

*New Life Ministries and
Every Man's Battle present*

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to be different

Every Man's Battle 4-Week Bible Study

Week One: *We Dared to Challenge Our Sexual Standards*

Week Two: *We Dared to Challenge Our Eyes*

Week Three: *We Dared to Challenge Our Minds*

Week Four: *We Dared to Challenge Our Hearts*

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Every Man's Battle

4-Week Bible Study

The fight for sexual integrity is indeed every man's battle. The following study is a four week study based on the book, *Every Man's Battle*, designed for men (post-high school) to gather once a week and discuss six short daily readings in between meetings. All you need is a willing spirit, a time and place to meet, and someone willing to start a discussion. You could meet at church with other men, with a group of buddies from your softball league, a group of neighbors, or the guys you work with. Take an hour a week and review what you read the previous six days, what it meant to you, and together share your answers to each day's questions and any insight you gained, or something you became aware of that you never thought of before.

Share your cell phone numbers and call one another when those temptations come along and you need someone to call who might give you a quick word of encouragement and a reminder that you can win this battle! Let us know how it goes. For more information, check out WeDared.com. And if we can help you along the way or when your study is over, call us at (800) NEW-LIFE (639-5433).

Week One: *We Dared* to Challenge Our Sexual Standards

Have you examined your standards when it comes to sexual purity? Have you challenged the way you view sex? This is the first step towards sexual purity.

1. *Mixing Standards.*

For most of us, becoming ensnared by sexual sin happened easily and naturally, like slipping off an icy log. Why is that? As we'll see later, our maleness brings us a natural vulnerability to sexual sin. But for now let's explore how the fickle human heart makes us vulnerable as well. Perhaps you've mustered the hope that you would someday be free from sexual sin and expected to grow out of it as naturally as you grew into it— like outgrowing acne. Perhaps you waited with each birthday for your sexual impurity to clear up. It never did. Later you assumed you'd be freed naturally through marriage. But—as for many of us—that didn't happen either.

In what ways have you hoped, or tried, to get rid of sexual temptation?

2. *Misplaced Confidence.*

When Mark signed up for my pre-marriage class, he told me, *“The whole problem of impurity has been a mess. I've been hooked for years, and I'm counting on marriage to free me. I'll be able to have sex whenever I want it. Satan won't be able to tempt me at all!”* When we got together a few years later, I wasn't surprised to hear that marriage hadn't fixed the problem. *“You know, Fred, my wife doesn't desire sex as often as I do,”* he said. Oh, really? *“I don't want to seem like a sex addict or anything, but I probably have as many unmet desires now as I did before marriage. On top of all that, some areas of sexual exploration seem embarrassing or immodest to her. Sometimes she even calls them ‘kinky.’ I think she's rather prudish, but what do I say?”* In our experience, not much!

If you've tried to get rid of sexual temptation (for example, that marriage would take it away, or prayed that God would take it away) why do you think you've failed?

3. *Marriage: No Sexual Nirvana.*

That marriage doesn't eliminate sexual impurity comes as no surprise to married men, although it does for teens and young singles. Ron, a youth pastor in Minnesota, said that when he challenges young men to be sexually pure, their response is, *“That's easy for you to say, Pastor. You're married! You can have sex anytime you want!”* Young singles believe that marriage creates a state of sexual nirvana. If only it were so.

First of all, sex has different meanings to men and women. Men primarily receive intimacy just before and during intercourse. Women gain intimacy through touching, sharing, hugging, and communication. Is it any wonder that the frequency of sex is less important to women than to men? Because of the differences between men and women, forming a satisfying sex life in marriage is hardly a slam dunk. It's more like making a half-court shot.

Second, life throws hard curves. Lance married his sweetheart only to find that his wife had a structural deficiency that made intercourse very painful. It took surgery and months of rehabilitation to correct the problem. For Bill, his wife once became so ill that he couldn't have intercourse for eight months. Did these circumstances free Lance and Bill to say, *“God, I'll just keep using pornography until You heal my wife?”* We don't think so.

Third, your wife may suddenly become much different from the woman you courted. Larry, a strapping, handsome young pastor in Washington, D.C., has a great Christian heritage. His father is a wonderful pastor, and Larry was thrilled when God also called him into the ministry. When Larry met Linda, a striking blond bombshell, they appeared meant for each other, a regular Ken and Barbie set. After their wedding day, however, Larry found Linda to be far more interested in her career than in fulfilling him sexually. Not only was she disinterested in sex, she often used it as a manipulative weapon to get her own way. Consequently, Larry doesn't have sex very often. Twice a month is a bonanza,

and once every two months is the norm. What's Larry supposed to say to God? "*Lord, Linda is being ungodly! Change her, and then I'll stop masturbating!*" Hardly. Marriage didn't satisfy Larry's sexual needs, but God still expects purity.

Your purity must not depend upon your mate's health or desire. God holds you responsible, and if you don't gain control before your wedding day, you can expect it to crop up after the honeymoon. If you're single and watching sensual R-rated movies, wedded bliss won't change this habit. If your eyes lock on passing babes, they'll still roam after you say "*I do.*" You're masturbating now? Putting that ring on your finger won't keep your hands off yourself.

What are some unrealistic expectations that you (or other men) have about sex and marriage? Have you been living with a mixed set of sexual standards? What are they? Are you seeing the need to change them to God's standard and be consistent?

4. What's Going on Here?

When marriage doesn't immediately solve our problem, we cling to the hope that, given enough time, marriage may yet free us. Andy told us, "*I once read that a man's sex drive drops in his thirties and forties, while a woman's sex drive reaches its peak during that time. For a while, I thought that Jill and I would meet in some blissful middle ground. It didn't happen.*" But freedom from sexual sin rarely comes through marriage or the passage of time. (The phrase "*dirty old man*" should tell us something about that.) So if you're tired of sexual impurity and of the mediocre, distant relationship with God that results from it, quit waiting for marriage or some hormone drop to save the day. If you want to change, recognize that you're impure because you've diluted God's standard of sexual purity with your own. That's the first of three reasons we'll look at for how easily men fall into sexual sin. We've said earlier that God's standard is that we avoid every hint of sexual immorality in our lives. If we followed this standard, we would never see sexual bondage. So we should be amazed that so many Christian men are under that bondage. Our heavenly Father is amazed. Here's our paraphrase of some questions God asked (in Hosea 8: 5-6) that reveal His amazement: What is going on here? Why are my children choosing to be impure? They are Christians, for heaven's sakes! When are they going to start acting like it? God knows we're Christians and that we can choose to be pure. So why don't we? We aren't victims of some vast conspiracy to ensnare us sexually; we've simply chosen to mix in our own standards of sexual conduct with God's standard. Since we found God's standard too difficult, we created a mixture— something new, something comfortable, something mediocre.

What are some of the ways that we as Christian men have settled for less by compromising our sexual standards?

5. Naïve, Rebellious, Careless.

Why do we so easily mix in our own standards with God's? Why are we so soft in our choices regarding sexual sin? Sometimes we're simply naive. Do you remember seeing the animated Disney classic, *Pinocchio*, when you were growing up? Pinocchio knew it was the right thing for all little boys to go to school. On his way there, however, he met some scoundrels who painted a wonderful picture of spending the day at a place called Adventure Island, a sort of amusement park just offshore. They gave Pinocchio a free ticket on the ferry over, but he didn't know that at day's end all the boys would be turned into donkeys and be sold to pull carts in the coal mines for the rest of their lives.

Likewise, we can be naive and foolish regarding God's standard for sexual purity as we stumble blindly into wrong "*because everyone else is doing it.*" But sometimes you choose wrong sexual standards not because you're naive, but simply because you're rebellious. You're like Lampwick, a swaggering boy who takes the lead in diverting Pinocchio to Adventure Island. Lampwick comes across as distasteful from the moment he appears on the screen with his macho posturing, spitting, and sneering little voice. You ask yourself, where are his parents? Why don't they do something? You know he's fully aware of the evil he's doing. Whatever the aftermath, he richly deserves it.

How have friends influenced you to water down God's standards for sexual purity? How do you react when men around you make sexual comments about women, or inappropriate sexual jokes? How should you react?

6. Destruction & Loathing.

Whether you've been naive, rebellious, or foolishly negligent in taking God's standard seriously, mixing in your own standards leads to being ensnared, and even worse.

Mixing standards can destroy a nation. When the Israelites left Egypt and were led to the Promised Land, God told them to cross the Jordan River and destroy every evil thing in their new homeland. That meant killing all the heathen people and crushing their gods to powder. God warned them that if they failed to do this, their culture would "mix" with the pagans and they would adopt their depraved practices.

But the Israelites failed to destroy everything. They found it easier and easier to stop short. In time, the things and people left undestroyed became a snare. The Israelites became adulterous in their relationship to God and repeatedly turned their backs on Him.

As promised, He removed them from their land. But just before the destruction of Jerusalem and the final deportation of her inhabitants, God prophesied this about His people in their coming captivity:

"Then in the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape will remember me— how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done." (Ezekiel 6: 9)

When we entered the Promised Land of our salvation, we were told to eliminate every hint of sexual immorality in our lives. Since entering that land, have you failed to crush sexual sin-every hint of it? If not, have you come to the point of loathing yourself for that failure? If that's where you are, you should be hopeful!

What are some of the standards God wants us to have concerning sex? What are some of the consequences for not following God's standards of sexual purity?

Week Two: *We Dared* to Challenge Our Eyes

To challenge our eyes, we need to understand the four steps of how sin has affected the way we're naturally wired as men to be visually stimulated.

1. Our Very Maleness.

Before I even knew that my wife, Brenda, was pregnant with our fourth child, I became convinced through prayer that our future child would be a boy—and our second son. I was so convinced of this that, during Brenda's pregnancy, I told this to her and to a few close friends. As delivery day neared, the pressure rose. "*Why did I tell everyone?*" I whined. "*What if it's a girl? What if I'm wrong?*" With the start of Brenda's labor pains, the pressure on me seemed to double every minute. Finally, standing under the bright lights of the delivery room and watching a little head crowning toward birth, I knew the moment of truth was near. The baby came out face up. Good, I thought. I'll have a perfect view. Anxious, I gently urged Brenda, "*Come on, sweetheart. Push a little more.*" The shoulders emerged. Just a few more inches, I thought. And then? Auugh! What are you doing, Doctor? He turned the baby toward himself at the last moment, just as the hips and legs popped out. Now I could only see the baby's back. C'mon, c'mon, I cried out inside. The doctor and nurse maddeningly said nothing. Methodically and efficiently, they dried the baby, suctioned the throat, and slapped a silly little cap on the newborn. When the doctor finally presented our new child to me, the legs were flopping apart. Immediately looking down, I just had to know. "*It's a boy!*" I exclaimed. Michael is now eight years old, and his older brother, Jasen, is sixteen, and I can assure you they definitely are both males. As I raise them, I'm aware of the natural tendencies inherent to maleness that will touch every aspect of sexual purity for them, just as they do for me. Our very maleness—and four male tendencies in particular—represent the reason for the pervasiveness of sexual impurity among men.

To challenge our eyes, we need to understand these four tendencies and how sin has affected the way we're naturally wired as men to be visually stimulated.

Where is your heart since you started this study? Are you feeling encouraged that there's an answer to why we do what we do as men? Or are you feeling discouraged because it seems overwhelming? Share what you're feeling in your heart at this point.

2. We Are Rebellious By Nature.

When Paul explained to Timothy that, "*Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner*" (1 Timothy 2: 14), he was noting that Adam wasn't being tricked when he ate of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Adam knew it was wrong, but he ate it anyway. In the millennia since then, all of Adam's sons tend to be just as rebellious.

Our maleness brings a natural, uniquely male form of rebelliousness. This natural tendency gives us the arrogance needed to stop short of God's standards. As men, we'll often choose sin simply because we like our own way.

While our natural rebelliousness provides the arrogance necessary to stop short of God's standards, our natural dislike of a life of purity gives us the desire to stop short and to instead experience the temporary pleasures of sin.

How do you see men rebel sexually in our culture? How have you rebelled? How do you want to be different from the culture?

3. We (Men) Have A Strong, Regular Sex Drive.

In *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*, Dr. Dobson writes, "*When sexual response is blocked, males experience an accumulating physiological pressure which demands release. Two seminal vesicles (small sacs containing semen) gradually fill to capacity; as maximum level is reached, hormonal influences sensitize the man to all sexual stimuli.*"

For most men, this buildup to heightened sexual desire takes only about seventy-two hours.

This pressure men experience does not justify seeking release through pornography or masturbation. The body has built-in mechanisms of release (including nocturnal emissions and overflow into the urine), and in fact I've talked with many single men who, by consistently keeping their eyes and minds pure of sensual things, haven't had sex or masturbated for years. The pressure "*dries up*," they say. Still, it's important for all men to realize how the cycle of pressure can escalate our sensitivity to temptation. After having sex on Sunday night, you drive to work Monday morning and, without much reaction, notice a new billboard with a foxy babe. But after three sexless nights, seeing that babe on Thursday's drive gets your "*motor*" running, and she may even pop in and out of your mind all day.

Your body isn't reliable for any spiritual battle, much less the battle for sexual purity and obedience. We easily identify with Paul: "*When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am!*" (Romans 7: 21-24) Your body often breaks ranks, acting as a traitor engaging in battle against you. This tendency pushes our sexual drive to ignore God's standards. When this sexual drive combines with our natural male arrogance and our natural male desire to drift from the straight life, we're primed and fueled for sexual captivity and disobedience.

How do men use this as an excuse? How does God help us with our sex drive?

4. We Receive Sexual Gratification Through Our Eyes.

Your eyes give you the means to sin broadly and at will. You don't need a date or a mistress. You don't ever need to wait. You have your eyes and can draw sexual gratification through them at any time. You're turned on by female bodies in any way, shape, or form. You aren't picky. Excitement can come in a photograph of a naked stranger just as easily as in a romantic interlude. You have a visual ignition switch when it comes to viewing the female anatomy.

Women seldom understand this because they aren't sexually stimulated in the same way. Their ignition switches are tied to touch and relationship. They view this visual aspect of our sexuality as shallow and dirty, even detestable. Often, a husband's effort to put a positive spin on this "*vision factor*" by suggesting his wife use it to advantage in the bedroom is met with disdainful scorn. Lisa, for instance, said, "*So I suppose I have to buy one of those cheap teddies and prance around like some saloon girl!*" Visual sexual gratification is no laughing matter in your fight for sexual purity. Given what the sight of nudity does to the pleasure centers of our brain, and these days it's pretty easy to see many naked or near-naked women. It's no wonder our eyes and mind resist control.

What are some of the differences you noticed between men and women when it comes to sex? Have you tried bouncing your eyes? How does bouncing and starving your eyes help with sexual temptation?

5. Impurity Of Our Eyes Is Visual Foreplay.

For males, impurity of the eyes is sexual foreplay, because foreplay is any sexual action that naturally takes us down the road to intercourse. Foreplay ignites passions, rocketing us by stages until we go all the way. God views foreplay outside of marriage as wrong. We get a glimpse of this in Ezekiel 23:3, where God, to portray the waywardness of His chosen people, uses the picture of virgins in passionate sin: "*In that land their breasts were fondled and their virgin bosoms caressed.*" (If you've ever argued that God doesn't address "*petting*" in the Bible, let Ezekiel 23: 3 serve to correct your thinking.)

Just as instructive is the overall thrust of New Testament teaching on sexual purity and the application of these standards mentally as well as physically. From God's viewpoint, sex is more than intercourse.

What acts constitute foreplay? Clearly, “caressing the breasts” is foreplay. Why? Intercourse is likely to follow. Remember the standard Jesus set? “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5: 27-28).

In what ways can visual stimulation feel like foreplay? What kind of feelings and physical reactions can our eyes cause us when we look at sexual images?

6. Breaking Promises.

If you’re married, you may be asking, “What does all this have to do with me? My foreplay happens only with my wife.” Are you sure? Impurity of the eyes provides definite sexual gratification. Isn’t that foreplay? When you see a hot movie scene, is there a twitch below your belt? What are you thinking when you’re on the beach and suddenly meet a jaw-dropping beauty in a thong bikini? You gasp while Mission Control drones, “We have ignition!” You have her in bed on the spot, though only in your mind. Or you file away the image and fantasize about her later. You stare at a sexy model and lust; you stare some more and lust some more. Your motor revs into the red zone, and you need some type of release or the engine’s going to blow. No doubt about it: Visual sexual gratification is a form of sex for men. As males, we draw sexual gratification and chemical highs through our eyes. Alex remembers the time he was watching TV with his sister-in-law. The rest of the family was at the mall. “She was lying flat on her stomach on the floor in front of me, wearing tight shorts, and she’d fallen asleep watching TV. I was on the chair, and I happened to look down and see her upper thigh and a trace of her underwear. I tried to ignore it, but my heart started racing a little, and my eyes kept looking at the back of her upper thigh. It got so exciting that I began to stare and really lust. I had to release it somehow. I masturbated while she slept, right out in the open.” In Alex’s case, impurity of the eyes was clearly foreplay, which led to further sin. It’s critical to recognize visual sexual impurity as foreplay. If viewing sensual things merely provides a flutter of appreciation for a woman’s beauty, it would be no different than viewing the awesome power of a thunderstorm racing over the Iowa cornfields. No sin. No problem. But if it is foreplay, and if you’re getting sexual gratification, it defiles the marriage bed: 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)

If you’re married or divorced, how has mixing sexual standards affected your marriage? And if you’re single, dating, or engaged, do your sexual standards need to be examined before you get married?

Week Three: *We Dared* to Challenge Our Minds

1. Your Mustang Mind.

As you build the outer defense perimeters, you'll find that the perimeter of the eyes goes up much faster than the perimeter of the mind. Why? First, because the mind is far more crafty than your eyes and more difficult to corral. Second, because you really can't rein in the mind effectively until the defense perimeter of the eyes is in place. Knowing this, you shouldn't be discouraged if your mind responds more slowly than your eyes.

The great news is that the defense perimeter of the eyes works with you to build the perimeter of the mind. The mind needs an object for its lust, so when the eyes view sexual images, the mind has plenty to dance with. Without those images, the mind has an empty dance card. By starving the eyes, you starve the mind as well. Although this alone is not enough—the mind can still create its own lust objects using memories of movies or pictures you saw years ago or by generating fantasies about old girlfriends or the women with whom you work—at least with your eyes under control you won't be overwhelmed by a continuing flood of fresh lust objects as you struggle to learn to control your mind.

As you bounce and starve your eyes, how do you think it will affect your mind? Think of at least one way the Lord can help you in the battle in your mind?

2. Your Mind Coming Clean.

Currently, your brain moves nimbly to lust and to bring you the little pleasure-highs of your lust. Your brain's "world-view" has always included lustful thinking. Double entendres, daydreams, and other creative forms of sexual thinking are approved and established pathways, so your mind feels free to run on these paths to pleasure.

But your mind is orderly, and your world-view colors what comes through it. The mind will allow these impure thoughts only if they "fit" the way you look at the world. As you set up the perimeter of defense for your mind, your brain's world-view will be transformed by a new matrix of permissible thoughts, or "allowables." Within the old matrix of your thinking, lust fit perfectly and in that sense was "orderly." But with a new, purer matrix firmly in place, lustful thoughts will bring disorder. Your brain, acting as a responsible policeman, nabs these lustful thoughts even before they rise to consciousness.

Essentially the brain begins cleaning itself, so elusive enemies like double entendres and daydreams, which are hard to control on the conscious level, simply vanish on their own. This transformation of the mind takes some time as you wait for the old sexual pollution to be washed away. It's much like living near a creek that becomes polluted when a sewer main breaks upstream. After repair crews replace the cracked sewage pipe, it will still take some time for the water downstream to clear. In transforming your mind, you'll be taking an active, conscious role in capturing rogue thoughts, but in the long run, the mind will wash itself and will begin to work naturally for you and your purity by capturing such thoughts. With the eyes bouncing away from sexual images and the mind policing itself, your defenses will grow incredibly strong.

What Bible verses can you use to fight off sexual thoughts when they come into your head? Have you tried taking control of your thoughts? Is it easy for you, or is it difficult? Think of a thought of a special time with friends, family or maybe alone in nature that you can go to when sexual thoughts come into your head. What would your picture/thought be?

3. Lurking at the Door.

You'll want to be doing all you can to push along your mental transformation. And do so with confidence! A helpful concept of something to be on the lookout for is the scriptural imagery of "lurking at the door." Job mentioned it. Just a

few verses after we read about the covenant he made with his eyes, we hear Job saying this: “*If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor’s door, then may my wife grind another man’s grain, and may other men sleep with her. For that would have been shameful, a sin to be judged.*” (Job 31: 9-11) Have you “*lurked at your neighbor’s door*”? It could mean stopping by in the late afternoon, visiting your friend’s wife for coffee, enamored by her wisdom, care, and sensitivity. You felt sorry for her as you’ve commiserated together over her insensitive, brutish husband. You held her as she cried. You were lurking at your neighbor’s door.

How can sexual conversations affect our minds? Can words that a woman says affect the way you think? In what ways?

4. When You Find A Woman Attractive.

If you find someone attractive, your first line of defense is a proper mind-set, which is this: This attraction threatens everything I hold dear. It may not appear threatening early in the attraction, when everything seems innocent. Remember, though, that attractions grow quickly and can destroy your marriage. Even if your marriage manages to survive, at the very least the lurking will weaken the foundation of your marriage and rob your wife of your full captivation. Your second line of defense is to declare, I have no right to think these things. State this to yourself clearly, decisively, and often. You don’t even know this woman; who are you to be attracted to her? Didn’t your Master give you your wife? The third line of defense is to heighten your alert. What do you normally do when you feel threatened? You take off your jacket and breathe deeply. You ready yourself for what’s coming.

Suppose you are a bouncer at a dance club, checking I.D.s and tickets, joking with the customers. One night, five men in black leather loudly roar up on motorcycles, looking surly and arrogant. Would you relax and back away from the door? Not on your life. Without hesitation, you’d step up to the door and stand erect, ready to confront the threat. Consider the old Star Trek television series. What did Captain Kirk do when danger approached? He cried out: “*Red alert! Shields up!*” In a similar vein, when an attractive woman approaches your corral, your defense perimeter must immediately respond: Red alert! Shields up! With your mind-set transformed, you won’t let her near the corral. The attraction will begin to starve, and she’ll drift back toward the horizon. How can you make sure that will happen? Bounce your eyes.

You saw her passing your corral, and you were physically attracted to her. Starve this attraction by bouncing your eyes. Don’t dwell on her beauty by stealing glances. Do this with zeal. Avoid her. Sometimes this isn’t possible, but do it when you can. If she works with you, and the two of you are assigned to the same project, don’t ask her to eat lunch with you or offer her a ride home. Avoid opportunities that create positive experiences with her until the attraction phase dies. If she asks you to do something with her, excuse yourself. When you’re in her company, play the dweeb. Our hero, Dweebman, steps into a nearby public rest room and emerges as the polyester-clad enemy of all things flirtatious and hip. Dull, mild-mannered Dweebman—pocket protector shielding his heart and hair slightly askew—wages his quiet, thankless war of boring interchange. Our once-threatening Amazon withdraws to undefended sectors, leaving Dweebman victorious again in his never-ending good fight to stave off the hip and the impure in his galactic empire! Okay, there’s not that much glory in playing the dweeb. There’ll be no comic-book deals, no endorsement deals, no 20/20 interview with Barbara Walters, but you’ll be a hero to your wife and kids.

A dweeb is the opposite of a player. In relationships, players send and receive social signals smoothly. Dweebs do not. When a player wants to send attraction signals, there are certain things he’ll do. He’ll flirt. He’ll banter. He’ll smile with a knowing look. He’ll talk about hip things. In short, he’ll be cool. You were a player at one time. You knew how to feed attractions. You spent your whole adolescence learning how. As a married man, however, a little social suicide is very much in order. Always play the dweeb. Players flirt ... learn to un-flirt. Players banter ... learn to un-banter. If a woman smiles with a knowing look, learn to smile with a slightly confused look, to un-smile. If she talks about things that are hip, talk about things that are un-hip to her, like your wife and kids. She’ll find you pleasant enough but rather bland and uninteresting. Perfect. Sometimes a woman’s attractiveness to you will be mental rather than physical. This is common in work environments as you work with women on projects that interest you both. In business it’s common to spend more hours per day with female coworkers than with your wife. You talk with them about common goals and achieving success, while all you and your wife talk about are the kids’ discipline problems, who is going to change the dirty diapers, and bills, bills, bills. As with physically attractive women, you must understand that if your shields aren’t up, and if you

don't recognize the threat to your marriage, you're flirting with danger. To summarize: If you're attracted to a woman, it doesn't mean you may never again have any sort of relationship or friendship with her. It only means you must enact your defense perimeters. Once you've starved the attractions and she's a safe distance away, you can have a proper relationship, one that is honoring to your wife and to the Lord.

What does the writer suggest as a defense for visual attraction to a woman (hint, there's more than one)? What does the writer suggest as a defense for a woman you find mentally attractive?

5. Women Who Find You Attractive.

No matter what our age (or our waistlines), we're still capable of saying preposterous things like, "Finally, here is a woman who clearly has good taste and knows 'handsome' when she sees it. I simply must get to know her better." Yes, guys still make those statements. Ed, being short on cash, took a second job working an early shift at FedEx to make ends meet. He was simply doing what a man should do for his family during a serious financial crunch. When Christi, an aggressive, attractive dispatcher, pranced by Ed's corral, she said, "You're so cute and sexy! I love to wrap my legs around men like you!" She bantered and flirted at every turn, teasing with double entendres and come-ons. She spread her legs slightly whenever they talked, and her shirt often flopped open for him. One day she said, "My husband is out of town hunting for the weekend. I'm going to be so lonely." Red alert! Red alert! An hour later, Ed found her house key on his desk with a note, saying, "I've left you this key in case you need to get into my house this weekend!" Ed, to his credit, returned her key and let it be known in no uncertain terms that he would not be coming, and he asked her to stop what she was doing. Ed kept the gate to his corral closed, because Christi was threatening everything he held dear.

If a gang of ravenous teens were outside your home, approaching with axes and clubs, you would probably sense a threat. Red alert! Shields up! Just as dangerous is the woman who finds you attractive. You must stop her by returning no attraction signals. If she's a non-Christian, she's even more dangerous since she has no moral reason not to go to bed with you. Your second line of defense is using your shield of rights. I have no right to think these thoughts, and I have no right to return these signals! Jesus died a bloody death on the cross to purchase you. He has all the rights here. You have none. Speak this out loudly to yourself again and again; it breaks and reins in the mustang mind.

Don't dawdle about getting your shields up. In one Star Trek movie episode, the enemy had captured a Federation starship and was approaching Kirk and the starship Enterprise (the good guys). The enemy commander didn't respond to any calls from Kirk. As Kirk hailed him repeatedly, the enemy commander simply sneered, "Let them eat static." Kirk found this lack of response peculiar. Confused and unsure of the intentions of the approaching ship, he dawdled. He did not put up his shields. Finally, when close enough, the enemy blasted away, severely disabling the Enterprise. Kirk paid a dear price for dawdling, losing his best friend to death in the ensuing interchanges. When a woman approaches your corral, you don't know what her intentions are. Maybe you're misreading her bright, outgoing personality, and she isn't attracted to you at all. Maybe she greets everyone that way, but maybe not. There may be an enemy on that ship. Get your shields up and ask questions later. Don't pay that dear price.

What do you do when someone finds you attractive? How do you starve these attractions? Here are some guidelines: Spend absolutely no time alone with this woman, even in public places. The reason is simple. You don't want to feed her attractions. Make it obvious you aren't returning her interest in you. Flee from her. Don't smile knowingly at her. Don't join her prayer group. Don't join her worship team. Avoid working with her on a committee. Don't be anywhere that she can be further impressed with you. Do this consciously and methodically. Prepare with "war game" simulations. What will you say if she calls you at work? What will you do if she invites you to lunch? Josh McDowell tells teens to decide what they'll do in the backseat of the car before they ever get to the backseat of the car. Otherwise passion rules, and reasoning isn't clear. As adults, we applaud his advice to teenagers. Why not follow Josh's words ourselves? Send absolutely no return attraction signals. Don't answer the call. Let them eat static! Play the dweeb. Help her out. Show her that her initial attraction to you was a ridiculous mistake. Choose to be boring, and do it fastidiously. Later, when she's no longer attracted to you, you can be your normal, interesting self again.

In what ways do we minimize, rationalize, and justify that it's ok if another woman finds us attractive?

6. Satan's Cruise Missiles.

As mentioned earlier, there's a second danger in not taking care of business with the attractions inside the corral. If you're careless, Satan can fire a cruise missile into your marriage and shatter your world in a moment. Years ago, I noticed a problem with Don, a married friend. He hadn't told me so, but several times when I was at his home, I noticed his finger hesitate on the TV remote when passing sex scenes on the movie channels. While the hesitation was nearly imperceptible, I saw it easily. His eyes had no defense, so I knew what he'd been watching.

What I didn't know, until it was too late, was what he'd also been thinking. Don and his wife were having problems. To him, the worst were the sexual frustrations. *"Joann just doesn't fulfill me,"* he told me. *"It wouldn't take much because I don't ask for much. All I wanted was to French kiss with her. She just wouldn't do it. We'd be messing around and, as things heated up, I'd try French kissing. She always got angry and pulled away. She says it's filthy and makes her nauseous. I don't see how French kissing is any filthier than any other kiss. It's the same saliva! Besides the Bible says that her body is not her own, but it's actually mine. The Bible gives me a right to sexual fulfillment, and as my wife, she owes me sexual fulfillment. It isn't fair, and I don't know what to do."*

Actually, Don had already decided on what to do and that was to turn his thoughts to his old girlfriend, where he could daydream about her French kisses and what might have been. She loved French kissing. Don was ripe for the taking. He hadn't heard from this old flame in years, and he figured his thoughts were harmless. What could they hurt? He didn't even know where she was, but Satan did. Out of the blue, she called Don and said she'd be in town. Don's unguarded mind raced with the possibilities at a time when his defense perimeters were down. The two of them landed in a hotel room. Boom! He didn't think it could happen to him, but in one smashing blow, his marriage was blasted to smithereens. He couldn't say no. Bottom line: You have no right to any relationship with an old girlfriend or ex-wife if you still nurture an attraction to her.

In what ways could a past girlfriend be a danger in your life?

Week Four: *We Dared to Challenge Our Hearts*

1. A Man With Complete Faithfulness.

We want to direct your attention now to an honorable man in the Bible loved God's purposes. All men should be as faithful as Uriah was, cherishing both his King and his wife. In 1 Chronicles 11 we see Uriah listed as one of David's "mighty men"—the men who ". . .gave his kingship strong support to extend it over the whole land, as the LORD had promised" (1 Chronicles 11: 10).

Uriah was consumed with the purposes of his king, David. He was also consumed with the purposes of God. Uriah was by David's side in the caves when Saul hounded their heels. He cried with David as their homes burned at Ziklag. He cheered himself hoarse at David's coronation, and he fearlessly fought to extend David's kingdom over the whole land. Swearing his life to the purposes of God, Uriah stood in harm's way for David's throne.

Sound familiar? You swore your life to someone, didn't you? You swore before family and friends to honor and cherish your wife, abandoning all others. You promised she would receive more from marriage than she would have as a single woman.

Are you consumed by this commitment? Consumed enough to live faithfully and to cherish her completely? Consumed enough to stand in harm's way and to eat gravel until God's purposes and your promises are finally established in your land? Uriah was that consumed. His faithfulness was complete, but alas, David's faithfulness wasn't. He went to bed with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. When she became pregnant, he had a mess on his hands. As always, Uriah was out fighting David's battles. Bathsheba's pregnancy could mean only one thing: David—not Uriah—was the father.

David addressed the situation by fabricating a ruse. He ordered Uriah back from the front lines. David's plan was to send Uriah quickly home to a warm, cuddly night with Bathsheba. If David moved quickly enough, people would naturally assume the unborn child was Uriah's. Tragically, Uriah's faithfulness to the king was so complete that David's plan didn't work. David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house. When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," David asked him, "Haven't you just come from a distance? Why didn't you go home?" Uriah said to David,

"The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" Then David said to him, 'Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home." (2 Samuel 11: 8-13)

Look at Uriah! He was so consumed by the purposes of God that he refused to go to his house even to wash his feet. His faithfulness was so strong that, even when drunk, he didn't waver from his commitment and zeal. His purity of soul was so great that no treacherous trick formed against him could stand. God wouldn't allow David's simple deception to cover his great sin against God and against God's choice servant Uriah. God loved Uriah, and God loved Uriah's love for Bathsheba.

David's trouble with Bathsheba started with his eyes (seeing her bathing on the rooftop.) How does sexual sin start with the first look? Have you had that experience?

How are David's views of sex contrasted with Uriah's views of sex?

2. Where Your Commitment To God Shows First.

If Christians were consumed by God's purposes, it would first be reflected in our marriages. But the rate of divorce, adultery, and marital dissatisfaction in the Christian community reveals our hearts. We've known very few men consumed by their marriages, and fewer still consumed by purity, but both are God's desire for you.

God's purpose for your marriage is that it parallels Christ's relationship to His church, that you be one with your wife. But what does the standard of Christ's relationship to His church have to do with our sexual purity? In our hearts, we often have selfish attitudes and expectations regarding our wives. When these expectations aren't met, we become grumpy and frustrated. Our will to maintain our outer defense perimeters is eroded. You may think, "*Well, if this is how she's going to be, why should I go through all the effort of being pure? She doesn't deserve it, and I deserve more.*" Be careful of that thinking!

We retaliate by withdrawing from our own responsibilities. Cherishing our wives is once such responsibility, and that includes remaining sexually pure. If this inner defense fails, the outer perimeters of the eyes and mind can also quickly fail.

Perhaps you're finding it difficult to cherish your one and only. We understand that sentiment. To cherish means to treat with tenderness and to hold dear, and you want to feel the romantic urge to do those things. But what if you don't feel like it? Something with such ramifications upon your sexual purity and upon the very strength of your marriage cannot be left to feelings alone.

Why is it important for us not to base our marital satisfaction on our feelings? How do you describe being in love? Is it more than feelings?

3. Whether You Feel It Or Not.

God entrusted your wife to you, and she placed herself in trust to you. How can we entrust such a valuable gift to some concept of cherishing based alone on wispy feelings? Christians like to say, "*Love is not a feeling, it's a commitment.*" Well, this is the time to heed those words. We owe that love, despite our feelings. In our society, we have "*sensitivity training*" and "*cross-cultural enrichment*" classes. We believe if we can only teach people the "*right*" feelings, they'll act correctly. In the Bible, however, God tells us the opposite: We're to first act correctly, and then right feelings will follow. If you don't feel like cherishing, cherish anyway. Your right feelings will arrive soon enough. Remember, the Bible says that God loved us while we were yet sinners. Clearly, loving the unlovely is a foundation of God's character, and cherishing the unlovely is its bedrock. Since Christ died for the church—the unlovely—and since our marriages should parallel Christ's relationship to the church, we have no excuse when we don't cherish our wives. God loved us before we were worthy; we can do nothing less for our wives.

As Christian men, how are we to commit ourselves to our wives? How can our feelings betray us on our commitment to our wives?

4. How Cherishing Feels.

Just how does cherishing feel? Does your wife feel cherished? For centuries the Song of Solomon has often been viewed as an allegory of how Christ feels for His bride and how she feels in return. Keep that interpretation in mind as you read on.

Look first at Jesus' feelings toward His bride:

"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves.... Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; Your mouth is lovely. . . How beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you.... You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes.... How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride!... Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel. Your hair is like royal tapestry; the king is held captive by its tresses. How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights." (Song of Songs 4: 1,3,7,9-10; 7: 5-6)

Now observe the church's feelings toward Jesus: "*My lover [husband] is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven.... His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this is my friend. I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me.... Let us go early to the vineyards... there I will give you my love. The mandrakes send out their fragrance, and at our door is every delicacy, both new and old, that I have stored up for you, my lover." (Song of Songs 5: 10-11, 16; 7: 10-13)*

Whether you're married or single, list some ways you can or will cherish your wife?

5. Caught Up In Conditions.

Do you feel these things for your wife? I haven't always. Do you remember pop quizzes from school, a sort of diabolical truth serum used by evil teachers to expose your knowledge (or lack of it) to the world? God loves pop quizzes, but He doesn't test our knowledge with them. He tests our character. I'm reminded of that when I recall the times during our first two years of marriage when Brenda and I were staggered by in-law problems with my family. Our marriage was quickly wilting away. One Valentine's Day, I went to buy a card. Without warning, this turned into a pop quiz from God. Fingering through the cards, I read the texts. One by one I returned them to the rack as *"too mushy," "too contrived,"* or *"too romantic."* Little by little, panic settled in as I sensed the inevitable. Not one Valentine's card in the store could be sent by me with any measure of sincerity. Head down, I scurried from the store, recognizing the depth of our loss. My grade on the quiz? Sickening!

What about you? Are you cherishing your wife? Do you feel cherished? If not, you probably got there the same way I did— by stopping short of God's standards. God's standard is to unconditionally cherish her, no matter what. No conditions. But in America, we've added mealy-mouthed terms to form *"conditional contracts."* If I were living according to God's purposes, I'd have added no conditions. But in my marriage, my conditions were that I would cherish Brenda if she made peace with my family and shaped up. When we set conditions, we fix our gaze on what we expect to get from the marriage. There's nothing wrong with expecting something, of course, and in pre-marriage classes, I always ask the question, *"What do you expect to get out of marriage that you can't get by staying single?"* We hope for an Eden, where needs are met and dreams are fulfilled. The problem comes when we expect our wives to deliver these things under contractual conditions.

With Brenda, anger and resentment erupted when I felt she didn't carry her side of the bargain. I no longer felt like cherishing her. With that kind of focus, oneness in a marriage can't grow. For instance, Bill said this about his wife: *"She was showing such a lack of ambition. What I expected when we got married was that we would both continue in our careers and really build our lives financially in our early years. She just isn't doing what I thought she'd do, and she really seems kind of lazy and selfish. Then she got pregnant. After a few months she said, 'I don't like the way I look anymore, so I don't want to have sex until after the baby comes.' I found that so unfair. The thought of no sex bothered me the more I thought about it, and I thought that if she were just going to live any way she pleased, I would live any way I pleased. I have a biblical right to sexual fulfillment, and I'll have it one way or another. That's how I came to have an affair."* That's a flimsy excuse for adultery, but its seeds were in Bill's selfish preoccupation with his expectations of the marriage.

These kind of conditional contracts don't work because they're written as we go along. Regardless of how long we date, we don't really know each other well enough to cover the hidden or changing conditions of the heart and mind. For instance, how could I have anticipated the huge problems with my family, and how could Brenda have anticipated my out-of-control temper? I broke holes in walls with my bare hands. I threw pots of bean soup across the kitchen floor. How could she have expected any of that? A conditional marriage contract originally defines what we hope to get out of marriage. As time passes and we learn more, we add more expectations and more requirements until we hardly recognize the agreement anymore. Wait a minute! This isn't working out like I expected. I'm getting out! Brenda and I came to a moment of truth sometime after that bean soup hit the floor. She simply said, *"I don't know how else to say this. My feelings for you are dead."* She wondered if we should consider divorce. Hearing that word stunned me. As a child of divorce, the old feelings of horror swept over me again.

Do you believe that sex is a need? If you do, or don't, explain why?

6. No Matter How Much Gravel.

Several days passed. One day when Brenda was at work, I stood before my refrigerator and reached in for a half-gallon of milk. Her words lay heavily upon my chest. I poured the milk, shut the refrigerator door, and paused. I had to do something. Raising my right hand and pointing a finger toward heaven, I declared, *"God, I don't care how much gravel*

I have to eat, I'll never get a divorce." I finally understood the promise I'd made on my wedding day. My promise wasn't conditional. If she fed me meat and potatoes, I would eat it. If she fed me gravel, I would eat it. I was going to change or tolerate or love in whatever way necessary, but I would keep my promise to love and cherish her, whatever the cost. "What does eating gravel have to do with cherishing?" you might ask. "Do I give up everything I have to keep peace? What about my rights?" Well, you do have a few rights, and we're not saying your wife has no responsibility in return. But in the countless ways we poke each other in this shared space called marriage, our focus needs to be on our sharp edges, not hers.

God always knew marriages would wither when rooted in contracts, which is why He established unconditional covenants. He knew that conditions change. God never forgot what we often forget— namely, the curse of Eden is a grinding curse. Life is a steamroller, making pancakes of conditions and easily smashing the naive contracts we create. In our dreams for marriage, maybe we forget that we would still have to work long hours by the sweat of our brow to eat, and that we wouldn't always see each other as much as we wish. Maybe we forget that we will sometimes be beaten up and used by bosses, our minds so numb we just don't want to talk when we get home. Maybe we forget that with the pain in childbirth come bodies that never regain their former shape. Any number of trials and tribulations might make conditions impossible to meet, but we demanded guarantees anyway, demanding some form of Eden from our marriages, when all the time our place is to cherish our wives unconditionally. That doesn't sound much like Eden to us. We don't like our place. So our inner defenses are let down, and we lose our concern for God's purposes.

What unrealistic expectations do we (as men) have about wives?

To become a sexually pure Christian man, sexual purity has to go beyond a study and become a lifestyle. For more information, or if you'd like to start a weDARED group with some friends or in your church, check out WeDared.com or call or email Paul Scott at 800-NEW-LIFE or pscott@newlife.com.