

After The Storm, Then What?

You've made it through the initial discovery, you've made the decision to stay in your marriage and fight for it. You know life will never be the same again, but now life does go on. The routines of everyday living continue--work, school, grocery shopping, housework, cooking, answering the phone. You are going through the motions, and you are giving it your best, but discouragement and sorrow might still be your constant companions. Perhaps you are looking back, instead of looking forward and are still mourning what you might still see as total loss. Remember, discouragement is always rooted in the way we think, the specific thoughts that we center our attention upon, the "what ifs" and "if onlys" that crowd out any hope or rays of light. Yes, you may know God's promises, but they will bring no comfort when our heart refuses to be comforted and continues mourning as though sorrow will somehow soothe the deep wounds that are yet so tender and sore. Oh, dear sister, it will not. There is no comfort, no joy, no healing and no hope in the deep abyss of morbid thoughts and fears.

Would you take some time to read through this list of comments that are gentle reminders and road signs that can lead you out of the valley and into the light of day? As we have sang so often, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth *will* grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace." It doesn't make sense to our human heart, but the weapon that slays the enemy of discouragement is within our reach and within our power to pick up and use because we have the Holy Spirit Himself dwelling within us, and God *wants* us to be encouraged, comforted, and strengthened. The Bible assures us, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:3-5) Will you summon inner courage by praying right now and asking God to walk with us a moment and strengthen you as we face some of those tormenting monsters together and conquer them with God's Sword?

Where in the world did she come from?

Many women have described their husband's bondage to pornography as adultery with a woman they cannot speak to or confront, for she lives on the pages of pornographic material. She is a phantom woman who steals the attention and affections of her husband and entices him to follow her far away from real life at home in a real world. This perpetually naked woman who is air brushed to perfection feels no concern for the home she destroys, the hearts she breaks or the men she lures into her pernicious trap. She smiles provocatively and demands nothing, or so it seems to the men who are mesmerized by her. Little do they know that they are following this woman like a cow to the slaughterhouse where death and horror quietly await them.

This seemingly "harmless" fascination with a woman who never speaks and never demands is, in reality, fascination with a woman who is leading a steady stream of men into a trap of the darkest most sinister sort. While they are feasting on her delights they are unaware that she is silently eroding their defenses and infiltrating every corner of

their lives with only one intent—total destruction. She is a beautiful Trojan horse that cares nothing for them and has no pity, though she destroys careers, marriages, homes and the most precious treasure of all, a man’s integrity, character and relationship with God. Solomon warns about this woman. In Ecclesiastes 7:25 we read, “I applied mine heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom, and the reason *of things*, and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness *and* madness: And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart *is* snares [traps] and nets, *and* her hands *as* bands [prison]: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her.”

Men who have been taken by the beauty of this licentious woman called “pornography” have far greater problems than a fascination with lewd photography. They have been hooked by the lure of sexual arousal. Pornography has one goal—arousal and sexual release. Make no mistake about it--the pictures are the bait, not the hook. The hook that snares and entraps is the sexual high. It’s certainly enticing for it seems better than the euphoria of illicit drugs with none of the “side effects.” It’s perfectly legal, comes without exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, costs little, requires no self sacrifice, and demands no emotional ties or investment of time. It seems no one is hurt, no one is physically violated, and no adultery is committed. The illusion is that it is the most perfect stress release and trouble free recreation a man could engage in with so little cost and trouble. Only one problem--it completely ignores God.

Men entrapped by the ritualistic habits of masturbation (self sex) live as though sexual gratification is a sport rather than a sacred gift from God that is reserved for the intimacies of marriage. It disregards the one flesh relationship of marriage that is characterized by physical union and mutual enjoyment. It exchanges the long lasting delights of true intimacy and love with one’s spouse for a self centered short cut to momentary gratification that incrementally destroys a man’s ability to enjoy and interact with his wife. It utterly destroys the mysterious spiritual bond that is established between a man and a woman who have come together in a sexual union, and it ultimately grieves the Holy Spirit and alienates a man from His God. In the end, it reduces a sacred act into lurid debauchery and hardens a man’s heart until he does not hear the cries of his own wife or children, let alone the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. High on the throne of his heart is his own insatiable lust, ruling his life with all encompassing tyrannical control.

Lust *does* conquer and rule whoever lingers in its grasp. What may have begun with curiosity or an impulsive act during a time of stress quickly envelops and consumes a man until he no longer controls it—it controls him. And sometimes, it goes beyond the pages of photographic images and morphs into a real woman who is willing to play the part and become a living fantasy. How in the world can this happen to a Christian man and is there any hope for his rescue? Thankfully, God’s love, and grace, and power can transform even men who have been corrupted by the utter blindness and deception of sexual vices. There is hope, and more than that, hope for a *better* tomorrow.

“What?” Paul asks incredulously, “know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one

spirit. Flee fornication [any sexual immorality]. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.” (1 Corinthians 6:16-18) Adultery is much more than physical intercourse between two living breathing people. To understand why adulterous behavior by a spouse wrecks such internal havoc one must understand it is more than a simple physical act. Adultery includes any act that robs a marriage of intimacy that rightfully belongs to one’s marriage partner alone. God designed marriage, which is the intertwinement of two people’s lives, both physically and emotionally, to produce an exclusive and delightful bond of companionship.

The sexual union is something God Himself has created for the enjoyment of people. Animals procreate to satisfy sexual urges, but people automatically engage their *minds* when they engage in sexual union, and people are designed in such a way as to develop an emotional attachment to the object of their love and physical attachment. Emotional intimacy and physical intimacy cannot be separated—the two compliment and feed the other. If one sets his (or her) love on the delights of a harlot, he will become inextricably attached to being with the harlot. If one sets his love on the delights of his spouse, he will become attached to his spouse. If one sets his love on his own self, he will become attached to his own self and be enveloped in self-gratification. When human beings violate the built in plan God has set in motion, human beings will always suffer excruciating consequences.

A satisfying marriage relationship in which both partners are emotionally attached to one other can be compared to a glass of water that is completely filled. There’s no room for more water from another source—it’s full. But as one or both partners begin investing their emotional and physical efforts into a third object of sexual attraction, the full glass of water begins slowly draining into another glass. Eventually the once full glass of water becomes a partially full glass of water and then nothing more than a dry glass with nothing in it. Men and women in such a marriage sense there is something very wrong with their marriage relationship. It is no longer satisfying or warm. They often wrongly conclude they no longer love their spouse, or believe all hope for the marriage is gone. What they do not recognize is that they themselves have stopped refilling the glass and have poured themselves into another until their glass has become empty. When both partners begin pouring themselves into each other and begin investing their attention and nurture into their own relationship, the “outside glass” becomes empty and the marriage is once again full and satisfied.

With this illustration now fresh in your mind, go back to the beginning of these notes and reread the description of a man entrapped in pornography. Then proceed to read the following paragraphs.

How could he do such a thing?

Perhaps you are wondering, “How do men or women get entrapped by something as vile and self centered as pornography and masturbation, or any kind of sexual immorality for that matter?” or “How can a husband say he loves his wife and then engage in such raunchy behavior?” Women who are faced with questions like these often feel deeply betrayed and as the impact of their husband’s sin presses on them, they usually vacillate

between anger, insecurity and sorrow. Trust is shattered and fear quickly slides into its place. Because involvement with pornography isn't usually understood or expected, it is often hard to grapple with the realities of such an enslaving habit. With good reason, it is a sin that causes a wife to feel strangely violated. Something or someone else has used what she believed was exclusively hers alone. To a woman who is reeling in the aftershock of discovering her husband's vice, it seems senseless and incredibly stupid for him to risk losing everything that is dear in order to gratify sexual urges that are so base. Yet responding with disgust and bewilderment is the way most of us respond when we hear about someone who is enslaved to some devastating sin. We are surprised because we do not fully comprehend the power of sin or believe every person is vulnerable to being controlled by it.

Women who are discouraged as they try to understand their husband's slippery slide into moral failure are often helped when they stop to consider the sins *they* might be enslaved to—perhaps sins that don't have the same consequences or stigma attached that enslavement to pornography has. Is gossip a problem? Worry? Anger? Is there complete self control with the things one buys and is credit card debt a battle? How about time management, time in prayer and Bible study? Any difficulties there? No matter whom we are or how well we have managed to keep ourselves from the clutches of sin, we all still need to be exhorted to "...lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us..." (Hebrews 12:1) Sin is incredibly deceptive, powerful, and tailor made to easily exploit every person's weakest link. One person's besetting sin may not be another's.

It is very easy to see sexual sins as heinous if sexual sins are not something that interest us or tempt us, but what about our own besetting sins? Have we made up our mind to flee from them only to be entrapped when our pet passions got the best of us once again? Have we asked forgiveness again and again and still failed? If we are not careful, we can become just like the Pharisee who self-righteously told the Lord (who let us know the Pharisee prayed with himself), "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, **adulterers**, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." Whenever we, like the publican, derive our sense of being right with God from what we do or do not do, we become puffed up in pride, critical of others, unmerciful and unforgiving. We can forget that God's grace is no more grace if we deserve His forgiveness and righteousness. If we come to God in our own merit we will find, not approval, but rejection.

It is not uncommon for a woman betrayed by a husband's horrible and sinful involvement with pornography or other sexual immorality to become so prideful and so self-righteous that she too prays and God refuses to listen, for the scriptures teach us that "...God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." (1 Peter 5:5) At the same time, her foolish husband who has sinned so grievously against her might humbly acknowledge his sin and turn in repentance to God to discover that the Lord is ready to receive him and grant him full forgiveness and restoration of fellowship. What a strange twist—the betrayed wife can behave as the Pharisee even while the sinful husband can behave as the publican who, ..."standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven,

but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.” The sinning husband can be forgiven and restored even while his wife who was sinned against can be rejected and estranged from God. What a sobering reminder that *none* of us deserves God’s mercy or forgiveness and none of us can be forgiven because we deserve to be. Humility elicits God’s compassion and grace, but pride, His opposition completely. “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” (Luke 18:11-14) The truth is, all of us can be every bit as enslaved to sin as the husband who is enslaved to his sin of pornography. And the path to victory for us is the very same path of victory for him.

What we need

In a nutshell, all sins that involve self-indulgence reflect the same spiritual lack of temperance, or self-control. Temperance is recognized in Scripture as a by-product, or fruit of the Spirit and is characteristic of those who learn to “walk in the Spirit.” One who exercises his own will and lives as he pleases is one who “walks after the flesh.” On the other hand, one who is able to restrain the sinful desires of his human nature and obediently chooses to do God’s will is one who “walks after the Spirit.” The Bible tells us in Galatians 5: 16-17, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust [sinful desires] of the flesh [human nature]. For the flesh lusteth [wars] against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” If the ability to do what is right and resist what is wrong depends on this one thing—whether one is walking in the Spirit—then learning what it means to walk in the Spirit ought to be of utmost importance to every believer. Of all the Christian men who have become enslaved by sexual sin, including many pastors, and of all the Christian women who have become enslaved by bitterness and slander, none can honestly dispute the practical truth of this passage of scripture. Those who daily walk in the Spirit find all the strength and grace they need to withstand temptation and do what is right. Those who do not walk in the Spirit do not. The flesh can never be trusted. The Lord Jesus Christ can.

To “walk” refers to how we live and conduct our life. To “walk **in** the Spirit” is to depend upon and walk with the Lord in the same way God commanded Israel to walk with Him. “And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul (Deuteronomy 10:12). The blessings and benefits to those who choose to learn, and do, God’s commandments are spelled out throughout both the old and new Testaments. “Who *is* wise, and he shall understand these *things*? prudent, and he shall know them? for the ways of the LORD *are* right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.” (Hosea 14:9) David understood that the power and ability to walk with God begins first with a decision of the will, but is also dependent on trusting in God’s enabling grace and strength to do so. God alone enables us to walk in His ways. “Teach me [*dependence*] thy way, O LORD; I will [*the will exercised*] walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.” (Psalm 86:11)

What both husband and wife need when faced with the aftermath of sexual sin is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, for He alone is the only means through which a husband will conquer his sexual sin or a wife will conquer the temptation to give up or become bitter. This is a time when both of you need to grasp the fact that ones spouse never could and never will be able to provide the kind of emotional satisfaction and fulfillment that can only come from a wholehearted relationship with Christ. Even the very best marriage relationship can be filled with disillusionment and disappointment if our first love is not our Savior with whom we are united forever.

What a miracle of God's grace if your husband is experiencing true repentance and is grappling with the realities of his sin. True repentance always brings with it true sorrow for sin. But whether your husband repents or not, you the betrayed wife desperately need to learn the practical lessons of walking with God, daily trusting Him, communing with Him, listening to Him and depending on Him, for He alone will never betray you, disappoint you, leave you or cease loving you. At a time in your life when your hopes and dreams seem to be crumbling all around you, you have the privilege to flee to the Lord and find in Him everything you need to face the challenges of each new day.

Many saints will testify some of the sweetest times with the Lord are those times when we are experiencing the depths of anguish and despair. But God does not leave us in the valley of sorrows. He walks beside us in the valley and sustains us through the darkest night, and then He leads us ever upward to sunny pastures where we will once again delight in all of God's loving provision. David testified of this when he said, "I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD." (Psalm 27:13-14)

Look up, dear sister, and don't look within. Don't focus your thoughts on your husband-- look *up*, for this is where your help and deliverance will come! David learned this same lesson and could confidently tell us, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore. (Psalm 121:1-8)

