

FINDING SEXUAL FREEDOM

By Terran Williams

The pursuit of sexual freedom

I write this because I am vulnerable to sexual temptation. And I know I'm not alone. If you too are vulnerable to sexual temptation - and if you're breathing, you are - then read on.

In the sixties, Western civilization embarked on a great experiment - 'the sexual revolution'. A combination of radical voices (such as Sigmund Freud, the psychotherapist and Alfred Kinsley, the sociologist) persuaded the masses that what had been previously described as 'sexual perversion' was in fact normal, and that to repress one's sexual desires and fantasies was destructive. Sexual freedom was promised to those who would shake off the traditional voices of family and religion that sought to unhealthily restrain one's sexual appetites. Millions of people listened, and embarked on the experiment.

A few decades later we can test its results: a soaring divorce rate, an unprecedented explosion of sexually transmitted diseases and high levels of unfaithfulness amongst couples. Broken hearts, broken families, dysfunctional relationships and shattered dreams are the sexual revolution's love children. Casual sex has come at a great cost. Thanks to the sixties' great experiment, sex has become idolised, depersonalised and animalised.

Like a river without strong riverbanks, this so-called 'sexual freedom' has brought flood-like devastation to untold lives, mine included. In fact, I dare say that most of the pain that I experienced in my first 20 years of life came as a direct or indirect result of 'sexual freedom'. My dad's affair led to the end of my parents' marriage when I was 5; my dad and his partner then died of Aids when I was 16; a part of my 17-year-old heart felt like it died when I broke up with a girl I'd been sexually involved with; and throughout my adolescent life, I was riddled with the shame and guilt of a secret addiction to pornography.

In the wake of all the empty promises and devastation you and I have experienced as a result of so-called sexual freedom, there is One who promises true freedom. Unlike the sixties - this freedom does not promise that we will be able to do whatever we want, but rather, that we will become all that we were born to become. The One who makes this promise is Christ. This booklet is written because I've become convinced that Christ, and the wisdom of his Scriptures, is the pathway to *true* sexual freedom. In this document, I've explored four important aspects to this freedom...

1) Make Christ your heart's treasure

The Bible tells us that God created us to have Christ as our heart's treasure. But instead, we have all pursued lesser things - like money, sex and power. Romans 1 explains that by failing to treasure Christ, many have begun to treasure a far lesser thing - sex:

'People knew God was real, but they didn't treat him like God. Refusing to worship him, they trivialised themselves into silliness and confusion so that there was neither sense nor direction left in their lives. They pretended to know it all, but were illiterate regarding life. They traded the glory of God who holds the whole world in his hands for cheap figurines you can buy at any roadside stand.

So God said, in effect, "If that's what you want, that's what you get." It wasn't long before they were living in a pig pen, smeared with filth, filthy inside and out. And all this because they traded the true God for a fake god, and worshipped the god they made instead of the God who made them—the God we bless, the God who blesses us. Oh, yes!

Worse followed. Refusing to know God, they soon didn't know how to be human either—women didn't know how to be women, men didn't know how to be men. Sexually confused, they abused and defiled one another, women with women, men with men—all lust, no love. And then they paid for it, oh, how they paid for it—emptied of God and love, godless and loveless wretches.

Since they didn't bother to acknowledge God, God quit bothering them and let them run loose... They know perfectly well they're spitting in God's face. And they don't care—worse, they hand out prizes to those who do the worst things best!' (The Message, Romans 1:21-28,32)

Notice how well these verses describe our culture:

- Despite our sophisticated knowledge, our culture overlooks the most important reality: God himself. We ignore God, fail to recognise his worth and fail to trust and worship him.
- But we still need to worship something. Aware of the spiritual vacuum in our lives, we become captivated by the next best thing: the wonderful gifts of God's creation. Instead of being devoted to the Creator, we become devoted to the things he created.
- One of the most wonderful gifts of creation is sex and the human body. So instead of worshipping God, we worship the human body and its sexual capacity (which is not surprising when the orgasm is supposedly the greatest pleasure available to human beings, second only to heroine).
- But idolatry always comes at a great cost. What God originally intended to be a blessing (sex for example), will always become a curse if we choose to worship it instead of worshipping its Creator.
- There's no denying it: our culture worships sex. Billions of people literally live for sex, arranging their lives around it, spending their money, time and energy in pursuit of it. God gave sex to us as a blessing, but when we worship it - it becomes a curse. Instead of bringing freedom

to our lives, it does the opposite: it enslaves us. Yet despite the obvious devastation, addiction and perversion that has come as a result, our culture still celebrates its so-called 'sexual freedom'.

Our culture really is obsessed with sex. Just think about it...

- In the words of Philip Yancey, 'We select our sexiest individuals and accord them the status of gods and goddesses, ogle over the details of their lives, broadcasting their bodily statistics.'
- We use sex to sell everything from computers, to motorbikes to hamburgers.
- On the Internet, the words most commonly typed into search engines are: sex, porn, nude and erotic.
- In the USA, for every movie that Hollywood releases, the porn industry produces twenty.
- The average person watches 14,000 sexual acts or references per year on television or in movies.

We're not just a sexually-aware world. We're sex-crazed. And by that I mean that sex has driven the sense out of us. The theologian C.S. Lewis made this point by looking at our society's obsession with nudity:

"Suppose you came to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate onto the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let everyone see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon. Should you not think that in that country, something had gone wrong with the nation's appetite for food?"

Something has gone very wrong with our sexual appetites. And there is only one way to break free. It is to discover something or Someone far greater than sex. Christ is that Someone. John Piper challenges us to treasure Christ rather than sex...

The supremacy of Christ enlarges the soul so that sex and its little thrills become small - as they really are. Little souls have little lusts that exert great power. The soul, as it were, expands or shrinks to encompass the magnitude of its treasure. The human soul was made to treasure Christ, to see and savour his majesty, beauty, power, grace and supremacy. Only treasuring Christ will enlarge the soul as God intended. And only treasuring Christ will make the little lusts lose their power over us. If we fail to find our fill in Christ then we will inevitably seek to find our fill in something much smaller, something like the buzz and thrill that sex brings.

Christ really is the supreme treasure. He came 2000 years ago and lived a totally sinless life, the kind of life we were meant to live. He then died on the cross to forgive us of our sin, of the way we had rejected and ignored God and gone in pursuit of lesser things. He then rose again from the dead, in so doing, made available to us the power we need to break free from our addictions to these lesser things and to rather worship, love, trust and adore Him. Christ was then exalted to the right hand of God from where he now pours out his Spirit on us so that we can see and savour him for who he really is: the greatest treasure of all.

That's why Christ alone can set you on the path to sexual freedom. Because Christ alone is willing to forgive you, empower you and replace your little treasures with something far more wonderful: himself. Will you turn from your lesser treasures to Christ himself, the most glorious of all treasure available to the human soul? Will you let him 'expand your soul to encompass this treasure'? Will you begin to live the life he intended you to, and let him put your little lusts in their proper perspective?

2) Bring your sexuality out of the shadows

Let us imagine God to be a bright-shining sun. We were made to be captivated by him, and to live our lives in his light, with nothing to hide. Adam and Eve, our first parents, lived in the light of God sexually...

Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said,
"This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman, for she was taken out of man."

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame. (Genesis 2:22-25)

In these verses, we see what God had in mind when he created sex:

- Gender, sex and sexuality are all good gifts of God to humanity.
- Sex is a life-uniting act between one man and one woman who come together with life-uniting intent in the covenant of marriage. Sex is the celebration of the marriage covenant.
- Sex is more than just body on body. It is heart on heart. It joins us spiritually not just physically.
- Sex is meant to be without shame when it is done in the context of love and marriage. Shame-free sex is also the kind that pleases God. Any other expression of sex brings both shame and the displeasure of God. Although sex is a private act, it is not something to hide. It is something that is done in the light of God. He smiles on sex in the right context.

But, we're told that our first parents, and all humanity after them, turned their back on God. Instead of being captivated by the bright shining sun that God is, and living in his light, we turned our backs on him, and began to live in the dark shadows of our sin.

And instead of controlling and expressing our sexuality in God's light, we have become corrupted sexually. Our sexuality is in the shadows of sin. Instead of the loving sex that should only happen in the context of a marriage covenant, an array of distortions have come about, most of them spoken of in the Bible: sex between people of the same gender, orgies (sex between three or more people), bestiality, bisexuality, sex before marriage, adultery, rape, polygamy, prostitution, paedophilia, incest and more. *I will*

explore the six most common sexual sins.

2.1) Lust

It is possible to appreciate a man's handsomeness or a woman's beauty without sexually desiring them. But the moment we look at someone in a way that causes or feeds sexual desire for that person, we have crossed from appreciation into lust. In Matthew 5:27-30, Jesus clearly taught that lust is unacceptable...

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.

Notice a few things about lust...

Sexual feelings and desires are a normal part of our humanity. However we must learn to control them so that they do not become lustful. In this sense, lust is runaway, uncontrolled sexual desires and thoughts.

The main battlefield for sexual purity is in our minds. The more we invite, accept and feed sexual thoughts the more powerful they will become. It is much like throwing fuel on a flame. As Christians, we need to learn how to take control of our thoughts by simply taking authority over them and through focusing on something else.

There is a difference between the temptation to lust and the sin of lust. Sexual thoughts may enter our minds as a temptation, but if we refuse to resist them, they quickly become the sin of lust. Martin Luther once preached, 'I can't stop a bird flying over my head, but I can stop it from nesting in my hair.' Similarly, although temptation may sometimes be unavoidable - but sin always is!

Lust is mainly fuelled by the images that we take in through our eyes. In the fight for sexual purity we need to 'cut out our eyes' says Jesus. Obviously, he didn't mean this literally. But he is calling us to aggressively take control of what our eyes look at. The visual imagery we take in with our eyes, becomes mental pictures that we 'feed on' - both in the moment, and in the hours and perhaps days that follow (recalling images from hours or days before for re-lusting purposes). Here are two essential strategies to 'cut out our eyes'.

Firstly, bounce your eyes. The moment you spot someone who is sexually attractive to you, you're experiencing temptation. Look away. If you fail to look away and instead lingeringly look again, your temptation has transformed into sin. I sometimes describe this lingering look as an eye-lick (much like licking an ice-cream) because of the instant pleasure it brings. The single most important step to victory is to look away. If you're watching

the television, change the channel. If you're in a movie, close your eyes until you can hear the scene has past, or walk out. If you're driving past an attractive jogger, refuse to turn your head or look in the rear-view mirror. *Bounce your eyes.* If you have not been in the habit of doing this, it will be very difficult at first because you've become addicted to the pleasure of eye-licks. The more you treat yourself to eye-licks, the harder it will be to refuse them in the future. Conversely, the more you refuse to take eye-licks, the easier it will be to refuse them in the future. This is not an optional extra discipline, only reserved for particularly zealous Christians - Jesus absolutely insists that *you* look away.

Secondly, from time to time starve your eyes. It is not enough to merely bounce your eyes. For seasons of our lives, we need to also starve our eyes. We live in a world awash with sexily-clad individuals and an incessant media onslaught on billboards, radios, television, magazines, etc. By constantly living in this sea of our sex-crazed culture, our consciences and spiritual sensitivities can be dulled. We then need to do something far more proactive than merely bouncing our eyes. What does it mean to starve our eyes? It means to refuse to expose yourself, even to the temptation, as far as possible for a good chunk of time until you are feeling your spiritual senses are sharpened again. Practically speaking, this means, for a week or two, decide to not watch television and movies at all, refuse to drive those routes where you're likely to be tempted. Refuse to go to certain beaches or places where 'sexiness' seems to be on display. When you sit in a restaurant, even face the wall so that no attractive people can catch your eye! Alternatively (or in addition to this), take time to really get away from it all and retreat to an isolated place where you can re-collaborate your senses Christward.

You may think that this battle against lust sounds over-the-top, but Jesus insisted that you do whatever it takes to beat it. When he spoke of cutting out eyes and cutting off limbs he was saying, 'Do *whatever* it takes to overcome this thing and live in victory.'

Some people may say, 'But what harm can my private thoughts do?' The answer: lots. Most devastatingly, it undermines your close walk to Christ. Secondly, it can set you up for long-term failure. Satan knows that if he can get a man or woman to regularly entertain sexual thoughts of others, eventually he can lure them into sexual action with others. Thirdly, your private thoughts always impact others eventually. Listen to the words of Henry Nouwen on this matter:

'For the Christian, even the most hidden fantasies, thoughts and actions are a service or a disservice to the community. I can never say that what I think, feel or do in my private time is nobody else's business - it's everybody's business.'

On this point let me address Christian females: please help us men in this area. Realise that for most men, our sexuality is far more visual than yours. Please don't dress to kill. Many of us know what it's like to have not really

been able to worship God in a gathering because of a Christian girl's revealing cleavage, short skirt, or body-hugging clothing.

Let me also address Christian males: young Timothy is charged by Paul to 'treat the younger women like sisters with absolute purity' (1 Timothy 5:2). Take this counsel to heart. Think pure thoughts about them. And relate to them purely.

2.2) Pornography

Never before has porn been as accessible as it is now. And never before have so many Christians been robbed of their joy in Christ, their intimacy in relationships, their power in ministry - all because of looking at porn, either very regularly or from time to time. I know of several married couples that have divorced primarily because of porn habits in the men. You may ask, 'But why do Christian married men battle with porn when they could have sex?' The answer is that porn is a fantasy world where you are a sexual god, and sexual goddesses throw themselves at you. It is a world of unreality that seems so much more exciting than the real world of human, loving sex. The tragedy is that a taste for imaginary, unholy sex makes it difficult to enjoy real-life, holy sex.

Tragically, the latest statistics from the USA tell us that pornography has radically crippled the church. 50% of Christian men regularly indulge in porn. We are God's army, called to advance his kingdom and charge the gates of hell. But we will never do this whilst half of us have our pants around our ankles! And it's not just the men mind you - the same statistics report that 20% of Christian women battle with pornography too.

It absolutely must stop! For the love of Christ, it must stop! Do whatever is needed to break free from sin's tentacles. Refuse Internet access at home or on your phone if you must. Don't go to those shops where porn mags are displayed. If you must use the Internet, then set up an accountability system through www.x3watch.com (this fantastic tool sends a list of all the websites you visit to a chosen person who keeps you accountable). Visit www.xxxchurch.com for more help.

2.3) Obsessive or lustful masturbation

Masturbation is extremely common amongst both men and women. The Bible does not condemn the act of masturbation as a sin and it has no adverse health affects. That's why we must be careful not to forbid it out right - after all, how can we forbid what God has not?

However, the Bible *does* condemn both lust and all kinds of obsessively regular behaviour (see 1 Corinthians 6:12). So if, for you, masturbation is lustful or obsessive then it certainly is a sin.

Although masturbation may function as 'a release valve' for some people who are experiencing a build up of sexual desire, consider these

disadvantages: feelings of shame usually follow masturbation (and no Christian should live in shame), and secondly, the more one masturbates the more one *wants* to masturbate. For these reasons, masturbation is discouraged, but not expressly forbidden (unless it's obsessive or lustful).

2.4) Pre-marital sex

Sex is more than body on body, it's also heart on heart and spirit on spirit. It's for this reason that we must save it for our life-partner alone. God designed sex to be a life-uniting act. Every time we sleep with someone, a part of ourselves is given away, and a part of the other person is taken into ourselves.

The bond that results from sexual intimacy with another is sometimes spoken of as a soul-tie. This soul-tie explains why people universally feel so drawn to previous sexual partners, and why break-ups with sexual partners are so much more devastating.

I gave my virginity away as a teenager (along with 65% of all other Western teenagers according to the stats). I experienced a deep soul-tie with my girlfriend. The intensity of our premature sexual bond made for a dysfunctional, love-hate relationship. When we finally did break-up, I felt like I was getting divorced, even though I was only 17! It took me many years until I was truly free from any sexual memories of my past.

Thank God I then became a Christian and decided to wait, and become - by the grace of God - a secondary virgin. About a decade later, I met the girl I would marry. She was saddened by the fact that I'd given myself away as a teenager. However, the fact that I had then waited for ten years delighted her. It was my way of saying, 'I love you so much that I loved you before I even met you, by saving myself for you.'

2.5) Pre-marital foreplay

Foreplay is a wonderful part of the sexual relationship in marriage. But it is out of bounds for the unmarried.

If you've asked the question, 'How far is too far?' then you've asked the wrong question. Mark Driscoll's answer to this same question is, 'What kind of sinful heart would even ask that question?' The right question is, 'How much can we keep special?'

Our simple guideline is this: do not arouse each other sexually until you're married. Many unmarried couples choose to kiss. This may be acceptable for some, but let us admit that there are two kinds of kissing. There is the kissing that is an expression of affection. And there is the kissing that is a fuel on the fire of arousal. The second kind of kissing is not acceptable.

The very word, 'foreplay' suggests that this is going somewhere. But an unmarried Christian couple have nowhere to go! Don't even go there at all,

for your own sakes. The experience of many is that once compromise has happened it is very difficult to regain a sense of purity in the relationship. Of course God forgives, but we must remember that sin always damages relationships.

Assume until the day you're married that the person you're with may be someone else's future spouse. Would you want people messing with your future spouse?

Two practical tips include: 1) Be accountable to a Christian married couple who will regularly ask you the question, 'Are you keeping it tidy sexually?' and to whom you can speak to if you're struggling or compromising. 2) Don't put yourself in tempting situations. Romans 13:14 tells us to make no provision for the sinful nature. So, don't sleep over. Don't stay awake until two in the morning. Don't lie alone on a bed together. And weekends away between the two of you are absolutely out of the question! Save these sacred moments for marriage.

2.6) Adultery

I know of no other sin that can so devastate a life, a spouse, a family, and the spiritual community you are a part of, like adultery can. A pastor friend once told me: 'One month I had to tell a wife that her husband had died. She was devastated. In the same month, I had to tell a wife that her husband was having an affair. As I told her, it was like a knife was plunged into her heart and she fell to the ground. Adultery devastated this woman more than death devastated the other. I couldn't help thinking: sin is worth than death.'

We put ourselves in the most danger, when we think something like adultery could never happen to us. I speak as a Christian leader, one who spends my life pondering and preaching God's will. And yet, if I look around the landscape of Christian leaders in the last few decades, it is littered with the carcasses of fallen men and woman, who have decimated communities and the credibility of Christ in their cities. If they were vulnerable, I am vulnerable. And you are too. Our impressive bible knowledge and our good track records cannot protect us. We remain vulnerable to sexual failure.

And in the words of Peter Howard-Brown, 'Whether you've got the face that would make it onto the Cosmo cover, or a face that could make it onto Farmer's Weekly, you are equally vulnerable!'

Another myth is that it is only people that you perceive to be more attractive than your spouse that you could fall for. Again, the statistics show that usually a person has an affair with someone *less* attractive than their spouses.

We must be honest with ourselves in this regard. Affairs always start in our minds first. Is there a person, other than your spouse, who causes your heart to beat fast, whose attention you find yourself trying to attract? If so,

you are on the edge of self-destruction. Take radical action, even if it means changing your job. It's essential you confess your temptation to your spouse, and your home group leader or the elders and ask them to pray for you and guide you.

Howard Hendricks did a survey of 250 Christian men who had had affairs. He looked for patterns that would show how at risk we are to adultery. He noticed four common traits in these men:

- 1) None of them were involved in any kind of regular accountability relationships with other Christian men.
- 2) All of them had stopped (or had never started) the daily habit of spending time with Christ in his Word and in prayer.
- 3) 80% of them had affairs with women with whom they spent significant amounts of time, usually at work. It was always an affinity with them (that came from prolonged association) that resulted in adultery. (It is for this reason that Billy Graham made a personal rule to never be alone with a woman, other than his wife, in a car or a room).
- 4) All of them were convinced moral failure could never happen to them.

Bob Mumford, a famous preacher, tells of how he once landed in a country far from his wife, and immediately felt what he called 'a spirit of lust' come over him. Struck by his own fallibility, he quickly hid behind a vending machine in the airport and, eyes closed, began to pray, 'God help me.' He opened his eyes and a beautiful air hostess was standing in front of him, 'Can I help you?' she asked politely. Bob loudly answered, 'No! No! No!' This story, as humorous as it is, is the experience of so many men when they travel. All men and women who travel, singles included, must develop a practical, pre-emptive, strategy to stay pure:

- Travel with someone (your spouse or a moral friend or colleague) wherever and whenever possible.
- If you must travel alone, try to not stay in hotels but rather in homes.
- If you do stay in a hotel, ask for one without a television set. If this can't be done, then unplug the television set right away.
- Keep a photo of your spouse in your wallet and keep looking at them, and praying for them.
- Keep in regular telephonic contact with people back home, telling them of your temptations if need be.

Living in the light

If we turn away from these sexual sins (lust, pornography, sinful expressions of masturbation, premarital sex and foreplay, and adultery) with all of our hearts and embrace life in Christ's light, then our sexuality will increasingly glow with the light of Christ, not fester in the darkness of sin. What a joy this is! Not only is this a good idea - it is God's will, and we're in trouble with him if we don't pursue sexual purity on all of its varying levels. If you're not persuaded, listen to Paul's command in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8:

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way

that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or sister or take advantage of them. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but the God who has given you his empowering Holy Spirit.

Are you willing to renounce all sexual sin, and get your sexuality from the festering darkness of the shadows, and into the liberating light of Christ?

3) If married, celebrate your love sexually

It is a common myth in our culture that marriage is something you do when you're ready to stop having sex. But it's simply not true. Secular statistics verify that the most regular and satisfying sex happens in marriage, not out of it. Listen to God's advice for married sex in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5:

But since there is so much immorality (in our world), each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. The husband should fulfil his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

This passage is wonderfully liberating. If you're married, it insists that a fully celebrated marriage marked by regular sex is a powerful deterrent against sexual temptation. It calls you to realise that you are the only legitimate source to satisfy the romantic and sexual needs of your spouse. It calls for regular sex, both when you feel like it and when your spouse feels like it. Having sex with your partner is, at times, the most spiritual thing you can do! If you're a wife it calls you to see yourself as a sexual equal to your husband, freeing you up to take initiative in love-making.

The single greatest secret to a great sex life in marriage is not some magic technique, but two people who love each other and keep on investing in the emotional and romantic intimacy of their marriage. Two practical ways to keep romance alive are 1) to tenderly kiss and embrace every time you come together again after not having seen one another for a few hours, and 2) to have a romantic 'date night' regularly, for the rest of your life. Be willing to spend money to make these dates memorable, and be sure to ask this question somewhere in the night, 'So how are you doing, really?' When our hearts touch, our bodies will follow.

Other advice for married couples:

- Make your partner the standard of beauty. Refuse to compare the attractiveness of your spouse with others and choose to redefine beauty not by what the culture dictates, but by what your spouse is.

- Plan times when you can make love. If you want heaven at eleven (pm), then begin romancing one another at seven (am). Having said that, many married couples find that mornings and middays are better for sex, since by the end of the day, we're usually exhausted.
- Decide to have sex as much as you can when you can, because there will be times when you can't.
- Keep nurturing your own attractiveness through keeping fit, eating healthily and dressing attractively for your spouse. Dress attractively, even when (especially when) it is just your spouse who sees you.
- Find and read Christian books like Ed Wheat's 'Intended for pleasure'.
- Give yourself years to get better at love making. The best sex should be happening decades into your marriage!

4) Receive Christ's grace in the area of your sexuality

Christ is ready to graciously forgive anyone who repents.

John 4:1-26 and 8:1-11 show how tenderly Jesus restored people who owned up to their sexual sin. So come clean. Refuse to defend your darkness. Proverbs 28:13 says, 'He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.' The first thing to do is to get face-to-face with God, let him know you are ready for change. Then tell someone else. James 5:16 says, 'Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed'. Find a Christian friend, a pastor or elder, a counsellor, or small group leader and get the secret out. Try to find someone or a group of people whom you can talk to regularly and honestly about your ongoing levels of sexual purity.

Declare war on sexual sin, because it has declared war on you.

1 Peter 2:11 says, 'Abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul.' Lust is going to attack you persistently until the day you die. Unfortunately, many older men say that it doesn't get that much easier over time. You are sentenced to a war for the rest of your life. The best response to this, is to strike pre-emptively. Attack lust before it attacks you. See yourself as a warrior, as a freedom fighter in God's kingdom. Your enemy is sexual sin. You must overcome it. God will give you the grace to do so. Your integrity, your future, your authority in ministry, your family, and all those that you've been called to help to set free - everything hangs in the balance. Just one failure can ruin it all! So stay alert to the reality of the battle. And don't forget that sometimes the most effective attack is *flight*. 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, 'Flee sexual immorality!' Don't trust yourself to withstand sexual temptation - get out of there!

Be confident that Christ by his grace will help you to stay standing.

Once we own up to how sexually vulnerable we are to falling sexually, we're ready to put our confidence not in *our* ability to stay standing but in *Christ's* ability to keep us standing. Jude 24-25 encourages us:

To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our

Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forever more! Amen.

The key to staying standing is to stay dependent on Christ's day-by-day, hour-by-hour empowering grace, and to stay mesmerised by his 'glory, majesty, power and authority'. Christ is the treasure more wonderful than any other treasure - even the treasure of sex. Let your heart expand to encompass him as your treasure, and the little lusts which once exerted such great influence, will begin to diminish in their power.

Conclusion

Jesus said that broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many take it, but narrow is the road that leads to life, and only few find it. This certainly applies to our sexuality. Our society marches with great boasting on the highway that leads to destruction, calling it the path of 'freedom'. But the devastation that trails behind them is so obvious. The very sexual path so many have believed would free them has enslaved them. After all, sexuality is a wonderful creation, but a cruel and terrible god.

In the midst of this sex-enslaved world, Christ calls you and me to *real* sexual freedom. It is a narrower path because Christ insists on restraint. But this narrow path leads to life, joy, hope and peace. It turns out that the cost of obedience to Christ is small when compared to the rewards of obedience.

Let's embark on this path by making Christ our heart's treasure, by bringing our sexuality out of the shadows, by celebrating our married love sexually, and by receiving Christ's forgiving, strengthening and sustaining grace. To stay motivated on this path, remember that our integrity, our future, our joy and peace, our relationship with God and those we love most, our influence and power to set others free, and our heavenly reward all hang in the balance.