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Singleness And Sexuality



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Singleness And Sexuality

INTENT & BACKGROUND: *This series is intended to help single individuals understand and deal with sexual feelings as commonly experienced in life. It was developed in response to requests that church leadership and ACCFS staff have received from singles who essentially told us, “We know what the Bible says about staying away from sexual sin and we are committed to that. Please help us understand how to deal with sexual feelings and desires as single individuals!”*

PERSPECTIVE OF THE AUTHORS: *This series was written by collective effort of the ACCFS staff (both single and married). We believe you desire to grow in likeness to Christ in all aspects of your life as you seek to live an overcoming life. We acknowledge that understanding and dealing with sexual feelings as an unmarried male or female is challenging. We do not claim to have a “cure” for these struggles, but we seek to help you view and deal with these struggles in a manner which honors Christ. All of us are a “work in progress” and we acknowledge pursuing victory in this area is part of the process of pursuing Christ. We hope you are encouraged and challenged as you read this series.*

We want you to know:

- *God knows you and loves you. He will empower you even in the middle of the battle dealing with the desires, frustrations, and temptations associated with sexuality.*
- *You are not alone. While Satan desires to use shame, isolation, fear, and embarrassment to harm you, we desire to stand with you as you walk with Christ.*

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU: *We are open to hearing your feedback, questions, and input on the topic of singleness and are glad to help where we can. We are also interested in suggestions for improving this paper. Feel free to contact us at singleness@accounseling.org.*

God's Design And Purpose For Sexuality: Part 1 of 3

I. DESIGN

Genesis 1:27; 31a, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them... And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."

Before the Fall of mankind into sin, God created our world in just the way it was supposed to be. Two genders, both reflecting the image of God, were created to be distinct and unique, yet equal in value. He also designed them to connect and relate within a covenant relationship that reflects the close-knit relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the Trinity. And so, when God created sexuality He proclaimed it, along with everything else that He created, was "very good."

Our physical differences are the most obvious distinctions between males and females. This variation is part of God's design and so it is natural to find one another attractive. God knew that sexuality was a powerful, intense drive, and called it good as well. As with other aspects of creation, we need to accept and celebrate that God made us distinctly male or female and that He made us sexual beings. You do things every day that correspond with your gender. Many people have attempted to describe the differences between men and women. While there are many ways to do so, one thing is certain: there is a difference. The differences cannot be simply defined by identifying who is more skilled, capable, or competent as both genders reflect aspects of the image of God. These differences are God-ordained and connected to the roles to which He has called us.

Ultimately, God desires that we function as one body (*Romans 12:4-5*) and to appreciate that He has placed us and others in the genders, roles, and functions in the church according to His good purposes (*1 Corinthians 12:18*). Having different roles does not mean that either gender is superior or inferior to the other, for *Galatians 3:28* speaks of our equality in God's eyes: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." As single or married individuals, we have a role to play in fully living out biblical femininity or masculinity.

II. UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SEXUAL BEING

To start, we must define sexuality in its broadest sense by recognizing that all humans are sexual beings, whether single or married. It is quite common for people to only consider sexuality in terms of either the sexual relationship of a married couple or in terms of sexual sin (pornography, etc.). However, this view is overly constricted and actually misses a much broader picture that God has created. Below is a partial listing of ways sexuality, broadly defined, is lived out by all people in four dimensions of life: biological/physical, emotional/psychological, relational/social, and spiritual.

A. Biological/Physical

- Human beings are created male and female and with the associated internal and external physical characteristics. God uniquely designed male and female bodies to be sexually compatible and created sexuality to be physically pleasurable.
- Hormonal shifts and influences that affect sexual development and interest are ongoing throughout life.
- Our sexuality and gender are part of us all the way down to our chromosomes.
- Our physical bodies are the temple of God, where our undying soul and the Holy Spirit reside while we are alive.
- Human beings thrive when they have adequate healthy physical touch.
- We experience sexual desires, feelings, and sensations.

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B. Emotional/Psychological

- God designed us to notice beauty, gender differences, and experience attraction.
- We desire to be desirable in the eyes of others.
- Our sexual identity is one part of our overall personal identity.
- We all have a gender identity that falls on a spectrum of masculinity and femininity.
- Expressions of affection are meaningful to us.
- Interacting with and learning from people of both genders is intellectually stimulating and helps us learn from various perspectives and individual natures.

C. Relational/Social

- Companionship, emotional connection, and attachment are deep human needs.
- Isolation, rejection, and abandonment are some of the most painful human experiences we can feel.

D. Spiritual

- God is glorified when His creation operates in the manner and for the purposes in which it was created.
- We learn obedience to God and reliance on the Holy Spirit's power to help us control the "appetites" of our body. We rely heavily on God to produce the spiritual fruit of temperance in our lives.
- Our experience of temptation to act in a manner outside of God's plan for our sexuality reminds us that we live in a fallen, sinful world, that Satan is real, and that someday all temptation and sin will be removed as God's plan of redemption eventually sets all things right.
- God uses the sexual union between husband and wife to provide an analogy of the closeness and intensity of Christ's love for the church.

III. RESPONSIBILITY: LIVING WITH BOUNDARIES

As God has designed us as sexual beings, we must be good stewards of this aspect of our lives. We each have a responsibility to maintain our sexual integrity. Feelings and desires He created within us are not a justification for stepping outside of the moral boundaries He has given. Verses such as those below indicate that God expects us all to live in obedience and keep our bodies and desires under control:

Hebrews 13:4, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:"

2 Timothy 2:22, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

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Effectively dealing with our sexuality is much bigger than just holding to a set of behaviors. Rather, sexuality is a God-ordained aspect of humanity that we are seeking to steward well. In addressing healthy sexuality, our primary source of strength and guidance comes from knowing Christ. As our heart is continually transformed by our relationship with Him, our thinking, our behavior, and our relationships with others will be significantly impacted. We must understand that true change happens from the inside out. *Matthew 23:26* reminds us, “*Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*”

Single or married, some of the greatest dangers are believing that you are either “above” temptation and invulnerable to it or that you are helpless and there is no use trying to fight it. As one writer states, “We can choose either to feed our arousal or to discipline it.” Pursuing sanctification and holiness is a full-time responsibility for all believers. Because we cannot obtain righteousness on our own accord, God gives us grace to overcome and He desires that we use it when facing temptation. *1 Corinthians 10:13* speaks of a form of this grace that can come as a way of escape: “*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*”

Finding godly, effective ways of dealing with sexual temptation is crucial rather than waiting for the temptation to go away. Some people unwisely avoid managing sexual temptation effectively because they assume it will just get better over time or if they are able to marry. Sexual temptation does not go away once you are married. Learning to manage sexual temptation now will help you to remain faithful in the future whether you marry or remain single. In practical terms, we need to be on guard against temptation. If we overestimate the strength of our will, set weak boundaries, or rationalize our thoughts and behaviors, we will likely fall prey to the temptation. The balance is found when we accept our sexual nature and allow God, through His Holy Spirit, to direct our behavior.

The Scripture notes that sexual sins violate something deep within us and carry consequences.

1 Corinthians 6:18-19, “*Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?*”

Proverbs 6:24-28, “*Keep thee from the evil woman, from the flattery of the tongue of a strange woman. Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids. For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread: and the adulteress will hunt for the precious life. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one go upon hot coals, and his feet not be burned?*”

However, this does not mean that sexual sins are unforgiveable or that all sexual feelings are sin. Christ's shed blood provides cleansing and forgiveness.

1 John 1:9, “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*”

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God knows that dealing with sexual desires and temptations is difficult and desires to help us in the battle. To be sure, Satan likely threw every type of temptation imaginable at Christ as Satan brought the glory of the kingdoms of the world in front of Him [Christ]. Christ responded to Satan by rebuking him with Scripture and so should we.

Luke 4:5-8; 13, "And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve... And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season."

Hebrews 4:15-16, "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

IV. DESIRE FOR INTIMATE EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Sexual desires, feelings, tension, and temptation are all made up of a complex mixture of longings. These longings include the desire to be known and accepted physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. Ultimately, God wants us to seek Him to fulfill our deepest needs, for He is the only One who can fulfill those longings. *Isaiah 54:5a* states, "For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name." Unfortunately, our adversary, Satan, wants to hijack these longings and steer us into sin.

Our sexual desire reminds us that we were created for relationship, to be intimately known and to know intimately. A marriage relationship can give a glimpse of this level of intimacy, but still it is incomplete. These desires will ultimately be met when we reach Heaven and experience the presence of Christ in His fullness (*1 Corinthians 13:12*).

Contentment, joy, emotional connection, purpose and meaning, close relationships, and wholeness are all available to single people and are necessary in order to experience *the abundant life* as a single person. The abundance we are referring to here comes from intimate communion with God and what springs out of life lived in His design.

One of God's purposes in creating human sexuality was to help us understand intimacy and to point to His covenant relationship with His people.ⁱⁱ Paul refers to this as a "great mystery" in *Ephesians 5:32*. One of the reasons our sexual drive was given is to draw us closer to God in addition to drawing us closer to other individuals. So, without a spouse, we draw nearer to God when these feelings become intense. One author noted,

"Your sexual ache was purposefully designed by God to motivate you (body, soul, and spirit) toward an intimate connection with God, an intimate connection with other members of the body of Christ, and eventually an intimate connection with a future spouse. Even if you never marry, the sexual ache is the divinely created vehicle God uses to give you a longing for intimate connection with himself and with others."ⁱⁱⁱ

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Whether single or married, we have the opportunity to know and relate with God. Consider your relationship with God. How connected to Him do you feel? If you think an intimate relationship with the Lord is not possible, consider the traits you love in people or would look for in a mate: gentleness, honesty, tenderness, trustworthiness, warmth, and understanding, to name only a few. God is infinite in all of these characteristics. The Bible has many references to support this. The intimate communion that can be experienced by a single individual focused on the Lord is noted in:

1 Corinthians 7: 32b-34, "He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit."

God created us so we could have a vibrant relationship with Him. If it is His will that you marry someday, there is nothing that will better prepare you for marriage than a deep relationship with Him. If marriage is not His plan for you, then He has other plans, "*thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end*" (Jeremiah 29:11), and there is nothing that will better prepare you for that plan than a deep relationship with Him.^{iv}

Questions for further discussion

1. In what ways do males uniquely reflect the image of God? In what ways do females uniquely reflect the image of God?
2. How can an accurate understanding of God's intent for sexuality aid our ability to manage sexual temptation?
3. What does this statement, "*all humans are sexual beings*" mean to you? Does reading the list of ways God's design for sexuality is broadly shown (biologically, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually) change the way you view sexuality? Why or why not?
4. It has been said "*marriage does not meet all of a person's needs.*" Why is it important for both single and married individuals to keep this in mind?
5. What are your thoughts about the statement, "*Contentment, joy, emotional connection, purpose and meaning, close relationships, and wholeness are all available to single people; and are necessary in order to experience the abundant life as a single person.*"?
6. Do you sense that God is real to you and actively involved in your life? If not, what can you do to grow close to Him? Who can you talk to about your feelings?

References

Referencing of these materials is not meant to imply an endorsement by the Apostolic Christian Church of America of the author, publisher, or organization that created the materials.

i Doug Rosenau and Michael Todd Wilson, *Soul Virgins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 134.

ii *Ibid.*, 214.

iii *Ibid.*, 138.

iv *Ibid.*, 17.

God's Design And Purpose For Sexuality: Part 2 of 3

I. INTRODUCTION

Having sexual thoughts and feelings is part of the human experience. Some Christian singles want to define spiritual victory with sexuality as a state of: "not having any sexual thoughts or feelings." However, this is not the goal that God is asking us to aim for and there are no Scriptures to equate being spiritually grounded with this state. Rather, we find in the Word being spiritually grounded means the person is connected to Christ, lives an overcoming life, the spiritual fruit of temperance is present, and sin does not have dominion over him or her (*Romans 6:12-14*). In this paper we will discuss sexual desire, what lust is and isn't, and provide a framework for taking a biblically grounded approach to living an overcoming life in this area.

Dealing with sexual desire is often reported as one of the top challenges that single individuals, both male and female, experience in their life. However, for others it is simply one challenge among many or not an issue at all. Regardless of whether sexual desire is a large or small issue for you, we hope that this paper can help you personally, as well as help you understand and assist others in your life.

II. APPLYING GRACE AND TRUTH TO SEXUALITY

The remainder of this paper (and how you receive it) will depend on your understanding of how the concepts of Grace and Truth apply to sexuality. Some readers may have become careless and self-indulgent with their sexual thoughts or behavior. They may not be adequately disciplining themselves in the battle against sexual stimuli and may tend to rationalize sinful behavior, instead of dealing with it as God would have them do. Other readers are likely to have viewed the topic of sexuality through the lens of condemnation, excessive guilt, and shame. As an example, for these readers, having a slip into masturbation after a six month period of abstaining from this behavior can lead them to depression, hopelessness, and wanting to give up. Our hope is that the following material will speak to individuals who find themselves across this entire spectrum.

Two overarching aspects of God's nature are His Grace (love) and His Truth (holiness). (See *1 John 4:16* "God is love" and *1 Peter 1:16*. "Be ye holy; for I am holy"). God's Grace is shown by His love, mercy, understanding, and forgiveness. His Truth is shown by His righteousness, perfection, holiness, and commandments. God is not 50% gracious and 50% holy. He is perfectly (100%) gracious and perfectly (100%) holy at the same time. A Biblical concept of God contains both Grace and Truth without violating the other as they cannot be separated.

Christ modeled living in Grace and Truth, which is directly referenced in the following verses in Scripture:

- *John 1:14*, "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."
- *John 1:17*, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."
- *Colossians 1:6*, "Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth."

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A wonderful example of this principle in Scripture is Christ's response to the woman caught in adultery in *John 8:10-11*. "When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." Note how He dealt with her in grace ("Neither do I condemn thee") AND truth ("go, and sin no more").

Our goal should be to have the mind of Christ (*1 Corinthians 2:16*) and live in a manner that thinks, believes, and lives in Grace AND Truth.

Grace: God's unmerited love, favor, mercy, and strength

AND

Truth: God's holiness, perfection, righteousness, and commandments

As human beings, however, we seem to tend toward one side or the other: either grace OR truth. This may be due to personality, family background, religious training, and other factors. Unfortunately, this takes God's grand design and distorts it, because:

- Grace *without* Truth isn't Grace: **It's license.**
- Truth *without* Grace isn't Truth: **It's condemnation.**

So, if you tend toward license, you need to add Truth. Conversely, if you tend toward condemnation, you need to add Grace. Remember the goal is to live in both Grace and Truth. These concepts can be visually represented on a continuum as noted below. For self-examination, ask the Holy Spirit to help you discern where you fall on this continuum as it relates to your sexuality. This question is good for believers to ask regardless of their gender, marital status, or age.

License-----Grace & Truth-----Condemnation

III. "HEART-FOCUSED" VERSUS "BEHAVIOR-FOCUSED" APPROACH

Along with thinking and living in Grace and Truth, we want to encourage readers to use a "heart-focused" method of considering the topic of sexuality instead of a "behavior-focused" approach. We have described each below:

A. Heart-focused approach

Individuals living by this approach:

1. Ask themselves, "How would God have me to live; both internally in my thoughts and attitudes as well as externally in my actions and relationships with others?"
2. Start by examining their heart where God, His Word, and one's personal walk with Christ is seated. The theme verse of this approach is *Proverbs 4:23*, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."
3. Take God's Grace and Truth seriously by recognizing the importance of pursuing God while trusting in His mercy.
4. Seek to fully live out Grace and Truth in all areas of life and avoid the extremes of either license or condemnation.

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B. Behavior-focused approach

Individuals living by this approach:

1. Ask themselves, "Where is the line that I'm not supposed to cross?"
2. Tend to fall into one of two categories:
 - a. behavior-focused approach that leads to perfectionism and condemnation:
 - i. Individuals living by this approach start out intending to live a Godly life, but eventually end up living like accountants tallying their failures and setbacks.
 - ii. Struggling individuals that use this method tend to gravitate toward perfectionism and feel good about their lives when they are "doing good" but feel despondent and shamed when they have a slip or struggle.
 - b. behavior-focused approach that leads to license
 - i. Individuals living by this approach start out with intentions of "not crossing the line", but eventually keep taking liberties by thinking, "How far can I go without getting in trouble?"
 - ii. These individuals may use the "letter of the law" to determine if they can do something ("Well at least I didn't do...") and often find themselves in trouble after they have gone further than they had imagined they would.

C. A special note on *Matthew 5:27-28*

Matthew 5:27-28, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

1. These verses come from Jesus' teaching during the Sermon on the Mount (*Matthew 5-7*). His teachings in this sermon provide the model for what a life transformed and empowered by the Spirit should be. When reading the Sermon on the Mount, we can quickly see that the high calling Christ lays out for us is not possible by human effort alone. His teachings expose the need for us to turn to a Savior for grace to overcome temptation and to find forgiveness.
2. In this part of His teaching, Jesus would start with the "letter of the law" the Jews were following (i.e., they were focused on external behavior). He would then extend the standard to deal with the heart. He was making clear He wanted more than behavioral compliance to a law. He wanted to see "heart change" which manifested itself in Godly behavior.
3. It is important to note the distinction in this passage between passing thoughts (which we do not have complete control over) and dwelling on and feeding sexual thoughts (which we do have control over). This distinction is critical. To notice an attractive person walking down the street or to have a sexual thought come into one's mind isn't what this verse is addressing. Rather the crux of this verse rests on the words "*to lust after*." These words indicate the active feeding or pursuit of the sexual thoughts. Sometimes Christians feel guilty over simply having thoughts enter their minds. Remember, Christ was tempted when He was on Earth, and the act of being confronted by these thoughts and images was not sin. A helpful phrase that summarizes the point of this paragraph is, "You can't keep the birds from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building a nest in your hair."

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IV. SEXUAL DESIRE

For many individuals, sexual desire is something that they feel internally, but might have difficulty explaining or defining. Sexual desire occurs as a collection of forces, including (A) biological, (B) emotional, (C) relational, and (D) spiritual factors. It is common for individuals to consider sexual desire through one of these factors in isolation and forget that the others play important roles. An accurate understanding of sexual desire will consider that all four factors provide contributions to sexual desire. Of course, the degree to which each factor is present will change over time and situations.

Below are examples of how each of the four factors contribute to sexual desire.

A. Biological

- Experiencing physical sexual tension, urges, and surges often with a corresponding desire for release
- Experiencing shifts in one's hormones and endocrine system
- Reacting to environmental stimuli (things you see, view, read, etc.) regardless of whether you intentionally sought it out or not

B. Emotional

- Having positive emotions (joy, fulfillment, etc.)
- Experiencing painful emotions and wanting relief (frustration, loneliness, sadness, etc.)

C. Relational

- Experiencing closeness and emotional connection with a person
- Longing for companionship
- Having a desire to be married and to experience sexual relations in marriage

D. Spiritual

- Your beliefs about sexuality based on your Scriptural understanding
- Temptation
- Lust

In addition, broadly speaking, gender can influence sexual desire in the following ways:

- For women, emotional intimacy (i.e., feeling safe, cherished, and connected) is often closely linked to sexual desire. Therefore, women tend to be more emotionally driven and seek a connection when considering sexual intimacy. Of course, this does not mean that women cannot or do not experience sexual desire as physical tension. In fact, some women struggle intensely with physical sexual tension. Unfortunately, due to the misunderstanding that "only men" experience physical sexual tension to this degree, some women feel abnormal or have deep shame for these feelings. Also, some women notice their sexual desire may intensify and decrease over the course of their menstrual cycle, as sexual desire can be correlated to hormonal changes.

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- For men, visual images and fantasy are often the gateways to sexual arousal. While this doesn't mean that men don't want or need emotional connection, it does mean that they can more easily experience sexual tension as physical urges instead of emotional longings. Unfortunately, Satan can "hijack" this aspect of our flesh and promote sinful inputs such as seeking physical release through pornography and fantasy.

Some individuals say they wish there was a "switch they could flip" to shut off their sexual desire. However, God did not design human beings in this manner. Our sexual desire is a definitive part of who we are, and we cannot "turn it off" without losing an essence of who God created us to be. In the Bible, God challenges us instead to be responsible stewards of what we do with this sexual desire.

1 Thessalonians 4:4, "That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor;"

V. WHAT LUST IS AND ISN'T

A. What lust is

Throughout Scripture, God is clear that lust is a real problem that stands in the way of His best for our lives. The problem of lust is not just a "guy problem" and is relevant to individuals who are single, engaged, married, or single again. Lust is craving or going after anything that is outside God's best and His will for us.ⁱⁱ Lust can be explained and defined in various ways.

- *1 John 2:16, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."*
- "Lust is craving sexually what God has forbidden."ⁱⁱⁱ
- Lust is a desire for pleasure/receiving without consideration or commitment to giving.
- "Lust wants to go outside God's guidelines to find satisfaction."^{iv}
- "Lust can never be quenched. As soon as the object of lust is attained, lust wants something more."^v
- It is lust to hold onto sexual thoughts by intentionally dwelling on and intensifying them.

When you are battling with lust, seek God, accountability, and counsel (*James 5:16*). Remember that forgiveness and hope are available to us when we turn away from our lustful thoughts and actions and turn towards Christ (*1 John 1:9*).

B. What lust isn't

Some individuals automatically interpret sexual thoughts and feelings as being sin, however, that simply isn't the case. While being careless or feeding sexual thoughts and feelings leads to error, so too does the opposite trap of fearing sexual thoughts and feelings and falling into the error of self-condemnation.

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Below are examples of times individuals may notice sexual desire or temptation where it is best to simply move on and neither react with carelessness nor condemnation.

- It's not lust to experience sexual temptation. Remember Jesus was tempted too!
- It's not lust to have sexual thoughts pass through your mind.
- It's not lust to be attracted to someone or notice that he or she is good-looking.
- It's not lust to anticipate and be excited about having sex within marriage.
- It's not lust when a man or woman becomes sexually aroused without any conscious decision to do so.
- It's not lust for men and women to have dreams with sexual content. In men this is sometimes called a "wet dream" or nocturnal emission. We cannot control our dreams while we are having them. We are challenged to control what we put into our minds while we are awake, but this does not mean we will never have dreams with sexual content.

C. Final thoughts on what is and isn't lust

In Scripture there are several Greek words used for lust. However, one of the most commonly used words, *epithumia* [NT: 1939], means "strong desire" of any kind and is used of both good desires and sinful ones. Note that it is not desire that is so much the problem, but rather the fact that our flesh tends to desire that which is ungodly. Having longings is in itself understandable, human, and, in fact, is no surprise to our Creator God and especially Jesus who experienced life in a human body. He is aware of the tensions, needs, and longings we experience and that it takes effort, energy, and determination for us to steer our focus away from sinful pleasures toward Godly outlets. However, when we actively pursue what is outside of God's design, seek to "drink in" or obtain what God does not sanction, or act on normal sexual desires through sinful means, then lust and sin occur. Our goal then is to live in a way that continually shifts away from the direction of the flesh and toward the way of the Spirit. As it says in *Galatians 5:16*, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." Gaining victory over lust does not mean we eliminate the natural sexual desire. Remember sexual desire is not the same as lust it's how you respond to this desire that matters.

VI. DEVELOP A ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY FOR SINFUL INPUTS AND ACCELERANTS

As mentioned in the preceding sections, every believer, will experience a degree of sexual tension. We believe God's grace to overcome is the promise that He will empower us to effectively deal with temptation (*1 Corinthians 10:13*). Believers have been given direction for how to lead an overcoming life, not a promise they will never be tempted. The challenge then becomes discerning what is unavoidable and what is created by an individual's life style and choices. Scripture is clear that we are to avoid, flee, and stay away from sin and things that promote or provoke sin:

Psalms 101:2-3, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me."

Job 31:1, "I made a covenant with mine eyes; why then should I think upon a maid?"

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Romans 6:11-16, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?"

2 Timothy 2:22, "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

In the context of sexuality, "inputs" and "accelerants" are anything that serve to stir, increase, or lead to lust or sin. Simply put, we must cut them off (*Matthew 5:29-30*). Zero tolerance. Satan's stealthy lies and a gradual deterioration of our vigilance can lead to allowing things which should not be tolerated. The following list includes examples of "inputs" or "accelerants" that should be cut off.

- Media/technology, in any form, that provides or provokes images or stories that lead to lust.
- Pornography in any form or pictures from any source that stir lust.
- Sexual fantasy and lustful thinking.
- Romance novels and stories with strong sexual content.
- Flirtatiousness and sexually-tinged conversations.
- Locations or people that provoke lust or sexual behavior.

With the ease of accessibility of these items in today's society, it is especially important to remain diligent. People are able to access "inputs" within the privacy of their homes, creating secrecy and a lack of accountability. It is simply never acceptable to allow sinful "inputs" into our lives.

Matthew 18: 8-9, "Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire."

VII. MASTURBATION

The topic of masturbation may be the most challenging sexual issue for many single people. Through the years there have been many myths and stories about masturbation; often passed around by teens trying to understand sexual feelings during puberty. While the Bible is very clear on warning about the sinfulness of lust (and by extension sexual fantasy and pornography), fornication, adultery, etc., there are no Scriptures which specifically mention masturbation. Therefore, biblical principles regarding temptation and sexual purity should be used as guidelines for how to approach this topic in Grace and Truth.

It is sometimes difficult to address the topic of masturbation because its meaning and impact are different across individuals. Let's start by considering again the following continuum. Please note where you would place yourself along this line as you consider the topic of sexuality.

License-----Grace & Truth-----Condemnation

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Individuals who tend toward License may minimize that they are letting their flesh set the course of their behavior instead of the Spirit. We have seen the damage left behind by the indulging of the flesh, the lack of accountability, and the absence of overcoming in a life not fully committed to sexual purity. Conversely, individuals who tend toward Condemnation may feel like completely giving up and being unforgivable for slips that occur. We have likewise seen the damage left behind by the shame, excessive guilt, and sense of spiritual failure created by those viewing these occasional slips from this viewpoint. It should also be noted some individuals may find themselves vacillating between periods of License and periods of Condemnation. Approaching the topic of masturbation through the lens of Grace and Truth means knowing that masturbation neither condemns completely nor is to be taken lightly. To be clear, there is a difference between continually experiencing sexual tension and continually submitting to sexual tension. This distinction is important and should be recognized as the believer discerns the line between feeling excessive guilt and unwarranted license toward masturbation.

Other factors that can influence how serious an issue masturbation is for an individual include:

- The age of the individual (pre-adolescent, teen, adult)
- The marital status of the individual
- The presence or absence of inputs/accelerants
- The history of the individual (sexual history, addiction to masturbation, etc.)
- The level of spiritual maturity and accountability of an individual

Below are some indicators to help determine whether a truth or grace approach to masturbation might need to be undertaken:

A. Indicators that Truth is needed

- Use of inputs and accelerants (pornography, movies, magazines, books, stories)
- Addiction to masturbation/being unable to stop oneself from masturbating
- Experiencing ongoing hiding and shame leading to isolation with God and, possibly, others
- Frequent masturbation – for some individuals masturbation is clearly dominating their lives such that masturbation occurs on a frequent basis.
- Masturbation occurs in binges – for some individuals one masturbation turns into a series of incidents within a period of time or a rapid increase in use of inputs/accelerants
- Using masturbation to numb or cope with emotional issues

B. Indicators that Grace is needed

- An occasional masturbation that releases sexual tension with zero inputs/accelerants
- When an individual has a tendency toward condemnation that leads him/her to want to give up

Many would argue it is not possible to have masturbation without lust or other inputs. Others believe that occasionally releasing sexual tension through masturbation does not require the accelerants of sinful fantasy or pornography. In general, masturbation provides a temporary outlet for an issue that needs to be redirected. For the majority of individuals it creates a greater desire to fulfill lust, weakens a believer's sense of self-control, and almost always includes inappropriate fantasy. Our bodies are given to us as a vessel to steward. People make the argument that masturbation is acceptable as it doesn't directly sin against another. However, as *1 Corinthians 6:19-20* states, our body is not given to us for our own use but for the Lord's and we are to glorify Him through it. It is essential this truth is kept in mind as this challenging topic is dealt with.

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VIII. CONCLUSION

Experiencing sexual desire is part of the human experience. By maintaining a perspective of Grace and Truth, we can gain a clearer understanding of our response to sexual desire. Approaching the topic of sexuality out of a heart-focused approach (as opposed to a behavior-focused approach) will lead to heart-change that then creates behavior change. These concepts provide a backdrop by which to scripturally view this struggle. God wants us to be empowered and to succeed in victorious Christian living. He does not want us to be brought under the power of anything (*1 Corinthians. 6:12*). Understanding normal sexual desire, focusing on the complete elimination of sinful inputs, and overcoming lust by the grace of God will help each of us to live an overcoming life in Christ.

Questions for further discussion

1. Consider how sexual desire is described in this paper. Is it similar to how you have seen it or different? Do you agree that it is possible to experience sexual desire without it automatically being lust? Why or why not?
2. How would you define the difference between experiencing sexual tension and submitting to sexual tension?
3. When considering your sexual desire and how you deal with it, where do you typically fall on the continuum of License ----Grace & Truth ----Condemnation? Which direction do you typically need to shift?
4. How have you been able to turn towards Christ when struggling with sexual tension and urges? If this idea is new to you, what can you do to draw nearer to God when these feelings arise?
5. How is the definition of lust in this section similar or different from how you have defined it? What other Scripture verses guide your understanding of and defense against lust?
6. Do you have a zero-tolerance policy on input and accelerants? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you do an inventory of your life and see if there is anything that needs to be "cut off."
7. In what ways does your sexual desire seek to be played out in ungodly ways? Some are tempted in more overt ways such as porn while others are tempted in more subtle ways such as developing private emotional relationships. Where are your weak points?

References

Referencing of these materials is not meant to imply an endorsement by the Apostolic Christian Church of America of the author, publisher, or organization that created the materials.

i Quote attributed to Martin Luther.

ii Joshua Harris, *Sex Is Not the Problem, (Lust Is)* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2003), 17-30.

iii Ibid., 20.

iv Ibid., 21.

v Ibid., 41.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This paper will focus on tools, attitudes, and methods for helping you to deal with sexual desire and sexual temptation. Remember that the goal God has for us is that we live an overcoming life. That doesn't mean that we will have a trouble-free or temptation-free life nor does it mean we will always overcome in the moment. However, it does mean that we don't have to live in isolation, feel like a failure, be overrun by sin, or lack purpose in life. We are called to "get up again" and continue moving forward (*Proverbs 24:16*). As you read the items below, you will likely recognize many strategies you are already following. If so, be encouraged you are on the right track. You may also have tools or practices that aren't listed in this paper that you find very helpful. Keep them up! Conversely, it is likely that some of the items below may come easy to you while others may seem more challenging. That is very normal. Do your best to find a way to incorporate them into your life, realizing they may need to be adapted to fit your circumstances.

II. INCORPORATING A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

Consider the following two life-paths you could walk, and consider how each is likely to deal with sexual desire, tension, and temptation. It is easy to see there will be a big difference.

Vibrant/Committed Christian walk (intentional commitment in prayer, the Word, worship)

- + Actively engaging in life by using your time and talents to serve meaningfully as defined by God
- + Good stewardship of the physical, emotional, relational and spiritual aspects of life
- + Strong connections with God's people (accountability, mentoring, fellowship, friendship)
- + Intentional practice of self-discipline, taking thoughts captive, disciplining one's thought life
- + A life devoted to Christian service
- + Zero tolerance for inputs and accelerants (anything that stirs, increases, or leads to lust or sin)
- + Repentant spirit and continued growth in areas of weakness
- = **Living an overcoming life in Christ**

Mediocre spiritual walk (inconsistent prayer life and time in the Word, apathetic worship)

- + Passively engaging in life to get "what's in it for me"
- + Not taking adequate stewardship of the physical, emotional, relational and spiritual aspects of life
- + Isolation, absence of deep connections with God's people (lack of accountability, mentoring, etc.)
- + Undisciplined thought life, lack of self-discipline
- + Service to others is avoided, is an afterthought, or only done if required
- + Carelessness with inputs and inconsistent resistance to accelerants
- + Shame and hiding, fearful to confess sin and seek forgiveness
- = **Living in defeat, disconnect, and discouragement**

We are called as followers of Christ to have a comprehensive approach to dealing with our sexual desires and temptations. This means our plan for resisting sexual temptation should touch all aspects of our life and have multiple layers of protection and action. It is critically important the struggle is framed properly in this "both/and", not an "either/or", scenario. Too often we believe changing one or two aspects of our life will result in a victory which, in reality, requires us to be completely aligned with God's truth by His grace. A few of the specific strategies are discussed below.

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III. USING SCRIPTURE TO GUIDE OUR THINKING

Below are some Scriptures and questions you can use to help guide your thinking as you develop strategies to overcome sexual desire. These verses and questions can help discern how to properly view this struggle. These questions can be used for self-examination or reviewed with an accountability partner or mentor.

A. *1 Cor. 6:12-13, "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body."*

- Is this type of thinking or behavior bringing me under its power? Am I being controlled by it?
- Is this type of thinking or behavior increasing or decreasing the Spiritual fruit of temperance (self-control) in my life?
- Even if this type of thinking or behavior isn't overtly sinful, is it wise or beneficial for me?

James 1:14-15, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

B. *Colossians 3:5, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:"*

- Is this type of thinking or behavior increasing my lust? If so, I need to flee.

C. *Matthew 5:28, "But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."*

- Is this type of thinking or behavior objectifying someone as an object of lust?

D. *Romans 14:14, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean."*

- Does this thinking or behavior cause me to feel shameful or isolated from God through the conviction of the Holy Spirit?

E. *Genesis 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."*

- Is this thinking or behavior leading me away from pursuing a marital relationship which God has called me to?

F. *Romans 14:13, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."*

- Is this thinking or behavior putting a stumblingblock in someone else's way?
- Is this thinking or behavior taking advantage of someone or leading them into sin?

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IV. REDIRECTING AND REFRAMING SEXUAL DESIRE

Our sexual drive is God-given and as with any other drive, we must discipline it to keep safeguards around it. We deal with it appropriately by redirecting our focus and reframing our thoughts. We redirect our focus away from sexual desires and toward other activities. Reframing occurs when we shift our perspective. Instead of concentrating on what we cannot have that would seem to satisfy our sexual desire, we concentrate on God and find ways to be drawn closer to Him and others in wholesome ways.

- A. Redirecting:** The practice of redirecting takes our sexual desire and refocuses this energy toward a different activity. These types of activities may be short-term, immediate tasks, or long-term training. For instance, choosing to go for a spontaneous walk or run is a healthy way to redirect sexual desire rather than sitting in your bedroom alone. Or, perhaps you want to get involved in a training program for a hiking trip that requires regular physical activity multiple times a week. You could also get involved in gardening or a household project that could provide healthy outlets for energy. There are situations that call for short-term solutions and others that call for long-term solutions. The key is being purposeful in redirecting your sexual desire when the tension starts to build.
- B. Reframing:** Reframing is more of a mental than physical exercise. It is looking at a situation in a different way, changing the frame of reference so as to give it a new meaning. For example, you can reframe a problem as an opportunity, a weakness as an area to work on building strength, an unkindness as a lack of understanding.ⁱ James was reframing when he said, *“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into diverse temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”* (James 1:2-3) The feeling of unfulfilled sexual desire can often turn our perspective inward and lead to a self-centered focus. Our own emptiness and deficiencies become very apparent. However, if we use reframing, we can acknowledge our feelings as a deep desire for relationship and connection. We can then intentionally and proactively seek to reach out and connect with others in healthy ways in order to deal with these feelings (dinner with friends, activities with nieces/nephews, attending church gatherings, etc.). In addition, reframing can motivate you to show compassion, and to delve deeper into knowing others, knowing yourself, and knowing God.ⁱⁱ

V. PROTECTING YOURSELF AGAINST TEMPTATION

It should be no surprise to us that temptation will come. Our adversary, Satan, is working diligently to find ways to get at us. Sexual temptation and frustration over sexual desire are certainly areas he tries to exploit. As *1 Peter 5:8-9* tells us, *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”* Based on this warning, we need to be aware of the sources of temptation around us (i.e. environmental sources of temptation) as well as the vulnerabilities inside of us (i.e., *spiritual, physiological, emotional, cognitive, and social* sources of temptation). *2 Corinthians 2:11* tells us that we should not be *“ignorant”* of his [Satan’s] devices. He is often subtle in that he can *“hijack”* legitimate needs and desires in order to lead you to temptation.

There is a wide variety of ways that sexual feelings, tension, and temptation can be kindled. Many temptations come as we passively go through our day without a diligent plan of protection. An *“innocent”* search on the internet or drive down the street can take a turn toward temptation as we come across something we were not expecting. Below are a number of sources that we need to be aware of and on guard against.

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A. Environmental

- Unfortunately, you don't have to look very far before you are confronted with sexually explicit and implicit content in many types of media, billboards, the Internet, etc. In addition, there may be specific people and certain locations that serve as sources of temptation for you individually.

B. Spiritual

- Satan is eager to entice us and draw us towards temptation (*James 1:14*). Attacks from Satan, the lust of the flesh, and even self-righteousness can be sources of temptation.

C. Physiological

- As humans, we must deal with our physical drives that can put us directly or indirectly in the way of temptation: sexual tension and fatigue are two examples of these types of physical states that we must learn to manage in healthy ways.

D. Emotional

- Emotions of sadness, loneliness, anger, boredom, stress, insecurity, etc., can all increase our vulnerabilities to temptation. Sometimes people try to "stuff" their emotions in order to cope with them, but that tends to only make them worse or come out in an unhealthy way later.

E. Cognitive

- Our thoughts play a large part in how we manage temptation. Viewing individuals as "objects" rather than souls, rationalizing our thoughts or behaviors, believing we are entitled in some way, or believing we are helpless to defend ourselves from temptation are all ways our thoughts can lead us astray.

F. Relational

- Satan wants to use our God-given longings for connection, affection, and affirmation to derail us through seeking ungodly means to fulfill those desires.

Ephesians 6:10-18 reminds us that we have spiritual protection (belt of truth, helmet of salvation, breastplate of righteousness, shield of faith) and a weapon (sword of the Spirit) to use as we wage a spiritual battle.

Ephesians 6:10-18 "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints."

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VI. "STARVING" OUR SOURCES OF TEMPTATION

We need to accept our responsibility in choosing how to feed our minds and the extent to which we feed our fleshly desires. When facing sexual temptation, take inventory of your life to see what sources of temptation you are aware of that you are allowing in your life. You are encouraged to pray through *Psalm 139:23-24*, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

We can all find ways to justify things in our lives that quite simply need to be removed and from which we need to flee. There may be certain environmental sources of temptation that you knowingly allow in your life (various forms of media, romance novels, pornography, etc.); or perhaps it is a relationship that consistently provokes unhealthy desires. Choosing *not* to feed the natural desires within us is an important step towards overcoming sexual temptation. This is a matter of enforcing your personal "zero-tolerance policy" on inputs and accelerants.

For more information, readers are encouraged to go the Dealing with Sexual Temptation section of the ACCFS website at www.accounseling.org/sexualtemptation.

VII. REMEMBER THE BODY OF CHRIST

In the midst of this struggle with sexual desire, it is imperative to remember the invaluable tool which God gives us in the form of His Body of believers. We are called to be active and involved members of this Body. This involvement can help fulfill or reframe the longing for deep connection we may feel is lacking in our lives.

Within the Body, we should utilize the source of protection accountability partners and mentors can provide (*Proverbs 27:17*). We are able to walk alongside each other through life as "members one of another" (*Romans 12:5*). We are also instructed to "bear each other burdens" (*Galatians 6:2*) and to confess our faults to one another and pray for one another (*James 5:16*).

Accountability partners are typically people of your same sex around the same age and stage of life as you. Mentors are individuals of the same sex with more experience in life or in some specific area who provide guidance and support. Accountability partners and mentors who know you well and know your vulnerabilities can provide encouragement as well as help you avoid some situations that might cause you to stumble. In addition, they can provide the "faithful wounds" that we often need when we are being led astray by our own desires (*Proverbs 27:6*). For more information, readers can go to the Mentoring section of the ACCFS website at www.accounseling.org/mentoring.

VIII. Managing technology effectively

While the topic of technology goes beyond the scope of this paper, it is too important to omit altogether. In many ways, technology and social media have affected people's lives in a positive sense. However, with different opportunities introduced daily, individuals are being called to a higher level of responsibility as new doors are also being opened to temptation. Technology has increased the ease of accessibility to pornography and sexual images like never before. Personal stewardship and high levels of accountability and integrity are needed to stay away from falling

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into a trap of isolation and secrecy. Remember that our Christian beliefs and behaviors need to go with us online. Nothing is hid from God. *1 Corinthians 4:5b* tells us that God "...will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."

Viewing pornography or graphic sexual images on the television or the computer can create a mental catalog of images to be recalled during future struggles. As sexual temptation is heightened, sinful fantasies increase and can result in masturbation to satisfy desires instead of seeking to fulfill deeper needs of connection in line with God's truth. Through continually viewing and fantasizing, a person's relationships with others and overall view of reality can become distorted. Women become objectified, diminishing a man's ability to see her worth in Christ as a human being. She instead becomes viewed only as an object of desire or fulfillment and standards are created which can never, even in marriage, be righteously filled.

Two extremes can occur when looking at social media's impact on a believer. While intended to be used for building connections socially, some sites can have the opposite effect, increasing a person's sense of depression and isolation as they view another's accomplishments or appearance. This can result in a diminished sense of personal value and reality. Also, some people settle for superficial relationships by communicating through a device rather than face-to-face so they don't have to make deeper connections and have accountability with other believers. Unfortunately, this superficiality has the effect of hiding insecurities or embellishing truths by keeping their true self hidden. This state can lead to further complications as hollow, shallow relationships lead to loneliness which can exacerbate difficulties of dealing with sexual desire.

On the other end of the spectrum, there is a distorted sense of concealment and safety that arises from the use of social media. Certain phone apps can embolden people to interact in inappropriate ways, while inappropriate pictures or messages may be exchanged under the pretense that they will be deleted and unseen by others outside of the intended recipient. These actions blur appropriateness in relationships, as people perceive these actions as "safe" without a clear understanding of the lasting mental, emotional, and spiritual effects that can result long after a physical picture is gone.

For more information, readers are encouraged to go the technology section of the ACCFS website at www.accounseling.org/technology

IX. FULFILLMENT AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH CHRIST

Our goal must be to have pure desires: desiring God's gift of sex to be honored and undefiled. In the spirit of *Colossians 3*, we must continually "put off" or "mortify" the natural lusts and "seek those things which are above" in order to "put on the new man" (*Colossians 3:1-11*). As we continue this pursuit of sanctification, we become transformed and conformed to the image of Christ and fulfill His calling to us (*Romans 8:29, Romans 12:2*). God's call to us is based in His unending love for us. When He calls us to defeat temptation, He does so knowing that He has something far better for us than the temporary, artificial fulfillment that lustful thoughts and actions attempt to provide. As we seek to defeat lust for the sake of holiness, we need to be properly equipped with:

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- The right standard for holiness as outlined in God's Word.
- The right source of power to change: the Holy Spirit's conviction and the power of Christ in us, not just will-power that can lead to self-righteousness.
- The right motive for fighting for purity: gratitude for the unmerited grace we have received and the desire to become more like Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, 7, "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God. . . For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness."

Remember your value in God's eyes. He was willing to pay the ultimate price so that you could have a relationship with Him. Consider the following verses in His Word:

Psalms 139: 17-18 (and the rest of the psalm), "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee."

Isaiah 43:1-2, 4, "But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. . . . Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life."

Isaiah 49:16, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me."

Zechariah 2:8, "For thus saith the LORD of hosts; After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you: for he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye."

John 15:9, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love."

Develop an intimate relationship with God and reflect on His love for you. How do you do this? In a similar way that you develop relationships with people:

- Spend time with Him.
- Talk to Him (pray, journal).
- Read His Word and meditate on it.
- Examine His work in nature.
- Open your heart and let Him in to even the secret places where no one else is allowed.
- Use the gifts and talents He has given you to glorify Him and serve others.

Finally, by finding purpose in the bigger picture, single people are able to focus on serving God more and their unfilled desires less. "When people catch a glimpse of something much larger than themselves, something they deeply believe in, seemingly nothing is too difficult for them."^{iv} This is not to say maintaining this purpose will always be easy, but this discipline allows us to strive for and fulfill the heart of *Colossians 3*.

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X. CONCLUSION

Singleness offers both joys and challenges. One major struggle single people face is finding ways to deal with their sexual desire. There are many ineffective ways of dealing with this relevant issue. Attempting to just “white knuckle” your way through life and relying on your own will power will set you up for failure. Merely trying to repress or deny your sexuality until you get married is also ineffective. Redirecting and reframing your sexual desires, developing and maintaining healthy relationships, starving sources of temptation, and gaining victory over lust are ways to properly acknowledge your sexuality and yet not allow it to lead you into sin. Finally, a vibrant, committed spiritual life which maintains healthy communication with God and the body of believers should be viewed as an essential first line of defense. The intimacy we have with our heavenly Father and the opportunity to experience it through prayer is powerful and fulfilling.

- Pray for the presence of Christ and the desire for God's will in your life, whether it includes marriage or not.
- Pray for yourself to be growing into the person Christ wants you to be.
- Pray for the purity and integrity of the men and women you know.
- Pray to be able to honor God as part of the Body of Christ.

Questions for further discussion:

1. What specific activities can you do in order to “redirect” the tension that comes from sexual desire? How can you specifically “reframe” your sexual desires into a greater perspective?
2. What are your vulnerabilities? Are there any social or environmental sources of temptation that need to be removed from your life?
3. Who are you accountable to for maintaining your sexual purity?
4. How can appropriate boundaries be set to maintain integrity and accountability when using technology?

References

Referencing of these materials is not meant to imply an endorsement by the Apostolic Christian Church of America of the author, publisher, or organization that created the materials.

i <http://changingminds.org/techniques/general/reframing.htm>

ii. Ibid.

iii. Ibid., 47-40.

iv. Ibid., 98.