

LOVE IN ACTION

finding freedom in Jesus Christ from sexual and relational sin



Understanding the Sex Addict's Struggle

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A Christian Sex Addict?

In working with men that struggle with sexual addiction I am often asked this question: “How can a Christian man have a sexual addiction?” There is no simple answer to this very complex question; there is just no easy way to make sense of the insane behavior that is produced by this addiction. How can a man who has experienced God’s greatest gift—His grace and mercy—fill his mind and soul with filth? To cite just one famous example, it doesn’t make sense that a “man after God’s own heart” (King David) would commit adultery and murder. I once heard sin described as temporary insanity; and no matter how hard you try, you just can’t make insane behavior make sense. In understanding how a Christian man can be afflicted with this addiction we will need to take a look at the enemy’s methods of assault.

The Seeds Of Addiction

Most often the seeds of this addiction are planted during the most vulnerable periods of a male’s childhood. Most of the men I work with have an “age 12” story of how they were exposed to sexual material or behavior at this vulnerable time. This is a very key age for the male because he is beginning his practice time for manhood. With this age come many anxieties and pressures. Many males have already learned by this point that they need to take care of things on their own and they can’t trust others with their feelings. As these new fears come about, Satan’s message is that he can give the male a place to go where he can either escape or medicate his anxieties. If the adolescent male continues to use this escape, then he never learns the skills he will need to work through his fears and pressures in adulthood. Each time he enters this fantasy world the after-effect of shame grows, but he doesn’t know what to do with it because he lacks the skills to express his needs. Most of the men I work with describe developing a world of image management at an early age. They put on an image that everything is OK because they fear what will happen if they reveal their shame and failures. What Satan and the pornographers don’t tell you is that each time a male engages in this world it assaults his mind and soul.

From Sprout To Full-Grown Plant

It is important to interject here the spiritual aspects of this addiction. The deep spiritual component of sexual addiction makes it different from other addictions. God’s purpose for sex is that it should form part of the spiritual bond between husband and wife. In other words, it is part of the process of the husband and wife becoming “one flesh.” When any aspect of sex, for example the visual aspect, is taken outside the area that God intended, then spiritual bonding and wounding occur. When an adolescent engages in repeated sexual acting out, then the seeds of this behavior are planted at a spiritual level. These seeds can lie dormant for many years or can progress straight into an addiction. Often such young men are wounded in other areas of their lives as well and use this acting out

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Understanding the Sex Addict's Struggle (*continued from front*)

as a balm for their wounded spirits. Suppose that the seeds of this behavior lie dormant for several years, but are never dealt with. As these men reach adulthood they use other behavior to medicate their fears. Many of the men I work with are very performance-driven and feed off the powerful drug of approval. This often produces men that are workaholics and very successful in the eyes of those around them. No one is truly able to get close to them because of what they learned long ago: that it is the people closest to you who can hurt you. Remember, they never learned to deal with their anxieties and fears. Thus as they undergo the stresses of life they will need more medications or avenues of escape. Satan's attack sounds something like this: "Hey, remember me? I've got a place you can go where you can get all your needs met and you don't have to jump through any hoops: just point and click!" The seeds that were planted earlier now grow into full-grown plants that wind their roots around the man's heart. Feeling the shame of his behavior, the man may try repeatedly confessing and repenting. Though this may be followed by a period of sobriety, eventually the man will return to his addiction when life's stresses mount again. This leaves him feeling even more defeated and ashamed. The addict often buys into the lie that this addiction is the only place where he can get his needs met. In doing this he will rationalize, minimize, excuse and reduce his behavior. He is now protecting his relationship with the addiction because he has swallowed the lie that it is not hurting anyone. The addiction now has its hook set in the individual and will lead his mind and body to places he never intended to go. Satan's goal is to rob, kill and destroy, and sexual addiction meets all of those goals: it robs you of your intimacy with God; it molests your soul and mind; it destroys your relationships with others; it kills and numbs your feelings and healthy desires and leaves you an empty shell; and sadly, it can also end in literal physical death. The hopelessness and despair of what has been can lead to suicide.

The Need For Compassion And Understanding

In this brief discussion I have tried to give a simple answer to a very complicated addiction. My goal is not to justify the addict's behavior simply because he may not have not gotten his needs met as a child. On the contrary, such men need accountability, honesty, and support. I truly believe that sexual addiction is Satan's number one attack on Christian men today. As the body of Christ, we need to open our eyes and hearts to the fact that we may be sitting on the same pew beside a wounded brother every Sunday. Following Christ's example, we must not shoot our wounded, but rather let them know there is hope and freedom.

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