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RELISH THE JOURNEY

As you start the final chapter of the book, now would be an excellent time to take another look at what you last wrote as your vision for the sexual man you believe God would have you become, to update it and revise it in light of where God has brought you thus far. When you have revised it, read it over several times so that it starts to sink into your heart. Think of how great it would be, if every time you felt a sexual attraction, the vision came to mind. And if in certain situations with your wife, wouldn't it be a blessing to spontaneously recall the vision and find yourself responding to her like the man in the vision?

This revision won't be the final one however. You are on a long journey, and so long as God is working in you, it is likely you will want to periodically revise the vision. Will this process ever be complete? Will we ever arrive? Will we, in this life, one day have the vision down just right and find that we are living according to it every day? It's possible—but not likely. God's word tells us:

And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 1:6

How far any man will go in this life on his journey towards becoming the sexual man God created him to be, we cannot say, but the clear message from this Scripture is that the *good work* of changing us won't be completed until *the day of Jesus Christ*, that is the final day, the day we meet Jesus face to face.

Does this mean that the journey, with its struggles and self-denial, is a futile one? Does it mean that if God is going to clean us up and tie up all the loose ends on that final day anyway, regardless of what we have accomplished in this life, there is no reason for us to stay on the road? No, no, no! It is true that the journey is a means to an end, but as I said early in the book, with God, means are as important as ends—and they can be just as great a blessing. The journey itself can be one of the great blessings of your life, so relish it. Enjoy to its fullest for it is on the journey that you will experience God and His great power at work in you

The blessings of the journey are indeed many, but I want to focus primarily on just three of them. First, you will become "perfect." Second, you will come to know God and yourself through tests, trials and temptations. Third, you will grow to experience God's purity through grace rather than through the law. My hope is that an awareness of these blessings, and an expectation for their realization in your life, will help sustain you on what will likely prove to be a long and arduous journey.

YOU WILL BECOME “PERFECT”

The journey will make you perfect? Isn't this a contradiction of what I just said; that those last vestiges of sexual sin, and those inadequacies in how we love our wives won't be taken care of until that final day? No it is not a contradiction—if we understand the meaning of *perfect* as used in the Bible.

I first came to understand this through an illustration offered by a bishop of my church at a church conference held in western Maryland. The bishop told how he and several others had driven to the conference from Virginia in an old minivan that had balding tires, worn and scratched paint, a chipped windshield and many other signs of its age. But then he told us that the van was “perfect”. He was using the word in its New Testament sense. It was perfect, he explained, because it had gotten them from Virginia to Maryland to attend the conference. He went on to explain that in the New Testament the Greek word we translate as perfect means “able to accomplish the purpose for which it was created.”

In the words of Jesus, in the writings of Paul and in the Book of Hebrews perfect does not mean flawless. This becomes dramatically clear when we realize that, if Jesus was made *perfect through suffering* (Hebrews 2:10), then he was imperfect before he suffered. In fact, Jesus was never flawed, so the word can't mean flawless. On the other hand, Jesus was not ready to accomplish the purpose for which God sent him to earth until a time of preparation had passed. He started out as a little baby unable to walk or talk, certainly not ready to go to Calvary. Later he was a young boy, wonderfully wise for His age (Luke 2:47) but not yet ready to make the world transforming decision that He was to make at Gethsemane. He had to grow to maturity as a man, and He had to suffer, as the Hebrews passage tells us, before He would be perfect as the Bible uses the word, able to accomplish that purpose for which He was born a man.

In fact, the same root Greek word translated as perfect in Hebrews 2:10 is translated as “completed” in James 2:22 and as “mature” in Ephesians 4:13.

So in being made “perfect” as sexual men, we are becoming men who are able to use our God given sexuality for the purposes for which it was given to us. It does not necessarily (nor does it necessarily rule out I might add) that we will become flawless in how we use and express our sexuality. It is the “becoming” that we need to take hold of. We are on a journey, and it is our destiny—God's purpose for us—that we keep moving towards that perfection. Can we be flawed as we move towards that destiny? Absolutely. We are not Jesus, so we are not flawless. The flaws are in how we deal with sexual desires and how we love our wives. These will diminish over time, and where sin is the problem we have a remedy; the blood of Jesus. But if we truly believe what the Bible says, we can become “perfect” in this life. *And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing* (James 1:4). What a great hope to keep before us while on the journey.

YOU WILL COME TO KNOW GOD AND YOURSELF THROUGH TEMPTATIONS, TESTING AND TRIALS

Temptation, testing, trials—three T’s—are all quite closely related. Each involves going through a difficult experience that may have a good outcome or a bad outcome. We all face them, perhaps Christians more than others, and it is probably safe to say, we wish they weren’t a part of our lives. In fact, we ask God to “lead us not into temptation” whenever we say the Lord’s Prayer.

Did you ever ponder the implications of the words, “lead us not into temptation”? They make no sense unless, indeed, God might lead us into temptation. Does He? Yes, Scripture gives us very clear examples that He does. God’s placement of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the garden had the purpose of tempting or testing Adam and Eve, as did Jesus *being led by Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil* (Matthew 4:1). We can also add God’s letting terrible calamities befall Job—in order to test his faith—as another example of God’s active involvement in man’s temptations.

But when we determine that God puts us in a situation where we will be tempted as He did with Adam and Eve, Job and Jesus, don’t we run head on into the book of James where we read, *Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one* (James 1:13). I believe that this verse is compatible with the temptations just mentioned, because in each case, *Satan* (or the serpent) was the tempter. God did not do the tempting, but rather, set up the situation where the devil could tempt Adam and Eve, Job and Jesus. I believe this reinforces the view expressed in Chapter 13 that we need to pay more attention to Satan’s role in our struggles with sexual sin.

Trials and temptations do bring suffering. They are by their nature negative experiences we don’t want to go through. Testing might be okay if we are the one in charge of the test, such as when we test our strength or our speed. Testing by another, however, especially by one who has authority over us, usually produces stress. Our negative reactions to trials, temptations and tests arise from two things. First, there is the painful struggle required to go through the test, and second, we face the possibility of a negative outcome: we will fail the test, yield to the temptation or be proven guilty in the trial. All of these situations are apt to produce suffering.

If God allows—or even arranges—for us to go through these experiences, what is His good purpose in all this. Scripture gives us a very clear answer:

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through His Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Romans 5:3-4

We are told that Jesus was in every respect, *tempted as we are* (Hebrews 4:15), and that He *suffered when tempted* (Hebrews 2:18). We are also told that Jesus was made *perfect* (complete) *through suffering* (Hebrews 2:10). Going through the suffering, including the suffering of temptation, was necessary to bring Jesus to the place where He could fulfill

his ultimate trial and testing on our behalf. If He needed this, how much more do we? We need our testing, trials and temptations in order to become true sons of the living God.

If we hope to experience more victories in our temptations, we are wise to expect that suffering will come with those temptations, sometimes severe suffering. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. To see that the suffering that comes from temptation is a part of the normal Christian life, we will be far less apt to fall into self-pity or despair, two attitudes of the heart that will almost always cause us to weaken.

But couldn't there be another way, one that was not so painful and difficult? No, given our fallen nature, there couldn't. The history of man and his relationship with God show no other way. Oswald Chambers said it well, "Faith must be tested, because it can be turned into a personal possession only through conflict"²³

So men, our suffering can be for good, and although it will never be pleasant, I believe there is a way in which we can embrace it as something our good Father allows to make us the sons He wants us—and we want—to be. A young man will willingly undergo the rigorous training necessary to become a Marine, an Army Ranger, or a Navy Seal, knowing that, if he makes the grade, he will come out in many ways a better man than he was before. Should we be any less willing to suffer in order to become God's sexual men?

Through our temptations, trials and tests, we will come to know our weaknesses, and we will be humbled. But, at the same time, we will be continually refreshed by experiencing the mercy and patience of God. When we are humbled, and when we have experienced his great mercy and kindness towards us, then we are ready to partake of His great power to make us changed men.

If we see suffering as normal, our hearts are less apt to waver in ways that would cause us to abandon the journey.

YOU WILL GROW TO EXPERIENCE PURITY THROUGH GOD'S GRACE RATHER THAN THROUGH THE LAW

The journey will bring you to a place where less and less you will be governed by the law, and more and more by God's grace. We need the law when we are young Christians, and we need the law when sin has strong control over us. But the law doesn't bring life. God's grace—His mercy and power working *in* us—is what brings life. As you progress down the road, and as you lead "the normal Christian life", your heart will be changed and more and more you will be led by a heart that passionately wants to please God. Sonship will be your goal; becoming a son who is in every way pleasing to the Lord.

²³ Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, Reading for August 29th.

As regards temptations and the world, as you grow in the Spirit, the Spirit Himself will warn you when you are approaching danger and when you need to back off. He will draw you to that which is good and true and beautiful. The Spirit will have gained a clear upper hand over the flesh.

As you grow in this grace, sexual purity will become more than just the absence of impurity. Purity will mean possessing a sense of clean, strong manhood. Purity will mean seeing the women you encounter in life as precious daughters of the Father. Purity will be found in knowing that in that special woman whom God has given you, you can experience the most perfect connection, completion and creation to be found this side of heaven, this side of your ultimate union with Christ Himself. For the married man, purity will be found in knowing that the gift of yourself—your body—to your wife is a truly priceless gift, and for the single man, that God treasures your gift of your sexuality to Him.

HOPE

Hold onto hope. Your vision is a verbal expression of your hope. Keep that hope ever before you. That hope is perfect freedom, freedom to be the man God created to be, freedom to live according to your true (unfallen) nature. Picture that free man traveling down the open road, less and less encumbered by sin, more and more the whole man in whom love and sexual desire are reunited. That man will meet challenges, but more and more they will prove to be a means whereby he can experience the joy of victory. And in becoming master of himself, he will humbly revel in the manhood that God his Father has so graciously nurtured in him. It will be an exciting journey. Relish it.

Finally men, *Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love* (1 Corinthians 16:13), and enjoy the journey.

EXHIBIT B

A MESSAGE FOR WIVES

During the years it took me to write this book, I would pray almost daily for the men who would read it, that they might be blessed and grow in righteousness through it. But immediately, as I started praying, the Spirit would bring to mind the wives and children of these men, and my heart turned to them. In fact over time my heart and prayers started to turn first to the wives and children of the men who read this book, that they would be blessed mightily as their husbands and fathers became the men God wanted them to be. In my heart this book became more for you than for the men.

At the same time, I saw a danger in this book, a danger for marriages. Although the book is written for men, I know that many women will read it. It is a fact that women read many more books than men, and furthermore, many women who find something missing in their marriage—and want to fix it—are quite naturally going to drawn to a book like this. Herein lies the danger. Your husband, no matter how good your marriage is, almost certainly falls short of being the sexual man, the lover, described here. In fact, few of us men measure up to the ideal man put forth in this book. This being so, in holding up such an ideal, a wife could actually increase her dissatisfaction with her husband. Her flesh will then want to actively call her husband to be more God's sexual man as described here. This could be, if not disastrous, at least extremely counter-productive.

A major theme of this book is that a married man's manhood and sexuality are meant to be a gift to his wife. For a wife to demand such a gift would be to nullify the gift. It would turn the gift into an obligation, or a duty, or a payment for what "I deserve." Just as God established in His relationship with us, love can never be commanded, it must always be offered freely or it is not truly love.

For a wife even to say, "Here, read this book", unless the words are spoken with great humility, can bring harm to a marriage, for they will be words of judgment. If the book leads the wife to make harder judgments of her husband—and it could easily do that—it will have led her deeper into sin, and this will harm the marriage.

All of this can put the wife in an extremely difficult and frustrating position. She senses how things could be made better, but she is powerless to act on those things. This is, I believe, a manifestation of the curse on Eve: *Your desire shall be for your husband, but he shall rule over you.* She wants her man to be the husband God created him to be, but he is the ruler of his own heart and his actions and she cannot control them.

But there are two things wives can do. First, just as we call men to form a vision of the man we are called to be, and to seek to become that man, so you can form a vision for the woman God calls you to be, and seek to become that woman. Second, prayerfully surrender your husband to God. It was less than two months after my wife heard God tell her to release me to Him—to her great consternation—that I surrendered my life to Christ

and found healing. Do these two things and trust God for the rest. He knows your husband better and loves him even more than you do.

I have another word for the wives of men whose husbands are currently reading this book. This is not a marriage book, as such, but it has a lot to say about marriage. Most marriage books and conferences, and marriage enrichment weekends lay tremendous importance on communications between a husband and wife. Except for calling men to speak words of love to their wives, there is very little of that here. The reason for this is that most of the changes and growth called for here will not come through conversations with his wife, but rather will come out of a man's sometimes sweaty, bloody, fierce wrestling with God. Our greatest life changing moments, especially where they involve deep repentance, true forgiveness of another person, or deathlike letting go of some idol, come when we are face to face with God. Then, when God has His way, the changed man lives out his changes with others. A goal of this book is to help men come to the place where they have such encounters with God. Then, if God has truly touched him, he will know that he has much to talk about with you.

Women often process things through conversations with other people. Men tend to be different. Most of us men, I believe, process things internally and with the God who lives in us and knows us so well. So wives, don't push your husband to discuss with you what he is reading in this book. To do so might interrupt a far more important conversation—or wrestling match—in which he is involved at the time.

If your husband is voluntarily reading this book, he is seeking to be God's man. Trust him and trust God to bring this about.

CONTRACEPTION AND THE CHURCH; A BRIEF HISTORY

To be added later.