

RESCUE PLAN



CHARTING A COURSE TO
RESTORE PRISONERS
OF PORNOGRAPHY

DEEPAK REJU & JONATHAN D. HOLMES

Standing on a Reformed foundation, pastors Reju and Holmes construct practical scaffolding to help struggling men and women and their supporters to build lives of ongoing healing and sanctification. They recognize that porn addiction isn't simply a lust problem or a stronghold that is corrected quickly; rather than treat it as such, they take their readers on a patient journey toward lasting wholeness.

—**Sam Black**, Vice President of Business Development, Covenant Eyes

Rescue Plan is an extremely practical resource, rooted in the gospel, for porn strugglers and those who want to help them to find freedom. But more than that, it unmask the truth that these struggles can be common problems for all God's people, at some time or another, in whatever stage of life they find themselves. It offers real, concrete strategies for the power of the gospel to break into strongholds of the heart in ways that lead to inner transformation and change.

—**John Freeman**, Founder, Harvest USA; Author, *Hide or Seek: When Men Get Real with God about Sex*

Ensnarement to the addiction of sexual sin can feel impossible to escape. But no sin is too strong for Jesus to help you to overcome. Whether you are fighting your own sin or helping someone else, *Rescue Plan* is packed with practical, thoughtful truth, rooted in scriptural wisdom to help you to lean on Jesus for help.

—**Garrett Kell**, Pastor, Del Ray Baptist Church, Alexandria, Virginia; Author, *Pure in Heart: Sexual Sin and the Promises of God*

Pornography has morphed into a ubiquitous assault on human dignity and the holiness of God. Jonathan and Deepak offer gospel wisdom to engage this sin in a gracious yet pointed way. They provide specific, practical insights that will bring freedom from the clutches of pornography through solutions that are drawn from God's Word. I recommend this book to disciplers who are helping people in various stages of life to overcome struggles with pornography.

—**Evan Marbury**, Licensed Therapist, Hope Counseling Services, Chapel Hill, North Carolina; Pastor, Christ Central Church, Durham

I love three things about *Rescue Plan*. First, it's soaked in the gospel, which means it provides burden-lightening truth for its readers. Second, it delves into areas of pornography that the church has often shied away from. Third and finally, it offers not only practical wisdom but opportunity for deep reflection. Jonathan and Deepak have written a book for our age, and for the ages.

—**Ronnie Martin**, Lead Pastor, Substance Church, Ashland, Ohio;
Cohost, *The Art of Pastoring* podcast

The apostle Paul commanded us to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” That is the heart of this book. Deepak Reju and Jonathan Holmes have provided a practical, biblical, and gospel-saturated guidebook to help Christians and the Christian church to bear the burdens of brothers and sisters in Christ who struggle with sexual sin. The book is remarkably candid, and the authors bring both years of pastoral experience and deep biblical conviction to this timely and urgent subject. We live in a world awash with pornography and its devastating consequences. Reju and Holmes offer sound and trustworthy care, saturated in gospel hope.

—**R. Albert Mohler Jr.**, President, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

There has long been a gap in biblical counseling resources for women who are struggling with sexual sin. Typically, the church has assumed either that women don't struggle in this way or that women struggle in exactly the same way as men. Many thanks to Reju and Holmes for filling the gap with a comprehensive, hope-filled, and practical guide for sexual sinners regardless of gender, age, or life stage. This will be a much-used resource in my library.

—**Brenda Pauken**, Biblical Counselor, Sterling Park Baptist Church,
Sterling, Virginia

Porn grabs hold of a person, body and soul. Its grip is so cruel—so comprehensive—that folks tend to give up hope that freedom is even possible. Holmes and Reju take that experience seriously, even while offering

confident guidance toward Jesus Christ, whose grip is much stronger than anything that threatens us.

—**Jeremy Pierre**, Professor of Biblical Counseling and Department Chair, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; Author, *The Dynamic Heart in Daily Life: Connecting Christ to Human Experience*

With a heart for both men and women who are ensnared by pornography, Deepak and Jonathan offer readers a compassionate understanding of how to break its addictive roots. Passing on what they have learned from helping strugglers in all life stages, they offer priceless practical tips, honest words of hope, and an invitation for strugglers to love Jesus more than their sin. I will be recommending this excellent resource often.

—**Darby A. Strickland**, Counselor, Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation; Author, *Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims*

An indispensable resource! Deepak and Jonathan provide vital wisdom gained from the study of Scripture and through years of counseling to help us all to make war on the calamity of sexual sin. In this book you will find practical and critical steps to take in implementing a rescue plan. I am thrilled to see a new resource that equips us with biblical truth as we seek to strengthen our counsel. A practical, helpful, and applicable book, and an excellent resource! Read it. Apply it. Share it.

—**Shauna Van Dyke**, Executive Director, Association of Biblical Counselors; Founder and Executive Director, Truth Renewed Ministries

Rescue Plan is a timely resource for the person who wants to take seriously the Lord's Great Commission to make disciples and then teach them to observe everything Christ has commanded us. Sexual sin in the church might be one of the most dominant issues you'll face as you seek the Lord and as you seek to help others to pursue sanctification in Christ. This book is an important addition to what's already been written. It adds significantly to the conversation rather than just repackaging and repeating what is already out there. It is gospel saturated with Christ at its center but also

helps disciplers understand how the gospel is intensely practical. Pastors, counselors, and anyone who is serious about the Great Commission, you need to read this book, and you need to have it in your library to reference in the future.

—**Greg Wetterlin**, Director, Restoration Ministries; Pastor of Men's Ministries, Faith Church, Lafayette, Indiana

In *Rescue Plan*, Reju and Holmes show the beauty, power, and sufficiency of Jesus to equip the body of Christ to care well for women and men who are dealing with sexual addiction. What a thoughtful work, filled with rich theology and practical wisdom. I can't recommend this book enough.

—**Jamaal Williams**, Lead Pastor, Sojourn Church Midtown, Louisville, Kentucky

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P U B L I S H I N G
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Scripture quotations from the New Testament use the ESV's alternate, footnoted translation of *adelphoi* (“brothers and sisters”).

Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

In the counseling cases described throughout this book, names and identifying details have been changed to preserve anonymity.

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To David Powlison,
who was a much beloved friend and mentor to both of us.

There are very few people who leave such an imprint on you that they rewrite your DNA and change the way you think and view life. David did that for us. Though we wrote this book, David's thoughts, words, love, and motivations sit on almost every page.

We still grieve his death but look forward to seeing him, hugging him, singing with him, and laughing together with him in glory.

Glory be to God.

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INTRODUCTION: HOW TO PLAN A SUCCESSFUL RESCUE OPERATION

The year was 1941. The Japanese overtook the Philippines on December 8, just ten hours after their attack on Pearl Harbor. General John MacArthur fled to Australia in March of 1942, leaving 76,000 US soldiers to surrender to the enemy in April.¹

The Japanese were cruel to American POWs. The prisoners were sent on the infamous Bataan Death March, an extended trek on which thousands of soldiers died due to starvation, lack of medical treatment, and their captors' unrestrained brutality. Trucks ran over soldiers who fell sick on the road, flattening and crushing them into the ground. Enemy soldiers forced POWs to sit in the sweltering heat without covering or had them pause within sight of cool water, killing any prisoner who attempted to break loose from the formation to get a drink.²

In December 14, 1944, one hundred fifty American troops were burned to death and executed by the Japanese at a POW camp at Palawan Island.³ Fearful that the same fate awaited the five hundred US POWs at a camp in Cabanatuan, the US Army selected Colonel Henry Mucci, a natural leader who was adored by his men,⁴ to lead the Army 6th Ranger Battalion to rescue them.

Colonel Mucci said, with characteristic passion in his voice, "It's going to be extremely dangerous. Some of you might not make it back."⁵ But when the Army Rangers learned of the opportunity to

rescue their fellow countrymen, not a single one turned down the opportunity.

Mucci's right-hand man was Robert Prince, a twenty-five-year-old Stanford graduate who had never seen combat up close. Mucci selected Prince to plan the entire operation. Mucci would get the troops to the edge of the prison at Cabanatuan, but Prince needed to piece together the rescue operation.

The key would be the element of surprise. Yet, as Prince planned, one thing struck him. The entire area around the prison camp was as flat as an Iowa or South Dakota plain and had no trees or structures.⁶ How could the Rangers catch the enemy off guard if there was nothing to hide behind?

"I was very apprehensive," Prince later commented. "Any commander's greatest fear is the fear of failure. It preys on you. You have to keep your focus. You have to consider all the things that could go wrong, but then you have to quickly banish them from your mind. If you think about them too long, you can't go forward—you're paralyzed."⁷

Would Prince plan a successful rescue operation? Could he find a way to free the US POWs from their three years of misery?

THE RESCUE OF A BELIEVER'S SOUL

If you've picked up this book, it's probably because you are in the middle of your own rescue operation. It's not a special operations assignment in World War II, carried out against a brutal imperial army. Rather, your war is against the devil—and his weapons are anger, hatred, lies, selfishness, deceit, confusion, unbelief, and idolatry. Rather than enduring torture or starvation, the prisoner you seek to rescue is being harmed by the devil through pornography. You are helping a friend who looks at the forbidden—click, click, click. You've seen the pain and misery that porn brings him. Every time a struggler faces temptation, he feels as though a magnetic pull is dragging him back. He hates it but wants more. He feels ashamed and struggles to find God's forgiveness. His desires run amok. He

gets further enslaved. Sadly, this becomes *the* preeminent battle of his life.

The battleground of a Christian's war is his heart. Like most wars, it is fought to be won or lost. There will be no peacekeeping treaty. God is jealous for his children's hearts, and he will not concede this territory to the devil (see Jer. 31:33; James 4:4–5).

Consider the apostle Peter's exhortation: "Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Peter asked the Christians of his day to refrain from the selfish passions of their sinful nature. Surrounded by the ungodly practices and customs of unbelievers, the Christians were to live as sojourners or exiles. They didn't belong, and so their lifestyle was supposed to look different from that of those around them. The same goes for every believer today—this world is not our home, and the practices of this world, such as the destructive habits of pornography use and masturbation, should be foreign to us as Christians. But, alas, they are not.

What is the purpose of a war? To destroy the enemy. As a disciple of a believer who struggles with pornography, you know this. You're helping a friend who is fighting to survive in her own personal war against porn. The selfish passions of her flesh are waging war—literally to destroy her soul. Scary, isn't it? The war raging inside her is between the Holy Spirit and her sinful flesh. She stares at a computer screen, with a tantalizing image staring back at her, and her flesh rages: "I want more." "Yes, this feels good." "Just a little bit longer." "Forget the truth, for a moment, and enjoy this." "God will forgive me." Click, click, click—she takes in more. But with each click, with each stare, with each selfish desire that is fed, the flesh wars against her soul and she sears her conscience with her sin. She has become a prisoner of the Enemy.

Depressing, isn't it? But there is hope. The fact that you picked up this book shows that the battle is not lost. You're still in the fight, and God stands alongside you, claiming the victory over the souls of his own children. Remember, the Scriptures say that God "yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us" (James 4:5).

God is jealous. He put his Spirit in believers, and he is eager to see their spirits worship him for all eternity.

Have you given up? If so, does it give you any hope to know that God “yearns jealously” for you and your struggling friend?

Welcome to the war for a believer’s soul. This is your call to arms and a reminder that God stands alongside you, arm-to-arm, in the fight (see 2 Tim. 4:16–18). Sound the trumpet, and let’s begin.

Pornography addiction is an addiction to sexual sin that overtakes a person’s life. The person who has embraced pornography views naked people through images or videos. For their own selfish pleasure, men and women arouse themselves by viewing someone else’s nakedness and (usually also) their sexual acts. Nakedness and sex are exposed, selfishly exploited, and consumed by a bystander who is not the husband or wife of the person or people involved.

The word *addiction* is a loaded term in our culture today. When we speak of addiction, we’ll define this idea biblically. Think in terms of *voluntary slavery*—the struggler has chosen this sin so often that he’s now enslaved to it. Or *desires run amok*—the struggler’s carnal desires have become ruling desires that have overrun her life.⁸

In today’s world, there are ever-expanding ways to engage sexual content and get addicted to it—sexting, engaging in phone sex, reading about sex in trashy fan fiction or erotic novels, viewing anime or virtual pornography, and so on. So, while we’ve written this book with an eye toward defeating pornography addictions, much of what we write applies to all kinds of troubling sexual sin.

HELPING THE HARD CASES OF PORNOGRAPHY

Who are you helping? Consider a sampling of stories.

Jayden was ashamed that he had fallen again. He’d started watching pornography in junior high and struggled on and off for years. It started with a click on an ad on a sports website so he

could look at scantily clad women in the swimsuit issue of *Sports Illustrated*. The images awoke a toxic combination of curiosity and arousal that led him on a quest for more. His descent into the pit continued with photographs of naked women and then videos of men and women having sex. Chat rooms and phone sex quickly followed. He's fought his habit for years, but to no avail. It's been so bad for so long that he assumes things won't change. He'll battle sexual sin until he dies.

Pornography is talked about as a man's struggle. So the fact that Ellen looks at illicit pictures and videos is doubly shameful to her. She fights temptations and carnal desires alone. Shame plagues her like a rain cloud that follows her around. Her thoughts are no better: "There must be something wrong with me." "None of my other girlfriends talk about struggling with porn." Worst of all: "Maybe God has forgotten me."

Patrice thought the relationship was going really well. Dominic was thoughtful. They laughed together a lot. He led in spiritual conversations. Now, however, she is hurt and angry. After four months of dating, Dominic has confessed his porn addiction. He'd been battling it throughout their relationship and long before, but she had no idea. She really thought he was going to be the one. Now she isn't sure.

Peter was watching an illicit video when his wife walked in. He slammed his laptop shut and sat awkwardly as she stared at him. "Why did you do that?" "Do what?" "Shut the laptop like you have something to hide." At first he denied any wrongdoing. But Jenny was suspicious. She snooped around in the days that followed. It wasn't hard for her to uncover a mountain of evidence that he was watching porn with frightening regularity. She was crushed. She confronted him again, and he denied it. Now their marriage is in troubled waters with no rescue in sight.

Camille spends her days fantasizing about a man she knows at work. None of the guys at church ever pay attention to her. She hasn't been on a date in five years. Loneliness is painful. Erotic literature is her reading pleasure. Fantasies allow her to experience sex when it is

impossible in the real world. She occasionally looks at pornography as well, though her conscience wrestles with it.

Ten-year-old Charlie saw porn for the first time after his parents gave him an iPad. They put the typical parental restrictions on, added Covenant Eyes, and falsely assumed those steps would keep him out of harm's way. They were dead wrong. Charlie is highly competent with technology. He found a workaround and started searching for porn. It didn't take long for him to find seductive pictures of naked women. Now, during his junior year of high school, he is looking two or three times a day, every day of the week. It is easy for him to rationalize his behavior: "I'll stop next time." "God will forgive me."

Every one of these scenarios is a mess of sin, guilt, lies, hiding, temptation, shame, self-justifications, hopelessness, foolish decisions, and hurt relationships. Change the names, circumstances, or even gender, and the underlying war remains the same—a battle to fight a sexual addiction that is ruining a believer's life.

What about you? You may be reading this book because your scenario resembles one of these. Or you may be a pastor, counselor, small-group leader, family member, roommate, close friend, or fellow church member who is looking to care for, counsel, and help a believer out of a pit. (From here on out, we'll use the term *helper* or *discipler* for any of these roles.) We've written this book primarily for the discipler, though we hope struggling Christians will benefit from it also.

A quick note on the use of pronouns: We understand that porn addiction is a problem for both men and women, so we alternate between masculine and feminine pronouns throughout this book. Much of the content applies to both men and women, regardless of the specific pronoun we have chosen for a given section.

What you need, and what we want to offer you, is a rescue plan—a way out of this mess. We're sending you twenty-seven miles

behind enemy lines to retrieve prisoners of war. You're fighting against the world, the sinful flesh, and the devil (see Eph. 2:1–3). In this book, you will learn how to chart a course to rescue prisoners of pornography. It *is* possible to help an enslaved believer to find joy, freedom, and hope in Christ. This requires struggling believers to fight sexual sin, build healthy relationships, reengineer their views on sex, rework their desires, learn to better navigate temptations, grow in faith in Christ, and so much more. It's a tall order, but we can do it.

So come aboard, and buckle up.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Here are the elements of a successful rescue operation.

In part 1, we get to *know our enemy*. Sin destroys sex. It attempts to ruin God's plan for our sexuality. Addictions imprison a believer and trap her. To help her, we've got to understand the nature of sexual addictions. And we'll think through the key ingredients to acting out in the moment: an addict's four foes of *access*, *anonymity*, *appetite*, and *atheism*.

In part 2, we get to *know the lay of the land*. This is important and practical background information about the terrain on which the war is fought. Masturbation is a common problem that is often paired with pornography. We've got to learn how to address masturbation to win this war. We've also got to understand similarities and differences between men and women. If we presume porn struggles are a man's problem and ignore the fact that many women are overrun with sexual sin, we've already set ourselves up for failure.

In part 3, we *rescue the prisoner*. It's time to put the information we've learned in parts 1 and 2 into action. Think of the difficult situations you encounter in daily life—a single man or woman who struggles with porn, masturbation, and fantasies; a dating couple in crisis after one party confesses his or her sexual sin; a spouse who is caught in addiction; and a teenager who has been hiding from his or her parents.

You'll find an application section at the end of each chapter called "Building a Rescue Plan." We'll offer personal reflection questions,

Introduction

potential problems, practical steps, and ways to pray. Slow down and make use of this section. Don't skip past it! You'll get more out of the book, and it'll strengthen your acuity and skills as a discipler.

Are you ready to begin? Let's get started with part 1, in which we'll get to know our enemy.

If you are a pastor, a counselor, or a ministry worker, you'll want to read *all* of part 3. You'll inevitably encounter each of these situations. Better to be prepared before they come knocking at your door. If you are helping someone in a specific situation, you should read parts 1 and 2, then jump to whichever chapter in part 3 most applies.

A NOTE ABOUT *RESCUE SKILLS*

This book is a companion to *Rescue Skills: Essential Counseling Skills for Restoring the Sexually Broken*.

Rescue Plan teaches you theory—explaining the nature of pornography addiction and what it looks like when it shows up in different stages of a person’s life. *Rescue Skills* is about how to *interact* with a believer who struggles with pornography. Ideally, you will read both books, since *Rescue Skills* guides readers in developing more than twenty different practical skills, including

- listening with an active ear,
- targeting the heart,
- discerning fake repentance,
- recovering after a fall, and
- fighting battle weariness.

Rescue Plan is about *what, when, and why*; *Rescue Skills* is about *how*.

Picture this: You’re talking with Harry, a Christian friend who confesses that he’s struggled with pornography since he was twelve years old. He is now twenty-five. He’s a member of your church and attends regularly. He’s a part of a small group, but he’s been vague about his addiction with the other men in the group. He stumbles late at night or on the weekends when he has much more time on his hands.

What do you do? What questions do you ask? Where do you take him in Scripture? How do you minister to his guilt and shame? What

A Note about Rescue Skills

kind of accountability does he need? What heart issues motivate his acting out? What does he do after he falls? How can you help him to renew his relationship with the Lord? What do hope and help look like in this situation with this person?

Do you feel like you would know what to do in a conversation with Harry? If your answer is “I’m not sure” or “Definitely not,” then we’d encourage you to read *Rescue Skills*.

PART 1

KNOW YOUR ENEMY

The Alamo Scouts were a group of behind-the-scenes intelligence gatherers. The two five-man squads were dispatched for a reconnaissance of the prison camp at Cabanatuan in advance of the Army Rangers' arrival. Led by Bill Nellist and Tom Rounsaville, the group initially failed at their task.

For two long days, they had done their best to survey the camp, but they still didn't have many details they needed. How many prisoners were in the camp? How many Japanese soldiers were guarding them? Were there tanks or any other heavy armored vehicles in the camp? If so, where were they stored? How many prisoners could walk, and how many were sick? Were there any ditches or ravines that could provide cover? Were there communication lines between the camp and the neighboring Cabanatuan City, and, if so, how many?

The famed Alamo Scouts were not living up to their reputation as an elite group. Why so little information?

"We can't get up close," Nellist explained to Colonel Mucci and Captain Prince. "It's flat as a pancake out there." The scouts had been unable to get near to the camp to gather the vital details needed to plan a successful rescue operation.

Mucci ripped off his sunglasses in frustration, revealing bloodshot eyes. "We've got to know more," he bellowed. "A *lot* more."

If they didn't gather the necessary information, the operation was bound to fail—and failure was not an option.¹

You can't save a prisoner if you don't know what you're up against. To plan a successful rescue, you first need to *know your enemy*. That's what we'll cover in this first section.

1

SIN DESTROYS SEX

We Christians get embarrassed about our bodies. . . .

*We are not sure whether bodies are good or bad;
it follows that we are not sure whether sex is good or bad.*

—Lauren F. Winner, *Real Sex*

*My sex life will be shaped and directed by whatever is my
street-level master. And I will only ever stay inside God's wise
boundaries when he is the functional ruler of my heart.*

—Paul David Tripp, *Sex and Money*

Is the name Alan MacMasters familiar to you? Probably not, but I'm guessing you use something that he invented. In 1893, MacMasters invented the first ever electric bread toaster. Up until this point, if you wanted a nice warm piece of toast to slather butter and jam on, you'd need to hold it over an open flame or put it on some sort of metal grate.

Why are we talking about MacMasters and toasters? The reason is more important than you think. Let's say you're involved in a little home improvement project and you're in need of a hammer. When you ask your son to grab one for you, he hands you a toaster. You look at him incredulously and repeat, "I need a hammer! This is a toaster," to which your son replies, "Yeah, I know, but a toaster can still hammer the nail in." Can the toaster do this? Yes (probably with great damage to its shiny chrome exterior), but it wouldn't be in keeping with what the toaster was designed for.

What if you went ahead and used the toaster as a hammer? That would be to declare, "I know it was designed for toast . . . but I'm

going to use this toaster how I want to use it. If I want to use it to bang a nail into the wall and damage the chrome, I will!” How destructive it would be to use a toaster like a hammer. Alan MacMasters would want you to use a toaster to *toast bread*, not bang nails into a wall.

THE IMPACT OF SIN ON SEX

What’s our point? We do the same thing when we use sex for selfish purposes and ignore God’s intention for it. Every time a man or woman misuses sex, they make the very same declaration: “I know how God has designed sex . . . but I’m going use it how I want to use it. If I want to indulge in premarital sex or pornography and masturbation, then I will! I don’t care about the damage it does to me and others.” Sin prefers to misuse and mistreat what God has designed. Our sinful flesh, our oversexualized culture, and Satan all work together to misappropriate sex.

Today’s culture writes its own script when it comes to sexuality. We live in an age in which each individual’s sexual expression is considered his or her personal prerogative. We are told to do whatever makes us happy! Be whoever we want! Be free! Our surrounding culture tells us that this is especially true as it relates to sex and sexual identity. “You use your body however you want!” it says. “Sex is whatever you want it to be.”

Embedded in this cultural narrative is a glaring fallacy. If sex is whatever you want it to be, then *ultimately sex is meaningless*. Journalist Alex Morris uncovered this fallacy in an interview he did with an artist, Curtis Roush, as part of a feature for *Rolling Stone*: “It’s more fun to get [sex] out of the way and see how you connect, and then focus on who they are as a human. ‘Are you interesting? Are you fun to be around? Great.’ Sex isn’t inherently a huge step. At the end of the day, it’s a piece of body touching another piece of body—just as existentially meaningless as kissing.”¹ If everyone defines sex however they want and to be whatever they want, then sex is certainly “meaningless.” No surprise—defining sex however you want leads to using sex however you want. Sex quickly devolves into a dehumanizing and selfish venture.

If the devil convinces you that *ultimately sex is meaningless*, then he's won. The devil laughs as teenagers, singles, and spouses indulge in pornography and get addicted. He loves it when singles start hiding from their gospel communities because of shame. He relishes the degradation of trust in a marriage when a husband or wife looks at videos of sex. He wanders around the earth, looking for another Christian to consume, screaming things like, "Can't you see how many people I've messed up? Can't you see that I've won?"

Has the devil really won? Some days, as we come alongside struggling Christians in our oversexualized culture, it can certainly seem as though he has. As Christians, you and I need God to redeem sex (and our understanding of it) after sin has ruined it and Satan has messed it up. We need hammers for nails, not toasters as hammers. We need to help people to see God's purposes for sex, especially as we come to know it through faith in Christ.

That's the goal of this chapter—to see how sin destroys sex but how God redeems it. Most of our energy throughout this book will be spent on one specific iteration of sin's war: how the sins of pornography and masturbation ruin what God intends. But before we descend into the specific details of pornography struggles, we'll take this chapter to set out the redemptive storyline of our sexuality. And in hearing this story, we'll come to know God's vantage point on our sexuality. What does God want for us when it comes to sex?

SEX AS GOD INTENDED

Today we live in a technology-dominated, sex-driven culture that screams, "God doesn't matter" and "Sex matters more than anything else." Television and movies are laced with it or (at the very least) heavy sexual innuendo. The Internet is chock-full of pornographic content. You can't walk down the street or drive down a highway without seeing an advertisement that is sexual in nature. Biblical notions of sex, marriage, and sexuality have been abandoned, and adultery is common.² If we could examine people's hearts, we'd find that a consumeristic view of sex rules the day. In this view, the

pursuit of sex is for *my* pleasure and for *my* fulfillment, and the person I'm having sex with is merely an object to be used for *my* selfish gain.

Given all the ways we see sex misused today, it can be easy for us to think that sex is inherently sinful. But Nancy Pearcey sums up the good news: "If we are ever tempted to think that sex is corrupt or dirty, we need to remind ourselves that it was God who created it in the first place."³ Nothing in the opening pages of Scripture suggests that sex is dirty—rather, it is to be celebrated.

Sex is not sinful. It's God's good gift to us. As the sovereign Creator of humanity, God designed our bodies for good and godly purposes, which includes sex. This is why we have sexual organs and engendered differences. After God created the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, they were married and became "one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). The essential idea of "one flesh" is a physical uniting of the man and woman . . . what you and I call sexual intercourse. From the beginning, God intended for men and women to have sex in the context of a covenant relationship.

"God is the Creator of the human being, and simultaneously also the Inaugurator of sex and of sexual difference. This difference did not result from sin; it existed from the very beginning, it has its basis in creation, it is a revelation of God's will and sovereignty, and is therefore wise and holy and good. Therefore, no one may misconstrue or despise this sexual difference, either within one's own identity or in that of another person. It has been willed by God and grounded in nature." —**Herman Bavinck**⁴

Before the fall, sex was *pure*, *good*, and *safe*. Moses writes, "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Gen. 2:25). Imagine that—a totally naked and transparent existence (they literally had no clothes on), with no awkwardness. God looked down on man and woman after he made them and declared them—sexuality and all—to be "very good."

SIN DESTROYS SEX

But Adam and Eve's perfect lives changed forever after Satan enticed them to break God's command. The moment they sinned, their eyes were opened, and they knew they were naked. At once, their nakedness—which previously had not been an issue—was now a liability. So what did they do? They sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths in order to cover themselves.⁵ When they heard God coming, they “hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen. 3:8). They couldn't stand to be in the presence of the Holy One anymore.

Adam and Eve went from guilt-free to guilty, from shameless to hiding, from naked to covered. Romans 5 tells us that their choice to disobey God brought sin to all mankind. Sexuality was never the same again. Because of the fall of humanity, our sexual desires became *self-centered* (we use people to satisfy our pleasure), *disordered* (we want what we should not have), and *idolatrous* (our desires become more important than God). In just the first few books of the Bible, we see the resulting spectrum of sexual sin:

- The men of Sodom's demand to have sex with Lot's two guests—and Lot's perverse offer of his daughters instead (see Gen. 19)
- The sexual assault of Dinah—Jacob and Leah's daughter (see Gen. 34)
- The prostitution of Tamar to Judah, her father-in-law (see Gen. 38)
- The attempted sexual assault and ongoing sexual harassment of Joseph by Potiphar's wife (see Gen. 39)
- The adultery of David and Bathsheba (see 2 Sam. 11)
- The incestuous rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon (see 2 Sam. 13)
- Solomon's engagement in polygamy (see 1 Kings 11)

Throughout Scripture, sexual sin is pervasive not in just the Old Testament but also the New. Many of the lists of sins in the Pauline

Epistles include warnings against sexual immorality (see Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5). Sexual sin even became characteristic of some churches, like the church at Corinth (see 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:18; 7:1). Though online pornography did not exist in Bible times, the viewing and exploitation of another person's nakedness and sex for selfish gain did.

The scourge of sexual sin continues today. Pornography addictions expose the very same self-centered, disordered, and idolatrous tendencies. Sexual sin ruins our consciences and corrupts our minds. It brings shame, self-pity, self-loathing, disappointment, and confusion into relationships; it laces us with guilt; and it causes us to grow hopeless. It's a clear demonstration that sin destroys sex.

What can be done about this? As is often told, there came a great Rescuer, who would do more for these people than they could ever ask or imagine (see Eph. 3:20).

GOD'S RESCUE PLAN

In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul warns us about the penalty for sexual sin: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither *the sexually immoral*, nor idolaters, nor *adulterers*, nor men who practice *homosexuality*, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9–10). This is not just bad news for the Corinthian church. It's a warning for all of us today who engage in sexual sin.

But Paul doesn't leave us there. He has good news for those who trust in Jesus: "You were *washed*, you were *sanctified*, you were *justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (v. 11). Paul distinguishes between the unrighteous (who won't inherit the kingdom of God) and believers who trust in Christ. The sexually immoral, adulterers, and homosexuals are transformed—they are "washed," "sanctified," and "justified." They are made new in Christ. They are no longer what they once were. And we, as believers, should not go back to our old ways. (Paul says, "And such *were* some of you," in verse 11.)

Jesus rescued us when he died for the ungodly. Through his work on the cross, our sexual sins are redeemed. All that is dirty, unclean, and shameful has been atoned for and cleansed by God in Christ. We no longer fight to live outside God's parameters but find a fullness of humanity by doing what God asks of us—staying pure. As our affections for the Lord grow, our desires for what he wants rearrange what we want. Our pleasure no longer revolves around ourselves. What we want is not self-centered but others-centered. For example, in marriage, our attitude moves from “I want pleasure” to “How can I serve and satisfy my spouse?” The best marital sex is selfless, not selfish. What God intended in the garden of Eden—for us to be naked and not ashamed, to be pure and happy in God—is redeemed in Christ.

What a glorious truth for all who struggle with sexual sin, disordered desires, frustrations, and disappointments. Jesus is making everything new.

Jesus's work on earth offers us hope in another way as well. Jesus came and lived life like one of us . . . body and soul. He “became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Our Lord lived a perfect life—one that was free of sexual brokenness and immorality. How and why is this hopeful to us? Because Jesus shows it's possible to be holy in a physical body. Though we'll never be perfect like Christ, he demonstrates what greater holiness looks like. We strive to be more like Christ in this way.

Jesus was, as the author of Hebrews says, “in every respect . . . tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). He experienced sexual temptation, just like us, but he never gave in. In fact, he experienced the full force of temptation in a way that we who give in to it do not.⁶ Jesus is sympathetic to our temptations since he also endured temptation. That gives us hope as we fight and await our full redemption. We have a Savior who really gets what we're going through, and we can take comfort in that fact.

When we see Jesus Christ, we see someone who suffered through temptation, even sexual temptation, in order that he might be a merciful and faithful Great High Priest for us (see Heb. 2:17–18).

Yet the extraordinary thing is that Christ never gave in and had sex. Todd Wilson explains, “No one was more fully human or sexually contented than Jesus, yet Jesus never engaged in a single sexual act. Think about it. Jesus never enjoyed the pleasures of sex, an erotic touch, or a lingering kiss. And he never indulged sexual fantasy or lust of the kind he roundly condemns.”⁷ Though God commends sex as a good gift for a committed married couple, Jesus shows what a sexually pure life looks like. He shows that purity is in fact possible.

Now the story comes full circle. God’s good design—for sex to be a gift to married couples and for us to be pure in our singleness before we get married—is restored through Christ. Sin destroys sex, but Christ redeems sexual strugglers through the cross.

CONCLUSION: TOASTERS, SEXUALITY, AND JESUS

If Alan MacMasters had a clear purpose for toasters (to toast!), how much more must God have clear purposes for our sexuality. Although porn struggles can be wearisome, discouraging, and defeating, those struggles are not the end of the conversation. Sin does not have the last word. Christ does. Jesus is the rescuer of our souls. That’s not just trite, hyper-spiritualized consolation—it’s true.

Pause and think about that. Do you really believe that Christ will redeem the sexually broken? In an age in which sexual sin is an epidemic, it’s hard to trust that Christ will clean up our sexual messes. But he can, and he will. What’s required of you is faith in him (see 1 John 5:4–5). Both the goodness of sex and its corruption are important to understand as we roll out a plan to rescue strugglers.

BUILD A RESCUE PLAN

Personal Reflection

In what areas have you struggled with sexual sin? How does your view of sexuality compare and contrast with God’s

view? Do you understand God's purposes for sex? Have you made sex into an idol or an ultimate thing or have you made it secondary? How can you trust in Christ to redeem your own views on your sexuality?

Potential Problems

It's common for believers who struggle with pornography to have a distorted view of sex. They are shaped more by the ungodly views of the world than by God's perspective on our sexuality. A part of our initial plan needs to be to revitalize and renew their view of sexuality.

Practical Step

Turn to the back of the book, to the appendix "A Godly Vantage Point on Sex" (page 219). Use this overview and its accompanying questions to start a conversation with the person you are discipling. Help him or her to contrast his or her view of sex with what God thinks about sex.

Prayer

Help me to be an instrument in your hands—one who helps my friend to renew and redeem his sexuality. Help me to believe that Christ can redeem anything. In Jesus's name, amen!