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GREEN



FLESH: SMALL GROUP BIBLE STUDIES

FLESH BY RICK JAMES

AN UNBREAKABLE HABIT OF PURITY IN A PORNOGRAPHIC WORLD. Sexual immorality and pornography have become the defining issues and obstacles to spiritual growth and ministry on campus.

Flesh (for men) deals fearlessly with lust, sex and pornography in a clear, comprehensive manner and in a way that supports the Campus Ministry's spiritual Growth Model. Written in a straightforward, gracious and humorous style, Flesh does not stir up guilt but helps the reader to develop an unbreakable habit of purity.

Flesh is divided into three sections: small group discussion material, topical articles, and a month of daily devotionals.

Partial List of Topics Covered: Temptation, Confession, Community, Filling of the Spirit, Faith, Accountability, Pornography, Worship, Truth-Scripture, Habitual Sin, Homosexuality, Masturbation, and Sanctification-How We Grow.



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FLESH

JAMES 5:16 GROUPS

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

James 5:16

If you are already involved in a men's small group, see if the members would be willing to take a seven-week detour to cover these critical topics. If you don't have a small group, pull together a handful of Christian friends, and either lead the Bible study yourself, or ask someone else to lead it. Then, devote the next seven weeks to the study of purity, to the Scriptures, and to developing relationships of accountability with other men. For Christian men, purity is not a personal issue—it's a relational one. Purity must be worked out in community with other men. Answers to the studies are in the back of the book.

ON TO THE STUDIES 



WEEK ONE

FORGIVEN

1. Of all of the sins we commit, nothing makes us feel more guilty than sexual sin. Why do you think that is?

No matter how we've sexually transgressed, we must all agree that nothing is worse than what Peter did. He out rightly denied Jesus, even after being warned. We can only imagine the sin "hangover" Peter felt from that failure. As a result, there is much we can learn about forgiveness from the account of Peter's restoration.

Read all of John 21:15-24

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me? He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep" (vv. 15-17).

2. The most obvious question is: Why did Jesus ask Peter three times, "Do you love me?" Is this a rebuke, or an opportunity for confession?

3. Why does Jesus ask Peter if he loves him "more than these?"

4. What are the essential components of confessing our sin? If we are forgiven due to Christ's death, why do we need to confess our sins?

5. What role does faith play in feeling forgiven?

6. Rationalizing, vowing to never commit the same sin again, and berating ourselves: all are human attempts to feel forgiven. How?

7. How is each a betrayal of faith?

8. It took great courage for Peter to hear the painful truth from Jesus. It has been said that courage, or the lack of it, is what keeps us from repentance, growing in holiness, and feeling forgiven. Why? Do you agree? What was the most painful truth you've had to hear about yourself?

"I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me" (vv. 18-19).

9. What and why is Jesus telling him this?

10. In what way do you think this would have been encouraging to Peter?

11. Is there any application of this for us?

12. Peter has an advantage in that he could see Jesus' face, which must have aided in his feeling forgiven. Who incarnates—or is Jesus' face—for you when you don't feel forgiven?

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and

had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me" (vv. 20-22).

13. Why is comparison an enemy of forgiveness?

14. Whose spiritual life puts you under the pile?

15. What struggles do you have that others might not have to deal with?

16. What two things can you do, that you are not doing, to aid in receiving God's forgiveness?



WEEK TWO
LUST

Read 2 Samuel 11:1-4.

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home.

1. We all have different things that spark our minds to lust. In his book "Not Even a Hint," Joshua Harris calls them "lust triggers." What do you think might have been some of David's lust triggers?

2. Fill in some of your lust triggers:

When I hear the music of ...

When I am feeling particularly ...

During this time of day ...

When I hang out here ...

When I find myself ...

After I have just ...

3. Is there a lust trigger that you tolerate and make little attempt to guard against? In other words, do you have an allowable form of lust? What is it?

4. What have you chosen to believe about yourself, your situation, or God that makes you allow yourself this freedom?

5. What is the difference between a godly desire for sex, and lust?

6. John Piper makes the statement that, "The fires of lust's pleasures must be fought with the fire of God's pleasures." What does he mean by this?

7. What have you done along these lines?

8. Scripture never mentions masturbation. In light of Scripture's silence, some have proposed we often make too big a deal about it, feeling far worse about this than most any other sin. Do you agree?

9. If it were possible to masturbate without lusting, would it still be sin? Why?

Lowell Seashore in his program, "Lust-Free Living" suggests a tapering down approach in order to stop masturbating. Stage one is to disconnect lust from masturbating. You continue masturbating with a strict discipline of guarding your thoughts. In stage two, you look to cut back on the amount of times you masturbate. Stage three is cutting it out altogether. In contrast, others have stressed a cold turkey approach.

10. Discuss from your own experience the merits, and liabilities of both.

11. How do women's lusts differ from men, or do you think there's no difference?

12. Dr. Al Mohler once said, "Men are tempted to give themselves to pornography—women are tempted to commit pornography." Discuss what you think he meant by this.

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Ephesians. 5:3

In seeing victory over lust and masturbation, most Christians agree for the need to make a clear commitment to the standard of "not even a hint," because lust always wants more.

13. Do you think such a standard is attainable?

14. What is the most effective thing you have done to guard yourself against lust?

15. What are the potential problems with making a major covenant or commitment to stop sinning in an area?

16. In light of that, what would be a godly commitment?

17. In your own words, write down your own commitment.



WEEK THREE

TEMPTED

1. Read James 1:13-18. James avoids putting the blame for temptation on Satan. Why?

2. To what extent is Satan involved in our temptation?

In Ephesians 6:11 it says, “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” The Greek word for schemes is *noemata*, from the root word *noema*, which means “mind or thought.” Not coincidentally, it is also the root of our word *noose* (as in “hanging”). The word illustrates that Satan’s schemes are well conceived and that his temptation efforts are usually confined to the most strategic times, and the most strategic methods.

3. When is it most strategic for Satan to get personally involved with our temptation?

4. How do you know when he’s involved? Can you think of a recent time when you felt that he was involved?

5. James 1:14 states, “But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” As it relates to sex and our desires, what is healthy and godly, and what is evil?

6. Certain temptations are anomalies, but others form consistent themes in our lives. What are your constant temptation themes or scenarios? How have you been tempted recently?

7. James points out that while God provides trials to mature our faith, he never seeks to induce sin to destroy our faith. How might it affect your life if you believed God was tempting you?

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

1 Corinthians 10:13

8. According to this verse, not only does God not tempt us, but he provides a means of escape to avoid difficult temptation. If he provides a means of escape, does this mean he doesn't think we can endure it? Are certain temptations, if not avoided, beyond our capacity to decline?

9. When, and how, did God recently provide an escape for you?

10. Why is it critical to remember "that no temptation has seized us," except temptations common to other men?

11. In 1:13 and 17, James conveys God's goodness and care for his children, because at the root of temptation can be a distrust of this truth. Read Genesis 3:1-6 and record what truths Adam and Eve were tempted to distrust.

12. In the midst of temptation, list four lies you are prone to believe about God.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

13. In explaining the ritual of temptation, James uses the metaphor of giving birth. In this metaphor, what do you think he means by conception?

Notice that sin does not happen until after conception. Temptation, in and of itself, does not constitute sin. We shouldn't feel we have sinned simply because we are tempted.

14. What temptations make you feel guilty, simply for being tempted?

15. James 1:16 says, "Don't be deceived." What have you learned in this study that would keep you from being deceived? What will you do differently as a result?



WEEK FOUR
SEX

1. Read I Thessalonians 4:1-12. Where are the two occurrences of the phrase "more and more" found? What does this tell you about Paul's primary purpose in writing these words?

2. Read verses 3-5 and define the following words:
Sanctified _____

Sexual immorality _____

Passionate lust _____

Heathen _____

3. What are the specific challenges of our culture to remaining pure until marriage? Do you think we have it better, worse, or the same as others? What is the most difficult of all these factors?

4. Honoring God by controlling our bodies is a consistent theme in Paul's letters. Look up the following verses and record what they say on this issue:

Romans 6:19 _____

Romans 12:1 _____

I Corinthians 6:13-20 _____

Philippians 1:20-24 _____

5. What insights do these passages give you with regard to I Thessalonians 4:3-6?

6. How does sexual immorality wrong or steal from another brother (or sister)?

7. Imagine you were married, and were having a discussion with your spouse concerning his or her sexual involvement before marriage. At what level of physical involvement would you begin to feel that someone had taken, or stolen, something from you?

8. How important do you feel it is to go back and apologize to people you have sexually wronged?

Long engagements are fairly common in our culture, which bring its own complexity. One result is that engaged couples can easily begin to slide into roles, responsibilities, privileges and intimacy that are proper only when that person belongs to you.

9. How have you witnessed this in relationships you have observed or experienced?

10. Read 4:6-8. What further motivations to remain sexually pure do you see here? In verse 8, why do you think Paul adds the parenthetical phrase “who gives you His Spirit?”

11. Why do you think God wants us to remain sexually pure until marriage?

12. In dating relationships, what levels of physical involvement do you think are clearly off limits? What do you think is allowable? What are some of the gray areas?

13. How have you arrived at this standard?

Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

Romans 16:16

All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss

1 Corinthians. 16:20.

14. Some have suggested the principle of the “Holy Kiss”—showing physical affection with a commitment to not cause sexual arousal. It moves away from a standard of “What can I get away with?” or “How can I avoid all contact,” and says rather, “How can I physically express affection without sexually arousing either myself or partner.” How do you feel about this as a guideline?



WEEK FIVE GROWN

In this study we'll examine how God makes us holy, and shed light on the question: What's God's part in the process, and what's ours?

1. What is the theological word for the process by which we are made holy?

2. The biggest reason we don't see holiness in our lives is that:

- We don't make right choices.
- We don't have enough faith.
- We don't pray enough.
- We aren't obedient.

3. In the spiritual growth process, what would you say is our responsibility? What is God's?

4. Christians can over-emphasize either our role or God's. How have you seen this?

A spiritually healthy perspective is one that sees a balance and a partnership as expressed in Philippians 2:12-13:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

5. How have you experienced God's working in you to will and to act according to His purposes?

6. Are there things you can do to increase the Holy Spirit's influence in your life? If so what?

7. Find a verse that talks about things that hinder the influence or power of the Holy Spirit.

8. What else, besides sin, can hinder our sensitivity to God's Spirit?

8. Philippians 2:12-13 says, "to work out" our salvation. Why isn't this contrary to our salvation being by God's grace alone?

9. We work out (take what God is doing on the inside and put it on the outside) our salvation by habitually making choices, which, over time, change our character. How would you define what a person's character is?

10. In what area of your life have you begun making a new series of choices? What new habits have been created?

11. The question is often asked why God doesn't immediately make us holy. How would you answer that question?

12. In the Scriptures, clearing our lives of sin is similar to the process the Israelites went through in clearing the Promised Land. Read the following passages and write down what insight they give to the last question:

Exodus 23:27,29 _____

Deuteronomy 6:10-12 _____

Deuteronomy 8:17 _____

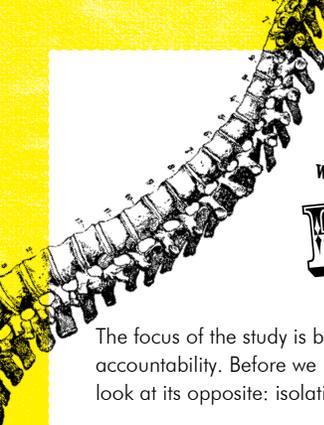
13. If you could see anything change in your life immediately, what would it be? Why do you think you have not seen victory yet?

Another reason for the great struggle for holiness is that God wants to teach us how to spiritually fight in partnership with him: "These are the nations the LORD left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the wars in Canaan (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience)" (Judges 3:1-2).

14. In your struggle for sexual purity, what are some of the lessons you've learned about fighting this spiritual war?

15. If there is one component more important than others, it is found in Romans 6:12. Look at the verse, and then answer why it is so crucial.

16. Give a passage that affirms the hope that one day the sanctification process will be complete.



WEEK SIX
HELP

The focus of the study is biblical community and accountability. Before we look at community, let's look at its opposite: isolation. Read Mark 5:2-13:

When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice,

"What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!" Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

1. Do you think isolation led to this man's state? Or, was his state caused by isolation?

2. How does isolation give Satan a foothold in our lives?

3. What causes people to isolate themselves? What causes you to isolate yourself from others?

4. Isolated and attacked, the man's mind became obsessed with death (living in tombs), self-destruction (cutting himself), and with the profane and perverse (not wearing clothes). How is your mind and thinking impaired by isolation?

5. Having spent too much time alone, what is the most bizarre thing you've begun to ponder?

6. In your experience, do media outlets (movies, music, computers, etc) relieve isolation or increase it?

7. The opposite of isolation is accountability and community. On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate your experience of community? Of isolation?

8. How would you define Christian community?

9. The reason we need community is that we all need to be known. Speaking of which, share one thing with the group that you have never told anyone else about yourself.

In the area of sexual immorality, one of the great benefits of community is found in this verse:

Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

James 5:16

10. How does confessing our sins to others lead to healing?

11. What is different about this passage from 1 John 1:9?

The 12-step Alcoholics Anonymous program was founded on Christian principles. Most people who make it through the program cite Step 5 as the most critical step. It states: "Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

12. Step 5 is essentially James 5:16. With whom can you, or do you, share the exact nature of your wrongs?

13. The term used for Christian friendships that help one another in the area of sexual purity is "accountability." What does accountability mean?

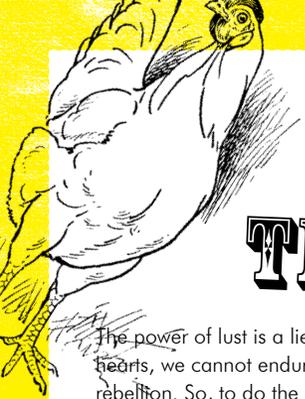
14. What sorts of things might you do to hold one another accountable?

15. It has been said that a true accountability partner models both "grace and truth." What do you think this means? Who models this for you?

16. Do you tend to be more grace or more truth oriented?

In Hebrews 10:24 it says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

17. Who could you spur on? List three things you could do that would spur a friend on to love and good deeds?



WEEK SEVEN

TRUTH

The power of lust is a lie. Yet, with Christ in our hearts, we cannot endure the pain of outright rebellion. So, to do the unthinkable, we conceal ideas under layers of lies, smuggling in lust dressed in rationales, justifications and outright lies.

1. Write out five justifications for giving in momentarily to sex or pornography.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

2. When the word "truth" is used in the Bible it can have different shades of meaning. What does truth mean in each of these passages:

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

John 8:32 _____

An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth.

Romans 2:20 _____

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

1 Corinthians 13:6 _____

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:15 _____

Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus.

Ephesians 4:21 _____

3. As a lifestyle, where are you most prone to exaggerate or stretch the truth? With whom? Why?

4. In John 8:32 it says, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Can you think of a time when speaking or telling the truth brought with it a sense of freedom?

5. Why does truth make us feel free?

"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!"

Mark 8:29-33

6. What is it about Peter's words that would be a temptation to Jesus?

7. Notice Jesus does not respond with Scripture, but how does he use truth as a weapon?

8. Think of two ways you could use the power of total truth and honesty to help you fight against lust and pornography.

1. _____
2. _____

9. Vulnerability is one form of truth. Write down a precise summary of the truth of your sexual temptation, history, struggle, failure and success.

Now you have a choice whether you want to read this to the group right now or not, but it should not be a choice of whether or not you keep this to yourself. Disclosing the truth will set you free.

THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE

10. What is different about the truth of Scripture from the general truthfulness we have been talking about?

In Joshua Harris' book, "Not Even a Hint" he says, "Part of sin is dissatisfaction with God. Lust's power comes from the promise it gives that something besides God can make us happy. What this means is the only way to overcome the power of lust in our lives is by finding better promises."

11. Can you think of better promises found in Scripture?

12. What passages have you memorized related to your battle against lust? How has it helped and what passage has been most helpful? How do you memorize them?

Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Romans 10:17

13. Scripture is not clear on this point, but some have suggested that during temptation it is more powerful to say aloud the Scripture than simply think it. This is hard to deny or confirm. What do you think?

Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

14. Scripture is not magic. Speaking it out loud doesn't make lust go away. What does determine, or enhance, the efficacy of Scripture?

15. What is one thing you will do this week to utilize truth in your fight against lust?
