

DEVOTED TO CHRIST: SINGLENES THAT GLORIFIES GOD
Devoting Your Body to the Lord II: Dealing with Sexual Brokenness

Introduction

This summer we have been exploring what God says to Singles in 1 Corinthians 7:34 – be devoted to me in body and spirit. Last week we looked at the meaning of our bodies and why we should devote them to the Lord. Since your body was given to you for the purpose of knowing the Lord, and since it has a future in the resurrection, what you do with your bodies in this life *really matters*. In particular, we saw that our sexual practices are significant because they tell a story about the meaning of our bodies. Either we live sexually in a way that underlines our union with Christ, or we assign some new meaning to our bodies that allows us to do as we please. Tonight, we want to discuss what to do when sex has gone wrong in your life.

Judging from the almost constant and obsessive interest of our culture in all things sexual, there can be little doubt that sexual desire has somehow malfunctioned in our culture. I do not mean to suggest that in other cultures sex has been unimportant. Sexual desire is a basic human appetite and so has played a critical and important role in every culture. But it seems clear to me that sexual interest has come to define our culture in strange and disproportionate ways. Imagine the following scenario with me for a moment:

Tom lies in bed . . . wide awake. As he turns his head to glance at the clock that now reads 2:34, Tom is not tired – his mind is racing. It’s been like this for him every night this week. Lying in bed – awake – aware of only two things: his deep desire to surf the web, and his fear that life was getting out of control.

Getting out of bed, he pulls on a t-shirt and heads downstairs to the family computer in the living room. Tom anxiously taps the keys of the mouse in an attempt to arouse the computer from its sound electronic slumber. Before the screen can even light up, his eyes are fixed, staring at the location where he knows he will find the web browser’s icon, and seeing it, quickly opens the program. Tom pauses momentarily, turning his ear to investigate the sound of the refrigerator kicking on behind him before nervously navigating to the site he had visited every night this week.

His stomach churning with adrenaline, Tom waits for the page to load – frustrated and excited at the same time. “Stupid Dell”, he thinks to himself. “We should have bought a Mac.” But he immediately forgets his complaints; his eyes widening and heart pounding as a dozen images or more – maybe a bakers dozen – fill the screen. Tom would have printed every one of them if he weren’t afraid of waking someone, so instead he studied each image individually.

Tom’s obsession had recently begun to escalate. The late nights were taking their toll. Over the last month Tom had arrived late to work six times, drawing the attention and frustration of his boss. He would have certainly been fired if his boss knew how many hours of the workweek he spent “stumbling” across sites just like this one. On a few

special and especially reckless occasions, Tom even left the office to visit some of the local “establishments” in town – blowing his paycheck to feed his appetite.

But none of that mattered now. The images were so bright and beautiful – each one them absolute cupcakes. Some were dressed in pink, others in white frosting. Most of them had brightly colored sprinkles, but all sat on top of the same delicious yellow cake wrapped in a red polka-dot wrapper. Tom loved cupcakes. Oh, he had always had a sweet tooth – donuts, ice cream, pancakes, pudding and pie– but a few months ago he had a craving for a Twinkie, a craving that had spun wildly out of control. Little Debbie couldn’t hold his attention anymore; all he craved were high-end pastries, and he would go to great lengths to get them. Earlier in the day Tom left work in the middle of the afternoon and drove all the way across town to get a fix. Those little ladies set him back \$35 a dozen, but not one of them survived the car drive back to work. Tom loved cupcakes. Maybe it wasn’t natural, maybe it was weird, but he didn’t care anymore.¹

You thought this story was about sex?! Get your mind out of the gutter! No! This is a story about *food*; though it is a rather absurd story. But just what makes it absurd? We can make sense of the story provided we think of Tom’s fixation and obsession as somehow related to sex, but once we learn that all this is over a cupcake, it seems altogether ridiculous. It’s not that we can’t imagine such obsessive behavior, but that we cannot understand such obsession over *this*. I take this as a sign that sex has been exalted to an unhealthy level.

This preoccupation with sex affects us all. Because of it, sex is virtually unavoidable. Television and movies are idolizing it. Women are using it to manipulate men. Advertisers are using it to sell products. Pornographers are filling the web with it. Under normal conditions it’s difficult to be a man with sexual integrity; but in a culture like ours, it’s almost impossible. If we are to believe the statistics, the majority of men in the church are wrestling with some form of sexual sin. But men turn to porn and sex for different reasons. Before you can battle this temptation, you need to understand why you turn to sex and porn.

Sex and Temptation: Identifying your Motive

Some men turn to sex because they have been victims of sexual abuse. If you have been the victim of sexual abuse, it is very likely that your sexual sin is related to your past. You need to know that you are responsible for what was done to you – you are not guilty of it and God will not hold you responsible for it. God wants you to live in freedom from it. The solution for you is going to involve counseling so that you can understand God’s love for you, his good purposes for sex, and the joy that is open to you in intimacy within a loving relationship.

For most men it has to do with their natural bodily appetite for sex. This appetite isn’t bad in itself – God gave it to you – but it can be distorted and twisted. This is the case in many men who never learn to discipline their sex drives. Many men are absolutely slaves to their bodies, refusing to exercise any kind of restraint or control. Consequently, many of these kinds of men fail to hold down a relationship, jumping from one bed to the next, and so lose the

¹ Adapted from C. S. Lewis’ analogy of a striptease for a steak, *The Four Loves*.

possibility of any meaningful relationship with a woman. If this is you, you need to learn to discipline your body and to be less selfish.

Some men use porn and sex to cope emotionally. Some guys use sex or porn as a way to boost their self-image. Often a guy like this is either an egomaniac, who is so full of himself that he feels entitled to as much sex or porn as he pleases or he is massively insecure, and reaching for sex or porn as a coping mechanism. Porn is comforting for this person because the girls in the videos are always satisfied and affirming. You are probably using porn to boost your ego if you find that you reach for porn when you suffer a big life set back or when you are celebrating a big life accomplishment. If this is you, you need to be humbled before the Lord and find your identity in Christ rather than in your personal performance.

In extreme cases, some men turn to sex because they have become addicted. The sexual addict is a person who has turned to sexual pleasure so frequently and regularly that their brains need sexual stimulation to feel normal, and so they are willing to engage in relatively high-risk sexual behavior. We say, 'relatively' because most people take sexual risks; but the sexual addict is willing to go to elaborate and dangerous lengths for sexual pleasure. The sex addict can spend hours out of his week watching porn or going to strip clubs, he will masturbate for hours at a time, he will spend large sums of money on porn and typically finds it difficult to manage his life because of his addiction. If this is you, there is hope and you can find help and I would encourage you to talk to me.

The reality is that most men struggle with this temptation for a mixture of reasons. Perhaps you have come here tonight tired of fighting this temptation, frustrated that you find it everywhere you turn. If that is you tonight, I want to encourage you that though you may not be able to avoid sexual temptation altogether, there are some practical strategies for battling sexual temptation that will help you become a man of sexual integrity. My prayer is that tonight you will learn some strategies that will free you from slavery to this sin and empower you to begin to walk in the joy of your union with Christ.

Strategies for Fighting Sexual Sin

Strategy # 1 – Change the Way You Think

Sin's power comes from the pleasure that it promises. So in order to combat sin, you need superior promises to hold to in the moment of temptation. You need to know the truth about the promises of sin. The best thing in the world for this is memorizing Scripture. Calvin taught that Scripture functions in our lives much like reading glasses serve our eyes. Just as a person with poor eyesight requires the help of glasses to see clearly, so every person is in need of the knowledge of Scripture to live wisely. Scripture teaches us to walk in the ways of wisdom by considering the meaning, purpose, and outcome of our way of life. No one with impaired vision would leave the house without their glasses; why would you try to live a Christian life without the clarity and wisdom found in Scripture?

Sex begins in the mind, so nothing could be better in the moment of temptation than clearly seeing the truth and being able to combat the lie of the enemy. This is exactly what

Scripture memory seeks to do. It seeks to arm you with truth for the moment of temptation. Allow me to show you just three:

1. *Your body is for God's glory.* Scripture teaches us that your body is not for sexual immorality, it is for the Lord (1 Cor 6:13). When you are assaulted by sexual temptation, you need to know that your body was not given to you for the purpose of having random and selfish sex. It was given to you as a holy instrument, consecrated to the service of God. Your body does not belong to you.

2. *Women deserve our love and respect.* Scripture also teaches that God did not make women for your private sexual fantasies, but as *co-heirs of the grace of life* (1 Pet 3:7). When you lust after a woman in your heart, you reduce her to an object for your sexual pleasure. No porn you've ever seen starts with a husband dutifully listening to his wife cry about her insecurities for 45 minutes, followed by 10 minutes of prayer and 15 minutes of sex. No – porn treats this as uninteresting. It begins with sex because it thinks that sex is something other than an act of *love*. It teaches you to think of women as merely sexual objects.

We are sometimes told by pornographers and women's liberation that pornography and casual sex are empowering to women – that it ennobles their bodies and sexuality. But I tend to worry about where this argument came from. It sounds too much like something a frat-boy tells his girlfriend to get her into bed. These practices objectify women – they transform them into mere sex objects. You need to know and be reminded that women are dearly loved by God and that their bodies and souls were created, not for your private sexual pleasure, but to honor and glorify God. This should change not only the way you act, but also the way you talk and think about women. They are fellow heirs of Christ and so should be shown respect and dignity.

3. *Sex comes with a price-tag.* Scripture also regularly draws our attention to the serious cost and damage of casual sex. I would encourage everyone to memorize Proverbs 5 and recite it to yourself on a regular basis.

- ¹ *My son, pay attention to my wisdom;
listen carefully to my wise counsel.*
- ² *Then you will show discernment,
and your lips will express what you've learned.*
- ³ *For the lips of an immoral woman are as sweet as honey,
and her mouth is smoother than oil.*
- ⁴ *But in the end she is as bitter as poison,
as dangerous as a double-edged sword.*
- ⁵ *Her feet go down to death;
her steps lead straight to the grave.*
- ⁶ *For she cares nothing about the path to life.
She staggers down a crooked trail and doesn't realize it.*
- ⁷ *So now, my sons, listen to me.
Never stray from what I am about to say:*
- ⁸ *Stay away from her!*

Don't go near the door of her house!
⁹ *If you do, you will lose your honor
and will lose to merciless people all you have achieved.*

²¹ *For the LORD sees clearly what a man does,
examining every path he takes.*

²² *An evil man is held captive by his own sins;
they are ropes that catch and hold him.*

²³ *He will die for lack of self-control;
he will be lost because of his great foolishness.*

The advice of v. 9 alone could have saved so many, so much heartache – “you will lose to merciless people all you have achieved in life.” When you sit in the car, on the couch, or on her bed – you need to know that sex has a price tag and that it will cost you. Your flesh isn't going to tell you these things. But wouldn't it be awesome if, in that moment, God would speak to your conscience and tell you the truth? He can, if you memorize Scripture.

Strategy # 2 – Be Accountable

Every guy who struggles with habitual sexual sin should get in a relationship that offers him accountability. Let me give you some advice on how to do that. *First, the goal of the meeting is to lift your vision to Christ.* The goal of accountability is not to make sure you don't sin, it is to encourage you to seek Christ. The goal is *not* to shame you into obedience. If your accountability meetings are not turning your focus on Jesus, something is wrong. A good accountability partner will not be satisfied to simply hear about his friend's struggles. He will try to raise his eyes and give him a new vision and desire for Christ.

Second, your partner should be a godly, Christian man that you trust. Don't just choose your best friend and *never* choose your girlfriend. Since the goal of these meetings are to give you a fresh view of Christ and your life, pick a person that you know can offer you help, advise, encouragement or rebuke. Pick someone whose faith you admire.

Third, your meetings should include a both a personal focus and a Word focus. Since the goal of these meetings is to draw your attention to Christ, honestly confessing any sin that is distracting you from following Christ is a natural way to begin. You don't gain forgiveness from God by confessing your sin to someone else, but very often you will get help and some fresh insight from an experienced Christian. Confessing your sin will help your friend pray for you and give you sound advise. Guys struggle with this because it involves a kind of vulnerability, but however uncomfortable it might be, it is important for our growth.

While you should spend some time evaluating your walk with God, don't spend every meeting, all meeting talking about *yourself*. Spend time reviewing scripture, praying, or discussing a book that you have read to strengthen your faith. By focusing on the Word of God we gain strength to confront and overcome our sin. Many accountability groups become ingrown by focusing too exclusively on personal struggles and not enough on the Word and power of God. For this reason, I recommend that these relationships be “one-way” for younger

Christians; that is, that only one of the two people are sharing their struggle. If both are sharing their struggle together, the meeting can easily deteriorate into a pity-party. But when only one person is sharing their struggle, it is much easier for the other individual to lift that person's gaze to Christ.

Strategy # 3 – Don't Plan to Sin; Plan Not to Sin

Romans 13:14 gives practical advice for all of us – “Clothe yourself with Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” In other words, don't plan to sin, plan not to sin. This is extremely simple advice. Don't be a student of ways that you can get away with sin. Don't educate yourself how to get around your internet filter. Don't schedule opportunities for you and your girlfriend to make out. Don't read about new ways to masturbate or have sex. Do the opposite. Make it more difficult to sin. Get an internet filter. Date your girlfriend in public. Don't rent movies by yourself.

Frankly, until you are willing to allow this to affect your lifestyle, you are unwilling to do what is necessary to kill it. Let me give you an example of how this works for me. I am a little bit of tech junkie – I subscribe to tech blogs and I enjoy spending time reading about new gadgets. When the new iPhone 3gs came out, I bought one. I own a brand new Macbook Pro. Both are fast, powerful machines – and both are *locked down* as far as the Internet goes. I have accountability software on all my computers and my iPhone. These programs are clumsy, buggy and inconvenient, but they help.

Strategy # 4 – Get Married

The final strategy that I want to encourage you to pursue is this – if you and your girlfriend find it extremely difficult to control yourself sexually, you should get married. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 7:9 that “it is better to marry than to burn with passion.” Marriage will not solve all of your problems, and you still need to learn self-control to be faithful to your wife in marriage, but marriage will give you the opportunity to express your love sexually. There are worse things in life than marrying early – it is not the kiss of death.

If you are struggling sexually but you are not dating I would encourage you in two regards. *First, learn to be content with Christ and celebrate the significance of your singleness.* Do not allow yourself to think of marriage as the greatest good of life, without which you will be less of a person and incomplete. Your singleness is significant because it declares the Church's undivided devotion to Christ. *Second, pray for and pursue a spouse.* I will talk more about how to do this next week, but for now let me just call you not to give up. You need to show patience and courage. Be patient as God brings the *right* girl to you, and be courageous knowing that your spouse will come from *God*.

Strategy # 5 – Remember Your Identity in Christ

Whatever you do, don't forget about the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You need to remember that however much you falter, however much you fall, you are not defined by your sexual history. You are defined by your union with Christ – forgiven by his death, given power

and promised new life by his resurrection. Your sexual history cannot erase your union with Christ, it can only lie about it. When you are overwhelmed by guilt, do not be afraid to come to the cross for cleansing. Do not stand at a distance, afraid that your sin might blaspheme the cross. Do not pretend that you can cover your own sin. Do not hide yourself in pride, arrogance, or self-loathing. Trust that Christ will receive you and cleanse you. Remember that he died to make sinners clean. Know that Christ does not turn sinners away, but welcomes them with open arms. In your moment of failure, turn to Christ and fall on him.