

Don't Let Lust Control You

Month after month, one particular article on my Web site receives an unusually high number of hits: "Overcoming Sexual Temptation." Many Christians, such as the reader quoted below, find sexual temptation a difficult struggle and walk in constant condemnation.

"I have failed God many times in the area of sexual lust. I find myself thinking about impure thoughts. I confess my sin, ask forgiveness and repent. I do OK for a few days but find myself back where I started. I feel out of control. How can I break this cycle?"

Here are the steps:

1. Stop sexual thoughts. Think on things that are pure, as the Scriptures command (see Phil. 4:8). You can control where your thoughts go by making a mental choice to focus on something nonsexual.

2. Remove sources of sexual temptation. Identify the things in your life that are contributing to the problem. Then remove them as sources of temptation. Areas to check include:

Movies: Avoid ones that encourage lust and erotica. They make it impossible for you to "flee from temptation."

Television: It may be time to rethink channel and program choices.

Magazines: The visual images can be arousing. The stories and suggestions often encourage lust.

Books: Reading steamy romance novels won't help you focus your thoughts on what is pure and virtuous.

Peer group: What values are reinforced? How explicit and graphic is the talk? Is being a virgin considered weird? Are your friends committing adultery?

Family: Some families don't model appropriate sexual behavior, limit sexual exposure or have good sexual boundaries. Know what's right and what isn't.

Computer: The Internet gives easy access to pornography. Put on parental controls or a filter system or unsubscribe if you can't seem to resist.

Alcohol: More illicit sex happens under the influence of alcohol because inhibitions are removed. Don't indulge.

Job environment: Resist pressure to be part of the group, go to bars and engage in sexual talk. And watch those opposite-sex friendships. Many affairs begin with an understanding, sympathetic, listening co-worker.

3. Purpose in your heart to follow God's Word. Don't be ruled by passion. No matter what you feel, act with your brain and not your emotions.

4. Don't put yourself in tempting places. In the same way that

a recovered alcoholic would shun going into a bar, you must avoid going to places that make resistance tough (for example, X-rated movies, strip joints, bars). When Satan tempted Eve, she engaged him in conversation instead of telling him to go crawl somewhere else. We all know the outcome of her choice!

5. Resist with the Word. When Satan came to Jesus, His defense was to speak the Word. Satan did not argue with Scripture; he left.

6. Don't lie to yourself. Many Christians think they can handle a lot more sexually explicit material than they can. We aren't aware of the subtle influence it has and the desensitization that takes place as a result of regular exposure.

7. Keep your walk with the Lord strong. Develop an intimate relationship with your heavenly Father. Difficult times come when we get out of fellowship with God. He doesn't leave us; we stop relating to Him. It is imperative that we stay connected.

8. If you fall, don't live in condemnation. Recognize your mistake, ask God to forgive you and turn from sin. True repentance involves a turning from the behavior. I have worked with a number of people who repent but go right back to the behavior because they haven't made necessary changes, aren't ready to give up the immediate gratification that accompanies lust or don't exercise their spiritual authority over sin.

Finally, if you still have difficulty, speak to a therapist or minister. There could be a spiritual, emotional or psychological root that requires more intense work. Getting

free from lust is not impossible, but it will require significant changes in your thought life and behavior.

Linda S. Mintle, Ph.D., is a Virginia-based licensed clinical social worker and author of *Divorce Proofing Your Marriage* (Siloam Press), available at [. She welcomes your questions about the tough issues of life at \[.\]\(#\)](#)