Bob: Romans, chapter 1, describes the progressive nature of sin, the descent from one kind of sin to another deeper, darker kind of sin. Mike Cleveland experienced that.

Mike: The involvement in pornography led to adultery because that's what you begin dwelling on, and so I was involved in immorality and adultery for many years.

Bob: Mike's wife, Jody, was stunned when she learned her husband had been with other women.

[musical transition]

Jody: In fact, I actually spoke with one because there were some odd phone calls, and I was, like, "Who are these people?" So I called, and I actually heard the woman on the other line. I hung up immediately, I was so terrified, and that sort of made it real to me. There were other real people, and it was devastating.

[musical transition]

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Tuesday, November 4th. Our host is the president of FamilyLife, Dennis Rainey, and I'm Bob Lepine. We hope you will get out and vote today. We also hope you'll stay tuned as we hear how Mike Cleveland hit bottom in his struggle with sexual sin and found hope.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today, thanks for joining us. You know, as you and I have had the opportunity to talk with many men at Weekend to Remember Marriage Conferences around the country, we have found that the issue of pornography, particularly, has been a source of bondage for a lot of men and a huge issue in marriages all around the country.

There are guys who realize they've got a problem, but have not been able to get free from the snare of this kind of behavior.

Dennis: And, Bob, it's now not just the men who are being ensnared. The other half of the population are being ensnared as well by social websites, social networking, and striking up relationships where they get the same adrenalin rush that a man gets by visiting a pornographic site.
And this has now become a universal problem in our culture in marriages and families that must be addressed, and it needs to be addressed from a biblical perspective, and I am grateful for Mike Cleveland and for his ministry, and I just want to thank you, Mike, for coming back on our broadcast and sharing more about your story. I want to welcome you FamilyLife Today again and just thank you for your ministry. Thanks for joining us.

Mike: Thank you, it's so good to be with you and I so enjoy sharing the grace of God, and I know that's what we'll talk about in this session.

Dennis: If you missed what we've already talked about this week, Mike has shared a compelling story of how pornography and chat rooms and affairs and infidelity destroyed one marriage that involved two children and nearly destroyed a second marriage in the process, and the deceit and the deception around pornography – well, it pushed him to the brink, to the brink of destruction of his own life, and it's just a great story because it's a story of redemption. So much so that Mike is now the president and founder of Setting Captives Free, which is a ministry both in literature and online that has courses that help people who have addictions get free of those addictions, and Mike and his wife, Jody, have six children. He's a pastor, he's an author, an airline pilot – Mike, you're pretty busy.

Mike: Not busy enough to come see you.

Dennis: But you've got a great story, and earlier this week we talked about how you were at that point of despair, and something clicked and began to turn your life around. What took place?

Mike: Well, it was about a year into my second marriage, and we were having the same kinds of problems, of course, because the same sin was in that marriage as in the first. And so my wife, Jody, began looking for help, and she somehow came across a book called "The Excellent Wife" by Martha Peace, and she read that book, felt that Martha understood, could offer some hope, and she wrote to Martha Peace.

We didn't expect to get an answer back, but we did, and Martha Peace suggested that we go see a counselor, and that we looked and there was one right there in Medina, Ohio, where we lived.

Bob: Now, you were aware of the fact that she was writing to somebody looking for help.

Mike: Yes.

Bob: Did you want help?

Mike: Yes, yes. I had actually been to various counselors, various psychologists; I'd tried the tips and the gimmicks that they would give you; I had tried to put a rubber band on your wrist, and any time you are tempted, snap that rubber band, and you'll begin to associate temptation and pain, and you won't do this anymore.
I tried their various gimmicks and things like that – the regressive method and so many different ways I’d tried to get help in the past, and nothing worked.

**Bob:** When Jody confronted you with her awareness of what you were into, was that a tearful evening? Was that an angry evening? Do you remember when she blew the whistle on you?

**Mike:** I do, although it runs together. There were probably not maybe one even but a series of a week or two that these issues began to come forth, and I really confessed and shared with her that this was a problem I’d had for 15 years of my life. And those times were times of great shock to her and, really, the light being turned on in my life began to expose what I really was as well.

**Dennis:** Tell me this – how many years into your marriage – your second marriage – was this?

**Mike:** One year. One year into the second marriage. We both discovered these things that were in my life; Jody finding pornographic images on the computer and various chat groups that I was involved in, and this was a year into our marriage.

**Dennis:** You know, I have to ask you at this point because for a lot of women, when a husband comes clean, it's like he takes a garbage can …

**Mike:** Yeah.

**Dennis:** … you just winced as I said that. You just – you know what I'm talking about here?

**Mike:** Well, you're dumping on your wife. You're taking all the impurity and throwing it at her.

**Dennis:** Yeah, and a man's way of thinking – I'm going to dump this out on the kitchen table, and my wife is going to be able to see it, process it and flip a switch and move on with me in the next 30 to 45 minutes. That doesn't happen, does it?

**Mike:** No. In fact, that's why she began looking for help, because she realized that this was a big issue, and that it needed to be addressed fully. So, yeah, it was like dumping the garbage can on her.

**Dennis:** You know what? Jody's out there listening to this.

**Bob:** Do you want us to have them bring her in here?

**Dennis:** I think I'd like to hear just her perspective of what was taking place at this point.
Mike: She's used to it.

Dennis: Is she?

Bob: Jody, come on in and have a seat. Thank you for popping in here and sharing with us. When you first found out what your husband was into, what did you feel?

Jody: Oh, it was devastating. I was just mostly heartbroken because I loved him so much, and I wanted so much for us to have this beautiful marriage, and we had just had Joshua, so he was only just a few weeks old when I came out and covered the whole story. I was a new mom and very afraid but very much in love and just wanted to fix it. I wanted to find the way out.

Bob: Were you angry or hurt?

Jody: Yes, but more just so wounded, because I wanted so much – I loved him so much, and I just wanted to share that with him, and I thought we had such a beautiful thing, and it sort of was like this whole thing has just been a lie, and so there was a lot of doubt and a lot of fear – more than anger, more of the fear.

Dennis: And so when he confessed this, actually when you confronted him, right?

Jody: I did. I was so afraid to do it, but our pastor said that I had to and so, yeah.

Bob: And Dennis talked about the feeling of having garbage all dumped over the table as he confessed to things you didn't know anything about.

Jody: Right, right.

Bob: Did you just want to die?

Jody: Well, in many respects I did, but before Mike and I married, I was a registered nurse, and I worked in a neonatal intensive care unit, so I was used to death and dying and sickness and those types of things, and, to me, this was just another form of something that needed to be dealt with, and I knew that if there is a sin problem, there is always a biblical solution, there had to be, because I was raised that way.

But I didn't have it in my heart yet at this point. But I knew there was something out there, and I wanted to find it.

Dennis: You're speaking of Christ. You didn't have a relationship with Christ yet.

Jody: I knew about Him. I had a lot of head knowledge, but no personal relationship at that time.

Dennis: So take us to the room or was it the kitchen? Where did he confess this to you?
Jody: Oh, well, I'm trying to remember. It was so many years ago, but now I think we were in the living room when it kind of all came out because I was looking at his computer, I was working something on his computer and kind of uncovered a lot of things, and then just sort of brought it up to him and said, "Hey, what's going on?" And then it kind of, it was like taking your finger out of the dam, and the whole thing just broke loose. And it was so relieving to him – very burdensome to me, but very relieving to him. You could see the weight just come off. It was amazing.

Dennis: You know, you used two words that I don't want our listeners to miss here because it will help men understand what they are feeling right now but also potentially what their wives will feel – relieving to Mike but burdensome to you.

Jody: Right.

Dennis: What is cleansing to him becomes …

Mike: Defiling.

Dennis: Yeah, I mean, of the worst kind. So did you think about leaving him at that point?

Jody: I did not. You know, oddly enough, pornography was not something that I ever viewed as a child, but I knew it was out there. My cousins and uncles and things like that, and I had seen it around their houses and stuff, so I knew it was out there, and I really just thought it was a man problem. And I was, like, there's got to be a solution for this.

So I probably wasn't – my response probably wasn't as shocking as maybe someone who lived a more sheltered life. But it was distressing.

Bob: And you were aware that night that it wasn't just viewing pornography but there had been other women?

Jody: Yes, in fact, I actually spoke with one because of some odd phone calls, and I was, like, "Who are these people?" So I called, and I actually heard the woman on the other line, and I hung up immediately, I was so terrified. And that sort of made it real to me. There were other real people, and it was devastating.

Bob: For a wife to hear that her husband has been looking at pornography on the Internet, that's devastating …

Jody: It can be.

Bob: But when it moves beyond that to involve adultery, that's even more crushing, isn't it?
**Jody:** It is, definitely. Because now you are dealing with an actual, physical, and the Scriptures deal with it in a different way as well.

**Bob:** So, Mike, was it Jody who said, "We've got to get help," and you said, "I'm ready?"

**Mike:** Yes, it was. She had discovered "The Excellent Wife" book and had read through that, and she contacted Martha Peace, the author, and Martha and, I believe, her husband, Sanford, wrote back to us and suggested that we go to a National Association Nouthetic counselor, and so we had never heard of them, didn't know if there would be any, but there was one right in Medina, Ohio, where we lived. And I was ready at that point, I truly was ready. I was all done with my life of deception, and I saw – especially, I think, looking at Jody and the pain – it wasn't so much anger with her, as she described, it was more hurt. Her heart was torn up and, I tell you, that tore me up because I saw the pain that my life had brought to this lady that I truly loved, and at that point it was, "Yes, let's go, let's get help."

And so we began at that point, went in to see the counselor, and this was different than any other type of help I'd ever tried to get. This was, "Let's open our Bible and pray," and I thought, "Well, that's religion, you know, what do we need with that? I need help with my problem." And, you know, and yet that was exactly what I needed.

And the counselor brought forward the Gospel. He brought me to the cross of Jesus Christ, and as I began to see that cross and the blood that was shed for me and the death that Christ died on my behalf, it became very real, it became like I was viewing the death of the Son of God for my sin, and I remember kneeling at the foot of that cross and just having wave after wave of forgiveness wash over me and cleansing come over me, and it was like I stood up a new person. Like, all that had been washed away, like, I had become new, and my slate was clean, and my guilt was gone.

And so that was the experience that happened. I didn't know it at the time, but the Bible describes that as being born again. And so the old is gone, and the new has come.

**Bob:** Was this the first counseling session you had with this counselor?

**Mike:** It was about a month into it, and …

**Bob:** Okay, and so you'd been unpacking stuff, and the counselor goes to himself or herself, "I don't think this guy gets it," and shared the Gospel with you?

**Mike:** He was sharing the Gospel all the way through because he realized my condition, and far more than I did, and so he was. But he also began to apply the Scriptures practically to me, and that's where I began to discover the how-to as far as getting free from all the impurity.
Bob: I wanted to ask you about that because it wasn't just a situation where he shared the Gospel, you were born again, and now you had no struggle anymore with any kind of sexual impurity. The struggle was still there, right?

Mike: I had the habit of turning to pornography and various other things, and that habit was not broken like that. But what happened is, if you read the rest of Psalm 107, it says, "Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains." So now we have the Lord working in our lives, and He is bringing us out of darkness and breaking chains.

What happened is the counselor began to share with me the how-tos of actually getting free from this stuff, and it didn't have anything to do with a rubber band or any drugs or anything like that. It was the actual biblical principles of radical amputation where Jesus said, "If you're lusting after a woman, pluck out your eye," or "cut of your hand." Now, obviously, He's not speaking of physical dismemberment there where you're going to cut off your hand. He's talking about make it impossible to view that anymore. Make it so that you can't gratify your flesh anymore.

So I remember taking the TV out of my hotel room, disconnecting the wires, unplugging it, carrying it down the hall to my co-pilot's room, and as I did that, the maid walks by, and I'm carrying this TV, you know, and I walk by her, and she's thinking I'm stealing the TV. But I got to my co-pilot's room and said, "Could you please take this for the evening." He's, like, "What?" And I said, "Yeah, I can't have this in my room," and I went back that night to my hotel room, and I did the victory dance, because I knew I wasn't going to fall that night. I couldn't. I didn't have access to it.

And so I began looking at areas in my life where I was falling to this sin, and I began cutting them off and plucking them out and getting rid of them one by one.

Bob: Do you still have a laptop that you carry with you?

Mike: I gave my laptop to my pastor at that point. The counselor – it was also the pastor – I gave my laptop to him. I gave my cell phone away. I began looking at any area that I fell in, and I began to cut it off.

Now, some people say, "Well, I'm not struggling with the Internet. Do I have to cut that off?" No. It's wherever you're falling, wherever you're in bondage to – that has to be severed.

Bob: But the guy who says, "Okay, I hear you, but I've got to have the laptop when I get back to the hotel room at night because I've got to use it for work." What do you say to him?

Mike: Right. And if you will look at what Jesus said – it is a radical approach to being free from this sin. If you think of cutting your hand off or plucking your eye out, it
means that there is going to be some pain involved in this, and wherever somebody will say, "Oh, I couldn't do that because" – that's where you know they're going to continue to stumble.

The second pillar of freedom is radical appropriation so that we replace whatever it was we cut off. So now we begin ingesting the Word of God. We begin to take in the grace of Christ and the Holy Spirit and feed on it, and so we've cut off, radically amputated that which is causing us to stumble. Now we're beginning to appropriate the Word of God, but the third area is radical accountability, because there's times when I think I've cut everything off, and I think I'm appropriating the Word, but I may fall. And so my accountability partner, who became my wife, is able to examine – is there any area where the enemy is hiding here? Are there any dark corners where he might be lurking?

And so we applied these three principles, and then as our ministry began to develop, certainly, we definitely came out into the light, and our story was put on the Internet, and so there was all kinds of accountability.

But for one year after I began to cut off things, I e-mailed my pastor every day for a year, and said, "I just want you to know, I'm free today, and I want you to be involved in my life. I care that you know," and so I would just e-mail him every day because I didn't feel like, at that point, I could walk on my own two feet. And so that's the accountability part.

**Bob:** What did this do to your relationships with other pilots in your airline when word starts getting out about, "Did you hear about Mike Cleveland? Could you believe what's going on with him?"

**Mike:** Yeah, actually, it was a very neat thing that happened. I was so scared, I even told my pastor, "Hey, I fear what would happen if I took the TV out of my room." He said, "If you're not willing to be embarrassed, you'll never be free." And so I said, "I want freedom."

So here is what happened – I took the TV over to my co-pilot – that was the first night. He kind of looked at me weird and said, "Okay, sure, I'll take it." The next day he said to me, "Mike, I know why you took the TV out of your room," he said, "and I probably need to do the same thing." And it opened up an area of discussion where we began to talk about these things, and I began to discover that just as my life in impurity affected others negatively, so my life in repentance and, with the grace of God, now began to have a good impact.

And it wasn't that I got a reputation for, "Oh, yeah, he uses that porn thing." It was that I began influencing them towards coming to Christ and understanding the issues that they were dealing with, and now we began to talk openly about these things.

**Dennis:** Your story, well, it just reminds me of what's been a favorite verse of mine for the past couple of years – Romans, chapter 1, verse 21 – "Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good." There are some listeners right now who need to overcome
evil with good. In fact, they know what they need to do. They don't need us to tell them. They've listened to you talk about these pillars. They know they need to repent, they know they need to get in the Scriptures, and they know they need to be accountable and come out of the dark. Just do it.

Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

Bob: Yeah, and since the year 2000, Mike, that's what you've been trying to help people do with your website, which is Setting Captives Free. We've got a link on our website at FamilyLife.com to your website, and if folks would like more information about what's available from your ministry, they can come to FamilyLife.com and follow the link. They can also find information about the Way of Purity workbook that you've created that takes men on a step-by-step journey from bondage to freedom, the same path that you followed and that we've talked about here today.

The workbook is on our website at FamilyLife.com along with additional resources designed to help a husband and wife win this battle and keep their marriage strong and keep it together. In fact, one of the resources we've heard about recently is the Covenant Eyes Program where a man can have an accountability partner, and each week the two of you get a copy of where the other person has been on the Web so somebody knows what you're up to.

And somebody can come back around and be praying for you and be challenging you, be encouraging you to do what's right and to stay away from what's wrong. And if you'd like more information about Covenant Eyes, that's on our website, too. Go to FamilyLife.com, on the right side of the home page, you'll see a box that says "Today's Broadcast." Click where it says "Learn More." That will take you to an area of the site where there is information about all of these resources.

Again, it's FamilyLife.com, click on the right side of the screen where it says "Today's Broadcast," or call us at 1-800-FLTODAY, 1-800-358-6329, that's 1-800-F-as-in-family, L-as-in-life, and then the word TODAY, and when you get in touch with us, someone on our team will let you know how you can get the resources you need send to you.

It occurs to me that this kind of an issue is becoming an issue at a much younger and younger age, and that's one of the reasons why, as parents, we have to be on the alert, we have to be paying attention to what our children are doing, and we have to be praying for them, because we can't always be around and watching everything that they're into.

FamilyLife has created a book for parents to help you pray specifically for character qualities, to be a part of your child's life as your child is growing. The book is called, "While They Were Sleeping," and it outlines 12 different character qualities, and over the course of 12 weeks you pray each week for one of these qualities to be molded into a child's life and heart.
We'd love to send this book to you as a thank you gift this month when you make a donation to help support the ministry of FamilyLife Today. We are listener-supported, so those donations are what keep us on the air in this city and in other cities all across the country. We do appreciate your support. If you're making a donation online, and you'd like a copy of the prayer guide for parents, "While They Were Sleeping," just type the word "sleep" into the keycode box on the donation form, or call 1-800-FLTODAY, 1-800-358-6329. You can make a donation over the phone and just mention that you'd like the prayer guide, or the book, "While They Were Sleeping" and, again, we're happy to send it out to you. We so much appreciate your financial support of this ministry. It's always great to hear from you.

Tomorrow we're going to talk about how a husband and wife can work together to rescue a marriage that has been rocked by sexual sin, and I hope you can be with us for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, and our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our host, Dennis Rainey, I'm Bob Lepine. We'll see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas – help for today; hope for tomorrow.