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Purity

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My Lord, I know so little about purity (from the practical, day to day life point of view). Help me now, O Lord, to set down some thoughts, exercises and practices that You have taught me by various means, and I have tried, with variable success. I often forget and peter out in my practice of these as time trundles on, so a written record is a good reminder to meâ€¦

The Nature of Lust

->
(i) **It is Selfish:** - a self-centred sin, since its main aim is to satisfy oneself regardless of the effect on others. Selfishness is the diametric opposite of love. No human loves to be selfish. It is a self-destroying characteristic. ->

(ii) **It is Pride:** - St John grouped these two together when he said, â€œFor all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.â€• (I John 2:16). ->

(iii) **It is Transient:** - â€œDo not seek for the food that perishesâ€• (John 6). Its transience is frustrating, it leaves the soul longing for more, i.e. it makes a person continually dissatisfied ï*f* feeling empty, hollow. ->

(iv) **It Destroys Peace:** - Every fall leads to disappointment and depression. It is a battle that wages within, and by giving in to sin, I am strengthening the enemy! (like selling arms to Iraq). ->

(v) **It brings Condemnation!:** - â€œIt is better for you to go through life with one eye rather than be cast into hell with a healthy bodyâ€• this small, transient pleasure is the 30 pieces of silver for which

I sell my Lord and my eternal life. And this is unavoidable- intrinsic! ->

(vi) **It Forms a Wall Between Me And God:** - sin is the dividing wall that separates me from You, O my loving Lord (Life of St Gregory). How horrible that I, who am dust and who need You so desperately, and often seeks You- how incredible that I should build a dividing wall with my own hands! ->
(vii) **It is a Betrayal:** - You who loved me, took my nature, and died for meâ€¦ how can I do the very thing which hurts You? I t is as though I stand at the foot of the Cross, and see you bleeding, suffering, suffocating- for my sake- then I turn my back on You and walk away with a hard heart to join those who crucified You. Give me, O Lord, a heart of flesh for this hard heart of store! ->
(viii) **It Is Defeat:** - I know that there is a battle. I know which side I WANT to be on. I know which side will ultimately win without doubt. Yet knowing all this, I sometimes capitulate and give in- even willingly! Sometimes. I even seek this defeat! It is a sign of my weakness. ->
(ix) **It Is A Counterfeit:** - The devil can CREATE nothing himself. The best he can do is take something beautiful and â€œgoodâ€• (Genesis) and twist it around. But when you twist anything (a bicycle wheel for example) â€“ no matter how you twist it, it will never work better than it did originally. And I leave the â€œgoodâ€• original for this twisted fake! What is the original? Sacramental love. And deeper than that- Divine, agapy love!

Purity means regaining the territory God gave me, and the devil invaded and corrupted. The desire for physical intimacy is holy, intended for use within a whole-person loving, caring and giving relationship with oneâ€™s spouse. The devil invaded this territory and corrupted the use of that desire. It is my role to fight, with the grace of God, to win back that territory and restore it to its rightful uses.

And there is a probably a great deal moreâ€¦

Yet these small facts have You allowed me to see in Your mercy, O Lord, that did not destroy me quickly, but gives me chance after chance. And now, my Lord, help me to put on paper some aids, exercises and methods You are trying to teach my stubborn and sinful soul. Before this, though, I must confess a great truth that should never forget, for I am a weakling and as nought before the well-practiced wiles of the wicked way-layer. That is:-

VICTORY COMES ONLY THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD

Purity comes not my own strength and struggle, but through your protection and aid. Certainly, You shall not bless me with this deliverance so long as I am lazy and loafing â€“ in Your love, You never force Your virtues on us. Purity is a prison-cell door of solid iron that I can never move; and I am locked inside in the darkness. But You have slipped the key under the door for me. It is for me to pick it up and turn the latch â€“ that much I am capable of. But it is for you to push the door open, for no-one else has that strength but You!

My efforts are that key. My tiny successes are the encouraging sound of the latch clicking open. Surely my Beloved will quickly set me freeâ€¦

Prayer

Prayer is integral to success in attaining the virtue of a pure heart and pure life. You force no-one to accept Your help and grace, but give it only when sincerely invited. But once You answer prayer â€“ my Beloved Lord â€“ it is often in an amazingly powerful way!!! Help me Lord, to set down some practical guidelines for my future memory:-

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(i) **Prayer Must Be Sincere: -** I must begin my prayer- battle with a real, honest and sincere decision to become pure and holy. The double-minded gains nought (James 1). Never mind the means â€“ be firm regarding the goal. ->
(ii) **Repentance:** - This is essential- I must feel I am in the wrong and need God to change me. (Strangely, one may truly repent though the love of sin remains in his heart. But this state is ALWAYS temporary â€“ a stepping stone. Either his repentance will gradually weaken and die out or become cold, habitual and meaningless or Godâ€™s grace will take effect and sin will disappear â€“ suddenly or gradually. Hence the importance of perseverance (see below). ->
(iii) **Constant Prayer:** - the practice of continual prayers- the Jesus Prayer, reciting the Psalms, spontaneous dialogue, reciting Bible passages or even just â€œpracticing the Presence of God (Brother Lawrence). All these keep the heart CLOSE to God. Thus they prevent the devil from having any opportunity to tempt â€“ even if he tempts, the heart is too occupied and happy with God to be distracted. The devil can only attack successfully when I lose the thread of continual prayer. E.g. â€œSet a guard, O Lord, over my eyes/ thoughtsâ€• and sign them with a crossâ€•. ->
(iv) **Metanias:** - These are the heavy artillery. A constant barrage of sincere metanias cannot be withstood by the enemy for long! Their power lies in humility, confessing oneâ€™s weakness, failure and double-mindedness with sorrow in oneâ€™s weakness in irretrievable humiliation before God. Humbling myself in obedience before my confession father who gives me my Rule. Humbling my body before itself, to confess its weakness and falls. ->
(v)**Fasting:** - There are some sins that â€œcannot come out except by prayer and fasting.â€• General fasts (Wednesday and Friday etc.) or Special fasts directed by the confession father, and linked strongly to prayer. This is the guided missile in the Battle. ->
(vi) **Liturgies and Name on Altar:** - The most powerful of all prayer â€“ offered by the priest right before Your Holy Body and Blood. This benefits in a number of ways â€“ one receives the power of the altar; the prayer of a righteous man (James 5); a period of concentrated prayer for myself in the presence of God; beautiful memories with purity-inspiring words I can carry into the world with me; communion of unity with other Christians already living a pure Christian life; and most of all â€“ the indomitable power of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ into my own body and blood so that You dwell in me and I dwell in You! ->
(vii) **Prayer on the Spot:** - As soon as I am tempted â€“ PRAY! A simple prayer of humility â€“ â€œhave mercy on me, My Lord â€“ I am weak!â€• The devil flees! Yet this requires vigilance. Donâ€™t do it once then forget to do it 5 minutes later! ->
(viii) **Perseverance:** - continue in prayer, confident that you can not lose. It may be successful today, maybe in 20 years time, but success is 100% assured, for it is You who fights for us, O Lord, and who can withstand You? The only way for me to lose is if I give up hope and desert the Battle.

Our Main Weapons
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(i) **True Repentance:** - This is essential â€“ I must feel I am in the wrong and that I need God to change me. I must make a real, honest and sincere decision to become pure and holy. â€œFor let

not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his waysâ€• (James 1). I must be firm in seeking my goal. At the very least, I must desire to be firm: â€œImmediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, â€˜Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!â€™ â€• (Mark 9:24). ->
(ii) **Humility:** - The devil cannot stand humility â€“ it is like capsicum spray in his face! If I remember my many sins and feel how in spite of His great love for me, I have let God down, it makes it very hard to let Him down even more. And beware the sneaky trick the devil uses of convincing you that you are a saint whenever you succeed in this battle for a while. Donâ€™t listen to him! Remember all those sins! ->
(iii) **Constant, Sincere Prayer:** - Prayer is the key that opens the door to Godâ€™s help. Continual prayers keep the heart CLOSE to God, eg. the Jesus Prayer; reciting the Psalms; just talking to God at any time and about anything; remembering memorised verses or passages from the Bible; or even reminding myself that God is present with me. Prayers also prevent the devil from having any opportunity to tempt â€“ even if he tempts, the heart is too occupied and happy with God to be distracted. The devil can only attack successfully when I lose the thread of continual prayer ->
(iv) **Prayer on the Spot:** - As soon as I am tempted â€“ PRAY! A simple prayer of humility â€“ â€œhave mercy on me, My Lord â€“ I am weak!â€• The devil flees! Yet this requires vigilance. Donâ€™t do it once then forget to do it 5 minutes later! ->
(v) **Metanias:** - (bowing in prayer) These are the heavy artillery. A constant barrage of sincere metanias cannot be withstood by the enemy for long! Their power lies in humility, confessing oneâ€™s weakness, failure and double-mindedness with real sorrow and humbling myself before God. ->
(vi) **Regular Confession:** - Humbling myself in obedience before my confession. Lust is one of those temptations that can lose its grip over me when I expose it to the light of day before another person. ->
(vii) **Fasting:** - There are some sins that â€œcannot come out except by prayer and fastingâ€• (Matthew 17:21). General fasts (Wednesday and Friday etc.) or special fasts directed by the confession father, and linked strongly to prayer. This is the guided missile in the Battle. ->
(viii) **Liturgies and Name on Altar:** - The most powerful of all prayer â€“ offered by the priest right before the Holy Body and Blood. This benefits in a number of ways â€“ one receives the power of the altar; the prayer of a righteous man (James 5); a period of concentrated prayer for myself in the presence of God; beautiful memories with purity; inspiring words I can carry into the world with me; communion of unity with other Christians already living a pure Christian life; and most of all â€“ the invincible power of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ into my own body and blood so that God dwells in me and I dwell in Him! ->
(ix) **Perseverance:** - continue in prayer, confident that you can not lose. You may be successful today, maybe in 20 years time, but sooner or later, success will come. It is 100% assured, for it is God who fights for us, and who can withstand Him? The only way for me to lose is if I give up hope and desert the Battle.

Lust and Pride

There seems to be a definite relationship between these two major and very stubborn sins. They are related by sharing a common nature â€“ both depending on feeding the ego. But there also seems to be a kind of synergy between them that is so frustrating to the struggling Christian. It works something like this:



When I overcome the sin of lust for a time, against which I have been struggling so hard, I find myself beginning to think of myself as a hero, a success, better than other people and now in a position to lecture them on this and many other areas of life (ie. pride). But pride, of course, separates me from the grace of God, for â€œGod resists the proud, but gives grace to humbleâ€• (James 4:7). In this graceless state, I become easy prey for the devil, who makes me fall again into lust, but this time with the added, heart-breaking disappointment of knowing from whence I fell. I am humbled, and thus in touch with the grace of God once more, and so I begin to overcome the sin of lust, and the cycle begins again.

Ideally then, my goal should be purity from the sin of lust simultaneously held with true humility. But how can this be achieved?

I suppose that I must find other sources to feed my humility. In truth, there is no lack of sins in my weak and faulty nature, yet none of them seems to carry the same ability to humble me as lust does. Perhaps I donâ€™t take them seriously enough? Perhaps I dismiss them as â€˜minorâ€™ and believe that they do not matter all that much to God? But in reality, even the smallest sin is still by its very nature a betrayal of God, no matter how large or small it may be. There is indeed such a long way to go!

I also need to free myself of the false notion that freedom from lust is equal to holiness. In fact, the instinct, the basic animal desire will always be in me as a human being, always with the potential at any time to take over again and overcome me. My periods of grace are analogous to keeping a wild wolf tied up in the backyard, starved and ravenous. If Iâ€™m not careful, it could get loose, or I could go too close and be seriously injured, if not killed. I think it is only those who reach the very highest of spiritual levels whose nature itself is totally and permanently rid of any desire or lust. And, of course, those who are dead.

Humiliating experiences are invaluable in this context! They may be very uncomfortable at the time, and afterwards as well, but they can be a most powerful weapon in fighting the demon Pride and bringing me back down to reality. However, the flip side is that if things go too wrong for too long, one is susceptible to despair. One can lose hope in Godâ€™s grace and give up altogether. Or one can seek comfort and consolation by losing oneself in a familiar old sin, including lust. This consolation is, of course, only temporary, and leads to an even greater sorrow and despair, but try telling that to the crazed drug addict mesmerised by his need for his next â€˜hitâ€™!

Practical Strategies

The Greek word for â€œRepentanceâ€• is METANIOA

â€œMetaniaâ€•

= a change of heart / attitude / way of thinking

Some â€œattitudesâ€• or â€œchanges of outlookâ€• that can help in the battle:-

->
(i) **Reality Check #1.** Imagine what the person will look like in 50 years time- i.e. All wrinkly, hairy, hunchback, dry skin, teeth lost etc. Not an attractive sight! Is this what I lust after? ->
(ii) **Reality Check #2.** Imagine what they look like if you just remove the top 5min of skin: muscles, bones, views, nerves, intestines â€“ Yuck! ->
(iii) **Reality Check #3.** Remember that this person has parents, family etc: how would I feel to have my own wife / sister / mother so thought of or looked at?! ->
(iv) **Reality Check #4.** Lust most often involves reducing the target of the lust to a mere object, a â€˜thingâ€™. I may know nothing about that person, who they are, what their personality is like, who their family and friends are â€“ they are not a person to me but merely a tool. Worse still â€“ they often donâ€™t even know that I exist. Yet I enter into one of the most intimate of interactions with them, often without them even being aware. Surely this is a terrible betrayal? How can I accept such devaluation, such humiliation of a fellow human being, and beautiful spiritual being made by God and intended to live in eternity? ->
(v) **Reality Check #5.** Regardless of any other factors, you cannot escape the fact that God has commanded against unbridled lust. Lust has a lawful place within the sacramental marriage relationship, subjected to the superior Aghape love, but anywhere else, it is â€œillegalâ€•. No amount of rationalisation can escape this fact. To lust is to break Godâ€™s law.
->
(vi) **Understand the Mechanism.** Understand that lusts are merely physiological process. It is based ultimately on stimulation of the â€œpleasure centreâ€• (if such a discreet centre exists in humans) and we thus behave in such a way as to repeat this stimulation. Experiments where electrodes were inserted in to the pleasure centres in the brains of lab mice showed that they would continually jump to press the little lever that stimulated their pleasure centre, ignoring food and water, until they exhausted themselves and died! Will I be so made a slave of my physiology?! On the other hand, by just acknowledging the process for what it is â€“ merely a set of chemical and electrical signals â€“ one can discount oneâ€™s need for it. A bit like controlling pain by understanding that itâ€™s only a set of signals being sent to the brain.

Also, am I to be reduced to the level of a mindless animal, merely being forced to think and act according to my instincts? Or will I live as God intended me to be â€“ as a human being with a free will and eternal spirit?
->
(vii) **Contentment.** â€œA satisfied soul loathes the honeycombâ€¦â€• (Proverbs 27:7). Often, falls result from discontentment, or restlessness, or a feeling of self-pity, poverty or emptiness. Seek to be satisfied by God - to be â€œfullâ€• and content in Him & in His good gifts. Remember, â€œGodliness with contentment is great gainâ€• (I Timothy 6:6). ->

(viii) **The Shield. Get into this habit:**- When in the presence of a temptation â€“ whether in reality

or in thought â€“ imagine a protective shield or barrier between you and the tempting sight. This â€œshieldâ€• could be:- ->

a) the Cross, with the crucified Lord suffering on it
b) the face of Jesus (looking at me!)
c) A medieval knightâ€™s shield, (perhaps with a red cross on white), behind which I hide myself;
d) or anything else that works!
->

(ix) **The Silver Chair**. (See also Useful Stories below) In the Narnia stories, the Silver Chair is used to bind the Prince who is kept as a slave of an evil witch by an enchantment. He is bound to it to prevent him from escaping during the brief moments of clarity he experiences once a day at a certain time of the day. In the end, the heroes of the story take a chance and loose his bonds during the moments of clarity, although he seems crazier. He immediately leaps up and destroys the chair with a sword, thus escaping the enchantment forever and becoming his true self again. This is an appropriate parable of the enchantment of lust. We have brief moments of clarity when the evil of it becomes obvious, but somehow we are not able to escape. We too need to destroy this Silver Chair. ->

(x) **Remember your sins.** TRUE Humility is a weapon the devil cannot withstand (remember the St. Macarius Story). Remember the sins you feel most guilt about and say, â€œIt is enough: how can I add to these!â€• ->

(xi) **Flee From Temptation.** Analyse the causes of temptation and change your lifestyle/ environment to eliminate or at least minimise them. ->

(xii) **Protective Wall.** Build a positive environment/ lifestyle that keeps you occupied and surrounded by things that are without sin, or better, building your love for God. Eg. Spiritual books, tapes/CDâ€™s of liturgies, sermons, hymns, icons, contemplations, inspiring people (especially saints). ->

(xiii) **God is Here.** Remind yourself that they eyes of God are trained upon you- now! As Joseph said, â€œhow can I commit this great sin before Godâ€• Even our thoughts cannot be hidden from Him. ->

(xiv) **Be A Child.** Having children is a great blessing! Coming home is a time of joy, for the kids miss their Dad- they come running to the front door, full of beaming smiles and laughter, jump on their Dad, hug him tight and say â€œWe love Daddy!â€• or â€œAre you staying home tonight?â€• And they donâ€™t let go!
This is a beautiful analogy for my relationship with God. Let me also run to Him and cling to Him whenever temptations beset me. Let me imagine myself as a young child, clinging to Jesus, my heart fall of joy, peace, security and comfort, headless of the dim, insipient attractions of the world! ->

(xv) **The Battle!** Remember that I am in a war. In war there may be many discreet battles. Some are won, some lost â€“ but in the end it is who wins the WAR that matters, not who wins an individual BATTLE. So I must not lose hope, but stay fighting on the â€œright sideâ€•! ->

(xvi) **Self Review: Revisit Your Goals:** - submitting to temptations implies that one has lost sight of his / her goals in life. â€œHe who loves Me keeps my commandmentsâ€• and â€œwhoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Himâ€•. (1 John 3:6). Every sin I commit is a reminder to me that I have not yet entered into a 100% genuine and true relationship with God; and it is a motivation for me to do everything within my power to sacrifice all and put all I have into finding that precious pearl beyond price that is our Lord Christ.
(This needs more careful contemplation: I suspect it is a, if not the, critical factor). ->

(xvii) **The power of the Altar.** It really is there for us to use, but we have to focus on it and seek it during the liturgy. Then amazing things happen. ->

(xviii) **Communion and Temptations.** One must never separate oneself from the power that Holy Communion bestows upon the struggler for purity. The only things that should prevent me from having Communion are if I continue to sin, and enjoy the sin so much that I really do not want to stop; or if my Confession Father asks me to stop. But if I come to the liturgy and feel genuine sorrow and remorse for my sins, even though they be repeated a thousand times, that genuine desire for repentance is enough to make the Holy Body and Blood of Christ a blessing and encouragement to me rather than a curse. St John Chrysostomâ€™s parable of the Kingâ€™s Son is useful here, as is the Paradise of the Fathers story, â€œYou Strike and Iâ€™ll Strikeâ€•. ->
(xix) **Imagining Victory.** A psychology tool may help. Continually take time out to imagine what life would be like if you were free of this sin. Imagine you have been free for a year. Picture in your mind how you are feeling. Imagine how you react to sources of temptation, now that you are now longer enslaved. Imagine the peace and freedom that fills your heart. Imagine the absence of guilty feelings, when you speak to others, when you pray. Now turn this image into a prayer. Do you really desire to be in this pure state? Then beg and plead with God to make it reality. ->
(xx) **Lust As Addiction.** It may be that the sin of lust can so take hold of a person that it takes the form of a true addiction, of the same type as smoking, alcoholism, drug addiction or gambling addiction (see the â€œ12 Stepsâ€• in Useful Sayings below). This has many consequences. For example, in order to overcome addiction, one must first admit that s/he is in fact addicted and that the addiction has taken over control of their lives. Outside help and support is almost certainly needed to overcome addiction. But before any of this can happen, the person must first admit to oneself that they are indeed an addict. Denying this will serve only to keep them in chains forever. ->
(xxi) **Mentor.** Alone, one may not be able to overcome their addiction because our human will is weak and our resolve is hard to maintain. But notice that when a person is in public, in the company of others they know well and respect, it is harder to fall into sinful thinking or action. If one has a mentor, someone of strong spiritual character, who knows the depths of the problem, they can benefit from that mentorâ€™s constant support. A mentor can ring their friend daily, or even more often, with words of encouragement to â€˜pep-talkâ€™ them into continuing to fight against sin. A mentor provides accountability â€“ if a person knows they will have to tell their mentor how things went each day, it is an added incentive for resisting sin. A mentorâ€™s pure world-view may â€˜rub offâ€™ on their friend over time as they interact with other over time.

But to really work, this mentor must be free an available to give time daily to the struggler. A Confession Father could carry out this role, but with their commitments it is very hard. A better option may be an older, spiritual and experienced servant who could be allocated to look after individuals intensively until they come out of their slavery. ->
(xxii) **Paper Tiger.** The devil is very good at convincing us that he is unbeatable. He roars and terrifies the hope out of our hearts, keeping us in a frame of mind where we feel that sin is inevitable. â€œDonâ€™t even try to beat meâ€•, he boasts, â€œYou know youâ€™re going to give in sooner or laterâ€•. And we believe him.
But the reality is that there is no substance behind this boast. The Bible quickly dispels his power over the person in whom Christ dwells, and who dwells within Christ: â€œHe who is in you is greater than he who is in the worldâ€• (1 John 4:4); â€œResist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to youâ€• (James 4). ->
(xxiii) **The Button.** Do I really love God? Can I still be His child if I continue to commit these sins? This is a test to determine whether I am a lost soul far from salvation or a struggling child of God: Imagine a little black box with a single red button on the top. Pressing that button will once and for all remove sexual sins from my life. Consider this: that will mean not only removing the sins, but all that I benefit from those sins, if they meet needs in my life, then they will do so no more, if they give me pleasure, they will do so no more, etc.

Would I press the button?

If my answer is no, then I am in trouble. That means that I have surrendered to sin and become its willing slave. I need to do major spiritual surgery on my heart, to reconsider my whole aim in life. If I donâ€™t, my salvation is genuinely in danger.

But if I answer yes, then I am indeed still a loyal and loving child of God. I am willing to give up all that sin gives me, but I just havenâ€™t found out how yet. I need to keep fighting and struggling, as well as seeking new ways to overcome this temptation. I need to trust that sooner or later, Godâ€™s grace will indeed carry me to victory. ->

(xxiv) **The Wicked Slave Master:** An analogy â€¦
Imagine an evil sorcerer who kidnaps you and chains you in his dungeon. To ensure his hold upon you, he laces your food with a very addictive drug so that you become dependent on it. Then, for entertainment, every now and then when the fancy takes him, he stops lacing the food for a day or two until you are craving the drug. Then he brings you out of the dungeon with a heavy iron chain around your neck, and amuses himself by dangling little delicacies (chocolates or lollies) infused with the drug before your face.

But he doesnâ€™t give them to you so easily! No, he makes you do tricks to earn them. Sometimes just silly tricks. Sometimes totally demeaning and unthinkable acts. And he laughs at how far you are willing to go to get that little delicacy, exulting in his complete power over you! But the longer you are in his power, the more do you lose your self-respect and your humanity. Instead, you become more like an animal, totally controlled by your urges and instincts, a slave of the sorcerer, to whom you have given this power over you by allowing yourself to become addicted.

But any addiction can be overcome, if the addict is motivated enough. Rebel! Donâ€™t stand for this! Donâ€™t accept your chains â€“ how long will you continue to be a slave? Fight for your freedom. Hate that sorcerer and hate the chains and the drug he has used to enslave them. ->

(xxv) **Transformation.** â€œAnd do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.â€• (Romans 12:2)

In the story of the woman who was a sinner (Luke 7), who washed the feet of Jesus with her tears and dried them with her hair and anointed them with fragrant oil, there is a beautiful, though subtle message. When Simon the Pharisee saw her actions, he immediately saw in them a sensual dimension. His interpretation may have gone something like this: *â€œThereâ€™s that woman. How dare she come into my house and be among decent people? We all know she is an adulteress! Now look what sheâ€™s doing! Kneeling in front of the Teacher? Kissing His feet? What, will she try to seduce Him even here, in public, in front of everyone? Has she no shame? How dare she behave like this in a decent house like mine! Why, sheâ€™s rubbing His feet with oil! Why doesnâ€™t the Teacher stop her? Why doesnâ€™t He tell her to get out? Surely Heâ€™s not actually enjoying this?â€•*

But then Jesus perceives his thoughts and turns them upside down. To paraphrase: *â€œSimon, do you ask why I let this adulteress touch Me in this way? That is because your thinking is still bound to the world, enslaved by the body. Turn now and look instead with the eyes of the spirit, and see this scene from the eyes of pure, divine agape love. She is not touching my feet to inflame lust, she is*

pouring her regret for her lust upon my feet. Can you not see the tears? They are tears of repentance. Can you not feel the bitterness in her soul? She is not enticing with her body, she is offering her body in broken, wounded humility for me to purify. She is saying to Me, â€˜Lord, as you have washed my heart clean of my sin, so I wash your feet in gratitudeâ€™. Her hair is not beautifully brushed and scented to attract; it is ragged and dirty with the dust and grime she has washed from my feet. She does not use perfume to attract, she uses it to make my feet pleasant. She is giving to me the little she has to offer, the little she knows how. So do not look with tainted eyes at her pure offering. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. (Titus 1:15).

Battle Strategy

Insight
Motivation
Means
Persistence

Useful Verses
Worth memorising, or writing down and putting somewhere always visible.

->
â€œWhoever has been born of God does not sinâ€• (1 John 3:9, 5:18) ->
â€œGodliness with contentment is great gainâ€• (I Timothy 6:6) ->
â€œA satisfied soul loathes the honeycombâ€¦â€• (Proverbs 27:7) ->
â€œHe who is in you is greater than he who is in the worldâ€• (1 John 4:4) ->
â€œI can do all things through Christ who strengthens meâ€• (Philippians 4:13) ->
â€œDo not rejoice over me, my enemy: If I fall, I will surely rise. If I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to meâ€• (Malachi 7:8). ->
â€œWhere do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. 3 You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. 4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. 5 Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"? 6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." 7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. 8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. 9 Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. 10 Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.â€• (James 4:1-10).

Useful Sayings

â€¢ â€œLove God and do whatever you willâ€•
-St Augustine
â€¢ â€œYou cannot prevent a bird form landing on your head. You can, however, prevent it from building its nest there!â€•
-HH Pope Shenouda III

â€¢Paradise of the Fathers: â€œOn Fornicationâ€• and â€œOn Humilityâ€•

Useful Stories

Delicious Rottenness

Anba Abraam, the saintly Bishop of Fayoum was renowned for his sincere ascetism. But this story reveals that he too had to fight the battle of the spirit against the flesh. One day, he found himself craving a dish of nicely cooked and seasoned quail. So he asked the cook to prepare the dish for him and place it on the dining table. He came, and sat before it, but did not eat any of it. He told the cook to leave it where it was. The next day, he did the same, and again the next. The food, of course, began to go off, and eventually, mould grew in it. Finally, he came and sat before the rotting mess and said to himself: â€œGo ahead, my soul, eat and enjoy your desire. Isnâ€™t this the meal that you craved?â€•

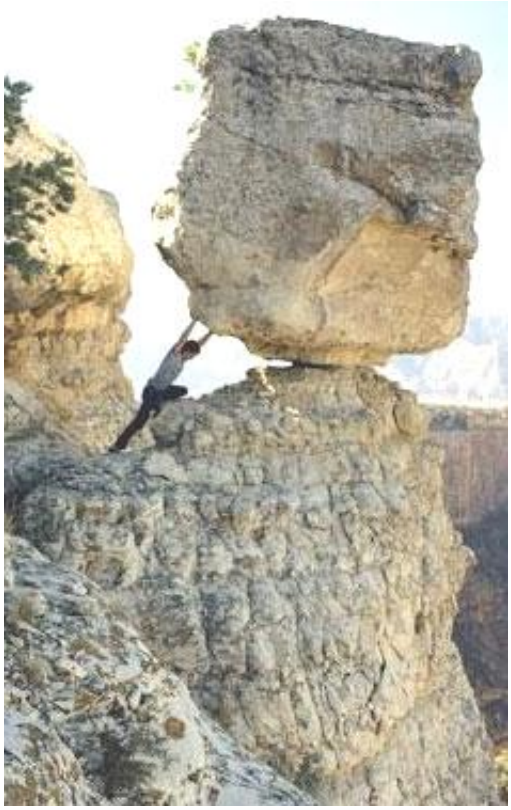
â€œYou Strike and Iâ€™ll Strike!â€•

The Paradise of the Fathers contains the story of a young monk who found himself beset with temptations of a sexual nature. He went to his spiritual father and confessed this weakness, explaining that he felt that he could not possibly be suited to the monastic life if he was so carnal. But his wise father told him not to give up, but to continue his spiritual life without interruption. If the devil managed to make him fall, he was to get up immediately and continue his prayers and fasts and metanias. â€œEvery time devil strikes you down, you strike him back. You know how labourers installing a fence post in the ground will stand on opposite sides of the post, each with a heavy mallet, and take turns in striking the post to drive it into the ground? Well, you tell the devil, â€˜Every time you strike a blow, I too will strike a blowâ€™.â€•

The young man was doubtful, but chose to obey his spiritual father. After some time, he grew weary of this battle. He went to his father to complain and beg to be released to go back into the world, but his father insisted that he should keep fighting. â€œRemember,â€• he told him, â€œ â€˜Every time you strike a blow, I too will strike a blowâ€™ â€“ be persistent. Be stubborn. Donâ€™t give inâ€•. Thus encouraged, the young monk went back to his battle.

Some years passed in this way, with the young monk getting support and encouragement from his spiritual father whenever he weakened and wanted to give up. Finally, after many years of spiritual battle, the young monk was praying when the devil suddenly appeared before him, looking angry and frustrated. â€œI came to tell you,â€• he spat out, â€œthat I will no longer be tempting you with sexual sins. But I want you to know that the only reason I am stopping that particular line of attack is that I do not wish to be the cause of you winning a heavenly crown for your struggles!â€• And with that, he vanished. From that day, the young monk had peace from the temptations that had plagued him for so long.

Pushing the Rock



A man kept having the same dream. In this dream, God would bring the man to a place where there was a very large rock, bigger than the man himself. God would say, "Your role is to push that rock". The man would obediently apply his shoulder to the rock and start pushing with all his might. Sometimes he would try different ways to push - higher or lower on the side of the rock, using his hands or lying down and pushing with his feet. Yet however hard he tried, however tired and sore he got, that rock would never move and inch. Night after night he would push as hard and as long as he could without once seeing a reward for his labour. But he was happy, for he was doing what God had asked of him.

One night, the dream was different. The devil came to him as he was pushing with all his strength and asked him, "Why are you trying to move that immovable rock?" The man answered, "Because this is the job God has given me, and I must obey him."

"Why do you waste your energy on such a useless exercise? Surely God is sitting up there laughing at you now! And what do you get out all this? Nothing but sore muscles, aches, pains, bruises and scratches. It's not worth it! If there were any hope you might actually move the thing it might be different, but do you really think you can ever move a rock that size? If I were you, I wouldn't strain myself on a task that will never succeed. Why don't you just take life easy and enjoy yourself?"

This seemed to make perfect sense to the man, so he took the advice and stopped trying so hard. Every night, he would put less and less effort into trying to move that rock, until at least he would just sit with his back leaning against it and let his thoughts drift aimlesslyâ€¦

And then, one night, God came back.

"Why are you not pushing against the rock as I asked you to?" He asked.

"Well", answered the man, "I really can't see any hope of shifting the thing - it's far too heavy for me. So I thought I might just rest instead until I got a chance to ask You for another job. I think there must have been some mistake."

"There was no mistake", said God. "When did I ever ask you to MOVE the rock?"

"But â€¦ wasn't that my task?"

"I asked you to PUSH the rock - I never said anything about it MOVING."

"Now I'm really confused," said the man. "What's the point of pushing against a rock that I have no hope of moving?"
"My son, why do you not trust Me? Look now at your arms. Look at your legs and your shoulders and your chest. Were all those muscles there before you began this task? Where did all those strong muscles come from, if not from your efforts in PUSHING against the rock? THAT was the purpose of this job that I gave to you. When you were obedient to Me, you were growing stronger and stronger, but when you decided you knew better, you stopped getting stronger and started to become weak and flabby again. Trust My requests and obey them, even if you don't know where they will lead. For at least you know this: that I love you and will always do what is best for you. But please trust Me and obey My requests."

â€¢ St John Chrysostomâ€™s parable of the Kingâ€™s Son
â€¢ Paradise of the Fathers: â€œOn Fornicationâ€• and â€œOn Humilityâ€•
â€¢ Fr Yousef Asaad: the young man who saw Church youth as all being sinful when he was enslaved to his sins, then saw them all as being angels when he was released that enslavement.
â€¢ CS Lewis: the image of the â€œDark Towerâ€•
â€¢ JRR Tolkein: the enslavement of the Ring upon its bearers

Further Reading

Books:

â€¢ â€œLife of Repentance and Purityâ€• by HH Pope Shenouda III. COPT.
â€¢ â€œI Kissed Dating Goodbyeâ€• by Joshua Harris. â€¦â€¦
â€¢ â€œSpiritual Warfaresâ€• by HH Pope Shenouda III.
â€¢ â€œThe Spiritual Manâ€• by HH Pope Shenouda III. COPT.
â€¢ â€œThe Spiritual Meansâ€• by HH Pope Shenouda III. COPT.

Websites:

https://www.settingcaptivesfree.com/home/courses.php excellent courses if you are serious