SEXUAL DETOX
A GUIDE FOR GUYS
WHO ARE SICK OF PORN
Tim Challies
“In an age when sex is worshiped as a god, a little book like this can go a long way to helping men overcome sexual addiction.”

**Pastor Mark Driscoll**  
Mars Hill Church

“Tim Challies strikes just the right balance in this brief but necessary work. His assessment of the sexual epidemic in our culture is sober but not without hope. His advice is practical but avoids a checklist mentality. His discussion of sexual sin is frank without being inappropriate. In a day when it can almost be assumed that every young male struggles with pornography, lust, and masturbation, this book will be a valuable resource. I’m grateful for Tim’s wisdom, candor, and grace.”

**Kevin DeYoung**  
Senior Pastor, University Reformed Church, East Lansing, Michigan; Conference Speaker and author of numerous books, including *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, *Just Do Something*, and *Why We Love the Church*

“In an era in which every man is online, pornography is not just a problem for Christian men; it is THE problem. All men face the temptation of this mind polluting, heart-hardening, soul-deadening sin. Many men, young and old, in our churches need *Sexual Detox*. This is a welcomed book. In a short, compressed format Challies identifies the toxic nature of this sin and offers practical, doable and, above all, gospel-centered hope for men. I want every man I serve and all the guys on our staff to read this book.”

**Tedd Tripp**  
Pastor, Grace Fellowship Church, Hazle Township, Pennsylvania; Conference Speaker and author of *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* and *Instructing a Child’s Heart*
“The church, the bride of Christ, finds itself in a sexual age. Much as we Christians might struggle to accept this, sex is very nearly the dominant cultural currency of our day. Because we know that this is a perversion of God’s good plan, we might struggle to accept this reality — and to confront it as we must. *Sexual Detox* is just what we need. It is clear, honest, and biblical, written with a tone that is knowing but kind, exhortative but gracious, realistic but determined. Those of us who work with youth — the target market in the sex-saturated society — have been given by Tim Challies a terrific resource for fighting sin and exalting Christ. We are in Tim’s debt. Here’s hoping that this book and its emphasis on confrontational holiness will spread far and wide for the health of the church and the strengthening of marriages both temporal and divine.”

**Owen Strachan**
Instructor of Christian Theology and Church History, Boyce College; Co-author of the *Essential Edwards Collection*

“Thank God for using Tim to articulate simply and unashamedly the truth about sex amidst a culture of permissiveness. This book is simple and biblical in its approach to “detox” us of the lies we hold onto in this area of sexuality. Read it and believe it.”

**Ben Zobrist**
All-Star Right Fielder, Tampa Bay Rays

“Tim has worked hard to express these truths simply. You can thank us for that. He has seen from teaching us that we are simple guys who need a simple explanation of God’s desires for our sexuality. We are convinced that if you are a normal guy with normal guy problems and a normal guy worldview, this book will be helpful for you, as it has been for us.”

**John Cowle, Steve Funston, Nick Mitchell, and Julian Freeman**
Twenty-something guys from the church in Toronto where Tim Challies is an elder (From the Foreword).
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FOREWORD

Why This Book?
Picture a group of 20-something-year-old guys sitting in a room brainstorming together on how to write a killer Foreword for an important book that has helped us replace worldly lies with biblical truth about sexuality. As we bat some ideas around, Steve brings out his famous half-cooked chocolate chip cookies and sets them before me, John, the token diabetic of the group. Immediately I am faced with a decision. Should I indulge and enjoy these chocolaty delights (the memories of which cause me to slip in and out of a mini flavour-coma) or should I resist and do what I know is the best thing for me?

This decision, like all decisions, is based on more than mere knowledge. It is based on belief. If I take a cookie, it means I believe that eating it is the best thing for me—or at the very least, that the pleasure it will give is greater than the consequences to my health.

In Sexual Detox, Tim Challies addresses men who know that sexual fantasies, masturbation, and pornography are wrong, but choose to indulge in their sin regardless. The purpose of this book is not to get you to admit that sexual sin is wrong—you already know that. Instead, the purpose is to move you to believe biblical truth about sexuality and have these beliefs determine your decisions.
When you indulge in sexual sin, it reveals what you truly believe about sexuality. You believe that the pleasure of sin is better than the pleasure of obeying God by enjoying sex the way God created it to be enjoyed. You believe that the pleasure you derive from your sin is greater than the consequences your sin will have on you and those around you. You believe that your momentary pleasure is greater than the rewards the Lord has for you—both in this life and in the life to come.

We all know sexual sin is wrong but we need to understand why it is wrong and that God has created sexuality for something greater. To help us replace a worldly view of sex with a God-defined understanding of sexuality is the reason Tim wrote this book.

Why Tim?
Many of you will know Tim from his blog or from other books and articles he’s written. You will already know that he is a gifted and compelling writer, able to present the truths of Scripture with clarity and conviction. What you won’t know is what we have all seen through the years we have known him as a friend, mentor, and pastor. Tim is a man who works hard to study the truth, to apply it to his own life, and then to teach what he has learned and applied in order to help others. Because Tim believes these things, lives these things, and loves to
bless other men in his life (like us) he is especially qualified to write this book.

**Why You?**

We are writing this Foreword to you to commend this book as highly as we can. Not primarily because it is some new cure-all, can’t-miss, one-step solution to all your problems with sexual sin, but because it represents what Tim has taught us that has helped us: It is biblical truth. And that alone is what will change your heart, your desires, your beliefs.

Tim has worked hard to express these truths simply. You can thank us for that. He has seen from teaching us that we are simple guys who need a simple explanation of God’s desires for our sexuality. We are convinced that if you are a normal guy with normal guy problems and a normal guy worldview, this book will be helpful for you, as it has been for us.

The bottom line is that when we believe in our hearts that the biblical view of sexuality is better than our sinful view of sex, we won’t cease to be tempted, but we will stop *indulging* in sin. When we believe that the joy of obedience and the rewards of purity are greater, the draw of sexual sin will be lesser. When we believe all that God has planned for us and our sexuality we will, in Christ, become conquerors over temptation.

If that sounds like something you need, then we
encourage you to take this book, to read it, and to have your mind and your heart detoxified, purified, and made ready for service to God who made you a sexual being—for his glory.

John Cowle, Steve Funston, Nick Mitchell, Julian Freeman
Members of Grace Fellowship Church
Toronto, Ontario
I often thank God that I grew up in the years before the Internet was in every home; I’m not sure I would have handled it very well. It’s not like I’m ancient, either, but my thirty-four years do mean that I was born and raised in a different world. It is difficult to quantify or even qualify how the world has changed since the web tied us all together into this strange and elaborate network of bits and bytes, but I do know that nearly every area of life has been touched by it. We do not have the old world plus the Internet; we have a whole new world. Even something as human as sex has been radically altered by this digital reality.

Teenagers in the 90s (when I was growing up) were not much different from teens today. We wanted the same things—we just had to work a little harder to get some of them. If we wanted to see pornography (and we did), the process usually involved at least two kids working in tandem. One would
distract a shopkeeper while the other tried to steal a magazine from the rack at the back of the store. The appointed thief would have to pick up the magazine silently, shove it down his pants, and walk out of the store without being spotted. This was dangerous, high stakes work that, if anything went wrong, could easily result in a really awkward meeting between you, your parents, and the police.

Today, as you know, unless there are unhackable firewalls or sophisticated filters, a guy needs only to turn on his computer and, within two or three clicks of the mouse, he can have unlimited access to unlimited amounts of pornography. Porn merchants established a beachhead on the Internet in its earliest days, and have been aggressively building their billion-dollar digital empires ever since. As a result, it is actually far more difficult to avoid pornography than it is to find it, and it would be literally impossible for one person to watch all the pornography being created today; there would not be enough hours in the day or days in the year. Not even close. Needless to say, teens, and teenage boys in particular, are quick to sample this illicit feast.

Even pre-teen boys are being drawn in. From the first awakenings of sexuality, many pre-teens are inundated with pornography. These are not the images of coyly posed naked women that were common a couple of generations ago, but hard-core
images that are often crude, base, and degrading. The sexuality of a whole generation of children is being formed not by talks with their parents, not by reading the kind of book I was given as a young man, but by professional pornographers who will do anything—anything!—to fuel an increased desire for increased depravity.

You don’t need to be a conservative Christian to be deeply troubled by all this. A short time ago I read an article by a woman who considered herself a feminist. She insisted that she enjoyed sleeping with men and thought little of sleeping with a continual succession of men. Yet she shared what for her was a growing concern. More and more, she said, the men she slept with had no real interest in her at all. They simply wanted her to act like a porn star for their benefit. They were using her to do little more than act out their porn-fueled fantasies. There was no tenderness, no desire for shared intimacy, and certainly no love. They simply used her body as a means to a very immediate end. This, she saw, is quickly becoming the new norm. What seems clear is that a generation of men, drowning in a cesspool of porn, has begun forming a new set of expectations for what they want from women. They want women to subvert themselves in order to act like porn stars. The women walk away used, feeling like little more than prostitutes.
Indeed, because of porn, even prostitutes are finding their world changing. In the bestseller, *Super-Freakonomics*, Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner devote most of a chapter to the economics of prostitution. One thing they have studied is the average price of specific sex acts charged by prostitutes over time. It seems that the taboo nature of certain acts has always claimed a premium. Yet “taboo” is a moving target. Acts that were once culturally forbidden because of their exceedingly vulgar and degrading nature are now accepted as legitimate forms of sexual expression. Therefore, what was once the most expensive act is now among the least expensive. In the world of prostitution, what would by any other standard be considered normal is now boring and undesirable. It has been replaced by the invasive, the degrading.

In the prices charged by prostitutes, Levitt and Dubner have found a way to measure the speed at which porn is warping the world’s view of sexuality. How fast is that? Really fast. From taboo to mainstream in less than one lifetime. It makes you wonder what could change in your own lifetime.

**Preparing for Detox**

So, while it has never been easy being a guy, today the challenges to guys who want to be holy, who want to honor God with their minds and
bodies, are tougher than ever. You live at a time and in a culture that is largely given over to sex. It’s all around you, and you can hardly avoid its lure.

If you are like most young men, you have already started to give in to temptation. Perhaps you have only just begun to look at pornography, or perhaps you’ve been doing so for many years. Perhaps you struggle with masturbation. You don’t really want to indulge yourself, but somehow it’s a whole lot tougher to quit than you would have thought. Perhaps you are finding that, more than ever, sex is filling your mind and affecting your heart.

This book is intended primarily for young men, married or not, though I think there is benefit for men of any age. For you single guys, yes, we will talk a lot about marriage, but for three good reasons—most of you will get married, marriage is the central human institution, and sexuality and marriage are obviously inseparable. So, regardless of the status on your tax form, I want you to know that despite all the challenges posed by pornography, there is a better way, a way of escape. The means of grace God richly provides can equip you to face the reality and bear the burdens of living at this particular time in this fallen world. This short guide can help you discover (or rediscover) God’s plan for sex and sexuality. I want to help you track down the lies you have believed about sex so those lies can be replaced by truth that comes
straight from God, the one who created sex for us. I hope to help you reorient your understanding of sex, both in the big picture and in the act itself, according to God’s plan for this great gift.

I suppose you noticed the word Detox in this book’s title. Detoxification actually takes place in your body every day as various organs transform or get rid of things that aren’t good for you. When someone has been chemically poisoned or exposed to too much radiation, the body needs some help, and detoxification becomes more intentional, more of a medical procedure. A third kind of detox is the popular meaning. This kind of detox takes place when someone is trying to be freed of addiction to drugs or alcohol. In each case, the basic idea is the same. Something has gotten inside you that doesn’t belong there and needs to be removed. If it stays or builds up, you will only get sicker. You might even die.

Detox is therefore a reset to normal, a return to health. It’s the reversal of a corrupting, polluting process. It gets you back to where you ought to be.

A huge percentage of men need a porn detox, a moral and psychological reset. In fact, I suspect that a large majority, even of Christian men, share this desperate need. Are you among them? If so, whether you recognize it or not, pornography has corrupted your thinking, weakened your conscience, warped your sense of right and wrong, and twisted your
understanding and expectations of sexuality. You need a reset by the One who created sex.

In this book, I want to help you detox from all the junk you’ve seen, all the lies you’ve believed. This is not an easy process. It is rarely a quick process. It involves a letting go of old realities and an embrace of a new normal, the original normal. To be willing to go through it, you need to see how bad your current situation really is, and how the path you are on leads to no place good. You need to see that the path of porn leads only to more isolation, guilt, alienation, and pain. Whether you are single or married, such a reset to normal is the only thing that can equip you to ever become a pure, loving, attentive, sacrificial husband.

But then, you already know you need to change. Few Christian men indulge in pornography without realizing they need to quit. Every Christian guy who looks at porn wants to stop, but many of us want to stop just a little bit less than we want to keep going. The problem isn’t knowledge—it’s desire and ability. And so sin prevails.

Here’s a promise. You will never stop until you begin to see the monstrous nature of the sin you are committing. You will never stop until the sin is more horrifying to you than the commission of the sin is enjoyable. You will need to hate that sin before you can find freedom from it. That means you need more grace. You need to cry out to be changed so you do see
the monstrous nature of this sin, and then you need to act, in faith that God will meet you with grace as you seek to cut off the pornography and begin the reset.

**The Monster in Disguise**

The issue of pornography is spoken about so often in Christian circles that it is in danger of becoming cliché. But the actual human dangers—physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual—are realities we must not avoid or overlook. We simply cannot allow pornography to become (or remain!) integrated into our lives. We must recognize it for the monstrosity it is. One helpful way to think about pornography is to see it as inherently mocking, violent, and progressive.

**Mocking** Pornography makes a mockery of God’s intention for sex. Indeed, all the messages of pornography go directly against God’s purposes. Here are just a couple of examples.

- Where God says the purpose of sex is to build unity between a husband and a wife, pornography says it is about fulfilling any perceived need with any partner, willing or unwilling. Indeed, pornography teaches that sex is everything except intimate body-to-body, soul-to-soul contact between willing spouses.
- God says sexual desire is good in a controlled
context because it urges a man to pursue his wife (and a wife her husband). But pornography says sexual desire cannot and should not be controlled, but should be allowed to draw us to anyone we find attractive.

**Violent** Pornography reshapes our very understanding of sex, of manhood, and of womanhood. It is inherently violent, inherently unloving. It is not about mutual love and caring and commitment, but about conquests and vanquishing, about “having your way” (a revealing phrase) with someone else. It tears love from sex, leaving sex as the immediate gratification of base desires. It lives beyond rules and ethics and morality. It exists far beyond love. In this way, it is a perversion of sexuality, not a true form of it, and one that teaches depravity and degradation at the expense of mutual pleasure and intimacy.

Is it possible for pornography to resemble an act of mutual, committed love? Of course, but don’t even think about using that as an excuse to dismiss this point. Any honest assessment of pornography must acknowledge that it has no intention of limiting itself to such quasi-legitimate depictions. Why? Because pornography is also progressive.

**Progressive** This is the very nature of sin, isn’t it? Sin is always progressive, and Sheol is never satisfied (Proverbs 27:20). It always wants more. It always
seeks to break out beyond its current boundaries. If you give it an inch, it soon seeks to take a mile.

Have you ever been scared by the progressive nature of your sin? Perhaps there was a time when you saw how a particular sin was taking you over. You had thought you were in control of your sin but then, almost in an instant, you found it had jumped to the next level. You were no longer in control—sin was leading the way and you were more and more just along for the ride, obeying the impulses of the flesh. It’s a terrifying place to be, isn’t it?

I know beyond doubt that many, many young men (middle-aged and older men, as well) can testify to pornography’s power to take control, one level after another. A man’s first glimpse of porn may be fleeting—intriguing but short-lived. A naked body is all the eye needs, and a single glimpse provides plenty of fuel for a while. But before long the heart craves more. What was once satisfying is now boring; what was once gross is suddenly desirable. Along the way, a person’s whole perception of sex is changed. No longer does sex involve simple intercourse between a man and a woman. Instead it becomes a series of acts, even acts that are in some ways uncomfortable or degrading.

If you have been looking at porn for any length of time, I know you can identify with this. Certain things that interested you at the beginning, that got
you going, now seem pretty bland. And things that were once gross are already beginning to intrigue you. This is the way sin is. This is the way sin always is. It will always demand more of you. And meanwhile, as you have been more or less certain that you’ve been controlling your sin, it has actually been controlling you. Subtly, unrelentingly, it has reshaped your mind and your heart in very real ways.

That’s why you need a reset. A return to normal. A detox.

**Clarifying the Promises**

The first message of this book, then, is that you must see what porn is doing to your heart. You must recognize that the corruption of pornography is real and, despite the convenient and self-indulgent little lies we can tell ourselves, that corruption is only going to get worse. The sin underlying the consumption of pornography will not stop escalating until it cripples your marriage, or until you die, or until you get too old and weak to care about sex. The only difference for single guys? The sin won’t stop escalating until it destroys any hope you will ever get married.

I want you to hate and fear the realities of pornography as you ought to hate and fear the sin itself. I want you to know that you cannot be a loving husband, an effective husband, or a godly man as long as your mind is filled with the lies of pornography.
I want you to see that you do need to quit looking at porn, and (even if you’ve already broken free) that you need to find a new way of looking at sex. This is because the detox comes in two parts. This two-step process is familiar to anyone who has studied what the Bible calls sanctification: there is the *putting off* of old ways and the *putting on* of new—the rejection of pornography and the embrace of a godly view of sexuality.

So, what’s the goal? We need to be clear about where we are trying to go. We need expectations that make sense in two ways. First, our expectations must be neither lower nor higher than the realities we see in Scripture. Second, our expectations must be in keeping with what’s possible in a short book like this.

First, remember that we are trying to reset or detox back to a time when porn had little or no hold on you. You cannot be reset to a state of sinlessness, because you were never there! You and I will always be susceptible to temptation. No program can deliver from the *experience* of sexual temptation. And no plan, program, or discipline can guarantee that you will never *give in* to temptation.

Huge, wonderful progress can indeed be made. When this book talks about being “set free” from sexual sin, that’s what it’s saying. God wants us to make that kind of remarkable progress, he’s eager to give us the grace to do it, and we should strive for it.
with every fiber of our being. But this is not about perfection. Therefore, stumbles and struggles do not equal failure. When properly handled, they are simply part of the progress.

Second, my expertise is limited and this book is short. All I can do here is try to frame the issue for you clearly, inspire you to take it seriously, and offer you a simple path and some next steps based on scriptural teaching. At the end of the day, I want you to take ownership of this issue in your own life. If you do that—if you take seriously the directives and suggestions in this book, and cry out to God for grace to implement them and be shown additional steps—you can have every confidence that God will be pleased to hear and help you.

**Think**

I’m going to end each chapter with a Think section. Especially in this rapid-fire digital age, it’s far too easy to zip through information we truly need and then skip on to the next chunk of information, without ever really reflecting on what we’ve only halfway absorbed.

Pornography is an area where it’s especially important to be honest. Whether you use these questions in a group discussion, or just by yourself, I’ve put them here to help you take a moment to reflect and, hopefully, to get very real about this.
1. Let’s get this one out of the way up-front. Have you ever seen pornography? Yes or no?
2. That was a pretty simple question, so let’s ramp it up a bit. How did you first see pornography and how old were you? How many times have you seen it since?
3. When was the last time that you saw pornography? Did “it find you” or did you go looking for it?
4. Have you ever been frightened by your sin? When? How did you react?
5. Have you found that the things in pornography that interested you or excited you at first continue to interest and excite you? Or have your tastes changed? Be honest.
6. Do you think that your mind, your heart, or your expectations of your wife (if you’re married) or your perception of women in general (if you’re not married) have been affected by pornography? In what manner?
7. If you’re married, do you think that pornography has affected your mind, your heart or your expectations of your wife? How, specifically?