

1. PEOPLE ARE STRUGGLING

When was the first time you heard the lie?

We've all heard it. We've all been told that pursuing our sexual desires with abandon is freedom. More than this, we've found ourselves whispering this to ourselves, quietly, with no one even around to hear.

If I follow this lustful desire, if I imagine sex with him or her, I'll be truly happy. I'll be free.

But here's the truth: following lust doesn't end up feeling very free at all. When we do it, we end up feeling defeated and lonely and captive. To some degree, we all know this truth personally. Lust is less a fairy godmother granting your every wish, releasing unbounded pleasure and happiness, and more like an iron prison master marching you out to gratify your flesh hour by hour by hour.

This isn't what a sexualized culture tells us, though. Supposedly if we shake off 'repression' of our passions, we'll be fully alive. We'll have

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ownership of ourselves and our sexual power. We will know who we are.¹ But this exciting language does not prove to be realistic. When our lives are marked by lustful addiction, it turns out that we don't feel like we are in control at all. We do not become masters of our utopian domain. Instead, we end up feeling controlled. Feeling like we are in chains. Though pleasure is what we want, there is actually very little pleasure in the mix. Instead, as we get deeper and deeper into patterns of lust, we feel the opposite of free.

We feel enslaved.

I Can Chase My Lusts (Can't I?)

There are two major ways that lust becomes a pursuit for sinners like us. First, we might struggle with *lusting after the opposite sex* (see book two of this trilogy for material on same-sex lust.) According to many influences all around us—commercial, movies, online images, and much more—when we pursue our passions, you and I will be free. We can chase our lusts with abandon. No one will stop us, and we'll never want to stop.

1 We think of what Michel Foucault once said: sex is 'the explanation for everything.' Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1976, 1978), pp. 78. While sex is a powerful force, it is definitely not the explanation for everything, and it is not where we will find ultimate meaning.

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We will know satisfaction that does not fade, and joy that does not disappear. In addition, when we pursue our lusts, we'll finally attain an elusive feeling of sexual power, sexual control, and reputational impressiveness.

These are powerful urges, aren't they? Voices all around us (including that wild voice in our heart) practically shout to us to go out and get what we want. But as we shall see, this is not how God thinks. This is not what the Bible teaches. And to put it most directly, this isn't actually what happens in our lives.

This is because sin never delivers on its promises. Sin is not God; only God perfectly fulfills His promises. Along these lines, I recall hearing the story of Terry Crews. Crews is a famous actor and an almost-impossibly strong man. He played in the NFL and made millions of dollars in his career. He obtained everything you could want in earthly terms. But there was just one problem with his seemingly perfect life: he was addicted to pornography. 'Every time I watched it, I was walled off,' Crews shared in a video a few years ago. 'It was like another brick that came between me and my wife.'² The promise of lust did not pay

2 Brandon Griggs, 'Terry Crews: Porn addiction "messed up my life"', CNN, February 24, 2016, accessible at <https://www.cnn.com/2016/02/24/entertainment/ter->

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off at all for Crews, as for so many others. Part of what Crews noticed about himself was how he viewed other people: ‘[Pornography] changes the way you think about people. People become objects. People become body parts; they become things to be used rather than people to be loved.’

This is a remarkably honest testimony from a famous man. I do not know whether Crews has found true freedom, the faith-driven freedom that comes repentance in the name of Christ (see Chapter 3). But I do know this: Crews is right about how lust warps us. Children, college students, fathers, pastors, young women, and countless others chase their lusts through visual stimulation. They do this over and over again, often engaging in masturbation, self-gratification, as they do so.

Many people can relate to Crews’s predicament – in fact, I think we all can at some level. Of course, we’re not all the same. Some are as deep into sexual addiction as Crews was, and are in eternal peril. Others aren’t as far in, but still find themselves lacking the self-control they need in this area. You know Christ as Savior, and you want to grow, but you don’t know how to gain mastery over the flesh.

[ry-crews-porn-addition-feat/index.html](#). Last accessed January 2020.

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Your battle against lust is a series of starts and stops, with some gains, and some losses.

I Am My Sexuality (Right?)

This isn't the only battle men and women fight, though. There is another category of lust that we might be drawn toward. Our struggle can take a second major form when we hunger *to be lusted after by the opposite sex*. You can desire to be desired. We'll delineate an appropriate urge for a spouse in pages to come, but that's not what we're discussing here. In our flesh, we may well hunger and yearn to be seen as sexually desirable—'hot' in common language—by the opposite sex. We try to find our very identity in that coveted label: 'She's so *hot*.' 'She is such a babe.' Or 'he is such a heartbreaker.' The phrases shift with each generation, but the point stands: some of us struggle powerfully with lust in this respect.

To be clear, those who fall into this category may or may not have a major obsession with lusting after others (as outlined above). But make no mistake, lust is *still* a serious problem for many in this way. It's not okay; it's not godly. Our habits, our spending, our time spent getting ready for the day: all this may reveal a major appetite for attention, sexual attention. That might be the end goal—drawing eyes and being pursued—rather