

OUR STORIES

“But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity” (Ephesians 5:3). If there’s a single Bible verse that captures God’s standard for sexual purity, this is it.

And it compels this question: In relation to God’s standard, is there even a hint of sexual impurity in your life?

For both of us, the answer to that question was yes.

From Steve: Collision

In 1983 my wife, Sandy, and I celebrated our first anniversary. One sun-splashed Southern California morning that year, feeling good about life and our future, I hopped in our 1973 Mercedes 450SL—the car of my dreams, white with a black top. I’d owned it for just two months.

I was tooling northbound through Malibu on my way to Oxnard, where I’d been asked to testify in a court hearing about whether a hospital should add an addiction treatment center. I always loved driving along the PCH, as locals called the Pacific Coast Highway. These four lanes of blacktop hugged the golden coastline and provided a close-up view of L.A.’s beach culture. With the top down and the wind blowing in my face, I found that summer morning a good day to be alive.

I never intentionally set out to be girl-watching that day, but I spotted her about two hundred yards ahead and to the left. She was jogging toward me along the coastal sidewalk. From my sheepskin-covered leather seat, I found the view outstanding, even by California’s high standards.

My eyes locked on to this goddesslike blonde, rivulets of sweat cascading down her tanned body as she ran at a purposeful pace. Her jogging outfit, if it could be called that in those days before sports bras and spandex, was actually a skimpy bikini. As she approached on my left, two tiny triangles of tie-dyed fabric struggled to contain her ample bosom.

I can’t tell you what her face looked like; nothing above the neckline registered with me that morning. My eyes feasted on this banquet of glistening flesh as she passed on my left, and they continued to follow her lithe figure as she continued jogging southbound. Simply by lustful instinct, as if mesmerized by her gait, I turned my head further and further, craning my neck to capture every possible moment for my mental video camera.

Then blam!

I might still be marveling at this remarkable specimen of female athleticism if my Mercedes hadn’t plowed into a Chevelle that had come to a complete stop in my lane. Fortunately, I was traveling only fifteen miles per hour in the stop-and-go traffic, but the mini-collision crumpled my front bumper and crinkled the hood. And the fellow I smacked into didn’t appreciate the considerable damage to his rear end.

I got out of the car—embarrassed, humiliated, saturated with guilt, and unable to offer a satisfying explanation. No way would I tell this guy, “Well, if you’d seen what I saw, you’d understand.”

Ten More Years in the Darkness

Nor could I tell the truth to my beautiful wife, Sandy. That evening, I put my best spin on the morning's unfortunate event in Malibu. "You see, Sandy, it was stop-and-go, and I was reaching down to change the radio channel, and the next thing I knew I rammed into a Chevy. Lucky no one was hurt."

Actually, my young marriage was hurt—because I was cheating Sandy out of my full devotion, though I didn't know it at the time. Nor was I aware that although I'd vowed to commit my life to Sandy, I hadn't totally committed my eyes to her.

I continued in the darkness for another ten years before realizing I needed to make dramatic changes in the way I looked at women.

From Fred: Wall of Separation

It happened every Sunday morning during our church worship service. I'd look around and see other men with their eyes closed, freely and intensely worshipping the God of the universe. Myself? I sensed only a wall of separation between the Lord and me.

I just wasn't right with God. As a new Christian, I imagined I just didn't know God well enough yet. But nothing changed as time passed.

When I mentioned to my wife, Brenda, that I felt vaguely unworthy of Him, she wasn't the least bit surprised.

"Well, of course!" she exclaimed. "You've never felt worthy to your own father. Every preacher I've known says that a man's relationship with his father tremendously impacts his relationship with his heavenly Father."

"You could be right," I allowed.

I hoped it was that simple. I mulled it over as I recalled my days of youth.

What Kind of a Man Are You?

My father, handsome and tough, was a national wrestling champion in college and a bulldog in business. Aching to be like him, I began wrestling in junior high. But the best wrestlers are natural-born killers, and I didn't have a wrestler's heart.

My dad was coaching wrestling at the time at the high school in our small town of Alburnett, Iowa. Though I was still in junior high, he wanted me to wrestle with the older guys, so he brought me to the high-school workouts.

One afternoon we were practicing escapes, and my partner was in the down position. While grappling on the mat, he suddenly needed to blow his nose. He straightened up, pulled his T-shirt to his nose, and violently emptied the contents onto the front of his shirt. We quickly returned to wrestling. As the up man, I was supposed to keep a tight grip on him. Reaching around his belly, my hand slid into his slimy T-shirt. Sickened, I let him go.

Dad, seeing him escape so easily, dressed me down. "What kind of a man are you?" he roared. Staring hard at the mat, I realized that if I had a wrestler's heart, I would have cranked down tightly and ridden out my opponent, maybe grinding his face into the mat in retaliation. But I hadn't.

I still wanted to please Dad, so I tried other sports. At one baseball game, after striking out, I remember hanging my head on the way back to the dugout. "Get your head up!" he hollered for all to hear. I was mortified. Then he wrote me a long letter detailing my every mistake.

Years later, after I'd married Brenda, my father felt she had too much control in our marriage. "Real men take charge of their households," he said.

The Monster

Now, as Brenda and I discussed my relationship with my dad, she suggested I might need counseling. "It surely couldn't hurt," she said.

So I read some books and counseled with my pastor, and my feelings toward Dad improved. But I continued to feel that distance from God during the Sunday morning worship services.

The true reason for that distance slowly dawned on me: There was a hint of sexual immorality in my life. There was a monster lurking about, and it surfaced each Sunday morning when I settled in my comfy La-Z-Boy and opened the Sunday morning newspaper. I would quickly find the department-store inserts and begin paging through the colored newsprint filled with models posing in bras and panties. Always smiling. Always available. I loved lingering over each ad insert. It's wrong, I admitted, but it's such a small thing. It was a far cry from Playboy, I told myself.

I peered through the panties, fantasizing. Occasionally, a model re-minded me of a girl I once knew, and my mind rekindled the memories of our times together. I rather enjoyed my Sunday mornings with the newspaper.

As I examined myself more closely, I found I had more than a hint of sexual immorality. Even my sense of humor reflected it. Sometimes a person's innocent phrase—even from our pastor—struck me with a double sexual meaning. I would chuckle, but I felt uneasy.

Why do these double entendres come to my mind so easily? Should a Christian mind create them so nimbly?

I remembered that the Bible said that such things shouldn't even be mentioned among the saints. I'm worse...I even laugh at them!

And my eyes? They were ravenous heat-seekers searching the horizon, locking on any target with sensual heat. Young mothers leaning over in shorts to pull children out of car seats. Soloists with silky shirts. Summer dresses with décolletage.

My mind, too, ran wherever it willed. This had begun in my childhood, when I found Playboy magazines under Dad's bed. He also subscribed to *From Sex to Sexy*, a publication filled with jokes and comic strips with sexual themes. When Dad divorced Mom and moved to his "bachelor's pad," he hung a giant velvet nude in his living room, overlooking us as we played cards on my Sunday afternoon visits.

Dad gave me a list of chores around his place when I was there. Once I came across a nude photo of his mistress. On another occasion I found an eight-inch ceramic dildo, which he obviously used in his kinky "sex games."

Hope for the Hopeless

All this sexual stuff churned deep inside me, destroying a purity that wouldn't return for many years. Settling into college, I soon found myself drowning in pornography. I actually memorized the dates when my favorite soft-core porn magazines arrived at the local drugstore. I especially loved the "Girls Next Door" section of *Gallery* magazine, featuring pictures of nude girls taken by their boyfriends and submitted to the magazine.

Far from home and without any Christian underpinnings, I descended by small steps into a sexual pit. The first time I had sexual intercourse, it was with a girl I knew I would marry. The next

time, it was with a girl I thought I would marry. The time after that, it was with a good friend that I might learn to love. Then it was with a female I barely knew who simply wanted to see what sex was like. Eventually, I had sex with anyone at any time.

After five years in California, I found myself with four “steady” girlfriends simultaneously. I was sleeping with three of them and was essentially engaged to marry two of them. None knew of the others. (These days, in my class for premarital couples, I often ask the women what they would think of a man with two fiancées. My favorite response: “He’s a hopeless pig!” And I was hopeless, living in a pigsty.)

Why do I share all this?

First, so you’ll know that I understand what it’s like to be sexually ensnared in a deep pit. Second, I want to provide you with hope. As you’ll soon see, God worked with me and lifted me out of that pit.

If there’s even a hint of sexual immorality in your life, He will work with you as well.