

Dear Lord,

It's me, Rex -- again.

Look at me. I can't even bring myself to lift my eyes to the heavens. That's how bad I've been feeling – I can't bear to look you in the eyes -- even though I can't see your eyes. I can't bear to think of you peering into my soul. I'm ashamed, embarrassed, humiliated.

On the surface, everyone thinks I am a saint. I am a big donor to our church and participate in all the activities. I know how to pray in public, I know the answers to Bible trivia questions, I have been on mission trips, I've served at the soup kitchen, I've led our youth group in Bible study.

At my job I work hard. I come in early and I leave late and I am productive with my time. At home, I go to most of my kids activities, fix up all the broken things, and help my wife in the kitchen. We have a great life together -- all of us.

Sometimes I even fool myself into thinking I'm everything I should be.

But, ... but... there's that other side of me that no one knows about. The part of me that is totally inconsistent with all that I believe and confess. The part of me that doesn't want to be seen or known by You, by my family, by my friends. The part that feels like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden just after they had sinned.

I don't know how it happened, frankly. It started out innocently as I perused the internet and all of a sudden came upon an image of a beautiful woman in very little clothing. But next thing I know, those images, and worse, have consumed and cluttered my mind. And now I keep going there again and again. I can't stop. I am caught in a web of sites and scenes that I know come from the very depths of the Tempter.

That such a thing can be produced and published is wrong, in my opinion. That such a thing captivates me, one of your beloved, is unthinkable. And yet here I am, bowing my head one more time. Here I am, having been lured and enticed into the den of impurity.

And I come to you, like I am today, and ask for your forgiveness. And I think everything is going to be better. And the next day I'm at my computer again – and, sure enough, I'm traveling to the same places that I did before.

Am I really a Christian, when I can't seem to get rid of this nagging inconsistency? And if so, how come I keep failing over and over again. How come I can't be rid of this ugliness? What does it take to be free?

Last week I heard Pastor speaking on that woman caught in adultery, and my ears sprung to attention. Suddenly I realized that the woman I never could relate to because she seemed like some horrible, flagrantly ungodly person was now someone I had become. For you said it, "He who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery in his heart."

Or King David. I remember his story well. In shame he covered up his sin of adultery by causing the death of Bathsheba's husband. And then he brushed it under the carpet until you sent the prophet Nathan to confront him with the truth.

So now, here I am. You know me. You know me from the inside out. I throw myself at your feet and ask you, what do I do now? Can you love such a one as me? Can you possibly still love me after the places I've traveled? And can you help me escape from this web which has me so entranced?

Dear Rex,

Let me start out with the most important message that you need to hear. I don't want you to wait and wonder even another moment. So before I say anything else, know this: YES, I still love you. And YES, there is forgiveness even for one that has struggled with persistent sin like you.

There are many addictions that people face on a daily basis. Some find themselves drawn to the bottle. They know drunkenness is not what I desire and yet, somehow, they find that the liquor and its power seem to bring moments of escape and a short sense of exhilaration. So they drink -- and they feel good, for a time -- and then they fall to their knees and vow never to do it again.

For others it is the thrill of possibly winning a great pot of gold that draws them into spiritual inconsistency. They work hard for their money, and they have all the best intentions of using it wisely -- and then they go on a binge at a casino and blow it all in a whirlwind night at the tables.

Some find escape in a binge of food. Some find a sense of peace in the drag of a reefer. Some are consumed by getting their body to its peak physical condition. Others find themselves glued to a tube night after night. And some, like you, are seduced by the sexual passions that lie within.

Whatever the poison, it is exactly what you described, Rex. A web. A sticky web that wants to trap you and keep you day after day. And if it

can't get you by making you insensitive to your sin, then it will try to get you by leading you into despair and depression.

It was the same for that woman. She knew what she was doing when she went out the door each night into the arms of her illicit affair. She felt the fear, the guilt, the shame. But her inner drives pressed her onward; and so sometimes she buried her morality in a cloak of feelings and went on her way. Other times she wept with guilt and figured she could never be a child of God.

St. Paul talks similarly about such a drive in himself. He writes in Romans:

¹⁵I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²²For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. ²⁴What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

You see, the web of addiction is an incredibly powerful force fueled by the Tempter.

But remember me? I'm the one who said to Peter, when he asked how often you should forgive someone who has sinned against you, "Seventy times seven" -- an idiom that meant "unlimited." And I meant it.

I went to the cross to make it so. I took your inconsistencies upon my own body on the tree. I took the scars and wounds that your sin is causing you right now and followed them to their natural end when I shouted, "It is finished" and commended my spirit unto the care of my Father.

Please remember what that means for you. It means that know the pains of that addiction because it was laid on me. And, more importantly, it means that I paid the price for it so that you could be forgiven.

You heard what I said to the people surrounding the woman caught in adultery. "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

Do you know which person present that day could actually have thrown a stone? It was I. And guess what. I didn't throw one. Instead, I said to her, "I do not condemn you," and encouraged her to get out of her trap.

That's what I would say to you too. Yes, you are still my son who has a future life with me. Yes, I am filled with love and compassion for you. Don't ever doubt the power of my forgiveness or think that your

addiction has won. As long as you trust and believe in me, forgiveness is yours.

But yes, get out of the trap. And sometimes it isn't as easy as just praying to me and thinking it should magically go away. Be prepared to put some work into your commitment. Not everything comes easily -- your salvation certainly took some hard work on my part.

Perhaps you would do well to get your struggle out of the closet by talking with your pastor or a counselor or someone else who can assist you. He can help you be accountable and pray **with** you and **for** you.

And I will continue to send my Holy Spirit to be with you. His power will help you in your weakness and give you strength to resist temptation.

Don't look backward in despair, Rex; and don't look forward with doubt. Just seek my face.