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Ministering to the Sexually Broken

This download gives practical advice and perspective in dealing with a pervasive problem in our society.



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Click on an article you'd like to read:

3 INTRODUCTION

Sexual Chaos

By JoHannah Reardon

6 LEADER'S GUIDE

How to use this download for a group study.

7 CONFRONTING SEXUAL SIN

There is no sin beyond God's redemptive healing power.

By Linda Dillow

12 A MAN'S ADDICTION TO PORN

Understanding this problem is the first step to treating it.

By Harry W. Schaumburg

18 OPENING THE DOOR TO HEALING

When childhood sexual abuse affects a marriage's intimacy

By Mary DeMuth

27 "HELP, I'M GAY"

How to talk to someone about same-sex attraction

By Stanton L. Jones

41 FREEDOM FROM SEXUAL ADDICTION

To find healing, you have to come out from hiding.

By Juli Slattery

47 WHY AFFAIRS HAPPEN

And what you need to know about prevention and recovery

By Cindy Crosby

58 STARTING OVER

With God's help, it's possible to rebuild trust—even after a painful betrayal.

By Louis McBurney

65 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Articles, books, and Bible studies to help you further



Introduction

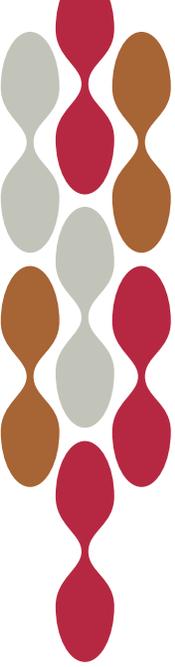
Sexual Chaos

By JoHannah Reardon



My husband was a pastor for 27 years. The biggest surprise, and the one he felt least prepared for, was the number of people in his office each week who wanted to talk about their sexual brokenness. The topics varied, but the frequency of those who struggled with various issues did not. He began reading furiously and going to conferences to try to learn how to deal with the complex problems people were coming to him with, such as childhood sexual abuse, pornography addiction, rape, homosexuality, and unfaithfulness.

He quickly learned that he could only help someone so much with these deep-seated issues. Those who were battling something new were able to find help from him as he led them in Scripture and self-discipline. But those who had been steeped in these things since childhood were beyond him. He would usually only meet with such people a



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Sexual Chaos

few times and then recommend a professional counselor or a layperson who had been through a similar experience and could offer help from the years of their own counseling.

So what hope do we have in addressing these complex issues in a download? We know we can't offer you three easy steps to help people become sexually healthy, but we do hope to provide perspective. These articles give you a broad overview of various kinds of sexual brokenness and hopefully some answers in initial meetings with those who are suffering.

In addressing the complex and ever-volatile issues surrounding sex and sexual identity, Marshall Shelley, editor in chief of *Leadership Journal*, quotes Michael Sytsma at BuildingChurchLeaders.com who identifies the three most important messages for church leaders to communicate:

1. Sex is a wondrous gift from God. And the Bible celebrates sexuality. God uses it as an earthly example of his heavenly passion for his people, the church, his "bride."
2. God has a clear purpose for sex. To assist in the mystery of "two becoming one." Yes, sex is important in procreation, and having children is essential to the survival of the human race. But sex is also the self-relinquishing love between two distinct members of the human race—a man and a woman, who complete each other in profound and sacred ways. And this is an earthly glimpse of the glory of our eternal union with God.
3. There is hope and healing for the misuse of sex. Whenever sex is used for something other than the purpose of sharing body and soul with a loving spouse, it is a



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Sexual Chaos

misuse of God's gift. In a world filled with those who have been wounded sexually, Christians are to be God's agents of healing and restoration.

Marshall goes on to say that those we counsel "need to know we can be trusted with sex issues before we deal with the heart issues about God." Our hope is that this download will help you better do that.

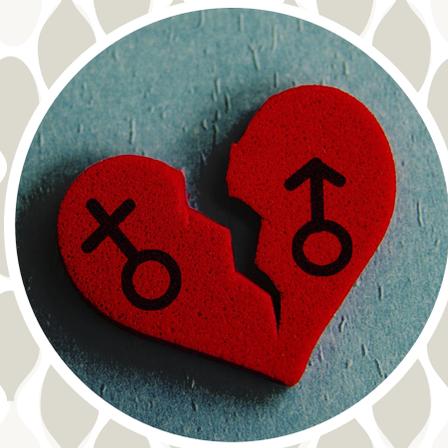
Blessings,

JoHannah Reardon

Contributing Editor for GIFTEDFORLEADERSHIP.COM

Leader's Guide

How to use this download for a group study



This download can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

- 1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
- 2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
- 3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
- 4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
- 5. When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
- 6. End the session in prayer.**

Confronting Sexual Sin

There is no sin beyond God's redemptive healing power.

By Linda Dillow



I was speaking at a large leadership conference in Texas when, in the middle of worship, I suddenly found a woman weeping uncontrollably in my arms. I escorted her out of the room, holding her as she sobbed. Then out came Sarah's confession:

"I just have to tell someone. I'm the mom of three beautiful children. I'm a wife, I'm a women's ministry leader—and I'm living a double life."

Over the next hour, Sarah told me about her life of sexual pain and sin that had culminated in a 12-year affair with her boss, and an ongoing 5-year sexual relationship with a woman who was also a leader in the church. Her story was filled with so much pain and shame, how could she even begin to put the pieces together?



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Confronting Sexual Sin

Humanly speaking, Sarah was broken beyond repair.

Over the years, I've had the privilege of walking with many women who were deeply sexually wounded. Many of them have histories of acting out sexually with men, women, and children. They confess to habitual masturbation, pornography use that started when they were children, and sexual experiences too horrific to recount. I want to share with you three things I've learned from these courageous women who had enough faith to trust me with their stories and believe that God could redeem the most vile of sins and offenses.

1. The church has believed a lie. The lie goes like this: When you trust Christ as Savior, he can clean up a lot of things in your life, but there is one thing beyond God's redemptive healing power: your sexuality.

Women enslaved in shackles of sexual addiction, in bondage to their unspeakable shame, often have this lie reinforced again and again by fellow Christians. It's acceptable to admit to gossip, lying, and even lust, but if anyone knew about the sexual perversions women like Sarah have experienced, there would be no room for grace.

Do you believe that some sins are beyond God's forgiveness, and that some addictions are too powerful for the Lord of Heaven's armies to break? That's exactly what our enemy, Satan, wants you to believe.

Here is the truth. There is *no* sin beyond God's redemptive healing power. As we are reminded in Romans 8:1, "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." There are no exception clauses! By his death on the cross, Jesus has separated you from all of your sin—past, present, and future.

2. Sexual addiction often begins when evil is done to a young child or teen. Sarah had memories of sexual acts with children and even animals when she was a preschooler. Other women tell stories of being exposed to pornography, being violated by a brother, stepfather, father, or uncle, or being taught to masturbate in childhood.

This makes it very difficult to separate true conviction (what I have done wrong) from false guilt (taking responsibility for what was done to me). A woman like Sarah can't blame her choices on those who stole her childhood innocence, but she must accept that she has been acting out of pain and confusion much of her life.

Receiving God's forgiveness means learning to extend it to those who have done great evil to a helpless child. Jesus was very clear: We must forgive others as we have been forgiven (**Matthew 6:14** and **Ephesians 4:32**).

3. God's redemption becomes a reality when we bring to light what has been hidden. That night in Texas was the first time Sarah had spoken much of her sexual sin out loud. Before that, she had hidden it, rationalized it, and intentionally "forgotten" it. By God's grace, she was compelled to bring her hidden life into the light. Her bondage began to break that evening, but that was just the beginning.

I told Sarah that if she really wanted to be free, she had to take some difficult steps to repent and turn from her life of hiding. She would have to break off the sexual relationship she had with her female friend, and she would have to tell her husband about her hidden sin. All of the color drained from her face as she considered what freedom might cost. Several months later, Sarah had taken those steps. Coming into the light meant facing the painful consequences of her choices, including the



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Confronting Sexual Sin

impact on her husband:

My husband has been crying today. He says he needs to go somewhere and cry some more. This is a painful place. I cry as I stand at the center of my pool of sin and watch the rings circle out from me and touch so many people with the pain of my sin.

Sarah and her husband wept. They sought help for their marriage. In the pursuit of freedom and forgiveness, you will have to risk much, including the respect of those you love. You may have to watch your family and friends experience deep pain because of your choices.

There are no guarantees that your husband, your parents, or your best friend will stand by you. But there is one promise you can cling to: "If we confess our sins to him, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all sin" (1 John 1:9).

Our great God can and does work miracles. On their 21st wedding anniversary, Sarah and her husband recommitted to their marriage vows before family and friends.

If Sarah were writing this article, she would testify to the unbelievable redemption of Jesus. It's not just a Sunday school lesson, but the reality of any man or woman who trusts in the words of the Savior.

*Linda Dillow is co-founder of **Authentic Intimacy**, and author of best-selling novels *Passion Pursuit: What Kind of Love Are You Making?*, *What's It Like To Be Married To Me?*, and more. Connect with her online at <http://www.lindadillow.org>. This article first appeared on TODAYSCHRISTIANWOMAN.COM.*



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Confronting Sexual Sin

Reflect

- *Have you or your church believed the lie that coming to Christ instantly solves all your problems? Why is this belief so destructive?*
- *Does the person you are dealing with need to face that he or she has done something wrong, or is the person suffering from false guilt (taking responsibility for what was done to him or her)? Why is it so important to distinguish between the two?*
- *Is the person you are counseling being honest or hiding their sin? If the latter, how can you make it safe for the person to be more forthcoming?*

A Man's Addiction to Porn

Understanding this problem is the first step to treating it.

By Harry W. Schaumburg



Typically the event doesn't start with a confession, but by discovering your husband has a secret problem with lust, masturbation, and pornography. Faced with horrifying acts of betrayal, your reactions may range from sadness to depression, anger to rage, to sexual disinterest, to having an affair. Obviously, this is a relational problem between you and your husband; it's a breach of trust with the love of your life. You promised to forsake all others when you said, "I do." Very few couples getting married recognize that all marriages are fragile covenants consummated by two sinners with seemingly good intentions. While strong love and commitment go a long way, they're never enough—sin is always going to express itself with some level of hurt and pain. It's always the grace of God that ultimately makes any



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

A Man's Addiction to Porn

marriage survive unfaithfulness and become more meaningful and glorifying to God.

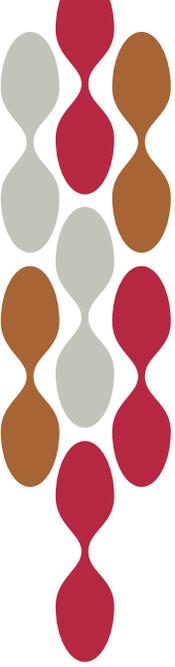
Whether you've been married just a few months or for more than 25 years, your worst fears are realized when you discover hidden sexual sin. Every moment of joy, satisfaction, and intimacy you've known with the man of your dreams seems to have been shattered. What was real now seems unreal. What was true intimacy now feels like false intimacy. What was a trusting relationship is now filled with paralyzing mistrust. This relational mistrust becomes the main element between you and your husband in the struggle to move forward.

All marriage relationships are complicated. Unfaithfulness takes the normal complications to the tenth power. There's no formula, "Do X, and then Y will logically follow," but instead it's a process of radical change, not only in your husband's behavior, but also in his spiritual, relational, and sexual maturity.

Where did it all begin?

You need to understand that your husband's lust, masturbation, and pornography use did not begin when you "gained 20 pounds," or "lost interest" in sex. Neither is it because your husband is visual and sexually hardwired. Women are sexually hardwired as well and are increasingly becoming addicted to pornography.

Long before you met your husband, his problem with looking at porn began, probably around age 11. Pornography is more accessible than ever, but the problem has become more extensive in conjunction with what has always lurked inside each of us: The drive to "look" isn't an overpowering sex drive or an addiction to sex, but an *overpowering, demanding*, selfish desire. Pornography, with its inherent ability to be secretive with easy accessibility, uniquely meets that demand. The essence of your



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

A Man's Addiction to Porn

husband's condition is an unwillingness to be told what to do spiritually, relationally, and sexually. *You need a new man, not just a change in behavior.*

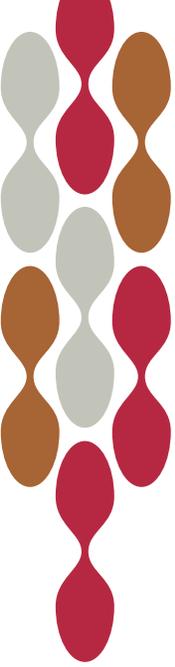
You could have sex twice a day with your husband, but he would still be lusting over other women if his selfish demand is out of control. Frequency is never the real issue; rather, it is a lack of passionate desire for mature spiritual, relational, and sexual intimacy *under* the supremacy of Christ over *all* selfish demands. Death is the only viable solution for sin. Thanks be to God that death has already occurred in Christ. Marital unfaithfulness is always a relational event between you and God, and between God and your husband. Heart change is required to move from false intimacy to real intimacy with God, and you! This is the change that will give you a new man.

Where do you go from here?

Experience tells me that behind every question you have, the never-ending threat of uncertainty lurks. *How could this happen—I thought he loved me? What's wrong with me? What do I do now?* And the critical question: *Can I ever trust him again?*

When the marriage covenant is broken by unfaithfulness, the most important preparation for moving ahead starts with the offended party. Think of your situation as rock climbing at the most precarious moment you could be in. Your 200-pound husband lost his grip on the side of the mountain and has fallen. You, the 120-pound wife, are holding the rope he's dangling from. This is your life and your marriage, but most importantly, *this is your sinful husband hanging over the cliff.*

We don't like when things get out of hand, but this kind of moment in life forces us to face reality about God and ourselves. Truth is, you can't get through life without pain, and you can't



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

A Man's Addiction to Porn

make it out alive. Certainty is a myth! So you either crawl under the blankets and never get out of bed, or you develop the biblical attribute of godly steadfastness. You will never be certain of what comes next, but you can learn to always be certain of God in your future. God reigns, not chance!

In all my experience in counseling and in searching Scripture, I'm convinced that all unfaithfulness is a testing of faith, and pain is an appointment with God for him to do his deepest work in you, your husband, and your marriage relationship for the glory of God.

A heart and a mind that are steadfast in the midst of betrayal are not numb to pain, but learn to respond to all the pain and uncertainty by knowing that your Father knows all about your situation. Long before you ever knew of your husband's hidden sexual sin, God was fully aware, waiting for the right moment to expose it for a purpose and to bring a radical change of heart. Pain is inevitable, but "[w]e can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love" (Romans 5:3-5). When you practice steadfastness with an understanding of the reality of God and what is really going on, you can turn your visual husband toward obedience to the Word, when he sees "your pure and reverent [life]" (**1 Peter 3:1-2**).

Trust is essential in any relationship, but unfaithfulness shatters trust. Sometimes working to build trust only feeds fear. You go back to thinking, "What if he's lying again?" In fear you pull away just at the moment when real intimacy



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

A Man's Addiction to Porn

needs to increase. Instead of pulling away, focus on caring for your husband's spiritual condition. The greater challenge of any wife facing uncertainty is not to believe that your husband will change, *but that God is able to change your husband*. In reality, your husband is seeking fulfillment through false intimacy. By caring, you are able to offer him what he's always wanted: true intimacy. Looking at pornography is a complete contradiction to what your husband wants. *He wants you!* He has always wanted you—care enough to help him want you not only more, but better!

Don't fall into the trap of thinking that traditional accountability will control his lust. A person is only as accountable as he wants to be. The problem with formalized groups of accountability is that men, wanting to perform and look good, learn to lie better in their meetings. Resist the temptation to become his "parole officer," because constantly checking everything never reveals the internal heart condition, but only external performance. *You*, with a heart seeking to be his wife according to the will of God, are his best hope for real change. Become his ally against sin, mutually asking each other, "As the months and years roll by, do you see me seeking more *to be* the will of God as your husband or wife, than seeking my own selfish will?"

Take the path of forgiveness; it's a narrow path! "Forgiveness is to pardon an offender by which he is considered and treated as not guilty" (Noah Webster's Dictionary, 1828 edition). Justice has been served for your sin and his sin; both of you are no longer under the wrath of God. Therefore, treat him better than he deserves, because that's the way God is treating you.

When dealing with the betrayal of unfaithfulness, the change for both of you is from the inside out. It is not simply a



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

A Man's Addiction to Porn

matter of his giving up pornography, but of both of you giving up yourselves, your natural independence, and your self-will. Now you can work together to build spiritual, relational, and sexual maturity in your marriage. Always remember, together, that this is a significant relational event between you and God that can change everything, now and for eternity.

*Dr. Harry W. Schaumburg is the founder of **Stone Gate Resources**, a counseling ministry specializing in the treatment of adultery, pornography, and all forms of sexual sin. He's written several books including **Undefined: Redemption from Sexual Sin, Restoration for Broken Relationships**. This article first appeared on TODAYSCHRISTIANWOMAN.COM.*

Reflect

- *How does it help a woman to realize that her husband's addiction is not due to something she has done?*
- *How is the rock-climbing metaphor useful?*
- *The author says, "It is not simply a matter of his giving up pornography, but of both of you giving up yourselves, your natural independence, and your self-will." Why is this necessary and how can it help a couple move forward?*

Opening the Door to Healing

When childhood sexual abuse affects a marriage's intimacy

By Mary DeMuth



“Don'tcha wanna be married? Or have kids?”

I nodded, tears streaming down my five-year-old face, thorns and brambles cutting into my backside.

“You gotta do this, then, or you can't ever be married.” The voice—which came from a teenage boy, accompanied by the snicker from his kid brother—would haunt me for 18 years until I got married.

It still haunts me.

The statistics about sexual crime both alarm and numb. According to the Department of Justice, by age 18, one in four women and one in six men have been sexually abused.

What happens to the titanic number of sexually abused men and women when they marry and enter regular sexual experiences with their mates? One study published in



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Opening the Door to Healing

Contemporary Family Therapy estimates that 56 percent of women who were sexually abused as children feel discomfort during sex and 36 percent seek some sort of sexual therapy.

Although I told my husband, Patrick, about the abuse while we were dating, after we were married, I pretended immunity from my past trauma. But keeping up the charade wasn't so easy, since sex reminded me of the abuse. I didn't tell Patrick, though, because I felt guilty, as though I were a poor wife.

I hoped somehow I could work out everything through sheer willpower. So throughout our early married life, I tolerated sex, never letting Patrick know how much I was hurting. I'm not sure if I even knew the extent of my pain, at least enough to verbalize it.

When our eldest daughter turned five, however, I began to relive the molestation I'd experienced at her age. I felt the horror afresh. I saw those brothers steal my innocence on muddied nature trails, in secluded playgrounds, and in their bedroom.

I puzzled over the photos my divorced father took of nude women and his insistence that I bathe him while he sat naked in his claw-footed tub. I ached over my mother's lack of protection. I felt abandoned.

Although I grieved, I still didn't realize how much those experiences were poisoning my sexual relationship with Patrick. It wasn't until we went through some marital difficulties and I spent two years in counseling that I finally realized the problem.

Now 12 years into our marriage, Patrick and I see clearly how the past affected our relationship—especially sexually.

Fear of being used. I felt used easily. If Patrick didn't talk enough with me during the day, but then initiated sex, I'd



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Opening the Door to Healing

remember that frightened five-year-old who was simply a rag doll to be played with. If he touched me in a way that triggered the abuser's touch, I'd grit my teeth and silently recoil.

I'd think, *Men want only to use me. I'm just a plaything.* My resentment grew toward Patrick, yet I remained quiet, and he grew frustrated that I wouldn't tell him the problem.

A distorted view of sex. It was difficult for me to see sex as beautiful and what God intended. I felt if I enjoyed sex, I was somehow legitimizing my abusers, that they were right in molesting me. But if I didn't enjoy it, I wasn't a good Christian wife.

My view of sex was that it was solely for a man's gratification. I longed (and still long) for the passionate Song of Songs kind of abandon.

Guilt over failure to perform sexually. I've often lamented to God, "Why did you give me a man who loves physical touch? Are you setting me up for failure?" I've felt overwhelming guilt over not having enough sex. The Christian marriage books I read and the sexual intimacy seminars I attended further thrust me into shame's cesspool; it's my duty after all—I'm depriving my husband. Couple that advice with a deep-seated ambivalence toward sex and I was a sexually defeated wife.

Part of my denying Patrick sex stemmed from wanting to avoid the deeper problem. When I "gave in," I uncovered prickly emotions I couldn't understand. It was easier if I avoided intimacy as much as I could so I wouldn't rip open a festering wound I couldn't handle.

Isolation and emotional disengagement. Of all the issues Patrick and I have confronted, this carries with it the deepest,



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Opening the Door to Healing

most insidious pain.

Patrick once told me about a vision he had in which I was pacing on a high diving board while he and the children beckoned me from a swimming pool far below.

They shouted, "Dive in! The water's great!"

I peered over the edge of the board.

I saw their laughter-infused antics, but I turned away and walked down the ladder. Instead, I settled for putting my toe in the water while the rest of my family splashed and laughed.

I longed to be the spontaneous one who dives into the lives of my family, but I'd disconnected somehow, which prevented me from letting my husband into the recesses of my heart.

Lack of affection and passion. I found myself unable to be affectionate with my immediate family. While I knew I was supposed to demonstrate my love in tangible, physical ways, that seldom came naturally. When my son cried, I had to tell myself to hug him. When my husband came home from work, I had to make myself kiss him.

Coping strategies

I wish I could say I'm free and the wound of sexual abuse is completely healed. I still have tender spots. But as Patrick and I have explored these areas, we've learned some important coping strategies.

Be willing to be healed. I liken emotional healing to a tunnel that links a barren land with a pristine forest. We'll never drink from the forest's mountain spring if we don't go through the tunnel. But most of us feel too afraid to step inside for fear of the dark; and the barren land—bleak as it is—has a staid



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Opening the Door to Healing

familiarity about it. The truth? It's dark in the tunnel. The hurt is intensified, especially when we can't see the other side.

When I became a Christian at 15, I clung to the apostle Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" I decided I'd been healed of all emotional wounds when I became a Christian and viewed others who struggled as lacking faith. But my emotional world fell apart in college and I became a struggler. I cried a lot. God sent many friends who simply listened and prayed for me.

I thought those prayers in college and my grief were all I needed to be whole. After things began to fall apart in our marriage, I realized how much more healing I needed and sought help from a Christian counselor.

Talk about your sexual relationship. As difficult as it might be, Patrick and I had to speak frankly about our sexual relationship.

Through God's strength, I was finally able to tell Patrick, "When you complain about our sexual frequency, I want to give up and never try," or "When you say or do that, I feel used, that I'm only an object."

In that same God-strength, Patrick was able to say, "When you don't place sex and affection as a priority, I don't feel loved," or "When you don't kiss me, I feel distant from you."

We also had to resolve not to hide our anger or our pain. Patrick buried his anger over my lack of response and then quit communicating altogether. I erroneously thought if I hid my pain over my past I could magically improve sexually. But we realized not addressing the truth was disastrous for our sexual relationship.



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Opening the Door to Healing

Heal together. I used to think I was the only one working on issues from my past. When I struggled, I'd turn to my "normal" husband who had a seemingly idyllic upbringing and say, "You're perfect and I'm yucky."

Patrick seldom explored his own childhood issues. Consequently, I felt alone in my grief.

In his book **The Wounded Heart**, Dr. Dan Allender suggests that one way a marriage can offer healing is if the non-abused spouse will look at where he or she has been harmed from childhood. I felt a sense of comfort when I read: "We all have wounds; some are stab wounds, others pinpricks. The category isn't the degree of bleeding but 'have you ever bled?'"

The camaraderie returned in our marriage when I saw Patrick begin to explore his family of origin issues. When he saw me becoming free from my past issues, it spurred him to look at his upbringing. He began to look at his quick temper, how he saw that modeled as a child, what it did to him to be on the receiving end of it, and how it still affects him. The process for him has been slow. He's quick to dismiss pain from his past, but he's beginning to see how that dismissal has helped him wall himself off from others, including me.

Now instead of feeling like a solitary pilgrim, I have Patrick's hand to grab as we share our past injuries and our future.

I still hear the haunting words of my abusers, and Patrick and I still struggle in our marriage. Last night we spent an hour discussing our sexual relationship and our mutual frustration over my reticence to kiss and his reluctance to share his hurts. Even so, I'm learning to take an emancipated leap off the high dive into our marriage.



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Opening the Door to Healing

Patrick's story

When Mary first told me about her past sexual abuse, I felt sad for her, particularly since it happened as a young child.

While I wasn't worried about the abuse influencing our sexual lives at first, later into our marriage I realized it was affecting us. I became angry because we'd be paying for years for what those people had done to her. It wasn't fair. I feel part of our marital intimacy is missing—that it's been ripped from us.

When Mary would withdraw from me sexually, I often found myself caught between feeling that things would never get better, that Mary would never be healed from her past, and empathy for her, wanting to give her as much space as she needed.

I became confused about what I was supposed to do to help her through this traumatic experience. The most frustrating to me was that I couldn't fix our situation. I couldn't fix her past. I was helpless.

It hurt me because I knew there was a part of her she was holding back from me. Because of the abuse, there was nothing I could do that would make her feel comfortable enough to allow me into the vulnerable parts of her life.

She felt dead where intimacy was concerned—which affected my self-esteem. For me, kissing and showing affection are important signs to make me feel loved, cherished, and accepted. I'd feel rejected when I'd lean in for a kiss or a hug and she'd turn away. I'd tell myself over and over, *Mary does love me, but can't express affection the way I want to receive it.*

I know I said and did things that cemented some of her fears. I put pressure on her to change. I placed "performance" expectations on her that were probably unfair. Still, though, I was angry. When I became angry, I just stopped talking. I put up an emotional wall toward her that served two purposes: it



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Opening the Door to Healing

would "teach her a lesson," and it would protect me from feeling rejected.

When these issues surfaced, I had to readjust my expectations until she was better able to handle our sexual relationship.

Along the way to her healing, I continually worried about whether what I was doing would bring back a painful memory for her. I didn't want her to connect what I did or said to the pain she'd experienced. There are times I still worry about that.

But I've tried to provide an environment where Mary feels safe to share the memories, the pain, and her current struggles. Sometimes this means just listening. Sometimes it means crying with her, praying for her, or encouraging her. Sometimes it means asking for forgiveness when I cross a line that's hurt her. Sometimes it means I challenge her to overcome her fears.

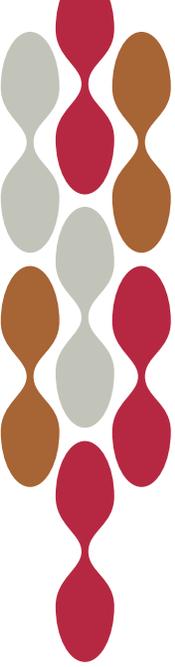
We both understand that if we want to grow together, we must be willing to challenge—and be challenged by—our actions and thinking. We both want to move past being victims to becoming survivors.

The most important thing is not to think, "Get over it already!" I know now that while her past continues to heal and our sexual relationship grows stronger, there may always be leftover scars. So during the times when I'm tempted to think, *Let's move past this*, I recommit myself to being consistent in my love for her.

No matter the discussion, argument, or difficulty, I realize she needs to know she can trust me with her emotions and that if I'm hurt, frustrated, or angry, I won't leave or run from her.

Mary and I deal with the issues as they arise, no matter how frustrating or difficult they may be.

My prayer is that one day we'll be able to look at each other



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Opening the Door to Healing

and know this abuse no longer taints our relationship. I'm hopeful because I've seen Mary grow so much in this area, and she continues to walk this difficult road with me.

—Patrick DeMuth

*Mary DeMuth is author of **Everything: What You Give and What You Gain to Become Like Jesus** (Thomas Nelson).*

This article first appeared on TODAYSCHRISTIANWOMAN.COM.

Reflect

- *How might you address fear, distortion, guilt, isolation, and lack of affection with those you are counseling?*
- *What can you do to help the one you are counseling to cope with these problems?*
- *What perspective do you gain from hearing Patrick's side of the story?*

“Help, I’m Gay”

How to talk to someone about
same-sex attraction

By Stanton L. Jones



It's one of today's most difficult conversations, but one increasingly impossible to avoid. The spiritual, political, and emotional implications make this topic explosive. How can pastors talk realistically and redemptively with those seeking pastoral guidance about same sex attraction? We asked Stan Jones, who has academic, professional, and personal experience in helping those sorting out their homosexual orientation, to let us listen in on one of his conversations with "Todd," a composite drawn from many of Stan's interactions.

Jones: Thanks for getting together. Tell me your story.

Todd: I am 20 years old, and since an early age, I sensed that I was different from other boys. I just wasn't into stereotypical boy stuff. In middle school I began to experience occasional attraction to other boys. It was in high school when I felt like I was in love with an older boy—a guy who was completely straight. I knew I was in trouble.



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

"Help. I'm Gay"

I couldn't talk to my parents or anyone at church about this. My church only brings up gays and lesbians as the enemy in the culture wars, and while my parents have never been hateful about gay people, I get the sense this would totally freak them out.

I shared my struggles with one woman who has been a good friend, but she is not a Christian, and she just tells me to come out and "be who I am." I also shared it with my closest Christian friend, and while he has kept my secret and initially promised to be there for me, he has since found ways to pull away. I feel terribly alone, and it's rather terrifying to talk about it all.

Jones: How can I help?

Todd: I am totally confused. On Christian radio and certain sites on the Internet, I hear that homosexual attractions can be changed. But professional psychological organizations and pro-gay groups are emphatic that change is impossible, and I should just embrace my gay identity. I hear the stories of ex-gay leaders who go back to the lifestyle.

Some friends say that the Bible condemns homosexuality, and others say it does not. I hear some evangelicals accept monogamous gay marriage, based on the argument that the Bible simply does not address monogamous same-sex relationships, but I hear most evangelical churches insisting that marriage is only between a man and woman.

I've come to the painful conclusion that I am gay, but what do I do now? How do I sort this out?

Jones: Many of our churches have not done a great job of making a space where people can open their hearts to one another regarding this issue and transparently seek God. We



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

“Help. I’m Gay”

need to do a better job of approaching this issue humbly and gently, recognizing that we are all broken creatures, including experiencing various kinds of sexual brokenness.

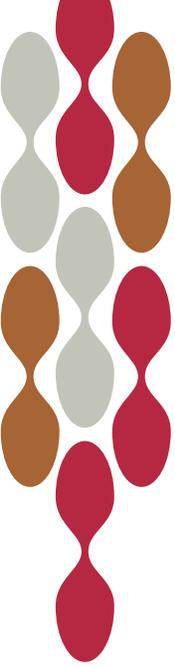
Fortunately, we worship a God who speaks into the dark areas of our lives with enough moral clarity that we can understand the rough outlines of how he wants us to seek him, in purity and holiness. The Bible has much more to say about heterosexual sin in all its crazy varieties than it does about homosexual sin, but in every place where homosexual conduct is mentioned, most clearly in **Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, Romans 1:26-27**, and **I Corinthians 6:9**, it is clearly condemned.

Todd: But the Bible doesn’t talk about consensual, orientation-based, same-sex love and marriage as we see today, does it?

Jones: I’ve been studying this for almost three decades, and several decades ago some progressives were arguing that whatever was being condemned in the passages that described homosexual conduct as an “abomination” bore little resemblance to the loving, consensual, and potentially monogamous same-sex conduct of today. They thus argued that the Bible was silent on today’s questions.

But the best recent scholarship has undermined these arguments. It’s virtually untenable today to believe that the Bible does not condemn all forms of homosexual erotic intimacy.

Here’s just one example. Prominent New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson (writing in *Commonweal*, 2007) said: “I have little patience with efforts to make Scripture say something other than what it says, through appeals to linguistic or cultural subtleties. The exegetical situation is straightforward: we know what the text says.” He is straightforward that the



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

“Help. I’m Gay”

Bible condemns all homosexual behavior. His proposed response has intellectual integrity, even if, in my opinion, it is spiritually disastrous. As a progressive, he concludes, “I think it important to state clearly that we do, in fact, reject the straightforward commands of Scripture.”

He rejects the Bible’s commands on the basis of the authority of experience, namely, what he regards as the exemplary spirituality of gay and lesbian Christians he knows.

But one of the foundations of classic Christian belief is that our God is a God who reveals himself and his will for us in the Scriptures, and that the Scriptures can be trusted absolutely. I would urge you not to just reject the Scriptures.

Todd: I’m not inclined to think the Scriptures are just wrong. But why does God condemn homosexual conduct? Does he hate me? That’s what **Romans I** seems to imply.

Jones: I am not sure I have a great answer for that. The Scriptures relate the commands but do not give extensive justifications of those commands. Here are my few tentative ideas.

First, today we are bombarded with messages that there is no higher purpose to our universe. The Christian testimony, the testimony of Scripture, is much more complex. Our world and our lives are infused with spiritual meaning and purposes. The apostle Paul in Ephesians says that when he speaks about marriage, he is really speaking about Christ and his bride, the church. God’s eternal purposes from creation onward were for human beings as individuals, families, and communities to manifest his image, to be his representatives, to be icons through which the world would see his character.

Included in this is the idea that each marriage between two



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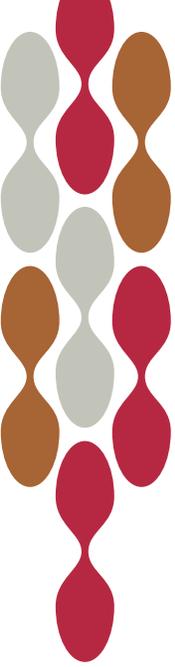
"Help. I'm Gay"

types of human beings, a man and a woman, would be a union reflecting the relationality of the Trinity, that could in turn result in children, thus reflecting the creative and good nature of God. Marriage and family is a way, though not the only way, to "image" God.

As a result of sin, this beautiful picture became distorted. God's moral law directs those who love him into a manner of life that reflects his very nature in tension with our sinful inclinations. Pope John Paul II was on the right path when he argued that a monogamous male-female marriage represents to the world the exclusive and covenantal love of God to a watching world, and that chaste single persons in community equally reflect to the watching world the faithful, loyal, and generously self-giving character of God. Both marriage and chastity are patterns for a life of dignity and blessing.

Second, our struggles toward holiness are an integral part of what it means to be human. A fundamental question that you will face time and time again is "What is the core of my identity?" The message that comes from the world today is that your sexual orientation is the core of your identity: "Who are you? You are gay." End of discussion. I believe the Christian faith would call us to a different answer. The calling to be a disciple of Christ is a calling to radical obedience, to become that which we are not. All of us face a fundamental challenge of reforming our identity into Christ. We face fundamental questions of what God made us to be. The overarching teaching of Scripture is that we are called to become like Christ, and that calls us on a journey of self-sacrifice.

Together, these callings—to a life that images the character of God and to reforming my identity in Christ—send me back to Scripture asking, "What is my calling of obedience to Christ?"



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

“Help. I’m Gay”

Todd: Well, that’s not totally convincing, but I wasn’t expecting a waterproof answer. A lot of God’s commands are mysterious. So what about the change question? Can my orientation change?

Jones: The best answer is an unequivocal “perhaps.” With my colleague Mark Yarhouse, we followed 98 people who started the change process through various ministries associated with what used to be Exodus International. We followed them over six to seven years. Of the 61 who remained in the study at the end of that period, 23 percent reported success in “conversion” to heterosexual identity and functioning, while 30 percent reported they were able to live chastely and had dis-identified themselves with homosexual orientation. On the other hand, 20 percent reported giving up on the change process and fully embracing homosexual identity, and the remaining 27 percent reported that they continued in the process of attempted change with limited and unsatisfactory success. These percentages do not include the one third of the original sample about which we have no information.

To be honest, I think these statistics suggesting 23 percent changed orientation and 30 percent are practicing chastity are on the optimistic side. People did not tend to make it into our study unless they had a strong determination to enter the change process. We know that at least a few of the people who dropped out of our study experienced significant change, but most did not.

We conclude from our study that some people had changed significantly, thus disproving that change is impossible. But we were unwilling to estimate the probability of success from our limited study.



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

"Help. I'm Gay"

Todd: Do these people who change become heterosexual? Do you think they were telling the truth about their experience?

Jones: What complicates our discussions in this area is our binary, simplistic thinking about sexual orientation, as if there are only two categories: gay and straight. Alfred Kinsey got many things wrong, but his idea about sexual orientation existing on a continuum appears to have been basically correct, though sexual attraction is probably more complex and multifaceted than just a single continuum between pure heterosexual and pure homosexual. Attraction varies on many dimensions other than its being directed to males or females.

Another thing that confuses our discussions is our equally simplistic notions about what homosexuality is. We talk about "homosexuality" as if we are talking about one thing, but the authors of the book *Homosexualities* long ago were on the right track. There are many ways in which gay men and lesbian women are profoundly different from each other: different rates of occurrence (with male homosexuality occurring at twice the rate of female homosexuality), different relational patterns and dynamics (with gays being much less prone toward long-term relational bonding and more prone towards promiscuous sexual patterns than lesbians), different levels of genetic influence, and on and on.

Heterosexuality is equally complex. Men and women differ among and between each other on the degree of masculinity and femininity, sexual drive, erotic preferences, and many other things.

The people that I know best who have changed profoundly have not moved miraculously to become "pure heterosexuals." They may still experience homosexual attraction, but much



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

“Help. I’m Gay”

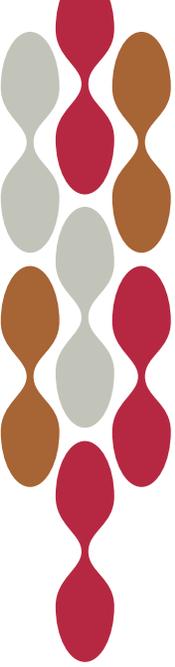
less frequently and intensely, and often feel this is attributable to stress, relational disruption, and/or spiritual oppression. The women I have known who experienced profound change probably, on average, report more complete and dramatic change than the men. Those who have changed experience satisfying sexual intimacy with their spouses.

Equally significant is the change of those who have embraced chastity. The individuals I know best who have pursued this path continue to experience same-sex attraction, but as they grow in Christ, the same-sex attraction they experience is less distressing, more manageable, and they are able to live well, finding faithful chastity a rewarding path.

But they face many challenges; for instance, they tend to find the church a hard place in which to find community in which they can be open and transparent. Many of our churches so emphasize family life that those who are single are treated as if their lives are “on hold” until they get married. The individuals who are succeeding at this life of chastity tend to be people who have found committed, chaste relationships in Christ of care with same-sex and opposite-sex sisters and brothers. To succeed in this direction, you have to face the risks of sharing your story with more people, and be ready to challenge your church and other Christian communities to be a help rather than a hindrance in your pursuit of God’s will for your life.

Todd: If I choose to seek change, how do I find someone to work with me in constructive and helpful ways?

Jones: That’s hard to answer. There is no compelling professional credential in this area, no organizational membership that sorts out the truly helpful from the pretenders or the destructive. I would urge you to stay away from anyone who



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

"Help, I'm Gay"

suggests that they have the program that will "cure" you. There is no such program. Stay away from anyone who does not acknowledge the profound mystery of homosexual attraction. Look for someone compassionate and caring but also knowledgeable and wise, someone who can speak truth into your life, someone who can walk beside you on what promises to be a long journey. Look for a community of such people to support you. It is a good thing, but nonessential thing, if one of those primary people is a mental health professional. I say "nonessential" because there is tremendous healing potential in the caring ministry of God's people in the local church.

Todd: Does the Bible tell me why I am this way? Does science?

Jones: The Bible gives the definitive but unsatisfying answer that your experience, like mine, is the result of being a sinful person in a broken and sinful world.

The answers that come from science are in some ways equally unsatisfying, because they only can answer in terms of averages and generalities, and never address the individual case. There is solid, credible evidence that there is some genetic influence or predisposition towards homosexuality for some individuals. But there are two important things to say about this.

First, genetic influence is not all that strong and does not itself rule out other factors such as the influence of family environment or of our own choices. There's a statistical measure of the power of a genetic influence called "heritability," and the heritability of same-sex orientation is approximately on par with the heritability of many common attributes of personality and many proclivities towards certain types of



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

“Help. I’m Gay”

behavior, such as the proclivity toward church attendance or even television watching. And few of us would say that we go to church or watch television because our genes made us do it.

Second, there is evidence that influences from family and cultural environment make a difference. Persons from broken homes or an absent parent, or who have experienced some form of sexual abuse, appear more likely to struggle with same-sex attraction and engage in homosexual behavior than those who have not experienced those things. But again, it's a moderate influence, and there are many who have experienced neither of these factors who experience same-sex attraction, and many who have these and other difficult experiences who have no same-sex attraction.

Todd: My pastor, who does not know about my sexuality issues, asked me to be a leader in my church's high school ministry. Do my struggles disqualify me? How should I handle this?

Jones: Let me lay a bit of foundation first. While Scripture teaches that homosexual erotic intimacy is a sinful practice, to generalize from this that the entire person who experiences same-sex attraction is especially sinful by virtue of those attractions is wrong. Homosexual desire is a proclivity to a certain type of sin that God considers significant enough to call an “abomination.” But a proclivity to a sin is not the same thing as committing that sin. Same-sex orientation may not be morally neutral, since it is a “leaning” in a direction contrary to God's wishes, but in resisting that proclivity and pursuing holiness, you are exhibiting virtue and strength that is admirable.

In many ways the decision decades ago by the major mental health organizations that homosexuality is not a mental illness



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

“Help. I’m Gay”

is right. Experiencing same-sex desires does not itself qualify as a mental illness. But what was wrong about that decision is the false conclusion drawn by many that same-sex attractions (and other sexual variations) are as normal as heterosexual inclination. Further, many make the false claim that homosexual persons are just as emotionally healthy on average as heterosexuals, which is simply empirically not true. Homosexual orientation is consistently associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and similar conditions, even if many gay and lesbian persons are not depressed, anxious, and so forth.

So if you embrace the Bible’s witness that homosexual conduct is immoral, and are committed to the pursuit of holiness, as I understand it, you are not morally prohibited from leadership in the church. You are not necessarily a risk in leadership on grounds of mental or emotional instability either. My concrete advice to you is this: Be transparent to someone in your church leadership; tell them honestly of your struggle and of your desire to serve in leadership out of your love for Christ. Establish a clear and effective accountability relationship with a mature elder. Commit yourself to total honesty for the sake of your witness to Christ.

And one more thing: Be aware that the Adversary will attack you and test you in your areas of vulnerability. The apostle Paul says “flee sexual immorality.” As Potiphar’s wife’s dress came off, Joseph got up and out; he didn’t linger to explore the possibilities. Be aware also that sexual temptation is not going to be your only area of vulnerability; seek out before God awareness of all areas of vulnerability.

Let me suggest one possibility. You, like many who experience same-sex attraction, know how others may disapprove and have found ways to hide your desires. So you may have



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

“Help. I’m Gay”

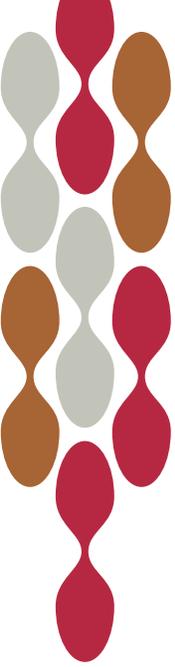
picked up subtle patterns of duplicity in how you live your life. This is why I suggest openness and honesty as a discipline. Commit yourself to careful accountability, expect to be tested, and be ready to pursue support at every turn.

Todd: Well, I’m grateful for this information, but I can’t say that you have solved things for me.

Jones: I apologize if my own inadequacy, mediocre scholarship, or lack of Christian maturity has failed you in any way. But Christian maturity is not about solving things; it is about faithfulness. We are confronted in this area with the uncertainty of our paths, the modesty of our knowledge, and the mystery of the human condition. My appreciation of these uncertainties has only grown over the years.

God has given you and me and every member of the human family a precious gift, the gift of life and the opportunity to grow into the person he wants us to become. I have meditated over the passage that speaks of God’s Word as a “lamp to my feet” (**Psalm 119:105**). What we often want today is a blinding searchlight that illumines our path for miles ahead. In the ancient world, the best you could get was an oil lamp or perhaps a torch lit with burning pitch. Imagine climbing a treacherous mountain path with such a light, with possible death only a step away on either side! But what do you really need? To see the whole path for miles ahead, or to know where next to put your foot?

In the face of the mind-numbing complexity of our brokenness and the profound mystery of human life, I urge you to celebrate that God has provided illumination for the next step in your path. Embrace the journey ahead, a journey of



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

"Help. I'm Gay"

uncertain outcome, but with the firm promise that the resurrected Christ will walk alongside of you as you walk alongside of him in obedience to his revealed will. It is much better to bind yourself to a trustworthy Guide than to bind yourself to some ideal outcome that may or may not be attainable for you.

But let my last words here be from the apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 6:11, describing the broken and sinful backgrounds of those in the church: "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." Included on the list were those in bondage to homosexual sin. I do not believe that when Paul says "such were some of you" that he necessarily means these people were now all happily married (though that is possible).

We need to remember that the opposite of being in bondage to sin is to be freed to pursue holiness. Heterosexual marriage is one way to pursue holiness; chaste singleness is an equally blessed way. But regardless of the overt expression of our sexual longings and erotic desires, the most important thing is to be in pursuit of holiness. To be washed, to be sanctified, to be justified, to be abiding in Christ and to be united with him. Regardless of the specifics of this conversation, if you continue to be dedicated to these things, you can trust that Christ will never let you go.

Stanton L. Jones is provost of Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. This article first appeared in LEADERSHIP JOURNAL.

Reflect

- *Jones says, "We need to do a better job of approaching this issue humbly and gently, recognizing that we are all broken creatures, including experiencing various kinds of sexual brokenness." How can you and your church do a better job at this?*
- *How would you answer Todd's question: I'm not inclined to think the Scriptures are just wrong. But why does God condemn homosexual conduct? Does he hate me?*
- *Jones says, "Our struggles toward holiness are an integral part of what it means to be human. A fundamental question that you will face time and time again is 'What is the core of my identity?' The message that comes from the world today is that your sexual orientation is the core of your identity: 'Who are you? You are gay.' End of discussion. I believe the Christian faith would call us to a different answer. The calling to be a disciple of Christ is a calling to radical obedience, to become that which we are not. All of us face a fundamental challenge of reforming our identity into Christ. We face fundamental questions of what God made us to be. The overarching teaching of Scripture is that we are called to become like Christ, and that calls us on a journey of self-sacrifice." How does this help you in talking to someone with a same-sex orientation? How does it help you in talking to a heterosexual person who is struggling with sin?*

Freedom from Sexual Addiction

To find healing, you have to come out from hiding.

By Juli Slattery



Sometimes I joke about things I am "addicted" to. Coffee and dark chocolate are definitely on the list. Honestly, we are all addicted to something—there are things in life that we just can't seem to get by without. You may be addicted to your husband's affection, a daily workout, talking to or texting your best friend, or spending time in prayer. At the most basic level, we are all addicted to things like food, sleep, human interaction, and oxygen. We simply can't live without them.

So why are some addictions normal, and others deadly? Why is it okay to joke about my need for a daily soy latte, but there is great shame surrounding a daily need for sexual stimulation?

Because sexual addiction is no joking matter. It has ruined millions of marriages, and keeps Christian men and women



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Freedom from Sexual Addiction

shackled in chains of self-contempt and fear. The roots often begin with children as young as eight or nine. When Satan gets a foothold, it seems as if a lifetime of struggle and failure is certain. Yet many men and women have discovered freedom from sexual addiction.

What is sexual addiction?

A neuropsychologist could give an eloquent detailed explanation of what happens to the brain during sexual addiction. In layman's terms, your body was designed to experience pleasure. There are areas of your brain and body that are wired to bring excitement, euphoria, and feelings of peace and elation. Some people call these the "reward" centers of your brain—God wired your body to reward you and motivate you toward certain actions. For example, after exercising, your body often gets flooded with endorphins that release stress and make you feel great—a.k.a. a "runner's high."

A lot of your body's natural rewards are associated with sexuality. The body's response to sexual excitement and passion is stronger than practically any other natural experience. I believe God designed powerful sexual feelings and rewards to draw us into relationship. If we never had sexual drives and feelings, who would ever want to get married? As Paul alludes to in **I Corinthians 7**, sexual desire is a primary reason why we are drawn to marriage.

An addiction occurs when we learn to go after the reward without doing the work that the reward is designed to be linked to. Sexual pleasure is designed to be a catalyst and reward for the hard work and risk required in relationship. Enjoying great sex over many years of marriage requires commitment, communication, humility, and effort.



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Freedom from Sexual Addiction

Pornography, sexual chat rooms, and erotic novels all allow for a person to experience the physical euphoria without the effort and vulnerability of relationship. They provide a "shortcut" to the powerful reward that God designed for marital intimacy.

Why is sexual addiction a problem?

The desires that lead to sexual addiction are not wrong. Women who find themselves caught up in porn, reading books like *Fifty Shades of Grey*, or in a sexual chat room, got there because their healthy God-given desires have been twisted. You are supposed to desire sex, intimacy, an escape from stress, and so on. . . . But the enemy has offered you a shortcut that has now taken over your life.

A hallmark of addiction is tolerance. This means that what brought excitement and euphoria last month isn't enough. Now you need something more. Perhaps you began with romance novels. That led to erotica, which led to Internet porn. Now you want to act out on what you've seen and read. You recognize that your appetites are getting out of control, but life without the reward feels dull, empty, and even hopeless.

The tragedy of sexual addiction is that it steals your ability to enjoy the natural rewards God designed you to experience. I've talked to committed Christian women trapped in sexual addiction who have no sexual desire for their husbands and can't enjoy simple things that once brought great pleasure. One woman put it this way:

I became more unsatisfied in our marriage. I was not satisfied by my husband sexually. He couldn't satisfy me, and it was my fault. And I cannot tell you how much I love my children. I have always wanted to be a wife



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Freedom from Sexual Addiction

and mother—more than any career life could offer. But I began to feel like my life was boring and mundane. I had thoughts of packing my bags and living a different life.

How do I get over it?

The first step to addressing a sexual addiction is to bring it to the light. For you, that might seem more like a giant leap. "Tell someone? Are you serious?!" I've talked to missionaries, homeschooling moms, and other women who love the Lord but are hiding a sexual addiction. The shame of admitting the struggle is enough to keep them silent.

You will never find healing while hiding. God works in light, not in darkness. The enemy wants to keep you isolated. He will tell you lies that keep you stuck in secrecy—lies like *If anyone knew what you did or looked at, you would be a disgrace. Your husband/boyfriend/family would disown you. Besides, there's no hope. You'll just fall right back into it!*

You may also be unwilling to take this step because you don't want to let go of your addiction. Telling someone means accountability. Accountability means that you won't have access to the reward. The "reward" has come to represent life, even while it brings death.

My friend, I can't tell you the chains that are broken when you bring the secret into the light. Please pray that God will bring into your life a counselor or wise friend with whom you can share.

It is important for you to realize you are not alone. Men aren't the only ones struggling with sexual addiction. Because of the stereotype that sex and porn are guys' problems, women feel even greater shame to admit their battle. **Crystal Renaud** is a brave woman who admitted to her sexual addiction and got



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Freedom from Sexual Addiction

help. She is the author of *Dirty Girls Come Clean* and the founder of **Dirty Girls Ministries**. She offers practical help and community for women battling sexual addiction.

Where is victory?

I sometimes wonder if the apostle Paul had an addiction. I wonder if his "thorn in the flesh" (which he also calls a messenger from Satan) was some sort of addiction. In Romans, he certainly describes what it feels like to have an addiction:

I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway. But if I do what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. (Romans 7:15–20)

An addiction makes you feel like you are unable to honor God—that no matter how hard you try, you will fail. Paul doesn't end his monologue with his statement of self-contempt, "What a wretched man I am!" He goes on to say that Jesus Christ has saved him from his sinful desires. This doesn't just mean that Jesus forgives, but he also has the power to free us from all bondage we have.

I believe God can work incredible victory through an addiction, and I've seen it. To admit the struggle of addiction



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Freedom from Sexual Addiction

requires humility and repentance. To develop the daily self-control to say "no" to the shortcuts will require absolute dependence upon God. If you are willing to surrender your struggle to the Lord, he will develop in you amazing qualities of a disciple—a broken woman through whom his strength and wisdom can shine.

Juli Slattery is a widely known clinical psychologist, author, speaker, and broadcast media professional. For more on healthy intimacy in marriage, engage with Dr. Juli Slattery's ministry, **Authentic Intimacy**, and explore her publication, *"Passion Pursuit: What Kind of Love Are You Making?"* This article first appeared on TODAYSCHRISTIANWOMAN.COM.

Reflect

- *The author says, "An addiction occurs when we learn to go after the reward without doing the work that the reward is designed to be linked to." How might that be a good place to start when talking to someone with a sexual addiction?*
- *Juli also talks about "chains that are broken when you bring the secret into the light." Why is that such an important first step, and who needs to know?*
- *Finally, she says, "To develop the daily self-control to say 'no' to the shortcuts will require absolute dependence upon God." What disciplines are necessary to incorporate to lead a person out of sexual addiction?*

Why Affairs Happen

And what you need to know about prevention and recovery

By Cindy Crosby



As many as 65 percent of men and 55 percent of women will have an extramarital affair by the time they are 40, according to the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*. A *Christianity Today* survey found that 23 percent of the 300 pastors who responded admitted to sexually inappropriate behavior with someone other than their wives while in the ministry.

In Dave Carder's and Duncan Jaenicke's book, *Torn Asunder: Recovering from Extramarital Affairs* (Moody), Carder notes that adultery and divorce rates in the evangelical population are nearly the same as the general population in the United States. Being a Christian does not lessen our chances of having an affair. Through his counseling experiences, however, Carder has found several "shared threads" woven throughout the experiences of married couples who become tangled in an affair. These patterns can serve as warning signals that married couples should be alert to.

Forewarned is forearmed. So *Marriage Partnership* talked to Dave Carder about what to do whether you are contem-



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Why Affairs Happen

plating an affair, have experienced an affair, or even never expect an affair to impact your own marriage.

What types of affairs do Christians tend to fall into?

All types. There's the "Class One" affair, which is the one-night stand. Then, there is the "Class Two" affair, which is a love relationship that starts as a friendship and grows primarily because of a deficit in the marriage. These often have a powerful emotional connection and involve a shared task or orientation, such as a common ministry or a shared passion. And there is the "Class Three" affair, which involves sexual addiction. Other addictions often go along with it, and many times there is a history of molestation or sexual activity on the part of the person before puberty.

What about the classic "mid-life crisis" people joke about?

We're finding that these types of affairs are happening when men and women are in their late thirties and forties. There's a pattern to them. Usually they happen in a marriage where there is little spousal interaction. Maybe the couple does everything as a family. When the children in the family grow older, the spouses become vulnerable.

Tell us more about emotional affairs. If there's no sex, just the emotional attachment, is it as serious as a sexual affair?

An emotional affair without sex occurs when two parties share their feelings for each other. These affairs are supercharged with emotion. The sound of her voice, the style of his e-mail—they are all loaded. But if you confront them, they'll insist they've done nothing wrong. These secret emotional affairs are



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Why Affairs Happen

powerful influences in the individuals' lives. They often live in a fantasy world, where they imagine what the other party is doing, even while appearing to watch sports on TV or doing some other task.

These individuals rob their marriages of emotional energy. They will save topics of conversation to talk over with the people they are having the emotional affair with, rather than their spouses. They also struggle with feelings of betrayal when they have sex with their spouse. But a lot of these emotional affairs remain non-sexual. They are the hardest affairs to recover from, because there is no guilt.

Should you always tell your spouse if you've had an affair?

Almost always. Remember, marriage is a contract and you broke it. The other party has a right to know. The only exception to this is if there is a history of violence on the part of the spouse: if she has a gun or if he has been abusive when he drinks. In this case, you will need a professional to help you know what to disclose.

The same goes for emotional affairs?

I still think you need to tell. Anything that is a secret for you can be enjoyed in private, and this is what we are trying to do away with. And it is very important that there is absolutely no contact between the two people who have had the emotional affair. It is very difficult to break them off.

What kind of things should married couples be aware of that can lead to an affair?

The fastest growing rate of infidelity is among young married women. Many of them have been molested or are the adult



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Why Affairs Happen

children of divorce. They are looking for marriage to make up a deficit that comes from their childhood. "Intimacy deficits" stem from your family of origin. They may be from a lack of touching or hugging, from a need for a lot of admiration, affirmation, and adoration, or from another vacuum that a spouse wants satisfied. Everybody has deficits.

How does a cheating spouse handle his or her emotions?

He or she is usually overwhelmed with guilt and sure that revealing the affair to the spouse will absolutely kill him or her. And the cheating spouse doesn't want to ruin the image of family he or she has built.

How can you tell if someone is tempting you to cheat?

If someone tells you things that you know are much better than they really are about yourself, then run. If someone admires you at a level beyond what you know to be true, it can get dangerous.

What are some other risky situations?

If a couple doesn't share a ministry, one spouse may get into a ministry with another individual and boom! They are in trouble. Or perhaps one spouse has a hobby that they share with someone of the opposite sex. Think about this: What don't I have in my marriage that I have the urgent need to share with someone?

You wrote that the tendency toward extramarital affairs runs in families. Why is this so?

We don't know why. Part of the homework I give a couple in counseling for infidelity is to explore what their parents did. Go back and ask them. Not to embarrass them. Ask them how



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Why Affairs Happen

they handled infidelity, if it happened in their marriage. Why did they stay together? What advice do they have? It's amazing how many of the couples I counsel talk to their family members and are shocked at what they find out.

So, is it inevitable, if you have a family where infidelity has occurred, that you will cheat on your partner?

No. But I believe it is inevitable that you will be tempted to have an affair.

How difficult is it to trust your spouse after an affair?

Trust is the big question. You have to forgive your spouse before you can trust him or her again. The repentant spouse must be careful to keep his or her word. No matter how small or unimportant a promise may seem, he or she can't afford to make promises that won't be kept anymore.

What about sex?

First you have to rebuild non-sexual touch. If you don't have good touch, you don't have anything special. It's also important to have the cheating spouse cleared by a physician before you have sex again. There should be no unprotected sex between you until he or she is checked for sexually transmitted diseases.

If there wasn't much sex in the marriage before, it will be difficult to initiate sexual activity after the affair. But in many cases, there is often a lot of sex between the spouses after an affair. Women will think, "I'll show my husband that I'm better than this other woman." A husband might wonder, "Am I as good as the person whom she was with?" Then, the wronged spouse becomes disgusted again, and anger and withdrawal follow. Communication is key here. This is a topic you will have to talk about.



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Why Affairs Happen

How does anger factor into all this?

It's different for everyone. If the wife has an affair, the guy's rage is often never resolved. It just doesn't take much to bring the affair back to his mind. Women seem to be able to let go of their anger more easily.

Anger can play a positive role. I encourage the wives I counsel who have been cheated on to try to find and enlarge pictures of the husband and the other woman, lay the pictures on a bed, then beat the snot out of them. I tell her not to stop beating until she is sobbing and exhausted. If she doesn't get angry about the affair, the anger will eventually leak out all over the relationship in a variety of ways.

Um, that sounds a bit extreme...

When Jesus was in the garden before the crucifixion, he was bloody, teary, messy, and sweaty. He was working through emotional upheaval. Betrayal and abandonment are two of the most painful emotions known to humans.

What do you tell the kids?

Children are your first priority here. Make sure you don't injure them for life. Both of you need to sit down together with the child or the children, and both of you need to take responsibility for whatever you have contributed to the experience—not to the affair, necessarily, but for the tension that exists in the family environment.

Does age impact this?

If your children are under eight years old, they've already made up their own story. They are egocentric and will think they have caused the tension. If your children are teenagers, the kids probably already suspect the affair. Tell them the



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Why Affairs Happen

whole story: Dad had a girlfriend; Mom got involved with someone at work. Sharing the truth allows them to process the issue with Mom and Dad instead of guessing and keeps them from expending emotional energy checking on how well Mom and Dad are doing.

That's a lot of honesty.

The issues for your kids are, "Will Mom and Dad make it? Will we stay together as a family?" Do not lie. If you are not sure your marriage can be saved, tell them to pray; tell them you are seeing a counselor. Then, give lots and lots of touching and hugging and stroking and eye contact to your child. They need that reassurance.

Whom else should we tell?

Each person going through recovery from an affair needs a same-sex friend. The key here is that the person is available twenty-four/seven. You need to be able to talk with them anytime. Don't tough it out on your own. If you do, you'll prolong the recovery process, and spend a lot more money on your therapist. Save the money for a vacation.

After an affair, how long can it take for a couple to put their marriage back together?

Think about adolescence, when you put your identity together. It took a long time—maybe six or seven years. This is the same kind of process of shaping your identities, to redo and reform them. Two years is a good point of reference to use. And I don't mean that you will be in crisis for the whole time; the emotions will still be near the surface. Healing takes time, whether you are wounded physically or emotionally.



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Why Affairs Happen

At what point do you give up on your marriage?

I tell couples to do three things before they throw in the towel, or else they will take all the anger and betrayal they feel into the next marriage. And another man or woman will not take care of the problems. First, know how and why the affair happened. Life is cyclical. If you had an affair, you will probably go through the same pattern in your next marriage. Second, you have to forgive—for yourself—whether you want to or not. Third, you have to rebuild the trust you had. Even if you divorce, you will still have financial ties, ties with your children, grandchildren, events you will attend together such as weddings and graduations and birthdays, and you have to be able to trust each other. The goal in therapy is to have these three components.

If 20 percent of your marital history before the affair was not what I would rank a "4" or a "5" mutually—with "5" being the highest satisfaction and happiness—you will need a miracle to keep your marriage together. Not every marriage is salvageable after an affair.

If a couple decides to find a therapist or counselor to help, what should they look for?

Look for someone who will give you structure and hold you on course. A counselor should give you follow-up work to complete, things to work on every day. You need to find a counselor who will help you work on the marriage, not just the affair. Pastors are actually quite good at providing structure and helping couples work through this.

How to End an Affair the Right Way

You've done the unthinkable. You've gotten into an affair. Now, how do you end it? In their book, *Surviving an Affair* (Revell), Dr. Willard Harley, Jr., the author of *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* (Revell), and his co-author, Dr. Jennifer Harley Chalmers, suggest the following:

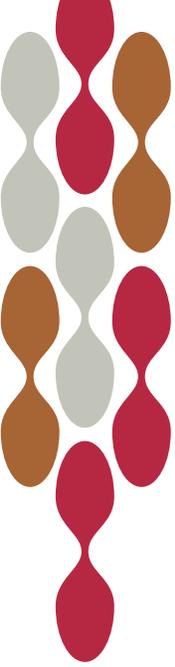
1. Tell your spouse about the affair.
2. The wayward spouse should make a commitment to the betrayed spouse to never see or talk to the lover again.
3. The wayward spouse should write a letter to the lover ending the relationship and send it with the approval of the betrayed spouse.
4. Extraordinary precautions should be taken to guarantee total separation of the wayward spouse and the lover.
5. If the lovers are co-workers, a job change or relocation may be needed.
6. All communication between the wayward spouse and lover should cease. This includes changing your e-mail address, telephone number, cell phone number, and pager numbers.
7. The betrayed spouse should monitor voice mail and regular mail.
8. The betrayed spouse and wayward spouse should give each other a 24-hour daily schedule with locations and telephone numbers to account for their time.
9. Make all future financial decisions jointly, and give each other a complete account of money spent.
10. Spend your leisure time together.

What to Do If You Suspect Your Spouse Is Cheating

If you think your spouse is having an affair, he or she probably is, says Dr. Willard Harley, Jr., the author of *His Needs, Her Needs: Building an Affair-Proof Marriage* (Revell) and the co-author with Dr. Jennifer Harley Chalmers of *Surviving an Affair* (Revell). If you suspect infidelity, Harley suggests asking yourself the following questions:

1. Who is my spouse's best friend? Whom does she admire the most? Whom does he spend time talking to on the phone?
2. Is there an opportunity for a secret second life? Do you have access to your spouse all of the time, or are there portions of the day when he or she is unaccounted for?
3. Are you always completely honest with each other? Or have you told your spouse you don't want to hear the truth if it is upsetting? Honesty is a huge obstacle to having an affair.
4. Have you picked up a sexually transmitted disease that you can't explain?
5. Are you really concerned that your spouse is having an affair, but he or she won't admit it? You may have to take drastic measures. As a last resort, hire a private investigator.

*Cindy Crosby is the author of **Waiting for Morning: Hearing God's Voice in the Darkness to be published by Baker Book House in June. This article first appeared on TODAYSCHRISTIANWOMAN.COM.***



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Why Affairs Happen

Reflect

- *What from the interview did you find enlightening for counseling someone who has had an affair?*
- *What steps under "How to End an Affair the Right Way" would be especially important for the person you are counseling?*
- *Which of the five points under "What to Do If You Suspect Your Spouse Is Cheating" would be most useful?*

Starting Over

With God's help, it's possible to rebuild trust—even after a painful betrayal

By Louis McBurney



When you promised "for better or for worse," maybe you momentarily considered the possibilities of "worse": illness, problems with children, financial difficulties. You probably never imagined you might one day face betrayal, but it's not uncommon for marital trust to be shattered by secretive behavior or broken promises.

In my counseling office, my own heart was breaking as I watched Barbara suffer in the moments after James, her husband of 21 years, confessed his infidelity. Her sobs wracked her whole body. She trembled in a corner, holding her knees to her chest as if to shield herself from the emotional assault.

James had been involved sexually with Barb's best friend, so she felt doubly betrayed. She had sensed a



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Starting Over

growing distance between her and James, but she'd never suspected adultery. Once Barb regained control, we returned to the counseling session to begin a process that would, at first, seem completely impossible: rebuilding her ruined trust. Sexual unfaithfulness inflicts profound wounds, but in our years of counseling, my wife and I have seen deep pain caused by all kinds of betrayal: financial mismanagement, gambling or embezzlement, drug or alcohol abuse, a so-called emotional affair, any habitual hidden behavior. It's devastating to find that your spouse has kept a part of his or her life a secret. Initially, the sense of betrayal is so strong that re-establishing trust seems an unreachable goal. But it is possible, as Barb and James found, to find a way to trust again.

Restoring trust takes place in four areas of your life. The process demands a lot of you, involving your emotions, your mind, your behaviors and your time. But the reward comes when you are able once again to put your faith in your mate.

Healing the Emotions

When secrets are exposed, they leave a trail of pain and shattered emotions. Healing begins through honest communication and a growing understanding of the emotions both partners are dealing with. It's essential that the offending spouse acknowledge the hurt that he or she has caused. And I'm not talking about a casual "I'm sorry" followed by an implied "get over it."

Andy and Becky came to counseling soon after Becky found an X-rated video hidden in her husband's closet. When confronted, Andy reluctantly confessed that he'd been looking at porn since he was about twelve. To his surprise, the confession actually relieved the tremendous guilt he had



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Starting Over

suffered, and he expected Becky to share his gladness that now they had no more secrets. He was understandably embarrassed, but once he had apologized, he felt the whole thing was over. He couldn't figure out why his wife couldn't let it go.

To Becky, Andy's revelation was a land mine that ripped apart her life. She couldn't believe he didn't understand how devastated she felt. She now doubted her sexual attractiveness. She was obsessed with questions about where his mind went when they were making love. She wondered if there had been physical infidelities as well as his fantasized affairs. Most difficult was the unnerving realization that while she thought they had shared all of life's most intimate moments, Andy had kept a secret part of himself from which she'd been totally excluded.

Andy wanted to get on with life, so he tried to avoid Becky's emotional struggle. But soon he realized that his eagerness to get beyond his shame was short-circuiting his wife's need for him to acknowledge the shame and hurt his addiction had caused her. The healing began for Becky when Andy started to really listen. His care and attention helped her begin to risk intimacy again. As she started to lower her protective barriers, she began to sense what it must have been like for Andy to struggle with his secret shame for 20 years.

Freeing the Mind

People often mistake forgiveness for a feeling, but fundamentally forgiveness is a choice, an act of the will. That's why we are *commanded* to forgive. Forgiving involves acknowledging your own hurt, releasing your thoughts about the violation and giving up the desire to pay the offender back. If you are the spouse who has been wronged, it may seem strange that



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Starting Over

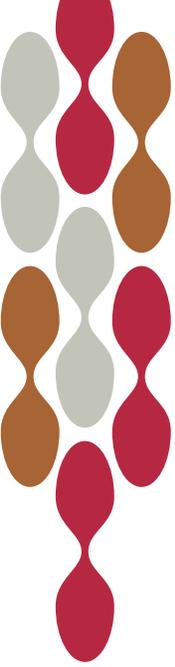
the burden of this stage of healing falls to you. But forgiving has more to do with the health of your spiritual and mental life than it does with your spouse's. Forgiving releases your spouse from your wrath, but—more importantly—it frees you from the destructive bondage of unforgiveness.

For a time, Becky got stuck in a painful recycling of Andy's betrayal, complete with vivid instant replay of the initial shock and her imagined scenarios of revenge. She finally left behind the incessant rehearsal of Andy's betrayal by choosing, again and again, to shut out negative, angry thoughts. She asked God to help keep those ideas from dominating her thinking. She substituted good memories and feelings about their relationship when those thoughts crept back in. She found it becoming easier, especially since Andy seemed more aware of the hurt he had caused. Forgiveness is much tougher if the offending spouse doesn't acknowledge his or her sin and the pain it causes, but it's still necessary.

Changing Behaviors

Most couples eagerly watch for changes in behavior to signal that trust is growing again. Barb found herself doubting James any time he was late coming home or not available when she called him at work. For years she had never questioned him about those things, but with his infidelity fresh in her mind, she had a hard time believing his explanations.

To build trust, James worked on changing his pattern; he tried to let Barb know if he was going to be later than usual or away from the office. After a while, though, having to check in with his wife began to make him feel stifled and controlled. By then, Barb could see James's efforts to be accountable, so she didn't need to check on him so much. After that, it felt good



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Starting Over

when James did call. It was more an act of love than of duty. Becky and Andy changed some behaviors, too. Andy told Becky the times of day when he typically felt tempted. They made a pact that he could call her for encouragement any time his mind began to wander into improper fantasies. Eventually, these calls became opportunities to express their love and passion for each other, instead of just an update on his struggle to overcome an addiction.

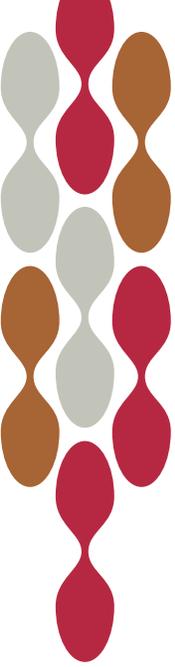
At home, they became more open about their sexual relationship. Andy was surprised to find that Becky was more adventuresome and interested in a greater variety of pleasurable experiences. Plus, she began to take more initiative sexually, which made Andy feel more accepted and desired. The new behaviors didn't promise an instant fix, but they were necessary steps in learning new skills.

Taking Time

There are rarely instantaneous reversals in behavior, so a crucial ingredient to rebuilding trust is time that is generously undergirded with God's grace. Having a spirit of grace doesn't mean you don't need tough love with clearly defined limits—especially when disastrous consequences (such as sexually transmitted disease, physical abuse, financial ruin or criminal activity) might result.

During your rebuilding time, you will deal with occasional new revelations of past failure, admissions of ongoing temptations, expressions of anger and other traces of the original betrayal. Expect these temporary setbacks, and keep on accepting one another with grace. Don't let the difficulty of the task prevent you from achieving your goal.

As you invest time in the healing process, make sure you



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Starting Over

celebrate your victories. Call attention to the positive milestones: a day when you no longer feel angry or guilty, an encouraging time of intimacy, a number of months free from an addictive behavior. Another way to celebrate is to check in periodically with a counselor or an accountability and support group. Rejoice together in the progress you make.

It's incredible to see what once appeared to be an irreparable wound transformed into a stimulus for growth. If you've been struggling with a betrayal of trust, be encouraged. You're already living with the "worse" in "for better or worse." With God's help, even the most serious betrayal can be overcome when you honor your vows and commit to making right what has gone wrong.

Louis McBurney, M.D., was a marriage therapist and co-founder, with his wife, Melissa, of Marble Retreat in Marble, Colorado, where they counseled clergy couples. Louis McBurney passed away January 20, 2009. This article first appeared on TODAYSCHRISTIANWOMAN.COM.

Reflect

- *How can Christ help heal a person's shattered emotions? What steps would you advise a person to take?*
- *What behaviors need to change for this marriage to begin to heal?*
- *The author says, "During your rebuilding time, you will deal with occasional new revelations of past failure, admissions of ongoing temptations, expressions of anger and other traces of the original betrayal. Expect these temporary setbacks, and keep on accepting one another with grace. Don't let the difficulty of the task prevent you from achieving your goal." Why is patience with the healing such a necessary part of the process?*
- *He also says, "As you invest time in the healing process, make sure you celebrate your victories. Call attention to the positive milestones: a day when you no longer feel angry or guilty, an encouraging time of intimacy, a number of months free from an addictive behavior." Why is that so important?*

Additional Resources

Articles, books, and Bible studies to help you further



Articles

Affairs of the Mind—Why romantic brain candy isn't all that sweet. By Linda LaMar Jewell, available on TodaysChristianWoman.com.

Healing Wounds from Sexual Violence—There's power in men and women working together. By Renee James, available on GiftedForLeadership.com.

Overcoming Sexual Addiction—The real remedy to pornography. By Shannon Ethridge, available on TodaysChristianWoman.com.

Books

Sexual Sanity for Women: Healing from Sexual and Relational Brokenness, edited by Ellen Dykas (New Growth Press, 2012). This book guides participants through the process of understanding why they struggle with destructive relational and sexual patterns and how the gospel brings change and a new way of living. Twenty lessons guide participants to understand God's good design for sexuality, the underlying reasons they struggle with sexual brokenness, and how the grace and truth of Jesus Christ can be applied to their struggles. Change begins as deeper heart issues are uncovered, and women learn that they are well-loved daughters of God who will find healing and wholeness as they live out God's Word in their relationships. This workbook is ideal for a one-on-one mentoring, college age student groups, and women's groups.

Surviving Sexual Brokenness: What Grace Can Do, by Thom Hunter (Westbow Press, 2010). Those dominated by some form of sexual brokenness, from pornography to adultery to unwanted homosexual temptation, share a secret they hope and pray will never be revealed. The urge to "act out" in their brokenness is destroying them because it conflicts with a life they have already chosen. They don't know how to live with it; they don't know how to be rid of it. They may not know what caused it; they only want to "cure" it. "Am I just a misplaced homosexual?" "Did God make me this way?" "Why won't he change me?" Surrounding them are the ones who sense something is amiss but have no clue what to do or where to find help. They may be confused by the teachings of the church: love the sinner; hate the sin. This seemingly biblical response can actually send the message to the struggler that he is, in



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Additional Resources

fact, unlovable because his identity seems inseparable from his sin. *Surviving Sexual Brokenness* examines the roots and the roadblocks and provides understanding, encouragement, hope and help through biblical truth and Christian compassion for the freedom-seeker and those who travel alongside.

Strength in Weakness: Healing Sexual and Relational Brokenness, by Andrew J. Comiskey (InterVarsity Press / 2003). Andrew Comiskey sees our weakness as "a threshold for holy power"—the point at which God can meet us for healing and equip us for service. It has been true for him and his wife, Anette, and hundreds of others they have ministered to. Telling real-life stories of despair, hope and lasting change, Comiskey lays out the foundations for healing from relational and sexual sin. This book makes clear the way to the Cross—God's sufficient answer to our deepest needs.

Online Resources

Teaching about Sex—How to more effectively address one of the most pressing issues in the lives of your congregants. Available from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**.

Pornography & Sexual Addiction—Resources for helping those who are stuck. Available from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**.

Adultery & Emotional Affairs—Practical advice in dealing with this thorny issue. Available from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**.



Ministering to the Sexually Broken

Additional Resources

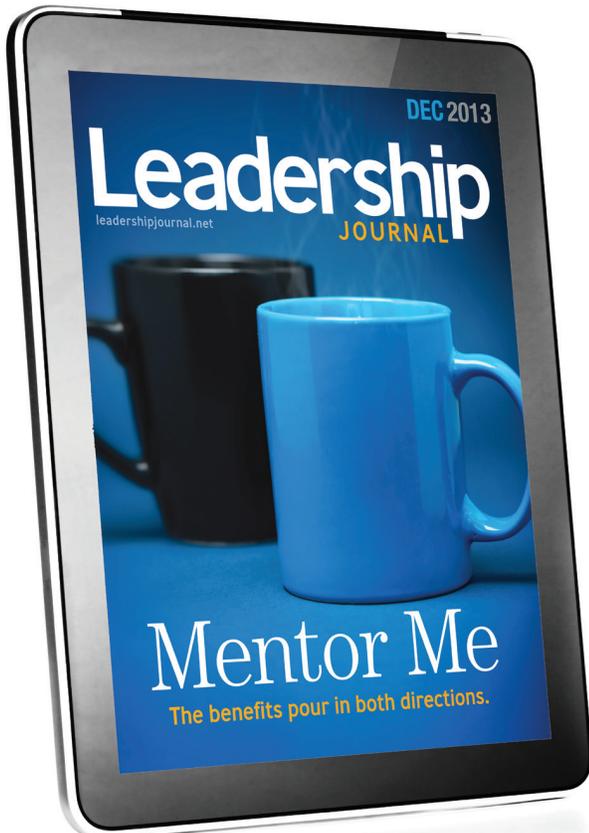
Homosexuals and the Church—Ways Christians can reach out to, understand, and minister to our homosexual brothers and sisters. Available from **BuildingChurchLeaders.com**.

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