

# 1

## “A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO SEMINARY”

■ Bob is a successful pastor in a large Protestant denomination. He is married, with three children. His wife and he met at their denominational college, and each came from a family strong in its faith.

Since college days Bob has struggled with pornography and masturbation. He hoped that getting married would take away his “lust.” He was shocked and disappointed that regular marital sex didn’t stop him from looking at pornography and masturbating. Periodically, he would “repent” and try to stop these activities but would always return to them.

Over the years of his ministry, Bob has frequently rented pornographic videos. When the church obtained on-line access, Bob became fascinated with Internet pornography. He has also become preoccupied with the idea of going to a massage parlor.

In his first three churches, Bob became emotionally involved with several women in each church. In his current congregation, Bob's relationship with a member of the praise team has become sexual. Bob is depressed and is having difficulty performing his pastoral duties. He doesn't know who to talk to. And his wife wonders what is going on.

Bob is a pastor who got trapped in pornography and began to struggle with sexual addiction. In his addiction, problems with pornography became worse. Now Bob has committed several different kinds of sexual sin or sexual misconduct.

When he became sexual with a church staff member, Bob committed sexual abuse. Previously, he came dangerously close to sexually abusing members of his church. Bob's case began with a very basic pornography problem. He illustrates what can happen if the basic problem is not addressed early.

Bob's story does allow us to define some important distinctions between these three terms: "sexual addiction," "sexual sin and misconduct," and "sexual abuse." There is a great deal of confusion in the Church about these distinctions. Some would assume, for example, that all sexual sin is addictive.

Dramatic cases of pastors sexually involved with church members have received a lot of media attention. While the percentages of pastors who sexually sin are very high, sexual sin does not automatically imply sexual addiction or sexually abusive behavior. Though we primarily want to speak to those who have struggled with basic forms of sexual sin, such as pornography, it is important to know the broad nature of sexual sin.

## **Sexual Addiction**

The term "sexual addiction" came into use in the 1970s, when similarities were noticed in behavior between those who were out of control with repetitive sexual activity and alcoholics. Programs similar to Alcoholics Anonymous were started for sex addicts, and hospitals opened treatment programs.

We recognize that the use of the term "sexual addiction" is very controversial in the medical and clinical communities. Some of the terms that have been suggested are "hypersexuality," "sexual compulsivity," and "out-of-control sex." The only purpose for using any diagnostic label is so that we will know how to correctly treat a problem. We both feel strongly that any label never defines the identity of a person, only one aspect of his or her behavior. We hope that any label used does not create a roadblock to anyone preventing him or her from seeking help. Our use of the term purely represents our backgrounds and training. Mark Laaser, having gone to treatment for sexual addiction, considers today that it is only one label that applies to his history.

Sexual addiction has been defined as a pathological relationship to any form of sexual activity.<sup>1</sup> From a Christian perspective, "pathological" means any sex that is not the expression of spiritual and emotional intimacy between a couple. It also means that sex is a substitute for, or an escape from, intimacy.

As an addiction, pathological sex becomes totally unmanageable. A sexual addict intends to stop but can't. Christians might think stopping sinful behavior is a matter of willpower. But sexual acting out is an expression of the addict's loneliness and anger. Part of this person is rebellious and feels entitled to get his or her needs met. So a sexual addict is at war with himself

or herself. A part of the addict wants to stop, and another part doesn't.

Over time, the amount of sexual activity becomes progressively worse. Most sexual addicts can trace their addiction back to their adolescence and even childhood.

Getting worse does not always mean addicts will move to deeper levels of sin. But they will need either more of the same kind of activity or newer kinds of activity to produce the same result or "high." This factor is based on the brain's ability to adjust and is often called "tolerance."

Sexual addiction is based on feelings of genuine sexual lust. "Lust" is a misunderstood word. Many Christians assume it is inherently sinful. Lust, however, can be best understood as a feeling of desire. For any substance or behavior to be addictive, it must involve the chemistry of the brain. Feelings of sexual pleasure and excitement involve this brain chemistry. Powerful neurochemical reactions are involved in very basic parts of the brain that create intense feelings of pleasure. If God had not built us this way, we would not procreate. It is a natural part of God's design.

Within itself the brain can get used to any level of neurochemical reaction. Over time, the brain needs more of this to achieve the same pleasure.

As with many addictions, sexual feelings can be used to escape painful emotions. If the sexual activity is new, exciting, or dangerous, the adrenalin it brings can elevate an addict's mood. If the feelings are about romance, touching, being held, and the orgasmic experience of sex, powerful opiates in the brain can have a relaxing effect. If depressed, an addict can elevate his or

her mood. If anxious or stressed, the person can depress his or her mood.

Sexual addiction usually leads to negative consequences. For pastors the consequences are often obvious. They may lose jobs or even their careers. Addicts can spend huge sums of money—we have known pastors who spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on sexual activity. One pastor, for example, spent \$75,000 on the Internet in one month's time. Marriages are lost. Social and legal consequences can be severe. Pastors are arrested for everything from soliciting prostitution to sexual abuse. As stated earlier, in some states it is a felony for a pastor to be sexual with a congregant. Pastors can also be sued in civil action for damages when they have had sex with congregation members. We even know a pastor who was arrested for stealing from banks to pay for prostitution. And physical consequences can be deadly. The incidence of sexually transferred diseases (STDs) and even AIDS is profound.

Patrick Carnes says sex addicts are shame-based individuals who don't believe that anyone really knows or likes them or that anyone could possibly meet their needs. Sex becomes their most important need. For addicts, sexual activity, whether a fantasy or an actual encounter, symbolizes love and nurture. Carnes has also said that sex addicts are also very dependent, though they may act powerful.<sup>2</sup>

The shame and core beliefs of sexual addicts lead to a cycle of addiction that contains four stages:<sup>3</sup>

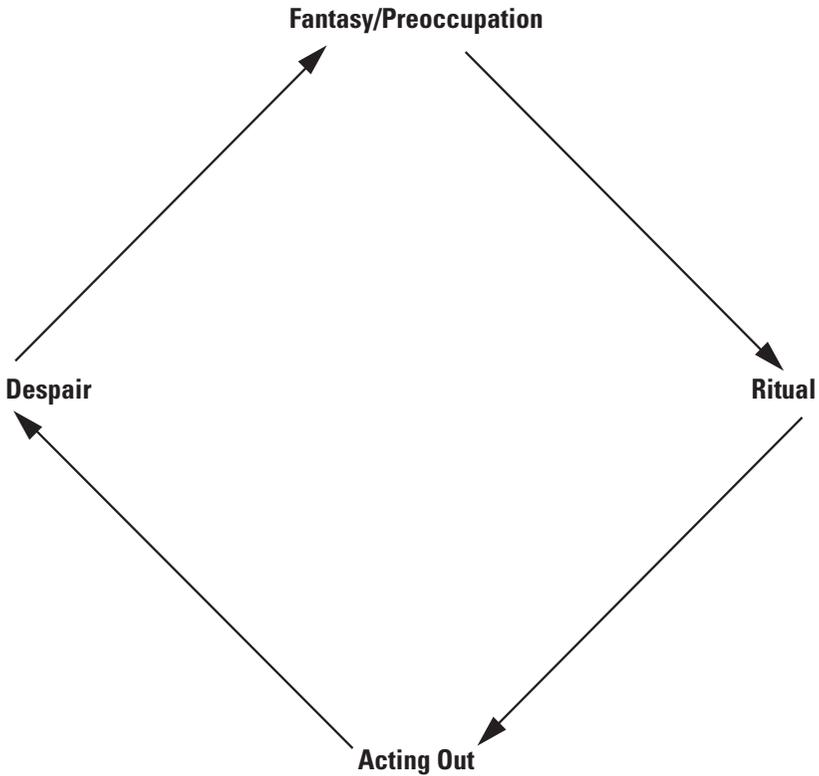


Figure 1

The first stage is engaging in **fantasy**, or a mental image of a desired result. We can have many kinds of fantasies, including athletic, financial, social, academic, and professional. Sexual and romantic fantasies are what we might consider to be ideal sexual or relationship situations. Fantasies are not abnormal. However, they become a problem when we become preoccupied with them. Sexual or relational fantasies usually involve images of the ideal people to be with. This may include their appearances, their behaviors, where the activities occur, and what happens sexually or romantically.

Fantasies alone can raise or lower moods. When we think of exciting or new situations, perhaps even dangerous situations, our moods can be elevated. When we think about warm and nurturing situations, our moods can be calmed. Fantasies contain emotional and spiritual longing. We long for nurture, affirmation, and touch. Sometimes we long for control over past pain. Sometimes we long to express anger over our deep wounds. Fantasies have the potential in our minds to solve this pain.

Jesus said in Matt. 5:28 that even when we look at another person lustfully, we commit adultery. According to Scripture, fantasies are adulterous if we imagine any sexual or romantic relationship outside of marriage.

Fantasies lead to the next stage—**ritual**. Rituals are preparations a person makes to be sexual in a direct way. These preparations might be mental and practical.

An addict's preparations might include justifying the actions. Ministers tend to have very interesting ways to justify their behaviors. One of their most common justifications is the "martyr" excuse, in which they say, "I am such an overworked pastor. I take care of everyone else. No one takes care of me. I am underpaid. I deserve to get some needs met." We call this "entitlement."

A minister may even gain the pity of others, and they become willing to do anything for him or her. A form of this excuse might be "My spouse doesn't understand me, doesn't take care of me, doesn't fulfill my needs. What am I to do?" Ministers who use this excuse may even have a warped sense of "If I do

enough good for God and for others, God won't mind if I meet my needs."

Another rationalization is "No one is getting hurt." These pastors think if no one really knows what is happening, no one is harmed. Pornography, masturbation, and even prostitution seem harmless on the surface. The mental and spiritual effects are never considered for very long. We have seen ministers who even thought affairs were not hurting anyone. If needy spouses come to them for help with a difficult marriage, these pastors even believe that they are being caring. Even the sexual relationship can be seen as "giving."

Another common excuse is a form of the martyr approach. These pastors think the world is so sexual in nature and that they are under such attack by evil influences, that it is impossible to resist. These pastors may even preach against the evils of our culture. We are always a little suspicious of pastors who are so eloquent and so angry against the sinful evils of the world. It is as if they are preaching to themselves. It is also as if they are desperately hoping God will remove all sexual temptation from the world so they don't have to struggle.

When a pastor acts out with parishioners or others, this excuse goes so far as to blame the other person for being so aggressive. Sexual addicts and sexual sinners are good at blaming others for their actions.

When a pastor justifies sexual sin, he or she will next take steps to **act out** (the third stage). These could be very simple steps. This person gets triggered into lustful fantasies, justifies acting out, and then privately looks at pornography and perhaps masturbates.

The steps can be even more elaborate. The pastor is out on pastoral calls and stops by an ATM at a bank. The hospital he is visiting is near a part of town with massage parlors. Since his time is his own and he is off doing God's work of visitation, no one will notice that he might be late getting home. He goes to the massage parlor.

Rituals leading to affairs can be very long. The pastor meets a person at church and is attracted. Over months, these two form a friendship, perhaps even around church business. They start having lunch, talk as friends, then share intimate details of their lives. Eventually they realize they are "soul mates." What are two star-crossed lovers to do but consummate this relationship? You might detect an element of anger in their "Why didn't God let us find each other first?"

Since rituals are long and short, most pastors who struggle with this have more than one going on at the same time. They might have fantasies and thoughts, a pornography ritual, and several affairs with different people going on. At times they might "trade off" rituals for acting out. Such thinking goes like this: "I don't really want to have an affair, so today I will masturbate to control my temptations to do that."

One who uses this kind of thinking actually believes that to "only" masturbate is a complete moral victory, because a more serious sin is avoided. By this we do not mean that masturbation as such is wrong or a sin. What is really important is whether or not it involves compulsive or obsessive acts that have a negative effect on a person's healthy sexuality and/or spirituality.

Sometimes just the excitement of the ritual is a form of acting out and can raise or lower mood. These rituals can take a

profound amount of time and energy, as well as creative thinking and manipulations. The stage of acting out can involve any kind of sexual behavior leading to direct sexual expression.

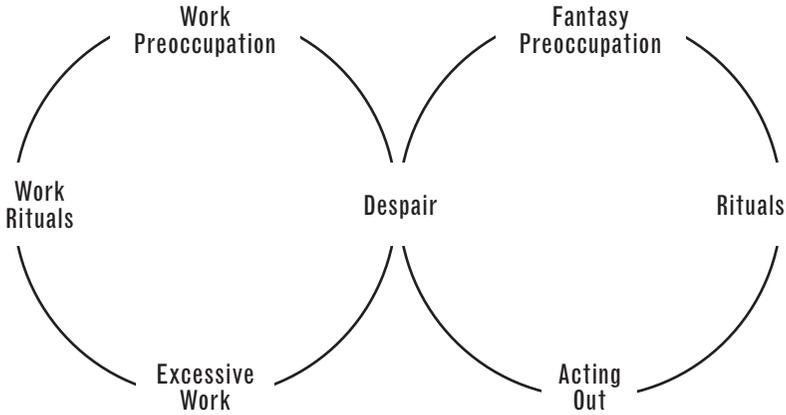
Acting out always leads to the fourth stage—**despair**. The excitement has worn off, the thrill is gone, and conscience takes over. Carnes discovered that seventy-one percent of addicts have actually considered suicide in this stage.<sup>4</sup>

In this stage more promises are made, prayers said, and sometimes desperate actions taken to prevent acting out again. Some sex addicts harm themselves in this stage, such as the pornography addict who plucked out both eyes because Jesus said, “If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out” (Mark 9:47).

At times addicts will turn to other substances or behaviors to medicate the feeling of despair. Many sex addicts suffer from other addictions such as alcoholism.<sup>5</sup> We used to call this dynamic “cross addictions,” but today we refer to it as “addiction interaction disorder.” Many ministers medicate their pain with a religious workaholicism. They may receive lots of affirmation for being so “faithful” and hardworking. The following diagram illustrates the interaction of work and sex addiction cycles.

Sex addicts will eventually return to fantasies to medicate their loneliness. This is where the whole cycle started. The cycle spirals and usually gets more destructive over time.

In this section we have only touched the surface of sex addiction. Please know that what we have to say about the answer to the more general problem of sexual sin and temptation is the solution for sex addiction. There is hope. We know thousands of men and women who have returned to sober and faithful lives.



## Sexual Sin and Misconduct

While many clergy are sexually addicted, our experience tells us that a far greater number sexually sin or commit sexual misconduct. The terms “sexual sin” and “sexual misconduct” may refer to the same behavior. Christians might call something sin, while the secular world might call it misconduct. Sometimes what the Christian community considers immoral the secular world does not.

Most sexually addicted pastors struggle with destructive fantasy, masturbation, pornography, or prostitution. Others may become involved in *paraphilic* behaviors, many of which can become quite perverse and extreme. These might include exhibitionism, voyeurism, *fratteurism* (uninvited touch for the purpose of a sexual high), bestiality, obscene phone calls, and sadomasochistic behaviors. These sexual behaviors don’t necessarily indicate addiction unless they’re repetitive or out of control.

## Sexual Abuse

The term “sexual abuse” assumes a person has used some form of control to be sexual with a person who is vulnerable to that power.

Power can take many forms. If a person uses physical power, rape results. What is less understood and accepted is the use of emotional or spiritual power. There are those who believe that anytime a pastor becomes sexual with a person who is subject to his or her influence as a pastor, it is a matter of "authority rape." This means a parishioner's trust has been violated and the damage done. This kind of sexual abuse has spiritual effects, so it is also *spiritual* abuse.

As we have said, some states have made it a felony for a pastor to have sex with an adult in the church. This becomes confusing, because on the surface some relationships appear consensual. The law now assumes that for the church member it is never consensual because of the power of the pastor's role.

Many studies have been done to describe the profile of therapists who abuse patients. But not much work has been done to describe pastors who abuse parishioners.

Since the roles of pastor and therapist have many similarities, let's look at some of these theories and see what they offer that might be relevant to pastors.

Remember: this problem of power abuse involves only a portion of those pastors who sexually sin. But this kind of problem receives much public attention and is a big problem in the Church.

John Gonsiorek, who has diagnosed hundreds of therapist and clergy offenders, describes nine categories of sexual offenders.

1. The *naive offender* is ignorant of the ethics and unprepared to deal with the power differences in caregiving settings.

2. The *normal or mildly neurotic* professional may develop a gradual romantic relationship with a vulnerable person during a stressful time in his or her life.

3. The *severely neurotic or socially isolated* professional displays longer term personality traits such as depression, inadequacy, low self-esteem, and social isolation. This person may demonstrate a repetitive pattern of offending and will punish himself or herself rather than change behavior. This person has poor boundaries.

4. Professionals with *impulsive character disorders* practice a variety of inappropriate behavior, including even criminal acts and uninhibited behavior, but they are not cunning and don't plan actions.

5. *Sociopathic or narcissistic* personalities are more deliberate, cunning, and manipulative. They set out to offend more intentionally.

6. *Psychotics* demonstrate delusional thinking.

7. "*Classic*" *sex offenders* chronically and repeatedly offend. They include pedophiles or other types of sex offenders and may be impulsive and narcissistic.

8. The *medically disabled* experience mood disorder problems, especially bipolar disease (manic-depression), which carries a decided lack of moral judgment.

9. *Masochistic, self-defeating* individuals experience internal conflicts about setting boundaries. They increasingly give in to demanding and needy or vulnerable people.<sup>6</sup>

These categories academically help us understand sexual offenders. No pastor fits neatly into one of these categories. We find that pastors are rarely found in the last four categories (6-9).

Those who prepare for ministry cannot usually pass screening procedures if they demonstrate the pathologies of these categories.

Glen Gabbard of the Menninger Clinic, Topeka, Kansas, describes four major types of offending professionals: (1) psychotic disorders, (2) predatory psychopathy and paraphilias, (3) lovesickness, and (4) masochistic surrender.

The two most common types of offenders among pastors are numbers 2 and 3. Under lovesickness, Gabbard lists subcategories such as these: unconscious reenactment of incestuous longings; a wish for maternal nurturance; enactments of rescue fantasies; viewing clients as an idealized version of the self; confusion of the therapist's own needs with the client's needs; fantasies that love is curative; repression of rage at the client's persistent thwarting of therapeutic efforts; anger at an authority; manic defense against mourning when ending counseling; the exception fantasy (I can get away with this!); insecurity about personal masculine identity; the client being seen as a transformational object; settling down by a female therapist of the "rowdy" male client; conflicts around sexual orientation.<sup>7</sup>

Marie Fortune, who has specialized in the area of clergy abuse, agrees with the concept of a spectrum of clergy offenders. She sees it on a continuum from "wanderers" to "sexual predators." Wanderers are fairly naive and cross boundaries, perhaps ignorant of the damage they've done. Predators are sociopathic and lack conscience.

She also lists traits of all sexual abusers in ministry that appear somewhere on the continuum: controlling, dominating, limited self-awareness, limited or no awareness of boundary is-

sues, no sense of damage caused by their own behavior, poor judgment, limited impulse control, limited understanding of consequences of their actions, often charismatic, sensitive, talented, inspirational and effective in ministry, limited or no awareness of their own power, lack of recognition of their own sexual feelings, confusion of sex and affection.<sup>8</sup>

Building on the work of Schoener and Gonsiorek, our late colleague Richard Irons formulated an archetypal categorization of sexual offenders. Regarding clergy, he describes the following categories:

**1. The Naive Prince.** This clergy person is usually psychologically healthy but is not trained well enough to perceive boundaries. He or she may be new to ministry and feel invulnerable with the power of status. Given the right circumstances and stress level, this person can become romantically and sexually involved a bit naively.

**2. The Wounded Warrior.** The church becomes this type of person's professional identity. This pastor usually becomes immersed in a demanding ministry and neglects self-care. Serving others is the main source of self-worth. Shame is a central issue for this person, so he or she receives validation from the outside, including that which is sexual. Repressed wounds from the past fuel current conflicts. This pastor becomes increasingly isolated, and addictions may be present.

**3. The Self-Serving Martyr.** The clergy person in this category usually is in his or her middle or late career. This person has devoted his or her life to serving the church, sacrificing personal growth and family. Despite this pastor's need to be "the ultimate caregiver," this type eventually resents the

congregation's demands. He or she feels unappreciated and abandoned. Anger and resentment lead this person to feelings of entitlement, which leads him or her across sexual boundaries into misconduct.

A long-suffering martyr may become narcissistic and start believing he or she has a special ministry created by God. This person thus believes that no one else fully understands him or her. A type such as this experiences significant anxiety, with the possibility of a variety of addictions, including sexual addiction. He or she may become obsessive-compulsive, narcissistic, dependent, or hysterical.

**4. The False Lover.** A person in this category displays intensity and high drama. This person loves taking risks, including the thrill of seducing another. He or she may be charming, creative, and energetic and often creates the impression that he or she is the best minister ever to serve the congregation. The false lover may maintain a series of lovers. He or she may experience divorces, job changes, and other social, legal, and vocational vacillation.

**5. The Dark King.** This clergy person is best described as charming and charismatic, exploiting his or her power for personal gain. He or she needs to control and can usually find a vulnerable adult for sexual involvement. This type usually has devoted followers who remain loyal despite exposed sexual misconduct. A dark king will go to great lengths to defend himself or herself and can do so convincingly. This type is rare and is usually the one we find in media portrayals.

**6. The Wild Card.** This person has a major mental disorder. The wild card may seek to manage his or her illness with

sexual activity, but not through a pattern or ritual. He or she may appear religious and may have a genuine spirituality.<sup>9</sup>

Assessment theories are usually based on an understanding of male offenders, since most offenders are male. And offenses by women are not perceived as negatively by males.

Women in all denominations can assume positions of power and authority even if they are not fully ordained. We live in a cultural climate in which women are taught to be more sexually assertive. We have personally found that women in positions of power in any church can be vulnerable to sexually abusing parishioners, but in smaller numbers than men.

It is fairly rare to see a person at the severe end of the spectrum ("the dark king," sociopathic disorder person). It is far more common to see offenders who are naive, young, uneducated, or inexperienced. It is also far more common to find offenders in the midrange of the spectrum with various personality and emotional factors.

We have gone through this detail about sexual sin, addiction, and abuse because distinctions are important. Accurate assessment of what we are dealing with will help us know what to do. All of us in churches must reach new levels of understanding about these behaviors.

The Bible contains stories of sexual sin and abuse. These have been challenges since the beginning of time. Paul often uses sexual immorality as an indicator of rebellion against God.

In the next two chapters we will look at what makes pastors and others vulnerable to sexual sin, misconduct, addiction, and even committing sexual abuse.