Build Your Walls! Guard Your Gates!
What Nehemiah Can Teach Us About Sexual Purity

By Michael S. Kientz
Dedication

This book is dedicated to the two people who have worked side-by-side with me on my walls as I struggled to develop sexual purity.

To Mike Epstein:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

Thank you for every time you picked me up and helped me learn why I fell so that I would be stronger for the next fight.

To Monica, my beloved wife:

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

Thank you for forgiveness (“seventy times seven” and then some) and your unfaltering support. I love you more today than the day you agreed to be my wife.
Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

(Isaiah 58:12)
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Preface

This is a book about sexual purity. It was born from a deep desire to see men get free of the sexual idolatry we have been practicing. The lessons it includes were learned from failure. Years and years of failure that finally gave way to a first, small success. That one was followed by another and then another. And to be honest, I still have struggles. I’ve learned to apply many of the truths in this book, but there are several that I’m still working on. In this regard, I relate to Paul, who said:

_Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus._ (Philippians 3:12-14)

When it comes to sex, there is more going on than we are aware of. Much more. To recognize this, we first need to be aware that the spiritual realm is real and that what we do here in the physical realm has spiritual implications.

The spiritual realm is at war. There are two armies lined up to do battle; one fights under the banner of Christ, and one fights under the banner of Satan. Sex is a key part of each army’s battle plan.

Surprised? That’s because part of Satan’s strategy is to get us to forget about the spiritual realm. He wants us to think that there’s no connection between our behavior in the physical realm and the war in the spiritual realm. Don’t be fooled. Spiritual and physical are bound together. Whether you demonstrate obedience to God or give in to temptation, there is a spiritual ripple effect.

But what does this have to do with sex? God created sex as a critical part of His battle strategy. It’s an ingenious way to win the world. God’s purposes for sex are:

**Procreation**
In a committed, Christian marriage, having children is a phenomenal way of expanding the Kingdom of God, since most of those children will learn to trust the God of their parents. The parents disciple the children, and the act of raising children helps the parents become better reflections of God.

**Intimacy**
Marriage is a picture of God’s relationship with the church (Ephesians 5:31-32). The oneness we experience in marriage (and particularly during sex) helps us understand the spiritual oneness of the Trinity and of Christ and the Church. The intimacy we experience during sex (as God intends it) is the clearest, purest image we can get of this oneness.
Pleasure
God wants us to enjoy sex with our wives. It’s His wonderful gift, and our response should be thankfulness and praise for a God who loves us enough to be so generous.

Can you see why Satan hates sex as God intends it? He is absolutely opposed to the growth of the Kingdom of God through procreation. He hates the image of God revealed during sexual intimacy, and he doesn’t want anyone giving God praise for His incredible gift. To prevent God’s purposes from being fulfilled, Satan launches some of his fiercest and most persistent attacks at sex.

Consider how many ways Satan has found to pervert God’s plan:

- Pornography
- Sexual abuse
- Rape
- Incest
- Adultery
- Sex “education”
- Cybersex
- Phone sex
- Pedophilia
- Swinging
- Masturbation (I’ll explain later)
- Bestiality
- Sexual cults
- Orgies
- Homosexuality
- Premarital sex
- Promiscuity
- Sexual guilt
- Some sexual inhibitions
- Masochism
- Sadism
- Prostitution
- Morning-After pills
- Voyeurism
- Exhibitionism
- Fetishes

I’m leaving out some of the really nasty stuff, but you get the picture. Satan hates sex as God intended it, and he’s prepared to do whatever it takes to pervert it. This list alone should be a clue to how important sex is in the spiritual battle. As I heard a Viet Nam vet once say, you get the most flak (anti-aircraft fire) when you’re over the target. Makes sense, doesn’t it? The closer you get to what’s important to the Enemy, the harder he will try to shoot you down.

Satan has been winning the battle over sex, and he’s taken a lot of territory. Much of what I’ve listed above is considered normal by the world. They call evil good and good evil. They have exchanged darkness for light and light for darkness (Isaiah 5:20). A friend of mine recently had a conversation with an old college friend, who thought my friend’s marriage was unhealthy because he and his wife wouldn’t consider swinging. Can you get anymore backward than that?

It’s time for us to make a stand for sexual purity. It won’t be easy. The world and even some in the church will laugh at our attempts. They will say that we are over-reacting, that we are blind to the times we live in. I hope to convince you differently. This battle is of utmost importance for Christian men. As long as we engage in sexual idolatry, we have no integrity to lead. Our spiritual walls are down, and the Enemy has free access to our hearts and our minds. Rebuilding our walls will take courageous leadership in the
face of heavy opposition. Thankfully, we have a blueprint for just such leadership in the book of *Nehemiah*.

**A Different Approach**

The book of Nehemiah is a great story that has much to teach us about courage, leadership, faithfulness to God’s call and more. Without discounting any of these approaches to the book, I would like to approach it from a different perspective. Consider the book of *Nehemiah* as a metaphor, as a vivid word picture of God’s plan for spiritual purity in our lives. To unlock the metaphor, you only need a few simple keys.

**Nehemiah / Jesus and the Word of God**

Nehemiah serves as a picture of Jesus and the Word of God. Like Nehemiah, the Word is the initiator of change. It first convicts us and leads us to weep over the condition of our spiritual walls. Then, it encourages us to do something about it. The Word inspires us to build and directs us as we work. It transforms the rubble of our lives into strong walls. Once they are up, the Word calls us to obedience and a higher standard of living.

The parallels between Nehemiah and Jesus are incredible. Nehemiah was cupbearer to the king, which meant that he sat at the king’s right hand and tasted the wine first to check for poison. He showed his complete devotion by being ready and willing to give up his life. Nehemiah left the king to do his work in a far away land, returned to the king for a short time and then went back to govern the people.

Jesus sits at His Father’s right hand, and He showed His complete devotion to the Father and to us by drinking from the poisoned cup that grieved Him so much in the Garden of Gethsemane. But instead of saving the life of the king, He saved ours. Jesus came to earth but has now returned to the Father. One day, He will return to govern His people here on earth.

**Ezra / the Holy Spirit**

Whenever you see Ezra in the book of *Nehemiah*, he’s bringing the Word of God to the people. He is most prominent when Nehemiah steps out of the spotlight and lets him lead, but we can assume that he is with the people at all times helping them build the walls. When Nehemiah returns to King Artaxerxes, Ezra stays as the spiritual leader of the people.

What a great picture of the Holy Spirit! In the early days of the Church, He took over for Jesus as the presence of God on earth after Jesus had gone to be with the Father. Since then, He has always been with believers. He is ever-present to help us understand and apply the Word of God, and He is our Friend and Helper as we build our spiritual walls.
King Artaxerxes / God the Father
I don’t want to take the metaphor too far. Artaxerxes was a pagan king in Persia, after all. But he does provide an image of God the Father, who sends both Jesus and the Holy Spirit to us to help us walk in godliness. Without Artaxerxes’ approval and royal provisions, there would have been no rebuilding of the walls.

The Temple / Your Heart
In reading Nehemiah, whenever it talks about the temple, substitute your heart. In Old Testament times, God met with his people in first the Tabernacle and then the temple. More accurately, He met with the high priest in the center of the Tabernacle or temple in a place called the Holy of Holies. It was a small inner room where only God’s designated high priest was allowed to enter. The room was separated from the rest of the temple by a thick, intricately woven veil. The high priest was only allowed to enter once a year on the Day of Atonement and only after performing rituals of purification and dressing in a garment designed by God himself.

When Jesus died on the cross, the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. Christ’s sacrifice eliminated the need for ritual and the intercession of one mortal man for many. We can now enter the King’s throne room boldly, knowing that we have the righteousness of Christ and that Christ is now our Intercessor, our High Priest. When God meets with us, it isn’t in a building; it’s in our hearts. He has removed our heart of stone, and given us a heart of flesh. (Ezekiel 11:19)

Jerusalem / Your Mind
When David became king over the united kingdom of Israel and Judah, conquering Jerusalem (it was held by the Jebusites) was his first priority. He knew how critical the city was to the strength of his rule, and he immediately built up the area around it from the supporting terraces inward. From that time on, Jerusalem became the city at the center of God’s holy and chosen people.

This city, where the king lived, created policy and law, judged the law and carried out the business of the kingdom, represents your mind. It’s where you make decisions, consider information and make judgments. It’s the seat of your emotions, your intellect and your will. It’s the Enemy’s prime target, because he knows that he can reach our heart only by getting into our heads.

The Inhabitants of the City / Your Thoughts
Nehemiah interacts with many people inside Jerusalem. Some are good; some are bad. Nehemiah struggles to turn the bad to good throughout the story. He seeks to only allow the pure (those who could clearly show their lineage) into the priesthood where they will minister in the temple, and he excludes those considered to be impure. Despite his efforts, he finds that some of the people are loyal to his enemy Tobiah, who you will learn, represents our flesh.
Your thoughts are often difficult to control, but the bad thoughts can be limited by guarding your gates (see below) and making sure that you allow in more good influences than bad. By bringing all your thoughts captive before Christ and making them obedient to Him (2 Corinthians 10:5), you will gain victory over your private thought life.

### The Walls / Your Relationship with Christ

Walls in Old Testament times were essential to a city. They provided protection for the city and its people. They were the chief obstacle that the enemy must conquer in order to defeat a city. They gave a city time to see an attacking enemy and prevented the enemy from launching a sneak attack. Walls exposed an attack before it could get to the heart of the city. When the walls were down, anyone who passed by could plunder the city and take the best of its treasures. A city without walls became a scorn to its neighbors. (Psalm 89:41)

In Psalm 51:18, David asks God to “build up the walls of Jerusalem.” He wasn’t asking for God to literally build the walls; the walls of the city were already built and strong. David was asking God to strengthen the people spiritually so that his sin with Bathsheba would not become a stumbling block to them.

Your walls represent the health of your relationship with Christ. They are the boundaries you have set up around your heart and mind to protect them. Throughout your walk with Christ, your walls can go up and down, depending upon the strength of your relationship with Him. If your walls are strong and tall, the Enemy is much less likely to attack you. After all, there are plenty of Christians out there whose walls are rubble. Why waste effort trying to overcome a city with strong, well-defended walls when you can easily take the next city, which has no walls at all?

The Scripture says, “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.” (Proverbs 25:28) Without your walls, you have no ability to resist temptation. You can’t stop looking at women’s bodies or pornography or your neighbor’s wife. You don’t want to act out sexually, but you have no defenses to prevent it. You promised God this time would be different, but it’s hopeless; you just can’t stop yourself.

Because I want to be clear, your walls do not signify whether or not you are a Christian. It’s your heart (your temple) that determines if Christ is Lord of your life. Provided you believe that Jesus is Lord and you accept the gift of His death as payment for your sins, you are a Christian. The condition of your walls indicates the quality of your walk with Him. There are many Christians with weakened walls in disrepair. They are still going to heaven, but they are missing out on God’s incredible purpose for their lives. We’ll talk about how to build your walls a little later.
The Gates / Your Eyes, Your Ears & Your Mouth
The gates of a city were the means of allowing things in and out of the city. Gates were guarded diligently to ensure that only things beneficial to the city were allowed in. Otherwise, what was allowed in could corrupt the city, bring down the walls and even destroy the temple. Elders presided at the gates and judged the complaints of the people. Gates represented the authority of the city.

If the gates were conquered, the city was conquered. The gates were the most vulnerable part of the city.

Your gates are your eyes, ears and mouth. Through the eyes and the ears, we take in information, sights and sounds. Through the mouth, we pass on information, praises, curses…

Sexual purity and godliness are simply about choices. What you choose to allow in your heart and mind through your gates determines the condition of your heart and mind, and the condition of your heart and mind often determines what comes out of your mouth.

Building Your Temple
If you are reading this, and you realize that you have never asked Jesus into your heart as your Lord and Savior, you don’t have a temple where God meets with you. The temple is created when Jesus comes into your life and renews your heart. There is no hope for you to overcome your problems with sexual purity unless Christ is at the center of your life.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for all the sins you’ve ever committed or ever will commit. He’s given you a wonderful gift, but He won’t force you to take it. You have to let Him know that you accept it for your renewed life as a Christian to begin. All you have to do is pray to Jesus. Let Him know that you recognize the sin in your life and that you receive His gift of forgiveness and everlasting life. Tell Him that you want Him to be Lord of your life, and He won’t turn you down. Please take a moment and reach out to Him now.

If you’ve just prayed this prayer, welcome to the family! Get plugged-in to a local church as soon as you can so that you have the support of other believers as you grow spiritually.

On Solid Rock
I have a friend who once had his house jacked so that it was supported by bedrock rather than clay. He shared with me that his house is now all “womperjawed” (yes, he’s from Texas). Not a thing in the house is square – but it’s solid. His house had been founded on clay so long that everything had shifted over time. In fact, much of it was square
before he jacked it, because it had all shifted together. It looked good and felt comfortable, but it wasn’t solid.

When my friend made the decision to jack the house to found it on bedrock, he gave up the comfort and aesthetics he had before. His house doesn’t look as good as it once did, but now it’s solid and will stand the test of time.

What a great analogy for what happens to our house (heart) when we accept Christ and found our lives on the Rock. If you’ve just accepted Christ, people may start to realize that you don’t have it all together like you used to pretend that you did. Your flaws are going to show. But rejoice in that! God doesn’t waste anything. You’ll find that He uses your flaws as much or more as He uses your strengths to accomplish His purposes. You can afford to be vulnerable with people, because you’ve got a solid foundation.

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Now that you have the key, a closer look at the book of Nehemiah should open up God’s message to us. You might want to dog-ear these pages so that you can come back to them for reference on the meaning of each part of the metaphor. In the first chapter, we’ll begin to look at the passages from Nehemiah that are most relevant to the building our walls and guarding our gates.
Chapter 1

Nehemiah’s Prayer
Nehemiah: Chapter 1

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah: In the month of Kislev in the twentieth year, while I was in the citadel of Susa, Hanani, one of my brothers, came from Judah with some other men, and I questioned them about the Jewish remnant that survived the exile, and also about Jerusalem.

They said to me, “Those who survived the exile and are back in the province are in great trouble and disgrace. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been burned with fire.”

When I heard these things, I sat down and wept. For some days I mourned and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven. Then I said:

“O Lord, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father’s house, have committed against you. We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.

“Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, ‘If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.’

They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man.

I was cupbearer to the king. (Nehemiah 1:1-11)

A Short History of Israel’s Temple Problems

Israel had God’s blessing more than any other nation in history. Rescued from slavery in Egypt with jaw-dropping miracles, cared for in the wilderness by God’s providing hand,
brought into the Promised Land with unbelievable military victories...Israel had every reason to honor and serve God all the days of their lives.

But just like most of us, Israel had a short memory. Before the grass started to grow on Joshua’s grave, the people of Israel began to marry foreign peoples and serve their gods. They forgot the mighty miracles God had done for them and exchanged the genuine for the counterfeit. God showed incredible patience for several hundred years, allowing Israel to repent, return to Him and then relapse into sin over and over again.

Finally, God allowed Israel to suffer the consequence of their disobedience. In 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Judah and deported large numbers of Israelites, spreading them throughout his kingdom. When Israel rebelled under Nebuchadnezzar’s yoke, he returned and attacked two more times, finally destroying the temple and taking all its riches back to Babylon.

Years later, Persia defeated the Babylonians and took over many of their territories. Unlike the Babylonians, the Persians were comfortable with allowing those they conquered to remain in or return to their homelands. So in 538 B.C., Cyrus of Persia decreed the return of the Jews to Israel, where they began to reconstruct the temple. They completed it 23 years later, though it was a far cry from Solomon’s glorious temple that Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed.

While having the temple rebuilt was cause to celebrate, the Jews knew how vulnerable it was with no walls to protect it. All around the city of Jerusalem, the walls were still broken down and the gates had been burned with fire.

Enter Nehemiah
In Nehemiah, Chapter 1, we are introduced to the title character, who held the position of cupbearer to Artaxerxes, king of Babylon under the rule of the Persian Empire. Cupbearers were highly trusted officers of the court, and they had the power of life and death for the king. A cupbearer’s responsibilities included tasting the king’s drink before it was given to him to ensure that it contained no poison. Because of the trust implicit in the role, the cupbearer often served as an advisor, as well.

When Nehemiah heard about the condition of the walls and gates from his brother, his heart was grieved for his nation’s plight. He knew that without walls, the city and the temple were freely accessible to those who didn’t honor God.

Feeling the burden God placed on his heart, Nehemiah confessed the sins of his people and claimed God’s promise to restore the nation of Israel. Like Esther before him, Nehemiah recognized that his position of trust with the king was “for such a time as this,” and he decided to make a petition to the king.

How Do Your Walls Look?
If you have accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, you (like the Jews who had lived their lives in a foreign land) have been freed from the captivity of the Enemy.
Specifically, I’m talking about being free from the slavery of Satan’s temptations here on earth and from hell and eternal darkness in eternity. Your temple (your heart) has been rebuilt – made new!

And yet, many of us still have little to no defenses against the attacks of the Enemy. Our spiritual walls (i.e., our relationship with Christ) are broken down, and our gates (ears and eyes) are open for whatever he brings our way. He assaults us with images and sounds, which we shouldn’t let into our minds, but we are weak without our walls. He can walk freely through our minds, because we have no way to keep him out.

God intended for us to be a light to all we meet. He intended for us to reflect His glory. But instead of shining, we’ve been sinning. Because of what we’ve allowed into our minds, they are full of darkness. Our mouth gates don’t send out wisdom; they send out perversity. We laugh at all kinds of sinfulness. We celebrate it along with all the other unsaved people around us. They can’t tell that we are God’s people, because we look just like them.

If you are truly saved, this should cause you as great a distress as Nehemiah experienced. You will never rebuild your spiritual walls until you first weep over the ruins. In other words, we need to reach a place of repentance for the mess we have made of what God gave us. God warns that if we continue to be unfaithful, He will give us over to our sins just as he scattered the Jews to the nations. But if we return and obey, He will restore us to relationship with Him. Even those of us who have gone to the farthest reaches of sin. Even those of us who think we’ve gone far beyond what God will forgive. He will bring us back.

**Walls Sanctify**

God wants walls around our hearts for the same reason He wanted walls around the temple. In addition to protection, the walls were a means of sanctification. The walls set the Israelites apart from everyone else. This doesn’t mean that the Israelites isolated themselves. It doesn’t mean that they weren’t allowed to associate with gentiles. It means that they were different from everyone else, and God wanted the world to know about that difference. God’s people bring God glory not by blending in but by being different.

Jesus put it this way in Matthew 5:13: “You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men.”

What is salt good for? Healing, flavoring, preserving. Christians are called to bring healing into broken relationships. We are called to demonstrate the flavor of life – the joy that comes with living for Christ. We are called to preserve the goodness of the world. We are what keeps the world from rotting under Satan’s control.
Think about it. If God took us all to heaven as soon as we accepted Christ, there would be no one left to prevent the Enemy from making the world rancid. He would have free reign. What Jesus is saying in Matthew 5:13 is that when we stop being different from the world, we are more like sand than salt. We deserve to be walked on and abused. We are no longer fulfilling our purpose.

In today’s world, Christians shy away from saying that they are different. We don’t want to be seen as “holier than thou.” We feel that saying we are different is prideful, but God is the One who made us different. He wants us to stand out – not so that we can puff up our pride but so that others will see the impact of God on our lives. If we are walking with Him, we will reflect His glory.

And believe it or not, those who are in the world want us to be different. They may hate us, but they like to know that we are there when they need us. In biblical times, the walls of Jerusalem created a safe place for all the surrounding people. When danger threatened, they could run to the protection of its walls. In modern times, you see the same thing happen when there is tragedy and uncertainty. When people are stricken with life-threatening diseases, they don’t turn to their atheist friends for answers – they look to people of faith. When they lose what matters most to them, they find those whose treasures are stored up in heaven. When disaster strikes, churches are full the following weekend.

It’s a beautiful thing, actually. It’s God’s plan at work. But it only works if we look different from the world. If we look the same, where will the world turn?

We’ve got to set ourselves apart, and we do that by building walls of holiness. They can’t be “whitewashed walls” like those of the Sadducees. That’s just a fresh coat of paint to cover up our corruptness, and our sin will eventually find us out. Our walls have to be genuine, built stone by stone while the Enemy does all he can to interrupt the work.

**Man of Action**

When he heard about the walls and gates of Jerusalem, Nehemiah went into action. He didn’t recklessly set off to fix the problem. He started on his knees, seeking the Lord’s leading.

As men, our first response to a problem typically isn’t prayer. Doesn’t seem decisive enough. We want to do something active with measurable results.

Prayer strikes us as passive, because we have no idea of its true power. And honestly, we have no idea of its true power, because we are lousy at it. Most of us pray inconsistent, boring, dutiful prayers. We don’t expect much to happen as a result, and sure enough, not much does. We don’t pray like Nehemiah – with power and anticipation. Go back and reread his prayer, and you’ll find that he wasn’t just going through the motions.

Nehemiah:
• fasted and prayed for days before this particular prayer.
• began by praising God and asking for his attention.
• confessed his peoples’ sins without excuse.
• prayed God’s Word back to Him.

All this before getting to his specific request! Nehemiah prayed with intention. He was conducting spiritual warfare on his knees. He knew that nothing he could do in the physical would be successful unless he first attacked it in the spiritual.

I’m convinced that if we could just get a glimpse of what goes on in the spiritual realm, it would change our prayers forever. I love the way Frank Peretti portrays the physical/spiritual relationship in his books *Piercing the Darkness* and *This Present Darkness*. In the stories, prayers and praise from those on earth strengthened God’s angels, giving them what they needed to attack and defeat the enemy. While it may not describe the connection precisely, it helps me remember that prayer makes a difference. Men of action pray.

Sometimes we don’t pray for a different reason. We’re afraid. What if God wants us to do something out of our comfort zone…like confess our sexual temptations to another man of God or to our wives? Be certain, you shouldn’t ask God what He wants you to do unless you are prepared to do what He says. Count the cost before you begin the work, because living a life of sexual purity is going to be one of the toughest things you’ve ever done.

You will have to make changes in what you watch, what you listen to, what you think, where you go and with whom you go. You will have to make some confessions and ask for some forgiveness. You will have to submit to the accountability of another godly person. There will likely be some very uncomfortable situations in your future as you try to explain to the guys why you can’t attend the bachelor party or why you no longer want to talk about the new receptionist’s better qualities.

Are you ready? Are you tired of failing God time after time? Are you prepared to do whatever it takes to walk blamelessly with Him? Are you a man of action? A godly man of action? Then, start on your knees and find out what God wants to deal with first in making you sexually pure. He won’t typically free you from the bonds of your lust all at once, but He will stick with you as long as you continue to strive toward purity.

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We can’t rebuild our walls without a thorough inspection. In the next chapter, Nehemiah takes a closer look.
Chapter 2

Inspecting the Walls
Nehemiah: Chapter 2

In the month of Nisan in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was brought for him, I took the wine and gave it to the king. I had not been sad in his presence before; so the king asked me, “Why does your face look so sad when you are not ill? This can be nothing but sadness of heart.”

I was very much afraid, but I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not look sad when the city where my fathers are buried lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?”

The king said to me, “What is it you want?”

Then I prayed to the God of heaven, and I answered the king, “If it pleases the king and if your servant has found favor in his sight, let him send me to the city in Judah where my fathers are buried so that I can rebuild it.”

Then the king with the queen sitting beside him, asked me, “How long will your journey take, and when will you get back?” It pleased the king to send me; so I set a time.

I also said to him, “If it pleases the king, may I have letters to the governors of Trans-Euphrates, so that they will provide me safe-conduct until I arrive in Judah? And may I have a letter to Asaph, keeper of the king’s forest, so he will give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple and for the city wall and for the residence I will occupy?” And because the gracious hand of my God was upon me, the king granted my requests. So I went to the governors of Trans-Euphrates and gave them the king’s letters. The king had also sent army officers and calvalry with me. (Nehemiah 2:1-9)

Taking Risks
Kings are a temperamenta lot. The Persian kings were no exception. Among their many laws and restrictions was one that forbade the king’s attendants from being sad in front of the king. Nehemiah knew that he was taking a risk by appearing in front of Artaxerxes disheveled and melancholy. He knew that he was taking a risk by boldly asking for the materials and letters of safe-conduct he was going to need to make his trip. He knew that he was taking a risk journeying hundreds of miles to rebuild city walls in enemy territory. Things had not been going well for the Jews who had already returned.
Soon after the first Jews returned to Jerusalem, they had decided to rebuild the temple. They rebuilt the altar for sacrifices first and then laid the foundation for the temple. It so angered the surrounding people that they tried to discourage the Jews and make them too afraid to continue building. When King Xerxes ascended to the throne, they sent formal complaints to him.

When Artaxerxes became king, they sent another letter, accusing the Jews of having plans to cancel their taxes and tribute to the Persian empire. They recommended that the king look at the official records to see what a rebellious people the Jews were. As a result, the king gave authority to stop the work on the temple, and the Jews had to wait fifteen years before restarting work on the temple during the reign of Darius. (Ezra 3:1-4:24)

Nehemiah knew that he faced similar risks, but he also knew how important it was to protect the temple. The vision of tall and fortified walls compelled him to take the risks and leave the results to God. Building your walls requires risk. If you’re going to grow your relationship with Christ, you’ve got to step out of your comfort zone and do the scary things God asks you to do.

**The Naked Lobster**

Ever thought about how a lobster grows? Because of its rigid shell, the larger it gets, the more uncomfortable the lobster becomes. Eventually, it has to shed its old shell in order to grow a new, roomier model. This process is repeated multiple times (as many as 25 times over the first 5-7 years of its life) until it reaches its maximum size.

During the 48 hours or so that the lobster is shell-less, it's in grave danger. (You could walk up at any time with a cup of melted butter, and it would be all over!) For the lobster, there is no growth without risk.

I see two lessons for us in the example of the naked lobster:

- You won't grow without taking some risks.
- You won't grow without leaving something familiar behind.

God is calling us to walk with Him, but the only thing He promises to be safe is your salvation. The rest of the walk can be incredibly scary. The familiar thing you are leaving behind is your old sin nature. Like the lobster’s old shell, it should be more and more uncomfortable to you as you grow in your relationship with Christ. When you realize that it’s dead, it’s time to shuck it off.

But where the lobster operates on instinct to shed his shell, we have to operate on courage. We don't have to take the risk if we really don't want to...if we are too afraid to leave the familiar for something better. We can continue to stay in our cramped, little shell convincing ourselves that it isn't so uncomfortable after all.
But let’s be honest with ourselves for a moment….it is starting to pinch, isn’t it? The things that used to excite us are empty now. The sins we used to enjoy bring release but no satisfaction. And the guilt! It’s miserable! The cost of the sin far outweighs it’s benefits. Getting rid of your shell will free you to walk with unconfined joy.

**Know Thy Enemies**

*When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official heard about this, they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.* (Nehemiah 2:10)

In verse 10 of Chapter 2, we are introduced to two of our enemies: Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite. From historical records, we know that Sanballat was governor of the province of Samaria and that Tobiah was governor of the province of Ammon in Transjordan.¹

We’ll be seeing them plenty, and Sanballat will never be mentioned without Tobiah at his side. Sanballat serves as a satanic figure, always opposed to the work of God’s people. In fact, his name means “enemy in secret” or “hatred in secret.” Tobiah represents our flesh, which works in partnership with the Enemy. His name means “Jehovah is good,” but it’s all for show. Tobiah doesn’t love the Lord anymore than our flesh does, but like our flesh, he wants everyone around him to think he’s super-spiritual.

A few verses later, we learn about Geshem, the Arab. One meaning for his name is “corporality,” which means “of the flesh.” He and other people (the Arabs*, the Ammonites, and the men of Ashdod) mentioned in later verses represent our third enemy – the world. Those in the world are consumed by their need to satisfy their flesh, and they want us to join them.

These three enemies work together to take us down. Of course, Satan is the one in charge. He simply uses our flesh and the world as his tools. Satan speaks their language, and they respond to him. Let’s look at each separately so that we know what we’re up against.

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* Please note that the inclusion of Arabs in this list does not imply that the Arab people of today are to be viewed as enemies. The Arabs mentioned here were a particular group of people opposed to the building of Jerusalem’s walls.
Satan
While he can’t actually sin for us, Satan can be counted on to do everything he can to make it easy. He shows us the fruit, points out how good it will taste and the enjoyment it will bring and encourages us to just take one little bite. He has a million ways to package sin so that it looks attractive, and he knows you well enough to know what your favorite gift-wrap is. Once he gets us to take a bite, he suddenly becomes our accuser, pointing out what a hypocrite we are and trying to sell us on giving up the good fight.

Our Flesh
Paul talks in Romans 7:24 about the “body of death” that was his flesh. He was using a metaphor with which readers of the time would be familiar. The Romans devised many ways to torture and kill men who they deemed to be guilty of crimes. One was to tie a dead body to a prisoner and force him to carry it while it decayed. As you can imagine, this was a terrible punishment that subjected the prisoner to an agonizing stench and life-threatening disease. Our flesh is dead and decaying. We can’t ever make it better, but we can’t get rid of it either. During this life, we are forced to carry it around with us, and it has the potential to poison our spirit. While this presents a difficult challenge, it isn’t as bleak as the prisoners had it in Paul’s time. Christ died so that we could be free. He gave us victory over our flesh, so that we don’t have to give into its temptations.

The World
Look around as you do your thing today. I bet you can find at least twenty ways Satan is using the world to try and corrupt your sexual purity. When I work in New York, I typically walk to the office. On my way (about one mile) I pass four hardcore pornography shops with graphic window displays, somewhere between four to eight posters advertising homosexual hook-up services, dozens upon dozens of women and girls wearing suggestive and revealing clothing and typically ten to twenty product or service advertisements that use sex to grab attention. On a recent trip, I changed hotels and stayed at one a little over two miles away from the office. As I walked to work on a different route, I found eighteen hardcore pornography shops! These hotels I’m staying in aren’t in bad parts of town, either. Sex sells.

Satan’s Motives & Methods
Satan is a formidable adversary (“adversary” is the literal meaning of the name Satan), and he has motive. Satan hates God. He hates God, but he can’t harm God. So, he hurts God by hurting us. Wound the Creator through His creation.

Another reason Satan hates us is because we are made in the image of God. Whenever he looks at us, he sees a reflection of God, and he wants to do whatever he can to distort or
destroy the image. Men are particularly important targets to the Enemy, because they are most often the leaders. They are the heads of families and churches. In these roles, men become spiritual role-models. Children often look at their fathers and apply what they see (good or bad) to their heavenly Father. The world looks at pastors and expects to see the best of what Christianity has to offer.

Sex is just one of the many weapons Satan has in his arsenal, but it’s one of the most powerful when used against men. Look how often he used it to tempt, corrupt and destroy men in the Bible:

- Ham looked at his father’s nakedness and earned his father’s curse. (Genesis 9)
- Abram (later “Abraham”) slept with Hagar, his wife’s maidservant, to help hurry along God’s plan. Their son was the progenitor of those who hate the Jews so much today. (Genesis 16)
- The Sodomites wanted to rape the angels visiting Lot and proved that there were none righteous in the city outside Lot’s family. (Genesis 19)
- Lot’s daughters got him drunk and slept with him in order to bear children. The two peoples that came from these children were a thorn in the side of the Hebrews for generations. (Genesis 19)
- Shechem violated Dinah, causing her brothers to seek a bloody revenge. (Genesis 34)
- Reuben slept with father’s wife (not his mother) and lost his birthright. (Genesis 35)
- Judah slept with a prostitute from the temple who turned out to be his daughter-in-law. (Genesis 38)
- Onan spilled his semen on the ground rather than fulfill his role as kinsman redeemer, and God struck him dead for it. (Genesis 38)
- Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph and allowed him to go to prison for a crime he didn’t commit. (Genesis 39)
- The Hebrews engaged in sexual immorality and idol worship with Moabite women and incurred God’s wrath. (Numbers 25)
- Samson spent time with a prostitute and with Delilah, who sold him out to the Philistines. (Judges 16)
- The Benjamites in Gibeah wanted to rape the Levite traveler but raped his concubine instead until she was dead. As a result, the eleven other tribes of Israel rose up against the Benjamites and almost completely wiped them out. (Judges 19-20)
- Eli’s sons slept with women who served at entrance to the Tent of Meeting, and the Lord put them to death. (1 Samuel 2)
- David watched Bathsheba bathe and lost control of his lust. He had an affair with her and killed her husband to cover up his sin. The sword would never leave the house of David thereafter. (2 Samuel 11-12)
- Amnon raped his sister Tamar, and Absalom killed Amnon in vengeance. (2 Samuel 13)
• Absalom slept with his father’s concubines on the roof of the palace for all Israel to see. Soon after, Joab plunged three javelins into Absalom’s heart as Absalom hung by his hair from a tree. (2 Samuel 16, 18)
• Adonijah asked Solomon for Abishag, their father’s concubine. Solomon saw the request as a power play for the throne and had Adonijah put to death. (1 Kings 2)
• Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines to satisfy his sexual desires. In his later years, they turned him away from God with their worship of foreign gods. (1 Kings 11)
• The youth who lacked judgment went in with the adulteress like an ox going to the slaughter. (Proverbs 7)
• The sexually immoral brother slept with his father’s wife, and Paul admonished the Corinthians to throw him out of the church. (1 Corinthians 5)

What a list! And I’m not positive that I got them all. Satan’s tactics haven’t changed. He’s going to keep beating this drum as long as we continue to dance to it.

I don’t want to give Satan more muscle than he has. He’s powerful, but he’s not all-powerful. He doesn’t read your mind, no matter how much it seems like it sometimes. He can’t make you sin; he can only lead you to it and make it really attractive. He can’t be all places at all times, but he does have countless demons under his command.

What makes him so formidable is that he’s had time to practice his deceit – at least six thousand years by some estimates. How difficult do you think we men are to figure out? My wife pretty much solved the puzzle the first year of our marriage. The Enemy has made it his life’s work to study us, because we are his instruments for hurting God.

Satan knows our thoughts not because he is omniscient but because they are so predictable. The flesh responds in a certain way to sexual temptation. It always has, and it always will. With six thousand plus years of experience under his belt, Satan can make some pretty accurate educated guesses about how we will respond. Our best defenses against him are strong walls and guarded gates.

**Building Your Walls Is a Threat to the Enemy**

Satan is a dangerous enemy, not to be taken lightly, but we have methods for waging battle. Verse 10 tells us that “…they were very much disturbed that someone had come to promote the welfare of the Israelites.” You bet they were! Without city walls, the Jews were no threat to Sanballat and his cronies. A fortified city would change the balance of power – would in fact flip it in favor of the Jews.

Satan sits up and takes notice when you start to build your walls. As long as you are willing to be a “carnal Christian,” you are no threat to his plans. But as soon as you start to live for Christ, you become a powerful force. Not only are you getting stronger against temptation, but you also are becoming a better reflection of God. Your walls reflect the glory of the Lord.
People around you will start to take notice when you’ve got strong spiritual walls. There will be no denying that there’s something different about you. You’ll be more confident, more self-assured. Saying “no” to temptation will become less and less difficult. Your marriage will improve, because you will be relying fully on your wife to meet your sexual needs. That type of oneness has a residual effect that draws people to you. They will want to know your secret. (“Why don’t you stare at attractive women anymore?” “What makes your marriage so strong?”) That’s the attractiveness that God wants to create in you and that Satan will do anything to prevent.

Start with an Inspection

I went to Jerusalem, and after staying there three days I set out during the night with a few men. I had not told anyone what my God had put in my heart to do for Jerusalem. There were no mounts with me except the one I was riding on.

By night I went out through the Valley Gate toward the Jackal Well and the Dung Gate, examining the walls of Jerusalem, which had been broken down, and its gates, which had been destroyed by fire. Then I moved on toward the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was not enough room for my mount to get through; so I went up the valley by night, examining the wall. Finally, I turned back and reentered through the Valley Gate. The officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, because as yet I had said nothing to the Jews or the priests or nobles or officials or any others who would be doing the work.

(Nehemiah 2:11-16)

Nehemiah took an assessment of how bad the situation was. He had heard the stories, but he had to see for himself. By inspecting the walls under cover of night and without telling anyone, he made sure that there would be no interference from the enemy.

As you begin this great work of building your spiritual walls and gates, start with an inspection. Ask yourself these questions to determine how you’re doing:

- Do you watch any shows on T.V. that you would be embarrassed for your wife to know about?
- Have you seen any pornographic movies, magazines, pictures or internet sites in the last month?
- Do you own any pornography?
- Do you masturbate regularly?
- Do you fantasize about women other than your wife?
- Do you have difficulty controlling your eyes when an attractive woman passes?
- Do you evaluate women based on body parts when you first notice them?
- Do you flirt with anyone other than your wife?
• Do you engage in conversations that include sexual innuendo with anyone other than your wife?
• Are you chatting inappropriately with someone online?
• Are you engaging in or contemplating an affair?
• Are you engaging in any homosexual or fetish behaviors?
• Do you engage in any illegal sexual activities?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, your walls and gates are a mess…and you’re in good company. I’ve found that most men are struggling in at least one of these areas. (Christian men, that is…men in the world don’t typically struggle with trying to be pure. They go where the world leads.)

If you think any of these behaviors is normal for a Christian man, your walls are down and you don’t even know it. The world has done a good job of lowering your standards for sexual purity.

Ask God to search your heart and tell you everywhere your walls are down. Ask Him to reveal how you have been sinning and compromising. The good news is you only have to work on the parts of the wall that the Holy Spirit shows you. He will reveal each area in its own time; so don’t feel like you have to be “perfect” today. The condition of your walls didn’t happen overnight. You won’t get them up overnight, either.

**Enlist Help**

_Then I said to them, “You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins, and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace.” I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me._

_They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work._

(Nehemiah 2:17-18)

Once you have identified what needs fixing, you’re probably going to need some help. Nehemiah didn’t say anything to anyone until he had counted the cost of what God was asking him to do. But once he was sure, he enlisted the help of others by sharing what God had done for him so far and the vision God had placed on his heart.

**Strength in Numbers**

If you’re going to gain victory in the battle for sexual purity, you need other godly men and a supportive wife to help you. Ecclesiastes 4 tells us:
Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

And…

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

Those are powerful verses! God is saying to you, “Stop going it alone!” We place so much value on our independence, but I can’t find anywhere in Scriptures where God says “You should handle that yourself.” Contrary to conventional wisdom, God advocates interdependence among Christian brothers and sisters and complete dependence upon Him. Independence is a recipe for disaster.

Remember the scene in the movie Gladiator where Maximus and the other gladiators are sent into the Coliseum to fight for the first time? A huge reenactment of the Battle of Carthage ensues with deadly adversaries in chariots with a variety of weapons. Maximus, having more battle experience than all the other gladiators combined, convinces most of them to form a circle with each fighter facing outward. Those who try to go it alone are killed quickly, and a few of those in the circle are taken out, but the strength of the unified group overcomes all threats.

There’s strength in numbers. Team up with your wife and with godly men. Form a cord of at least three strands. (Jesus should always be one of them.) Don’t try to fight the Enemy alone. Compare Satan’s six thousand plus years’ of battle experience to your 20, or 30, or 40, or 50… Even if you’re 100, do you think that you alone are a match for him? Not a chance. You need God’s help, and you need the help of other believers.

A Band of Brothers
In particular, we need other men to hold us accountable, to hear our confessions, to keep us honest. Knowing that you are going to have to face that brother or group of brothers at breakfast next week makes it harder to sin. It makes it easier to see the consequences of our actions. We don’t want to let our brothers down, so we stay the course. We divert our attention. We replace the sexual thoughts with godly thoughts.

I don’t know why this doesn’t work as well with our relationship with God. We should flee from temptation simply because we know that God is watching and sees all that we think, say or do. But in the moment of temptation, God becomes much less real than our Christian brothers. Because He doesn’t zap us when we are in the act of sinning, we can rationalize His displeasure and even His existence at times. A brother sitting across the table from you is more tangible. Do not neglect this strategy. If you are not meeting with an accountability partner or a group of godly men, ask God to show you some.
I have a friend who knows my struggles. When I’m having a rough time on the road, I call him and ask him to pray for me. He lifts me up in prayer and checks on me throughout the week to see how I’m doing. Just knowing I’ve got him in my corner gives me the strength to keep fighting the good fight. When I’m ready to throw in the towel, he reminds me that even though the Enemy looks tough, I’ve got him on the ropes. If I continue to resist him, he will flee. The Word says so!

*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*
(James 4:7)

During one time of particularly difficult struggles for both of us, my accountability partner and I agreed that we had to confess to each other every time we fell into sin. Even if the other person didn’t prompt us, we couldn’t hold back. Everything had to be disclosed, and the person who gave in to temptation the most had to buy breakfast! This arrangement made us think twice before giving in to sin. In the moment of greatest temptation, we both knew that if we caved, we would have to confess to the other.

That leads to one more point. A true friend and accountability partner won’t just tell us what we want to hear. He won’t listen to us tell about our ungodly behavior and say it’s okay. He won’t see us messing up and let it slide. He’ll tell us he loves us as he’s knocking us on the head. Psalm 141:5 captures it:

*Let a righteous man strike me – it is a kindness; let him rebuke me – it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it.*

That knock on the head is love. Men typically deliver tough medicine better than women. That’s why your wife is not enough. You need a band of brothers.

**The Enemy’s First Attack**

*But when Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite official and Geshem the Arab heard about it, they mocked and ridiculed us. “What is this you are doing?” they asked. “Are you rebelling against the king?”*

*I answered them by saying, “The God of heaven will give us success. We his servants will start rebuilding, but as for you, you have no share in Jerusalem or any claim or historic right to it.”* (Nehemiah 2:19-20)

Verse 19 describes the enemy’s first attack. It includes mocking, ridicule and an accusation. These words are intended to strike fear into Nehemiah’s heart and include a veiled threat that Sanballat might send word to the king of Nehemiah’s “rebellion.”

Satan will often use the same attack on us by using the world to make fun of our efforts:

- “What do you mean, ‘You can’t go to the men’s club for lunch?’”
• “That’s the dumbest thing I’ve ever heard of…You’re taking your religion way too seriously.”
• “What’s next, are you going to become celibate and be a priest?”
• “Sounds like you are thinking about playing for the other team.”

Just because we’ve grown up doesn’t mean we aren’t susceptible to peer pressure. If we aren’t confident of our purpose and ourselves, we might find ourselves intimidated by the opinions of those around us – and there are plenty of them being expressed. It’s not just your peers that apply the pressure. You’re likely to get criticism from your boss, your clients, your neighbors, your family… anyone who knows where you stand on the issue of sexual purity.

But it doesn’t stop there. You’ll hear criticisms on T.V., on radio and in the movies. I watched a liberal, political comedian on cable recently. He was exceptionally good at using ridicule to abolish the conservative point of view and make you feel like an idiot for believing the things you believe. I think of myself as fairly conservative, but this comedian was so effective that he got me to laugh at several jokes that were totally opposed to my worldview.

Mocking and ridicule are powerful weapons in the enemy’s hands. They use humor and condescension to undermine. While we are laughing, we aren’t thinking – we’re accepting. Humor gets a backstage pass to our brains, bypassing our normal bouncers of discretion and logic. But when others are laughing at us, it’s worse. We are tempted to second-guess our opinions. Even if we are resolved in them, our courage may fail us. It’s hard to stand alone.

Nehemiah withstood the attacks of Sanballat and the others, because he had courage and because he knew that his work was of God. I’m sure that he also knew something we should know. Mocking and ridicule are powerful weapons, but they are used in the absence of sound logic and compelling evidence. When the Enemy is short on ammunition, he throws mocking and ridicule, hoping we will panic and abandon our work.

Stand your ground, and the Enemy will be seen for what he is – worried. Eventually, the biting sarcasm and caustic barbs will stop being funny compared to your determined effort, and anyone listening in will wonder why your attacker is so preoccupied with your behavior. In truth, he is preoccupied because you are a threat to him. Darkness hates light, because it exposes what’s in the dark. Take heart, that’s what you are supposed to do.

**Satan’s Bluff**

Satan will threaten you when you start the hard work of rebuilding your walls, and he wants you to think that he is the one with the power. Recognize this for the bluff that it is. Satan has no power over you that God doesn’t allow. In other words, the only way
that Satan can do anything to you is if God lovingly allows it. I say “lovingly,” because…

...we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

As we look at the conflict between Nehemiah and Sanballat, you’ll notice that Sanballat never once physically attacks the Jews building the wall. His attacks are nothing more than intimidation, slander and temptation. Why? Because Sanballat knows that this work is commission by the king. The last thing he wants to do is bring the king’s wrath down upon his head.

Satan tries to get us to take his bait, but barring that, he can’t do anything unless the King gives him permission. It’s all a bluff. If we continue to do God’s work, we stay under God’s protection. Of course, that begs the question: “What if we stop doing God’s work?” If you stop building your walls and indulge in sin, be sure that Satan is waiting just outside the protective perimeter. God still has to give the go-ahead, but it’s likely that He will allow you to experience the consequences of your actions. Don’t step into Satan’s trap. Keep building your walls.

Nehemiah’s response in verse 20 still works for us today. God will give us success as we build our walls, and Satan no longer has any share in “Jerusalem” (our minds). Satan acts like he owns us, but Christ paid to redeem us from his power. Provided you accepted His gift, Satan has no claim to you. We are free from his power; now, we just need to act like it.

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Alright, we’ve inspected our walls and met the enemy. In the next chapter, we’ll start building!
Chapter 3

Let the Building Begin!
Nehemiah: Chapter 3

Eliashib the high priest and his fellow priests went to work and rebuilt the Sheep Gate. They dedicated it and set its doors in place, building as far as the Tower of the Hundred, which they dedicated, and as far as the Tower of Hananel. The men of Jericho built the adjoining section, and Zaccur son of Imri built next to them. (Nehemiah 3:1-2)

As soon as the people had Nehemiah’s vision for a walled city, they began the work. That’s the power of a clear and compelling vision. It inspires people to act.

So, what does it mean to build your walls? Remember that your walls represent the strength of your relationship with Christ. When this relationship is strong, your heart and mind are protected from evil. When it’s not, your walls are down, and Satan has access to your heart and mind.

Nehemiah’s walls were built with stones. Our spiritual walls are built through spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines include (but are not limited to):

- Attending church
- Avoiding temptation
- Fasting
- Fellowshipping
- Honoring the Sabbath
- Journaling
- Living simply
- Meditating on God’s Word
- Memorizing Scripture
- Participating in an accountability group
- Praising God
- Praying
- Reading His Word
- Serving others
- Studying God’s Word
- Submitting to authority
- Tithing
- Witnessing
- Worshiping

You don’t have to do all these things to have strong walls. In fact, don’t feel compelled to do any more than the Holy Spirit leads you to do. He works with each of us in different ways and at a different pace. This is not intended to be a checklist of spiritual maturity. Those lead to pride and can get you distracted from your relationship with Christ. Good works will not strengthen your relationship if they are motivated by anything other than growing closer to God and doing His will.

If your walls are rubble, and you don’t know where to start on this list, try starting with prayer. Ask God which of these disciplines would help you build your walls and grow closer to Him. I won’t put all of them in order, because it would be a totally subjective exercise on my part, but I will say that I think attending church is the second most
important discipline. Without the fellowship of other believers, we are easy marks for the Enemy.

Spiritual disciplines will build your walls, but sin will erode them. If you know what God wants you to do and don’t do it, your walls start to crumble. You’ve got to be diligent to keep building your walls every day, because you are going to sin just about every day. Maybe that’s pessimistic on my part, but I’ve found that there are few (if any) days when I can honestly say I didn’t commit even one sin. (And if I do, I’ve probably just committed the sin of pride.)

**Desire – Discipline – Delight**

Spiritual disciplines are habits, and good habits are difficult to form. (The bad ones just seem to leap into existence.) When we are working on incorporating a new habit like daily time in the Word, we often struggle mightily to get started. We do well for a few days, and then our inspiration leaves us. Guilt ensues. We begin again. We fail again. More guilt. We wrestle with our own best intentions, but so often, Newton’s first law of motion wins out – things at rest really do stay at rest.

It doesn’t have to be that way. Understand the universal process for implementing good habits, and you will recognize that victory is simply a matter of time. I’m borrowing material from Dr. Larry Lea, who wrote a book called *Could You Not Tarry One Hour?* In it, he describes a three-stage process for developing good habits. The three stages are – Desire, Discipline and Delight.¹

**Stage 1 – Desire**
The essential first ingredient in a habit is desire. You can have all the knowledge, skills and resources you need to get started (remember that treadmill that’s gathering dust in your living room?), but if you don’t have desire, it ain’t happening. Sure, other people can coerce you into starting a habit through authority, nagging or guiltling you into it, but without your own personal desire to make a change, you’ll dump the habit as soon as they take the pressure off. Desire is the gas in your engine. Use it to help you push through Stage 2.

**Stage 2 - Discipline**
Once you have the desire (yours – not someone else’s) to make a change, you have to discipline yourself to follow through. Yes, it’s hard. Yes, it’s painful. Yes, it takes you out of your comfort zone, but it’s also temporary. Studies have shown that it takes twenty-one consecutive days of repeated activity to form a habit. There have been no studies that say you have to enjoy the process. You just have to stick with it. Keep your eyes on the larger goal that fuels your desire, and keep plugging.

**Stage 3 – Delight**
Here’s the secret. Your flesh absolutely loves habits – both good ones and bad ones. It loves habits, because it loves its comfort zone, and habits are
comfortable. If you push your way through the wall of discomfort during the discipline stage, you make it to the third stage. This is where the habit that was such a chore before becomes a delight. You long to accomplish it each day. You can’t wait to get started, and if you neglect the habit for some reason, you feel a tangible gap in your day – like something is missing. When you get to the Delight Stage, benefits of the habit that you never knew existed suddenly materialize. You’ve developed momentum that makes the habit easy to continue.

So many times, we give up too soon. We allow our feelings to dictate our actions. If we’re tired, we make excuses for not spending time with the Lord. If we feel unmotivated, we let ourselves off the hook. If someone dangles an option before us that is even slightly more appealing, we give in to temptation. That’s backward thinking. Feelings follow actions, not the other way around. When you discipline yourself to take action, you push through to delight.

It’s just a matter of time and persistence. Do it even when you don’t feel like it. Fake it until you make it. Resist the temptation to give up, and you can take advantage of the second half of Newton’s first law: things in motion tend to stay in motion. Be a thing in motion, and your walls will start to take on some height.

**All or Nothin’**

Don’t try to do all the spiritual disciplines at once. So many of us men feel that we have to be Super Christians or that we shouldn’t even try. We either do all the spiritual disciplines and do them better than anyone else (this is the sin of “compare-a-son,” which I’ll talk about a little later), or we give up. This is a trap. Watch out for it.

The danger in this trap is that it causes many of us to give up without a fight. If complete victory over our words, thoughts and deeds isn’t possible, why try? If we can’t keep up daily devotionals 365 days a year, why start? If we can’t commit to God like Billy Graham, why bother? This is the “fool’s choice.” It’s not the real choice we are faced with, but it’s the only one Satan wants us to see. Why? Because most of the time, when the choice is all or nothing, God gets nothing, and Satan knows it.

It’s the fool’s choice because the truth is that we are never able to give God “all.” Have you ever had an extended time in your life when you didn’t sin at all? Of course not. Besides, we don’t build our walls in our own power. God builds them – at His pace.

We come to God with a heart that is willing to submit to Him, and He gives us the power to live Righteously. Outside His power, we don’t have a chance of setting even one stone in our walls.
Lower Your Expectations

It’s not all or nothing. It’s something or nothing. Can you give God *something* today? Don’t worry about tomorrow. You’ve got your hands full with today. Start small, and work your way up. Open your bible and read one sentence. It’s something! Commit to closing your eyes when the cheerleaders come on during the game. It’s something! Go one day without masturbating. It’s something! Avoid going for coffee where the cute barista works. It’s something! It’s exciting what God can do with something!

Remember the story about Jesus feeding the 5,000? (John 6:1-15) When he challenged the disciples to feed the people, Philip responded from an all-or-nothing mentality:

“Eight months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!” (John 6:7)

Translation: “Why try? It’s impossible. If we can’t feed them all, why start?”

Andrew, on the other hand, responded from a something-rather-than-nothing mentality:

“Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?” (John 6:8-9)

Translation: “I think Philip’s right. It looks impossible, but I’m willing to give you what I can and trust you with the results.”

The difference between Philip and Andrew is that Andrew gave God something to work with. God isn’t in the business of just doling out freebies. He wants us to give Him what we’ve got. It doesn’t have to be much. It almost never *is* much. But if we’ll give Him what we can, He’ll take care of the rest.

Want more proof? Check out the story about the Widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17 or the one about Jonathan attacking the Philistines in 1 Samuel 14 or the one about Gideon defeating the Midianites in Judges 7.

We need to have a realistic view of our contribution to living Righteously. When it comes down to it, we have no more to offer than the widow with her “two very small copper coins.” (Luke 21:1-4) Our ability to act Righteously is poor indeed, but if we’ll give God what we can out of our poverty, He will add the rest from His abundance.

Burn the Boats!

God is not looking for perfection. He’s looking for commitment. He wants to know you will show up at the worksite each day to build your walls with Him. There’s a great story that will give us a metaphor for this point.

On April 21st, in the year 1519, the Spanish explorer Hernando Cortez sailed into the harbor of Vera Cruz, Mexico. He brought with him only about 600 men, and
yet over the next two years, his vastly outnumbered forces were able to defeat Montezuma and all the warriors of the Aztec empire, making Cortez the conqueror of all Mexico.

How was this incredible feat accomplished - when two prior expeditions had failed even to establish a colony on Mexican soil? Cortez knew from the very beginning that he and his men faced incredible odds. He knew that the road before them would be dangerous and difficult. He knew that his men would be tempted to abandon their quest and return to Spain.

And so, as soon as Cortez and his men had come ashore and unloaded their provisions, he ordered their entire fleet of eleven ships set on fire and destroyed. His men stood on the shore and watched as their only possibility of retreat went up in flames and sunk into the bottom of the ocean. From that point on, they knew beyond any doubt that there was no turning back. Nothing lay behind them but empty ocean. Their only option was to go forward, to conquer or die.

When change is required, the most essential element is commitment. It's much too easy to go back to the comfortable old ways of doing things when Satan attacks us. We have to eliminate all routes of escape for our flesh. We’ve got to burn the boats! If we don’t, we’ll find our flesh sneaking back to the shore at the first sign of temptation.

**Pride and the Sin of Compare-A-Son**

*The next section was repaired by the men of Tekoa, but their nobles would not put their shoulders to the work under their supervisors.*

(Nehemiah 3:5)

What a disgrace! The nobles of Tekoa were too good to join in this great work. Apparently, they were the only ones who wouldn’t help with the walls; no other abstainers were mentioned. These men allowed their pride to keep them out of one of the greatest acts of God in Jewish history.

God hates pride. It’s at the root of so many of our sins. Pride caused Satan’s fall; pride caused ours. We want to be in charge like God, but we’re not qualified for the job. At most, we are big fish in a little pond. A little bit of talent or intelligence or money or good looks or whatever… and we think we are better than those around us.

You will have prideful thoughts as you work toward sexual purity. Promise. Mine typically come around the time I meet someone who has more serious struggles than me. I think, “Huh…well, I’ve never done that.” That’s called the sin of “compare-a-son.”
I get the name for this sin from the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15. When the bad son returned from his sinful living, the father was so grateful that he killed the fatted calf and threw a celebration for him. The older, more faithful son had been in the field and missed all the commotion, but he knew a party when he heard one. When he learned what had happened, the older son became indignant. He stood outside and pouted until his father came out to find out what was wrong.

When his father begged him to come in and celebrate, the oldest son protested that he had been good all his life. He had never wasted his money on prostitutes. Compared to the younger son, it was obvious to him who really deserved a party.

You might agree with him. The youngest son didn’t deserve a party, but neither did the oldest son. Sure, the oldest son had led a decent and obedient life, but so what? That’s what he was supposed to do. He was never promised a prize for doing what he was supposed to do.

One of the many rich teachings of this story is that God can do whatever He wants when He chooses to show grace to us. We don’t deserve anything more than hell for what we’ve done. All our good works are like filthy rags. But God, in His grace, chooses to bless us exceedingly abundantly above all that we could ever ask or imagine.

Satan is always trying to trigger our pride by getting us to compare-a-son. He points out other people who are “worse” than we are. They could be other Christian brothers or sisters, or they might just be our lost neighbor next door. We compare their lives to ours and say, “At least I’m not like that guy.” In light of the other person’s sinfulness, we look pretty good, so we are reassured about our own sin.

The problem with this line of thinking is that God doesn’t grade on a curve. God has a firm standard of morality, and it never changes. When we compare ourselves to others, we are playing an inverted game of “keeping up with the Joneses.” As long as we stay a little more moral than our neighbor, we’re “okay.” But instead of getting better and better, we are getting worse and worse. As “the Joneses” fall more and more into sin, we stay just one step behind them, still confident that we’re okay because we are ahead of them.

Like the Tekoan nobles, we stop working on our walls. Our pride convinces us we don’t need them. After all, ours are already higher than those of our friends and neighbors. We believe that we are such super-spiritual Christians that Satan can’t touch us. It’s a trap! Anyone remember this verse?

*Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.*

(Proverbs 16:18)
Or this one?

_Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall._
(1 Corinthians 10:12 – NAS)

God doesn’t want us to compare ourselves to each other. Without Jesus, none of us is righteous (“no, not one”). God is never impressed that we are “better” than the guy next to us. What God wants us to do is to compare ourselves to His holy standard and accept no substitutes.

**A Vested Interest**

*Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house... Beside him, Hashabiah, ruler of half the district of Keilah, carried out repairs for his district. The repairs next to him were made by the priests from the surrounding region... Beyond them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs in front of their house; and next to them, Azariah son of Maaseiah, the son of Ananiah, made repairs beside his house... Above the Horse Gate, the priests made repairs, each in front of his own house. Next to them, Zadok son of Immer made repairs opposite his house... Next to them, Meshullam son of Berekiah made repairs opposite his living quarters.* (Nehemiah 3:5, 10, 17, 22-23, 28, 29, 30 – emphasis mine)

Nehemiah knew human nature. He knew that the best way to get people to do quality work on the walls was to get them to build next to areas in which they had vested interests. The need for self-preservation will do a lot to motivate a group of wall-builders. They weren’t just building some wall; they were protecting their property, their jobs, their families, even their own lives!

How do we put this principle to work for us? I recommend that you include your wife in your building crew. She has the most to gain by having a husband with a strong relationship with Christ. While the responsibility for staying pure is up to you, here are a few suggestions for how your wife could help:

- Remove her name from lingerie catalog mailing lists.
- Become more selective about which movies she rents for the two of you to watch.
- Set up the internet content filter with a password that only she knows.
- Help you relieve sexual tension when you are struggling.
- Hold you accountable for staying pure when you are traveling.
- Tell you when it’s okay to look if you are surprised with a revealing image on T.V.
- Scan magazines and remove inappropriate pictures and advertisements.
Your kids can participate, too. (Really!) You don’t have to give them all the details, but watching their dad fight for sexual purity will make a huge impact on them. While the actual help to you may be minimal, you’re letting them practice building their own walls. Depending upon their age, here are a few things they could do:

- Change channels when something inappropriate comes on T.V.
- Let you know about movies and shows that seem inappropriate.
- Throw out catalogs and other mail items that show revealing pictures.
- Hold you accountable for staying pure when you are traveling.
- Advise you of any bad websites or chat rooms that they stumble across.
- Talk with you about the pervasiveness of sex in advertising and use these discussions to decide which companies should not get your business.
- Share observations that they make throughout the day as they interact with their friends and the world.

Once you enlist your family members, be prepared for a higher level of accountability. On many occasions, I’ve noticed my wife or kids turn to look at me when something I shouldn’t watch comes on T.V. They are waiting to see what I’ll do. Will I walk the talk, or will I compromise in the moment? Just knowing that they are paying attention has helped me improve my reaction time.

**Unlocking the Gates**

Ten gates are mentioned in Chapter 3, and their names are significant. Each is a symbol representing an aspect of our Christian walk. Let’s take a walk around the city with Nehemiah and unlock the meaning for each of the gates as we go.

**Sheep Gate (Nehemiah 3:1)**

Through this gate, sacrificial sheep were brought to the temple. The Sheep Gate represents Christ’s sacrifice as the Lamb of God. Accepting His sacrifice on our behalf begins our walk with Him. Remembering His sacrifice draws us closer to Him and inspires us to serve others.

**Fish Gate (Nehemiah 3:3)**

Fishermen would bring their catch through the Fish Gate each day in order to sell it. The gate reminds us that we are called to be “fishers of men” and that we should always be mindful of the lost. When you think about it, there’s little reason for Christians to still be on earth after salvation unless God wants us to bring others to Him. Without the Great Commission, we’re just working on our spiritual resumes.

**Old Gate (Nehemiah 3:6)**

The Old Gate (also known as the Jeshanah Gate) exited to the West of Jerusalem. It represents truth, because God’s truth never changes. We live in a world today that believes truth is relative, but we know that it’s absolute and anchored in
Scripture. The Old Gate reminds us to live in the confidence of what God has said is true.

Valley Gate (Nehemiah 3:13)
The Valley Gate opened (appropriately) to a valley, though we are not sure which one. For the Christian, it speaks of the trials and tribulations that Jesus guaranteed we would have (John 16:33). While we don’t typically enjoy our valley experiences while we are going through them, they are God’s tool for making us more like Him. Consider that very little grows above the tree line on a mountaintop, but valleys are lush with growth. Our spiritual lives flourish in the valley.

Dung Gate (Nehemiah 3:14)
The Dung Gate led to the Valley of Hinnom, where all the garbage and animal dung was taken to be burned. God uses our valley experiences to surface our garbage so that He can get rid of it. When a silversmith works with silver, he heats it until it becomes molten. Impure materials (called dross) within the metal rise to the top, and the silversmith skims them off. He continues this process until he can clearly see his image in the metal. God allows us to travel through the valleys to turn up the heat on us spiritually. As our impurities rise to the top, He skims them off and gets rid of them so that He can see His image in us more clearly.

Fountain Gate (Nehemiah 3:15)
This gate was at the end of the Pool of Siloam. It reminds us of the streams of living water Jesus said would flow from those who believe in Him and have the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39). After God has cleared away our garbage, the Holy Spirit flows from us much more easily. He refreshes us as He pours out His blessings on those around us.

Water Gate (Nehemiah 3:26)
The Water Gate was located at the beginning of Hezekiah’s tunnel and the spring of Gihon. It represents the Word of God, and it’s no coincidence that this is the site where Ezra opened the Book of the Law of Moses (Nehemiah 8:1). We need to wash daily in the Word to prepare us for the trials and tests we will encounter.

Horse Gate (Nehemiah 3:28)
The Horse Gate was used to take horses out for water. Horses in Scripture represent battle, and this gate is intended to remind us that we are in a spiritual war. We should never let our guard down but build our walls with one hand while we hold a sword in the other. Beginning with this gate, the final three gates also point forward as a symbol of the last days. The Horse Gate reminds us of Jesus coming on a white horse as described in Revelation 19:11.
East Gate (Nehemiah 3:29)
The East Gate faced the Mount of Olives and was important because of the anticipated coming of Messiah (Zechariah 14:4). Of course, we know that His coming will not be His first. The East Gate reminds us that we are to look forward to Christ’s return and live with hope.

Inspection Gate (Nehemiah 3:31)
The final gate opened to a road that led to the Miphkad, or “appointed place.” Here, people were numbered or registered for the temple tax. For Christians, it points to the bema judgment of believers. “Bema” is the Greek word for judgment seat, which is a raised seat on which an official would sit as he decided on legal matters. Scripture tells of a judgment for believers only, where their works will be judged and rewards handed out. (No one is punished at this judgment.) As we walk with the Lord, we are to keep our focus on our heavenly rewards rather than our earthly ones.

Nehemiah’s account in chapter three ends with a second reference to the Sheep Gate (Nehemiah 3:32). As we’ve come full-circle around the city, we should remember that our Christian walk begins and ends with Christ’s sacrifice for our sins. The second mention also promises that Christ’s second coming will be to reign here on earth.

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Remember the meaning of the Horse Gate? We shouldn’t expect that Sanballat will just sit back and let Nehemiah build up the walls of Jerusalem unchallenged. In the next chapter, we’ll see what the Enemy plans to do about it.
Chapter 4

The Next Attack
Nehemiah: Chapter 4

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, "What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?"

Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, "What they are building—if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!" (Nehemiah 4:1-3)

Chapter 3 describes the efforts of the people working on the walls. Chapter 4 relates Sanballat’s response. Satan, like Sanballat, hates to see us building our walls. He is threatened by our progress. His grip on us loosens as we begin to realize the implications of our identity in Christ.

Notice that while Sanballat became angry, he didn’t do anything but complain. Satan has no power over us that God doesn’t allow him to have. He can use others to criticize us, make fun of us, belittle us, tell us how impossible building our walls is, point out all the obstacles in front of us… He can try to instill doubts in us, but we don’t have to allow these to take us away from the task.

Sanballat asks in verse 2, “Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble – burned as they are?” Satan will try to divert us from our task by pointing out our hopelessness and the depth of our depravity. He wants us to think there is no possible means of resurrecting our walls and that even if we do, there is no way they will withstand the first challenge to their stability. Why even try, when you’re just going to give into temptation again like you always have. All or nothing.

This is all very clever slight of hand on Satan’s part. He gives us a half-truth to distract us from the real truth. He wants us to think that we are building our walls in our own limited power. If we do, he’s right, we are doomed to failure. But we don’t build them in our limited power. We build them in the unlimited power of Christ, who knows no failure.

As long as we show up for work everyday, the walls will get built because Jesus supplies the materials, the builders and the strength. I’ve seen it happen over an over. A Christian brother might reach out to you to start an accountability group. Your wife might offer to help
you stay pure by making love right before you leave on your next business trip. Start each day ready to build your walls, and God will make sure you have what you need.

**F.E.A.R.**

When it all comes down to it, Satan’s attacks on you are intended to create fear and discouragement. We’ll cover discouragement later. Let’s tackle fear now.

What does fear mean to you? For many of us, it’s…

**Finding Excuses And Reasons**

…for not doing the things we know we should do or that we know we want to do. We allow fear to stop us from reaching our potential. We allow it to keep us from taking that first step to build our walls. We allow it to paralyze us within our comfort zone. We allow it to make us…

**Forget Everything And Run**

..far away from what would often be the most effective approach to our fears – to push through them! If we examined all the fears of our lives, we would find that fear really means…

**False Expectations Appearing Real**

We have highly developed imaginations, and it’s easy for us to come up with worst case scenarios in our minds. If we don’t, Satan will plant a few seeds. But despite how plausible these seem at the time, almost none of them come true. Consequences are almost never as dire; outcomes are rarely as bleak.

And besides, fear is the opposite of faith. God doesn’t want us to be fearful. His Word tells us:

*For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.* (2 Timothy 1:7)

As of today, I encourage you to change what fear means to you. Redefine it to mean…

**Face Everything And Recover**

Or …

**For Everything A Reason**

Or…
Faith Erases All Reservations

Don’t allow any more False Expectations to chain you down. Feel the fear and do it anyway!

What’s So Scary?
Nehemiah and the Israelites feared an imminent attack by Sanballat and his followers. Some of us may fear Satan’s retaliation when we begin to build, but I think there is something scarier that influences our actions. We fear success. I know that sounds difficult to believe. Let me explain why I think this fear has the ability to control us.

When we begin to build our walls, there are often questions in our minds. You may not even recognize them consciously, but you can search them out if you try. The questions are:

- How will this change my life?
- What will my friends think?
- Will I become a prude?
- What am I going to have to give up?
- What if I stumble along the way?
- Will sex become routine and boring?
- How will I keep this up once I get started?

Our Self-Image Thermostat
The last question is common and revealing. If sexual sin has been a big part of our life for years, we often fear that we won’t be able to make a lasting change. This is especially true if we’ve made earlier attempts to clean up our act and failed. We begin to identify ourselves as “sexual sinners” or “perverts” or “prodigal sons.”

The more we struggle with sexual sin, the more it defines our self-image, and a self-image is a difficult thing to escape. It serves as a type of thermostat for our behaviors. The thermostat in your house is set to a particular temperature that you find comfortable. If the house gets too warm, the thermostat signals the air conditioner to cool it down. If the house gets too cold, the thermostat signals the furnace to warm it up.

Your self-image thermostat is set to a group of beliefs that define who you are to you. When you act in way that disagrees with your self-image (whether you are acting worse or better), you get uncomfortable, and your self-image thermostat signals that a change in behavior is in order. If you are acting worse than your self-image, you will feel bad about yourself and often make changes to improve your behaviors. If you are acting better than your self-image, you are likely to get nervous and commit acts of self-sabotage. In either case, your behavior gets in line with your view of yourself, and comfort is restored.
Have you ever known someone whose life was a parade of setbacks and tragic events? Things never seem to go their way. Just when they had turned a corner, “BAM!” – they get hit with the next series of unfortunate events. Have you ever wondered if they might be bringing some of the trouble on themselves? Even if most of their circumstances are out of their control, it’s likely that they had some choices to make along the way, and bad choices on a consistent basis can be an indicator of a low self-image.

Those who carry a self-image that says, “I’m a failure” or “I’m a bad person” create a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy for themselves. They behave in ways that agree with their self-image and turn themselves into prophets: “I knew I would mess up.” “There I go again, letting everyone down.” “I just can’t help myself.” When they act differently than their self-image, they discount it: “That was a fluke!” “That was so unlike me.”

This is a process called selective perception. When we create a “story” about ourselves (another way of describing our self-image), we only accept data that agrees with our story. When the data disagrees, we find a way to explain it away. If we get too much data that disagrees, we have a choice to make: accept the data and redefine our self-image or reboot the system by screwing up. The former requires much more courage and effort than the latter.

**Back to the Story**

Hear us, O our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity. Do not cover up their guilt or blot out their sins from your sight, for they have thrown insults in the face of the builders. (Nehemiah 4:4-5)

Sanballat’s and Tobiah’s criticism and ridicule might have created some F.E.A.R. in Nehemiah, but he fought through it by turning his circumstances over to God in prayer. He gave them the spiritual equivalent to “I’m the rubber and you’re the glue…” That’s exactly what we should do. When those around you criticize your attempts to build your walls, turn them over to God in prayer and trust Him to deliver you from them.

If their attacks are especially cutting, or if they put you in an embarrassing situation, you might be tempted to let them have it (verbally or otherwise). But remember, that’s God’s business:

*It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."
(Deuteronomy 32:35)

The attacks are intended to create fear and discouragement, but failing that, Satan is hoping they will distract you from the work. If he can get you invested in fighting with your distracters, you aren’t building your walls. Nehemiah was a hoss, because he stayed focused on his goal, no matter what the distraction. Satan only wins if you stop building.
Satan’s Backup Battle Plan
Satan knows he lost the claim to your soul when you gave your life to Christ. So, his backup battle plan is to make you ineffective. The last thing he wants is for you to live out the Great Commission, drawing other lost souls to Christ, and people with strong walls do that. Satan’s primary tools work through your emotions. He tries to get you feeling Discouraged, Disillusioned, Disappointed, Disconnected and Defeated. Let’s look at each one individually.

Discouraged
Satan wants you weary of well-doing. He wants you to feel that you can never get better, live a pure life, do what God calls you to do, abstain from fantasy… He accomplishes this by showing you how impossible your goals are. He wants you focusing on how much farther you have to go – not how far you’ve come.

He’s the master of distortion, and he can make your progress look almost non-existent compared to the distance you still have to go. Remember, Satan is the father of lies. Counteract his lies with truth. This is why it is so important to keep a spiritual journal where you record what God is doing in your life. During times of discouragement, your spiritual journal will be a testimony to the growth in your life that will refute the Enemy’s lies.

Disillusioned
Sometimes our hope is in a person or a group of people. Sometimes it is in an expected outcome. I’ll cover both. First, people…

Satan knows that our human nature is to be respecters of persons. We put a lot of stock into our heroes. We place high expectations on them and make them more than they really are. When we do, we are setting ourselves up for a fall, because people will fail you.

Even the godliest people around you are engaged in a battle with their flesh. There will be battles that they lose, and sometimes they can be big ones. If you put all your hopes in them, their fall will devastate you almost as much as it devastates them. The Enemy will then whisper excuses in your ear… “If he can’t do it, there’s no way you can.” Or “If it’s okay for him to quit, to take the easy way out, why should you continue to fight?” Remember, only God will never let you down.

In the other instance, we may put all our hope into an expected outcome. “When I get to this point, things will get easier.” Or “After I take care of this, they will forgive me and we can go back to the way things used to be.” When that outcome
doesn’t turn out like we planned, we become disillusioned. It’s emotionally deadly to get to the top of the mountain only to realize that it is just the first in the series. If we declare victory too soon, we will struggle to find the motivation to climb the next peak.

**Disappointed**

Whenever reality is less than your expectations, you will experience disappointment. The problem we most often have here is that we set our expectations too high. We set ourselves up for failure. Changing an ingrained habit takes time, patience and perseverance. We should counsel with others who have walked our path to get a realistic expectation of what our progress should be.

**Disconnected**

The Enemy wants us to feel isolated, like there is no one else who knows or cares what we are going through. You may feel that your sin has sidelined you, that you are no longer allowed on the Christian playing field. Don’t believe it. God will use you from the moment (or moments) you repent and commit to obedience. What we forget is that:

> No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.  
> (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Someone close to you is struggling with the same thing you are struggling with. In fact, God has probably put them in your life so that you can build your walls together. Pray that God will show you who that person is. You may have to take the first step. You may have to take a risk and open up about your struggles, but God will then meet you more than halfway.

I remember a time when I was part of a large men’s group that met once a month to talk about man stuff. We rotated the teaching role for each meeting, and when my time came up, I decided to talk about purity. I didn’t originally intend to talk about sexual purity (I was still new to this group), but in my illustration, I used pornography as an example of what can pollute our mind. It was just one example, but it resonated with many of the men.

Several approached me privately to share with me their struggles with sexual purity. One man, who I hardly knew, approached me the following Sunday morning and embraced me with a big bear hug, saying he knew exactly the struggle I was talking about. His wife told my wife what a huge impression the lesson had made on him and how impressed he was that I had been so vulnerable.

Truth is, it was an accident. I was talking about “men in general,” not me in particular. But God showed me how He is willing to rush to help me if I will take even the smallest step toward Him. That experience gave me the confidence to
share my struggle with other men. Before long, it was obvious to me that sexual purity was (to borrow a term) “everyman’s battle.” If you will take a risk, others will respond.

**Defeated**

The Enemy has lost, but he talks a good game. If you’ve ever played chess, you know that just because your opponent calls “checkmate!” doesn’t mean that it really is. Satan will triumphantly declare “checkmate!” even when he knows it isn’t true. He knows that if he can get you to believe it, you will give up.

I’ve learned that feeling defeated is a danger sign. If I feel defeated already, what’s one more time going to matter. It’s easier to give in to temptation when you feel like you’ve already sunk as low as you can sink. You rationalize, “As long as I’m already down here….”

Don’t allow Satan to turn your discouragement, disillusionment, disappointment or disconnectedness into defeat. As long as you keep trying, you cannot lose. Greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world! (1 John 4:4) The saint falls down seven times but gets up eight. Keep fighting.

The antidote to all of Satan’s poison is action. Satan tries to create defeat in reality by making you feel defeated. Don’t trust your feelings. They change directions with the wind. Trust what God says and keep fighting. When you feel discouraged, disillusioned, disappointed, disconnected or defeated, take action. Move toward God’s promises and watch as He rushes to your rescue.

Action clears the head of Satan’s lies so that we can see and think clearly. It helps us to see things as they really are and not just as they appear to be. Be disciplined and determined. Whatever God has told you to do, keep doing it no matter what the results. God has the long-range perspective that you lack.

**Post a Guard**

*So we rebuilt the wall till all of it reached half its height, for the people worked with all their heart.*

*But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.* (Nehemiah 4:6-9)
Nehemiah now had the wall rebuilt to half its original height – an amazing accomplishment in a short amount of time. Sanballat began to get worried, so he gathered some allies and plotted with them about stopping the building. In addition to Tobiah and Geshem, Sanballat now has the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod on his side. Nehemiah knew about their scheming, so he prayed and posted a guard both day and night.

Are you praying for your sexual purity? Is anyone else? Who do you know that could join you in the fight?

How about posting a guard to protect you from attack? This can take many forms. It could be your wife, who uses some of the strategies mentioned earlier. It could be a buddy, who points out to you when you are letting your guard down. It could be an internet content filter that prevents you from going places you shouldn’t go online. It could be the act of blocking the adult movies in your hotel room as soon as you check in.

Whatever it is, you need it. When Satan realizes that you are closing the gaps in your wall, expect him to intensify his attack. Gaps being closed means less opportunity for Satan to gain access to your heart. Prayer is your best weapon. Guarding yourself against temptation is your second best. Even though your walls are going up, do not get complacent. An unguarded strength is your greatest weakness (more about that later).

Weary of Well-Doing

*Meanwhile, the people in Judah said, "The strength of the laborers is giving out, and there is so much rubble that we cannot rebuild the wall."*

*Also our enemies said, "Before they know it or see us, we will be right there among them and will kill them and put an end to the work."

*Then the Jews who lived near them came and told us ten times over, "Wherever you turn, they will attack us."* (Nehemiah 4:10-13)

You will become weary of well-doing. Nehemiah’s people did. At some point, clearing the rubble (the sins of your past, your addictions, your dependencies, the damage done by any of these) will seem impossible, and you might want to give up.

Sometimes I get so tired of guarding my eyes. With today’s low-cut and high-cut clothing styles, the Enemy has unlimited ammunition to throw at me. Billboards, T.V. commercials, bathing suits at the swimming pool, tight workout clothes at the gym… Inappropriate images are everywhere.

I teach adults leadership skills for a living, and I always make eye contact with every person in the room after asking a question. During one workshop, however, I couldn’t stop looking at one woman’s breasts for the life of me. I kept telling myself, “Look at her
eyes! Look at her eyes!” But whenever I looked in her direction, my eyes always started
on her breasts before I could break them away and make eye contact. I’m sure she could
tell, and I was increasingly embarrassed as the day wore on, but I just couldn’t stop
myself.

I know what to do. I want to do it. Christ gave me the ability to do it. Why don’t I do it?
The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. How I know it! And it’s not just that the flesh
is weak; it’s corrupt. It fights against the Spirit of God inside us:

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit
what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other,
so that you do not do what you want. (Galatians 5:17)

I’ve learned that my flesh is “weaker” at some times than at others. If I keep an eye on
certain factors that make me weak, I find that I have a much better chance of avoiding
temptation in a vulnerable moment.

H.A.L.T.

Therefore I stationed some of the people behind the lowest points of the
wall at the exposed places, posting them by families, with their swords,
spears and bows. After I looked things over, I stood up and said to the
nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them.
Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your
brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."

When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God
had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work.
(Nehemiah 4:13-15)

Twelve-step programs have an acronym that they use to help addicts remember when
they get in the danger zone for temptation. It’s H.A.L.T., and it reminds us that we are
especially susceptible to falling when we are Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. These are
our low points in the wall. Satan knows this, too. He loves to launch an assault when
and where we are weak. Remember, he waited until Jesus had been fasting for 40 days
before he attacked Him. Then he left Jesus until an “opportune time,” presumably when
Jesus’ guard was down.

When we are in one of these emotional states, our focus is splintered. We’re spread
thinly, and the Enemy knows it. Like having too few guards to adequately guard the
wall, we don’t have the energy or resolve to guard ourselves against temptation during
these times.

I’ve found that there are other emotional states I have to watch out for. Be careful when
you are feeling Stressed, Bored or Insecure. You might be tempted to use sex to relieve
the pressure, but these emotions are often only symptoms pointing to a deeper need or hurt. Masturbation or sex only mask the real issue, so you can count on the real issue resurfacing after Satan has sufficiently beat you up for failing to walk purely.

Follow Nehemiah’s example, and remember the Lord during these times. He will refresh you if you ask Him for more strength, and He will help you determine where the emotions are coming from. You might be surprised. They often have nothing to do with sex.

Over the years, I have learned that one of the low spots in my wall is insecurity over work. When I have really big projects with tight deadlines, I tend to procrastinate, not knowing exactly where to start. As the deadline approaches, the pressure builds until I have a high level of anxiety. In the past, these were dangerous times for me with sexual temptation, but I’ve learned how to short-circuit the trigger by avoiding procrastination at the early stages of the projects.

Know Your Triggers

*But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.* (Proverbs: 4:19)

Don’t imitate the wicked, who don’t even know why they are having problems. Know your triggers for sexual sin. Triggers are the conditions that lead you into sexual sin. They are the patterns of behavior, the rituals that follow temptation and lead us into sin. All of us have triggers that create weak spots in our wall.

I’ve found that one of my triggers is channel surfing while I’m on the road. If I turn on the T.V. in my hotel room without clear boundaries about what I’m about to watch, I often find myself channel surfing. When I see something racy, I linger. Within moments, I’ve advanced to lust and begin searching for more explicit images to satisfy it.

Your triggers are likely different. I have a friend whose trigger is anger with his wife. He becomes resentful and masturbates as a way to “get back at her.” (How do you think that’s working for him?) Another friend struggles with time in the shower, another when hanging around a certain group of guys and another with curiosity while surfing the internet.

Start to notice when and where the temptation starts, and set up guards to protect you in those places. My guard for aimless channel surfing is to commit to God in the morning (while I am strong) what I will watch and what I will not watch. I don’t turn on the T.V. until it’s time for my show, and I turn it off right afterward.

If you’re not sure about your triggers, journaling can help you identify patterns of behavior that reveal the low points in your wall. Especially after you’ve fallen into sin,
it’s important to do a post-mortem to retrace the steps that led to failure. Ask yourself questions like:

- How was I feeling when the temptation to sin first hit me?
- What was I thinking before the temptation?
- What was I doing?
- How am I feeling about my major relationships (wife, kids, other family, boss, co-workers…)?
- How do I feel physically?

By asking yourself these and other questions, you can figure out the Enemy’s battle tactics. You need to learn what weak spots Satan is exploiting, or you’ll never be able to repel his assaults. When your walls are strong in those areas, you will find that the Enemy will stop attacking you there (at least for a time). With each trial that you pass through, you become stronger and better able to withstand the next temptation.

**Look – Linger - Lust**

This is probably a good place to make a distinction between temptation and sin. If you don’t know the difference, I can almost guarantee that you’re allowing Satan to beat you up for crimes you haven’t committed. Temptation is not sin. Temptation is largely out of your control (provided you aren’t putting yourself in harm’s way). You can be tempted by miniskirts all day long and not sin. Sin happens when the look turns into a linger. It happens again when the linger turns into a lust, but the look is typically involuntary. (I’m talking about the first look, gentlemen, not the second.)

You are wired to notice an attractive woman. God gave you that wiring to attract you to your wife. But once you’ve found her, you need to fight the temptation. Train your eyes not to follow the woman who just walked by. You’ll get better at it with practice, and the temptation will become less, but you may never get rid of it entirely – at least not until we get the new bodies Christ ordered for us. Train yourself, but don’t beat yourself up if you mistakenly glance. As soon as you realize you are being tempted, bounce your eyes off the temptation and look somewhere else.

You get into trouble when you allow yourself to continue to look or to look again. That’s lingering, and that’s sin. If you recognize you’re being tempted, you’ve got to disengage to continue to walk blamelessly. If you allow that linger to turn into mentally undressing the woman or imagining sexual acts with her, you’ve fallen into full-blown lust, and Jesus said that was as bad as actually committing the act you’ve fantasized about. (Matthew 5:28)

**Is Masturbation Wrong?**

The question of masturbation is central to the fight for sexual purity. There’s no direct answer to this question in the Bible, but I can find some related principles. I firmly
believe that masturbation is wrong, particularly for married men, for the following reasons:

- **Matthew 5:27-28** - if you lust after a woman in your heart, you have committed adultery. Masturbation is fueled by fantasy. So, ask yourself, “When I masturbate, am I fantasizing about my wife or someone else (even if it is an imaginary someone else)?”
- **1 Corinthians 6:19** – your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Should you unite the Holy Spirit with those images in your fantasies?
- **1 Corinthians 7:4-5** – your body is not your own. It belongs to your wife, and you should not deprive her of it. Are you using masturbation as a replacement for sex, because it is easier?

In addition to these principles from Scripture, here are some other good reasons to abstain…

- Fantasy is mental practice. Practicing imaginary sexual indiscretions with another woman makes it more likely that you will eventually act on the impulse in a weak moment.
- According to Dr. James L. McGaugh (University of California, Irvine), masturbation and orgasm cause your body to release epinephrine (a.k.a. adrenaline), which reinforces the mental images of a fantasy in your brain so that they are harder to get out of your mind.
- Masturbation replaces your need to have sex with your wife, because it relieves the pressure brought about by the 72-hour cycle of semen build-up. God gave us that 72-hour cycle to turn us toward our wives. It compels us to initiate, and as a result, it brings about physical oneness in our marriage.

All of the above being said, let God lead as you attempt to stop masturbation. It’s extremely difficult to give up if you’ve been doing it since you were young.

The guilt associated with failing in this area is frequently worse than the act itself, and it’s Satan’s way of creating distance between God and us. Forgive yourself every time you mess up. God does if you ask Him. Repent, and ask God to help you to abstain. He has grace for you each time you fall.

**Designed to Initiate**

Men are physiologically designed to initiate. Every 72 hours, the man has a physical need to empty his semen. Women do not have any type of similar need. Their readiness for sex changes with their reproductive cycle. God made the men the initiators, because we are the leaders of our homes. If you are waiting for your wife to initiate, you are not leading in your family.

For our wives, orgasm is not necessary and frequently not very urgent. It may seem like a twisted joke, but God gave us the urgency for sex so that we would not let the topic go.
He created the urgency so that we would be compelled toward physical oneness with our wives. If you have learned to live without sex, you’re not leading. If you are meeting your needs in any other way, you’re not leading.

It stinks to be the leader sometimes, but that’s the way it is. To whom much is given, much is expected. Swallow hard and accept your responsibility as the leader of your family. Initiate.

Not What God Intended
Satan loves to get us to go after God’s will in ways God never intended. He knows that righteous goals achieved with unrighteous means are dishonoring to God. Adam and Eve desired to be like God, so they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was a righteous goal – God did create man in His own image – but it was sought after in an unrighteous way. Abraham desired to be the father of many nations, as God had promised, but he failed to wait for God’s timing when he slept with Hagar. Moses wanted water for his people, but he struck the rock in his anger and angered the Lord. David sought to honor the Lord by bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, but he tried to carry it on a cart rather than the shoulders of God’s priests. Peter… well, Peter’s three years with Jesus were full of examples.

There must be several dozen examples of this strategy of Satan’s from the pages of Scripture. If it worked so effectively on some of the most godly men in the Bible, you can bet Satan is still using it. In particular, he uses it to tempt us sexually. It works so well, because we want the pleasure of sex without the hard work and commitment required to make sex work in our marriages.

Sexual pleasure is from God. He created it and gave it to us as a gift. Within the confines of marriage, it is beautiful and right, but we’ve found all kinds of ways of getting the gift without the commitment God requires. Pornography and masturbation are two of those ways. God intended for us to get pleasure as we gave pleasure to our wives. He didn’t want us selfishly pleasuring ourselves.

A good friend of mine laughs about one of the first conversations he ever had with our pastor after being led to Christ. Our pastor had been talking with him about sexual purity, and he told my friend that pornography was wrong. That cut right into my friend’s lifestyle at the time. After a moment, he asked our pastor, “Is it still wrong if I watch it with my wife?”

The answer is “yes,” in case you were wondering. God gave you your wife. She’s exactly what you need, and she will be very exciting to you if commit to making her your only sexual outlet. Watching pornography and masturbating are ways to achieve God’s purposes (sexual arousal and release) in an ungodly way. God’s plan for your marriage works. Don’t take shortcuts.
When you accomplish God’s purposes in a way He didn’t intend, you suffer the consequences. Pornography and masturbation can lead to the need for greater and greater stimulation, reduced desire of your wife, difficulty controlling your private thought life and hairy palms (or so I’ve heard). Stay on the path that God set before you.

Warrior / Wall-BUILDER

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me.

(Nehemiah 4:16-18)

I love Nehemiah! He was a warrior as well as a wall-builder. Because of the threat of his enemies, he had half the men working and half watching for any sign of attack. They were well armed with spears, shields, bows and armor. Those who had to go and get materials carried stones in one hand and swords in the other. They were ready for whatever Sanballat tried to throw at them. Meanwhile, the enemy was losing precious opportunity as the wall grew taller and taller.

We should do the same. It would be nice if we could just build our walls in peace, but we live in the middle of enemy territory. 2 Corinthians 4:4 tells us that Satan is the “god” (little g) of this world. We’re on his turf, attempting to free as many of his prisoners as possible. Only warriors are sent behind enemy lines. We’ve got to build our walls and stay vigilant at the same time.

But there is an added degree of difficulty. We’re not fighting a conventional war. As the Scripture tells us:

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Ephesians 6:12)

We fight against an invisible Enemy. That adds a degree of difficulty, but God tells us how to defeat him in the next verse:

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of
salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.
(Ephesians 6:13-18)

Like Nehemiah’s men, we should be well armed and prepared for battle every day. Pray on each piece before you begin your day, and they will give you victory when you are tempted.

Satan’s Strongholds

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.
(2 Corinthians 10:3-4)

We don’t fight against flesh and blood, and we don’t fight with worldly weapons. We don’t use guns and ammunition. They are useless against Satan’s attacks, and they do nothing against his strongholds.

What is a stronghold? If you’ve been a Christian for some time, you’ve probably heard about them and maybe wondered what they were. A stronghold is a fortified place; a place resistant to attack. Whether it’s a negative or positive term depends upon whose stronghold it is. Psalm 9:9 says,

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.
( emphasis mine)

But Jeremiah 51:53 says,

Even if Babylon reaches the sky and fortifies her lofty stronghold, I will send destroyers against her,” declares the LORD. (emphasis mine)

Strongholds in military terminology refer to physical places of defense, but “we do not wage war as the world does.” Our strongholds are mindsets – ways of thinking about things or mental patterns of thought. We aren’t fighting flesh and blood; we’re fighting a thought war.

Lust can be a stronghold – it’s how you think about women and sex. If you find yourself evaluating women based on their body parts, you have a stronghold of lust in your mind. If you find yourself reviewing mentally recorded sexual images throughout the day, you have a stronghold of lust.

Satan sets up strongholds in your mind by getting you to first accept a single, unholy thought. Once that one is past your defenses, he brings more…and then more….and then
more. He’s patient and persistent. What began as a toehold becomes a foothold and then a handhold and then a stronghold. When it becomes a stronghold, it’s incredibly difficult to defeat. It gives Satan a strategic and tactical advantage in the war for your mind.

Once Satan sets up a stronghold in your mind, he wages war from that fortified place. He can be especially effective with real estate in his enemy’s territory – especially if you don’t cut off his supply lines. That’s your first plan of defense. Don’t give him any new ammunition to launch at you. We’ll talk more about how to do that when we get to the chapter on guarding your gates.

Minutemen

_Then I said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "The work is extensive and spread out, and we are widely separated from each other along the wall. Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us!"

So we continued the work with half the men holding spears, from the first light of dawn till the stars came out. At that time I also said to the people, "Have every man and his helper stay inside Jerusalem at night, so they can serve us as guards by night and workmen by day." Neither I nor my brothers nor my men nor the guards with me took off our clothes; each had his weapon, even when he went for water. (Nehemiah 4:19-23)_

Nehemiah recognized that he had too few guards stationed around the wall. This created weak areas defensively, but he had a simple solution. He had a man accompany him everywhere he went. The man carried a ram’s horn. If there was danger anywhere around the wall, Nehemiah would have him blow on the ram’s horn. Every man was to then report to the place where the horn sounded and be ready to fight. The men stayed battle ready at all times, even wearing their sweat-stained clothes around the clock. With this defensive posture, they were ready for attack at any time.

It reminds me of the famous Minutemen during the American Revolution. They were men chosen for their enthusiastic patriotism to defend against the British attacks in the New England area. Their name came from their ability to be ready for battle at a minute’s notice.

They were outnumbered and out-armed by the British, but they were better organized and underestimated. When General Gage led his redcoats in a march on Concord, MA, in April, 1775, he had in mind to take possession of reported arms stockpiles held by the colonists. He was surprised when the Minutemen overwhelmed his trained soldiers and chased them back to Boston. General George Washington’s subsequent arrival on the scene convinced Gage to give up Boston altogether.
What if we had the same level of readiness as Nehemiah and the Minutemen? We would be ready for an attack at any moment. Temptations wouldn’t catch us ill-equipped and unprepared.

Satan studies you so that he can find ways to bring you down. He may know you better than you know you. That should scare you a bit. If you’re going to be effective at spiritual warfare, you need to make regular inspections of your walls. If/when you are attacked in your weak spots, bring all your energy and resources to bear on resolving the issues before Satan makes it through your defenses.

**Dig the Well Before You Need the Water**

The key to a good defensive strategy is to prayerfully dig the well before you need the water. In other words, don’t wait until the moment of temptation to decide how you will handle it. That’s much too late. In the moment, you are weak and believing all the lies that the Enemy is selling.

You need a plan to help you maintain your sexual purity. The plan should include answers to the following:

**PREVENTION: How will I avoid sexual temptation?**

You may have heard about Billy Graham’s provisions for sexual purity. He always travels with at least one other man. He never counsels with a woman alone, and he won’t even get on an elevator with women if he is the only man present. You may call it excessive; I call it smart.

**INTERVENTION: What will I do if I am tempted?**

I have an agreement with my accountability partner that I will call him if I’m tempted. I also encourage you to memorize Scripture (some recommended Scriptures are in the Appendix) so that you can defend yourself as Jesus did when He was tempted in the desert.

**REPERCUSSION: What are the consequences if I fall?**

Consequences seem to shrink in the moment of temptation, so make them significant enough to make you think twice. To whom will you have to confess? What penalties will you incur? If you’ve had consequences in the past but sinned anyway, you need stronger consequences.

I want to be clear about these self-imposed consequences. Nothing is required other than repentance to restore your relationship with God. These consequences are simply to help those of us who tragically find it too easy to take advantage of God’s grace, knowing that He will forgive us. Because they are tangible, they seem more real to us when we are hovering on the brink.
Control the Source and You Control the Quality

King Hezekiah (715-687 BC) dug his well before he needed the water. He created a tunnel 1750 feet long to divert the waters of the Gihon Spring so that they flowed into the west side of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32:30). He then sealed the cave from where the waters originally sprung. By doing so, he brought the city’s water supply within its gates, a military objective that drastically improved and extended the peoples’ chances of survival in the event of a siege.

Bringing the water supply within the city gates prevented an enemy from poisoning it before it entered the city. Excellent tactical move! But Hezekiah was also thinking about the defensive weakness presented by the water shaft required to let water enter the city. He knew that the water shaft was the route David’s army used to conquer the Jebusites when they occupied Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:8). He didn’t want an invading army to follow suit.

We would do well to follow Hezekiah’s example. Are you allowing anything into your city (your mind) that has been poisoned by the Enemy? He will send his poison in through any opening you give him, and that poison will start to break down your walls (your relationship with Christ). But if you control the source, you control the quality.

Make the source of your daily refreshment God’s Word. Satan has no access to it. He can lay siege to your mind, but if you are getting a continual flow of living water, he has no chance of outlasting you. All he can do is call out toothless threats from outside your city walls. He will search for a weak point in your relationship with Christ, but there will be none to be found, because you will have shored up your walls.

Hezekiah’s plan was put to the test. Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem in 701 BC, shortly after the completion of the tunnel. As hard as he tried, Sennacherib couldn’t force Hezekiah out. The city was too strong with an internal water supply. The siege made such an impression on the invading king, that he had this commemoration inscribed on the Prism of Sennacherib:

"As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke…”

May Satan say the same of you.

*****

Sometimes we make progress two steps forward and one step back. In the next chapter, we’ll see how Nehemiah dealt with the same problem.
Chapter 5

Back Into Slavery
Nehemiah: Chapter 5

Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain."

Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine."

Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."

When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are exacting usury from your own countrymen!" So I called together a large meeting to deal with them and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our Jewish brothers who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your brothers, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.

So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let the exacting of usury stop! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil."

"We will give it back," they said. "And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say."

Then I summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised. I also shook out the folds of my robe and said, "In this way may God shake out of his house and possessions every man who does not keep this promise. So may such a man be shaken out and emptied!"

At this the whole assembly said, "Amen," and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised. (Nehemiah 5:1-13)
Can’t Get Enough of a Bad Thing
The Hebrew people had a long history of persecution and enslavement even during Nehemiah’s time. A few hundred years in Egypt, several hundred years off-and-on during the period of judges and 70 years of forced exile before they were able to rebuild the temple after returning to Jerusalem. Don’t you think they would have been tired of it by now?

To Nehemiah’s surprise, they weren’t. Like the kid who gets picked on by the neighborhood bully and then goes home to beat up his younger brother, Israel’s upper class enslaved its own lower class. That’s insane! How could they ever expect to rise above their enemies if they kept putting themselves in bondage?

How can we? Even though Christ has freed us from our bondage to Satan, we keep acting like the Enemy’s slaves. We once couldn’t help sinning, but now we have Christ. No sin can hold us unless we willingly submit to it. We have freedom from our sin, but we have to exercise it.

Our Self-Image Prison
In the last chapter, I talked about how our self-image acts as a thermostat to regulate our behavior. Now I would like to share how our false self-image can become a prison for us.

I’m currently watching old episodes of the original “Battlestar Galactica” T.V. series with my oldest son. Last night’s episode (“The Long Patrol”) was about Starbuck getting captured by colonials who mistakenly thought he was bootlegging. They knocked him out and put him into prison. When he came to, he began asking the prisoners in the adjoining cells who they were, but he discovered that none of them had real names. Instead, they referred to one another by the name of their crime (e.g., “Bootlegger 157” or “Adulteress 122”). Their captors had successfully divorced them from who they were by making them think of themselves in terms of what they did.

Aren’t those just like the Enemy’s tactics? He imprisons us spiritually because of some sin we commit. By continuously reminding us of our sinfulness, he starts to change our self-image. We begin to identify ourselves by our sin instead of the incredible creation that God made us.

At one point in the show, Starbuck gets frustrated and tries to shake the bars of his jail cell. Instead of shaking the cell, he accidentally pushes the door open. He looks at the other prisoners and asks, “Are all the doors unlocked?” To which, they reply, “The locks haven’t worked for centons (i.e. years).”
What?! The cells have been open for years?! They are in prison voluntarily?! In the plot of the story, it sounds silly, but it makes a great metaphor. Even though we have been freed from Satan’s prison… even though our debt has been paid in full by Jesus Christ, we still feel imprisoned by our old self-image. We’re comfortable knowing that we’re sinners. Our new identify as saints is way out of our comfort zone, and against all logic, we prefer our imprisonment to the scary unknown of living a blameless life.

When we see ourselves as “sinners,” we keep ourselves in prison by continuing to sin. If we manage to walk blamelessly for a period of time, we begin to get nervous so far away from our comfort zone. The pressure builds and builds until we sin again. When we do, even though we have the guilt of having failed the Lord, we feel somewhat relieved that the pressure to be perfect is over. Thus, our sin helps us balance the scales. We wouldn’t want to be too good, now would we?

I hope I’ve made the point that our self-image is a powerful force in our struggle to build our walls. It’s why so many have a difficult time creating lasting change in their behaviors. But having made the point, I want to remind you that your self-image is really a Christ-image if you’ve accepted Him as your Savior. You have Christ in you! You have His righteousness!

Don’t let Satan convince you that you are still a sinner; you’re not. You’re a saint who sometimes sins. Notice the difference. When we talk about your sin, we’re no longer talking about who you are; we’re now just talking about what you do. Behavior is infinitely easier to change than self-image. See yourself as a saint, and your self-image becomes a powerful force for eliminating your bad behaviors. You will begin to sin less, because your self-image thermostat aligns your behavior with your high opinion of who you are in Christ. Self-image works both ways, so where you start is of utmost importance.

The Sin Problem

For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. (Romans 7:18-19)

So we are saints who sin. We may want with all our heart not to sin, but we struggle to walk blamelessly with the Lord because of our flesh, that “body of death” that Paul talks about in Romans 7:24. Our flesh is our constant companion until Jesus takes us home or comes again. The more sinful your life was before you accepted Christ, the more difficult it is going to be for you to overcome the consequences of what you’ve done.

If you’ve seen countless sexual images or slept with many different women, you’re going to struggle for some time before you can overcome your flesh. Once the Enemy has those images planted in your mind, he can activate them and put them into service
whenever he wants. They sit dormant awaiting his command. Your flesh is his willing accomplice.

God has delivered us from the ultimate penalty of our sin, but he has left us with our traitorous flesh to strengthen and test us. Our trials with our flesh produce spiritual strength – making us warriors worthy of following the King. David’s Mighty Men didn’t get to be mighty without battling powerful enemies. Neither will we. Our spiritual training has to be tested on the battlefield.

But I Like It! I Really, Really Like It!

Maybe you’re thinking, “But I like sinning.” I’m not here to lie to you. Sexual sin can be fun and exciting. Duh! There’s a reason why so many people do it. But that’s your flesh talking. Do a realistic cost/benefit analysis, and you’ll find that the fun and excitement don’t outweigh the negative consequences.

We’re like the Hebrews, who thought food was better than freedom (Numbers 11:4-6). Not finding desert living to their liking during the exodus, they moaned about the garlic, leaks and the onions that they used to enjoy in Egypt. Somehow, they forgot they had been slaves! How fun was that? When we think about the sexual “freedoms” of our past, we forget the bondage that came with it. The emptiness, the guilt, the self-loathing, the risk, the broken relationships… Do you really want to go back to Egypt?

It gets worse. If you have Christ in your heart, sin will never be the same for you again. No longer can you sin with impunity. Sure, you can push God out of your mental window during the time of temptation, but He’ll be back. After you’ve given in to the temptation, the Holy Spirit will show your sin for the betrayal that it was. The more you walk in the Spirit, the harder it will be to enjoy turning your back on God.

Shiny Things

A few years back, I read my kids one of my favorite children’s stories, Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls. Wonderful story. One of the ones that can make Dad cry. I bring it up here because it has a terrific metaphor for sin and its consequences.

The book is about a boy and his hunting dogs, who spend time after chores each day tracking raccoons through the woods. At one point in the story, the boy comes across evidence of an unscrupulous trapper. Instead of giving the raccoons a fair chance at eluding him, this trapper uses a weakness in their nature to trap and kill them. He finds a fallen tree and drills a two- to three-inch hole in it. Inside, he places a worthless, shiny object, such as a ball of foil. Then, he hammers a nail into the hole at a 45-degree angle.

When the raccoon sees the shiny object, he has to have it. He reaches his hand into the hole around the nail and grabs it. But when he tries to make off with his newfound treasure, the raccoon discovers that with his hand around the shiny object, he can no
longer remove it from the hole. The solution seems simple to us. Let go of the shiny object, and you’re free. It’s not so easy for the raccoon. Even though he is a very clever animal, he so desperately wants the treasure that he is unwilling to let it go even as he sees the trapper coming to club him on the head.

Doesn’t it make you mad that this is the same tactic Satan uses on us? He knows men’s weakness for sex and visual stimuli. That’s our shiny thing. We see it. We want it. We go after it. We love it so much that we have to have it even if we recognize that it’s a trap. When I am in a hotel that offers “adult” movies (as if they were only inappropriate for children), I know they are garbage. I’m not fooled by the shiny. But sometimes I can’t help reaching my hand into the trap.

Once we’ve got the shiny, we are unwilling to let it go, even though releasing it means our freedom and victory over the Enemy. Some of us see the unscrupulous trapper coming, and some of us don’t, but few of us have the self-control to let the shiny go. We prefer a club to the head over letting go. And so it is that with worthless garbage, Satan reduces us from God’s most intelligent and complex creation into Pavlov’s dog; it’s a basic stimulus-response relationship.

The irony is that the shiny never delivers on its promise. It looks good, but it’s worthless and unfulfilling. We take hold of it, because it makes us feel good for a period of time. But after Satan has clubbed us in the head a few times, we feel much worse than we did before we put our hand in the trap.

Logic means nothing when your hand is around the shiny. A friend and I once implored our accountability partner to consider the consequences of the emotional affair he was engaged in. He had met an attractive Christian woman who filled the gaps he perceived in his relationship with his wife, and the two of them were advancing toward physical consummation. We asked God for wisdom and shared every warning we could come up with, but our friend wouldn’t listen to us. He saw the trapper coming and didn’t care.

Fortunately, events occurred that forced the truth out into the open. His wife confronted him about his sin, and he had to let go of the shiny. He didn’t get away clean, though, and neither did any of us who were trying to help him get loose. All the friendships were destroyed in the process. As far as I know, none of us talk anymore. It’s one of my deeper regrets, but I willingly trade those friendships for the preservation of marriage and family. Sin always has consequences.

The shiny is a powerful tool in the Enemy’s hands. He studies us, learns what we like and custom makes tempting shinies for each of us. They are garbage compared to what the Lord wants for us, but we have a hard time resisting them. If we take hold of the shiny, it won’t be long before it has hold of us.
Why Did God Make Us This Way?
If sexual purity is so important, why did God give us such a strong sex drive? How come we are so visually-oriented? Why do we want sex as much as we do?

After all, when someone has an addiction to alcohol or drugs or cigarettes, he can quit it for good. Sex isn’t like that. Married men with a sexual addiction can’t abstain from sex for the rest of their lives. Their bodies are not their own, and they have a responsibility to keep their marriage healthy through physical oneness. While single men can abstain from sex, they still have to contend with the 72-hour cycle of semen build-up. Imagine giving up heroine but still having to resist a compulsion given by God to shoot up every 72 hours for the rest of your life.

It seems incredibly unfair. Was God setting us up for failure? I thought it was, “lead us not into temptation.”

By way of answer, let’s first separate what God has done, and what we have done.

God gave us a drive for sex for several important reasons:

a) Attraction – Our sex drive helps us to select a wife. Of course, this is not the primary criteria for compatibility, but it does get our attention.

b) Procreation – The command is to “multiply and fill the earth.” Our sex drive compels us toward our wives to fulfill it.

So far, these are the same reasons that God gave a sex drive to animals. The next reason He gave to us alone.

c) Oneness – as Paul has said, this is a mystery. I don’t completely get it, but oneness in marriage is designed to help us understand our oneness with God. How does our sex drive help us gain oneness in our marriage?

a. It causes us to become one physically. (This we get.)

b. It compels us to initiate. As husbands, we are to lead in the area of sex in our marriage. Most of the time, it doesn’t matter what is going on in our relationships with our wives – we still want sex. We could have just had a terrible fight, but the sight of our wives undressing will get us in the mood. While our wives may not understand this and may even be insulted by it, our ability to switch gears so quickly serves a purpose. The fight suddenly gains its proper perspective in the context of our relationship. Often, we are able to set aside our pride and apologize to mend the relationship.

c. It keeps us humble. God made men strong in many ways with the ability to operate independently, but we are not designed to be completely self-sufficient. We need our wives to meet our sexual needs, and physical intimacy is the key to our vulnerability. Our hearts are never more open than they are after sex (provided we don’t fall asleep, of course).
Sex motivates us to make changes. We will do the dishes if it speaks our wives’ love language. We’ll replace all the light bulbs, do the laundry, put the kids to bed, get the oil changed in the car…whatever!

That’s what God has done. What we have done is pervert what God intended. We have fed on a steady diet of ungodly images, text and sounds, increasing our sexual appetites in the process. We’ve trained our brains to think of women as objects rather than people. We’ve made our wives compete against other women and other images.

Sure, it’s difficult to reserve our attention for our wives alone. Our physical urges and the temptations with which we are faced daily are formidable. But as Stephen Arterburn & Fred Stoeker say in their book Everyman’s Battle, “We must choose to be more than male. We must choose manhood.” Being a man rather than just a male means doing what’s hard to honor God and our wives.

**Take My Yoke**

*Moreover, from the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, until his thirty-second year—twelve years—neither I nor my brothers ate the food allotted to the governor. But the earlier governors—those preceding me—placed a heavy burden on the people and took forty shekels of silver from them in addition to food and wine. Their assistants also lorded it over the people. But out of reverence for God I did not act like that. Instead, I devoted myself to the work on this wall. All my men were assembled there for the work; we did not acquire any land.*

*Furthermore, a hundred and fifty Jews and officials ate at my table, as well as those who came to us from the surrounding nations. Each day one ox, six choice sheep and some poultry were prepared for me, and every ten days an abundant supply of wine of all kinds. In spite of all this, I never demanded the food allotted to the governor, because the demands were heavy on these people.*

*Remember me with favor, O my God, for all I have done for these people.*

(Nehemiah 5:14-19)

Nehemiah was careful not to put extra burdens on the people. He knew that they had all that they could contend with just creating walls around their city. Previous governors had placed difficult requirements on the Jews, but Nehemiah’s yoke was easy, and his burden was light. I use that phrase particularly to evoke Matthew 11:28-30, in which Jesus said:

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in*
heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Throughout the book, Nehemiah serves as a picture of Jesus and the Word of God, which calls us to build our spiritual walls. The message from this passage is that we should compare the burden of Satan’s yoke to that of our Savior’s. When we live a life of sexual immorality, we are submitting to Satan’s yoke. Like the governors before Nehemiah, Satan will exact a heavy price from us. But when we choose to take on Christ’s yoke by putting away sexual immorality, we find that it’s much easier to bear.

If we could remember how heavy Satan’s yoke is, we would think twice about committing sexual sin. If we could remember the guilt, the depression, the disappointment that follows the sin, we would steer clear of his temptations. But we forget. The further we get from the pain, the less real it seems to us. I found that it helped me to sit down and make a list of all the negative consequences of sexual sin. Then, I made a list of all the benefits of walking with the Lord in this area. Reviewing those lists helped me remember whose yoke I preferred.

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Nehemiah’s almost done with the walls. When your walls are up, Satan switches tactics. We’ll see how in the next chapter.
Chapter 6

The Enemy’s Arsenal
Nehemiah: Chapter 6

Divide and Conquer

When word came to Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab and the rest of our enemies that I had rebuilt the wall and not a gap was left in it – though up to that time I had not set the doors in the gates – Sanballat and Geshem sent me this message: “Come, let us meet together in one of the villages on the plain of Ono.”

But they were scheming to harm me; so I sent messengers to them with this reply: “I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?” Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.
(Nehemiah 6:1-4)

With the walls built and the gates about to go up, Sanballat knew he couldn’t launch a frontal assault on Jerusalem. So, he switched tactics. Instead of threats, ridicule and intimidation, he tried diplomacy. Through persistent invitations, he attempted to get Nehemiah to leave the protective wall of the city. Four times, Nehemiah refused, citing the great project in which he was involved. Nehemiah was no dummy. He knew the enemy wanted to isolate him away from his bodyguard and the safety of his walls.

Satan has many different devices to lure us outside the city walls. His objective: divide and conquer! If he can get us alone, he knows that he can pick us off. So, he wedges in-between us and those who could help us. Here are just a few of his tricks to get us isolated:

Resentment
We are sometimes resentful about our wives in regard to sex. It’s either that they won’t initiate, or that they always have a “headache” or that they don’t want to do the things we want them to do. Whatever the reason, Satan uses it to lead us down the path of resentment as he reminds us of all the things we did for her. We did the laundry or the dishes or washed the car or stayed at home with the kids or went to the social mixer or turned off the game to talk to her… Now we feel like she should reciprocate. When she doesn’t, we become bitter. Often, we shut down. We stop communicating. We go into our caves. She asks what’s wrong, but we won’t tell her. She should know already. We’ve talked about it before, after all. How many times do we have to tell her? Our resentments isolate us from our wives.
Pride
Men don’t talk about their struggles with pornography, masturbation, wandering eyes, wandering thoughts or their sex lives. So all of us think we are the only ones struggling like we are struggling. Our pride is tied up in our ability to be incredible lovers who have wives who love to satisfy all our needs. No one wants to talk about hidden sin.

But the Enemy knows that while we keep it hidden, we rarely get any better. Usually, we get worse. And the worse it gets, the less likely we are to share it with another man. We spend so much time comparing ourselves with others that we are afraid that sharing our struggles might make us less than another man. Our pride isolates us from other godly men.

F.E.A.R.
We are afraid to initiate with our wives, because each time we get turned down, we feel like the most sensitive, vulnerable part of us has been stomped on. What is it that turns our wives off? Are we not attractive enough, talented enough, satisfying enough for her? After we’ve been stomped on a few times, we find that it is easier to stop asking. We’ve got other ways of dealing with our sexual frustrations, after all. But masturbation is just another form of isolation.

Divide and conquer is one of Satan’s favorite attacks. Just as Nehemiah was tempted by the enemy to come outside the city walls, we are tempted to leave the safety of our godly circle of friends and family. Nehemiah refused. We should follow suit.

F.E.A.R. of Discovery
At times, Satan deepens our isolation by convincing us that our sin is so bad that we can’t talk with anyone about it. If we believe him, we give him leverage to use against us.

In the movie Training Day, Denzel Washington’s character, Alonzo, pressures the rookie into using some of the drugs they have confiscated. He says that everyone on his team must do it, or they can’t be part of the team. He says that it’s part of the research that enables them to be convincing undercover in the field. In a weak moment, the rookie caves, and in doing so, he compromises his integrity.

Once Alonzo knows that the rookie has drugs in his system, he can now manipulate the rookie to go along with his illegal activities. Every time the rookie thinks about going to the authorities, Alonzo reminds him that he has the drugs in his system. “Who’s going to believe a drug addict over an officer with a long list of achievements?” The rookie no longer has any integrity to stand on. He can’t turn Alonzo in without being implicated himself.

The Enemy uses this same tactic on us. First, he tempts us to sin. Once we have given in to a sin that we don’t want anyone else to know about, he uses it to force us deeper into
isolation. Satan doesn’t want us reaching out to those who might help us, so he tells us that those people would no longer accept us if they knew what we had been doing. They would be disgusted, disillusioned, disappointed… Satan fills us with F.E.A.R. about the consequences of our sin. We might lose our marriages, our jobs, our reputation, our friends or worse.

Sin flourishes in darkness, so even though we don’t want to sin again, we do. Once we’ve crossed our moral boundaries once, it’s easy to cross them again…and again…and again… Our sins accumulate, and we cross new boundaries that we thought we never would. We live in constant fear that someone will discover them. But at the same time, we almost hope that someone will catch us if only so that we don’t have to live a secret life anymore.

This downward spiral almost always leads to exposure and serious consequences. Of course, the consequences would be much less if we would seek help early in the process, but we too often believe the lie that there’s no one we can turn to, no one who would understand. Don’t fall for it. Even if you are at a high level of leadership or in the public eye, God can show you at least one person that will share your burden and help you to get free from your sin. By confessing your sin to God and to those you trust, you remove Satan’s leverage in your life.

To Whom Do We Confess?

Confessing our sin to God is one thing. Confessing to people is often a very different thing. God loves us unconditionally. Very few on this earth will be able or interested in loving us at that level. What makes it more difficult is that sexual sins shock people. For these reasons, confessions should be handled with care.

My wife has a guideline that helps me to sort this out. She says that the confession should be no bigger than the transgression. In other words, confess to the people against whom you sinned. When I fall, I confess to my wife, my accountability partner and God, because I have committed to walking purely with them.

At times, there are other circumstances to consider.

- **You should not confess in a way that would be hurtful to someone else.** Example: When I confess to my wife, I don’t walk her through the gritty details of my fantasies. Nor do I confess in a setting (like my cell group or home team) that might embarrass her.
- **You should not confess with an ulterior motive.** Example: I should not confess to my female coworker that I fantasized about her in the hopes that she’ll respond with interest.
- **When the stakes are high, you should pray and seek godly counsel.** Example: If you could lose your job because of your confession, pray and seek godly counsel first. When the stakes are high, you have to consider the impact to those around you, as well.
Where Are You, and Who Are You With?

Sanballat and Geshem invited Nehemiah to a special meeting of high-level leaders, but Nehemiah knew that he had no business associating with men like them. We should avoid isolation, but we also have to be careful not to put ourselves in harm’s way by going places we shouldn’t go with people we have no business being around.

Far too often, we unnecessarily put ourselves in the way of temptation. As a result, it becomes almost impossible for us not to do the wrong things. Look at Peter, for example. Where was he when he denied the Lord? He was warming himself by the enemy's fire. He was at the wrong place, listening to the wrong voice, which led him to lie and deny.

And where was Adam when he fell into sin? He was at the tree that God had told him not to eat from. He was listening to the wrong voice (even if it was his wife’s), leading him to give in to his curiosity.

I’m just getting started…

Wrong Place
- What was David doing back at his palace when the kings are supposed to be out at war (2 Samuel 11)?
- Why was the youth who lacked judgment walking in the direction of the adulteress’ house at nighttime (Proverbs 7)?
- What was Samson doing in Timnah looking for Philistine women (Judges 14) or in the valley of Sorek, where he met Delilah (Judges 16)?

Wrong People
- What was Hezekiah thinking when he invited the envoys from Babylon into his storehouses, his armory and his palace to show them all his riches (2 Kings 20)?
- Why did Rehoboam ask his friends for counsel when he already had solid counsel from the elders who had served his father Solomon (1 Kings 12)?
- Why did Solomon (the wisest man who ever lived) act so foolishly by taking 1,000 wives when he knew the law forbade it (1 Kings 11)?
- What convinced Jehoshaphat that allying himself with Ahab through marriage and joining him in war against Ramoth Gilead would be a good idea (2 Chronicles 18)?
- What was Amnon doing getting advice on love from his crafty cousin Jonadab, who encouraged him to rape his own sister (2 Samuel 13)?

When we’re in a place we know we shouldn’t be and we’re with people we know we shouldn’t be with, we are setting ourselves up for a fall. Where are those places, and who are those people for you? Stay far, far away from them. They weaken your resolve. By way of example, let’s look at another man of God who was in the wrong place with the wrong people.
In Harm’s Way

In chapter thirteen of the book of Genesis, we read that the herdsmen of Abraham (Abram at the time) and Lot began to quarrel. As a result, the two men decided that they needed to separate. Abraham graciously offered Lot the first choice of land for his herds, and Lot greedily took what looked best to him. He chose the entire plain of the Jordan river and set out to the east.

Notice what Lot did next. He “pitched his tents near Sodom,” which as the narrative tells us, was full of men who “were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.”

Our first question should be, “Did Lot know that Sodom was wicked when he pitched his tents?” We don’t know for sure, but it seems likely. This wasn’t his first day in the region, after all. People in the area would have readily shared the stories of what happened in the city. Nothing travels faster than a bad reputation.

But on second thought, maybe it doesn’t matter if he knew or not. We don’t always know what temptations we’ll come across in the video store, on T.V., on the magazine stand, at the mall… before it presents itself. It’s not the temptation that is the problem. The problem is what we do with the temptation, which gets us to the next scene in Lot’s story.

In Chapter 14, we learn that Lot had moved and was actually living in Sodom. It was an unfortunate choice, because he and his family became plunder when the kings of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela lost in their attempt to overcome the powerful coalition of neighboring King Kedorlaomer and his allies. As far as we know, Lot had nothing to do with the conflict, but he was guilty by association. He put himself in harm’s way and paid the price. Had it not been for the bravery and loyalty of his uncle Abram, this might have been the last chapter on Lot’s life.

But as it turned out, Abram rescued Lot and his family by defeating King Kedorlaomer and his allies. You would think that Lot would have taken the cue God was giving him, but he didn’t. The next time we see him (chapter 19), he is no longer just living in the city; now, he’s sitting at the city gate. This is significant, because it reveals that Lot was now integrated into the culture of Sodom. He’s regarded as an elder and allowed to judge legal cases and business transactions for the city.

What on earth was he doing there? I’m sure he thought he was helping the sinful city and that he could remain above their sinfulness, but he underestimated the powerful pull of sin. Without realizing it, Lot made compromise after compromise in his walk with the Lord. We learn in the same chapter that Lot had even pledged his daughters to the unrighteous men of Sodom. Had God not intervened, it’s likely that Lot would have sunk deeper and deeper into sinfulness until there would be no distinction between him and the unbelievers he lived among.

Is it hitting home yet? I’m talking about us. We live in an immoral culture – a 21st century Sodom if you will. And though we are children of the King, it’s often hard to
distinguish us from the unbelievers living around us. Why? Because we do all the same things that the unbelievers do. We watch the same movies; we laugh at the same dirty jokes; we make the same innuendoes in mixed company… It’s a good thing God knows our hearts and recognizes us as His own or else we might accidentally get mixed in with the unbelievers in the coming judgment.

When you intentionally pass the adult bookstore or strip club on your way home from work... When you make it a point to visit the administrative assistant’s desk on your way to your desk in the morning… When you give the babysitter a ride home… You’re putting yourself in harm’s way. You’re pitching your tents toward Sodom, and it won’t be long until you take up residence in the city.

You’ve got to draw your lines much further back. Don’t go anywhere near sin city. Don’t tell yourself that you can handle it. You can’t. Stronger men than you have been compromised in the exact same way. Lead yourself not into temptation.

Who Suffers?
The story of Lot is instructive, because it reminds us of the consequences of putting ourselves in harm’s way. We often like to think our sinfulness is our own business. We think that we’re the only ones who are impacted by it.

Lot was certainly impacted. In God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah, he lost his home, his possessions, his community, his position, his sons-in-law – just about everything. He even lost his wife, who was turned into a pillar of salt when she turned back to look at the devastation of the two cities.

I would contend that he also lost his children. How? Though his daughters survived the judgment of God, they had been pledged to unbelievers – wicked men who cared nothing for God. And while they were rescued from ungodly marriages, their hearts were infected with the sin of Sodom. When we last see Lot (chapter 19), his daughters are getting him drunk on successive nights and sleeping with him so that they can have children.

Where did they get such a perverse idea? If they were worried about carrying on the family name, why didn’t they put their trust in God? Where was their sense of decency and moral conduct? It was destroyed long before the fires consumed Sodom. Lot has only himself to blame. He raised his daughters in an environment of sexual perversity, and what they should have seen as abnormal looked normal to them.

When you put yourself in harm’s way, there are consequences – both to you and to those you love. Maybe you think that you’re only hurting yourself…that no one but you knows about your lust, about the images you look at, about what you do when you’re on the road. Even if no one but God (remember Him?) and you know about your sin, innocent people can still be hurt. Consider these possible consequences:
• Your wife can no longer excite you, because she doesn’t look like the woman in the magazine.
• Your marriage cannot experience oneness, because you are keeping secrets from your wife.
• Your purchase of pornographic material helps to fund the next marketing initiative designed to lure men into a life of sexual addiction.
• Your lack of sexual integrity makes you unqualified to lead your son or daughter through the difficult dilemmas related to sex during their adolescent years.
• An unbeliever who knows you are a Christian sees you lingering over the women’s revealing images at the video store and wonders why all Christians are such hypocrites.
• God removes His covering from your home until He’s got your attention again.

Those are just a few examples, and they don’t even deal with the impact to God and to you. Have you ever thought about how grieved God must be when we continue to walk in sin? …when we lust after His creation? …when we pretend He doesn’t exist long enough to consummate our sin? How about the impact your sin is having on you?

_Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?_ (Proverbs 6:25-28)

What does it mean to be reduced to a loaf of bread? Seems like every commentator I’ve looked at has their own opinion on this, but no matter what the answer, it can’t be good, can it? I prefer to interpret this to mean that going to a prostitute makes you a dumb loaf. You no longer act using your intellect; you are now acted upon with no ability to resist your temptations.

But how about the rest of the verse? Mess with a married woman, and you risk her husband’s jealous reimbursement. Act on your lusts and you’re gonna get burned. Lust is progressive. It’s naïve to think that you can keep the animal caged. Remember the raptors they had in an underground cell in Jurassic Park? That’s your lust. Sure, it’s easy to keep it under control when it’s young, but the more you feed it, the bigger it gets. No matter what kind of controls you’ve put into place, it will get free. When it does, it won’t be underground anymore. Everyone around you will find out about it.

Sin brings suffering. Always. Sometimes to you, sometimes to others, but it always hurts someone.
Damaging Your Reputation

Then, the fifth time, Sanballat sent his aide to me with the same message, and in his hand was an unsealed letter in which was written:

"It is reported among the nations—and Geshem says it is true—that you and the Jews are plotting to revolt, and therefore you are building the wall. Moreover, according to these reports you are about to become their king and have even appointed prophets to make this proclamation about you in Jerusalem: 'There is a king in Judah!' Now this report will get back to the king; so come, let us confer together."

I sent him this reply: "Nothing like what you are saying is happening; you are just making it up out of your head."

They were all trying to frighten us, thinking, "Their hands will get too weak for the work, and it will not be completed." But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands." (Nehemiah 6:5-9)

The fifth time Sanballat invited Nehemiah to leave the safety of the city and join him in the “plain of Ono” (that’s read “Oh, no!” if you’re Nehemiah), he turned up the heat. This time, he sent an aide with an unsealed letter that claimed Nehemiah was building the wall as part of a revolt against the king. It further asserted that Nehemiah had already made declarations that he was the new king of Judah.

Of course, none of this was true. Nehemiah was beyond reproach and completely committed to the Persian king. The significance of the letter being “unsealed” was that it was made public. Nehemiah was the last stop for the aide, who likely took the letter to several influential leaders in the surrounding area to let them read it first.

Lies and slander are a common trick of the Enemy. If he cannot get us to actually compromise our integrity, he can at least give the appearance of it. Remember, he is the Father of Lies. While rumors can definitely hurt you, avoid the temptation to get down in the mud with your accuser. Take the high road.

Nehemiah’s response is helpful. He basically said, “Nice try.” Then he turned to God and asked for strength. No smear campaign for this leader. Nehemiah knew that getting tangled up with Sanballat would only distract him from his work. He also knew that God was the only One who could do anything about the situation, so he put it in the Lord’s hands and got back to the Lord’s work.
The Inside Man

*One day I went to the house of Shemaiah son of Delaiah, the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home. He said, "Let us meet in the house of God, inside the temple, and let us close the temple doors, because men are coming to kill you—by night they are coming to kill you." But I said, "Should a man like me run away? Or should one like me go into the temple to save his life? I will not go!" I realized that God had not sent him, but that he had prophesied against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.*

*Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me.* (Nehemiah 6:10-14)

Sanballat’s next tactic was to compromise Nehemiah’s integrity by using someone he trusted. He hired a Jew to warn Nehemiah that men were coming to kill him and that he ought to seek refuge in the temple. This proposal could have been tempting for Nehemiah for two reasons. It could have appealed to his sense of self-preservation and to his sense of pride. Surely he was important enough to protect. What would the Jews do without his leadership? But Nehemiah saw right through this ruse. He knew that only the priests were allowed in the Holy Place. (Numbers 18:7) Nehemiah refused the suggestion and once again turned his enemies over to God for justice.

Sometimes Satan will use someone close to you to lead you into sin. That’s all the more reason to be careful whom you allow in your inner circle of intimate relationships. But sometimes it’s even a well-meaning Christian brother or sister. Maybe they question the intensity of your commitment to this whole sexual purity thing. Maybe a Christian sister confesses that her feelings for you have replaced her feelings for her husband. Maybe your girlfriend makes it difficult for you to save yourself for marriage. Maybe your wife wants to spice up your sex life with a little *Penthouse Letters* or by sharing a racy story with you from the novel she is reading.

Not everyone is at the same level of spiritual maturity. In fact, God may not even be working on sexual purity in the lives of some of the people around you. If they seem insensitive to your struggles, it may be ignorance, or it may be bad motive. A little coaching about your boundaries will help the former. You may need to discontinue the relationship if it’s the latter. In either case, you can’t allow those around you to lead you into temptation.

Shemaiah, Sanballat’s hired messenger, can also represent our thoughts. Satan loves to dangle the most tempting option in front of us to see if we take the bait. By planting a suggestive thought, he tries to get us to give in to the sin. ‘It would be so much easier. Quit fighting the ‘good fight.’ Where’s it gotten you so far? The struggle never ends. It
only gets harder. C’mon, think about yourself for once, will you. You deserve this…” On and on it goes. If he can tell you are listening, Satan will turn up the volume. Like Nehemiah, we’ve got to rebuke this messenger in a decisive, unequivocal way.

**Look for the Lie**

Whenever you are tempted to sin, look for the lie. I promise it’s there. Every temptation involves at least one lie and probably many. One of the most common lies associated with sexual temptation is that you have an urgent need that has to be met right now! The pressure can seem enormous and overwhelming. You begin thinking it would be easier to just give in, but don’t.

What looks urgent is often a lie. (Ever answered an urgently ringing phone only to discover that it’s a telemarketer?) Satan wants you to think that you have an urgent need, but resist the temptation with resolve, and watch how quickly he flees. A moment later, you’ll be amazed at how different you feel.

How about some other lies that we believe in the moment of temptation?

*“It’s my wife’s fault. She’s not meeting my needs.”*
While your wife may not be meeting your sexual needs, you are still accountable for your own behavior. You can’t use what someone else does or doesn’t do as justification for sin. Before you blame your wife, ask yourself if there is anything you are doing or not doing that might be contributing to the problem.

*“I’ve been good. I deserve a break.”*
You’re assuming that you’ve crossed some arbitrary righteousness threshold. This is a very legalistic way of looking at your walk, and it’s false. Our relationship with Christ is based on grace, not works. Works are the evidence of your love for Him. Besides, the threshold is much higher than you are thinking. (See Jesus’ interpretation of the seventh commandment in Matthew 5:27-30.)

*“I need to see how bad it is.”*
Maybe a little “Christian research” might make you better prepared to defend against sexual immorality. Not a chance. It’s bad, and it ain’t getting better. That’s all you need to know. More diligent research will only take you down. It will make you want to do more and more research until you’ve consummated your sin.

*“Just one look won’t hurt.”*
Wrong. Curiosity killed the cat, remember? One look will turn into a linger, and a linger will turn into a lust. If Satan can get you to take one look at the bait, he sets the hook and starts to reel you in. Besides, how long can your active imagination go on just that one image?
“I’ve already messed up. What’s one more time?”
How far away from God do you want to wander before you try to find your way back to Him? It may not be as easy as you think. Though God is always as close as our repentance, you might find it difficult to ask for forgiveness. Every time you sin, you are poisoning your spirit. The sooner you turn back, the better.

Punch Yourself in the Nose
When I was younger, I read a story about a man who was in the precarious position of being just about to fall over a cliff. In that split second before he fell, he punched himself in the nose with all his strength, forcing him to fall backwards. It was a drastic move, but drastic moments call for drastic measures. Falling over the cliff meant certain death. A bloody nose was a welcome alternative.

Consider that moment of temptation your moment on the cliff. Too often, we allow ourselves to fall into a sin that kills our spiritual health, but there are always alternatives. God never allows a temptation without also allowing a way out.

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)

Drastic times call for drastic measures. A bloody nose might just be the way out that God is providing.

So, how could you “punch yourself in the nose?” Could you call your accountability partner and confess your struggle? Could you call your wife? Could you begin a conversation with someone nearby to get away from your impure thoughts? Could you confess to your friend that you’re still thinking about the waitress after she took your order? Could you introduce your wife and kids into the conversation with an attractive woman? Could you act like a dork? Could you leave the party abruptly to get away from her?

“Punching yourself in the nose” is no fun. It’s the last thing you want to do in that moment, but that’s only because you’ve forgotten that falling off the cliff is deadly to your relationship with your Savior. What we’re really talking about is your level of commitment to your relationship with Jesus. Are you really willing to follow Him no matter what the cost? Then that cost involves a few bloody noses.

From Rubble to Rampart

So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were
afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. (Nehemiah 6:15-16)

Chapter 6 announces a finished wall. It took Nehemiah and his people only 52 days to go from rubble to rampart. And they did quality work – some of the wall still stands in Jerusalem today, almost 2500 years later. A work like this required an extraordinary commitment on the part of the builders.

Seeing the completed condition of the walls struck fear into the hearts of Nehemiah’s enemies, “because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.” Beautiful! To God be the glory! Building your walls helps you and glorifies God. What other reasons do we need to engage in this great work?

No matter how bad the condition of your spiritual walls, you can put them back together quickly with God’s help. Don’t give in to despair. That’s what the Enemy wants. A healthy relationship with Christ is closer than you think. You can turn your rubble into a strong rampart.

If you believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you must believe this: His blood was enough. There is no sin that you have committed or could commit that His blood wouldn’t cover. To believe that your sin is unforgivable is to deny the power of Christ. So, relax! Jesus can bring those stones back to life from the heap of rubble you’ve made of your life. Just watch Him!

The Real Inside Man

Also, in those days the nobles of Judah were sending many letters to Tobiah, and replies from Tobiah kept coming to them. For many in Judah were under oath to him, since he was son-in-law to Shecaniah son of Arah, and his son Jehohanan had married the daughter of Meshullam son of Berekiah. Moreover, they kept reporting to me his good deeds and then telling him what I said. And Tobiah sent letters to intimidate me. (Nehemiah 6:17-19)

Remember how I said that Tobiah was a metaphor for our flesh? Beginning in 6:17, he begins to take center stage. Nehemiah became aware that the Jewish nobles were sending letters to him and receiving replies back. Many were under oath to serve him, because he was related to several prominent citizens. Shecaniah, son of Arah, was his father-in-law, and Tobiah’s son Jehohanan was married to the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berekiah. The nobles tried to influence Nehemiah by pointing out Tobiah’s better qualities. Meanwhile, Tobiah continued to send letters to Nehemiah to intimidate him.

Our flesh is the real “inside man,” and Satan has his hooks in it. When you accepted Christ, your heart was renewed, but your flesh was not. It’s corrupt, and God has purposed that you will receive a new body when you join Him in heaven or when He
comes again (whichever comes first). Satan gets to keep your carcass, but God got the better part of the deal. Though we spend our lives worrying about improving our flesh, it’s our spirit that has the potential to please God.

As believers, the battle we wage with Satan is for our hearts and minds. Our hearts have been renewed, but our minds still have a lot of loyalty to our flesh. The people mentioned in the above passages are a metaphor for our impure thoughts. They are motivated by our flesh, which has no interest in living purely. Everything that you do to grow closer to Christ is a threat to our flesh, so don’t expect it to give up without a fight. Just like Sanballat wanted to control Jerusalem, Satan wants to control our minds. He will use our flesh and our thoughts to wage his war.

The Dogfight

Maybe you’ve heard the story about the man who raised dogs for the cruel sport of dog fighting. Strangely enough, he would let his dogs fight each other, and he always bet accurately on the one that would win. His apprentice couldn’t figure out how he did it, so he asked him one day, “How do you know which dog is going to win?”

“Simple,” the man answered. “It’s the one I feed the most.”

Each of us has a dogfight going on inside. Each dog represents a part of us. One is our flesh, and one is our redeemed nature from the Spirit of God. Which one will win? Simple. The one we feed the most.

Are you feeding your flesh with sexual images, steamy plot lines and lingering looks, or are you feeding you redeemed nature with the Word of God, prayer, worship, service and other godly pursuits?

*****

In the next chapter, we’ll begin looking at how you can help your redeemed nature with this fight by guarding what you allow through your gates.
Assigning Gatekeepers

As soon as Nehemiah had the walls up, he turned his focus on the temple and made sure that all the important jobs were filled. One of the most critical responsibilities belonged to the gatekeepers, who were to protect the temple by controlling what was allowed into it.

There are actually two types of gatekeepers: those assigned to the temple and those assigned to the city gates. Gatekeepers made sure that only good things were allowed in and that bad things were kept out. By following this simple principle, the city and the temple were protected. If the gatekeepers compromised their leadership role, they endangered the temple, the city and all those within it.

For us, it’s important to guard both our hearts and our minds from attacks by the Enemy. Your gates, as you may remember from the introduction, include your ears, your eyes and your mouth. Things come into your city (i.e., your mind) through your eyes and ears, and things leave your city through your mouth.

If we allow the Enemy past our gates, he can do untold destruction to our hearts and minds. Maybe you remember the story about another city whose gatekeepers compromised when deciding what to allow in the gates.

The Trojan Horse

Homer and Virgil wrote about the famous battle between the Greeks and Trojans outside the gates of Troy. Interestingly enough, the war was started by Paris’ lust for another man’s wife. The Greeks’ siege lasted ten long and bloody years before they came up with the idea. It was simple but risky. Build a huge, hollow, wooden horse. Fill it with
Greeks, and get the Trojans to bring it inside the city gates when they thought the coast was clear. After building the horse and filling it with warriors, the Greeks set sail. They didn’t leave, though. They just hid out of sight until the time was right.

The Greeks were crafty. The horse was considered to be the sacred animal of Poseidon, and so it would seem that it was a gift to the sea god bestowed in order to gain them safe passage home. But the horse was also the customary gift left by a defeated general as a sign of surrender and respect to a conquering general. In case these two customs failed to allay the Trojan’s fears, the Greeks also left behind a spy. His name was Sinon, and he convinced the Trojan’s that the wooden horse was a gift. The Trojans believed him even though several prominent citizens warned the leaders not to accept the horse.

That night, the Trojans had a celebration worthy of the end of a ten-year war. Warriors, who normally would have been on high alert, let their guard down and went to bed sloppy drunk. When the Greeks realized that everyone was asleep, they poured out of the horse, opened the gates for the rest of the Greek soldiers and sacked the city.

The battle for sexual purity is very much a war and often more sinister. If our Enemy was flesh and blood, and God gave the call to engage in battle, we would rush forward despite our fears and fight to the death for our General. But as our Enemy is spiritual and unseen, we are poor warriors. We see the gift of the Trojans outside our gates and lust after it. We listen to the Enemy’s “inside man” (our flesh) as he tells us how great the gift will be. We listen as he tells us that we can’t do without it. We must have it, and what harm could it do?

We open our gates wide and pull the horse in ourselves, suffocating the nagging cry of our conscience that says, “Wait! There’s something wrong here! It’s too heavy. It’s too good to be true. Why would the Enemy give us a gift now after years of bitter bloodshed?”

Once within our gates, the Trojan Horse captivates us. We abandon all our defenses to admire the handiwork, to caress the flanks, to believe mistakenly that the horse is ours, all ours, to do with what we will.

Then, we go to bed, the horse still within our walls. In truth, once we let it past our gates, it will never leave. It becomes one of the many such horses we have allowed within our walls. Insanely, we repeat the folly of the Trojans over and over again, each time convincing ourselves that the horse can do us no harm even though we know better. We’ve cut the throat of our conscience, and left it dying - its still, small voice becoming stiller and smaller.

And while we sleep, gratified in our conquest, the belly of the horse vomits its contents. The Enemy’s henchmen scatter throughout our city, putting to the sword any good they come across. They find our marriage, a prize specifically sought for, and they put it to the sword. Unhindered, they make their way to the very center of our city, and there they find our relationship with God, the chief prize. Mercilessly, they hack away at it. It may
take dozens of attacks to kill it completely, but in our steadfast loyalty to the Enemy’s plans, we provide plenty of opportunity.

After the attack, we suffer agonies of loss in the most important relationships in our lives. But sadly, sickly, we look forward to the next visit by the Trojan horse. It helps us to forget our pain for a time, as we live in a fortress that looks strong and secure from the outside while it is filled with death behind its walls.

No one comes to our aid, because as they pass our city, they see only its outward strength. They don’t know about our nightly appointment with the Trojan Horse. But because our infatuation with the horse is progressive (we become dissatisfied with the horse we’ve been getting and we allow the Enemy to bring in a larger one), there will come a day when the Enemy’s victory is complete, and He will be content to tear down our strong walls and reveal the evil that is inside us.

Sounds bleak, doesn’t it? My apologies, but I don’t think I’m being overly dramatic. Because sexual sin can be so easily hidden, we tend not to realize how devastating it is to our relationships with our wives and with God. We are in a spiritual war with real consequences. As long as we allow the Enemy inside our gates, we give him tactical advantage.

**You Crave What You Consume**

There’s another problem with packing our brains with sexual stimuli. We are training our appetite.

Our appetites are the result of our diet. If you eat lots of sugary foods, you will crave the sugar. If you drink lots of caffeinated beverages, you will crave the caffeine. But if you train yourself to eat healthy foods, you will start to crave them before long, too. I’ve even heard of people who craved salad (though I’ve never experienced this phenomenon myself).

We crave what we consume. The more sexual stimuli you consume through your ear gates and eye gates, the more difficult time you will have controlling your thoughts and your behaviors. If you’ve been feasting on large portions of porn, you are going to crave visual images and/or encounters like the ones you see in the videos.

This is so unfair to our wives. Few (if any) wives can live up to the physical perfections and faked passions of the women in the videos and the magazines. When we allow those images in, our wives start to seem like a salad in comparison. Our passion for them dries up as we start to notice the weight gain, the wrinkles, their lack of interest or intensity… They no longer excite us like they used to, and we find that we can’t stay interested in sex with them unless we fantasize about someone else (or several someones).
When we give into lust, our appetites become insatiable. What satisfied us last week no longer satisfies us today. “Normal” sex bores us. We have to have more variety, more risk, more taboo in our sex life. Feeding our sexual appetite might require visiting strip clubs or watching porn or reading *Penthouse Letters* before we become aroused enough to have sex with our wives. Some of us have even asked our wives to participate in these activities with us “to add spice to our sex life.” (How tragic is it, men, that we have even tried to infect our wives with our disease?)

It isn’t supposed to be this way. God wants us to be satisfied with “salad,” and He created us so that salad can be incredibly satisfying if we operate within His guidelines. If salad is boring to you, that’s because you haven’t looked at all the ways you can dress it up. Your sexual relationship with your wife can and will be incredibly exciting, but you’ve got to trust God with it. Start by not forcing your wife to compete against the unhealthy images you’ve been ingesting.

**Forbidden Fruit**

Samson struggled with lust. You can read his story in Judges, chapters 3-16. His eyes were always getting him into trouble. First, he saw a Philistine woman and had to have her for his wife. He had no business marrying a Philistine, but she looked good to him—maybe because he wasn’t supposed to have her. Forbidden fruit always tastes sweeter (at first).

Things didn’t work out with his betrothed, and the next woman we find Samson with is a prostitute. Now, Samson was a Nazirite. That means that he was set aside by God for God’s purposes. His parents were instructed by the angel of the Lord to keep him free from alcohol and contact with anything unclean. While not mentioned explicitly, don’t you think the spirit of the law would include prostitutes? Another forbidden fruit.

The third woman we see Samson with was Delilah. She was a cruel seductress, who ended up trading Samson to his enemies for eleven hundred shekels of silver. When you read the story of her repeated abuses, you have to wonder why Samson stayed with her. His reasons were complex, to be sure, but I believe an overriding motive was that Delilah was a bad girl.

Other women probably didn’t excite him anymore. He had continued to draw his sexual lines further and further back until the only thing that turned him on was the danger Delilah represented and helped to create. He had to have known that she was no good for him, but that only added to her appeal.

See the downward progression of Samson’s lust. Once you’ve tasted the forbidden fruit, it will no longer satisfy. You’re going to have to find something further and further out. You’ll hate yourself for doing it. You’ll know that it’s destroying you, but it will be almost impossible to resist. Stay away from the forbidden fruit. It creates an appetite that can never be satisfied.
What we need to manage our appetites are rules about what we will consume. We need some gate-keeping rules.

**Gate-Keeping Rules**

*I said to them, "The gates of Jerusalem are not to be opened until the sun is hot. While the gatekeepers are still on duty, have them shut the doors and bar them. Also appoint residents of Jerusalem as guards, some at their posts and some near their own houses."* (Nehemiah 7:3)

Nehemiah created guidelines for when to open and close the gates. They were not to be opened until the sun was hot in the morning, and the gatekeepers were to bar and lock them before they got off duty at night. Waiting until late in the morning to open the gates ensured that the residents were awake and alert in the event of attack. Nehemiah also knew that nighttime was the time of a city’s greatest vulnerability. Closing the gates during that time kept evil influences outside the city walls.

I don’t know about you, but I find that nighttime is the time of day when I struggle the most. I’m physically tired; most of the stuff on T.V. is more sexually tuned; the more explicit shows are on later in the evening; my wife has already gone to bed… There are a variety of reasons why we should keep our guard up in the evenings. Like Nehemiah and the Jews, we could use some gate-keeping rules – not just for nighttime but for all times.

Gate-keeping rules are about avoiding temptation. They are designed to protect you from the infiltration tactics of the Enemy. They are not about legalism. Having rules about what you look at and listen to doesn’t make you any more or less of a Christian. They make you a smarter Christian.

Here’s a list of some rules you might consider for guarding your ear gates and your eye gates. They are organized by area of temptation and by degrees of intensity. The least intense tactics for avoiding temptation are first in each group. The most intense are last. Place a checkmark beside any gate-keeping rules to which you are willing to commit.
### INTERNET & EMAIL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sign up for an internet accountability service. * (The service will email those you designate with information about which websites you’ve been visiting.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get a pornography filter. *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have a professional clean your hard drive to remove cookies, spyware, Trojan horses and other devices that were loaded onto your system when you visited porn sites. (These devices can help pornographers continue to send you garbage even though you aren’t visiting their sites.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put the computer in the family room or somewhere else that others can see what you are looking at.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let your wife review your internet History (showing where you have been.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let your wife read your incoming/outgoing email whenever she wants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give yourself a computer curfew (and tell your wife about it).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancel your internet service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get rid of your computer.</td>
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### SUBSCRIPTIONS

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<tr>
<td>Get off mailing lists for catalogs that include lingerie and women’s underwear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask your wife to review magazine subscriptions and remove questionable pictures and articles before you see them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancel subscriptions to magazines with swimsuit issues (you know which one I’m talking about).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancel subscriptions to men’s magazines that show explicit or revealing photographs or publish articles that prompt lustful thinking.</td>
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### TRAVEL

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ask your wife to help you release sexual tension when you are struggling or about to head out of town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pray over your hotel room, bed, T.V., shower… when you arrive.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tape pictures of your wife and kids to the T.V. set.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Throw out the cable T.V. guide when you arrive at the hotel.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask the hotel to block movie access in your room.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make a list of shows you will allow yourself to watch in the hotel before you take the trip. Stick to the list.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commit to leaving the television off.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ask the hotel to remove the T.V. from your room.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schedule a regular evening call to your wife or accountability partner where you share how you are doing in the fight.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Only stay at hotels that don’t offer pay-per-view pornography or cable. *</td>
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<tr>
<td>Travel with another godly man.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commit to never be alone with a woman at meetings, at meals or when you are commuting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change jobs so that you don’t have to travel as much.</td>
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## MUSIC

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<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Begin listening to the lyrics of the music you enjoy to determine what messages the artists are promoting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read about music albums from a reliable source before you buy it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop listening to any music that has sexually promiscuous themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change your station presets to stations that play music with acceptable lyrics or no lyrics at all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Throw away or delete all music with inappropriate themes and lyrics.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen only to Christian music.</td>
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## MOVIES

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close your eyes / plug your ears during a sexual or visually revealing scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask your wife to pick out movies that are suitable for you to watch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read about the movie from a reliable source before you go to see it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliminate movies that are rated R specifically for sexual content, nudity and/or adult themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set a ratings limit for yourself (PG or PG-13). (Be careful, some PG-13 movies have heavy sexual content in them.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave the theatre or turn off the T.V. when you realize a movie is inappropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay out of the video store.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## TELEVISION & CABLE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read about T.V. shows from a reliable source before you watch them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask your cable company to block inappropriate channels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record shows you want to watch and fast-forward through inappropriate commercials and/or scenes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set a ratings limit on shows you can watch through your cable company or on your DVR device (i.e., like TIVO ®).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have your wife tell you when you can and can’t look at the screen to help you avoid inappropriate commercials and/or shows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn off the T.V. when you realize something is inappropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancel your cable subscription.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stop watching T.V. altogether.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## VIDEO GAMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Set a ratings limit for yourself (E, E10+, or T).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read reliable reviews about game content before you play or buy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk to godly gamers about games before you play or buy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade in or throw out games that you find to be inappropriate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INCIDENTAL CONTACT

| Avoid shopping at the mall. |
| Keep your eyes off magazine racks and newsstands. |
| Avoid channel surfing. |
| Preset your radio stations so that you don’t accidentally tune into a shock jock show. |
| Avoid “watering holes” where people discuss the latest racy gossip, movies or T.V. shows. |
| Don’t go through parts of town with clubs, bars, prostitutes… |
| Be where you are supposed to be when you are supposed to be there. |
| Make a covenant with your eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. (Job 31:1) |
| Avoid spending time with people who have lower standards than you in this area. |
| Throw away anything you shouldn’t have around the house. |

GENERAL STRATEGIES

| Read your Bible. |
| Memorize relevant Scriptures. * |
| Surround yourself with things that remind you of your love and commitment to your wife and family. |
| Let your wife look through your contacts and calls on your cell phone whenever she wants. |
| Let your wife review your credit card bills or go online to look at your account history whenever she wants. |
| Go to bed on time or even early if you were feeling weak. |
| Enlist an accountability partner, who will call you or who you can call during the times when you know you are going to be weak. |

* See Appendix for resources and recommended businesses.

Pure vs. Impure

*These searched for their family records, but they could not find them and so were excluded from the priesthood as unclean.* (Nehemiah 7:64)

Verses 4-63 of chapter seven list the exiles who returned. The list ends with Nehemiah’s note that those who could not prove their family lineage were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. Some of them may have been in the priestly line, but Nehemiah took no chances. Better safe than sorry, so he made some tough decisions and cut down the list of those who had access to the inner parts of the temple.
If the people in this metaphor represent our thoughts, Nehemiah’s example serves to instruct us to be ruthless about what we allow to pass through our minds and into our hearts. Only the pure should be allowed access. If it’s questionable, throw it out. There’s a good chance it’s from the Enemy.

2 Corinthians 10:5 says,

_We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ._

We have a responsibility to evaluate every thought of dubious origin. Where did it come from? From our spirit or our flesh? From God or from Satan? If it came from the latter, it’s got to go. A single thought can be the beginnings of a stronghold for the Enemy.

**Preventing Nest-Building**

At times, it seems impossible to prevent our minds from thinking sexual thoughts. Anything can trigger them… an attractive woman, a billboard, a store window… even a harmless comment. I’m convinced that the Enemy plays a part. He whispers thoughts into our mind, and he points out sexual images to tempt us.

While you’ll never totally eliminate sexual thoughts, you can prevent them from becoming Enemy strongholds in your mind. As John Wesley was reported to have said,

_“You can’t stop the birds from flying over your head, but you can keep them from building a nest in your hair.”_

Your first strategy should be to reduce the amount of sexual stimuli that you have in your environment.

**What kinds of T.V. shows and movies are you watching?** Even if they don’t show the sexual act, many are convincing enough to send us mentally where they want us to go. Comedies and comedians may be the most effective at programming us sexually. Humor disengages our spiritual defense mechanisms. I’ve found myself laughing at some really raunchy material before I stopped to think about what the underlying message was. Even our kids’ cartoons are full of sexual innuendo that is intended to entertain the adults.

**What printed material are you looking at?** Many of the men’s magazines on the market are full of pictures of women half-clothed and in sexual postures. Yes, I know you only subscribe for the well-written articles, but maybe it’s time to look for another resource. Lingerie catalogs still coming to your house? You know what to do.
**What music are you listening to?** As an adult, I’m continually surprised about the lyrical content of many of my favorite songs from when I was a kid. A large percentage of the songs I listened to growing up were about sex. While you may not have even listened to the lyrics, you can be sure that programming is going on. Like humor, music gets beyond our defenses. Nothing brings this out in the open more than hearing your six-year-old son belting out “My angel is a centerfold!” in time with the radio as you take him to school. I realized that moment that it was time to reset my stations.

**What types of jokes are you telling/laughing at?** What you find funny is a good indicator of your level of sexual purity. If you find yourself making crude sexual jokes with the guys or receiving and forwarding off-color emails to your friends, you’re lowering your spiritual walls. Ephesians 5:4 says,

> Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.

**Where are you going?** I’ve found that trips to the movie store make it more difficult for me to control my eyes. Every third video case has a woman with scant clothing or a suggestive title that promises sinful pleasures. The mall is almost as bad. In addition to the attractive women that patrol its halls, there are lingerie stores, curiosity shops and clothing retailers who love to put provocative images in their window displays. Are you regularly putting yourself in harm’s way?

I’m assuming in my comments above (maybe I shouldn’t) that you already know that you shouldn’t be watching adult movies, looking at magazines with centerfolds and visiting your local men’s club. Your conscience should have been telling you these things, but it’s possible that you stopped listening some time ago.

Your second strategy is simple, but it’s not easy. When the thoughts occur to you, shoo the birds. Don’t allow them to stop and build a nest in your mind. If you’ve ever tried to shoo pigeons before, you have an idea how difficult it can be. It seems like no matter how many times you shoo them away, they come right back. Lustful thoughts will do the same thing until you train your mind not to accept them.

**Deflection & Redirection**

The technical term for shooing the birds is “deflection and redirection.” God expects us to put up a fight. We’re not helpless. When our gates are attacked, we need to have a plan to turn back the Enemy. God will meet us there. Isaiah 28:6 says,

> He (God) will be a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.
Anytime Satan or your flesh launches one of those impure thoughts at you, deflect it and redirect your thoughts to something godly. Here are some deflection and/or redirection strategies and from whom I borrowed them:

- Pray for the woman who caught your eye. (Steve Farrar)
- Say to yourself, “That’s not God’s will for me.” (Kenny Luck)
- Say to yourself, “That’s none of my business.” (Me)
- Say, “Go away, Satan. It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.’” (Luke 4:8) (Mike Epstein)
- Bounce your eyes off the temptation and onto something else. (Stephen Arterburn & Fred Stoeker)
- Ask God to show you her flaws. (Stephen Arterburn & Fred Stoeker)
- Remember that she is someone’s daughter, sister, mother… (Steve Farrar)
- Distract yourself with other thoughts, e.g. “How ‘bout them Cowboys!” (Jimmy Johnson)

Use the combination of strategies that works best for you. I’ve found that deflection alone isn’t good enough. You need redirection, too. When you get rid of the impure thought, replace it with a pure one (like thinking about the Cowboys). Otherwise, the impure thought will be back.

**Replace What You Remove**

When you are in the moment of temptation, it’s not very effective to try to not think about what is tempting you. It’s like trying to not think of a purple elephant – you just can’t do it. You have to replace the thoughts with something godly.

There’s an old story about a man who had a friend come over and help him move all his old furniture into his garage.

“Why are you putting all this in your garage?”

“It’s time for a change. The old furniture got wet when my laundry room flooded, and it’s growing mold spores.”

So, together, they moved out all the old furniture.

A few months later, the friend was visiting the house and noticed that all the old furniture was back from the garage.

“What happened? I thought we moved all this stuff into the garage because of the mold spores.”

“Yeah, but after awhile I got tired of having nowhere to sit, so I moved it all back in.”
When we get rid of old habits and old thoughts, they create a vacuum, and as you probably learned in school: nature abhors a vacuum. We have to go back and fill that space with something good.

Remember the story that Jesus told in Matthew 12?

"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."

(Matthew 12:43-45)

Now, Christians can’t be possessed by demons, but we can be possessed by lustful thoughts. If we get rid of a lustful thought but don’t replace it with something godly, it’s likely that the lustful thought will come back (and it may bring friends).

**Guarding Your Mouth Gate**

*Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips.*

(Proverbs 4:24)

*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

*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. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.*

(Ephesians 5:1-4)

My wife and I are friends with a couple that we’ve known for years. They are a godly couple, and we love them dearly. Even though they live hours away, we try to get together each year during the holidays.

Because they have known us for years, they knew us when we were much more spiritually immature. In fact, they knew me years before I became a Christian. During the early years of our relationship, we developed a terrible habit of “coarse joking” with them. Our get-togethers were peppered with sexual innuendo and off-color jokes.

While all of us have grown in our walk, I’m ashamed to admit that this is an easy habit for us to slip back into when we get together. It’s a comfortable routine in our
relationship, and we’ve found it difficult to break. I really have to guard my mouth gate when I’m around them to protect me from the temptation to say inappropriate things.

Maybe you have a friend or friends like these. When you are around them, it’s like you take seven steps backwards in your spiritual walk. I mentioned earlier, our flesh loves habits. It doesn’t matter if they are good habits or bad habits. It loves the comfortable feel of them. If you find it difficult to break out of the “obscenity” or “course joking” habits with one or more of your friends, you might need to limit the time you spend with them. This gate-keeping rule isn’t just for your spiritual walk; it’s also for theirs. You might be a stumbling block to them, pulling them down into ruts that they thought they had gotten out of. If the friend is not a believer, what kind of example are you setting?

If the person you are saying inappropriate things to is a woman, you are in danger of a more serious sexual transgression. Sexual innuendo can be a way of testing the waters to see if the other person is interested. It’s an advanced form of flirting, like sending a messenger outside your city walls to see if the Enemy would like to come play. Even if you don’t intend it to be taken that way, the other person can misinterpret your signals. At the least, it can cause people to question the health or existence of your walk with the Lord. Don’t play with this verbal dynamite.

**GIGO**

You may have heard this expression before. GIGO means “Garbage In – Garbage Out.” It mainly refers to computers (i.e., don’t blame the computer…if you put in bad programming, you’re going to get a bad result.), but it applies to our mental computers, as well. If you stock your brain full of garbage, be certain that it will find it’s way back out – usually through your mouth gate.

I was teaching a leadership workshop several years ago, and I showed a video about two women working through a conflict scenario in an office setting. It was a normal (even boring) training video produced for the class I was teaching. I had seen the video many times and showed it to many groups of managers. There was nothing remotely sexual about it. So, I was at a loss for words when during my debrief on this particular occasion, one of the men in the workshop joked that the two women looked like lesbian lovers.

My co-facilitator and I talked about the comment after the class and we tried to figure out from where the participant had gotten that impression. In the end, we agreed it had nothing to do with the video and everything to do with the person. With that one comment, he revealed to a group of twenty or so peers something very telling about his private life. For him to have seen a lesbian relationship in an ordinary working relationship, he must have been programming his brain with sexual stimuli.

What we take in through our ear and eye gates colors the way we see the world. If we allow large amounts of sexual stimuli in, we start to see sex in everything. Innocent remarks take us places they were not intended to take us. Normal situations begin to
seem sexually charged. Typical behaviors from the women around us seem to be sexually motivated.

You’ve heard the principle “what goes up must come down.” How about “what goes in must come out.” The more sexual stimuli you pack into your brain, the more likely your mouth will betray your confidence through inappropriate comments, sexual jokes and innuendoes. And if your mouth doesn’t do it, your eyes will. When you see a man who can’t resist the urge to stare at an attractive woman as she passes by or who can’t seem to make eye contact with the woman he’s talking to because he is focused on her neckline, you can bet that he has been programming his brain when no one was looking.

Jesus was communicating this principle when he said:

“But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'…”

(Matthew 15:18-20)

If you allow garbage into your temple, it’s going to find it’s way to your mouth gate. Garbage In – Garbage Out.

*****

In the next chapter, we’ll look at strategies for strengthening your walls.
Chapter 8

Keeping Your Walls Strong
Nehemiah: Chapter 8

When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. (Nehemiah 8:1-8:3)

Nehemiah is describing for us the Feast of Trumpets, which occurs on the first day of the seventh month (Tishri, which occurs around September-October) on the Jewish calendar. It’s also known as Rosh Hashanah or “Head of the Year,” and it celebrates the new year and remembers the creation of the world. Jews use this time for self-examination and prayer. They face up to their sins and their mistakes and commit to returning to the Lord in these areas during the new year.

The secular parallel to this practice is the tradition of setting New Year’s resolutions. The Christian parallel is repentance. When we repent of our sins, we make a 180-degree turn and head in the opposite direction. We return to the Lord and commit to obeying His Word. While this may seem somewhat somber, it’s intended to be a celebration. It’s starting over with a clean slate thanks to God’s grace. Once we “confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

Obviously, we shouldn’t wait an entire year to get right with God. We should turn back to God as soon as we are convicted of our sin. The sin will eat our walls from the inside out, so keeping short accounts with God is an essential ingredient for strong walls.

Wall Fortification
Another essential way to keep your walls strong is to stay in the Scriptures daily. It’s the sword of the Spirit, which you can use both offensively and defensively to defeat the Enemy. Nehemiah knew the power of Scripture to change hearts and make the people more like God.
Many men have told me that the battle over their thoughts is unwinnable. They’ve tried over and over without success. Most think that there must be something wrong with them. Other guys don’t seem to be struggling like they are.

But they are! Trust me; most Christian men struggle mightily with their impure thoughts. They would tell you if they knew it was safe to do so, and if it weren’t for their pride. If you are struggling, terrific! You’re fighting the good fight. It’s when you stop struggling that you’re in trouble.

But how do you gain victory in this area of your life? We’ve talked about a few strategies already:

• Assigning gatekeepers
• Deflecting and redirecting

Now, let’s talk a little more about feeding your spirit rather than feeding your flesh. Remember the “dogfight?” The one you feed the most wins. Assigning gatekeepers and deflecting and redirecting are about starving your flesh. Short of a lobotomy, you may not be able to do much with the images that are already in your head, but that doesn’t mean you can’t dilute them.

You feed your spirit with the Word. Every morning should begin with a steady diet of God’s truth. I say every “morning,” because you need your armor on before you go into battle. If you are saving your time alone with God for the evening, you’re running the risk of going unprotected all day, and you’re gambling that you won’t be exhausted at the end of the day. God doesn’t want your leftovers from the day. He wants your first and foremost.

**First and Foremost**

Remember the story of Cain and Abel? Read this scripture carefully:

> Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. (Genesis 4:2-5)

God preferred Abel’s offering over Cain’s. Why? Honestly, I don’t exactly know, but I think I have an idea for at least part of the problem. Abel brought the fat portions from the firstborn of his flock. He honored God by sacrificing to Him his first and best lambs and not taking for himself first. Cain, however, brought his offering “in the course of time.” I don’t want to read too much into this scripture, but it looks like Cain kept God waiting.
God wants us to honor Him first. He also wants us to honor Him with our foremost (or best). God commanded the Israelites not to make sacrifices to Him with their lame, blind or spotted animals. It wasn’t that God valued the lame, blind or spotted animals less than the others, but He knew that the Hebrews would want to sacrifice these animals because they were worth less at the market. God wants us to honor Him with what’s hardest for us to give up, because He won’t be second in anyone’s heart.

There are three types of sacrifices we can offer to God. We can sacrifice our time, our talents (what God has gifted us to do) and our treasure (that’s cold, hard cash, gentlemen). We shouldn’t tithe our treasure by giving God what we have left over at the end of the month. (Who are we kidding? There won’t be any “left over.”) We shouldn’t tithe our talent by using our lesser gifts to serve others. And we shouldn’t tithe our time by praying in the last, exhausted minutes of our busy days. God wants us to spend time with Him when we are full of energy. We should serve Him first and with our best—our foremost.

If you’re like me, giving God the first and foremost of your day is a struggle. When I get up in the morning, prayer and study of the Word are the last things I feel like doing. My flesh cries out for me to go back to sleep, and the battle ensues between my fatigue and my best intentions. But God never said we could just obey Him when we feel like it. If we wait until we feel like it, we will never win this battle. Feelings follow actions, not the other way around. We have to practice obedience before we feel like it, but if we practice it, the feelings will come.

Guilt Trip

Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law.

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord.

Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve."

Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them. (Nehemiah 8:9-12)

The Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah) is meant to be a joyful time, not a time of mourning. In fact, Christians see in this holiday a picture of the second coming of Christ. It should remind us of the trumpet that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:52 that will
sound to call us to heaven. There won’t be any mourning on that day – only ecstatic celebration!

That said, it’s obvious from this passage that the Word of God convicts. That’s one of its purposes. It holds the mirror up in front of us and lets us see our sinfulness for the ugly thing it is. God doesn’t pull His punches. You can count on some of the many scriptures on sexual purity to take the wind out of you. But once our walls are up and we are following the Lord in obedience, there is no use mourning the sins of our past. We should rejoice that our walls are up and that our temple is safe.

There’s a difference between good guilt and bad guilt. Good guilt is from God and intended to convict us of our sinful behavior. It drives us toward repentance. It helps us restore our relationship with the Lord by asking for forgiveness and changing our behavior. Bad guilt is from Satan and intended to make us ineffective soldiers for Christ. It paralyzes us and lowers our self-image. It puts us in prison for sins that have already been forgiven.

How do you know the difference between good guilt and bad guilt? Good guilt occurs while we are sinning. It lasts until we repent and ask God for forgiveness. It’s like the pain you feel when you put your hand on something hot. It hurts, and you may hate the pain, but it serves an important purpose. It’s a messenger. It tells us that something is wrong and that we need to take quick and decisive action. If we don’t, the pain and damage will get worse. The pain also educates by showing us the consequences of our action. Hopefully, the pain is significant enough that we will choose not to do what we did again.

The pain associated with good guilt is a sign of God’s love for us. It’s intended to help us stay away from sin and its consequences. Unfortunately, if we ignore the pain for too long, we can kill it. Because God allows free will, He will eventually give us over to our sins. We can then sin without painful guilt, but the consequences are tragic.

One of the most serious problems associated with leprosy is that those who have it often lose feeling in their hands, arms, feet or legs. Without the pain messenger, those with leprosy can injure themselves and not even know it. By the time they realize their injury, the damage could be far worse and even life-threatening. Similarly, if we’ve deadened our good guilt, we can find ourselves so deep in our sin before God gets our attention that the consequences can threaten our career, our marriage, our health…

Bad guilt is very different. It’s a sign of Satan’s hatred for us, and it occurs in two types. Sometimes bad guilt is misdirected guilt for things over which we had no control or responsibility. Satan fools us into thinking that it’s our fault. Then, he condemns us over and over to lower our self-image and make us think of ourselves as terrible sinners.

The other type of bad guilt occurs after we’ve repented for sins we actually did commit. Satan makes us doubt that God could really forgive us even though Scripture tells us
differently. He deceives us into thinking that our repentance and renewed obedience isn’t enough to restore our relationship with God.

No matter which type of bad guilt it is, its objective is the same. Satan hopes that we will become so riddled with guilt that we will be ashamed to live the bold Christian life. He wants us to feel unworthy of God’s forgiveness.

**The Father’s Forgiveness**

Ever find yourself wondering if God can really forgive you after you’ve failed Him yet again? I do. I’ve learned so much about God’s limitless forgiveness when I repent (yes, even if it’s the 32,121st time) from my struggles with sexual purity.

Remember the prodigal son? You may have thought of him as a metaphor for the unbeliever who comes to know the Lord, but remember that he is a son. He was a son before he sinned and after. The prodigal son is a metaphor, true, but it’s for the believer who backslides.

As the story goes, the son asked his father for his full inheritance, an act equivalent to telling his father that he wished he were dead. Despite this incredible disrespect, his father gave it to him. The son took the money and squandered it through sinful living. When it was gone, he had to tend pigs to survive.

Think of that! A Jew tending pigs! Pigs were/are considered to be an unclean animal according to Jewish scripture. The son was desperate…so desperate that he considered eating the pigs food to ease his hunger pains. Standing in their filth, he realized that his father’s lowest servant had a better life than him. What he didn’t seem to realize is that he had been in the muck long before he went to work for the farm. His life in the fast lane may have seemed fun and exciting, but it was fleeting and empty. His father offered a dignified, meaningful life of service. It wouldn’t be easy, but it would come with lasting and satisfying treasures the youth couldn’t imagine.

The son decided it was time to go home and beg for his father’s mercy. He had his speech planned. He would confess his sin and ask his father to put him to work. He knew that he didn’t deserve to be treated like a son, so he was prepared to return as a servant. To his surprise, though, his father was waiting for him. Watching the horizon for his son’s return, the father saw him and came running. Embracing his son, he commanded the servants to throw a party, because his son had returned to him. All was forgiven.

Apply the metaphor to your struggles with sexual purity. When we persist in living sinfully, we are squandering our inheritance – our gifts and talents, the blessings of God, His plans for us…- but that never changes our position with God. We are always and irrevocably sons of the Father. So, even though you’ve been in the muck, wasting your inheritance, the Father will forgive you and welcome you back with open arms.
Greg Laurie, in his daily devotional, said this about the prodigal son:

_When the prodigal son finally went home, his father ran to meet him (see Luke 15:20). In that culture, it was undignified for an older man to run. But the father didn’t care about dignity; all he cared about was his son. The father smothered his son with kisses. Now keep in mind that he had been hanging around with pigs. This kid would have reeked. His clothes would have been tattered rags. His father could have said, “Go get a bath! Then I will hug you.” But he hugged and kissed his son in his miserable, stinking state._

What a fantastic picture! We come to God stinking in our sin, and God embraces us with His arms. You’re his SON! He loves you! He wants you back! Every day, He watches for your return. He knows you’re coming back, because he knows where sin will lead you (and, well, because He knows everything). He’ll take you back as many times as you return to Him.

**Spiritual Markers**

_On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priests and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law. They found written in the Law, which the LORD had commanded through Moses, that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem: “Go out into the hill country and bring back branches from olive and wild olive trees, and from myrtles, palms and shade trees, to make booths”- as it is written._

So the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their own roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the Water Gate and the one by the Gate of Ephraim. The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this. And their joy was very great.

_Day after day, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the Book of the Law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days, and on the eighth day, in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly._

(Nehemiah 8:13-18)

This ceremony is known as the Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths), and it’s named after the small shelters that the Jews created to live in for seven days. The festival remembers God’s presence during the forty years the Hebrews spent in tents in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. It also has a second meaning, because it falls during harvest time.
(September-October). Also known as the “Holiday of Ingathering,” it celebrates God’s faithfulness to produce an abundant harvest. Christians view this holiday as a picture of Christ’s presence in us and his faithfulness to produce an abundant harvest of new believers to the church.

Technically, Nehemiah and Ezra skipped a step. The Feast of Tabernacles is supposed to be held from the 15th day to the 22nd day of the seventh month (Tishri). Before that, the Jews were supposed to celebrate Yom Kippur (or the “Day of Atonement”) on the 10th day of Tishri. On this day, there would be a blood sacrifice for the sins of the Jews, and the High Priest would carry blood into the Holy of Holies. He would sprinkle that blood on the Ark of the Covenant, which held the Ten Commandments. That way, when God looked down, He would see the sacrificial blood, which covered the Law inside the Ark. (For Christians, this is a picture of Christ dying for our sins.)

It’s possible that Nehemiah and Ezra didn’t observe the Day of Atonement, because the Ark of the Covenant had been missing since the Babylonian captivity. There would have been no place for the High Priest to sprinkle the blood. In any case, Chapter 9 describes the full repentance of the people, so the spiritual discipline of repentance was not ignored – just delayed.

In Nehemiah 8, we have an entire chapter devoted to describing the observance of a few Jewish holidays. God was a stickler about Jewish holidays (see Leviticus 23), because He knew/knows so well our fleshly nature. God ordained the feasts to make sure that His people remembered Him and what He had done for them. They also look forward to what He’s going to do, and that’s some exciting stuff! They are spiritual markers, designating key events and disciplines that God’s people must remember and observe. They have the effect of drawing Jews closer to God through confession, repentance and celebration.

The Church on average has largely boiled these spiritual markers down to Easter and Christmas, and I’m not sure we’re getting the spiritual mileage that God intended out of those celebrations. Our flesh doesn’t want to take time out to think about God, but our spirit yearns for it. Spiritual markers are important, because they put time with God on the calendar. And as we know, if something isn’t scheduled, it usually doesn’t get done. So, schedule some spiritual markers during your year. Even if your church isn’t observing very many of the Christian holidays, it doesn’t mean your family can’t. Strong walls don’t stay strong unless we roll up our sleeves spiritually and work on them regularly during the year.

**Spiritual Entropy**

*I want you young men to bear in mind that it is the nature of a fire to go out; you must keep it stirred and fed and the ashes removed.*

~ General William Booth, founder of The Salvation Army
Entropy can be defined as “a gradual decline into disorder.” It’s a term typically associated with thermodynamics, but it has application in other areas, as well. It means that things naturally tend to deteriorate unless someone or something intervenes. If you don’t believe it, take a look at the house you live in, the car you drive, the roads you drive on, your manly physique… They’re all in a mad rush to return to the dust. You step in from time-to-time to do a little maintenance, but you’re only slowing the downward progress.

“Spiritual entropy,” then, describes how our spiritual walls tend to deteriorate without upkeep. You can’t coast in your Christian walk. It’s not a Christian “ride.” You have to put more work into it than that. If you stop building your walls, they start to erode. In other words, if you’re not growing spiritually, you’re dying. There is no status quo. That means that you have to develop your spiritual disciplines into habits.

I love the above quote by General William Booth, founder of The Salvation Army. He’s saying that if you want to stay on fire for God, you’re going to have to keep feeding the fire. Keep stirring it up. You do that with spiritual markers and spiritual disciplines. He also says that you have to get rid of the ashes – the impurities that are left over after God has put you through the fire. Remember, after the Valley Gate comes the Dung Gate.

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Hit the fast-forward button. We’re going to pick up the speed as we look at the next four chapters and a blueprint for getting back on track after we’ve sinned.
Chapter 9

The Four R’s
Nehemiah: Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 follow the series of steps Nehemiah and Ezra led the people through in order to honor God for the mighty work He had done through them. They provide a picture of the steps we should take anytime we fall in our efforts to maintain our sexual purity. These four R’s will help you get back into the fight.

Chapter 9 – Repent

On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. They stood where they were and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day, and spent another quarter in confession and in worshiping the LORD their God. (Nehemiah 9:1-3)

Following the joyful celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, the people came together for a time of repentance. They humbled themselves before God by fasting, wearing sackcloth (a comfy material made of coarse goat hair) and throwing dust on themselves. These practices were to show their complete poverty of spirit before the Lord. In this state, they confessed their sins and the sins of those who came before them. Then they stood for three hours while the Word was opened and read aloud. Those three hours were followed by three more hours in more confession and worship. In other words, they were serious.

And they aren’t done. The rest of Chapter 9 includes Ezra’s prayer, the longest recorded prayer in Scripture.1 When I grow up, I want to pray like that! Ezra doesn’t rush through his wish list so he can hurry and get on with his day. He puts the focus on God. First, he recounts the greatness of God (verse 6). Then, he remembers the goodness of God (verses 7-30). He finishes with the grace of God (verses 31-38).2 In the whole thing, he only makes one request:

"Now therefore, O our God, the great, mighty and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love, do not let all this hardship seem trifling in your eyes—the hardship that has come upon us, upon our kings and leaders, upon our priests and prophets, upon our fathers and all your people, from the days of the kings of Assyria until today." (Nehemiah 9:32)
That’s not to say that this prayer is the model for all prayer. It’s not. God isn’t looking for us to ignore our needs. He wants to hear them. What makes this prayer remarkable is the context. This was a time of repentance for the Jews. They are turning from the sins of the past back toward their great, good, gracious God. Ezra is also laying the foundation for the second “R,” – Recommit. He’s making sure everyone knows why they are about to make the commitments they are about to make.

The message of Chapter 9 is Repent. When you’ve turned away from the Lord through your sin, turn back. No matter how far you’ve gone in the wrong direction, He’s right where He was when you left Him. With humble spirit, repent. Acknowledge that God has always been great and good and gracious. Then, Recommit.

Chapter 10 – Recommit

"In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it."

"The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand- (Nehemiah 9:38, 10:28)


“…all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.

"We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.

"When the neighboring peoples bring merchandise or grain to sell on the Sabbath, we will not buy from them on the Sabbath or on any holy day. Every seventh year we will forgo working the land and will cancel all debts.

"We assume the responsibility for carrying out the commands to give a third of a shekel each year for the service of the house of our God: for the bread set out on the table; for the regular grain offerings and burnt offerings; for the offerings on the Sabbaths, New Moon festivals and
appointed feasts; for the holy offerings; for sin offerings to make atonement for Israel; and for all the duties of the house of our God...We will not neglect the house of our God.” (Nehemiah 10:29-33, 39)

If you skimmed the Scripture above, here are the cliff notes. The Jews committed to walking with the Lord by returning to four gate-keeping rules that would protect them from temptation. They pledged to:

- Follow the law of God given through Moses (10:28-29)
- Not intermarry with the neighboring peoples (10:30)
- Honor the Sabbath (10:31)
- Make regular tithes and offerings of different types to support the temple (10:32-39)

I told you they were serious. If the list of commitments is making you nervous, remember that they were under the Law. Because of Christ, we are under grace. You don’t have to work through this list when you recommit to walking with God. That said, we can learn from it. How much stronger against temptation would you be if you reviewed what made you fall and then established gate-keeping rules to guard against it?

As the old saying goes, those who don’t know their history are destined to repeat it. I mentioned it earlier, but it bears repeating. If you fall, learn from it. Search your wall for weak spots and post a guard. Rework your gate-keeping rules to make them more effective at keeping the bad stuff out. Plan your defense, and then stick to your plan.

Chapter 11 – Refill

Now the leaders of the people settled in Jerusalem, and the rest of the people cast lots to bring one out of every ten to live in Jerusalem, the holy city, while the remaining nine were to stay in their own towns. The people commended all the men who volunteered to live in Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 11:1-2)

Nehemiah knew that having the walls up and the gates guarded was only part of the battle for protecting Jerusalem and the temple. If there were no people living within the city, it had little chance to flourish and would be susceptible to attack. So, he took a tithe (meaning “one-tenth”) of the people by lot and had them pack their bags. In addition to those who were drafted to move, leaders were expected to relocate because of their responsibility to the people and some Jews volunteered.

In our battle to maintain sexual purity, it’s fantastic for us to build our walls to improve our relationship with Christ. It’s critical for us to guard our gates to ensure that the Enemy doesn’t slip in his poison through our eyes and ears. But if we don’t fill our
minds with godly things, the Enemy will see his opportunity. A city without residents is weak. So is a mind without godly thoughts and wisdom.

In one of my favorite scriptures, Paul writes:

> Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:8-9)

Paul was warning about our tendency to focus on the negative. We worry about what tomorrow will bring; we jump to negative conclusions about each other; we fear the unknown; we doubt… Left to our own devices, we’re a mess! The Enemy can plant suggestions in our minds and send us reeling. Paul knew that if we were focused on the things of God, there would be no room for what Satan wants to distract us with. Focusing on what is godly brings peace.

So, how do you focus on what is right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy? In addition to reading God’s Word, memorize It. It’s one of the most empowering things you can do spiritually. Locking God’s Word in your heart helps you avoid sin (Psalm 119:11) and gives you ammunition to defeat the Enemy’s next assault on your mind. It’s like reprovisioning your city after an Enemy attack or siege.

> How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O LORD; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. (Psalm 119:9-16)

When you have God’s Word in your heart, it’s so much easier to focus on Him. His truth permeates your life, and you see things from His perspective. Plus, it’s great for diluting the crud we’ve been packing in our brains.

**Chapter 12 – Rejoice**

> At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres...When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall.
I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate... The second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people...

And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.
(Nehemiah 12:27, 30-31, 38, 43)

Nehemiah got everyone together to rededicate the walls to God. And you’ve got to admit, the guy’s got some flash. He doesn’t just have a party inside the walls; he has the party on top of the walls! They would have been visible to all their enemies. You can bet Sanballat, Tobiah and Geshem saw them marching around on the walls – the same walls about which Tobiah said, “if even a fox climbed up on it, he would break down their wall of stones!” (Nehemiah 4:3)

When your walls are up, and you are following the Lord, rejoice! Celebrate it! Don’t worry that Satan will see you dancing on your walls. To God be the glory. They are up by His grace and mercy. I’ve found that the longer my walls are up, the harder I’m willing to work to keep them up. When I mess up, my recovery time is shorter, because I know what I’m missing.

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In the last chapter of Nehemiah, we’ll see how the Israelites do when Nehemiah heads back to work to check back in with his boss.
Chapter 10

Don’t Let Down Your Guard
Nehemiah: Chapter 13

On that day the Book of Moses was read aloud in the hearing of the people and there it was found written that no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be admitted into the assembly of God, because they had not met the Israelites with food and water but had hired Balaam to call a curse down on them. (Our God, however, turned the curse into a blessing.) When the people heard this law, they excluded from Israel all who were of foreign descent.

Before this, Eliashib the priest had been put in charge of the storerooms of the house of our God. He was closely associated with Tobiah, and he had provided him with a large room formerly used to store the grain offerings and incense and temple articles, and also the tithes of grain, new wine and oil prescribed for the Levites, singers and gatekeepers, as well as the contributions for the priests.

But while all this was going on, I was not in Jerusalem, for in the thirty-second year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I had returned to the king. (Nehemiah 13:1-6)

Nehemiah had been in Jerusalem for twelve years (Nehemiah 5:14). He had promised the king in the first chapter that he would return, so even though I’m sure he wanted to continue his work, he had to go. Unfortunately, everything started to unravel without his spiritual leadership.

It started with Eliashib subletting the temple of God to Tobiah. That ought to make you do a double-take. Remember Tobiah? Sanballat’s right-hand man. One of the big three. Worse, Tobiah was an Ammonite – a scriptural public enemy. Here we are only three chapters later, and the people have already broken one of their commitments from Chapter 10. Their first commitment was to follow the Law of God given through Moses. Deuteronomy 23:3-4 specifically states that Ammonites are not to be admitted into the temple.

How could Eliashib, the high priest…God's man…the man who was supposed to be the chief spiritual leader of the Jews…how could he justify allowing one of the Jews’ chief enemies within the city walls, much less a room inside the temple? The answer is found in Nehemiah 13:28:

One of the sons of Joiada son of Eliashib the high priest was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite.
Eliashib’s grandson was married to Sanballat’s daughter! Talk about divided loyalties! We’re not totally sure what a “Horonite” was, but scholars think Sanballat was most likely a Samaritan. That means that while he probably had a claim to some Jewish genes, he was not considered to be Jewish. Remember just a few chapters ago when the Jews made a covenant with the Lord? The second part of the covenant was that they would not intermarry with the neighboring peoples (Nehemiah 10:30). That didn’t last long.

And it wasn’t just Eliashib’s grandson. The end of the chapter tells of other intermarriages. Broken commitment #2.

Moreover, in those days I saw men of Judah who had married women from Ashdod, Ammon and Moab. Half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or the language of one of the other peoples, and did not know how to speak the language of Judah. I rebuked them and called curses down on them.

I beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. I made them take an oath in God’s name and said: "You are not to give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor are you to take their daughters in marriage for your sons or for yourselves..." (Nehemiah 13:23-25)

Why did Nehemiah care if the Jews intermarried with their neighbors? Doesn’t that seem a little prejudicial or even racist? No, Nehemiah’s motives were pure. This is not racial discrimination; it’s spiritual discrimination. His unbending attitude toward mixed marriage came from a desire to keep Israel from the temptation of following other gods. He knew the Israelites’ history and didn’t want to repeat it. After all, foreign wives were what led King Solomon away from the one true God and began the Israelites’ freefall into sin that eventually led to the Babylonian captivity.

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh’s daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. (1 Kings 11:1-6)

Because of his appetites for sex and power, Solomon took on 700 wives and 300 concubines in direct defiance to the Word of God. What a dummy! How did the wisest
man who ever lived get turned into such a fool? Survey says…ding! Sex – at the top of
the list. And believe me, it can do the same thing to us if we aren’t careful.

Sex can have incredible power over us – not just to attract us but to get beyond our
defenses, as well. Most men are incredibly vulnerable directly following sex, because it
unlocks the deeper parts of us that we don’t share during our more guarded moments.
(How else can you explain Samson’s incredible gullibility while he lay with Delilah?
Read Judges 16 if you need a refresher.)

If our wives want to talk about a sensitive issue, directly after sex is the time to do it. If
they want to ask us a probing question and get an unfiltered response, that’s when they
have the best chance. That intimate access is God-intended and allows for true oneness in
our marriage. But it’s meant to be reserved for the wife to whom we have pledged our
life. (That’s “wife” singular.) Solomon gave that kind of access to hundreds of women!
How many of them used that time when Solomon’s gates were wide open to talk about
the pagan gods of their people?

I’m convinced that one of the reasons why Paul tells us not to be unequally yoked is that
he’s concerned about the potential of our unbelieving partner to pull us away from the
Lord. In 2 Corinthians, he says:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and
wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with
darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

The word picture Paul is creating is one of two oxen joined by a wooden crosspiece or
“yoke.” The two are joined so that they can work as a team, probably to plow a field. If
one is strong and the other weak, the team won’t be able to plow a straight line. Unless
the strong ox is able to do the work of both, it will be pulled toward the weak ox as the
strong ox wearies.

Now consider what would happen if one of the oxen is dead. How difficult would it be
for the live ox to walk a straight line? Nearly impossible, right? That’s the metaphor for
the believer. Partner with an unbeliever in business, in marriage or in close, intimate
friendship, and you’re partnering with someone who is dead to the things of God. It will
be much easier for that person to pull you away from walking a straight line than it will
be for you to carry the weight of both of you.

Eliashib allowed his grandson, a member of the priestly line, to marry into Sanballat’s
family and become unequally yoked. Bad move. If Sanballat was a Samaritan, his
family didn’t use the same set of scriptures as the Jews. How long before that started to
create doubts in the young priest’s heart? Sure, it’s possible that Eliashib’s grandson
could lead his wife to the Lord, but it rarely works that way. It’s a lot easier to pull
someone down than it is to pick someone up.
Like a Thief in the Night

Nehemiah had left Jerusalem in good shape under able leadership, but the people got complacent after he returned to the king. They let down their guard at the gates, and the enemy was able to sneak in and make his home in the heart of the city – the temple. Tobiah didn’t scale the wall, after all. He entered through the gate, most assuredly with an escort and maybe a priestly one at that. We tend to let our guard down when we feel like we’ve got a temptation under control, but it’s almost always a mistake. An unguarded strength is your greatest weakness.

In the sixth and seventh centuries B.C., Sardis was the capital city in the kingdom of Lydia (now Turkey). It was the convergence of five trade routes and incredibly wealthy as a result. Legend had it that King Midas washed himself in the Pactolus River that flowed next to the city in order to rid himself of the golden touch that plagued him. As a result, the river was said to run with gold and bring riches to the people of Sardis.

The city protected its wealth in a citadel on an acropolis atop a fortified hill that rose one thousand feet above the plain. Steep cliffs surrounded the city on three sides, and there was only one point of access, a narrow neck of land to the south. Because of its natural defensibility, the city was called, “Sardis, the Impregnable.”

The king and the people believed that they were invulnerable while within the citadel. They had turned away many would-be conquerors who tried to lay siege to the wealthy city over the years. But twice, the city was conquered, and ironically, both overthrows occurred in exactly the same way.

Cyrus of Persia was the first to successfully overcome the stronghold in 547 B.C. Fourteen days after laying siege to Sardis, Cyrus instructed his officers to tell all the soldiers that the first man to scale the wall would earn a reward. Many men rushed to make it up the wall, but none succeeded. Then, a soldier named Hyroeades remembered that he had witnessed one of the Lydians accidentally drop his helmet over the side of the wall the previous day. Thinking he was unobserved, the soldier had come down the wall at the point that had seemed most dangerous and inaccessible to the Persians. Because of the tremendous height of the cliffs at this point of the wall, the Lydians posted no guard above it. Gathering his courage, Hyroeades retraced the soldier’s path and ascended the steep cliff. Once the Persians realized it was possible, many more followed and joined Hyroeades in sacking the city.

Three hundred years later, in 214 B.C., Sardis was captured again in the exact same way by the army of Antiochus the Great of Syria. His men scaled the wall at the steepest point and found it unguarded at the top.

While the people slept securely and unaware inside their fortress, Sardis was twice conquered by armies who came like a thief in the night. The kings and the people assumed that no one would attack them where it was obvious that they were strong. They
became complacent in their vigilance and only invested their soldiers in their weaker areas.

Like Sardis, we become vulnerable when we make the mistake of thinking we no longer need to post a guard. When we believe that we have mastered a particular temptation, we are in for a surprise. We can’t stop building our walls and guarding our gates. It’s a lifelong process. When Satan sees that we took our guard down, he’ll tempt us in that very area.

I distinctly remember a men’s group meeting where a brother in Christ confessed to an affair he had been having. Convicted by that evening’s study, he trembled as he unburdened his heart before us. He asked for our prayers to help him end the affair and tell his wife.

Afterward, a few of us met with him to discuss what needed to happen next. At one point, he referred to another member of our group, who had confessed to an affair approximately six months earlier. My friend said, “When I heard him talk about his affair, I said to myself, ‘That will never happen to me.’” Only a few weeks after thinking that thought, my friend was deep into sin and deception as he cheated on his wife. Remember, an unguarded strength is our greatest weakness.

**Tying Yourself to the Mast**

In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus had his men tie him to the mast of his ship so that he wouldn’t succumb to the Siren’s alluring song as they passed the rocky Sirenum scopuli islands. The Sirens were mythical sea nymphs who sang so beautifully that sailors would sail their ships into the island cliffs in an attempt to reach them.

Odysseus commanded his men not to untie him, no matter what he said, and he had them all plug their ears with beeswax. By doing so, he wanted to have his cake but avoid eating it. He wanted to be the only man to listen to the Siren’s song without giving in to its power. All others had succumbed to the irresistible call and met their deaths when they sank their boats on the rocks.

Odysseus was an idiot. Don’t try this at home. He got away with it only because the book was named after him and it was early in the story, but you can’t take these kinds of chances with the Enemy. You may think you’re above a particular temptation. You may think you are immune to its power. You, unlike other men, can handle it without falling. You’ve tied yourself to the mast and can experience the temptation and maintain your purity. It’s not true. You can’t tie yourself to the mast tightly enough if you are putting yourself in harm’s way. That’s exactly where Satan will come after you.
Nehemiah Cleans House

Some time later I asked his permission and came back to Jerusalem. Here I learned about the evil thing Eliashib had done in providing Tobiah a room in the courts of the house of God. I was greatly displeased and threw all Tobiah's household goods out of the room. I gave orders to purify the rooms, and then I put back into them the equipment of the house of God, with the grain offerings and the incense.

I also learned that the portions assigned to the Levites had not been given to them, and that all the Levites and singers responsible for the service had gone back to their own fields. So I rebuked the officials and asked them, "Why is the house of God neglected?" Then I called them together and stationed them at their posts.

All Judah brought the tithes of grain, new wine and oil into the storerooms. I put Shelemiah the priest, Zadok the scribe, and a Levite named Pedaiah in charge of the storerooms and made Hanan son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah, their assistant, because these men were considered trustworthy. They were made responsible for distributing the supplies to their brothers.

Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.
(Nehemiah 13:6-14)

Nehemiah was the John Wayne of Jerusalem. He didn’t mess around with sin; He dealt with it decisively. He threw Tobiah out, bleached the place and restocked the room with what was supposed to be in there. When he found out that the people weren’t tithing and that the Levites and singers had to resort to farming to feed their families, he brought in new leadership.

Now we know why the temple storerooms were available for Tobiah. The people had stopped giving to the house of God. (That’s broken commitment #3 in case you’re counting.) There’s a message here for us. If we aren’t giving to the Lord, our flesh will take up that space in our heart. I’m talking about all three tithes – time, talent and treasure.

You might as well give them to the Lord. If you keep them for yourself, they won’t bless you. There will never be enough time. You’ll be frustrated in your talents, and your treasure will evaporate. God’s only asking us for a small amount, and He lets us keep the rest.
Rich and Lifeless

In Israel, there are two major bodies of water: the Sea of Galilee (a.k.a. the Kinneret) and the Dead Sea (though both are really lakes). Although they are in the same country and connected by a common river (the Jordan), the two couldn’t be more different. The Sea of Galilee is fed by the Jordan River and teeming with life. It contains 27 species of fish, some found nowhere else in the world. Its sweet waters serve as the heart of the water supply system for Israel. Its shores are lush with vegetation.

The Dead Sea, on the other hand, didn’t get its name for nothing. There are no fish, no fishermen, no vegetation on its shores… It’s twice as wide and almost four times as long as the Sea of Galilee, but the Dead Sea is toxic and bitter – so much so that there is no life in it or around it.

Why? The Sea of Galilee receives nutrients and water from the Jordan River. It then empties back into the Jordan River, which begins again at the lake’s south end. The Jordan then takes the nutrients throughout the Jordan River Basin, snaking 200 miles before it reaches the Dead Sea. But that’s where it all ends. Nutrients from the Dead Sea stay in the Dead Sea. It doesn’t share any of its wealth with the valley below it. Seven million gallons of water evaporate from the lake daily in the hot desert environment, and the water that’s left is so mineral-rich that it can’t support life. Scientists estimate that it has a mineral concentration between 26% and 35%.

The two bodies of water serve as a good metaphor for a natural law. When you share your gifts and resources freely, you receive much more in return. Whatever you jealously clutch and keep for yourself stagnates and eventually chokes the life out of you.

“Sea of Galilee people” have an abundance mentality. They know that if they give freely, there will always be more coming their way. They never worry that the supply of blessings will dry up. “Dead Sea people” have a scarcity mentality. They fear that sharing their riches will make them poorer. What they don’t understand is that the only reason they were given the gifts and resources in the first place was so that they would pass them along.

If you want to keep it, share it.

Ferret Out the Criminals

In those days I saw men in Judah treading winepresses on the Sabbath and bringing in grain and loading it on donkeys, together with wine, grapes, figs and all other kinds of loads. And they were bringing all this into Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Therefore I warned them against selling food on that day. Men from Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were bringing in fish and all kinds of merchandise and selling them in Jerusalem on the Sabbath to the people of Judah. I rebuked the nobles of Judah and said to
them, "What is this wicked thing you are doing—desecrating the Sabbath day? Didn't your forefathers do the same things, so that our God brought all this calamity upon us and upon this city? Now you are stirring up more wrath against Israel by desecrating the Sabbath."

When evening shadows fell on the gates of Jerusalem before the Sabbath, I ordered the doors to be shut and not opened until the Sabbath was over. I stationed some of my own men at the gates so that no load could be brought in on the Sabbath day. Once or twice the merchants and sellers of all kinds of goods spent the night outside Jerusalem. But I warned them and said, "Why do you spend the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will lay hands on you." From that time on they no longer came on the Sabbath. Then I commanded the Levites to purify themselves and go and guard the gates in order to keep the Sabbath day holy.

*Remember me for this also, O my God, and show mercy to me according to your great love.* (Nehemiah 13:15-22)

Would you believe it? The people broke the fourth and final commitment they made in Chapter 10, because they didn’t honor the Sabbath. That’s serious stuff, because it is a large part of the reason why they got to take a 70-year field trip to Babylon. God instructed the Hebrews to take a weekly Sabbath starting Friday evening. He also told them to give their land a Sabbath rest every seven years. When they didn’t do it, He gave the land its rest by allowing Nebuchadnezzar to conquer them and take them away.

Nehemiah gave the merchants both barrels, even threatening to lay hands on them (not for prayer this time). He was either big enough or wild-eyed enough to make the threat credible, because he didn’t have to warn them twice.

Whenever the Holy Spirit points out sinfulness of any type in your heart, follow Nehemiah’s example. Kick it out of your city. Psalm 101 makes a good pledge for keeping your heart and mind pure. I encourage you to make it part of your memorized Scripture arsenal.

*I will sing of your love and justice.*  
*I will praise you, LORD, with songs.*  
*I will be careful to live a blameless life—when will you come to my aid?*  
*I will lead a life of integrity in my own home.*  

*I will refuse to look at anything vile and vulgar.*  
*I hate all crooked dealings; I will have nothing to do with them.*  

*I will reject perverse ideas and stay away from every evil.*  
*I will not tolerate people who slander their neighbors.*
I will not endure conceit and pride.

I will keep a protective eye on the godly, so they may dwell with me in safety. Only those who are above reproach will be allowed to serve me.

I will not allow deceivers to serve me, and liars will not be allowed to enter my presence.

My daily task will be to ferret out criminals and free the city of the LORD from their grip.

I use this psalm to remind me of my responsibility to God as His steward over my body, my mind and my heart. As a child of the King, I am not allowed to sin without consequence. I commit to protect my eyes from the vile and vulgar. I reject perversity, which is the distortion of what God has made beautiful. I will not play with sin. I’ll be careful about who I associate with. I will join together with other believers and hold them accountable for their walk with God. I will protect my heart from those (including Satan and his demons) who lie to me, and everyday, I will take every thought captive before Christ until my heart and my mind are pure.

The criminals for us are the sexual thoughts and images that hide in the deepest recesses of our minds. Satan enjoys having these emissaries on the inside, because he can call them up whenever it suits him. They readily join him in the battle to get within our walls, and they are usually the ones holding the gates open for him.

Each time you allow a perverse image, thought or sound into your head, it sets up permanent residence. I can vividly remember images of nude women from when I was in 2nd grade. I can remember an old, discarded filmstrip of a woman taking a bath that I found on the street when I was about ten. I can remember the text from just about any sexually explicit storyline that I’ve ever read. I can remember all the sexual scenes in the movies I’ve watched, the audio clips I’ve heard and the magazines I’ve looked at.

Those thoughts don’t go away. They might go into hiding as you work to become sexually pure, but as soon as Satan senses that you’re susceptible, he’ll call them up. They weaken our resolve like nothing else.

At this point, it’s important to say that there are things we can change and things we can’t change. In response to your petitions, God may purge your mind of all the filth you’ve allowed to enter, but I’ve never met a man who could say that this happened. It has to be very rare. More often, though God forgives us and delights in our commitment to become sexually pure, He allows us to suffer the consequences of our sin (e.g. David after the Bathsheba incident). What’s in there is in there. This is what you can’t change.

Instead, focus on what you can change. Work on diluting what is in your brain by adding in “whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is
lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8)

Diluting the Garbage
I did an object lesson once in a men’s group that illustrated this principle. We started with a small cup full of water and talked about how the clear water in the cup represented our minds as God created them.

Unfortunately, we allowed the vile and the vulgar to get beyond our gates. (I recognize that for some of us, this was involuntary at first, but at some point, we began making our own decisions about what to allow in our gates.) I demonstrated this by dropping in some red flood coloring and giving examples of the types of things we allowed in (sexual images, lyrics, sounds, text and fantasies). With each drop, the water became murkier and murkier until it was dark with the sin.

As discouraging as it is to realize how we have damaged the purity of the gift of our minds, there is hope. As we think about true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy things, God dilutes the negative effects of the garbage in our head (this was demonstrated by pouring in fresh water). Unfortunately, it takes much more water to purify the murky water than it does food coloring to darken it.

The hard fact is that walking in sexual purity is difficult and a life-long struggle. The good news is that it gets relatively easier the more we dilute the vile and vulgar that we’ve let in our gates. Satan can still call up old images, but we are stronger, and the struggle to “ferret out criminals and free the city of the LORD from their grip” becomes easier.

Build Their Walls – Guard Their Gates

What if your son were kept free from this draining fever in the first place, and all of his spiritual energy could be spent on God’s call in His kingdom?

~ Every Man’s Battle

I can’t conclude without talking about our responsibility to our children. If you’re a dad, your job is to build the walls for you kids and to guard their gates from the vile and vulgar stuff that’s out there. Unless they are older, they don’t know enough to do it themselves yet.

The pornographers particularly want your boys. They know that if they can get your sons exposed to pornography early, they create life-long customers. I’ve seen a statistic that says that the average age a boy is exposed to pornography is between thirteen and
fifteen. Pornographers are even willing to give away free samples if it means that they can hook your kids.

Remember when you first were exposed to pornography? Don’t think it was an accident. You didn’t just stumble across that magazine, or that filmstrip, or that video collection. It was strategically planted there for you. You were led to it by the Enemy.

My first exposure to pornographic material happened when I was seven. My mother had allowed a man to stay with us for a few months after he moved to Texas, because he had been a good friend of my sister before she died. One night after I was supposed to be in bed, I went walking into his room. While I was there, he showed me some magazines with pictures of nude women in them. I don’t think he meant any harm. In his eyes, he was initiating me into the things of men.

While there was nothing exciting about the pictures to me at that age, I believe seeds had been planted that dramatically changed the way I thought about women. What began as curiosity about the female body became fascination and then preoccupation.

As the hormones of puberty began to change my body, I was again exposed to pornographic material while visiting my older brother’s house one summer. He and his dad (we had different fathers) had dozens of “medical research” books with page after page of pictures including every imaginable sexual act. They even had reel-to-reel pornographic movies. Fuel was added to the fire, and preoccupation became addiction.

I began looking for new ways to view pornographic material. If left unsupervised, I found late-night movies on cable T.V., magazines stashed under a mattress at a friend’s house or sexual story lines in my mom’s racy novels (always three-fourths of the way through the book, a friend told me).

It wasn’t hard to find, and that was over twenty years ago. Today, it’s so much easier to find porn. You don’t even have to go looking for it. It will find you.

**Pornographers’ Marketing Tactics**

No one knows marketing better than the pornographers. They have somewhere between $2.5 and $10 billion reasons to get their product to us. A friend of mine once went to a workshop on a prominent college campus, where the speaker extolled the genius of the pornography dealers. He talked about how cutting edge their marketing strategies were and encouraged everyone present to study their lead. Let there be no mistake – there will be more pornography, not less, in the coming years. It’s hitting the mainstream.

Their marketing strategy is ever-evolving and increasingly effective. Here are just a few of the tricks they use to reel us in:

- Using innocent keywords in their websites to trick you into clicking on them while you are working on something else
• Buying expired domain names (even Christian ones) and using the sites to publish porn
• Purchasing domain names similar to popular sites (e.g., NASA.com instead of NASA.gov) and posting porn on them
• Piggy-backing on popular children’s site searches – sites like Disney, My Little Pony, Action Man or Nintendo
• Giving away free material hoping that you will get hooked
• Daisy-chaining sites so that clicking out of one only opens another, and another, and another…in an endless line of sites from which it is very difficult to extricate yourself (the technical terms for this are “circle-jerking” or “mousetrapping”)
• Hijacking you to a different site than you intended to visit (i.e., they own both sites, but the front site is just a façade to get you interested)
• Advertising in the margins on Google and other search engines when you do a keyword search
• Automatically making a site your home page
• Adding spyware, cookies and Trojan horses to your hard drive
• Sending pornographic spam to random email addresses (If you’ve visited a questionable site, this may not be completely random.)
• Offering “starter” videos (commonly referred to as “soft porn”) at your local video store
• Using bait and switch tactics (Recently, I was in a foreign country in a hotel that had a card advertising a movie popular in the United States. But when I turned to the channel where the movie was supposed to be, it was twenty-four hour porn. I was never able to find the real movie.)
• Sending friend requests using spam robots to MySpace patrons shortly after they log in

The pornographers have the dollars and the bright minds to invest in new technology. They know how to get the pornography to you. They are master marketers, who continually look for ways to make pornography low-hanging fruit.

In fact, pornographers don’t always care if you actually view their sites. If they can show their advertisers that their sites have more hits, they can drive up ad revenue. Just getting your computer to hit the sites helps them make more money…hence the popularity of some of the strategies listed above.

They know how powerful words are, so they changed their industry terminology to make it less offensive. “Soft porn” sure seems more palatable than regular pornography. “Mature” movies are for consenting adults. “Adult” movies even more so. Adults can do what they want, right? “Gentlemen’s clubs” seem much more high scale than striptease bars.

Pornographers know that by changing their vocabulary, they overcome some of our inhibitions. They confuse the lines between normal and abnormal, between morality and immorality. Because we don’t know where we should draw the line, we don’t know what to make of it when they call porn and sexual immorality something different than we’ve
always thought it was. While we are trying to figure it all out, they push the line further back.

A few years ago, Janet Jackson and Justin Timberlake had to apologize for allowing Timberlake to remove a patch covering Jackson’s breast at the end of their Super Bowl halftime show. I never heard them or anyone apologize for the indecency of the rest of the event. The dance moves were bumping and grinding and very sexual in nature, but we all forgot about that when we saw the closer. That’s how Satan works. He shocks us so that we forget everything that came before. The shocking action is simply a diversion so that he can slip the rest of it under the radar.

**Frog in a Pot**

You’ve probably heard the metaphor about boiling a frog in a pot. If you put him into a pot of boiling hot water, he would jump out immediately. But if you put him into a pot of cold water and gradually increase the temperature, he will be boiled before he realizes what happens to him.

We are the frog. Pornographers have been turning up the heat since the 60’s, but we haven’t taken a strong enough stand for sexual purity. We allow the world to embarrass us and tell us we are over-reacting. Sex researchers tell us that we are repressed and that we should loosen up a little.

As the Church, we can’t seem to come up with a good argument to counter the “consenting adults” line of thought, but even if it were true that we should let the world do what they are going to do, it’s not just consenting adults who are being impacted. The pornography industry has an insatiable appetite for revenue, and consenting adults aren’t a big enough market. They are coming after our children and anyone else they can reach whether we like it or not.

While pornographers may be working for individual gain, there is an undeniable coordination to the whole affair. Behind the pornographers is our Enemy, and while pornographers might think that they are autonomous, they are really serving him. Satan is seeding us. He’s seeding our children. He knows if he can get us to view it once, our curiosity will often lead us back. When we see how easy it is to find, we are more likely to try it again. A small taste leads to a meal, and before long, our appetite increases beyond what we can get on the free sites.

**Protecting Our Kids**

So how do we build walls and guard gates for our kids? Build their walls by making sure they practice spiritual disciplines, and take time to talk about spiritual markers with them. Guard their gates by teaching them what is inappropriate and dangerous in computers, video games, magazines, T.V., movies and other media, and then hold them
accountable for guarding their gates as best they can. Here are a few gate-keeping practices we’ve adopted in our family.

**Computers**
With all the junk that’s out there and the scary marketing tactics of the pornographers, it’s essential that you have a porn filter on your computer. If you don’t already, review the resources in the Appendix. Accountability reporting is great, but by the time you get the report, the damage will have been done.

In addition, I recommend putting the family computer in a high-traffic area of your home. Computers in kids’ rooms make it difficult for you to monitor their activity. Setting a password on your administrative sign-in ID is also a good idea. If you are really concerned, there are “big brother” software packages that track keystrokes, sites visited, chat streams and other information.

My wife and I aren’t cutting edge techies, but we try to keep up with new online trends that would impact our kids. MySpace is one of the more recent phenomenons we’ve been watching. We’ve seen personally how the medium can be abused, so I recommend restricting your kids from setting up a space. With all the predators and pornographers out there, it’s just too risky.

**Video Games**
I’ve found that it’s helpful to review games before you buy them. (There are some good websites for this listed in the Appendix.) You can also rent the games to get a general idea whether the rating is reliable, or you can talk to other parents who have already purchased the game.

A few years ago, one of my kids was playing an E-rated game that we had rented and that seemed fairly innocuous. I was barely paying attention, but my eye caught a glimpse of a billboard in the background graphics. It showed a nude woman with huge breasts. Her nipples were obscured by a building, but it was clear what I was looking at. I’m still angry about that one, because the image was insidiously placed so that kids would see it without necessarily registering what it was that they were seeing. It showed me that the ratings aren’t always reliable. You have to be familiar with what your kids are playing.

Another time, I made the mistake of purchasing a game named “Red Steel” for my son without checking it out first. He played it for several days and talked to me about some of the challenges. Something he said made me curious, so I had him play while I watched.

He was in a building, going from room-to-room killing bad guys. Though the game didn’t announce it, I realized his character was in a brothel. The women in the rooms were fully dressed, but each room had an adjoining room with a one-way mirror and camera equipment behind it.
My son had no idea what this meant, so I told him (he’s a teenager, and I’ve been fairly candid with him about the need for sexual purity). We agreed that the game wasn’t appropriate and exchanged it for a better one at the game store. Lesson learned.

**Magazines, Comic Books & Other Periodicals**

When my oldest son gets a gaming magazine, his mom goes through and pulls all the inappropriate pictures out. I follow-up and pull out the ones she missed, because she doesn’t always see things the way I do after years of struggling with sexual impurity.

None of my kids are much into comics, but if they were, I would review these, as well. I once tried to give my son some of my old comics from when I was a kid, and I was amazed at how sexually provocative they were. The women were drawn like super-charged Barbie dolls, wearing tight, skimpy outfits that showed everything that God had blessed them with. Pay special attention to the messages and images in the comics your kids read.

**Television**

When an explicit commercial comes on T.V., I tell my kids to turn their eyes, and their mom tells us when it is okay to look again.

If I walk past the living room while my oldest son is watching cartoons, I often ask him if what he is watching is appropriate. He’s into anime now, and some of what’s out there is garbage. He’s come to me several times and confessed that he saw a cartoon that had inappropriate themes or images in it. We talk about the cartoon and agree that he should not watch it in the future.

Recently, we had this talk about a show called *Naruto*. I walked in on my youngest son while he was shielding his eyes and desperately trying to change the channel without looking at the buttons he was pushing on the remote. Since the show was recorded, I watched it to see what had bothered him. It featured a character who lusted over women’s rear ends (with several full-screen shots of the women’s rears in skimpy shorts). In one scene, the title character changed himself into a naked girl to catch the perv in his lust. You could only see the girl from the shoulders up, but the show made it clear that she was fully naked.

If my oldest is doing a sleepover at a friend’s house, it’s likely that the rules are going to be more lax about inappropriate content. He has learned that he has two main strategies for avoiding these images: ask his friends not to watch the program or leave the room during inappropriate scenes. I don’t want to take him out of the world; I want to equip him to survive in it so that he can still be a light in a dark place.
Movies
We regularly review the movies our kids see before we rent them or head to the theatre. If we decide not to go to one that they were interested in, we tell them why (in age-appropriate ways). Occasionally, we will be surprised by a steamy scene in a video that we thought was appropriate for the kids. Mom fast-forwards through these scenes, and I can’t remember even one time when it interfered with our ability to understand the storyline.

Music
I let my kids listen to any genre of music they want as long as it is from a Christian artist. My oldest prefers heavy metal and rap, which is fine with me as long as the message is positive and honors God. I know this is more extreme than many families will want to get, so I recommend going online to review the lyrics of whatever music they are hearing. Music can program our brains and change our worldview, and we don’t even recognize it much of the time.

Give It to Them Straight
In addition to these gate-keeping precautions, I recommend that you talk honestly with your kids (your boys, in particular) about your struggles. My thirteen-year-old and I have had many discussions about how bad XXX videos are. One day, as we passed a XXX theatre, he said from the backseat, “Dad, you would never watch one of those movies, would you?”

I could have lied. Maybe he was too young to really understand. Maybe I should save this confession for later. If I was honest, it might undermine his view of all the admonitions I gave him about living purely. But I realized that it was important for him to know. It was important that we have a relationship of integrity where he knew that Dad had real struggles, which sometimes required him to repent and recommit to walking purely. So, I said to him:

“Son, I’ve seen those movies before. In fact, I’ve seen more of them than I could count or would really want to tell you. I’m ashamed that I’ve watched them, and I’m committed to never watching them again, but the truth is that I’ve made lots of mistakes in this area. It’s because of my mistakes and because I know how truly evil those movies are that I want to protect you from them. I don’t want you to make the same mistakes I’ve made.”

I’m not sure what he thought about my confession. He never said. He just absorbed the information. Dad’s not perfect. Dad makes mistakes. Dad’s done some pretty bad stuff.

If you are afraid of letting your son see your dark side, you may not be able to save him from his own. Your secret life is the Enemy’s most powerful stronghold in your life. Confess it, and your vulnerability leaves him nothing to hold against you. There is no danger that your son will one day stumble across your journal and be shocked at what he
sees there. He’ll know that his dad is a real man with real struggles, and maybe that is more to be admired than the superhero our son’s thought we were when they were knee-high.

It’s a more mature admiration that won’t fall victim to disillusionment. It sees us, warts and all, and recognizes that we are warriors in a battle with a powerful Enemy. Sometimes the Enemy wins a battle, and he may have even carried on a long campaign against us, but we aren’t done fighting yet. We know that our Savior has won the war and that all we have to do is keep getting up every time the Enemy knocks us down.

Be honest with your kids in age-appropriate amounts of disclosure. It will strengthen them for the fight.

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Last Thoughts
I hope you have enjoyed working through the book of Nehemiah from the perspective of maintaining your sexual purity. And I hope that you’ve gained at least a handful of strategies to turn back the Enemy at the gate.

The most important thing to take away from this reading is that God loves you no matter where you are at. If you are still stinking in your sin, knee-deep in the muck, God loves you as much as He ever has. He could never love you more. He could never love you less. As Max Lucado has said, “God isn’t loving. He IS love.”

Don’t believe the Enemy’s lies. Rebuke him when he tells you that you are unworthy of God’s love, grace and mercy. Never allow him to shame you for your struggles. Shame is a sin, for it says, “I am unworthy” when God says differently. He says you have the righteousness of Christ and that you are His son. Even if you’re a prodigal son, you are still God’s son. What you DO can never change WHO YOU ARE in Him.

With that assurance, build your walls and guard your gates. Go at the pace that the Holy Spirit establishes for you. He has started this great work, and He will complete it in His time. God bless you, men. May you experience the success of Nehemiah.
Sexual Purity Scriptures

Here is a collection of Scriptures I’ve found to be helpful in the fight for sexual purity. It will take you some time, but I recommend that you pick out your favorites and work on memorizing one per week. They will be of inestimable value to you during temptations, because the Holy Spirit will call them up for you in your time of need.

**Our Hearts / The Temple**

I have tried my best to find you – don’t let me wander from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. *(Psalm 119:10-11)*

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. *(Proverbs 4:23)*

As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man. *(Proverbs 27:19)*

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. *(Matthew 5:8)*

…For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. *(Matthew 12:34)*

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. *(Luke 6:45)*

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. *(Luke 12:34)*

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. *(Colossians 3:1)*

**Our Minds / Jerusalem**

Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain. *(Psalm 127:1)*

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. *(Romans 8:5)*

The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. *(Romans 8:6-8)*

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. *(Romans 12:2)*
Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. *(Colossians 3:2)*

**Our Thoughts / The Inhabitants of the City**

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. *(2 Corinthians 10:5)*

But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. *(Matthew 15:18-19)*

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. *(Philippians 4:8)*

**Our Relationship with Christ / Building Our Walls**

How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. *(Psalm 119:9-11)*

I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws. I hold fast to your statutes, O LORD; do not let me be put to shame. I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free. *(Psalm 119:30-32)*

In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. *(Romans 6:11-12)*

Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace. *(Romans 6:13-14)*

But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. *(Romans 6:17-18)*

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. *(Galatians 2:20)*
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)

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:13-18)

But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:15-16)

**Our Eyes, Ears & Mouth / Guarding Our Gates**

I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. (Job 31:1)

I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. (Psalm 101:3)

Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. (Psalm 119:37)

Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips. Let not my heart be drawn to what is evil, to take part in wicked deeds with men who are evildoers; Let me not eat of their delicacies. (Psalm 141:3-4)

Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. (Proverbs 4:24)

A wise man’s heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction. (Proverbs 16:23)

Death and Destruction are never satisfied, and neither are the eyes of man. (Proverbs 27:20)

He will be a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment, a source of strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate. (Isaiah 28:6)
Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. *Ephesians 5:4*

**Our Enemies & Spiritual Warfare**
For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. *2 Corinthians 10:3-4*

For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. *Galatians 5:17*

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. *Galatians 5:19-21*

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. *Ephesians 4:22-24*

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. *Ephesians 6:12*

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. *1 Peter 2:11*

**Temptation**
But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. *Matthew 5:28*

So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! *1 Corinthians 10:12*

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*

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. *Romans 8:9*
Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. (Romans 1:24)

The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:12)

Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature. (Romans 13:13-14)

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:22)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

God blesses the people who patiently endure testing. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. (James 1:12)

But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (James 4:7-8)

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it. (James 4:17)

**Consequences**

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. (Proverbs 5:1-5)

Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress
preys upon your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his
clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being
scorched?  (Proverbs 6:25-28)

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be
deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male
prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor
slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some
of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the
name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.  (1 Corinthians 6:9-11)

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you
put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by
the Spirit of God are sons of God.  (Romans 8:13-14)

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one
who sows to please his sinful nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to
please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in
doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.
(Ephesians 6:7-9)

Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will
judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.  (Hebrews 13:4)

Confession & Repentance
Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed
is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is
no deceit.  (Psalm 32:1-2)

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For
day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the
heat of summer. Selah  (Psalm 32:3-4)

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I
will confess my transgressions to the LORD "— and you forgave the guilt of my
sin. Selah  (Psalm 32:5)

He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a
rock and gave me a firm place to stand.  (Psalm 40:2)

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual
immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of
these, the wrath of God is coming.  (Colossians 3:5-6)
If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Accountability
Let a righteous man strike me – it is a kindness; let him rebuke me – it is oil on my head. My head will not refuse it. (Psalm 141:5)

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken. (Ecclesiastes 4:12)

The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (1 Corinthians 7:4-5)

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Hebrews 3:13)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

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)
# Appendix

The resources listed here are only intended to give you a head start guarding your gates. I don’t recommend any vendors in particular. Please do some research and comparison to find out which providers meet your individual needs.

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* Allows you to search for porn-free hotels by city.

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Notes

Preface

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