

Flat Lining - The New Normal

Dear Member,

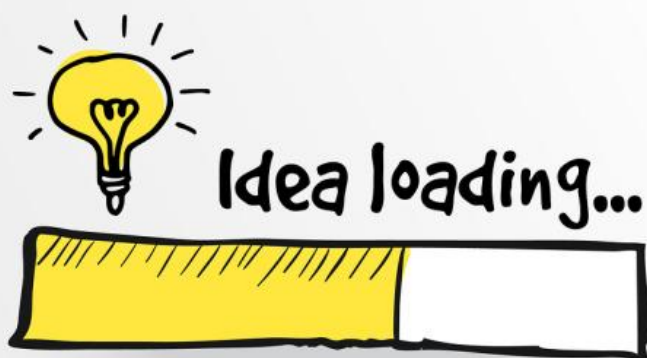
I find the hardest aspect of maintaining purity and avoiding the sins associated with sexual addiction is trying to deal with the 'emptiness' of day to day living. By now you are probably several months into the battle and the success of your perseverance is finally bearing fruits. Your slips have been minor or nonexistent and your brain is now rejuvenated and ready for healthier challenges.

Now is when you need to change from defensive fighting to directed attacks and regain all that lost ground to rebuild your Self Esteem. Understanding what it is that made you turn to sexual gratification is crucial but deciding what you are going to do to create long term replacements is pivotal. Now you have to create strong neural pathways with healthy pleasures and challenges. In short, this unit is all about discovering who is the 'New You'.

“My dear Wormwood ... I have always found that the trough [boring] periods of the human undulation provide excellent opportunity for all sensual temptations.”

—The Screwtape Letters, by C.S. Lewis

My mentor recently referred to this period of boredom as 'flat lining' - suggesting our next battle is to establish the new normal. Everything to date has been about giving the brain and neural pathways time to rewrite themselves - time to recover. I use the term flat lining as a means of explaining the sense of 'emptiness' I often associated with the post battle boredom. I had all this energy and nowhere to go with it. (In the early days this led straight back to pornography)



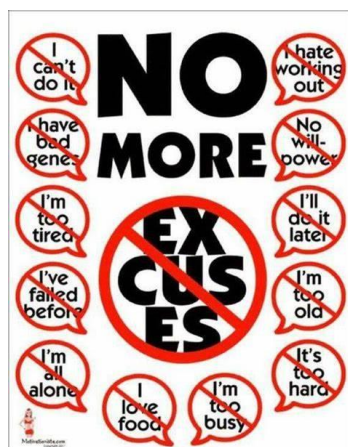
We often find ourselves happy that the 'draw' of impurity has dwindled but tend to wander about (literally and mentally) with lots of free time. It almost feels like discontentment and our desire to fill it with 'something' is the very trap the devil wishes to exploit. Hence, the need for new discoveries to learn who we *should have become* if addiction had not derailed our journey.

'Boredom is an impetus to action. It's much like anger—without its fuel, we would never do certain things that need to be done. But here is what needs to change: rather than seeking to medicate or entertain our boredom, we need to cultivate active, creative alternatives. These include creative things, thoughtful things (things that stimulate your mind such as reading or writing), relational things (who you can interact with in order to stimulate social and emotional connections), natural things (what you can do that will put you out in nature), and athletic things (what you can do to stimulate your body, not relax it).

Unlike media, these things replace boredom but at the same time they expand our capacity for boredom and use it as an impetus for creative doing.'

(Rick James for Covenant Eyes - Jun 2010)

So what did I do to change?



Physical Activity - Joined a Gym and 'forced' myself to attend at least 3 sessions/week. This included swimming, cycling and a group activity. Though I initially struggled because of my weight I found the interaction with others and the helpful staff great for motivation and building of self-esteem. Although the cost seemed high I quickly worked out that I wasted that amount in other less healthy ways.

I also started walking to town and left the car at home whenever possible. Whilst walking I recited rosaries and enjoyed the fresh air. Some of the walks I extended into longer hikes out of town. I found local walking routes and places of interest to visit.

Educational - I started a Spanish course which was extremely difficult and not easy for me. I still find it difficult but I am persevering and I do gain a sense of worth in completing the end of chapter assessments. This costs me nothing but time. (I still can't hablar Spanish)

I also looked back at my old school hobby of creative writing and enrolled onto a correspondence course. This has rekindled my passion for stories and has helped me to write the Self Help Units. I am currently writing a science fiction story related to Guardian Angels etc

I joined an online learning school to gain qualifications in Web Design and Construction - subjects I had no knowledge of...or interest in. I found these courses as a result of a 'free offer'. Providentially the knowledge gave me the skill and confidence to build the MOH website from scratch.

I tried to learn guitar but gave up within a few lessons - it's just not my thing. I mention this because it is okay to give up on some of your ideas...just so long you don't give up on them all.

Religious - I do love reading so this part was easy. I restricted **all** of my books to catholic subjects (fiction and non-fiction). I have read numerous historical books covering most ages of the church (Carroll, Props, Archbishop Goodier). I have also discovered a host of great catholic fiction from Owen Dudley (Masterful Monk) and Robert Hugh Benson (Dawn of All series). There is so much good stuff that has been written which I had never even thought about. So now I make it my mission to find it though I do still read Tom Clancy when I want to escape...

Regular weekly attendance at Mass and confession. Daily readings of the Missal and New Testament. I also schedule in a 10 minute daily session for the Old Testament.

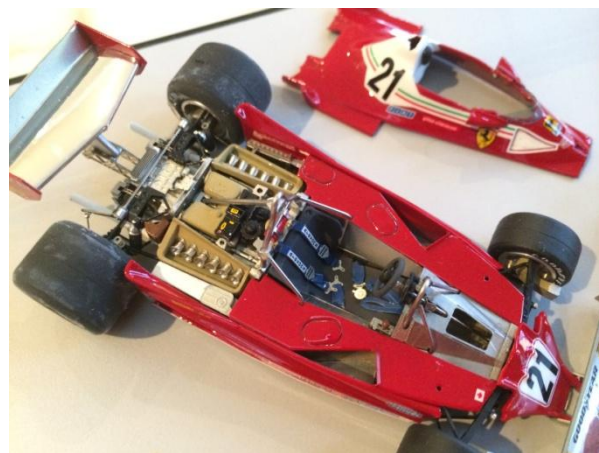
Rosary and daily devotions.

Self Improvement - I have book marked a number of different online news sites which I read most evening/mornings. They include mainstream as well as less 'accepted' sources. BBC, RT, Reuters, CNN, Remnant News, Live Site, Catholic Herald, You Tube for the conspiracy stuff :)



I have concentrated on many aspects of DIY and am now competent in basic electrical, plumbing and brickwork. Again, some of these have been learnt through vocational courses. All have been used around the house.

Hobbies - I have rekindled my love of plastic model kits and recently completed a Formula 1 car. I always enjoyed improving the models with extra detailing from photographs. I am an avid computer gamer - though I now restrict myself to set time. I no longer spend whole evenings gaming - maximum of 5-6 hours/ week. I have started to sort through my school stamp collection and am trying to find out what is valuable.



Fishing is something I have started to do with my Father again - last time was when I was 13. There is definitely something very relaxing about sitting by a river waiting for a fish to bite.

It is important to share at least one hobby with friends or family members.

Relationships¹ - I have spent a lot of time understanding why my friends and family felt abandoned or betrayed. I worked on becoming humble and less desirous of praise. I concentrated on learning about others and actively finding interests that coincided.

I made a difficult choice to join several social groups - including a gardening club and a ballroom dancing club. Neither of these activities were of interest but I knew I needed to challenge myself to meet new people. My dancing is atrocious but slowly getting better and I have made 2 friends as a result, one of whom, wants to go fishing next month.

My support network is still small and needs a lot of development but at least I recognise this.

Employment - I am more vigilant about how I conduct myself at work and how I interact with colleagues. I am no longer the 'centre of attention'. If any colleagues were occasions for sin then I avoid them. I do not take work or worry home with me. I now tell someone about my day and any concerns I have had.

IN other words - I practice effective communication and emotional sharing :)

Conclusion

If you challenge yourself on every aspect of this unit you will affect change in yourself. The final aim is to wake up and look forward to the day. Hobbies and interests should leave you feeling engaged and emotionally fulfilled. Physical activity should leave you tired but satisfied. Contact with other people 'in a positive light' should build your confidence and self-esteem.

You have already removed the physical stain of addiction but now it is time to remove the emotional stain. Getting rid of the feeling that makes you *look back* for that 'old thrill' you used to enjoy. Replacing it with

¹ This subject will form the next Unit under the title: Unit 2.3 - My Support Circle

the 'what new thing' can I learn or do today. Addiction can be for life but that does not mean you *have to* make it your life.

I still remember the feeling of satisfying my lust - but it is far less powerful and I can now much more easily chose to ignore it and do something else. If I was to fall now it will only be because I have **chosen** to - not because I needed to. After all - God did give us our 'free will' to use as we decide best...

This is the place that we all need to reach.

To complete this unit:

1. Look at each of the categories and identify at least 3 options that may take your interest.
2. Establish a daily/weekly/monthly timetable where there is a balance of these interests.
3. Make a note of any 'down time' or periods of boredom and discuss these with your mentor.
4. Make weekly communication with your mentor a habit.
5. Actively make new 'long term' plans for the future.

