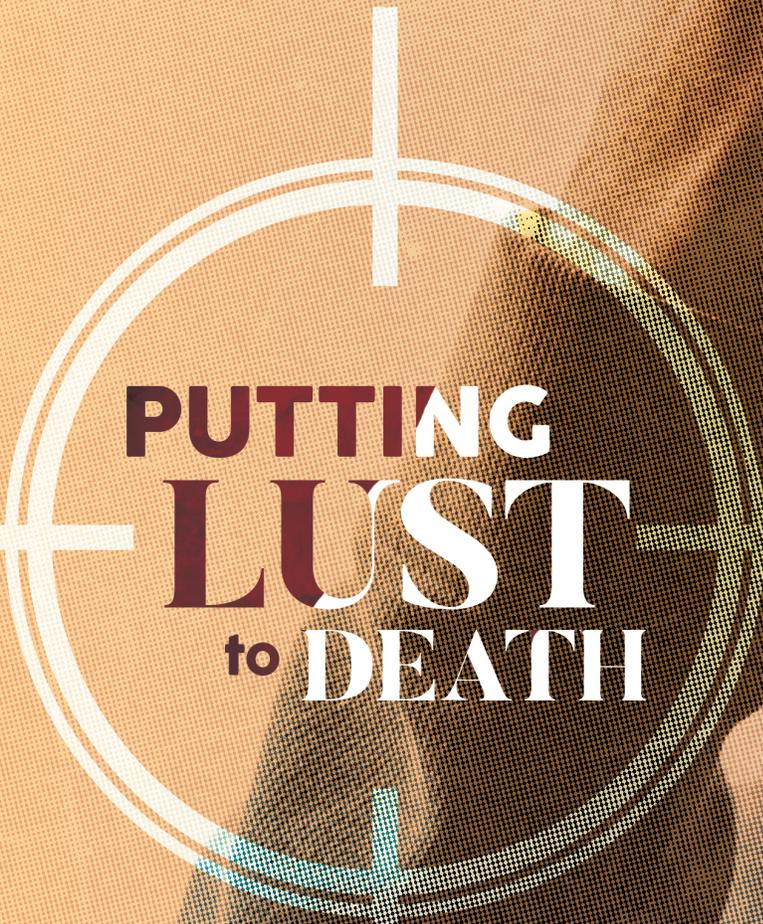


PERSPECTIVE

MARCH 2016



PUTTING
LUST
to **DEATH**

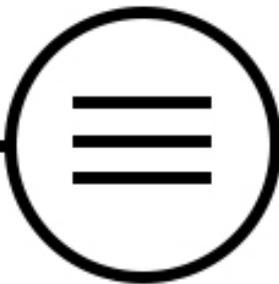
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Putting Lust to Death

“But I in my misery seethed and followed the driving force of my impulses, abandoning you.”

-Augustine

“Lust is a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God.”

-John Piper

“As God makes very clear in his word, sex and the issues surrounding it are fundamentally spiritual in nature. The temptations of pornography engage our minds and bodies in what is primarily a spiritual battle.”

-Tim Challies

2015 went down in history as the year America legalized same-sex marriage. For months now Christians have been wringing their hands, scratching their heads, and trying to get their mind around the changing cultural landscape. We’ve wondered how the Supreme Court decision will affect our families and our churches. We’ve worried about the erosion of religious liberty. We’ve asked how to respond when we can no longer take something as simple as gender for granted. Through it all, we’ve spent a lot of time thinking about the sexual purity of our neighbors.

But what about our own sexual purity? I always slow down when I come to 1 Corinthians 5. Paul rebuked the church for failing to excommunicate a man who had sexual relations with his father’s wife—a scandal in any age. Even in the first century, Paul knew Christians were tempted to throw stones outside the church. But Paul’s chief concern was what happened within: “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?” (1 Cor 5:12). Paul didn’t command us to be unconcerned about the standards of Hollywood or the laws of Washington. He simply wanted our focus to be on the holiness of those who claim to be disciples of Christ. That’s us, the church.

PORNOGRAPHY IN THE CHURCH

Looking at the statistics, the sad truth is Christian men and women struggle with pornography. According to research done by Covenant Eyes, a ministry devoted to fighting lust, one out of every five Internet searches on a mobile device is for pornography. It’s a multi-billion dollar industry. In 2014 Barna reported that 64 percent of men view porn monthly, and this percentage did not noticeably decline among Christian men. Though the

number is much smaller for women, it is not negligible; nearly twenty percent of Christian women view pornography at least “a few times a year.”

What kind of toll is this taking on the body of Christ? How many men are hiding in the shadows, unwilling to serve the church publicly because of the shame they bear privately? How many more men and women have managed to stay active in the church while hiding their secret sin? Many of them have seared their consciences by walking around with the “appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (2 Tim 3:5). Too many genuine Christians have allowed repeated pornography use to rob them of the quiet confidence that comes from faithful if imperfect obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ.

A few days ago I was having lunch with a young man and member of Mount Vernon. I told him I was writing this article, and I asked him what I ought to communicate about lust. He said something like this: “We need a church where people know it’s okay to talk about the struggle with lust. This is something we can and should discuss. Right now a lot of people probably think this is something they can’t talk about. The leadership needs to help create a culture where we know it’s important to confess this sin to another brother or sister.”

He’s right, and that’s why I’m writing this article. I want to begin, or at least reignite a conversation about personal, sexual ethics. I’m not writing this article to make you feel guilty about the lustful thoughts or looks or actions you’ve committed in the past. I’m writing to call you to action. I want you to reach out to someone who cares about you, tell them what you’ve done, and ask them to help you chart a new course of holiness.

We all came into the church ravaged by sin. It had its gnarly, scaly claws stuck deep into our black hearts. Sexual immorality, homosexuality, adultery, greed, idolatry and the like conquered our souls and beat us into submission. But then Christ came into your life and he changed you. As Paul put it, “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). This means that Jesus went to war for your soul. And because Jesus went to war for your soul you can now go to war against your sin. It’s not easy, but it’s possible. It’s not painless, but it’s worth it. We need to be the kind of church where we can talk about this sin. Unless we talk about it we won’t repent of it.

STOP AND PRAY

Before you read on take a moment, right now, to pray for the Spirit's help. The fact of the matter is you can't defeat the temptation to view pornography on your own. You can't clean up your thought life without God's help. You must heed Scripture's command and "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col 3:5). This is a command. But the only way you will every obey this command is if you draw near to the Lord, bask in his amazing grace, and call upon him for the help you need to find him more attractive than your sin.

We all came into the church ravaged by sin. It had its gnarly, scaly claws stuck deep into our black hearts. Sexual immorality, homosexuality, adultery, greed, idolatry and the like conquered our souls and beat us into submission. But then Christ came into your life and he changed you. As Paul put it, "You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:11). This means that Jesus went to war for your soul. And because Jesus went to war for your soul you can now go to war against your sin. It's not easy, but it's possible. It's not painless, but it's worth it. We need to be the kind of church where we can talk about this sin. Unless we talk about it we won't repent of it.

I'm writing this article because Satan hates Mount Vernon almost as much as I love it. The devil will spare no expense to discourage, oppress, and silence God's people. We live in age that talks a lot about the threat of North Korea's Kim Jong Un and Iran's ayatollah, Ali Khamenei. These men present a real and present danger to civilization. Both of these tyrants operate with the title, Supreme Leader. But their power is not supreme. It is miniscule when compared to the "cosmic powers over this present darkness" (Eph 6:25) and microscopic when put up against the power of the Triune God. The war of lust is spiritual, and I'm convinced that one of the sharpest and most potent arrows in Satan's arsenal has been dipped into the poison of pornography.

If you struggle with lust, keep reading. Even if, by God's grace, you don't, keep reading! I guarantee you know someone who does struggle and God may use what you learn to help him or her in the days and months ahead. I want you to see the danger of a heart pierced by this particular satanic arrow, and I want you to see the hope

held out for each of us in the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. If you didn't already, stop and pray. Ask for God to enlighten the eyes of your heart so that you would see the beauty of holiness and walk in the ways of the Lord.

JESUS WAGED WAR AGAINST LUST

In chapter five of his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus waged war against lust:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell."

Lust isn't the only sin Jesus addressed in this sermon. He preached against anger and hate and stinginess and hypocrisy, too. But Jesus reserved his most severe warning for those who would try to follow him without leaving their lust behind.

The Pharisees knew quite well that the seventh commandment prohibits adultery. Under the Old Testament Law, the punishment for adultery was death (Lev 20:10). Such a steep punishment highlights the holiness of God and the sanctity of marriage. An adulterer does more than sin against his wife. He takes spray paint and vandalizes the very picture God gave his

people to showcase his love for them: marriage. In the Old Testament God calls himself the husband of his bride, Israel (Isa 54:5-8). And when God's people decided to worship other gods, God labeled them adulterers (Jer 5:7-9). He could use this language because marriage is more than a union between a man and a woman; it's a stunning picture of God's faithfulness to his people. And when God's people turn away from God to other lovers, they are nothing less than adulterers themselves. And when a husband takes another woman for his own, he presents a scandalous picture of God to the world. God calls for sexual integrity because marriage is supposed to be an earthly model of divine fidelity.

But the Pharisees came nowhere close to plumbing the depths of the seventh commandment. They were legalists, to be sure, doing everything they could to guard the holiness of the body while ignoring the status of the heart. They thought they could please God with simple outward conformity to the Law. In fact, they added to God's Law, creating a list of extra biblical commands. They prohibited men from even looking at another man's wife, her clothes, or her heel. They even told men not to gaze upon the beauty of their own wives. The Pharisees went beyond the seventh commandment, but they never went into it—they never went to the level of the heart. Jesus did.

Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus never prohibited a man from looking at a woman. He banned, according to Matthew 5:28, looking at women with "lustful intent." In other words, Jesus said part of the seventh commandment is the call not to look at a woman in such a way that you want her for yourself. This, of course, is the very purpose of pornography. Pornography exists to encourage us to look at another human being with "lustful intent." Pornography calls us to gaze at a person in such a way that we consume her, we act as if she belongs to us. It doesn't matter if that the naked person is in fact someone's daughter or son, wife or husband. It doesn't matter that the person is an image-bearer of God himself. Pornography tells us to cast those facts aside and claim that person—even if it's only in your own mind—for yourself. This is the meaning of "lustful intent."

So when Jesus spoke against the roving eye he was really speaking against the roving heart. It isn't simply the direction of the eye our Lord cares about; it's the intent of the heart. Furthermore, according to Jesus, if your heart is inclined to "lustful intent" you should have no confidence you will be welcomed by Jesus on the Day of Judgment. Why else would Jesus say, "If your right eye

causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell"? You cannot have pornography and heaven. You must choose.

THE VICTIMS OF PORNOGRAPHY

Of course, pornography leaves many victims in its wake. It's why John Piper in the sentence I quoted above argued lust dishonors its object. The same girls and boys whose images are devoured by hungry eyes online are led to seedy hotels around the world every night. I'm writing these words just a few days after the Super Bowl. North Carolina Congresswoman Renee Ellmers described the horror that surrounded the biggest game of the year: "As Carolina Panthers and Denver Broncos fans stream into California for the big game, innocent children and women will be forced into modern-day sexual slavery rings right there in Santa Clara." Ellmers is right. And what's true of Super Bowl Sunday is true every night of the year in cities like Atlanta, New York, Raleigh, Birmingham.

One day the King of the Universe is going to come and judge the living and the dead. Justice will come like a tidal wave of holiness and wrath pouring over the sinful soil of humanity. God hears the cries of children whose lives have been stolen by the pornography industrial complex.

But where is the demand that feeds this complex? Who are the people trading their souls for sex? It is those whose eyes are filled with "lustful intent." Jesus gets to the heart of the matter. The man who purchases a few minutes with a girl in a tawdry motel room is not fundamentally different from the man who spends a few minutes looking at a girl on his iPhone. Are some sins worse than others? Absolutely. The Bible talks about greater sins and lesser sins. Looking at an image online is not the same as spending time with a person in bed. But let's not fool ourselves. The "lustful intent" is the same: they both desire that girl for their very own. Every sin may not be equally heinous, but because every sin is a matter of the heart the man who fails to guard his eyes is flirting with hell.

What would happen if every Christian on the face of the planet made a conscious decision never to click on a pornographic website again? Would the demand go down? I think it would. Every time a Christian man or woman lingers on an inappropriate website he's reassuring an advertiser that money spent on that website is money well spent. He's making his personal

contribution to the longevity of the pornography industrial complex. He's making it easier, if only slightly, for a young woman to earn a living by taking off her clothes.

THE COUNCIL OF KING JESUS

What prescription does Jesus offer? What counsel does he give? "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell" (Matt 5:29). In short, do anything and everything you can to protect yourself from the "lustful intent" that is the rotten fruit of indwelling sin. As the Puritan John Owen wrote in his great work, *The Mortification of Sin*, "Be killing sin, or it will be killing you." Is it any wonder, then, that the New Testament authors severely warn us about the spiritual danger of sexual immorality?

- ✦ "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Pet 2:11).
- ✦ "On account of these the wrath of God is coming" (Col 3:6).
- ✦ "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality . . . I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:19, 21).

You can't fight lust on your own—I'll address that more in a moment. But note this well: you must fight lust. You must engage in mortal combat with an enemy who is waging war against your soul. One day the wrath of God is going to come and snuff out any and all opposition to King Jesus. The Lord has kindly prepared us for that day by exhorting us to put sin to death today. It's not easy work, but it's necessary. Even when sin tastes good it must be put to death. As you grow in holiness your taste for sin will weaken. But until then your fight against sin must strengthen.

I have looked at pornography. I grew up in a pre-digital, non-Christian home where viewing pornography was considered something of a rite of passage. There are images in my mind impressed upon me when I was still a child. A few years after my conversion the Internet went mainstream and pornography became accessible in ways I could never have imagined. Satan knew the sinfulness of my own heart and, like the crafty tempter he is, he set a trap I happily entered. Don't get me wrong: my sin is my fault. I wish I could say I loved Jesus so much I never gave in to sexual temptation. I can't say that. I have given in to it. I know, even as a Christian, what it means to

look at a woman with "lustful intent." But thankfully my story doesn't end there. By God's grace I know what it means to tear out my eye—to confess my sin to brothers in Christ who could point me to the cross, lead me to the path of holiness, and walk with me along the way. It's not easy to let someone know you are a sinner, but it's necessary if you truly want to follow the way of our Master.

Jesus says it would be better to tear out your eye than to keep looking at a woman with lustful intent and find yourself one day in hell. What do you need to do to put lust to death in your life, once and for all?

PRACTICAL LESSONS TO TAKE LUST SERIOUSLY

The Book of Proverbs is a treasure chest of practical wisdom for the Christian. Much of its words are devoted to the topic of sexual purity. In chapter 6 a father writes to his son, urging him to fight sexual immorality. When we read these words in light of the gospel we find a potent plan to battle lust every day of our lives. I pray the following ten imperatives help you in this battle.

1) Saturate your life with Scripture.

In Proverbs 6:20-21 we read, "My son, keep your father's commandment, and forsake not your mother's teaching. Bind them on your heart always; tie them on your neck." God has given us his Word to battle temptation. God's Word is sufficient to train ourselves for godliness (1 Tim 4:7). A Christian who struggles with lust but does not spend significant time in God's Word is like a soldier on the front lines of battle who rejects continued training. Paul tells us the Bible is "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Your battle with lust will be over before it really begins unless you arm yourself with the Word of God.

2) Train your heart to value purity.

Solomon knew his son's eye would be captivated by beautiful women, and so he warned him, "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes" (Prov 6:25). Isn't it interesting that he begins with the heart? Her long eyelashes aren't the fundamental problem; it's the heart! Solomon knew that unless his son's heart valued holiness his eyes would be led astray. This is Jesus' point when he said, "from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality," etc (Mark 7:21). From King

Solomon to King Jesus the Bible's concern is with our heart.

Isn't it clear we need the gospel? Only God can change our heart, and he does it through the grace of Jesus Christ. We deserve God's wrath for our rebellion—including our hearts full of lustful intent. Each of us has gone astray in many different ways (Rom 3:10-18). And for our disobedience we deserve eternal wrath and judgment (Matt 25:41-46; Heb 9:27). But thankfully God, in his love, didn't leave us alone in our sin. Jesus Christ came to earth and lived a perfect life. Not only that, he died in the place of sinners, including the sexually immoral (1 Pet 2:24; Mark 10:45; 2 Cor 5:21). God raised Jesus from the dead (Eph 1:20-21). Now all those who repent of their sins and believe in him (Mark 1:15) find themselves fully, finally, and forever forgiven. The Good News is that through Christ we can be both saved from our sins and empowered to live lives of marvelous holiness (Rom 6:1-4). All this is done through the gift of a new heart that God has given all who humble themselves to him. A life of holiness is rooted in a new heart (Ezek 36:26; Eph 1:18; 6:6).

Brothers and sisters, God has given you a new heart. Your spiritual taste buds have changed. This is why sin never remains sweet to you but always leaves you with a bitter taste in your mouth. Train your heart by reminding yourself of the gospel. Remember the extent of Christ's love and the depth of his sacrifice for you. I love how J. C. Ryle impressed upon his readers the need to train their hearts by pondering the work of Christ:

I pity those who try to be holy without Christ!
Your labor is all in vain. You are putting money in
a bag with holes. You are pouring water into a
sieve. You are rolling a huge round stone uphill.
You are building a wall with untempered mortar.
Believe me, you are beginning on the wrong end.
You must come to Christ first, and he shall give
you His sanctifying Spirit. You must learn to day
with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ
which strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13).

Remind yourself, by God's grace, you are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17). When you feel the pull of temptation leading you into the path of pornography take a moment to reflect on the power of a Savior at work in your new heart (Gal 2:20). You now value purity more than pornography—even if you have to train your heart to believe this every day.

3) Keep hell on the forefront of your mind.

This, of course, is Jesus' counsel, but we find a similar word of instruction in Proverbs 6:27-28, "Can a man carry fire next to his chest and his clothes not be burned? Or can one walk on hot coals and his feet not be scorched?" Furthermore, those who touch his neighbor's wife, Solomon says, will not go unpunished (6:29). In short, nothing good comes from pornography and the man or woman who persists in it has no hope of everlasting life. It is for good reason Jesus warned us about the reality of hell. Unless you are truly changed by God now you will not enjoy the comfort of his presence in the future.

We don't hear as many fire and brimstone sermons nowadays. Certainly there's more to be preached in the Bible than punishment and wrath. But Jesus made it clear that the battle against lust includes the recognition that heaven is no place for those devoted to lustful intent. Fear of hell is not the only motivator for holiness, and it's not even the best one, but the fear of hell is one motivator to holiness we should not ignore.

4) Ask yourself the question, "Do I want to be a fool?"

Proverbs 6:32, "He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself." It is foolish at so many different levels to allow pornography into your life. It is foolish because you are playing with spiritual fire. It is foolish because you are leading others into harm's way. It is foolish because you are trying to quench your thirst with a bowl of sand. Pornography will never make you feel happy or whole. You won't find a sense of accomplishment or meaning by losing an hour or two in front of a monitor, and it's the height of foolishness even to try.

5) Keep temptation far away.

In chapter 7 of Proverbs Solomon described a foolish young man who managed to walk right by the house of a woman dressed as a prostitute. This young man unwisely put himself in the way of temptation (7:8-9). We know that in the 21st century you don't have to leave your home to find sexual danger. It's in your pocket on your mobile device.

Men, to keep yourself from temptation you may need to cancel cable, trade your smart phone in for a flip phone, and install Covenant Eyes on your computer. You may have to notify a friend when you are going to travel. None of these precautions will address the idol of your

heart. They are, nonetheless, wise moves to keep you away from temptation.

Women, you may have the same struggle, and everything I wrote above would apply to you. However, think carefully about what outside influences tend to put pressure on your heart to engage in lustful intent. It may be a particular movie, television show, or blog. You may be tempted to sin by romantic comedies or by friends whose Facebook posts are filled with salacious gossip. You, too, have hard work to do in order to keep temptation far away.

6) Distinguish between fact and fiction.

Our world throws fiction at us every single day. The fiction is that you deserve a break. You deserve to relax, to let your mind wander, and to engage in a harmless fantasy. I've counseled enough men to know they tend to look at pornography when they are discouraged and lonely and when they choose to believe the lie that a few moments of sexual immorality will somehow make their lives better. This is fiction.

The fact of the matter is pornography use increases loneliness, makes relationships with real people harder to sustain, creates physiological barriers to sexual intimacy in the future, and robs you of any confidence you are truly a child of God.

The world tells you if you live according to the flesh you will be happy. That's fiction. The Bible reports "if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom 8:13). That's fact. The crisper the difference between fact and fiction is in your mind, the better your battle with lust will be.

7) Cultivate a right view of marriage.

I fear most Christians don't really understand why sexual purity is so important. They know pornography is bad, and they fear hell, but they stop there. A careful reading of the Bible will help you see that lust is really a theological problem. At stake is your view of God.

It's no accident that God describes his relationship with the church in marital terms (Eph 5). Throughout history God has presented himself as a husband to his people. He could have presented himself merely as our employer or our benefactor or our counselor (and at different times, he does!). But, as I mentioned earlier, most often God is presented as our husband. Why? Because this metaphor communicates in the most powerful image

possible what it means to be close to God. Communion with God is like a wife submitting herself to a perfect and holy husband. He is faithful to her by caring and loving and serving her. She is faithful by honoring and obeying him. The metaphor of marriage is supposed to show us something about God's steadfast love for his people and our love for him, too.

How does lust damage this metaphor? When we take sex out of marriage or when we misuse it in marriage we mock God's relationship with his people. We are acting as if sexual morality is simply about personal gratification when it is also about showing the world God's faithfulness. What good is it if the church rails against same sex marriage while neglecting the purity of our marriage beds? Sexual purity is important because marriage is a picture of Christ's relationship with his bride, the church. When you sully sex by viewing pornography you are watering down the most important visual God gave us of his love for his people.

8) Nurture a high view of God.

Pastor A. W. Tozer in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, opened with this now-famous line, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." How true this is. Many people think of God as something of a cosmic candy dispenser, as if the purpose of his existence is to meet your needs. Such a view of God plays right into the hand of our pornified culture as men and women across the globe happily make their own satisfaction their end.

But what if our personal satisfaction isn't, in fact, the goal of humanity? What if God designed us for something much bigger and better? What if God designed us to make much of him, to live for his glory, to honor him with who we are and with what we do?

This is, of course, exactly what God did. He put us here with a purpose: to exalt his name with our lips and with our lives. "I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever" (Psa 86:12). David came to understand the reason he existed had everything to do with God's glory and very little to do with his own. He may have been the king of Israel, but he was nothing more than a servant in the kingdom of God.

Many men and women are struggling with pornography because they think of God as a divine butler instead of as a sovereign Lord. They expect God to cater to their needs when in fact they were made to serve him. If your

first thought of God is that of a loving and holy Creator you will think twice before you put him on the back shelf while you devote your time pornography.

9) Marvel at God's transforming grace.

There are many ways to be motivated to pursue holiness. For the Christian none is better than the reality of God's grace. The following excerpt from Heath Lambert's book, *Finally Free*, is worth a slow and careful read:

There is no porn user so enslaved that Jesus cannot set him or her free. There is no struggle for purity so intense that Jesus' grace cannot win the battle. There is no consequence so steep that Jesus' power cannot carry you through. Jesus' grace to change you is stronger than pornography's power to destroy you. Jesus' grace is stronger than your own desires to watch sex. While there is no hope for you in looking at pornography, there is all the hope in the universe when you look to God and his grace.

This is what each of us needs to hear in the midst of our battle for holiness. As Lambert so carefully notes, God's grace has the power to forgive (Col 2:13-14) and the power to transform (Rom 6:4). God's children hear his voice and look to him, and God won't let these children live in slavery to sin. He won't. The one who justified you will sanctify. The one who ripped you out of the kingdom of darkness will help you walk in the light.

Lust is a terrible sin, but it is not beyond God's reach. My experience is that those who struggle with pornography can be overcome by a sense of shame and worthlessness. Behind this feeling is the lie that God can't work with you. But that's not true at all. My guess is if you are caught in the tractor beam of pornography, you spend little time marveling at God's grace. It is not easy to devour illicit photos and videos while contemplating the power of an immortal God who invaded a sinful earth to save sinners like us.

10) Lean into the church.

Over the past decade perhaps no verse has been more influential in my thinking about discipleship than Hebrews 3:13, "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." We tend to think of "church" as a Sunday morning gathering, but there is an everyday-ness to the Christian life. Somehow our relationships with other believers are supposed to fill up the nooks and crannies of our weeks, including those hours when some of us are tempted to look at porn.

This doesn't mean spending every waking moment with brothers and sisters, but it does mean making every waking moment a topic of conversation with other Christians. To lean into the church of the living God is to pursue a relationship (or two or three) with fellow Christians who love you enough to point you to God and the gospel of his grace. Failure to do this is an invitation to moral disaster.

If you are struggling with pornography please tell someone. You don't need another book or article; you need another Christian who will exhort you with the proper balance of truth and love.

A CALL TO ACTION

I began this article by calling it a call to action. It's really a plea from me to you. We are entering a stage in world history where the church is the only place you will hear a call to temperance in sexual activity. We live in age where *Fifty Shades of Grey* is mainstream. Society no longer knows how to blush.

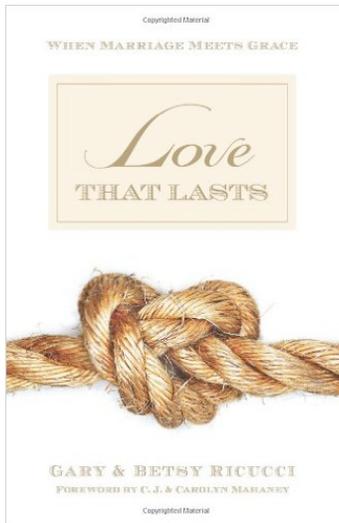
Tozer called on his readers to "boldly repudiate the cheap values of the fallen world and become completely detached in spirit from everything that unbelieving men set their hearts upon." You can't do this unless you know there is something better to treasure. This leads us back to the gospel. The key to fighting lust is telling a friend, but the door to holiness is treasuring Christ. Until he is more precious to you than silver, more valuable than gold, more awesome than the imagined touch of an invisible lover you will never fight lust with all your heart. Boldly repudiate the cheap values of the fallen world by boldly treasuring the priceless value of a crucified Savior.

~Aaron Menikoff

Love that Lasts: When Marriage Meets Grace

Written by Gary and Betsy Ricucci

Bookstall Price \$14



Christian marriages *should* get better, sweeter, and richer with each anniversary. To this end, Gary and Betsy Ricucci wrote the first version of their book, *Love That Lasts*, 24 years ago. The updated version with its subtitle, *When Marriage Meets Grace*, marks a significant shift in their view of marriage and offers real hope for change. While their first book emphasized “human effort for human ends,” the newer version faithfully teaches that Christ and his gospel are the “beginning, the means and the goal of marriage.” (12)

The Ricuccis carefully explain that theology—what a person believes about God—is the most important component of marriage. When a couple understands and believes the gospel, sin’s power over them is broken, and they are able to biblically fight against it. The book lays a solid, gospel-centered basis from which to approach practical issues like headship and submission, good communication, conflict resolution, romance, and intimacy.

Having been married for 27 years, I can look back and see that we, like the Ricuccis, have grown in our understanding of God’s grace. But our marriage can still grow better, sweeter, and richer. This book will encourage husbands to lovingly lead and wives to joyfully submit. It will renew your desire to reflect Christ in your conversations, conflicts and private moments. Reading *Love That Lasts* would be a worthwhile investment of time for any couple—engaged, newlywed, or married for many years. There are discussion questions in the back of the book which would make for great date night conversation! I particularly appreciated reading a book that wasn’t expressly for newlyweds, but was applicable to my third decade of being married. With Christ, there is always hope for marriage.

– RECOMMENDED BY SHIRLEY CHANDLER

Excerpts from the Book

1

“When we grasp the depth of God’s love for us revealed in the gospel, when we rest in the joy of God’s forgiveness toward us in the gospel, when we experience God’s transforming power in us through the gospel, and when we begin to emulate the pattern of humility and obedience we see in the gospel, what a wonderful difference this will make in our lives and marriages! Nothing is more essential to a marriage, and nothing brings more hope, than applying the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

–Relational Intimacy, p. 69

2

“God has handpicked your spouse—with all of his or her unique traits—to complement you in precisely the ways needed to accomplish God’s will in your life, in your spouse’s life, and in your shared life as a couple.”

–Grace to Those Who Hear, p. 84

3

“A biblical leader is a servant who, by God’s grace and by his own example, takes others further into the will and ways of God. Do I do things to my wife or for her? Do I direct her or come alongside her to lead her and serve her? A wise man leads his wife into a deeper knowledge of God and his grace, and into a deeper trust in the Savior. This frees her to truly be her husband’s helper, confident that ultimately God is sovereign over all.”

–Leading With Love, p. 41

Ephesians 2:6&7

129 Trombone Treble

481 and raised us up with him and seated us with him

482 in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,

483 so that in the coming ages he might show the

484 immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us

Cho. in Christ Jesus

[A]nd raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

– Ephesians 2:6-7

As I’m writing, the song *He Will Hold Me Fast* is playing. It’s one of my favorite songs because it reminds me of God’s unfailing love and power to keep to the end those who are his in Christ Jesus. The final stanza says:

Raised with him to endless life,
 He will hold me fast
 ‘Till our faith is turned to sight
 When He comes at last!

That is a fitting summary of Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:6-7. This verse begins mid-sentence. He just stated that we who were “dead in our trespasses, [were] made alive together with Christ—by grace have you been saved.” In vv.6-7, he gives the climax of our salvation. When God saved dead sinners he gave us life “in Christ” so that we might be partakers of all he has experienced. Four times in two verses he says we are “with him” and “in Christ Jesus.” This is called union with Christ. In him, we share in his resurrection, ascension, and session. God saved us from the due punishment for our sins and gave us life and glory in Christ.

Why would God be so lovingly gracious? So that in the eternal age to come we might experience “the

immeasurable riches of his grace.” The culmination of our salvation is an endless eternity of knowing and experience God’s grace. God’s perfect wisdom and love is that we would enjoy his richest grace for all eternity. Amazing!

Brother or sister, we are presented with two realities that are ours in Christ, but neither of which have we fully obtained. So until that day, we wait by faith. I pray that today you will hope for heaven, where these realities will be fully realized, and faith in Christ will grow. All that seems wrong and unbearable in life and in this world will fade to the background as you look forward by faith to the endless days and boundless eternity to experience the immeasurable riches of God’s grace!

– BRAD THAYER

Graphic courtesy of The Verses Project. For more devotional material and memorization tools, visit www.theversesproject.com.



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