

**The War Within: An Anatomy Of Lust**  
**(Name Withheld)**

[Leadership Magazine, 1982 / 1987]

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PART ONE - THE WAR WITHIN

Driving through Wisconsin on vacation this summer, a LEADERSHIP staff member passed a huge sign in the middle of the bucolic countryside. "Naughty Things for Nice People," it proclaimed, and as if to prove it, a gigantic cuddly bear peered out from beside the words "Adult Novelties".

"What's that mean, Dad?" came the question from the ten-year-old boy in the back of the station wagon. "Yeah," piped up the siblings, "what's that all about, Dad?"

Such questions abound these days, as media penetrated our homes and station wagons with not just sleazy sex but carefully packaged titillations. One report has it that a recent convention of youth pastors created the highest rental of X-rated movies in the hotel's history. More than 80% of all customers signing up for cable TV opt for the erotic films. The availability - the near-ubiquity - of so much sexual enticement, the constant barrage of innuendos, and the nonstop polemic for indulgence inevitably attracts.

Many rationales tempt the mind of the Christian leader: "I have to know what's going on...Voyeurism is better than adultery....I need moderation - total deprivation isn't necessary."

Admittedly, there are no easy answers. We cannot shut off either our brains or our glands. But consider the following article by a man in full-time ministry. The article is blunt. It's not the usual LEADERSHIP article. But we felt it important to be just this blunt and realistic. Sexual temptations in many forms have always lured Christians, but today's opportunities and climate make this article especially relevant to all of us.

"Lust is the ape that gibbers in our loins. Tame him as we will be day, he rages all the wilder in our dreams by night. Just when we think we're safe from him, he raises up his ugly head and smirks, and there's no river in the world flows cold and strong enough to strike him down. Almighty God, why dost thou deck men out with such a loathsome toy?" -Frederick Buechner Godric

I am writing this article anonymously because I am embarrassed. Embarrassed for my wife and children, yes, but embarrassed most for myself. I will tell of my personal battle with lust, and if I believed I were the only one who fought in that war, I would not waste emotional energy dredging up stained and painful memories. But I believe my experience is not uncommon, is perhaps even typical of pastors, writers, and conference speakers. No one talks about it. No one writes about it. But it's there, like an unacknowledged cancer that metastasizes best when no one goes for x-rays or feels for lumps.

I know I am not alone, because the few times I have opened up and shared my struggles with Christian friends, they have replied with Doppelganger stories of exactly the same stages of awakening, obsession, possession. Years from now, when socio-historians sift through the documents describing our times, they will undoubtedly come up with elegant explanations of why men who grew up in church homes are oversexed and vulnerable to attacks of lust and obsession, and why women who grew up in those same environments emerged uptight and somewhat disinterested in sex. But I leave that to the future analysts.

I remember vividly the night I first experienced lust. Real lust - not the high school and college variety. Of course as an adolescent I had drooled through Playboy, sneaked off to my uncle's room for a heart-thumping

first look at hard-core pornography, and done my share of grappling and fumbling with my fiance's clothes. I date my lust awakening, though, to the adult onslaught of mature, willful commitment to lust.

It hit on one of my first trips away from home. My job required me to travel at that time, and as I sat in a dingy motel room near the airport and flipped through the city guide of what to do in Rochester, New York. I kept coming back to one haunting photo of an exotic dancer, a former Miss Peach Bowl winner, the ad said. She looked fresh and inviting: the enchanting kind of Southern girl you see on TV commercials for fried chicken - only this one had no clothes on.

Somehow, I had survived the sixties sheltered from strippers and Woodstock-type nudity. And when I first saw the ad, I instinctively ruled her show out of bounds for me. But as I settled down to watch an inane TV show, her body kept looming before my mind with the simple question, "Why not?"

I began to think. Indeed, why not? To be an effective Christian, I had to experience all of life, right? Didn't Jesus himself hang around with prostitutes and sinners? I could go simply as an observer, in the world but not of the world. Rationalizations leaped up like flying buttresses to support my desires, and within ten minutes I was bundled in the back seat of a taxi headed toward the seamy side of Rochester.

I got the driver to let me off a few blocks away, just for safety's sake, and I kept glancing over my shoulder expecting to see someone I knew. Or perhaps God would step in, efface my desires, and change my mind about the wisdom of the act. I even asked Him about that, meekly. No answer.

I walked into the bar between acts and was then faced with the new experience of ordering a drink. My forehead sweating, I scanned my memory of Westerns for an appropriate drink to order. Finally I decided on whiskey. I tried to make it sound casual, but the waitress flummoxed me by asking another question. "How do you want it? How do I want it? What did she mean? What could I say? It seemed everyone in the bar was staring at me. "A double," I stammered. Sensing my naiveté, she rolled her eyes slightly and asked, "Is on the rocks OK?"

Bolstered by my first fiery sips of whiskey, which I tried to stretch out so as not to have to order another, I sat with my eyes glued to the stage.

Miss Peach Bowl was everything the ad had promised. With a figure worthy of a Wonder Woman costume, she danced superbly and was something of an acrobat. She started fully clothed and teased us with slow removals of each sequined article of clothing. Toward the end, when she wore only a G-string, whooping men near the stage bade her lean over and stuffed folded bills under the tiny swatch of cloth. She grinned invitingly. I stared in disbelief. In one final strobe-lit routine she cartwheeled nude across the stage.

The flush of excitement created by my first whiskey, drunk too fast in spite of myself, the eye-popping spectacle of this gorgeous woman baring all and jiggling it in front of me, and the boisterous spirit of the all-male audience combined to over-power me. I walked out of the bar two hours later feeling strangely warmed, intensely excited, and surprised that nothing had actually happened to me. I suppose it's the same feeling that washed in after a big event like marriage, or graduation, or first intercourse for that matter. In just a few hours you realize that although in one sense everything has changed, in another sense nothing has changed. You are the same person.

Lust shares with sins like envy and pride the distinction of being invisible, slippery, hard to pin down. Was what happened that night a sin? I denied it to myself on the way home. To really rate as lust, I told myself, you must look on a woman so as to desire sexual intercourse with her. Isn't that what Jesus said? Whatever

happened that night, I certainly couldn't recall desiring intercourse with Miss Peach Bowl. It was more private and distant than that. What happened, happened quickly, was gone, and left no scars. Or so I thought at the time.

Ten years have passed since that awakening in wintry Rochester, ten years spent never far from the presence of lust. The guilt caught up with me, and back in my motel room that very evening, I was already praying slobbery prayers for forgiveness. For a while that guilt kept me out of live shows and limited my voyeurism to magazines and movies, but only for a while. For ten years I have fought unremitting guerrilla warfare.

Being the reflective sort, I have often pondered the phenomenon of lust. It is unlike anything else in my experience. Most thrills - scary roller coasters, trips in airplanes, visits to waterfalls - lose a certain edge of excitement once I have experienced them and figured them out. I enjoy them and will duplicate the experiences if given the chance, but after a few tries, they no longer hold such a powerful gravitational attraction. Sex is utterly different. There is only so much to "figure out". Every person who endures high school biology, let alone a snickering sex education class, knows the basic shapes, colors, and sizes of the sexual organs. Anyone who has been to an art museum knows about women's breasts. Anyone who has hauled down a gynecology book in a public library knows about genitalia. Somehow, no amount of knowledge reduces the appeal - the forces may, in fact, work concordantly. What strange power is it that allows a male gynecologist to clinically examine female sexual organs all day long - there is nothing left for him to "learn" - and yet return home and find himself quickly aroused by his wife's peekaboo blouse?

"An ape that gibbers in my loins," wrote novelist Frederick Buechner about lust, and no experience comes with such a feral force. And yet, maybe by labeling it an "animal drive" we have missed the main point of lust. No animal I have heard of spends its life fixating on sex. Females in most species invite attention only a few times a year or less; the rest of the time males obediently plod through the mundane routine of phylogeny, apparently never giving sex another thought.

Humans are different. We have the freedom to center our lives inordinately in this one drive, without the harmony enforced by nature. Our females are biologically receptive the vast majority of the time, and no instinct inhibits us from focusing all our thoughts, behavior, and energy on sex.

I have tried to analyze lust, to fractionate it down into its particulars. I take a Playboy centerfold and study it with a magnifying glass. It consists only of dots - dots of four primary colors laid down by a printing press in a certain order. There is no magic on that page, only stipples of ink, which under magnification, show flaws and blurs. But there is magic on that page. I can stare at it, burn the image in my mind, fondle it mentally for hours, even days. Blood steams up when I gaze on it.

Early Marxists, heady with revolution, added sex to their list of human foibles needing alteration. Lenin pronounced his famous Glass of Water Theory, legislating that the sexual act was of no more consequence than the quenching of thirst by a glass of water. Surely bourgeois morality would topple along with bourgeois banks and industries and religions. But in a few years, Lenin had to abjure the Glass of Water Theory. By all reductionist logic, sex was like a glass of water, but sex proved immune to reductionist logic. It resisted being made of no consequence. Lenin, a historian, should have known better. Kings had renounced their thrones, saints their God, and spouses their lifetime partners because of this strange demon of lust. Dialectical materialism hardly stood a chance.

Books often question God's wisdom or goodness in allowing so much pain and sorrow in the world, and yet I have read none that question his goodness and wisdom in allowing so much sex and lust in the world. But I think the two may be parallel questions. Whether through creation or marred creation or whatever (we can't

get into that here), we ended up with sex drives that virtually impel us to break rules God laid down. Males reach their sexual peak at age eighteen, scientists tell us. In our culture, you can't even legally marry before then, so when a male marries, if he has remained chaste, he has already forfeited his time of greatest sexual prowess. Mark Twain railed against God for parceling out to each human a source of universal joy and pleasure, at its peak in teenage years, then forbidding it until marriage and restricting it to one partner. He has a point.

Couldn't our hormones or chromosomes have been arranged so that mates would more easily find sexual satisfaction with just one partner? Why weren't we made more like the animals, who, except for specified periods, go through their daily routine (nude to a beast) with hardly a thought of sex. I could handle lust better if I knew it would only strike me in October in May. It's the not knowing, the ceaseless vulnerability, that drives me crazy.

Lust, I read somewhere, is the craving for salt by a man who is dying of thirst. There's a touch of perversion there, isn't there? Why were we not made with merely a craving for water, thus removing the salt from every newsstand, television show, and movie?

I know what you are thinking, you readers of LEADERSHIP. You are protesting that God never makes me lust, that I choose it, that he probably allows it as an opportunity for me to exercise my virtue. Yes, yes, I understand all that. But some of you know firsthand, as I do, that those pious platitudes, albeit perfectly correct, have almost no relevance to what happens biologically inside me when I visit a local beach or pick up any of a hundred magazines.

Some of you know what it is like to walk with your eyes at breast level, to flip eagerly through every new issue of TIME searching for a rare sexy picture, to yearn for chains on the outside of your motel room to keep you in - unless it comes with that most perverse of all modern inventions, the in-room porno movie. And you also know what it is like to wallow in the guilt of that obsession, and to cry and pray with God to release you, to mutate you, to castrate you like Origen - whatever it takes to deliver you. And even as you pray, luscious, bewitching images crowd into your mind.

You also know what it is like to preach on Sunday, in a strange city, to preach even on a topic like grace or obedience or the will of God, or the decline of our civilization, with the awful and wonderful memories of last night's lust still more real to you at that moment than the sea of expectant faces spread out before you. You know the self-hatred that comes with that intolerable dissonance. And you muddle through the sermon swearing never to let it get to you like that again, until after the service a shapely woman comes beaming and squeezes your hand and whispers praise to you, and all resolve melts, and as she explains how blessed she was by your message, you are mentally undressing her.

The night in Rochester was my first experience with adult lust, but by no means my last. Strip joints are too handy these days. The drug store down the street sells Hustler, High Society, Jugs, anything you want. I have been to maybe fifteen truly pornographic movies, including the few classics like Deep Throat and Behind the Green Door. They scare me, perhaps because it seems so deliberate and volitional to stand in line (always glancing around furtively), to pay out money and to sit in the dark for an hour or two. The crowd is unlike any other crowd I mix with - they remind me I don't belong.

And the movies, technically, aesthetically, and even erotically, are vapid and boring. But still, when a local paper advertises one more Emmanuelle sequel, I drool.

I learned quickly that lust, like physical sex, points in only one direction. You cannot go back to a lower level and stay satisfied. Always you want more. A magazine excites, a movie thrills, a live show really makes the blood run. I never got as far as body tattooing, personal photograph sessions, and massages, let alone outright prostitution, but I've experienced enough of the unquenchable nature of sex to frighten me for good. Lust does not satisfy; it stirs up. I no longer wonder how deviants can get into child molesting, masochism, and other abnormalities. Although such acts are incomprehensible to me, I remember well that where I ended up was also incomprehensible to me when I started.

A cousin of mine subscribes to at least fifteen of the raunchiest magazines I have ever seen. Books I have peeked at for just a few seconds in airport newsstands litter his house. He has told me that, even surrounded by vivid depictions of every sex act, every size and shape of woman he can imagine, he still wants more. He still devours the new issues. He and his wife are experimenting with orgies now, and numerous other variations I won't mention. It is not enough. The thrill will fade before long, and he will want more.

Psychologists use the term obsession to label what I have been describing, and they may say that I have more innate obsession than the average male. They would trace its genesis back to my repressive upbringing, and they are undoubtedly right. That is why I am writing to others of you in the Christian world. If you have not fought such obsession yourself, every Sunday when you step to the pulpit you speak to many who have, although you could hardly read it in their blank, freshly scrubbed faces. Lust is indeed an invisible sin.

At times the obsession has felt to me more like possession. I remember one time especially that scared me. I was in Washington, DC, one of the places in the United States where any kind of lust is easily attainable. At three o'clock in the afternoon, after touring the cherry blossoms, I sauntered into a dark bar that advertised nude dancing. I fended off the girls who came to my table and asked for drinks, and instead directed my attention to the dancers. There were only two, and maybe five customers at most. One black girl with an unspectacular figure weaved over to the part of the stage nearest my table.

This was somewhat different than the other strip shows I had seen. There was no teasing or "visual foreplay". She was already naked, unashamedly so, and she wiggled maybe a foot from my head. She stared right into my eyes. This was so close, so intimate, that it seemed for a terrifying moment to be nearer a relationship than a performance. What I felt could only be called possession.

I found myself - it seemed as though I had not made the decision, that someone else's hands inside mine were doing it - fumbling in my pocket, pulling out bills and stuffing them in a garter belt high up on her thigh. In appreciation she maneuvered herself to grant an even better view. She had no secrets.

I staggered out of that bar. I felt I had crossed a line and could never return to innocence. That weekend I had important business engagements, but throughout them indelible images of that anonymous girl filled my mind. I yearned to flee and go home to my wife, to demonstrate to her my fear so that she could shelter me and mother me and keep me from following where all this was leading.

Just a few years before, I had sat with a distant, reproachful view and watched men lose control and act like country-fair churls as they stuffed bills down the G- string of Miss Peach Bowl. I would never stoop to that - I was smugly confident in Rochester. After all, I was intelligent, happily married, sophisticated - a committed Christian known by friends for my self-control. It would never happen. But it did.

When I went home, I did not tell my wife. How could I? The story was too long, and she, who had hardly ever known lust and had never been unfaithful to me, would not comprehend it. It would likely rupture my marriage, and then I would be cast loose on a sea I could not navigate.

I made a vow then - one more in a series. I vowed I would only look at Playboy and other "respectable" erotic magazines. No more raunchiness. I had certain rationalizations about lust, and pained realism about my inability to stay pure. I simply needed some safe boundaries, I decided. Here are some of my rationalizations that supported my conclusion to contain, not destroy, my lust:

Nudity is art. Go to any art museum in the world, and you will see nudity openly displayed. The human form is beautiful, and it would be puritanical to cut off appreciation for it. Playboy is photographed well, with an aesthetic, not prurient tone.

Playboy and its kin have great articles. There's the Jimmy Carter interview, for example, and Penthouse's conversation with Jerry Falwell. I must keep up with such material.

Some stimulation will help my sex life. I have a problem approaching my wife and communicating my desire for sex to her. I need a sort of boost, a stimulant to push me to declare my intentions.

Other people do far worse. I know many Christian leaders who still do all the things I toyed with, and worse. For that matter, look at Bible characters - as randy a bunch as you'll ever meet. There's probably no such thing as a pure person anyway; everybody has some outlet.

What is lust anyhow, I kept asking myself. Is fantasizing wrong in itself? If so, then erotic dreams would count as sin, and how could I be responsible for my dreams? I reminded myself of the definition of lust I had started with long before: desiring intercourse with a specific sexual partner. I experienced a general sexual heightening, a raising of the voltage, not a specific desire for the act of intercourse.

Some, perhaps all, of these rationalizations contain some truth. (Do they sound familiar?) I used them as an overlay of reason and common sense. To my dismay, on several occasions I had already felt it burst out of containment and take on a sinister power. At other times, I could analyze lust and put it in perspective, but at the moment when it was occurring I knew I would not stop and analyze. I would let it take its course. Secretly, I began to wonder what that course would be.

Don't let me give the wrong impression. My entire life did not revolve around lust. I would go days without fixating on sex, and sometimes a month or two without seeking out a pornographic magazine or movie. And many, many times I would cry out to God, imploring him to take away the desire. Why were my prayers not answered? Why did God continue to curse me with freedom, even when that freedom led me away from him?

I read numerous articles and books on temptation but found little help. If you boiled down all the verbiage and the ten-point lists of practical advice for coping with temptation, basically all they said was "Just stop doing it." That was easy to say. I knew some of those authors, and knew that they too struggled and failed, as I did. In fact, I too had preached many a sermon on handling temptation, but look at me. Practical "how-to" articles proved hopelessly inadequate, as if they said "Stop being hungry" to a starving man. Intellectually I might agree with their theology and their advice, but my glands would still secrete. What insight can change glands?

"Jesus was tempted in all points as you are," some of the articles and books would say, as if that would cheer me up. It did not help. In the first place, none of the authors could conceivably describe how Jesus experienced sexual temptation, because he never talked about it, and no one else has ever been perfect and lived to tell about it. Such well-meaning comments reminded me of telling a ghetto dweller in East Bronx, "Oh, President Reagan used to be poor too. He knows how you feel." Try telling that to a poor person, and prepare to duck.

I felt a similar reaction when I read accounts of people who had overcome lust. Usually, they wrote or talked in a condescending, unctuous tone. Or, like Jesus, they seemed too far removed from my own spiritual quagmire to comfort me. Augustine described his condition twelve years after conversion from his lusty state. In that advanced spiritual place he prayed to overcome these besetting sins: the temptation to enjoy his food instead of taking it as a necessary medicine "until the day when Thou wilt destroy both the belly and the meat"; the attraction of sweet scents; the pleasure of the ear provided by church music lest he be "more moved by the singing than by the thing that is sung"; the lure of the eye to "diverse forms of beauty, of brilliant and pleasing colors"; and last, the temptation of "knowing for knowing's sake". Sorry, Augustine, I respect you; but prayers like that led to the climate of repression and body-hatred that I have been vainly trying to escape all my life.

I got a perverse pleasure out of knowing that this same Augustine a few years earlier had prayed, "Give me chastity, but not yet." He delayed purity for a while also, to sample more delights than I would likely get around to. Why is it that I scoffed at accounts of saints who overcame temptation but loved hearing about those who gave in? There must be a name for that sin, too.

Most of this time I hated sex. I could not imagine it existing in any sort of balance in my life. Of course I knew its pleasure - that was the gravitational attraction - but those short bursts of pleasure were horribly counterbalanced by days of guilt and anguish. I could not reconcile my technicolor fantasy life with my more mundane experience of sex in marriage. I began to view sex as another of God's mistakes, like tornadoes and earthquakes. In the final analysis, it only caused misery. Without it, I could conceive of becoming pure and godly and all those other things the Bible exhorted me toward. With sex, any spiritual development seemed hopelessly unattainable. Maybe Origen had the right idea after all.

It is true there is difficulty in entering into godliness. But this difficulty does not arise from the religion which begins in us, but only from the irreligion which is still there. If our sense were not opposed to penitence, and if our corruption were not opposed to the purity of God, there would be nothing in this painful to us. We suffer only in proportion as the vice which is natural to us resists supernatural grace. Our heart feels torn asunder between these opposed efforts. But it would be very unfair to impute this violence to God, who is drawing us on, instead of to the world, which is holding us back. It is as a child, which a mother tears from the arms of robbers, in the pain it suffers, should love the loving and legitimate violence of her who procures its liberty, and detest only the impetuous and tyrannical violence of those who detain it unjustly.

The most cruel war which God can make with men in this life is to leave them without that war which He came to bring. "I came to send war," He says, "and to teach them of this war. I came to bring fire and the sword." Before Him the world lived in this false peace. - Blaise Pascal, *Penses*

This article is divided into two parts. The first part, which you have just read, recounts the downward spiral of temptation, yielding, self-hatred, and despair. If I had read this article several years ago, I would have gleefully affirmed everything. Then, when I got to the second part, which describes a process of healing, I would have turned cynical and sour, rejecting what follows. Such is the nature of self-deception.

I have described my slide in some detail not to feed any prurient interests in the reader (after all, how many racy articles have you read in LEADERSHIP?) and certainly not to nourish your own despair if you too are floundering - God forbid. I tell my struggles because they are real, but also to demonstrate that hope exists, that God is alive, and his grace can interrupt the terrible cycle of lust and despair. My primary message is one of hope, although until healing did occur, I had no faith that it ever would.

Score, maybe hundreds of times I had prayed for deliverance, with no response. The theologians would find some fault in my prayers, or in the faith with which I prayed them. But can any person assume the awful right to judge the prayers of another who writhes in mental torment and an agony of helpless nonspirituality? I would certainly never assume the right, not after a decade-long war against lust.

I have not mentioned the effect of lust on my marriage. It did not destroy my marriage, did not push me out to find more sexual excitement in an adulterous affair, or with prostitutes, did not ever impel me to place unrealistic demands on my wife's sexual performance. The effect was far more subtle. Mainly, I think, it cumulatively caused me to devalue my wife as a sexual being. The great lie promulgated by Playboy, television commercials, and racy movies is that the physical ideal of beauty is attainable and oh, so close. I stare at a Playboy centerfold. Miss October has such a warm, inviting smile. She is with me alone, in my living room. She removes her clothes, just for me, and lets me see all of her. She tells me about her favorite books and what she likes in a man. Cheryl Tiegs, in the famous Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue, sweetly walks toward the camera, letting the coral blush of her breasts shine out boldly from underneath a net bikini. She lets me see them - she has no inhibitions, no prudishness.

The truth is, of course, that if I sat next to either Cheryl Tiegs or Miss October on an airplane, she would not give me the time of day, let alone take off her clothes for me. If I tried to strike up a conversation, she would brush me off. And yet, because I have stared at Cheryl's breasts and gone over every inch of Miss October as well as the throng of beauties that Madison Avenue and Hollywood recruit to tantalize the masses, I start to view my own wife in that light. I expect her to have Farrah's smile, Cheryl's voluptuousness, Angie's legs, Miss October's flaming red hair and sparkling eyes. Envy and greed join hands with lust. I begin to focus on my wife's minor flaws. I lose sight of the fact that she is a charming, warm, attractive woman and that I am fortunate to have found her.

Beyond that, lust affected my marriage in an even more subtle and pernicious way. Over time, I began to view sex schizophrenically. Sex in marriage was one thing. We performed OK, though not as often as I liked, and accompanied by typical misunderstandings. But passion, Ah, that was something different. Passion I never felt in my marriage.

If anything, sex within marriage served as an overflow valve, an outlet for the passion that mounted inside me, fed by sources kept hidden from my wife. We never talked about this, yet I am sure she sensed it. I think she began to view herself as a sex object - not in the feminist sense of being the object of a husband's selfish greed, but in the deprived sense of being only the object of my physical necessity and not of romance and passion.

Yet the sexual schizophrenia pales in comparison to the schizophrenia of my spiritual life. Can you imagine the inner rupture when I would lead a spiritual retreat for a weekend, winning sighs of admiration and tears of commitment from my devoted listeners, only to return to my room and pore over the latest copy of *Oui*? I could never reconcile it, but somehow I could not avoid it. If you pinned me down on what degree my succumbing to temptation was a conscious choice, I would probably search for an enigmatic response such as the one a Faulkner character gave when asked about original sin. "Well, it's like this," he said, "I ain't got to, but I can't help it."

Paradoxically, I seemed most vulnerable to temptation when speaking or otherwise performing some spiritual service. Those who see Satan as personally manipulating all such temptation to sin would not be surprised by that observation.



Lust became the one corner of my life that God could not enter. I welcomed him into the area of personal finance, which he revolutionized as I awakened to world needs. He cleaned up many of my personal relationships. He gave stirrings of life to the devotional area and my sense of personal communion with him. But lust was sealed off, a forbidden room. How can I reconcile that statement with my earlier protestations that I often cried out for deliverance? I do not know. I felt both sensations: an overwhelming desire to be cleansed and an overwhelming desire to cling to the exotic pleasures of lust. A magnet is attracted equally to two opposite forces. No matter how small you cut a magnet or rearrange it, the two ends will still be attracted to opposite forces. One force never cancels out the other one. This must be what Paul meant in some of those strange statements in Romans 7 (a passage that gave me some comfort). But where was Romans 8 in my life?

Even when I had lust under control, when I successfully limited it to brief, orderly perusals through Playboy at the local newsstand, I still felt this sense of retaining a secret corner God could not enter. Often I would get bogged down in sermon preparation. For motivation to keep going, I would promise myself a trip to the newsstand if I could finish the sermon in an hour and a half. Can you sense the schizophrenia?

Just as I can remember graphically the precise incident in Rochester when adult lust moved in, I can remember the first flutterings of a commitment to healing. They also came on a trip out of town, when I was speaking at a spiritual-life conference. The conference was scheduled for a resort hotel in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, near my favorite part of the country. Nothing affects me like the long drive up the rocky coastline of Maine. It is an invigorating, almost religious experience. Some people find deserts affect them like that, some wheat fields, and some mountains. For me, the magnificence of creation unwinds with each curve on the road up Maine's coast. I made plans to fly into Boston, rent a car, and spend three days cruising the coast just to refresh myself before the conference.

My mistake was spending the first night in Boston. I was then practicing a fairly rigid regimen of "controlled lust". I hadn't given in to any scary splurges like my Washington, DC, encounter in some time. But sure enough, that night I found myself stalking the streets of the seedy areas looking for lust. I did not have to look far. Like many cities, Boston offers strip shows, porno movies - a veritable menu of lust. I usually avoided porno movies because they had proved so unsatisfying. But, Boston also features live nude girls on a revolving platform that you can watch for twenty-five cents. I went in one of those booths.

The mechanics are simple. Twenty curtained booths encircle a revolving platform. Each booth has a glass window covered by a piece of plywood. When you insert a quarter, a mechanical arm somewhat like a toll gate lowers the piece of plywood and lets you see the nude girls revolving on the platform. Then, about three minutes later the toll gate goes up, and you have to drop in another quarter to continue. This is lust at its most unadorned.

The girls employed by such places are not beautiful. Imagine for yourself what kind of women would willingly settle for such employment. You lie under bright lights, revolving like a piece of roast beef at a buffet table, masturbating occasionally to keep the quarters clinking. Around you, leering, furtive stares of men appear for three minutes, disappear, then reappear again, their glasses reflecting your pale shape, none of them looking at your face.

Maybe such booths do serve a redeeming purpose for society - by exposing lust in its basest demythologized form. There is no art or beauty, no acrobatic dancing. The woman is obviously a sex object and nothing else. The men are isolated, caged voyeurs. There is no relationship, no teasing.

The girls are bored stiff: over the whirl of the timing mechanism you can hear them trading talk about grocery prices or car repairs. They masturbate as a routine for the customers, like an ape at the zoo who learns to make faces because the onlookers then laugh and point. This is what the richest, freest society in history spends its wealth and freedom on?

And yet, there I was, a respected member of that society, three days away from leading a spiritual-life retreat, dropping in quarters like a frantic long-distance caller at a pay phone.

For fifty cents you could go to a private booth, and one of the girls would entertain you personally. A glass wall still separated you from the girl, but you could, if you wished, pick up the receiver and talk to the girl. Maybe you could talk her into doing something special for you. I went into the booth, but something restrained me from picking up the telephone. I could not make that human an act - it would expose me for what I was. I merely stood, silent, and stared.

Guilt and shame washed over me in waves that night, as usual. Again I had a stark picture of how low I was groveling. Did this animal lust have any relation to the romance that had inspired the *Symphonie Fantastique*, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets*, and the *Song of Solomon*? Certainly each of those works contained traces of glandular desire, but this that I had experienced was devoid of all beauty. It was too naked, and shameful.

I had felt all that remorse before. What shocked me more was my trip up the coast the next two days. I followed my usual practice of staying in homey inns with big fireplaces, and of eating by the waterfront and watching the sailboats bob in the shimmering sea, of taking long solitary walks on the rocky promontories where huge waves crashed with thunder, of closing my eyes and letting salt spray splash across my face, of stopping at roadside stands for fresh lobster and crab. There was a difference this time: I felt no pleasure. None. My emotional reaction was the same as if I had been at home, yawning, reading the newspaper. All romance had drained out, desiccated.

The realization disturbed me profoundly. By all counts, those wonderful, sensuous experiences rated far higher than the cheap thrill of watching a fat, pock-marked body rotate on plywood. And yet, to my utter disbelief my mind kept roaming back to that grimy booth in Boston. Was I going crazy? Would I lose every worthwhile sensation in life? Was my soul leaking away? Was I becoming possessed?

I limped through the conference, and everyone warmly applauded each talk. They were all blessed. Alone in my room at night, I did not pore over pornography. I pored over what had been happening inside me for ten years. I did not like it. Exactly three days later, I spent the night with a very dear friend, a pastor of one of the largest churches in the South. I had never shared intimate details of my lust life with anyone before, but the schizophrenia was building to such a point I felt I must. He listened quietly, with compassion and great sensitivity as I recounted a few incidents, skipping over those that showed me in the worst light, and described some of my fears to him.

He sat for a long time with sad eyes after I had finished speaking. We both watched our freshly refilled cups of coffee steam, then stop steaming, then grow cold. I waited for his words of advice or comfort or healing or something. I needed a priest at that moment, someone to say, "Your sins are forgiven."

But my friend was no priest. He did something I never expected. His lip quivered at first, the skin on his face began twitching, and finally he started sobbing - great, huge, wretched sobs such as I had seen only at funerals.

In a few moments, when he had recovered some semblance of self- control, I learned the truth. My friend was not sobbing for me; he was sobbing for himself. He began to tell me of his own expedition into lust. He had been where I was - five years before. Since that time, he had taken lust to its logical consequences. I will not dwell on sordid details, but my friend had tried it all: bondage, prostitution, bisexuality, orgies. He reached inside his vest pocket and pulled out a pad of paper showing the prescriptions he took to fight the venereal disease and anal infections he had picked up along the way. He carries the pad with him on trips, he explained, to buy drugs in cities where he is anonymous.

I saw my friend dozens of times after that and learned every horrific detail of his hellish life. I worried about cognitive dissonance; he brooded on suicide. I read about deviance; he performed it. I winced at subtle fissures in my marriage; he was in divorce litigation.

I could not sit in judgment of this man, because he had simply ended up where my own obsession would likely take me. Jesus brought together lust and adultery, hatred and murder, in the Sermon on the Mount, not to devalue adultery and murder but rather to point to the awesome truth about hatred and lust. There is a connection.

If I had learned about my friend's journey to debauchery in an article like this one, I doubtless would have clucked my tongue, questioned LEADERSHIP'S judgment in printing it, and rejected the author as an insincere poseur in the faith. But I knew this man, I thought, as well as I knew anyone. His insights, compassion, and love were all more mature than mine. My sermons were like freshman practice rounds compared to his. He was a godly man if I had ever met one, but underneath all that ... my inner fear jumped uncontrollable. I sensed the power of evil.

For some weeks I lived under a cloud that combined the feelings of doom and terror. Had I crossed some invisible line so that my soul was stained forever? Would I too, like my trusted friend, march inexorably toward the systematic destruction of my body and my soul? He had cried for forgiveness, and deliverance, and every other prayer he had learned in church, and yet now he had fallen into an abyss. Already lawyers were dividing up his house and possessions and his children. Was there no escape for him - for me?

My wife could sense the inner tension, but in fifteen years of marriage she had learned not to force a premature explanation. I had not learned to share tension while it was occurring, only afterward, when it fit into a logical sequence, with some sort of resolution. This time, I wondered whether this particular problem would ever have such a resolution.

A month after my conversation with my friend, I began reading a brief and simple book of memoirs, *What I Believe*, by Francois Mauriac. In it, he sums up why he clung to the Roman Catholic church and the Christian faith in a country (France) and an age when few of his contemporaries seriously considered orthodoxy. I had read only one novel by the Nobel prize- winning author, *Viper's Tangle*, but that novel clearly showed that Mauriac fully understood the lust I had experienced, and more. A great artist, he had captured the depths of human depravity. I would not get pious answers from him.

Mauriac's book includes one chapter on purity. He describes the power of sexuality - "the sexual act has no resemblance to any other act: its demands are frenzied and participate in infinity. It is a tidal wave" - and his struggles with it throughout a strict Catholic upbringing. He also discounts common evangelical perspectives on lust and sex. The experience of lust and immorality, he admits, is fully pleasurable and desirable; it is no good trying to pretend that sin contains distasteful seeds that inevitably grow into repulsion. Sin has its own compelling rewards. Even marriage, Christian marriage, he claims, does not remedy lust. If anything,

marriage complicate the problem by introducing a new set of difficulties. Lust continues to seek the attraction of unknown creatures and the taste for adventure and chance meetings.

After brazenly denying the most common reasons I have heard against succumbing to a life filled with lust, Mauriac concludes that there is only one reason to seek purity. It is the reason Christ proposed in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Purity, says Mauriac, is the condition for a higher love - for a possession superior to all possessions: God himself.

Mauriac goes on to describe how most of our arguments for purity are negative arguments: Be pure, or you will feel guilty, or your marriage will fail, or you will be punished. But the Beatitudes clearly indicate a positive argument that fits neatly with the Bible's pattern in describing sins. Sins are not a list of petty irritations drawn up for the sake of a jealous God. They are, rather, a description of the impediments to spiritual growth. We are the ones who suffer if we sin, by forfeiting the development of character and Christlikeness that would have resulted if we had not sinned.

The thought hit me like a bell rung in a dark, silent hall. So far, none of the scary, negative arguments against lust had succeeded in keeping me from it. Fear and guilt simply did not give me resolve; they added self-hatred to my problems. But here was a description of what I was missing by continuing to harbor lust: I was limiting my own intimacy with God. The love he offers is so transcendent and possessing that it requires our faculties to be purified and cleansed before we can possibly contain it. Could he, in fact, substitute another thirst and another hunger for the one I had never filled? Would Living Water somehow quench lust? That was the gamble of faith.

Perhaps Mauriac's point seems obvious and predictable to people who respond to anguished problems with spiritual-sounding clichés. But I knew Mauriac and his life well enough to know that his observation was the culmination of a lifetime of struggle. He had come to that conclusion as the only possible justification for abstemiousness. Perhaps, just perhaps, the discipline and commitment involved in somehow allowing God to purge out the impurities formed the sine qua non, the essential first step toward a relationship with God I had never known.

The combination of grave fear struck in me by my pastor friend's grievous story and the glimmer of hope that a quest for purity could somehow transform the hunger I had lived with unabated for a decade prepared me to try once again to approach God in confession and in faith. I knew pain would come. Could God this time give me assurance that, in Pascal's words, pain was the "loving and legitimate violence" necessary to procure my liberty?

I cannot tell you why a prayer that has been prayed for ten years is answered on the 1,000th request when God has met the first 999 with silence. I cannot tell you why I had to endure ten years of near- possession before being ready for deliverance. And, most sadly of all, I cannot tell you why my pastor friend has, since our conversation after New Hampshire, gone into an unbelievable skid toward destruction. His marriage is now destroyed. He may go insane or commit suicide before this article is published. Why? I do not know.

But what I can tell you, especially those of you who have hung on every turn of my own pilgrimage because it so closely corresponds to yours, is that God did come through for me. The phrase may sound heretical, but to me, after so many years of failure, it felt as if he had suddenly decided to be there after a long absence. I prayed, hiding nothing (hide from God?), and he heard me.

There was one painful but necessary step of repentance. Repentance, says C.S. Lewis, "is not something God demands of you before he will take you back and which He could let you off if He chose; it is simply a

description of what going back is like." Going back for me had to include a very long talk with my wife, who had suffered in silence and often in conscience for a decade. It was she I had wronged and sinned against, as well as God. Perhaps my impurity had kept our own love from growing in the same way it had blocked the love I could experience with God. We lay side by side on our bed one steamy summer evening. I talked about nothing, in a nervous, halting voice, for an hour or so, trying to break the barrier that held me back, and finally about midnight I began.

I told her nearly everything, knowing I was laying on her a burden she might not be able to carry. I have wondered why God let me struggle for a decade before deliverance: maybe I will one day find out my wife required just that much time to mature and prepare for the one talk we had that night. Far smaller things had fractured our marriage for months. Somehow, she incarnated the grace of God for me.

I hurt her - only she could tell how much I hurt her. It was not adultery - there was no other woman for her to beam her resentment toward, but perhaps that made it even harder for her. For ten years she had watched an invisible fog steal inside me, make me act strange, pull me away from her. Now she heard what she had often suspected, and to her it must have sounded like rejection: You were not enough for me sexually, I had to go elsewhere.

But still, in spite of that pain and the vortex of emotions that must have swirled around inside her, she gave to me forgiveness and love. She took on my enemy as her enemy too. She took on my thirst for purity as her thirst too. She loved me, and as I type this even now, tears streak my face because that love, that awesome love is so incomprehensible to me, and so undeserved. But it was there. "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel!... For I am God and not man, The Holy One in your midst." - Hosea 11:8-9

Saint Augustine, who wrote so eloquently of his own war within, describes our condition here on earth as a simultaneous citizenship in two cities, the city of man and the City of God. The lure of the city of man often drowns out the call of the City of God. Man's city is visible, substantial, real; as such, it is far more alluring. God's city is ephemeral, invisible, cloaked in doubt, far away. It may not even exist - no one knows for sure.

Cheryl Tiegs coming toward me out of the page, her teeth flashing, her eyes sparkling, her body glistening, is that city of man. She, and what she represents, fits well with my body and the hormones that surge inside it and the complexes that grew in my repressed childhood and whatever else contributed to my obsession with lust. The pure in heart shall see God. Set against luscious Cheryl, sometimes that promise does not seem like much. But that is the lie of the Deceiver, and the dyslexia of reality we are asked to overcome. The City of God is the real, the substantial, the whole. What I become as I strengthen my citizenship in that kingdom is far more worthy than anything I could become if all my fantasies were somehow fulfilled.

A year has passed since the late-night talk with my wife. During that time, a miracle has occurred. The war within me has fallen away. Only a few snipers remain. Once I failed, just a month later, when I was walking the streets of San Francisco. I felt myself pulled - it felt exactly like that - into another of the twenty-five cent peep shows to watch an undulating girl on a revolving table for three minutes. Not ten seconds had passed when I felt a sense of horror. My head was pounding. Evil was taking over. I had to get out of there, immediately.

I ran, literally ran, as fast as I could out of the North Beach district. I felt safe only when I got out of there. It struck me then how much had changed: previously I had felt safe when I had given in to lust, because the

war inside died down for a moment, but now I felt safe away from the temptation. I prayed for strength and walked away.

Other than that encounter, I have been free of the compulsion. Of course, I notice girls in short dresses and halter tops - why else would they wear them? - but the terror is gone. The gravitational force has disappeared when I pass in front of newsstands. For twelve months I have walked by them and not picked up a magazine. I have not entered a porno theater.

I feel a sense of loss, yes. I enjoyed the beautiful women, both the art and the lust of it. It was pleasurable; I cannot deny that. But now I have gained a kind of inner gyroscope that is balanced correctly and alerts me when I am straying off course. After ten years I finally have a reservoir of strength to draw on as well as a conscience. I have found it necessary to keep open and honest communication with God and my wife on every little temptation toward lust.

The war within still exists. Now it is a war against the notion that biology is destiny. Looking at humanity as a species, scientists conclude that the fittest must survive, that qualities such as beauty, intelligence, strength, and skill are worthy factors by which to judge the usefulness of people, that lust is an innate adaptation to assure the propagation of the species. Charity, compassion, love, and restraint fly in the face of that kind of materialist philosophy.

Sometimes they defy even our own bodies. The City of God can seem like a mirage; my battle is to allow God to convince me of its reality.

Two totally new experiences have happened to me that, I must admit, offset by far my sense of loss at the experience of lust I miss.

First, I have learned that Mauriac was right. God has kept his part of the bargain. In a way I had never known before, I have come to see God. At times (not so often, maybe once every couple of months), I have had an experience with God that has stunned me with its depth and intimacy, an experience of an order I did not even know existed before. Some of these moments have come during prayer and Bible reading, some during deep conversations with other people, and one, the most memorable of all because of my occupation, while I was speaking at a Christian conference. At such moments I have felt possessed, but this time joyfully so (demonic possession is a poor parody of the filling of the Spirit). They have left me shaken and humbled, renewed and cleansed. I had not known that level of mystical experience, had not, in fact, even sought it except in the general way of seeking purity. God has revealed himself to me. The City of God is taking on bricks and mortar.

And another thing has happened, again something I did not even ask God for. The passion is coming back into my marriage. My wife is again becoming an object of romance. Her body, no one else's, is gradually gaining the gravitational pull that used to be scattered in the universe of sexes. The act of sex, as often a source of irritation and trauma for me as an experience of pleasure, is beginning to take on the form of mystery and transcendence and inexpressible delight that its original design must have called for.

These two events occurring in such short sequence have shown me why the mystics, including biblical writers, tend to employ the experience of sexual intimacy as a metaphor of spiritual ecstasy. Sometimes, lingering remnants of grace in the city of man bear a striking resemblance to what awaits us in the City of God.

It is not the business of the church to adapt Christ to men, but men to Christ. - Dorothy Sayers

## *Battle Strategy: Some Practical Advice*

In the account of my personal pilgrimage, I resisted giving "practical advice" on lust. There are no ten easy steps to overcome temptation.

At times the power of obsession overwhelms all reason or common sense. And yet, throughout the war within, I did learn some valuable strategy, which I will add in hopes of preventing needless scars.

1. Recognize and name the problem. If it's lust, call it lust. you must admit your condition before it can be treated. Much of my earlier rationalizations were blatant attempts to shirk the name lust - I tried to redefine it.
2. Stop feeding lust. Killing fantasies is like trying not to think of a pink elephant, and there is no "magic bullet" solution to this problem. But cutting off desires through diversion, not dwelling on them when they begin, and trying to eliminate some of the mystery can help in the early stages of lust. The farther down the road you travel through books, magazines, films, and personal contacts, the more steps you must one day retrace.
3. Demythologize it. Sexual stimulations promise a lie. Cheryl Tiegs is not going to bed with you - in fact, photo sessions that create sexy photos are tiresome and mechanical, not at all erotic. Recognize that Playboy centerfolds are touched up in the miracle of dye transfer printing, that they represent an unrealizable ideal of sexuality that does not include feelings of impotence, awkwardness, monthly menstrual periods, and many other reminders of humanity. Life is far different from what soft porn portrays it to be.
4. Confess its real price. I learned the ultimate price just in time, by watching my pastor friend who went beyond the point of no return and is today as miserable a man as I have ever met. All the time lust was demanding its tribute from me, in the form of irritation with my wife and in the subtle and progressive loss of intimacy with my wife and with God. My own self-respect was gradually deteriorating also.
5. Trace its history. Professional counselors have proven very helpful in pointing out the root causes of my obsession that began in my sexually repressed childhood. For some people, lust comes from trying to win back the love of a distant parent, or earning vengeance against a disappointing God, or overcoming feelings of physical inadequacy by feeding myths. Friends and sometimes professional counselors can help you identify the cycle of lust by exploring its history with you.
6. Study sex in perspective. The church has unwittingly caused many of the problems with sexuality by elevating it to a singular status as heinous sin. A general term, immorality, comes to focus on merely one sin, sexual sin. From God's perspective, sex is a powerful dimension of humanity, but it was never meant to preoccupy or gain dominion over the creation. Getting an idea of what God had in mind won't tame the obsession but can be a picture to remember when the obsession flares, a counterpoint, a balance leading to alignment.
7. Build fantasies on God's ideal. It may help to channel your fantasy life toward your spouse. As you become creative and loving and healthful when thinking about sex, the obsession lessens. When a fantasy pops into mind, try to direct it and control it.
8. Work on some positive addictions. Tennis, maybe, or scuba diving or hang-gliding. I've found that even video games like Pac-Man preoccupy me for a time, especially when I am traveling. When I'm

tempted to go to a sexually explicit movie, now I seek out a safe, constructive film to occupy my evening. The obsession fades, at least temporarily.

9. Recognize the humanity of your victims. A friend of mine told me that he had regularly picked up Playboy and Penthouse until his daughter turned eighteen. Then for the first time he realized those "Girls from Kokomo" or "Girls from the Southwest Conference" were real human beings, daughters of parents like himself. Who can know what subtle destruction occurred inside them as they were coaxed to use their bodies to entice male America? As long as the obsession can make you blind enough to care about satisfying only your needs, you will continue. But once you realize what you are doing to others, including the objects of your lust and your own family, obsession becomes more difficult.
  
10. Obsession comes out of a legitimate set of anxieties; follow them to their authentic source. I need God. I need a father. I need female friendship. I need to be hugged. I need to be loved, and to love. I need to feel worthwhile, attractive to someone. Those are my real needs, not the three-minute rush of voyeurism inside a twenty-five cent booth. Let these real needs be met when the obsession arises, and the sexually based substitute may lose its grip.



## PART TWO - THE WAR WITHIN CONTINUES

### *An update on a Christian leader's struggle with lust.*

Five years ago LEADERSHIP published "The War Within" (Fall 1982), a candid description of one Christian leader's fierce, protracted battle with pornography and lust. The article generated more mail than any single article, before or since, in the history of LEADERSHIP. Though responses were diverse, their sheer volume showed how troublesome the problem is for many Christian leaders. Since then, much has happened.

Pornography became the focus of national attention with the Attorney General's Commission and its landmark report last year, which among other things, documented the rapid spread of porn in recent years.

The VCR, barely known five years ago, has made sexually-oriented material much more easily available and brought it into many homes for the first time. Sales of hard-core porn videos, for example, more than doubled from 1983 to 1986.

This trend has not spared pastors. According to a LEADERSHIP survey . . . of the pastor responding to the survey, 20 percent said they look at sexually oriented media (in print, video, or movies) at least once a month. And 38 percent said they find themselves fantasizing about sex with someone other than their spouse at least once a month.

All this prompted us to seek out a pastor who knows how intensely difficult the war against lust can be - yet also knows God's grace and strength applied in that situation. Who better than the author of the previous article? Here then, is an update from the anonymous writer of "The War Within," and the lessons he has learned in the intervening five years.

I was sitting in an aisle seat on a cross-country flight when the passenger across the aisle, one row ahead, pulled out a magazine from his briefcase. I recognized something familiar in the furtive way he looked around, nervously adjusted his posture, and opened the magazine. He held the pages open just far enough to see inside, but from my angle I had a clear view of various women spreading their legs for the camera.

It seemed incongruous, even bizarre, for a man dressed in a business suit to be studying some anonymous woman's private parts in the artificial setting of jammed-together airplane seats and plastic folding trays. But after the sense of the bizarre had passed, I felt another twinge, this one a mixture of pain and sadness. Five years ago, I was that man in the business suit, addicted to lust. I wrote about my struggle in the Fall 1982 edition of LEADERSHIP, in an article called "The War Within." After the sadness had passed, I felt an enormous sense of relief, for I realized that my initial sense of bizarreness was a sign of the healing God has accomplished so far.

Not long after the airplane trip, an editor from LEADERSHIP asked if I would do another article, recounting what I had learned about lust in the five intervening years. At first, I didn't like the idea. It seemed an unnecessary probing of old wounds. The article had been for me a means of catharsis, a deliverance. Why dredge up the past? Finally, however, I agreed to consider the request.

I reread the original article for the first time in five years. Its passionate tone startled me. I had forgotten how completely sex had dominated my life. I found myself feeling compassion for the author of the article, momentarily forgetting his identity! Again, I breathed a prayer of thanks for God's healing. In the same file

folder as the article, I also found an envelope from LEADERSHIP containing several dozen letters from readers, and I proceeded to read each one.

Some readers felt a sense of shock and betrayal. They criticized the article for being prurient and disgusting. The author had been far too explicit, they said; he dwelt on lurid details as if he still enjoyed his memories of lust.

"The author cannot possibly be considered a Christian," concluded one reader (I hope this person never encounters Augustine's *Confessions*). Others claimed the article had caused them to distrust their pastor and all Christian leaders: 'Who knows what might be going on in their minds.'

I pray and hope that my article did not lead anyone astray. I must admit that, at a distance of five years, the article seemed somewhat overwrought. Does the issue of lust merit such a long, involved treatment? But I also know that the article was true, every word of it. I lived it. War raged within me for a decade.

Five years ago some people were scandalized that a Christian magazine would print such a blunt, realistic confession by a Christian leader. But in recent days we have read far more explicit accounts of Christian leaders' immorality in *Time* and *Newsweek*.

Not all the letters were negative, however. More than half expressed deep gratitude. I have a whole stack of letters that begin like this: "I thought I was the only one with this problem. Thank you so much for having the courage to bring it out into the open." Some go on to describe agonizing personal battles with lust and immorality. At least one reader said the article permanently cured his lust problem by frightening him away from the temptations of bare flesh.

The most moving letters, however, came from people who have not been cured. "Please, tell me how to solve my problem!" they wrote. "You said that God 'came through' for you but he has not come through for me. What can I do?" It was this group of letters that ultimately convinced me to write about what has happened in the past five years.

### *The Road To Freedom*

I begin with humility and gratitude to God for breaking my addiction. I came to see the problem of lust as a true addiction, much like addiction to alcohol or drugs or gambling. And I can truly say that I have been set free of, in Augustine's words, "scratching lust's itchy sore." For those still caught in the web of that addiction, I bring a message of hope.

Ironically, I am most grateful for two things I normally try to avoid: guilt and fear. Augustine records rather candidly that, except for the fear of God's judgment in the afterlife, Epicurus would surely have lured him even deeper into carnal pleasures. A similar kind of fear and guilt kept me on edge during my long struggle with lust.

Psychologists use the term "cognitive dissonance" to describe the battle inside a person who believes one way and acts another. For example, a woman will normally feel intense cognitive dissonance if she secretly carries on an affair with another man while pretending to be happily married to her husband. Even if her husband suspects nothing, her own mind will constantly remind her that she is living with contradictions. Because the mind cannot sustain too much cognitive dissonance, it will seek ways to resolve the contradictions.

Perhaps the wife will unconsciously let slip certain clues about her affair, or maybe she will accidentally call her husband by her lover's name. In such unexpected ways the mind will attempt to bring together her two lives.

A sense of cognitive dissonance haunted me during my addiction to lust. I believed one set of things about Christian ethics, the dangers of separating physical appeal from other aspects of sexuality, and the irrationality of an obsession with body parts. But I acted contrarily. From the pulpit I preached that a person's worth is measured internally, and that ugly people and fat people and the physically handicapped can express God's image. But, like much of male America, I spent my time drooling over shapely women with well-formed legs.

Most urgently, I experienced cognitive dissonance in my marriage. I had roped off large areas of my sexuality from my wife, which I cultivated in private, usually on trips, in visits to adult movie theaters and magazine shops. How could I expect to find sexual fulfillment in my marriage when I was nurturing a secret life of sexuality apart from my marriage?

Guilt and fear finally forced me to deal with the cognitive dissonance. Guilt made it feel dissonant in the first place; it constantly reminded me that my actions did not coincide with my beliefs. And fear, especially the fear I experienced after I learned how sex had utterly destroyed my Southern pastor friend, forced me to face my own sin. It led me, kicking and protesting all the way, toward repentance.

I mention this because guilt and fear do not often get good press in our liberated society. Had I sought help from a professional counselor, that counselor may well have dealt with the symptoms of guilt and fear rather than with the root problem. I have come to believe that the guilt and fear were wholly appropriate; they were, in fact, the prods that led me to resolve the cognitive dissonance in my life.

Today, I hear cries of outrage against anyone who, like President Reagan or Jerry Falwell, conveys a tone of judgment. President Reagan simply asks that sexual abstinence be taught as an option, possibly the best option, for young people who wish to avoid the health dangers associated with sexual promiscuity. "Don't lay a guilt trip on us!" many people respond. "Don't try to scare us." But I have learned that guilt and fear may serve us well, as warnings against the direct dangers posed by a disease like AIDS, or against the more subtle dangers represented by an addiction to lust.

Yet guilt and fear are such powerful forces that they may also deceive. In my case, they deceived me into seeing God as my enemy. Now as I read "The War Within," it reminds me of a testimony delivered at a revival tent meeting; "For many years I wallowed in the stench and filth of sin until finally I reached the end of my rope and in desperation turned to God." Typically, as I did in the article, the testifier spends most of his time on vivid descriptions of the smells and sights of that sin.

I now view my pilgrimage differently. I believe God was with me at each stage of my struggle with lust. It wasn't that I had to climb toward a state of repentance to earn God's approval; that would be a religion of works. Rather, God was present with me even as I fled from him. At the moment when I was most aware of my own inadequacy and failure, at that moment I was probably closest to God. That is a religion of grace.

The title of one book on my shelf, "He Came Down from Heaven", summarizes the gospel pretty well. Immanuel: God is with us, no matter what. He calls us to heaven but descends to earth to rescue us.

I wish we in the church did a better job of conveying God's love for sinners. From the church, I feel mainly judgment. I cannot bring my sin to the church until it has been neatly resolved into a warm, uplifting

testimony. For example, if I had come to the church in the midst of my addiction to lust, I would have been harshly judged. That, in fact, is why I had to write my article anonymously. Even after the complete cycle of confession and forgiveness, people still wrote in comments like, "The author cannot possibly be considered a Christian."

Having said that, however, I also recognize that many people who struggle with addictions have been greatly helped by counselors or other mature Christians to whom they have made themselves accountable. They testify that knowing there is someone to whom they have to report honestly and regularly has been a key factor in resisting temptation.

I have attended a few meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, and they convinced me that we in the church have something to learn from that group. Somehow they require accountability and communicate the "Immanuel-ness" of God. He is with you when you succeed and when you fail. He does not wait with folded arms for you to pick yourself out of the gutter. His hands are stretched out toward you, eager to help.

Where are the hands of the church?

### *Bearing Scars*

So far I have given mostly good news: the good news that an addiction can be broken, that God's love extends to the uttermost, that even guilt and fear can work for our good. But in honesty I must bring bad news as well.

In Sunday school we learn simple illustrations about the long-term effects of sin: "God will forgive you for the sin of smoking, but you'll always have spots on your lungs." Damage from sexual sins is rarely so easy to detect, but such sins do indeed have consequences.

I bear scars from my addiction to lust, even though the addiction seems broken. First there is the scar of "spoiled innocence." Sex has a certain "you can't go back again" quality. Pornographers understand this well: They know that what titillates this month will only bore next month, and they must constantly search for new and exciting sexual variety in order to hold a viewer's attention. Pornography feeds on our fascination with the forbidden, but as the rules of what is forbidden change, our fascination changes as well. We want more.

I don't know exactly how to describe this long-term effect, but I definitely feel a sense of spoiled innocence. My sexual fantasy life far outstripped my sexual experience within marriage, and I have not been able to bring the two together. I was a voyeur, experiencing sex in loneliness and isolation. But sex is meant to be shared. To the degree that I indulged my voyeurism, I drifted away from my wife and our shared experiences.

And of course my years of deception undermined trust. Eventually I told my wife everything about my addiction to lust, and she accepted it with astonishing grace and forgiveness. Still, though, she must wonder: When I travel without her, am I trustworthy? I sometimes wonder if I can even trust myself. By living in a state of cognitive dissonance for a number of years, I developed a great ability to live falsely. As I ignored the early warning signs of guilt, I opened up even greater possibilities of self-deception. Perhaps I have seared my own conscience. I continue to pray for the Holy Spirit's healing of my receptivity to him.

These are some of the long-term effects from my experience with lust. Surely similar scars form as a result of adultery, divorce, or a decision to abort a child. God will forgive such actions and grant repentance and restoration. But healing does not come free of long-term cost.

How do I respond to sexual pressures now? I am still a sexual being, a male. That has not changed. I still experience the same magnetic force of sexual desire that used to pull me toward pornography. What do I do with those urges? What do any of us do? As I see it, we can respond in three possible ways: indulgence, repression, or reconnection.

### *The Way Of Indulgence*

"The War Within" described in detail - some say too much detail - a process of indulgence, of following my sexual desires wherever they might lead. Our society seems strangely schizophrenic on the wisdom of that approach. On the one hand, authors advocating "The New Celibacy" appear on talk shows and Time [with] articles on the new ethic of intimacy. On the other hand, you need only flip through the advertisements in a magazine like Vogue or Glamour to realize our society's approving attitude toward lust.

"Lust is back!" heralded an article in Esquire a few years ago. The sexual revolution of the sixties stemmed from an overall assault against tradition and authority. Soon feminism put a damper on anything that treated women as sexual objects. But now it seems perfectly acceptable to treat either women or men as sexual objects. Today's sexual revolution is fueled not so much by a reaction against authority as by the New Paganism that glorifies the human body (witness the incredible boom in body-building, fitness and exercise).

Cable television and video cassettes now make pornography available to nearly everyone. The recent book Vital Signs reports that of Christian households hooked into cable television, 23 percent subscribe to porno channels - the same percentage as the nation as a whole.

What harm is there, after all, in displaying a little skin? Christians tend to be so uptight about sex; why not experiment with pornography to help loosen us up? There are many answers, I suppose, but one especially seems to fit my experience: pornography radically disconnects sex from its intended meaning. Human sexuality, a gift from God, was designed to express a relationship between a man and a woman, but pornography separates out one aspect of that gift - physical appeal - and focuses exclusively on it.

The specialists like to remind us that sexuality reveals our animal nature. It is a matter of biology, they say of glands and hormones and physical maturation. Sex is technique: it can be learned, and mastered, and perfected. And perhaps pornography can assist you in mastering the technique.

But certain facts about human sexuality still puzzle the experts. While it resembles animal sexuality in some ways, it also expresses fundamental differences. Human beings possess disproportionate sexual equipment: Among mammals, only human females develop enlarged breasts before their first pregnancy, and among primates the human male has the largest penis. In contrast to virtually all other animals, human beings engage in sex as a year-round option rather than limiting intercourse to the time of estrus. Behaviorists puzzle over these anomalies. What evolutionary advantage do they offer?

Perhaps the answer does not lie in "evolutionary advantage" at all. Perhaps it lies in the nature of human sexuality as an expression of relationship rather than as an act of instinct for the purpose of reproduction.

The most telling difference between human and animal sexuality is this: all other animals perform sexual acts in the open, without embarrassment. Only human beings see any advantage to privacy "Man is the only animal that blushes, or needs to," said Mark Twain. For us, sex is different. It has an aura of mystery about it, and instinctively we want to keep it separate, to experience it in private. We treat it as we treat religion, with an aura of apartness, or "holiness."

As free creatures, human beings can, of course, rebel against these natural tendencies that have characterized all human societies. We can treat sex as an animal function, separating out the physical act from any aspect of relationship. We can tear down all the fences that societies have traditionally erected to protect the mystery surrounding sexuality. That, in fact, is precisely what pornography does. And it does so at our peril.

A few years ago in major cities like San Francisco, you could find certain establishments that catered to the sexual interests of gay men. Some of these reduced sex to its most basic nature. A man could enter a stall and insert his genitals through an opening in the wall at crotch level. He could thus have a sex act performed on him without ever seeing his sexual partner. Such parlors offered efficient and anonymous sex, free from the trammels of relationship. In 1970, at the height of the gay sexual revolution, Kinsey Institute researchers found that 40 percent of white male homosexuals in San Francisco had had at least 500 sexual partners and 28 percent reported over 1,000 partners. (The hysteria over AIDS has greatly reduced those statistics, although now "safe sex" is being touted as a way to enjoy such pleasures without the risk of infection.)

What does all this frenetic sexual activity prove? It demonstrates, of course, the enormous power of the sexual drive in human beings, who are capable of indulgence at a rate without precedent in the animal kingdom. And it also shows that sex can be reduced to an utterly anonymous act, disconnected from relationship. The San Francisco statistics make that point most dramatically, but our society offers many other, more subtle reminders. "What's love got to do with it?" Tina Turner bellows into a microphone. Surely you can have great sex without the complications of love.

As I look back over the lessons I have learned, this seems the most important. Lust, and its expression in pornography, led me away from relationship toward raw desire. It enticed me with the promise of relationship: Cheryl Tiegs and Madonna and the monthly Playmates would remove their clothes and smile at me from the pages of magazines. But the photos lied. I was developing a relationship with ink dots printed on paper, not with real human beings.

Gradually, at a deep level, I was learning to view sex as mere technique, an exercise like gourmet dining. I was forgetting the crucial distinction between gourmet dining and gourmet sex: I have no human relationship with the food I eat, but I must have some sort of relationship with a sexual partner. Pornography attempts to abolish that distinction.

The magazines, especially the soft porno magazines, convey the message that sex is merely a physical act, a matter of technique. Television soap operas, in their own way, express much the same thing: only 6 percent of the sex depicted on them occurs between a husband and wife.

Through them, we learn that we can disconnect the sex act from normal social mores.

And yet society can never sever the connections completely. Inconsistencies continue to surface. Consider two examples:

Every society on earth acknowledges incest taboos. The United States, if anything, has recently become even more sensitive to incest and the sexual abuse of children. But why? If sex is merely a physical act, a matter of technique, what difference should it make if parent and child have sex together, or brother and sister? The taboo against incest shows that human relationships are a part of sex at its most basic level.

Movies very often depict an affair that begins "just on a physical basis." But rarely can the characters continue the affair on that basis. It grows, dominating the characters' emotions and gradually undermining their marriages. The old cycle of cognitive dissonance sets in, and what began as a physical affair soon

blossoms into a full-fledged relationship. Linda Wolfe, a feminist author, wrote a book called "Playing Around: Women and Extramarital Sex" in which she expressed amazement that so many physical affairs begun "to preserve a marriage by giving me a sexual outlet" ended up destroying that marriage.

I have come to realize that the greatest danger of pornography lies in its false depiction of sexuality. It focuses exclusively on physical appearance and technique, without recognizing sex as an expression of relationship between two human beings. Because pornography begins with a false premise, the more I follow where it leads, the less able I will be to find a well-integrated, healthy experience of sexuality.

Gay men in San Francisco with 1,000 partners may be light years beyond me in sexual technique and proficiency. But I doubt whether they have found a high level of mature sexual satisfaction. They have addressed the "animal" aspect of their sexuality, but at the expense of developing relationships. We are more than animals: that is the basic Christian contribution to sexuality. (And, in fact, as the anomalies of human sexuality show - disproportionate sexual organ size, the need for privacy, the constant availability - in sexuality we may be least like other animals.) Whatever leads me to emphasize exclusively the "animal" side of my sexuality will likely lead toward confusion and dissatisfaction.

I have learned that my addiction to lust probably expressed other human needs. What was I searching for in the porno literature and movies? The image of the perfect female breast? More likely, I was searching for intimacy, or love, or acceptance, or reinforcement of an insecure male ego, or maybe even a thirst for transcendence. I was searching for something that could never be satisfied by two-dimensional photos printed on slick magazine paper. And not until I recognized that could I begin to turn toward a more appropriate sexual identity.

In my search, I "de-mystified" sexuality. I made the female body as common as a daily newspaper, rather than as rare as the one woman I had chosen to spend my life with. I destroyed the fences around sexuality, chasing away any remnants of "holiness". Nudity became not the final mutual achievement in a progression toward intimacy, but the very first step. These are the results of my choices toward indulgence. From all of them, I am still trying to recover.

### *The Temptation Of Repression*

Some people writing in response to my original LEADERSHIP article could not identify with my struggles at all. They offered me stern advice, mostly consisting of admonishments from the Bible.

Wrote one pastor: "Nowhere does the Bible say to pray for victory over lust. It does say to flee immorality (1 Cor. 6:8). It does say to saturate our minds with Scripture (Ps. 119:9, 11). It does say to make a covenant with our eyes so that we do not gaze on a virgin (Job 31:1). It does say to take every thought captive to Christ (2 Cor. 10:3-5)."

Several people also cited the apostle Paul's statement about the perversions of Ephesus, "It is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret."

Reading so many of these letters in one sitting, I had to question my own experience. In my struggles with lust, was I making complex something that should have been very simple? I had written page after page about "the war within" and the forces that pulled me toward lust.

The letter writers seemed to think the solution to lust was the same as the solution to the drug problem in America: Just Say No!

But then I read the letters of people who had felt every moment of my struggle. These, among them godly men and women, had succumbed to temptation. A firm resolution to say no did not seem enough.

What is the difference between "fleeing immorality" and simple repression? By automatically turning away from any impulse toward sexual desire, will I dam up a reservoir of repression that will one day overflow? I don't know, but I do believe that we who learn to practice repression at an early age may be woefully unprepared to face real temptation.

I think of the classical distinction between virtue and innocence: virtue, unlike innocence, has successfully passed a point of temptation. Perhaps a person who grows up in a Christian subculture, attends Christian schools, watches Christian television, reads Christian books, and listens to Christian music can survive the 1980s in something like a state of innocence. But there is a danger also: a person reared in such a hothouse environment may wilt once he or she steps into the broader society.

I grew up in a sheltered Christian background, where I learned to rely on simple, black-and-white, just-say-no repression as the best defense against all forms of temptation. But that defense failed me in the matter of lust. I was utterly unprepared for the force, the almost magical force, of human sexuality.

Since those days of innocence, I have read thinkers like Wilhelm Reich, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Sigmund Freud, each of whom explains almost all human behavior on the basis of the sexual instinct. I do not agree with them, but they do underscore the enormous power of human sexuality.

"I feel as if I had escaped from the hands of a mad and furious master," said Sophocles when old age finally quelled his sexual drive.

Sex cannot be reduced to neat, rational formulas and explained away. And I wonder whether any degree of repression can withstand its force.

Will any amount of repression ever prepare us for virtue?

Yet I must confess that in the past five years, I have often used pure repression as a response to temptation. Once the back of my "addiction" to lust had been broken, I was able to repress temptations in that direction. But just saying no became possible only after I had dealt with the nature of the lust impulse.

Different people develop different ways of controlling their sexual impulses. I recently read of the French Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain, who together with his wife took a vow of celibacy. Both in their early thirties and having been married ten years, they kept the vow the rest of their lives. Maritain revealed his secret only after Raissa's death: "We decided to renounce a thing which marriage fulfills, a deep need of the human being - both of body and spirit ... I do not say that any such decision was easy to take ... It implied no scorn for nature but a desire to follow at any price at least one of the counsels of the perfect life." Maritain also reported that "one of the great graces of our life was that ... our mutual love was infinitely increased." I stand in awe before such a decision, even as I choose another way for myself. But whatever you think about the Maritains' choice, it hardly seems like repression. They made the choice in full awareness of their sexuality, in full commitment to their relationship. It sounds more like virtue than like innocence.

I ultimately came to reject repression as the best response to my sexuality for the same reason that I rejected indulgence: it fails to satisfy the underlying human needs. Indulgence meets temporary needs but disconnects them from the underlying needs of intimacy. Similarly, repression may give me an escape from an immediate temptation toward lust, but it will not satisfy the state that made me susceptible to lust in the first place.



The only ultimate solution for my sexual needs, I am convinced, will involve finding a balanced and mature way of expressing the full range of my sexuality within my marriage. I experienced sex in its "disconnected" form, as a voyeur of other people's bodies, apart from a relationship. My healing process will surely involve reconnecting that sexual power and energy with the growth toward intimacy it was designed to accompany.

G.K. Chesterton once likened this world to the desert island site of a shipwreck. A sailor awakes from a deep sleep and discovered treasure strewn about, relics from a civilization he can barely remember. One by one he picks up the relics - gold coins, a compass, fine clothing - and tries to discern their meaning. According to Chesterton, fallen humanity is in such a state. Good things on earth still bear traces of their original purpose, but each is also subject to misinterpretation or abuse because of fallen, "amnesiac" human nature.

Evil is a kind of subverted echo of goodness and spirituality. Power, a wonderful human gift, can be used for great good or can through violence be used to dominate others. Wealth may lead to charity or to exploitation' delicious food may inspire gratitude or gluttony.

Sexual desire, one of the most powerful "relics" we find on this earth, invites obsession. When we experience sexual desires, it seems only right to follow where they lead. As the modern song puts it, "It can't be wrong when it feels so right."

John J. McNeill, the Jesuit psychotherapist who was expelled from his order for his teachings in his ministry to gay people, wrote, "I was convinced that what is bad psychologically has to be bad theologically and that, conversely, whatever is good theologically is certainly good psychologically." McNeill then concluded, "Every human being has a God-given right to sexual love and intimacy."

McNeill's philosophy sounds very appealing. Who could argue against our psychological good corresponding to our theological good? His philosophy has only one basic problem: If I am the one determining my psychological good, there will be no end to my rationalization. A bulimic teenager may, for example, determine that vomiting will make her feel better psychologically, and thus starve herself to death. An alcoholic may determine that one more pint of Scotch would provide oh so much psychological relief.

The problem is that we are the problem. The good things on earth - food, drink, sex, recognition, power, wealth - are not spoiled; we are. They are relics of Eden. But our amnesia affects our very ability to determine their proper use.

Christians, of course, believe that we have a message from the one who designed the relics, the ship, and the sailor. That message teaches us that sex is tied to relationship, and desire finds its best and most satisfying fulfillment within marriage. It's a message I do not always like, and one I have often rebelled against. But I am convinced it is true. And thus the only hope for me to find balance and maturity in my sex life is to pray and work toward a healthy marriage relationship, which includes sex.

The authors of the best-selling book "Habits of the Heart" reported that, of all the people they interviewed, only evangelical Christians were able to articulate a reason for continuing to believe in marriage. We have been given a message from God that connects and gives meaning to such things as physical desire, gender differences, reproduction, love and mutual sacrifice.

I now see the challenge before me as a process of reconnecting what, during my addiction to lust, I had so tragically separated. Can my physical desire for my wife develop along with my desire for union with her

emotionally, and even spiritually? Can our experience of union, interpenetration, and shared pleasure convey the very deep spiritual - more, sacramental - significance that lies at the heart of a Christian view of marriage?

I would like to conclude with a glowing profile of how that has been accomplished in my marriage. I cannot, not yet. My wife and I are both committed to that goal, and we both seek it. We will continue to seek it even as we recover from the distrust and distance that entered our lives during my addiction to lust.

### *Easy Lie Or Hard Truth*

I tremble to say this in an age when anyone who focuses on the differences between the sexes is held up to ridicule, but I am convinced that the experience of lust is one in which gender differences stand out strongest. The same Kinsey Institute survey that discovered almost half the male homosexuals in San Francisco had more than 500 partners also revealed that more than half the gay white women surveyed had had less than ten sexual partners. Most of those women rarely had casual sex and tended toward monogamy with one gay partner.

The striking difference in statistics might shed light on this whole issue of lust. Wives wrote to me confessing that my article had touched on an area of great conflict in their marriages. When their husbands had admitted some acquaintance with pornography, the wives found that disgusting and perverted.

I would not attempt a theory on why sexual aggression and lust seem more of a danger to men than to women. But the picture comes clear if you simply compare the number of porno magazines directed toward men with those directed toward women. Or, simply stand outside an adult movie theater and count the number of men and women who enter. The compulsive thirst for sexuality that leads to the voyeurism seems to fall more within the male domain. It contains within it an element of sexual aggression that seems foreign to most women.

What does a man want in sex? What need was being met in the days when I would fawn over photos of women I would never meet? What lay behind the appeal? Pastors' wives wrote to ask me the question, and in turn I have asked it of myself.

Here is the answer that seems closest to me. In sex, I want to feel welcome. I want to feel accepted, not rejected. In some primal sense, I want to feel like a conquering king, like a warrior (and I know how out of fashion those images are in this liberated age).

Yet ironically, sex combines aggression and insecurity in a precarious balance. I think most women would be surprised to learn how intimidating, even terrifying, sex is for many men. Pornography lowers the terror. It's an easy form of arousal. And the key to the arousal is the illusion of welcoming. Miss October arches her back and spreads her legs. Beautiful women from around the globe smile at me, beckon me to enjoy them.

Real life is never so easy. Sex comes, for the most of us, after months or years of courtship. There is romance, yet, but there is also conflict, and boredom, and incompatibility. The woman I desire is busy asserting herself, seeking her identity, fending off a culture that tends to treat her like a sex object. She has kids around the house, a career to juggle with her other chores, and financial hassles. Unlike Miss October, she doesn't spend all day preparing herself to look appealing and available.

So I am left with an easy lie or a hard truth. The easy lie is the illusion of pornography. It offers its own rewards, and I would be dishonest if I said its appeal eventually vanishes. It doesn't. I miss the thrill that lust used to provide me, just as a recovered drug addict misses the highs he once experienced. How can sex in marriage, complicated by real-life commitments, intricacies of compatibility, and the inconveniences of children, possibly compete with the illusory thrills of Playboy women?

But there is a hard truth suggested by Chesterton's analogy of the shipwreck. Why are we here? Are we on earth primarily to experience pleasure, to have fun? If so, Christianity, with its offer of a cross and sacrificial love and concern for the weak and the poor, seems pretty thin. If we are here for no real reason, why go through all the bother of trying to connect glandular desire with lofty goals like intimacy and marriage?

Or are we here on a mission? Are we indeed creatures who will best find fulfillment by living up to the demands of the Creator? If the latter, then the thrills offered by the easy lie of pornography will not permanently satisfy. Indulgence is not an option for me, and neither is repression. I have only one option: to seek God with all my heart, so that God may continue his process of healing and bring me to sexual fulfillment - at home, with my wife, where I belong.

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