

# A Case Study of Freedom

Hi, I'm Konrad, and today I am going to give part of the message and Ben Hung will give the other part. It's a two-for-one sermon, so... lucky you. Ben and I, being the leadership team for Pure Desire here at SP were asked to share from our unique angle on sexual brokenness. For those of you who don't know, Pure Desire is a small group ministry for men struggling with sexual sin and addiction. We meet weekly for about 8 months going through this workbook and sharing our struggles with each other. As Ben and I prepared to share today, we recognise that we are speaking to the men AND the women of SP. So even though this is very much from a male perspective, I pray that our messages today will speak to everyone.

Topics of sexual addiction, abuse, pornography, homosexuality and fantasies are so weighed down with trauma, guilt, shame, stigma, isolation, temptation, and desire. They are taboo to talk about. They are untouchable topics. They are extremely private parts of our lives. And yet they are by far the most profound and fundamental part of the human experience. Everyone; men, women and children are affected by it. Because they touch us all so vulnerably.

In fact, I would go as far as to say that sex represents the closeness that we are meant to have with God. If that seems sacrilegious, I think it's because we bring with it all the taintedness sex has come to be associated with. But really sex is all about vulnerability, trust, and unity.

So I think it's no surprise that a lot of our brokenness is experienced sexually, and that we as children of God can feel cold and defensive inside. The most vulnerable part of us has been violated (either by someone else, or through the distortion of our own sexuality) and the door to our heart is locked shut.

As I wrestled with the process of writing a sermon, I realised how difficult it is to make one cohesive 20-some minute speech with a theme and points. But now that I've managed to get something down, pretty much what you're getting is a case-study of everything P Sam and Rachel has talked about so far. I realised I'm not very good at writing a sermon, but I know my own story. So I will tell you my story, and the lessons I have learned along the way.

Honestly, this topic makes me excited. Having come as far as I have through my own healing journey, I'm at a place where talking about sexual brokenness is less of an embarrassment than an opportunity to see such a massive cavern of hidden grace. In fact, as I was typing out this message, I sensed that SP is sitting on a massive cavern of grace waiting to be unearthed. Each of us have our own story and our own struggles, and I pray and declare that God is bringing freedom and healing to SP and that all sexual brokenness is being redeemed to a level of vulnerability we never knew was possible. So let me open us with a word of prayer.

I pray God that you use Ben and I, as broken and weak as we are, to speak your truth into each of our hearts. May your freedom be released in your church, God. Strengthen us, Holy Spirit, to speak clearly and to be led by you. Jesus, we give you all the glory. You are our salvation, and our deliverer and our hope. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## PART 1: Origins of sexual addiction

I shared a bit of my testimony a couple years ago during announcements, so this may sound familiar to many of you. I felt anything but free growing up. I was trapped in sexual addiction from an early age. I also experienced sexual abuse in my elementary years. I grew up in a so-called Christian home, but I only remember my relationship with God being a fearful prayer for him to not send me to Hell. I felt so hopeless, so shameful, so worthless. And I kept it all hidden inside. Or at least I tried. I gravitated to being alone and drawing a lot. I wanted to be normal and live like everything was okay. I wanted to function like every other kid at school. But there was a black hole of fear under the surface, and every attempt to fit in just made me feel more insecure.

Pornography was a coping mechanism for me. It helped me escape that terrifying feeling of worthlessness if only for a moment. For a moment, I could experience the pleasure without the vulnerability. It's so ironic, because it also perpetuated that feeling of worthlessness. I knew it was wrong and in the end I would either feel worse about myself, or just become numb so as to not

spiral down into depression. In Pure Desire, we call this the noose of addiction. It just get's tighter and tighter. I turn to pornography to feel better, but it makes me feel worse, and so I turn to pornography to feel better, but it makes me feel even worse.

There were times I told myself I would stop this behavior. But when I tried, I inevitably would fail and again cement the belief that there was no hope. I was really stuck in a strong performance-based value system, and I was unable to perform. I felt worthless about myself and projected that on everyone I yearned for approval from, including God. I remember having nightmares as a small kid of being crushed by some gigantic being. I would try running away, but I could never escape. I felt like I was being suffocated with silence and shame.

It came to a point where I wanted to just blurt it out, to just tell someone that I'm struggling. Like I could see how ridiculous a state I was in. I was tired of living like this. I was tired of living in silence, in guilt and in fear. But it felt like standing at the edge of a cliff. I just couldn't get myself to do it.

I was exactly where Satan wanted me. He was feeding me lies like a hotel buffet, and I was gorging myself on them. The lies were:

- 1) You cannot tell anyone
- 2) You are a failure
- 3) You might as well enjoy it
- 4) You will never escape
- 5) God doesn't love you

In John 8:44 Jesus says about Satan "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

So that's where I was: stuck in Satan's spiderweb being wrapped up in his thread.

Before I go on with my story, I feel like I need to pause for a moment to share a sort of parable:

If any of you are adventurous out there, you may relate to this illustration. Often going out into nature, to waterfalls or rock pools, you'll find three groups of people: There's the people who hike up to the water, and sit at the edge to rest and enjoy the scenery. The second group go a step further and see the water as an invitation to cool off and be a bit adventurous and wade in. But the third group aren't satisfied unless they climb up the side of the rocks and jump several meters down into the water. So guess which category I fall into. I'm in the second category... unless I've observed and feel assured that it is safe and I won't die. I did this once in the Philippines. After watching other tourists and some local kids jumping in for some time, me and a friend figured we'd give it a shot.

Can we show the photo now?



So we got up there, and when we looked down, it suddenly felt like a very bad idea. It felt twice as high as it did from down below. But we were up there now and everyone was waiting to see us jump. So we counted to 3 and jumped together. And all of a sudden we were in the air, falling. I tried to not flail my arms and scream so I could look cool and sporty and less like I'm freaking out. It was quite liberating and we were laughing when we came up out of the water.

Bringing this back to my story. One day, when I was a young teenager, my mom called a family meeting out of the blue. Family meetings were not a common thing growing up, so this must be serious. I remember the scene quite vividly. Me and my three older brothers all gathered sitting in a semi-circle in the dining room. My mom was standing in front of us, and my dad close beside. My mom spoke, "boys, I have been struggling with lesbianism for some time now. I'm attracted to other women." she confessed not only this but how she had wanted to commit suicide. Her intent in sharing this with us was to bring it to light and assure us that she was choosing to trust in God to bring her freedom.

Sometimes, you need to see someone else jump first.

I don't remember how long after her disclosure I waited, but it wasn't long. Teenager Konrad came up to his mom one night and confessed to her "Mom, I have something to tell you. I look at porn." All of a sudden everything changed. My mom grabbed me and gave me the most loving and accepting hug a mom could give. In that moment, all those lies completely vanished.

Instead of "you cannot tell anyone", it was "you are safe to come into the light"

Instead of "you are a failure", it was "you are an overcomer"

Instead of "you might as well enjoy it", it was "now I can experience true joy"

Instead of "you will never escape", it was "I think I am escaping"

Instead of "God doesn't love you", through my mom's response God spoke to me "I love you more than you'll ever know"

It's really incredible how our brokenness and our failures can actually reveal how deep and how wide God's love is for us. (13:30)

Romans 8:37-39 says...

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

On a side note, if anyone is interested in my mom's story, she wrote a book called "Searching for Love: One Woman's Spiritual Journey Through Same-sex Attraction". Feel free to get a copy from me, or you can also find it on book depository.

So was I instantly freed from my sinful behavior? Actually no. I continued to struggle with giving into temptation for years after my confession. But I was indeed free, even if my behaviour was lagging behind. There's an incredibly powerful lesson in the Pure Desire workbook that explains what I experienced. It's about the time the Jewish leaders brought a woman caught in adultery to

Jesus and how Jesus spoke those words to her “has no one condemned you? Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more” The lesson was not that Jesus gave the gift of no condemnation IF she would sin no more. “Christ gave her the gift of no condemnation SO THAT she could go and sin no more.”

-Dr. Ted Roberts in “Seven Pillars of Freedom”

When I found freedom from the lie of condemnation, I found freedom to begin the journey to sexual purity. Because when I failed, I knew Jesus was on my side. The Enemy's condemnation had lost its power because of God's grace. I was freed from the noose.

The years following, I grew closer to God, I became more confident in myself, and I actively invested in getting out of addiction through resources like “Setting Captives Free” which is an online course, reading books like “Every Young Man's Battle”, and becoming more open about my struggles. There was euphoric coming into the light, and it was more enticing than my addiction.

2 Corinthians 12:10 became my anthem:

“That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

I had spent all my energy hiding my weaknesses. But in the end that made me even weaker. When my weakness was exposed, suddenly it was like God's strength rushed in and came to my aid.

I am forever in awe of God's timing. Three years after confessing to my mom, and having come so far in recovery, I met Bena. Not in the thick of my addiction. Just at the perfect moment.

We had a similar experience like what I had with my mom when we started seeing each other, except this time I was the one who jumped first. I confessed my struggles to her, and that liberated her to confess things to me. We were able to start our relationship without any secrets, and completely vulnerable with each other. From that moment onward I never again looked at pornography.

## PART 2

I could end my story here and be a model example of a neat and tidy testimony of freedom and deliverance. But that wouldn't be the truth.

After 9 years of sobriety, after Bena gave birth to our firstborn, Atticus, I relapsed.

It wasn't necessarily explicit content I gave into, and so my first reaction was to tell myself to dismiss it. “Don't let the spirit of condemnation pull you under. Just repent and don't go down that road.”

I was being fed lies again. “Don't tell Bena. You'll just hurt her. It was just an insignificant slip up” I didn't tell her right away. But a month later, I fell again, and I knew I couldn't kid myself. I confessed to my wife I had giving into temptation. But even though I confessed, I still was giving in, and over the course of 3 years I tumbled back to where I started. Through my relapse, that paradise-like relationship of complete trust was tarnished, and suddenly being vulnerable became much more of a risk in our marriage. It's a very different struggle when you're married and have children. There's a lot more at stake.

Freedom is not a one-time deal. My experience as a teenager did not make me immune to sin. I think P Sam shared this verse in his recent sermon:

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!” 1 Cor 10:12

It's interesting how God's grace can be distorted into self-glory and pride. My journey to sobriety has been one of the most tangible experiences I've had of God's love and grace in my life. But I do know that feelings of pride snuck in, and I can't deny at times I looked back and said “I made this happen” and claimed credit. I glorified myself instead of God for the freedom he brought to my life. This was a critical mistake. Because then I trusted in my own strength. “Look at me, I overcame addiction and have made it this far without giving into temptation.”

As I'm reflecting on this, I feel like I lived out an alternate version of Jesus parable about the wise and foolish builder. Without a doubt I found freedom from sexual addiction by relying on God and not myself. I was the wise builder who's foundation withstood the storm. But after some time, I decided to relocate to the beach. My trust shifted to myself, and I was fine, everything was normal. But eventually a storm came, and I was not prepared.

In many ways I had reverted back to my old belief system during my time of sobriety, a performance-based value system. My confidence rested in my behaviour rather than in God. Except instead of feeling inadequate, I felt more than adequate. I felt strong, not because of God's strength, but because of my imagined strength.

Let me pause for a second here and beg all of you, if you haven't been, please start journaling! Whenever God's people encountered God in a life-changing way, they set up monuments and gave names to places and people to remember what God had done. My journals have increasingly impacted my walk with God in the present by reminding me of what he has done for me in the past. Looking back at my journals during my relapse, I am being ministered to.

I am in awe of God's timing once again. Looking back at my journals, I realised literally two months after my relapse began, SP held its second ever Men's Retreat, which was about sex. It was at that retreat that Pure Desire was introduced as a new ministry at SP, a ministry that was aimed at restoring men struggling with sexual brokenness through regular accountability in a small group. Exactly what I needed at exactly the right time. It's pretty amazing that God was preparing for my restoration even before I knew I needed it!

But to my discredit, it took me three years until I actually joined a group. I really regret that. So much unnecessary damage was done in those three years. And I pray that my mistake would be a warning to those to whom this message is God's timing. Do not delay.

But in the end I did join, and I am forever thankful that I did. All I can say is having a community where we can talk about this and not feel judged is one of the greatest experiences I've ever had. It feels like a lightning storm of God's power being surrounded by weak men like me. We are witnessing not only our own healing, but each others as well.

Here's the thing about sin. The goal is not to have a flawless track record. We are going to slip up. We ARE weak.

**"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" Romans 3:23-24**

My value doesn't rest on how long my sobriety lasts or how spotless I live my life. My value lies in who I am in God's eyes. It's not about how strong I build my house. It's about what I build my house on. It's much better to have a patchy house on a strong foundation than a beautiful house that washes away in the storm.

## Part 3

Going through PD, I experienced God's grace in fresh new ways. I risked to be vulnerable with my wife in sharing my journey. Which was painful for her, but through the pain, she dared to risk trusting me, and forgiving me. She did suffer from my unfaithfulness, and times she discovered I hadn't disclosed things. But over the years she has been a fiercely loving wife, and the strength God gave her to forgive me again and again rescued me from the lie that my failure defines me. Thanks to my wife, I really can't deny how much God loves me, again when I felt I reached a place beyond love, that's where I experienced the most profound and unshakable love and acceptance.

Love sometimes takes suffering. I cannot minimise my wife's suffering through this season of our lives. And I don't think we should minimise Christ's suffering in how far his love compelled him to go for us.

God is mind-blowing. These incredible lows I experience in my life are always followed by incomparable highs. My relapse led me to PD, and now God is using me to lead other men to freedom as a leader of PD. Honestly, I don't feel qualified to be a leader. I'm still not a very confident person, and I am a mess at administration. I do not have the gift of governance. But I know the power of vulnerability and God has been refining me to use my weakness to his glory. Even now the suffering Bena went through because of my mistakes has been used for God's glory as she has been leading along side Erin Hung the companion program to PD, "Betrayal and Beyond" which is for the wives of sexually broken husbands.

I love what Joseph says to his brothers who sold him into slavery.

**Genesis 50:20**

**You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.**

Our sexuality is not just a physical experience. It is deeply spiritual. God wants us to experience wholeness to the most private, intimate part of our lives. He wants us to risk opening up, to stop protecting that vulnerable area of our lives and release it to him.

I'll end with this. If you feel trapped in sexual brokenness, either being single, married, a man, or a woman, God is working on your restoration. It may hurt, it may be messy, but it will be glorious. To the degree that you feel trapped and hopeless, God is going to bring you to a place incomparably free. Talk to someone, join Pure Desire or Betrayal and Beyond. Take that jump.

I want to end with a storybook, and I pray that in the midst of your guilt and shame God reveals his deep love for you.