

Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People
Chapter 4: Thought Life – Overcoming Impure Thoughts
Pastor's Notes/Review

Raynald III was a fourteenth-century duke in what is now Belgium. Raynald's younger brother Edward led a successful revolt against him. Edward captured Raynald but did not kill him. Instead, he built a room around Raynald in the castle. The room had several windows and a door that was just a bit smaller than normal. Raynald was told that he could regain his title and property just as soon as he could leave the room. Normally that wouldn't be so difficult, since the windows and door were not locked. The problem was Raynald's size – he was very overweight and could not fit through the door. To regain his freedom, he needed to lose weight. But Edward knew his older brother's weakness was food, and each day he sent a variety of delicious foods into his room. Raynald, instead of dieting his way out of prison, grew heavier from the food. When Duke Edward was accused of cruelty, he had a ready answer: "My brother is not a prisoner. He may leave when he so wills." Raynald stayed in that room for ten years and wasn't released until after Edward died in battle. By then his health was so ruined he died within a year, a prisoner of his own appetite.

There are many of us who are like Raynald, trapped by our sinful desires. We wish we didn't have these desires but often the delicious temptations that are wheeled before us are too hard for our flesh to resist. And the temptations are certainly not lessening. As Keith Drury, author of the book, "Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People" says, "We live in a sex-saturated society. Advertisers use sex appeal to sell perfume, after shave lotion, blue jeans, hosiery, even toothpaste. Most of the TV advertising we see is carefully designed to appeal to our sensual natures. Magazines, books, newspapers, billboards, movies, even office conversations offer stimulation of the sexual parts of our beings. An increasing host of "soft core" TV programs titillate millions of viewers nightly, and what was once considered blatantly "sexy" is now accepted as good taste in clothing."

It's no wonder that so many men and women struggle in this area of temptation. It's hard enough, at the best of times, to keep one's thoughts and mind pure, but with so much emphasis, at every turn, on sexuality, it's next to impossible not to be affected by it. Chances are that we have all had to struggle in this area at some time or another. It doesn't matter if you are young or old, male or female.

- So... the question is, how do we deal with it? How do we overcome impure thoughts?

There are some who would say not to worry about it; that sexual fantasies are normal and quite innocent. But the Bible doesn't have that opinion. Over and over again, God's Word condemns lust as sin.

Jesus tells us that if we look at a woman with lust, that we have already committed the sin of adultery with her in our heart. Never mind the action, just the *desire* is sin in itself.

- Jesus didn't say that it is a sin if you see a woman; but when you look at a woman with lust.
- To look isn't the same as to see. You may see something without really looking. To look indicates a purposeful and continued action.
- Jesus is not condemning the unexpected and unavoidable exposure to sexual temptation. Seeing someone who dresses provocatively isn't a sin. The Bible says Jesus was tempted in all ways (Hebrews 4:15), yet was without sin.
- But when you keep following that person with your eyes or in your mind, that's when you run into problems with lust.

The story is told of a minister and his family who were walking down a street in Daytona Beach, Florida. Two women wearing bikinis passed by. The minister remarked, "How disgusting!" His wife said, "If it is so disgusting, why do you look?" The 12-year-old son spoke up with, "I think Dad likes to be disgusted."

JAMES 1:14-15 says: *But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.*

Some women take the attitude that if you have a problem with lust, that that's your problem.

- That may be true, but Jesus makes it abundantly clear that those who cause others to sin are just as much in the wrong. Luke 17:1 *Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come.*
- Those who dress provocatively are no less guilty than those who struggle with lust.
- Short dresses/skirts, low cut tops, tight fitting clothes... they only serve one purpose – to look sexy.
- A woman can be very beautiful and at the same time very modest... if they choose to.

1. Admit You Have a Problem.

The first thing we need to do is recognize the problem.

- There are many people who would not commit the physical act, but they will look longer than they should at someone and then they allow that look to lead to other things that happen in the mind.
- In 2 Samuel 11:2-5 (the situation with David and Bathsheba) David saw, inquired, acted.
- David was not at fault for seeing Bathsheba bathing. He could not have helped noticing her, because she was in plain view as he walked on the palace roof. He could have looked away and put the experience out of his mind. Instead, he had her brought to his room. It started with a look.

I don't expect you will see a woman bathing while you are working on your roof, but pornography is a reality that confronts us in many ways. Anyone with a computer and the internet can easily access pornography.

The very first step in breaking this downward spiral of sin is confessing it. 1 John 1:9 *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*

2. Avoid Tempting Situations.

On the old TV show "Hee Haw," Doc Campbell is confronted by a patient who says he broke his arm in two places. The doc replies, "Well then, stay out of them places!" He may have something there. We cannot regularly put ourselves in the face of temptation and not be affected. When faced with the problem of temptation, we need to take the good doctor's advice and "stay out of them places."

What is it that gets your mind going? Is it a TV program? Certain movies? Soap Operas? Is it someone who is flirting with you? Is it a web site online? Maybe it's romance novels that start your sexual engine or indecent jokes. Think about it; what situations lead you into temptation? Avoid them!

- Remember the kids song; "Be careful, little eyes, what you see."

Keith Drury puts it well. He writes, "Lust is a hungry carnivorous monster. It must be fed "flesh" to survive. External stimuli trigger lust. These stimuli continuously nourish and multiply a lustful orientation. Since society is saturated with sexual stimuli, you may be tempted to play along -- simply giving up. But you need not do this. With a little thought you could make a list of the ten most dangerous "triggers" for temptation in this area. Then starve the sources."

2 Timothy 2:22 *"Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart."*

3. Be Accountable to Someone.

Being accountable to someone means you sit face to face, look that person in the eye and honestly, openly discuss what is going on in your lives. It means having someone; of the same sex; who you can openly and honestly discuss your struggles, weaknesses and victories with. Someone who will support you, listen to you, and truly care about you.

James 5:20 says; *"Remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins"*

Confidentiality is crucial. We need to share with people who know how to keep our confidence and when to confront us about our unhealthy secrecy.

4. When tempted, Pray

Here's a good one to do. When you are tempted sexually, pray. Pray not only for yourself, but pray for someone else. Pray for a brother, sister, one of your children, your pastor, your spouse.

If your thought life has been troubling you, you don't need to give in, and you don't need to give up. If God is convicting you in this area, it means he is ready to work with you on this. Will you let Him?