

“The church is filled with the sexually hurting that need the biblical guidance found in God’s word. *Sensitive Preaching to the Sexually Hurting* provides much needed help to pastors and leaders who communicate in today’s pulpits. Dr. Sam Serio illustrates how God openly talks about sex in his Word. Filled with practical examples, this book opens the door to greater communication.”

—Sue Detweiler,
author, speaker, and pastor of Life Bridge Church, Frisco, Texas

“Dr. Sam Serio has provided a desperately needed resource in ministry to break the silence of the greatest evil our society faces: sexual brokenness, perversion, and abuse. Many pastors and those involved in pastoral care struggle with understanding a survivor and his or her emotional needs. I applaud Dr. Serio for offering perspective, compassion, and thought-provoking sermons as a guide for pastors to address this difficult issue. This book inspires courage to address the silent epidemic of sexual abuse and exploitation in our society. This is a must-read for all pastors and those in pastoral care in order to facilitate accountability and healing for the millions of wounded survivors.”

—Angela Williams, founder of VOICE Today
and author of *From Sorrows to Sapphires*

“We live in a world where sexual freedom reigns and exploitation is at an all-time high. Many individuals have emotional scars and deeply wounded hearts as a result of horrific trauma caused by this freedom and exploitation. These hurting hearts sit in our churches and youth groups behind a wall of fear and secrecy, praying to find hope and healing rather than criticism and condemnation. In *Sensitive Preaching to the Sexually Hurting*, Dr. Sam Serio profoundly informs in explicit words how to minister to and counsel the sexually hurting who are presently suffering silently. The precise words needed for healing are found throughout his book. With Scripture for each topic and sample sermons, readers cannot help but hear the heavenly Father’s heart as the Holy Spirit prompts our own hearts with a passionate desire to offer hope to the hurting and wholeness to the broken, setting the captives free.”

—Keven C. Covert, speaker, facilitator of post-abortion healing Bible studies, and author of *Brick By Brick: Healing His Way, A Devotional and Journal for Healing a Woman’s Heart*

“Sam Serio has written the book that few others would have. In a sensitive manner, and with absolute care not to offend, he explains how to preach from most of the biblical passages dealing with sexual sin. You will receive much help from his frequent tips. I know of no other book like it. You will want a copy.”

—Jay E. Adams,
founder of The Institute for Nouthetic Studies

“Finally—a powerful tool for pastors and counselors. Dr. Serio shares his profound knowledge of Scripture and sexual abuse throughout this book. Those who wish to address the walking wounded from sexual sins, but don’t know how, will find this a phenomenal resource. Sam Serio’s book should be in every pastor’s study and every Christian counselor’s office. I especially like the final chapter, ‘My Challenge to the Church of the Future.’ Through counseling, marriage preparation, and sermons, we absolutely *must* address the issue of abnormal sexuality and its consequences. *Everyone* is affected by the topics discussed in this amazing book.”

—Karen (Austin) McDonald,
counselor and president of Racheal’s Rest

“Dr. Sam Serio’s wisdom comes from years of research into and experience dealing with tough topics. As a survivor of sexual abuse, I can personally say the chapter on sexual abuse is not only brilliant but much needed. I can’t adequately describe the pain, confusion, and rejection I felt during my early years in recovery when I tried to attain support and direction for healing from the leadership in my church. Dr. Serio has a passion for empowering pastors to address the pain, sin, and bondage inherent in sexual deviance and to apply the Word of God to heal their flocks.”

—Tammy Kennedy,
founder of The King’s Treasure Box Ministries

SENSITIVE
PREACHING
TO THE SEXUALLY
HURTING

DR. SAM SERIO

Sensitive Preaching to the Sexually Hurting

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PREPARING YOUR HEART
AND YOUR CHURCH



WHO'S IN YOUR PEWS?

Did you know that the teenage couple sitting in the front seat of your church on Sunday morning is having sex in the back seat of their car on Saturday night?

Meanwhile, the middle-aged couple sitting behind them have not had sex in in the last year, are having serious marital issues, and are already talking of divorce.

One of your ushers wasn't there Sunday morning because he stayed up too late on Saturday night clicking on those porn sites he just can't get enough of.

Your choir director missed this past Mother's Day service because she didn't want to be reminded about the abortion she had.

Betty never attends the Father's Day service because she doesn't want to be reminded to "honor and obey" the man who sexually molested her for years.

Susie always misses the evening service because she doesn't want to leave the house at night now—ever since she was raped one night behind a nearby convenience store.

Wayne always misses the men's monthly breakfast because he doesn't feel comfortable around men who don't know his struggles with homosexuality.

Mary lost her interest in missionary work about the same time she lost her baby in the abortion. She remembers your sermons about how God hates abortion and fornication. She gave up hope that God could ever use her in world missions.

Rod also remembers your sermons about how much God hates homosexuality. That's why he tried to commit suicide, but no one will know that—especially you!

Carole continues to silently struggle over her middle-age miscarriage because she thinks God is still punishing her for her teenage promiscuity.

Janet's husband doesn't know how terrified she is to have sex with him ever since her boss raped her at work. She is scared of giving AIDS to her husband, losing her job, or losing her husband who would want to kill her boss if he knew what happened.

Molly struggles because she waited her whole life as a virgin for her husband, only to be miserable now that he has no interest in sex with her and snores while she cries at night.

And don't be too quick to judge Mrs. Jones for wanting a divorce! Ask her about her husband's forcing her to act out the sexual positions and perversions he sees on the sites. He expects the same from her and now, she wants to leave.

And please don't get mad at Melissa who is now distant and devastated upon hearing that her husband wants to leave her

and proudly live that gay life that he has secretly had for twenty years now.

Tim's parents just can't understand why he seems so distant and quiet now. After he told them that his gym teacher tried to touch him, they told him to stop making up silly stories and just be quiet. So, now he *is* quiet.

Michelle and her daughter are also quiet. They refuse to go back to the house ever since she caught her husband sexually fondling their daughter while tucking her into bed last night. Meanwhile, the church ladies continue to gossip about Michelle.

Lilly won't volunteer for helping out in the church nursery. She's really uncomfortable around children because they remind her of the baby she aborted. She can't help wondering which one would have looked just like hers.

But that's okay, since Tom fills in every Sunday! He loves to be around little children since they remind him of the ones he sees in his secret movies at night.

Little Amy is one of those children. Bet you didn't know that the reason she runs away from you every time you kindly offer her candy at church is because that's exactly what "Teacher Tom" offered her before he touched her privates.

Did you know how horrible Angie feels from being continuously told her entire married life that she is not woman enough—only to later discover her husband was only interested in men? Years of daily degradation have taken their toll. She didn't have a chance, no matter how hard she tried to please him.

Did you know that your deacon resigned so he could spend more time with his family? His son announced that he was gay. They'll never tell you that family news because they know how you feel about homosexuals. They hear your sermons.

Did you know that Paula, your most zealous pro-lifer at church, is desperately trying to prove to God how truly sorry she is for having that abortion in the past?

Did you know that Sheila, who pickets the pornographic stores, is trying to erase her childhood memories of having to watch similar movies with her Dad?

Did you know that your newest church member happens to also be a lesbian? She was gang-raped in high school after her graduation party and that's why she now prefers women over men. She'll keep all of this a secret.

Katie was date-raped in college, and now freezes up and gives excuses as she refuses her husband who wants to be intimate with her at night. He feels so rejected by her and had no idea that marriage with Katie would be so difficult.

No one knows why shy little Sally doesn't come to youth group events. Her dad limits her social activities at church because of his sexual activities at home.

No—this is not the daily digest of reality TV, Facebook postings, lunchroom gossip, late night TV, or daytime soap operas. This is real life. These are the people in your pews, chairs, and churches on Sunday mornings. You'd be amazed at how many people in your church are either sexually wounded, hurting, struggling, addicted, tempted, or devastated, but will never tell you. It's a whole lot more than you could ever imagine. They have severe sexual pain in their memories or in their families. If not found directly in them, then it is in their children or grandchildren's families. Rarely is there any family without sexual sadness and skeletons hidden in their closets. Everybody has that one chapter they don't read out loud.

*It's time for the church to open
our eyes not only to the harvest,
but also to the wreckage!*

They are the casualties of the sexual revolution that's been going on for years. Whenever there is a war or a revolution, there is a mess. A lot of people have been left limping. They are the walking wounded. Many are dazed and confused—not having a clue on where to get help. They wonder what hit them

and they don't know how to recover. They're hesitant to share what has been done to them or by them. They suffer in silence, they sin in secret. These casualties of the sexual revolution come in all shapes and sizes, genders and ages. They're in the world but they're also in your church—either as members, seekers, attenders, volunteers, or leaders. They sit in your church with superficial smiles, monstrous memories, hidden hurts, mixed motives, and agonizing addictions. They stand a few feet away from the hidden key that could finally set them free: you! As their preacher and pastor who best knows God's Word, *you have the solution* they need—but they're usually not coming to you for that answer.

Here's why:

We can be rather insensitive or incompetent. We tend to neglect either truth or grace in sermons about sex. In Jesus' name, we can fail miserably whenever we preach about sex.

Open our eyes to the fact that sexually wounded or addicted people don't or won't come to you for their healing because of how you preach.

Most ministry leaders usually do one of two things when it comes to this kind of delicate preaching on these most difficult topics—we are either negligent or negative. We either say nothing, or we say mean things. We ignore, or we abhor. There is rarely a happy medium. Which extreme are you most likely to do? When is the last time you mentioned something about sex? And if you did approach this subject, how did you sound? Is your preaching about sex easily summed up with a bunch of Bible verses mentioning God's wrath? Or did you maybe do the opposite, and only talk about God's love but not about God's law? Do you have that rare biblical balance? Do you preach truth and grace? Do you preach love and law? Facts and feelings? Proclamation and consolation? When is the last time you actually smiled as you preached about sex and offered hope and restoration, healing and wholeness, forgiveness and transformation?

That is the purpose of this book.

Seminary probably didn't prepare you for the sexual issues we face. They didn't offer you much in their curriculum about how to effectively counsel or preach to a sexually wounded and addicted generation, did they? It was too taboo and controversial. They didn't do it then and they still aren't doing it today. Yet they claim that they're preparing the leaders of the next generation for Christ? *Not.* They have failed to keep up with the sexual topics which God has addressed. I estimate that sixty to eighty percent of all adults (sixteen years or older) in our churches are emotionally affected by sexual pain or sin that has been done by them or to them. This is no small matter or minority in our churches, and it must be taught in seminaries.

You preach to a generation who believes that it is more important to recycle than it is to abstain from porn. You preach to women who have been raped. You preach to men who are secret and serial rapists. Some have actually molested small children. And some of your members were molested when they were small children. Some women had an abortion. Some men insisted on their baby being aborted. You preach to a generation who believes that sex is meant to express yourself, demonstrate intimacy with someone you think you love, fulfill your needs, or to connect with another person in an enjoyable way. Gen-Xers, Boomers and Millennials reject the biblical notion that sex is meant by God to unite a man and a woman in marriage. We have an uphill battle, since there has been an immense cultural shift! Some of your church members are gay or lesbian. Some are porn addicts and their wives feel inferior. Some marriages are on the brink of divorce because of a lack of sexual intimacy. Some of your church members have various sexual partners or complicated sexual struggles. This is the real generation of people to whom you are now ministering.

Did you ever consider the fact that church is one of the very best places to hide your sin and cover up your lifestyle? People assume you're right with God because you're sitting in church. No one asks you about your Saturday night walk with God because of your Sunday morning seat at church! And then, we all act so shocked when we hear of church members/attenders who were actively engaged in some scandalous sin and we wonder how this could have happened! You're trusted, you're validated

and you've got the best cover at church. That is what some of my counseling clients have secretly told me in their disclosure. Don't be naive to think that your church is automatically immune and free from sexual predators. Don't forget this important truth that God already included in His Word (Jer. 9:2–6; 23:9–11; Matt. 7:15; Acts 20:29–31; Jude 1:4).

What sermons did you preach to comfort rape victims or to confront rapists? What have you done to publicly or privately heal your church members who were molested as children? How can the woman who had an abortion get release from her guilt? Have your sermons taught men how to get victory over addiction to porn? What do you say to the homosexuals who are willing to change? Do you talk about sex in marriage being a gift from God that is not to be withheld by either spouse? Do you assume that all the weddings you perform happen to consist of virgins?

Some of your people need to be convicted, while some need to be consoled. Which is easiest for you to do? Rare is the preacher who can seamlessly do both. Which emotions are you most inclined to preach? Are you usually too easy or too hard on people when it comes to everyday sin and especially our sexual sin? Don't answer too quickly and don't assume you preach both with the same effectiveness. Might your theology be one-sided and imbalanced in this? Most preaching about sex is either antinomian or antagonistic. Either God's law or God's love is not communicated effectively today. Can you actually preach both messages of conviction and consolation? Better yet, can you preach each of these in the same sermon? Can you change your tempo? This book will help you.

When you finally do decide to preach about sex, remember that this is not about a topic nor is this about an issue. It's, instead, all about individuals! That premise will change your preaching. You're not ever preaching about sex as a topic or an issue; you are preaching *to people* who are sexually wounded or sexually addicted. They have sexual hurts and habits. They have dark secrets and deep trauma. When you preach about sex, your purpose is not to expound—your purpose is to expose this sexual pain or sin. You're there to do surgery, not give a soliloquy. You're changing the lives of sexual victims and victimizers—from your sermon! The deepest healing for sexual hurt or habits comes from God's Word, not from a man's advice in an office or a therapist. We have a God who has all-sufficient

grace for all sexual hurt. He has immeasurable power for people who have sexual memories or temptations that are beyond their power. Healing can come from a preacher. Why do sexually hurt people go to the world and not to the preacher for help? Why are pastors the last people on earth they would ever consider coming to for help? Is this possibly our own fault?

Here's a question to ask ourselves:

Do I publicly communicate about sex in such a way that people would want to come to me for additional counseling afterward OR do I preach in such a way that they would not want to come to me for counseling after they just heard what I said and also how I said it on a typical Sunday?

Let me help you answer that initial question by posing another question for you. How many people *are* currently and continually coming to you (or coming to your designated or specialized staff members) for some type of sexual help or private counseling right now? How few? Be honest. Might there be a correlation or connection? Why might they not be coming?

I can't tell you the countless number of people who have told me they would *never* approach their pastor or priest for personal counseling after they heard his or her preaching on any topics surrounding sex. Who wants to get yelled at again? They already feel horrible inside and now they honestly believe they will feel worse—because of you. You have not shown much truth or grace and as a result, you might have turned people away in your sermons. Maybe the opposite is true, though. Maybe, some feel far too comfortable and smug in their sin, because of you. As George Whitefield once said, "It is a poor sermon that gives no offense that neither makes the hearer displeased with himself nor with the preacher." Do you think that is the furthest thing from the truth or do you think that is accurate? Might there be a middle ground? Others tell me how their church just does not discuss anything about sex. You have preached no conviction of sin and personally believe their selfish sexual behavior merits no mention from the pulpit. I'm trying to cover the wide range of our belief systems and preaching styles.

Whenever you do mention any sexual topics from the pulpit, do you genuinely communicate warmth or tenderness?

How so? Are your arms extended or are your fists clenched or fingers pointed? Do you smile as you look into their eyes when you are inviting people to give their agony or addiction to God who can help them the most? A pew is better than a podcast; you can communicate better to your people, who need to see your face. Would a teenager or family in the church with an unplanned pregnancy ever come to you for help, based on how you regularly preach about sex? Do people think you are truly conversational and approachable, or would they avoid you like the plague in terms of sexual topics? Do people in your church think that you're an expert on sex, or that you're way over your head on this one?

The purpose of this book is to help you communicate both warmth and wisdom when it comes to any and every topic relating to sexuality. That's what God does.

This book will help you improve both your preaching and counseling ministries to sexually confused or consumed people who happen to be all around you today. This is the book you should give to all the members of your staff who specialize in ministry to women, men, couples, marriages, counseling, young adults, teenagers or children in your church. They need this book, too.

Mother Teresa once said, "You can see Calcutta all over the world if you have eyes to see."

That's my goal here. I want you to have the eyes to see and the words to say. I want to help you become the expert you are supposed to be in the topic of sex. Sex begins in the church—not in the kitchen or the bedroom. Here is where we should get our education, not there. There is so much to learn when it comes to seeing how God's Word is so sufficient. There is so much to learn about helping others and also yourself! You'll experience depths of depression that you never deemed possible, as you listen. You'll never forget some of their stories. They will haunt you. They will leave you a different person. Outrage and shock, tenderness and compassion—these deep emotions will come out in full intensity. You'll want to cry, and you'll want others to pay for what they did! You'll have to learn to control your

anger as you confront people who have selfishly and sexually damaged others and who have taken advantage of their childhood innocence. Can you handle your emotions while talking to the adult who has abused or molested a child? Can you restore the marriage destroyed by porn? By sexual reluctance? Do you know what to say to the spouse who has been brought to ruin by their spouse, who has cheated with someone of the opposite or the same sex? Can you control your emotions and words? Can you act just like Jesus in this situation?

This book will show you why people actually commit sexual sin and why people are totally devastated as a result of that sexual sin. You can help both.

This revolutionary book deals with a wide variety of sexual hurts or habits from a preaching perspective.

*You'll be fully equipped on what to say and how best to say it. You'll get the specific pre-packaged words you can carefully use in your own sermons as you console or confront people. You'll learn how to apply a wide variety of Bible characters, texts, and stories. You'll learn to creatively and deeply minister to people whose lives have been truly shattered by sexual sin or pain. It took many hours to carefully craft the transitions and segues in each sermon as I carefully chose certain words that accurately move you from the text to the application. I hope you will use these words which have been tested and proven in a variety of settings, public and private! You'll gain a greater confidence in the power of God's Word. You'll see God's Spirit bring conviction—and consolation—in ways in which you have never dreamed. You'll be amazed at how God brings sexual healing to all the brokenhearted, and sexual freedom to the captives. *He is the solution for any and all kinds of hurts or habits, including sexual ones which we consider to be off-limits for Christians.* That is the premise for this book. He is the God of hope (Rom. 15:13) and God of comfort (2 Cor. 1:3–4) who is able to make all things new (2 Cor. 5:17) and who makes all kinds of people brand new (Rev. 21:5). There is no emotional or sexual pain or sin in this world that lies beyond God's transforming and healing grace. None.*

2

ARE YOU AND YOUR CHURCH READY FOR THIS MINISTRY?

If you want to have a public and private ministry to the sexually wounded and addicted in your church and community . . . beware *and* prepare! Yes, the fields are ripe unto harvest, but they're also filled with explosive landmines that can destroy your ministry, family, and future. Walk very carefully and slowly as you embark. Be extremely patient, because this will take time. This kind of ministry *should* not happen overnight and *will* not happen overnight. You will need to get some things in order. Both you and your church will need to change some key concepts you currently have about God, the church, the worship service, and your limitations.

There are some major myths and misconceptions about the church and the pastor that will also need to be changed if you're going to minister in this arena. Since you're the pastor, you'll hopefully be that main change agent. You'll need to gradually and patiently re-educate your church members about sin and sex.

Let's examine seven biblical truths you'll need to firmly believe and wisely communicate:

1. Church is the best—not the worst—place to go for our sexual healing.

People wrongly think that the church is the *last place* you go to for help about sex. The world also thinks that the preacher or pastor is the *last person* you go to for expertise in sexual matters. People are told to go to the therapist, the analyst, the specialist, the doctor, the counseling center, or anywhere else *but* the pastor or preacher of a church. How sad that such a myth exists! Most people erroneously believe that you especially ought not to wade in the sexual waters that should be reserved for the “professionals.” You will be told that quite often. Watch and see.

In order to minister in the future, you must try to reverse this popular pagan thinking about who best can help the victims of the ongoing sexual revolution. The world can't, but the church can—and you can—because God can heal and give hope. He is the Great Physician. He breaks the power of dwelling sin and changes the belief systems and daily habits of sinners. We just express our sin differently. *Bible teachers should be the best equipped and the most skilled types of sexual counselors, analysts, therapists, and specialists.* Do you believe that? I hope so. His Word is the best tool to train people in righteousness so that they are thoroughly equipped for every good work. Churches are the best local hospitals for the sexually wounded or addicted. Here is the place where sexually broken people should get the very best care, diagnosis, and treatment for what consumes them! God teaches us that sanctification happens best when we're around the best of people, which are God's people. In spite of all our flaws, we are the best hospital. We let the world take sex away from the church but it is God who created sex; if anyone knows best about sex, it is Him. God doesn't want His

people to go over to Egypt and the world for help (Isa. 31:1) when they should be going to Him.

2. Church should be *uplifting*, but it doesn't have to be *upbeat*.

There is a difference in the details. We have somehow gotten the wrong notion that church has to always conclude on a positive enthusiastic note, where everybody leaves with smiling faces and happy handshakes. We think the pastor is paid to make us feel energized and enthused and be a glorified cheerleader to the congregation. Positivity is the new politically correct but spiritually incorrect word. Are people supposed to leave with a smile but go home and cry? They do. People wrongly think that the church should *never* be somber, but it can be. God is holy, and sometimes a holy hush or godly silence can be a very good way to end church. Crying is good if the Spirit of God so leads. There are so many people who need to grieve and weep. Are they allowed or encouraged to, as your sermon or service comes to a close?

*Church is supposed to make us
be good, not just feel good!*

As long as you and your members believe that your job is to make people smile big and feel good, you will never have an effective preaching ministry to the sexually wounded. Touching a nerve, convicting a conscience, or opening a wound is all good with God. Surgery is painful and you don't wake up with a big smile at first. It may not feel or look good but it is. It is perfectly fine to have rivers of tears, loud wailing, and intense crying during a church service if God is in the midst of mending some broken hearts. What is wrong with people coming to the front for prayer because they are overcome with grief for how they have sexually hurt others in the past? If some of your members get upset—because the church is now getting far too emotional, because you are preaching to their innermost hurts—it's okay. Let some whine, but let others weep.

Jesus is the Great Physician, not the Great Cheerleader or the Great Clown! The same is true with you. Your job is not just to make your people laugh, smile, pumped up, and enthused. Your job is to help them to live and become like Jesus.

3. Church is where you should deal with your problems, not deny them.

Most church members think that Sunday morning is the time to focus on Jesus and that we must leave all of our worldly problems outside the doors. We are supposed to temporarily forget what happened to us this past week. We are supposed to put any and all worldly things out of our minds and memories. The church has become the place where you temporarily ignore your problems. Church is supposedly the place where you think only about Jesus and never about the world. Is this a biblical model?

We need to propose a new way to approach church. What about focusing on Jesus, who came to save us from our sins? What about our boldly coming to the throne of grace, so we can find grace in our time of need (Heb. 4:16)? He doesn't want us to ignore our hurts; He wants us to give Him those problems! Where does God say to ignore, deny, or forget about our hurts in life? We can't forget! Do we want people to try to forget being raped or molested? Why encourage denial? Is that healthy? Doesn't He accept us in our weakness and bondage? Who said we have to leave our garbage outside? Jesus wants to recycle our garbage and bring it inside to Him! He wants to take the hurts and sins of this world (and yes, even the sexual ones) and use them for His own glory to make us more like Himself. So, let's encourage people to bring *all* their hurts with them and leave them at the cross inside of church—and not outside in the parking lot.

4. Church is where you should confess your sins, not conceal them.

It's assumed on Sunday mornings or evenings that you're rather close to God because you're sitting in church close to His people. True? And if you're so close to God and His people, it's also assumed that you are much safer and less sinful than other people who are not attending church. True? Your sins are seen to be safer and smaller and more sanitized in comparison to others. People want to feel that the safest place away from the raging world is in church. (With that prevailing mind-set, who wants to be told that they might be in church sitting next

to a porn producer or child molester? That can be rather unsettling!). That's how people think. And yes, it does have an element of truth and fact, but that's why it's dangerous.

Church is the very best place to conceal your sin and have people think that you're doing great and living right.

Everyone assumes you are a good Christian since you're there, and thus few rarely ask about your soul or your sins. They assume that you're saved because you're sitting next to them (or at least, they hope so). Sin is surely in the world out there but not as much in the church, and especially not in *my* church. They'd be upset to hear that another church member or attendee was actively engaged in severe sexual sin, especially there! They'll not come back. Yes, people can hide well behind a cloak of righteousness. That has always been true and always will be. Might that be true in your setting?

Some church leaders and denominational statements have also abandoned the concept of personal sin and instead replaced it with the notion that sin is found in countries, governments, political parties, and special-interest groups—but not in individuals. Their preaching reflects their theology. Other churches focus so much on evangelism that they think sin is found out there in the world but not in the church. The world needs saving but not us. And other churches view sexual sin as *the* worst of all sin; after all, that's how the pastor preaches every Sunday!

If you decide to preach about one's need to confess and renounce sexual sin, you might be viewed as being too harsh by your members. Some of your leaders or members may think you're being too strict and that certain sexual practices are not to be preached as sin. Try preaching about abortion or same-sex attraction and see. Have your resume ready.

So, how does your church deal with sin among its members or visitors? Could they handle it if you preached so well that someone started weeping out of Holy Ghost conviction, saying how terrible they feel for molesting little children in the neighborhood? Would people run for the hills, terrified that such a person is in their midst? Would your people have any tender

compassion on him? Would they head for the altar to pray with him, or will they head for the door to escape? Would your membership numbers or church attendance go down? Would a real sincere sexual sinner find much mercy from your current church environment?

Would your church members show mercy to a woman who finally and humbly confesses to those sitting next to her about having an affair and abortion, after you just preached about either? How would people react if a man stands up in the midst of your wisely crafted sermon to proclaim that he does watch child porn and desperately needs help from this addiction? Does your church offer an environment in which a person feels enough security, love, and acceptance that people who are broken by your sermon will risk *all* to seek help? Do they truly feel free to confess their sins, publicly and verbally? Would they get a smug or a hug from your people? Do your people view sexual sin as the unpardonable sin—making all the sexually wounded and addicted want to hide under a rock and never come out to confess? That’s the case with most churches.

Both you and your church leaders/members need to firmly believe, “Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Prov. 28:13). Create an environment in which this happens.

5. Preaching about sex does not mean that you are guilty of sexual sin.

One well-known preacher from the past was caught in a national sexual scandal and said, “Pastors, I have hurt you and I have made your load heavier.” How true! Today, it is so much harder to talk about sex from the pulpit because of sexual scandals involving those in religious positions. We’ve all been executed, already. In the church around the world, there are news headlines, allegations, and convictions of sexual misbehavior which were covered up or pushed aside. Imagine how suspicious the parish is when a priest begins to open his mouth and talks about sexual abuse of children (even though he is trying to heal, not hide). Pastors and preachers are the easiest targets on earth for sexual accusation and immediate execution. *People suspect that you are preaching about sex out of guilt for what you are hiding or doing, don’t they?* They assume

you're preaching to yourself in the pulpit, since their church surely doesn't have such sin in their pews. So, you do have to be careful in how often you mention this. Definitely don't mention sexual sin or sadness every single Sunday. Don't overemphasize the issue but also don't underemphasize it. Preach about sex with a truly biblical quality and quantity. Be careful not to go too far or not to go far enough—because of this prevailing perception that you're instantly guilty if you're verbal about sexual issues.

6. The podium or pulpit is designed for communication, not adoration.

People have idealistically romanticized the pulpit as if it were made out of the wood from the cross of Jesus, the ark of the covenant, or some other holy icon. Have you yet seen how people get so easily upset about an actual pulpit when something questionable is ever done to it or shown from it? The same applies to a metal stand or speaker's podium. Church folks have a tendency to protect and defend this area. Try to imagine the response from your church members if you were to ever show a beer bottle, pack of cigarettes, package of condoms, or adult magazine from the pulpit or podium for any reason. You might have signed your death warrant as their pastor. Many will complain to you or gossip about you as a result. The pulpit has become an object of worship in our church and is not to be tainted or tampered with. That is how some think and we can't ignore that feeling.

I once preached a sermon using a playing card with a king of hearts on it to illustrate Proverbs 22:1 about God holding the king's heart in His hands. A few commented afterward how irreverent and inappropriate it was to display a card from the pulpit. I preached another sermon using a hammer to nail into a piece of wood, trying to illustrate God's sovereignty. And yes, some people got upset and said it was wrong to do that on the pulpit. Pulpits are pure—that's how some think. Just beware of such a prevailing mind-set as it pertains to your sexual topics. Sexual language and wording from the pulpit is also seen by most people as highly irreverent and quite inappropriate. (Funny how those same church members don't get upset when sex is preached from the pulpit in their own home, called a television set—but we won't go there now.)

Try moving away from the pulpit/podium area the first few times you preach about the lessons you've learned in this book and move closer to your people in the front instead. That achieves both goals and it's a win-win situation.

Try placing some important words or phrases on the large monitor screen instead of saying them from the pulpit, if applicable. Just be careful. You need to protect yourself from the complaints of some. By showing your words instead of saying them, you get to wisely project yourself as a warm and compassionate pastor who understands how people can be hurt. View the podium or pulpit as a yellow light to proceed with caution, instead of a red light for you to stop immediately.

7. Good preaching can also be gentle and soft, instead of harsh and loud.

Some church members or leaders today think that good preaching always has to be long, loud, mean, harsh, and bold. Some ministry leaders think the opposite in that all preaching should be soft, tender, emotional, and never bold or loud. Both camps are off the mark.

Good preaching is preaching that best illustrates the text or topic that has been carefully and prayerfully chosen.

If the text is about God's mercy or forgiveness, you'd better not sound harsh and mean. If your text is about God's judgment, you'd better not sound soft and gentle. Why should our voices and sermons always sound the same every single Sunday, regardless of the text? *Your tone of voice and manner of delivery should be totally dependent on your text and not on your personality.* Most preachers have never yet understood that essential deep truth.

Ministering to people with sexual wounds will require a softer and gentler tone of voice. If you've been taught by your denomination, seminary, mentor or leader not to have that kinder tone of voice in preaching, you'll never have people come to you for help and hope. You'll have already scared them far away and will continue to do so. If you yell a lot from the pulpit,

people will assume that you will yell at them if they come to you for counseling. *If you are tender in your tone, they'll be more apt to believe that you will understand them in their sin or grief.* It's about time we imitate the preaching and pastoral style of Paul who said, "Our attitude among you was one of tenderness, rather like that of a devoted nurse among her babies" and that "we dealt with each one of you personally, like a father with his own children, stimulating your faith and courage and giving you instruction" (1 Thess. 2:7–12, Phillips). Good preaching, like God's voice, can sound like a gentle breeze, a soft rain, a gentle whisper or a small voice (1 Kings 19). We have to get past the false notion that our voice and style should be just like the television preachers, who typically sound far too forceful and aggressive about everything they say in their sermons! Wise preaching should change with the text or topic. God's personality is robust and diverse—so should your preaching be.

Here are some other factors or characteristics about your church that will help you decide when they might be ready to embrace such a ministry:

LOCATION: Is your church located in a densely populated area or college town? You will have greater liberty to engage in sexual topics like date rape, abortion, premarital sex, molestation, homosexuality, and pornography than if you're in a less populated and in a more rural church setting. If your church is in a small town, please be extra-careful in your sermons, because of the church gossipers who especially can ruin lives in these smaller settings. Is your church in a busier city that has a lot of runaways? Ever think that they ran away to avoid being molested by their dad or stepfather? Human trafficking is real. Regional and cultural considerations matter here too. Certain parts of the country are more inclined to accept and tolerate sexual topics or language than other areas of the country. Some will label your preaching as "gutter talk," while others will gladly say you are "telling it like it is." For example, Southerners are very different than Northerners when it comes to acceptable pulpit language about sexuality.

NUMBERS AND GENDERS: If there are only a handful of teenage girls or college-age women Sunday mornings and you

continually talk about abortion, will not everyone assume one of them is probably guilty of this? If there are only a handful of men in the congregation and you rant and rave about pornography, all will suspect that one of them is the culprit and reason. If there are only a few families that have young children and you often mention child molestation in your sermons, then that family might leave, lest they be deemed the targets. If there are only a few married couples amidst the many singles attending while you mention marital sexual reluctance or refusal in your sermons, everyone assumes it's targeted.

Obviously, you are free to preach about any and all of these touchy sexual topics when you have a larger number of people—male and female, with all ages represented—who attend. Just be mindful of the intricate makeup and mind-set of your members.

AGES: People react differently to sexual topics from the pulpit depending on their age. We all know that the elderly in your church may sometimes react more negatively since they were not brought up in a culture in which sex was as freely discussed as it is today. They can be easily shocked at *any* sexual topic discussed, especially from a preacher. Age is a factor to be reckoned with.

However, do *not* assume they will all and always be repulsed. They have never told you that they have family members who have been hurt by sexual sin.

Some elderly folks have very unpleasant sexual memories of their own, as well as family secrets with their children or grandchildren that they have been hiding for a very long time now.

They didn't tell you about their sixteen-year-old granddaughter who had an abortion, that their thirty-eight-year-old daughter was recently raped, or that their twenty-seven-year-old son has same-sex attraction. Would it not be wonderful if you were the one pastor who could finally set them all free? Some older folks may welcome you with open arms because you are the first pastor to use the Bible to welcome their family's sexual suffering or secrets with open arms. And yes, they would be so proud of their preacher.

Let's go the other direction...

What do we do with the children during church?

Pulpit language about sex becomes quite tricky, as a result. Children are a force to be reckoned with when it comes to a pulpit ministry to the sexually wounded and addicted. I suggest a separate children's church service, in order to give you a little more freedom (which is all you really need) to talk more openly about this topic. All of this partially depends on whether parents are talking to their own kids about sex in their own homes. If the topic is taboo at home, don't expect anything different at church. However, some parents want you and your Sunday School teachers to approach this topic in appropriate ways in church so they can more easily discuss it at home. (You've got to admit, though, how hilarious and hypocritical it is when parents get *very* upset if their children hear about sex from the pulpit, but don't get upset when their kids hear about sex from the television set, computer screen, or school curricula. But that's another topic, isn't it?). It is interesting that the Old and New Testament scriptures were read to the entire congregation, and there is a whole lot of sexual language there that children heard.

EVENINGS AND EVENTS: How about introducing the topic of sex in a more casual and flexible setting instead, such as Sunday or Wednesday evening services? You probably have a little more freedom (again, that is all you need at first) to preach about topics usually considered taboo on Sunday mornings. Evening meetings are usually more apt to include the congregation talking with testimonies; what a neat opportunity it would be to hear how God healed others in these weaknesses, and how He set some free from their lifelong habits. Encourage members to publicly testify of such sexual miracles in their lives during evening services.

You might want to use a local or national headline event that is being discussed as a springboard or platform to approach a sexual topic in church.

Each new week there is something generated in the news which could be a starting place, true? There won't be as much protest or anger then from your members. People are talking about it; why shouldn't you? Jesus would often take a well-known event in his day as an introduction or illustration in His sermons; go and do likewise. He knew exactly what they were thinking before He spoke and while He spoke (Matt. 9:5; Luke 5:22; 6:8; 11:17). Analyze your audience and scratch them where they itch. We want them to know that God's Word talks about everything.

Now that we've examined whether your church might be ready for such a ministry, let's see if the pastor, church leaders, and staff members are equally ready for this:

1. Are your motives clean?

Do you really have a genuine compassion for sexually wounded or addicted people, or do you really want to be stimulated in a seemingly safer environment? If you're easily tempted with heterosexual or homosexual attractions, how will you help the woman or man who meets with you to discuss their sexual struggles? What will you think or do while you are alone with them? Should you simply delegate congregational counseling needs to specialized staff who have also read this book? Does your budget allow this? Do you need to have someone else there at this time? Is this asking for too much temptation? It might be. Do you want to know people's sexual histories in order to help them or so you can be turned on as you ponder these scenarios later on? If you're not having a healthy and happy amount of sexual activity in your marriage, please deal with that first. Do you ask for more details to learn more, or to lust more? That's important. Your goal is to find the facts and not feed your fantasies.

Don't assume your motives are as clean as you think. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9).

You need squeaky-clean motives for being pastorally involved with those who have become sexually involved.

Whoever wants to stand in His holy place must have clean hands and a pure heart (Ps. 24:3–4). How strong are you if the vulnerable woman you're counseling feels the need to prove her desirability and femininity and you happen to become her safer target? You will not believe the immense quantity and quality of sexual temptations that will come your way should you become well known as a skilled and compassionate counselor and preacher who really does understand sexually hurting and broken people. Make yourself *very* accountable to others in practical ways as you enter this monstrous minefield.

Your sex life needs to be happy, as it is. Your marriage needs to be happy, as it is. If there are problems in either, you're not ready to minister.

2. Is your past forgiven?

You can't minister from personal lust and you can't minister out of past guilt.

If you have unresolved guilt from past sexual misbehavior, you're not yet ready. Are you truly preaching to others, *or*, might you be vicariously preaching to or about yourself? If you're tormented about sex, it will show up sooner or later. Preaching about sex does not make God forgive you of any or all your past sexual indiscretions. Only the blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sin (1 John 1:7) and that includes sexual sin. You have to personally experience this grace to preach it. If you have sexual issues from your past that are not resolved (and you might), how can you show others how their similar issues can be resolved? Have a long talk with God before you tell others to do the same. He who is forgiven much, loves much (Luke 7:47). They will see your freedom and be attracted to it.

3. Is your job secure?

If your leadership is not currently supportive of you right now, you might need to wait to preach on sex or you might end up waiting in the unemployment line. You might need monies set aside, just in case they choose to set *you* aside. If they don't love your current preaching, this will be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Having your people supportive

of you is quite instrumental and foundational. If they have been looking for *any* reason to dismiss you, this will certainly become the one reason they will easily and quickly use. Timing is everything.

If you are brand new and they expect you to keep the peace and not make any waves, wait. Gain their trust or respect first.

People need to trust you before they allow you to enter their holy of holies.

Few people, if any, will ever be allowed to enter their sacred room of sexual wounds, sins, temptations, and memories. Will you be one of those few who are given access to their sexual secrets and sadness? I hope so. What better person than their pastor who will most fervently pray for them and shepherd them!

This next chapter helps you to see that you're in good company and following in the footsteps of a good God who has given you the green light to enter within. He never was embarrassed to talk about sexual topics since the beginning of time.