

## MEN'S RETREAT 2022

### TALK #3 KILLING SIN FOR HIGHER PLEASURE

We want to conclude our time on killing sin by examining what has been for me, the most helpful set of truths and this set of truths are another application of using faith to kill our sin. For me, it was an embarrassingly long time after I was converted and even in the pastorate before I spent time drinking in this truth and seeing how indispensable it is for killing our sin. For me, if I do everything else that I know to kill sin, but neglect this last piece, I simply will not for any length of time live above the power of enslaving sin.

The reason this set of truth has been so helpful for me is because **none of the other strategies to kill sin attack sin at its heart and at the heart of all our sins is sinful desire.** Let's begin by admitting that we have our natural, God-given desires and appetites. The desires, in and of themselves, are not sinful, but if we do not control them, they become idols that enslave us. Sex is the best-known example of this, but it can also be things like desires for approval, desires for media, desires to be appreciated for our talents and appearance. We can make idols out of trying to find ultimate satisfaction in our hobbies.

Any of them can become idolatrous desires and there are several biblical interventions to help us keep these desires under control. We do this proactively by renewing our mind in the Scriptures on a daily basis. We do it through cultivating a fruitful prayer life. We do it through building redemptive community in the body of Christ—spending time with our wives and/or other brothers who will build us up, encourage us to holy living and hold us accountable in our weak areas.

We do it by taking to heart what Jesus says in Matthew 5:29-30, "<sup>29</sup> If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. <sup>30</sup> And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell." This means taking any possible sources of temptation and

radically separating ourselves from them. There are several resources that are very helpful on this. John Piper has an excellent one on the internet with the acronym A-N-T-H-E-M. That's a six-pronged strategy for killing sin and I have copies of the printout.

All of that is non-negotiable. If those kinds of disciplines and strategies are not part of our arsenal to kill sin, then we will be frustrated and unsuccessful in killing our sin. Those are necessary, *but they are not sufficient*. There are men in this room who have done and are doing many or all those things and who still look at porn and/or are regularly sexually lusting after women or allowing other sinful desires to dominate their lives.

Much of the time that's because—**if you don't definitively address the root issue of desire, you will not find lasting victory**. Any final solution to killing sin must free us at the level of these very strong, idolatrous desires of our heart. They are idolatrous because they tempt us to want them more than we want God and other things that he says are more important.

Before we delve too deeply into this, we must first dispel a lie that the world peddles and frankly, our sinful flesh seems to confirm at times. That is that our sinful desires are basically uncontrollable and every man in this room has at times believed that lie because at times, **it feels like they are!** But **feelings should never direct our thinking or dictate our behavior**, the truth of Scripture should do that. And it's simply not biblically accurate to believe that desires are uncontrollable. We all know from experience that we CAN control our desires.

If you are walking behind a woman and you are sinfully focusing on her—if, as your eyes are sinfully bugging out, you clumsily step off the curb and sprain your ankle, you will stop lusting. If you are becoming angry with an obnoxious flight attendant and are about to make a rude and sinful remark to her when the aircraft instantly plummets 2000 feet, your anger will evaporate.

In a matter of only a few moments, you can suddenly move from burning with a desire to sin, to wanting *nothing* to do with that sin. ***The reason you no longer want the sin is because another, stronger desire has***

***overtaken your heart.*** The point of those illustrations is to reinforce the truth we often FAIL to believe in the midst of our sinful desiring and that is—we can definitively address and conquer even the very strong, addictive, idolatrous desires IF a stronger desire drives them away.

We'll see from Scripture that **THAT** is God's best and ultimate way to liberate believers from their idolatrous desires—to **overwhelm them with stronger desires.** What so many men in bondage to enslaving sins ***don't*** often put together is that—the way to get free with God's help is **NOT to simply ask him for his help to remove the desire or simply look to him for strength.** As important as expressions of humble dependence on God are, God's most powerful means to freedom from addiction/idolatry is—***finding more joy, more enduring pleasure, more satisfaction in him than you find in sexual sin or other sinful pleasures.***

And one reason we know God will give us this is because having him as the source of our supreme satisfaction is far, far more than simply one more strategy to get rid of our over-desires. We must never see what Chalmers called “the expulsive power of a higher affection” as simply one of many strategies to deal with our sinful desires! **This is about God's glory. It's about seeing that the temptation to lust in our lives as something God uses to teach us that HE is far better than sexual sin.** That's one reason God allows lust into our lives!

Let me say that again. ***One of God's designs for lust (or any strong, sinful desire) in a believer is to use it to teach us to trust that HE is more satisfying than even the strongest earthly pleasures.*** That intensely biblical and positive and redemptive way to see them makes it much easier to do battle with because **it spiritually elevates the battle 15 levels up from simply saying NO, NO, NO.** Lust and sexual desires become the spiritual workbench God uses to teach us the supremacy of the pleasures he offers. Is that the way you view your sinful desires like lust?

This sounds foreign to many in the church and that is, sadly, because way too many in the church believe that God's main role in helping to curb our sin, (in some mysterious, unexplained way) is to supercharge our willpower—to give us some kind of “jolt from above” that will mysteriously

enable us to “just say, ‘no.’” Another way some believers seek to find motivation from God to harness their desires is through FEAR. We **must** fear God and the consequences of unrepentant sexual sin, but that is just one step on the road to killing our sin. Fear alone will never set you free from sin because the LAW never set anyone free.

Neither willpower nor fear is strong enough to liberate us from...**the intense desires that God hard-wired into us but which our sinful flesh seeks to hijack to turn us into craven idolators.** Simply hoping that God, in some mysterious, unexplained way, will strengthen my will to say “no” doesn’t do anything to keep me from **wanting/desiring** the sin. Likewise, believing God will punish me if I don’t repent is not sufficient to decisively keep me from **desiring the sin.**

In fact, Paul teaches us in Romans chapter seven that this kind of fear-based/law-driven approach ONLY strengthens our desires for what is forbidden. The challenge we must confront to be free from sinful desires long term is—**how do I deal with my native, human AND POTENTIALLY sinful desires and thereby kill my sins?** The answer we want to offer today is **by expelling our desires for illicit sex or other sins with a greater desire for God!!** Ultimately, THAT’S the best and most durable answer to lust and addictive desires. More importantly, when those sinful desires are expelled in favor of a stronger desire for God and his superior pleasures, we not only find freedom from sins like lust, more importantly, we fall much more deeply in love with God.

Now, let’s give some biblical support to that. Tonight, I want us to see three truths from the Bible related to this truth that help us **know how to greatly decrease our sinful desires like lust.** Truth number one introduces this idea to us and that is: **God wants to be and can be our highest pleasure and source of greatest joy and delight.**

Many of you know that, but do you BELIEVE that? Is that a reality in your life, or do you just mentally qualify to check the “Christian Hedonist” box on the doctrinal survey? My observation of myself and other is that many more people actually mentally accept that this is the way we are supposed to relate to God, than those who actually do relate to God this way. Do we

believe that it's *even possible* for God to be such a great source of pleasure that it can eliminate my desire for pornography or other sexual sins? Again, many Christians in our tradition know this, but **many Christians have not even begun to *relate to God* as if he is their highest joy—highest treasure and source of greatest pleasure. For years, I knew the “right answer” regarding my desires and even counseled others in that truth, but having the “right answer” didn’t free me from my sin because it’s not about having a theological answer, it’s about having a heart that increasingly delights in God.**

So, let's try to build some real faith by citing some Scripture. Listen to a few verses that remind us of what God ultimate wants from us. First, Psalm 37:4 says, “**4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.**” That means that, as we delight ourselves in the Lord, he will expel any sinful desires from our heart like for sexual sin and pornography. This delighting ourselves in the LORD is a COMMAND from the Psalmist.

That means that the God of the universe is *someone we take delight in—find pleasure in—receive joy from*. You are SO blessed to hear that truth ALL the time from your pulpit but **is that the way you relate to God?** Is this something you daily make as your objective? Do you fight for this?

Many believers know we need to *obey God and follow God and live for God*. We need to be willing to deny ourselves and even DIE for God. But how many of you make as your goal each morning to delight yourself in God—to make it your aim that day to find your highest joy in Jesus? Anyone remember what the great commandment is? Is it-**OBEY** the Lord your God with everything you have? No. Is it **BELIEVE** the Lord your God with everything you have? No. Its— “You shall LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart, mind and strength.” **Again, especially on a weekend where we are focusing on killing our sin, we must never forget that God’s goal for you is NOT *fundamentally* that you would be free from sinful desires. His main desire for you is that you, for the sake of his glory, would be totally, utterly enraptured with him and all he is for you in**

**Christ—that he would be glorified by satisfying our deepest and strongest desires.**

In Psalm 16:11 the psalmist says to God “11 You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Ok, **the deepest, most satisfying source of joy and pleasure in the universe is knowing and loving God.** Do you BELIEVE that? God would never say there is *fullness of joy* and *eternal pleasures* in sex or material wealth or popularity because it’s not true. We all know how short-lived those pleasures are! If this isn’t *at the heart of* what you believe about how God wants you to relate to him, then you don’t have access to the only sure-fire way to change your desires and kill your sin.

Or how about Psalm 1:2? It says this of the man of God. “2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law, he meditates day and night.” To the man or woman of God, God’s word is NOT mildly interesting or intellectually stimulating or even strongly engaging. No. You DELIGHT in it because it’s God’s personal word *to you*—**a love letter from God** to you. The example of the man of God in Psalm one is--you DELIGHT in his word so much that you WANT to spend any spare moment thinking about it. Again, this is nonsensical to unbelievers and sadly, to many who claim Christ.

How about Paul, who commands the believers at Philippi in chapter four of Philippians saying, “4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.” Rejoice! Find your highest JOY **in Jesus** so that you are rejoicing—expressing that joy ...ALWAYS. And just to keep us from thinking that Paul might be using a bit of hyperbole here, he says, “...AGAIN I will say, rejoice [in the Lord].”

This is not rejoicing in something God **has done for you.** **It’s not rejoicing in a spiritual experience** you had. This is not rejoicing in **music about** God. It’s about rejoicing **IN GOD**—in all he is for us in Jesus Christ. If, for you, God is not someone you rejoice in, then you will not only miss the best

way to be free from the enslaving power of sin, but far more importantly, the best way to live for Christ across all fronts of your life.

There are so many verses like this in the Bible which is why Jesus can say that ***the entire message of the Old Testament*** is summarized in *Loving God with all our heart, soul and mind* and out of the overflow of that love and his love for us—loving our neighbor as ourselves. The first truth is **God wants to be and can be our highest pleasure and source of greatest joy and delight.**

A second truth we must, by God's grace, get into our hearts is this—***God ultimately sees all our sin—including our lustful sins, as not treasuring him highly enough.*** Do you think about your sin that way? Do you see your sin, first and foremost as a failure to love and treasure God? Think for a moment. Doesn't it seem to follow that if, **the Great Commandment** is to love God supremely, then **the Great Sin**—the essence of sin **MUST** be NOT loving or treasuring God highly enough. This is so important for us to get into our hearts because THIS does something SO important for us as it relates to enabling us to kill our sin.

If you see an organism and want to exterminate it, you need to know whether it's a plant or an insect. Using bug killer on crab grass won't kill it. Likewise, **if you don't understand what sin is in its essence, your attempts to kill it will be far less efficient.** The reason is because knowing and living out of these truths takes our sin out of the sterile and lifeless realm of "Christian morality" and "being good" and instead places it where it belongs—how am I relating to God?

One text that clearly spells this out is in Jeremiah chapter two. God says through Jeremiah to his sinful, idolatrous people in verse 12, "<sup>12</sup> Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, <sup>13</sup> for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

Some definitions here. A fountain of living water is **water that will give life and joy and peace and vitality**, and it never runs dry because it's a fountain—the water just keeps bubbling up. On the other hand, a cistern was **a large ceramic tank or container buried in the ground which held water that had been poured into it**, but it very soon became stale, stagnant, bacteria-filled water because there was no new water being pumped into it. Cisterns ended up getting gross with dead and rotting things floating in them. But these cisterns Jeremiah is talking about weren't only stale and gross, they were broken, so all the nasty water in them had leaked out into the ground and was undrinkable. There was NOTHING to quench your thirst here—not even gross water. **This is a picture of an absolutely futile source of satisfaction.** There is NOTHING here that will satisfy.

This verse is a good summary statement for **how God broadly views our sin and in particular, our idolatrous desires**. Sin is knowingly walking right past God—who legitimately offers us a continual supply of satisfying, refreshing, life-giving water. Jesus says, "He who drinks of this will never thirst" and instead, trying to quench our thirst by staring longingly into empty, muddy hole in the ground. God says—**that's** the essence of all sin. **THAT'S** a perfect description of how God views our every idolatrous behavior!

When we watch porn or lust after a woman or obsessively work for personal approval from others, we are doing the spiritual equivalent of staring longingly at an empty, muddy hole in the ground. That means that a HUGE part of conquering our sexual and other sinful desires, by God's grace, is **to develop a heart that sees God for what he is—a glorious, satisfying, life-giving fountain of water and then, learning to trust in for HIM to satisfy our desires.**

God is saying—"*THIS is your main problem in your sinful desires. You're on the ground sucking on that muddy hole in the ground looking for*



*satisfaction, when you could have the all-satisfying, life-giving, joy-filling fountain of God to drink from.” C.S. Lewis put it this way, “It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.”*

We must see that ALL our repenting of sin—sexual and otherwise, **as not only saying “no” to sinful desire.** Even more importantly—it’s seeing God for who he is and **saying “YES” to a relationship with him that is marked** by delighting, rejoicing and finding our ultimate pleasures in him. Psalm 34 says, “TASTE and see that *he is good*.” Experience him, delight in him the same sensory way you would delight in your favorite food. This is behind what G.K. Chesterton says in the quote, *“Any man knocking on the door of a brothel is looking for God.”*

What he means by that is—all of us have this gaping vacuum in our souls and it’s a vacuum that only God can fill. When men knock on the door of a brothel, or open the door of a crack house, or click on a pornographic website, or lie to get a promotion at work, they are all trying to fill that hole with something only God can fill. That’s idolatry. Augustine was right when he said it this way as he told God, *“We are restless until we find our rest in you.”*

It’s when we begin to see that indulging our sinful desires as **not loving God enough** that we’re on the right track to finding lasting freedom. It’s when we begin to see that our fundamental problem is NOT that the pull of sexual sin is too strong, it’s that **our sense of the pull of God on our hearts is too weak**, that temptation and sin begin to lose their power.

That leads us to our third truth (and I hate to sound so pragmatic, but this is where I have experienced where men live) and that is—***Treasuring God most highly is effective in saying NO to idolatrous desires.*** The clearest support for this biblically is in one of the kingdom parables of Jesus in Matthew 13. In verse 44 Jesus says, “<sup>44</sup>The kingdom of heaven is like

treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” Jesus is explaining what the kingdom of heaven is like. That is—he’s telling us what it is like to have God as our King—our supreme treasure.

A man goes out to a field---he’s probably a hired hand doing some weeding or cultivating. He finds a big rock that he doesn’t remember from the last time he saw this field. He looks under the rock and he finds a hole with a bag of gold in it worth a million dollars. This was not all that uncommon in the Ancient Near East because people often buried their money. Anyway, the field in which the million dollars is hid is only worth \$10,000. So, this man goes and sells all his worldly belongings—he cashes out everything he has to get enough money to buy the field. And Jesus says that he sells everything he has **WITH JOY**. He bankrupts himself... joyfully.

He practices an extreme form of **self-denial** here—totally impoverishing himself. And he does it WITH JOY. Why? Because the treasure he finds in that field is worth FAR MORE than anything he could possibly liquidate to buy it. And so, he gives up—he surrenders everything with JOY because he is getting something so much better, so much more satisfying, pleasure-giving, dream-fulfilling.

The way this relates to freedom from sexual sin is transparent. If Jesus is your supreme Treasure who gives you supreme satisfaction, then you will not only give up sexual sin, or what other idols you are struggling with, you will surrender those things WITH JOY to get HIM! THAT is the kind of freedom we want all of us to have—joyful self-denial!

The problem—the reason many of us don’t do this is a simple one. We don’t value God supremely. So, the crunch question is—**why don’t I treasure God as he deserves to be treasured?** That gets to the very heart of our problem. There are many, many possible answers, and this could be something you want to talk more with a brother. One reason that many experience is—**you cannot long for, delight in, rejoice in, desire, treasure, cherish, give supreme worth to God— (so much so that it deadens other, sinful desires) ...if you haven’t tasted and seen that the Lord is good.** And in the grip of some besetting, habitual sin that you feel

totally defeated by, many men AND women in church have NOT experienced the goodness of God *because they are totally demoralized. They've given up. Their spiritual life has increasingly orbited around NOT committing that sin and they can't beat it, so they are ready to give up.*

Believers who are trapped in lust or porn usage know that it's wrong for them to do this—they know it can destroy them. But they're hooked. Their desire is strong for that rush of adrenaline and the dopamine high. So, they indulge their desires and, if they are believers, afterward, they feel horrible about it. (If you DONT feel horrible about it, you may very well NOT have the Holy Spirit in you!) These men pray hard, weep and, in complete sincerity, genuinely want to get the upper hand on this sin, but down deep, they know that they won't and that is the definition of hopelessness.

And men who feel completely enslaved to the idol of sexual sin repeat that cycle countless times. **Is there anyone who, in this cycle of shame, will feel or believe that God is good to them?** Not likely. How could God be good to such a low-down pervert who, time and time again, has failed to control his sinful desires? We know that WE would never be good to someone who had hurt us in the way our countless sins have grieved God because no one else we know has ever treated us the way we've treated him. And so, our experience of God's goodness to us is fleeting, at best.

If this group is typical, that's where some of you are living. *You don't treasure God as you could because deep down, you believe--there's no way God could treasure you.* And that is CRUCIAL for us to love God because First John 4:19 tells us, "We love because he first loved us." Now, in context, that has to do with our loving others in response to God loving us. But if our love for others is in response to God's love for us then SURELY our love for God is in response to his love for us.

The problem with doubting God's goodness and love for us is that—we are forgetting the gospel—the central truth of the Bible. It's true—***if God were like you and me*** and we did the things we have done to him through our treasonous sins, he WOULD be a fool for loving us and in fact, the only reasonable thing he *could* do to us would be to condemn us. A third, closely

related reason we don't desire God as we should is—**we have forgotten the gospel of grace.**

In Second Peter chapter one, Peter lists many Christian virtues including self-control that are ours because we have been united with Christ. But in verse nine, he gives a reason some believers are NOT living out these qualities that are ours in Christ. He says, <sup>9</sup> For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, *having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.* That tells us that a big reason we don't live in freedom from sin is because **we have forgotten the goodness of God in forgiving our sins.** This is where Jesus comes in. The reason God is not disappointed or fed up or disillusioned or enraged by a believer's habitual sin—is not because that isn't a perfectly reasonable response to our sin. It is!

The reason God doesn't relate to us like that in the habitual sins we feel guilty and worthless about is because—**he has already expressed his rage toward your sin. He took all your destructive habits, all your false apologies, all your betrayals, all your lies, all your cover-ups and whatever else you have done in your idolatrous sin—and he put them on Jesus. And then HE CRUSHED HIM in your place for them! And he did that *because he loves you. Among other reasons!***

His love is NOT motivated by anything you do or have done, his love IS what motivated him to punish his Son for YOUR sin on the cross. He did that because HE IS GOOD, not because YOU are. He did it —because he loves you—**because he is *NOT AT ALL* like anyone else you've ever met.** As John Piper says, **the only sin you can have victory over is a sin for which you have received forgiveness. Any sin you refuse to believe you are forgiven of you will never be free of. You kill sin by faith and there is no faith in doubting God's forgiveness.**

**When, by God's grace you get that gospel truth down into your heart—that opens the door to delighting in God.** You'll be increasingly able to rejoice in God, long for him, treasure him, cherish him and make him your greatest love. And when you do that—the things you're addicted to—you

will leave them behind WITH JOY—like that man who gave up everything he had to get to get his great Treasure.

So, if you want to love God, delight in him so strongly that you will, by comparison, see whatever sins you're enslaved to as a muddy hole, preach this gospel to yourself every day and many times a day and pray that God would pierce your heart with it. As you do that, you will find that delighting in him and rejoicing in him and longing for him become a way of life—a life with no room for little tawdry pleasures like those delivered to us by idols like sexual sin.

And if you haven't accepted Christ by faith, do that today. Cry out to him, admit your biggest problem is NOT your lust problem or the rotten things you've done because of it. Your biggest problem is—you don't love God which is the greatest sin a person can ever commit because it's breaking the Great Commandment. Confess THAT to him—that you have been sucking on that muddy hole.

Tonight, God wants you to know that you don't have to do that. You can have the fountain of living water—you can have the great Treasure, HIM. Place your trust in Jesus—trust in Christ that his death was powerful enough to forgive all your sin and to make you a child of God. Ask for the Holy Spirit who can cause you to love God more than anything. May God give us the grace to surrender the paltry promises of pleasure and delight this world offers in exchange for what alone can satisfy us for his glory and our joy.