Twitter Thread by Heather Griffin



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Part of what is going on here is that large sectors of evangelicalism are poorly equipped to help people deal with basic struggles, let alone the ubiquitous pornography addictions that most of their men have been enslaved to for years.

> There\u2019s this crazy horseshoe where where having a strong emphasis on human sinfulness just turns into a power washer that blasts all harm and wrong-doing down to the same level of things people (re: men) inevitably do given half a chance. https://t.co/BLOWzpf1RA
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> — Laura Robinson (@LauraRbnsn) February 13, 2021

On the one hand, there's a high standard of holiness. On the other hand, there's a model of growth that is basically "Try Harder to Mean it More." Identify the relevant scriptural truth & believe it with all of your sincerity so that you may access the Holy Spirit's help to obey.

Helping sincere believers believe and obey the Bible facts is pretty much all the Holy Spirit does these days, other than convict us of our sins in light of the Bible facts.

If you know you are sincere and hate your sin and believe the right Bible facts as hard as you can but continue to be enslaved to your pornography addiction, what else left for you to do? Just Really, Just Really, Just Really Trust God and Give it to Him?

To suggest that there are other strategies available sounds to those formed in this model of growth like one is also suggesting that the Bible is insufficient, but it also suggests something just as threatening- that there are aspects of reality that are not immediately apparent.

White men in these sectors of evangelicalism are habituated from an early age in astounding overconfidence that they are people that see reality more or less as it is because they are people that sincerely believe and understand the self-evident, plain meaning of scripture.

This overconfidence is a trap on several levels. It forms the basis of male dignity and authority. It simplifies a complex and overwhelming world. It keeps the outside world out by giving a license to write off anything that doesn't resonate with one's Sanctified Common Sense.

Not only does it make the world small and relatively controllable, it greatly reduces the scope of responsibility of white male believers. If you see the world with your more or less as it is, you are capable of defining and prioritizing what falls in the scope of "the gospel."

Mutually endorsing each other's Maturity Badges, men in these cultures can manage any unease or insecurity when faced with challenges to their understanding by reminding themselves that their bros also see things clearly & agree that the troublemakers are "unbiblical."

This means that they never have to take feedback seriously from anyone that is not formed in more or less the same ways that they are and does not have the same vested interest in maintaining the status quo.

The ways that we are formed by our communities are more or less invisible because the power of tradition and authority in shaping how its members think and feel and understand themselves and the world are minimized or dismissed.

"Tradition" is still treated as a largely pejorative term referring to the "traditions of man" that Catholics and Anglicans rely on (along with their feelings) to make judgements about reality because they just don't trust that God's Holy Word is sufficient.

If the meaning of scripture is self-evident and plain most of the time to the sincere believer and "everyone knows" what particular words mean by just looking them up in the dictionary, our understanding of God and scripture seems established apart from tradition.

The basis of unity in the church becomes a social contract in which all sincere believers in the plain meaning of scripture affirm that other members must also be sincere believers because they also see what is plain and self-evident in scripture.

The possibility that the other Clear-Eyed Stalwarts interpret scripture in the same way because they were formed in similar families, communities, church traditions, and social roles is not considered.

If you've been encouraged to be overconfident in your own judgement on the basis of your sincere belief in scripture by other men who are also overconfident in their own judgement, you will be of course overconfident in your ability to judge the characters of other people.

The standards of maturity slide down to what male leaders in the community can achieve with their sincere belief in scripture. White, middle-class, employed, sincere about scripture, brow furrowed at anything labeled liberal, possessing a pulse...the Kingdom of God is at hand!

This means that any presentable man with the ability to project sincerity and display a mastery of the Bible facts is Leadership Material. It's a system that is easy prey for narcissists because the system itself is a manifestation of communal narcissism.

When people have high standards of holiness but are not formed with the character to meet these standards; and when the appearance of meeting these standards is lavishly rewarded with few questions asked, narcissism flourishes.

Communal narcissism occurs partly because the goodness of God is threatened if the ability of men to discern the plain meaning of scripture and obey it appropriately when they are sincere is challenged.

When the role of the Holy Spirit is reduced to helping us believe, understand, and obey scripture when it is read or heard, the suggestion that we might not have everything we need to get life sorted from there suggests a failure of the Holy Spirit and the goodness of God.

When you and everyone that you trust has built your life on that kind of foundationalism, you cannot afford to look too closely at the cracks in the foundations. The goodness of God and the basis of your dignity and authority and security and identity would be at stake.

Also, the cracks are invisible partly because the community doesn't train you to attend and notice the cracks. If someone on the outside points them out, they will just sound crazy or like they're overreacting to anyone whose judgement is respected in the community.

It's not like the warning signs pile up and overwhelm you. Each complaint or challenge is deflected and explained away one by one. The weight of them doesn't get a chance to accumulate.

If the Troublemakers get louder in their complaints because the church is harming people, this is further evidence of their lack of credibility because they are "angry," "emotional," & guided by feelings rather than the self-controlled reason that comes from trusting God's Word.

Going back to how this relates to widespread pornography addiction among white evangelical men- there's little support other than accountability programs that consist of exhausting rounds of "Try Harder to Mean it More."

When men don't experience freedom from their pornography addictions in this model of discipline and support, this creates a problem. They know they are meaning it as hard as they possibly can. They know their bros are meaning it as hard as they possibly can.

They know that parts of them hate their sin because whacking themselves over the head with self-loathing is just about the only tool that they have when sincerely trying to trust God doesn't prevent them from whacking...other parts of themselves.

If nearly all the other sincere Bible-believing men that they know and trust continually struggle with pornography addiction and rarely get better, the problem has to be reframed. We have no other resources other than believing the Bible more sincerely.

Correction- "Praying more" is also in the suggested toolbox. It's entirely possible to spend your entire life in an evangelical church and for "read your Bible," "pray more," and "just trust God" to be the only spiritual practices ever recommended.

This wouldn't be a huge problem if evangelical churches trained their people in HOW to pray and HOW to read scripture and HOW to build trust with God and HOW to troubleshoot these practices if something's not connecting, but actual training in these practices is rare.

If you don't pick up how to do these practices from a relatively emotionally healthy and mature family or mentors, you can be told to do them your entire life without ever being taught HOW to do them. The meaning of the words & how they should be obeyed is supposed to be obvious.

Anyway- how to reframe the problem of ongoing pornography addiction on the part of sincere men? Unintentionally misreading the struggle of the "I" in Romans 7.7-25 is a particularly favored strategy.

If men are sincerely doing what they don't want to do when they consume pornography and agree with God that this is sin, displaying self-loathing to oneself, God, and others becomes a liturgy that assures them that they are still on the right track.

Any of the various points in their lives when they cry out "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" in legitimate anguish, despair, and frustration might finally be the time when they mean it hard enough for God to zap them into self-control.

If this takes for every, there is the assurance that God is sovereign and that "some things just don't get fully dealt with this side of heaven." Periodic bouts of addiction followed with white-knuckled sobriety followed by relapse become the norm, dignified by scripture.

Because so few men experience growth and victory in this area, sexual addiction becomes this overwhelming and inescapable force in the white evangelical male imagination.

If so few men ever get better from them their enslavement to pornography, the sense that "That could EASILY be me" when they see Ravi Zacharia's pattern of unchecked, predatory, narcissistic sexual abuse is entirely plausible for men in Owen Strachan's world.

If nothing much can be done about their pornography addictions, what could possibly be done for a sincere, Stand-up Guy like Zacharias who they recognized as one of their own & whose darker and deeper enslavement was enabled by money, power, authority, & fame?

There is nothing to be done about men like Ravi Zacharias other than to proclaim that they were not really One of Us after all.

Since he clearly did not lack knowledge of the correct Bible facts, his sincerity belief must be impugned...but...lurking in the back of the mind might be a glimmer of self-awareness that is too scary to sit with for long periods of time.

Though parts of their soul "agree with the law of God" & Just Really, Just Really hate their own sin, other parts of their minds absolutely hella love that sin and are all for it when they are acting out.

The parts of the soul that are driving the bus when they act out their pornography addiction are followed swiftly after the hit by parts that bombard them with shame and self-hatred and yell "What the hell was I thinking?!!"

It can feel like the parts of them that act-out are a completely different person that is unreachable (and therefore uncontrollable) by the parts of them that want to obey God can't reach.

They have no other tools other than trying to kill the "bad" parts off through self-hatred and bashing them with scripture, categorizing this (if they reflect on it at all) as "putting to death the sinful flesh" and "dying to self," etc.

There's no encouragement to seek to reconcile these parts that act out by pursuing them with God's loving-kindness, because particularly for Reformed or Reformedish bros, the only option is to bring the full Wrath of God.

They become caught in a kind of internal ping-pong game in which they escalate the shame & self-hatred to control sinful behavior, then escape into the pornography addiction to escape the shame & self-hatred, back & forth, wearily anticipating that this will go on until they die.

Most of them have no narrative of how their sexual addiction is connected with how they were formed to bond and connect (or not connect) in their families or origin, church, or broader culture.

Sexual sin becomes the focal point and explanation for most of one's relational problems, but it's usually understood in abstraction from emotional development &patterns of attachment (these are dismissed as unbiblical secular categories in much of evangelicalism/fundamentalism).

There is rarely anyone connecting their addiction to their father's lack of emotional availability or ways that misbehavior was controlled through anger and shame in their families and childhood churches or the expectation that it's normal for close relationships to be joyless.

These considerations seem like an attempt to "blame other people" for their problems and avoid "personal responsibility." Recall that all it should take for anyone to be "personally responsible" is to sincerely believe the scripture and obey through the Spirit.

There's very little expectation of connection to God, despite the phrase "it's not a religion, being a relationship" being deployed as a favorite cliche or a lexicon to "encourage" someone who is struggling or in attempts to respond to critiques of their faith.

There's also no narrative other than "I just must love my sin more" to explain why some men either don't struggle with pornography or recover.

The possibility that they may have had more life-giving relationships in their family of origin that set them up to connect with God and gave them hope that their relationships could be restored and flourish after shame isn't part of the explanatory toolbox.

Therefore, it doesn't occur to anyone to ask how the church can help people connect to God and experience life-giving relationships with God and others so we can overcome sin and walk in the peace and joy of the Spirit.

The people who are walking in relative freedom have the same explanations for why they are not struggling as much as everyone else. "I just got the point where I just had to trust God, and He took it away."

In the Try Harder to Mean it More model of growth, Captain Purity isn't struggling with porn right now because he Finally Just Really Trusted God enough & was doing his devotions & praying and witnessing & hitting all the vague markers of flourishing recognized in his community.

The guy that's doing well might have way more relational resources that shaped his identity, gave him a baseline level of security assuring him that God won't hate him if he does bad things, and helped him form more supportive relationships.

It's not going to occur to him to include those as relevant factors in his testimony in any deep reflective way other than to think those people and wonder why he was led astray for a time in spite of God's blessings.

He's not going to have much to offer in the way of wise advice to his still-struggling bros who DON'T have a well of security from their family that formed the foundation of their relationship with God. Those factors are neither visible or relevant in this system.

He can only encourage them to read their Bible and pray more and trust God and apologize to their wives. He means well. He wants to help. He wants them to have the freedom he's experiencing. He doesn't know how to help them troubleshoot.

He knows more than he can tell them but doesn't have language for reflecting on what he knows or how he knows it. Simplified models of growth based on knowledge and sincere responses to truth leave us practice-blind and vague about the few practices we do acknowledge.

Remember- scripture is self-interpreting, therefore the aid of the Holy Spirit should also help you act on it in obvious ways. If you know not to do something, don't do it. How our affections and desires become distorted by sin and how they change is as simple as that.

These cultures, with the best of intentions, train people to dress up their despair as hope, doubt as faith, & defeat as perseverance. Nobody means to do this. Nobody can afford to acknowledge this because they are doing everything they know how to do and trying so hard to obey.

This leaves people with parts of them that are carrying a massive amount of anger and resentment towards God that they have no idea how to handle other than trying to kill it off or banish it to the wilderness.

No one teaches them how to talk to God about their disappointment or anger because the presence of anger or disappointment towards God is something they expect God to be angry or disappointed about. God has already told them to "just trust" and they haven't.

This also plays out in that they have no way of talking to their leaders or fathers about ways that they feel angry or disappointed about the lack of effective help in their relationships.

Pretending that other well-intentioned men are mature if they are sincere about scripture becomes an act of love and faith and hope. We are trusting God for what is unseen and showing grace and being faithful & acknowledging that "no one is perfect but Jesus."

This makes it very difficult to hold leaders accountable if they are good at being presentable. Not trusting shiny leaders who display sincerity about Bible facts feels like a failure to trust God.

Because the standard of fruitfulness is lowered to being sincere about bible facts and presentably middle class, we get into the habit of calling a tree by the fruit that it has on its label rather than fruit it produces. Our criteria for good fruit is impoverished.

The longer people persevere in these church systems, the more it costs them to consider how little transformation is actually occurring in people's lives. People are trying so hard to serve God and each other with so little training for their character and capacities.

It's not good news for people who have given their lives to these communities to be told that God wants so much more us. It's an insult to everyone who has sincerely worked hard toiling in the fields of the Lord with only a few glimpses of good fruit and joy to show for it.

To say that things don't have to be the way they are is to also say that things didn't have to be the way they were. Years of persevering in misery and joyless relationships in sincere effort to be faithful to God would then be misguided.

Think of the rage. Also, think of the shame of having encouraged other people to just keep on keeping on despite the lack of transformation.

No one can handle that kind of worldview and identity implosion unless they see someone that they trust get better. If that person offers them a better map to walk out of the elaborate prison, it starts to be safe to hope be open to something better.

The shame is too much to handle for people who have unsuccessfully tried to control their behavior with toxic shame for years thinking that they were doing what God wanted them to do and listening to the Holy Spirit. We have to have hope that is bigger than the threat of shame.

To close off this thread for how, here are some resources if you want to jump off the hamster wheel of "Try Harder to Mean it More," with a caveat- books can help, but you need to learn practices from real wise people with real bodies that can help you learn how to DO stuff.

I recommend regularly praying along these lines- "Jesus, I want to trust you and hope that I can get better, but I am so discouraged and tired. I'm afraid to hope because I'm afraid of being disappointed. I have tried as hard as I can for as long as I can to obey you."

"I'm afraid that anything that would actually help me would demand more energy than I have. I'm afraid it would be more information that would take forever to learn and that I would have to mean it with an intensity that I can't muster."

"I can't imagine what a different way of being and relating and thinking would even look like, but I want whatever it is that you have for me, as long as it is good and real and helpful and really from you."

"Please show me the ways that I have pushed away your help because the help was in a form I didn't expect or recognize, and I thought it was either unbiblical because it was unfamiliar or irrelevant because I assumed I could judge what was relevant."

"I can't just force myself to trust you anymore. This probably wasn't trust in the first place. All the parts of me that I've tried to kill off have only come back stronger, and it's harder and harder to beat them back down each time."

"I don't know any other way to control my behavior except for beating myself up, and parts of me also expect that you are mad at me and think I'm bad and are frustrated with me because I'm not getting better with the help you've already given me."

"If the parts of me that are yelling at me & shaming me are not reflecting how you relate to me, I want to know it. The thought of praying in a way that connects to you instead of just talking at you compulsively scares me because I'm afraid you are mad at me & will yell at me."

"Will you please open my eyes to ways that you are moving to reach me with your love that are beyond what I can control and not something that I have to manufacture by 'just trusting, even though I don't see it.'"

"I need you to raise my ceiling of trust with you by giving me experiences of you moving in my life that build trust. I need it to not just be in my head anymore. I need it to not be dependent on my willpower to believe."

"I need you to retune me so I can receive YOUR trustworthiness so that I can respond to your trustworthiness with trust. I need you to open my eyes to see what the Bible is trying to say about you. I thought that I should already be able to see already, but I can't."

"I need you to begin clearing off my blocked receivers so they can begin receiving. I need you to reshape my receivers so that they can receive you. If this reshaping takes time, I need you to help me see the process enough to hope that the process is going somewhere good."

"Please move in my life to move me away from relationships and situations that keep me stuck. Please move me towards relationships and resources and situations that will help me receive what you have for me. Keep me away from false hope and quick fixes."

"I don't know how trust works because I thought it was a choice that I made when a claim by a sincere person sounded true and biblical. I don't know how to build trust. I don't know when someone has earned my trust or not."

"I need you to guide me through these places where I don't know how to see yet and to make me into someone that can see. I need you to build healthy humility in me so I won't cut myself off from growth with overconfidence that I already know everything I need to know."

People to hang out with who know how to do stuff: Life Model Works: https://t.co/kJn2lDDOqn

Their book on narcissism in leaders, communities, and ourselves is relevant for responding to the Ravi Zacharias scandal. https://t.co/maaMz43j5v

Life Model Works's resources are hard to navigate and unfamiliar, so just get in touch with their team and ask for help in getting started. If possible, go to their conferences when the pandemic lifts. It's worth the investment.

Other resources that are good at teaching people practices and growing in our relationships with God and others- Thrive Today, a sister ministry of Life Model Works. Again- get in touch with them. Ask for help. https://t.co/0n7hf2NZqE

If you have been told to pray your entire life as the solution to every struggle but no one has taught you HOW to pray & you are afraid that connecting to God in prayer is going to mean that he is going to yell at you, check out https://t.co/BnrcnKsdxq & https://t.co/E6Nvaklyks

Immanuel Approach prayer can also help you if you have a hard time reading your Bible because you hear God/Paul yelling at you with an angry tone of voice about how bad you are.

If your marriage is struggling and you have been taught to expect that marriage just descends into one long, joyless choice to "just choose to love," get this book https://t.co/d6NunciUeM & look for an Emotionally Focused Therapy therapist in your area.

If you've been told that Biblical Counseling (especially the ACBC variety) is the only counseling believers should seek and that everything else is unbiblical, we can have a long conversation sometime about why that's not true.

The way that they read scripture distorts it, though I believe the counselors are well intended & are trying to help people. I believe many of them DO help people. However, you don't get better with the help they have to give, you will likely get the message that it's your fault.

If all sincere believers should be able to understand and obey scripture & Biblical Counseling is the one true way to help you get there, you're pretty much screwed if they can't help you because you have nothing left that's still considered safe because it's labeled "Biblical."

It's our old trap of easy knowledge that minimizes the Holy Spirit. If you were raised to functionally view the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Scriptures & are eeked out by the Holy Spirit & afraid of crazy, abusive "charismatics," start here: https://t.co/vIx7z3N0og

If you are struggling with pornography or other forms of sex addiction and don't know where to go for help and are tired of "Try Harder to Mean it More," start here: https://t.co/Char0VkWcE

If you have been misreading Romans 7 to explain why you don't get better & need a better way of thinking about your internal struggles between parts of you that want to do what is right and parts of you that want to do what is wrong, look for an Internal Family Systems therapist.

Some Christian therapists practice Internal Family Systems and can help you integrate it w/ your faith. We are grown-ups and can ask for wisdom & do the hard work of developing biblical, theological language to describe helpful things that bear good fruit. https://t.co/XcvLRgjix7

Also, this is another conversation for another time, but if you grew up in this sort of church culture, you were probably taught that feelings are trash and should be suppressed or ignored and that "mind" meant true bible thoughts. This isn't a biblical model.

When the scripture says "your heart is deceitful above all things," it's not saying "your feelings are deceitful but you can trust the Bible facts in your brain."

In the Hebrew bible, your thinking and feeling and discerning and everything else took place in your "heart." Whatever deception your feelings are subject to is also deception your thinking is subject to.

Just because we assent to something cognitively doesn't mean we fully believe it. Feelings are registers of reality,, but they are an indication of what stories we actually believe. The goal is to win the trust of these parts so that they can come in line with the truth.

You can't do that effectively if you're trying to beat your feelings down with Bible facts. Some evangelical subcultures assume that if we take feelings seriously, we're placing them above reality. Also not true. There are more than two options here.

That's it for now. @threadreaderapp unroll, please.