

on a life of its own, and I found no release until my addiction cycle was interrupted by the power of God.

UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLE

The cycle of sexual addiction often follows seven stages. Other types of addiction follow a similar cycle. Let's take a look at these stages and how God can interrupt each one. For healing to take place, a man should seek help with *each* stage.

Stage One: Secretize

Shame always produces a "secretiveness" in a person's life, which includes denying, justifying or blaming. The addict's secret world isolates him from others, which makes matters worse.

My own secret world was interrupted almost 10 years ago when a lay counselor said, "Don, I'm sorry, but I let the information about your sexual sin slip with church leaders." It was like a thousand knives were thrust into my stomach. I knew it meant the end of my ministry, but I also knew it would end the guilt, hypocrisy and shame I had felt for so long. I knew that God, in His severe mercy, would use the exposure to heal and restore me.

One of the first works of God toward healing is to bring to light hidden areas of our lives (John 16:8-13). All secretiveness should be replaced by a new honesty and openness allowing others to confront any behavior.

Stage Two: Fantasize

A man will often use fantasy to escape stress or as a substitute for meeting legitimate needs (nurturing and relationships, for example). He grows dependent on the emotional and physical "high" that fantasy produces.

How does he run from fantasy? First, he feeds upon the wisdom that comes from scripture. Through memorizing and meditating upon scripture, he replaces something destructive with something healthy. Second, he looks at

people as recipients of God's love, not as objects to be used.

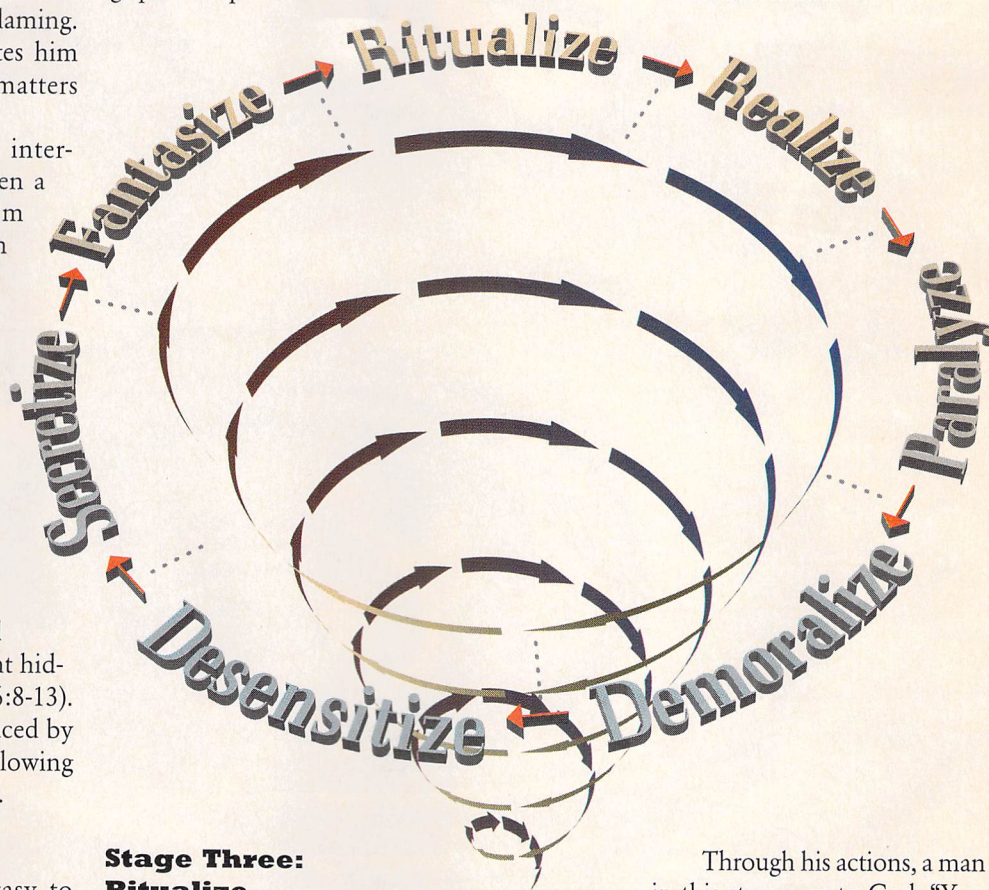
How well I remember driving home from speaking at a meeting several years ago. As I drove through a large city, thoughts of pornography flooded my mind, and then feelings of euphoria. I felt unable to stop the thoughts, so I cried out, "Help me, God!" In my mind I then saw myself speaking to a large group of men, and deep inside felt God saying, "If you will allow My grace to help you overcome, you will see many men set free." That message filled me with joy, and I was released from the grip of temptation.

I discovered that he would go cruising when he felt stressed or lonely. He had never noticed the connection between cruising and his negative feelings.

Rituals should be confessed to a person or group who can help a man set new boundaries and accountability.

Stage Four: Realize

Sooner or later, fantasy and ritual is acted upon (see James 1:15). In sexual addictions, it could be masturbation, pornography, homosexual acts or adultery. It could be a serious criminal act such as rape, incest or child molestation.



Stage Three: Ritualize

Some men will form rituals that fall short of a sex act. Flirting, seducing and pornography often become part of the ritual. It's common for men to deny any problem at this stage because they haven't committed a sexual act with another person.

Here's a typical example of a ritual: A friend confessed to me that he regularly cruised an area of town where prostitutes walked the streets. As we talked,

Through his actions, a man in this stage says to God, "You cannot or will not meet my deepest longings, so I'll do my own thing."

A man in this stage needs a sense of God's purpose and counsel for his life (1 Thess. 4:1-7, Rom. 12:1-2). Knowing God's counsel for our lives refocuses our passion on Him. People often tell me that, even in the middle of a sexual act, they sense God asking, "Is this the reason for your life?"

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