



# harvestusa

CARING FOR SEXUALLY-HURTING PEOPLE IN JESUS' NAME

## REBUILDING SEXUAL INTIMACY AFTER SEXUAL BETRAYAL

Ellen Dykas

## IS A STRUGGLE WITH PORN A DEAL-BREAKER FOR GETTING MARRIED?

Mark Sanders

## MY "MIXED-ORIENTATION" MARRIAGE

Tammy Perlmutter

# JUST WHAT IS GODLY SEX?

HOW SEXUAL PLEASURE POINTS TO SOMETHING GREATER

David White





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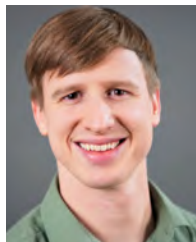
John Freeman



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HARVEST USA brings the truth and mercy of Jesus Christ by:

- Helping individuals and families affected by sexual struggles
- Providing resources that address biblical sexuality to individuals and churches

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# FROM THE PRESIDENT:

## THE MAGIC MIRROR OF ME



Where does one find their sense of self-worth? Of community? Of identity?

Go back in time 50 years. The answers you might have heard to those questions would have probably sounded something like: "From my work," or "From my family," or "From my church."

Now, don't get me wrong. Those aren't terrible answers, but they miss the truth that our self-worth, our identity, and our sense of belonging in community ought to come from God, and from his relationship with us. They are, however, a small step closer to truth than answers to those same questions asked today.

Today, those answers would likely be variations on a theme, which centers around *me*. I determine my self-worth. My community is *people who affirm me as I am*. My identity comes from *who I am as a sexual being*. *Me* as the arbiter of identity and value is bad psychology. It's also self-destructive theology. It's a counterfeit identity bound to collapse under the weight of the inevitable experience of a creation—which includes my own life—utterly broken by sin and suffering.

Our twenty-first century self-centric culture leads many (and tempts all) to venture no further than the closest mirror to find the answers to life's deepest questions. Our hearts leap to gaze into that magic mirror, to be free from everything that could deny us the happiness we seek on our own terms. If we are honest about life, though, the magic mirror of me possesses no real power to give us what we ultimately long for. I am not enough to determine who I am and what my worth is.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see in a mirror dimly...now I know [only] in part..." We see only a dim, incomplete, and distorted image of who we really are, but it points to this truth: we are image-bearers of God, men and women created to bear great glory.

When we fail to grasp that truth, we put our hope into people and things that are not enough.

For many, that misdirected hope leads to distorting God's good gifts of sex, sexuality, and gender. We confuse sexual activity for love. We look at pornography to give us the intimacy we crave when real relationships fail us. In our culture today, we particularly place enormous weight upon sexual experience. We must have it; we must have more of it; we must have it better and better. Sex is what gives me my sense of self-worth.

This issue of *harvestusa magazine* explores the reasons God gave us our sexuality; that in its physicality and earthiness, it is something glorious and grand that enriches our lives and points us to the One who is the Giver of good gifts. Yet, that pre-Fall ideal isn't destroyed when sin and suffering break in and distort it. You'll also find articles and testimonies from couples that speak of God's grace when sexual struggles are part of the picture. All of us will find ourselves there, in some way, because we all struggle with this powerful gift from God. Which is why we need God's forgiving and restorative grace to see more clearly through "a mirror dimly."

In the Lord,

Tim Geiger, President  
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# Just what is godly sex?

## HOW SEXUAL PLEASURE POINTS TO SOMETHING GREATER

By David White



Although most Christians know the moral “guardrails” of sexuality—one man, one woman, for life—they’re unable to explain the theological realities behind God’s design for sex. The idea that the Bible encourages sexual pleasure between a husband and a wife is generally minimized (by the church) in order to avoid uncomfortable discussions about sex. When churches fail to teach God’s intention to enrich our lives and that of society as a whole through our sexuality, it leaves believers unable to adequately respond to a culture that sees biblical sexuality as restrictive and repressive. Yet, the Bible has much more to say about sexuality than procreation or “wait until marriage.”

Like Paul restating his point (Philippians 3:1), we need to keep returning to what God has said about this glorious and powerful gift of sex. We need to recapture the rich meaning of sex and God’s desire to bless men and women with it.

We’ll examine two theological aspects of godly sex and three practical considerations.

### God loves pleasure

Scripture is unashamedly positive about sex. Remember God’s first command to newly created humanity? “Be fruitful and multiply!” Genesis 2 records the beauty of human sexuality prior to the Fall: Adam rejoices in Eve (“This *at last* is bone of my bones...”); their union is described as becoming “one flesh”; and the passage concludes they were “naked and not ashamed” (Genesis 2:23-25). Shame surrounds our nakedness and sexuality because of sin. It’s not the design of our loving Creator. Jesus came to restore our sexuality, that we may know God’s joy in it. God designed sex to be pleasurable. He’s the one who crafted everything, including orgasms, and declared it all “very good” (Genesis 1:31). This is hard for us to believe because we are prone to overdo pleasure, whether food, entertainment, sex, etc. This leaves us feeling guilty and ashamed; our problem is we worship “created” things, rather than letting these good gifts lead us to a deeper worship of the Giver. As the majesty of a sunset declares God’s glory (Psalm 19:1), all beauty—and pleasure!—should lead to worship of our Creator.

The Bible extols the pleasure of sexuality. Proverbs 5:18-19 tells husbands, “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth... Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love.” God wants married couples to be drunk with sexual delight! Further, the Song of Songs contains passages with profoundly sensual language. Most English translations render the Hebrew with accurate, but very safe, interpretive decisions. The bride proclaims, “His body is polished ivory, bedecked with sapphires” (5:14). Many scholars observe that knowing ivory comes from an animal’s tusk gives a clearer picture of the object of her delight. Prudish views of sex are added by church tradition but are foreign to Scripture.

### The wooing Bridegroom—the importance of “otherness”

God created us with an erotic drive so we’d glimpse his heart for us and be amazed by his love. We see this in the OT Prophets, where God describes his relationship to Israel as a Husband with his Bride. In the NT, Jesus takes the OT description of God as Israel’s husband and says, in effect, “I AM!” He places himself in the center of this metaphor, in the very role of God. And, of course, all of human history is hurtling forward to the New Heavens and Earth, beginning with the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-10). Why did Jesus teach there’ll be no marriage at the resurrection (Matthew 22:29-30)? Because marriage points to our relationship with him. Writing about marriage, Paul makes this explicit: “This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (Ephesians 5:32). This glorious reality should be reflected in, and guide, sexual activity in marriage, so a couple’s physical intimacy appropriately mirrors Christ’s love for his Bride.

God designed sex to be pleasurable.  
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everything, including orgasms, and  
declared it all “very good.”

God created you as a sexual, romantic being with deep, powerful longings so you would understand *his longing for you!* When I was engaged to my wife, Isaiah 62:5 bowled me over: “For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.” This verse teaches my love and longing for my wife, my desire to be one flesh with her (which far transcended mere physical desire), was a drop in the Pacific Ocean of God’s heart toward me. And you. He created us that we would catch a glimpse of this “profound mystery” through our longings—Christ’s love and longing to be consummated with his Bride. God insists that sexual expression between a husband and a wife be exclusive, covenantal, forsaking all others, because it is analogous to a deeper relationship—a reflection of Jesus’ desire that we be utterly devoted to him, forsaking worship of all others.

Further, gender asymmetry is foundational to godly sex as the only physical coupling that suitably reflects the mystery of “Christ and the church.” While male and female is directly connected to procreation in Genesis, theologians have long pointed to gender differences as contributing to a deeper shaping of humanity. All that can be said in this brief space is this: The unity and diversity of male and female, in life as well as in sex, is a call to explore, know, and delight in someone

who is “other.” As each spouse grows in wonder of the “other,” it is a snapshot of our ultimate union with the One who is holy, which means “set apart”—profoundly and infinitely “other.”

Our sex drive is an invitation to worship. Perhaps you’re experiencing the richness of this in your marriage. You worship God easily in your sexuality. But what if you’re single or, like many, in a marriage that falls short of your sexual hopes? Jesus invites you to draw near to him in your unsatisfied longings, realizing they ultimately point to him and the sure promise that they will be forever satisfied on That Day. At his right hand are pleasures forevermore (Psalm 16:11), which God says we can’t even begin to comprehend (1 Corinthians 2:9).

This doesn’t mean singleness isn’t hard and at times crushingly lonely, or that a distant, sexless marriage isn’t painful. But these frustrated desires point beyond themselves to something God will eventually give you with a fullness you can’t begin to imagine. And you need to know Jesus “gets” your experience. He suffered in this life with all kinds of unsatisfied desires, and he’s been waiting 2,000 years for the glorious consummation to come. He’s sitting at the right hand of the Father, ruling over the universe, still waiting and fasting (at least from wine; see Matthew 26:29) until he can celebrate with us at the Wedding Feast. He understands your suffering, groans within you by his Spirit, and promises that you will be satisfied if you hunger and thirst for righteousness.

### Godly sex serves

The only sex “how to” passage in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. It states each spouse “owes” the other “conjugal rights” and commands them not to deprive each other. It even says sex is a mandate in marriage; the only reason for not engaging sexually is when both agree specific time is needed to seek God in prayer (perhaps when facing a life or family crisis). This is another problem in many marriages: It’s too easy to let sexual expression fall by the wayside in the busyness of life. Juggling jobs, children, household responsibilities, church activities, and friendships take time. The Bible makes clear that this crucial area of marriage can’t be neglected. Couples must prioritize building mutual intimacy—emotional, spiritual, and physical—for their marriage to flourish. And deepening intimacy is further hindered when couples allow the accumulation of hurts, slights, fights, etc., to build until neither can muster the desire to be vulnerable again.

Even though sex is “mandated,” there is no room in Christian marriage for sex on demand. Against a culture proclaiming sex is about *my pleasure*, the Bible teaches sex is about giving pleasure to your spouse. 1 Corinthians 7 mentions that each spouse’s body belongs to the other, but

I should not read that passage thinking, “My spouse’s body is mine.” Instead, my body belongs to my wife; I’m called to use it to bless her. God designed sexuality in marriage to teach couples the joy and blessing of serving. God intends husband and wife to approach the marriage bed looking to pleasure his or her spouse—this is the recipe for a great sex life! And it is why a marriage must be marked by good communication. A dynamic sex life doesn’t come easily or naturally; it requires intentionality, effort, direct conversation, and practice! Part of the joy and wonder is discovering how to satisfy someone who’s built radically different than you!

### Godly sex takes work

If sex is such an incredible blessing, why do so many Christian couples struggle to have a fulfilling sexual component to their relationship? First, many buy into the world’s lie that “sex = life.” This guarantees you will never be satisfied, and anyone telling you sex is life-giving is lying. There is only one Life Giver. Sex is glorious because it points beyond itself to the Lover of our souls. If we think it’s more than a signpost, we’re setting ourselves up for discontent. Sex will always be more like a piece of chocolate cake—a gift to be received with thanksgiving to God—than something that will change your life.

Further, many couples have broken sexual histories or present struggles sully their experience. Sexual sin mars the blessing God wants us to experience. That’s part of the reason sexual sin is described as a sin against self (1 Corinthians 6:18). So many marriages are impacted by porn use. It violates the call to forsake all others, and its effects are devastating. Porn brings out the base instincts of our fallen nature, focusing on physical appeal and the desire to copulate with abandon, completely ignoring God’s design that sexual desire be focused on serving another in an emotionally and spiritually intimate relationship. Those ensnared by porn live with perpetual discontent. No individual will ever satisfy. Internet porn programs us for constant novelty by providing innumerable sexual “partners,” leaving many people incapable of maintaining real relationships. Years ago secular researchers were stunned to discover the fastest-growing demographic of men dealing with erectile dysfunction were not the elderly, but guys in their 20s and 30s, abusers of internet porn since adolescence. There’s even greater social devastation as a generation prefers images over real people. And this isn’t just a “guys’ problem”—women are also drawn to porn. Brokenness abounds in our sexuality, so we need to grasp God’s grace for forgiveness and healing.

Because God made us his image bearers, our sexuality is greater than a physical act. Image-bearing sexuality is about becoming one with another creature, emotionally and

God created you as a sexual, romantic being with deep, powerful longings so you would understand *his longing for you!*

spiritually, as well as physically. We were created to be known, and marriage should be the most significant place this happens. In marriage, we are invited back to the experience of “naked and unashamed,” to be known for who we truly are and experience profound love and acceptance. Marriages become broken and distant when it is not safe to be vulnerable. Sex is intended to be a celebration of the emotional and spiritual closeness experienced by husband and wife in all of life. The Hebrew word used most frequently in the OT for sexual intimacy is “to know,” because image-bearing sexuality should be the culmination of a deep knowing and oneness. A great sex life starts in life’s mundane moments: driving in the car, sitting in the living room, during long walks, and doing the dishes.

respect, and safety is destructive to godly sex. Many behaviors celebrated by our culture are the result of porn’s destructive influence on our imagination, and safety, trust, and respect are violated when a spouse uses power or manipulation to get their way. And some Christian couples justify using porn to try to “spice up” their sex life. The marriage bed is a place where God wants us exclusively devoted to one another, focused on each other, learning of each other, not titillated by others.

Finally, there’s also no room for pouting when your advances are met with tired refusal. Focusing on one another forces us to balance our own longings with the desire to bless our spouse. And the cultural joke about a wife’s headache is increasingly inaccurate. Many wives are desperate for their husbands to engage them sexually, but often he neglects her,



### Practicing godly sex

These two aspects of sexuality—theological implications and practical applications—are crucial in helping couples express godly sexuality. Often couples want to know what behaviors are permitted in the marriage bed. Here’s where couples need to reflect on what they are pursuing and ask: Will my spouse be served, blessed, and encouraged? Or shamed, demeaned, and feel exploited? Is our activity a reflection of Christ’s love for his church? Will my spouse experience love, safety, joy, comfort through this? Will our behavior lead to my spouse’s flourishing, or will it mainly be for the benefit of one, turning the spouse into an object of self-centered pleasure? Honest reflection and discussion about motivation is critical, considering God’s intentions for sex in marriage.

For example, many in our culture were swept up in the *50 Shades* phenomena, including Christians. But activities like sexual bondage (BDSM) are completely at odds with everything we’ve been considering. To inject humiliation, pain, shame, fantasy role-play, and violence into what God designed to be the most intimate place of love, mutual trust,

consumed by his own struggle with pornography and other sexual sin.

Some Christians believe the world’s lie that maximum pleasure is the goal of sex. Scripture warns that in the last days people will be “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4). God wants us to know him more fully in all of life, to worship him as our Creator, and see that the world and life are charged with pleasure and glory as they reflect the wonder of his majesty. Although only partial in this life, he wants our eyes open now to this wonder, even as we long for its fullness. Sex, like all of life, is profoundly theological, while being gloriously earthy and physical. There should be a “Godward” orientation to every aspect of our lives. Through sexuality Christians are invited into deeper relationship with God, knowing our Creator’s delight in our experience of pleasures he designed for his glory and our good.

May we increasingly worship God through our sexuality, knowing that whether we fast or feast, sex is a signpost to the great consummation with Jesus, a herald of the glorious life to come.

# REBUILDING SEXUAL INTIMACY AFTER SEXUAL BETRAYAL



## Ellen Dykas

There are few hurts deeper than sexual betrayal. Sex is supposed to be a space of deep vulnerability, a place of joyful self-giving. No wonder the Bible calls marriage a “one-flesh” union, where physical nakedness is an image of total knowing and complete trust between a wife and husband.

When that trust is broken, a husband and wife will struggle to believe that their sexual intimacy can ever be restored. For those who stay together (and sadly, sometimes that will not be possible), they will need a way forward to become vulnerable again. It will not be easy, but a focus on the gospel gives real hope and practical help.

Sexual unfaithfulness breaks trust at the most vulnerable aspect of oneness as a spouse chooses, *rather than forsakes*, something or someone instead of the one to whom they promised faithfulness.

To understand how to rebuild trust, it helps to see God’s intention for sexual intimacy within marriage. As Dave White says in the main article, sexual expression is analogous to a deeper, eternal reality—a husband and wife are to be devoted to one another, forsaking all others, as “a reflection of Jesus’ desire that we be utterly devoted to him, forsaking worship of all others.”

Sexual unfaithfulness breaks trust at the most vulnerable aspect of oneness as a spouse chooses, *rather than forsakes*, something or someone instead of the one to whom they promised faithfulness. Whether the betrayal is mental,

emotional, or physical (or all three), the sins of pornography, sexual fantasy, masturbation, and adultery are ways a spouse breaks from devotion to Christ and their spouse, for worship of self and pleasure.

It is crucial for relational trust and spiritual togetherness to grow between two spouses before they attempt to restore sexual intimacy. If you are *already* actively pursuing healing in your marriage after the disclosure of sexual unfaithfulness, then consider the following four steps which can bring the kind of healing that makes the renewal of sexual intimacy a reality. If you are a friend, counselor, or pastor, these steps can enable you to help.

**1. Pray and commit for Jesus to have the first place in your heart.** Colossians 1:16-17 describes Jesus as Lord and Creator over all, which means he is to be first in *all* things. This includes your marriage and your sex life! Ask God to show how this failed to happen in your marriage, and in repentance begin learning what a biblical view of sex within marriage is and how Jesus helps you love your spouse.

**2. Turn towards your spouse.** Firm and strong choices to turn from all things that led to sexual sin must be another initial step. That means cutting off people, places, and situations that are sources of temptation. Trust cannot grow if the offending spouse is not actively seeking to flee from sin. However, fleeing is not enough! It is just as important for both to choose to turn towards the other sexually. This means making your marriage relationship a priority, as well as learning what cultivates an atmosphere of trust and safety for sexual intimacy, before, during, and after being together.

To move in that direction, pray for God to give you renewed emotional, mental, and sexual desire for your spouse alone. In other words, ask God to make you spousal-sexual: radically oriented and devoted to your husband or wife. God delights to respond to this prayer! After all, godly sex is his idea.

**3. Cultivate honest communication about sex.** God will use the exposure of sexual sin to open up communication on many topics, but the one that will require major focus will be your sexual relationship. Rebuilding trust will require an openness to share feelings, thoughts, and desires in this area. You need to learn what the other enjoys, what brings pleasure, what is uncomfortable, what communicates being used rather than being delighted in. These are extremely vulnerable topics; go slowly, and remember to continually/actively build up your emotional trust with each other. For some, fasting from sexual activity can enable a couple to communicate honestly without the pressure (and fear) of engaging sexually.

**4. Pursue and receive your spouse with patient love.** Restoring your sexual relationship will take time. Expressing non-sexual affection is a way to express love for the ‘whole person’ of your spouse. Remember that pain and hurt don’t go away quickly, so be patient with yourself and your spouse as you learn new ways of relating. Patience and perseverance are the key words!



# A COUPLE'S JOURNEY AFTER SEXUAL BETRAYAL

Ellen Dykas



After Drew's admission of years of secret pornography usage, he and Tilina got involved with Harvest USA's biblical support groups. Ellen Dykas asked them to share their story on what helped them reconnect and rebuild intimacy back into their marriage.

**Ellen:** *Can you share briefly what happened in your marriage?*

**Tilina:** Two years into our marriage, Drew confessed to years of pornography addiction. Our sexual relationship had grown distant and infrequent, as his sexual sin caused him to experience arousal only through images and not a real human being: me, his wife! When his years of deceit came to light, my trust broke to pieces.

**Ellen:** *What was most difficult—and most helpful—in rebuilding trust?*

**Tilina:** Rebuilding trust certainly required effort from both of us. I needed honesty from Drew at all costs, no matter how minor the situation, because I had no gauge of what was true anymore. Hiding or omitting anything would be detrimental to me emotionally. I also needed answers to many questions, even those to which I feared the answers. I started with trusting God, knowing he had my best interest at heart and would help me to trust Drew again.

**Drew:** It was difficult to disclose and then handle the harsh results of my sin. I had to trust that God could redeem and heal the relationship by shedding my pride and selfishness, learning that the two of us couldn't rebuild the marriage on our own. The most helpful thing for me was learning how to depend on God by being on my knees and crying out to him. Only the gospel and prayer allowed Tilina and me to grow into a restored marriage.

**Ellen:** *How did Drew's sexual betrayal impact your sexual relationship?*

**Tilina:** I was stunned when I found out why Drew was so lacking in sexual desire and response to me. After discovering that, I not only lacked any desire to be intimate with him, I felt unattractive, unloved, and, most of all, not good enough as a woman. I didn't trust him, and I didn't feel safe around him. But I also desperately wanted to be enough for him. I felt trapped. I didn't want to share myself sexually, but I would force myself in an attempt to keep him from viewing pornography, and he feared me thinking he was going back if he wasn't petitioning me for sex. A year after Drew's confession we were having sex often but not exactly for the right reasons. Our sexual relationship was driven by fear.

**Ellen:** *So if you realized that your sexual relationship at that point was unhealthy, what did you do then?*

**Tilina:** In order for us to reconnect inside the bedroom, we first had to develop a strong connection outside the bedroom. The most important thing was being vulnerable. We wanted our sexual relationship to be the "icing on top" of our increasing emotional and spiritual intimacy. After much prayer and discussion, we decided to fast from sex for 90 days.

*(continued on page 8)*

# A COUPLE'S JOURNEY AFTER SEXUAL BETRAYAL

(continued from page 7)

Our purpose was to grow emotionally and spiritually, and also for Drew to attempt to rewire his brain from the damage caused by years of pornography. This trying and grueling task showed us how God knit us more closely together even when sex wasn't an active part of our relationship. During that time we daily prayed and read devotions together. We also practiced extended cuddling and uninterrupted listening, both of which allowed us to grow closer. All this helped us to put our sexual relationship in a much better place.

**Ellen:** How would you encourage a hurting spouse who is fearful about moving forward sexually, post-betrayal?

**Tilina:** Rebuilding sexual relations is tough, because you'll both feel so far apart. You may find that what cannot be said can instead be felt through touch. Other times, you may be able to talk but still be unable to let yourself be vulnerable enough to touch each other intimately or make love like you used to. Talk to each other directly about your feelings. Be honest if you don't want to have sex. If you're open to being physical, but not sexual, tell your spouse what those things are. If you both feel safe, this can move toward sexual intercourse, but it doesn't have to. Touching, hugging, snuggling, or even showering together may be the goal for the first few weeks or months. Try to be patient with one another and take your time.

**Drew:** I would encourage a husband who was the betrayer that moving forward is going to burn. I cannot sugarcoat this. But it's not a furnace of annihilation; rather it's the grace of refinement. Your pride and self-worship will be chiseled away. Though at first fear and uncertainty may set in, don't give up; when you realize that God is working all things for your good, you can be more vulnerable to expose your weaknesses and disclose the warfare in your heart. You'll see your spouse as a helpmate, a friend who truly loves and cares for you, rather than feeling like she's a drill sergeant or CSI detective.

During this time take steps to build your relationship with your wife vertically; that is, reintroduce God. Pray together, read the Bible together. Horizontally, set up date nights, sleep naked with each other, and fast from sex to rebuild intimacy as you learn to love each other once again without the mask.

Let me encourage you that there is beauty in the struggle. I heard a pastor once say, "Whatever we seek to cover, God will expose it. Whatever we expose God will cover." Through all this our desperate need for grace becomes illuminated by a perfect loving Savior who grips us into his arms.

*Drew and Tilina Chheang have been married for four years. They have a two-year-old son and two daughters, ages 12 and 15, from a previous marriage. Drew works in the housing industry and plans to attend seminary in the near future. Tilina is a stay-at-home mother and intends to continue her education with a Masters in counseling.*

## Our Impact...

### Michael Howell (MONTGOMERY, AL)



"One of the main reasons that I support HARVEST USA has to do with a seminar they sponsored, which I attended online. At first, it was what I expected: Bible-based, Reformation roots and eminent practicality. However, as the weekly sessions continued, something unexpected happened. I began increasingly to look forward to each lesson because there was such life-giving emphasis and application of the gospel. Although each session closely guarded the time constraints of busy pastors, I wanted to linger a bit longer in order to hear (again) about the power and love of Christ for sinners. Additionally, I am able to hand out copies of their fine printed materials to those who struggle or to their parents and friends."

*Michael is the Minister of Pastoral Care at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Montgomery, AL. He holds a B.A. from Jacksonville State University and an M.Div. from Reformed Theological Seminary.*

### Sue Milligan (NOTTINGHAM, MD)



"I thank God often for HARVEST USA's ministry. As a parent, I have needed direction and advice on how to help my children think biblically in this culture full of sexual confusion, and to understand how to love the hurting instead of avoiding them.

As a pastor's wife, I have leaned heavily on HARVEST USA's resources and conferences to help equip those in my church to intentionally be salt and light in the lives of their children and the surrounding world. I support HARVEST USA because they endeavor to anticipate the needs of the church in this unanchored society."

*Sue attends Loch Raven Presbyterian Church where her husband, David, serves as the senior pastor.*

# REAL LIFE CONVERSATIONS

## PASTORS SHOULDN'T BE AFRAID TO TAKE THE LID OFF

The pastor on the other end of the phone call was nervous. The uneasy tone in his voice told me that he was both uncomfortable and distressed. He had called seeking advice because he didn't know what to do.

"I think pornography use among the men in my church is at an epidemic level. But, frankly, I'm afraid to take the lid off it and address it openly." He then related that, over the previous months, several men had shared with him about their secret, life-long struggles and recent failures with Internet porn.

I congratulated him on being someone who others obviously felt was approachable with this very sensitive and shaming issue. He went on to tell me what perplexed and paralyzed him the most. "You don't understand, John. Some of these men are leaders in my church—a Sunday school teacher and a deacon. It could be a major disruption for me to address these issues straightforwardly." He also told me his foremost fear: If this was happening amongst his leadership, how pervasive might this be with other guys in the church?

The situation was too overwhelming to him, hence his hesitancy to boldly dive in. This was evident to me when he shared, "There's a part of me which would just rather not know." That's when I pushed into his fears and unbelief—his fear about how it would all turn out and his unbelief that God could do something powerful in the lives of the men in his church. I talked to him about what it seemed like the Lord was doing and could now do even more through his involvement. I also bluntly told him that the obstacle to growth and change for these men was not just their sin, it was now him. (Not sure he liked me saying that.)

In reality, he was so caught up in his own fear that he didn't see this: The confessions made by these leaders were orchestrated by God. When our eyes are on ourselves—our fears, our inabilities—don't we often miss the big picture of how God is working? This situation was a golden opportunity

for him. I tried to encourage this pastor and also challenge him. "Obviously, for this to begin to come to light among some of your men—well, this is nothing less than a movement of the Spirit. How can you not pursue your leadership in a more wide-scale and intentional way?" I asked.

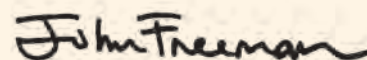
Yes, in the short-term, moving into these men's lives might be messy. He might find out things he'd rather not know. Patterns of temptation, strongholds, and other sin tendencies would be uncovered and might be deeper and more complex than feared.

However, I also helped him to see that his involvement could be transformative for these men. I urged him to take the long view and picture the outcome down the line of helping these men turn from porn to Christ. He could have men more appreciative of God's mercy, more engaged

with their wives and families, and more active in the church. They could move to a new understanding of Jesus as one who meets us in the midst of the chaos of our lives to show us our deep-seated idols and replace them with his grace-filled presence. Walking alongside these strugglers might have far-reaching consequences and could be dramatically redemptive for those who had confessed.

I finished our conversation by telling this pastor that whatever mess he might uncover would be well worth it. I think he started to get the picture.

John Freeman



Founder and Ministry Liaison  
john@harvestusa.org

PS. I'd love to send you a copy of my article for church leaders, *Sex and the Silence of the Church, Why it is Crippling God's People*. Send me an email, and I'll get you one.



That's when I pushed into his fears and unbelief—his fear about how it would all turn out and his unbelief that God could do something powerful in the lives of the men in his church

# IS A STRUGGLE WITH PORN A DEAL-BREAKER FOR GETTING MARRIED?

Mark Sanders



Many who come to HARVEST USA battling a serious pornography problem are married. Some discussed their struggle with their spouses before getting married, while others kept it completely hidden. Pornography's impact on a marriage can be devastating, sometimes to the point of becoming the main factor in a couple's divorce.

With this danger in mind, is your fiancé's use of pornography grounds to call off an engagement—or even to end the relationship? If sexual sin, past and present, can destroy a marriage, raising those questions before taking vows becomes a matter of wisdom. It's also a matter of necessity today. With the universality and accessibility of pornography, almost no one's heart and mind today are untouched by its impact. Younger generations of Christians, especially, have grown up with high-speed Internet and its ability to deliver pornography anywhere and at any time.

If almost everyone is affected by porn in some way, then it is not enough to simply ask your fiancé, "Have you looked, or are you looking, at pornography?" That's not going to decide your answer about the relationship. Rather, you need a follow-up question if the (likely) answer is yes: "If this is an ongoing issue, in what direction is your struggle going?" Meaning, what is he or she doing about it? Is your fiancé showing a growing desire to honor Christ in all areas of life? Is that seen in how he or she acknowledges struggles, confesses sins, and shows evidence of repenting?

To better answer the question in the title of this article, here are three follow-up questions you need to work through.

## **Is your fiancé growing in openness and transparency?**

First, is your fiancé growing in being open and transparent with you and others about this struggle? Many couples never discuss sexual issues, much less struggles, even when the relationship is clearly heading for the altar. But these issues need to be brought into the open. More than ever, it is essential that couples receive biblically-based pre-marital counseling. Discussing sexual issues with a third party provides a degree of safety for talking through these issues. Navigating this kind of disclosure without help can be scary and difficult. How much should I share, and what details should I give? This is why having an experienced pastor, counselor, or older mentoring couple walk with you is recommended. The goal of this disclosure is meant to promote intimacy, but done carelessly, without wisdom, it can have the opposite impact.

The third party can also provide discernment on the health of the relationship, answering critical questions about proceeding towards marriage. Sometimes the intensity of the struggle might indicate that the relationship should slow down and any plans for marriage be postponed until further evidence of success is demonstrated. You need an outside voice to help you make that decision.

This transparency not only needs to happen in pre-marital counseling; it should be an ever-increasing way of how you are currently living. Is your fiancé open about other things in his life, or do you sense that he keeps some things hidden? One devastating consequence of pornography usage is a typical

pattern of deceit and hiding, which eventually bleeds into all areas of life. So, do you both have trusted people in your lives who really know where you struggle, both individually and as a couple? The biggest barrier to fighting sexual sin is living in secrecy. Shame does that to us.

Proverbs 18:1 says, “Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment” (ESV). If your fiancé has never told anyone else about his struggle, then that is a sign he’s not ready to deal with his sin, and he’s also unable to see the situation with any clarity. Danger ahead!

### Are specific steps being taken to avoid sources of temptation?

Secondly, is your fiancé actively taking steps to remove clear sources of temptation in her life? If she struggles with her phone or laptop, has she gotten accountability software and put up filters? Or maybe she’s even gone back to a dumb phone, because she knows that having 24/7 availability to the web is a dangerous place for her to live. Though simply removing access to pornography does not guarantee a changed heart, it is evidence that your fiancé takes this struggle seriously. We often have a love/hate relationship with our sin patterns, and it is typical for most of us to be tempted to keep a back door open to our sin. We don’t seriously want to be free of it. Intentionally eliminating those back doors is evidence that she is not simply managing sin; she wants to kill it.

1 Peter 5:8 tells us to be sober-minded and watchful because the devil seeks to devour us. Taking real, sacrificial steps to avoid sources of temptation means that you accurately understand the weight of the situation. Real change needs to happen at the level of heart, but that change is facilitated by humbly recognizing the need for clear boundary lines to live within. For the sake of loving God and others well, we willingly accept restrictions that make it harder to engage in sin.

### Are other people holding your fiancé accountable?

Thirdly, accountability is the natural result of transparent living. If your fiancé has taken the difficult step of sharing his struggle with trusted friends and mentors, is he also willing to be held accountable to them? A one-time confession of a private struggle is often a liberating and freeing experience. But the harder work comes in the regular discussion about how the fight has been going and what changes need to be implemented to fight better. If he is willing to be challenged and called to account by men who care about his soul, then you both will experience the fulfillment of God’s promise to

“give grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).

Establishing who bears this burden of accountability is important. It is unhelpful for a (future) spouse to become the “porn police.” This does not mean that couples fail to confess their sins to one another, but it does mean that the one who struggles has friends in his or her life who regularly ask hard questions. Consequently, the accountability partners have access to speak freely to the couple and their counselors to give their input. Having accountability partners outside of

the romantic relationship provides additional support for the struggler. Without it, a constant temptation to worry and speculate can seriously impair the relationship; with it, the fiancé knows that the problem is being addressed and that her intended spouse is getting the help he needs.

We’ve looked at three key areas to consider if your fiancé is struggling with pornography: increasing transparency, actively fleeing temptation, and accountability. If one of these areas is lacking or non-existent, some serious and difficult discussions—and decisions—need to happen. But, again, this should not be done alone. Deciding to

postpone or call off an engagement or relationship requires the insight of trusted and competent mentors.

In addition to discussing struggles with pornography, Christian couples need to honestly address how they are honoring Christ in maintaining sexual integrity in their relationship before marriage. Christian couples today are as sexually active before marriage as their secular counterparts. A false line is drawn to rationalize their behavior; everything short of intercourse is defined as not being sex. There are good reasons for delaying sexual intimacy before marriage, and one of them is learning to center your relationship on Christ by jointly encouraging each other to obey and trust his will. If disobedience is brought jointly into the marriage, then a perilous pattern is established. How you choose to honor God and one another through sexual integrity in one season of life will show your commitment and fitness for the next season.

Take heart, brothers and sisters: God does not call or bless only those with perfect obedience to him. His grace covers a multitude of sins, and that same grace can enable both of you to turn from destructive relational patterns and toward honoring Christ in this important area of life. And taking appropriate, wise steps *before* saying your vows is an investment that will reap a harvest of righteousness and joy in God’s glorious covenant of marriage!



# SAME-SEX ATTRACTION AND ME

Tammy Perlmutter

I used to lie in bed at night and pray to not wake up. I wanted *it* to be gone, I wanted it to be gone. I struggled, prayed, and did the right things. I still do the right things and put in the work, but I am still, for as long as I can remember, a woman who is attracted to other women. Call it bisexuality or same-sex attraction or fluid sexuality or an abomination or a natural affection, it doesn't change the fact that it is *unwanted*.

I never wanted to be this way. I had enough problems already. Born to an alcoholic mother, abandoned by my father before I was born, placed in foster care at 4 to spend the rest of my childhood in homes that never felt like my own. I was already set apart in the loneliest of ways.

But it's all I've ever known. I would fantasize about my mom coming to rescue me, taking me home and promising to never leave, loving me the way a little girl is supposed to be loved by her mother. It never happened.

To add to the avalanche of painful circumstances, I was sexually abused by a foster father, kissed by a youth pastor, experimented on by a female family member—the list goes on and on of sexual brokenness finding me and owning me.

The fantasies of my mom morphed into fantasies of *any* woman coming to rescue me, and since much of the affection I received was overly sexualized, these fantasies became sexually charged, too.

Feeling loved, accepted, approved of, and wanted by a woman became the defining pursuit of my life. Since I was abandoned by a woman who didn't value me or cherish me, in my mind, the only way I would have worth or value was to be loved by a woman. My troubled heart translated friendship into sex, fueled by an intense jealousy.

Amid all this confusion and shame was a deep-seated self-hatred that completely blinded me. I saw nothing in myself worth pursuing. It magnified the worth I placed on other people, especially other girls. I worshipped these peers who were beautiful and loved. I wanted to be with them. I wanted to be them, consume their best traits, I wanted them to worship

me in return, and the closest I could get to *being* them was to engage in a physical relationship *with* them.

All this time I longed to know Jesus as personally as I could, but I was never enough, never felt whole. I looked for comfort in porn, masturbation, drinking, cutting, and adolescent sexual encounters in alley ways, behind garages, in basements, dark stairwells, with both girls and guys.

I believed this particular struggle was the worst one you could possibly have. The constant crushes on my girl friends, the fear of exposure and rejection, the aching need for connection that was never quite fulfilled brought me to a place where I felt like I had no hope, and I sunk into a heavy depression. The shame surrounding this temptation forced me into isolation and despair and a loneliness so deep and

dark it made me want to kill myself.

I felt cursed and punished by God, like I was tainted from conception and at one point was convinced that Satan owned me and God was not powerful enough to get me back. I wanted to be a "good Christian girl," but felt like that would never be me, unless God healed and delivered me. I prayed after I flirted with friends, I prayed after spending the night with a girl, I prayed as I pined away from unrequited love. I prayed alone in bed when the crushing weight of my brokenness could only be alleviated by a blade across my skin.

I begged for healing, but there was no deliverance. There was no miraculous removal of these desires from my heart and body. There was only me, wanting to love God with the entirety of my being, even if it meant refusing to act on my feelings, denying myself and putting on Christ every minute of the day. There was only me, burrowing into God's heart and begging him to be enough for me, to fill the cavernous emptiness inside me, to comfort me with his love so completely that I wouldn't settle for a love that feels good but draws me further from his heart with every flutter in my stomach, every furtive kiss, every secret touch.



When I was 19, homeless and hopeless, I was faced with the choice to pursue God or pursue a woman I was in a relationship with. I had an opportunity to move to Chicago to serve in a ministry I could make my home, where I could be discipled and known. God spoke to me, telling me my sexuality was expressed out of brokenness, loss, and grief. I knew, even in the darkest, dirtiest corner of my heart, that if I acted on my desires, I would be choosing to live from my fear, my deficit, my huge, gaping mother-wound.

I made a deal with God. I told him I would go. I promised that I would stop living a double life and be painfully honest about what I was wrestling with, that I would answer any question with absolute truth. I also told him that if He didn't meet me in Chicago I would never go back to him. I kept my end and he did too. I was taught the transforming energy of transparency and confession, the desperate need for accountability, and the expulsive power of a new affection.

A few years ago a woman I knew was writing a piece about

The power of healing is in its ongoing nature. It's not a point in time, but a living, breathing Thing with seasons of lying fallow and flowering flush, of flooding the plain and feeding from beneath the surface.

faith and homosexuality, and I offered her my story. She let me down easy, telling me that she wasn't in the market for any "ex-gay" stories. I wish ex-gay referred to me. I wish I could be summed up that easily. But nobody can be reduced to so few syllables.

For myself, I don't find it helpful to allow myself to identify as gay. My sexuality does not define my identity. It's a small part of it but not enough for me to choose to identify by it. I am so many other things than same-sex attracted. I identify more accurately as a sci-fi geek girl than a girl-who-likes-girls.

Pursuing wholeness, for me, doesn't look like becoming fully heterosexual. It looks like honoring God through obedience in mind and body. Putting on Christ, dwelling in him, suffering with him, and experiencing transformational change that draws me closer and deeper, as I live out and live in the God-breathed Word that saves and heals.

I love God. I want to live a whole life. I may not be able to choose being same-sex attracted, but I can choose what I do with it. Nobody chose it for me. I chose a life of drawing near to God as best I could every day. I chose to say no to myself in a hundred different ways, not just when I wanted to hook up with the cute girl I just met, or look up that high school crush

that almost was. The other hundred ways I say no to myself are the ones that might not be as flashy and dramatic, but they matter just as much, if not more.

I'm 44 years old. I've been married to a man I love for almost 20 years. I have a beautiful daughter who I smother with love and attention so she knows, in her deepest places, that she is loved, valued, wanted, and cherished. I am still attracted to women, I still feel the pull sometimes, I still struggle with crushes and fantasies. But it doesn't control me anymore. I am not overpowered by it. I am not without hope. Even though it doesn't look or feel the way I want it to, my prayers have been heard and answered, and God's promises of faithfulness and a future have defined my life and identity more than my attractions.

I no longer daydream about being rescued by my mother or a lover or a friend; I am already rescued by Jesus who loves me like a father and a mother. When I left my first foster home, the mom put a little prayer card in my hand. It had that classic image of a child leaning into God's hand with the verse from Isaiah: "Behold, I will not forget you, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands." I can still picture it. I still lean into that truth.

It's taken years of counseling, group therapy, prayer, hard choices, vulnerability, excruciating confessions, and brutal honesty. It's taken a strong community-now-family, good friends, and a great husband, but I am more convinced every day that I am delighted in, rejoiced over, comforted, forgiven, and deeply, truly loved.

Healing has a different meaning now. I always assumed that its significance was only in its past tense, but I've learned the power of healing is in its ongoing nature. It's not a point in time, but a living, breathing Thing with seasons of lying fallow and flowering flush, of flooding the plain and feeding from beneath the surface. Deliverance has also showed me a new facet of its many sides. I was so obsessed with being delivered from same-sex attraction that I forgot that I was being delivered to something, or rather, Someone. And that was the more needful thing.



Tammy Perlmutter is a former intern at HARVEST USA. She writes about unabridged life, fragmented faith, and investing in the mess. She is founder and curator of *The Mudroom*, a collaborative blog encouraging women to speak truth, love hard, and enter in with each other, and co-founder of Deeply Rooted, a biannual worship and teaching gathering for women. Tammy is a member of Redbud Writers Guild, writing blog posts, personal essays, flash memoir, and poetry. She lives in an intentional Christian community in Chicago with her husband, Mike, and daughter, Phoenix. She has a poem included in the book *Everbloom*, coming out May 2017 with Paraclete Press.

# MY "MIXED-ORIENTATION" MARRIAGE

Tammy Perlmutter



I never heard the term “mixed-orientation” marriage until a few years ago. I didn’t have a name for what we had. It was just *marriage*. There wasn’t any special treatment of our relationship. Maybe things would have been easier if there was. I wasn’t aware of any couples’ support groups, retreats, or conferences focusing on this unique covenant.

When Mike pursued me, he already knew about my past and it didn’t matter to him. He would joke that we have the same struggle: a weakness for women. He wasn’t intimidated by my attraction to women, and he wasn’t threatened by it either. He just loved me. He didn’t want us to have a strong relationship in spite of my attractions; he believed we could have one that transcended my attractions.

Our story isn’t one you will read about in the media because it doesn’t attract the same attention as others, namely the ones featuring adultery and divorce due to a spouse’s same-sex attraction. News like this feeds the false belief that any sexual desires thwarted or denied will only cause heartbreak and betrayal. “Follow your heart” becomes the new Golden Rule, and “being true to yourself” is now seen as heroic, regardless of who gets hurt.

But Mike didn’t expect me to be miraculously delivered from my struggle as soon as he put the ring on my finger. He knew it would be a journey, but he had hope. Mike trusted my relationship with Jesus would be the foundation of my love for him.

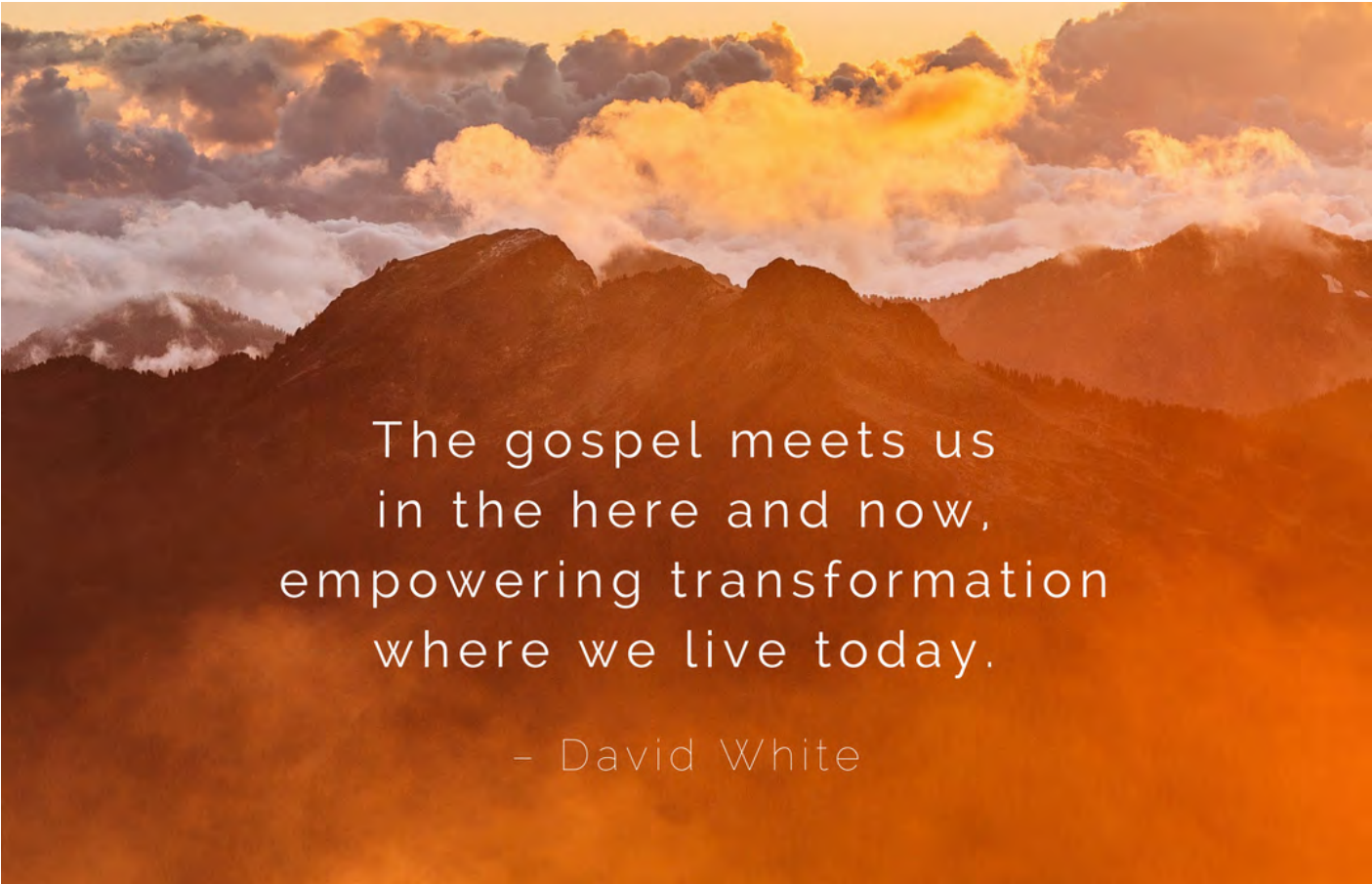
The most powerful temptation for me is to find my worth in my friendships with women. I would pursue and invest with abandon, often leaving my husband feeling abandoned. He would point out that I listen more and better to the women in my life than I do to him. I would immediately get defensive. But it turned out to be true. I would put more stock in my friends’ opinions and advice, and seeking Mike’s was an after thought.

Ultimately, I wasn’t choosing between Mike and women, I was choosing between *God* and women. I committed my heart, body, and spirit to Jesus, and that included my sexuality.

The cure for that isn’t giving Mike more attention or time, it’s responding to Jesus’s conviction about where my heart is. If I’m not present to my husband, that most likely means I’m not present to God. I can’t improve my marriage solely by focusing on my husband’s needs. The only victory over flesh we will find is when we are both seeking the kingdom first.

Ultimately, I wasn’t choosing between Mike and women, I was choosing between God and women. I committed my heart, body, and spirit to Jesus, and that included my sexuality. I tried the white-knuckling for years. I tried to be vigilant





The gospel meets us  
in the here and now,  
empowering transformation  
where we live today.

– David White

about what I saw, listened to, and read. I prayed for awareness of the vibes (bait) I was putting out and being honest about vibes from others I was picking up. I was scrupulous in my confession. I wore shame like a shroud and defeat like a mantle.

I was focusing on behavior modification when what I needed was heart transformation. God doesn't want me driven to distraction by fleeting feelings or momentary twinges of desire, he wants me so transfixed by him that what I want changes dramatically. I'm no longer aiming for fewer temptations as I am longing for more of God—more of his Word, more of his presence, and more of his healing power. That is when I want more of Mike—more of his heart, more of his attention, more of his affection.

There are specific challenges we face in our relationship. Mike has felt lonely over the years. He often prays that my longing for him would match the intensity of my desire for women. Anne Lamott once said that the mind is a dangerous place, you shouldn't go in there alone. I have women I confess to, who hold me accountable, and ask hard questions. My husband checks in with me regularly and helps me stay present.

When I'm in a vulnerable place struggling with my thoughts and desires, I don't stay there. I'm learning how to invite Jesus, right then and there, into whatever fantasy is playing in my head. I imagine myself talking to him about what is happening, why I want it, or who I want, and how I think it will fill the hole inside me. Then I look at him and beg

him to be enough for me, to give me the power to say no to myself, to surrender my desires to him, and ask him to fill the emptiness inside me with his Spirit.

My struggle can be a constant source of hurt for Mike. He senses a low-grade rejection of him as a man. He hasn't had anyone to talk to about this; nobody he knows has experienced it. He doesn't have a safe place to express his pain and confusion. He doesn't have someone to walk alongside him in this. It's taken him years to acknowledge it and share how he feels.

**I don't believe that my same-sex attraction is the biggest obstacle in our marriage.** It's not the hinge that all other arguments or issues swing on. When we have conflict it's not because I have a crush on a woman, entered into enmeshment with a friend, or gave in to using porn. More likely than not, it's about Mike's anger, my impatience, my detachment, his negativity. Those are the real enemies of our marriage.

We know that God brought us together and keeps us committed. Our marriage is a testimony of how God's healing power and love can draw people to one another and keep them devoted, faithful, and fruitful, even in the face of adversity and disappointment. Our faults and failings threaten to separate us, but when we are vulnerable and honest, those same things pull us closer to each other and to God. We have an enemy who wants to destroy our marriage, and us, but we have a God who will defeat death and destruction in any form, and he has hope and a future for our marriage.

# THE DESTRUCTIVE EXPECTATIONS OF REPARATIVE THERAPY

R. Nicholas Black

Expectations. We all have them, whether we acknowledge them outright or hide them in our hearts. We are hope-based creatures; we need to have hope in order to live. Yet there is danger in hope; it will crush you if you put your trust in something that can't deliver.

I think about the destructiveness of false hope whenever reparative therapy pops up in the news. Every few months another state or city government proposes legislation to outlaw reparative therapy. All over the web are stories of gays and lesbians who were harmed by attempts from therapists or Christian ministries to change their sexual orientation. The faith of many broke over those unbiblical expectations.

Putting one's faith in anything outside of what God has explicitly promised is courting disaster. I remember sitting with a church leader, pouring out my fears about the impending birth of my third child. Three years earlier our second child was born severely disabled. We had a 25% chance of the same birth defect occurring with other children. We decided not to have any more. God decided differently. It was a pregnancy full of fear for us.

In that meeting, what I heard from him deeply unsettled me: "Don't worry. God isn't going to give you another disabled child." How did he know that? He didn't, but he said he couldn't fathom that God would do that, again, to us.

I left that meeting confused but already determined to reject that advice. I knew that no page of Scripture promises specific things we want in life. I had been painfully learning for the past three years, in raising my disabled son, to let God be God. While I didn't understand what God's purposes were for giving us such a child, I had, unexpectedly, come to trust him more. My relationship with God was no longer based on what I expected him to do for me. (Isn't that much of the way we relate to God in our hearts?)

I had come to see that my prior expectations of what God would do in my life were but projections of my own hoped-for future. False expectations. God had mercifully smashed them. And in doing so, I came to grasp that his death on my behalf was a sufficient display of his love for me. I could live on that.

The essence of reparative therapy is that homosexuality can be changed into heterosexuality through following its counseling practices. Some of those practices were immoral and

unethical (past practices included aversion therapy, "cuddling," using pornography to encourage heterosexual desire, etc.). But the expectation of change—that was what deeply pulled on the hearts of those who wanted to live without same-sex desire.

A significant part of HARVEST USA's ministry work is with those who live with unwanted same-sex attraction and who reach out to us for help. Many of these men and women grew up in the church, and many of them want the kind of "guarantee" reparative therapy falsely offers. So, we are asked from time to time whether HARVEST USA does reparative therapy. Can we promise the kind of change many have desperately hoped for?

And our answer is a compassionate, biblical "No." HARVEST USA has never used, nor approved of, reparative therapy. We believe

it to be thoroughly unbiblical and unhelpful because it attempts to correct a spiritual issue with behavioral modification. Reparative therapy is a product of our culture's obsession with all things therapeutic. Tragically, the evangelical community jumped on the therapeutic bandwagon and found themselves wed to a psychological methodology that was never biblical to begin with.

The church is now, thankfully, repenting of proclaiming this kind of unbiblical hope. Not because there is no hope; rather

it is not the hope Scripture gives to sexual strugglers.

Homosexual behavior is a sin that needs repentance. Like all sin, it comes out of our fallen hearts. All sin rises, as Luther said, from the "inherent bentness of our hearts" toward idolatry, and away from God. That's the message of Romans 1. Paul is not singling out gays and lesbians as being the worst of sinners; he is pointing the finger at every single human being because all of us possess a disordered heart. A heart whose inclinations and desires, whether chosen or discovered, insist and demand to live life on its own terms. Following Christ, however, is about always submitting our heart's desires to his kingly rule over every part of our life.

Therefore, we call everyone to a different kind of change, an inner heart change. HARVEST USA is not in the "sexual re-orientation" business, but rather seeks to help men and women grow into radical Christ-orientation in all areas of life, including our desires and attractions. Our core ministry is to help sexual strugglers of all kinds know and learn from Jesus (Matthew 11:29), who promises to meet us in our struggles and give us new life, daily. In our teaching, we acknowledge and address

So, we are asked from time to time whether HARVEST USA does reparative therapy. Can we promise the kind of change many have desperately hoped for? And our answer is a compassionate, biblical "No."

Authentic submission to Christ is allowing God to direct our lives and our future in ways that exceed our expectations—even when the reality might be that one continues to live with same-sex attraction and on-going temptation.

the complex life experiences that each person brings through our doors. Our work is about applying the power of the gospel to inform all the external and internal factors that shape a person's life while calling and helping everyone to live a life of sexual integrity according to the Scriptures. That kind of life is supernatural, and it does lead to surprising joy.

In our culture, living a life of sexual integrity that the gospel calls us to is an especially hard journey. Now both secular society and proponents within the wider church say that same-sex behavior is an acceptable life to God. Tragically, leaders in the church are now proclaiming this kind of false hope also.

What about change then? We believe that people are changed when they grasp ahold of the gospel. But we don't say what that change will exactly be. We don't create unbiblical and unrealistic expectations of how God is going to work in every person's life (for a fuller discussion read our mini book, *Can You Change if You're Gay*, available at [harvest-usa-store.com](http://harvest-usa-store.com)). Jesus promises to make his followers into his image, expressing his character, steadily growing in outward obedience to his will. This is not behavioral modification. Authentic submission to Christ is allowing God to direct our lives and our future in ways that exceed our expectations—even when the reality might be that one continues to live with same-sex attraction and on-going temptation.

One quick point about the legal issues surrounding reparative therapy; the push for legislation does raise legitimate concerns about religious liberty. Would the way HARVEST USA helps people with same-sex attraction—to follow Christ faithfully and live according to God's design for sexuality—be viewed as being no different from reparative therapy? Will it one day be illegal to even speak of the Christian position on sexuality to a young person in the church who wonders about his or her sexuality? This is a significant matter and one that we must defend. For that reason, we must also be clear about the lines we draw in how we help people, and not go beyond Scripture.

I still wonder as I think about all this, if I had put my trust in the well-meaning words of that church leader, where my faith in Christ would be now, because my third child was born with the same genetic disease, and his short life ended six months later. Thankfully, I had learned to put my hope in God and his glorious cross—and not my hoped-for expectations of what I needed him to do in my life. That made all the difference in my life and for my faith, and it has led to surprising joy.

## Our Impact...



### Joy Whitney (PRINCETON, NJ)

"I was familiar with HARVEST USA's ministry for many years prior to becoming a monthly supporter. When the Supreme Court ruled in June 2015 to make same-sex marriage legal across the country, I knew that it was just the beginning of major changes in society. I felt that I needed to make a commitment to an organization that was ministering to those inside and outside the church as they struggle with sexual issues. HARVEST USA is a leading voice on these issues and they speak with integrity, compassion, mercy, and grace."

*Joy is a Research Director for a financial services company, providing information and analysis through the lifecycle of each investment.*





Partner with us.  
Impact a person,  
a family, a church.

## PEOPLE AND LIVES IMPACTED BY HARVEST USA

Throughout this issue, you've read many stories. Tammy Perlmutter shares a remarkable story about the Lord bringing her to faith and keeping her faithful in her marriage despite an ongoing struggle with same-sex attraction. And Drew and Tilina invite us into the story of their redeemed marriage that was nearly lost because of sexual sin.

Then I hope you read the stories from six donors presented in this issue, telling us how they have been impacted by the ministry of HARVEST USA and why they support us.

These donors—campus ministry workers, teachers, pastors, sales representatives, graphic designers, researchers, mothers, and grandmothers from across the country—are representative of the diverse group of people who support HARVEST USA.

Each one has been equipped to think biblically about sexuality and gender. And each one has been helped in moving toward sexually-hurting people as a result of our ministry.

Our donors' unique stories identify what we do and why we do it. We're committed to the church so that people like Kevin Offner can do better college ministry. We're committed to sexual strugglers so that people like Theo Facinoli have a safe place to be cared for and discipled.

I am humbled that God has written HARVEST USA into all of these stories. Please join me in giving him thanks for making our ministry fruitful and sustaining our ministry through the kindness and generosity of our donors.

If you've been helped by our direct or equipping ministry, I invite you to share your story with us by emailing [info@harvestusa.org](mailto:info@harvestusa.org).

I also invite you to partner with us in our ministry. Many people don't realize that our direct ministry to men and

women who come here for help is given at no charge. We are not a fee-based ministry.

Your prayers and financial gifts make our ministry possible. You can give an online gift at [harvestusa.org/donate](http://harvestusa.org/donate) or mail in a gift using the reply envelope in this magazine.

In the Lord,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tim Geiger'.

Tim Geiger, President

A COMMUNITY OF GRACE  
IS WHERE SINFUL PEOPLE  
LEARN THAT SEXUAL SIN  
ISN'T UNFORGIVABLE.

— TIM GEIGER

# Our Impact...



## Kevin Offner (WASHINGTON, D.C.)

"I'm finding in my work with university graduate students on secular campuses in Washington, D.C. that issues related to sexuality are repeatedly coming up. This is no longer a secondary issue in my ministry. In fact, I allow few conversations to transpire without at some point asking a student how he is doing on this front, and invariably the men will open up about their struggle with Internet pornography, questions about what it means to be male and masculine, sexual sin that needs to be confronted and repented of, etc.

One thing I especially appreciate about the ministry of HARVEST USA is the way they remain unashamedly committed to historic Christian orthodoxy on all things pertaining to sexual ethics, while simultaneously expressing deep love and service for those in the midst of sexual struggle. It's a wonderful blend of grace and truth; confronting sin, yet glorying in Christ's forgiveness; acknowledging how sexual sin can take a deep and at times seemingly irresistible hold on someone, while never giving in to the notion that one's very identity as a Christian is defined by one's sexual desires.

I have benefited immensely from attending HARVEST USA seminars and I turn regularly to its blog for the helpful articles and insights offered there. HARVEST USA also helps me do better college ministry where issues related to sexuality come up repeatedly.

As a para-church minister, I'm quite aware that one important part of ministry is raising support, and thus I eagerly and regularly support HARVEST USA. This is a practical and tangible way that I can say thank you for the ways the Lord uses HARVEST USA to serve others."

*Kevin has been on staff with InterVarsity for over 30 years. He currently oversees faculty and graduate student ministry on five campuses in Washington, D.C.*

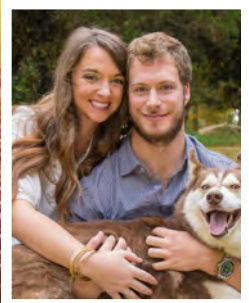


## Andy Stapleton (MASON, OH)

"When I finished seminary and my HARVEST USA internship in 2010, God called me to become a teacher at Mars Hill Academy. Everything we do at school is aimed at preparing young people to do what Paul did at Mars Hill: engage an unbelieving, idol-worshipping world with the truth, goodness, and beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As relationships and sexuality play such a big role in the unbelief and idolatry of our day, I have plenty of opportunities to share God's perspective on these topics as I teach worldviews, apologetics, and humanities—not to mention the conversations I have with the individual students I'm mentoring. My experience at HARVEST USA prepared me very well for all these gospel opportunities.

I'm so thankful for the resources that HARVEST USA has developed in recent years for people like me. I get to keep the wisdom of the HARVEST USA staff at my fingertips even though I don't live near an office. That's why I praise God for HARVEST USA, pray for the staff, and give to support this profoundly strategic ministry."

*Andy teaches Antiquity, Apologetics, Greek, and Worldview in the Rhetoric School at Mars Hill Academy in Mason, OH. He holds a B.A. in History and Christian Thought from Grove City College, and an M. Div. from Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Andrew also served as a former intern at HARVEST USA.*



## Theo & Brittany Facinoli (MATTHEWS, NC)

"My wife Brittany and I have been supporting HARVEST USA because we know personally the pain of sexual brokenness and the need for those who are struggling to have a safe place to be disciplined and loved. I have struggled with same-sex attraction for many years, and HARVEST USA's resources and ministry have changed my life!

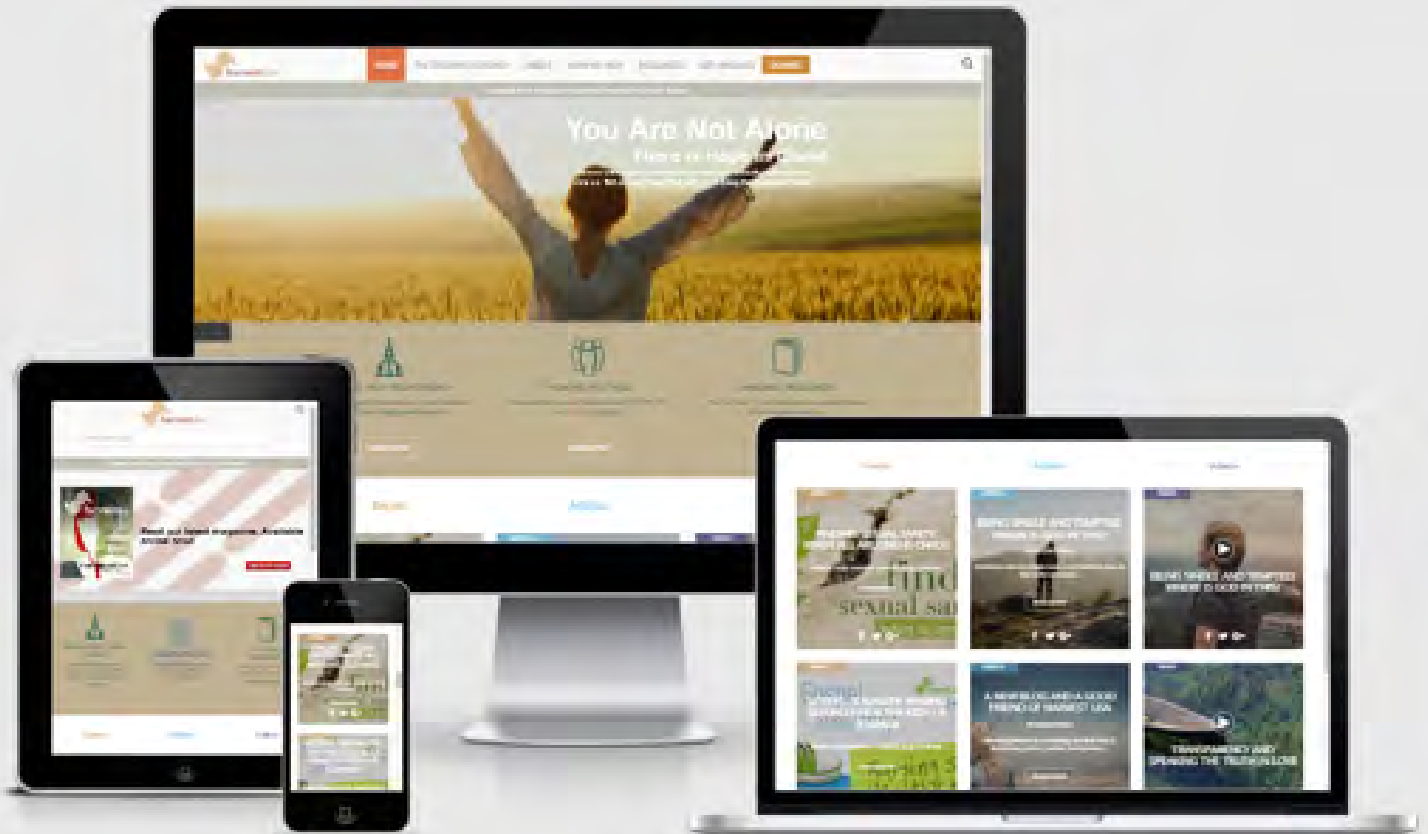
My wife would say the same. We love HARVEST USA's seminars, leaders, and its boldness in speaking about things that are often kept quiet in the Church. The need for this ministry is huge, especially in today's culture, where lies can often overshadow the truth.

We're also thankful for HARVEST USA's vital role in launching Set Free, our local church ministry to sexual strugglers. We used one of their books to take a group of men through 14 weeks of accountability and growing in their understanding of the Word. We will be starting a group for parents in the spring. We are thankful for HARVEST USA's commitment to the local church, and hopeful to see it grow in the years to come."

*Theo & Brittany are on the leadership team of "Set Free," a ministry to sexual strugglers at their local church in Matthews, NC. Theo is a sales representative and Brittany is a graphic designer.*

# HARVEST USA's website

HARVEST USA's new website is accessible on any device. Read our latest content—blogs, commentary, video blogs, podcasts, interviews, our magazine—and stay informed on how to think about sex, sexuality, and gender from a gospel perspective.



“I have benefited immensely from attending HARVEST USA conferences, and I regularly turn to its blog for the helpful articles and insights offered there.”



CARING FOR SEXUALLY-HURTING PEOPLE IN JESUS' NAME