

BOOK REVIEW  
*PURE DESIRE* BY Ted Roberts  
(Ventura, CA: Regal, 1999, 2008)

Ted Roberts recently stepped down from his long-time pastorate at East Hill Foursquare Church in Gresham, OR to devote full attention to his Pure Desires Ministries International. Ted came to Christ while a Marine fighter pilot in Vietnam. He was hooked on alcohol and porn. God delivered him “cold turkey” from alcohol but his porn addiction was a protracted struggle--3½ years of absolute war! (p. 85). Out of that personal journey to sexual wholeness, Ted began to address sex addictions in his church with the emerging ministries called *For Men Only* and *For Women Only*. The book is a mixture of loving confrontation, encouragement that the reader is not alone, diagnostic tools, illuminating and gripping fighter pilot stories, and description of the pathway to freedom.

Ted italicizes the urgency of the issue with the statistic that up to 29% of evangelical pastors are sex addicts<sup>1</sup> and his personal estimate that *...50 percent of the men in every congregation I have ever had an opportunity to minister to are struggling with this issue.* (p. 70) *The average age of a first-time viewer of pornography is now down to 11.* (p. 69) He calls sexual bondage “one of hell’s master plans” and labels the Internet as a “stealth bomber from hell with pornography as its payload.” His burden is that each church tackles this issue squarely with compassion, hope and healing.

Major themes of the book are:

1. Health: *[O]ur goal is getting healthy, not just stopping destructive behavior. And that will probably take three to five years, with the Holy Spirit doing miracles all along the way, as you cooperate.* (p. 75; cf. p. 156)
2. Accountability: *No one can win this battle alone* (p. 37). See the major dragon parable, (pp. 33-36). *A man caught in sexual bondage lives in a lonely world, because his primary energies are directed inward.* (p. 100) Men cannot deal with the issue alone...Every man needs a Nathan (I Kings 1:11-13) (p. 110) *Hell always grows strong in secrecy.* (p. 245)
3. Chemistry: *A major aspect of sexual activity is a strong release of adrenaline and endorphins, which is why sexual events become imprinted in the brain.* (p. 32) *Sexual activity and fantasy...can actually alter a person’s brain chemistry.* (p. 52) *The neurochemistry of cocaine affects the same centers in the brain that are involved in sexual pleasure...* (p. 68) *I medicated my pain by going for the high that pornography provided.* (p. 90) Sex releases drugs into the blood stream (p. 140) He refers to the adrenaline rush experienced in sexual addiction (p. 162)
4. Self-discipline/behavioral modification: *Release from bondage has to begin with actions. We can’t change simply by trying harder. But that doesn’t mean we can’t work on changing the daily behavior....eventually the feelings will follow.* (p. 107) Chapter 9, “The Cleansing Hope of a Vision” is heavily about self-discipline—plus its interface with a personal vision. He urges the reader to develop an escape plan for dealing with the potential of relapse. (pp. 122-126)
5. Etiology: *“[A]t least three issues lie at the root of most addictions: 1. Family Dysfunction. 2. Personal trauma. 3. An addictive society. Family dysfunction is one of hell’s major entry points into the lives of the vast majority of individuals I have counseled who have struggled with sexual bondage.* (p. 52). See also the Patrick Carnes study on page 67 documenting the linkage of

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<sup>1</sup> *...I did a survey for a particular denomination concerning the issue of sexual addiction and discovered that 21-29 percent (depending on the region of the country) of the pastors were sexual addicts. They weren’t just struggling with the issue—they were addicts. This was a rapidly growing, Bible-believing, solid group of leaders...* (page 27)

adult addictions with childhood experiences of abuse. See the sample interview with Ted's friend, Rob (p. 137)

Ted introduces a number of tools:

1. The "Noose of Sexual Addiction" diagram (p. 50)
2. "The Web of Sexual Addiction" diagram (p. 109)
3. Carnes Sexual Addiction Screening Test (discussed on pp. 116ff. The test itself is in Appendix B, pp. 313-315)
4. Identifying and preempting stressors and triggers. A list of questions and a rating scale tool appear on pp. 118-122.
5. Learning to Walk in God's Grace as a Way of Life (chart, p. 127)
6. Michael Dye's FASTER Relapse Awareness Scale (see [www.genesisproject.org](http://www.genesisproject.org)) (p. 143)
7. Spiritual "Altitude" Test (pp. 182-183)
8. Suggested resources on pp. 317-318

The book gets high praise from such evangelical luminaries as Jack Hayford, John Townsend, Stephen Arterburn, John Trent, and Stu Weber. The final two chapters are written by Ted's wife, Diane, and are directed to women. She covers critical issues pertaining to women betrayed by their addictive husbands like self-esteem, healthy boundaries, rebuilding trust, and dealing with feelings of shame and guilt.

*Pure Desire* is not a step-by-step manual, nor is it a copious Bible study—although the book is well-salted with Scripture. Some of its claims are not documented (e.g., the brain chemistry comments). On what evidence does he announce that it takes three to five years to get sexually healthy? However, Ted does get a lot of the issues of sexual addiction "on the table." He defines the problem, calls men to get into accountability, frames the issue biblically, offers hope and encouragement, and provides anecdotal and case-study templates for responsible pursuit of spiritual transformation. Addiction as a heart-idol issue is acknowledged but not developed: *Addiction, at its spiritual core, is about idolatry—about where we're going to find life and fulfillment.* (p. 115) Scripture memory is mentioned in a few paragraphs but not developed. (pp. 124-125)

Overall, the book is honest, redemptive, biblical, direct, and encouraging. It is, at least, a superb prompter for a sexual addict to take the next step into a structured, transformational, accountability journey to spiritual wholeness.

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