Bob: Many men and woman have found that sexual sin and sexual temptation are a persistent problem. Something that they struggle with for years. Here’s Jay Stringer.

Jay: One of my friends recently said to me—he said, “Jay, when I’ve been having the same conversation with my accountability partner for 15 years, something isn’t working.” That’s part of what this journey is all about. Romans 12:2 says “Do not be conformed to the ways of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” You really can’t renew your sexual mind if you don’t know what’s actually in there to begin with.

Bob: This is FamilyLife Today for Friday, May 17th. Our hosts are Dave and Ann Wilson; I'm Bob Lepine.

Sexual sin is like nut grass. It’s like a weed that won’t go away unless you get to the root. That’s what we’re going to spend time talking about today. Stay with us.

And welcome to FamilyLife Today. Thanks for joining us. We’re talking about something this week that we’ve already said is at epidemic levels—maybe pandemic levels. If the CDC called this a disease, we’d be quarantining, right?

Dave: Yes.

Bob: But this is one of those things that’s under the surface for most people.

Ann: It’s hidden.

Bob: Yes; so people are functioning and coping but this is robbing them. It’s invading their soul and robbing them of joy and of life and of peace. We’re talking about the subject of lust.

Dave: I was thinking you hadn't told us what we’re talking about so it could have been fantasy football or something. [Laughter] Man oh man. We are going deep into a hard topic that is so crucial to talk about. I’m really glad we’re talking about it.
Ann: I am, too, because I think people are looking for help—because they’re carrying a lot of shame in this area. They’re asking people like “Help me,” but they’re afraid to reach out and ask that.

Dave: And a lot of defeat. They’re not winning, and they want “Somebody help me out of here.”

Bob: Well, Jay Stringer’s been joining us all this week to help us with this. Jay, welcome back.

Jay: Thank you for having me back.

Bob: Jay is an author. He’s a therapist. He lives in the Seattle area with his wife, Heather, and their two kids. He’s written a book called Unwanted: How Sexual Brokenness Reveals Our Way to Healing. At the heart of this book is a research study that you did with 3800 respondents, exploring what’s going on in our world, but specifically in churches among Christians as it deals with this subject of sexual temptation and lust.

We’ve been talking about the problem this week, but we want to talk at this point about the solution and how you get to a place of victory. When I say that, I almost hesitate to use that word because it sounds a little clichéd, you know?

Ann: And yet people are really wanting it.

Bob: They want to be free from the guilt and the shame and the control of this. What should we be aiming for? What’s the place we should get to where we could go “This is where God wants me to be”?

Jay: What I would recommend is that when we think about sexual brokenness, we think about it in terms of “This is a roadmap to healing and growth not necessarily a life sentence to sexual sin.” So what that means is that our sexual brokenness is one of the primary places through which the work of redemption is going to be played out in our life. Rather than feeling like we need to hide or suppress the things that are difficult and broken about who we are, we can actually bring them to the surface and study them.

I know what that immediately conjures up is just a sense of shame of “You’re asking me to name and to talk about something that for my whole life has been a secret or that I’ve been keeping from people.”

So what I would say happens to most of us in the midst of our sexual shame and failure is that we try to change principally out of self-hatred. We hate ourselves for what we’ve done—for our inability to find freedom and so we hate ourselves. Then we go into different types of lust management where we try and just prevent desire from taking over our life. And yet, part of what I think we need to begin to do is to turn towards our
shame and let other people know where we harbor it. So many times the power of these unwanted behaviors—the power of them is actually derived from our flight from them, but if we can begin to turn and face them, that’s really where we begin to disempower this really nasty beast of shame.

**Ann:** So let me get real practical with you. For me as a young woman, I had a lot of shame I carried because of abuse/because of some other things. So my self-talk, which I wasn’t ever aware of, were things like “You’re so stupid. You’re ugly. You’re worthless. You’re forgotten.”—not even realizing it; that would be with me all of the time. So for that listener that’s faced with those realities on a day to day basis, what do they do with that?—because that’s shame.

**Jay:** I’d start with this premise that the God of the universe is not ashamed of you. What we know in Romans 2:4 is that “Do you not know that it is the kindness of God that leads to change.”

So much of that self-talk that fills our lives is really that language, again, of self-contempt and self-hatred. Self-contempt is a really, terrible motivator for change. We can definitely do it. If you don’t like your body, then you can hate yourself and go to the gym. You can hate yourself and try to just fix something really fast, but it’s not until you begin to really learn how to extend kindness to yourself, in the very midst of your struggle, that change really happens.

**Dave:** It’s interesting as you talk, Jay, I’m noticing something I’ve heard all throughout our conversation is truth from the Word of God. So I was thinking as Ann was saying that we hear lies, we hear lies, and you’re like “Okay, we’ve got to attack that and replace it,” and what I don’t want people to miss is you know the Word of God. You keep quoting it. You’re never going to replace those lies unless you make a decision—one way to attack the shame/to attack the lie is go to where truth is found: The Word of God.

You’ve got to make it a daily decision and say “I’m going to input that into my brain rather than the lies. I’ve got to counteract it.” So anyway, I was just making that observation; you’re a man of the Word. That’s where you got your truth, right?

**Jay:** Indeed.

**Dave:** So what’s that look like for you to get that? How do you do that?

**Jay:** Back to that point where the angel of the Lord pursues Hagar in a place where she’s likely going to die. It’s there that the angel of the Lord says, “Where do you come from and where are you going?”

That’s what God is inviting us into. It’s not the reigning in of our desire but, inexplicably, He’s given us the keys to His kingdom—to open up doors of beauty that we can’t even
begin to conceive of at the height of our brokenness. So to me that’s what this gospel is all about. It’s not about the cessation of desire. It’s not about annihilating some aspect of our life, but it’s actually to allow our hearts to be free, to pursue goodness and beauty. I firmly believe that that’s what God wants for us in our lives.

Bob: There is a hymn—I’ve quoted this before, but it’s so meaningful to me. The second verse says, “When Satan tempts me to despair.” I mean how often does that happen? “And tells me of the guilt within,”—and when the voice in your head is telling you of the guilt within, you can identify where that voice comes from. God will bring conviction. Satan brings shame.

“When Satan tempts me to despair, and tells me of the guilt within, Upward I look, and see Him there Who made an end to all my sin.”

Then it goes on to say
Because the sinless Savior died, My sinful soul is counted free, For God, the Just, is satisfied To look on Him and pardon me.

I’ve sung that to myself over and over again in the battle with shame and guilt—to just say “I know what to do with this. I just need to look up and say, ‘There’s Jesus who bore it and God is satisfied with what He’s done with it, and He’s pardoned me.’” That’s the message of the gospel.

Ann: I totally relate to that because I remember reading when Paul talks about take every thought captive. I would let those thoughts/the lies about myself—they were running rampant in my mind. I wasn’t taking them captive at all. So I was trying to learn to replace those lies with the truth of even Psalm 139, “For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;”

That’s true and that’s how God always sees us—no matter what we’ve done, no matter what we’ve looked at, or what has happened to us. He always sees that.

Bob: But then that Psalm takes you right to the end, which is what we’ve been talking about, “Search me, O God, know my heart; see if there be wicked ways in me, and lead me in paths of righteousness.” It’s that exploration that is the beginning of the path to healing, isn’t it? That’s what you’ve been telling us all this week.

Ann: Well, and Jay you talk about listening to our hearts. What does that mean?

Jay: With regard to recovery from sexual brokenness, most of us, again, go into these lust management protocols where we bounce the eyes, we try to suppress desire. But what I invite my clients into, and certainly the reader of this book, is to really imagine
your life as a house. Let’s just imagine that it’s late in the evening and you hear that familiar knock of lust on the door. What are you going to do? In the past, you may have called/phoned a friend for back up. You may have put some surveillance over your house. Maybe you go and shoot the intruder; or at other points in your story, you’ve just let this intruder come in and ransack your house.

But what I’m proposing is that you actually go out onto the front porch and you acknowledge your lust and you say “Why are you here? What is it about my life? What is it about my house that makes you think that you would even be welcomed here?” And then to ask it questions “Why am I so drawn to you?”

As one of my friends recently said to me—he said, “Jay, when I’ve been having the same conversation with my accountability partner for 15 years, something isn’t working.” That’s part of what this journey is all about. Romans 12:2 says “Do not be conformed to the ways of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” You really can’t renew your sexual mind if you don’t know what’s actually in there to begin with.

Very similar to Psalm 139 that God knows the depths of our hearts. He knows what our minds are thinking. Then at the end it says, “How precious/how wonderful are your thoughts about me.” That to me is so much of where the healing process comes in is to really begin to listen to “Why am I able as a man/as a woman to be seduced into this infidelity?—to be seduced into this pornography?” I think part of what we recognize is that there are some really broken dynamics within us, within our family of origin, but also in our day to day life that are actually crying out for us to engage.

So what I’m trying to underscore is this issue of lust is not ever random in our life, but it’s a direct reflection of parts of our story that we haven’t engaged. So when we listen to our lust, what we actually identify is that there’s a lot of significant stories that await our engagement, and if we’re not going to attend to those stories, we can expect the involvement with sexual brokenness.

**Dave:** I’m guessing you would say if I’m going to go out on the front porch and talk to that temptation, I lust, I should probably take somebody with me. What’s the value of having some community in that discussion?—talk about that a little bit. How critical is it to have somebody else on this journey with you?

**Jay:** So well said. In my research, what we found was that 59% of people that were struggling with unwanted sexual behavior did not have someone that they felt like they could talk to. What we did find among those that actually did pursue someone to talk to when they were struggling, is they saw a 22% reduction in unwanted sexual behavior.

Part of the reason for that is that when we don’t hold our stories just to ourselves, that sense of accusation that’s really where that comes on line is in our isolation. But when we share our story and we talk about some of the shame, and some of the specifics
about the things that have captured our imagination and our thought life through out many decades, we actually invite other people into our shame and into our story.

That’s really the conversation that I want to invite people into is don’t just let it be “I messed up three times last week. I messed up two times last week.” Actually begin to talk about what is it within your story that actually makes you drawn to this specific unwanted sexual behavior that has really been part of your life for decades.

**Bob:** You put together an 18-week series for men to go through called *The Heart of Man Journey*, to start to address some of these issues. I heard about it. I thought “I’d like the three-week version.”

[Laughter]

“I would like the microwave version because I just—18 weeks might be a little more invasive than I want to get to, and I’d just kind of like this to go away easier than that.”

So have you got a three-week version?

**Jay:** This work cannot be rushed.

[Laughter]

*The Heart of Man Journey*—you can find it at www.heartofmanjourney.com. And just as we’ve been talking about how sexual brokenness is not random, the road to recovery is not random either. I teamed up with a film called *The Heart of Man*. It’s available on Netflix right now. Basically what that film is all about is to basically invite people to see that your shame is not a barrier, but it’s actually the very bridge to the longing and to the healing that you’ve been waiting for. So what they underscore in that film is what is the heart of the Father towards us when we find ourselves in a broken place? It’s full of love and it’s full of pursuit.

What this 18-week journey is all about is for you to begin to connect the story between how does my sexual brokenness—actually, how is it informed by the story of my life? What we started realizing was that there was a lot of churches and accountability partners that were having the same conversations and wondering why there wasn’t change and healing taking place. What I would say to that is it wasn’t going deep enough into the “Why?” to help people identify, and also transform, some of those key drivers of unwanted sexual behavior.

**Dave:** When I heard you say “18 weeks,” I was the opposite of Bob. I know Bob’s being facetious about it.

**Ann:** And Bob’s brilliant. He could do it in three weeks.

[Laughter]
**Dave:** He could do it in three. I need at least 18. But I did think when you said that—I thought, “Finally somebody’s going to lead people on a journey to get to the core.

**Ann:** —to the root.

**Dave:** It’s going to take at least 18 weeks. I mean, think about it. You’re not going to change your physical body in three weeks, right? There’s all these 30 days, 60 days—I did the P90X—you know three months. This is so much even more important. It’s like “Man, I want to go on this journey.” When I hear them, I want to encourage people take this journey.

**Ann:** —because it brings freedom.

**Dave:** Yes.

**Ann:** Yes, and Jay, let me ask you this because I talk to so many wives who are so frustrated because their husband is really struggling with this, continues to struggle. Some wives I talk to say, “I don’t want to know about this,” and others are like “Help me! I don’t know what to do.” How would you encourage wives or spouses that maybe their spouse isn’t necessarily trying to get help?

**Jay:** One of the things that some of the research—not mine—has shown is that women often waited far too long to pursue healing for this dimension of their married life. So a lot of times that voice of self-hatred can kind of come back of “What’s wrong with me? What’s going on in my own life that he’s not available to me?” Or “It must mean something about me.”

**Ann:** So it triggers all of that.

**Jay:** It triggers all of that. So I think that that would be the encouragement is how do you begin to pursue your own friendship or therapeutic work around these are some of the lies that are coming up in me. This is some of the difficult place that I’m in because what we want to invite people into is really to know that brokenness, whether it’s your husbands or your own, is the context for relationship to take place. That’s where so much healing begins to take place is when we actually begin to turn and face the things that we’re struggling with and that are hard.

So I would just encourage women to not wait months or years—because a lot of times, a lot of the stories that I will hear, a woman might find out about her husband’s pornography use or an affair and it’s not until five or six years later that their marriage is kind of in need of resuscitation that they realize that they’ve never pursued help for that story.
**Bob:** So the person who’s going to pick up your book or who’s going to go through *The Heart of Man Journey* I’m guessing is either desperate or really courageous. It’s not going to be the casual person who’s going to go “That sounds like an interesting book. I was looking for something to read at the beach this summer. I’ll pick up Jay’s book,” right?

**Jay:** “I’ll read it on the airplane.”

**Dave:** If you look in the mirror and go “I could probably lose a couple of pounds,” you’re never losing anything. But when you look in the mirror and go “That’s it. I am a holy disgust. I need to change,” that’s the person who is going to go on this journey.

**Jay:** Yes, and this journey is for men and women as well. Part of what we started recognizing is that most resources that are out there for churches and accountability partners are very male oriented, and so we wanted to really bring material and a curriculum for women as well.

**Ann:** I believe every single person will benefit from reading this book because I would guess that if you talk to 100 people, 99 people have some sort of brokenness—100 people.

**Bob:** I was going to say the other one is lying about it, right?

**Ann:** Yes; you’re right.

[Laughter]

We all have brokenness and we can all benefit from going into our past and seeing “Where did that start?” and “What are the side effects of that brokenness?”

**Bob:** And understanding what’s driving us in this area and get to the heart of it. Again, Jay, that’s what you do in the book, *Unwanted*, which we’ve got in our *FamilyLife Today* Resource Center. You can order a copy of this book when you go to our website, FamilyLifeToday.com; or call to order at 1-800-FL-TODAY.

Again, the book is called *Unwanted: How Sexual Brokenness Reveals Our Way to Healing* by Jay Stringer. Go to FamilyLifeToday.com for more information on how to get a copy of the book, or order by calling 1-800-358-6329—that’s 1-800-“F” as in family, “L” as in life, and then the word “TODAY.”

Anytime we talk about issues related to human sexuality, we are going to the center/to the core of who we are and that can lead to exhilaration and that can lead to shame. David Robbins, who’s the President of FamilyLife, is here with us and these are weighty issues for individuals or for couples to stop and ponder.
David: Yes; it reminds me of C.S. Lewis’s analogy around rats in the cellar. We all have rats in the cellar of our lives. The more layers that get peeled off as we are formed into Jesus, the more we realize all that’s in the cellar of our lives. A lot of times when we try to face those, we stomp on the steps on the way down/we beat on the walls so that when we turn on the light in the cellar, a lot of the rats are scattered. We know what’s really there and we kind of make a lot of noise, so they scatter.

But we all know those situations or people or times in our relationships and marriage where the light just gets flipped on, and we see what’s really there. I think a lot of times we do—we run back up those stairs after we see what’s really there; we slam the door. We put locks on it, and we go “I will never put myself in the situation where that happens again,” but certainly those situations happen again. You go through life; it doesn’t fix it. Lights get turned on.

I think Jesus says, “Let’s go in there together.” He goes down with us, arm in arm, and what’s amazing, I think if we were to look at Jesus’ face, He’s not overwhelmed. He has covered it all, and He wants to lead us out into healing and clearing out the rats in our cellar.

Bob: This is where we have to remind ourselves that Romans 8:1 is true. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

David: Oh man, yes; and the depth of God’s love for us in Christ far out measures the depth of our shame.

Bob: Yes; that’s great. Thank you, David. I want to ask our listeners to be praying for couples who are going to be attending a Weekend to Remember marriage getaway this weekend. We’ve got getaways happening in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and in Madison, Wisconsin. So there will be several hundred people, spending a weekend, learning more about how to have a strong healthy marriage relationship this weekend. Pray for those folks if you would.

Weekend to Remember marriage getaways, the resources FamilyLife Today produces, this daily radio program, our website—all of what we do happens because listeners like you say “This is important and we want it to continue,” and you wind up making a donation to help support this ministry. The funding for FamilyLife Today comes from FamilyLife Today listeners, and we’re grateful for those of you who are monthly Legacy Partners, or those of you who from time to time will make a donation.

During the month of May, we’ve had some friends of the ministry who have come along and offered to match every donation we receive. They’ve put a matching gift fund together and when we receive a donation, they will release money from that fund up to a total of $645,000, which is pretty unbelievable. We’re hoping to take full advantage of their generosity this month, and so we’re hoping regular FamilyLife Today listeners will consider making a one-time donation or becoming a monthly Legacy Partner. If you
become a monthly Legacy Partner, every donation you make for the next 12 months is going to be matched, dollar for dollar.

In addition, we’re going to say “Thank you for your ongoing support” by sending you a gift card so you and your spouse, or someone you know can attend as your guest a Weekend to Remember marriage getaway. We’ll send you the card that covers the complete registration when you become a Legacy Partner during the month of May. You can sign on at FamilyLifeToday.com; make your first gift there. Or you can call 1-800-FL-TODAY to make a one-time gift or to become a Legacy Partner. Thanks in advance for helping us take advantage of this matching gift opportunity, and we hope to hear from you.

We hope you have a great weekend. Hope you and your family are able to worship in your local church together this weekend. Then join us Monday; Jonathan Pitts is going to be here. We will talk about the unexpected tragic death of his wife last summer, Winter. She died one afternoon when her heart gave out. It was right after Jonathan and Winter had finished a book on marriage. We’ll talk about his experience of losing his wife and about some of these lessons on marriage that they learned over the years that they were together as husband and wife. I hope you can tune in for that.

I want to thank our engineer today, Keith Lynch, along with our entire broadcast production team. On behalf of our hosts, Dave and Ann Wilson, I’m Bob Lepine. We will see you back next time for another edition of FamilyLife Today.

FamilyLife Today is a production of FamilyLife of Little Rock, Arkansas; a Cru® Ministry. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow.

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