

the
PROVERBS 31
MINISTRIES
podcast

Biblical truth for any girl in any season.

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Meredith Brock: Hello, friends. Welcome back to *The Proverbs 31 Ministries Podcast* where we share biblical truth for any girl in any season. My name is Meredith Brock, and I am thrilled to get to host today's podcast.

Meredith Brock: It's actually part of a two-part series on, drum roll, please, *Therapy & Theology*, everybody's favorite. What do we call these things? Episodes. We're just really, really excited about today's installment. We're back with more *Therapy & Theology*, and before we dive into the discussion, we want to do our due diligence and remind you that this content may not be appropriate for young children and to use your discretion while listening. Maybe you're in the car with your kiddos in the carpool line. We encourage you, maybe turn it off right now and listen to this on your own because our prayer is that this series practically equips you with both spiritual and practical ways to address some sensitive topics alongside biblical truth and your everyday realities.

Meredith Brock: So, now without further ado, I'm going to welcome our guests on the show. Today, you'll be hearing from Lysa TerKeurst, president of Proverbs 31 Ministries and *New York Times*' bestselling author of *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. We've talked about that book a lot on this podcast, so I hope you've picked up a copy of that, and we will also be having her personal counselor, Michael Cusick. Welcome Lysa and Michael. So glad that you're here.

Lysa TerKeurst: Thank you so much. And just so people don't get confused because they've met my other counselor, Jim Cress.

Meredith Brock: Yes, that's absolutely right.

Lysa TerKeurst: ... who's also been on *Therapy & Theology*. Michael was really the counselor who worked with me and my husband together.

Meredith Brock: Right.

Lysa TerKeurst: And so Jim worked with me individually, and I'm just very excited to have Michael on today. I'll tell you a little bit more about Michael. He is, besides being a wonderful marriage counselor and personal counselor as well, he is part of a ministry called Restoring the Soul.

Lysa TerKeurst: He also has *Restoring the Soul* podcast, and he's the author of a really interesting and informative book called *Surfing for God: Discovering the Divine Desire Beneath Sexual Struggle*, which gives you a clue on our topic today.

Meredith Brock: Yeah, folks. We're going there.

Lysa TerKeurst: We are going there. we're going to tackle pornography and some of the reasons behind it. What do we do about it? How do we talk about this hard subject? So Michael Cusick, welcome. We're so honored to have you today.

Michael Cusick: Well, I am thrilled to be here. Thank you.

Meredith Brock: Yeah, well we are, like Lysa said, folks, we are jumping in both feet. We are going to talk pornography with our audience today, and I want to open up the floor. I want to hand the reins right over to Lysa and Michael, so we can jump into this topic and learn all that we need to from a biblical perspective.

Lysa TerKeurst: Thank you so much, Meredith. Okay, so Michael, I'm going to get into the discussion with you, but I do want to give this little preface. I know Meredith has already addressed not listening to this podcast with kids in the car, but I want to say we recognize that we have all different women and all different walks of life, maybe even some guys listening as well.

Lysa TerKeurst: But, if you are married, I encourage you to listen to this with your spouse. I think it's great to get on the same page together, and I very much recognize that when dealing with a subject like pornography that there is a lot of fear for some couples. There's a lot of pain, and I want to recognize that and just say, "Hey, this would be a great episode to listen to with your spouse together." And part of what we want to talk about today is the whole issue of where does pornography even come from and how big of an issue it is?

Lysa TerKeurst: So Michael, I'm going to jump right in and turn that part of the discussion over to you.

Meredith Brock: Well, can I ask you a question really quickly before we do that?

Lysa TerKeurst: Sure.

Meredith Brock: What if I'm not married? What do I do with this? What do I do with this conversation if I'm not married? Maybe Michael wants to address that because I'm just thinking, what about our girls who are not quite there yet?

Lysa TerKeurst: Yeah, well I think it's always good to get educated at the very start of even considering a relationship on some of the potential struggles and pitfalls that could exist. Now, I'm not placing this on anyone. But Michael, why don't you comment on how big of an issue pornography actually is?

Meredith Brock: That's great.

Michael Cusick: Great question. And that's almost always the first question that people ask. And the statistics differ from person to person and organization to organization. And I like to say the best way of describing the statistics is that the struggle with pornography is like secondhand smoke.

Michael Cusick: So, a person doesn't need to be a smoker, but they will be affected by it, and secondhand smoke, as it was proven medically, can even take your life or have really, really damaging effects.

Michael Cusick: And so, whether a person has actively looked to pornography or whether that's been in the past, it's really impacting us, and it's everywhere. And in my work, I simply assume that men have been affected by it and that at some point in their life, that it's been something they've been exposed to, and that it's very likely, if not a struggle, something that they're trying to avoid.

Lysa TerKeurst: And I, I will recognize too, that I've read many statistics and studies pornography, and this is not just a male struggle.

Meredith Brock: That's right.

Lysa TerKeurst: I know that, increasingly, females are struggling with this too. But, one of the reasons I wanted to tackle this subject is because with us being a women's ministry and people being familiar with my marriage struggles and the restoration process that we are walking through, I'm getting a lot of questions about pornography.

Lysa TerKeurst: And so Michael, I think when people think of this issue, they think, well, if a man or a woman, whoever's struggling with it, but from the context of today's conversation, let's say you're married to a man who is struggling with pornography, and you think a couple of wrong thoughts as the female. You think that if you could do more or be more or you know, look better or something that surely this would not be an issue, and that's just not true.

Lysa TerKeurst: And also, we think, well, if whoever is struggling with pornography, if they just had more willpower or more faith, then this surely wouldn't be such a big struggle. But, both of those are beliefs that make sense but aren't actually true. It really has a lot less to do with a wife in a marriage where the husband is struggling with pornography, and it has a lot less to do with her, and it also has a lot less to do with, well, if you could just have more willpower, then this wouldn't be a problem. So, comment on that, Michael.

Michael Cusick: Yeah, I sure will. And let me just add that as I speak, I have two graduate degrees, one in clinical counseling psychology and the other in pastoral psychology and counseling. But as I speak, I'm mostly speaking out of my own life journey and experience. And as I share in my book, for 29 years, I was a full-

blown sex addict. We're actually starting around the age of four where there was abuse. And so, most of what I say comes out of my own journey of healing and restoration.

Michael Cusick: But, in response to your question, I want to go to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, and it's the context of Paul addressing sexual morality and sexual sin in Corinth. And many people might be familiar with the passage there where he talks about if you join yourself with a prostitute, you have become one. And he really speaks about spiritual union and physical union, in other words, sexuality and spirituality as two sides of the same coin.

Michael Cusick: And in 1 Corinthians 6:14, Eugene Peterson paraphrased in his message. He said Paul's words this way, "That sex is more than just skin on skin, but it has much spiritual mystery as physical fact." And he was really getting to the heart of Paul's teaching, and that is that yes, there's a physical aspect to our sexuality that's a gift from God, that there's reproduction, that there's pleasure, that there's union, but that there was, at the core of it, the spiritual mystery, that when a man and a woman in marriage join together, that that actually becomes a representation of God.

Michael Cusick: And therefore, if we approach the struggle with lust or the struggle with pornography as just trying to push it down and push it away, our capacity for spiritual union and for spiritual connection that would flow from or be the foundation of a sexual connection is lost.

Michael Cusick: And I love to quote Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an unlikely person to speak into modern sexuality, but Bonhoeffer wrote apparently from prison before he was executed for opposing the Nazis. He said that, "The pursuit of purity is not about suppressing lust, but about reorienting our life to a larger goal." So, my whole approach has been a response to what has been largely this idea of suppressing, of trying to manage or wrestle down lust and sexual desire as opposed to seeing it as a legitimate God-given desire that gets misdirected because of how we mishandle the pain and the disconnection in our lives.

Lysa TerKeurst: I love that quote that you gave us. I also saw from your book a quote by G.K. Chesterton, and it says, "Every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is knocking for God." And when you and I were talking about this, Michael, you were saying this really is an issue of fullness versus emptiness. So, that help when we were talking about that, helped me take it out of the stinging feelings around pornography within the context of a relationship and feeling so personal and so intimidated by the subject. And you really helped me understand that the real issue, if you want to get down to the heart of it, comes not from the sexual struggle as much as from an emptiness in your relationship with God.

Lysa TerKeurst: And so, one of the verses you had given me was Proverbs 27:7 which says, "One who is full loads honey from the comb, but to the hungry, even what is bitter tastes sweet."

Meredith Brock: Wow.

Lysa TerKeurst: And I know when you and I were talking about this also, you were saying that fullness in God looks different for a man than it does woman, and this was very eye opening to me. So, comment on that.

Michael Cusick: Yes. So I think women are, as your listeners will know, are more naturally connected, more naturally relational. And so, the first part of fullness for a man is developing an awareness of the legitimate God-given desires, and the word that I like to use is longings and thirst. The Scriptures are full from Genesis to Revelations of this idea of hunger, thirst, longing, yearning, hope, desire, and those desires in and of themselves are not sinful.

Michael Cusick: And that might be surprising to some listeners, but it's what we do with our desires. Beneath every single sinful behavior or every behavior that's maladaptive or somehow unhealthy for us is a legitimate God-given desire. So, beneath the struggle for pornography, there can be a desire for comfort, for connection, for being soothed, for a man to feel powerful. And this is a whole separate topic, but sometimes it's because of a man's deep brokenness and the anger within that can be a way to feel powerful because in the past, he has felt so powerless. So, in some, struggles with lust and porn are not about sex, which in some ways is the most radical idea of all. But, Jesus was the master teacher that always redirected the issues to something deeper in the heart.

Lysa TerKeurst: I think that's fascinating because I myself have struggles. Pornography is not one of them. But, when I think about the men in my life potentially struggling with pornography, it strikes fear in my heart so deep that I don't even know what to do with it.

Lysa TerKeurst: And so, I imagine there's someone listening today, and they're like, "That sounds great in theory, Michael. But, when I hear the word pornography, and if I think my husband is struggling with it, I am so afraid. I don't even know what to do with this."

Lysa TerKeurst: So, I want to make sure that we talk about, how do we talk about this with the men in our life? But, I also want you to unpack a little bit what you said, that fullness in Christ for a woman is nurturing and relational and all of that. But, what is it for a man? And I know one time, you had given me a chart that helps unpack fullness in Christ for a man. I think this is a better place for a woman's heart to go to than all of the fear around pornography. So, let's go through what this looks like, fullness in Christ for a man.

Michael Cusick: Yeah, well, fullness in Christ, Jesus spoke about how we don't live by bread alone. And Matthew, when he was speaking to the evil one, and in John, his disciples come to him and say, "Hey, rabbi. Have something to eat." And His response is, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

Michael Cusick: And so, coming back to this idea that the first thing is that men have to become aware of these desires and longings, and that generally happens for men when they hit some kind of wall or when they come to a place where, as I say, they got no game. They suffer from how to empower their brokenness.

Michael Cusick: And when that happens, a man may begin to look inside. And what he will discover is that there are these hungers and thirsts for something so much more than life as he knows it, or this is just as good as it gets.

Michael Cusick: And so I speak of four A's and three S's specifically to help men begin to have a language for this. They're their longings. They are desires. And just to frame this in the context of Scripture, there's a passage I stumbled on as a very young believer that I have highlighted in every Bible version I've had. And David says in Psalm 38 verse 9, "All my longings will I open before you, oh God. My signing is not hidden from you."

Michael Cusick: And so often, men will refer to David as the man after God's own heart, despite the fact that he committed adultery and conspired in a murder. But David, this prototype of the godly man was somebody that was deeply, deeply connected to his own heart and to the emptiness out of which came to this cry to God of "my sighing is not hidden from you. It's right here." And so, a man who is moving toward fullness is a man who is aware of the hunger and thirst in his heart truly for connection and for adventure and for a sense of purpose.

Michael Cusick: And the very first A of these words that I use is simply the longing for attention, and by attention, I don't mean to be on center stage and for everyone to think he's wonderful, but rather the attention of do I matter? Each of these words really has a question attached to it. And each of these would also be things that an infant and a child and a teenager would also have on the forefront of their mind. And we lose this idea that now I'm a grown-up, now I'm a man, now I have a family and I need to stuff these longings and desires, and those are just childlike.

Michael Cusick: But, attention is asking this question, do I matter and do you see me, and do I have the value of kind of putting aside, in a moment, what is important to you and giving me your attention with your eyes, with your heart, with your touch.

Michael Cusick: The second one is affection, and that is not hugs and holding hands or even sexual affection. But, affection is really about delight and that aspect that the other delights in us in such a way where there's a physical demonstration. Children, when they're excited about a Christmas present, will jump up and down and flap their hands, and their eyes will sparkle, and that sense of a partner, a spouse, having that toward the other is something, obviously in the context of a marriage, that is difficult to sustain, but that's a deep longing in the heart of a man as well.

Michael Cusick: And I can keep going down the list, but I also want to give you the freedom to jump in and ask any questions along the way.

Lysa TerKeurst: This is fascinating to me because I've never heard someone break it down as well as you. And honestly, I think giving verbiage to something that feels hard to define, fullness in Christ, especially fullness in Christ for man is so helpful. So, I say keep going. I'm taking notes as you're speaking.

Meredith Brock: Yes, yes.

Michael Cusick: Well, and I'm glad you said that because we tend to separate the spiritual in the every day. We all tend to, and this is a historical idea that probably comes from the Greeks, but we tend to separate the secular and the sacred.

Michael Cusick: And so, a man's walking in the door, coming home from work, that that is as spiritual as when he's at church with his arms raised, listening to a Chris Tomlin song. And so, God put these desires in us for attention and affection because we were meant to experience them with Him, but we are also meant to experience them in human relationship. And the phrase in the whole field of attachment theory right now about the science of our connections is that we were really created to experience these from womb to tomb. And it used to be understood that these needs were basically zero to four, and then once a child got them, you're kind of okay and then they're not so necessary anymore.

Michael Cusick: But, a lot of problems in relationships break down in marriages because these needs get suppressed for any number of reasons. The third A is affirmation, and this is not stroking the ego, but it's the longing and desire in a man's heart for others to say, and particularly a wife to a husband, "You have what it takes."

Michael Cusick: The fourth A is acceptance and this is often one that gets quickly passed by, but acceptance is the question of do I belong somewhere? Does my heart have a home? And you start to hear that these questions are directly applicable for God. Do You see me? Do I have value? Do You delight in me? Do I have what it takes? And God, do I have a place where I belong? Not just church on Sunday, but is there a place in You, Jesus, where I belong? Is there a connection with You that is always there that I can fall back on and fall into?

Michael Cusick: And then, after the four A's, there are three S's. And the first one is satisfaction. And we oftentimes think of lust as well. I'm just trying to satisfy a desire, and indeed it can be emptiness to fullness, but satisfaction is really about wellbeing.

Michael Cusick: And one of the things that Jesus talked the most about was this whole idea of shalom, the Hebrew word for wellbeing or for deep wholeness in a way that leads to peace. And so, satisfaction is something that we speak of, and yet, I know personally that that kind of deep wellbeing within my soul, within the pace of a given day or week or life with ministry and family and finances and all of the things that come at us, it's really difficult to land in a place where we feel

content, not because we've settled for less, but because our hearts are awake and alive, and we're hungry and thirsting for abundance.

Michael Cusick: The next S would be significance, and that's really the sense of do I have a purpose, a mission and a destiny that I am to fulfill? And this is not to become a rock star or a billionaire, but is there something that uniquely makes me get up in the morning? And if nothing else, that would be to contribute and to pour out what's inside of me as a man or the man that we would speak of into the lives of others to generate, to create, to bear fruit.

Michael Cusick: The last S is security, and that's also this idea that I referred to with satisfaction, but it's more global than that. You know the classic hymn, "It Is Well With My Soul," and I speak of this as security, is this a Psalm 62 idea, that "You, oh Lord, are my refuge, my fortress, my rock, my safe place."

Michael Cusick: And back to the idea of how men's fullness is different from women's, I think it's something that for men, they would see that safe place and that rock and fortress as outside of themselves, when in fact, Christ is within us. Colossians 1 tells us, "The hope of glory."

Michael Cusick: And so, my judgment would be based on ,being married for 28 years, in counseling for 30 years, is that women tend to more naturally see their spirituality as internal and then interpersonal, and men would see it as more external and more performance driven. So, I have spirituality in my relationship with God based on reading the Bible and praying, go to church and maybe an occasional men's meeting. But, our spirituality as men and women is meant to come from our inmost being.

Michael Cusick: Let me wrap up this little segment with a Scripture from Jesus, and John 7. Most people will be familiar with this idea that John says on the last and greatest day of the feast. Jesus stood up and in a loud voice said, "If anyone is thirsty, come to me, and streams of living water will flow from within you."

Michael Cusick: And I just turned 55, and if I were to ask myself, how often as a Christian have I felt streams of living water flowing within me, I've been a Christian for 35 years, and the answer is not as often as I would like. So, how do those streams of living water flow? Well, Jesus said it. "If you're thirsty."

Michael Cusick: And so, there's a contingency there that we can only come to Him and have the streams of living water flow if we are aware of that thirst and if we acknowledge that thirst and say, "Jesus, I want more."

Michael Cusick: And for men who do that, it's really an invitation of awakening of their hearts to desire more deeply, and then their souls can be satisfied on the richest affair as the Lord refers to in Isaiah 55 as opposed to those things that don't satisfy. And as it said from the Scripture you read, Lysa, in Proverbs 27, that "What is bitter will taste sweet if we don't have this internal fullness and solidness."

Lysa TerKeurst: You know, Michael, I think what you're sharing is so crucial because as I have unpacked with Art, my husband, some of what got him in trouble with some of the struggles that he had, this was such a big part of it that I probably five or six years ago, would have said no.

Lysa TerKeurst: My relationship with Art, it is important that we have good communication, and it's important that we have fun and adventure and that we manage our finances well together, and we have a vision for the future. I would have said all of those things, but honestly, unpacking things with him now, it has helped me see that his relationship with God has more impact on our relationship than just about anything else.

Lysa TerKeurst: And it's this fullness that you're talking about that I could never give him, and I think for so long I kept feeling like if I could do more, be more, say more of the right things, then I had this general sense of some emptiness in him, but I thought it was around me. And looking back now, he would say, "No Lysa. It's exactly what you're talking about, Michael," not understanding how to connect and get his fullness from God.

Lysa TerKeurst: One last verse I'll read from Amos 8, which I don't often go to Amos, but I think this is right in line with what we've been talking about today. Amos 8:11-13, "The days are coming, declares the sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine through the land, not a famine of food or thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. People will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. In that day, the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst."

Lysa TerKeurst: And it's this thirst for the fullness that we can only find in Christ, which maybe if you're listening today, this is surprising to you, that this is really what we're talking about, but what you've shared today is pure gold. Michael, and I've seen it make the biggest difference in my relationship with Art, and I've seen it truly transform his heart, tapping into understanding fullness in Christ, and Michael, you had such a big part of that in our counseling time together.

Lysa TerKeurst: I know that the next broadcast that we're going to do in our next episode, we are going to talk about how do you have this conversation with your spouse if you're married about pornography, and we're also going to be talking about the five broken promises of porn. So, you'll want to make sure to put that in your schedule to listen to the second episode because today was just part one.

Meredith Brock: That's right.

Lysa TerKeurst: And part two is going to be equally as informative and important.

Meredith Brock: Yeah, that's absolutely right, and thank you, Lysa, for that. I want to touch on one last thing, and I just think it's so important, and you touched on it lightly

yourself, where when you stop looking at porn as this being afraid of it and you can look at it through this lens of it's a man's question. He's asking, do I matter? Do you delight in me? Do I have what it takes? Do I have somewhere where I belong? When you can see it from that vantage point, it shifts, at least in my heart, from fear and maybe even anger—

Lysa TerKeurst: And feeling so threatened by this.

Meredith Brock: Yes, and it shifts to deep compassion because I can look in the eyes of my husband and say, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, you do matter. You do have a place." I can look in the eyes of my son and breathe that into him at the young age of eight years old. I have three brothers, and to be able to see them that way and be the life-giver that God created me to be in their lives, it shifts the whole perspective on this thing.

Meredith Brock: So, I'm excited that we are diving in. We've got one more episode coming up right after this. But Michael, I wanted you to close this particular teaching segment out on, why don't you read that Bonhoeffer quote one more time because I think it's the right place for us to land. So, can you read that for us?

Michael Cusick: Yeah. You bet. Bonhoeffer said that, "The pursuit of purity is not about suppressing lust, but about reorienting our life to a larger goal."

Meredith Brock: That's beautiful. It's beautiful. Let's, us as women and men, sons and daughters of the Lord, reorient our hearts toward Him, toward a greater purpose in Him.

Meredith Brock: Well, this has been a fantastic conversation. I want to make sure you guys have, our listeners have the right resources as we close out today. So first, I want to remind you, Michael's book, *Surfing for God: Discovering the Driving Desire Behind Sexual Struggle*. It's available out on Amazon right now, and we want to make sure if this is real, if this is a real struggle you're living in right now, grab a copy of that. Read it with your husband, and start the conversation to get healthy in this area.

Meredith Brock: And second, of course, if you haven't read Lysa's book, *It's Not Supposed To Be This Way*, and you are working through some of these things, like this is not the life that I had envisioned. Where do I go? What do I do? Visit the Proverbs 31 bookstore. It's p31bookstore.com. You can pick up a copy there. Everything you purchased from the Proverbs 31 bookstore goes back to supporting the ministry of Proverbs 31, so we can continue to make resources like this podcast free and available to everybody around the globe.

Meredith Brock: And lastly y'all, if you are just really loving the idea of *Therapy & Theology*, I want to remind you earlier this year, we had a whole series where we talked about this, and so you can go back, revisit those episodes, tell us what you think because we're excited to hear how God is moving in your life.

Meredith Brock:

So, thank you so much for listening today. We pray today's episode helps you know the Truth of God's Word and live that Truth out because we know when you do, it really will change everything. Thanks for listening.