

Unburdened: The Christian Leader's Path to Sexual Integrity
Available September 2015
 \$15, 128 pages, paperback
 978-0-8308-4432-6

Michael Todd Wilson is a licensed professional counselor and board-certified coach with Intentional Hearts. He specializes in coaching Christian men in the recovery and pursuit of sexual integrity and is also the cofounder of ShepherdCare, a nonprofit ministry that offers support and training for ministers by promoting health and long-term effectiveness in ministry. He is the coauthor of *Soul Virgins: Redefining Single Sexuality* (Sexual Wholeness Resources) and *Preventing Ministry Failure*.

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Getting Past the Taboo of Sexual Integrity and Christian Leaders

What made you realize there was a need for a book like *Unburdened*?

Michael Todd Wilson: *Unburdened* is written from my experience in working with Christian men and Christian leaders in the areas of improving sexual integrity. Even with greater freedom to discuss this topic within the Christian church, there still seems to be some measure of taboo around giving permission to Christian leaders to discuss this issue.

What is at the heart of *Unburdened*?

MT: The central thesis is that men in Christian leadership struggle similarly as any other man with sexual integrity. We must encourage Christian leaders to have safe places to work through sexual integrity struggles as well as encouraging resources and permission to take whatever the next step is to improve sexual integrity in practical ways that are consistent with both clinical best practices and classic spiritual formation perspectives.

What are the main points you hope to convey to Christian leaders?

MT:

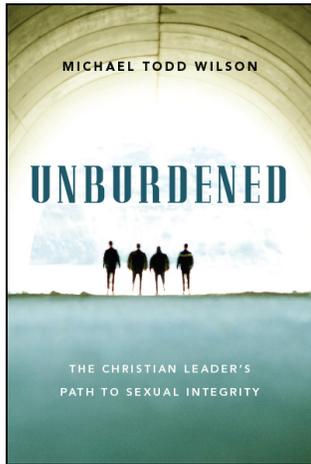
- Men in Christian leadership contend similarly as other Christian men for their sexual integrity.
- Pursuing sexual integrity isn't complicated; small but intentional steps form the stepping stones for growth.
- Men in Christian leadership can take the risk of forming relationships with safe men who can encourage each other toward greater sexual integrity.
- What other Christian men have learned about sexual integrity recovery, the rest of us (including many Christian leaders) can beneficially apply to strengthen our own sexual integrity journey.
- Giving in to sexual temptation is a weapon Satan has used against many Christian leaders for millennia and serves to siphon our strength; intentional steps to strengthen our sexual integrity reverses this process and allows us to redemptively reclaim this God-given resource and redirect it into our calling as Christian leaders.

What do you hope *Unburdened* accomplishes for Christian leaders?

MT: My heart is to give men in Christian leadership information about the nature of pursuing sexual integrity but also permission to both pursue sexual integrity and discuss it in a productive manner among their peers. Hopefully, this book will serve as an encouraging resource toward those goals.

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Many Christian leaders suffer the burdens of past and current mistakes in shame and silence when it comes to sexual sin and temptation. Michael Todd Wilson understands these challenges and provides honest, grace-filled counsel drawn from years of experience helping men achieve greater sexual integrity. He uncovers the everyday tendencies that keep us from overcoming our personal obstacles and provides fresh ideas to live in the light.

Getting Honest about Sexual Integrity

Among clergy, a 2009 study conducted by Texas Tech University of 460 male ministers revealed over 20 percent accessed pornography at least twice monthly. Older statistics on Christian clergy showed anywhere from 35–50 percent of ministers consider pornography a personal struggle, whether currently or in the past.

As Christian leaders, these stats don't really tell us anything we don't already know. Porn is a significant issue for both Christian men and Christian leaders alike. And that's just about pornography! This says nothing about our sexual integrity struggles with prostitution on business trips, strip clubs, affairs, masturbation, unbridled fantasy and checking out the sexy jogger in the rearview mirror. At some level, sexual integrity is challenging for all of us. Some experience good success; some don't. But the challenge to that integrity is *everywhere*.

This is true for Christian leaders across the spectrum. Anyone with a leadership role in the lives of other believers – pastors and clergy in traditional settings, denominational leaders, Christian nonprofit leaders, Christian small business owners, Christian counselors, elders, deacons and church small-group leaders – we all have feet of clay. *None* of us are somehow beyond the struggles of any other men in our sex-saturated culture...

This book isn't so much about equipping as it is about *giving permission*. Permission to work through our fear and internal resistance so we can simply take one single step in the direction of greater sexual integrity. Each of us pays a price when we're unable – both individually and collectively as Christian leaders – to take ownership (privately and publicly) of our common struggle with sexual integrity. Notice, I didn't say our common struggle with engaging sexual sin. Engaging sexual sin is optional; engaging sexual struggle isn't.

When we don't feel permission to be honest about our common struggle with sexual integrity, we're more likely to fall morally and lose what really matters: loss of ministry, marriage and family; loss of money; lost enjoyment in ministry; isolation from friends, colleagues and mentors. Not to mention an increased distraction away from our ultimate goal of impacting the kingdom – to the point of potentially becoming irrelevant in ministry.

If we can't own our common struggle with sexual integrity as Christian leaders, the consequences can find us seemingly without warning. Maybe some of us have been so successful playing Russian roulette that we forget one of the chambers is loaded. Even hearing about someone like Pastor Albert – which happens more frequently than we care to admit – doesn't always get our attention.

– Taken from chapter one, "Welcome to the Path"

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