



Fight For Freedom | Doug Wekenman | 02.18.2024

Weekly Study

## SHARE

As group members get settled, take a few minutes to check in with everyone and see how life is going. Share an exciting story from this week, your highs and lows, an answered prayer, or something you're struggling with. If someone is really struggling, rally the group around them and take a few moments to pray over them.

**Rate your week on a scale of 1-10. Why did you choose that number?**

**If you dedicated yourself to being excellent at one thing in all of your relationships, what would it be and why?**

**What is one word you would use to describe how you are feeling about this relationship series so far? Explain that word to your Group.**

## DEAR CHURCH

Dear Red Rocks Groups and Leaders,

We know that this week's topic is difficult and uncomfortable to talk about. We know that talking about sex, pornography, and sexual immorality can stir up feelings of shame and guilt surrounding things that you've done, things that have been done to you, or places you might feel stuck. We know that it might reignite bitterness from old wounds you may have received after being subjected to a toxic purity culture fueled by judgment and condemnation. And we

know that it shines a light into the most personal and intimate parts of our lives that we don't want the world to see.

But, and it's a big but (thanks for that joke, Doug), we want to remind each and every one of you that you're not alone, you're not too far gone, you're not too broken, and you're not too stuck for God to heal, redeem, and restore the parts of your life and relationships that have been affected by this topic –Jesus made sure of that.

So, you have a choice to make Red Rocks Church:

1. You can play it safe this week and half-heartedly tiptoe around this topic, or even skip it altogether.
2. You can lean in, seek discomfort, get vulnerable, trust your group, have faith in Jesus, and drag the things that have been holding you back out of darkness and into the light, exposing them to the ultimate source of healing, growth, and transformation.

The second is how you experience life to the full and make heaven more crowded.

The people at Red Rocks Church are authentic and courageous. We don't shy away from difficult things, we lean into them with love, truth, and grace, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus. What the Lord wants to do in and through you, your group, and your families, is far too important to skip this topic.

Our prayer this week is that you take Doug's challenge seriously: The question isn't if God has healing and freedom for each and every one of you whose story has been impacted by this week's topic, however much or little. You can have secrets, or you can have freedom, but you can't have both. The question is, "Are you willing to do the work and drag those secrets out of darkness and into the light that remains undefeated, yesterday, today, and forever, so that you can step into the freedom God has for you?"

We're with you every step of the way, never to call you out, always to call you up.

- Red Rocks Groups

## G R O W

Welcome to Week Three of Biblical Strategies for Relationships, *Fight for Freedom*. From the very beginning, God designed us in His image for companionship, both with Him and with each other (Mat. 22:37-39), so that we could co-reign over all of creation with him (Gen. 1:26-28 NLT). This week, Doug talked about sex. Sex is a beautiful, God-given gift that was interwoven into our design with the intention of helping us fulfill our purpose to be in perfect union with God, and each other so that we could co-reign with Him. Sex was designed to be pure, perfect, and void of shame.

Unfortunately, we live in a broken world that preaches a different story about sex that sounds just good enough to believe, but it always leads to pain and brokenness (Prov. 14:12). This is the art of deception - a tactic the enemy has mastered. It's exactly what the serpent did in the Garden of Eden to Adam and Eve when he said, "Did God really say..." (Gen. 3:3), and it's what he continues to do to us. Deception, by definition, is "the perversion of truth in an effort to abuse one's confidence for personal gain." This is why what the world preaches about sex and pornography can be so convincing. The world has taken the good and pure truths about sex and disfigured them just enough to the point where the world's idea of sex still looks good and true, but underneath the surface, only pain and brokenness await. The enemy found a way to use one of God's greatest gifts to us (sex) to target our greatest human desires - to feel needed, known, and loved, in order to isolate us, addict us, break us, separate us from God, and bury us under a mountain of shame, guilt, and fear.

This tactic is not unique to sex, in fact, it's actually one of the only tactics the enemy has, but the fallout it has caused through our understanding of sex has been extraordinary due to the intimate and personal nature of sex. From breakups and abuse, to baggage and addiction, to fractured relationships and bitterness, and more, the impact can be felt. So, what do we do? How do we move forward, or rather, get back to experiencing love, sex, and intimacy the way God originally intended?

First, we must acknowledge the fact that the shame many of us carry regarding sex and pornography is not from God. It's the enemy's attempt to keep us quiet, isolated, and stuck. Doug said it best, "God is righteously angry, but not at you." Read that again because I know

many of us need to hear it. God is righteously angry about the sexual sin the world is stuck in, but He's not mad at you. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

**Romans 8:1-6 NIV, 1 Corinthians 10:13 NLT**

**Do you ever have a hard time receiving and embracing Romans 8:1 for yourself? If so, why do you think that is?**

**Have you ever experienced shame, guilt, condemnation, or addiction around the topic of sex? If you feel comfortable, share it with your Group.**

We understand that this topic is difficult to discuss, and some group members may not be ready or feel comfortable sharing details with the whole group. If this is you, please know that there's no shame in not being ready yet. If you feel this way, would you consider taking this smaller step: would you just slip up your hand so your group can see that this topic is part of your story and you're not ready to share, but you'd love some prayer and support?

**What are your thoughts/takeaways from 1 Corinthians 10:13 in regard to sex and pornography?**

The second thing we must remember is that God is a great restorer of all things pure. You are not too far gone, too addicted, too stuck, or too broken for God to heal, restore, and renew the parts of your story that have been affected by sex and pornography. The enemy may try to use the good, true, pure, and holy things God has created to destroy us, but God will not be mocked, and He will reclaim and renew every single thing.

**Read Isaiah 43:18-19 CSB, Revelation 21:5 NLT, Genesis 50:20 NIV,**

**What comes to mind after reading these passages?**

**If you could hear God say to you, "Hey, will you surrender \_\_\_\_ to me, so I can restore the broken parts of your life and make all things new," what is that thing, and how might he be nudging you to lay it down at his feet?**

**Is there something that has happened in your past that is preventing you from stepping into a pure, good, true, and holy version of Godly love and intimacy with Him and/or with someone in your life that you have yet to experience? What is it? Explain.**

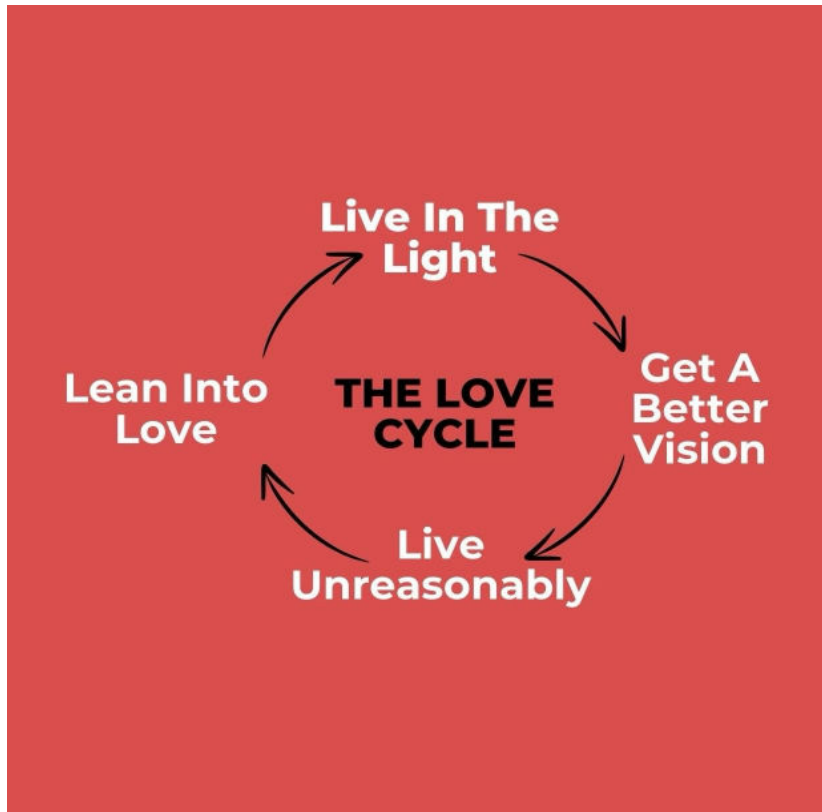
## MOVE

Doug shared two helpful cycles that illustrate how we often get stuck in sexual sin when we follow the advice the world gives, and how we can break free and experience healthy, Godly, sexual freedom and intimacy the way God intended. The first cycle is called “The Lust Cycle,” which piggybacks off of James Clear’s work in his book, *Atomic Habits*. In all habits, both good and bad, four things take place: the cue (or stimulus), the craving, the response, and the reward/consequence.

The Lust Cycle:



The Love Cycle:



As Doug illustrated here, it doesn't matter if a habit is healthy or unhealthy, Godly, or ungodly. Both create reinforcement cycles that impact our lives. James Clear puts it this way, "Every decision we make is either a vote for or against the person we want to become." When looking at the Love Cycle, Doug gives us helpful things we can do, that allow us to cast a vote in favor of who God is calling us to be, helping us move on from the places we may feel stuck and remain in a healthy space.

### **#1: Live in the Light**

God can't bless who you pretend to be. If you want to live free, you have to be willing to talk to people you trust about the things you are struggling with. You can have secrets or freedom, but not both.

Not everyone needs to know what you are going through, but somebody should.

**What does living in the light mean to you?**

**Do you have a person in your life you can talk to about the things you are struggling with?**

## **#2: Get Some Vision**

Do you have a vision for the person you want to be? Do you have a reason to fight for freedom? The Bible says, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). You need a goal, a dream, and a vision for the person you want to be. Fighting for freedom is just that - a fight.

You may experience withdrawals, and temptation, and go through difficult times that will stretch and challenge you; in those moments, having a vision of who you want to be and the relationships you want to have will remind you why you're fighting in the first place. Vision will give you a reason to keep fighting.

**Do you have a vision for the person you want to be this time next year? For your relationships? Explain?**

**Read Ephesians 4:17-24 NLT**

## **#3: Live Unreasonably**

The third step is to go to great lengths to live free. If you want to fight for freedom, you have to be ready to live unreasonably. In the passage you just read, Paul calls us to throw off our old sinful nature and let the Holy Spirit renew our thoughts and way of living. Experiencing the fullness of love in our relationships with God and with others, requires us to live unreasonably. How far are you willing to go to realign your heart with God? There are several things you can do. We've found that these three strategies can be extremely helpful to get you started on the right track.

### **1. Barriers and Boundaries**

- a. Put things in your way that physically restrict your access to things that may trigger a response. Cravings/temptations are the result of being exposed to Ques/stimulus. Think of it this way: if you want to stop eating junk food, don't keep Oreos in your house. Can you go to the store and get more? Yes. But knowing that you don't have immediate access to them, and equally important, not being able to see them sitting on your counter, is an extra barrier in your way

that can help you stay on track. Put as many barriers in your way as possible. Make it extremely difficult, even painful, to fail. Find more resources on this at the bottom of our study.

- b. Create strict boundaries and overcommunicate them with whoever you need to in order to place obstacles in your way to help you stay on track.

## **2. Accountability and Community**

- a. At Red Rocks Church, no one fights alone. We bear each other's burdens and lift each other up. This is especially important when it comes to sex and pornography because the enemy uses shame, guilt, fear, and isolation to keep us stuck where we are. Find someone you trust, or a group of people, and create an accountability plan where you can check in on each other.

## **3. Prayer**

- a. God isn't looking for behavior modification, He's looking for heart transformation. Scripture says we have been saved by grace through Christ, not by our own works (Eph. 2:8-9). The truth is that barriers and accountability are very effective in helping you refrain from falling into sexual sin while they're in place, but if your heart is not transformed in the process, the likelihood of falling back into sexual sin the second those barriers and boundaries are no longer in place is extremely high. Virginity, refraining from sexual sin, and avoiding pornography should not be the goal. This is what toxic purity culture looks like, which weaponizes shame, guilt, judgment, and condemnation to control others; a tactic that leaves people feeling bitter, broken, wounded, and ruled by fear. Rather, these things should be the byproduct of a purified heart that is in alignment with God's heart and will for your life, which is the only thing God has ever wanted. Barriers, boundaries, and community help break The Lust Cycle, but prayer moves us into The Love Cycle.

**What is your takeaway from the passage in Ephesians?**

**What can you do to "live unreasonably" in an effort to "throw off your former way of life and let the Spirit renew you?" What "new nature" might God be calling you to step into?**

**Read 1 John 4:4-19 NLT**

**#4: Lean Into God's Love**



The final step is to lean into God's love. The gospel of John is filled with God's love because John understood the profound power of God's true love. John says that anyone who does not love does not know God, and whoever does not know God cannot know true love, for God is love. The reason we have the capacity for love at all is because He first loved us.

That order matters. If you want to live free this week, the starting point is remembering that God loves you! He loved you first, and He still loves you. If your capacity to experience the fullness of love, intimacy, and companionship has been broken through the world's idea of sex, God is inviting you to return to the source of love—Him.

**What are your thoughts on The Lust Cycle and Love Cycle?**

**What stuck out to you in 1 John 4?**

**Look at vs. 16-17. How easy or difficult is it for you to believe, receive, and embrace how this verse applies to you? Explain.**

**What does your belief about v.16-17 reveal to you about your current capacity for companionship, love, and intimacy?**

P R A Y

Jesus, this week we pray for freedom and breakthrough from sexual sin that has held far too many of us captive for far too long. Will you remind us that you are love, and love is made perfect and complete in you. Would your mercy and grace restore all things that have been made impure, so that we can experience the fullness of love, companionship, and intimacy the way you originally intended. Will you soften the hearts of those who have become bitter from toxic purity-culture. Free the addicted from the chains of lust and pornography. Remind those who feel desperate and lonely that they are worthy of love beyond their wildest dreams because you loved them first. Restore the sanctity of marriage, and silence the lies from the enemy.