.

This all happened several years ago and while Tom was with our groups, he did not go back to a strip club, and he only had one momentary slip in his recovery after Immanuel met him there. He continued to find Jesus in new places and his continued transformation was evident to everyone who knew him. Every time I met with him, I saw new strength, confidence, and growth. He began speaking freely in our small groups and even the big group time and became an encouragement to many.

It is important to note that he was also faithful in other recovery behaviors. He worked on materials, called men from the groups, and attended multiple meetings every week. His Immanuel connection was a critical element in his recovery. I believe it empowered him to walk out of his shame and do the things he struggled

so much to do prior to experiencing Jesus as Immanuel. Unfortunately, about a year after experiencing Jesus meeting him in the strip club, he moved to another town and no longer attends our groups or comes for counseling. While he has struggled again with some destructive behaviors, I truly believe he will never go back to where he was because he now has a right brained, experiential understanding that Jesus is always “glad as glad can be” to be with me, even in the lowest places.

### **Immanuel Journaling**

We have experimented through the years with many different ways to connect with Immanuel. They have all worked in varying degrees for different people. However, at the THRIVE 2015 Annual Gathering, John & Sungshim Loppnow, Anna Kang and Dr. Jim Wilder introduced a new book, *Joyful Journeys* which we are finding incredibly helpful. In *Joyful Journeys*, the authors present a simple journaling model that helps us connect with Immanuel and experience attunement from Him. Everyone I have introduced it to has found it helps them connect to Jesus in very clear ways. I highly recommend you get a copy and begin experiencing His presence daily as you journal through your interactions with Immanuel.

There is a one-page guide in the Journaling and Application section below. However, you will want to read *Joyful Journeys* (available from [www.lifemodelworks.org](http://www.lifemodelworks.org)) to see the rest of the process to understand how to use it in daily and practical ways as well as to understand some of the brain science behind the process.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Immanuel prayer is not a “silver bullet.” It isn’t something you do once, experience a great healing and move forward with no more pain. Yes, it often resolves specific traumatic memories. However, there are always more memories to address so it is best when it becomes a consistent part of your walk with God. You can also see it like a date between two soul mates. It is an opportunity to be together and experience a taste of what can and will be. Therefore, don’t be discouraged if you don’t receive a great revelation or if you don’t perceive His presence the first time or even the hundredth

time you try. Instead, make it a daily part of your life. Take time to be with Jesus and see what a difference it begins to make.

Obviously, this is just a brief introduction to Immanuel prayer. I could give more examples and there are many intricate things to learn about dealing with blockages. The process is also a little difficult to describe in print and is more easily understood when someone facilitates you through it. However, it isn’t as complicated as it may sound, and it isn’t a formula you have to do perfectly. Jesus is more than able to show you His presence even if you don’t follow precise steps. If you can find a friend or a counselor who can guide you, great! However, don’t be afraid to try it on your own, especially with the *Joyful Journeys*. Another good beginning place is in my “Power of Joy” teachings. You can click on “Immanuel Mentoring Groups” to watch a beautiful example of someone connecting with Immanuel. ([www.newhope4si.com/poj](http://www.newhope4si.com/poj))

If you get stuck on your own, find someone who can help you move through the process. Ask your counselor to read this chapter. Order Dr. Lehman’s videos of actual sessions from [www.kclehman.com](http://www.kclehman.com) and ask your counselor to watch them to see if he or she would be willing to try this with you. I personally recommend the “condensed versions” especially for those who are just learning about the process. Ask around; find someone or several individuals who are interested in learning more about this form of connecting with Jesus. It will be a great blessing in your life and theirs.

If you attend a “Restarting” program using the material from Jim Wilder and Ed Khouri, you will see several Immanuel sessions during the program as well as participate in Immanuel exercises. Dr. Lehman also has numerous free articles and helpful information in his works.

Discovering safe and secure attachments to Jesus is life changing. They can empower you to leave insecure forms of attachment and begin to really love and be loved in ways you have only imagined. Connecting with Jesus is also a huge key for dealing with all forms of BEEPS and especially sexual addiction. Attachment pain is the primary reason most addicts relapse. Allowing Jesus to meet you and begin healing your traumas and your attachment pain will pay huge dividends for you, your spouse, your children and others with whom you interact.

## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. What is your initial reaction to the concept of “Immanuel Prayer”?
2. Take some time to try to simply begin with an appreciation place through Immanuel Prayer. Ask Jesus to show you something you can appreciate or remind you of a time you felt closely connected to him. Write out anything that comes to your mind.
3. Write a “Thank You Note” to Jesus for what he has shown you.
4. Write a response from Jesus to you in regards to your thanking him. Just write whatever comes to your mind. Don’t try to edit your thoughts or worry about if it is really from him. Simply write to yourself whatever thoughts seem to come from Him.
5. Read what you have written in from questions 2-4 above out loud to yourself.
6. Read it all aloud again but this time to someone else.



# Handouts and Worksheets

Important Instructions: Please Read and Respond

**IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS!! PLEASE READ & RESPOND...**

OK... Lets establish the basics...

- ① You love me with an everlasting love.
- ② You are not angry with me...
- ③ **IMPORTANT!!** I am not angry with You...
- ④ I'm not sure that I know how to get back to a good place...  
(+) "Well then, let ME meet you there."  
(me) "How?"  
(+) "Its done. I'm right here."  
(me) "I love You."  
(+) "I love You too..."



## Steps of The Immanuel Process

1. Focus on appreciation: Ask Jesus to bring to your memory previous “5 Bar Experiences” blessings, gifts, positive relationships etc.
2. Verbally express appreciation to Jesus for the things He brings to mind.
3. Ask Jesus to refresh your perception of His presence. Ask him to bring that memory and the feelings of that 5 bar<sup>76</sup> memory into the here and now.
4. Ask Jesus to show you a new place where you can experience His Immanuel Presence.
5. Enter the memory and describe what comes to mind even if it seems strange or irrelevant.
6. Ask Jesus to open the eyes of your heart so you can see or sense His presence in the memory.
  - a. **If you do not sense His presence proceed to point 7.**
  - b. If you sense his presence in any way, do the following:
    - i. Focus on Jesus’ presence and the way it changes the way you feel.
    - ii. Ask for more: For example, if you sense His presence but He seems far away, ask Him to come closer or ask if you can move closer to Him.
    - iii. Ask if there is anything He wants to say to you in this place. Ask what His heart is towards you. Ask who you are to him. Ask anything you want to know.
    - iv. Ask if there is anyplace else He wants to take you. If another memory comes to mind, go back to point 4 and continue the process.
    - v. Try to spend time “soaking” in His presence. When you sense Him, don’t be in any hurry to leave. Allow yourself to simply enjoy being in His presence.
    - vi. When you are done, (again, be sure to check with Jesus) spend a few moments talking to Him and thanking him for what he has shown you.
7. When you don’t have a sense of His presence, ask Jesus to show you what is preventing you from perceiving Him.
  - a. Report anything that comes to your mind to your facilitator.
  - b. The facilitator should pray specifically against any condemning messages. (Rom. 8:1)
  - c. Allow yourself to feel the frustration of not sensing His presence as well as any feelings associated with the memory.
  - d. Describe those frustrations and feelings to your facilitator.
  - e. If new memories pop into your mind, simply report them as Jesus often takes us on journeys through connecting memories to the places He wants to address.
  - f. Ask Jesus if there is anything he wants you to do to remove the blockage. Do whatever you sense He tells you.
  - g. Invite Jesus to show you his presence again. Pray something to the effect of, “Jesus, I give you a personal heart invitation to show me your presence in this confusing place. I want to know the truth that you are with me here.”
  - h. If you still can’t sense His presence, ask Jesus what is blocking you and then start back at 7a.
  - i. If you have a previous “5 Bar” memory, go back to it whenever you get stuck. In that memory, ask Jesus if there is anything he can tell you about the stuck memory.
  - j. Try going back and forth between the memory where you sense His presence and the memory where you do not.
  - k. Even if you do not find an Immanuel place, go back to steps 1 & 2 so you can end in a positive place.

---

<sup>76</sup> 5 bar comes from the idea that if you need to make a cell phone call, you will have a stronger connection with 5 bars than one or two. We want to remember times of strong connections with Immanuel or the Father.

# Immanuel Journaling<sup>77</sup>

## ***Interactive Appreciation***

1. Ask Jesus to remind you of something you can appreciate.
2. Write Jesus a “Thank You” for what you just wrote.
3. Write a response from Jesus about your “Thank you”

## ***Thought Rhyming*** (Write from the perspective of Jesus speaking to you)

1. I see you . . .
2. I hear you . . .
3. I feel how big this is for you . . .
4. I am glad to be with you and have tenderness for your weakness . . .
5. I AM able to do something about it . . .

**Name the story & Read it out loud to someone.** “I call my story ‘ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

---

<sup>77</sup> From *Joyful Journey* by E. James Wilder, Anna Kang, John Loppnow & Sungshim Loppnow. Shepherd’s House 2015 Used with permission. *Joyful Journey* explains the process more completely. You can purchase it from [www.lifemodelworks.org](http://www.lifemodelworks.org).

## 14. TELLING YOUR WIFE ABOUT YOUR STRUGGLE

---

Imagine a friend was in a tight spot and you loaned him \$10,000. A year goes by and his finances show no signs of improving and in your compassion, you decide to forgive the debt. However, the thought of forgiving \$10,000 is more than you can entertain, so you pretend to yourself and to him the debt is only \$1,000. What happens when you go to him and say, "Friend, I know things are still hard for you, so I have decided to forgive the \$1,000 you owe me?" At first your friend is probably greatly relieved. However, in the back of his mind, he knows there is still a \$9,000 debt outstanding. In the back of your mind, you still know there is \$9,000. Both consciously and unconsciously you end up avoiding one another and the relationship suffers.

Now imagine how much worse it would be if you honestly didn't know the debt was \$10,000. Imagine what it would be like if a trusted accountant conspired with your friend to reduce the debt without your knowledge. What happens when you learn the truth? Of course, you would feel betrayed and most likely be furious. Well, that is exactly what happens when a husband confesses to "dabbling with a little porn" when he has spent twelve hours a week on-line, been to strip clubs and even hired a prostitute.

### **"Coming Clean" with Your Spouse**

One of the most difficult things to do in early recovery is to "come clean" to your spouse. We believe to remove shame and allow the opportunity for true forgiveness and healing in the marriage the husband must come clean about both the breadth and depth of his activities. Even men whose wives caught them with pornography on the computer, discovered their affair or found other evidence still face the task of coming completely clean. Often, even those who have been in recovery for a significant period of time need to go back and have a "full disclosure" meeting to confess things they have hidden.

A common excuse for avoiding full disclosure is the belief that telling everything will only hurt her more. However, the reality is he doesn't hurt her when he tells her what he has done; he hurts her when he sins sexually against her and then compounds that hurt when he hides, denies and outright lies about his sin. A man's desire to protect his wife from pain is almost always rooted in the self-protection of knowing the more she knows, the more painful it will be for him. The guise of "not hurting her" is usually a thinly veiled smoke screen for not wanting to face the consequences of his actions. Unfortunately, men are often advised by well-meaning pastors, counselors, and friends to

either not tell or else not tell everything. Our experience, however, has shown full recovery for both husband and wife require everything to be in the light. The earlier this happens, the better it is for both individuals and for the marriage.

It is necessary for a husband to have outside input on what is "breadth and depth" and what is "detail." It is also helpful for the wife to have guidance on what questions she should and should not ask. The line between "breadth and depth" and "detail" is often very blurry. In the fearful place of disclosure, men often use this principle as a justification for withholding things they should share. Wives, in reaction to their pain and in their desire to know "the whole truth," will often press for details that ultimately make the healing process more difficult and painful.

However, **I believe a wife needs to know what she needs to know, and it isn't her husband's place or even my place to tell her what she needs.** An analogy that many find helpful is that of barbs on a fishing hook. If you get hooked, there is no way for it not to hurt. However, if there are no barbs on the hook, it will come out with less pain and leave less scarring. Details of a man's acting out are like barbs on a hook, so I encourage wives to pray

and ask for clarity about what they really need to know. It is also where a trained disclosure coach or therapist can be invaluable.

I also counsel couples with what I call a 24 hour rule: I tell husbands, “If after your disclosure, your wife asks something that you believe is a ‘detail’ rather than a ‘breadth and depth’ question, tell her you are concerned the answer is a barb that will only bring pain but that if she still wants the question answered at this time tomorrow, you will answer it.” I tell the wife to then pray and ask the Father if she really needs the answer. Many times, this enables her to allow God to calm her fear to a manageable level and make a good decision about her question. Even if she still wants it answered, they both know she is not asking simply out of place of fear.

### **“Death by a Thousand Cuts”**

Another huge mistake men often make is to tell a little bit at a time. We call this “death by a thousand cuts.” For example, in January he feels convicted and tells her he has been struggling with Internet pornography. In March, he feels even more conviction and admits he has been to a few strip clubs. A couple weeks later he confesses he had a “one night stand” while out of town on business. Then, just about the time she regains her balance and starts the healing process, he feels horrible and admits the “one night stand” was actually a two-year affair. As painful as it might sound, disclosure is best done like taking off a band aid. Get as much of it done as possible the first time. With that said, it is also common for men who are honestly trying to give “full disclosure,” to simply not remember some of their actions. That is why they also need a disclosure coach or therapist and why a “Facilitated Full Disclosure” is essential.

***Please do not attempt to do this process on your own.*** Please read the detailed description of our process at [www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com) (click on the “Disclosure” box.) There are too many pitfalls to navigate without well trained help. We recommend only doing this with individuals with training from Dan Drake & Janice Caudill, Dr. Minalla’s DST (Deceptive Sexuality and Trauma) program, CSATs and/or APSATs.

## **Some General Guidelines**

The disclosure process (We use Dan Drake & Janice Caudill’s *Full Disclosure* workbooks as guides) will help you learn what you will need to share, but here are a few words of caution as you begin to think about moving towards disclosure: A wife needs to know the “breadth and depth” but she does not need to know all the specifics. She will have enough to forgive without the burden of unnecessary details like places you met, things you did, what the other woman was wearing, her hair color, chest size, perfume etc. It also isn’t wise for a husband to describe the “type” of woman he is drawn to in pornography, strip clubs or fantasy, and it is absolutely essential he never make any comparisons between his wife and his “dream girl.”

A man’s pornography and fantasy life are just that—fantasy, and no woman can live up to her perceived ideas of her husband’s fantasy woman. It will drive both him and her to very painful and often ugly places. The 2007 trial of Mary Winkler, a minister’s wife who shot her husband in the back with a shotgun, illustrates this poignantly. In her trial, the defense attorney presented a pair of shoes and a wig and asked Mary what they were. She said they were items her husband bought for her and made her wear before having sex. When asked what else he expected her to wear she responded by saying “something slutty.” The defense attorney then introduced a pornographic picture (thankfully not shown to the public) that was taken from her husband’s computer showing a woman wearing a pair of shoes that exactly matched the one she had in front of her and whose hair matched the wig. He was attempting to mold his wife into his favorite fantasy porn star. You can imagine the damage that did to her view of herself.

## **Respect Your Wife’s Needs and Reactions**

A husband must also give his wife the space she needs to process as well as the time she needs to make her own decisions about what she will do with his disclosure. Hopefully, she will be willing to go through the forgiveness and restoration process. However, even the most forgiving wife will need time and space to forgive and to heal from the betrayal trauma. She

will also need the support of safe people and must not be burdened with pressure to “keep the secret.” No, it would not be helpful for her to go out and tell everyone, but that response would be an extreme exception. Most women will struggle to find the courage to tell anyone so telling her you understand her need to seek support from safe people will remove one barrier from her temptation to live in isolation. The very best thing would be if she would join a support group for women whose husbands wrestle with pornography and other sexual issues.

You also need to be prepared for her reaction which may be anything from a response of, “OK, thanks for being honest” to, “Get out, I don’t want to ever see you again.” This is an extremely painful thing for wives to hear and they respond in very different ways. Some wives respond by going straight to denial while others go straight to rage. Most vacillate between the two extremes. The reality is they are deeply hurt in one of the core areas of a woman’s heart. Your struggle most likely hits a place that was already battered even before you married her. Your confession will be a huge weight for her to process and even if she immediately offers you forgiveness, you must allow her to revisit the issue if, and when, her recovery requires more clarity. If at the time of disclosure, or even later when the reality of what you have done sets in, she asks you to leave the house or to sleep in another room, do not argue with her. The best thing you can do is give her the space she needs and come back the next day to set up another time to talk.

Remember, your sexual sin violated your marriage vows. You have no rights here anymore. Yes, for her part, she must choose to either forgive you or continue to live out of her own hurt and bitterness. For her sake, we pray she will choose the path of forgiveness. However, even if she chooses the path of forgiveness that does not automatically mean full reconciliation. She can forgive you for the sins you have committed against her and still not be able to move towards you. This is especially true for women whose husbands do not choose the path of deep healing and recovery. Ultimately, her decision to reconcile is between her and God. That is part of why I believe Jesus said, in cases of infidelity, divorce is an acceptable course of action. He understands how

painful this relational betrayal can be. (Note: He says it is an option, not the best option.) If she chooses to forgive and reconcile, it will be out of God’s mercy poured out to you through her. You cannot expect her to take this path and any effort to minimize, dismiss or shut down her pain will be counterproductive. Our experience is that most wives, once they finally know—and truly believe they know—the truth, choose to forgive and even reconcile. However, just because most do, does not mean your wife can, will or even should.

### **Words are Great But ...**

Through the disclosure process, many wives finally put the missing pieces together and become incredibly disturbed by the amount and the extent of the deceptions. They often respond with something like, “You have lied to me for ten years now, how am I supposed to believe you are now telling me the truth and this is really all there is?” At this point, you must acknowledge your past behavior gives her no reason to believe you in the present. All you can do is apologize and ask her to seek God’s guidance.

The only thing that will prove to her you are serious about recovery is doing recovery. Trust that has been broken requires a new history over a significant time to rebuild. However, one thing some of our couples have found helpful at this stage is for the husband to voluntarily take a polygraph exam. While this sounds extreme, it can be incredibly helpful as it establishes “ground zero” on something more tangible than the addict’s words. The looming polygraph often helps the addict come clean with everything and it helps the spouse because she sees her husband’s willingness to both lay it all on the line and have that confirmed by an external measure.

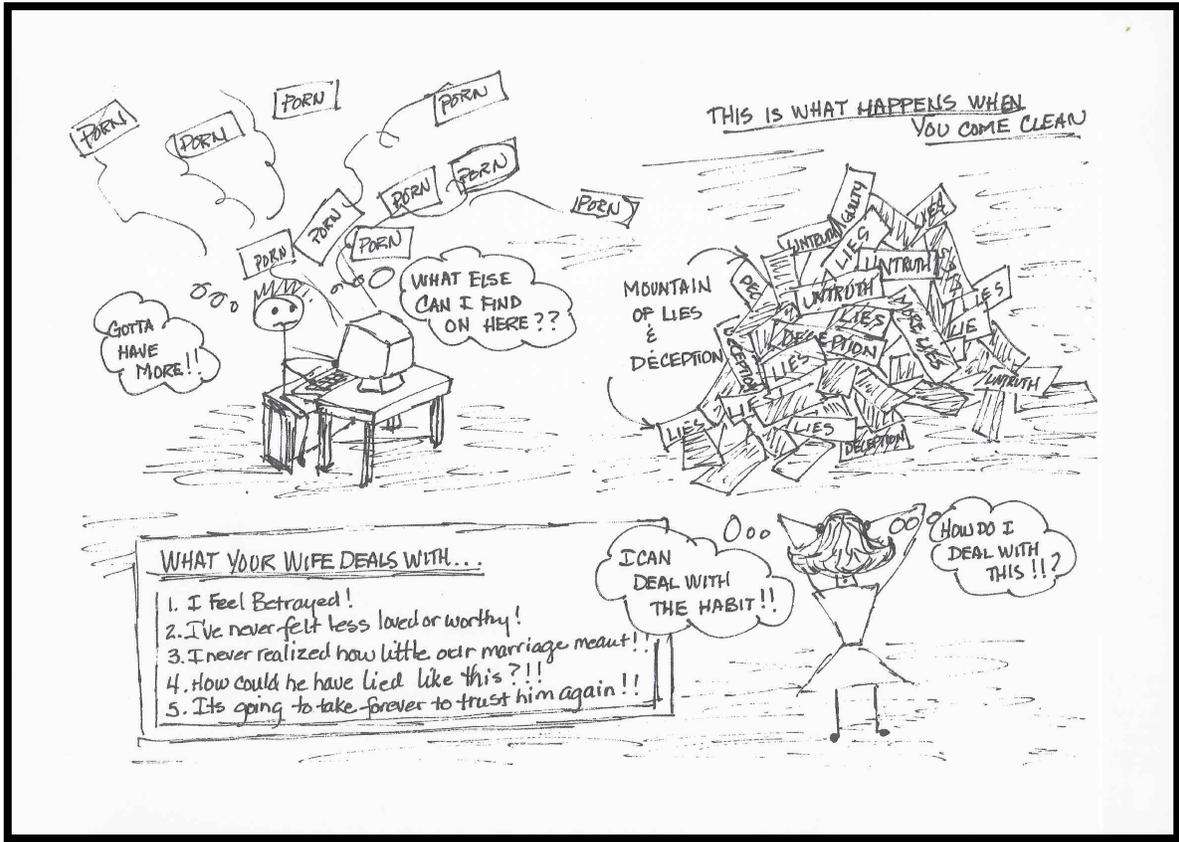
It is a terrifying thing to start being honest. However, you cannot lie your way through recovery. If you are hiding things from your wife, Satan will use that to keep you disconnected from her and from others which will most likely lead you back into the very behaviors from which you desperately want to be free.

Again, please read the disclosure process information at [www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com).

## Application & Journaling Questions

1. On separate sheets of paper, for the time you have been married and/or dating your wife, list all sexual sins you have committed. Be specific as general confessions do not remove shame or create an environment for forgiveness. (See Sexual History Inventory at the end of Chapter 3) Next, create a timeline with those transgressions using a key word for each incident.
2. If you have had any involvement (sexual or emotional) with anyone other than your wife, have you severed all contact with that person? Have you asked God to remove any soul and heart ties created by involvement? (See Question 18 from Chapter 3). When did you last see, talk, email or have any other contact with that person? Have you created a safety plan in case of contact?
3. List any lies or deliberate omissions from what you told your wife about your sexual history prior to your marriage that need to be confessed?
4. In an average week, how much time did you spend on your sexual sin?
5. In your worst week, how much time did you spend on your sexual sin?
6. How much money have you spent on your sexual sin?
7. What steps have you taken to this point to deal with your sexual sin?
8. What practical steps do you know you need to take to deal with your sexual sin?





## 15. TELLING OTHERS ABOUT YOUR STRUGGLE

---

Once you have told your wife about your addiction, one of the questions that may come to your mind is, “Who else should I tell?” Needless to say, that is a very complicated question. Some men want to tell everyone. I know it sounds crazy and, in many ways, it is. However, when you get a taste of the freedom that comes from being transparent, you want more. Unfortunately, not everyone is ready, nor is everyone safe for you to tell your story. On the other extreme many men want to tell no one outside their recovery group. (Truthfully, they aren’t too sure they even want to tell them.) They want to do recovery in “anonymity” and are terrified about anyone knowing their true struggle. Maybe, once they have several years of sobriety, they might be able to imagine telling a few people about it in the context of “in my past.” Unfortunately, you cannot do recovery while hiding in shame.

Somewhere between these two ditches there is a road of healthy disclosure. That road, however, is extremely narrow and requires more wisdom and guidance than you possess. Therefore, you must learn to be dependent on God to show you who to tell and who not to tell. The suggestions presented in this chapter are simply things we have seen and learned both in our personal recovery and in the lives of individuals we have seen walk the road out of addiction.

### **You Cannot Lie Your Way Through Recovery**

First, you cannot lie your way through recovery. One of the core struggles for all addicts is deception. We learned to deceive as small children and we have mastered the art through years of practice. Often, lies come out of our mouths even before we realize they are untrue. What does this have to do with the question of, “Who do I tell? In the practical aspects of daily living, there is a huge connection. One of the first men I worked with came to me because his employer terminated him because pornography on his work computer created a “hostile work environment.” He went from being a well-paid and highly respected professional who worked behind a desk in an air-conditioned office to a laborer who spent his days in the heat of the sun doing construction work. Very early in his recovery God convicted him that when people asked why he was no longer working at his desk job, he needed to simply tell the truth. His answer became, “I was fired for looking at pornography and now I am in recovery learning how to heal from my addiction.” I must admit when he shared that in group, I was taken back and part of me wanted to tell him that might not be such a wise decision. However, he felt

strongly God had led him to that conclusion and fortunately, I chose to not argue with him. His conviction to not avoid the truth led him to tell his story on a very regular basis and telling his story strengthened his spirit and helped break the chains of shame.

### **You Can Withhold Information from “Unsafe” People**

Second, you can honestly withhold information from “unsafe people.” Not everyone in your circle of relationships is safe. Some are unsafe because they will hold your sin against you. They will see you as a “pervert” and look down their spiritual nose at you because they “would never do anything like that.” Of course, that is their delusion and God will deal with them for their arrogance. However, some men, especially those with deep rejection wounds, are not strong enough in early recovery to face that kind of rejection, so being “truthful” could have some very damaging results.

Some people are unsafe because they want to “fix” you. If you tell them you have a problem and you are working on it, they want to jump in

the middle of your mess and make sure you do it the right way (i.e. their way). Often, Christian fixers want to throw scripture or spiritual disciplines at you as if all it takes to defeat an addiction is more will power or “the right answers.” These individuals are probably even more unsafe than those who would reject you because so often what they say sounds good and has scriptural backing or quotes behind it.

So, how does this work in real life? Maybe a couple examples will help. If you need to ask your mother to watch your kids on Sunday afternoons so you and your wife can attend recovery groups, you must decide what you will tell her about what you are doing. God may convict you to simply tell her about your problem. He may, however, impress on you she isn't safe at this time. If he does, then it is not being dishonest to tell her you are going to a support group to help you and your wife to deal with issues that affect your marriage. If she presses the point, you must either decide to tell her the whole truth or to be honest by saying, “Mom, I'm sorry, but I'm not in a place where I am ready to share that with you.” If she cannot handle that answer, that is her problem and not yours. You are an adult and only must share what you choose to share. Of course, you might need to find a new source for childcare, but that is better than being manipulated into sharing things you are not ready to disclose. If you make up excuses, tell lies or even intentionally allow her to believe something that isn't true, you are continuing to live in the web of deceit that led you to your addiction in the first place.

Another common situation is when someone asks questions about why you are never available whenever your recovery groups meet. Again, you have at least two choices for which you must seek God's guidance. It may be God has prompted this person to ask the question, so you have an opportunity to come out from the shame of hiding and be open about your struggle. It may be you are not ready for that or that the person is not a safe individual. Again, it is perfectly acceptable to say you are in a support group and you are committed to being there every week. Often the people who tend to press this issue are people from your church or your extended family who feel spurned by your lack of availability. You do not need to cave into their demands. You are an adult who has the right and the responsibility before God for how you use

your time. They may not understand this, but that is their problem and not yours.

### **Tell Someone in Your Church**

Third, you will worship with more freedom if you tell at least one person in your church. We have found that men who open up to their pastor, an elder or at least a couple men in their local church find themselves much more open to hearing from God and enjoying their church experience. One of Satan's primary weapons against us is toxic shame. One of his greatest fears is that we might open our ears to hear the word of God and our hearts to the praises of God's people and, as a result, experience God's grace in church. Therefore, if you haven't told anyone at your church, he will constantly whisper things to you like, “If they knew what you struggled with, they would run you out of this place.” Listening to these messages of condemnation leaves us at best distracted and most likely completely numb and safely insulated from God's message of grace. Telling a few safe individuals in your church, however, gives you a tangible answer to Satan's lies. “No, Bob knows about my struggle, and he greeted me this morning, saying, ‘It's good to see you today.’” You might be thinking, “I don't know, my church is pretty serious about sin, if anyone knows I'm struggling, they won't respond well.” Most likely that is another one of Satan's lies trying to keep you in isolation. Even in the most legalistic churches there is almost always someone who has struggled in life who would embrace you even in the midst of your mess. If there really are not any safe people in your church, then maybe you should ask the question, “Is it good for my heart to be in a church that doesn't embrace honest strugglers?”

If you are in any kind of a leadership role in your church, the thought of telling someone may invoke an even greater response of fear. However, that fear, and even the realities behind that fear, is still not a good reason to remain hidden in darkness. Yes, they may ask you to step down from your position of leadership. Yes, they may want more accountability from you to protect children and those working with you from your addiction. However, are those things inherently bad? While the addict within you may think “Yes,” I would say “No.” I was a minister wrestling with my addiction, and looking back, I

now realize one of the best things I could have done for my recovery and my marriage was to step out of the fishbowl of ministry and focus on healing. The fact your leadership might remove you from a position does not inherently mean they are “unsafe.” In fact, I would argue that removing you from your position (whether paid or un-paid) might be one of the best things they could do for your heart.

For example, we had two church leaders join our groups at the same time. One chose to step down from his role and focus on recovery. The other attempted to juggle the responsibilities of church, family and recovery. Fourteen months later, the first man had a year of sobriety, was making huge strides in his recovery and discovering levels of freedom he never knew existed. The second man constantly left groups early to attend Deacon’s meetings and other church functions and dropped out without ever finding more than a couple weeks of victory. A leadership that removes you from roles of service may be protecting both you and other sheep in its flock. If they ask you to step away from your role but do so offering to pray for you and walk beside you as you heal, then thank God for their courage and faithfulness to you and your church. Do not resent them for taking away your position.

### **Pray for Wisdom and Trust God**

Obviously, there are more situations than could possibly be addressed. The tension of who do I tell and who do I not tell will be a struggle for every individual in recovery. God is faithful and if you ask will show you who you need to tell. Sometimes he will prompt you to tell people

you don’t want to and sometimes he will discourage you from telling those you think are safe. Learn to listen to his promptings and learn to be obedient. Please also know that Romans 8:28 applies even in this context: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purposes.” Even if you tell the “wrong” person, even if seemingly horrible things happen because of your transparency, trust that God will use it for your sanctification and will bless you through the struggle.

### **Build a Recovery Team**

When you step out on faith and tell an individual or two, don’t fall into the trap of thinking “I’m done.” The reality is every man trying to walk out of this struggle needs to think in terms of building a 9-12 person recovery team. Why so many? Because if you only have one or two men on your team, there will be times you will desperately need to talk and/or be with someone and those individuals will not be readily available, or they might be in a bad place themselves with little or nothing to give to you. However, if you have 9-12 guys on your team, you will never be out on a limb alone unless you choose to not reach out to your team. In addition, more men on your team will give you more perspectives even more importantly, more men praying for you. The other thing you will find is that as you respond to the Father’s promptings to tell your story, you will find other men desperately needing help in this arena. Not only will they become partners for you in your recovery, you will likely be the one whose courage empowers them to begin their own journey of healing and recovery.

## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. Who have you told about your struggle? How have they responded and how has their response impacted you?
2. Who do you sense God leading you to tell? Who should you not tell? Why?
3. Who are you afraid to tell? Why?
4. What circumstances can you anticipate that could force you to decide on the spot whether or not you should tell an individual about your struggle?
5. What is your wife's comfort level with you telling others about your struggle? If you haven't talked to her about this, when will you?
6. What is the worst thing that could happen if your struggle were broadcast to everyone? In light of Romans 8:28, what "good things" could you envision God doing with that "worst thing?"
7. Take a moment to pray and ask God specifically if there is anyone He wants you to tell about your struggles at this time. If any names or faces come to mind, write them down and begin praying about how and what to tell them.

## 16. RECOVERY WITH YOUR WIFE: PART I: THE BOY & THE LION

---

Imagine you are a young boy living in the bush of Africa. Also imagine your father is trying to become one of the leaders of your tribe. Because of his ambition, he places a tremendous amount of pressure on you to perform in ways that make him look good to others. You also are eager to earn your status in the tribe, so when he asks you to take a tribal message to a neighboring village, you agree, even though you know there is danger. Your father announces proudly that his “exceptionally brave” son has accepted the challenge. Part of you relishes in his public praise, however, another part of you cringes as you sense it is more about him than you.

It is your first time traveling the bush alone, so you struggle with many fears, the greatest of which is knowing that lions prowl in the tall grass. However, your father has assured you that everything will be fine even though you are vulnerable alone. Therefore, you press down your fears and begin the journey.

As you walk the trail, your mind plays tricks on you as you think you see movement and hear footsteps. The wind rustles the tall grass, and you can feel your heart beating through your chest. You also notice you are taking quick but shallow breaths. Every muscle in your body is tense and ready to spring into action. You carry a knife in your right hand, and as you look down, your knuckles are white from clenching it tightly.

It’s only a couple miles to the neighboring village, so you decide to run. As you run, you feel the muscles in your legs burn, but the movement gives you a sense of power and helps greatly with your fear. Upon arriving at the village, your legs barely hold you up, and you struggle to catch your breath, but you have arrived safely and feel great relief. When you deliver the message, the head of the tribe commends your bravery and says how proud your father must be of you for making the journey alone. You feel a great sense of accomplishment swell up from deep within you, yet the mentioning of your father brings up an uneasy feeling that you just can’t seem to shake.

You must now go back alone and your fear returns. Your legs and lungs make it clear you don’t have it in you to also run back home. You begin the journey as briskly as you are able.

Once again, you hear the sounds of the bush. You hear the grass rustling. You think you hear a twig snap. You see bushes move from the wind. You are all but certain you hear something moving in the grass. You attempt to shrug off the noises as “normal,” though your heart continues to pound.

Suddenly a bird startles as you pass unknowingly close to its perch. Its startled flutter sends your heart into a frenzy once again. You laugh at yourself, “It’s just a stupid bird, don’t be a scaredy-cat.”

As you continue to walk, you notice your heart finally slows down to an almost normal rate, and your breathing deepens to a regular pattern. You can see your village in the distance. As you get closer, you see your father has his peers with him watching for your return. When he sees you, he points you out to his friends and begins waving to acknowledge your successful journey. You once again feel a deep sense of pride rising within as you begin imagining your father’s words of praise: “That’s my son! He is so strong, so brave, a chip off the old block.”

Then suddenly, without a warning, without a sound, you feel a piercing pain in your back as you are knocked to the ground by a lion. You have had your knife in your hand the whole journey, but you relaxed your grip when you saw your father, and the force of the lion’s initial assault has knocked it away. You feel his sharp claws tearing at your flesh. You feel and hear your leg break as he snaps his powerful jaw and drives his canines through your femur. The pain is indescribable, and you are certain you are about to die.

You know you cannot fight against such a powerful enemy, so you freeze, curl up in a fetal position and allow the lion to play with you like a house cat plays with a ball of yarn. The pain is so intense you go into shock. You black out and believe you are dead. However, the next thing you know, your father and many villagers are circling over you, crying, calling your name, and rendering you aid.

The pain is like nothing you have ever experienced. It makes the time you burned your hand badly and every other hurt in your life seem insignificant.

The pain is so horrific, you even have trouble distinguishing its origins. Your leg is punctured, and the femur is shattered. Your head hit a rock and several ribs cracked when he tackled you from behind. Your chest is bleeding from where his claws dug through the skin and even took out pieces of your ribs.

It is a miracle they were able to scare away the lion before he finished you off. Yet now, you are barely alive, and the physical pain is intense.

Not only is it intense, but it is unrelenting. For days, and even weeks, you cannot sleep. Every movement, every breath, every cough, moves muscles torn by the lion. You spend months in bed and then many more months attempting to rebuild the lost muscle tissue. You will always walk with a significant limp. You will never be able to be part of the hunting parties or do many things in life.

In addition to the physical pain, you are also plagued by questions about your father: “Why did he send me?” and “Why did he send me alone?” You have since learned that a hunting party that had returned the day before your attack reported to your father and the elders that they had seen a pride of lions close to the village. Yet your father asked you to go and to go alone?

These questions haunt you, but you believe it would be unthinkable to ask them out loud. You keep hoping he will address them, that he will come to you and say how sorry he was for putting you at risk. Yet his silence speaks volumes.

It has now been almost a year and you are able to walk. You will never be “normal” again, but you are alive.

Then one morning, your father comes to you and asks you to go with him to the neighboring village. He says, “It will be good for you to go out.” “It will be good for us to spend some time together.”

You wonder if he will talk about the part his desire for position and recognition played in your attack. Part of you longs for the conversation, but most of you is afraid of what might come out of your mouth if it starts. Yet he says nothing.

Thoughts of the conversation momentarily move to the background because every step of the journey is terrifying. You notice each moving limb, every rustling blade of grass. You are constantly looking behind you for another surprise attack. The only thing that makes the

journey possible is that this time you are not alone. Your father is with you, though that brings the questions of, “On the day I was attacked, why did he send me alone? Why did he not come with me?” back to the front of your mind.

Take a few moments now to allow yourself to imagine that journey.

1. What does it feel like? What do you see? What do you hear?
2. What are your thoughts towards your father?
3. How do you feel about having to rely on the one to protect you who put you in harm’s way last year?

Now, what I want you to think about is that your wife has experienced a similar, yet likely even more horrific trauma. She gave you her heart and her body. She believed she was safe and then “That Day” happened. “That Day” being the day of her discovery of your betrayal. For many, it was the day when she found your pornography, a receipt from a local hotel or the text with graphic language and pics from some other woman. “That day” was her lion attack. Only it didn’t end quickly, as for days, weeks, months and, for some, even years, new confessions, new admissions, new understandings, and even new discoveries came out. Every piece of new information felt like another swipe of the lion’s claws.

You may be understandably resistant to seeing her pain that way, especially if you are doing well and maintaining your sobriety. How can my actions be like a lion’s attack? How? Because our brains feel relational betrayal in a very similar manner as physical pain. In fact, those who study attachment theory say attachment pain is the deepest level of pain in the human experience.

Your wife left her mother and father and transferred her primary attachment to you. You were super glued together through relational and sexual intimacy. She thought she knew you. She trusted you, but when “That Day” came, her whole world came crashing down along with your house of lies.

Think how much worse that is for her than for the boy in the story. His betrayal experience is from the fact his father put him in harm’s way for the sake of how he would be perceived. His father wasn’t the one who broke his leg or physically harmed him. It certainly has elements of betrayal, but pales in comparison to your wife’s experience of hearing you vow to “love, honor, cherish and forsake all others” only to discover you received sexual pleasure from others and then covered it over with a mountain of lies, minimizations and deceptions.

Think also about the surprising aspect of your betrayals. The boy in the story knew there was at least the potential for lions on his journey. He was on the lookout for them, and while the actual

moment of attack was a surprise for him, he wasn’t caught completely off guard. Your wife, however, married you believing you would be her safe person. She believed you would guard her heart and honor your vow to “forsake all others,” only to find out on “That Day” that you chose to find sexual pleasure in others and then withhold, hide, lie, minimize, deceive and gaslight<sup>78</sup> her about what you had done. Many wives describe this as being run over by a locomotive when they weren’t even aware there were any train tracks.

However, possibly the worst part for her was her isolation. In the story, the father and his friends rush to the boy’s aid. In your wife’s story, not only was she alone, she likely also took on the burden of carrying your secret. Your betrayals tapped into her own toxic shame and core lies that told her she wasn’t enough and too much at the same time. She wasn’t beautiful enough, sexy enough, kind enough, etc. to keep your heart from wandering. She was too much, too critical, too emotional, too needy, too busy with the kids, etc. All this leaves her in a place where she believes if she tells anyone, not only will she destroy you, but she will expose her own perceived failure as a wife and as a woman. Most fear that telling anyone could lead to huge relational disruptions with friends and family. Many also fear the loss of financial stability as your actions could have consequences with your job, business, or ministry. Most are terrified about what their faith community will think, say, or do.

Embedded in her isolation is the reality that the one person she would normally turn to in fearful places is the very person who now scares her more than anyone else. Because of your many lies, she now understandably doubts every word coming out of your mouth. She questions many, if not all, of her perceptions of reality.

She needs to know how bad the damage really is, but you’re the only one with that information. She has no idea if you are even capable of seeing the truth, let alone telling her. In the lion story, you had your father and his friends to rescue you. In her story, if she has anyone, it is likely strangers in a support group who are just as

numerous forms of deception to convince his wife she cannot trust her own reality.

---

<sup>78</sup> Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse where one attempts to distort or change the reality of another. The term comes from the 1944 film, *Gaslight* where a husband uses

unsure about their ability to see the world accurately as she is. If she is especially fortunate, she has a skilled therapist trained in sexual addiction and betrayal trauma, but even then, she knows she must pay dearly by the hour for that kind of care. That's likely hard for her to do in normal circumstances, but almost impossible when she is afraid of you losing your job and/or the possibility of needing to fund separate living arrangements. Deep down she knows she needs space from you so she can heal without being triggered back into pain just by knowing you are in the other room, but she likely wrestles with the question of, "How can we do that?"

### **Lion story emotions**

If you allow the story to sink in at all, you will likely feel many strong emotions. For me, the story brings sadness, shame, toxic shame, and guilt. If you're defensively dismissing the story with thoughts of "Darrell, that's an exaggeration," or "I didn't do that much damage," or, "Come on, that happened X number years ago," I believe you are stuck in the denial path of toxic shame. Toxic shame says, "I am flawed to the point that I can never be loved and have my needs met."

Obviously, that feeling is extremely painful, so we usually take one of two paths to try to not be consumed by the pain. One is the path Maribeth Poole and others have called the Eeyore path. "Woe is me. I'm such a screw-up. Nothing good ever happens to or for me." This path leaves me in self-pity, looking for someone, often my wounded wife, to pull me out by telling me I'm not that bad. Of course, even if someone tries to tell me the very words I am looking for, I will dismiss them because I know they don't know how screwed up I really am.

The other toxic shame path is that of a strutting peacock. We deny our failures and defects and instead attempt to draw attention to our elaborate plumage. Hence, "Come on, it can't really be that bad, look at all the good things I do." Or "I've been clean and sober for X months or years now, can't you see how hard I've worked, and how far I've come?" We work hard from a defiant and defensive position that is terrified of others discovering how deeply flawed we believe we are. We fearfully believe that any concession will provide them (whoever they may be in the moment) the proof they need

to reject us. Therefore, we deny, deflect, blame-shift, minimize and even gaslight those questioning, pointing out, or even noticing our failures. We do this to uphold our own perceived sense of safety. This is especially magnified with our wife as she is our primary attachment. We are terrified of losing her connection.

One of my guys put it best as he was telling his story in group: (He was Scottish and spoke with a strong accent.) "I was so desperate for me wife to trust me that I had no choice but to lie to her." Every man in the room, while laughing at the absurdity of the statement, understood it completely. We lived in such terror of losing our wives' trust, we thought we had no choice but to continue to lie to protect the previous lies and remain connected.

Every individual I have ever known with sexual addiction issues plays both Eeyore and the peacock, often shifting back and forth, sometimes even in the same conversation or situation. Unfortunately, neither role brings any comfort to a wounded wife. These roles also damage connection with her and others. We all naturally recoil from peacocks because we either sense the disingenuous nature of their strutting, or else their posing taps into our own toxic shame, which in turn leads us to hide. After all, we don't believe we have any plumage, let alone the glorious feathers of the peacock.

A closely related, yet significantly different, emotion the story brings up is legitimate shame. Many balk at the term legitimate shame, but I find it very helpful in sorting out my own emotions. Legitimate shame is the fact that I am human, and I make mistakes. I can do some things, but not all things. I have defects that are not my fault, but they are my responsibility.

For example, I grew up with an often-angry father who was especially harsh with me. Failure to properly water the grass or leaving my bike in the driveway or any other "offense" would regularly result in severe tongue lashings, shaming and sometimes worse. Failure, and especially the exposure of my failures, (regardless of real or perceived) meant danger to me.

Therefore, I learned early in life to hide, deny, and even outright lie about my mistakes and even about things that I believed others would see as mistakes, even if they were not.

The comedian Mike Warnke had a great routine many years ago that went something to the effect of:

Parents use questions to raise us, and the primary question they ask is, “What do you think you’re doing?”

His extremely sarcastic reply was

“WELL MOM, it doesn’t matter what I think I’m doing. It doesn’t even matter what I am doing, cause I’m not going to be in trouble for what I think I’m doing or even for what I am doing. No, the only thing I’m going to be in trouble for is what YOU think I’m doing!”

We can all laugh and relate to his monologue. However, what I learned from my experience was to hide, deny, deceive, and outright lie about my actions.

Whenever I was asked a question by an authority figure, or someone whose opinion of me mattered to me, my central nervous system (CNS) kicked into danger mode and my initial response was to answer in whatever way I thought had the best chance of diminishing the threat.

This created patterns of deception that negatively impacted almost all my relationships and were especially damaging to my wife. She could ask me a basic, legitimate question, like, “What did you do for lunch today?” If, at the moment, I was afraid she would be upset about my bad diet, I would say, “I got the salad bar.” If, in the moment, my fear was around our finances, I would say “I got a \$1 double cheeseburger.” The crazy thing is on Tuesday, I may have gotten a double cheeseburger and told her I got the salad bar, and on Wednesday, I could have had the salad bar and told her I got a double cheeseburger. Yes, that sounds crazy, but it all depended on what my brain’s fear center (the amygdala) was focused on at the moment of her question.

It was also based on a child’s fear of facing an angry primary attachment figure who was also a big scary man rather than the reality of my wife’s response. Even if she would have been frustrated with my lunch choice, her response would have been mildly disapproving at worst, and I certainly wasn’t in any real danger. She

wasn’t going to harm me or leave me because of my lunch choice. My CNS, however, was still operating out of a childhood fear of danger and abandonment centered around me being nine and my Father being a large, angry adult.

Now if that fear-based system kicked in over what I had for lunch, you can only imagine how it operated around my acting-out behaviors, and especially my terror of her discovering the depth of my addiction.

So how does all that point to legitimate shame? It points to legitimate shame because I didn’t choose to be born to a family where fear drove the bus. I learned this pattern long before I could choose differently. It created a defect in my personality that was beyond my control until I began facing it honestly in my recovery journey. There was legitimately something wrong with me that did great harm to my wife and others. The reality that my CNS was wired from birth for fear was not my fault. However, as an adult, it became my responsibility to do the incredibly hard work of retraining my brain and my mouth to answer with the truth, not with what I think will appease the person in front of me. To change these patterns, I had to face my legitimate shame head on.

That now leads us to a third powerful emotion of guilt. Guilt is when I can honestly look at how my mistakes and failures impact others. It’s when I can hear the story of the boy and the lion and weep over the damage I have done to the one I promised to “Love, honor and cherish.”

The good news about guilt is that guilt, when faced directly, without sliding into toxic shame, provides the opportunity for reconnection. When I can look honestly, ask questions about the real impact of my failures, and engage my wife’s pain, I can go to deep sadness and join her in a grieving process. A deep and genuine sadness can position me to make “A Good Apology.” (see the excellent book, *A Good Apology* by Molly Howse)

A good apology often, though not always, leads to healing and reconciliation in damaged relationships. However, an inability or unwillingness to feel guilt will cause us to go into toxic shame and once again deny, deflect and/or minimize the effects of our actions.

So what’s the point of parsing out our emotions this way? Why can’t I just say, “I feel like crap” and have that cover it all? Well, first because that’s how we tried to manage our

emotions in our addiction, and that strategy has proven itself woefully ineffective. Second, parsing our emotions helps us learn what it means to be human. It allows me to own my failures because I don't stay stuck in toxic shame. It allows my wife and others to see genuine sadness in me, which, unless they are triggered by their own pain or in their own toxic shame, usually brings compassion and the opportunity for reconnection. This is radically different from a husband playing the Eeyore card and manipulating connection from her to feel better about himself.

The reality is our acting-out behaviors and our deceptions were the lion in our wife's life. They have done very real and great harm. Her pain is intense and is probably even greater than she will ever be able to fully express.

Our job now is to do the hard work of pressing in, of allowing her to tell us about her pain, and how we have caused it without running away through denials, minimizations, blaming her or others even if she has some or many of the facts wrong. The reality for the boy was that he didn't know if his leg was broken by the lion's canines or by his knocking him to the ground. However, it didn't matter. The only thing that mattered was that his leg was broken. Yet too often we want to argue about facts like how many times we did \_\_\_\_\_, how long we have in sobriety, or on what day something happened.

When we allow ourselves to honestly feel, name and work through our emotions, we can accept our guilt and share sadness with our wife as we grieve together the damage of our past. This is an incredibly difficult and yet rewarding journey.

Another critical purpose for the story is to help us understand our wife's reality and her reactions. Our addiction, and even worse, our deceptions, created an incredible sense of "unsafe" for our wives. Most questioned their safety long before we came clean about our actions, yet we met their legitimate questions with responses of "You're crazy! Everything is fine." Or "You're imagining things." We only admitted to what we knew they knew and even then, often attempted to distort their reality by convincing them they didn't know what her gut and sometimes hard evidence told her. This distortion of their reality is a form of gaslighting

that is both abusive and incredibly damaging to a wife's ability to feel safe.

We also often blame-shifted by saying things like, "If we had sex more often, I wouldn't need \_\_\_\_\_." Or "Your anger, criticism, gained weight (or any other flaw we could point out) drives me to act out."

You may be thinking, "Sure I did those things when I was acting out, but I have been clean for X number of days, weeks, months or even years now. She can't hold that against me forever."

This is where we need to put ourselves in the place of the boy after his lion attack. When did his central nervous system (CNS) stop noticing the rustling grass? How long before he could walk through the bush without being terrified? How long before he could even think about walking there alone? How long does he question his father's judgment for not going with him? Does he ever really get to a place where he is not afraid?

Our wife's fear is not something she chooses to hold over us. It is her body and brain doing exactly what it's designed to do, protect itself from danger. Her fear and subsequent reactions start happening inside her before she even has a chance to recognize, let alone process, whether what's happening is because of the current situation or the past. This is not something she chooses to do. It happens sub-cortical, below the brain's reasoning center.

When we grasp the reality that our actions and lies are her lion in the grass, we can have greater compassion, understanding, and a newfound ability to do whatever we are able to help her feel safe.

I can't say this strongly enough: A felt sense of safety is essential for connection. She cannot choose connection while feeling unsafe without harming herself.

The Gotthard tunnel in Switzerland provides a powerful image here. The tunnel is 15 kilometers or 9.322 miles long. Now, imagine you are at the head of a two mile long, slow moving train and your wife is in the caboose. Also imagine there has been a power outage so there are no lights in the train or in the tunnel. Scary to think about, isn't it? You would have to travel many miles through the tunnel before you got your first glimpse of light.

Your journey with deceptive sexuality is like the dark tunnel, and while you have worked hard to get through it and can finally see light ahead,

what does she see from the back of the train? All she sees is darkness. Even if you're able to communicate with her and tell her about the light, guess what? Her CNS tells her to take your words with a huge grain of salt. After all, how many times have you tried to convince her everything was fine when it wasn't? Again, try to imagine how scary this is for her.

So, what can you do? First and foremost, you must keep moving forward in your own recovery. If you stop because she doesn't respond the way you would like her to, not only will you leave her in the darkness, you will also likely slide back into it yourself. You must keep moving forward and recognize this critical principle:

*You must be safe for a long time before she can feel safe.*

The head of the train must travel two miles in the light before the caboose comes out of the darkness. You cannot convince her of the light. You must lead her there.

You also cannot let her discouragement about the darkness stop your progress. In fact, if you express anger to her about her fear of the dark you will simply give her CNS more evidence that you are not safe. Her darkness is real, and historically, you have not been a good source of truth for her. Therefore, allow her to be afraid and pray she will have the courage to stay on the

train long enough to eventually see the light. Again, "*You must be safe for a long time before she can feel safe.*"

So, what can you do? First and foremost, stay the course of your recovery. Do whatever it takes to establish and maintain sobriety. Second, dig in and do the work to understand your wife's pain. She will be your most important teacher in this area, but that is difficult because she will also trigger your own internal defenses. Dr. Omar Minwalla has said, "The hardest thing for the human psyche is to honestly look at the pain I have caused someone I love."<sup>79</sup> The work of setting aside our defenses and looking deeply and honestly at the damage we have done is the hardest but maybe most important work we will do. Dr. Sherry Keffer's *Intimate Deception* book is a valuable resource that many have found helpful in seeing more clearly the damage of betrayal trauma. I won't lie to you; it is a painful read when you have been the one who has done the harm. However, seeing that harm more clearly will help you honestly own what you have done. It will provide you even greater motivation to not act out sexually, and to become a man of integrity in all you say and do. I can't state it clearly enough, even more damaging than acting out sexually is the deceptions that go with it and the deceptions that we have committed in any and all arenas of life.

---

<sup>79</sup> Minwalla. *Illumination Training* 2022.

## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. What are your initial responses to the “Boy and the Lion” story?
2. What parts of the boy’s story grabbed you?
3. What parts do you relate to the most?
4. How does it feel to think of your wife’s journey with you in light of the boy’s story with the lion?
5. How did your wife learn of your struggle in this arena?
6. What do you remember of your wife’s reactions on the day of “discovery?”
7. How did her understanding of your struggle grow over time?
8. Where do you feel resistance to seeing her pain? Where do you feel it in your body?
9. What do you remember about your wedding vows? If you have a video or a written copy of them, take the time to refresh your memory.

10. Dr. Omar Minwalla says, “One of the hardest things for the human psyche to do is to honestly face the pain we have caused someone we love.” Reflect on that statement and your journey with your wife’s betrayal trauma.
  
11. Describe how your struggle has and continues to create isolation for your wife.
  
12. How has she asked for space, and how have you responded to her requests?
  
13. What core emotions come up for you as you compare the lion story to your wife’s experience?
  
14. What objections do your defenses make?
  
15. When and how have you taken the “Eeyore” path of toxic shame?
  
16. When and how have you taken the “Peacock” path?
  
17. What fears do you have about completely revealing your mess?
  
18. What specific ways did you gaslight your wife prior to starting recovery?

19. What ways have you gaslit her since starting recovery?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
20. How do you identify with the Scottish man's statement about having to lie to his wife?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
21. In what ways can you identify "legitimate shame" in your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
22. How do you identify with Mike Warnke's monologue about "What do you think you are doing?"
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
23. Identify as many examples as you can of instances when you answered a question with a fear-based, reflexive deception. Try to remember at least a few occasions from childhood as well as current times with your wife.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
24. How have you been deceptive with your wife around nonsexual matters?

25. Describe feelings of “legitimate guilt” that you are feeling in reading this chapter. Pay attention to your body: Where do you notice stress, tension, changes in breathing, etc., as you ponder the harm you have done?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
26. Think of a recent situation and parse out the different feelings of guilt, legitimate shame, and toxic shame. Identify how they play off each other.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
27. What does it mean to think of your deceptions as “the lion in your wife’s life?”
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
28. When have you used your length of sobriety as justification for why she “shouldn’t feel that way?” What does this story do for that thinking?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
29. How willing are you to “do whatever it takes,” for your wife to heal?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
30. What does the illustration of the train in the Gotthard tunnel do for your willingness to be patient with your wife, no matter how long it takes her to feel safe?

## WEDDING VOWS

As you work through these chapters about recovery with your wife, take time to read **OUT LOUD** through these typical wedding vows or even better, dig yours out and read yours again.

Do you take this woman, \_\_\_\_\_, to be your lawful wedded wife, promising before God, with your friends and family as witnesses, that you will be to her a faithful, loving, and devoted husband; that you will provide for her and protect her; that you will honor and love her, and remain with her in any and all circumstances and that you will forsake all others in order to keep yourself to her, and to her only, so long as you both shall live?

I, \_\_\_\_\_  
take you \_\_\_\_\_  
to be my wedded wife  
to have and to hold,  
from this day forward,  
for better for worse,  
for richer for poorer,  
in sickness and in health,  
to love and to cherish,  
till death do us part!

### Reflection

1. What core feelings (see core list in your check in points in chapter 2)
2. Reflect on each of these words or phrases: How do you understand them differently today then when you promised them originally
  - “Before God”
  - “Faithful”
  - “Loving”
  - “Devoted”
  - “Provide”
  - “Protect”
  - “Honor”
  - “Love”
  - “Remain”
  - “Forsake all others”
  - “Her only”
  - “Cherish”

## 17. RECOVERY WITH YOUR WIFE: PART II

### HIS REALITIES—HER REALITIES

---

One of the most difficult aspects of recovery from sexual addiction is the rebuilding of trust and connection in the marriage relationship. As the story of the boy and the lion illustrates, your sexual sin and your deceptions have done great harm to your wife’s heart. It also cuts in places that were probably already tender, if not deeply wounded, from things from her past. In your addiction you repeatedly deceived and hid things from her that you have hopefully now brought fully into the light.

If your wife is like most women, her discoveries and your disclosures have brought great pain and havoc into her world. She may have known some things; she may have even been deeply involved in your attempts to walk in purity; however, your “coming clean” with her has most likely created two very distinct realities. This chapter explores these clashing realities and provides guidelines for a weekly recovery meeting with your wife to help navigate through them.

#### The Clashing of Two Realities

The *Pure Desire* materials do a great job illustrating these two realities with the following chart.<sup>80</sup> (The last reality, however, is an addition we have made to incorporate the incredibly insightful content from Dr. Omar Minwalla.)

<b>His Realities</b>	<b>Her Realities</b>
I’m becoming a man of integrity.	I’ve been betrayed.
I’ve never loved her more.	I’ve never felt less loved or worthy.
I’m beginning to see how much I value our marriage.	I’ve never realized until now how little the marriage meant to him.
Finally, I’m an honest man.	How could he have lied like this?
I understand the healing process takes three to five years, but I’m pretty sure I can complete that path to freedom in a couple years.	Five years seems like a lifetime to deal with this pain.

---

<sup>80</sup> Ted Roberts: *Pure Desire* p. 255

### ***Reality #1***

#### **I'm becoming a man of integrity.**

For the husband, there is generally a great sense of relief and victory that comes with finally bringing things into the light. Men often describe feeling like a thousand-pound weight has been taken off their shoulder once they tell their “secrets” to other men and especially to their wife whom they know they have offended. They know their confession hurts her deeply but at least the weight of the “secret” is gone.

#### **I've been betrayed.**

The wife experiences that thousand-pound weight as being dropped from twenty feet up and the force has absolutely crushed her. She feels an incredible sense of betrayal because on your wedding day, you promised (among other things) to “love, honor, cherish and forsake all others.” Yet instead of “forsaking all others” you have kept a harem of women in your computer, your mind and in sometimes in your very bed. Then you have compounded that harm by creating a secret sexual basement that you hidden well. Possibly the worst part was that when she became suspicious of your secret world, you gaslit her by directing her attention to other things, lying, and even by pointing out her faults to prevent her, or anyone from knowing what was in your secret basement.<sup>81</sup>

This hurt goes much deeper than most men want to see or admit. The depth of the pain came home many years back as I was meeting with a new couple. I had a woman tell me her story in the presence of her husband. With some pain, she told of growing up in a home with an alcoholic father and of being raped when she was a teenager. When she described the day she discovered the computer trail of her husband's addiction, she broke down in tears and said, “This hurts much more than being raped.” My heart (and thankfully her husband's) broke for her that day. Hopefully, the fact that you have made it this far in the manual, means you are starting to come out of the fog of the addiction and are beginning to see the painful effects your sexual sins and the connected deceptions have had on your wife and on others.

Yet despite your confession and the tremendous trauma it brings to the surface, most

wives want to love and work through the hurt. (It continues to amaze me what women are willing and able to forgive once they believe they know the truth.) However, a wife's desire to save the marriage and to continue to love often increases the weight of your confessions. While parts of her may rejoice at finally knowing the truth, and in seeing you take positive steps towards healing and recovery, her struggle to find safety may cause her to attempt to mask her pain in order to not cause you more stress, which she fears would lead to more acting out.

Wives are often very isolated, afraid to talk to friends or family out of the fear of being exposed and out of respect for you. She often thinks, “It isn't my place to announce your sin to the rest of the world.” You feel better because you are finally becoming an honest man. She feels like death because her world has crumbled, and yet she must still hold things together for you, for her children and for herself. His reality “I am finally becoming a man of integrity” and her reality “I have been betrayed” are radically different.

### ***Reality #2***

#### **I have never loved her more.**

As a man stops looking at pornography and acting out sexually, he often begins to see his wife in a whole new light. I can't tell you how many times I have heard men in our groups say things like: “My wife is just so amazing. She has stuck with me through the struggle, and I don't deserve to be with her.” As they stop feasting on the artificial world of young models, silicone implants and digital airbrushing, they begin to catch a new glimpse and hunger for her physical beauty. As a man moves out of the fog of the addiction, he can finally begin to appreciate the incredible gift God has given him.

#### **I've never felt less loved or worthy.**

At the same time, his wife often feels completely rejected and extremely self-conscious about her beauty and her worth as a woman. After all, “If I had been enough, he wouldn't have needed others.” Wives often begin questioning everything. “Has he ever really loved me?” “Were those gifts genuine or

---

<sup>81</sup> The “Secret Basement” is a metaphor created by Dr. Omar Minwalla that helps us understand the damage done by men who hide their sexual acting-out behaviors from their wives. Highly recommend

you listen to Darrell's “Protector or Predator” teaching at [www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com) where he fleshes out this metaphor.

merely guilt offerings trying to buy his way out of his guilt?"

Dr. Omar Minwalla uses the illustration of a drop of ink falling into a glass of water to help us see how a wife now questions everything. In our minds, it is just a single, tiny drop of ink. In her experience, however, that ink changes the color of everything.<sup>82</sup> She now questions every gift, every kindness, every aspect of life together because she now realizes things were not as they seemed.

Wives also begin putting pieces together and realize that many of the times you were "too busy" with work, projects, etc., to be with her or your kids you were spending hours on-line looking at pornography. Satan tells her you would rather spend time debasing yourself than being with her and he uses that realization to scream his lies about her lack of beauty and worth. Your reality, "I've never loved her more" and her reality, "I've never felt less loved or worthy" are miles apart.

### **Reality #3**

#### **I'm beginning to see how much I value our marriage.**

A man in recovery begins to realize how much he truly values the marriage and how he longs for real connection and relationship. Satan uses the noose of sexual addiction to constantly drive a man to deeper and deeper levels of isolation. As the noose tightens, he becomes less and less able to recognize his need for relationship. One man illustrated this in a painful way when he described fantasizing about his wife and child being killed in a car wreck. "I remember thinking how much better my life would be. After all, our sex life was pretty much non-existent and I got more out of masturbation anyway. If my wife and child were gone, I could take care of myself and not have the constant conflict and pain that comes with the marriage."

This of course was a lie straight from the pit of hell and his memory of the thought is a painful reminder of what the addiction had done to his heart. Thankfully, as he has come out of his addiction, he has seen more clearly every day just how much his wife and child mean to him.

#### **I've never realized until now how little the marriage meant to him.**

A wife, however, often feels a very opposite response. "How could he value our marriage so little as to waste time, money, and affection on this trash?" "How little is our marriage worth to him that he would risk losing it over a brief thrill of looking at pixels on a screen or dots on a page?" Once again, his reality and her reality are night and day.

### **Reality #4**

#### **Finally, I'm an honest man.**

As a man starts bringing his sin into the light, he discovers the strength that comes from being honest. Beneath the sexual addiction is almost always an addiction to deception that bleeds over into every area of his life. As he begins to be honest about his sexual issues, he also begins to speak the truth in other areas and it feels very good.

#### **How could he have lied like this?**

His wife, however, begins to see for the first time how deep the deception really runs. She remembers times when his words didn't seem to match reality. She remembers times when her gut knew he was lying but she didn't know how to trust herself and instead took him at his word. I can't tell you how many times a wife in my office has said something to the effect of, "I can handle the sexual sin, what I can't handle is the mountain of lies and deceptions that have piled up through the years." This is one reason a polygraph exam can be so helpful. Once a wife believes she knows the truth, she can usually start the healing process. He may see becoming an honest man in his future, however, all she can see is the mountain of lies from his past.

### **Reality #5**

#### **Three to five years.**

The reality of this time frame is very difficult for most. If the husband is forty years old, he has most likely been fighting this issue for almost thirty years. To him, three to five years doesn't sound that bad. Besides, as a "master of the universe" he likely believes he can do it in half the time it takes *normal* guys.

---

<sup>82</sup> Dr. Omar Minwalla's "Illumination Training" 2022.

### Five years seems like a lifetime to deal with this pain.

His wife, however, hears “three to five years” and thinks it is an eternity. He feels the pendulum shift in the direction of recovery while she feels the pendulum shift in a direction that appears to be taking her over a cliff. She isn’t sure she can make it through the week, let alone three to five years.

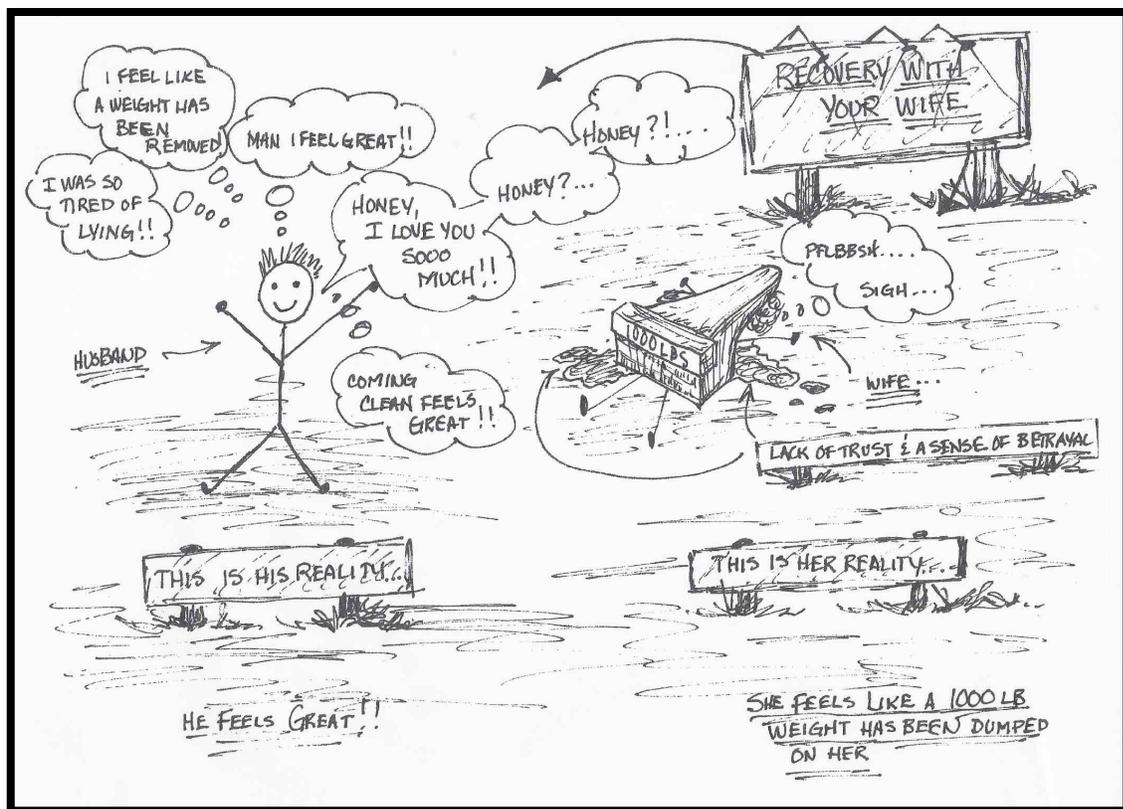
### Accept Her Realities

The realities are vastly different, and it is essential for a husband to recognize, acknowledge and honor her reality. She must have the time, space and resources necessary to grieve her losses and begin her own journey of healing and recovery.

There may come a day where your wife is genuinely proud of you for what you are doing in your recovery. However, don’t expect that early on. She can’t be your recovery cheerleader and be honest about her pain at the same time. Therefore, you must seek your encouragement and support from your brothers in recovery and not be surprised when you encounter her anger and resentment instead of her applause. The men in your group can rejoice with you when you go thirty days without looking at porn or masturbating. She is just as likely to think, “Great! It has only taken you ten years of marriage to get committed enough to go thirty days without committing adultery against me.”

Don’t, however, lose hope. While it may be difficult to see right now, if you continue the road of recovery, you will become stronger and more able to fight for her heart as well as your own. You will also discover God wants to use your journey to bring things to the surface that need healing in your wife’s life as well as your own. God has an amazing way of redeeming the very things that Satan intended for our destruction. If you and your wife will allow him, he will even use your painful and opposite realities to draw you closer to him and eventually closer to each other. I know I was personally blown away one night as my wife and I were praying. To my total amazement, I heard her pray, “Thank you Lord for his sexual addiction and for the way you have used it to bring the broken places in my life and in our marriage into the light for your healing. Thank you for loving us so much.”

So how do you go about the process of allowing God to bring healing in your marriage? Well, first you must understand that each individual and each couple have a unique path that only God can guide them through. However, in spite of each journey’s uniqueness, we have learned some things through the years that couples have found helpful in this process. Some of these lessons are covered in the next chapter.



## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. Have you done your “full disclosure” meeting with your wife? If yes, what good things have come out of your confessions? What difficult things? If you haven’t done this yet, why haven’t you?
2. What initial reactions do you have toward reading the “His Realities/Her Realities” chart?
3. If you have shared this chart with your wife, what were her reactions?
4. How can you relate to the idea of removing the thousand-pound weight off your shoulders?
5. What evidence can you see about that weight being transferred to your wife?
6. What impact does the woman’s tearful statement, “This hurts so much more than being raped” have on you? Do you see that depth of pain in your wife’s heart?
7. What evidence do you see of your wife attempting to protect you (or herself) from feeling the real weight of the betrayal you have brought on her?
8. How do you see your wife differently today compared to before you began the recovery journey?

9. When and how do you sense your hunger and appreciation for her physical beauty increasing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. What lies do you think Satan is telling your wife about her worth and her beauty? What can you do at this point to counter those lies? What can you do in the future?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. How do you see Satan using your addiction to drive you to isolation in similar ways as the man who confessed to fantasizing about his wife and child's death?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. How is her value and worth changing in your eyes as you proceed in your recovery?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
13. How are you discovering "the strength that comes from being honest"? Where, besides your sexual addiction, is God challenging your deceptions?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
14. How is your wife responding to seeing your deceptions more clearly? What can you do when she asks you about them?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
15. Are there any other deceptions that you are aware of needing to confess to her? (Could be about money, time or many other things not seemingly connected to your sexual addiction.)

16. How does your wife's anger over your deceptions impact you? Do you find yourself getting defensive, angry, depressed, going to despair? What can you do to allow her to struggle and yet continue on the road of honesty?
  
17. How does the reality of a 3-5 year recovery time hit you? How does it hit your wife?
  
18. How does the wife's prayer: "Thank you Lord for his sexual addiction and for the way you have used it to bring the broken places in my life and in our marriage into the light for your healing. Thank you for loving us so much" impact you?
  
19. What redemptive threads can you already see in your recovery journey? What surprising things have you seen God do in the middle of messy and painful places?



## 18 RECOVERY WITH YOUR WIFE PART III

### “WHAT CAN I DO?”

---

#### **1. Establish and maintain sobriety along with a strong personal recovery**

Helping your wife heal and restoring your coupleship is impossible if every time she opens herself to you, she soon discovers you have betrayed her once again. Each betrayal makes it more and more difficult and even unsafe for her to choose connection with you over self-protection. Again, go back to the train analogy, you must keep moving forward and be safe for a long time before she can feel safe.

Your three-circle initial recovery plan (Chapter 2) and then your full recovery plan (Chapter 8) are essential for your progress. It is also critical that you share these plans with your wife. When she knows you have clearly defined your areas of struggle, that you have built a good support team and that you have action plans in place in case of any and all slips or crashes, she will have a much better ability to respond well.

Your action plans need to specifically define how long after a slip or crash you have to talk to your recovery team (sponsor and recovery brothers) and then to her as well as any other actions you need to take. Be sure to note that having a plan is only helpful if you follow through with it. Yes, it's often terrifying to share your mistakes and failures with your wife, but ironically, coming clean with her, while difficult and painful for both of you, actually builds trust, and, in the long haul, gives her central nervous system a much better ability to stay calm. It helps because she can begin to learn she doesn't have to catch you in a deception or be the detective because you will bring struggles to her instead of hiding them.

Your plan also needs to include a commitment to correct every deception. What that means is if you're in a convenience store and the clerk asks you, "Wasn't that game last night awesome?" If, without thinking, you respond "Yeah it was great," but then when you are driving away realize you lied because you don't even know what game he was talking about, then you acknowledge the deception and deal with it. You deal with it by turning around, going back in and saying, "This

might seem strange to you, but I am working on being a person of integrity, and I wasn't honest when you asked me about the game. The truth is I don't pay any attention to baseball. I'm sorry I lied to you. Hope you have a great day."

I know that sounds awkward, unnecessary, and even weird since it was a meaningless "white lie" to a total stranger. However, correcting every deception as soon as you realize you have deceived someone will help you retrain your brain to speak the truth rather than telling people what you think they want to hear.

Yes, this is especially hard with your wife since she has trauma around your deceptions and you likely have trauma around her responses to your deceptions. However, while she may get upset, she might get triggered, and she might even "blow a gasket," it is the fastest way to learn to speak the language of truth. Most wives, especially if they hear this from me, their counselor, or someone they trust, will see your corrections as positive movement once the initial wave of "I can't believe he lied to me again" passes.

A commitment to ruthless honesty is one of the most important things you can do for your own recovery and for rebuilding trust with her.

#### **2. Expose, unearth and eliminate the secret basement**

Most men in the early stages of recovery focus primarily on their sexual acting-out behaviors. While that is certainly critical, so is establishing and maintaining a clear baseline of truth. Most men have no idea how much damage their lies, deceptions and gaslighting have done to their wife. Here it is helpful to look at Dr. Omar Minwalla's illustration of the secret sexual basement. Imagine a nice home in the suburbs with four bedrooms, a great yard, and a picket fence. From the outside everything looks great. Inside there's a wife, two kids and a dog so it's almost the American dream. However, if you look closely with ground penetrating radar, you can see that the husband has gone into a closet, pulled up the carpet, cut through the floor and dug a secret basement. In this basement he regularly retreats to engage in his

sexual acting-out behaviors: pornography, masturbation, strip clubs, affairs, prostitutes and/or a whole myriad of other deceptive sexual behaviors. When he is in the basement, no one in the family knows where he is or what he is doing. When he resurfaces, the family may ask, “Where have you been?” He replies by saying, “I’ve been here the whole time. I don’t know what you are talking about.”

Over time, his disappearing becomes almost “normal.” His wife and kids learn not to ask him about it because his answers deflect away from the question and often leave them wondering if they are the crazy ones. As the sexual activities fester, toxic relational fumes start oozing up through the floor. When his wife notices a strange smell and asks, “What’s that stench?” he quickly opens a window and tells her she is imagining things.

Now imagine what it’s like for her on the day she accidentally discovers the hatch leading down to the basement. Imagine her peeking in and getting her first glimpse of his secret world. She is horrified both by what she sees and by the fact that her husband, the man she thought she knew, the man who promised to be faithful and true and “forsake all others” could have created this secret world right under her nose without her knowing.

She naturally asks “Who is he?” and “What kind of man does such a thing?” Many wives get hammered with their own toxic shame and ask, “What is wrong with me that I haven’t noticed sooner or that I would marry a man with a deceptive secret sexual world?”

Then as the details of that secret basement start surfacing, her world crumbles. Everything she thought she knew is now suspect. Every good memory is now tainted by questions of, “Was it real?” “Did he really enjoy being with me or was he just biding his time before he could go to where he really wanted . . . his basement?”

Exposing and eliminating the secret basement is just as critical as stopping the sexual acting-out behavior. Your lies, deceptions, and gaslighting have done incredible harm, and task number one is to stop harming her in this way. It’s also critical to know that the lies and deceptions are not limited to the sexual arena. Most men struggling with sexual deception also struggle with deceptions in at least one other area such as alcohol, substance

use, gambling, finances, food, time, etc. You must understand that deception of any kind triggers her right back to the moment of her discovery, right back to her personal “D-Day.”

Therefore, you must work diligently and thoroughly on your “Full Disclosure,”<sup>83</sup> making sure you give a complete inventory, not just of your sexual sins against her but also of other deceptions as well.

Some men think, “Well if I just get sober, stop the acting out and board up the entrance to the basement, it will be enough.” I’ve talked with numerous men who have had affairs or other secret sexual behaviors in their past who say, “Why tell her now? That was X number of months or even years ago. It will only hurt her.”

To that I always ask, “Do you want a marriage with intimacy or a marriage based on the sham of deception? Do you want to live the rest of your life not being able to fully receive her love because you will know she doesn’t really know you? Do you want to always hear that voice in your head saying, ‘She wouldn’t be responding to me this way if she knew about . . .?’”

Second, don’t you think she deserves to know the truth? Doesn’t she need to know she hasn’t been crazy all this time? After all, there really were fumes coming up from the floor. She wasn’t imagining them.

Finally, what do you think the odds are of you becoming a man of integrity, capable of forming healthy attachments to her, your children and others while living a continual lie with your primary attachment? I’m not an odds maker but I think your chances are much better of hitting the lottery three weeks in a row than of having integrity and healthy attachment going forward while still lying to your wife, your primary attachment.

You must eliminate and expose every aspect of your secret basement! But what if she leaves? What if she “can’t handle the truth?” Then that is the consequence of your actions and deceptions but at least you will finally have integrity, and until you do, you have no idea how solid it feels when you are finally fully in the light.

Think also what it would be like if your wife knew everything about you and chose to love you

---

<sup>83</sup> See “Disclosure” at [www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com) for a description of what we believe is the best way to handle disclosure.

anyway? Isn't that what we all long for? To be truly known and truly loved at the same time.

I can't make any promises about your wife, but what I can tell you is most wives stay in the relationship when they believe their husband is serious about his recovery, and they believe they know the full truth. Yes, some leave as the damage has been too much. However, I have marveled much more at the wives who have stayed than at the very few who have left.

### **3. Deal with your own triggers and remain calm:**

You must learn to deal with your own triggers and remain calm even when your wife is triggered. This may be one of the hardest things you will have to learn to do in this journey. Our partner being triggered invariably triggers us. This often results in defensiveness and trying to argue about facts rather than attuning to her hurts, fears, etc.

For example, a triggered wife may attack by saying "You always lie about what time you're going to be home." If you are not in a good space, her statement will likely trigger your sense of "always being in trouble." In your triggered place, you will defensively try to list days you got home on time or even early and want her to apologize for misrepresenting your actions. We all know where that pathway leads as both your brains will find countless examples to prove your triggered points.

However, if you can calm your own fears and recognize how scary it is for her anytime you don't do what you said you will do, (because it feels like the rustling grass in the lion story) you can calmly apologize for being late and attune to her by saying something to the effect of, "I'm sorry I was late. I know in the past I was often late because of my addiction. I understand it must be especially scary to you, but I am not acting out now. I will work on being on time and/or letting you know if and why I am running late."

Sounds easy, doesn't it? It is not as difficult as you think when you are in a calm and untriggered place. The real challenge for you is doing what you must do to be calm in those situations.

This is where calming skills such as deep breathing, appreciation, mindfulness, etc. are essential. One of the recommendations I have given men for many years is to do a two-staged appreciation exercise while driving home. Step one is to ask Jesus for any appreciation. (Yes, your

daily appreciation exercise.) Then after you have talked with Jesus about your general appreciation, ask him to remind you about something specific about your wife that you can appreciate. It's not a magic bullet, but if you do this before engaging her, you will have a much greater chance of responding well, even if she is upset when you walk in the door.

A resource many men have found helpful in dealing well with their wife's triggers is Carol Juergensen Sheets, Allan J. Katz, et al. *Help Her Heal Workbook*. One of my men recently said he was shocked how well one of the examples worked. His wife hit a trigger and started texting him while he was working in the workbook. He followed their script and was shocked when a few minutes later, his wife was texting him about normal house stuff. He said a similar trigger a month earlier led to multiple days of conflict. Attunement is a powerful skill that can be learned, but the first step in learning it is to calm yourself, because if you are ramped up, you'll quickly go off the rails yourself, and the odds of two triggered people finding a good resolution are miniscule.

### **4. Do what you say you will do and quickly own any times you fall short of that goal.**

Let's be honest and acknowledge that we all fail to follow through on many things. This is especially true for people struggling with addictions because it is also a symptom of a poorly developed prefrontal cortex. We sometimes forget things, or we lose focus, get distracted, etc. However, what we must realize is that most wives, post-discovery, connect the dots of how many times we got distracted by porn or other acting-out behaviors and let details fall to the wayside.

Therefore, make concerted, focused efforts to only commit to what you can do and then follow through and do it. Send yourself an email and put a reminder on it, put a sticky note on your computer, steering wheel or someplace, or find something that consistently reminds you to do what you have said you will do.

Then, when you drop the ball (you are human and will make mistakes), own, apologize and attune to your wife's fear. Again, an apology of "I am sorry. I told you I would pick up the dry cleaning on the way home. I had every intention of doing it, but I spaced on it when I left work. Next time I will put a sticky note on my steering wheel so I won't forget. Would you like me to go

now, or try again tomorrow?” If she is upset, allow her the space to be upset and then when she is ready, assure her with “I’m sorry my forgetfulness is scary for you. I’m working on it, but I’m not there yet. I know it’s especially upsetting because of how rampant it was when I was acting out. However, I’m doing well. I’m sorry that today I forgot to do what I said I would do. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you know this is not the old pattern.” (Important aside: many wives find the words, “I’m sorry” to be triggering in and of themselves because of how many times we said we were sorry but didn’t make any real changes. If that is the case with your wife, it is better to substitute “I know” for “I’m sorry”)

## 5. Educate yourself on “Betrayal Trauma.”

While this is a difficult and likely painful thing, it is incredibly important for you to understand what your betrayal has been like for your wife. The Lion and the Boy story is just a beginning place, and as I said, the analogy falls apart because for it to really compare, your wife’s primary attachment figure would need to be the lion who attacked her.

If your wife is like many, she will have an incredibly wide array of responses ranging from silent but deep sadness to intense fits of rage. She may have panic attacks when she doesn’t know where you are or what you are doing. She may shut down and go completely numb. She may shut down sexually and she may become hypersexual in response to her trauma.

Many couples see pastors or counselors who do not understand betrayal trauma. Upon seeing or hearing about the wife’s reactivity, rage, etc. they become focused on “fixing the wife” without understanding or addressing the real driving force behind her “behaviors” because they do not recognize they are trauma responses. If you see this happening, resist the urge to join them. Their validation of you is not helpful and is, in fact, harmful to your wife. They are uninformed. Be her protector by finding helpers who understand betrayal trauma even though it will be an initially harder path for you.

Some of you may want to argue at this point and say, “My wife acted this way before she knew about my acting-out behaviors and deceptions.” That may be true, and some of her issues may come from her family of origin. However, a wife

experiences many impacts from her husband’s “Secret Sexual Basement” even when she doesn’t know where they are coming from.

Yes, your wife likely does have family-of-origin issues. We all do because we all had fallen parents. However, you are the last person to decide whether a given issue, her fits of rage for example, come from her background or your betrayals. Your natural defenses of self-protection will rise and point the finger at her background. Whenever you do that, you rub salt into her wounds regardless of the source of her pain.

This is a place where Paul’s instruction to husbands in Ephesians 5 comes into play. “Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.” Think about one of the most significant ways He loved the church. Jesus, the sinless one, became our sin, and took the blame when he had literally done nothing wrong, so that we could become the righteousness of God. (II Corinthians 5:21)

What that tells me is that one way we can love our wives as Jesus loved the church is by not defending ourselves even when we believe we are being falsely accused. Allow your wife to express her pain and attune to her in her pain rather than defensively dismissing it because you don’t believe you caused it, “at least not in this case.” Trust God to be your defender when the source of her pain is outside of you and the Holy Spirit to be the one who convicts you by showing you your culpability when it does come from you. It will be much better for your wife’s healing for you to be falsely accused than for you to prove yourself innocent. Again, **YOU ARE THE LAST PERSON TO DECIDE THE TRUE SOURCE OF HER PAIN!**

How can you educate yourself? Read books on the subject: *Intimate Deception* by Sheri Keffer, *Treating Trauma From Sexual Betrayal* by Dr. Kevin Skinner, etc. Listen to podcasts such as mine titled “The Secret Sexual Basement” ([www.newhope4si.com](http://www.newhope4si.com) click on “Podcasts” box). Omar Minwalla’s three-part series on the “Helping Couples Heal” podcasts as well as others will help you see your wife’s responses are not unique to her. They will give you greater compassion for her as well as help you take honest ownership for the damage you have done.

## 6. Honestly Face The Reality of Harm/Abuse

It is incredibly difficult to look closely at the reality of harm and abuse. The “A” word is especially triggering for many. We often think “ABUSE” is a word reserved for physical and/or sexual harm. Most men with secret basements are reluctant, if not outright resistant, to anyone, especially their wives or others advocating for their wives, using the term. However, it is important to note that there are many types of “abuse” that certainly apply to secret sexual basements as well as many of the associated behaviors.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V* (DSM 5), in its category for “Spouse or Partner Abuse, Psychological” describes psychological partner abuse as follows:

Acts of psychological abuse include berating or humiliating the victim; interrogating the victim; restricting the victim's ability to come and go freely; obstructing the victim's access to assistance (e.g., law enforcement; legal, protective, or medical resources); threatening the victim with physical harm or sexual assault; harming, or threatening to harm, people or things that the victim cares about; unwarranted restriction of the victim's access to or use of economic resources; isolating the victim from family, friends, or social support resources; stalking the victim; and trying to make the victim think that he or she is crazy.<sup>84</sup>

Unfortunately, through the years, I have heard many stories of husbands who have done each of the things listed above. The last line especially stands out as that is the definition of “gaslighting,” and is the inevitable impact of a secret sexual basement. At the end of this chapter, I have included two difficult, but significant lists compiled from slides from Dr. Omar Minwalla’s “Illumination” training of “Integrity Abuse Behaviors.” Please take the time to read through them slowly and thoughtfully. I recommend circling or highlighting each behavior that has been part of your past and/or your present

treatment of your wife. Know that your natural response will be to turn away as it is incredibly difficult to look honestly at harm we have caused someone we love. However, looking at them honestly, will help you have a greater understanding of the impact of your actions, the reasons your wife is struggling, and motivate you to do whatever is necessary to change so that you stop harming her in these ways.

## 7. Confess Your Sin, Not Your Temptations

While sharing your struggles is a critical part of building intimacy, Satan convolutes this many times in the recovery process when he burns the candle at both ends. He tempts a man, then even if he successfully resists the temptation, Satan pounds him with the condemnation, “If you weren’t a pervert, you wouldn’t have wanted to look.” Now, if the husband (even though he resisted the temptation) makes an agreement with the condemnation and confesses to his wife that he saw an inappropriately dressed woman, his wife assumes he “lusted” and her heart hurts again. Satan then pounds the man with the message, “This is hopeless. You will never be clean in her eyes.” So, what does a man need to “confess?” I believe he needs to confess any time he takes deliberate actions to feed his lust. Hopefully the following example will help clarify:

Imagine a man leaves for work one morning. As he drives away, he sees one of his neighbors jogging toward him in a revealing outfit. If, by the grace of God and the application of the tools he is learning in his recovery, he looks away, drives off and successfully resists the temptation, he doesn’t need to say anything to his wife. (Though he likely needs to tell another man about it, so it doesn’t become a source of fantasy.) After all, he hasn’t sinned against her. Satan simply dangled an appetizing temptation in front of him and his resistance was a victory. However, if he drives around the block to get a better look or if he uses the image of her in his mind for fantasy, he has gone from being tempted to sin. He has taken deliberate action to feed his lust, and therefore, needs to confess that to her. However, I believe it is harmful to tell his wife about every temptation. The constant barrage of temptation, especially in the early stages of recovery, is relentless. Confess

---

<sup>84</sup> DSM V, p. 721

your sins, but not your temptations and do not pretend to “protect” her by hiding your sin.

Side Note: Many wives, especially in the early stages, want and even demand to hear about all issues, struggles, details, etc. It is important to recognize their desire is a legitimate and understandable “safety seeking” desire. Unfortunately, our experience finds it to be counterproductive. The sheer volume of sexual temptations a man faces on any given day is overwhelming to most wives, and they are often triggered back to actual betrayals even when the husband is battling well.

So, what can you do? Ask your wife to go to a couples’ counseling appointment with you with someone trained in both sexual addiction and betrayal trauma to discuss this issue. She will be much more open to this guideline if she hears it supported by someone other than you. Having her read this section may also be helpful.

Unfortunately, some wives will continue to insist their husbands tell them “Everything.” If that is your situation, take that question to Jesus, and if you sense Him telling you to try that approach, then offer to try it for a week and see how it plays out. Hopefully, after a very painful week, she will see the wisdom of our recommendations.

## **8. Regularly Communicate Your Progress:**

You also need to communicate your recovery progress with her regularly. We recommend a scheduled, weekly check-in that the husband initiates. Some wives are not ready for this in the early stages after discovery, after relapses, new disclosures, or other painful times. Your first responsibility is to synchronize with her needs. Many men find checking in with their wife becomes a key in finding and maintaining sobriety. I.e. knowing I’m going to sit down at the table with my wife on Thursday evening, look her in the eye and tell her I’ve had a clean week makes the porn spam email easier to immediately delete. However, if your wife isn’t ready for regular meetings, you must not pressure her. You must find your check-in support from the men in your group, your counselor, sponsor, etc.

On the other side, many men struggle to initiate check-ins because they are afraid of their “I’m in trouble again” trigger even when they are doing well. Therefore, a regularly scheduled meeting can be helpful. Yes, it may be hard, especially at first,

but the benefits for you and for her are well worth pressing through your fearful avoidance.

Couples find different formats helpful, but we believe a good couples’ check-in should include at least the following:

1. Appreciation: Starting by sharing at least one of your appreciations from your daily exercises is a great way to set a good tone for your meeting.
2. Sobriety check-in. Have you had any issues in your red and yellow areas of your three-circle plan or any slips or crashes according to your personal recovery plan? (Don’t use an upcoming recovery meeting as an excuse to not confess any issues to her in the time you established in your recovery plan)
3. What is something you have read or learned from recovery work, individual counseling sessions or group work that you can safely share? (If something you learned has a potential to induce a painful trigger, be sure and ask Jesus first and then your wife if it’s a good time to share a hard thing.)
4. Check in on how you have done on your proactive boundaries, (see personal plan in chapter 8) I.e. your six dailies and other recovery behaviors you have committed to put in place. Sharing what you are doing to grow and to heal can help her have greater hope that the train is moving out of the dark tunnel.
5. Check in specifically about how you are doing with deceptions. I.e “I caught myself on Tuesday exaggerating a story at lunch with Jeff. I stopped in the middle of it, apologized to him and told him the ‘boring version.’ He responded well and I was surprised how satisfying the whole exchange felt. He feels like more of a friend to me now and said he appreciated both the ‘boring version’ and my willingness to be honest. He said he admired that.”
6. Pray. Take the initiative to pray with your wife about the things you have discussed, even, and especially, if the discussion has been difficult. Thank Him for the things you appreciate about your wife and ask God to speak truth to both of you as He brings the healing He desires for your heart, her heart and for your relationship. Prayer is often an essential element of returning to joy.
7. Expect conflicts. Inevitably, conflicts will arise during your recovery meetings. Satan will use every trick in his book to twist your actions,

words, and non-verbal communication into attacks against her and vice versa. Therefore, it is crucial for you to invite, and be aware of, Jesus' presence in your meeting. In Matthew 18:19-20 Jesus says: "Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." We usually think of these verses in the context of "church" i.e., if there are two or three of us together, we can have church because Jesus has promised to be with us. However, if you look at the verse in context, you will see Jesus says this in the context of conflict. Jesus promises His presence as a comfort and mediator in times of disagreement. Therefore, it is incredibly

helpful to recognize and look for His presence in these difficult moments. *You are not alone.* Jesus is right there with you and with your wife and, if you let Him, he will empower you to work things out.

Finally, I can't say loud enough or often enough, the most important thing you can do to help your wife heal is keep getting healthier yourself. No matter how much sobriety you have, no matter how much work you have done, no matter how honest you have become, there is more to do. Keep moving your train forward further into the light and keep praying God will give her the courage to stay on the train long enough for her to experience the light as well.



## Dr. Omar Minwalla's Integrity Abuse Behaviors<sup>85</sup>

### Covert Phase (Prior to her knowing about the secret basement)

- Lying/lying by omission
- Deceiving, hiding, manipulating the truth
- Gaslighting (Intentional psychological manipulation of the victim's reality)
- Second brain (Enteric system) incongruence (her gut tells her something is wrong, but you insist everything is fine so she is forced to choose between trusting her gut or trusting you, her primary attachment)
- Blaming others, especially intimate partner, for the secret basement and/or other destructive behaviors (covertly or overtly)
- Cultivating negative narratives to justify the secret basement (corroding perceptions of intimate partner, relationship, family system)
- Relational neglect, withdrawal, rejection (including sexual)
- Relational integrity erosion
- Relational (including family) risk-taking and endangerment
- Covert tactics of domination and control
- Intentional withholding of life-altering information necessary for survival (leaving victim in state of disempowerment, without a viable escape route)
- Intentional withholding of relevant information (e.g., about the secret basement) in individual or couples' treatment

### Overt Phases (Post "discovery" of the secret basement)

- Lying
- Lying by omission
- Deception, hiding, manipulating the truth
- Gaslighting (Intentional psychological manipulation of the victim's reality)
- Externalizing responsibility
- Blaming intimate partner for the secret basement or IABs (covertly or overtly)
- Denying the problem or the disorder and its actual consequences
- Continued sexual-relational violation behavior (overt infidelity or secret basement)
- Minimizing
- Rationalizing
- Justifying
- Protecting
- Denying
- Covering-up
- Partial disclosures
- Staggered disclosures
- Revising facts and history
- Obstructing
- Stonewalling
- Refusing to cooperate or speak
- Technical manipulation
- Verbal abuse or diminishment
- Intimidation and threatening
- Being aggressive or passive-aggressive
- Equivocating
- Withdrawing
- Abandoning
- Feigning innocence or ignorance
- Assuming the role of victim
- Fault-finding
- Demanding immediate equality
- Frequent or rapid integrity violations or abusive actions
- Shaping the narrative
- Defying logic or reason as a protective tactic
- Shifting focus to the abuser's pain
- Selective attention or memory
- Callous/insensitive/cruel attitudes and actions toward victim
- Lack of demonstrated remorse
- Lack of demonstrated empathy
- Integrity abuse towards the victim (e.g., denying facts) in context of couples' treatment
- Violating agreements or commitments
- Inability or unwillingness to be accountable
- Refusing to participate in repair or healing
- Inability to provide valuable care and support
- Pathologizing the victim's reactions
- Demanding the victim "get over it" and move on (demonstrated impatience)
- Sexual entitlement and demands (violations)
- Assumptions and expectations of impunity
- Continued engagement of the secret basement
- Continued domination and control (covert and/or overt)
- Continued social misrepresentation
- Continued lack of demonstrated remorse or empathy

<sup>85</sup> From Dr. Omar Minwalla's "Illumination" training, 2022.

## Dr. Omar Minwalla's Integrity Abuse Behaviors<sup>86</sup>

**Combined numbered list to use for checking in with yourself and accountability partners.**

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Lying/lying by omission</li> <li>2. Deceiving, hiding, manipulating the truth</li> <li>3. Gaslighting (Intentional psychological manipulation of the victim's reality)</li> <li>4. Second brain (Enteric system) incongruence (her gut tells her something is wrong, but you insist everything is fine so she is forced to choose between trusting her gut or trusting you, her primary attachment)</li> <li>5. Blaming others, especially intimate partner, for the secret basement and/or other destructive behaviors (covertly or overtly)</li> <li>6. Cultivating negative narratives to justify the secret basement (corroding perceptions of intimate partner, relationship, family system)</li> <li>7. Relational neglect, withdrawal, rejection (including sexual)</li> <li>8. Relational integrity erosion</li> <li>9. Relational (including family) risk-taking and endangerment</li> <li>10. Covert tactics of domination and control</li> <li>11. Intentional withholding of life-altering information necessary for survival (leaving victim in state of disempowerment, without a viable escape route)</li> <li>12. Intentional withholding of relevant information (e.g.,</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>about the secret basement) in individual or couples' treatment</li> <li>13. Externalizing responsibility</li> <li>14. Denying the problem or the disorder and its actual consequences</li> <li>15. Continued sexual-relational violation behavior (overt infidelity or secret basement)</li> <li>16. Minimizing</li> <li>17. Rationalizing</li> <li>18. Justifying</li> <li>19. Protecting</li> <li>20. Denying</li> <li>21. Covering-up</li> <li>22. Partial disclosures</li> <li>23. Staggered disclosures</li> <li>24. Revising facts and history</li> <li>25. Obstructing</li> <li>26. Stonewalling</li> <li>27. Refusing to cooperate or speak</li> <li>28. Technical manipulation</li> <li>29. Verbal abuse or diminishment</li> <li>30. Intimidation and threatening</li> <li>31. Being aggressive or passive-aggressive</li> <li>32. Equivocating</li> <li>33. Withdrawing</li> <li>34. Abandoning</li> <li>35. Feigning innocence or ignorance</li> <li>36. Assuming the role of victim</li> <li>37. Fault-finding</li> <li>38. Demanding immediate equality</li> <li>39. Frequent or rapid integrity violations or abusive actions</li> <li>40. Shaping the narrative</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>41. Defying logic or reason as a protective tactic</li> <li>42. Shifting focus to the abuser's pain</li> <li>43. Selective attention or memory</li> <li>44. Callous/insensitive/cruel attitudes and actions toward victim</li> <li>45. Lack of demonstrated remorse</li> <li>46. Lack of demonstrated empathy</li> <li>47. Integrity abuse towards the victim (e.g., denying facts) in context of couples' treatment</li> <li>48. Violating agreements or commitments</li> <li>49. Inability or unwillingness to be accountable</li> <li>50. Refusing to participate in repair or healing</li> <li>51. Inability to provide valuable care and support</li> <li>52. Pathologizing the victim's reactions</li> <li>53. Demanding the victim "get over it" and move on (demonstrated impatience)</li> <li>54. Sexual entitlement and demands (violations)</li> <li>55. Assumptions and expectations of impunity</li> <li>56. Continued engagement of the secret basement</li> <li>57. Continued domination and control (covert and/or overt)</li> <li>58. Continued social misrepresentation</li> <li>59. Continued lack of demonstrated remorse or empathy</li> </ol> |
|---|---|--|

---

<sup>86</sup> From Dr. Omar Minwalla's "Illumination" training, 2022.

## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. What has been your wife's experience of repeatedly discovering ways you have acted out sexually and/or been dishonest with her? What are ways you see that have impacted her?
2. How do you feel about correcting every deception? Give one example of what that would have looked like for you in the recent past?
3. How does the image of the "secret sexual basement" change how you view your history of acting out and the deceptions that come with it?
4. When has your wife sensed the toxic fumes and how have you responded?
5. How does the idea of boarding up the access to the basement, never going back there but never telling her about either sound to you? How do you see that approach playing out for you and for her?
6. What do you most fear you wife will do if your secret basement is completely exposed?
7. What have you learned to this point that has been most helpful to you for "staying calm" when you and/or your wife is triggered?

8. Give several examples of times you have told your wife you would do something but didn't follow through. Times you have promised to not do something but then ended up doing it? In light of these chapters, how do you now see those instances?
  
9. What have you read/listened to in order to help you understand "Betrayal Trauma"? What are you willing to commit to do to educate yourself here?
  
10. How does the idea of loving your wife like Jesus loved the church strike you? How difficult is it for you to accept blame, especially when you don't believe something is "your fault?"
  
11. What does the phrase "You are the last person to decide the true source of her pain" bring up for you?
  
12. Take three different colors of highlighters. Go through Dr. Minwalla's list of integrity abuse behaviors and use a different color to mark each of the following:
  - Color 1—Things I know I have done in the past
  - Color 2—Things I know I am continuing to struggle with doing
  - Color 3—Things my wife would say I have done or am doing
  
13. Using the highlighted lists, create your own master list of your personal "Integrity Abuse Behaviors."\*

---

\* Share your list of "Integrity Abuse Behaviors" with your sponsor, your therapist/counselor/coach and ask them to help you "Check In" on these behaviors every time you meet. These are your "I must stop doing behaviors!"

14. Take at least 10 minutes to Journal about the impact of looking closely at Minwalla's list and their implication for the harm you have done to your wife.
  
15. Get an index card or use the note app on your phone to make your "Top Ten" list of the IABs you have done that have caused the most harm to your wife. Then do a daily scan of that list and use it in your check ins. Remember, if you haven't scanned your list, you can't honestly answer the question about having any IABs to bring into the light. Use the combined list to number them for an easy shorthand.
  
16. A powerful way of staying accountable and to reducing the harm is to partner with a brother in recovery and every day send a quick text of your IABs. I.e. "3, 7, 11 & 14 today."
  
17. Take a real incident from the past week and draw out the distinction between the "temptation" and the "sin." How can drawing that distinction be helpful to you?
  
18. What has been your experience with "Recovery Meetings"? Is your wife open to them? What are you doing to make them a regular part of your recovery?
  
19. How does the thought of a weekly "Recovery Meeting" impact you?
  
20. What do you need to do to be in a place where recovery meetings would even be possible?
  
21. What day and time do you think would be good for recovery meetings?
  
22. How long do you think they should last?
  
23. What will make it difficult for you to take the initiative and/or keep recovery meeting appointments?

24. What impact would giving your wife a weekly accounting of things you have done for your recovery have on your motivation to do the work?
  
25. Have you shared something significant you have learned about yourself during the recovery process? If yes, what was that like? How did she respond? How did you feel telling her? How did you feel after sharing your heart?
  
26. What does Matthew 18:19-20 say to you about conflicts with your wife? Have you ever thought of using that verse in this context?
  
27. Take ten minutes and list as many things as you can think of that you appreciate about your wife.



## 19. RECOVERY WITH YOUR WIFE: PART IV

### “WHAT ABOUT SEX?”

---

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Genesis 2:18

#### Physical and Sexual Intimacy

As we continue to focus on how to walk out our recovery with our wives, we will focus this chapter on another area that is always difficult in recovery: physical and sexual intimacy. Pornography and sexual addiction has warped and distorted both your and your wife’s perspective on sex. Regaining God’s perspective is difficult and yet essential in your recovery. It is therefore essential to look to scripture and see that sex is a gift from God and it is very good.

#### Regaining God’s Perspective

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis offers a great insight into Satan’s primary attack on God’s gifts when he says, “...wickedness, when you examine it, turns out to be the pursuit of some good in the wrong way. . . Goodness is, so to speak, itself: badness is only spoiled goodness. And there must be something good first before it can be spoiled.”<sup>87</sup>

Something was good. In fact, as the creation account in Genesis tells us “It was very good.” God created Adam and dropped him in the middle of “heaven on earth,” the Garden of Eden. The garden met all Adam’s physical needs: When hungry, he picked incredible fruit from one of the many trees. When thirsty, he drew water from crystal clear streams with no pollution or contaminants. The garden met his physical needs and God himself met Adam’s spiritual needs. They walked together, talked constantly, and had no barriers of sin or distance between them. Yet something was still missing.

“The LORD God said,, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (2:18).

Alone? How can Adam be alone when he walks with God? I think the answer lies in the part of our nature that God created for intimacy. Genesis 1:27 says, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”

As we noted in Chapter 12, God is a relational God. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit have been in intimate relationship for all eternity and man is an outgrowth of their relationship. Part of God’s image, stamped deep in our soul, is the need to reflect the relationship of the Trinity here on earth. In fact, the astute reader can see the Trinitarian reflection in God’s decision, “I will make a helper (Hebrew *ezer*) suitable for him” because scripture primarily uses “helper” (*ezer*) to refer to God himself. Examples of this can be seen in the following verses:

- *My father’s God was my helper (Exodus 18:4).*
- *We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield (Ps. 33:20).*
- *You are my help and my deliverer; O LORD, do not delay (Ps. 70:5).*

Adam is alone and therefore unable to reflect God’s relational glory so God chooses to create a representative of himself to walk beside and partner with his son. Adam, however, is not ready for God’s incredible gift. He does not yet see his need, so God has him name all the

---

<sup>87</sup> C. S. Lewis: *Mere Christianity* p. 49

animals. The implication appears to be that he is to name each animal and choose a “helper,” a representative of God, from among them. This begs the question: Did God really expect him to find a life partner in a hippo or a giraffe? Of course not! God simply wanted Adam to recognize his need for relationship which leaves the end of verse 20 one of the saddest phrases in scripture: “But for Adam, no suitable helper was found.” At this point, God causes Adam to sink into a deep sleep: (Maybe he was even depressed over seeing his loneliness?)

*So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.*

Try to imagine the scene as Adam awakes. I picture him wiping the sleep from his eyes and catching a glimpse of Eve. When he sees her, he realizes that she is like him, but not like him. She is beautiful. She is literally, physically, and otherwise, the perfect woman. She is femininity as God designed it. She is alluring, mysterious and above all else lovely. If she were here today, every magazine would want her picture on its cover. Adam’s response is one of amazement. His jaw is on the garden floor, and when he recovers, he bursts out in song, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man.” Hebrew scholars tell us his words are pure poetry. They are the lyrics to the original love song spoken by a man who realizes that he has been given an incredible gift: a life partner, a wife, a soul mate.

The writer of Genesis then adds these powerful words, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” The phrase “one flesh” is a rich expression. It means that man and wife are to be extensions of one another. It means they are to be one emotionally, physically, and spiritually, and it also refers to sexual intercourse—the physical union of man and wife. Now, here is the crazy thing. Sex is

God’s idea, His creation. It wasn’t invented by Hugh Hefner or Hollywood or some dirty, old man. No, God created sex and when He created sex, He created something beautiful, mysterious, and incredibly enjoyable. John Eldredge in *Wild at Heart* paints a beautiful picture of God’s design for our sexual intimacy:

*Our sexuality offers a parable of amazing depth . . . The man comes to offer his strength and the woman invites the man into herself, an act that requires courage and vulnerability and selflessness for both of them. Notice first that if the man will not rise to the occasion, nothing will happen.*

*He must move; his strength must swell before he can enter her. But neither will the love consummate unless the woman opens herself in stunning vulnerability. When both are living as they were meant to live, the man enters his woman and offers her his strength. He spills himself there, in her, for her; she draws him in, embraces and envelopes him. When all is over he is spent, but ah, what a sweet death it is.<sup>88</sup>*

God created intercourse to be a deep and powerful connection between man and wife. Even our physical anatomy speaks to God’s design of enjoyment and intimacy through the sexual union. Dan Allender in *The Wounded Heart* says, “God has built the human body with more nerve endings on the head of the penis and the clitoris than anywhere else in the body other than the taste buds. God is concerned with our pleasure, otherwise it would be difficult to understand His choice to have so created male and female.”<sup>89</sup>

God’s design is for husband and wife to experience this intimate and powerful union with one another so that they will be super-glued together. In Ephesians 5:31 Paul says, “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” The word the NIV translates as “unite” comes from the Greek word *Kallao* which literally means “to glue together.”<sup>90</sup> God designed sexual union between man and wife to be “super-glue” that bonds one flesh to the other.

<sup>88</sup> Eldredge: *Wild at Heart*, p. 185.

<sup>89</sup> Dan Allender: *The Wounded Heart*, p. 103.

<sup>90</sup> K. L. Schmidt, “Kallao” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* III p. 822

(This is why the modern idea of “casual sex” is ludicrous: try super-gluing your fingers together and then getting them apart . . . “casually.”)

### **A Picture of Our Relationship with God**

Paul goes on to tell us that this intimacy of “one flesh” is a “profound mystery” that he compares to the relationship between Christ and the church. Not only does God create sex for the enjoyment of husband and wife, he also created it to give us a glimpse of himself. God gives the intimacy of husband and wife, and especially the intimacy of sexual union to help us understand the powerful connection he wants to have with us. Sex is a parable of the relationship of the Trinity and of its relationship with us. In fact, throughout scripture, the ancient writers use the phrase “to know God,” and the word they use most frequently is the same word used in Genesis 4:1, “Adam knew his wife Eve and she gave birth to a son” (KJV).

### **A Favorite Target of Satan**

Sex is God’s gift to man so he can know and be known and so he can catch a glimpse of God. Therefore, is it any wonder Satan would attack God’s gift of sex? Is it any wonder that from the beginning of time, he has attacked man and woman at this place of intimacy?

In John 10:10 Jesus says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.” God gave the gift of sex as part of his plan for his creation to have “life to the full.” The Enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy any place where he sees anyone experiencing a taste of real life.

Jesus, in order to bring life “to the full,” brings redemption in the very places where Satan twisted and distorted his gifts of freedom. Therefore, recovery should also address our sexual relationship. In our addiction, in our sin, we allowed Satan to use us as his instruments of abuse to pummel our wives. Now it is time to allow God to bring his healing balm to both us and to our wives.

### **Helping Your Wife Heal**

Following the narrow road of recovery is of course the crucial first step in allowing him to bring his healing. You can’t help either of you heal if you continue to abuse yourself, your wife, and others through sexual acting out.

Additionally, one of the first things you can do to help your wife heal from the sexual abuse of your addiction is to allow her the time necessary to feel safe enough for physical intimacies. Some wives respond relatively quickly, (which at times is a gift of God’s grace and at other times a sign of their own struggles), others take weeks, months and even years to feel safe enough for sexual intimacies to resume. You must allow her the time she needs without pressuring, manipulating, or badgering her. She may need counseling to address her trauma, or she may just need time to grieve her losses and find God’s forgiveness for you. Yes, waiting is difficult and often painful, but remember, sex is not life.

Once your wife is ready to move forward in physical intimacies, be willing to go slowly. She may need you just to sit on the couch beside her just talking and holding hands for a long time. She may need you to court her. She definitely needs you to talk with her and communicate clearly and repetitively that you want her heart and not just her body.

When she tells you she is ready for more, it is critical you do everything you can to move out of your old pornographic ideas about sex: you must learn the difference between “making love” and “having sex.” First, you must be diligent about staying connected to her in ways that feel good to her. Talking and maintaining eye contact as much as physically possible is a must. It will also help if you have a light on or candles lit in the room. (Remember, most joy communication takes place through the non-verbal signals coming from the left side of your face and particularly from your left eye.) Talking to her and looking in her eyes will also help prevent you from fantasizing about your pornography or previous sexual experiences and communicate your desire to be with her and not just to have a sexual release. It may also be helpful to ask her permission as you move forward, i.e. softly asking “may I” can help her feel a greater sense of safety and allow her to enjoy your touch rather than feel groped. Of course, if she says “no,”

honoring her boundary and allowing her the time she needs will speak volumes to her. Doing what you want anyway will do great harm even if she doesn't resist any further than saying "no."

Do not assume your sex life will go back to the same places it was before she knew of your struggle. In fact, you shouldn't want it to as most likely it was influenced and tainted by your pornographic view of sex. Therefore, activities and positions should be discussed and not assumed or manipulated. It is important to understand that your pornography may have created in you an appetite for things that do not feel good to her. It isn't her responsibility to meet those distorted desires. Yes, God gives great freedom in the marriage bedroom. You are free to explore and enjoy one another in different ways. However, if any of those ways feel degrading, painful, or unpleasant to one partner then pushing for them is not an act of love but a selfish act.

It is also helpful to change your goal and desire for sex. Stop focusing on orgasm, yours, or hers, and begin focusing on sharing joy. The part of your brain that controls your genitals is immediately adjacent to your attachment center, and secure attachments are primarily formed through the alternating rhythm of joy and quiet.<sup>91</sup> Sexual intercourse is, therefore, an intricate dance designed by God for the sharing of joy and quiet together. However, if you are anxious about "pleasing" your spouse, your ability to communicate, "I'm glad as glad can be" will be greatly diminished. If, however, your focus is on the joy and delight you have for her, you will be surprised how naturally you will communicate that. What she needs most is not orgasm, but to know you delight in her: body, mind, heart, and soul.

You should also be aware that most wives struggle with physical intimacy long after the first "reconnection." Don't assume because she was in a place one night to be intimate that she is ready for regular and consistent intimacies. There will be days when she struggles with her hurts, with stress and many other things that make it difficult and even painful for her to think about being physically intimate. Again, you must allow her the space she needs. One avenue that has helped many couples in this place is for

the husband to surrender his right to ask or initiate for a significant length of time. No, this isn't ideal, but in a perfect world a husband would not have a sexual addiction. Surrendering the right to initiate allows the wife the freedom to move towards her husband when she is able without the constant fear of having to say "no" again and again. It also helps the husband as being told "no" almost always feels like rejection. One place this may not be a good idea is for husbands who are extremely dismissive (see Chapter 12 on Secure and Insecure Attachment Styles) and tend to be "sexually anorexic." In other words, if your wife has always had to be the initiator, you may need to actively pursue her as a way of moving toward her heart. It is critical for you and your wife to talk about what she needs. Does she need you to allow her to initiate or does she need to feel wanted and pursued in that way?

### **Establishing Protective Boundaries**

Finally, you and your wife need to discuss what length of time you both need as a protective boundary if you have a slip or a crash. I don't believe it is possible to separate pornography from the marriage bed. When a man consumes pornography, he inevitably brings those images and ideas with him when he is with his wife. Many men have confessed in group and one-on-one sessions to playing the slide shows or movies in their heads while being physically intimate with their wife. That is one of the reasons many wives complain that they don't feel like their husband is really with them during sex. This is incredibly harmful to both partners and must be countered. Having lights on and conversation helps greatly but having time between acting out and being intimate is essential.

Therefore, we encourage couples to make a boundary that says something to the effect of "no physical intimacies until at least \_\_\_\_\_ days after the husband has confessed his crash to his wife." We recommend an absolute minimum of 7 days before resuming physical intimacy. Many wives will need much longer than this and their need for a felt sense of safety must be honored. This means a husband commits to not ask or try

---

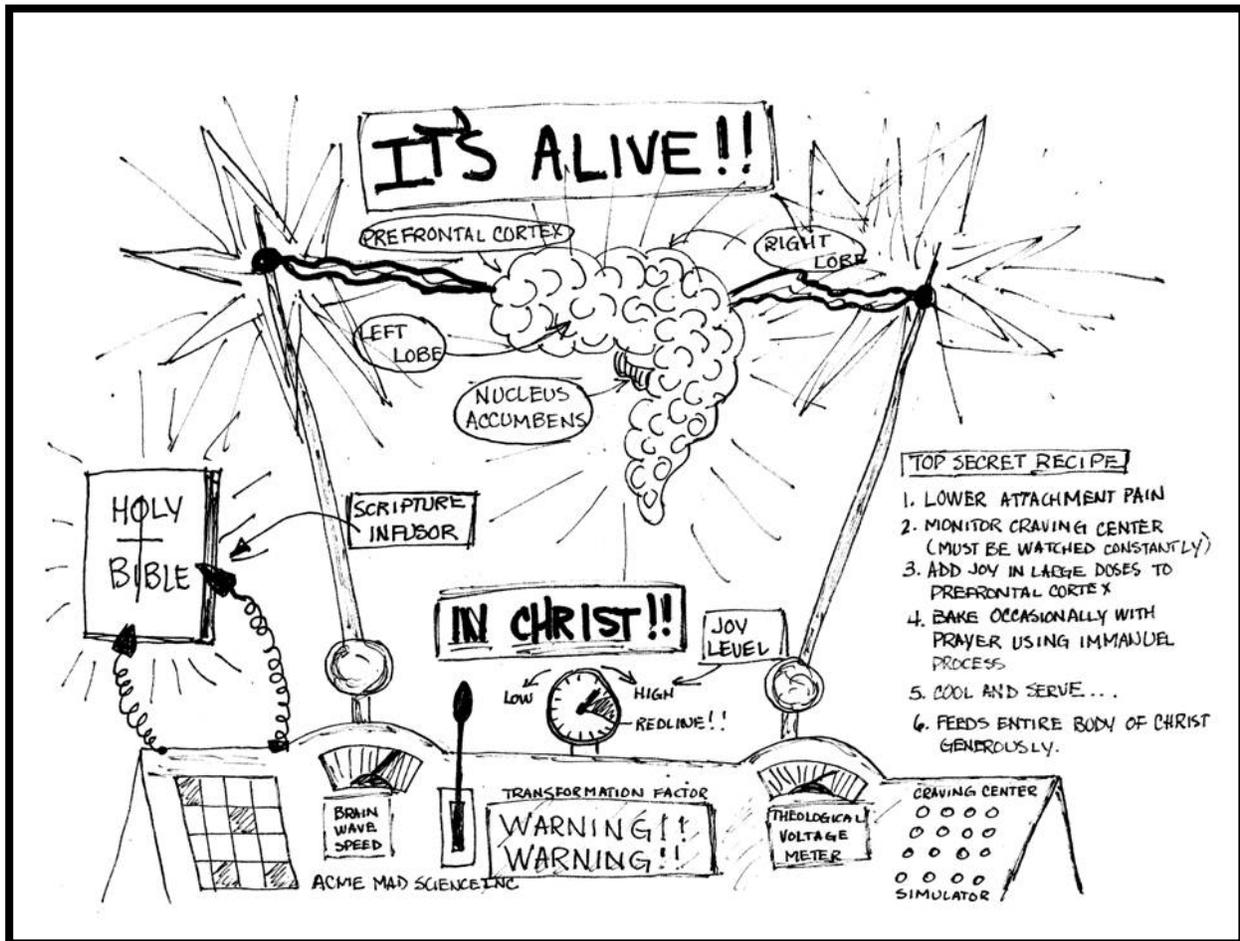
<sup>91</sup> Jim Wilder. "Recovery From Sexual Addiction" Video Conference

to initiate intimacies if he has had problems during the time they've determined. It also means he commits to "coming clean" if she begins initiating or asks for sexual intimacy. (Though, hopefully he is living out of his recovery plan that includes coming clean to his wife within 24 or 48 hours of a crash depending on what they have predetermined.)

This provides a layer of safety for the wife and also helps the husband in many ways. First, it helps him develop a healthier separation between making love with his wife and the pornographic failures of his past. Secondly, it helps with motivation. If a man knows a crash will close the bedroom door for a significant amount of time, he may think twice about clicking on that porn spam. It also has an added benefit in that it encourages the husband to confess things quicker. Remember, the longer secrets remain in the dark, the stronger their impact grows.

## It is Worth the Wait

Recovery of the marital bed and God's gift of sex is a very difficult and yet incredibly rewarding part of the process. Don't be dismayed if it doesn't happen quickly or if you make many blunders on the way. Our God is a redeeming God, and he can redeem the sexual relationship with your wife even though you have done great harm. It can indeed be *very good*. I pray you will discover more of the good gifts He has for you and for your wife in this arena.



## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. How has God's perspective on sex been presented to you in the past? How accurate of a picture have you been given?
2. In light of Eve being created as Adam's "helper," a word used primarily for God in the Old Testament, what does it mean for your wife to be your "helper?" How has that been twisted in your history?
3. Try to put yourself in Adam's place: What would it have been like to wake up and see Eve for the first time? When have you, or how can you, begin to see your wife this way?
4. What does God's design of our physical bodies say to you about His desire for you and your wife in the sexual arena?
5. How does the super-glue analogy explain some of your pain? (see Chapter 3 question #18)
6. How does it strike you to hear that God wants to use your sexual intimacy with your wife to teach you more of what intimacy with Him really is?
7. How committed are you to using your sexuality as a healing balm instead of an abusing club? What will that transformation require?

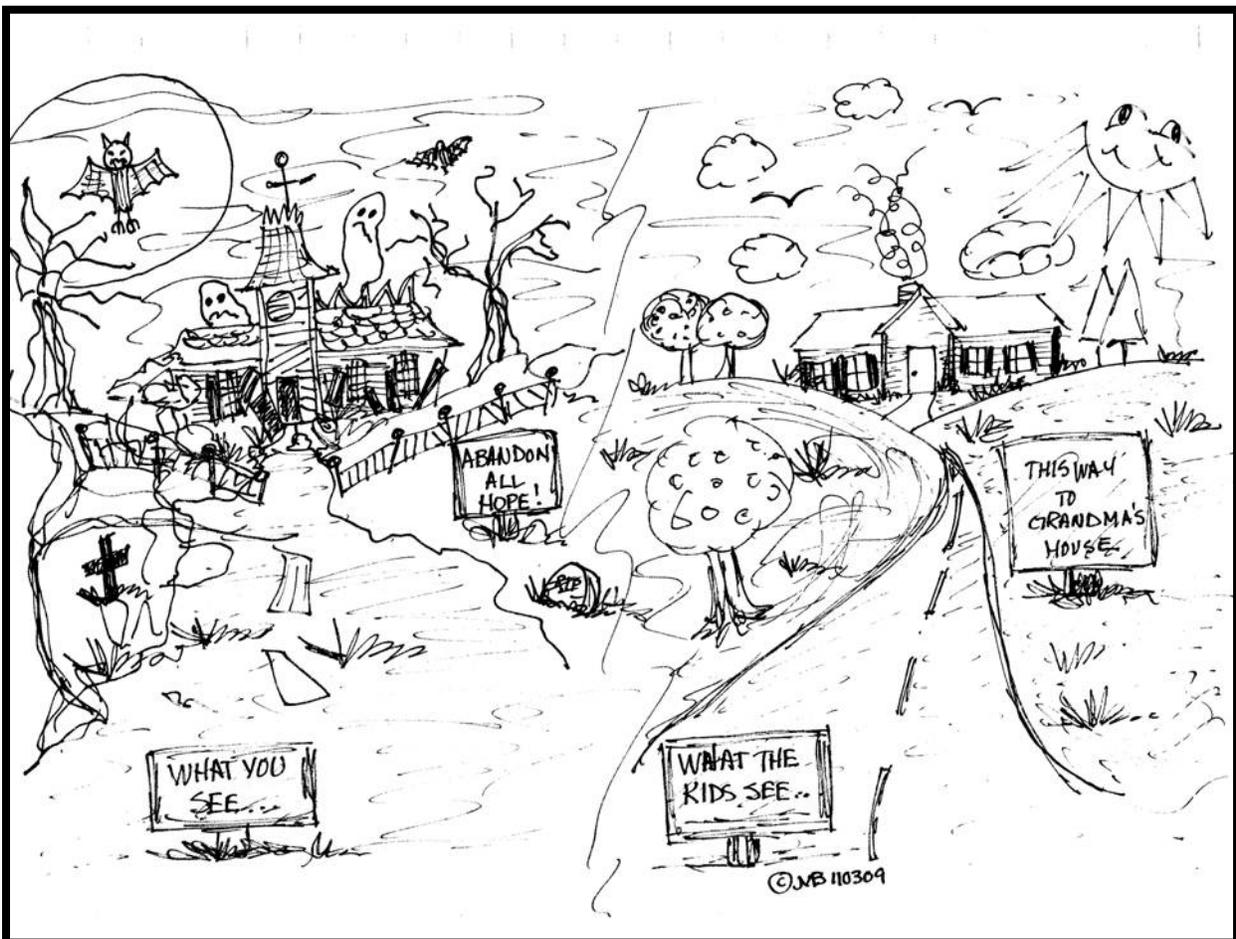
8. What has your wife communicated to you about her need for time and space when it comes to sexual intimacy? Do you believe she feels safe enough to tell you what she really needs?
  
9. What specific suggestions from this chapter do you need to put into practice when it comes to being physically intimate with your wife?
  
10. What is the difference between “making love” and “having sex?” How does that play out in your marriage?
  
11. Is the idea of using sex to share joy new to you? How does it strike you?
  
12. Who historically has initiated sexual intimacies? Do you see the value of giving up your right to ask or initiate for a time? What fears and concerns does that bring up for you? How long of time do you think you and your wife need where she is in control of your sexual relationship?
  
13. How long do you think you need after a crash before you can stay connected to your wife and not wander back into ugly places in your mind? Can you understand your wife’s need for this safety time?
  
14. What hopes and fears do you have concerning your sexual relationship with your wife?



## 20. HOLIDAYS, HELLADAYS & OTHER JOYOUS FAMILY OCCASIONS

If you have made any progress at all in your recovery, you have begun to realize many of your struggles and your sinful ways of relating to others have their genesis in your family of origin. No, I am not trying to make your family the enemy or trying to pull you away from them. (Unless of course they are actively sabotaging your healing or continuing to wound you in ways from which you are not able to protect yourself, your wife, or your children. If that is the case, you do need to separate yourself at least for a time while you heal.) It is essential, however, for you to recognize the source of much of your wounding and the models from which you learned to live and relate. This point becomes extremely magnified during holidays, family reunions and other times when “the family” spends time together.

I can remember as a teenager hearing on the news that depression, substance abuse and suicide attempts skyrocket during holidays and thinking, “It must be from people who don’t have family to be with during these special times.” Now that I am an adult in recovery, I realize it probably has even more to do with the reality that deeply wounded people spend extra time with those who hurt them in the first place. It is also magnified by the fact it is a holiday and is supposed to be “the hap... hap... happiest time of the year.” Therefore, they try to pretend everything is wonderful when in reality, it hurts like hell.



## **“Honey, Don’t Forget to Pack Your Battle Weapons”**

Every year in our recovery groups we try to remember to at least broach the subject of potential family landmines right before Thanksgiving and invariably some of the new people look at us like we are crazy. The look on their face is one of, “What do you mean this might be a difficult time for me? I get two days off from work. I get to eat my mom’s cherry cobbler, watch football, and just hang out with my family.”

Yes, those things may be true. However, what you are more likely to experience is the following: The stress of five hours in the car with your wife and two very hyper kids; three days and two nights in a three bedroom house with eight adults and seven children (at least one of which is guaranteed to throw up all over someone before the weekend is over); a spouse who resents being with your family (or vice versa); a sister who is so angry at her other brother she can do nothing but hide out in a back bedroom, sulk, swear, plot and even declare her desire to cause and watch his painful death. As if that weren’t bad enough, your mother will be running around a like a chicken with her head cut off trying to entertain her grandkids, pacify your sister, get your brother to apologize, cook the turkey and make dessert. Meanwhile, you, your dad, brother, and brother-in-law will sit in front of the TV watching football trying to pretend everything is just fine, and the only thing that upsets you is the fact your team is getting creamed.

Is it any wonder you find yourself as if caught in the tractor beam of the close-up shots of the cheerleaders and the beer commercials more than usual? Is it any wonder you feel an increasingly intense pull to disappear to your dad’s office in the back room to go online? It may even be you are so much in the fog you don’t notice the pull until after the crash. However, even if you notice it, Satan will make sure to hammer you with condemnation. “What’s wrong with you? It’s a holiday with your family and all you can do is think about acting out!” I don’t know about you, but for me, behind the laughter at the absurdity of the situation lies a lot of pain.

Remember, one of the primary roots of our sexual addiction is that we learned very early in life to use sex as a drug to relieve pain and take

us to a place of “comfortably numb.” Being with family is many things, but it is often painful. On top of the pain, there is the reality that you are out of your normal routine and away from many of your safeguards. On a typical day in recovery, you wake up, take a shower, pray for God’s strength to keep you sober for the day, spend a few minutes in recovery materials and make a phone call to a group member either before or while you drive to work. On a holiday you try to sleep in (of course that never works out because the kids are going strong at 6AM, your wife is stressed because she clearly hears your four-year old’s voice over the fray and she expects you to make sure he is OK and/or assumes he is the one causing the problems.) You can’t get your morning shower because the ladies have all the bathrooms tied up. You can’t work on your recovery materials because you don’t want anyone to know you have “issues.” Finally, the thought of making a phone call seems impossible because of the chaos of the house, and besides, you don’t want to bother anyone on their holiday.

So, with that lovely portrayal of the holiday experience, are you now beginning to see why they are such prime times for relapse? Whenever you spend time with your family of origin, salt will be rubbed in old wounds and recovery behaviors will be more difficult to maintain. Therefore, you must prepare yourself for these inevitabilities. Even if everyone in your family is in recovery, even if everyone supports your recovery, old patterns die hard, and things will be said and done that will trigger memories and pain from the past. This is especially amplified when, as is so often the case, no one but your wife even knows you are “in recovery.” (Don’t misunderstand me here. I’m not implying you must tell them because sometimes those in your family of origin are the most unsafe people in your world.)

### **Your Wife’s Family**

Realize many of these same struggles also exist when visiting your wife’s family of origin. Don’t assume that because you aren’t spending time with your family that your buttons will not be pushed. Most likely, your wife will struggle and her struggle will impact you. If your wife shuts down or pulls away, how will you respond? How do you handle your wife’s increased stress level? How do you handle

hearing and seeing the negative things that crush your wife's heart? Your family or hers—it really doesn't matter. The stresses and hurts are real. The question is not will it happen, but how will you handle it. Will you handle it in the isolation of your addictive and co-dependent patterns, or will you take the struggle to God and ask for his help and the support and encouragement of others?

### **The Battle Plans: Anticipate and Prepare**

So, what do you do? How do you maintain your sanity and your sobriety in the midst of the chaos? In some cases the battle is just too much and the best thing you can do for yourself and for your recovery is to “just say no.” Sometimes, especially in early recovery, the best thing you can do is simply say, “I'm sorry, Mom, but we aren't going to be able to come this year.” Yes, that would be an incredibly difficult thing for many to do, but it is better than reverting to the old cycles.

However, if you choose to go, or invite them to come to you, you need to make plans. You need to go into the holidays with clear battle plans for staying connected with those who will help you in your healing and for how to handle the chaos. Both my kids loved the movie “Home Alone.” Strangely enough, in the middle of the humor there is something we could all learn from Kevin. He knows the “bad guys” are coming at 9PM so just before they come the movie shows him with his “battle plan.” It isn't just a few ideas or thoughts, but a detailed map of how he plans to handle every imaginable situation. No, you can't prepare for everything. However, there are many things you know will happen. Having a plan for what to do when those things occur will at least lower the stress of making decisions on the spot. The remainder of this chapter presents a few suggestions for things to address before you leave, or they arrive.

#### **Plan 1: Establish Boundaries**

##### **Establish a firm time to arrive and leave.**

Make sure you and your wife are clear on when you will arrive and when you will leave. Don't even have the discussion about staying another night unless you can have it alone as a couple, and even then, if

there is any doubt, stay with your original plan. If you have the discussion in front of or with others in your family, it will make it incredibly difficult for you and/or your spouse to speak honestly about what you need.

##### **Don't be afraid to leave early if necessary.**

Again, this shouldn't be discussed in the presence of others. It might even help to have a code word or some way of letting your wife know you need to talk to her in private. Remember, your wife may also be the one who needs for you to leave early as it is often even more difficult for her. Give her permission ahead of time to be honest about what she feels and experiences.

##### **Give yourself some “buffer time.”**

Give yourself some “buffer time” on both sides of the time you spend with your family. If you work until 5:30 on Wednesday, hurry home, load up the kids and the luggage and rush to get to your parents by midnight, you will enter the weekend on an adrenaline rush but emotionally depleted. If you stay until Sunday afternoon, drive home with just enough time to get the kids to bed and then fall asleep yourself so you can be up at the crack of dawn to go into work, you are setting yourself up for problems. You need time to prepare and you need time to decompress.

#### **Plan 2: Take Care of Your Needs**

##### **Plan ahead for phone calls.**

Ask ahead of time in group who would be willing to receive calls so you can silence the voice of, “Don't bother anyone on the holiday.” Schedule a phone call. You aren't the only one in your recovery group who will be in that situation and having an “appointment” will also help you excuse yourself from whatever is happening so you can make the call. It is much easier to say, “Mom, I told a friend of mine who is struggling with some difficult things I would give him a call at 10 AM so I'll be in the back room for a while” then it is to try to find a good time to “disappear.”

**Carve out time to pray.**

Even if it means going in the bathroom, locking the door, and letting everyone assume you are taking care of other business. Find time to ask God for the strength, wisdom, and perseverance to handle the stress and not look for ways to medicate. A running dialogue prayer where you change your self-talk to a conversation with God is another form of prayer that is often incredibly helpful in these situations. God doesn't require every prayer to start with "Dear God" and end with "Amen."

**Plan 3: Set Realistic Expectations for Recovery Activities****Set aside time for recovery material.**

Yes, it would be good for you to spend an hour reading, journaling etc. However, you are much more likely to actually do something productive if you set a realistic goal of ten minutes. Don't buy the lie that ten minutes isn't enough time to accomplish anything. No, you won't make major headway or finish a chapter, but you might just get a tidbit that will help you stay focused and keep a recovery mindset.

**Have and maintain clear boundaries.**

Being with family does not make it okay to put aside your TV, movies, internet, and other boundaries. Prior to being with family would be a good time to go over your "Three Circle Plan" (Chapter 2) and your "Personal Recovery Plan" (Chapter 8) and remind yourself of the commitments you have made to yourself, your spouse and to the people in your recovery group. Your parent's unfiltered, unaccountable computer may be a huge pull for you. More than one man in recovery has stayed up late watching sports and found himself in a room by himself with a remote in his hand and late-night cable TV at his disposal. Others have had family members rent a movie with sexually explicit or implicit scenes and felt trapped because saying anything would appear judgmental or else expose their struggle. You must prepare yourself for these types of situations and

have an escape route in mind before the moment of crisis.

**Set aside time for journaling.**

Make a special point to spend time journaling both before and after your time with your family. Wrestle honestly with any feelings of anxiety, fear, and excitement before your trip. Reflect introspectively after you are home (or while on the trip) about moments where you felt yourself cringe, wince or want to fight or disappear. Allow God to take you on a journey of similar such times from your childhood. Ask him to reveal the wounds inflicted on you and the vows you made in response. While often painful, the process can be incredibly redemptive. It could also be helpful to share these insights with someone from your group, a counselor and possibly your wife.

**Plan 4: Keep You and Your Family Your Top Priority****Don't try to fix the world.**

Don't try to confront, fix or even challenge your family's craziness unless you have real clarity God has asked you to do so and that he is asking you to do it now. Many times, people in recovery believe they must share what they have learned with their family, and the fact that everyone is together seems like a perfect opportunity. However, our experience is that initial conversations with parents and even siblings often result in the one in recovery feeling attacked, dismissed and/or even blamed for the abuse and/or neglect. There may come a day where God asks you to confront your parents, but don't assume that is today. Those discussions are generally more effective and healing both for you and for them after you have spent much time processing things yourself. Don't assume your family really wants to know the ways they failed to love you. Some do, but they are the rare exception. Most people respond negatively whenever someone breaks the fragile glass of their denial even when it is with stones of truth. If and when God calls you to throw a stone of truth, you will need to be in a place

where you have the strength and faith to turn to God to protect you. Otherwise, the broken glass and flying debris may slice you open and leave you with even more gaping and bloody wounds. Just as you would not allow a four-year-old to help you clean up after breaking a glass pitcher, don't assume you can pick up the pieces from your parents crumbling glass house of denial. You need time to heal and to grow and to experience God's divine fathering in your life. They didn't handle your heart well the first time, so don't expect them to suddenly be capable of hearing the truth now.

**Protecting yourself and your family is your #1 priority.**

Put your sanity above your fear of hurting others or making them angry. You must be willing to stand up for yourself. You must decide you are worth doing whatever you need to do to stay healthy and not put yourself in dangerously vulnerable positions. Your mother might have her feelings hurt if you step out for thirty minutes to make a phone call, but that is her problem and not yours. Your family might be angry with you if you leave on Saturday instead of Sunday but again your responsibility is to do what is best for you,

your wife, and your children: it is not to make your extended family OK by pretending their craziness is normal.

**Plan 5: The Most Important Plan of All: Join Hands in the Fight**

As we end this chapter, how fitting it is for the final paragraph to address the most important aspect of preparing for time with family: **read, discuss and pray about this chapter with your wife.** Commit with her to fight *for* one another and not *with* one another. One of Satan's primary strategies in this battle is to "divide and conquer." If you stand together, your strength isn't doubled it increases tenfold.

"For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife." Your wife is not the enemy. She isn't even simply an ally. She is the soldier fighting beside you in the foxhole. She needs you and you need her. The bullets flying all around you are real and they do incredible damage. Fight together. Dress one another's wounds when hit and whatever else you do, don't start shooting at each other. It is hard to miss at that distance and the results are gruesome. Remember, she is not your enemy and fighting for your wife's heart and for your marriage pays incredible dividends.

## **Application & Journaling Questions**

1. Do you feel a need to defend your family of origin as you travel on the road of recovery? If yes, how and why?
2. Describe any ways you can see your family of origin continuing to wound you or sabotage your recovery?
3. Take ten minutes and simply write whatever comes to your mind as you try to remember the last time you were with your family of origin. Don't edit your thoughts, just write whatever you remember.

4. What do you look forward to about times with your family?
  
5. What do you dread?
  
6. How does the paragraph describing what you are most likely to experience parallel your past experiences with your family? What about your wife's family?
  
7. Describe a time when you have had a crash with sexual sin either while visiting family or right before or right after. What connections, triggers and wounds can you identify?
  
8. In light of this chapter, what level of risk do you see in your next family gathering?
  
9. What does your family know about your struggle and your recovery? What does your wife's family know?
  
10. If your family knows about your struggle and recovery, how have they responded?
  
11. How do you think those who don't know about your struggle would respond if you told them your story? What are you afraid they will do or say, etc?

12. In the first column, list as many things as you can think of someone from your family typically says or does to you that feel like salt rubbed in a wound. In the second column, describe what you can do to protect yourself or to respond in a healthy manner.

Salt	Plan/Response

13. In what ways can having a clear plan for when you arrive and when you leave will help you during your time with your family?
  
14. What circumstances, problems, etc. can you foresee that would make leaving early a wise decision?
  
15. How difficult will it be for you to take a break and make a phone call when you are with your family? What can you do to make it easier?
  
16. When will you pray while at your family event?
  
17. What goals do you have for recovery materials?
  
18. After reviewing your boundary worksheets in light of being with your family, what extra precautions do you need to take? With whom are you going to share these prior to going to your event?
  
19. What “buffer time” do you have built into your trip?
  
20. What will motivate you to journal before and after your trip?
  
21. What hopes or pressures do you feel about confronting or talking with your family about what you are learning in recovery?

22. Describe any guilt you would feel if you decided it wasn't a good time for you to spend the holiday with your family. Is that feeling a valid guilt (conviction) or is it a "false guilt" (condemnation)?
  
23. How do the issues in this chapter play out in regards to spending time with your wife's family?
  
24. If you spend time with your wife's family and she shuts down or pulls away from you, how have you responded in the past? How do you want to respond?
  
25. How do you handle your wife's increased stress level? How do you handle hearing and seeing the negative things that crush your wife's heart?
  
26. In the past, how have you seen Satan's attempts to "divide and conquer" you and your wife at family events? How can you counter that attack on your next visit?

## CONCLUSION: WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

---

Congratulations! You have made it to the end of this manual. If you have read everything and answered most of the questions you have accomplished much. However, the work of recovery is far from finished. In fact, the longer I am in recovery the more convinced I am that recovery and sanctification should be considered synonyms. I have recovered much, yet I can now see areas of my life I could not see before that need recovery just as desperately as my sexual addiction did when I started this journey.

Does that mean my work has been in vain? Absolutely not! I will not be fully healed until I see Jesus face to face and have been transformed “in the twinkling of an eye.” However, I have experienced significant healing and I will continue to press on the healing journey until I die. I pray you have made similar observations and a similar commitment.

There are many good books, workbooks and recovery programs that can aid you in your continued journey. I would encourage you to go back to the “Recovery Goals” and “Resources” listed at the back of Chapter 2 for ideas of what to do next.

I would also encourage you to come back to this workbook periodically. Many of the things you have written are dynamic in nature and need to be revised and tweaked on a regular basis. Also, as you grow and as you heal, you become more able to hear and understand difficult things. If you come back and re-read this material and your responses in six months or a year, you will undoubtedly see things you missed the first time through. You will also be amazed at what God has done in your heart. For the first few years of our groups, we worked through Ted Roberts’ *Pure Desire* and the first three times we finished it, we just started over at the beginning. I was amazed each time through how many things seemed “new” and significant not just to the new guys in the group but even to me.

However, here are three critical thoughts I want to leave with you. First, stay connected to God. He is the source of life and the source of our recovery. Sometimes individuals find just enough healing that they learn how to not act out in the ways that offend themselves the most. They then allow themselves to get so busy with life they lose the intimacy with God they discovered in their desperate fight against their addiction. Have the courage to see the horror of your secondary addictions and other “BEEPS” that also require God’s divine intervention in your life.

Second, stay connected with your brothers in recovery. The best friends I have in life are the men I’ve journeyed with in the basement of New Hope Fellowship. I can’t imagine what life would be without regular phone calls, lunches, and face-to-face interactions with them. I’m a men’s group junkie for life because I will always need my brothers in Christ no matter how much I grow, and no matter how much healing God brings in my life.

Third, allow God to show you who he wants you to mentor on this path of recovery. I learned a lot as I tried to do recovery for me. I’ve learned even more as a sponsor, group leader and now recovery director. It is amazingly convicting when someone shares a struggle and you hear yourself telling them what you know they need to do, yet realize you aren’t doing it yourself. Yes, it is tempting to hide in that place and act as if you have it mastered. However, it is also an opportunity to allow the conviction to bring confession, repentance and a change of your actions, thoughts, and behaviors.

Thank you for taking the time to read, and hopefully work through, my multi-decade labor of love. If it has been one tenth of the blessing in your life that it has been in mine to write it, then I know God has given you a precious gift.

Because of the resurrection,



Darrell Brazell