



Giving Men Hope in the Face of Overwhelming Bondage

By Steve Gallagher

Throughout my 22 years of ministering to men in sexual sin, I have known many who felt like they had gone too far to ever find freedom. How does a pastor tell a man who has only ever known defeat that there is hope? How can he convey that God *can* set him free when everything in his life seems to be a mockery of that promise? It is extremely important for pastors to instill hope in struggling men—even those who battle overwhelming bondage to sexual perversion. But we must first understand why they feel like there's no way out.

Causes of Hopelessness

One of the difficulties with ministering to a sexual addict is that, because he has established a sinful behavior pattern for so many years, he gets to the place where he can't imagine a life of purity. The towering, 90-foot image Nebuchadnezzar built is a picture of how enormous the idol of sexual sin can seem to a man. All of his activity is done under the shadow of its inescapable presence.

Moreover, along with an extensive history of illicit behavior, the addict's repeated failures, broken promises, and false starts have created a defeatist mentality. He has tried to change many times in the past, but unfortunately, all his efforts to break free seem like a waste of time.

Another obstacle to victory is that sin pollutes every aspect of the addict's life. Its contaminating presence ruins his best efforts to find the Deliverer and leads him down the *Spiral of Degradation*. The more he sins, the more defeated he feels. And, the more defeated he feels, the less he wants to do right. So despite previous quests to find God, he eventually ends up back *at the altar of sexual idolatry* where his temple is defiled once more.

As if those factors weren't enough to keep him in despair, he also has the enemy in his ear taunting and telling him that he'll never be free. "Face it, there's no hope for you. It doesn't matter how much you try, you *will* fail! You might be able to get through today without going to that website, but it's only a matter of time before you give in!" He encounters this sort of mental onslaught every time he determines to quit his behavior.

The final clincher to his hopelessness—the thought of this has brought me more personal grief than I can begin to articulate—is that his head is crammed with so many exaggerated promises by would-be spiritual teachers who have claimed that their book about freedom was "powerful" or that their seminar would be "life-changing." Sadly, this undiscerning man doesn't realize that what he has been given are either superficial, Band Aid answers or the wisdom of this world packaged as truth. How many times has he gotten his hopes up and believed such claims, only to be disappointed or even devastated by the lack of any real results?

Causes for Hope

There *is* hope, however. I have been witnessing it for many years at Pure Life Ministries. While I cannot explain all that encompasses finding that freedom in the short confines of this article, I will briefly mention five important principles that pastors can pass on to their men. Amazingly, all five are the antitheses of the five reasons for hopelessness mentioned above.

1. A man battling some life-dominating problem must learn to get his eyes off the sin and onto the Lord. I remember the words of a certain musician who graduated from the PLM residential program. He said, “God looms large at Pure Life Ministries.” Those words describe the kind of atmosphere that helps men obey the words of Paul: “Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.” (Colossians 3:2) Concentrating on the sin does not foster hope and may lead to further bondage. Focusing on the Deliverer is the answer!
2. A man who has gone down the convoluted stairway of sin must be shown through godly counsel how to walk back up—one step at a time! However, this is unfeasible without obedience. As he humbles himself and begins to obey God in little ways, he will find that obedience will become a way of life. And miraculously the disgusting filth of sin begins to vanish. Before he knows it, he will have climbed right out of that deep pit he once languished in. Conformity to God’s will heighten a man’s sense of victory—he can smell it!
3. A man needs to be taught how to go to God in deep repentance. What Christian man battling sexual sin hasn’t prayed David’s prayer? “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” (Psalm 51:2) But many have become well adept at minimizing the wrongness of their sin and have forgotten what real repentance is all about. Like obedience, it too must become a part of a man’s daily life.
4. One of the most important duties of the pastor is to help a man learn how to shut his ears to the demoralizing lies the devil whispers to him. Again as mentioned in #1 above, instead of focusing attention upon his overwhelming sin, encourage him to fix his gaze upon the Lord! A man who sincerely spends his time looking to Jesus will not wallow in hopelessness. As he focuses on the Lord, that mountain of sin is eventually reduced to a molehill. Perhaps that’s what Jesus was referring to when He said, “Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall... say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and cast into the sea,’ it shall happen. And all things you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.” (Matthew 21:21-22) Such faith involves allowing God to reign supreme in the life and in the mind.
5. As the man lets go of man-made solutions and truly turns to the Lord with all his heart, he finds real victory. He will exclaim along with David: “O give us help against the adversary, for deliverance by man is in vain. Through God we shall do valiantly, and it is He who will tread down our adversaries.” (Psalm 60:11-12)

Is there hope for those in overwhelming bondage? Absolutely! As a minister of the gospel, you are in a wonderful position to help the man see that there is hope. Perhaps you don’t have a testimony of being freed from some life-dominating habit, but you can certainly testify to the fact that God has done a marvelous work inside you! A sincere word of testimony about what the Lord has done in your life will do more to instill hope in him than piles of books. Pray for him. Believe God to meet him in his need. And never stop pouring your life into him. You might be surprised at the results!

Steve Gallagher is the founder and president of Pure Life Ministries. He has dedicated his life to helping men find freedom from sexual sin and the abundant life in God that comes through deep repentance.

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