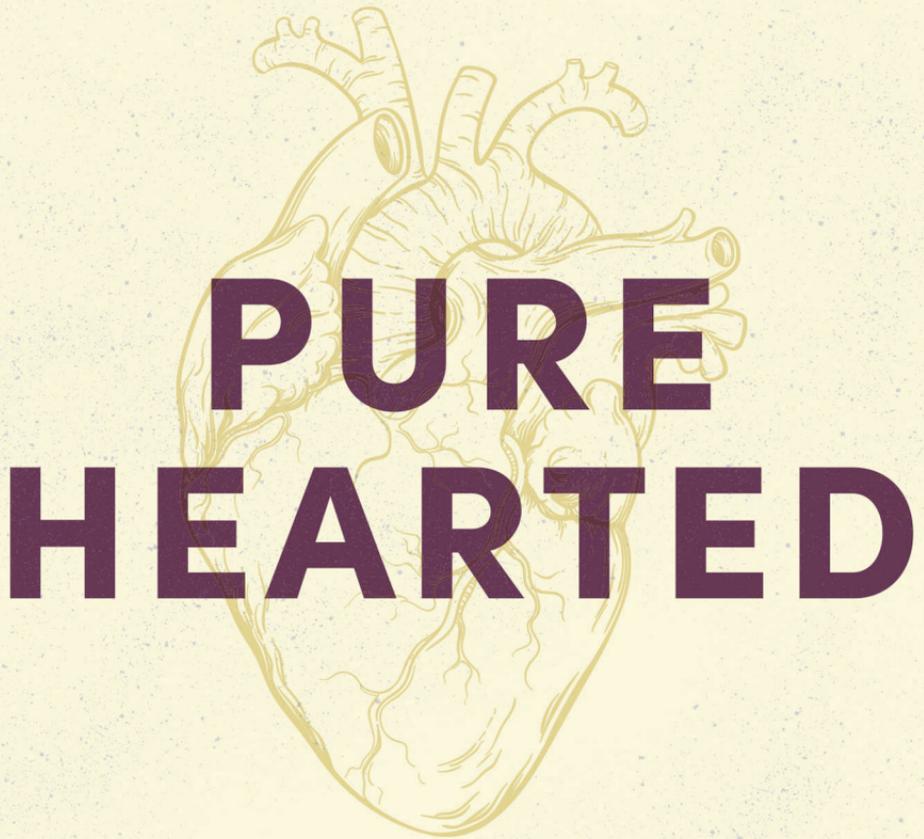


MARK ONGLEY

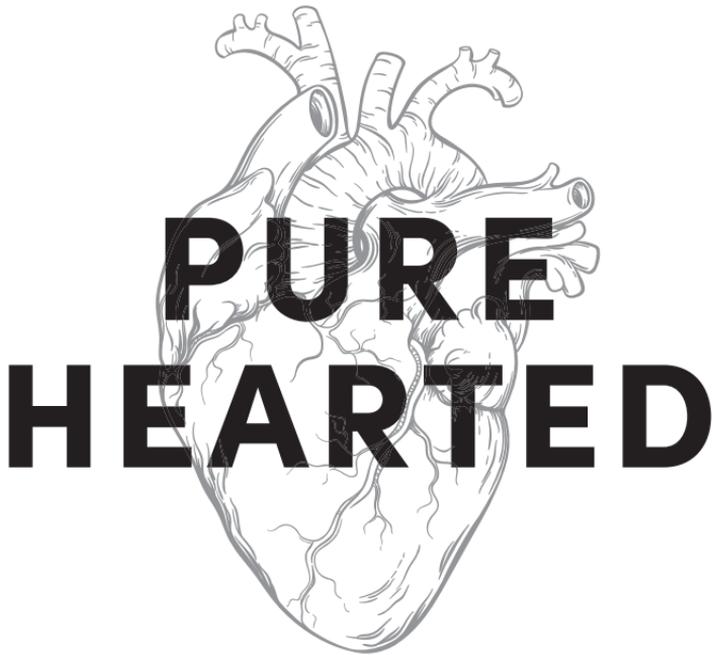


**PURE
HEARTED**

**BANDING TOGETHER
FOR SEXUAL WHOLENESS**

**PURE
HEARTED**

MARK ONGLEY



BANDING TOGETHER
FOR SEXUAL WHOLENES



Copyright 2021 by Mark Ongley

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without prior written permission, except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles.

Scripture quotations unless otherwise noted are from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™ All rights reserved worldwide.

Printed in the United States of America

Cover design by Nate Farro
Page design by PerfectType, Nashville, Tennessee

Ongley, Mark

Pure hearted : banding together for sexual wholeness / Mark Ongley. – Franklin, Tennessee : Seedbed Publishing, ©2021.
pages; cm.

ISBN 9781628248333 (paperback)

ISBN 9781628248340 (Mobi)

ISBN 9781628248357 (ePub)

ISBN 9781628248364 (uPDF)

1. Pornography—Religious aspects—Christianity. 2. Sex addiction—Religious aspects—Christianity. 3. Sex—Biblical teaching.
4. Sex—Religious aspects—Christianity. 5. Sexual ethics. I. Title.

BV4597.6 O54 2021

241/.667

2021931709



SEEDBED PUBLISHING
Franklin, Tennessee
seedbed.com

Contents

Introduction	vii
Banding Together for Purity: The First Meeting	3

Cycle One: A Vision for Wholeness

Lesson 1: God's Good Design	17
Lesson 2: Puppy Dogs and Predators	27
Lesson 3: Fantasy and Imagination	35

Cycle Two: A Perspective on Slipups

Lesson 4: The Box, the Path, and the Circus	45
Lesson 5: The Dynamics of Adultery	53
Lesson 6: Feeding Circus Monkeys	61

Cycle Three: A Promise of Victory

Lesson 7: The Impact of Abuse	71
Lesson 8: Restoration and Grace	79
Lesson 9: Where to Draw Lines	87

Cycle Four: A Vision for the Church

Lesson 10: The Elephant and the Scapegoat	97
Lesson 11: Making Church a Sanctuary	105
Lesson 12: The Importance of Welcoming the Wilde	115
Lesson 13: When Will This Ever End?	123

Appendixes

Appendix A: Some Thoughts on Masturbation	133
Appendix B: A Perspective on Victory	137
Appendix C: The Divine Office for Sexual Strugglers	141

Introduction

It was a warm summer night. I was a twelve-year-old, longing to step into manhood, and quite unable to sleep. Suddenly, light poured in through the window on the south wall. For some reason, the curtains had been left open, and I knew the light must be coming from our neighbor's house.

Our houses were just fifteen feet apart. Rising from bed, I peered through the window to see the open bedroom window of the neighbor girl—a blooming teen about to enter her senior year. Like mine, her window and curtains were open because of the warm summer air.

She walked past her window briefly. I could tell she was getting ready for bed. My heart raced. But because our windows were not directly across from each other, the angle of view limited what I could see. I waited for what seemed like forever, hoping for that forbidden glimpse. Eventually the light went out.

Greatly disappointed, I slipped back into bed. But my mind wandered to vague scenes of intimacy and pleasure. At that point

in my life, I'd not seen explicit porn and knew very little of what to visualize, but I knew my heart was longing for something.

The next night I laid awake, hoping to see the familiar light streaming through my window. Dad and Mom finished in the bathroom, shut their door, and soon all was quiet. I waited. And then, at last, the light came on. I jumped up to the window. But again, only a few fleeting moments of her moving through her nightly routine. If I went to my sister's room, I reasoned, I could see straight into this girl's bedroom!

My sister had moved away, and her empty room was just a few creaky steps down the hall. Walking as softly as I could, I entered her room and gently pried an opening between two blades of the venetian blinds. But the girl was not there. The fear of being caught by my parents combined with my anticipation was exhilarating. But where was she? Spooked by a creak in the house, I quickly retreated to my room and gently latched the door. But again, I gazed through my window. Where was she? And why was I even waiting? Did I really expect her to walk naked in front of her window? She was probably changing in the bathroom.

Then it happened. I gasped as she walked by her window bare from the waist down. My only glimpse was her behind. *If only I was in the other room!*

As quickly as I dared, I slipped out of my room and into my sister's. But before I pried open the blinds, the neighbor's light went out. That was it! End of the show. But not the end of the story. My mind began to play it out over and over and over, adding a few details—at least the details that I, in my ignorance, could muster.

Kicking the Habit

That first glimpse of nakedness was mild compared to the eye-fel most kids are receiving today. The Internet has opened a window to a world of pornography with a just few accidental clicks on a screen. Most studies reveal the average first exposure to be at the age of eleven. By age fourteen, 94 percent of teens will have had far more than just a glimpse.¹

No doubt you, the reader, at this point in your life, have taken in far more forbidden views than you care to mention. For many people, childhood curiosity has grown into an obsession. Eventually, if left unchecked, it can become an addiction. Could this be true for you?

Whether your issues with lust are an occasional entanglement or a maddening bondage, this resource is designed to help you find freedom. In the past two decades, much has been written about the lure of porn and its addictive nature. A few defining principles have emerged that apply to all who struggle.

First, you cannot kick this on your own. For lasting freedom, you need some fellow travelers. And this is not news for sincere followers of Jesus Christ. Paul's letters are replete with admonitions to love, encourage, and serve one another. Basic Christian living was meant to be done arm in arm. This is especially true when seeking God's grace to get free of addictive behaviors.

1. See <https://www.njherald.com/lifestyle/20180408/kids-are-seeing-porn-sooner-than-adults-think>.

I have adapted some questions from a tried-and-true small-group resource of the distant past. In the 1700s, John Wesley formed groups of seven or fewer, and called them bands. As people banded together, they opened up the deepest secrets of their hearts and found God's grace flowing in from others. In this way, they found strength to live a pure life.

The band approach is making a comeback. Seedbed Publishing has their own adaptation of this model, scaling the numbers back to three to five folks, and using their Discipleship Bands app and the Daily Text as a hub for interaction. In fact, some of you may currently be in one of those bands.

The size of your group when using this material may be as few as two and as many as five. The key factor is confidentiality. Do you feel safe enough with the men or women in your group to open up fully about your sexual temptations and stumbles?

Another finding that is obvious from a believer's perspective is that *sexual obsession cannot be kicked without help from God*. In fact, Patrick Carnes, the leading psychologist on sexual issues, said, "healthy, successful sex and a well-developed spiritual life are inextricably linked."² This resource points you heavenward for God's touch of grace.

That heavenward gaze begins with seeking God daily through prayer and meditation. Don't underestimate this practice! One

2. Patrick Carnes, *Sexual Anorexia: Overcoming Sexual Self-Hatred* (Center City, MN: Hazelden Publishing, 1997), Location 376.

counselor told me that the most helpful practice in his recovery was using the divine office—an organized routine of morning and evening prayers, Scripture readings, and affirmations.

Yes, it may be out of your tradition to read written prayers and to recite creeds, but it is a useful tool for positioning people in God's transforming light and for correcting the worldly distortions they have regarding sex. The Scripture passages, both morning and evening, are chosen to correspond with each lesson's content. (See appendix C, "The Divine Office for Sexual Strugglers.")

Finally, as a counselor who has worked with sexual strugglers for more than fifteen years, I know the following to be true: *You cannot completely kick this without going deeper.* Root issues and past experiences need to be addressed. To that end, the practice of formational prayer has been absolutely transformational for many. Therefore, with each lesson, you will find instruction on how to lead each other through "prayer keys" in order to find greater freedom from your struggles.

Keep in mind that *kicking habits becomes easier once you reach ninety days clean.* Recent research is proving what alcoholics have known all along. Their mantra for newcomers has always been, "Get in 90 AA meetings in 90 days."

The Format

The design of this book is to facilitate an accountability band of three to five people of the same gender. If one member is attracted

to the same sex, that should be fine. Temptation is temptation. In fact, the person with same-sex attraction might find it very healing to receive acceptance and love from hetero members of the band. But having more than one person of the same gender with such attractions will obviously complicate things.

Whether this is a new group or an already established discipleship band, once you begin this ninety-day journey, it should be a closed group. No newbies. And everyone should fully commit to the ninety days. This makes for a group where people feel safe enough to share from the heart.

This book contains thirteen lessons. If done weekly, of course, this will last a full ninety days. If you want to continue beyond that, the final lesson has suggestions for moving forward. It is likely someone will slip up along the way, so continuing the band will help everyone make it through the ninety-day window.

The Content

You may have noticed that the book is divided into four cycles, each one reflecting progress on your journey. Scattered throughout the cycles you will find general principles, theology, and specific sexual issues. These will be addressed in the sections titled “Windows of Grace and Truth.” Here’s the rationale.

First of all, let’s be frank. The church in general has done a poor job of addressing sexual issues. In fact, our wranglings over homosexuality have pretty well landed us in a ditch, and the mud

has spattered us all. The principles found in this text help to get us back on the path and moving in the right direction to overcome our addictive behaviors.

Principles to guide us, yes, but why theology? Because the cultural landscape has been shifting dramatically beneath our feet since 2015. That year began with the film adaptation of the runaway best seller *Fifty Shades of Grey*. Four months later, the Supreme Court legalized same-sex marriage. And that very same month, Olympian and reality TV star Bruce Jenner transitioned to Caitlyn. Since that pivotal year, chaos has ensued, and the distortions spilling out from this cultural shift feed sexual addiction. A clear and robust understanding of God's design for our sexuality is critical to finding freedom.

And you may find it odd that a resource geared toward addictive issues takes time to look at sexual abuse, adultery, and other matters. But the overlap on these issues is significant.

Much of the content in the "Windows of Grace and Truth" sections parallels my other book, *Into the Light: Healing Sexuality in Today's Church*. This text, however, stands on its own two feet. If you want to understand more fully the ground those feet are planted on, however, you can order the main text at www.seedbed.com.

Getting Started

So how does one get this rolling? First with prayer. Obsession with sex and pornography is entangled with darkness. There are

forces that don't want you or anyone else to get clean. And so pray that God will bring together the right handful of members for this band. The ninety-day journey will be intense. It is not for the faint of heart.

Familiarize yourself with the content of the first meeting so that you can make clear to the others the level of commitment required. And once they have prayerfully committed to the process, order copies of this book, and schedule the first meeting. Prior to getting together, you all should have read this introduction and the section titled "Banding Together for Purity: The First Meeting."

Windows of Opportunity

One warm evening, King David was peering through a window of sorts. While walking on his rooftop, his eyes caught the form of a lady taking a bath. Soon she was taken to his bedroom. And after murdering her husband, she was taken as his wife.

Their son Solomon was heir to the throne, and he seemed to have also inherited Dad's proclivity to sexual sin. But as king of a growing empire, Solomon could marry any woman who caught his eye—and he did! Hundreds of them.

If the words of Proverbs 1–9 came from his pen, you can see evidence that he wrestled with his sexual obsessions. Not wanting to pass them on to his own sons, he repeatedly warned them about

adultery. Chapter 7 describes his late-night musings as he peered out his own window. Hear the pleading of a father as you read these words to his sons:

Say to wisdom, "You are my sister,"
and call insight your intimate friend,
that they may keep you from the loose woman,
from the adulteress with her smooth words.

For at the window of my house
I looked out through my lattice,
and I saw among the simple ones,
I observed among the youths,
a young man without sense,

passing along the street near her corner,
taking the road to her house
in the twilight, in the evening,
at the time of night and darkness.

Then a woman comes toward him,
decked out like a prostitute, wily of heart.
She is loud and wayward;
her feet do not stay at home;
now in the street, now in the squares,
and at every corner she lies in wait.

She seizes him and kisses him,
and with impudent face she says to him:

“Come, let us take our fill of love until morning;
let us delight ourselves with love.
For my husband is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey.
He took a bag of money with him;
he will not come home until full moon.”

With much seductive speech she persuades him;
with her smooth talk she compels him.

Right away he follows her,
and goes like an ox to the slaughter,
or bounds like a stag toward the trap
until an arrow pierces its entrails.

He is like a bird rushing into a snare,
not knowing that it will cost him his life.

(Prov. 7:4–13, 18–23)

Have you been that ox led to the slaughter? While sexual obsession has not cost you your life, it has likely damaged your marriage, contaminated your sexual intimacy, and plagued you with self-contempt. If it has become public knowledge, it has robbed you of respect from your children, friends, and peers.

Is your room darkened by despair? Is it cluttered with broken promises and unkept resolutions? Look carefully. Can

you see light coming through your window? It could very well be the light of God, ready to liberate you from the prison cell of sexual obsession. Don't pass this vulnerability on to your kids and grandkids. Seize this opportunity, and band together with a few trusted friends.

This page intentionally left blank

**PURE
HEARTED**

This page intentionally left blank

Banding Together for Purity: The First Meeting

N*inety days.* That's the goal. For most of you, it is the goal for abstaining from pornography. Others of you may struggle with lust, sexual fantasies, or obsessive masturbation. For some, trips to clubs, bookstores, or hookups may be the thing. Regardless of the obsession, you are invited to take the journey.

Thirteen weeks. Can you hang on that long? Some of you have tried to stop before. Your secret or not-so-secret behaviors have been following you into your bedroom, hindering your ability to respond to your spouse, and leaving him or her feeling rejected.

Three months. It can seem like an eternity when you are in the fog of obsession. But it's really just a small slice of your lifespan to gain control over an obsession that could eventually rob you of reputation, honor, and true intimacy.

In fact, get this: If you can make it through the first ninety days, the rest of the journey just might get easier!

Recent neurological research reveals that significant rewiring of the brain takes place in the first ninety days of recovery. And many are finding that abstinence for ninety days not only lessens the pull of pornography, but restores one's ability to respond properly to one's spouse. Instead of needing edgier and kinkier visual extremes, they have been able to recalibrate, finding sufficient arousal from the one they love.

There are three elements which can enable you to power through these thirteen weeks:

- Connection with God
- Connection with Others
- Resolving Deeper Issues

Connection with God

Solar panels. Don't you love them? Maybe it's because I am always looking for ways to save a buck, but I think it's great to power my calculator and other small stuff from the God-given energy of the sun. No need for batteries or outlets. You simply have to aim the panel toward the light.

There is a God-given source of energy to help you power through these ninety days: his sustaining grace. God's Holy Spirit enters each one who has placed faith in Jesus Christ. But just like solar panels, we need to position ourselves before his healing light on a daily basis to receive his enabling. While there are many

ways to turn our hearts heavenward, the tried and proven means have always been Scripture and prayer.

Yep, I can already hear sighs, groans, and moans. A few of you have been battling addiction for years and have been told to pray harder and read your Bible more. And you've found it a bit like a stationary exercise bike: furious pedaling and much fatigue, but the scenery stays the same. I get that.

But for these ninety days, I'd like you to make a subtle shift in how you view daily devotions. Simply think of it as putting out solar panels.

Some days the spiritual atmosphere around you and the clouds of your own emotions will make it seem as though you are gaining nothing. But grace is seeping through those clouds. Some days, however, the clouds part and the beams of his presence will noticeably fill your heart with hope and energy.

If you have a satisfying practice of daily devotions which readily connects you with God, great. If your intake of Scripture and prayer are providing conscious contact, simply try putting the panels out both morning and evening.

Note: Many are finding an ancient practice known as the divine office a tremendous means of looking Godward, and so I've included appendix C, "The Divine Office for Sexual Strugglers." This will probably be out of your tradition and comfort zone, but I encourage you to try it for at least two reasons. Let's start with the hardest to swallow:

Written Prayers: Yeah, not my tradition either. But these prayers are written in first-person plural: “we” and “our” instead of “I,” “me,” and “mine.” This is healing tonic for the narcissistic, self-absorbed soul, and it unites us with the prayers of people around the world. This is subtle but liberating. And having a routine of the same prayers day by day provides a much-needed spiritual rhythm.

You are encouraged to pray them slowly and from the heart. Like a well-chosen greeting card which captures our sentiments for the one we love, these prayers capture our soul’s deepest needs and faintest groanings.

The Psalms: The divine office keeps our nose in the Psalms throughout the month. These are sacred prayers that point our panels heavenward both morning and evening.

The Psalms have been the prayer book of God’s people ever since the days of King David. Jesus quoted from them frequently. Even while languishing on the cross, he reached for Psalm 22:1 to put words to his anguish: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

The struggles of the psalmists will echo your own at times. In fact, the scriptures chosen parallel your journey through these ninety days. And as you read with an open heart, God’s grace will seep through the clouds.¹

1. Have a smart phone? Many discipleship bands are finding Seedbed’s Daily Text a tremendous resource for daily interaction with Scripture that allows conversation among band members. See <https://www.seedbed.com/daily-text-subscribe>.

Connection with Others

We need each other. That's just the way it is. Yes, our culture exalts the hardened individuals who, through grit and determination, climb to the top of the heap. But the reality is that the greatest triumphs require a team.

Jesus had the Twelve, three of whom became especially close. Paul had Barnabas, and then others. Moses had Aaron. David had his thirty mighty men. And you, my friend, need a band of brothers (or sisters).

There is a healing and empowering dynamic that arises when two or three open their hearts to each other in the name of Jesus. First of all, Jesus promised to be right in the midst of such a meeting (see Matthew 18:20). And Christians have found much grace when two or three live life together with transparency.

Such groups were the initial building blocks of John Wesley's Methodist movement. These "bands," as Wesley called them, were three to seven people of the same gender who asked penetrating questions about their inner life. The following are an adaptation of his questions, shaped for our purposes as a band:

- What sexual sins have you committed since we last met?
- What temptations did you face successfully?
- How did you overcome those temptations?
- Did you do anything questionable that you are not sure was sinful?

Okay, I think I heard a collective gulp! Not so sure you want to pry open your secrets just yet?

While our weekly questions are based upon Wesley's model, it takes a little time to develop trust and to sense safety in a new group. This week, simply take note of these questions. Take the plunge only when you are ready. Perhaps in the next two weeks you will feel safe enough to entirely open the vault.

Yes, you can lie about your secrets. You've probably become quite good at lying, actually. But here's a simple question: *Do you want to get free?* If so, honesty with one or two others is a must. How can anyone help you if you continue to keep secrets?

This is the reason for closing the group to newcomers, limiting it to no more than five, and requiring take-it-to-the-grave confidentiality. Such an atmosphere provides the safety needed for full disclosure. And as you hear each other's secrets, there's a huge need to be compassionate and free of judgment.

In his excellent book *Surfing for God: Discovering the Divine Desire Beneath Sexual Struggle*, Michael John Cusick identifies three types of accountability. "Cop" accountability, as the name implies, is all about finding the facts and "arresting" behavior. This, of course, can lead to shame and discourage honesty.

"Coach" accountability is a bit better. In this approach, each one in the band helps the others by spotting weaknesses and sharing how they themselves have found improvement.

But what we are aiming for in these bands is “cardiologist” accountability—opening up from the heart. Not a cop standing over you, demanding you fall in line. Not simply a coach who can come off as a know-it-all. But fellow students of the heart, each seeking God’s enabling.²

We know that as we confess our sins to God we find forgiveness. But James 5:16 urges us to confess our sins to one other “so that you may be healed.” Healing that transforms—that’s what we long for. View these questions as a time for confessing and finding healing, not for dumping and finding shame.

The part of the brain that is stimulated by sexual arousal is the very part that relates with people. This is a key reason for needing a band. Deep connection with others will help fill this aching void!

So for the first ninety days, *connect!* Every day! Whether it’s a text, call, e-mail, or lunch meeting, find a way to connect daily with members of the band. In fact, search your app store for “discipleship bands” for helpful tools. And make sure initiating contact isn’t falling on just one person.

Finally, if possible, meet in person weekly to go through the questions and prayer keys. If schedules or geography get in the way, meet via Skype or Zoom. Contrary to John Wayne, Frank

2. Michael John Cusick, *Surfing for God: Discovering the Divine Desire Beneath Sexual Struggle* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012).

Sinatra, or other cultural icons, we cannot do this alone. We can't power our way through this. We need each other!

Resolving Deeper Issues

As a follower of Jesus Christ, you already know that the world has taken God's beautiful design for sexuality and turned it into a commodity. Distorted messages about sex permeate our culture.

What is not so obvious is how deeply this has contaminated our thinking as believers. It doesn't help that the church has been crippled by an awkward timidity on all subjects sexual. That is why these lessons include teaching on basic principles and theology to prompt us to discuss God's design for our sexuality.

In addition to equipping your minds, each chapter in this workbook will also equip you with prayer keys to help you begin to resolve past issues and connect you more deeply with God. Like a ring of keys to keep with you throughout the day, these prayers can be pulled out and used as each occasion requires.

Keep in mind that some of you may need to pursue counseling from someone trained in formational prayer. Others will find it helpful to locate a twelve-step fellowship to address their past. If difficulties continue, seek out a certified sex addiction therapist.

But the content found in these lessons and the use of prayer keys will be sufficient for many to make it through the ninety days and to continue on the path of freedom.

“No Man Left Behind”

If you’ve watched the movie *Black Hawk Down* or a similar military flick, you are familiar with this slogan. No one is to be left behind on the battlefield.

As a band of sisters or brothers, we are making a commitment to leave no one behind in their battles. And so this group may need to go more than three months in order for each one to reach his/her ninety days.

Are you ready?

Ninety days. Thirteen weeks. Three months.

It is a window of opportunity for significant rewiring which, by God’s grace, will enable you to walk in greater victory over sexual temptations.

Band Discussion Questions

- What in this lesson stood out to you?
- Why does joining this band interest you at this time in your life?
- Have you been a part of similar groups in the past? How were they helpful? Or not helpful?
- What has been the most difficult challenge when it comes to putting out spiritual solar panels on a daily basis? What can be done differently so that you have more of God’s grace to reach the goal of ninety days?

- What is the best way for us to connect with each other on a daily basis?

Prayer Key: Surrender of Sexuality

As this first meeting comes to an end, take a minute for everyone to silently read the following prayer. Then ask if everyone is ready to pray it out loud together.

And be sure to write down your starting date for your ninety days!

Lord Jesus Christ,

Thank you for the many times you have forgiven me for my sexual sins. Your grace and mercy are amazing. And yet I still struggle. I cannot seem to get free. I need your intervention!

Give me strength! Protect me from the evil one! Meet me day by day!

By your grace, I surrender to your purposes for my sexuality as defined in your Word. I renounce the world's message that sexual fulfillment is a right. I refuse to meet my emotional needs through ungodly relationships and sexual activities. I will look to you as the Source for the fulfillment of my desires and only to my spouse as the resource you have provided.

Enable me to reach ninety days free from viewing pornography, masturbating to fantasies, or meeting up with others for sexual encounters.

In the name of Jesus!

Amen!

Starting date of your 90 days: _____

Assignments

A key part of this thirteen weeks is gaining a grip on a sound theology of sexuality. It's a brainwashing of sorts. And our brains could certainly use a good scrubbing! So be sure to follow through with the reading assignment.

Read Lesson One: "God's Good Design."

Connect with your band of brothers (or sisters) daily. (Seedbed has an app that facilitates daily interaction around a daily scripture: see <https://www.seedbed.com/daily-text-subscribe>.)

Connect with God daily using appendix C, "The Divine Office for Sexual Strugglers."

This page intentionally left blank

CYCLE ONE

A Vision for Wholeness

Years ago, I had an aspiring writer proofread a booklet I had written about God's design for our sexuality. Having been raised in a strict Christian home and enrolled in a Christian high school, he had never heard a balanced and biblical explanation for God's good design for his sexuality. Upon returning the draft, he stated emphatically, "If I had read this chapter when I was in junior high, it would have saved me a *lot* of heartache."

This cycle lays out a vision for wholeness. It reshapes our vision according to God's design, helps us identify sinful patterns in our behavior, and shines light on the idolatrous mind games we play.

As you begin this journey as a band, keep in mind an important principle from author and teacher Terry Wardle: "I am responsible for me and accountable to you." Drill that into

your thinking. You are *not* responsible for your band members' behavior. They are. And you are responsible for yours.

Day by day, encourage each other as you build relationships. Ask God to develop loving friendships with those in your band. And, like spectators at a sporting event, cheer one another onward toward the vision for wholeness. Then at your weekly meeting, ask the accountability questions with much grace, and answer them with gut-level honesty.

May God grant you much clarity as you gain a new vision for his wholeness!

LESSON 1

God's Good Design

If you have made it through the last seven days without caving in to your sexual temptations, *hallelujah!* That's tremendous! Yes, I know, you have twelve more weeks to reach the ninety days, but the goal is attained one day at a time. You now have seven, so you are well on your way!

And if you stumbled, just get back up, dust yourself off, and keep moving forward. In fact, as you confess to your band, have them help with the dusting by looking you in the eyes and stating, "In the name of Jesus, you are forgiven!"

And don't view a stumble as starting from square one. You've made progress on the path. Learn a few lessons as you walk through the "Coaching One Another" questions and write down your new start date. Prayerfully move forward. Remember that you are part of a band of brothers (or sisters). We are in this together!

And what is the goal? Purity: consistent victory over sexual sin. Not freedom from all temptation, of course, but freedom from the behavioral ruts where we've been stuck.

So what does that look like? This brings up the subject of masturbation. What exactly is consistent victory, especially when the urge for release becomes so strong? Is it always wrong for a man or a woman to masturbate? Or are there other means for release? Many mature Christians have differing opinions on the matter.

If your convictions are firmly in place regarding this issue, great. Follow whatever guidelines you believe God has given you. But if you are still undecided, you can read my observations in appendix A. They may be helpful as you prayerfully hammer out your own convictions.

Windows of Grace and Truth

Down through the centuries, the church has pretty much been tight-lipped about sexual subjects. But this tendency is far from biblical.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is clear and frank about God's wonderful gift of sexuality. Within its pages one finds observation, instruction, and inspiration, but never obsession with sexuality. And there's no cover-up when Judah, Samson, David, and others commit sexual sin. The consequences for their sexual lapses are clearly laid out—but so is God's amazing grace.

The very story of creation provides clues as to God's plan for our sexuality. In fact, one finds four purposes for God's design in those initial chapters of Scripture.

First of all, God created us as male and female to more fully reflect his image: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). While each of us as individuals reflect the image of God, together as male and female the reflection is more complete.

The second purpose? Having kids. The very next verse contains a command: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (1:28). A command which, by the way, we have happily and amply obeyed!

The next two purposes for our sexuality arise out of a simple comment which God made: "It is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). And after creating a woman, the Scripture declares, "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). And so, the third purpose for sexual union with another is simply to meet the deep longing for companionship.

Practically speaking, how does this one-flesh union meet this longing? Through a chemical called oxytocin. It's the glue that binds our hearts to another person. Even when you learn someone's name, shake their hand, and get acquainted, a little bit of oxytocin is produced and some bonding takes place.

When a mother gives birth or breastfeeds her infant, oxytocin is produced in large quantities, bonding the heart of mother and

child. And when husband and wife come together in sexual union, there is a spike in the production of oxytocin, cementing together a bond of love.

This is why masturbation always falls short. So often the end feeling is loneliness as oxytocin is released in the brain, without a person there to connect with.

Finally, the fourth purpose also addresses this loneliness. The Hebrew word that is translated to mean sexual intercourse also translates as “to know.” Genesis 4:1 says, “Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain.” The chief purpose of sexual union is to know and to be known by another human being. This again is a reason God designed us as sexual beings—to meet that deep loneliness which he described as “not good.”

Hmm. Wait a minute. “Not good”? So the singleness of Jesus, Paul, and countless others who have remained unmarried either by choice or by circumstances is deemed “not good”? And yet, each single is given this sexuality like a loaded gun never to be fired, or a violin never to be played? What’s with that?

In her wonderful book *Redeeming Sex*, pastor and author Debra Hirsch masterfully distinguishes between social sexuality and genital sexuality. There is an appropriate intimacy that our sexuality fosters which, if kept within proper boundaries, bonds us with others in ways that can be healthy and liberating. In this way, Hirsch asserts, Jesus was able to “create a space between himself and others where real love is able to flourish and where feeling passionate toward another doesn’t

have to lead to having sex.”¹ Such bonding apart from genital expression is available to us, and can bring great blessing to all who are made in God’s image.

God hardwired us for relationships, and our sexual design has deep significance. It sets us apart from all other creatures. In fact, scientists have noted that humans alone seek privacy when making love.² It is because our sexuality reflects the image of God, unites our hearts deeply with another, and opens us up to a mysterious knowledge of another human being. It is indeed deeply personal and altogether relational in nature.

Band Discussion Questions

- Can you name the four purposes for our sexuality? In what way does your sexual obsession run counter to God’s intended purposes?
- Would you agree that the dominant feeling following masturbation is loneliness? What other feelings do you experience?
- Besides loneliness, what other unmet needs do you think people are trying to fill with sexual activity?

1. Debra Hirsch, *Redeeming Sex: Naked Conversations About Sexuality and Spirituality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 57.

2. William H. Masters, Virginia E. Johnson, and Robert C. Kolodny, *Human Sexuality*, 3rd edition (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1988), 651.

The Three Cs

Abstaining from pornography brings some degree of suffering. For some, the withdrawal symptoms are mild, but others actually endure symptoms similar to those coming off of drugs. The neurochemical changes can manifest with the following: “insomnia, anxiety, irritability, mood swings, headaches, restlessness, fatigue, poor concentration, depression, social paralysis and cravings.”³

Withdrawal symptoms, however severe, do begin to fade day by day. And after ninety days, it will be much more manageable. Suffering prompts us to lean into Jesus. And as you lean into him, seek the support of the members of your band.

Accountability is drudgery unless we know someone has our best interests at heart. Perhaps today as you confess to each other, share if you are experiencing any of these withdrawal symptoms. Say heartfelt prayers for God’s strength to endure.

- **Confessing to One Another**

- What sexual sins have you committed since we last met?
- What temptations did you face successfully?
- How did you overcome those temptations?
- Did you do anything questionable that you are not sure was sinful?

3. Gary Wilson, *Your Brain on Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction* (Kent, UK: Commonwealth Publishing, 2014), Loc. 1426.

Week by week you will also coach each other, learning from each other's victories and failures. So if someone in the band stumbles or even faces severe temptation during the week, these questions are valuable.

- **Coaching One Another**

What made you vulnerable to temptation? Were you:

Hungry?

Angry?

Lonely?

Tired?

Stressed?

Bored?

This forms the handy acronym HALTS-B.

- **Cleansing One Another**

Today you will learn the first prayer key. But as the weeks progress, you will have additional keys to choose from with which to cleanse one another.

Prayer Key: Renunciation

In my work with people battling sexual issues, I have found resistance from evil spirits. Now let's be clear. Evil spirits don't cause us to sin. They are not responsible for our problems. But they can certainly stir the pot, especially if they get a foothold.

In Ephesians 4:26–27, Paul warns us that harboring anger can “give the devil a foothold” (v. 27 NIV). In other words, certain persistent sinful behaviors can provide evil spirits a place to latch on to our souls, yielding them a bit of control so that they can jerk us around. The answer is not to cast out demons willy-nilly, but to first deal with the footholds.

So, in the example from Ephesians regarding anger, we remove the foothold by first repenting of the bitterness and forgiving those who have hurt us. Then we can brush off any remaining evil influence with a simple prayer of renunciation.

This prayer key can be used each time we resolve an issue or find some healing on the road to wholeness, even if we don’t sense a demonic presence. For example, after asking God to forgive a sexual sin, you can simply pray, “And if any spirits gained a foothold in my life as a result of this sin, I command them to go in Jesus’ name!”

In light of last week’s prayer of surrender, take turns praying the following prayer:

Gracious God,

Thank you for forgiving my sexual sins. Thank you for the opportunity to surrender my sexuality last week, and for your grace to walk in victory. If any evil spirits had gained a foothold in my life through my sexual sins, I now command them to leave in Jesus’ name!

Holy Spirit, please fill me. Take over this area of my life. In Jesus’ name, amen!

Assignments

The next lesson includes insights into the dynamics of sexual addiction. Even if your issues don't seem to be an actual addiction, you may very well find yourself looking in the mirror. Are you a puppy dog? Or perhaps a predator? Be sure to follow through with these assignments.

Read Lesson Two: "Puppy Dogs and Predators."

Connect with your band of brothers (or sisters) daily.

Connect with God daily using "The Divine Office for Sexual Strugglers."