

INTRODUCTION to **FINISHING STRONG**

(as told by the man who started Finishing Strong)

If you would have told me ten years ago that I would be writing an introduction to a study guide for men struggling with destructive sexual behavior, I would have looked at you like you were crazy! But God in sovereignty had His plan.

It was just over ten years ago that I allowed the power of sexual images on the internet to cause my life to spiral downward. I had been a Christian for over 26 years. I was approaching my fiftieth birthday with ever increasing responsibilities at work and at home. Middle age is a very dangerous time for men. It is a time of increasing responsibilities and decreasing strength and capacity. But those are no excuses for my choices. It also started quite innocently and small as most sin does. I viewed the latest online issue of Sports Illustrated Swimsuit Issue. Little did I know how powerful those images were and that they would lead to wanting more and then wanting more, more often. This continued for a period of time in my life that I am not proud of. Destructive sexual behavior increases your shame which then leads to further isolation, deception, and lying. As my acting out continued there was an ever widening gap between the public, 'Christian' me and the private acting out me.



Thankfully much like the prodigal son, God brought me to my senses. In 2003, through deep conviction I repented and confessed to God my actions. I confessed and asked my wife for forgiveness. That was the beginning of my recovery. I started the process of restoring my relationship with God, rebuilding my relationship with my wife and supporting her healing, and the recovery of my own life.

This was the focus for me the next couple years. As I began to share my story with other men, I found out the lie that I believed-I am the only one who struggles- was just that- a big lie. Each man let me know how he also struggled in one way or another with viewing sexually explicit material, masturbation, fantasy, and emotional or physical infidelity. From these individual conversations came the weekly recovery group meetings where we would meet and share our struggles and victories over the past week. There were first just two of us, then three then four, then more guys. Some stayed for a while and left. Some stayed longer. The core group still meets today.

From those meetings came the ideas and principles in this guide. Unfortunately we never discovered the 'magic pill' or the five easy steps to stopping destructive sexual behavior. What we did find was a Biblical based process of recovery. Our recovery was to be viewed and experienced as a journey. It was a journey toward intimacy that we were longing and searching for but we had chosen the false intimacy that destructive sexual behavior offered as a counterfeit.

While this is a study guide designed to encourage men in the battle against destructive sexual behavior, it is really a guide about pursuing God, being a Christ Follower, and Finishing Strong. That is what is important- not how we begin but how we finish and hearing God's words, "Well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord!"

Enjoy the adventure! Enjoy the journey! Persevere! Finish Strong!

Finishing Strong

Finishing Strong is a Christian support group for men who have been affected by destructive sexual behavior and that behavior has become an obstacle to finishing the Christian life strong. Finishing Strong is not a traditional Bible study. Biblical principles and the Word of God are used at the meetings since they are foundational to any deep, viable, and long term change happening in a man's life. Finishing Strong is not a traditional 12 step group, although the 12 step principles are used.



Core Beliefs - Finishing Strong's core beliefs are:

1. We believe that as we look to a loving God for help and put into practice those principles for living which he has given us in the Bible, we shall find freedom from sin and strength to finish strong.
2. We believe that Jesus Christ is the resurrected and living Son of God and is both Savior and Lord of our lives.
3. We hold no corporate opinions concerning politics, economics, race, philosophies, science, or any other matters not bearing on our recovery.
4. We hold no corporate view concerning denominational preference.
5. We are dedicated to the principles of confidentiality, anonymity, and honesty.
6. We seek to provide an atmosphere of unconditional acceptance, safety, and grace.
7. We understand that our common welfare must come first.
8. We believe we must never judge or criticize a person or what they share at a meeting.
9. We believe our leaders are chosen not to govern but to serve.
10. We welcome any man who has the desire to stay straight, clean, and sober from destructive sexual behavior.
11. We meet together to share our experience, strength, and hope.
12. We believe that the loving support and genuine care of fellow members along with daily prayer and meditation will prepare us to live each day one day at a time in the greater context of Finishing Strong so we may hear God's words, "Well done good and faithful servant."

Statements of Purpose - Our five fold purpose based on the Word of God is:

1. To provide a safe, grace based fellowship of recovery where men can experience healing so they can Finish Strong.
2. To be and to live reconciled to God and others.
3. To gain a better understanding of sexual temptations that are cunning, baffling, and powerful.
4. To be built up and strengthened in our Christian faith.
5. To spread the message of life and hope to those who are suffering.

Finishing Strong Principles

In order to finish the Christian life strong, a person must practice the following principles daily:

1. Brokenness-We admit that our destructive sexual behavior has become unmanageable and that we are powerless to control our lives. John 12:24.
2. Surrender-We believe in God, accept His grace, and surrender our lives and wills over to His care. Romans 6:12.
3. Dependence-We daily exercise our dependence upon God to do in and through us what we are incapable of doing ourselves. John 15:5 and Romans 8:13.
4. Pursuit of God-We improve our daily conscious contact with God through His Word, prayer, and meditation in order to develop true intimacy with Him Jeremiah 29:15.
5. Isolation-We avoid isolation by finding a safe place, a safe person, and a safe group of men recognizing that the battle for sexual integrity is not fought alone. Proverbs 18:1.
6. Soul Surgery-We thoroughly examine our core fears, past wounds, past actions, and current thoughts and feelings. 1 Corinthians 11:28.

7. Honesty-We make the commitment to being 100% honest and practice absolute honesty as an essential, non negotiable discipline in our recovery journey. We must be 100% honest in the words that we speak and also in the thoughts, feelings, and actions that we want to hide. Ephesians 4:32.

8. Confession-We admit to God and to others the exact nature of my actions and that these actions are wrong. We must get all the secrets out all of the time because secret keeping is central to our addiction and therefore we need to not have any secrets. James 5:16 and 1 John 1:9.

9. Vision-We embrace the visions of absolute sexual integrity and finishing strong living life one day at a time in the context of that final ONE DAY. These visions will motivate and encourage us in recognizing that half measures will avail us nothing.

Proverbs 29:18. 10. Self care-We practice caring for ourselves physically, emotionally, relationally, mentally, and spiritually. We must practice godly self care to avoid the danger zones and stay in the healthy zones so we can avoid relapse. Ecclesiastes 10:10.

11. Journey-We recognize that Finishing Strong is a process not an event. It is a journey and not a destination and we must be committed to the process of Finishing Strong recognizing that this journey will take endurance, perseverance, and resilience. Proverbs 24:16.

12. Tell story-As we live in sexual integrity we must carry our message of Christ's healing to others who still struggle. In order to save ourselves, we must save others. Matthew 28:19-20

Rod Lawrence
Luke 2:52 Ministries
400 Market Place
Benton Harbor, MI 49022
(574) 806-4445