

**Radical Faith:
The Hard Sayings of Jesus**
Part 7: Radical Purity
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TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS



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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. —*Psalm 145:11*
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —*Joshua 22:5*

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Questions for Reflection

- Do you think Aron Ralson did the right thing? Why or why not?
- Jesus' command to "pluck out an eye, cut off a hand" is found in his famous "Sermon on the Mount", found in Matthew 5-7. **Our** response might be "Yuck! No way!", but Matthew 7:28 records the response of Jesus' original hearers. What was it? Look up some synonyms at <thesaurus.com>.

Verse 29 records **why** they were amazed. What are some **personal** implications of Jesus' authority?

- We learned that the Greek word rendered as "lust" means a strong desire or craving **for anything, regardless** of whether the **thing** we crave is good or evil. How should we respond, what should we do, when what we crave is something that we may not lawfully have (Exodus 20:17)?

Read 1 Corinthians 6:12 and 10:23. How should we respond, what should we do, when what we crave **is** biblically lawful for us to have, yet may not be profitable or edifying for us?

What is wrong with being mastered (6:12) by anything—even a good thing—other than Christ?

What is an example of a "lawful but not profitable/edifying" thing that tends to master you? (It could be a food, entertainment, lawncare, a hobby, shopping, work...literally anything.)

What would examples of a "plucking out an eye/cutting off a hand" sort of decisive, drastic actions you could take against that sin?

Read Galatians 6:7-8. What is at risk if you're not willing to "pluck and cut" in this situation?

What benefit comes if you are willing?

So, what **will** you do?

Need help learning to renounce sin?
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Application-Challenge

- Memorize one of these passages: Job 31:1; 1 Corinthians 6:18; or Romans 13:13-14.
- Make no provision for the flesh; cut off and destroy any thought of coveting or sexual sin.
- Keep fighting the good fight! God is pleased with your struggle against sin and will reward you.
- You can't do this alone. God created the church to help each other. Reach out, open up.

Sermon Summary

In April 2003, while hiking alone in a remote Utah slot canyon, Aron Ralston's right arm became pinned when an 800 pound boulder became dislodged. Unfortunately, he had failed to let anyone know his plans. Ralston spent five days trying to free his arm, without success. Finally, not expecting to survive another night, he carved his name, date of birth and presumed date of death into the sandstone canyon wall. After waking at dawn the following day he discovered that his arm had begun to decompose due to the lack of circulation. Finally, dehydrated and delirious, Ralston amputated his arm with a pocket knife, tied a tourniquet on the stump, rappelled down a 65-foot cliff, and began hiking out of the canyon. He came upon a family that was camping, who called for help. Four hours later he was evacuated by helicopter. Today Ralston is a motivational speaker, who continues to enjoy hiking—but now he lets people know when he's heading out to the wilderness!

In Matthew 5:27-30, Jesus said: "You have heard that it was said, 'YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY'; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell."

When Jesus said, "you shall not commit adultery", he was saying something that every Jew knew by heart. It was one of the Ten Commandments. You can almost hear the religious leaders say, "Preach it! Amen! You go! That's right Jesus!" as they think to themselves, "I've never committed adultery. I know a lot of other people all around me are a bunch of wicked sinners. They've done it—but not me." But Jesus did not stop there... There's an important three-letter word: "but". We should pay extra close attention to the buts in the Bible. "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

When most of us think of the word "lust," we associate it only with sexual desires. The Greek word for lust in verse 28 means a strong desire, for either something good or for something evil. (Too often we crave evil, but see Matthew 13:17 and Luke 22:15 for examples when this word is used for desiring something good). So Jesus was simply reminding us that this commandment forbids coveting anything, good or bad, which is not lawfully yours. Committing adultery in our hearts happens when we look at someone who is not ours in order to gain gratification. Jesus is forbidding staring, desiring, craving, imagining or having a thought about being with someone else other than your spouse. Adultery of the heart includes emotional connections which are not yours to have. We men tend to struggle more with sexual fantasies; I'm told that women often struggle with fantasies of emotional connections. Women may keep in touch with old flames, imagining what it would be like to live with them instead of their own husbands.

God sees and cares about the heart, because that's where sin conceived (Matthew 15:19; James 1:14-17). Where does the problem start? When lust is conceived—when we put resources to it—when we follow our strong desires with our imaginations or with other actions. That's when it gives birth to sin and sin to death. James tells us, "Don't be deceived. You think that following through with these lusts are good for you. They are not. They bring destruction, they bring death—in your relationship with God and in your relationships with others." Then James goes on to tell us that only good things come from God. When we indulge these lusts sinfully, we steal from the good gifts that God has for us.

At least five truths flow from Matthew 5:27-30:

- [1]** Jesus uses the eye and the hand because the eyes are what we use frequently to indulge our covetous thoughts and the hands are used often to carry out those thoughts with sexual sin.
- [2]** Jesus does not say "cut off both hands or pluck both eyes". We are not to literally dismember our bodies. We could cut off all of these body parts and still sin with our hearts.
- [3]** The "right" eye and hand mean our strongest, most dear eye/hand. Jesus is telling us that nothing is to be too precious to get rid in the fight against sexual sin.
- [4]** To "stumble" means to entrap or to trip up. Get rid of whatever traps you in sexual sin! We must act decisively!
- [5]** Sin makes us guilty before a holy God, and deserving of hell. Jesus is serious about sin!

Using Radical Measures to Fight Sin

Many people struggle with sins such as pornography because it is so easy to have access to it. If you keep pornography easily available, sooner or later you **will** look at it. Jesus said:

*“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery’; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, **tear it out and throw it from you**; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you stumble, **cut it off and throw it from you**; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.”* (Matthew 5:27-30)

Jesus calls us to a **serious standard** and a **serious strategy** because of the **serious stakes**:

- **Serious Standard** Jesus raised the standard of purity from external physical acts of fornication to internal lustful intentions of the heart and lustful looks of the eyes. Pornography reveals the evil, corrupt desires within our sinful hearts (Jeremiah 17:9; Mark 7:20-23).
- **Serious Strategy** Jesus said not only to pluck out your eye and cut off your hand, he commands us to **throw them away**. He doesn't allow us to retain these sinning body parts in hopes of using them later! Jesus is urging something **more** radical than a one-time physical amputation; we must act aggressively **every time** we are tempted and in **every way** required to avoid the sin. We need to get tough with sin. We need to limit our access and starve our temptation.
- **Serious Stakes** Why does Jesus urge such radical measures? Because of the life-and death nature of the consequences. Employing radical measures is the path to life, while indulging sin is the path to hell. God forbids sexual immorality because it leads to brokenness, sadness, emptiness, death, and hell. Sin is **not** complicated; there are two simple choices and two guaranteed outcomes. It **is** possible for you to know the abundant life that Jesus promises, but it won't come at a discount. Amputation is extraordinarily painful and brings a sense of loss—but the rewards are **far** better.

We sin when we have the **desire**, the **time**, and the **opportunity**. In order to conquer sin, we will need to employ radical measures for each of those three issues.

Radical Measures in Your Thought Life

You are only **truly** free when you have **full access** to sin **yet no desire** for it. That's where we're headed. By the time you look at porn, a dozen other things have **already** gone wrong in your heart. You will not have victory over sin until you **first** have victory in the battles that came **before** you ever looked.

If you have weeds in your yard but only pick off the buds, they will keep coming back. Only when you remove weeds at the root do they go away. So it is with sin; if you only attack the outward behavior the problem will keep returning. If you only **begin** the fight against porn when you're alone in the dark with your computer, you are guaranteed to fail. The very moment you become aware of even your desire to look at porn is when you need to take **three radical measures**:

- You must **repent immediately**. Repentance is an ongoing practice. Begin asking the Lord to forgive you for your lustful desires. Ask him for the grace to flee. Plead with him to give you the power.
- You must **remember Scripture**. **“How** can a man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to your word. I have hidden your word in my heart **that I might not sin** against you” (Psalm 119:9,11).
- You must **reach out for help**. You were not designed to fight the battles of sin and temptation alone. Recruit an accountability partner **now**; reaching out for help **in the midst of** temptation will often be too difficult because sin loves the darkness and is skilled at presenting attractive excuses.

Radical Measures in Your Use of Time

A person who desires pornography can only view it when it is available, and when they have time **alone**. Imagine you have a desire to look at porn, and happen to be in a room full of it...but just then your pastor stops by! You would resist looking—despite your desire and the availability. Then, your pastor leaves—and you're instantly tempted again. Why? Because you're **alone**. If you want to be free of sin, you **must** limit the time you spend alone—especially in the early phases of your struggle against it. Make plans to be with others during those times of the day when you're typically tempted.

Radical Measures for Cutting Off Access to Pornography

Cutting off access to pornography is the area most people think of **first** when they want to become free of sin, but the changes they make typically are not radical enough to be effective. You must **eliminate**—not merely limit—your access to outlets for pornography. Hand over your video-capable devices to your accountability partner. Destroy movies, magazines, or pictures you possess. Give your accountability partner total access so he may enter your home at any time for a spot-check. If you live alone, get a roommate. You cannot maintain unbridled mobility to access pornography; install GPS tracking software on your phone so that your accountability partner can know where you are.

You may even need to give up absolute freedom to spend your own money. Provide your bank passwords to your accountability partner so he can monitor your transactions. Agree to avoid cash withdrawals. Ask him to put passwords on your computer, phone, and TV which will make it impossible for you to access the internet or to view porn without the code. Install accountability, filtering and monitoring software for your router—not just for your individual devices. And **you** don't get administrative privileges! Remember, you **don't need any** electronic devices, but you **do** need to be holy.

When you travel, show your accountability partner your itemized hotel bill. At the hotel, have a maintenance worker remove the TV from your room. They **really will** do this if you insist. (One man I counseled would text me a time-stamped picture of the TV being removed from his room!)

Finally—don't seek out **someone else's** stash of porn! Are you using someone else's device to look at things you don't want your accountability partner to know about? If so, confess your struggle to both your accountability partner and to that person, and then ask that person to remove your access to their porn. It will be embarrassing and painful—but it's less painful than plucking out an eye! And plucking out an eye is far less painful than hell. Just because something is hard doesn't mean you shouldn't do it.

Are You Ready to Get Serious?

If you are stressing about these things, it's because you are considering the seriousness of the strategy **but not** the seriousness of the stakes. Jesus commands amputation because he is concerned that we avoid hell and pursue life in him. Indulging in pornography is like drinking spiritual poison. Get a clear, biblical understanding of what pornography is doing to your heart, your mind, and your life. Not everyone will need to employ **all** of these measures, but **everyone** will need to employ **some** of them.

These measures are not meant to be convenient; they're meant to be radical, difficult, painful, and costly. No one removes a limb because it's fun or handy. They do so because they realize they cannot keep that limb and live. It's a life-and-death decision. But outward measures, regardless of how radical they are, can never change your heart. This is why it is critical to employ radical measures in your thought life first. You need more than a change in your circumstances; you need a change of heart. But outward measures give you **the space and time you need** to direct your heart toward Christ instead of porn.