

This is not just for Lent – It is for Life...I promise!

Dear Member,

This unit was written with a key thought in mind: Firm ‘but realistic’ Resolution to change. I am hoping that after our first session you are feeling an invincible zeal to stay clear of pornography. If so – that is great! If you have already fallen, then do not worry. Just stay positive and remember every God centred choice is a good choice. Rome was definitely not built in a day 😊



Every year, countless people around the world resolve to give up a bad habit at New Year; and every year the majority fail in this enterprise. For many, this resolution is important. It may be to stop smoking, drinking or something else just as harmful. Yet, once the euphoria to stop gives way, we quickly make excuses...then return to old habits. Normally telling ourselves:

“This approach is not right for me...”

With Catholics, the most appropriate time for such resolutions occurs at Lent. Six weeks of ‘purgatory’ offering up our cravings to show God, our recognition of what he did by sending Jesus to die for our sins on the cross. For an addict, that is a very long time to go without. In fact, it is actually a sufficiently long enough time to allow the brain to start rewiring the neural

addiction-pathways. If you remain true to your resolution then by the end of Lent the physical aspect of your addiction should have reduced drastically. The hardest part of your journey should be over...Deo Gratias.

Although this article was for Lent, it does not mean we should treat other opportunities to resist temptation differently. In fact, I insist that you **do** treat this occasion as if it ‘is’ Lent. This first stage requires a momentous amount of effort and prayer to stand you any true hope of prolonged success. It also needs about 6 weeks of abstinence to get the brain’s *pleasure / reward* processes somewhere near normality. Without this, you will struggle to sustain any sort of healthy lasting substitutions for your sexual addiction.

It took me well over a dozen ‘first’ attempts to survive longer than 7 days. Each time I fell the resulting behaviour seemed worse than before. However, once I did get through this 6-week period, my life changed as quickly as my old habits did. My physical craving for pornography was negligible and I definitely had a new lease on life. I was motivated and creative and filled with a desire to never fall again. This is one of those moments that I implore you to take full advantage of. Make a diary entry of your happiness detailing how you come to feel so good.

Better still; make a short motivational voice recording on your mobile.

But why bother?

Simple...when that unexpected craving suddenly takes you by surprise you need to have something motivational and relevant to read or listen to as a reminder of why you must resist. Although your physical craving has reduced that does not mean the psychological causes have disappeared. I have experienced many occasions of ‘lasting abstinence’, yet still found myself thinking ‘how good’ it would be to watch pornography again. It is nowhere near the same as that terrible thirst you feel during the early weeks of

giving up...but it still has a pull. The pull is not physical – so you must have healthy options to put into play. What better motivation than listening to a recording of you *declaring the joys* associated with freedom from sexual addiction?

Another unintended issue with resolutions – especially Lenten ones, is they have a completion date. Be careful of this. It is astounding how often you will find yourself looking forwards to the time when Lent finishes...along with your intention to change. In truth – I found that my sub-conscious builds an unintended ‘end time’ for my resolution. Just look back over previous Lenten periods and see how many times you have shown a remarkable success at eliminating your sexual addiction, then lapsed shortly after Lent. We seem eager to repeat our sinful habits, whilst congratulating ourselves on the efforts we made for God to abstain.

We almost pat ourselves on the back for a ‘job well done’...then drop back into sin.

It occurred to me that Catholics, as a whole, are the luckiest people on Earth. They are the one religious group who can deliberately commit sin and still find a way to forgiveness through the correct use of Confession. They can do this every time they sin and so long they have the firm intention, at that moment, can still find a way back into God’s Grace. What a true signpost of God’s unending charity and love for us...

Now clearly, I am not advocating becoming Catholic just to ease your mind as you sin your way through life. It occurred to me that one of the toughest challenges we face is the ‘*sin of presumption*’. On a personal note, I have had the Sacrament of Confession on a Sunday and been in a state of mortal sin by Monday morning – countless times. I have spent the week alternating between sorrowful acts of contrition and lustful hours of pornography. In essence, I have ‘presumed’ that because I have a real sorrow, God forgives me sufficiently to allow me to get to confession. Oh so easy to live with that dangerous assumption...

Now, we all know how badly *post-sin* regret hits us. We can all recognise the despair with which we fall to our knees and shout out ‘Never Again’. Empathy with others is easy, as we honestly, with firm intention, promise to never sin again. The joy we share as we break our laptops or throw away the ‘offending object’ in our desire to demonstrate to God our willingness to change. Yet we also all share that feeling of ‘anticipation’ and ‘lust’ as our addiction destroys any ‘firm intention’ moments later. I will not disclose how much money I have wasted replacing such items...

This unit is not about why this occurs but simply to highlight the single biggest challenge you must overcome – Presumption. I cannot tell you how and when you will reduce or stop your addictive behaviours – only you can. In previous blog posts, I have mentioned the correct use of your free will but I have not been able to give you a method to ensure you use it effectively. Some of us have the answer thrust at us through unintended circumstances – normally, ‘Loss’.

I lost my job, my reputation and, very nearly, my family.

For each of us, that circumstance or moment will be different. However, many of us will not be so fortunate. Some of us may not get to Confession or recognise our destructive behaviour has led to spiritual death. We cannot take the risk of presuming that God will show us why we must stop before death suddenly ends our battle.



So keep on trying, but if you keep failing then you **MUST change something**. Otherwise, presumption is your only hope to salvation whilst you remain unwilling to accept this truth.

Wheel of Life Exercise

You are probably still struggling to overcome your sexual desires and you may even be wondering what use there is in doing any more units. I implore you to be patient and humble and persevere. The first week was solely about recognising your need to make a ‘first’ God centred choice - asking for help. You were tasked to look at several obvious addiction-related questions. These need to have been addressed before moving forwards.

Anybody can make himself endure weeks of pain if he choses to. However, I think we can all recognise that this is not a lasting or effective solution in ‘our’ cases. It just gets too hard and too exhausting with all of the other demands of life. Hence, we fail so often. Therefore, to make that effort worthwhile, we need to understand some of the underlying issues that must be tackled first.

Over the next few months, I will be helping you develop your *weapons and defensive armour* against temptation. It sounds very dramatic I know, but I find the analogy with warfare pertinent and helpful in focussing our thoughts for this battle. This is a war of attrition – it will not be won quickly. It is rarely won in the early skirmishes because our enemy (the devil) is a devious tactician and he hates to lose. However, to have any success, you must understand your enemy first. In this case – *you* are your own enemy. So let us first try to build an intelligence package on ourselves...

I will give you several key subject headings and I would like you to write truthful answers to them. Find yourself a quiet place where you can meditate and then treat this exercise as if you were talking with your guardian angel. Ask what *he* might tell you about yourself. In fact, I strongly recommend daily devotion to your guardian angel from now on. This should become a part of your morning and evening prayers.

- Creativity and Achievement and how it relates to you.
- Work and play – where is your balance?
- Inner peace – this can relate to: esteem, confidence, happiness, how you perceive yourself against others.
- Religious peace – where do you see yourself in your spiritual journey?
- Healthy living – this is not just about exercise but also about how you run your daily routines.
- Self Management – what is your problem solving and time management like?
- Friendship & Intimacy – who you have in your life and how you relate to them?
- Knowledge & Mastery – What are your abilities and limitations and how do you work with them?

I recognise that this will be a time consuming task but if you want to have any chance of overcoming your enemy (you); then you must understand how and why ‘he’ acts as he does...

TREAT THIS EXERCISE AS IF YOU WERE ON A SPIRITUAL RETREAT.

Change requires commitment and perseverance. Hard work is a part of this process and completing this task is a clear message to the devil that you are no longer willing to be his slave. No matter how complicated and busy your life is right now, it is blighted by the darkness of sexual addiction. You are trying to progress with your hands tied behind your back. You can be so much more, if only you make the time to cut the bonds holding you.

If you are unwilling to attempt these tasks (or feel they are silly), and you continue blaming the ‘day-to-day’ pressures of life for your lack of time, then you are not yet ready for this Fellowship. This is not a judgement just an observation based on my own experiences of supporting others in their fight with sexual addictions. The *Men of Hope* approach requires a strong commitment to establishing new and healthy habits. Habits take time and lots of repetitious work to become effective.

Are you ready to put in this work?

To complete this unit:

1. Accept that death is sudden and may stop you ever getting to Confession.
2. Realise that God knows if you **really** have the ‘firm intention’ to amend your life.
3. Understand that a priest can only forgive what you tell him. He is not Saint Padre Pio.
4. Find a reason important enough to **MAKE** you want to change. What are you unwilling to lose?
5. Do not set unrealistic targets. (Live hour to hour...then day to day)
6. Recognise the first change to make involves trusting that others will help you. So be honest.
7. Be ready to discuss your answers on the Wheel of life exercise.
8. Have completed all of the tasks from previous units.
9. Reviewed and be ready to discuss your temptation diary entries.

I strongly advise you to have a word document running for your next chat session. It will certainly save you time and effort with the keyboard if you are able to just ‘cut and paste’ the work you have done when I ask questions. ☺

Finally, stop being so hard on yourself. You are God’s creature and he loves you – warts and all!

