

Why Marriage Doesn't Heal Your Lust Problem—and What Can

I saw a pornographic magazine for the first time when I was in the fifth grade. A friend's dad worked for the company that printed the industry's leading periodical at the time and had a massive collection at home.

So we attempted to educate ourselves in human sexuality entirely apart from parental direction or biblical principles. We were clueless, curious boys entering puberty, trying to figure out what all the fuss was about.

Now, I've talked to countless men my age who had the same experience. We were exposed, because of the sin and carelessness of our parents' generation, to images that warped our understanding of human sexuality and male-female relationships. By age 10 or 11, most of us (primarily men, but some women as well) were getting a simple message etched into our brains whether we understood it or not: The human body is here for your entertainment. It's an object, not a soul.

Since then, the pornography industry has exploded with growth, thanks to the internet. Our standards of decency have eroded in this area as well. And our society is just now starting to learn the damaging consequences of our collective choices in this area. Finally, the world around us is waking up to the harsh reality that we've taught an entire generation of people to sexually objectify one another. Just browse for five minutes for a massive education about why this issue matters so much.

As a result of being sexualized at a much earlier age than previous generations, we're surrounded by marriages now suffering from the harmful effects of unbridled lust. Don't

misunderstand ... lust has been around since the beginning of humanity. It's nothing new. Peruse the Old Testament and you'll discover the raw stories of mostly men and a few women given over to the harmful results of lust. The fire of lust has burned since sin entered our race, but modern technology, both print and digital, have thrown massive amounts of fuel on that fire.

In the context of modern marriage, I've noticed a particular theme among young men who have grown up in this sex-saturated culture of ours. They struggle with lust, and they get married with an incorrect assumption: She'll fix my lust problem. I say "struggle" because I'm referring primarily to those guys who *want* to be pure, but keep finding themselves addicted to pornography, masturbation and lustful thoughts.

Why Marriage Doesn't Heal Your Lust Problem

Getting married doesn't give you victory over lust because singleness isn't what causes lust.

Lust doesn't come from a magazine or a website. And while Satan instigates our culture toward brokenness and certainly orchestrates temptation, he isn't the root cause of our lust, either. And lust has nothing to do with the attractiveness of your spouse. This is why I always cringe when I read something from a Christian leader who encourages women to improve their personal appearance to help their husbands curb their lust problems.

First of all, if that's the solution, single men are hopeless. Second of all, men with wives the world may define as physically attractive still have lust issues. And third ... you're just wrong! And it's an often painful burden you place on the hearts of hurting women.

Where does lust come from? It comes from *within*. James put it this way:

“But each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed. Then, when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin; and when sin is finished, it brings forth death” (James 1:14-15).

That’s right. Lust is an out-of-control *desire*. Desire, in and of itself, isn’t sin. Neither is temptation. Being attracted to someone isn’t sin either. But when temptation comes and awakens my desire and I, in the power of my flesh alone, choose not to escape, lust is born and gives birth to death.

Don’t blame your wife, your computer or Hollywood for a lust issue. Blame your own flesh, your own mind and your own heart. Does that mean you’re a terrible dirtbag? No. It means you’re human. You’re a sinner. And it can sometimes mean that you’ve been hurt and victimized in ways that weren’t your fault, such as sexual abuse or early exposure to pornography, both of which wire your brain in unhealthy ways.

Is Victory Over Lust Possible?

Yes. Victory over lust is possible. Some guys argue that it’s an out-of-reach goal, but the Bible says otherwise. Scripture is clear that we are “more than conquerors” through Jesus. Sin has been put to death in the death of Christ on the cross. You can absolutely win over your lust problem.

As a married man, you’ll need your wife’s support in the form of prayer, encouragement and even some measure of accountability. But she can’t fix you, and fixing you is a burden that will likely crush her under its weight.

So how do you win over lust for the sake of your spiritual and marital health? Here are the basics:

1. Own the responsibility for your choices and agree with God about the sinful nature of lust. Confess it and claim the forgiveness God promises in 1 John 1:9.

2. Take an inventory of your past for sexual abuse or premature exposure to sexually explicit material and ask God to give you peace and break the bondage those experiences still hold on you.

3. Open up to a godly friend—one who will love you without judgment but also be honest with you without reservation. Confession to God brings forgiveness, but confession to others is required for healing.

4. Talk to your spouse. Whether it's an affair, a pornography addiction or out-of-control lustful thinking, she deserves to know. Intimacy is the goal of marriage, and it's impossible without honesty and transparency.

5. Get counseling and/or coaching depending on the severity of the problem. There is never shame in seeking the healing help of others.

6. Commit to purity. Repeatedly. Claim the freedom and victory that are yours in the atoning sacrifice of the cross, in the power of the resurrection and in the company of the Holy Spirit.

7. Take the escape. God promises in 1 Corinthians 10:13 that He will never allow more temptation than you can, in His power, withstand. And, He will always make a way for you to escape. Always.

8. Run away from sexual temptation. Don't fight it. Don't subject yourself to it or open the door for it. Run away! You're strong only when you lean into God's strength, and He delivers you by providing a route of retreat.

9. Cultivate a softened heart toward people, especially women. Re-humanize the women you encounter by remembering they are souls, loved and cherished by the Father.

10. Stay close to Jesus. When you draw close to God, He will

draw close to you.

By the way, it's entirely possible that your lust is toward other men. Everything I've said still applies. The desire and attraction, even for someone of the same gender, isn't sin in and of itself. But when the temptation comes to dwell or to act on those thoughts, take the escape and stay committed to transparency with the people close to you who will love and protect you.

A Word to Wives

Wives are, more often than not, taken by surprise when the lust issue comes up. Most women think differently than most men and your initial reaction will likely be a question along the lines of, *Is this my fault?* I understand why you would ask that question. It's easy to feel that it's a comparison issue. But it's really not. So hear this from the heart of a man—of a husband who has had this very tough conversation with his own wife ... **It's *not* your fault.**

It's not about how you look. It's not about how much sex you have or don't have. Again, if this were the problem, single men are toast. It's about *his* choice to allow *his* desires to grow into lust.

While it is **not** your fault that your husband struggles with lust, you can help him, if you choose to show grace (and I hope you will). How?

1. Listen to his confession.
2. Hurt. It's OK to hurt. Don't ignore it.
3. Be honest about how it all makes you feel.
4. Set some boundaries with sexual intimacy to protect your feelings while you work through it.
5. Talk to someone—a female friend or a counselor.

6. Ask God to heal you, over time.
7. Forgive him. Not for his sake, but for yours. And remember how much God has forgiven you.
8. Forgive him again when the resentment creeps back in—and it will.
9. Expect honesty and transparency. Expect him to be accountable for his behavior.
10. Love him unconditionally. This is the hardest part, but it's what you must do if your marriage is going to make it.

The conversation about sexual lust brings most marriages into valleys and shadows for days, weeks or months. It's not easy. It won't be solved by this blog post, but maybe this is a starting place. As you walk through the valley remember this: There is hope. There is always hope. There is a Savior. His name is Jesus. He died for the sexually impure and His grace makes us clean and whole again. Keep running to Jesus!

Because my church, Grace Hills, treats lust and pornography addiction as such an important issue, we put together a church "porn" page of resources. Check out . {eo2}

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