

Mid-Morning
Dr. Mitch Kruse
Three Habits of Highly Destructive People (1 John 2:15-17)
Habit #1: Pleasure

Do you pursue satisfaction of your desires apart from God? In our fallen nature, we lust for sex outside God's design. We crave food beyond that which is healthy, life-giving, and nutritional. We restrict intake in order to feel thin. We pursue the rush of a drug or the escape of alcohol in attempts to make our bodies feel gratified apart from God. We even over-train, often addicted to the chemical release that exercise offers. The pursuit of physical pleasure apart from God leaves us wanting more and more of our fix of choice in order to feel a greater rush.

The Apostle John called this the lust of the flesh, the first of three habits of highly destructive people: "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and *also* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17 NASB).

Did you catch that? The lust of the flesh is not from the Father, but from the world, *kosmos* in Greek, meaning that which is opposed to God. The world and its lusts are temporary. While a life of gratifying these desires might occasionally feel good in the short-term, it carries long-term consequences, namely death, eternal separation from God. However, those who embrace the Father's love and do His will experience eternal life. Consequently, each of us is faced with a choice regarding our bodies: Do we pursue the world's *lust* of the flesh and its pleasures or the Father's *love*?

Solomon referenced this choice regarding what we take into our bodies when he admonished: "Whoever loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and olive oil will never be rich" (Proverbs 21:17). When facing sexual temptation, Solomon taught men: "Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes" (Proverbs 6:25). Men are attracted by sight; women desire pursuit and nurture that pursuit.

In our western culture, we are bombarded with the message that sexual gratification outside God's design is normal and satisfying. The Apostle Paul taught believers living in one of the most promiscuous societies in history: "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:18-20). God paid a world-record price in Christ for us to be redeemed from our plight, so that we might pursue His love over the lust of the flesh.

Regarding our physical tension, Paul put it this way: "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). When tempted by the lust of the flesh, we need to seek God's doorway out. The path to that doorway is lit by the Holy Spirit who unlocks the door and leads us to Christ. Pursuing the heart of Christ transforms our focus. Paul summarized: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Christ is the solution to our conflict. Paul imparted: "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Romans 13:14 NASB). The NIV translates the latter part of his command as: "Do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." We need to say, "yes" to Christ who empowers us to say, "no" to the lust of the flesh. Christ is ready, willing, and able to deliver us from our worldly temptations. He transforms our minds when we surrender every thought to Him: "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).

We experience the hope of Christ through: (1) the Word of God, (2) the people of God, and (3) the Spirit of God. We connect with the Word of God when we read the wisdom of the Bible. Jesus quoted Scripture when He was tempted by Satan. Memorizing verses from the Bible is one of our most powerful tools to learn wisdom and combat the lust of the flesh. We connect with the people of God when we enter into mutual-submission with another Christ-follower. We connect with the Spirit of God when we pray, modeling Christ's prayer of confidence in the loving Father who leads us away from temptation and delivers us from evil (Matthew 6:13). When we humble our hearts to the Spirit of God, His wisdom will flow through us: "Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord a man avoids evil" (Proverbs 16:6).

Street Smarts for The Restoration Road

What physical temptation is luring you toward life apart from God? Regardless of how dark it is, a glimmer of God's light is shining through. Turn toward the light. The Holy Spirit is guiding you toward the doorway to freedom. Confess your sin to your heavenly Father and a trusted friend. Develop a restoration plan that leads you to God's design of abundant and eternal life. The Word of God, the people of God, and the Spirit of God will make you new again and use you to bring His light to others.