

Seven Steps to 'Sex-cess'

☒ Live in a sex-charged culture, without getting zapped!

Jim is in my office one Saturday morning crying over the lust, guilt and terrible sexual choices that are destroying his life. I don't know whether to empathize with his pain or kick his butt for going to sleep on his watch!

I remind him that the battle for sexual integrity demands constant vigilance. It's a wrestling match with Satan, and any time you let your guard down, you get body-slammed.

Our society so bombards us with sex. With our male fascination for visual stimulation and our often-adolescent mindsets, this is very disconcerting.

It is easy to empathize with the early church father, Origen, who made himself a eunuch in a desperate step to achieve greater purity. But, God has also given us a wonderful gift in being sexually alive with exciting potential for deep, passionate intimacy.

The following are practical skills, actually disciplines, men need to practice as they grow up into sexual maturity and intimacy. "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Tim. 1:7, NIV).

1. Bring Sexual Secrets Into the Light

Several years ago, I can remember having trouble keeping my thought life disciplined around a certain woman who would occasionally cross my path. There was no inappropriate interaction, but I did not like the way she could ring my sexual chimes without even trying.

I finally told a friend of mine about her—the way I had

coached others to confess their secret struggles. How interesting that the next time I saw this woman the sexual pull was gone.

Wow! Isn't it amazing how Satan's system thrives in darkness and secrecy? It is exciting to practice the discipline of bringing a secret into the light of day and to actually experience its power disappearing.

"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible" (Eph. 5:11-13).

What a dynamic concept God created with His emphasis on confession and walking in the light. An important part of this discipline is seeking out appropriate confessors, groups and accountability buddies.

Wives cannot be in that role alone. We need male buddies to help us bring our secrets into the light.

2. Practice Pre-Zone Choices

In sexual addiction there is an interesting concept of being in "the zone." This is when sexual temptation and lustful desire have headed down the slippery slope and already given birth to sinfully following through on a behavior.

It would take a team of wild horses to stop you once you reach the acting-out zone. "But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin" (James 1:14-15).

Carl stated the car had a mind of its own and turned into the parking lot of the convenience store that sells dirty magazines. Of course the car couldn't be stopped, Carl was already in the zone by the time he got near the store. The time for decisions was earlier.

That morning he could have called a friend for help. He could have called his wife before he left work. But he failed to make any of these pre-zone choices to preserve his sexual integrity.

Christian men often get angry with God and complain that He allowed sexual temptation that they couldn't stand up under (see 1 Cor. 10:13). No, we simply did not make a series of healthy choices until it was too late.

God didn't fail us. We failed to take the first choices He gave to keep us from sinning. The quicker you begin making decisions about sexual temptation, the more God can intervene.

3. Discipline Fantasies and Sexual Surges

Men usually think they are more highly sexed than their wives are. It is true that most men think about sex more and are more visually specific as they zoom in on female bodies. But I don't think it is higher testosterone or our sexual natures that make us more sexually aroused; it is our poor self-discipline of the environmental sexual cues.

Controlling sexual cues is an interesting discipline. It involves several ways of applying the wisdom of "take captive every thought" (2 Cor. 10:5) and "the eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light'" (Matt. 6:22).

Practicing the following really helps:

Don't close your eyes or give free rent. When seeing or hearing a sexual cue (for example, a guy in the locker room talking about a sexually charged movie he saw) keep from closing your eyes and visualizing or fantasizing about the sexual image.

You can't always avoid the sexual stimulation, but when a thought or visual cue comes into your mind, you can choose not

to give it lodging rent-free. God gives us the ability to switch topics in our minds.

Direct your vision and practice the “one-second” rule. Try to discipline your vision to look at women’s faces or see their bodies in a general way—don’t do the elevator routine as your eyes roam up and down, stopping at favorite floors.

When seeing specific visual cues (for example, a tight sweater), do not allow your gaze to linger and further sexualize the cue. Move your eyes and mind on.

Do not run with cues. Noticing the cute runner may be natural. Following up that cue by almost driving off the road trying to check her out in the rearview mirror is a step into dangerous territory.

Now you’re thinking, Wow, what a build! You are off and running in your mind as you take one cue and build it into seven. Choose to stop with one cue.

4. Work Inside Out

Do you sometimes believe God doesn’t hold up His part of the bargain with changing our sexual behaviors? You try so desperately to uphold the right sexual behavior and yet always seem to slip.

Quit trying to work outside in. Instead, start with God working His deeper changes in your heart and creating true freedom and redemption.

Real sexual integrity is not about what you aren’t doing; it is about what you are doing. You may have stopped masturbation but haven’t dealt with the deeper heart lust issues. Go deeper than the behavior.

How is masturbation affecting you and your relationships? Are you lusting, lazy, avoiding intimacy, feeding an addiction? Go deep into God’s character and the heart of issues, and work

inside out.

We will make better choices as God helps us become appalled at how shallow, ugly, stupid and tragically destructive sexual sins are. Psalm 97:10 says, "Let those who love the Lord hate evil."

When we lust after another woman or are tempted to have an affair, we can better understand the damage we're causing by imagining instead an evil we could never see ourselves doing—such as taking a tire iron from our cars and bashing our wives with it.

This may seem over-the-top. But we each need to recognize just how cruel and mean God sees our sinful fantasies and actions.

5. Meet Nonsexual Needs Nonsexually

I recently asked my men's group: "It's Friday afternoon, and you got off work early. The wife and kids are not home, and you have time to relax and enjoy. How many of you might think of something sexual as a part of that recreation?"

All of them admitted that it would cross their minds.

We brainstormed on what were they really desiring at the end of an exhausting week: diversion, a chance to let down and play, and maybe some adventure and excitement. Sex can accomplish this, but we started listing alternatives: wandering around Home Depot, playing video games, biking or shooting hoops.

Men long for connection, meaningful physical touch and consolation when stressed. False sexual intimacy can seem helpful, but this shallow substitute can never become the real thing. One of my friends, Mark Laaser, keeps saying that the antidote to lust is good male friendships.

Letting God help us meet our needs, sexual and nonsexual, wisely and appropriately, is a critical discipline for sexual

integrity.

We often think that we need sex when we are really searching for something else.

6. Quit Window-Shopping

We can summarize God's plan for our sexuality quite simply: Every Adam courageously waits for and erotically connects only with his Eve—all other women are his sisters.

1 Timothy 5:2 tells us to treat "older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity."

A female client of mine recently asked why Christian men do so much window-shopping of women. She stated: "If they are godly men, why are they sizing up women for mental or sexual relationships? Aren't we sisters?" I couldn't agree more.

I fondly think of a pastor friend of mine, who upon seeing an attractive woman says to himself, "Thank you, Lord, for this woman." And then he adds: "But this isn't my woman, Lord. Thank you for mine."

7. Practice 3-D Sexuality

God teaches us that sexuality is three-dimensional. It can never be just a body thing (see 1 Cor. 6:13-19) but naturally involves our soul and spirit.

When you are at a mall and notice an attractive woman, look at her face and notice if she is tired.

Observe the packages she is carrying and think, I bet she's a great mom. Make the woman a person and give her a life.

Body: Look at less common but very feminine features such as hands, smile and ways of gesturing. Let her body communicate her heart, not just her sexuality.

Soul: Honor the needs of her mind and heart for respect and

affirmation, not lust. She is very precious to God. Would you want someone looking at your daughter the way you are looking at her?

Spirit: Remember that she wants someone special in her life to connect with—and this is not you!

One of my clients, after seeing a great body and struggling with lust, starts praying for that woman that she will truly know Christ. Giving her a spirit gets him back on track.

Godly disciplines are not easy or natural. Keep practicing because it's a no-brainer choice. Do we want pain, guilt and failed intimacy, or do we want the fruit of the Spirit with love, joy and peace?

“No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:11). It's time to vigilantly protect your sexual integrity.

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