

Pastoral Resources

These **Sermon Outlines** and **Sermon Notes** can be used by anyone who wishes to present a helpful message on the subject of biblical sexuality. The **Sermon Outline** can be reprinted in a church bulletin with the words in red being omitted. Leaving the dark line but omitting the text gives the congregation a “fill-in” space to write down the appropriate words as they follow along.

The **Sermon Notes** gives the speaker all the information they need to present the message to their congregation. The speaker may want to print out each of the scripture references (in full) and add those to the **Sermon Notes** for ease of delivery. In addition, you may want to create power-point slides with all of the main points, citations and/or scripture verses. Showing this will help the congregation follow along even better (especially if you have the fill-in words bolded or highlighted on the screen).

You may use these resources to bless your church in whatever way you wish. Sharing these messages is especially helpful as a way of publicizing the upcoming Breaking Free groups you are planning to start.

The day you present the message will also be a good day to encourage sign-ups for the group or publicize the contact information (whether on the screen or as a separate item in your bulletin). At the conclusion of your message you could say something like this:

“If you have been impacted by today’s message and want to pursue further growth in this area we will be starting a men’s group on _____, _____ at _____ pm. Here is the name and info for the contact person who will be heading up the group. Call, email or see them at the sign-up table after the service.”

You are free to utilize and reproduce these **Sermon Outlines** for use with your congregation. We don’t require that you attribute the material to Russell Willingham or New Creation Ministries, but we do ask that you don’t claim original authorship.

Sermon Outline #1

Healthy Sexuality for Christians

Introduction: This subject is crucial if you are married or ever hope to be married. It's crucial if you may counsel or support someone in the future who is married. Lastly, it's crucial if you are a human being because all human beings are sexual.

- 1) When we look around us we see that sexuality is basically a wreck.
- 2) It didn't start that way. When it first rolled off the showroom floor it was amazing (Gen 2:18-25)!
 - a) Adam enjoyed intimacy with God and the glory of creation but something was still missing (Gen. 2:18-20).
 - b) God told Adam where this woman came from and he was amazed and delighted (Gen 2:21-23).
 - c) Their urgency to fuse with each other makes perfect sense.
 - d) They immediately acted on this impulse and felt no shame whatsoever.
- 3) We don't think about sex enough, nor consider it as deeply as we should. Why?
 - a) Because unlike the first couple in paradise (when it comes to sex) we are ashamed, broken and confused.
- 4) For many Christians sexuality has become one of two things: thoughtless indulgence or aversive avoidance (1Cor 6:12-7:5).
 - a) *Thoughtless indulgence*: the prevailing attitude both then and now (1 Cor 6:12-20).

We should ask, "Is this helpful or hurtful to me?" and "Does it bring me greater freedom or greater bondage?"
- 5) Seeing sex through three lenses.
 - Lens #1) Thoughtless indulgence

Pagan version: "Sex is good with anybody, any time!"
"Christian" version: "In marriage sex meets orgasmic needs and provides stress relief."
 - a) 1 Cor 6:12-13. A test case for Paul's logic using food as an example. Eating is:
 - Neither good nor evil.
 - A pleasurable experience created by God.
 - Crucial for our survival.

b) These three things are true about food yet our relationship with food may still fail the two test questions (helpful or hurtful? More freedom or more bondage?)

A profound truth about sex none of the world (and most of the Church) has never accepted is this:

In sexual engagement our spirit, soul and body can only flourish within an exclusive, healthy marriage between a full-grown man and woman. Every alternative to this—without exception—brings unique long-term harm to our mental, emotional and physical well-being.

c) Dogma, opinion or fact ?

■ Lens #2) Aversive avoidance : “Sex is bad, but if I’m married I guess I have to.”

a) I Cor 7:2-5 makes the case that sex is a crucial part of marriage.

■ Lens #3) *The Biblical Lens:* Exuberant Celebration

Many think that sexual holiness equals freedom from sexual desire.

6) The joy of biblical sexuality

a) The Song of Solomon describes married sex as:

- better than wine (So 1:2, 4)
- delightful (So 2:3)
- intoxicating (So 5:1)
- a celebration (So 2:4; 3:11)

b) The Song of Solomon describes sex between husband and wife as a joyous party, a grand occasion:

- Breaking out the wine (5X)
- Celebrating in a special room (2X)
- Delight, gladness, singing, dancing (4X)
- A procession, a coronation, a wedding, a royal spectacle, a public celebration and acknowledgement (5X)
- Bringing out the “good stuff”/the vintage/that stuff with the extra kick (1X)

7) If Christian couples aren’t experiencing this how can they find their way back? We must:

a) Throw away the first two lenses and hold tightly to the third.

b) The three ways to do this are outlined in Rev. 2:2-5.

- Remember
- Repent
- Do the works you did at first.

c) Jesus tells us if we turn back to our “first love” (relationship with him) that in heaven we will “eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). It is also true that turning back to our “second love” (our spouse) enables us to partake of life-giving nourishment on earth and experience a little bit of paradise now.

Healthy Sexuality for Christians

This subject is crucial if you are married or ever hope to be married. It's crucial if you may counsel or support someone in the future who is married. Lastly, it's crucial if you are a human being because all human beings are sexual (and this appears to be a gathering of human beings here today!)

1) When we look around us we see that sexuality is basically a wreck.

2) It didn't start that way. When it first rolled off the showroom floor it was amazing (Gen 2:18-25)!

a) Adam enjoyed intimacy with God and the glory of creation but something was still missing (Gen. 2:18-20).

b) God told Adam where this woman came from and he was amazed and delighted (Gen 2:21-23).

Because Eve came out of Adam it was only natural that he would feel an irresistible pull. They both did. It was overwhelming. It was all-consuming. It was full-bodied. It was sexual. And it was God-given. In light of this...

c) Their urgency to fuse with each other makes perfect sense.

d) They immediately acted on this impulse and felt no shame whatsoever.

No discomfort with their nakedness, their urges, or their connection. Think about that. Can you even imagine it? We're supposed to (that's why it's in the Bible). It's not that we think about sex too much or focus on it too often. The reality is...

3) We don't think about sex enough, nor consider it as deeply as we should. Why?

a) Because unlike the first couple in paradise (when it comes to sex) we are ashamed, broken and confused.

4) For many Christians sexuality has become one of two things: thoughtless indulgence or aversive avoidance (1Cor 6:12-7:5)

a) *Thoughtless indulgence*: "porneia" [por-nay'-ah]—the prevailing attitude both then and now (1 Cor 6:12-20).

"It's my life and my body. I can do what I want with both." The slogans we hear so often, "My body, my choice," "I can love whoever I want," "Who are you to judge me?" aren't new or inventive. These are restatements of "all things are lawful for me." This mindset is thousands of years old.

But what if we're asking the wrong questions? Maybe the questions shouldn't be: "Who are you to judge me?" or "Don't I have the right to be fulfilled however I please?" Maybe we should ask, "Is this *helpful* or *hurtful* to me?" and "Does it bring me greater *freedom* or greater *bondage*?"

We separate body and spirit. God doesn't. Even death is only a temporary separation of the two (until the resurrection). Not only are those of us who are born again united in spirit with Christ we are united in body. But Paul takes us a step further and reveals something to us that no other religion even says. He says every other sin we could commit harms others (and certainly effects us personally in some way). But when we deviate from our *sexual* design we are uniquely damaging our very personhood in a way that no other sin even comes close to touching. And we may not even know it for thirty years!

5) Seeing sex through three lenses.

■ Lens #1) *Thoughtless indulgence*

Pagan version: "Sex is good with anybody, any time!"

Christian version: "In marriage sex meets orgasmic needs and provides stress relief."

a) I Cor 6:12-13. A test case for Paul's logic using food as an example. Eating is:

- Neither good nor evil.
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b) These three things are true about food yet our relationship with food may still fail the two test questions (helpful or hurtful? More freedom or more bondage?)

A profound truth about sex none of the world (and most of the Church) has never accepted is this:

In sexual engagement our spirit, soul and body can only flourish within an exclusive, healthy marriage between a full-grown man and woman. Every alternative to this—without exception—brings unique long-term harm to our mental, emotional and physical well-being.

c) This statement is either religious dogma, human opinion or unassailable fact proven by research. So what does the research say?

- "56% of divorces involved one party having "an obsessive interest in pornographic websites. 68% of the divorces involved one party meeting a new lover over the Internet."¹
- "In a Swedish study on Porn Induced Erectile Dysfunction (PIED), men between 16 and 52 were interviewed who'd engaged in daily porn since adolescence. All of them had reached a point where they needed extreme content (involving, for example, elements of violence) to maintain arousal. When sexual arousal became exclusively associated with this kind of pornography it rendered physical intercourse bland and uninteresting. This results in an inability to maintain an erection with a real-life partner. The only effective treatment for these men is to embark on a "re-boot" process, giving up pornography completely."²

¹ Jonathan Dedmon, "Is the Internet bad for your marriage? Online affairs, pornographic sites playing greater role in divorces." Press Release from The Dilenschneider Group, Inc., Nov. 14, 2002. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/is-the-internet-bad-for-your-marriage-online-affairs-pornographic-sites-playing-greater-role-in-divorces-76826727.html> (accessed June 7, 2018).

² SWEDISH STUDY (2019)

- “In 2005, a study of youth between the ages of 10 and 17 concluded that there is a significant relationship between frequent porn use and feelings of loneliness and major depression.”³
 - “This year alone, 15.3 million Americans will contract a new sexually transmitted disease...2 to 4 million of those infected will be teenagers. Though teenagers make up just 10% of the population, they incur 25% of these diseases.”⁴
 - “HPV has the dubious distinction of being one of the few causes cancer we know about, and is directly responsible for 99.7% of cervical cases and the deaths of nearly 5,000 women each year.”⁵
 - “The cells covering a teenage girl’s cervix are physiologically different from the cells lining a 25- or 30-year-old woman’s cervix, and are therefore far more susceptible to infections.”⁶
 - “One study of 8200 adolescents, ages 12 to 17, found that those involved in romantic relationships had significantly higher levels of depression than those not involved in romantic relationships.”⁷
 - “Men who live with their girlfriends before marrying them are more likely to be underemployed (before and after the marriage) than men who have not cohabited. Women who live with their boyfriends before marrying them are more likely to need to be employed full time to compensate for their husbands’ underemployment.”⁸
 - “The dissolution rate for couples who lived together before marriage is 80 percent higher than it is for couples who didn’t.”⁹
 - “Statistically the most dangerous relationship to be in is a lesbian relationship. They contain the highest incidence of domestic violence, 47%. Almost half are characterized by physical assault.”¹⁰
- Lens #2) *Aversive avoidance*: “Sex is bad, but if I’m married I guess I have to.”

Some sex aversive husbands or wives are dealing with unhealed abuse or neglect from childhood. Some are dealing with the ongoing effects of betrayal trauma at the hands of an unfaithful spouse.

³ Michele L. Ybarra and Kimberly J. Mitchell, “Exposure to Internet Pornography among Children and Adolescents: A National Survey,” *CyberPsychology & Behavior* 8 (2005): 473-486.

⁴ Meg Meeker, M.D., *Epidemic: how teen sex is killing our kids* (Washington, D.C.: LifeLine Press, 2002, pg. 12

⁵ (J.M. Walboomers et al., “Human Papillomavirus Is a Necessary Cause of Invasive Cervical Cancer Worldwide,” *Journal of Pathology* 189 (1999): 12-19

⁶ Meg Meeker, *Ibid.*, pg. 21

⁷ Kara Joyner and J. Richard Udry, “You Don’t Bring Me Anything But Down: Adolescent Romance and Depression.” *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 41 (2000); 369-391

⁸ Cunningham and Antill, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*

⁹ Cunningham and Antill, *Ibid*

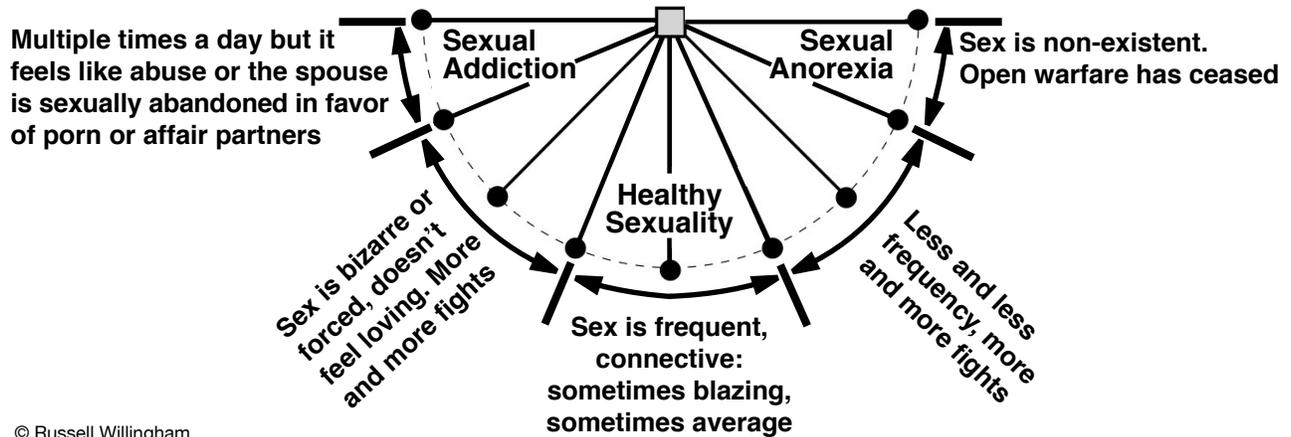
¹⁰ Claire M. Renzetti, “Violent Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships”

Still others may have neither issue but find themselves thinking: “Whose idea was this sex thing anyway? If my spouse insists on it I’ll create as many rules and build as many hurdles as I can to postpone it. If we have to do it I’ll make sure it’s brief and disappointing. After we’re done I will drop hints that I didn’t like it, start a fight, be in a mood or sabotage the experience in some way and blame my spouse for it.”

- a) I Cor 7:2-5 makes the case that sex is a crucial part of marriage. If, for whatever reason, sex is not regular and joyous this couple must get to the bottom of their struggle (preferably with the help of wise counsel). Working through this is crucial, not only for the spouse who wants greater quantity or quality, but for the marriage itself.

■ **Lens #3) *The Biblical Lens: Exuberant Celebration***

We know what aversive avoidance and thoughtless indulgence looks like. Let’s put it all together and see what healthy sexuality looks like compared to its extremes. We see this when we look at the sexual pendulum.



Many think that sexual holiness equals freedom from sexual desire. In some marriages one spouse wants sex all the time and the other, not at all. The spouse who doesn’t think about sex may assume they are more godly than their “sex-crazed” wife or husband. But as we can see with the pendulum they are *both* broken (just in opposite directions). In fact, the over-indulgence of the one might be sexual addiction and the avoidance of the other might be sexual anorexia (depending on the severity).

Unfortunately, many Christians tend toward one extreme or the other. But this isn’t what God created us for. In marriage he wants us to live within the healthy range. To do this we must stop seeing our sexuality through the lens of Thoughtless Indulgence or Aversive Avoidance. When we look through the biblical lens we catch a vision of *Exuberant Celebration*.

6) The joy of biblical sexuality

- a) The Song of Solomon describes married sex as:

- better than wine (So 1:2, 4)
- delightful (So 2:3)
- intoxicating (5:1)
- a celebration (So 2:4; 3:11)

b) The Song of Solomon describes sex between husband and wife as a joyous party, a grand occasion:

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We must:

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b) The three ways to do this are outlined in Rev. 2:2-5.

- Remember
- Repent
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c) Jesus tells us if we turn back to our “first love” (relationship with him) that in heaven we will “eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). It is also true that turning back to our “second love” (our spouse) enables us to partake of life-giving nourishment on earth and experience a little bit of paradise now.

Sermon Outline #2

The Family's Guide to Defeating Porn and Sexual Brokenness

Intro: Pornography is insidious: It destroys those who make it. It warps those who use it. And it is only a mouse click away. Christian families (whether they admit it or not) are right in the middle of this battle: A good percentage of Christian men use it, more and more Christian women are being ensnared and our children are exposed to it (on average) by age nine. This war has come to us. We don't have the luxury of opting out.

1) RELATIONAL HEALTH FOR SINGLES

Singles must say no and yes. "No" to:

- a) All sexual interaction (1 Thess 4:3-5)
- b) All manipulative romantic interaction (Prov 5:3-6; 7:10-21)
- c) Isolation (Prov 18:1)
- d) Porn & compulsive masturbation (1 Cor 13:11)
- e) Inappropriate sexual fantasy (Prov 28:19; 2 Sam 13:2)

■ "Yes" to:

- a) Truly getting to know Jesus (Jn 7:37; 1 Tim 4:8)
- b) Truly getting to know yourself (Prov 14:8; Ps 4:4; Lam 3:40)
- c) Taking healthy relational risks with brothers and sisters (1 Pet 4:8)
- d) Engaging the world around you (Mk 12:31; 16:15; 1 Cor 7:32-35)

2) RELATIONAL HEALTH FOR MARRIED COUPLES

Husbands and wives must say no and yes personally. "No" to:

- a) All sexual interaction outside marriage (Ex 20:14; Heb 13:4)
- b) All seductive interaction outside marriage (Prov 27:8 ESV; Is 3:16)
- c) Porn & compulsive masturbation (1 Cor 7:2-5)
- d) Sexual thoughts about anyone besides spouse (Ps 101:3 NLT; Php 4:8; Song 4:1-5, 7:9-11; 1 Cor 7:33-34)

■ "Yes" to:

- e) Truly getting to know Jesus
- f) Truly getting to know yourself

3) Husbands and wives must regularly and intentionally say "Yes" to:

- a) Engaging in sex
- b) Learning more about sex
- c) Engaging in heart-to-heart communication (choosing a culture of honor)
- d) Learning more about heart-to-heart communication

4) Parents can't be naive about porn and must protect their children. We can't assume:

- a) Our child hasn't seen porn
- b) Our filters/parental controls are enough
- c) Because we've taken a stand against porn our children are safe
- d) Because of a close parent/child bond they'd tell us if they had seen porn

5) RELATIONAL HEALTH FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Parents must teach and model sexual joy to their children.

- a) Are we imparting freedom or shame?
- b) Are we anti-sin or pro-sex?

6) How to teach and model healthy sexuality (caught vs. taught)

- a) We can't give what we don't have
- b) A healthy marriage is the foundation for a healthy family
(The sexual pendulum)

7) Stewardship of your children's sexuality must keep pace with their ongoing development.

- a) What you tell them at 4 is different from what you tell them at 13, 18 or 25.
- b) You must maintain your ongoing education in childhood development from trustworthy sources (especially the Lord Jesus)

8) HEALTHY RELATING TO THE SEXUALLY BROKEN

Grace must be given to the person who struggles (freely you have received...)

- a) Love, acceptance and respect are extended to the person who falls into sin
(Mt 7:1-2; Gal 6:1; Jn 3:17; 8:10-11)
- b) Yet we don't support or condone their destructive choices—how would that be loving (Eph 5:11; Jude 22-23)?

9) Accountability must be in place for the behavior.

- a) A failure to insist on accountability and boundaries is neither loving nor "Christlike."

10) Maturity = getting to the roots and meeting Jesus there (lifelong relational healing).

■ Maturity isn't:

- b) Becoming more independent and self-sufficient (Prov 28:26; Jn 15:5)
- c) Becoming more legalistic, modifying your behavior, managing your image or acquiring more bible knowledge (Mt 23:25-26; Jn 5:37-40)
- d) Being ashamed of your humanity or sexuality (Eccles 3:12-13; 5:19; 1 Cor 10:31)
- e) Being ashamed of your body, body image or bodily functions (Ps 139:14-16)
- f) A lack of emotions or being uncomfortable with money or personal power

■ Maturity is:

- g) Becoming more comfortable with dependence and desperation for God
- h) Becoming more experienced with life, self-aware and able to walk through pain
- i) Consistently loving others well and letting a handful of people love you
- j) Letting Jesus undo you and letting others (who are "safe enough") touch your unguarded soul

The Family's Guide to Defeating Porn and Sexual Brokenness

Intro: Pornography is insidious: It destroys those who make it. It warps those who use it. And it's only a mouse click away. Christian families (whether they admit it or not) are right in the middle of this battle: A good percentage of Christian men use it,¹¹ more and more Christian women are being ensnared¹² and our children are exposed to it (on average) by age nine.¹³ This war has come to us. We can't avoid it.

1) RELATIONAL HEALTH FOR SINGLES

Singles must say no and yes.

- a) "No" to all sexual interaction (1 Thess 4:3-5)

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- 64% of self-identified Christian men and 15% of self-identified Christian women view pornography at least once a month
- 37% of Christian men and 7% of Christian women view pornography at least several times a week (compared to 42% of non-Christian men and 11% of non-Christian women). (*The Barna Group, 2014 Pornography Survey and Statistics. Proven Men Ministries. <http://www.provenmen.org/2014pornsurvey/> (accessed June 7, 2018).*)
- According to data taken from Internet users who took part in the General Social Survey for the year 2000, regular church attenders are 26% less likely to look at porn than non-attenders, but those self-identified as "fundamentalists" are 91% more likely to look at porn. (*Steven Stack, Ira Wasserman, and Roger Kern, "Adult social bonds and use of Internet pornography." Social Science Quarterly 85 (March 2004): 75-88.*)
- 37% of pastors said viewing pornography was a "current struggle." (*Barna Group Survey 2014.*)
- 1 in 5 youth pastors and 1 in 7 senior pastors use porn on a regular basis and are currently struggling. That's more than 50,000 U.S. church leaders. (*Josh McDowell Ministry, The Porn Phenomenon: The Impact of Pornography in the Digital Age (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2016).*)
- 37% of pastors said viewing pornography was a "current struggle." (*Leadership Journal, "The leadership survey on pastors and internet pornography," Christianity Today, Jan. 1, 2001. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2001/winter/12.89.html> (accessed June 7, 2018).*)

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- In 2003, 34% of female readers of Today's Christian Woman's online newsletter admitted to intentionally accessing Internet porn. (*Ramona Richards, "Dirty little secret," Today's Christian Woman, Sept. 2003. <http://www.todayschristianwoman.com/articles/2003/september/5.58a.html> (accessed June 7, 2018).*)

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- In one study of men and women who were in pornography recovery programs as adults, their average age of first exposure was found to be 9.66 years old for girls and 9.95 years old for boys. (*Bentley, Lacy (2016) Gender & Childhood Pornography Exposure, Addiction/Brain Science*)
- New research from security technology companies suggests that children under the age of 10 now account for 22% of online porn consumption among the under 18 age while 10-14 year-olds make up 36% of minor consumers (*Bitdefender, 2016*)

God is clear on this point: sexual engagement for singles can only be manipulative and selfish since it pursues pleasure over permanence. It “wrongs” and “takes advantage” of the other person (even if that person is 100% willing). Unmarried sex is a life-uniting act without life-uniting protections or purpose.

b) “No” to any manipulative romantic interaction (Prov 5:3-6; 7:10-21)

Flirting, being seductive, or spending inordinate amounts of time with someone you barely know preys on their vulnerability. Being “nice,” “sweet,” or “always helpful” is wrong if it’s an attempt to recruit future lovers. Real love is kind, warm and caring to those who could respond romantically as well as those challenging, disagreeable people who could never respond that way.

c) “No” to isolation (Prov 18:1)

It’s so easy for singles to isolate but God commands them (and every married person) to actively engage with others. Solitude can be good but isolation is always a refusal to love our neighbor.

d) “No” to porn & compulsive masturbation (1 Cor 13:11)

Singles who engage in these behaviors often seek relief from loneliness. But porn and masturbation reinforces selfishness, immaturity and, oftentimes—addiction. They train us to expect quick release in a mental world of perfect lovers who never disappoint us. These behaviors are poor training, however, for any future marriage. Because anyone we marry will be *imperfect*, have needs of their *own* and expect us to relate to them at an *adult* level.

e) “No” to inappropriate sexual fantasy (Prov 28:19; 2 Sam 13:2)

We all have a God-given sexual imagination. This is a good thing (in fact, we need it). But when our fantasies center merely on body parts, sex acts, the perfect person, control or unrealistic scenarios we set ourselves up (as well as others) for failure. The person who regularly indulges in sexual fantasy is choosing not to bond with a person. Instead they are bonding (with ever-increasing attachment) to a make-believe world which makes them less and less capable of enjoying the real one.

■ “Yes” to:

a) Truly getting to know Jesus (Jn 7:37; 1 Tim 4:8)

When we develop intimacy with Jesus it satisfies more and more of our deep desires. As a second benefit, intimacy with Christ purifies us and deepens us. This character and depth uniquely prepares us for the rigors of marriage (if God brings that into our lives).

b) “Yes” to getting to know ourselves (Prov 14:8; Ps 4:4; Lam 3:40)

Many of us try to find ourselves through bonding with a lover. In a healthy marriage this can happen to a degree. But there is no substitute for getting to know ourselves with all our strengths and weaknesses. Lack of maturity and self-awareness as a single translates into big problems in a marriage.

c) “Yes” to taking relational risks with brothers and sisters (1 Pet 4:8)

Singles are uniquely positioned to go deeper in their relationships if they so choose. Just because relationships with the same or opposite sex are platonic doesn’t mean

they can't be intimate. We can socialize, have fun, go deep, and have greater effectiveness in ministry if we truly engage fellow believers. If we don't experience this relational richness it isn't because we're single.

d) "Yes" to engaging the world around you (Mk 12:31; 16:15; 1 Cor 7:32-35)

It's easy for us (single or married) to circle the wagons and try and keep the world out. But God calls each of us to reach out to the unsaved world in *some* way. In fact, this is where singles have an advantage over married people. They still have the responsibilities of work and home but they are free to pour themselves out relationally in a broader way.

2) RELATIONAL HEALTH FOR MARRIED COUPLES

Husbands and wives must say no and yes personally.

a) "No" to all sexual interaction outside marriage (Ex 20:14; Heb 13:4)

As obvious as this sounds it needs to be restated. Many of us say, "I would never commit adultery against my spouse." But we are comfortable with micro violations of this. Before anyone betrays their spouse they have to cross dozens of these little boundaries first.

b) "No" to all seductive interaction outside marriage (Prov 27:8 ESV; Is 3:16)

We must be honest about this: *Husband*, are you nice, affirming and charming as you interact with other women? Are you doing this simply because you're a "people person," or do you secretly like the attention other women give you? Are you more worried about offending other women than you are your wife? *Wife*, are you sure you only make your clothing choices because "it looks cute on you," or "that's all I can find at the store," etc.? Or do you secretly like the attention you get in a tight fitting dress or a plunging neckline? For husbands or wives: would you feel comfortable with some of your interactions with the opposite sex if you later found out your spouse saw the whole thing?

c) "No" to porn & compulsive masturbation (1 Cor 7:2-5)

Porn adds nothing to married sex (though some couples claim it spices things up). Married sex is supposed to be the bonding and joy of *two* people coming together. Porn introduces a third party (whether one indulges secretly or both indulge as a couple). Porn might make sex more intense and exciting, but so would incorporating ecstasy or meth. When couples engage in these behaviors they don't bond with each other but with a mood altering experience or substance.

Masturbation is occasionally recommended, however, in the case of certain sexual dysfunctions. A woman who has never experienced orgasm with her husband may be directed by a counselor to utilize masturbation for a period of time. This frees her to become more comfortable with her body in a relaxed, private setting. Once she experiences her first sexual release she is then able to incorporate that into her marital relationship. At that point the "training wheels" are no longer needed.

Lastly, in the case of a sexless marriage the frustrated spouse may believe that porn or masturbation is the only thing enabling them to *stay* in the marriage. But, oftentimes, reliance on these leads people to eventually seek out a real person anyway (which effectively ends the marriage).

Allowing themselves to feel their loneliness and anger (without numbing themselves through masturbation, adultery or marital apathy) can actually propel the frustrated spouse to seek real answers for their marriage. Does the other spouse carry trauma from unhealed sexual abuse? Are there physiological problems? Psychological issues? Is control and selfishness the primary factor?

Whatever the issue(s) the frustrated spouse must insist they pursue competent marriage counseling (being careful not to do it in a harsh or demeaning way). If the non-sexual spouse steadfastly refuses to pursue a healing path they are making a marriage-ending decision (just like the drug-addicted spouse who refuses to pursue treatment or sobriety).

In cases like this separation (or worse) may be the only option if everything else has been tried. Choosing this would certainly be painful to both parties as well (but not as painful as choosing an affair and *then* getting divorced anyway!).

- d) “No” to sexual thoughts about anyone besides spouse (Ps 101:3 NLT; Php 4:8; Song 4:1-5, 7:9-11; 1 Cor 7:33-34)

Sexual thoughts are not bad—at all! We are supposed to have an abundance of sexual thoughts, longings, memories and euphoric recall *about our spouse*. The problem is letting our sexual thoughts (or full-blown fantasies) linger on someone other than that. For many of us (especially men) limiting our thoughts to our spouse becomes a major undertaking.

It’s an undertaking because we’ve allowed our thoughts and imaginations to roam so freely that it’s become automatic. Refusing to think sexually about anyone besides our spouse is a game-changer: it stops all sexual immorality in it’s tracks (that’s kind of a big deal). It redirects our sexual focus and energy on the person it belongs to (since they have now become our sole standard of beauty). It gives us opportunities to think, dream and plan for a fuller sex life with our spouse.

Lastly, since our spouse becomes our only sexual resource we are motivated to be more gentle, caring and repentant during times of conflict (versus clinging to our pride and saying, “I don’t care! I’ve still got my porn.”)

Some spouses don’t have a problem with errant sexual thoughts (they rarely think about sex at all). They should. They would do well to discipline their minds by developing their sexual imagination (and hunger) for their spouse. We love what we focus on. And we can choose to focus in this direction.

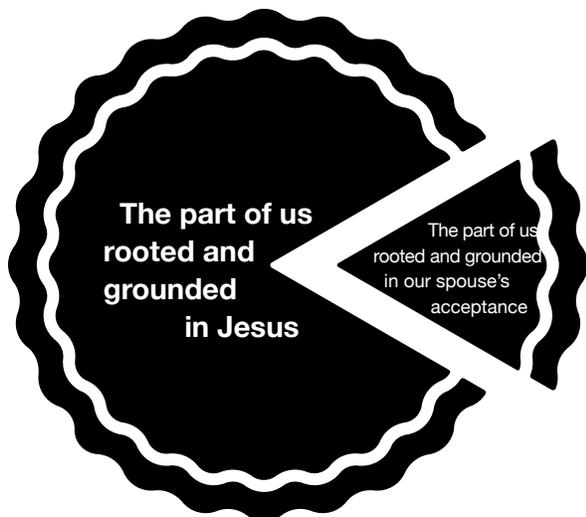
■ “Yes” to:

- e) Truly getting to know Jesus

Some of us who are married not only have a strong foundation in Jesus but are intimate with him as well. But for most of us the reality is different. We say we look to Christ for our security, well-being and sense of value but in reality we look to our spouse. This reveals itself most clearly whenever there is a marital conflict, wound or disappointment. When we experience one of these (whether momentary or ongoing) isn’t this the time we lash out in rage or fall into despair? It is. And this is telling us something.

It’s telling us that our core security is founded in spousal acceptance and love—not Jesus himself. If we really knew “who we were in Christ” these marital set-backs would be painful but not devastating to the core of our being. This is pictured in the graphic below.

How we *perceive* our security, worth and value



How it actually is for most of us



© Russell Willingham

God wills for us to be deeply, truly intimate with our spouse. The irony is this: if we seek that supremely it is guaranteed we won't find it. We can't be totally intimate with someone we fear may reject us at any time. Even if we have the most amazing spouse sooner or later they will hurt us, overlook us or make a selfish decision that causes us to feel betrayed. And no wonder, they are sinners just like us. We say we know this, but take careful note of what happens in your heart the next time the two of you have a falling out. Our spouse is simply too small of a basket to put all of our eggs in!

Learning to switch these ratios in our lives is the hardest thing we will ever do. But the better we get at *wholeheartedly* trusting Jesus's love and care for us the better spouse we will be. Why? Because we will work to love them according to their need (even when our own needs are disappointed in the marriage). We will be affectionate, giving and passionate out of the fulness of Jesus in us (not based on the quality of love we get from our spouse). This doesn't mean we have no marital needs or can be happy in a one-way marriage. But it does mean that when those legitimate needs in us aren't fairly acknowledged we are not destroyed as a human being. We run to Jesus, get loved on, and then we are able to turn our hearts back to our spouse and try again.

f) Truly getting to know yourself

Many of us have not taken the time to find out who *we* are. Sure, we know the basics, but do we know—*really know*—our strengths, weaknesses, pain and truest longings? If we have not gotten to know Jesus intimately we probably don't know ourselves at this level either. Only *he* truly knows us and can show us who we are. So many of us are still trying to find ourselves through marriage, career, possessions, and positions. We can certainly learn a lot about ourselves in those contexts but only if Christ interprets them for us (and we take action on what he shows us). When it comes to marriage there can't be a "we" unless there is a "me."

3) Husbands and wives must regularly and intentionally say "Yes" to:

a) "Yes" to engaging in sex (Prov 5:15-19; 1 Cor 7:5)

This might seem like a no-brainer but so many couples neglect this part of their relationship. They allow busyness, exhaustion, kids, activities, and (quite frankly) laziness, to rob them of this source of life. A mistake that many couples make is to

assume that sex is not a “have to” (like job, kids and bills are). But sex is a “have to” if they want to flourish as individuals and as a couple! The research is overwhelming on this subject. Sex may seem wasteful, low on the priority list or even self-centered to some. But know this: the couple that neglects to nourish sexual intimacy will eventually experience painful consequences in the rest of their relationship as well.

b) “Yes” to *learning* more about sex (Prov 1:22; 9:1-6)

Even a couple who has engaged in sex a thousand times has so much more to learn (and experience!). We can allow our sex lives to become boring and predictable, or we can launch out into new excitement together. The choice is ours. Are we still allowing old messages to keep us stuck? Are we still embarrassed at some level about this part of ourselves? Do we understand the freedom and joy God gives us in this area?

If we want to educate ourselves about technology we will learn everything we can about it. Home improvement projects? We’ll spend hours dreaming together, planning and watching endless Youtube clips. But when it comes to growing our sexual intimacy few of us will read, take a class or pursue counseling together. We either avoid it out of embarrassment or we avoid it out of pride (thinking we’ve already mastered the subject). There is a whole world of discovery waiting for us (and we don’t even need porn or anything “kinky” to go there!).

c) “Yes” to engaging in heart-to-heart communication (choosing a culture of honor)

Many couples keep conversation at the superficial level because anything below that is threatening. It’s threatening because we don’t really listen to each other. Listening takes time, patience, self-control and a lot of effort. We often give away our best energies and focus to other things and have nothing left over for heart-felt communication.

Not only is listening hard but *speaking* is hard. We aren’t clear in what we express to others (because it’s not always clear to us). And we usually don’t say what we feel—we express the emotion right *next* to it. We don’t say, “I’m lonely for you.” We say, “*Why aren’t you ever around?*” We don’t say, “You are breaking my heart by the way you talk to me.” We say, “*You’re such a jerk!*” And we’re surprised when they don’t see the hurt below our angry outburst. Go figure!

d) “Yes” to *learning* more about heart-to-heart communication

Even though these ways of communicating are painful and cyclical we insist on doing them over and over. There will never be true intimacy if we don’t learn more effective ways of talking to each other. But this means three things: 1) We must admit that what we’re doing doesn’t work. 2) We must humble ourselves and seek a better way. 3) When we learn a better way keep doing it (as counter-intuitive as it feels) until we start seeing fruit.

4) Parents can’t be naive about porn and must protect their children. We can’t assume:

a) We have to assume that our child *has* seen porn (or will shortly).¹⁴

¹⁴ In 2008, more than 560 college students responded to an online survey: 93% of boys and 62% of girls were exposed to pornography before 18. (14% of boys and 9% of girls were exposed to pornography before 13. Chiara Sabina, Janis Wolak, and David Finkelhor, “The nature and dynamics of Internet pornography exposure for youth,” *CyberPsychology and Behavior* 11 (2008): 691-693.)

This isn't fatalistic, it's realistic. The question is: have we talked about this with them in a non-shaming manner? Have we talked with them about walking through it together when it occurs?

b) We can't assume our filters/parental controls are enough

Pornographers are targeting our children in a variety of ways. Once hooked, our children can easily get around some of the filters and blocking software.¹⁵ There are also apps that enable children to hide their online activity from parents. Our kids may do these things—not because they are evil—but because they are vulnerable, curious and too ashamed to tell us.

c) We can't assume because we've taken a stand against porn our children are safe

For many parents taking a stand sounds like, "Have I told you how wrong and disgusting porn is?" This might communicate our stand but it also sets our children up for defeat. When they see porn for the first time (if they haven't already) they will believe they are bad and disgusting. If (as your child) I believe this is how you will see me, I won't come to you for support.

d) We can't assume they would tell us about porn because of a close parent/child bond

As loved as our children might feel they have other very powerful forces working against them: 1) The fear that their parents will see them as "dirty" because they saw that "dirty thing." 2) The shame they carry for actually liking "that dirty thing" or feeling involuntarily aroused by it (which is perfectly normal). 3) The belief that they are no longer dad or mom's special, innocent child now that they've seen porn.

The only way we can head this off at the pass is to tell our children we expect them to encounter porn at some point (if they haven't already). They need to know that disgust, shame and *desire* will occur when they see porn (and we totally get it). They need to know that shame or guilt will tell them they *can't* come to us (but to come anyway because we anticipated this). And they need to know they can leave, call us or be picked up when/if someone exposes them to porn. A great resource to prepare your children is *Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today's Young Kids* by Kristen A Jenson and Debbie Fox.

5) RELATIONAL HEALTH FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Parents must teach and model sexual joy to their children.

a) Are we imparting freedom or shame?

What is the over-all message we are communicating to our kids about sex? They undoubtedly know what sexual practices or lifestyles we don't approve of. But do they

¹⁵ According to a Symantec study, after analyzing 3.5 million online searches done between February 2008 and July 2009, "sex" was the 4th most used term; "porn" was the 6th. This reflects searches done by children in households that use Norton Family. (*BBC News, "Kids top searches include 'Porn,'" Aug. 12, 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8197143.stm> (accessed June 7, 2018).*)

• The most common ways to view pornography was via their smartphone (57%) or tablet (24%). Most commonly, porn was viewed in their bedroom (61%) or elsewhere in the house (21%). 48% viewed it out of boredom. (*Amanda Zurface, "Survey Shows Why Parents Should Keep Smartphones out of the Bedroom," Covenant Eyes. <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2018/05/10/parents-keep-smartphones-out-of-bedroom/> (accessed June 15, 2018).*)

know what we do approve of? Saying, “sex is for marriage” is good but what does that mean? Why is that true? Are there deeper relational issues at play or is it primarily about morality, disease prevention and avoiding unwanted pregnancy?

b) Are we anti-sin or pro-sex?

The Lord didn't say, “I have come that they might have rules and obey them correctly.” His entire work on earth was dedicated to bringing people into life with God and each other. Sex is an important part of that in marriage and child-rearing. Do we simply warn our children about the dangers of sex or do we tell them what it can look like in its redeemed, new creation form? We certainly want our children to be sexually holy (set apart from the destructive, heart-breaking ways sex is misused). But what do we want them to be set apart *for*?

The world and the church often make sexuality a flash point. But isn't it also a good thing? An amazing gift from God (that isn't limited to making babies)? Can it be a taste of transcendence? A place where two fully committed people can go to learn things about each other they could never otherwise know?

At a track meet we need clear lanes marked out for us. We need someone to fire the gun and someone to record the run times. These protocols matter but shouldn't runners also enjoy the sheer pleasure of the race? Shouldn't the crowd be swept up in this too? Isn't *that* the main point? Similarly, many of us focus on the morality of how sex is done and with whom. But in marriage shouldn't we also dive in to this adventure and go as deep as possible? This is the vision you want to give your children.

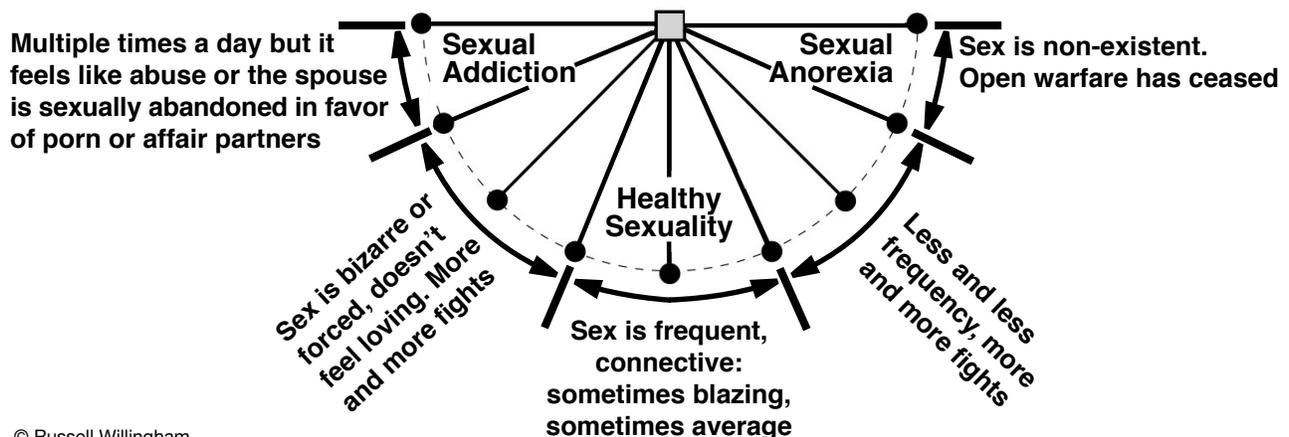
6) How to teach and model healthy sexuality (caught vs. taught)

a) We can't give what we don't have

Parents struggle to teach their children about sex because they often feel inadequate to know where to begin or how to proceed. But the main reason we struggle is because we have an uneasy relationship with sexuality ourselves. Are we experiencing sexual freedom and joy in our marriage or do we battle with the “it's good/it's dirty” dilemma in our minds? The uncertainty and discomfort many of us feel about our sexuality gets communicated to our children (whether we realize it or not). We have to work through our own issues in order to effectively teach our children and guide them into healthy adulthood.

b) A healthy marriage is the foundation for a healthy family (The sexual pendulum)

Husband and wife must nourish each other sexually, enjoy each other as friends, and work through conflicts together. But if these are not present (or severely broken) in their marriage then any family built on top of that can't help but be unhealthy and dysfunctional as well. The following graphic shows the range of what a couple can experience sexually.



Obviously as sex moves further left or right for this couple they will experience pain, a lack of trust, and greater disconnection. The disconnection they feel in their intimate life will play out in their parenting efforts as well. They won't be (or work effectively toward being) united in their vision of raising the children, resolving family conflicts, agreeing on discipline, and a hundred other parent/child challenges. The ambivalence and lack of unity they feel privately with each other will hinder everything they try to do with their children as well. In the family all of these relational dynamics are interconnected.

As strange as it might sound one of the best things a couple can do for their children (besides staying close to God) is to pursue a vibrant, healthy sex life. This provides an underground stream which waters the couple and makes them better for their kids too.

7) Stewardship of your children's sexuality must keep pace with their ongoing development.

a) What you tell them at 4 is different from what you tell them at 13, 18 or 25.

Sex education in the family must start early. If you are waiting to have "the talk" you are already behind the eight ball. We must be open to answering every question they have about sexuality (no matter how uncomfortable it makes us). Obviously we must do this with age-appropriate language. We also want to create teachable moments where we talk with them about sexual issues when they might not expect it (even if it feels a little awkward for them at first).

We want to anticipate the sexual challenges they will face (and plan for them). And, most importantly, we want to talk with them about the relational aspects of sex (not just plumbing). Understand this: the world is already "disciplining" your children's sexuality. You must meet this challenge head-on with good logic, patience and warmth.

b) You must maintain your ongoing education in childhood development from trustworthy sources (especially the Lord Jesus)

If you see your two year old masturbating do you tell them they are being "nasty" or "dirty"? No. You find non-shaming ways to redirect their behavior. If your ten year old son is staring at a girl do you lecture him about lust or affirm his burgeoning sexuality as you guide him toward proper etiquette? Some parents see these as moral issues that must be "nipped in the bud." Educate yourself about your child's psycho-sexual development and guide them gently through it instead of shaming them.

8) HEALTHY RELATING TO THE SEXUALLY BROKEN

Grace must be given to the person who struggles (freely you have received...)

a) Love, acceptance and respect are extended to the person who falls into sin (Mt 7:1-2; Gal 6:1; Jn 3:17; 8:10-11)

Whether someone you know personally has fallen or you find yourself commenting on the latest sexual scandal do you judge the situation harshly? If so, what does that reflect about your heart? How will that impact family and friends who overhear what you say (who are secretly struggling themselves)? Though we want to be clear about the destructive nature of sexual immorality we don't want to condemn the person.

b) Yet we don't support or condone their destructive choices—how would that be loving (Eph 5:11; Jude 22-23)?

Some believe you can't truly accept the person unless you accept the behavior (because of the command not to judge). Would we love our son or daughter if they became drug addicts? Of course. Would we support them in their addiction? Never. Yet so many

(even in the church) advocate supporting the person and the lifestyle they live. It isn't loving—or progressive—to encourage (or say nothing at all to) the person who is making choices which bring guaranteed harm into their lives

9) Accountability must be in place for the behavior.

a) A failure to insist on accountability and boundaries is neither loving nor “Christlike.”

This weak response enables sexually addictive behavior to continue (which harms the struggler and their family members as well).

10) Maturity = getting to the roots and meeting Jesus there (lifelong relational healing).

■ Maturity isn't:

a) Maturity isn't becoming more independent and self-sufficient (Prov 28:26; Jn 15:5)

Quite the opposite. Maturity is finally accepting and walking in the truth that dependency on God is as good as it gets.

b) Maturity isn't becoming more legalistic, modifying your behavior, managing your image or acquiring more bible knowledge (Mt 23:25-26; Jn 5:37-40)

The Pharisees did these things. In fact, they excelled at them. But they were neither spiritually mature nor even in a living relationship with God. Maturity isn't about knowledge. It's about the personal and moral development which grows out of intimacy with Jesus over the long haul.

c) Maturity isn't being ashamed of your humanity or sexuality (Eccles 3:12-13; 5:19; 1 Cor 10:31)

Many equate maturity with being so “spiritual” that you are above (or way past) those who live worldly lives. According to this way of thinking, however, worldliness is anything associated with our physical or material experiences. This is flat wrong (it is Gnosticism). The mature person embraces an *embodied* relationship with the Lord. Eating, drinking, working, exercising and being sexual aren't hindrances to our intimacy with God; these are the realms in which our intimacy with God is lived out.

d) Maturity isn't being ashamed of your body, body image or bodily functions (Ps 139:14-16)

Feeling embarrassed about how my body looks, operates or behaves isn't humility—it's a rejection of God and his good gifts. God designed our body shape, size, and attributes on purpose. Digestion, bowel movements, burping, sexual arousal, and orgasm were all invented by him. He wasn't embarrassed to make them, why are we embarrassed to have them? The mature person has learned to enjoy this embodied life God has given us and not feel ashamed of it.

e) Maturity isn't a lack of emotions, or being uncomfortable with money or personal power

Emotions. Some equate maturity with an unflappable emotional state. In other words: I am mature if nothing gets to me. This is false. If I am mature I will be able to feel my emotions deeply and honestly *but they won't overrule my will*. Feeling joyful, sexually aroused, despairing or fearful doesn't mean I am immature; it means I am human.

Do I accept those emotions and handle them in a healthy way or do I hate those emotions and try to “keep them down”? The mature person has learned how to acknowledge them, express them appropriately to the right person (beginning with God), and know when they are tied to reality or *perceived* reality. Though David had his flaws

he had learned to feel and express the full range of his emotions without hating those emotions or himself. He was emotionally healthy.¹⁶

Money. The mature person neither equates money with happiness nor with evil. He doesn't feel entitled to a certain amount of money (because he knows that neither God nor the world "owe" him anything). He also doesn't handle money with fear, contempt or legalism (because he knows money isn't a demon, it's merely a tool). For him, money is a commodity to be stewarded (whether large amount or small).

The mature person knows that money isn't the issue. His *relationship* with money is the issue. He keeps an eye on his money but, most importantly, he keeps an eye on his heart. He neither trusts money (which is idolatry) nor allows his heart to become attached to it (which is greed). He is respectful of money and how powerfully God can use it but he also disciplines himself to treat it with a healthy indifference.

Power. Like money (or sexuality) the mature person handles power with respect and discernment. He is careful to use his power (within his family, career, ministry or civic engagement) to bless people, not use them. He has developed a working understanding of the power God has given him and leverages it boldly (but humbly) to move others toward Christ and his will for them.

Yet (like money) he knows his sinful heart will be on the lookout for ways to utilize it for selfish ends. He sees his personal power as a thing to be stewarded. He doesn't abdicate his power (due to laziness or shame) and he doesn't envy those with greater power (because of a mistaken view that he is inferior to them or less "loved by God" than they are). Instead he sees his power (personality strengths, status, roles or supernatural giftings) as an endowment, a responsibility, and a joy.

■ Maturity is:

f) Maturity is becoming more comfortable with dependence on and desperation for God. The mature person utilizes their personal power but also relies on God's guidance and strength. They know they are capable in many areas but are also aware of huge areas of weakness and blindness in their lives. They have learned to stop hating these parts of themselves (or denying they exist) and simply bring them to God on a moment-to-moment basis.

g) Maturity is becoming more experienced with life, self-aware and able to walk through pain

The mature person doesn't know everything. They haven't experienced the hardships and temptations of every single person on earth; and they haven't found the secret to a pain-free existence. But the mature person *has* chosen to confront the frustrations and riddles of life (and not run from them). They have been diligent to educate themselves and find many of the answers they needed. And they have learned (through painful experience and the honest feedback of others) who they are and who they are not.

The mature person has also made an uneasy peace with suffering. In the areas of their lives where suffering was the result of foolish choices and personal blind spots they have been ruthless in confronting those and finding a better way. Where suffering was the result of abuse, mental and physical health problems or socio-economic factors

¹⁶ See Ps 28:7; 92:4; 69:20; 126; 6:6; 31:9-10; 94:19; 139:23;

outside their immediate control they have given up their “right” to demand a pay-back from God. And they have stopped expecting automatic pain relief or an exemption from the pain that is common to humanity.

Where suffering in their lives could be treated or eliminated in a healthy way they have taken advantage of every opportunity. Where suffering has seemingly become a staple in their lives they have looked for the good work God is doing there. This doesn’t mean, however, that their suffering is no longer suffering or that it hurts less (sometimes it intensifies!). But they have given up their “right” to a pain-free life (aging can’t be willed away, we can’t terminate every painful relationship and we can’t demand that the world and the people in it are always cooperative and caring).

They have come to know (through life experience and divine revelation) that the godliest, the smartest and the fleetest of foot cannot outsmart suffering forever. It is unavoidable for fallen creatures in a fallen world. The mature person will still *hate* it sometimes but they will see its indispensable role in the creation of their ultimate joy.

h) Consistently loving others well and letting a handful of people love you
The universal sign of a person’s maturity is how well they love. If someone is successful in business or ministry, really smart, an expert in handling Scripture, extremely poised or even the nicest and most pleasant person in the world it does not mean they are mature. A person can have mastery in one or more of these areas and still not know how to give others what they really need (loving well).

Emotional intelligence is important but *relational* intelligence is the great undiscovered realm. Relational intelligence is a two-way street. It means I have the wisdom and courage to pursue others. And I do this for the purpose of helping them experience all God has for them (doing so with a sensitivity to restraint, timing and effectiveness). I don’t do this, however, from a place of superiority (in other words: helping the poor “unfortunates” but not needing anyone to help me). Interacting with others in this way is only arrogance disguised as servanthood.

Relational intelligence also receives: the mature person knows he is not complete in himself. He needs both God and others to meet relational needs in him. Not only is he open to such input, he actively seeks it from those who are mature enough to provide it.

i) Letting Jesus undo you and letting others (who are “safe enough”) touch your unguarded soul

The maturing person knows that relational vulnerability will sometimes hurt. This hurt is a result of others not being equally vulnerable. Or others—who have been trustworthy in the past—failing us now because of ignorance, distractibility or outright sin. The mature person knows that the deepest and most trustworthy of friends will fail them (on occasion) because they are flawed or fallen.

Knowing this about others, however, will not dissuade them from continuing to take relational risks. The mature person knows there will be occasional disappointment or grief engaging vulnerably with others. But they also know that approaching others in this way is still preferable to the so-called “safety” of isolation. To them, experiencing some relational pain is tolerable if they can taste the joys and fulfillment of healthy connections. Because they’ve learned that living the isolated, self-protective life—though protecting them from *some* pain—insures they will experience agony of a different sort that is far deeper in the long run.