

Recently I had a friend of share with me his problems of lust, masturbation, loneliness, and time management. I thought I would share with you my brief response in case this might be helpful to you. This draft has been edited for various reasons.

www.prshockley.org

Thanks _____ for asking for my help. I wish I was up there with you but I am here for you. I appreciate your candidness and have heard similar stories countless times by all sorts of Christian servants. While all this is hard and painful, I truly believe in you. You have significance and worth. Thus, you have the capability to make your life count for something great! In fact, the goal is to make your life count for something great, to be a servant that follows hard after Jesus Christ-just like Paul, Peter, John, and thousands and thousands of others who have done so through the centuries (e.g., A. W. Tozer; Oswald Chambers; Hudson Taylor; John F. Walvoord). This issue for you is not capability, but willingness.

All your statements seem to revolve around a lack of discipline-as you admitted. Therefore, I think you have to qualitatively commit yourself to developing good habits. In fact, I would encourage you to develop habits of intellectual and moral excellence. The issue is not capability, but willingness to consistently choose the higher road, to continually ask in a given particular moment of time, "*what will give God the most glory?*" Therefore, you need cultivate, develop, and maximize habits of excellence, but you have to do so in the Lord's strength (Phil. 2:12-13; 4:13). I'm defining a habit as a disposition to think, feel, desire, and act in a certain way without having a tendency to will consciously to do so.

We develop habits by actually doing them. It is like you are traveling down a "rutted" road. Quite honestly, it is hard to break those habits unless you are aware and are really willing to change those habits by making new habits-for it is difficult to remain out of a rutted road. Let's consider time management. Go to bed early and force yourself to get up and seize the day. An example where this takes place for millions of people each and every day is military "boot-camp." After a few weeks, their bodies are trained to get up very early in the morning. People learn to adapt to new schedules.

On my website I have a powerpoint presentation on mortifying sinful temptations. I believe it is titled, "Principles of Mortification." Please take a look at it. This will help you regarding some of your vices, that is, bad habits. Mortifying the flesh, being controlled by the Spirit, yielding to the Spirit, and intimately knowing Scripture are vital for a balanced Christian life. The powerpoint is under "Spiritual Life" on my website: www.prshockley.org.

I would also add that you may always be attracted to lust and masturbation all the days of your life; those desires to want to yield to them may never go away.... like wolves along a tree line, they are always lurking. Moreover, there is the possibility that your sinful tendencies and fleshly desires may have become "trees of sin" in your life. Their roots have grown so deep because of repeatable yielding that they have now become

part of your very person. In fact, the roots may have grown so deep that more than likely (outside of a direct divine intervention) you will never altogether pull that tree of lust up. So, if you are thinking that you want these desires to leave, they probably never will (outside of a divine miracle). As one old theologian once said to me, "*The sins of my youth haunt me today but as I have walked with the Lord they have lost their attractiveness.*" But once we realize these fleshly tendencies and sinful desires may never leave us, we can devote ourselves to subduing it. This is actually a liberating thought. Too many of us think we can't grow spiritually until these sinful impulses are removed and discarded. But once we recognize that they may always be "lurking" around, we can begin the process of restraining, placating, and subjugating them. Once again, see my powerpoint on "Principles of Mortification to learn 8 steps on how to mortify the flesh.

So, since you are free by the power of the Spirit (Romans 8) to not necessarily give into these sins, you need to starve those temptations or impulses. In fact, you don't want to yield to them. Here's why! Every time you give into a temptation or sinful impulse, you are giving it "Miracle Grow." With every "feeding," the roots grow deeper. Therefore, I would encourage you to starve them. Or like a lumberjack, mortify these temptations by cutting them down... which may take a life time. For example, take time to trace the fruit of your sin to your root, seriously reflecting upon why you yield to it; don't merely deal with the fruit-take it to the root. In other words, "send yourself into the bedroom" and ponder why you yield to these temptations and sinful impulses. Also, seriously consider the possible consequences of your action (e.g., who will you be hurting?). But also realize that these sinful tendencies and fleshly desires are not going to immediately depart from you. And even if you cut the tree of lust down, you may never get rid of the roots. And if you do get rid of the roots, the scars will still remain.

Moreover, I want you to consider Proverbs 8:36. It states, "*But he who sins against me [wisdom] wrong his own soul.*" This passage states that when you are hostile to wisdom, you literally commit *violence* to your own person. So, every time you give into sin, you are taking a violent beating. Though you might not immediately see the bruises, the broken bones, and the open wounds, they are there. Like Dorian Gray in Oscar Wilde's famous novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, you will change for the worse with each sin you commit.

Word about Porn! Brother, as you know, porn will take the life out of you. You need to master it or get out of ministry! Christ's name is at stake and you are His representative! It is like taking crack cocaine. Don't go back to it, ever again! It will lead you to places that you would never think you would go. I see it all the time among my students and people in my church. The "Miracle Grow" in that stuff is supercharged, potent, and exponential.

Now that you (a) thousands and thousands of images instilled in your mind, (b) possess an imagination, and (c) are designed to have sex with the opposite sex, masturbation is going to be very hard for you to conquer. Therefore, you need to starve it through mortification and vivification. By the way, I know a lot of married people who struggle with masturbation. Sure, they enjoy their spouses, but they developed this bad habit which is hard to conquer.

Regarding community, pray that God would cultivate desires and opportunities to pour your life into others...that to me is the bottom line in view of community and relationships. At the same time, understand who you are. Some people are naturally energized by being with people and others are drained by being with people for long periods of time. Nevertheless, pour your life into people given who you are in Christ... show Christ to them in your daily affairs... serve them even if it costs you, and see what God will do. Also, be real but skilled in what you say. Love them with the love of Christ. By doing so, you will find that you will not be as lonely. For some, this is very hard to do given their natural disposition and temperament, but you are following Christ (Mark 8:34-36).

Lastly, if you find yourself alone quite a bit, esp. since you live in an isolated location, pour your life into prayer and Scriptures. Some of the most profound moments I've had with God were those times when I spent several hours a day in prayer. God is always near; His omnipresence demands it! As His child, you draw near to Him and then you reach forward to those things which are ahead; press toward to the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Bro, the opportunity lies before you to make your life count for something great. If character is defined as the "sum-total" of your habits, then I would work on your habits. You've already made the decision to live for him. You know that the spiritual life of the believer is the life of Jesus Christ reproduced in your life by means of the Holy Spirit. You also realize that the living a spiritually mature life is not merely a decision, but a life of consecration; not merely consecration, but separation from "mold" of the world; not merely separation, but transformation by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:1-2). Now you need to cultivate habits that promote intellectual and moral excellence, for the glory of God, consistently beseeching Him for His enablement on bended knee. How you will do is by turning away from your sin and turning to God in the moment-by-moment choices you make, taking the commands in Scripture and translating them into habits that will eventually become your identity, all dependent upon and undergirded by means of the Holy Spirit.

In sum, the question is not capability, but willingness. Ask God to help you with your willingness. Even when you are not willing, commit yourself to doing it anyway. Perhaps in that moment, willingness will begin to bubble up and perhaps God might show up in an amazing way as you walk this hard path with joy.

Love in the Lamb,

Paul