

Designed For Desire

God's Design For Sexuality

by Tim Jackson and Mart De Haan

Frank greeted the counselor with a stiff smile when he came into the restaurant. After some uncomfortable small talk, Frank's eyes dropped. He played with the stir stick in his coffee. His hands and his voice trembled.

The counselor had never seen Frank (not his real name) this way before. He had always been upbeat and optimistic. His wife of 5 years and his two little boys adored him. He was doing well as a systems analyst. He attended church regularly. On the surface, all seemed to be going well—but that was far from the truth.

Over the next few minutes, Frank said that he'd had an affair with a woman at work, and that she was now pregnant with his baby. There was a long silence. The color had drained from his face. His eyes were still riveted on the table. "I didn't intend for it to happen, but there hasn't been anything for me at home. Patty has

been so preoccupied with the kids, she just doesn't have time for me anymore. She's been too tired to be interested in me since Billy came along—but she didn't deserve this. I've really messed up. I don't know what to do. I can't bring myself to tell Patty. This will kill her. She'll probably . . . I couldn't bear to lose her and the kids. I can't believe what I've done.”

Frank needed help. Even though he would bear the burden of his own choices, he was also at a point of needing someone to support him as he carried the weight of what he had done. He needed friends to help him find his way back to God and to those he had hurt.

A registered nurse (we'll call her Janet) works at a local hospital. Outwardly she is attractive and competent. Inwardly she is dying. She tells a

painful story of childhood sexual abuse and a violent 18-year marriage to a physically and sexually abusive man. Since her divorce 6 years ago, she has dated several men from her church singles' group and from the hospital. She has slept with all of them. Eventually, she said, they all dropped her.

Through her tears Janet sobbed, “I know what I'm doing is wrong. But I just don't seem to be able to stop it. I always vow that it will never happen again. But nothing works. The men I go out with all expect me to be intimate with them after a couple of dates. I know it isn't all their fault. I seem to need so much affection and reassurance. I just want someone to hold me, to love me. I feel so alone. What's wrong with me?”

The answer to Janet's question also applies to

Frank—and to the rest of us as well. Our inclination is to misunderstand our God-given capacity for intimacy and desire. Our tendency is either to deny and kill our passions or to satisfy them temporarily in ways that only multiply our frustration and self-contempt.

Our tendency is also to fail to see the difference between needs and misdirected desires. We learned long ago that when we are thirsty we need water, when we are hungry we need food, when we are tired we need sleep. It is easy, therefore, to assume that when we are sexually aroused we need to satisfy ourselves with a real or imagined sexual relationship.

Our culture reinforces such an assumption. Industry and media have made an art of sexual seduction. We are

surrounded by those who know that they can make a living by stirring up and fanning the flames of sexual desire. TV, radio, the internet, music, video, movie, publishing, advertising, and clothing industries are all exploiting our misunderstood and misdirected longings for intimacy and satisfaction.

The truth, however, is that we don't need a kind of sexual experience that robs us of opportunity for long-term friendships and relationships. We don't need a physical, sexual relationship to be fulfilled as a man or a woman. Sexual conquest outside of marriage is not a sign of freedom, personal worth, or sophistication.

If you have lost your way in the darkness of our sexualized world, there is a way back. There is a way to be sure of the forgiveness of God. But first it's

important to have a clear understanding of the problem. Even though some of the following material might be painful to read, it's essential that we know what God thinks of sexual behaviors that are not according to His design for desire. The prospects for recovery are much better if we are willing to listen carefully to the voice of God.

The History Of Sexual Problems

The issues of marital unfaithfulness, homosexuality, abortion, abuse, and unwanted pregnancies once seemed new within the Christian community. But in many ways we are repeating the mistakes of our fathers and showing our need for repentance and the forgiveness of God.

In many ways we are faced with a need to distinguish ourselves from those who don't know our God.

Moses warned the nation of Israel about falling into the sexual practices of the surrounding culture. In Leviticus 18, he expressed to his people what God had said about the dangers of adultery, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. With the detail of a lawyer, he made capital crimes of sexual contact with children, step-children, parents, step-parents, brothers, sisters, step-brothers, step-sisters, brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law. He outlawed sexual relations with aunts and uncles, a neighbor's wife, a person of the same sex, or with an animal.

Not My People! The prophet made his reasons clear. All of these sexual sins were common in the

surrounding culture of his day. Yet God's people were to distinguish themselves by avoiding those behaviors that had brought destruction, disease, and shame to the nations around them. Specifically, Moses wrote:

You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices (Lev. 18:3 NIV).

Such behaviors, God said, would bring great harm to those who practiced them (vv.24-30).

Yet the people of God didn't remain faithful to their God. Even King David, a man after God's own heart, gave in to temptation. In a moment of misdirected passion, he had an affair with another man's wife and brought enormous pain to himself,

his family, his nation, and his God.

How could it happen? How could someone as godly as David fall so low? What was happening inside him on that dark night? How could sexual temptation reduce a man after God's heart into a sexual predator and murderer? If misdirected sexual desire caused David to act like a pagan, what chance do we have of not repeating his mistakes?

Not Even a Hint! A thousand years later, the people of God were still struggling to separate themselves from the sexual behavior of a surrounding culture. Writing to brothers and sisters in the metropolitan city of Ephesus, the apostle Paul said:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity,

or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people (Eph. 5:3 NIV).

Earlier in the same letter he urged:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more (Eph. 4:17-19 NIV).

There was good reason for Paul's concern. Ephesus boasted one of the ancient wonders of the world, the temple to the goddess

Diana. At this shrine, prostitutes engaged in ceremonial sexual intercourse with the worshipers. But there was more. According to Henri Marrou in his history of ancient education, homosexuality was also taught in this "open" Greek society as one of the privileges separating civilized Greek nobility from the barbarians.

Yet, someone asks, so what? Why does religion have to look into society's "bedroom"? Why would God be concerned about the sexual behavior of those who believe in Him? Isn't it more important that we believe in Him, love one another, and respect our differences? Why would God want Moses and Paul to make rules about sexual behavior? There are several ways to answer this. One answer, according to the Bible, is that God cares

about sexual behavior because it is rooted in deeper issues. More about that later. Right now, it is enough to mention what has been happening in our own society as we have increasingly thrown off the sexual restraints urged by Moses and Paul. Is it possible that God loves us enough to want us to be spared the pain of misdirected sexual desire?

Sexually Transmitted Diseases. In *Tracking The Hidden Epidemic: Trends In STDs In The United States 2000*, the Center For Disease Control And Prevention reported that 1 in 5 people in the US (65 million Americans) is currently living with an incurable sexually transmitted disease. Among the 15 million new cases diagnosed each year, two-thirds occur in those under 25 and one-fourth in teenagers (p.3). AIDS is

now the seventh leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year olds (*National Vital Statistics Report*, Vol.47, No.9, June 30, 1999).

Unwanted Children.

In spite of all the education on risky sexual behavior and pregnancy, about 40 percent of American teenage girls become pregnant before age 20. Approximately one million teens—10 percent of all women between the ages of 15 and 19—become pregnant each year. And of those pregnancies, nearly 4 in 10 are terminated by abortion (*Teen Sex And Pregnancy*, Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1999). Sadly, “despite a 20-year low in the teen pregnancy rate and an impressive decline in the teen birth rate, the United States still has the highest teen pregnancy rate of any industrialized country” (*When Teens Have Sex*,

Annie E. Casey Foundation, p.1, 1999).

Sexual Abuse. The costs and cries of misused sexuality are everywhere. Infatuation and physical conquest replace love. The explosion of the pornography industry routinely exploits women, children, and men. Society's protectors become predators. Suspicion replaces trust. Little children are warned about adults. Adults, in turn, are hesitant to greet a little child on the street for fear of being misunderstood. Men are suspicious of other men, and women of both men and women.

Families have been turned upside-down because of decades of secret sexual abuse. Husbands and wives struggle with the memories and scars of prior sexual partners. Divorce of long-term commitments is seen as freedom to pursue

the short-term passion of a new relationship. Pastors, priests, counselors, and child-care workers all work under a cloud of distrust that has been created by countless instances of sexual misconduct by others in their profession.

These are some of the reasons that God cares about our sexuality. But there are deeper issues as well, and in the remaining pages we'll take a closer look at why the Bible makes such an issue of our sexual behavior.

The Root Of Sexual Problems

To the person caught in the grip of a sexual affair or a pornographic addiction, life's problems seem very physical and focused. It seems so apparent that to satisfy sexual desire we

must give it what it wants. What is not always apparent, however, is that behind our physical desires are deeper spiritual appetites, which are only temporarily numbed by sexual pleasure. The real problem fueling sexual obsession is not physical but spiritual. At the root of our problems is a belief that we can satisfy our own hearts by taking matters into our own hands and by treating our desires and passions as mere physical appetites. Yet in believing this lie, we are missing our opportunity for real solutions and self-control.

Symptoms Of A Deeper Problem. It might seem humiliating enough to admit to sexual sin or addiction. It might seem to be about as much as we can bear to confess that we have not lived up to our own expectations or God's, or that we have hurt

those we love by our sexual choices. But before we can really come to terms with our problem, before we can discover the richness of God's love and forgiveness, and before we can recover a healthy sense of passion for life, we must understand that the root of sexual sin is *idolatry*.

Idolatry is the worship of anything or anyone other than the one true God. The New Testament goes so far as to say that misdirected passions are idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). According to Paul, to covet (to long for that which God has not offered you) is to commit idolatry. The reason is clear. When we long for that which God has warned about and we do not "hunger and thirst" for that which our Lord has encouraged us to pursue, we have honored our own desires more than God Himself.

With this kind of danger in view, the first New Testament letter of John ends with the words, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 Jn. 5:21). This warning was “the last word” of a letter that appealed to its readers to love God above all else and to love one another as a sign of our love for the Father. John realized that when God ceases to be the passion of our life, and when we do not honestly care for others with the kind of love that we ourselves have received from God, then a loss of healthy love will leave us consciously pursuing lusts that make us dangerous to ourselves and others (1 Jn. 2:15-17). These lusts are a symptom of idolatry.

The idolatry the apostle warned about has a long history. It was a root sin of the twin cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Even

though Sodom is known for its sexual sins, the Scriptures make it clear that her sexual obsessions and sins were symptoms of the deeper problem of idolatry. Before falling into gender confusion and sexual abandon, the men of Sodom turned their passions away from God and inward on themselves.

The prophet Ezekiel said to Jerusalem:

Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did detestable things before Me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen (Ezek. 16:49-50 NIV).

Sodom’s sexual sins were the result of her errors, not the cause. Behind her homosexuality was a pattern of choices that

put herself, her own desires, and her own pleasure at the center of her universe.

To her own eventual destruction, Sodom's men replaced God with a form of sexual obsession that could never satisfy (see also Rom. 1:18-32).

Symptoms Of A Lost Passion For God.

Sexual obsession occurs (inside or outside of marriage) when we become more focused on temporary physical pleasure than in finding our satisfaction in the design and desires of God. Addiction occurs when we lose a zeal for God and when we no longer “hunger and thirst” for what God alone can do in our hearts (Mt. 5:6). Sexual enslavement tightens its grip on us when we use the momentary intoxication of sexual pleasure to numb the restless cravings that can only be satisfied by a passion and love that God

shares with those who trust Him.

What often happens, however, is that there is little around us to help us see the kind of passion we've lost. It is very possible that we won't know what we're missing. That's why it's so important to spend time with the One who taught us to “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” It is Christ who shows us by His own example that those who are filled with healthy love for God and others don't have to be preoccupied with physical sexual pleasure in order to be real men and women.

Christ shows us what we've lost. Even without sexual relationships, He was a perfect example of masculinity. He was a source of strength and protection for the men and women in His life. He went to battle with the enemy on

our behalf. He sacrificed His life for His bride, the church. He absorbed the punishment and insults of His enemies. He had close personal friendships with both men and women. He resisted the seduction of the tempter. He was strong enough to be gentle, zealous enough to clean out His Father's house, and secure enough within Himself to weep for those He loved. Although He was God, He was in every sense a man. Yet He lived through adolescence and His twenties as a single who did not "need" a physical, sexual relationship.

Our reaction might be, "Yes, but I'm not Christ. If I were, I would have His deep desire for God and I wouldn't have the sexual problems that I do." That's true. We are not Christ. But He is in us. In this life we will not be as perfect as

He is. But we can place ourselves under His control. We can invite Him to live His life through us, and to do what we cannot do for ourselves. We can invite Him to turn our hearts toward God and to share with us His passion for the Father, His hunger to do the will of God, and His deep, abiding love for both friend and enemy.

But what if, in spite of our desire to please Christ, we still long for the sexual intimacy of a marital relationship? What if we are struggling with the thought that God may not give us a husband or wife?

Then we need to bring our disappointment, dissatisfaction, and sense of despair to God. This is what our Lord did in the Garden of Gethsemane. When faced with the prospect of being executed for our sins, He didn't merely repress His fears and try to act godly.

With great intensity He struggled with His longings to avoid the cross. With great honesty He pleaded with the Father to let Him avoid the coming agony. But He stayed in the garden until He was able to say, “Nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done” (Lk. 22:42). He struggled with God until He again had more passion for the will of God and more desire for the rescue of those He was dying for than He had for His own temporary relief.

Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus, “for the joy that was set before Him [to rescue us from a lost, dark eternity] endured the cross, despising the shame [of being killed as a criminal], and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” In the days of His “passion unto death,” He also became the model for God’s design for desire.

God’s Design For Desire

Solutions are always found by creating or restoring a sense of design. Everything has a design—from the veins of a leaf to the mane of a horse, from a computer chip to Chicago’s Sears Tower, from a child’s toy to a supercharged Thunderbird. Everything has a design, a time, and a place. Everything demonstrates the existence of a creative mind behind the design. The same is true for our sexuality. It is the product of an all-wise Designer.

According to Genesis 1:26-28, after God made the world, its plants, its animals, and its seasons, He said:

*“Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion . . .”
So God created man in*

His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 2 expands on the origin of our gender and sexuality. In a second and more specific account, Moses told us that after first making Adam alone, it became apparent that there was no suitable companion for him among the animals. So from a rib of Adam's own flesh the Lord made a woman. Then Moses concluded:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And

they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:24-25).

The Genesis account of God's design makes it clear that sexuality comes from God. While being male or female is thought by many today to be a curse, it was not so in the beginning. In the beginning, gender was a precious gift from God. Man and woman were the crown of creation. Together they possessed complementing sexual identities that enabled them to be good for one another. In marriage their complementing genders would provide a basis not only for companionship but also for the mutual pleasures of a shared physical sexuality and oneness. Outside of marriage, man and woman would enrich one another by the social blending of their masculine and

feminine differences. They would give to one another the richness of personality and relationship that is missing in all-men or all-women gatherings.

Genesis also shows us that while man and woman were made somewhat different from one another, they both were made very different from the animals. Together man and woman shared the image of God in a way that gave them no counterpart in the animal world. As a result, Moses' view of the sexes differs significantly from modern evolutionary theory. The naturalistic philosophy that has shaped so much of current education suggests that there is no deep-rooted distinction between man and animal. It is no surprise, then, that those who see themselves as more related to the animals than to God act like animals in their sexual

relationships.

With decades of naturalistic, evolutionary theory built into our educational system, it is understandable that our generation would defend its sexual choices by citing occurrences of homosexual or multiple-partner sexual relationships among the animal world. We often hear, "Sex is natural and beautiful. Look at the animals. They show us that we don't have to be so uptight and moralistic about freely expressing our heterosexual or our homosexual desires."

Moses showed us, however, that even though we share with the animals a common Creator, we are not animals. Unlike the creatures of the animal world, we were created in the image of God. Furthermore, God chose the human sexual relationship to reproduce

His own likeness in every child that is born.

It is this God-likeness that is so violated when men and women view one another as sexual objects rather than as whole persons with shared needs, dreams, and destinies. There is something very dehumanizing about a kind of sexual ethic that views women merely for the physical, sexual pleasure their bodies offer. It's degrading to value one another for "parts" that quickly age and lose their appeal. It is far more dignifying to see every man and woman as a whole person who needs not to be exploited and defrauded for someone else's sexual pleasure, but to be honored, loved, appreciated, and enjoyed as a whole person. It is far more noble to be a man who loves women as friends than one who sees them as objects of sexual

conquest. Yet it is not just a matter of being noble. The truth is that we have been designed for a desire that is far higher than self-centered sexual aggression.

The Genesis account of creation, however, does more than describe the dignity and origin of our sexuality. It also takes us back to the roots of our sexual problems.

The Distortion Of God's Design. In Genesis 3:1-5, Satan suggested to Eve that God was holding out on them. Pointing out the one tree in the garden from which God had forbidden them to eat, Satan said:

God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil (v.5).

Oswald Chambers said, "All sin is rooted in the

suspicion that God is not very good.” Satan seduced Eve into believing that God was selfishly keeping the best things for Himself. And if that were true, He couldn’t be trusted.

Satan’s half-truth had an evil twist. Genesis 3:7 says:

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked.

From then on, their sexuality became a constant source of temptation and struggle. No longer controlled and protected by perfect love, human sexuality became a strategic battleground between heaven and hell. From then on, that which was made to be enjoyed in the intimacy and pleasure of a faithful, mutually loving relationship became an indicator of the extent of human rebellion.

Sexual fantasy is what

many people use to cope with the inescapable loneliness of a tragic world racked with sin. It is the attempt to force our way back to Eden to recover what has been lost. Patrick Carnes, in his book *Don’t Call It Love: Recovery From Sexual Addiction*, notes that “Americans spend more on pornography in one year than the annual sales of the Coca-Cola corporation” (p.57). The centerfold photographer knows how to sustain the illusion. So does the prostitute or the partner in an affair. They all feed into the fantasy that “somewhere there is someone who will love me perfectly.”

In our rebellion, we refuse to accept the tragic reality that we can’t go back to Eden. So, instead of turning to God for mercy, the best we can do is to try to dull some of our pain

with some form of pleasure that is within our power to control. Sexual immorality works well. It creates a false sense of life and passion that for a few brief moments allows us to escape the pain of our daily lives. Thus, we seek to indulge our twisted sexual passions to soothe the ache in our souls. In essence, we exchange the one true God for a false god. But there's a price to pay.

Harry Schaumburg writes, "When people seek a taste of heaven by their own means, they create a living hell of uncontrollable desires" (*False Intimacy*, p.60). The root of all sexual perversions and immorality begins with the desire to relieve one's pain with pleasure. But the passionate desire for intimacy with God is too deeply imbedded in the human heart. It cannot be silenced, so it degenerates

into a futile attempt to kill off all passion.

According to Hosea, the replacement of passionate worship of God with some pitiful pleasure results in nothing that deeply satisfies:

They will eat but not have enough; they will engage in prostitution but not increase, because they have deserted the Lord to give themselves to prostitution

A people without understanding will come to ruin" (4:10,14 NIV).

It is this image of prostitution, adultery, and idolatry that is repeated throughout Scripture (Jer. 3:2-5; Ezek. 16,23).

Because man suppressed the truth about God (Rom. 1:18), he "exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images" of his own making (v.23 NIV). So God gave mankind over to the control of sinful things that

we prefer more than Him:

- heterosexual perversions (v.24)
 - the perversion of homosexuality (vv.26-27)
 - perverse thinking leading to perverse behavior in every area of life (vv.28-32)
- Harry Schaumburg

notes:

God's action is severe in that He gives us over not only to our desires but to a condition of ungovernable desires. We demand, God steps back. We choose to regulate our lives rather than honoring and obeying God; we lose the ability to regulate our desires (*False Intimacy*, p.59).

The point is this: Once we abandon passionate worship of God, whatever we have passion for will become our god. Paul's words should serve as a warning that if we

don't allow the Lord to passionately stir our hearts to worship Him, our passions will inevitably be stirred by something else. The progression is clear. Once people turn their back on the truth about God, their thinking becomes skewed, their understanding becomes darkened, their heart becomes hardened, and the ability to deeply experience passion is diminished. The only thing that scratches the heart's surface is sensuality. But its effectiveness is diminished. Instead of controlling our desires, we become slaves of our desires.

But there's hope. God wants to restore the passion to our lives, not destroy it.

The Recovery Of God's Design. Dealing with our sexuality in a way that is consistent with God's design is not easy.

But with our Lord's help, with the saturation of His Word, and with the help of friends who will share our pain and confidentially hold us accountable, it is possible. Several steps can begin to reverse the addictive patterns exposed in Ephesians 4:17-19.

1. Acknowledge that we are designed for desire. God does not want us merely to deny or repress our desires. There's a close relationship between our passion and our ability to worship. Desire is what God uses to bring us to Himself. David implied this when he wrote:

Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart (Ps. 37:4).

This doesn't mean that if we delight in God we will get whatever we want. It does mean, however, that God is so good, so loving, so powerful, so close to us,

and so committed to our eventual well-being, that He can satisfy the deepest longings of our heart.

A man named Asaph expressed this very confidence when he wrote:

Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You (Ps. 73:25).

What is interesting about Asaph, however, is that he didn't come to that confidence without a struggle. In the earlier portions of Psalm 73, he expressed a great amount of disappointment with God. He began by saying that while he knew God was good to Israel, he wasn't all that sure that God had been good to him. In fact, he was so unconvinced of God's goodness to him personally that he almost lost his faith. Only after receiving insight into the destiny of

the people he was envying did he learn to be deeply satisfied with God. Only then could he honestly say, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You” (Ps. 73:25).

Asaph’s problem was not that he was too full of desire to be satisfied with God. His problem was that, prior to his “moment of insight,” he had not thought clearly enough about the ungodly or about God Himself to see where real pleasure and satisfaction is found.

John Piper in his book *Desiring God* makes a similar point when he writes:

The great hindrance to worship is not that we are a pleasure-seeking people, but that we are willing to settle for such pitiful pleasures (p.77).

Consider what God has offered to us for seeking a

deepening relationship with Him. C. S. Lewis writes:

It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased” (*The Weight Of Glory*, pp.1-2).

2. Honestly face the dark side of desire. While we are designed for desire, it is just as true that misdirected sexual passion poses a great threat to our well-being. Sexual struggles are far more than skin-deep. The problem is not just out-of-

control hormonal urges that can be brought back into line with exhortation and rigid self-discipline. Sexual immorality involves the faulty direction of our depraved human heart that refuses to worship the God who made us.

After all our foolish efforts to control our lives by worshiping the false god of sexual pleasure have failed, we must begin to see God as the only Person who can relieve the terror of our isolation with His powerful and good presence. He desires to draw us to Himself with the hope of joyful involvement and to rid us of our stubborn determination to survive on our own.

Courage is required to face the terrors of life (Josh. 1:9). We fear that we will find something or someone who will destroy us. But courageous faith is believing that we can

handle anything life throws at us because we belong to a God who has already handled it (Jn. 16:33).

Courage is required to face both the disappointments of our external world and the depravity of the dark regions of our hearts. That means that we refuse to pretend about anything, and that instills integrity.

Humility is needed if we are to honestly face the arrogance and rage behind our determination to survive this world on our own because of our suspicions that God isn't good. If we are willing to humble ourselves before Him and confess our rebellion against Him, He will extend grace and mercy to sustain us through life (Jas. 4:6).

Are we more passionately moved by an illicit affair, a sexual fantasy, or an internet illusion than we are when

we read the account of our Lord's death in the Bible? Do we feel more alive when watching a steamy love scene on TV than when we have the opportunity to share our faith with an unbeliever? If so, we have just exposed our own commitment to a darkened understanding of life apart from God (Eph. 4:18).

3. Ask God to redirect your desires. The root problem is not out-of-control sexual urges but an unbridled heart that has hardened itself against the warming rays of God's grace and truth. The pleasure of illicit sex (or any sinful addictive pattern) is short-lived. Satan is the one who constantly seeks whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8), so every addiction (or false god) has been designed to destroy the worshiper. Satan doesn't reward the

desires of the heart; he destroys the desire of the human heart so that there is no longer a passionate desire for anything, especially God.

Confessing our sins to God (1 Jn. 1:9) and to one another (Jas. 5:16) must never be limited to our actions and observable behaviors. It must always take into account the sinful root of our sinful actions— hearts that are hardened to God's extension of forgiveness, grace, and mercy. Repentance at this level is a change in heart direction away from a false god to the one true God (1 Th. 1:9).

True repentance is always marked by a broken and contrite heart. That is the passionate heart that God delights in (Ps. 51:16-17).

4. Passionately commit yourself to living by God's design. If we

are now devoted to life in Christ (Rom. 6:11), we have reason to listen to the apostle Paul when he wrote:

Offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to Him as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6:13 NIV).

We are all involved in the war for the souls of men and women. We will either become a weapon in the hands of the evil one to rob God of glory and worship (Rom. 6:12-13), or we will become a weapon for good in glorifying God by the way we enjoy Him.

Sexual promiscuity is an effective weapon Satan uses to rob God of glory and honor. Quite often we don't stop to think of it that way, but how we handle our sexuality affects God and how others see Him.

Whenever we participate in illicit sexual activity, we drag God into the scene with us and make Him a participant in our immorality (1 Cor. 6:12-20). When we refuse to indulge in sexual immorality because of the deep joy and gratefulness we feel in our hearts for God's goodness to us, we defeat the cause of the evil one by doing good (Rom. 12:21). Saying no to immorality, then, becomes a pleasure because illicit sexual activity pales in comparison to the enjoyment of our Father's presence (Ps. 16:11).

While sexual temptation will always be attractive to us as long as we are alive, it will become more resistible as we focus on our pursuit of a passionate relationship with Christ. Enjoying a growing intimacy with God will expose the allure of sexual indulgence for what it is—

a thief that robs us of the exquisite joy of genuine intimacy. In that realization, the desire for sexual pleasure becomes far less important or threatening.

5. Gratefully accept the precious gift of gender. While learning to see sexual pleasure in perspective, it is important that we don't minimize our sexuality in the process. There is a difference between sexual desire and sexuality. Sexual desire is a God-given capacity that all too often is *overrated* as a pleasure. Sexuality, on the other hand, is a God-given gift of gender that is often *underrated* as a factor of identity. Sexuality is a dimension of personhood, which reflects the way we have been selected and designed to reflect the image of God.

Throughout the ages, because of prejudice and

abuse, many have seen their masculinity or femininity as a curse. Some Jewish men, for instance, have been known to thank God regularly that they were born neither as a Gentile nor as a woman. Yet masculinity and femininity, as they are built into the design of our race, are part of the good and wise plan of God.

While the sexes are often in conflict, the apostle Paul pointed out that both men and women owe their existence to God. Neither could exist without the other (1 Cor. 11:11-12). Both have equal access to salvation in Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28). And both have distinct roles in God's plan for the family and church (1 Cor. 11:1-16; Eph. 5:17-33).

As a result, the Scriptures place a strong prohibition on cross-dressing (Dt. 22:5), homosexuality (1 Cor. 6:9),

or any other kind of behavior that intentionally masks the gift of gender God has built into us.

6. Honor the marriage bed. The pleasures of sexual intimacy are intended to be a celebration of marital intimacy. Within the context of an enduring, faithful marriage, mutual submission and love are the guidelines for the enjoyment of each other's bodies (Prov. 5:15-23; Song 4:1-15; 7:1-8:4).

God's design for the marriage bed, however, cannot be separated from God's overall design for a one-flesh marriage relationship. The "marriage act" is to be shared by a man and a woman who relate to each other "outside of the bedroom" in a manner that reflects Christ's relationship with His church.

Ephesians 5:22-33 gives us a picture of the kind of

relationship God has designed to accompany the sexual act of marriage. Seventy-five percent of what Paul wrote in this passage focuses on the man's responsibilities to reproduce in miniature a reenactment of the incarnation of our Lord:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her (v.25).

The example is one of aggressive action, tender strength, and deep purpose. It is not characterized by withdrawal but by active movement toward His bride that is intent on washing away anything that mars the beauty and radiance within (vv.26-27). God has built within a man the desire to be actively involved in the life of his wife to draw forth her inner beauty.

Paul's command to

wives was that they were to submit to their husbands (vv.22-23). That doesn't mean that a woman is supposed to passively disengage her brain and just do whatever any man tells her to do. Far from it! It means that she is to actively engage all of her feminine faculties of personhood for the sake of her husband. God's design is that she will experience the most joy in life by responding to her man the way the church experiences joy by receiving Christ as her bridegroom (v.24). The church is expected to openly trust the good intentions of Christ and to receive His involvement even when the outcome is hard to accept. In the same way, a wife is to respect her husband (v.33) and hold him accountable to his calling to be the tender lover of her soul. In the process of giving her inner

feminine beauty to him (1 Pet. 3:1-6), she will respectfully encourage him to be the man God designed him to be.

This is the kind of relationship God has designed to accompany the marriage bed. Since the heart is the ultimate source of sexual feeling and pleasure, it is apparent that God is far wiser than those who treat sexual pleasure as little more than a matter of technique. God knows that it is from clean, mutually faithful hearts that the most meaningful sexual pleasure is derived.

7. *Make love your goal.* Whether we are married or single, a love for God must become far more important to us than the pursuit of sexual pleasure. We will become more resistant to the allure of sexual temptation when we intentionally focus our energy on passionately

loving Him and sacrificially serving others.

The man or woman who is enjoying a growing, loving intimacy with Christ will not be willing to defraud another person sexually. Love won't let that happen. Love produces an overriding desire to honor the Lord and to see strength of character produced in the other person (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

Sexual passion is very strong, but it can be bridled by a passionate obedience to Christ that is more than mere dutiful compliance to the letter of the law. A deeply felt hunger and thirst for God (Ps. 42:1-2) can help us to see one another through His eyes rather than through the self-centered demands of blind desire.

The apostle Paul knew the kind of love that comes from a heart focused first on God. He gave us the

finest tribute to love ever written:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in

the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13:1-8).

This is desire redirected.

It gives meaning and direction and satisfaction to life whether there is opportunity for marital sexuality or not. Where such love exists, men and women do not use and defraud one another of that which is not theirs to give or receive. Certainly, such love will always be incomplete and imperfect this side of heaven. But to the extent that this love exists, it will redirect our hearts to the kind of selfless passion for which our God has designed us.

The Rough Road Back

For those like Frank and Janet (pp.1-2) who have become entangled in destructive sexual relationships, the way back isn't easy. It is never easy to admit your sin, accept responsibility for your own choices, and admit that without the help of God and others you will not be able to overcome desires that you have allowed to run out of control.

It is always painful to admit that the problem is not simply a lack of self-control or a few instances of bad judgment. It is disturbing to admit that your problem has roots in idolatry—that you have worshiped sexual intimacy more than God, and that without a willingness to be radically changed by God your

problems will continue.

The Bible does not deal with sexual sin as a small problem that can be resolved with some counseling and a few “adjustments.” With respect to the sexual desires that leveled someone like King David, the Scriptures tell us that there is a time to humble ourselves and run. Realizing the power of sexual temptation, the apostle Paul wrote:

Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body (1 Cor. 6:18).

To a young pastor named Timothy, Paul wrote:

Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22).

Sexual sin cannot be corrected by promising yourself to do better next time. It can be dealt with only by honestly getting to the root of your heart’s desire, coming clean with God and those you’ve hurt, and then redirecting your heart to God.

Most important, we need to use the awareness of our sin as a reason to run to the arms and scarred hands of Christ. Run to His cross. Cling to the truth that when Christ died He paid the price for every sexual sin and every other kind of sin that you have ever committed. Claim the forgiveness that God offers to those who trust in His Son.

As you trust in Christ for that forgiveness, make sure that you are doing so with a desire to replace sexual sin with righteousness and love. Don’t treat forgiveness

itself as another means of avoiding pain. Test your love by seeing if you are willing to share in the pain of those you have hurt by your sexual choices. If your repentance is real, if you really want to live in the strength of God's forgiveness and in the cleanness of His Spirit, if you really have been broken by your sin, then you will not demand that others forgive and forget what you have done to them.

If your experience is like Frank's, whom we mentioned at the beginning of this booklet, you will have reason to care that those who have been hurt by your sins are struggling daily with the harm you've inflicted. To demand that they forget is to inflict further punishment and burden on them. Pleasure and passion for life will be rediscovered not by forcing

others to forget but by showing others the transformation that God has made in you. Change will come as you become far more concerned about the pain others feel than about your own immediate satisfaction.

This is the path of real love. This is the path that allows us to walk with the One who lived not for Himself and not for the moment, but for us—and for our eternal pleasure with Him. This is the path that shows the highest sense in which we have been *designed for desire*.

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RECOMMENDED READING

False Intimacy: Understanding The Struggle Of Sexual Addiction by Harry W. Schaumburg (NavPress, 1997).

The Gift Of Sex: A Guide To Sexual Fulfillment by Clifford and Joyce Penner (Word Publishing, 1981).

Love Without Shame: Sexuality In Biblical Perspective by David Wyrzten (Discovery House Publishers, 1991).

Understanding Who You Are by Larry Crabb (NavPress, 1997).

Desiring God by John Piper (Multnomah Publishing, 1996).

Wild At Heart by John Eldredge (Thomas Nelson, 2001).

The Allure Of Hope: God's Pursuit Of A Woman's Heart by Jan Meyers (NavPress, 2001).

The Journey Of Desire
by John Eldredge (Thomas Nelson, 2000).

OTHER RBC BOOKLETS ON RELATED TOPICS

When The Flame Flickers—rekindling intimacy in your marriage (CB012).

When A Man's Eye Wanders—overcoming addiction to pornography (CB991).

When We Just Can't Stop—overcoming addiction (CB961).

When Passions Are Confused—understanding homosexuality (CB962).

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