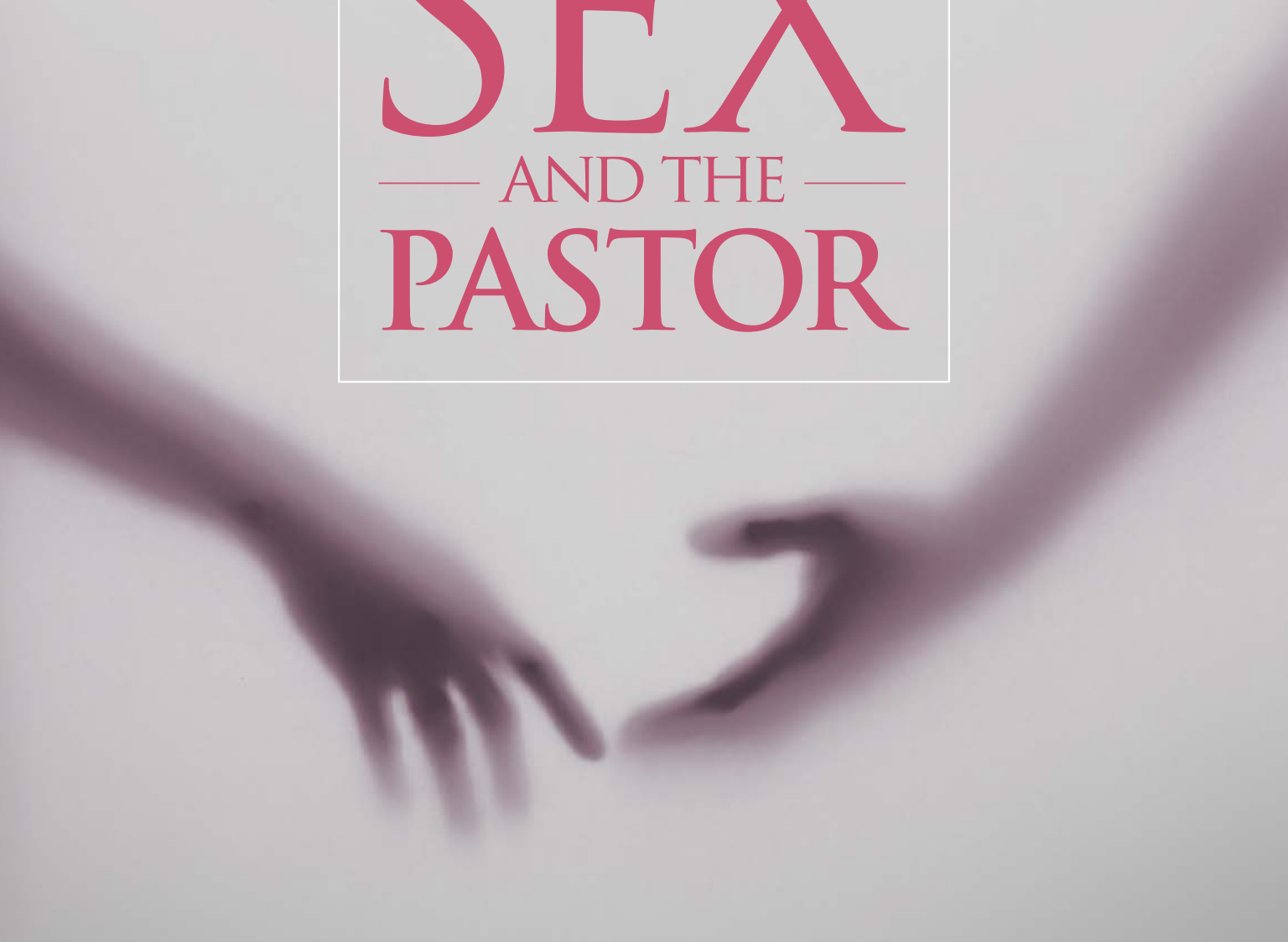


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## SEX — AND THE — PASTOR





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*"In every aspect of life, we all need that patient listening ear of a person whom we trust."*

### Still appreciating

I have very much appreciated receiving and reading your monthly publication. Recently I received the November issue and was greatly taken by the article written by Torben Bergland entitled "Fired up or burned out?"

My wife and I work as the International Member Care coordinators in our Mission and are keenly aware of the stress, overload, and burnout potential within our workers. I would be very grateful if I could obtain permission to quote some of the text from Torben's article along with an acknowledgment to him for an in-house article I am preparing.

And thanks again for a great periodical.

—Allen Teal, WORLD OUTREACH International

### Still sharing

I just read "Paid in Full" that is in your January magazine. Pavel Goia's testimony is so powerful that I would love to be able to share it. Our church sends out a weekly email that contains a devotion. I was wondering if it is possible to share this as the devotion. Thank you for sharing it with us!

—Liz Martin, Christ Church, a United Methodist Congregation, Racine, Wisconsin, United States

### Still relevant?

I valued the November 2018 guest editorial (Peter N. Landless, "Our

work is not yet done") very much but as a retired minister aged 81 I wondered whether the title is still relevant. In this process of aging there is sense of one's ministry no longer being valid. But I would like to make a case for the continued use of life experience.

I can recall from those times of active ministry when I sought the wisdom and support of senior retired members of the profession. In every aspect of life, we all need that patient listening ear of a person whom we trust. Retired clergy can often provide that "priestly" role.

—J. Lawson, Perthshire, Scotland

### Response from author

I fully agree that retired clergy can be of great benefit as mentors and, yes, priests to those serving in one of the loneliest professions of all—pastoring! This role not only benefits those served and mentored, but very positively benefits the wholistic health of the one doing the mentoring. Of course, the mentors need to be measured, circumspect, and respectful in communicating the wonderful experience gained, often through lifetimes of selfless service. But we should encourage careful, intentional, and positive mentoring from one of our greatest resources: our retired pastors who so often have much to offer—if granted the opportunity.

—Peter Landless

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Jeffrey O. Brown, PhD, is associate editor of *Ministry*.



# “I don’t know”

When I was studying at Andrews University, we had a guest speaker for chapel. His name was Charles Wittschiebe, author of *God Invented Sex*. During the question and answer period, a student asked, “Doc, at what age does a man’s sex drive taper off?” Dr. Wittschiebe, who I suppose was in his eighties, replied, “I don’t know.”

Perhaps there is a time to know and a time not to know.

The class was called Old Testament Theology. The professor was the famed Gerhard Hasel, whose book *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*<sup>1</sup> has been the standard text in seminaries across denominations. We were required to choose a book of the Old Testament and write a theology of it; a sermon on it; and a children’s story from it. I decided to look for a very small book of the Bible. I chose the Song of Solomon. I realized how much I didn’t know when I went to the library only to discover that volumes had been written on that small book with just eight chapters. In fact, in the Anchor Bible series, the fattest commentary—because of the multitude of interpretations of

the writer’s message—was the Song of Solomon. I groaned. When my friends asked me why I had selected the Song of Solomon, I replied, “I don’t know.”

But then I saw the beauty of the book. In my paper, I wrote that while the book did have undoubted spiritual implications, first and foremost Song of Solomon was about the love between a man and a woman; and human love at its zenith, I said, is divine.

I thought that was profound; my professor didn’t. He wanted me to say that the book was about God’s love for the church. I’m not bitter about the fact that he gave me a B. In fact, I’ve forgotten all about it (smile). But I haven’t forgotten the profound impact that book had on me. The commentaries said that the book of the Bible pastors preach least from is the Song of Solomon.

My wife, Pattiejean, and I spoke at a pastors and spouses retreat a couple of years ago in Montego Bay, Jamaica, alongside Dr. Alanzo Smith and Dr. June Smith from New York. It was the first time I had heard anybody preach from the Song of Solomon. With humor and transparency, the Smiths expounded

on the beauty and passion that God intended for marital love. I learned that day not to just focus on sex with its warnings and prohibitions, restrictions and limitations—but to lift up the joy, the fun, and the ecstasy of God’s gift of marital sex. We are called to preach it and to model it. And if we fall—and grace gives us a second chance, and a third chance—recommit to God’s standards on intimacy: abstinence before marriage and faithfulness in marriage.

Dr. Wittschiebe tells the story of a successful pastor who told him, “You know what I do sometimes, Charlie? I call my wife from the office and ask, ‘Is your husband home?’ She says, ‘No.’ So I say, ‘I’ll be right over!’”<sup>2</sup> We are God’s servants, and sex is God’s gift. Can you, with your spouse, celebrate the gift by teasing each other, pleasing each other, and just enjoying each other? Then one day your children may ask, “When are you guys going to stop all that stuff?” And you can reply, “I don’t know.”

1 Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

2 Norma Sahlin and Charles Wittschiebe, “Shepherdess: Ministers and Their Wives,” *Ministry*, October 1981.

## Suggested books for romantic intimacy

- Song of Solomon (read it in *The Message* paraphrase!)
- Driscoll, Mark, and Grace Driscoll. *Real Marriage: The Truth About Sex, Friendship, and Life Together*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012.
- Leman, Kevin. *Sheet Music: Uncovering the Secrets of Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008.
- Maltz, Wendy, and Larry Maltz. *The Porn Trap: The Essential Guide to Overcoming Problems Caused by Pornography*. New York, NY: Harper, 2008.
- McCluskey, Christopher, and Rachel McCluskey. *When Two Become One: Enhancing Sexual Intimacy in Marriage*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 2004.
- Penner, Clifford, and Joyce Penner. *The Gift of Sex: A Guide to Sexual Fulfillment*. Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2003.
- Rosenau, Douglas. *A Celebration of Sex: A Guide to Enjoying God’s Gift of Sexual Intimacy*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002.
- Shalit, Wendy. *A Return to Modesty: Discovering the Lost Virtue*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2014.
- Waring, Emma. *Seasons of Sex and Intimacy*. Bristol, UK: Hullo Creative, 2018.

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# Sex and the clergy

Pastor John,<sup>1</sup> a progressive, creative thinker and experienced shepherd of the flock, allowed himself to get caught in the web of emotional entrapment. Not only had his ministry been highly successful, his wife, a professional, enjoyed her role as a shepherdess and did her best to keep her family intact and her husband's ministry thriving. Their children enjoyed the serenity of home, appeared emotionally stable, and had many friends. From the outside looking in, one could conclude that the pastor had a healthy relationship with his wife. But on that fateful morning, when he preached that formidable sermon on the family, it laid the foundation for him to become the antagonist in the drama "Sex and the Clergy."

Anna,<sup>2</sup> a beautiful woman, had a winsome personality, an attractive appearance, an enticing smile, and a sensational wink. Unfortunately, however, she had the toxic mix of being charming and cunning, and she used it to her advantage. As she listened to him preaching that powerful sermon on marital fidelity, she mused to herself that he could not be that strong and, from then on, set out on a calculated path to test him. She developed a three-stage approach to accomplish her objective. Her play included:

1. *Befriending the pastor.* Her handshakes were a little longer and firmer, as was her gentle embrace. Her words of affirmation on his appearance, ministry style, sermon

content, and delivery went to his head, as she got to his heart, and their contact developed into a platonic friendship.

2. *Befriending the wife and children.* It is easier to conceal interest in one party when you are friends with the other one. So, she worked her way into the family. Gaining their trust and appearing loyal, she soon became their friend.
3. *Employing fictitious sicknesses.* To have more private moments with the pastor, she faked illness. Frequent pastoral visits encouraged the growing affection that morphed from platonic pastoral care to a sensual affair.

Do not think that pastors are passive victims in such dramas. Pastors, too, are passionate about sex. Unfortunately, these passions, when uncontrolled, have led many well-intended and gifted preachers to make irreparable errors in judgment. How can pastors model and preach healthy sexuality? One effective way is through the Song of Solomon.

## The drama of the Song of Solomon

The Song of Solomon is one of the most misinterpreted books of the Bible, containing four types of drama: periodic, poetic, symbolic, and erotic.

*Aperiodic drama.* Here, the relationship between the king and the bride represents Israel's history: longing for deliverance while in Egypt (Song of Sol. 3:1–5), the Exodus (vv. 6–11),

the conquest of the land (Song of Sol. 4:1–15), idolatry (Song of Sol. 5:2–8), correction by prophets (v. 7), repentance (Song of Sol. 6:1–3), restoration (vv. 11–13), and the return from exile (Song of Sol. 8:5–7).

*A poetic drama.* Authors, composers, and, yes, lovers have all drawn from the poetic composition of the biblical book Song of Solomon. James Hamilton believes that Solomon is "not presenting historical narrative but idealized poetry."<sup>3</sup> In this poem, Solomon is portrayed as a new Adam who, through love and forgiveness, reverses the Edenic curse and restores God's original intention for marriage. The Song of Solomon, therefore, is seen as "a stunning renewal of Eden's lost glory."<sup>4</sup>

*A symbolic drama.* The marriage depicted in the Song of Solomon is viewed as a minidrama of God's relationship with His people. Douglas O'Donnell, a senior lecturer in biblical studies and practical theology at Queensland Theological College, asserts that this song of songs is meant to teach us about both biblical sexuality and God's heart for His people.<sup>5</sup>

*An erotic drama.* The Song of Solomon is about love between a man and a woman in marriage. Wyatt Graham states, "We need to disabuse ourselves of wrong notions of what Song of Songs is about." "In the song, sex and romance are viewed as good, holy, and right." "Song of Songs speaks of legitimate sexual desire for one's love."<sup>6</sup> This latter drama is the one that arrests our attention here.

## The Song of Solomon and romantic attraction

People in love have often employed lyrics from the Song of Solomon to flatter their beloved. Some frequently quoted verses:

- “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine” (Song of Sol. 1:2).<sup>7</sup>
- “Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me” (Song of Sol. 2:13).
- “Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out” (Song of Sol. 1:3).
- “May your breasts be like clusters of grapes on the vine, the fragrance of your breath like apples” (Song of Sol. 7:8).

It is hard to read the Song of Solomon and not experience its sexual attraction. But the biblical book sees its beauty only in the context of the splendor of marriage and not otherwise. Many people can identify with such romantic verses; they help to enhance romantic attraction and amorous conversations. And one should not deny clergy such passionate feelings and expressions. Sex for them should not be a dull, inhibited, and sinful thing. Rather, it should be an invigorating, romantic, and wholesome experience. The Song of Solomon is speaking to the heart of “clergy passion” in the context of marriage. And rightly so, because it was God who designed sex for His people, including the clergy, but only within the context of holy matrimony.

### Clergy ethics

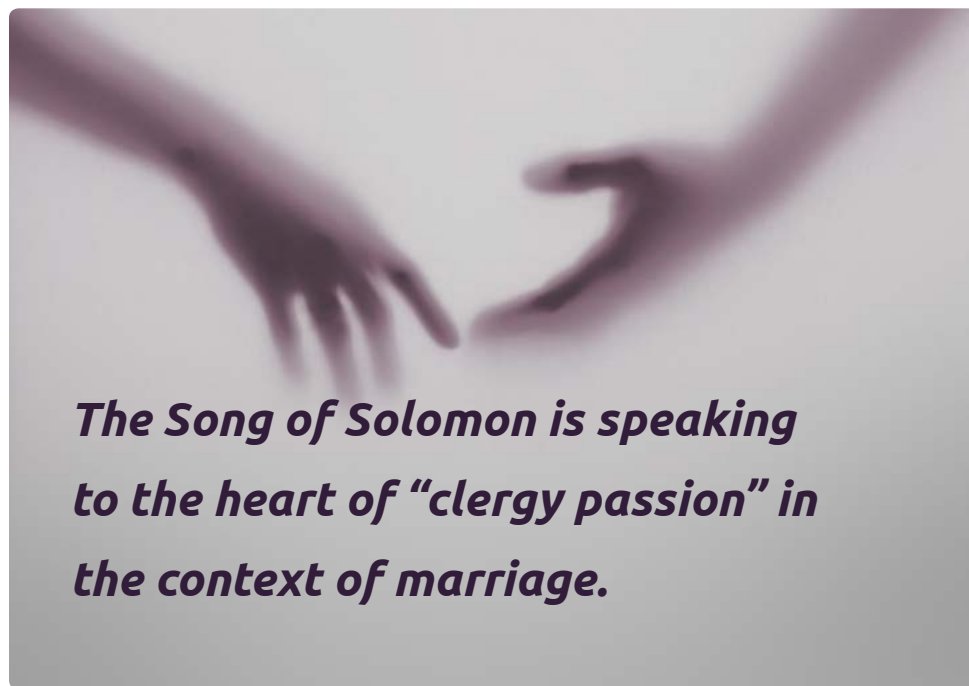
John’s failure was not Anna’s doing but a consequence of his miscalculated and misplaced romantic expression, enhanced by a lack of ethical and professional judgment. Ellen White says, “When men, standing ‘in Christ’s stead’ . . . to speak to the people God’s message of mercy and reconciliation, use their sacred calling as a cloak for selfish or sensual gratification, they make

themselves the most effective agents of Satan.”<sup>8</sup> In the light of this statement, here are some possible miscalculations a pastor can make and their results:

- a breakdown in marital commitment
- failure to count the cost to one’s ministry, integrity, and future
- unawareness of the emotional wounds inflicted on parishioners, friends, family, and society
- the mental, emotional, and psychological pain caused to one’s spouse
- allowing spirituality to fade
- giving the enemy cause to blaspheme God’s name
- a dying relationship with God
- ignoring the spiritual cost to members who could become discouraged by the pastor’s behavior

topic of sex and the clergy reveals the prevalence of the problem. One article recounts that almost 700 clergy from one denomination in a single state face accusations of sexual immorality.<sup>9</sup> It has become common to view clergy as sexual predators. Some even conclude that more cases get covered up than actually come to light. Unfortunately, this kind of negative portrayal of sex and the clergy creates two problems.

The first problem is clergy inhibition. Hollywood and social media have taken over as the proponents of sexual expression and culture. Because society has concluded that sexuality is a purely secular behavior, they think a secular society should be its chief advocate. That myth drives clergy from discussing it. However, they should be the ones preaching and teaching to their congregants, and to society at large, the sacrosanct nature, purity, beauty,



Professional literature is replete with discussions of clergy sexual mishaps. We are inundated with cases of clergy misconduct. Talk show hosts, late-night comedians, and media have bombarded us with accounts of clergy sexual failures. Research on the

and sensual passion of sex. Instead, some are afraid to use the word sex in any sermon. R. Kent Hughes, professor of practical theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, maintains, “Our culture holds the megaphone when it comes to talking about sex today. Yet

the church has maintained a reputation for keeping quiet, hesitant to teach people about this sacred aspect of life. The Song of Solomon, however, holds nothing back as it sings loudly about the holy practice of sexuality and pushes us into the conversation with godly theology.<sup>10</sup> Understandably, the failures of some have silenced the majority. Public criticisms have repressed the prophetic voice.

Second, too many see the clergy as neophytes to romantic expression. Clearly, if all one hears about sex and the clergy consists of immoral and derogatory innuendoes, then it is understandable why many may regard pastors as incapable of true romantic expression. But let the truth be told that the vast majority of clergy are actually sexually pure, sexually expressive, and romantically inclined. Pastors make their spouses happy by the way they love them, embrace their human beauty, and sexually stimulate them. Such clergy members are human beings who relish the orgasm of the climactic experience, embrace the tenderness of their spouse's body, and savor the feelings of sexual arousal in their marriages. The Song of Solomon experience is theirs: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth"; "May your breasts be like clusters of grapes." The incongruity that sexual expression is a carnal manifestation and therefore needs a carnal mind to explore and express it must be debunked by the fact that sexuality is the Creator's gift to humanity. It lies at the heart of one's spiritual commitment to God to be morally pure. If one can understand sexuality in the context of spirituality, who better than the clergy to write, teach, and practice sexuality as God designed it?

## A paradigmatic shift

Our perception of sex and the clergy needs a paradigmatic shift. Hollywood is not the best authority for human sexuality. Neither is social media or talk show hosts. Sexuality came to us from God and needs a sacred platform. Clergy members are God's spokespeople and should be best equipped to promote

wholesome sexual practice and passion. It is said that one bad apple can spoil the whole barrel, and while it is not true that all clergy members are sexually spoiled, the perception is there. It hampers them from actively preaching and teaching human sexuality in the context of God's gift to humanity.

The time has come for clergy from all walks of life to stand up and speak out. The statement of Ellen G. White rings true: "The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."<sup>11</sup>

"But such a character," she continues, "is not the result of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man." We may apply her observation to the clergy. Is it too audacious to say, "The greatest want of the world today, is the want of clergy who are sexually pure and spiritually connected"? In order for this to happen, they must have the mind of Christ. The apostle Paul summarizes it best by saying, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5, KJV).

## Stand tall

The Song of Solomon provides a classic reminder that God's people, including clergy, were intended to be passionate, romantic beings. Sex is a spiritual function in the marriage of all clergy members. And they must stand tall amidst a corrupt and decadent society. The more social decay we see, the more we should see clergy living with integrity. We owe it to our family; congregants; ministry; society; and, most of all, to our God. He has called us to be light bearers to the world in the areas of modesty, morality, and spirituality. The danger of sex and the clergy lies not in

hot, passionate, lovemaking with his or her spouse—that is normative and expected—or even in preaching and teaching appropriate human sexuality. Rather, it lies in expressing lustful, seductive sexuality outside of marriage.

We must commend those who are able, by His grace, to live up to the integrity of ministry and be bright light bearers to a world that needs examples of men and women with sound moral compasses. Faithful clergy persons must continue to be the forerunners in preaching, teaching, and living the beauty of sexual fidelity. The admonition is that whatever we do, we should "do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31, KJV). Let our mantra be, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things" (Phil. 4:8, KJV).

The plea, therefore, is for clergy to get in touch with their sexuality, be in control, master their affection, and create a beautiful symphony of love and romance in marriage. [V]

1 A pseudonym.

2 A pseudonym.

3 James M. Hamilton Jr., *Song of Songs: A Biblical-Theological, Allegorical, Christological Interpretation* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2015), 45.

4 Ibid., 26. See also Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007).

5 Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon: An Invitation to Intimacy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

6 Wyatt Graham, "Three Ways We Misread Song of Songs," The Gospel Coalition, Canadian edition, August 25, 2017, [ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/three-ways-misread-song-songs/](http://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/three-ways-misread-song-songs/).

7 Unless otherwise noted, Scripture references in this article are from the New International Version.

8 Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958), 580.

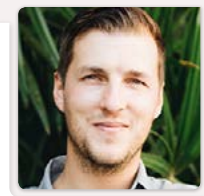
9 Jessica Mouser, "Almost 700 Catholic clergy in Illinois accused of sexual abuse," <https://churchleaders.com/news/340298-almost-700-catholic-clergy-in-illinois-accused-of-sexual-.html#abuse>

10 R. Kent Hughes, "A Word to those who Preach the Word" in Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *The Song of Solomon: An Invitation to Intimacy*, p. 11.

11 Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), 57.



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# Need an accountability partner? #MeToo

In the age of the #MeToo movement<sup>1</sup>, men are being scrutinized more than ever—as they should be.

No man is safe from his own deceptive desires and inappropriate choices. No one is immune. Paul tells us that sin dwells within (Rom. 7:20), yet few of us recognize that temptation to sin is like a roommate that will not move out.

I remember my pastoral counseling professor in seminary sharing about a study of men who had failed in their marriages because of sexual infidelity. Studies of hundreds of these marriages revealed that the one characteristic they had in common was that none of them thought they would ever be sexually promiscuous.<sup>2</sup> When Solomon said, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18, NKJV), some may never have considered it in the context of sexual fidelity, but it can certainly be applied. So, what safeguard can a man with appropriate self-distrust employ to avoid a sexual misstep? This was my story.

One day, as I was about to exit the bathroom at the hospital where I was a chaplain resident, I, being my friendly self, said “Hi” to a man washing his hands next to me. Some people find it strange being friendly with strangers in bathrooms; I do not. He introduced himself as “Pastor Jeff” and stated that he “did accountability.” I found that an odd way to describe one of the roles of

a pastor: “accountability.” After chatting briefly, he asked me to take his number and stay in touch. I am not shy. I can make friends. But even I thought it was odd to share numbers after knowing someone only a few minutes. Yet something prompted me to pursue the friendship.

I texted him later, as promised, so that he would have my number. I said, “Hey Pastor Jeff, it was great to meet you (smiley face). Looking forward to connecting with you.” I received the following reply: “Great to meet you today! I will be praying for you, bro! Any specific prayer requests?”

I did not really know this stranger. I reasoned, *I can choose to be cold and distant, or I can choose to be open and transparent.* I chose the latter. I shared something that had been burdening my mind. He replied that he would be praying for my request, and then he asked the question that changed everything for me: “Do you have an accountability partner?”

In the weeks and months that followed, Pastor Jeff taught me some very simple and very significant lessons. I came to understand that accountability is a willingness to accept responsibility for actions that I take, or refrain from taking, that affect those around me. It is the basic understanding that all persons must answer for their deeds and safeguard the commitments they have

made to themselves and others. I have come to believe that biblical accountability has the potential to radically enrich manhood—and even womanhood, for that matter. Here is how it works.

## The why of accountability

There is a biblical mandate for accountability, comprising several levels:

*Confession to God.* Accountability, involving confession to God, is a biblical mandate founded on 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (NKJV). Here, the apostle John gives clarity regarding how healing happens in accountability.

Some might ask, what sins should they share and what should they keep private? Many point to the advice that some sins should never be uttered to anyone but God.<sup>3</sup> When it comes to habitual sins that have engulfed our lives, these need to be confessed to God, and then we need to seek the support of an accountability partner. The act of keeping those sins secret did not help make you a “bondservant of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 1:1, NKJV)—but rather a bondservant to sin. The goal is to become more and more like Christ as one becomes more intentional with thoughts, actions, and words.

*Confession to each other.* Accountability, involving confession to each other, is a biblical mandate founded on James 5:16: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed” (KJV). Such confession is directed to the one who has been wronged by you. When we have confessed our faults and are fully exposed, we go to God in prayer. Pray for each other and plead the blood of Jesus’ death on the cross for each specific area. The absolutely amazing reality is that, after confession, forgiveness is ours when we ask for it.

*Support for each other.* Accountability, involving support for each other, is a biblical mandate

him down, as it were.”<sup>4</sup> These were more than friends; they were accountability partners. Green declared, “I keep myself accountable to my friends. . . . They are the pit crew to my race car, and they always get me back on track.”<sup>5</sup>

### The what of accountability

Paul declares, “It was a beautiful thing that you came alongside me in my troubles” (Phil. 4:14, *The Message*). Partnership in accountability requires the following:

*We are always truthful.* Why ask persons to hold you accountable if you lie to them? The essence of the accountability process is admitting who you

there is an equal playing field. No one is better than the other. Paul writes in Romans 3:23, “All of us have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory” (CEV; emphasis added). We may not have all sinned alike, but alike we have all sinned.

### The who of accountability

So, why not pick an accountability partner right now? Whom you choose is important. It cannot be someone of the opposite sex; neither can it be someone with the same struggle as you. When I was in college, one of my friends told me that when he was struggling with the issue of premarital sex, he got a call

*I came to understand that accountability is a willingness to accept responsibility for actions that I take, or refrain from taking, that affect those around me.*

founded on 1 Corinthians 12:26: “If one member suffers, all suffer together” (ESV). This accountability is an agreement to walk the Christian journey together (Amos 3:3). Solomon acknowledges that “a righteous man may fall seven times and rise again” (Prov. 14:16, NKJV). He does not get up by himself, however. It was the Preacher who said, “But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!” (Eccl. 4:10, ESV). We must recognize that we are our brother’s keeper, called to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2, ESV).

Former Los Angeles Lakers basketball star A. C. Green was known not only for his physical skills on the court, but for his moral strength off the court. “I get a lot of late-night calls from women . . . I’m not saying I don’t get tempted. I’m human. I get weak. But I have my tricks.” He says one is to call his closest Christian friends and have them talk

are and what you have done—without masks. We do not confess our sins to be forgiven by a fellow human being, we confess our faults to become bonded in the support of one another’s weaknesses.

*We are always confidential.* Confession is “to each another,” meaning it is reciprocal, between the two of you. Trust is essential to this process, otherwise accountability falls apart. It requires enormous vulnerability. There is risk, but there is also reward. Being vulnerable to someone is something most of us fear, particularly in the area of our weaknesses. Yet it carries enormous freedom when we embrace that both of us are lost—“no one does good,” (Psalm 14:3, NLT)—and both of us need Jesus, the Listener and the Healer.

*We are always accepting.* We never judge each other. There is one Judge in heaven and many government judges on earth, but between two persons

from a friend who was supposed to be holding him accountable. They both had sex with their girlfriends that night.

Choose someone you trust and respect, possibly older and mature in the faith, even someone who has found victory over what you are struggling with. While it is great to be honest with a good friend, you want someone whom you can admire and who can hold you accountable to rise to a higher standard.

### The how of accountability

Now the actual process of accountability begins. It is based on one baseline question asked six different ways in relation to the body: eyes, ears, mind, hands, feet, and mouth. “When was the last time your (insert one of the six) did something it should not have?” For example, “When was the last time your mind thought what it should not have?” Or “When was the last time your

feet went where they should not have?” Each person asks the other all six questions. It can be intense, uncomfortable, and absolutely embarrassing; but it is utterly restorative.

Finally, ask: “Do you *feel* forgiven and cleansed now? Why or why not? Is there something else God might be asking of you?” Feelings are fickle—that is certain—and some things need to be understood without feelings, but there is a place for them. Pay attention to them after your time in prayer, because God can speak through them. For instance, if you do not *feel* any better, could it be because you need to take a stand on an issue you are dealing with, like apologizing, making amends, or some other thing God may be asking of you?

## The when of accountability

Set a time to meet: weekly or biweekly. Some issues may even require daily checking in on one another. But regularity is key. Listen, dialogue, pray, and offer some Scripture to meditate on and memorize, encouraging transformation by the “renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2, KJV). Some people do not mind struggling for years on end with

the same sin, but I want to grow more and more like Jesus, sooner and sooner.

While the practice of becoming more like Jesus may take a lifetime, change can be realized much sooner for those who yearn for it. I would rather have surgery sooner for a life-threatening disease than wait too long and die a premature death. Many are dying prematurely from bottled up stressors such as financial blunders, broken relationships with others, and a broken relationship with God. David writes in Psalm 7:12, 13, “If a man does not repent, God will whet his sword; he has bent and readied his bow; he has prepared for him his deadly weapons, making his arrows fiery shafts” (ESV). It is so much better to repent now and face the unfortunate consequences that may come from telling the truth—than to face God’s retribution and lose eternal life.

## The where of accountability

The need for accountability can confront you anywhere, at any stage of your life. Some time ago, I met a friend at a Christian event. We had not seen each other since college days. He was married with children. I watched him laughing and holding his two children. I felt impressed to share with him about accountability and what God had done in my life. He did not seem interested at all, but I gave him a small sheet of paper with some of the guidelines, and we parted ways. I got a call the next day from him asking, “Filip, were you serious about what you said about accountability?” We spent two hours on the phone as he recounted his fall from grace, getting into a sexual affair with a coworker. What I found most fascinating was how, the morning that the temptation birthed into sin, he had had the most meaningful prayer time with God.

As strange as I felt that afternoon with that encounter with Pastor Jeff, that text message was what I needed. I knew it, Pastor Jeff seemed to know it, and God definitely knew it because I think He orchestrated that strange

encounter. You see, at the time, I had fallen into making some choices I was not proud of, and I needed accountability more than ever. “Pastor Jeff who does accountability” altered my reality in a way that I needed.

By the way, “Pastor Jeff who does accountability” is actually the senior pastor of an incredibly engaging church in the city that I lived in at the time. He hosts monthly meetings with the fire and police departments, other major nonprofits, and church leaders on how to make the city a better place. He regularly meets with the governor regarding social justice issues, is on the boards of various organizations, leads countless Bible and outreach programs, and preaches multiple times a week. Yet he has a heart for strengthening men along the way.

There are so many more essential principles one should follow, such as daily walking with Jesus, fostering a healthy marriage, and exercise. But one thing is certain, we need one another in this journey of restoration. We were made for community and healing. Who might God need you to be shepherding? Might you need your life altered by accountability? I discovered my need for an accountability partner. I hope you can say, #MeToo. <sup>1</sup>

## Accountability questions

### When was the last time your ( . . . ) should not have?

1. *Eyes intentionally looked for what they*
2. *Ears intentionally listened to what they*
3. *Mind intentionally entertained what it*
4. *Hands intentionally touched what they*
5. *Feet intentionally went where they*
6. *Mouth intentionally spoke what it*

- 1 “The Me Too movement (or #MeToo movement), with a large variety of local and international alternative names, is a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault.” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me\\_Too\\_movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Me_Too_movement)
- 2 See J. Allan Petersen, *The Myth of the Greener Grass: Affair-Proof Your Marriage; Restore Your Love; Recover Your Dreams* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1984).
- 3 “Many, many confessions should never be spoken in the hearing of mortals; for the result is that which the limited judgment of finite beings does not anticipate . . . God will be better glorified if we confess the secret, inbred corruption of the heart to Jesus alone than if we open its recesses to finite, erring man.” Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2013), 72.
- 4 Rick Reilly, “The NBA Player Who Has Never Scored,” *Sports Illustrated*, December 9, 1999. <https://www.si.com/vault/1999/12/13/271228/the-nba-player-who-has-never-scored>
- 5 A. C. Green, *Victory: The Principles of Championship Living* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1994), 52.

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# *“Whosoever will . . .”* Embracing everyone

**P**reviously I published an article in *Ministry* about personal happiness, self-fulfillment, and homosexuality in the church.<sup>1</sup> A friend of mine challenged me to write about how the church can minister to persons with same-sex attraction in a healthy way. I decided to accept the challenge, but in the process the focus became extended to all who have strong urgings for sexual relationships outside the biblical description of the gift of sex as properly expressed only in a marriage relationship between a man and a woman (Gen. 2:22–25; Eph. 5:22–33; Col. 3:18, 19; 1 Peter 3:1–7).<sup>2</sup> So the ideas expressed in this article would apply to heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals.

I have intentionally excluded discussing ministry to those who are transgender or pedophiles—the former because the Bible seems to say little, if anything, on the subject (we need more research on this topic) and the latter because safety issues for children and the laws of certain countries make that type of ministry much more complicated. There is a need for separate articles on both of these areas of ministry.

The Bible clearly calls Christians to minister to, and to invite to discipleship, all persons in the world (Matt. 28:19, 20; Rev. 14:6). This includes persons who have sexual attractions that are outside

the biblical design, whether they act on those desires or not. We do not have the option to ignore, reject, or marginalize them (nor should we do this to anyone else; all people are important to God). So the question becomes, how do we make room for everyone?

There are at least three levels of relationship that the church has with persons who struggle in the area of sexual expression. The order in which I present these levels is from what is probably the least controversial to the most. The first level involves the basic way we should relate to all human beings, the second discusses persons who are guests and attendees at church activities, and the third addresses official membership in the church organization. All three of these levels relate to how people belong to the community of faith.

## **Our responsibility to love everyone**

This first level requires that, as Christians, we are to treat everyone with dignity, respect, and value because through Creation and Redemption, all are valuable and precious to God. Paul says that God created all humans from one original human (Acts 17:26); and Jesus died for every person on the planet (John 3:16). There is simply no room for any type of physical violence, abuse, disrespect, scorn, ridicule,

belittling, marginalizing, or demeaning of anyone who struggles with sexual temptations or orientation. Jesus’ example as He related to the woman caught in adultery (John 8) and the woman at the well (John 4) should be normative for believers today.

Unfortunately, there have been a few Christians (and a few congregations) that have conducted shameful demonstrations that used derisive terms and remarks to demean homosexuals and others. This is always wrong, and as church leaders and congregations, we should rebuke such activities as un-Christian and immoral. We must make room for everyone to be treated with kindness and love, as members of the human race created in the image of God.

For some, it may be a struggle to see everyone as valuable and worthy of respect. Because of expressions of contempt that they have observed in others, they may wrestle to reject such attitudes. But as disciples of Jesus, we must battle against such expressions. One day, I took my wife on the train from Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA, where we live, to Chicago, Illinois, for her birthday. After several stops, it became clear from the clothing some passengers were wearing and signs others held that they were going to attend a gay pride parade. Later, as we tried to make our way to a favorite restaurant,



we actually walked along the parade route. I must admit that at first, when I realized what was happening, some uneasy feelings arose in my heart. But as I thought about it, I saw that these feelings were unfounded. The people on the train and at the parade were, first and foremost, people. And, except for their sexual orientation, they were in many respects just like me. With these thoughts, the ill feelings disappeared. As Christians, we have an obligation to fight the temptation to see persons as “less than.” Viewing people as less valuable is the foundation for abuse and marginalization.

I would think that most would agree with what I have said here, that we should value all persons and treat them with respect, including those whose sexual urges or practices are outside the biblical norm. There is probably not much controversy here. Then there is a second level of relationship.

### **Our responsibility to welcome everyone**

Many years ago, I had the privilege of ministering to a young man who had contracted AIDS. Some of his family members were Seventh-day Adventists, and they asked me, as an Adventist pastor, to visit with him. So I went to his home. We developed a friendship, and he began to attend our church. The members graciously received him as their guest. After a few more weeks, this young man went to the hospital; it was to be his last journey. As I visited him in his room, we shared Bible passages, talked about spiritual things, and prayed together. He was very open to God and His love. I cannot say what the man’s eternal destiny will be, but that is not the point. I was able to share God’s grace and love with him and to relate to him as a fellow human being, not as a “spiritual superior”—both of us unworthy but thankful for God’s grace and mercy.

This second level of relationship may evoke more disagreement—but probably not to a high degree. We want to welcome everyone as guests to our services and activities. So whether a

person is acting sexually outside the biblical ideal or is resisting those strong temptations, we want them to attend the church’s Bible study services, worship services, prayer meetings, social activities, community service activities, fellowship dinners, evangelistic meetings, baptismal services, and small groups. Participation in the Communion service may cause some members to demur. However, Jesus allowed Judas, an active thief in the process of betraying Jesus, to participate. But aside from

would deny the second. But if temptation is not sin (Jesus was tempted in the wilderness), then how can we exclude from membership those who, by God’s grace, do not act on the temptation? We all are tempted in some way, although perhaps not sexually.

To exclude anyone is at times difficult, especially if that person is a member of our family or a beloved friend. But the Word and church practice (at least in theory) require that those engaging sexually outside of

*As Christ’s followers, we are called to love people of any ilk with kindness, respect, and honor, even if some of their ideas or actions may be unacceptable to the church.*

Communion, I think the vast majority would welcome all persons to the church’s activities.

### **Our responsibility to include everyone**

This is the tough one. This is where the level of disagreement is higher. Can a person who has sexual urges and attractions that differ from the biblical model be a member of the church? Based on the Bible and church statements, there are two answers. For those who are not acting on their urges and attractions, the answer is yes. There is no sin in the temptation.<sup>3</sup> For those who are sexually active outside of biblical marriage (i.e., marriage between a man and a woman), the answer is no.<sup>4</sup>

I realize that there may be persons, even in the church, who would disagree with the first answer and others who

biblical marriage are not to hold church membership. It is true that, at times, congregations seem less concerned when a heterosexual person is improperly active in sexual relationships than if a homosexual individual is sexually active. Some seem to “tolerate” one more than the other. But to be fair, both should be treated the same way.

So, if we do not allow such persons to hold formal membership in the church organization, how do we minister to them? Here, I want to explore an idea that I am not certain about myself. I suggest it, not as the answer but to spark critical thinking and dialogue. Would it be fruitful to pursue ways of ministering to people who are sexually active outside the biblical marriage model that do not include official membership yet create a level of belonging? Do we need spaces outside official organizational entities

to minister to some groups of people? Or would it be better to create areas of belonging in the current structure that do not include official membership?<sup>5</sup>

I am the first to admit that these ideas have some potential drawbacks. The main one is the danger of stigmatizing or even ostracizing men and women. Memories of the lepers in Jesus' day and their cry "Unclean!" remind us to be extremely careful. The tension is between embracing people in love and acceptance and incorporating them into the church family without condoning particular behaviors. The solution is not easy to find.

An illustration of how this might look is the Little Flowers Community established by Jamie and Kim Arpin-Ricci in Winnipeg, Canada.<sup>6</sup> From the Anglican tradition, this couple felt called to develop a community that really lived the principles of Jesus' sermon on the mount. Arpin-Ricci shares how the Little Flowers Community implements this teaching of Jesus when it comes to the question of who belongs to the community. Based on Mark 9:24, where the father asks Christ to heal his son ("Lord, I believe; help my unbelief"), and John 8, where Jesus addresses the sins of the "members," first, and then those of the woman caught in adultery, Arpin-Ricci defines a different paradigm of belonging that is embraced in his community.

According to this paradigm, Jesus accepts persons the moment the seed of faith is planted in their heart, even though that seed has not yet borne the fruit of correct behavior. The Little Flowers Community focuses on the hearts of these participants (they are not official members of the denomination, only informal members of the community), encouraging them to live the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. This provides the "soil of belonging," where the seed of faith can grow in the hearts and lives of those new to Christ. Only then can the "little flowers" of correct behavior bud and bloom in the lives of these growing Christians.

So for this church community, people become part of the group by accepting Jesus and a willingness to

grow in the living out of the principles of Jesus' sermon. This approach to community relationship (not to denominational membership) is different from the traditional one that requires a certain level of right behavior (practices) before one can belong to the community.

While it may not be possible or desirable to embed this model within organizations that have different requirements for belonging, it may be fruitful to explore whether there is light in creating a space for certain people groups that do not seem to currently have a place in the organizational structure. In these situations a home might be created for them (without official membership in the denomination) where they could belong to a community that seeks Jesus. The hope would be that, as they learn to love Christ and submit their lives totally to Him, the day would come when their growth in Christian lifestyle would allow official membership in the organization. Much prayer, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and biblical principles would be needed in such an endeavor.

### Let them come

Of course, not everyone will accept our love, our invitation, or our attempts to include them. Like the rich young ruler, some will walk away from the community of faith as it reaches out in love. But as Christ's followers, we are called to love people of any ilk with kindness, respect, and honor, even if some of their ideas or actions may be unacceptable to the church. And we certainly want to invite all to participate in our services and activities; we want to be as inclusive as we can. The issue of organizational membership is difficult. This third level is the most controversial. But we must find ways to include those whose sexual lifestyle is outside the teaching of Scripture, without violating biblical principle.

This can happen, by God's grace. But it will require us to be creative, self-sacrificing, and willing to adjust how we do church in order to widen the circle of belonging. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say,

Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17, KJV). The mandate is clear: "'As I have loved you, so you must love one another'" (John 13:34, NIV). And how has He loved us? "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, NIV). We can do no less. ❧

- 1 David Penno, "Personal Happiness, Self-fulfillment, and Homosexuality in the Church," *Ministry*, June 2016, 25–27.
- 2 "Homosexuality, adultery, fornication, and other sexual temptations are not sins because they run counter to nature. They are sins because they . . . contradict our loving creator's original design of one man and one woman in covenant relationship for a lifetime." J. K. Jones, "The Struggles of Henri," *Christian Standard*, February 5, 2015, christianstandard.com/2015/02/the-struggles-of-henri/.
- 3 "Scripture condemns heterosexual immorality no less than homosexual practice. . . . While homosexuality is a distortion of the Edenic ideal, 'there is no condemnation' for homosexually oriented persons as long as they are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1) and do not harbor or act upon their orientation and propensities. The same principle applies to those who struggle with heterosexual immorality (see Matt 5:27–28; Rom 6:1–23; 8:1–4; Col 3:1–10; James 1:14–15). Even as some individuals may experience a miraculous deliverance from sinful heterosexual and homosexual urges, others may have to wrestle with such tendencies all their lives (see Gal 5:16–25). One is not culpable for these involuntary tendencies, but for acting upon them either in imagination or actual practice." "An Understanding of the Biblical View on Homosexual Practice and Pastoral Care" (position paper, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, October 9, 2015), andrews.edu/sem/about/statements/seminary-statement-on-homosexuality-edited-10-8-15-jm-final.pdf.
- 4 "It is inconsistent with the Church's understanding of scriptural teaching to admit into or maintain in membership persons practicing sexual behaviors incompatible with biblical teachings." "Responding to Changing Cultural Attitudes Regarding Homosexual and Other Alternative Sexual Practices," Seventh-day Adventist Church Official Statements: Guidelines, April 8, 2014, adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/responding-to-changing-cultural-attitudes-regarding-homosexual-and-other-alternative-sexual-practices/.
- 5 Another group that might benefit from such intermediate levels of belonging would be those with severe mental incapacities. It is difficult to accept into church membership persons who cannot comprehend key doctrines or who are unable to value and practice certain important aspects of an Adventist lifestyle (Sabbath-keeping, unclean meat, smoking, alcohol, etc.).
- 6 Jamie Arpin-Ricci, *The Cost of Community: Jesus, St. Francis and Life in the Kingdom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 2011.



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# A theology of sexual intimacy<sup>1</sup>

Sex has been given by God as a divinely unique and extraordinary gift for a man and a woman to share together in celebration of their oneness in marriage (Gen. 2:25). Tim Alan Gardner wrote: “Sexual intimacy is a spiritual, even mystical, experience in which two bodies become ‘one.’ Sex, really, is holy, a sacred place shared in the intimacy of marriage. And it’s an act of worship, too—a sacrament of marriage that invites and welcomes the presence of God.”<sup>2</sup> Sex is holy because it is in sex, in the unity of both male and female, that the full image of God is represented.<sup>3</sup>

However, because of sin (Rom. 3:23), sex has been misused and abused (Rom. 1:24, 25). The Bible admonishes us to be sexually pure. Sex must not be stirred up or awakened until the time is right (Song of Sol. 8:4). Premarital and extramarital sex are condemned (1 Cor. 6:13–18; 1 Thess. 4:3). Pornography distorts God’s gift of sex, which should be shared only within the bounds of marriage (1 Cor. 7:2, 3). Scripture also condemns adultery (Lev 18:20), incest (Deut. 18:6–18), and prostitution (Deut. 23:17, 18).

A biblical theology of sexual intimacy must recognize that sexual intimacy has exclusive purposes. First, it establishes the one-flesh union (Gen. 2:24, 25; Matt. 19:4–6). Second, it provides for sexual intimacy within the marriage bond. The word “know”

indicates a profound sense of sexual intimacy (Gen. 4:1). Third, sexual intercourse is for the mutual pleasure between husband and wife (Prov. 5:18, 19).

## Differentiate sex drive from lust

God made us as sexual creatures and wired us with this incredible thing we call a sex drive. The desire for sex is one of humanity’s basic physical drives.<sup>4</sup> “Be fruitful and multiply,” God commanded humankind (Gen. 9:7). Just as He gave us an appetite for food, He gave us an appetite for sex not only for procreation but also for sexual pleasure and intimacy within the context of marriage.

This sex drive is not dirty, it is not unclean, and it is not lust. Joshua Harris, in his book *Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is)*, offers these insights on what lust is not:

- It is not lust to be attracted to someone or notice that he or she is good-looking.
- It is not lust to have a strong desire to have sex.
- It is not lust to anticipate and be excited about having sex within marriage.
- It is not lust when a man or woman becomes turned on without any conscious decision to do so.
- It is not lust to experience sexual temptation<sup>5</sup>

God’s standard is high when it comes to lust. “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people” (Eph. 5:3, NIV). Why is God’s standard so high? How can God demand not even a hint of lust when He knows that He made us with strong sex drives?

One of the reasons God calls us to cleanse our lives of lust is because He knows that lust never stays at the level of “just a hint.” Lust craves for more. The result is that lust can never be quenched. As soon as the object of lust is attained, lust wants more.

In Ephesians 4:19, Paul describes this endless cycle of lust. He speaks about those who have turned away from God and says, “Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.”<sup>6</sup> That is the payoff of lust, “a continual lust for more.”

This is the problem with pornography. Pornography never satisfies; it always leaves one wanting more because it is a pseudo-relationship and is empty. God designed our needs to be fulfilled through real relationships. One needs to invest his or her energy in God-given relationships, not relationships built on deception and lust.

When it comes to lust and pornography, God says, “not . . . even a



hint” because we cannot give in to lust’s demands and hope to satisfy it. It always grows. And as it does, lust will rob us of our ability to enjoy true, healthy intimacy and sexual pleasure.

Understanding the distinctions between the sex drive and lust will enable one to develop a hatred for lust and a grateful appreciation for the gift of sexual desire. John Piper explains, “Lust is a sexual desire minus honor and holiness.”<sup>7</sup> When we lust, we take this good thing, sexual desire, and remove from it honor toward fellow humans and reverence for God. Lust is an idolatrous desire that rejects God’s rule and seeks satisfaction apart from Him.<sup>8</sup>

## Develop healthy intimacy

Sex is more than a physical act. Satisfying sex is the reflection of a good relationship. Research indicates that fulfilling sex has at least four separate aspects that work together: verbal, emotional, spiritual, and physical.<sup>9</sup> Thus psychologist Gary Oliver can say, in regard to marriage, “All of life is foreplay.”<sup>10</sup> And *intercourse* literally means “to get to know someone intimately.”<sup>11</sup>

In our culture, we have reduced sex to refer only to the physical act. Equally, we have nearly forgotten a traditional meaning of the verb *to know*—which was “to have sexual intercourse.”<sup>12</sup> The Bible says, “Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived” (Gen. 4:1). The two words *intercourse* and *knowledge* are closely aligned. Healthy intimacy is multidimensional, including:

**Verbal intimacy**—This involves getting to know our mate through conversation and spending time together. Women often want to connect with their partners through verbal intimacy before they can enjoy the physical act. Gary Chapman points out that when it comes to the nature of the sex drive, the female’s drive or desire is far more tied to her emotions than is the man’s. If a woman feels loved by her husband, she may then desire to be sexually intimate with him.<sup>13</sup>

Verbal intimacy enhances a husband’s romance with his wife. A survey asked women to fill in the blank: “If he were more romantic, I would be more inclined to . . .” The answers were: “Be excited to be with him.” “Keep myself looking attractive.” “Find out what he wants; try to help him fulfill his needs.” “Stay with him rather than find a new partner.” “Be in a good mood around him.” “Attend to his sexual needs.”<sup>14</sup>

During verbal intimacy, couples can learn new ways to think and talk about

are often most responsive to sexual intercourse when the entire relationship is open and loving—when they feel that their husband understands and values their feelings.<sup>17</sup>

Louann Brizendine, a UCLA neuropsychiatrist, reports that during a male orgasm, the chemical oxytocin is released into the brain. In women, the same chemical, oxytocin, is released in the brain during meaningful conversation. That means it can be as exciting and pleasurable for a wife to connect

*Anytime another person is physically or emotionally introduced into sexual intimacy, even in one’s imagination, it compromises the purity of marital intimacy.*

their sexuality. They can read books and articles on healthy sexuality. This is one way to avoid the temptation of pornography.

**Emotional intimacy**—Sharing deep feelings with each other is emotional intimacy and it is vital to sexual satisfaction. Bryan Craig points out that one of the most critical factors in the communication process is the ability to identify and understand the feelings being expressed. “Feelings are the gateway to a person’s heart and soul.”<sup>15</sup> Connecting with a spouse’s feelings constitutes the most powerful part of the intimacy process because it brings with it a sense of closeness and vulnerability.<sup>16</sup>

This involves conversations that are linked to emotion with the question, “How does that make you feel?” This is especially significant for women. They

with her husband emotionally as it is for her to connect with him sexually.<sup>18</sup>

**Spiritual intimacy**—Nick Stinnett conducted a highly publicized study at the University of Nebraska. After looking carefully at hundreds of families that considered themselves healthy, his research concluded that healthy families possess six common characteristics. One of those characteristics is “a shared personal faith in God.”<sup>19</sup> Surveys taken by sociologist Andrew Greeley indicate that “frequent sex coupled with frequent prayer make for the most satisfying marriages.”<sup>20</sup>

Spiritual intercourse may be the highest level of intimacy. A husband and wife can know each other as they both turn to God and know Him in a personal, intimate way. Authors Carey and Pam Rosewell Moore point out that “the most important goal of prayer

together is that it keeps our relationship as a couple intimate and close, and it keeps our hearts open before the Lord as a couple. There is a lot of unspoken accountability in our walk with the Lord and with each other.”<sup>21</sup>

Developing and maintaining healthy, intimacy-oriented sexuality is an effective way to avoid yielding to temptations of pornography or sexual activity outside of the marriage of a wife to her husband. In intimacy-oriented sex, nobody is exploited or gets hurt. The sex is shame-free because it is consistent with one’s overall beliefs, values, and goals of life.

## Establish effective boundaries

There are a number of different boundaries we set throughout our lives. They include emotional, social, relational, spiritual, and physical, including sexual, boundaries. Pia Mellody suggests that boundaries serve three primary functions: First, they prevent others from intruding into our personal space or abusing us. Second, they keep us from intruding into the personal space of others and abusing them. Third, they create a framework or structure that provides us with self-identity which defines us as individuals.<sup>22</sup>

In Matthew 5:27, 28, Jesus said, “You have heard it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” In this teaching, Jesus makes it clear that “our thought life is more important than our actions.”<sup>23</sup> Jesus seems to tell us that adultery is more than having an affair with someone other than one’s spouse. It begins in the heart—and God sees the heart and knows our imaginations and intentions (1 Cor. 2:11; Heb. 4:13).

Further, Jesus’ words teach that mental and emotional boundaries are just as important as physical boundaries. The implications of this concept are clear as they relate to pornography, sexually explicit romance novels, and other materials that promote thinking sexually about people other than one’s

spouse. Anytime another person is physically or emotionally introduced into sexual intimacy, even in one’s imagination, it compromises the purity of marital intimacy.

A boundary is what distinguishes us as separate from others, and here are a number of different boundaries we may establish:

**Safety.** Rory Reid and Dan Gray explain that a boundary is like a fence around a home, a boundary protects us from the outside while giving us an area in which we can feel safe. Each individual is his or her own gatekeeper and determines who will be allowed to enter the solemn and sacred aspect of his or her life.<sup>24</sup>

To avoid the temptation of pornography, an appropriate boundary might include installing filters that block out pornographic websites. Those who successfully overcome sexual lust, including pornography, take pains to create safe environments. Safety is found in establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries.

**Abstinence.** Perhaps the most beneficial aspect of establishing boundaries is abstinence itself, saying no to sexual temptation. With regard to pornography, Dennis Frederick offers three helpful and practical steps: “When you are on the computer and feel the temptation to look at pornography, get up and leave. Walk away from the temptation. The same applies to television programs, DVDs, or printed material. Say a prayer and rebuke the pornography and temptation in the name of Jesus. Say it aloud. Call a friend or talk with your wife openly. Create a situation so that you are not alone.”<sup>25</sup>

The question one must ask is this: Is taking care of myself important enough to me that I will do what it takes to make that happen? Robert Bly expressed this concept well when he said, “The making of a man is making your body do what it doesn’t want to do.”<sup>26</sup>

**Transparency.** In marriage relationships, boundaries establish limits that provide the maximum environment for healthy intimacy. Reid and Gray point out that transparency represents how

well we can see beyond the walls that others establish to protect themselves and how well they can see beyond our walls. The boundaries for a spouse are usually more transparent than for any other person. Transparent people allow others to see their true selves.<sup>27</sup>

This transparency can enable spouses to know each other more intimately than individuals outside the marriage relationship. A boundary is violated when a person crosses a line that defines our limits. When a spouse indulges in pornography by seeking sexual gratification outside the marriage relationship, a boundary is violated. Trust is broken. Respect is diminished.<sup>28</sup>

An example of a boundary regarding computer use might be a rule that requires a spouse to report any accidental exposures to pornography while on the computer. If a spouse has been exposed and informs his partner, this experience can be processed and strategies to avoid additional exposure can be established.<sup>29</sup> A good boundary is thus established that eliminates secrets and creates an atmosphere of trust in the home.

## Maintain consistent accountability

There are two reasons why an accountability partner is vital:

1. *The Bible stresses the importance of accountability.* The wise man Solomon wrote: “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken” (Eccl. 4:9–12, NIV).

This is the true essence of what an accountability partner is all about. It is being there for each other to strengthen one another when one is down. It is to pray with and remind each other of the real source of power against temptation and pornography.

2. *Medical science research supports it.* Richard Swenson points out that confession is therapeutic.<sup>30</sup> Researchers have called it the “disclosure effect.” Simply disclosing a problem improves well-being in measurable ways. Thus, confessing faults to one another can be supported biblically and medically.

James declared, “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed” (James 5:16, KJV). Healing can be found in confession of faults to one another. When persons keep their secret lifestyle hidden and known only to themselves, it keeps them in bondage. For men, the only way one can experience the power of God is with other brothers—by confessing, sharing, and opening his wounds. When a person does not have to hide those wounds and sins anymore, those sins lose a lot of their power.<sup>31</sup> There is freedom when one makes his struggles known to another.

An accountability partner is someone who can love and care but be brutally honest and tough when needed. David Blythe comments that a man’s accountability partner should meet the following criteria:

- Be anchored in a healthy and committed relationship with Christ
- Truly desire to help and be accessible to you when you need him

- Be able to commit time to pray for you and meet with you on a regular basis
- Be able to be discreet and confidential about the things that you share with him
- Be someone you trust and respect
- Have courage to address the issue head on.<sup>32</sup>

Sexual addiction or temptation may be extremely difficult to talk about, but talk we must. Find an accountability partner, someone you can be transparent with, someone who will keep your struggles confidential and hold you accountable.


## Affair-proof your marriage

To affair-proof one’s marriage, the following guidelines should be followed and reviewed weekly:

- Go to bed at the same time with your spouse.
- When tempted, make a speedy exit; turn your heart toward home. When you see an image or a person who attracts your sexual thoughts, place your spouse in that picture and pursue the feelings and thoughts with your spouse in mind.
- Call ahead when staying at hotels to make sure they do not subscribe to channels with sexual content,

and if they do, request that these channels not be available in your room when you check in.

- Get filters that block pornography sites.
- Give all passwords to your spouse.
- Teach your spouse to check the history of your internet usage on the computer.
- Subscribe to television programming packages that are completely porn-free.
- Avoid stores, movies, or sites that carry X-rated movies.
- If you get cable or satellite, ask your spouse to block all questionable stations using a password of her choice unknown to you.
- Immediately change the channel anytime you are watching TV and something questionable happens to come on.
- Join a prayer group (males with males, females with females) for support and encouragement.
- Memorize a dozen Bible verses on the subject of purity and holiness.

Developing an intimacy-oriented sex, setting boundaries, and taking practical steps to affair-proof marriage can help persons avoid sexual temptation and enjoy God’s gift of marital sex. After all, it was God who invented sex. 

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# Single moms—What pastors need to know

**S***ingle moms.* Just hearing those two words together immediately evokes a response. Some will immediately think of the single mother who raised them after their father passed away far too early—or maybe remember a special coworker, family member, or friend who has such a story. Maybe, as a pastor, it reminds you of a special church member who has been a faithful part of your congregation despite the many hardships she has faced. Compassion fills your heart as you recognize the weight the words *single mom* carry. For others, you may not fully understand their journey, and despite your best efforts to the contrary, you struggle with an attitude of judgment as you assume those words must denote sin. No matter where you fall on the spectrum of response, we all have a reference point for single motherhood.

People who hold varying viewpoints about single moms, usually rooted in their own life experiences, fill our churches. As the church—the collective body of Christ—we are called to put aside prejudice, judgment, scorn, or even pity. Pastors are called upon to ensure that the church views single moms as God does: chosen; beloved; and worthy of dignity, respect, and compassion.

## A note to the single mom reading this

Before I go any further, let me stop and say to any single mother reading this, the details of the challenges you face, the statistics, and even the perception that some may have about you *do not* circumvent one enormous fact: your God is far bigger than any statistic written on a sheet of paper or any opinion held by the crowd. Your God calls you chosen, blessed, set apart, and righteous through Jesus' blood, and His Word says that He shall supply all your needs, so do not for one second think that I am suggesting that you (or your children) are destined to become a statistic or that you should carry shame. No, my sister, your God is far bigger than that.

## What in the world is going on?

With more than 15 million single mothers in the United States alone, raising an estimated 24 million children,<sup>1</sup> the implications of how we view, discuss, and ultimately minister to single moms have profound importance. The number of single parent families has more than doubled since 1970.<sup>2</sup> We also see data showing that single mothers face incredible challenges, including children who are 10 times more likely to drop out of high school<sup>3</sup> or five times

more likely to commit suicide.<sup>4</sup> Single moms raised 78 percent of the current prison population in the United States.<sup>5</sup> Such mothers often struggle with financial burdens, greater parenting woes, and the lack of a strong support system through family or church community. Children of single parents are 77 percent more likely to have endured physical abuse.<sup>6</sup> Ninety percent of all homeless and runaway children come from fatherless homes.<sup>7</sup> In the face of such challenges, how do we march forward?

## The objections to single moms' ministry

Having been involved in single moms' ministry for more than a decade and having personally discussed the issue with many single mothers, I am aware of the objections, both voiced and just thought, that prevent a pastor from moving forward in single mother ministry. Allow me to address a few:

*Won't a single mothers' ministry endorse sin or produce more single motherhood?* My response is always the same to this one: No. Drug recovery programs do not endorse drug use. They simply meet people where they are. We are doing the same thing with single mothers. Millions of single mothers live in the US and even more worldwide. Do we simply ignore their existence out of



fear that the ministry process could get a little messy? Well, we could, but that is certainly not what Jesus did. He was in the midst of our messy situations. I encourage you to be too.

*We already have a very limited budget. How can we afford to start a single moms' ministry?* The truth is you cannot afford not to have a single moms' ministry. The demographic is rapidly growing. The most successful churches (those that are both the fastest-growing and most active in saving lost souls) are the ones who think outside the box and use their God-given creativity to meet people's needs. Single moms' ministry does not have to be complicated. In short, it's a meeting place, a casual gathering where single moms fellowship. It does not have to start huge or with any budget, really. The Life of a Single Mom ministries offers many creative ways to host single moms' events and Bible studies at low to no cost at all.<sup>8</sup>

*Won't single mothers be a drain on our already stretched budget?* I do not expect any church to fulfill all the needs of every single mom they come in contact with. You do not have to pay every utility bill or provide housing for every struggling single mom. I get it. There are lots of needs, and resources can be limited. All that said, literally hundreds of ministries, nonprofits, and resources are available for single mothers. We have a full national resource guide to assist you in directing moms to where they can get help for various needs without constantly stretching the church too thin.

*I don't have the time to lead another ministry.* You are carrying many responsibilities. Instead, we want you to identify someone in your church who can direct the ministry. It can be a current or former single mom, your women's ministries leader, a strong Bible teacher, or a wise woman who has years of experience. The goal is to start somewhere. Begin to pray that God would show you who can direct it. Yes, it can be led by someone who is not a staff member. The goal is to start a fun, casual, single moms' program

that can reach into the community to offer love, support, wisdom, and truth. Relationship comes before ministry, so begin the work of establishing the necessary relationships to forge the pathway to a strong single moms' ministry.

## The complexity of single parenting

The origins of single parenthood are many. They can include anything from death and abandonment to adoption, incarceration, and more.

*Yes, there are single moms, like me, who did have sex outside of marriage that produced new life. But that does not apply to all single mothers.*

Single parenthood can result from the ugliness of addiction or extramarital affairs. Often it involves unwed pregnancy. In other words, the journey is complex. Yes, there are single moms, like me, who did have sex outside of marriage that produced new life. But that does not apply to all single mothers. And regardless of what sin or struggle led to single parenthood, this truth remains: God loves single mothers despite a story that may not clean up in a pretty package with a neat bow. He simply is overwhelmed by love for them. His heart breaks for the things that shatter theirs. Ministry can get hard. But the lives of single mothers and their children depend on a compassionate church that exudes the love of Christ.

If this is how God views single mothers, and knowing the unique

hardships facing single moms, what should be the church's response?

## Why single moms do not attend church

The Life of a Single Mom ministries conducted an informal study in fall 2009 for the release of the book *The Church and the Single Mom*. The study included surveying hundreds of single mothers throughout the US. Some single mothers loved their home churches and detailed how the church saved their lives, gave

them hope, and offered invaluable support. Others detested the local church and its failure to recognize the need and hurt they carried. What was overwhelmingly true was that two out of three single mothers did not have a home church that they attended regularly. The reasons varied as much as the stories, but common responses included

- fear of judgment by other church members,
- lack of understanding by the church for the challenges faced by the single mother,
- no programs or ministries that addressed the unique make-up of the single mom family,
- depression and isolation that left single mothers feeling unloved or broken,
- failure of church leadership to recognize that the church is

diverse and not made up of only married couples,

- the perception that they did not “fit in” anywhere.

Whether any of the things above are actually true, in the context of fear or judgment, for example, is actually irrelevant. What is important is that this is the perception many single mothers have. Satan is masterful at convincing single mothers (and others, for that matter) that the local body of Christ does not want them. Recognizing this, how can pastors address this challenge?

### Step 1: Develop an evangelism plan to reach single moms

First, the local church must develop an evangelism plan to reach single mothers. Single mothers are the fastest growing demographic in the nation. Forty-nine percent of all children today are born outside marriage.<sup>9</sup> It means that we must be strategic with witnessing to single mothers and their children—and create outreach programs that engage single moms. The list of possibilities is endless but can include such things as single moms car prep (a free oil change and car wash); single moms celebrations, such as Christmas parties, nights of worship, or outreach programs at community centers or parks that target single mothers; free tutoring services for single-parent families; Mother’s Day programs; and so many more. Yes, it will take some of the church’s budget. And, yes, it will require planning and volunteer hours. But the church has long held the belief that women’s ministries, men’s ministries, youth groups, or widows should warrant part of the budget (and they should). Single mothers simply need to be considered, seen, and strategically reached out to as well.

### Step 2: Develop a discipleship plan for single mothers who make a commitment to your church

Next, prepare a discipleship plan for single mothers. One-time single


mom events are great. The common assumption is that after such an event, all the single moms will acclimate into an existing program at the church or attend weekly services, but in actuality, they do not. Some are “testing the waters” because the church (or others) have already hurt them. Others are not sure where they fit in. Developing a discipleship plan is critical. What does that look like? While it might be different at every church, it is simply an ongoing, regular gathering of single mothers that fellowship and grow in the Word together.

Whether it be a single moms’ weekly Bible class, life group, or more formal ministry that meets on a Friday or Saturday night, single moms often like to have a place where they can gather and discuss issues unique to them. Post-divorce classes are wonderful and provide healing for those who have gone through such trauma, but they are limited to 10 to 12 weeks and also only serve those who have gone through divorce. What happens after the 12 weeks? What about the single mothers who never married? While I greatly support divorce-recovery programs, I vehemently believe that there should be a single moms’ ministry that runs throughout the year, providing an opportunity for them to acclimate to the church.

### Step 3: Make single moms’ ministry an ongoing ministry in your church

The single moms’ ministry plan should be ongoing, much like women’s ministries or youth ministries. People will come and go as life seasons change, but there should always be a place for them to plug in through a single moms’ group. A healthy single moms’ program gives them a place to grow, mentor other single moms, and network about job or daycare opportunities and provides a support chain that can assist with the practical needs of the single-mom family, such as moving, babysitting, or just providing listening ears.

## The church needs single moms

As a former single mother who had two children outside of marriage and carried more shame than words can express, I implore pastors to hear me. The burdens of the single mom are many. The data do not lie. Single moms exist in your community, whether you have them in your congregation or not. Sometimes, the implementation of a single moms’ evangelism and outreach program is just what your church needs to get more single mothers inside the church versus outside looking in. Even when she is doing an amazing job (and most are), working two jobs and juggling homework, finances, and carpool with little to no help, she needs your support. Despite struggles surrounding time and money, a single mom can make an incredible contribution to the life and ministry of a church. She needs to know you see her and feel that she has value within the whole church body. Single moms need the church—and the church needs single moms. 

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# The paradox of intimate terrorism: *4 steps every church must take*

When Jesus articulated His Messianic mission to “heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, . . . to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18, KJV), it should have elicited a rallying cry in support of the underprivileged and the disenfranchised. Instead, it ignited explosive anger and murderous intent against Jesus Himself (vv. 28, 29).

So, when Jesus speaks to victims of abuse, He speaks from experience. The community He speaks for includes victims of domestic abuse—even in the church. The community He speaks to, with the greatest responsibility to fight for the oppressed, including victims of domestic abuse—is His church.

Intimate partner abuse is a reality, and to combat it we pastors in particular need to understand it. Domestic abuse occurs in relationships where one individual holds power over another and uses that power for harm. The most virulent form of domestic abuse is characterized by the practice of coercive control—a pattern of behavior that seeks to take away the victim's freedom and strip away their sense of self. It consists of the violation of another person's human rights. Coercive control may include emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual abuse, along with

stalking and a myriad of other ways to intimidate and control such as financial, property, or digital abuse. These relational dynamics are not limited to the home or to marriage. Incidences of dating violence are disturbingly on the increase. We must also keep in mind that some people misuse the definition of *abuse* to include any difficult relational conflict or disagreement to easily exit the marriage.

## Abuse and intimate terrorism

Terrorism has been defined as “the calculated use of violence (or the threat of violence) against civilians in order to attain goals that are political or religious or ideological in nature; this is done through intimidation or coercion or instilling fear.”<sup>1</sup>

Trauma specialist Dr. Judith Herman, in her excellent book *Trauma and Recovery*, has identified major commonalities between the experience of survivors of domestic violence and prisoners of war. She compares “the survivors of vast concentration camps created by tyrants who rule nations and the survivors of small, hidden concentration camps created by tyrants who rule their homes.”<sup>2</sup>

In his book *A Hidden Wholeness*, Palmer Parker describes violence as

“any way we have of violating the identity and integrity of another person.”<sup>3</sup> Victims of intimate terrorism often testify that physical violence is not the worst part of their experience. The worst part is the malicious tactics of humiliation, degradation, and insults that systematically undermine identity and personhood. Intimate terrorism is a heinous sin because it not only warps the individuals' concept of themselves but also fundamentally distorts the image of God for both victims and perpetrators. An appropriate response to intimate terrorism will always fall short until we fully appreciate the long-term traumatic impact of exposure to coercive control upon the spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical health.

## The church and intimate terrorism

That intimate terrorism occurs in secular society is bad enough; that it happens in the church is even more tragic. Research shows that in faith communities, religion is not a deterrent to domestic abuse. Research on intimate partner violence, conducted by Dr. René Drumm among 49 Seventh-day Adventist churches in the United States, indicated that 90 percent of abusers were active church members. These included church leaders such as deacons, elders,

pastors, chaplains, a Pathfinder leader, a conference secretary, and a university professor. The study indicated that women in the church are just as likely to be abused by their husbands as are women in the general population. Even more surprising was the finding that men are more likely to be abused by their wives in the church than are those in the general population.<sup>4</sup>

Maybe the reality of domestic abuse in the church should not take us by surprise. The apostle Paul warned that in the last days men would be “lovers of themselves . . . unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:1–7, NKJV). An accurate description, for sure, of intimate terrorists in the church.

C. S. Lewis said it well: “Of all bad men religious bad men are the worst.”<sup>5</sup> We have terrorists in the church. However, they do not carry bombs and AK-47s; they carry Bibles and have learned to weaponize the Word of God itself. In the context of marriage, intimate terrorists commit violence to the Bible in order to commit violence against their spouses. They often quote passages about headship, submission, and subjection as a way to justify their abuse. Whatever view is held about roles in marriage, a godly union cannot include force, coercion, intimidation, or violence. Such behavior is antithetical to the gospel. Jesus said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Matt. 20:28, NKJV). He came to sacrifice Himself, not to demand allegiance and impose punishments for disobedience.

Biblical submission is a voluntary gift of love given by the one who submits. It cannot be demanded. “Neither the husband nor the wife should attempt to exercise over the other an arbitrary control.” “Entire submission is to be made only to the Lord Jesus Christ. . . .

“When husbands require the complete subjection of their wives, . . . they place their wives in a position contrary

to the scripture.”<sup>6</sup> True biblical headship places an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of husbands to care for their wives with the self-sacrificial love that Jesus displayed for the church (Eph. 5:25). The glaring disconnect between the *agape* love that characterizes genuine Christianity and the malice perpetrated by abusers is a testimony to the fact that intimate terrorism is, first and foremost, evidence of a spiritual deficiency. The bottom line is that perpetrators of abuse are not interested either in biblical injunctions to love or in the injunctions that prohibit abuse (see Col. 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7). They are not interested in truth; they are interested in power and control.

## Myths and intimate terrorism

Ineffective responses to the challenge of intimate terrorism are compounded not only by a failure to appreciate the meaning of Jesus’ mandate to fight for the oppressed but also by the failure to understand the nature of perpetrators and the dynamics of coercive control. For example, intimate terrorism is not an anger-management problem. It is often assumed that abusers just cannot control themselves. They do not tend to “lose it” with their boss, friends, or parents. They direct their abuse only at their spouses and children. For most abusers, anger is a tactic, not a cause. Intimate terrorists know how to control themselves. They just choose not to.

Intimate terrorism cannot always be solved by couples counseling. Pastoral carers often make the erroneous assumption that, in abusive marriages, both parties are at fault in some way, and some conflict resolution strategies will heal the relationship. Such rationale fails to appreciate that abuse, by definition, involves a power differential in which power is abused. Abusers are not interested in solving problems or what is right or wrong; they are interested in dominance. Abuse is, always, the fault of the abuser, no matter what provocation they may claim. Counseling couples in such cases places victims in

greater danger of harm and often implies complicity in the abuse they experience. Abusers require individual intervention, preferably in special programs that are designed to work with perpetrators.

As pastoral caregivers, we believe in the sacredness of marriage, the efficacy of hope, and the power of the gospel to transform lives. However, we must also come to terms with the research that indicates that the vast majority of abusers (some studies put the numbers as high as over 90 percent) will not change.<sup>7</sup> This is not because they cannot change but because they do not own responsibility for their behavior or choose to access help. When we are delivering support to victims of abuse, we need to factor this unfortunate truth into the equation because there must come a point when enough is enough.

When a marriage fails to fulfill the purpose for which it was created, it becomes destructive to spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical health. When abuse is involved, affirmative action is required to “rescue the perishing.” Not all marriages can be saved, and we must guard against the danger that our high view of marriage leads us to make an idol out of the institution. Just as Jesus pointed out that “the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27, KJV), marriage was made for humankind and not humankind for marriage. When intimate terrorism is taking place, our primary responsibility is the safety of the victims, not the preservation of the marriage.

## Confrontation and intimate terrorism

While the reasons why individuals perpetrate abuse are multifaceted, the general reason is that, somewhere along the line, they have accepted a culture that makes abuse OK. Whether the culture is a secular mind-set or a religious one, it denigrates, diminishes, and subjugates women to the status of property to be used and abused at will. The challenge for the church is to change the culture. There are four steps every church must take.



1. *Embrace the mission of the Master.* Victims of abuse need to know that God is on the side of the oppressed and that we are too. “Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:17, NKJV). We must send a clear message to survivors and perpetrators that our church is committed to a zero-tolerance policy on intimate terrorism. Combating this scourge is everybody’s responsibility. It requires collaborative work. It especially needs men to accept the challenge to change the mind-sets that allow abuse to thrive. Male abuse against women is a men’s issue, too, and the people best placed to change the culture of men are other men. So, the majority of men who do not abuse their partners need to influence those who do. That means (a) challenging attitudes that diminish the value of women, (b) mentoring young men and modeling for them how to respect women, and (c) teaching our young women to view themselves as precious in God’s sight. We cannot remain indifferent to the problem of intimate terrorism. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke profound truth when he said, “A man dies when he refuses to stand up for that which is right. A man dies when he refuses to stand up for justice. A man dies when he refuses to take a stand for that which is true.”<sup>8</sup> A sense of justice should compel us to “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; for the rights of all who are destitute” (Prov. 31:8, NIV).

2. *Educate the mentality of the ministers.* With the best will in the world, we can make bad situations worse when we operate out of ignorance. We can think we are doing the right thing, but we end up becoming complicit with perpetrators of abuse. Victims of abuse are frequently made to feel guilty by church leaders—with erroneous views on submission and faulty theologies of suffering—into staying with their abusers. To tell victims of intimate terrorism to “take your beating, be a good wife, submit more, and pray harder” pours spiritual abuse on top of the physical, emotional, and psychological abuse that they are already suffering. Such advice flies in the face of research

that indicates that the more submissive a victim becomes, the more emboldened the abuser becomes in their abuse and the more justified they feel.<sup>9</sup> Perpetrators need accountability, not appeasement.

3. *Enlighten the minds of the members.* Every church should have clear policies and procedures regarding the best practice in dealing with incidences and disclosures of domestic abuse. Church leaders should be trained to respond in appropriate ways. Policies and procedures should include information regarding local agencies who are specially equipped to assist victims of abuse in ways the church is not equipped to do. Worship leaders can speak out against domestic abuse in preaching, teaching, and prayers. Every church should make church members aware of whom to approach when they are ready to disclose intimate partner abuse. Departments can work collaboratively to combat domestic abuse. Resources can be made available that give clear guidance to victims about their options. Up-to-date information on domestic abuse should be provided on every church’s website.

4. *Enforce the accountability of the abusers.* Intimate terrorists are not Christians, contrary to what their baptismal certificates, church offices, or ordinations may say. In addition to Paul’s warnings about those who merely have a form of godliness, Jesus said, “‘An evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart’” (Luke 6:45, NIV). First John 4:8 states, “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (NKJV). Intimate terrorists in the church are Christians in name only, and the church has a responsibility to hold them accountable, not only in order to help their victims but also because abusers are lost souls in need of a Savior.

Where a victim reports abuse, the church has guiding principles for addressing offenses, summarized in Matthew 18:15–17. If abusers express genuine repentance and are willing to engage fully in a treatment program, then we can give them the opportunity to mend their ways and support them in their efforts to change. However, if they

refuse, then the procedure outlined in Matthew 18 should be carried to its *n*th degree, and the privilege of church membership should be removed.

## Compassion and intimate terrorism

The church must cultivate spiritual insight and compassion for victims of abuse. The mission of Luke 4:16–19 is not just a message of comfort. It is, also, a message of deliverance. We are challenged to be the voice, the hands, and the feet of the Master, who Himself knew abuse, in order to make the Messianic message of justice for the abused and oppressed a reality in our churches. Pastors, we have an obligation to “Defend the poor and fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy; free them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:3, 4, NKJV). Surely the victims of intimate terrorism must be considered prime candidates for defending. ▮

- 1 Vocabulary.com Dictionary, s.v. “terrorism,” accessed February 5, 2019, [vocabulary.com/dictionary/terrorist%20act](http://vocabulary.com/dictionary/terrorist%20act).
- 2 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), 3.
- 3 Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 169.
- 4 René Drumm, Marciana Popescu, and Robert Kersting, “Effects of Intimate Partner Violence Among Seventh-Day Adventist Church Attendees,” *Critical Social Work* 10, no. 1 (2009), [uwindor.ca/criticalsocialwork/effects-of-intimate-partner-violence-among-seventh-day-adventist-church-attendees](http://uwindor.ca/criticalsocialwork/effects-of-intimate-partner-violence-among-seventh-day-adventist-church-attendees).
- 5 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Books, 1958), 32.
- 6 Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), 118, 116.
- 7 See also Carrie Askin, “Abusive Partners Can Change! We Aren’t Doomed to Repeat Our Mistakes,” *Psychology Today*, Nov. 3, 2015. [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hurt-people-hurt-people/201511/abusive-partners-can-change](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hurt-people-hurt-people/201511/abusive-partners-can-change).
- 8 Martin Luther King Jr., speech in Selma, Alabama, March 8, 1965, [wisdomquotes.com/martin-luther-king-jr-quotes/](http://wisdomquotes.com/martin-luther-king-jr-quotes/).
- 9 See, for example, Thijs Kanter et al., “Are Child Abusers Sexually Attracted to Submissiveness? Assessment of Sex-Related Cognition With the Implicit Association Test,” *Sexual Abuse* 28, no. 5 (August 1, 2016): 448–468, doi [.org/10.1177/1079063214544330](https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063214544330).

## ► World church honors pastor's dedication to God, his church, and his family

**Columbia, Maryland, United States—**Dr. **Roscoe J. Howard**, former executive secretary of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's North American Division (NAD), passed away in Apopka, Florida, United States, on January 21, 2019, after a struggle with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). He was 64.

Howard began his ministry as the pastor of a two-church district in Oak Harbor, Washington. An African-American pastoring two Caucasian congregations was almost unheard of 40 years ago. Then Howard moved to pastor the largest African-American congregation in the Pacific Northwest, Emerald City Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in Seattle, Washington.

"Roscoe was shaped in a unique way by the hand of God to become the man and the instrument God would use in many varied and diverse ways," said **G. Alexander Bryant**, NAD executive secretary. "Roscoe had a special blend of spirituality, intellect, articulation, humor, and laughter that was carefully woven into every assignment he undertook."

The North Pacific Union Conference called Howard to serve as the youth

director and vice president of Regional Affairs; the Mid-America Union called him to serve as the executive secretary of its territory; the NAD asked him to serve as the executive secretary for the division, and after he served in this capacity for several years, the Mid-America Union Executive Committee took a surprising step and asked Howard to return and serve as the president.

Howard had served as president of Mid-America Union for a relatively short period when he was asked by Adventist Health System (now AdventHealth), located in Orlando, Florida, to serve as vice president for Spiritual Wellness (later called Mission and Ministries). He served with distinction, dignity, creativity, courage, faithfulness, and an unshakable trust in God.

**Ted N. C. Wilson**, president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, stated, "On behalf of the world Seventh-day Adventist Church family, we offer our Christian sympathy and condolences to Mrs. Osceola Howard, Heather, Seth, and the extended Howard family on the death of Pastor Roscoe J. Howard. I have prayed

for the family and encourage you to lift them up in prayer. May the Comforter come especially close to the family as we look forward to Christ's soon return when He will provide us with eternal youth and life. 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.' "

Dr. Bryant concluded, "Throughout Roscoe's ministry and assignments, he never lost sight of what was important—and that was his family. He was always able to keep them as the top priority no matter what the assignment, and they were able to stay a tight-knit unit throughout his ministry, his life, and until his death."

For the full story, please see the North American Division news article "Roscoe J. Howard, Former NAD Executive Secretary, Passes to His Rest" at [nadadventist.org/news/roscoe-j-howard-former-nad-executive-secretary-passes-his-rest](http://nadadventist.org/news/roscoe-j-howard-former-nad-executive-secretary-passes-his-rest). [NAD Communication with G. Alexander Bryant]



Roscoe J. Howard

## ► 100,000 copies of pastor's hope for families book delivered in Brazil

**São Paulo, Brazil—**A camporee gives Pathfinders many learning opportunities and is the perfect place for them to share what they have learned with the community around them. This is just what club members from Brazil and Chile did as they handed out copies of the book *Hope for the Family: The Road to a Happy Ending* in the town of Barretos, Brazil. Coauthors of the book, **Willie** and **Elaine Oliver**, codirectors of Family Ministries for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, accompanied

them. During the two rallies of the South American Camporee, participants planned to distribute 100,000 copies of the work, with a cover specially designed for Barretos residents.

A group with pastor **Alacy Barbosa**, director of Family Ministries for eight South American countries, approached three ladies and handed them books saying, "At present, families have many needs. Most people have a lack of knowledge, and we have a secure source that shows us the way



Photo: South American Communication department

to build a healthy family, which is the Bible. This book presents the same principles.” **Maria Aparecida dos Santos** responded, “The family is especially loved in the lives of people. All we have is the family. It was a joy to receive this book.”

Dr. Willie Oliver commented, “When we develop dynamics to improve the lives of families, we are saying that we want a healthier, stronger society. The more parents and children are together, the stronger the relationship between them.” In their book, the Olivers also state that “sexuality was God’s idea, and without doubt, it is very good. . . . Unless you set healthy boundaries ahead of time, whether married or single, you will be in trouble.”

For **Nayele Ribeiro**, 13, it was a privilege to be able to contribute. On three previous occasions, she and her two friends have distributed the book with their club located in the interior of Pará, Brazil. Ribeiro stated, “The best thing is that these books can help people to know Jesus.” [Brazil Lucas Rocha/ ANN Staff]

## ► Most pastors encounter sexual brokenness—few feel “very qualified” to address

A newly released study, *Sexuality and the Church in America I*,<sup>1</sup> shows that 77 percent of non-mainline and 56 percent of mainline church pastors strongly agreed that churches should offer help with issues of sexual brokenness. Of those surveyed, 80 percent of pastors said they were approached in the past year by individuals with questions concerning marital infidelity. Yet, only 37 percent of non-mainline pastors and 32 percent of mainline church pastors said they feel very qualified to assist



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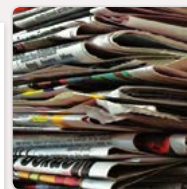
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congregants struggling with marital infidelity.

Even though many feel inadequate, 70 percent of pastors said they are approached several times a year or more by church members struggling with various sexual sins. And 22 percent were contacted once per month or more regarding concerns over sexual brokenness. Issues of sexual brokenness include marital infidelity, lust, pornography addiction, gender identity confusion, and sexual abuse, among others.

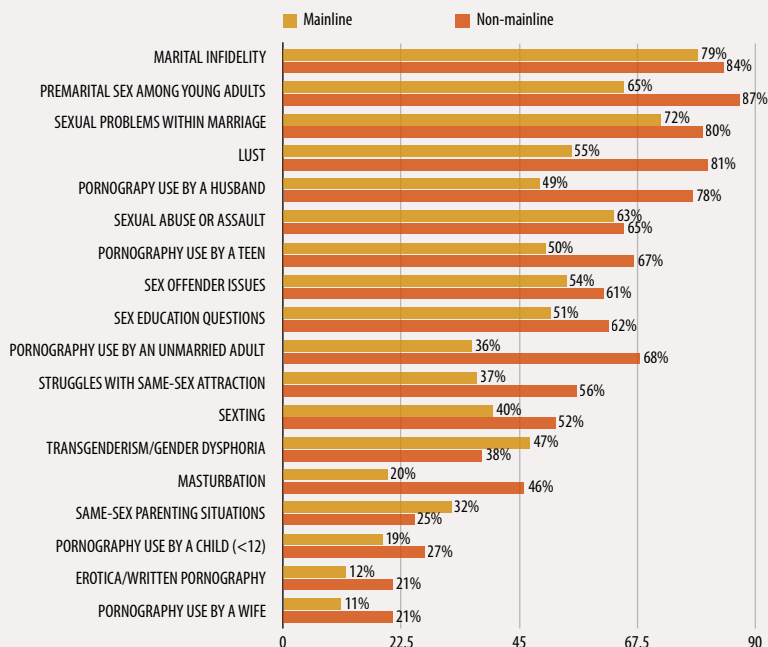
Notably, 73 percent of pastors were approached with pornography-related questions. But only 16 percent of mainline pastors felt very qualified to address pornography use by husbands, versus 30 percent of non-mainline pastors. A mere 10 percent of mainline pastors and 9 percent of non-mainline pastors felt very qualified to address a wife's pornography use.

But even fewer pastors feel very qualified to assist church members struggling with pornography, sexual abuse, and transgenderism/gender dysphoria, to name a few.

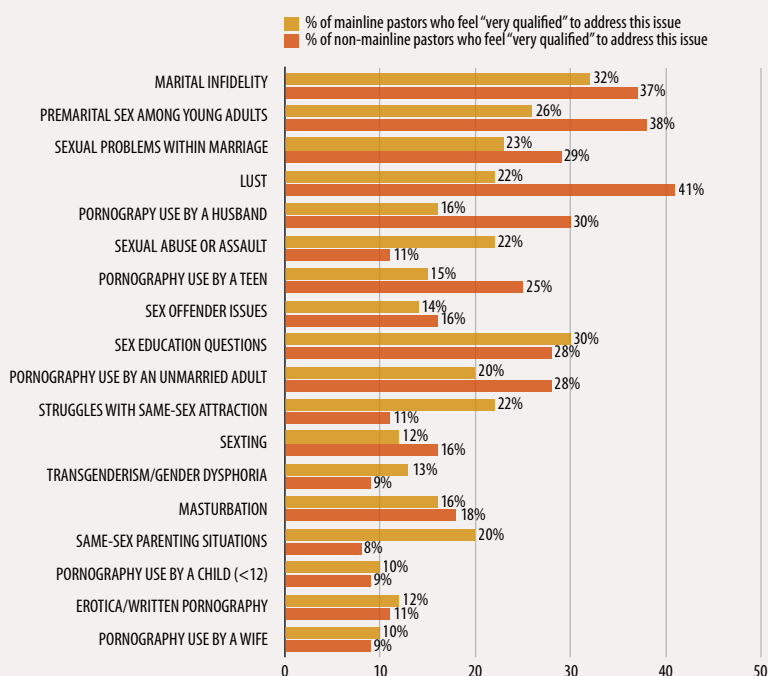
"It doesn't alarm us that pastors are encountering so much sexual brokenness over the course of a year. We know such issues exist," said **Daniel Weiss**, president of the Brushfires Foundation and author of the report. "What concerns us is that so few pastors feel very qualified to handle these difficult and painful issues. There is a great need for ministry leaders to be trained and for outside caregiving ministries to work directly with local churches to handle these issues in a caring and professional way."

The study surveyed 410 senior, executive, or lead pastors on behalf of 25 organizations and was conducted by Barna Group. [Chelsen Vicari/Juicy Ecumenism or The Institute on Religion and Democracy]

## Sexual issues brought to pastors by members and staff

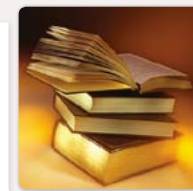


## Pastors' assessment of their ability to address sexual issues



1 The report can be found on the Brushfires website at [brushfiresfoundation.org/integrity/](http://brushfiresfoundation.org/integrity/).





## Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God's Grand Story

by Christopher Yuan (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2018).

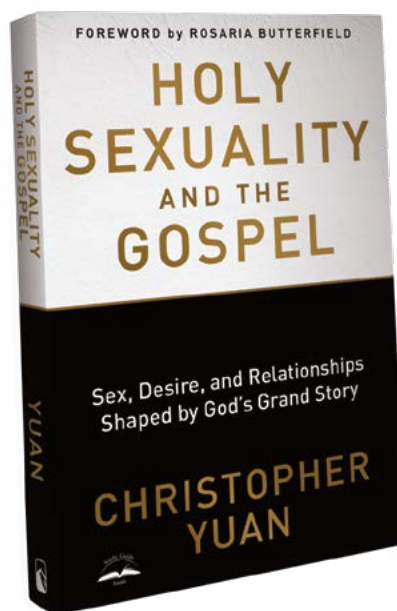
Christopher Yuan, professor-at-large in biblical studies at Moody Bible College, suggests that holiness, especially holy sexuality, is God's will for everyone. He maintains that the biblical framework reveals (a) our true identity as humans made in God's image, (b) the problem of sin and sinful sexual desires, and (c) our need to submit to Christ and His will—returning to the original holiness that humans, made in God's image, experienced before the fall (13).

A couple of chapters focus on the biblical theology of marriage and are followed by two chapters revealing that singleness, too, is good, according to Scripture. Other chapters emphasize the importance of spiritual family relationships that will last through eternity; sanctification, which is living holily in the midst of temptations; and the importance of teaching biblical sexuality in the right way in order to bear the good fruit of repentance that leads to salvation. The book also has an eight-week study guide for individuals or small groups to use to further develop the understanding of holy sexuality.

Yuan focuses on who people really are, based upon the Bible. How should people identify themselves? Are we more than our sexuality? He systematically answers those questions by revealing Scripture's teaching that men and women are made in the image of God. He suggests that as people made in God's image, who we are is more than what we feel or do (9). The creation of humanity in God's image in Genesis 1, 2 is quickly followed by their fall in Genesis 3. Due to sin, he maintains, the image of God in humanity has been distorted and defaced. "God declares that only sex between a husband

and a wife in marriage is good. Every sexual expression outside this context—whether in an opposite-sex relationship or a same-sex relationship—God condemns as sinful" (45).

The premise of *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel* is summarized in this statement: "From Genesis to Revelation, in




the entirety of the biblical witness, only two paths align with God's standard for sexual expression: if you're single, be sexually abstinent while fleeing lustful desires; if you're married, be sexually and emotionally faithful to your spouse of the opposite sex while also fleeing lustful desires" (48).

Two chapters unpack the fact that as sinful people, sexual temptations—same-sex and opposite-sex—come our way, but how we respond to the temptations is what matters. As Christians, we must not entertain sinful sexual desires.

Yuan points out that the Bible calls us to resist, refuse, and flee temptation, claiming the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God will make a way of escape for us (57).

Yuan uses the term *sinful nature* or *sinful orientation* (69) rather than *sexual orientation*, indicating that, due to sin, we all are born with a sinful nature; therefore, we all need to be born again. Redemption and victory through Jesus Christ is the answer for our sinful orientation, whether we have homosexual desires or immoral heterosexual desires. Yuan clarifies that "good sexual desires are those whose end is biblical marriage. Sinful sexual desires are those whose end is outside the context of biblical marriage" (70). Victory will not always mean a heterosexual marriage—but it will mean engaging in the daily struggle of placing the will on the side of Christ.

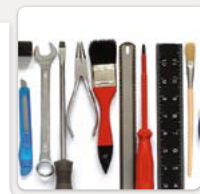
This book faithfully upholds a biblical theology of sexuality. At the same time the author, who gave up a same-sex promiscuous lifestyle after becoming a born-again Christian, is sensitive to how to communicate and interact with persons in that same lifestyle. The last four chapters of the book offer suggestions for how to compassionately and redemptively relate to people who are struggling with sinful behavior. As humans, Yuan maintains, "the overall problem is the same: sin. And the overall answer is the same: new life and daily renewal in Christ" (165).

I highly recommend this book. In a world filled with confusion on this topic, its biblical faithfulness, objectivity, and balance are refreshing. 

—Reviewed by **Jared S. Miller, DMin**, pastor of Middle East University Church, Beirut, Lebanon.



**Eric Bates, DMin, and Ann Marie Bates** serve as family ministry directors for the Carolina Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Charlotte, North Carolina, United States. Eric also serves as lead pastor of the Arden Seventh-day Adventist Church in Asheville, North Carolina.



# Four tactics of attack against pornography

**R**ecently a lay leader met with me in my office. Over the next two hours, he laid out a sordid story of some six decades of sex addiction. His struggle began when older boys exposed him to a pornographic magazine when he was seven years old. In the years since, it had affected every aspect of his life, including every relationship.

A Barna survey found that 64 percent of young people ages from 13 to 24 actively seek out pornography weekly or more often.<sup>1</sup> How do we as pastors help those who struggle with pornography—including ourselves? Since porn is more than an issue of lust or an addiction to dopamine,<sup>2</sup> any unilateral approach to it will fail to bring about lasting change. I suggest four tactics: a healthy environment, a yielded will, a pure heart, and a faithful community.

## 1. A healthy environment

As I disciple someone struggling with porn, together we need to look at his<sup>3</sup> life and analyze the times when the struggle is at its worst. Such moments require management, first by stopping every conduit of porn. That can be accomplished by canceling cable TV, installing filtering and accountability software on every computer and device,<sup>4</sup> taking precautions such as ensuring accountability when on business trips, setting up a personal schedule that reduces moments of temptation, and thinking about every situation as one that could lead to a fall.

The typical approach to those who struggle with porn is to install the software and put the computer in a public place; but if that's all we do, we won't have accomplished much. Just changing negative behavior is not our ultimate end.

## 2. A yielded will

Even if we succeed at cutting off all future access to pornographic images, the struggler can, at will, still access those images already filed away in his brain, and sometimes he will involuntarily visualize them. It is important to understand the role of the will with the battles taking place in the human mind.

Does he really want to be free from the sin of pornography, or does he simply feel bad about what he has done? Is he experiencing true guilt, or is he only ashamed of being exposed? Does he view porn as an escape from stress? Is he longing for love or affirmation without the required effort that intimate relationships require? Is he pursuing the emotional rush that he feels from the risk he is taking?

Once we understand what drives the struggler, we can guide him in replacing ungodly motives with biblical ones.

## 3. A pure heart

When I disciple someone struggling with porn, I must keep in mind that the battle is primarily a spiritual one. Our goal for those to whom we minister is to lead them to a heart transformation that comes from abiding in Christ. The shepherding pastor must acknowledge the motivations, desires, and idols of the heart.


Jeremiah declared, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9, KJV). David cried, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10, KJV). To understand the struggler's heart, the shepherding pastor needs to be aware of his view of God, his personal faith life, and how he is attempting to confront this sin.

Does he know and trust God? Does he view Him as kind and loving or as arbitrary? Does he love Jesus and fully understand his identity in Him?

## 4. A faithful community

There is an enemy that seeks to separate believers from one another. Pornography is a specific contributor to broken relationships, not just when a spouse discovers her partner's addiction but by the changes that take place in the porn addict's heart and mind, creating an enslaving cycle of sin, guilt, shame, and then return to sin. By nature, pornography offers a false intimacy. What the struggler needs is authentic intimacy.

The church is the perfect institution for providing it as believers live out their faith together day by day and week after week. Through a small group, church members must lovingly ask their fellow believers vital questions, such as, How is your devotional life? What is God showing you about Himself and your own heart? What boundaries have you established to protect yourself, and when are you most tempted?

A multiple-front approach is not just necessary to win a battle, it is imperative for winning the war. As we walk alongside and disciple strugglers—including ourselves—we must address not just behavior but also the relationship with God. We must make real the gospel of grace—that God not only forgives sins of the past but, through the indwelling Spirit, prepares the way for heart transformation. The only hope one has in the struggle with porn is the gospel of Jesus Christ. 

1 Barna Group, *The Porn Phenomenon: The Impact of Pornography in the Digital Age* (Ventura, CA: Josh McDowell Ministry, 2016).

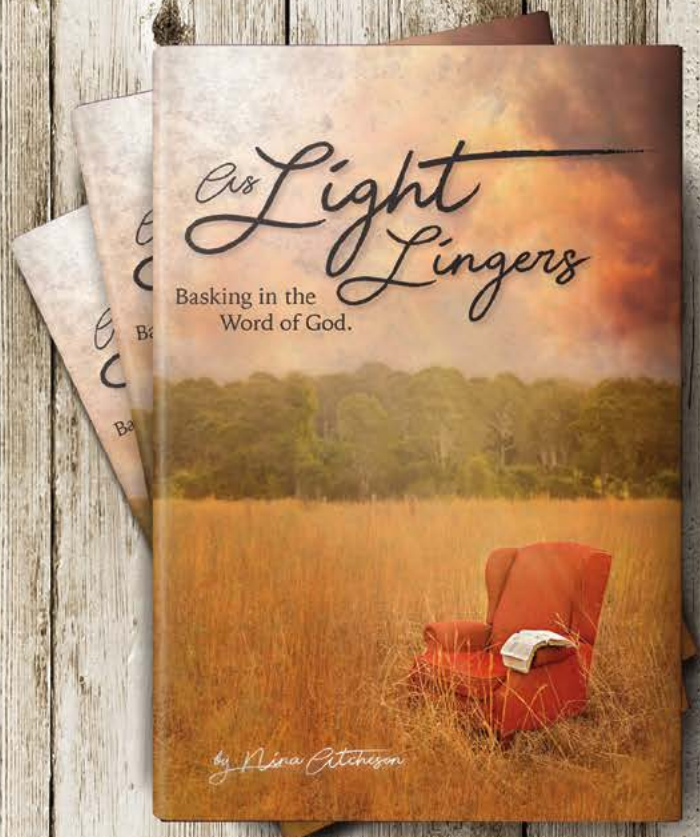
2 Dopamine is the neurotransmitter that bathes the brain while one views pornography.

3 Throughout this article I will refer to the porn struggler by the masculine pronoun. That does not imply that women do not struggle with porn addiction. The majority of those who use porn are men, but the number of women who also do so is rising rapidly.

4 Many accountability and filtering software programs are available. I recommend Covenant Eyes, which is a subscription-based software to install on computers, tablets, and smartphones. To be effective, the software requires setting changes on iOS devices, including turning on “restrictions” and shutting off the user's ability to download applications.

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