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THE BELT OF TRUTH

FLESH BY RICK JAMES • ARTICLE EXCERPT

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



A BELT OF TRUTH

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.
John 8:44

The power of lust is its embedded lies—little white ones, dark and monstrous things. With Christ dwelling in us, our hearts cannot endure the pain of outright rebellion. So, to do the unthinkable, we conceal ideas under layers of lies. We smuggle lust in, dressed in rationales and justification, always hoping the metal detector will not go off. We tell ourselves the following: “It’s not that bad. God doesn’t care about me anyway. I’m already this far gone. I might as well keep going. It’s just a *small* sin. This is *really* the last time. After all, my desires are stronger than other people’s desires. I should have the freedom to watch this show. I’m just doing an image search.” And the list goes on, etc., etc., ad infinitum.

We lie to put ourselves into the path of temptation. We have believed lies about women. We lie to both justify and hide our behavior. We have told ourselves—and listened—to lies that tell us God is at fault, doesn’t care or hasn’t provided. We have been less than honest with ourselves about the potential consequences. Then, when we sin, we fail to believe that God is merciful and forgiving and that our sin has been paid for. These are all lies, lies, lies.

The result is a haze-filled layer of pollution that hangs over our lives like smog over Los Angeles. Our protection is the bright and blinding light of truth that harshly renders all shades into black or white, right or wrong.

A LIFESTYLE OF TRUTH

Truth comes in two containers. One container is a rather generic-looking box, reading simply “truth.” It refers to a lifestyle that shuns all forms of falsehood. The other container is “the Bible,”

God’s special revelation of truth. Christians often focus on the second and overlook the importance of the first. In Ephesians 6:14 it says:

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place

What might be surprising is that Paul is not talking about the truth of Scripture but truth in general. He is making reference back to a lifestyle of truth he had already elaborated on, like in verse Ephesians 4:25:

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

In his book *The Most Personal Addiction*, Joe Zychick defines the lifestyle of honesty this way:

I define honesty as: the attempt to make accurate identifications and communicate them to others. In other words, it's the intention to figure out what's going on and sincerely trying to tell other people what you are aware of. Honesty is the heartbeat of mental health because the mind longs to know and experience itself, and allows the people you value to know you.

One component of this life of truth is transparency, which is well described by the phrase "living life with the walls down and roof off." A life of truth is an honest disclosure with others of your actions and motivations as best as you are aware of them, coupled with an honesty and transparency with yourself. Upon being tempted, I have found it very powerful to voice out loud, to myself, my own duplicity, "What you're doing is trying to tell yourself that this will have no consequences. Rather clever of you, meat bag—but a lie!" or, "Oh, that was a good one! Did you catch that? You were trying to make this seem like it is God's fault? Let's also blame the military while we're at it!"

Another aspect of lifestyle-honesty is a careful attention to detail, guarding against all levels of exaggeration. Have you ever told your parents you'd be home around 1:00 A.M., when in your heart you knew it would be closer to 2:00 A.M. As a lifestyle, we are talking about an intentionality

to be truthful in every way. Such a life has a hard time supporting the habit of sexual immorality because there are so many fabrications that attend it. The more powerful the lifestyle of truth, the more scandalous you find it to harbor the dozens of rationalizations and lies that cloak the activities of sexual misconduct.

A lifestyle of truthfulness is a wonderful focus, for it moves us from "avoiding lust and pornography" to "living truthfully." I don't know about you, but I've never seen a "Wet Paint, Do Not Touch" sign I haven't been compelled to go and touch. The point being: It's helpful to focus on being truthful rather than simply not lusting.

Imagine that moment when a lie concerning lust begins to ticker tape through your mind. At that moment, consider stopping and telling God, "Lord, I was just thinking that it wouldn't matter if I quickly went to a website right now." Or consider telling God or a friend, "I'm already beginning to get excited about being alone tonight and how I might have opportunity to satisfy my flesh." Look at the following passage:

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

Wouldn't you expect that Jesus would greet this temptation (the same one given by Satan to bypass the cross) with a passage of Scripture? But he doesn't. He does, however, resist it with truth. He blurts out the bald, blunt and hurtful truth that Satan is using Peter to tempt him, and he will not listen to it.

What I also take from this passage is the importance of voicing the truth, not simply thinking or confessing the truth to God in our thoughts but actually hearing our voices speak and say the truth. If you commit yourself to a life of truth, and make it your goal to inject every thought and action with the serum, it will be difficult to continue in sexual sin. Truth will continually drive lies further and further away from your life.

THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE

I have not put the truth of Scripture second because it is secondary to honesty. It isn't. But, because the first thought is less obvious, I didn't want you to miss it. Knowing you (the reading audience) would be more sprightly on page one than on page three, I put it first in order, not priority. Scripture is not only truth, but it also has the power to renew our minds, strengthen our faith and inflame our hearts with loving God. As Joshua Harris states in his book *Not Even a Hint*:

Scripture cuts through the confusion and hazy half-truths that our sin generates. It reveals our wrong desires. It rebukes our apathy. It corrects our selfish human thinking. It unmask the deception of sin. It points us to God's goodness and faithfulness when we're tempted to forget. It counters the false promises of lust with God's true promises. ...

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.

In moments of temptation, your mind instinctively scans the database for Scripture. If you haven't memorized any, you're likely to make up your own: "This is really, really, dumb. So ... like ... just stop it, thus saith ... me." Or, worse, you might quote Walt Whitman, at which point you might as well just begin confessing because the ball game's over. Only Scripture has divine power to dismantle falsehood.

In arming yourself against lust with the sword of Scripture, we would make the following suggestions. First, find a few verses to memorize that relate to sexual sin. You could rip these right out of the book, but don't. It's always better to deface a library book rather than your own. Or better yet, go buy yourself a Bible. Here are a few suggested verses:

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

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

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-6

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl.

Job 31:1

Now, don't just memorize these verses, but meditate on them. Think about the truth encapsulated in the words. This ain't Harry Potter. Bible verses are not spells. They are truths that, if meditated upon and believed, will protect and renew our minds.

Secondly, memorize more individual verses that are tailored to your situation. Specifically, find Scripture that counteracts the typical lies that lead you to sexual sin. For example, I often believe in my heart of hearts that there will be no consequences for my actions. So, I find this verse very helpful:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

Galatians 6:7

Third, don't simply say the verses to yourself in your head. At different times—particularly during tempting situations—verbalize these verses. Look at the following passage:

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

Romans 10:17

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Romans 1:11-12

The first passage obviously affirms the power of hearing God's Word. The second verse is less apparent, but the point is that there is something about actually communicating and orally repeating the Word of God that is different than simply saying it in your head. You are imitating God. God did not just think creation into existence but spoke it.

Saturate yourself in the Word of God, and your entire life—not just the sexual area—will be transformed.