

From Section 4: Alluring Idols

*"The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips." Psalm 16:4*

Common Sin Struggles of Pastors and Their Wives: Seeking Pleasure

*"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." –Psalm 16:11*

A GOOD THING

Pleasure is a good thing. Adam and Eve knew unending pleasure in the Garden—the pleasure of knowing God, the pleasure of a perfect marriage, the pleasure of a perfect world of delight, the pleasure of a pure desires coming from pure hearts. Then Satan came and tempted Adam and Eve by masquerading an act of sin as the way to ultimate good pleasure: being like God, knowing good and evil. After their disobedience, the mask came off. Sin had not brought greater pleasure. It had only broken Adam and Eve's ability to know the pleasures God had given them already. Now, we must wait for the day when we go to live with God and have those pure pleasures fully restored forevermore, as David says in Psalm 16:11.

A GOOD THING, GONE BAD

But now, in the "Now and Not Yet," we still live with desire gone wrong. Our hearts still desire pleasure, but we do not always seek it in the good ways God created for us. Where will our desire for pleasure take us? To God or elsewhere?

Pleasure is one of the most powerful forces in our lives. We love to feel good and to enjoy. When our pleasure is in God and His good ways, our desires can be a turbo-engine for good. But when our pleasure is in sinful things, our desires become a tractor-beam towards destruction. Let's look at what the Bible says about what following sinful pleasures does:

Sinful desires are a formidable enemy

"But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." – Genesis 4:7

Our hearts are quick to rationalize what we want to do

"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" –Jeremiah 17:9, NIV

Sinful desires lure us into sinful actions

"But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death." –James 1:14-15, ESV

It is part of the old man we still struggle against in our passions, bodies, and minds

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”

--Ephesians 2:1-3, ESV

Following sinful pleasure can lead others (especially weaker, less mature Christians) into the same sinful traps

“Their [False teachers’] idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed—an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness.

These people are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of the flesh, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them.”

--2 Peter 2

When we indulge in sinful pleasure, it doesn’t only hurt ourselves and fellow believers, it is a rejection of God

“The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.” --1 Thessalonians 4:6-8

Continuing in Sinful pleasure is worshipping that which is not God

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” --Colossians 3:5

Following Sinful Pleasures Choke Out the Good Fruit God Desires

“And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.” --Luke 8:14

Beauty Is Fleeting and Charm Is Deceptive

“Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain.” --Proverbs 31:30, ESV

THE TEMPTATIONS FOR PASTORS/THEIR WIVES

What tempting circumstances fan sinful desires for pleasure among pastors and pastors’ wives? Different versions of relational and sexual sin. Here’s the ones I’ve noticed:

Pornography

Many men struggle with pornography. And, with so many images so readily available through the internet, this can be a huge battle to win. You don’t have to be looking for it, for it to find you... a bad choice of words typed into the search engine, the spam in your email, the sidebars as you surf the web for something totally benign. Add mobile phones and online movie channel subscriptions and you have

multiplied the allurements. And the double trouble with so much internet porn is that it can be accessed so secretly. Men can be drawn in and tied up in addiction and no one even knows it. Pornography is a growing problem among women in recent years for the same reasons. (Great book by Garrett Kell)

(Im)Modesty

Summer can be especially tough on men in ministry. Such a parade of women who (usually unconsciously) do not realize what that cool, skimpy dress does inside a man's head! However, there are women with hearts hungry for attention who are tempted to use the beauty of their figure to draw notice from others. It doesn't even have to be a particularly provocative outfit. Sometimes it's simply so well "turned out" that they look like something out of a fashion magazine. This is a far cry from Paul's admonition in 1 Timothy 2:9-10 to be modestly dressed but beautifully adorned with godliness. As pastors' wives, this is particularly important that on both accounts we set a good example. It can be very tempting, even for us, to seek attention by how we present, perhaps especially in certain areas of the country, such as parts of California, where outward appearance is so strongly emphasized.

Relational Pleasures Outside of Marriage

God created people to be relational—relational with Him and relational with each other. Part of the relational way he made people is to "bond together," especially men and women in a pleasurable way. (What did God say in Genesis 2:18: The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.") It's like men are one side of Velcro and women are the other side. The longer and the closer they get to each other, the more they are likely to stick together. This stickiness is what is meant to lead to marriage and hold together marriage.

The tricky thing with the church is we are called to be brothers and sisters in Christ, yet most of us are not blood relatives. So, that stickiness of closeness can not only lead to the godly pleasure of marriage but also into the sinful pleasure of lust, sexual promiscuousness, dating without the intention of marrying, emotional and physical affairs, and adultery.

Being a Good Pastor, Without Making an Inappropriate "Connection"

The even trickier thing for our husbands is that they are often in regular relationships with many people of the opposite sex, as part of staff or as church members. They might have long work hours with staff women or have important counselling sessions with women church members in need. These are opportunities to do good, but they can also be opportunities for desires to grow in unhealthy ways. The compassion and care our husbands rightly show these women may be the honey their hearts long for. Men love to feel like providers and fixers. Can you see the temptations to both in counseling? So many affairs start out with no ill intentions and nothing but the best of relational motives. It's just that sin doesn't play fair. It entices, deceives us and drags us away so easily.

Divergent Lives

Pastoral ministry can require long hours, especially in church plant situations or when a pastor is newly on the job. Seasons like this, when your husband and you are more divergent in schedule than usual, can leave the door open to getting your loneliness filled with someone else since your spouse isn't around. Or, for your husband to grow an unhealthy relationship with a woman on staff sharing those long hours with him.

Entangled with Texts

The ability to hold text relationships makes it easy to be secretly tying your heart to someone other than your spouse. It can start with just a little message regarding business or "just checking up on what we talked/prayed about" and grow into a significant relationship.

RECOGNIZE THE ROOTS

This is a particular uncomfortable area to take a look at, but that also makes it particularly important.

- Does my husband or I struggle with lust?
- Are we over-busy and is loneliness setting us up to be tempted to fulfill good desires for companionship through others?
- Is my husband or I regularly meeting/communicating with someone of the opposite that puts us in a situation ripe for temptation, either in person, via phone/texts, or the internet?
- Is my husband or I tempted by pornography or “soft porn” images online?

TACKLE LIES WITH TRUTH

However legitimate our sin struggles look, we know that with sin, there is a good desire believing a bad lie. Look to God’s Word for truth to replace the lies.

Turn Your Heart to the Good Ways God Fulfills Your Pleasures

“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” – Psalm 103:5

“Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.” --Psalm 37:4

Ask God to Provide a Way Out

“No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.” – 1 Corinthians 10:13

Do Not Neglect Sex with Your Spouse

“Now for the matters you wrote about: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.” But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” –1 Corinthians 7:1-7, NIV

God Can Work in You to Will and to Work for His Good Pleasure

“For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” --Philippians 2:13

We Are Joined to God Through Christ. The Power God Used to Raise Christ from the Dead Is at Work in Us to Help Us Flee Immorality

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything... The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” –1 Corinthians 6:12-20, ESV

Dress to Point to God, Not to Point to Yourself

“Women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, 10 but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. –1 Timothy 2:9-10, ESV

Remember How Fleeting Sinful Pleasure Is Compared to the Lasting Reward to Come

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward.” --Hebrews 11:24-26, ESV

Fighting This Struggle Is Important that the Example of Our Lives Lines Up with the Preaching of God’s Word

“But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.” --1 Corinthians 9:27 ESV

Continuing to Grow in Godliness Helps You Fight Lust

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.” –Galatians 5:16

Remember the Battle Has an Expiration Date! Keep Fighting!

“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.” --Romans 13:12–14

RUN TO GOD

Ask God to continue to grow your attraction and affection for one another. Ask Him to help you talk about any marital difficulties that impede your togetherness. Ask God to make the fleetingness of sin so obvious. Ask Him to show you the hungers of your heart and areas where you are tempted to fill them wrongly. Confess your struggles to God and ask Him to show you a way out as you fight temptation. Ask God to help your husband care well for the women of the church in wise ways that protects his heart and their hearts.

REACH OUT TO OTHERS

Confess your struggles to others. Encourage your husband to, also. Have them pray for you and hold you accountable. Ask them if they see any relationships you or your husband are in that need extra accountability or change in frequency or add in an extra person, etc. to protect you from being tempted to sexual/relational sin.

Meet together with a counselor, if necessary, to work through any marital difficulties that could improve your relationship and make it more pleasurable, as God desires it to be.

Have an accountability partner who will regularly ask you how you are doing, set goals, ask awkward questions and pray for you. Have this person also ask your husband about his counseling sessions with women of the church? Does he have any on-going counseling sessions with women? Has he been able to have someone else present in those meetings? Has he developed any on-going text or email conversations with them?

ARMED AND READY

In the Moment:

Get to know when sinful pleasure is likely to “jump out at you” in the moment, such as when you surf the web, and make a strategy of what you will do. If your husband has difficulty with girls dressed immodestly at church, have him ask other pastors what they do to combat this struggle.

In Your Church:

Sin loves darkness, so add accountability and visibility! Our church has done this by putting glass in all the doors of our pastors’ offices so that they and whoever they are meeting with can be clearly seen (but not heard).

Also, If a pastor needs to have regular meetings with a woman at church, they ask that another person (husband or another woman) be present. If a pastor or elder is asked to meet with a woman at her home, it is paramount that he does not go alone. It’s not that we think all our husbands are chomping at the bit to cheat on their husbands. It’s just trying to be pro-actively protective.

This is also why we employ a number of women counselors at our church. We let the same-sex relationships bear most of the depth and weight of counsel, with the pastors over-seeing the counselors’ work.

Business trips out of town can be another source of temptation to guard against. Our church has made it a policy for a man’s or another man accompany our pastors on such trips.

Hold annual talks for women on modesty and how they can help their brothers not struggle. Have a regular course on dating/courtship, including how to stay pure through the process.

In Your Strategy:

Encourage each other to speak with other pastors/pastors’ wives how they deal with relational struggles and/or how to care deeply for church members of the opposite sex without endangering your relationship with your spouse.

Build in regular time off into your schedules! There may be seasons where the workload is especially consuming, but make those short. Do not coast along on your relationship’s past health. Plan for its continued prosperity by making it a schedule priority.

Look into the apps that provide protective filters for phones, computers, etc. Share your electronic devices with your spouse for them to look through your texts, social media, emails at any time. Covenant Eyes is an app that lets your accountability partner (wife or another guy), know what your husband is looking at online. Texting, email, social media can also be a place where relationships can be formed “under the radar.”

Read

Finally Free by Heath Lambert

Wired For Intimacy by William Struthers

Purity Is Possible by Helen Thorne

Pure in Heart: Sexual Sin and the God’s Promises by Garrett Kell

REPENT ON REPEAT PLEASES GOD

With so much allurements all around us, it is no wonder that it is so easy for sinful pleasures to take hold of us. This is a fight we will have to battle every day of our lives. And for some of our men, particularly, this will be so hard and so discouraging. Praise God for Christ’s forgiveness! And praise God for His promise to help us get up and fight again and again.

YOUR MERCIFUL HIGH PRIEST

Struggles with sexual sin can lead to powerful addictions. It can be very hard to turn away from habits turned bondage like this. But Jesus our high priest is the sympathetic Savior. The New Testament is full of allusions to people who were formerly slaves to lust and sexual sin, trusted in Him as their Savior. The story of their continued fight is written of often by Paul. You are not alone, if you struggle. And the same Jesus who helped those believers long ago, is interceding for us today, to fight and one day—even if only in heaven—and be free!

Reaching Forward to God’s Goal

“Not that I have already reached the goal or am already fully mature, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I do not[c] consider myself to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly[d] call in Christ Jesus. Therefore, all who are mature should think this way. And if you think differently about anything, God will reveal this also to you.

In any case, we should live up to whatever truth we have attained. Join in imitating me, brothers, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things, but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body, by the power that enables Him to subject everything to Himself.” --Philippians 3:12-21, ESV

So, how do you feel after all these chapters dwelling on your sin struggles? Discouraged? Defeated? Frustrated? Overwhelmed? I don’t know how you feel about the struggles in your heart, but I hate them! I understand why God says all of our righteousness are as dirty rags! Sin has infiltrated everything I do. And, It seems the more good I try to do or the more I try to fight, the more I feel sin’s tug. Sometimes I just want to stop trying.

If pride seeps into something good I'm doing, maybe I shouldn't do it at all, I think. Won't doing more just be multiplying more opportunities for pride? Other times, I think my problem is that I need to up my game. Then I won't struggle as much. More Scripture memory; more prayer time, more, more, more to make my heart cleaner and temptations weaker. But still, even when I least expect it, once more creeps in those sinful desires looking to be gratified. What in the world is a person like me doing as a pastor's wife! What an ugly mess!

What to do? Who can help? Once more Paul's exclamation comes to mind:

"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Romans 7:24-25

Jesus. HE is where we need to start in understanding to have hope as we take on this fight with the desires that long to be the gods of our heart. Because of Him, the victory IS won! We will end this section with a meditation on what He does for us.

Questions for You

1. How do you/have you desired pleasure?
2. Has this led to any sin struggles for you? Have any of these been heightened by or caused by the fact that your husband is in the ministry?
3. What has helped you in these struggles?
4. Do you have any other words of wisdom for people with this struggle?