

PURE

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HOLY

Youth Workshop

YOUR BRAIN ON PORN

5 PROVEN WAYS PORNOGRAPHY
WARPS YOUR MIND AND THE
5 BIBLICAL WAYS TO RENEW IT.





PORN ON THE BRAIN

“It seems so obvious,” says regular *Playboy* writer Damon Brown. “If we invent a machine, the first thing we are going to do—after making a profit—is use it to watch porn.” In the last 150 years, pornography has ridden on the heels of new technology, from the photograph to the film projector, from VHS to DVDs, from the World Wide Web to smartphones. “You name it,” Brown says, “pornography planted its big flag there first, or at least shortly thereafter.”¹

We’d like to believe Christians are immune to the prevalence of pornography, but Paul Fishbein, founder of Adult Video News, is right when he says, “Porn doesn’t have a demographic—it goes across all demographics.”²

That includes the church. According to data taken from Internet users who took part in the General Social Survey, those who self-identify as “fundamentalists” are 91% *more* likely to look at porn than the general public.³

“Porn doesn’t have a demographic—it goes across all demographics.”

We are only beginning to see the effects of mass-produced porn on our culture. The Internet generation—those who have grown up with online media in the home—have now entered young adulthood. Many saw pornography for the first time when they were very young, and today consuming Internet pornography is a weekly, or even daily, affair for many college-age men and women.⁴

Over a decade ago, Dr. Judith Reisman called porn an “erototoxin,” theorizing that the brain itself might be *damaged* while watching porn.⁵ She speculated that future brain studies would reveal that the surge of neurochemicals and hormones released when someone watches porn has measurably negative effects on the brain.

Recent studies are now validating her theory.

DESENSITIZED TO PLEASURE

God wired the brain in such a way that it wants to remember where our natural drives are satisfied. If the body is thirsty, the brain's job is to remember in vivid detail where water can be found, and *dopamine* is the neurotransmitter responsible for helping us remember where to satisfy our natural drives.

When sexually stimulated, dopamine is released into a region of the brain responsible for emotion and learning, giving the viewer a sense of *sharp focus* and a awareness of *craving*: “I have got to have this thing; this is what I need right now.” Dopamine supplies a great sense of pleasure. The next time the viewer gets the itch for more sexual gratification, small packets of dopamine are released in the brain, saying, “Remember where you got your fix last time. Go there to get it.”

In the context of a secure marital relationship, this push to return to the source of pleasure brings couples back together again and again in sexual intimacy, building a bond of love. But in the context of viewing pornography, the effect is something altogether different.

Continued exposure to porn, especially for long periods of time, releases surge after surge of dopamine, giving the brain an unnatural high. The brain eventually fatigues, limiting the release of dopamine, leaving the viewer wanting more but unable to reach a level of satisfaction. This is called *desensitization*. Everyday pleasures begin to lose their luster—including sex—and the viewer expands their pornographic tastes and seeks out more novel or harder pornography to get the same arousal.⁶

James says sin begins in strong desire, but “sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:14-15). Growing sin brings about all forms of death—death to pleasure, death to relationships, and ultimately eternal death.

HYPER-SENSITIZED TO LUST

While the brain becomes desensitized to pleasure in general, it becomes hyper-sensitive to various sexual triggers. In his book *Wired for Intimacy*, Dr. William Struthers offers a way to understand sensitization. He writes:

Like a path is created in the woods with each successive hiker, so do the neural paths set the course for the next time an erotic image is viewed. Over time these neural paths become wider as they are repeatedly

traveled with each exposure to pornography. They become the automatic pathway through which interactions with women are routed. The neural circuitry anchors this process solidly in the brain. With each lingering stare, pornography deepens the Grand Canyon-like gorge in the brain through which images of women are destined to flow. This extends to women that they have not seen naked or engaging in sexual acts as well. All women become potential porn stars in the minds of these men.⁷

In other words, the more a person masturbates to pornography, the wider the neuro-superhighway becomes, developing more and more “on-ramps.” Sexual cues are everywhere and they all lead to the same place.

The Apostle Paul vividly describes the never-ending lust people experience when cut off from the life of God. He writes, “They have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity” (Eph. 4:19, NIV). One act of lust leads to two, two leads to four, and four leads to an all-consuming desire. Its appetite is never satiated.

CRIPPLED WILLPOWER

The process of sensitization and desensitization impacts the prefrontal cortex in the brain. As dopamine receptors degenerate in the brain, changes take place in the prefrontal lobes. This region of the brain is responsible for our willpower, regulating our behavior, and making decisions based on wisdom and morals.

Normally, when emotions, impulses, and urges surge from the midbrain, the prefrontal lobes are there to exercise “executive control” over them. But when this region is weakened by continual porn use, willpower is eroded and there is nothing to stop the sense of craving for pornography. As a result, the person experiences the urge, not just as a desire, but as an intense *need*. Neuroscientists call this problem *hypofrontality*. This person is no longer has mastery over his passions but is a slave to them.⁸

It is just as Paul says: as men and women become calloused, desensitized to God and all that is good, they also experience a great “hardness of heart” (Eph. 4:18). They become “slaves to various passions and pleasures” (Titus 3:3).

Our brains are designed by God to weigh consequences and situations and judiciously choose when to allow cravings through, but hypofrontality means the porn-saturated mind has a very limited ability to do this. The prefrontal region is one

of the things that makes humans unique—filled with rationality and conscience. For this reason, one could say that viewing porn, in a very real sense, makes us *less human*.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM WITH PORN

Desensitized to pleasure, sensitized to lust, and crippled in willpower—these are some of the things modern science is unearthing about the affects of porn on the brain. As we will see in the next chapter, studies have shown how porn shapes our sexual beliefs and expectations.

Based on observations coming from the fields of psychology, neurology, and the social sciences, there's much that can be said today about the evils of pornography. Pornography is addictive. The women in porn are often coerced, sexually abused, and encouraged to use drugs. Porn use is contributing to divorce rates. All of these are true, however, it is important for Christians—and for human beings in general—to understand the cardinal problem with pornography.

Pornography is essentially wrong because of its message: it rips sexuality from its relational context and presents human beings not as creatures made in God's image, but as sexual commodities—something to be bought and sold.

THE GOSPEL SAYS:

- 💬 “This is my body, which is given for you” (Luke 22:19).
- 💬 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17).
- 💬 “Your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3).
- 💬 Treat “older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Timothy 5:2).
- 💬 “This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

PORN CULTURE SAYS:

- 💬 “This is her body taken by me.”
- 💬 “Relax, for there is nothing wrong with your fantasies.”
- 💬 “Your life is found in your hidden adventures online.”
- 💬 “Treat older women as cougars and younger women as barely legal.”
- 💬 “This is real life, that we would never be denied our every sexual desire, no matter how misogynistic or demeaning.”



5 WAYS THAT PORN WARPS YOUR MIND

In the early 1980s, Dr. Dolf Zillmann of Indiana University and Dr. Jennings Bryant of The University of Alabama wondered whether continued exposure to video pornography had any impact on people's sexual beliefs and their attitudes towards women. For their experiment, 80 male and 80 female college-age participants were divided into three subgroups, and each group was shown 4 hours and 48 minutes of media.

- The first group, the “Massive Exposure Group,” was shown 36 non-violent pornographic films over a six-week period.
- The second group, the “Intermediate Exposure Group,” was exposed to 18 pornographic films and 18 regular films over a six-week period.
- The third (control) group, the “No Exposure Group,” was shown 36 non-pornographic movies over a six-week period.

Later, these groups were asked a variety of questions ranging from their personal preferences to social issues.⁹

The results were fascinating...

FINDING #1:

WATCHING PORN DECREASES OUR SEXUAL SATISFACTION

Zillmann and Bryant found a direct correlation between the amount of pornography one viewed and one's overall sexual satisfaction in real relationships. Participants from the Massive Exposure Group reported *less* satisfaction with their intimate

partners: they were less likely to be pleased with their partner's physical appearance, affection, and sexual performance.

They concluded that porn consumers eventually compare their spouse, their boyfriend, or their girlfriend with images of porn models.

Another study appearing in the *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* in 2002 found similar results. When men and women were exposed to pictures of female centerfold models from *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, this significantly lowered their judgments about the attractiveness of “average” people.¹⁰

This is disheartening because God is not the enemy of pleasure and sexual attraction; He is the Creator of it. The Bible proclaims it. Even the demons know it. But it is human beings who are most likely to forget it.

The demon Screwtape, in C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, reminds his young demonic apprentice of this truth. “[God’s] a hedonist at heart. All those fasts and vigils and stakes and crosses are only a facade. Or only like foam on the sea shore. Out at sea, out in His sea, there is pleasure and more pleasure. He makes no secret of it; at His right hand are ‘pleasures forevermore.’...He has filled the world full of pleasures.”¹¹

Sex is one of these God-created pleasures. To highlight the goodness of sexual pleasure, God inspired King Solomon to write a little book of romantic melodies called “The Song of Songs”—a title that means “the best love song of all.” This book expresses—at times in erotic detail—the pleasure and joy of marital sexuality.

But like all good things, sin aims to twist this pleasure.

When people become more and more entrenched in pornography, this ends up only deluding and deadening their libido. After years working with men and women

entrenched in pornography, Dr. Mary Anne Layden concluded, “Having spent so much time in unnatural sexual experiences with paper, celluloid and cyberspace, they seem to find it difficult to have sex with a real human being.” Pornography, she says, “is toxic miseducation about sex and relationships,” training men and women to expect online “designer sex” in the real world.¹²

“Pornography essentially trains men and women to be consumers, not lovers; to treat sex as a commodity; to think about sex as something on-tap and made-to-order.”

This isn't merely about comparing someone's body type or sexual performance.

When someone is exposed to pornography again and again, they can start comparing *the whole fantasy experience* to their normal sex lives. Instead of being drawn to one woman or one man, they end up being turned on by the *variety* and *novelty* porn offers them.

Neurobiologist Peter Milner explains that our brains are wired to be attracted to that which is unfamiliar and novel. This inward drive is what helps us to learn new things and adapt to our environment. But, he explains, it is possible “to become addicted to novelty and uncertainty.”¹³ Over time the brain that feeds on erotic media is trained to equate sexual excitement with the novelty and variety of pornography. Eventually the familiar face, body, and sexual performance of a spouse doesn’t arouse the way it used to.

For all of Solomon’s romantic wisdom and marital passion, even he was ensnared by a lust for “variety.” In 1 Kings 11 we learn Solomon eventually accumulated 700 wives and 300 concubines because “he loved many foreign women” (v.1).

Pornography essentially trains men and women to be *consumers*, not lovers; to treat sex as a commodity; to think about sex as something on-tap and made-to-order. As Dr. Judith Reisman rightly concludes, pornography “castrates” men visually, training them to retreat into the realm of fantasy if they want to be aroused.¹⁴

FINDING #2:

WATCHING PORN DISCONNECTS US FROM REAL RELATIONSHIPS

After their experiment, Zillmann and Bryant concluded that the more porn someone saw, the more likely they were to prefer sex without emotional involvement. After watching less than five hours of pornography over a six-week period, the Massive Exposure group was more likely to *devalue* marriage, the idea of having children, and the importance of faithfulness in a relationship. They also showed a greater acceptance of casual sex.

“Casual sex” is not new to our generation. Even 2,000 years ago, the apostle Paul planted churches in places like Corinth—a city with a reputation that might make a Las Vegas pimp blush. In Corinth, sex was a religion—literally. The temple to Aphrodite was home to thousands of priestesses—glorified prostitutes—who serviced the worshippers. The loose sexual mores of Corinth were even lower than those of the rest of the Roman Empire, and the verb “corinthianize” was coined to describe this lifestyle of decadent sin.

Paul's word for this way of life was *porneia*: a persistent lifestyle of sexual immorality. To the church in Corinth, surrounded by these depraved influences, Paul writes, "Flee from sexual immorality...Because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband" (1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2). Paul commends a habit of regular sexual intimacy between husbands and wives because the temptation to sin is, at times, very strong (7:3-5). For Paul, sexual passion finds its haven in a marital relationship.

Pornography, however, is not only an expression of casual sex but feeds a desire for it, as the Zillmann-Bryant study confirms. We see this especially among the

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younger generations who have taken up the habit of "sexting," sending racy photos or videos of themselves to others—essentially becoming someone else's pornography. As one 17-year-old girl put it: "You can't get pregnant from it, and you can't transmit STDs. It's a kind of safe sex."¹⁵

Dr. Gary Brooks, author of *The Centerfold Syndrome*, explains how pornography alters the way men think about romantic relationships. The glossy magazine pictures or pixels on the screen have no sexual or relational expectations of their own. This essentially trains men to desire the cheap thrill of fantasy over a committed relationship. Pornography trains men to be digital voyeurs, to prefer *looking* at women more than seeking out genuine intimacy.¹⁶

We might say the real problem with pornography isn't that it shows us *too much* sex, but that it doesn't show us *enough*—it cannot possibly give us an experience of real intimacy. Porn treats sex one-dimensionally, packages it in pixels, and rips it from its relational context. It only titillates us with images of sex but cannot offer the experience of closeness with another person.

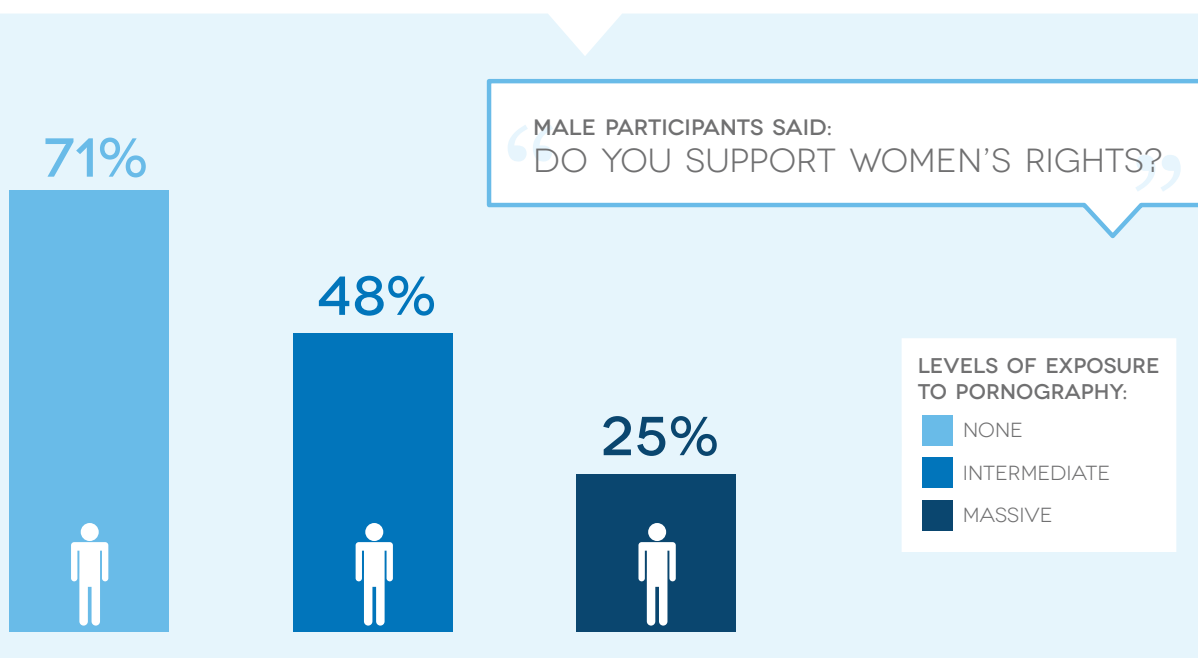
FINDING #3:

WATCHING PORN LOWERS OUR VIEW OF WOMEN

In the Zillmann-Bryant experiment, the Massive Exposure Group was far more likely to believe women in society really fit the stereotype of the women they

saw in pornographic films. They were more likely to believe all women are really “as hysterically euphoric in response to just about any sexual or pseudosexual stimulation, and as eager to accommodate seemingly any and every sexual request” as the porn girls.

Participants in the experiment were asked to rate their overall support for women’s rights. Men in the Massive Exposure Group showed a 46% drop in support compared to the No Exposure Group. And among *women* participants, this drop was an alarming 30%.



Contrary to the message of pornography, the Scriptures tell us both men and women are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28). The implications of this doctrine are far-reaching. As image-bearers we “reflect” God in a way no other creature on earth does. As far as God is concerned, to assault someone made in His image is a great crime (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). Knowing we are made in God’s image should impact how we see ourselves and how we see one another.

It is not only men who bear this image, but women as well. In human history the failure to appreciate this fact has led to all manner of abuses to women. And in our increasingly sexualized culture, it is women who are often the most dehumanized as they are constantly rated for the size, shape, and harmony of their body parts. Often pornography, and even mainstream media, portrays women as people who are *glad*

to be used and objectified. It isn't surprising to find women increasingly devalued in our porn-saturated culture.

“Free porn” is a misnomer. Pornography always costs somebody something. And it's the women and girls in our culture, surrounded by boys and men with porn expectations, who often end up paying the highest price.

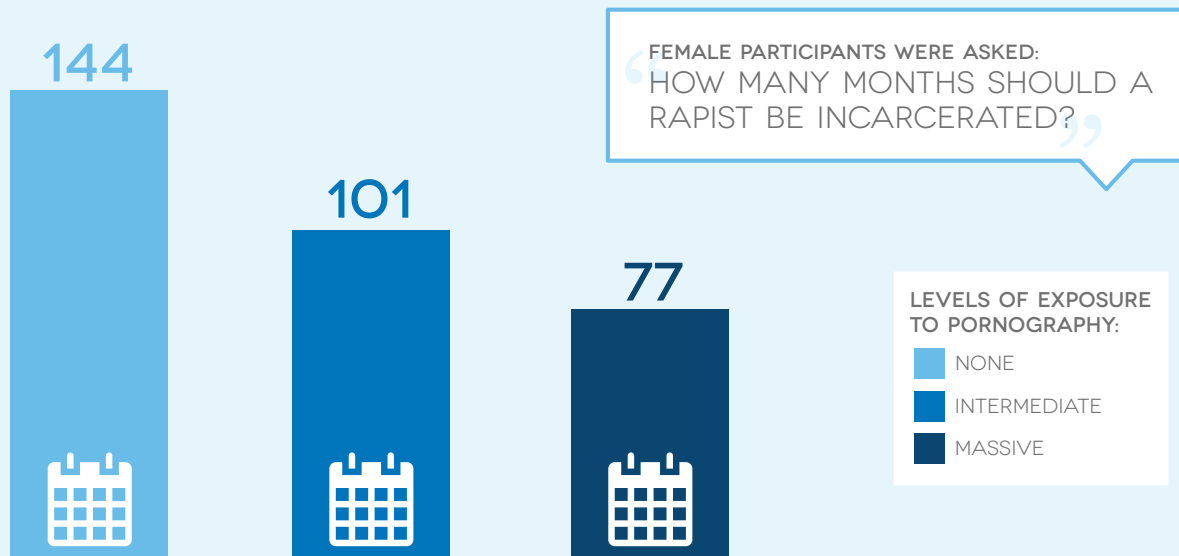
Naomi Wolf, writing for *New York Magazine*, puts it best: “Today real naked women are just bad porn.” The onslaught of porn doesn't train men to value women as people made in the image of God, but instead trains people to see fewer and fewer women as porn-worthy.¹⁷

FINDING #4:

WATCHING PORN DESENSITIZES US TO CRUELTY

In Zillmann and Bryant's experiment, when asked how common certain sexual activities were in society—activities like anal sex, group sex, sadomasochism, and bestiality—the percentages given by the Massive Exposure Group were two to three times higher than the No Exposure Group. Pornography led them to believe these sexual activities were more common.

Watching pornography also conditioned participants to trivialize rape. Participants were asked to read about a legal case where a man raped a female hitchhiker and



then recommend a length for the rapist's prison sentence. Males in the No Exposure Group said 94 months; the Massive Exposure Group cut this by nearly half, recommending only 50 months.

Pornography essentially desensitizes us to sexual violence and cruelty, even when the pornography is considered “non-violent” in nature, as in the Zillmann and Bryant study. Unfortunately, aggression is common in pornography today.¹⁸ A 2000 study discovered the presence of violence in 42% of online pornography. Today, it is not uncommon for even the youngest Internet users to be exposed to graphic material. By the age of 18, for instance, 39% of boys and 23% of girls have seen acts of sex involving bondage online.¹⁹

In a 2007 presentation, Robert Wosnitzer, Ana Bridges, and Michelle Chang released the results of their study of the 50 top selling adult DVDs. After analyzing 304 distinct scenes in these films, they found 3,376 acts of verbal or physical aggression—that's an act of aggression every minute and a half. About 90% of scenes contained at least one act of aggression. Verbal aggression, such as name-calling, was present in about half of adult video scenes. In 73% of instances, men were the aggressors, and when women were the aggressors, most of the time they were being aggressive to another woman. In 95% of the scenes, the person receiving the aggression reacted neutrally or positively to it. Positive or healthy sexual acts, such as kissing or compliments, were found in only 10% of scenes.²⁰

“Often pornography, and even mainstream media, portrays women as people who are glad to be used and objectified.”

These numbers give us a glimpse of the sexual education porn consumers receive. Routinely, pornography depicts acts of aggression, cruelty, and degradation, and teaches viewers that women enjoy these acts.

Lust and abuse have always been closely related—and the Bible routinely links them. David's daughter Tamar was beautiful, and David's son Amnon secretly loved her from a distance. Amnon described his obsession and lust as so great, it “tormented” him to the point of being ill (2 Sam. 13:2). Eventually he hatched a plan to get her into bed. When the moment came and they were alone, he forced himself upon her and raped her. Then, the Scriptures say, after he had his way with her, he “hated her with very great hatred” (v.15) and threw her out of his house.

A story like this shows the insidious nature of lust. True love leads us to serve one another as human beings created in God's image. Lust leads us to *use* one another, to see others as expendable. And just like in the case of Tamar, a mind that only sees women as objects of lust, can also easily be numbed to cruelty towards women.

FINDING #5:

WATCHING PORN MAKES US WANT TO WATCH MORE PORN

Two weeks after the Zillmann-Bryant experiment, all participants were given an assortment of pornographic and non-pornographic films to watch in private. Those who were exposed to more pornography were significantly more likely to want to watch hardcore porn.

Continually watching pornography has been shown to produce an escalation effect. Fifteen years after this experiment, Dr. Zillmann continued research in this area, finding that the habitual use of pornography led to greater tolerance of sexually explicit material over time, requiring the viewer to consume more novel and bizarre material to achieve the same level of arousal or interest.²¹

As Solomon said, sex is *intoxicating* (Song 1:4). To his students he wrote, "Rejoice in the wife of your youth...be intoxicated always in her love," but do not get drunk on the embrace of a forbidden woman (Prov. 5:18-20).

Solomon had no knowledge of the human brain the way we do today, but his words on the intoxicating nature of sexuality take on a new richness as we study the effects of pornography on the mind and body.

There is considerable debate today about the existence of "sex addiction" or "porn addiction." Generally, counselors and therapists agree the phenomenon is real: in a 2008 survey, over 90% of therapists believed a person could become addicted to cybersex.²² Some have proposed calling this "hypersexual disorder"²³ or "sexual compulsion."²⁴

Cambridge Neuropsychiatrist Valerie Voon's research demonstrates that the brains of habitual porn users show great similarity to the brains of alcoholics. A brain structure called the ventral striatum plays a significant role in the reward system of the brain—the pleasure pathways. This part of the brain "lights up" on an MRI when an alcoholic sees a picture of a drink, and the same structure lights up when a self-confessed porn addict sees a pornographic image.²⁵

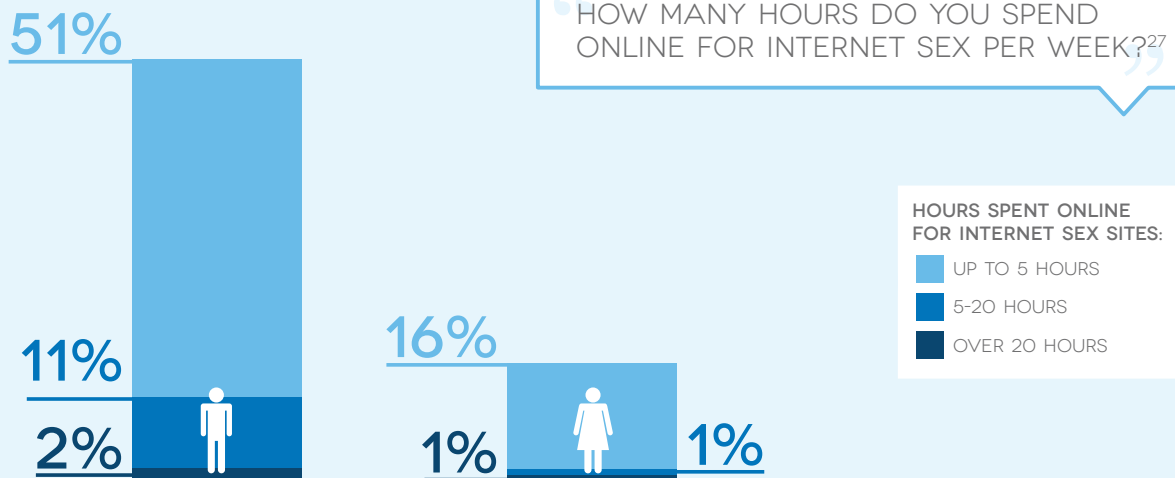
Regardless of the specific labels we use—addiction, compulsion, dependency, hypersexuality—the intoxicating nature of pornography cannot be denied. As the Zillmann-Bryant experiment shows, the more we watch pornography, the more pornography we want to watch: it is like a toxin that gets into our blood. This is one great example of what Paul calls “the law of sin,” sin’s persuasive pull, which he says resides in the physical members of our bodies (Rom. 7:22-24). We can become captive to the impulses of our brains and bodies when they are trained by sinful indulgence.

30 YEARS LATER: AFTER THE EXPLOSION OF INTERNET PORN

At a 2011 conference, Dr. Mary Anne Layden commented about Zillmann and Bryant’s research. “When this study was done, that was called the ‘Massive Exposure Group’”—seeing five hours of porn over a six-week period—“I now call that the ‘Friday Afternoon Group.’”²⁶

“True love leads us to serve one another as human beings created in God’s image.”

Her statement is far from an exaggeration. A recent survey of 29,000 people at North American universities shows 51% of men and 16% of women spend up to five hours per week online for sexual purposes, and another 11% of men spend anywhere from five to 20 hours *per week*. What used to be “massive” exposure is now common practice.²⁷



Furthermore, the Internet has not only increased the public's exposure to porn, but has also changed the way it is consumed. Dr. Jill Manning believes Zillmann and Bryant's findings have *greater* applicability in the modern age because Internet porn tends to be more interactive and consumer-driven. Viewers can select exactly who and what they want to see, custom-tailored to their exact specifications.²⁸

PORN SHAPES OUR SEXUAL BELIEFS

So far we've seen five ways pornography warps our minds:

- 1. WATCHING PORN DECREASES OUR SEXUAL SATISFACTION.** It trains us to desire the variety and "designer sex" of porn more than the familiar sexuality of marriage.
- 2. WATCHING PORN DISCONNECTS US FROM REAL RELATIONSHIPS.** It trains us to detach emotional involvement from sexual experience.
- 3. WATCHING PORN LOWERS OUR VIEW OF WOMEN.** It trains us to see women as sexual commodities, not people created in God's image.
- 4. WATCHING PORN DESENSITIZES US TO CRUELTY.** It numbs us to the seriousness of verbal and physical aggression.
- 5. WATCHING PORN MAKES US WANT TO WATCH MORE PORN.** It taps into the neurocircuitry of our brains, making us desire the rush of sexual energy from porn again and again.

For those who have been entrenched in pornography, how do we reverse these mind-warping effects? How do we renew our minds (Rom. 12:1-2)?



5 BIBLICAL WAYS TO RENEW THE MIND

The Bible does not describe us merely as wayward, broken, or needing a moral boost but as those who are *dead* in sin (Eph. 2:1). Dead men and women do not just need recovery: they need resurrection.

For the follower of Christ, the ultimate goal is not merely “quitting pornography,” but is something far richer and more comprehensive. If merely modifying behavior was the most important thing, there are any number of psychological tips and tricks one can use. But for the Christian, as it should be for all people, the goal is not merely *recovering* from pornography, but being *remade* by God Himself into the image of the perfect Man, Jesus Christ.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Just as sure as pornography stirs up lustful cravings in us, the Holy Spirit is a source of new, holy cravings. Galatians 5 says we who have the Holy Spirit have the “desires of the Spirit” (5:17). God promises that when we “keep in step with the Spirit,” the lusts of the flesh that lead to sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality will not have their way in us (5:16,25). We can become new men and women from the inside out.

What does it mean to keep in step with the Spirit of God, to walk in the Spirit?

1. **WE MUST LISTEN** to cry of the Spirit in our hearts, “Abba, Father,” which confirms our new identity. To walk in the Spirit, we need to learn to relate to God, from the depths of our soul, as dearly loved adopted sons and daughters, believing that we belong to God and that our ties to sin are broken forever.
2. **WE MUST STIR UP THE HOPE** the Spirit inspires in us—the hope of righteousness. To walk in the Spirit, we need to wait eagerly for this hope, putting faith in God’s promises that we are destined for an eternity of purity, and longing to see that purity spill over into our present lives.

3. **WE MUST INTERNALIZE** the inspired words of the Spirit found in the Scriptures. To walk in the Spirit, we need to renovate our thoughts according to the truths He has revealed, rejecting the lies pornography had fed us.
4. **WE MUST TAKE GREAT DELIGHT** in holy and wholesome longings—finding pleasure in all that honorable, pure, lovely, and excellent. To walk in the Spirit, we need to pursue pure pleasures with sincere gratitude until pornography loses its luster.
5. **WE MUST LIVE IN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY** where we can share our darkest secrets and be reminded of our highest calling. To walk in the Spirit, we must confess our sins to each other, pray for each other, and stir up one another to live according to our true identity.

1. WALK IN YOUR TRUE IDENTITY

In the original language, “walk in the Spirit” carries the sense of, “walk *as you have been walking* in the Spirit.” How had the Galatians been walking in the Spirit already?

Earlier in the letter Paul writes about what the Spirit of Christ had been doing in the hearts of his readers:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.
(Gal. 4:4-7)

First and foremost, keeping in step with the Spirit means being able to pray—from our deepest heart—as *adopted sons and daughters*, not as spiritual orphans. Orphans obey in order to make themselves attractive prospects for adoption. Adopted children already know and believe they are loved. Adopted children obey because they are secure in the love they have from their parents, and that love has birthed in them a deep love of their own.

At first, relating to God as a dearly loved son or daughter may sound overly simplistic. When fighting the deteriorating effects of sin in our hearts we cry out for action steps, for methods that summon our willpower—not sentiments about love.

But this is the very thing the gospel of Christ warns against.

Paul taught that religious regulations do not work. “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ‘Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch’” (Col. 2:20-21). Try-harder ethics are useless: “they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (2:23). Better Internet filters and personal regulations might stop you from looking at porn for a time, but they will not transform a heart of lust.

Instead, Paul says real change is first about *knowing who we already are*. “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (3:3). “You have been raised with Christ” (3:1). “You have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self” (3:9-10). Only those who first know this about themselves have the power to slay sinful sexual desires and habits (3:5).

How has this new identity come about? After all, for those entrenched in porn, many don’t *feel* like they are new people. Paul tells us about this new identity in his letter to the Romans.

First, says Paul, we must understand what the death and resurrection of Christ accomplished. Christ not only died *for* sin; He also died *to* sin. Dying *for* sin means Christ took upon Himself the punishment that was due us (Rom. 5:6-9), which means we are free from the wrath of God because Jesus has absorbed that wrath on the cross. Dying *to* sin means Christ no longer lives in this sinful realm but instead enjoys resurrection life in the presence of God (6:10). Living on earth, He was subject to the pains of a world filled with sin, He was subject to temptations and trials, and in the end He endured the wages of sin itself on the cross. But as the resurrected Son of God, He no longer lives in sin’s domain.

Second, we must understand that we are *united* to the One who is dead to sin (6:8). The Spirit of the risen Christ is in us. We no longer belong to this age, but to the kingdom of God.

Paul likens this to a change of masters. We used to belong to Sin. Sin was our master. But when the Spirit of Christ comes to us, He redeems us for Himself. Now we belong to our new master—a better master—who loves us with an undying love. Sin may still have a loud voice in your life. He still may be shouting at you from across the street, still barking orders at you. But you no longer belong to him.

Knowing these truths, Paul’s first and primary application in the whole letter is this: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus”

(6:11). Paul does not say we are *dying* to sin (a process). He does not say we *should die* to sin (a command). He said that because we are intimately united with the risen Christ, because His resurrected life flows in our veins, we should consider ourselves *already dead* to sin.

The word translated “consider” is an accounting term: it means to add something up, to take stock of something. When a child adds up how much money is in her piggy bank, at the end of the counting she doesn’t have any more or less in the bank than when she began. The only thing that has changed is her *knowledge* about the value of what is there. This is what Paul means. You already believe these basic gospel truths—Christ died to sin’s power, He rose from the dead, and the Spirit of the risen Christ lives within you—so now *reckon* it to be true; *reconsider* it; *meditate* on it; get the idea of your new identity deep into your soul.

As much as porn feels alive to you, if you are in Christ, you are dead to porn. The Spirit of the living God is in you.

As far as God is concerned, you are already His. God’s love for you cannot be overstated. The God and Father of our Lord Jesus loves you with an endless love, and you have done nothing to merit it or deserve it. He loves you despite all your unlovability, despite your lingering sinful desires. Though in your sin you are undeserving and undesirable, He loves you when your mind disavows it, your heart dodges it, and your soul dismisses it. He loves you right now as you are, not as you think you should be.

This, the New Testament says, is the key to unlocking God’s power for change. It is not God’s *wrath* that affects deep repentance in us, but rather, God’s *kindness* (Rom. 2:4). Being filled with all of God’s fullness happens not by knowing God’s power but by comprehending the breadth and length and height and depth of His love—a love that “surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:19).

There is an unfathomable difference between relating to God as an orphan and relating to God as a son, and this is the first critical step of walking in the Spirit. God is not holding back His love until we get our act together. He wants us to relate to Him as one dearly loved—so much so that Christ’s Spirit whispers His prayer in our hearts, “Abba, Father.” He loves His true children now in the midst of their unworthiness, and in time His love transforms our desires.

2. WALK IN HOPE

In the same letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, “For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness” (Gal. 5:5). Keeping in step with the Spirit and having hope are intimately connected: the Spirit kindles in us a fresh hope for the things God has promised.

Paul declared a gospel of hope—of anticipation and expectation—which he calls the “hope of righteousness” (Gal. 5:5). Our great hope is that one day Christ will judge the world and make all things right again (Acts 17:31). He will destroy sin and death forever. He will recreate the world anew, and we will be just like Him (1 Cor. 15:51-55).

God also promises that we will see foretastes of this “hope of righteousness” in the present age. Paul writes that as citizens of the kingdom of God, our lives should be filled with “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

Though we are no longer under sin’s tyrannical power, sin is still present in our lives: our body “is dead because of sin” (Rom. 8:10). Porn, for many, will always carry some appeal. But we are promised God’s Spirit will “give life to your mortal body through His Spirit who dwells in you” (8:11), and by His grace, we can present the members of our bodies to God “as instruments of righteousness” (6:13).

This is our astounding hope: that fallen, porn-loving sinners like us will become like the holy Son of God.

For Paul, faith in this gospel hope does not merely mean we agree that these grand promises are real but that we *give ourselves wholly* to them: we center our lives on them. Far from being a passive thing, faith is *active*. It engages the mind and the heart. As the author of Hebrews says, faith is the *assurance* and *essence* of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1): it is the delightful conviction that the things we hope for are real.

Walking in the Spirit means we *stir up* this hope in us, or as Paul says, we “eagerly wait” for it (Gal. 5:5). We all suffer from the distractions of the world and sin. It is for this reason the apostle Peter similarly urges us: “set your hope *fully* on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13, italics added).

Practically speaking, this means just as we have fed our minds on pornography, we should now feed our minds on God's hope-filled promises. Just as we have spent hours engrossed in sexual media, we should spend hours filling our imaginations with God's vision for our lives and our eternity. We must, as Paul says, set our minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5), on the glories of our inheritance as God's children (8:17).

When it comes to saying no to lust and pornography, there are tailor-made promises in the Scriptures that hold out to us blessings of having a sexually pure mind and body.

- If you are sexually pure, you will be living in the will of God for your life (1 Thessalonians 4:3).
- If you fill your mind with that which is honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy, then God's peaceful presence will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9).
- If you are not enslaved to your lusts, you will be freer to serve others in love (Galatians 5:13).
- If you are sexually pure, your life will be fruitful, and that fruit will be full of goodness and truth (Ephesians 5:8-9).
- If you are sexually pure, your mind will no longer be foggy, your heart will be teachable, and you will be filled with the very life of God (Ephesians 4:17-19).
- If you are sexually pure, your heart will not be enslaved to the worship of sex, which means you can wholeheartedly devote yourself to the true and living God (1 Kings 11:4).
- If you are sexually pure, you will be more prepared to be a great lover and to enjoy sexual intimacy with your spouse or future spouse (Proverbs 5:18-19).
- If you are sexually pure, you will keep your marriage bed undefiled (Hebrews 13:4).

- ▶ If you are sexually pure, you will no longer waste time but instead make the most of it (Ephesians 5:16).
- ▶ If you are sexually pure, you will be an honorable person (1 Thessalonians 4:4).
- ▶ If you are a sexually pure person, you will not be enslaved to your passions (1 Corinthians 6:12).

This is God's vision for your life: aligned with His will; surrounded by His peaceful presence; mastering your desires, not being a slave to them; full of goodness; full of life; full of honor; full of worship; tender-hearted and clear-minded; making the most of your days. When pornography assaults your senses or when those lustful flashbacks fill your mind, let this vision, and the promises attached to them, be the fuel you use to reject the world's temptations.

This "hope of righteousness" is not just for this life. This hope is ultimately about what we will become. The apostle John reminds us that though we are God's adopted children right now, "what we will be has not yet appeared." We know when we see Christ face to face at his return, we will be totally transformed, becoming just like him (1 John 3:2). John follows this glorious promise with a practical application for the here and now: "Everyone who thus hopes in him *purifies himself* as he is pure" (1 John 3:3, italics added). Knowing we are destined for an eternity of breathtaking purity and holiness, we purify ourselves *now* because we want to have a taste of that future purity. When temptations come knocking, we say to ourselves and to the temptation, "No! This is not who I am. I am destined to be like Christ, the Son of God, and nothing can be more satisfying than that."

As intense as pornography is, it cannot compare to the life-sustaining hope we have in Christ. Far from shutting down our desires, actively hoping in God's promises fully engages our desires in ways we have never dreamed. In his famous Oxford sermon, *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis reminds us,

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making

mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased...

Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness.²⁹

3. WALK ACCORDING TO THE WORD

When Paul writes, “keep in step with the Spirit,” the word he uses is the same as that of an army marching in line, a platoon following their marching orders. Lest we think keeping in step with the Spirit is a purely mystical experience, Paul says it is very practical. Keeping in step with the Spirit means obeying His clearly revealed orders.

We cannot claim to keep in step with God’s Spirit if we ignore or disobey the writings He inspired: the Scriptures. Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit speaks clear words to the church. As an expert in God’s law, Paul understood this. He knew all the writings of the prophets were “breathed out by God” (2 Tim. 3:16). No less than 32 times in Paul’s letters he uses the phrase “it is written,” pointing to the writings of the prophets who came before him. Paul also knew the Spirit was inspiring him and his fellow apostles (Eph. 3:5). The Scriptures are a gift from the Spirit to us: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction,” Paul says, “that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

To keep in step with the Spirit we must know and obey the Book He inspired. We must explore the Bible and learn what God thinks. We must renew our minds with *His thoughts*.

Take, for instance, the five main ways pornography warps the mind. Exploring the Bible, we can “reverse engineer” the bad training pornography has given us and replace it with God’s thoughts.

1. PORN PROMISES GRATIFICATION but only decreases our sexual satisfaction. But **GOD IS THE CREATOR OF SEXUAL SATISFACTION** and has designed marriage for its enjoyment (Song. 4:9-16). For the single man it means learning “how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor” (1 Thess. 4:4, RSV)—pursuing

wholesome, intentional relationships with women. For the present time it also means surrendering to God's providence and timing (Ps. 37:5), believing that dying a virgin is not a tragedy, but is infinitely superior to pornographic indulgence. (1 Cor. 7) After all, the Son of God did. For married men and women, this means renewing our minds towards our spouses, choosing to make them our standard of beauty. It means returning again and again to the enjoyment of sex in marriage (Prov. 5:18-19; Song. 7:11-13).

2. PORN DISCONNECTS US FROM REAL RELATIONSHIPS, training us to believe that the best sex is solo-sex. But **GOD HAS DEFINED GOOD SEX AS AN EXPRESSION OF "ONENESS,"** not emotional detachment (Gen. 2:24). For married and single people alike, this means seeing one's body not as his or her own, but as something to give as a gift to another (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 7:4).

3. PORN LOWERS OUR VIEW OF WOMEN, training us to see each other as sexual commodities. But **GOD CREATED WOMEN IN HIS IMAGE**, and as such, women are worthy of great honor (Gen. 1:27; 1 Pet. 3:7). For the man, this means not letting his eyes lead his heart astray, but instead making a covenant with his eyes to never look upon a girl with lust (Job 31:1,7). For the woman, this means refusing to see her own worth through the lens of porn standards, knowing she is fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14) and her inner beauty is unfading (1 Peter 3:3-4).

4. PORN DESENSITIZES US TO AND EROTICIZES CRUELTY. But **GOD HAS DESIGNED SEX AS AN EXPRESSION OF AFFECTION**, not aggression (Deut. 22:25; Eph. 5:28-30). God has promised to maintain the cause of the afflicted and destitute (Psalm 82:3; 140:12), and that includes those whose brokenness has led them to a life of prostituting themselves for the camera. God redeems prostitutes like Rahab and brings them into the fold of His people (Josh. 6:25). He forgives their sins and defends their honor (Luke 7:36-50). As the church, we should do the same.

5. PORN HOOKS US DEEPLY, leading to possible addiction and sexual bondage. But **GOD REDEEMS OUR WARPED SEX DRIVE** so that sex is a holy act of love and giving, not selfishness and slavery (1 Cor. 13:4-7; Gal. 5:22-23). Sex becomes our master when we believe the lie that porn tries to sell us: that sex is a "need." If sex is a need, then we feel justified when we get mad at the world or at God for not giving us the sex or the kind of sex we so rightly deserve. But if sex is not a need, but rather a good desire, then we can set it alongside other good desires and go to the Word to understand its place.

For married men and women, this means surrendering our sexual desires to the Lord in a spirit of giving, not taking, and regularly returning to our spouse to be intoxicated with love (Song. 1:4; Prov. 5:18-20). For single men and women, this means surrendering our sexual desires to the Lord, practicing self-control, and using one's undivided interests to serve the Lord (1 Cor. 7:32-35).

Each of these ideas is only the beginning, but the more the mind engages with the Bible around these truths, the more our thoughts are renovated. Over time our minds will be rewired to see things the way God does. As we do this we are “sowing to the Spirit” and in time will reap a harvest of eternal life (Gal. 6:8).

4. WALK IN PURE PLEASURE

Paul specifically states that what trumps sinful longings are *holy* longings: “the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh” (Gal. 5:17). Paul says if we keep in step with the Spirit's *desires*, we will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

The human spirit was never meant to be devoid of desire. If, in the battle against pornography, we only spend time trying to empty ourselves of the desire for it, we will inevitably fail. Some desire will always try to fill the void.

It is noteworthy that the language Paul uses to talk about the Spirit's “desires” is the same word used throughout the New Testament for “lust.” The Spirit “lusts,” craves, longs—and He shares those longings with us. This is what the old Scottish minister Thomas Chalmers called “the expulsive power of a new affection.” Laws, rules, and regulations can only tell us *what* is bad and *why* it is bad, but they do not change our *desires* for sinful things. These sinful longings can only be conquered by implanting new “affections”—new cravings—that counter our sinful cravings. This is what the Spirit does in us: He shares His own desires with us, changing us from the inside out.

Time and time again the Bible describes a holy longing to know and be with Jesus the Messiah (Matt. 13:16-17; Luke 17:22-24; Phil. 1:21-24), an eager desire to understand His sufferings and His glory (1 Pet. 1:10-12). The Holy Spirit inspires us to worship Christ above all else, helping us to leave the idol of sex and the altar of porn behind.

The Holy Spirit longs for all things that God calls good. And lest we think this means we must constantly walk around in a holy fog and avoid physical pleasures, God calls us to embrace whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable,

excellent, and praiseworthy—wholesome pleasures become a means to practicing God’s presence (Phil. 4:8).

The world is full of holy pleasures for God’s people, and they can become windows of worship when they are infused with gratitude. “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:4).

Paul writes to Titus, “To the pure, all things are pure” (Titus 1:15). In his book, *Pure Pleasure*, Gary Thomas explains this text:

In context, Paul is arguing against hyper-religionists trying to saddle Christians with arbitrary rules and prohibitions. These teachers wanted to enslave believers to the old belief that if a defiled person touches something (food, drink, or even another person), this something becomes defiled. Paul cleverly turns this around, saying if someone is pure, then whatever they touch becomes pure!

I’m arguing that we need to look at pleasure and the good gifts of this earth through the eyes of redemption. When our hearts are cleansed and transformed by God, the very things that used to cause us to stumble can now become friends of faith. Not *all* things, of course; anything specifically against the will and commands of God, regardless of what kind of pleasure it seems to offer, will always destroy our souls. But the good things of this earth, created by God to be received with thanksgiving and praise—things such as friendship, good food and fine drinks, laughter, sex, and family life—can be redeemed to season our life and faith in many positive ways. God can even give us the power to take what we formerly misused and transform it into an instrument of praise.³⁰

Neurologically speaking, porn has carved a pathway of pleasure in the mind, but we can avoid that rut if we begin to carve our new holy pathways in the brain. In time, as pleasure-creating dopamine is released again and again through these pure channels, new habits are created and old habits begin to lose their luster.

Over time we no longer look to porn as our release valve to entertain our idols, but rather we use healthy pleasures as means of delighting in God as the giver of every good and perfect gift.

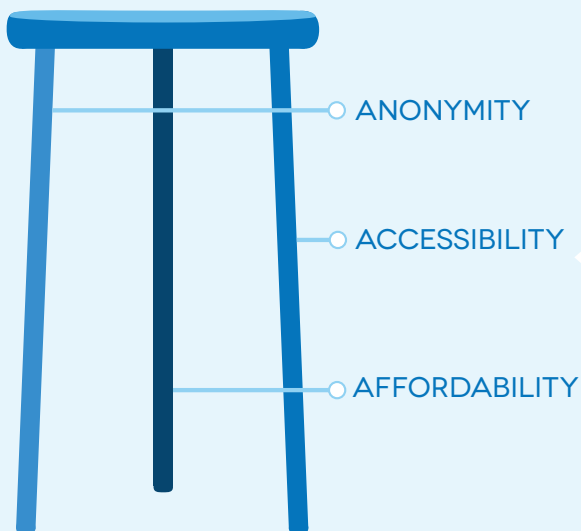
5. WALK IN ACCOUNTABILITY

When Paul says we are to “walk in the Spirit” he is writing to a church community, not just to random individuals reading his letter in their private corners. Keeping in step with the Spirit of God is a community activity, something we do together.

In other words, we keep in step with the Spirit by keeping in step with one another. We must live lifestyles of encouragement and accountability. The Spirit does not merely indwell individual Christians. He indwells the church corporately as His temple (2 Cor. 6:16). Walking in the power of the Spirit means we must depend on how the Spirit empowers others to help us.

Nothing slays the power of sin like confession. James writes, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed” (James 5:16). In confessing our sins to God we are promised forgiveness. In confessing sin to *others* we are made whole.

Sin must be *habitually* exposed to the light of confession. This is called *accountability*: being honest with another trusted believer about our temptations, sins, and the state of our heart. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, after eating of the forbidden fruit, our knee-jerk reaction is to hide—to hide from God and from one another. Accountability is the willingness to habitually and regularly allow others access to your heart, your motives, your secret desires, your dark thoughts, and, of course, your sinful actions.



How does this relate to pornography? The late psychologist, Dr. Al Cooper, believed three main factors draw people into online sexual activity:³¹

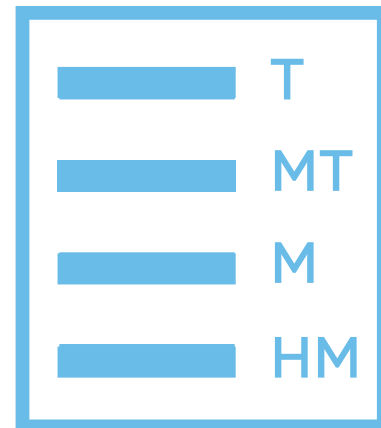
1. **ANONYMITY** (home computers and Smartphones have made it very easy to be secretive)
2. **ACCESSIBILITY** (porn is accessible from any Internet connection)
3. **AFFORDABILITY** (millions of free or very cheap images are available online)

He dubbed this the “Triple-A Engine” of Internet porn.

These three factors work like three legs on a stool: remove just one of the legs and the stool will fall.

The easiest leg to remove is the leg of *anonymity*, or secrecy. We do this by becoming accountable to others about the time we spend online, taking away the option to hide our Internet activity.

One way to do this is through the use of Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability. This software program monitors your home computer, work computer, and smartphone and then sends a detailed report of your Internet activity to a trusted friend, spouse, or mentor. Covenant Eyes, which pioneered the concept of Internet Accountability, also rates websites for mature content, flagging specific web searches and sites.



You can learn more about Covenant Eyes at www.covenanteyes.com and learn more about using this software for godly accountability in *Coming Clean: Overcoming Lust Through Biblical Accountability* a free e-book available at www.covenanteyes.com/accountability-partner-ebook/.

Confession of sin is not the only goal of Christian community. In the face of each other's weaknesses, we need to encourage one another to fight sin. The author of Hebrews says, "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24-25).

This can be called "gospel accountability." When we give an *account* of our sins to someone else, in return, they should listen and then give an *account* of God's gospel promises to us. When sin is confessed, it is not to merely assuage a guilty conscience. Christian community is not so much about calling one another *out* on sin as it is calling one another *up* to our true identity in Christ. Accountability is not merely about confessing our unrighteousness; it is about confessing our need to depend on the righteousness of Christ.

In this text, God calls us to "stir up" one another—that is, to urge, to spur on, to provoke, to motivate each other—to love and good deeds. Each time we meet together we should be contemplating and praying, "God, show me how I can really motivate my friend to resist temptation and instead love You and others

wholeheartedly.” We are to have a hardcore intentionality and thoughtfulness in our friendships.

Like the embers of a red-hot fire, we stir up the fire not by adding heat to it, but rather by exposing the glowing embers to the air, helping to bring out the energy that is already in the embers. If the Spirit of God is in us, He has already planted His holy desires into our hearts. He has etched his law on our hearts (Jer. 31:33-34; Ez. 36:25-27). But He has also placed us in the family of the church, among trusted friends who are also filled with His Spirit, in order that we might stir up in each other what God has already put in us.

KEEPING IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT

Walking in the Spirit is a lifetime journey, but as we keep in step with Him, we are promised that the desires of the flesh will not overwhelm us. We can finally be free.

Such a vision of the Christian life might seem too high up and too far away for us, especially if we’ve lived for a long time in the shame of our darkest sexual obsessions. Daring to believe that God is as good as He says He is takes faith in the face of our deepest struggles.

Benedictine monk Sebastian Moore says whenever our faith begins to buckle and we doubt the ugliness of our sin or the vastness of God’s love, we need only to meditate on the cross. In our relentlessly self-absorbed lives, at times we gloss over our sin, we rationalize it, we minimize it. Other times we feel the crushing weight of it and believe nothing is strong enough to change us. But at the cross we see the stripes the Son of God bore for us—convincing us that our sin is serious. There we see the compassionate face of One willing to die for His enemies—convincing us that our sin is never too great for God’s grace.

And while standing at the foot of the cross, when all the evil in our shabby hearts tries to hold its own against God, He answers with the thunder of resurrection.



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Overcoming Pornography Addiction

It's a problem...



Jeff is frustrated. Jeff is depressed. He doesn't want to look at porn. He's managed to not look at porn for three days, but tonight for some reason, almost against his will, he feels compelled to sit down in front of his computer. He has the urge to look at porn. He clicks to open his browser. Porn makes him feel guilty. That guilt in turn triggers him to watch more porn.

Maybe Jeff is you. Maybe you've tried hundreds of times to stop, but you just can't. Maybe this is the first time you've ever made an effort to stop. Maybe you have a loved one who you want to help stop.

Sexuality is everywhere. It's in our music, our movies and television, and in the commercials and ads on Facebook. High speed Internet access has made pornography free and easier to get than ever before.

Life is better without porn

Even in our secular society many are noticing the frightening side effects of Internet pornography. Unconnected relationships, self-esteem issues and poor sexual performance. More and more non-religious websites (such as yourbrainonporn.com) are dedicated to encouraging people to stop porn addiction. Stopping a porn addiction increases self-confidence, restores a healthy sex life in marriage, and enables more genuine relationships with those closest to us.

Besides these physical benefits, overcoming porn addiction is essential to restoring a strong, healthy relationship with our Creator God. Sins like porn addiction and lust separate people from God. Repentance (a true change from sinful behavior to godly behavior) will enable you to have a deep, personal relationship with God.

It's hard to quit

Wanting to overcome is easy. Actually overcoming a sexual addiction is hard. Porn rewires your brain. The chemicals released while viewing porn are so psychologically addictive that porn addiction has been compared to heroin addiction. It can seem impossible to stop.

With God, you can overcome

With God's power and influence in your life, you *can* stop a pornography addiction. You *can* overcome! You can break free from sexual addiction. You can regain meaningful relationships with God and with others. You can live your life with-

out the shame and guilt that pornography brings. To accomplish this enormous, life-changing task though, we need help. We need God.

Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

God wants you to break free of your pain. God wants to wipe away the pain of addiction. He sent His son to die to bring you out of a sinful life (John 3:16).

With strength from God, a lot of bravery, hard work, and with support from others, you can use this booklet to gain traction in your fight. This booklet is about understanding what porn does to your brain and how it affects you, and it will give practical ways to fight and overcome. You can use it not just to overcome pornography addiction, but also to wipe away sexual lusts and to regain a pure mind.

If you know someone who struggles with pornography addiction, you can use this booklet to better understand how to support them and help them through their trial. You, with God's power and your loved one's desire to change, can make all the difference in their life.

Break free and live a transformed life

Jeff is sitting at his computer. His cursor hovers above the address bar. Before he starts to type in his favorite adult website address, he stops. He reaches out to God in prayer. With new resolve he closes the Web browser. He pushes his chair away from his computer. Jeff is overcoming. With God's love and guiding hand, he's turning his back on his former addiction. He's choosing a life of loving obedience to His heavenly Father and enjoying the benefits of a life free from sexual addiction.

Make a commitment now

You can also make the choice to overcome. God wants you to break free from porn addiction. There is nothing that you can't do if God desires it. He is waiting for you to make a commitment to do whatever it takes to make overcoming a reality.

As you read each chapter of this booklet, make God your partner in overcoming. Pray to Him and ask Him to strengthen you and open your heart to the truth of His Word in the Bible. You've take a big step in your journey to overcoming by reading this far. God's hand is outstretched, and He is ready to lead you to victory in overcoming pornography addiction.



What is pornography addiction?

by Roy Fouch

When we think of addiction, we most often think of being addicted to chemicals. The truth of the matter is that people can also be addicted to behaviors. Some of these behaviors include eating, gambling and sex. And the number one type of sexual addiction is habitual viewing of pornography.

What is pornography? It's pictures, videos, writing, or other material that is sexually explicit. It often involves the depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement.

The word "pornography" comes from two Greek words that mean "prostitute" and "writing," so the original meaning is "writing about prostitutes." But today, even though there are still lots of salacious books, pornography is largely about visual images—in magazines, movies, videos and the Internet.

Modern technology has brought us photography, videography and the Internet. Now anyone with a TV or computer can watch porn 24/7 in the privacy and secrecy of his own home. This has made it extremely easy to become addicted—a tragic consequence of scientific achievement.

In a study of 932 sex addicts conducted by Dr. Patrick Carnes, 90 percent of men and 77 percent of women indicated that pornography played a significant role in their addiction (*Don't Call it Love: Recovery from Sexual Addictions*, 1991, New York, Bantam).

What's wrong with pornography?

Pornography is destructive to the mind and heart of the viewer even when he's not addicted to it. God gave the Ten Commandments to steer humanity toward a happy, healthful life and away from the automatic penalties of disobe-

dience. The Bible is filled with praise for God's wonderful laws. Psalm 119 is by far the longest chapter in the Bible at 176 verses. It's entirely about praising God for His Word and His laws. Verse 97 says: "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." Verse 9 is helpful for people struggling with pornography addiction. It says: "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word."

The seventh of the Ten Commandments is "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). This brief umbrella command refers to all the various kinds of sexual sins. And sexual sins are the most self-destructive of all. In 1 Corinthians 6:18, the apostle Paul wrote: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

And Jesus Christ revealed the spirit of the law: "But I say to you that who-

ever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery in his heart” (Matthew 5:8). Therefore lust (sexual fantasizing and craving) is a sin against God. What Jesus said applies just as much to looking at a *visual image* of a woman. It’s the same principle if a woman is lusting for a man. Therefore, virtually all deliberate viewing of pornography is sinful because of its lustful nature.

What’s wrong with just looking? God designed our minds, hearts and bodies as they are so people would be attracted to the opposite sex. He made men to be more visually-oriented, and He made women to be beautiful. God’s plan is to motivate men to get married and for each man to enjoy his wife for the rest of his life. This is somewhat summed up in Proverbs 5:18-19, which says: “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love.”

At the same time, God doesn’t want any man to see any naked woman other than his wife, and doesn’t want any woman to see any naked man other than her husband. That way, all the excitement is focused on one’s spouse. And no man has his mind desensitized because he is comparing his wife’s body with a thousand other nude bodies that he’s seen on the Internet. So viewing pornography is never harmless, even when it’s not yet an addiction.

Pornography is addictive!

Peering at porn often starts as casual curiosity, but that often becomes the appetizer for more and more indulgence in what God forbids. The frequent viewings become a habit, and the habit soon becomes an addiction.

Viewing porn excites the mind and sexually arouses the body. A natural consequence is the carnal desire to act out sexually and relieve the sexual tension. Most often, this is done by masturbation. Pornography and masturbation are both habit-forming, and the two together become a powerful force for addiction. The self-stimulation to a sexual climax is momentarily pleasurable,

and it can initially elevate a person’s mood, providing a momentary “high.” That usually results in the temptation to repeatedly replicate these feelings, potentially producing an obsessive-compulsive pattern if not stopped in time by the obvious red flags.

Addictive behaviors often cause chemical alterations in the neurotransmitters of the brain which, in turn, alter moods. These changes can temporarily dull pain or produce pleasurable sensations. They therefore reinforce the addiction.

Typically, people who are quickly attracted to this form of addictive behavior do so to escape some emotional state such as depression, loneliness, anxiety, fear or shame, or to escape from the reality of their circumstances. As a man once told me, “In that world, I’m king.”

However, for most addicts, there is a flip side of the coin. Many feel intense shame and grief for the addiction because it goes contrary to their own belief systems and consciences.

Faulty beliefs about self

Some people become sexually addicted even though they came from a healthy and wholesome family background. They first look at pornography out of curiosity and thrill-seeking and then are gradually seduced by the lure of the eroticism.

But more often than not sex addicts have dysfunctional backgrounds and usually have distorted views of themselves. Dr. Patrick Carnes, a pioneer in sexual addiction, has identified four core beliefs of most sexual addicts. Many of the core beliefs that addicts have are acquired from family systems that are dysfunctional. Dysfunctional families are those where poor boundaries exist among family members, emotional needs are not being met, or where abuse of one form or another might exist. Individuals who come from families where addictions have occurred have a greater probability of, or predisposition for, acquiring addictive behavioral patterns.

Here are the core beliefs Carnes outlines in his book, *Out of the Shadows*.

1. I am basically a bad and unworthy person.
2. No one would love me as I am.
3. My needs are never going to be met if I have to depend upon others.

Internet pornography affects Christians

By now we are used to hearing statistics such as a fifth of our youth are solicited while surfing the Internet and that a virtual flood of pornography is increasingly available to online users.

But one fact many may not be aware of is the debilitating effect of pornography on Christians. *The Southern California Christian Times* reported that “those who have dealt with the issue of sexual addictions say the Christian community is far from exempt when it comes to the lure of pornography on the Internet. Unlike other addictive behaviors, sex carries an enormous stigma that is not easily bridged in Christian circles.”

But how extensive is this particular problem? This article continued: “Although securing data is difficult because of the nature of the lifestyle, other studies suggest that 10 percent of the Christian community is sexually addicted.”

And yet Christians hesitate to ask for needed help partially because, as Steve Watters, Internet expert for Focus on the Family, stated: “There is an increased pressure in the church for people to look their best and not demonstrate anything that represents weakness, especially if it’s sexual addiction.”

But this is no time to put our heads in the sand. The salvation of sufferers may be at stake. Addicts should be able to consult confidentially with their pastors and other competent professional counselors without fear.

Sources: *Southern California Christian Times*, *The Washington Times*.



Some people become sexually addicted even though they came from a healthy and wholesome family background. They first look at pornography out of curiosity and thrill-seeking and then are gradually seduced by the lure of the eroticism.

4. Sex is my most important need.

Dr. Carnes believes that the roots of sexual addiction begin in childhood. He writes: "When a child's exploration of sexuality goes beyond discovery to routine self-comforting because of the lack of human care, there is potential for addiction. Sex becomes confused with comforting and nurturing."

As with other forms of addiction, a number of characteristics are common to sexual addiction. Here are some to be aware of when confronting porn addicts.

Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism that maintains the addictive behavior by failing to admit or minimizing the seriousness of the behavior. The first step towards overcoming any addiction is acknowledging that you have a problem. Only when you can truly be honest about your actions and their conse-

quences and take personal responsibility can a healing process begin.

Compulsivity and Dependence

Compulsivity is a recurring impulse that is difficult to resist. The tension of a negative emotional state is relieved when a behavior or chemical is introduced that causes a neuro-chemical reward. That "reward" reinforces and perpetuates the behavior. When this process is repeated multiple times, it creates a physical and/or psychological dependency.

Tolerance and Escalation

Over time, what used to produce a desired effect and state of mind becomes less effective, and this is called tolerance. What typically happens is that the individual needs more of the drug or behavior to get the desired result. With pornography, the cravings tend to

degenerate to porn that is more erotic, explicit, kinky or violent. Or the person may act out sexually in more high-risk behaviors such as going to strip clubs, using "escort" services, or connecting with prostitutes online. This escalation leads to increased levels of shame and guilt, which leads to increased desire to "medicate" the mental pain through escapism, and the cycle of dependency increasingly gets reinforced.

Powerlessness and unmanageability

At this point in the downward spiral of addiction, the individual begins to suffer consequences that may impact areas of life such as marriage, family, spiritual life, financial, legal, and possibly others. It's often at this point that one finally seeks help. The best way to start the recovery process is to seek the help of our all-powerful Heavenly Father. At this level of enslavement, we need God's help to emancipate us from the sinful bondage.

How pornography progresses from bad to worse

According to Dr. Victor Cline, an expert on sexual addiction, there is a four-step progression of this addictive behavior:

1. Addiction: Pornography provides a powerful sexual stimulant or aphrodisiac effect, followed by sexual release, most often through masturbation.

2. Escalation: Over time, addicts require more explicit and more deviant material to meet their sexual needs. They desire (even think they *require*) rougher, more deviant, more explicit, and kinky kinds of sexual material to get their "high" and "sexual turn-ons."

3. Desensitization: What was first perceived as gross, shocking, disturbing, in time becomes common and acceptable. Tragically, healthy sexual relations with one's spouse seems boring.

4. Acting out sexually: There is an increasing tendency to act out behaviors (including violent behaviors) viewed in pornography—imitating what one has seen. **BT**



Coming out of slavery to sexual sin

by Roy Fouch

Let's now learn about slavery, our slave masters, and how we can be freed from this form of slavery.

Slavery

In John 8:34, Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." Repeated sins quickly enslave us, much more than most people realize. Sins quickly begin to affect us and those we love, put distance between God and us, and increasingly control us.

In Romans 6, Paul explains about being slaves to sin. He said that as Christ died for us, we must put to death our old sinful way of life and "should walk in newness of life" (verse 4). To grow spiritually, "we should no longer be slaves to sin" (verse 6). In verse 12, he concludes: "Therefore do not let sin

reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."

Paul goes on to tell us we have a choice. We can choose to be a slave to sin with the eventual consequence of death or a voluntary slave to God which leads to righteousness and eternal life. In verse 16, he wrote: "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"

Our evil slave masters

Without God, we are slaves to the downward pulls of our own *human nature*. Jeremiah described it this way: "Who can understand the human heart? There is nothing else so deceitful; it is too sick to be healed" (Jeremiah 17:9, Good News Bible). "What human

nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions" (Galatians 5:19, GNB). We must resist the "pulls of the flesh."

The pervasive and insidious influence of the corrupt *world* around us is another slave master. The apostle John wrote, "For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). Without God, we're "in bondage under the elements of the world" (Galatians 4:3). In Romans 12:2, Paul wrote, "And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

The third and most powerful of the evil slave masters is Satan, "our adversary the devil" and "the tempter" of

mankind (1 Peter 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). He is called “the prince of the power of the air; the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). That indicates that his evil influences are broadcast to everyone who “tunes in” to him. Remember James 4:7, which says: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Satan is “a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). He’s such an effective liar that he “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). We must identify Satan’s lies and with God’s help be willing to root them out of our hearts and minds. We must replace them with

Whatever lies one may have bought into, they must be identified and with the help of God, and they must be discarded.

the truth of God’s Word and move away from irrational thinking to rational thinking. One phrase used by Alcoholics Anonymous that describes it well is “stinking thinking.”

Here are some common lies that Satan influences addicts to use: “I work hard all day” and “my wife doesn’t fulfill my needs” and “I deserve this” (pornography, phone sex, affairs, strip clubs, etc.). “I have a very high sex drive, that’s the way God made me.” “I’m just looking at pictures (or chatting on the Internet).” “I’m not actually doing anything harmful.” “How can sex be a problem? I choose to look at pornography, masturbate, Internet chat, and I can stop anytime I want.”

Whatever lies one may have bought into, they must be identified and they must be discarded.

So we have to contend with three powerful slave masters in addition to our own genetic predispositions for addictive behavior! We have only one hope for survival and liberation—“our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). But if we rely on God to fight our battles for us, we can be “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

Emancipation

The perspective I share with you is the one I believe is the most effective and beneficial to a person coming out of any form of sexual addiction or behavior pattern.

To be emancipated from slavery to sin, we must admit to ourselves and God that we need His help to overcome the powerful grip of sin and to break free from Satan. This coincides with the 12 step philosophy of recovery programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA), and Sexaholics Anonymous.

In my 30 years of counseling experi-

ence, I have found that the most powerful change agent in the recovery process from addictions is the role of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. It is obvious that the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous and the subsequent 12 step programs found the spiritual component essential to the process. Have others succeeded without this spiritual component? Absolutely, but the programs and processes that have endured the longest and helped the most have had this spiritual component.

Step 1: The first of the 12 steps is one of acknowledgement. We admit we are powerless over our compulsive behavior and that our lives have become unmanageable.

Step 2: As Christians, we believe that power comes from the Creator God, the God of the Bible. True Christians know that through repentance (sorrow and a change of direction) of our sins, including pornography or other forms of sexual sin, we can receive God’s forgiveness, grace and blessings. In John 10:10, Jesus said: “The thief [Satan] does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” **BT**

The twelve steps of alcoholics anonymous adapted for sexual addicts

1. We admitted we were powerless over our sexual addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

—From *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, page 170.



From slavery to freedom

by Roy Fouch

Next we'll take a look at practical as well as spiritual solutions and strategies to overcoming an addiction to pornography, and even the temptations to indulge in viewing pornography. These strategies can be useful in overcoming all forms of sexual addiction.

Triggers

The first concept to understand is that of triggers. These are factors which stimulate the desire for viewing sexually explicit material and stimuli. Some of the common triggers I hear about are boredom, depression, anger, loneliness, rejection, anxiety, fear, stress, sadness, shame, guilt and low self-esteem. Most of these are emotional states from which the individual seeks relief. Triggers can be visual or auditory as in movies, music, magazines or even in looking at someone in a way to become sexually

aroused. It is also possible to become aroused by another person's behavior. In today's world many people have become increasingly provocative in their interactions with others. Often this type of behavior occurs in a work setting, but I have known (counseled or spoken with) a number of people who have been tempted and acted out even in faith communities. The adversary, the devil, has infiltrated all social contexts.

When you can identify the triggers in your own life, you can begin to develop safeguards and alternative responses to these triggers. This is what we in the addiction field call relapse prevention strategies or plans. These plans are an integral part of recovery or emancipation from sexual slavery or idolatry.

Emotional triggers

With emotional types of triggers, like those mentioned above, we need to find alternatives to managing these

emotional states that are infinitely better than pornography or any kind of escapism. This often involves a holistic approach—addressing mind, body, and spirit. Nutritional enhancements including foods, vitamins and herbs can positively affect mood and brain chemistry. Exercising regularly can help with mood issues and stress management. In situations where extreme forms of depression or other mental issues exist, medication might be needed along with counseling. In these cases, seeking the appropriate medical or professional help is recommended. Often people will self-medicate by using drugs, alcohol, or engagement in behaviors to elevate mood or cope with stress when there are more effective means of coping with these conditions.

Electronic triggers

When the triggers are electronic in nature, like a computer and the

Internet, safeguards need to be put in place. There are software programs that prevent sexually explicit material from being accessed. The addicted person should have someone else install the program so that only the friend or significant other has the password. Spyware programs are also available to alert an accountability partner of an attempted access. The same type of safeguards can be utilized with television programming.

Visual triggers

When real people in one's environment have a provocative effect, this can be more challenging. But with all triggers, there are solutions. One obvious solution is to never let your eyes linger on the tempting sight, but move out of eyesight from the person who has become a spiritual stumbling block. This is implied by what Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-30. Another concept that works, if applied consistently, is "bouncing of the eyes." This strategy merely means making a conscious decision to look the other way when one sees something that has a sexually erotic effect. This is in contrast to ogling and lusting for a person who is sexually stimulating and/or provocatively dressed. Taking second and third looks should also be avoided. One finds something else to look at or just look away. Job was a good role model. He said he made a "covenant with his eyes" (Job 31:1). For that verse, the Good News Bible says: "I have made a solemn promise never to look with lust at a woman."

Matthew 6:22-24 offers a principle that can be applied to the idolatry of sexual sin. "The lamp of the body is the eye. If, therefore, your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in you is full of darkness, how great is that darkness? No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." The principle here is specifically about serving God versus materialism and the lust for money. However, when we put the lust of the flesh through our visual



When you can identify the triggers in your own life, you can begin to develop safeguards and alternative responses to these triggers. These plans are an integral part of recovery or emancipation from sexual slavery or idolatry.

sense ahead of righteousness and our love of God, we are in a similar place with the same question to answer: What do we want to serve, God or pornography?

Gateway to other sexual sins

Pornography opens the door to other forms of sexual sins. While it starts with fantasy stimulated by visual images, it often leads to other forms of sexual sins. Similar to drugs, where one is often looking for a better high, those seeking pornographic highs often seek material that is increasingly stimulating—from soft porn to hard porn, from still pictures to videos, from viewing relatively "normal" sex to viewing increasingly perverted and even violent sex. For many, it eventually leads to other forms of sexual sins such as phone sex, Internet sex, prostitution

and extramarital affairs. As mentioned in the previous article, 70 to 90 percent of sexual addicts started with pornography.

One point I wanted to make before looking at other relapse prevention strategies is to remind everyone about setting healthy boundaries in relationships. This means that if you are married, you need to avoid intimate conversations with anyone of the opposite sex or being alone in a private room with that person for any length of time. You should also avoid flirtatious or sexual conversations, because they can lead to sexual fantasies or lust. When married, your intimate conversations should be reserved for your spouse. If there is a problem in your marriage, seek a counselor, preferably a Christian counselor, to help with communication and relationship issues.

Be proactive with relapse prevention

Returning to relapse prevention, I would strongly encourage being proactive, especially in spiritual ways. This means a spiritual approach to each and every day that will strengthen you against temptation. The apostle James wrote: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8). And then strive to stay close to God!

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus Christ stated: “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.” “All things” can include the mental, emotional and spiritual resources you need to defend yourself against temptation. It has been my experience in working with people with sexual addictions and weaknesses that if they start their day with prayer and time in the Bible, they are much better prepared to deal with the world’s temptations and stresses and Satan’s attacks. Among other benefits, having the mind filled with godly thoughts is effective in blocking out negative thoughts and temptations.

When you are tempted, God and Jesus Christ are only a prayer away. As Jesus admonished His disciples, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40). A prayer can be worded, “Father, please help my eyes to be pure for you. Please uplift my mood to cope with whatever distraction is pulling me down spiritually, Father.”

There are many other resources people can access to support their efforts in overcoming pornography addiction or other forms of sexual addiction. There are support groups in practically every community across the country and around the world. Many are in churches. It is such a pervasive problem that more and more people are seeking and finding help in these groups. Some of them are treatment groups run by professionals. Others are run by men and women who have made major progress in overcoming these problems and are helping others. Men and women can find these resources by looking online for meeting places. One Christian 12-step group that I think is doing a good job is Celebrate

Recovery. It tends to address all forms of addictions, but there are some that are specific to sexual issues. It has a spiritual approach that includes God at the center, repentance, self-examination, making amends to injured persons, and helping others as a final way to support and continue one’s own healing.

Relying on mentors, accountability partners, sponsors and similar support persons is also helpful, because they give you someone to turn to in your hour of need. Of course the most important source of help is our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. God is there for us if we would only call upon Him.

I am recommending two books that I have heard are very helpful as well: *Being God’s Man in the Face of Temptation* by Stephen Arterburn and *At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry* by Steve Gallagher. There are other good books on this subject and some include workbooks that offer daily exercises to help heal, guide and direct toward recovery.

Other books and authors that may help those struggling with sexual addictions are: *A Hunger for Healing* by J. Heath Miller; *Pure Eyes* by Craig Gross; *Surfing for God—Discovering the Divine Desire Beneath Sexual Struggle* by Michael John Cusick; and *Growing in Christ while Helping Others* by John Baker.

Two final thoughts to leave with those who have engaged in pornography and other sexual sins: 1) Please contemplate the pain and suffering that such sins inflict on an innocent partner such as a spouse. The damage done to a spouse and a marriage is usually extreme and needs its own healing process. 2) Please contemplate how dysfunctional lifestyles and bad habits are often passed down from generation to generation. What kind of role model are you for your children, grandchildren, and nieces and nephews? What kind of legacy will you leave for future generations?

Please also read related articles in the *Breaking Free Journal* at <http://breaking-free.ucg.org>. And the *Breaking Free* staff expects to add more and more related articles as time goes by.

Those of us engaged in counseling and writing regarding addictions regularly pray for all those who suffer from

any addiction. We pray that God will bless you with success in breaking free from any bondage—and that you will remain free and filled with the joy that comes from living a good and godly life.

Roy Fouch is a Christian family therapist in Mason, Ohio. **BT**

3 Bible tips on avoiding pornography and lust

1. Looking with lust is mental adultery.

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:27-29).

Jesus used hyperbole here to make a strong point: If the only way to avoid lust were to pluck out an eye, that would be better than eternal death. Thankfully that’s not the only way!

2. Like all sins, the best way to avoid pornography is to avoid the source. Block such sites on your computer, etc.

“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

3. God’s Spirit can give us help to avoid giving in to lust.

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).



Breaking free from sexual addictions

by John Cafourek

Sexual addiction occurs in many forms and can be very destructive spiritually. How can it be overcome?

“**W**hen Dan’s therapist told him that he was sexually addicted, he was outraged! He thought his therapist was exaggerating. Dan was certain his real problem was depression. He was simply down all the time, and he wanted to be happier. True, his life had left a trail of broken relationships and he had some sexual problems, but that was because he was so down all the time” (*Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, page 177).

Denial is an all-too-common human defense mechanism. Patrick Carnes, an acknowledged expert on sexual addic-

tions and author of about a dozen books on this topic, lists denial as symptomatic of the initial stage of progressive sexual addiction. The addicted person refuses to admit, even to himself, that he needs help. He thinks he can handle his own problems.

What is sexual addiction?

Obviously, not every person who has some difficulty or problem involving sex and sexual relationships is sexually addicted. However, since sexual addiction is progressive, it’s possible for difficulties or problems to become exacerbated and to ultimately develop into addictions.

In his book *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, Dr. Carnes provides some important insight into identifying some of the common symptoms indicative of sexual addic-

tion. “A way to understand sexual addicts...is to compare them with other types of addicts. A common definition of alcoholism or drug dependency is that a person has a pathological relationship with a mood-altering chemical. The alcoholic’s relationship with alcohol becomes more important than family, friends, and work. The relationship progresses to the point where alcohol is necessary to feel normal. To feel ‘normal’ for the alcoholic is also to feel isolated and lonely, since the primary relationship he depends upon to feel adequate is with a chemical, not other people.

“Sexual addiction is parallel. The addict substitutes a sick relationship to an event or a process for a healthy relationship with others. The addict’s relationship with a mood-altering experience becomes central to his life...

“Addicts progressively go through stages in which they retreat further from the reality of friends, family, and work. Their secret lives become more real than their public lives. What other people know is a false identity. Only the individual addict knows the shame of living a double life—the real world and the addict’s world” (pages 14-15).

The anatomy of addiction

How does addiction actually begin? Perhaps not surprisingly, it starts with the acceptance of delusional thought processes about oneself, allowing them to become rooted in one’s personal belief system. As a consequence, addiction stems from faulty core beliefs about one-self that affect how we perceive reality.

Each person develops a belief system that is the sum of the assumptions, judgments and ideas that he or she holds to be true. This belief system contains potent family messages about such things as one’s value or worth, relationships, needs and sexuality. When these core beliefs become inaccurate or faulty, they have the potential to provide fun-

Tools of Recovery

A. Michael Johnson, Ph.D., lists the following tools and more on his website www.sexual-addict.com:

- **Accountability Partners and Agreements**

Being accountable to someone is an important anchor for sobriety. Make an agreement with someone to check in daily if at all possible. That person should have a list of questions—very specific questions—to ask you and that you have agreed to answer honestly. Your partner may be a member of your group, a friend in recovery, your therapist or a good friend. An accountability partner must be someone you trust and with whom you feel safe. It is not recommended that you ask your life partner to be your accountability partner. Related tools include sponsors and a support network.

- **Avoid Triggering Situations:**

You don’t have to go to business meetings at nude bars. You can tell the others that going to such places interferes with your spiritual growth. If you can’t avoid some triggers such as working on a computer, make it safe for yourself. Install blocking software (so that you don’t know the password), keep your door open, turn the screen toward the door, put the computer at home in a public area and never go online when you are alone.

- **Balance Your Life and Service**

- **Carry Recovery With You at All Times:**

That may be reminders, cues, instructions or anything else that will help. Those things might include:

- » Phone numbers of recovery friends.
- » Photographs of loved ones.
- » Cost card (add up the costs of your addiction).

- **Combat Physical Inactivity:**

Spend time doing fun activities and getting involved in sports, exercise and other physical activities. This is useful for all addicts and particularly important for those who became sedentary with their addictions such as cybersex addicts.

- **Combat Isolation:**

Spend time with people. Isolation is a part of your disease. Find ways to be in contact with people.

- **Interrupt Your Acting Out:**

Develop and memorize a set of strategies to help you avoid acting out. Use these daily.

- **Meetings:**

In these meetings you learn valuable information about your disease and how the 12-step program works. Members give and receive support, work the steps and share experience, strength and hope in a safe environment. At first, attend as many meetings as you can. If possible, attend meetings daily for the first 90 days and

practice abstinence to the best of your ability.

- **One Day at a Time**

- **Prayer and Meditation**

- **Professional Help:**

Your addiction may have been a subconscious way of self-medicating yourself for wounds you carry from your earlier life. It is important to work with a professional who understands sexual addiction or is willing to learn. This is another way to keep yourself on the path of recovery. Remember that recovery is much more than abstinence from sexually addictive behaviors. You may want to seek out group therapy, individual therapy or both. If possible, including your spouse in therapy, both individually and as a couple, can be a great benefit to the recovery of both and to your relationship.

- **Set Boundaries**

- **Telephone:**

The telephone is your lifeline between meetings. Get phone numbers from other members in your program. Get used to calling someone daily. It is an important way to break out of the isolation that is so strongly a part of the disease. You may be shy and hesitant at first, but by training yourself to call someone, it will be easy to place that call when that moment of crisis arises. And it will!



Interacting faulty beliefs produce distorted views of reality. Denial leads the list. Slicing through this mental fog to both recognize and deal with denial and self-deception is essential to recovery and overcoming.

damental momentum necessary for the development of sexual addictions.

What are some of these irrational beliefs? Perhaps the most common is the perception of not being a worthwhile person. Addicts believe that other people would not value them as a person if everything about themselves was known, including their addiction. They also believe that sex is their most important need. Sex is viewed as the only thing that makes their isolation bearable. Consequently, faulty personal core beliefs become the anchor points for sexual addiction.

Impaired thinking

Interacting faulty beliefs produce distorted views of reality. Denial leads the list. Ignoring the problem, blaming others and minimizing the behaviors become part of a defensive repertoire. Arguments, excuses, justifications

and circular reasoning abound amidst impaired thinking patterns. Even consequences such as venereal disease, unwanted pregnancy, lost jobs, arrests and broken relationships are either overlooked or attributed to factors other than the addiction.

Slicing through this mental fog to both recognize and deal with denial and self-deception is essential to recovery and overcoming. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren" (James 1:14-16).

The addiction cycle

Addictive experiences tend to progress through a four-step cycle, intensifying with each repetition:

1. *Preoccupation* is the mood or trance

in which the mind becomes completely engrossed with thoughts of sex. This mental state creates an obsessive search for sexual stimulation.

2. *Ritualization* is the formation of special routines leading up to sexual behavior. The ritual intensifies the preoccupation, adding arousal and excitement.

3. *Compulsive sexual behavior* is doing the actual sexual act, the end goal of the preoccupation and ritualization.

4. *Despair* is the feeling of utter hopelessness and sense of powerlessness that results from once again having engaged in sexually addictive behavior.

A self-perpetuating cycle

Since the end result is very disappointing and very painful, why would anyone repeat this addiction cycle? The reason is that the cycle becomes self-perpetuating. Ironically, much

of the pain felt at the end of the cycle can be numbed or obscured through sexual preoccupation. This reengages the addiction cycle all over again. Hence, sexual addicts become hostages and slaves to their own preoccupations. Jesus Christ gave this concise warning about the enslaving potential of all sin: "Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin" (John 8:34).

God's revealed purpose for sex

We live in a society that presents "the joy of sex" as the rightful pursuit of everyone. It seems, in fact, suspicion may likely be attached to anyone who refrains from engaging in sexual activity. The so-called sexual revolution insists that we discard any "inhibitions" and "sexual hang-ups." This preoccupation with sex pervades many facets of life.

The great Creator God has designed human sexuality to be a wonderful blessing. God revealed His intent and purpose for sex when human civilization began. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). This is a reference to the union of the sexual organs of husband and wife and implies that marriage is intended to be an intimate relationship.

This understanding is confirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians, where he calls sexual intercourse becoming "one flesh" (1 Corinthians 6:16). In the same context, Paul wrote, "Flee sexual immorality" (1 Corinthians 6:18), explaining that sex outside of marriage is sin and that it brings penalties on the sinner. In contrast, in Hebrews 13:4, Paul affirms that the sexual union between a husband and wife is the lawful function of human sexuality. The marriage bed is undefiled, he explained. Paul then immediately warned that other sexual acts outside of marriage do defile a person spiritually.

Christ's statements in Matthew 5:27-30 explain how it is possible to commit sexual sin in our mind alone—apart from any action whatsoever. We are commanded to guard and control our thoughts as well as our actions. Jesus Christ later also inspired Paul to write

about our thoughts as the battlefield on which we win or lose the struggle: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

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Levels of addiction

Sexual addiction is generally categorized into three levels. The presence of one or more of these sexual behaviors does not always involve addiction. Various sexual crimes, for example, may or may not be addictive behaviors. The behaviors designated as level one have in common general cultural acceptance. Some are regarded as illegal, but the reality is that widespread practice conveys a public tolerance. Though often considered by society to be less destructive, each of these can be devastating when done compulsively. Level one addictions generally include masturbation, compulsive relationships, pornography, prostitution and anonymous sex.

Level two addictions include exhibitionism, voyeurism, indecent phone calls and indecent liberties. These behaviors are deemed sufficiently intrusive to warrant stiff legal sanctions. They are all punished when actively prosecuted. Both prosecutors and the general public, however, often view these acts as nuisance offenses. The commonality of all of these addictive behaviors is the fact that someone is victimized.

Level three sexual addictions share in common the violation of some of our most significant boundaries. Rape, incest and child molestation entail basic transgressions of laws designed to protect the vulnerable. A number of additional detestable behaviors and addictions are intentionally not being mentioned in this listing.

Breaking free

Breaking the hold of sexual addic-

tion is very difficult to do. All forms of addiction are vicious because they further the inability to trust others. However, without help from others, the addict often fails to regain control because the addiction feeds itself. Also, few forms of fixation or excitement are as supercharged with social judgment, ridicule or fear. This makes seeking help

especially difficult for the sexual addict.

One of the best proven paths to recovery is the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, but adapted to a particular sexual addiction. The 12-step program helps members restore their network of human relationships, especially in their family. Members are taught how to live the program, leaving behind their double life and its delusion and pain.

Battling a pornography addiction

Sex sells! Pornography, one of the greatest sexual scourges afflicting human society today, is a \$57 billion industry. Porn revenue is larger than the combined revenues of all professional football, baseball and basketball franchises! It also exceeds the combined revenues of ABC, CBS and NBC television networks.

Overcoming an addiction to Internet pornography may necessitate the use of some special computer safeguards. For example, various software programs filter Internet content but still allow normal Web surfing. They can be used to block out offensive websites.

If you install this type of program yourself, you will easily know how to get around it. Therefore, it would be better to have your spouse or some other trustworthy adult set up the software on your computer.

Three good ones are CyberPatrol, CyberSitter and NetNanny. They cost less than \$40. All have free trials, so you can take each for a test drive before you buy. You'll find them at, respectively:

• www.cyberpatrol.com/

- www.cybersitter.com/
- www.netnanny.com/

Both America Online and MSN offer ways to limit access to the Internet's darker side. Like the filtering software, you might want to have your spouse or other trustworthy adult set up the account. This way, you do not have any of the passwords. While these controls are meant primarily for children, they can help adults avoid problem websites.

You could also use an Internet service provider that does filtering. Below are links to two such companies:

- www.characterlink.net
- www.bsecure.com

If you need something more adult, check out accountability software. One such program is X3watch, which is offered by XXXchurch.com, a ministry that battles online pornography. With this program, you designate an accountability partner. X3watch makes a record of any questionable sites you visit and e-mails the list to your accountability partner. It also makes a note if you close the program. X3watch is free. You can get it at www.x3watch.com.

Here are some additional websites that may prove to be helpful in recovery from an addiction to pornography:

- Sex Addicts Anonymous:

www.sexaa.org.

- Dr. Patrick Carnes, author and expert on this topic: www.sexhelp.com.

Overcoming sexual addictions

The process of overcoming sexual addictions is neither simple nor easy. Spiritual freedom, however, is made available to us through Jesus Christ. "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36). The first step in the process of attaining this freedom is to recognize and acknowledge our sins. Remember King David's example of repentance. "For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me" (Psalm 51:3).

The next step involves changing direction in our life, turning away from sin

and toward obedience to God. Deep, heartfelt repentance before God can provide a marvelous cleansing process, a spiritual catharsis that releases the guilt and shame induced by sin. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

The struggle against sin is a long and difficult process. It's not only essential that we continue to "put to death" (Colossians 3:5) the old sinful carnal nature within us, but that we also allow Christ to transform us through the power of the Holy Spirit, the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2). Sinful habits must be rooted out and replaced with habits of obedience to God. As Paul expressed it, "And having been set

free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (Romans 6:18).

It is possible to break the bonds of sexual addiction. If you need help in this area, ask God to give you the courage to honestly face the problem. Be willing to seek counsel from the ministry and, if recommended, to obtain specialized professional help as well.

Most importantly, beseech Almighty God to accomplish His will in your life.

"But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life" (Romans 6:22).

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An Assignment on Sexual Purity

The following is a Bible study that discusses the importance of sexual purity in the life of a Christian. Satan will try anything he can to destroy us, and this is one of his favorite tools to use against every one of us. As your elders, we want you to consider the importance of sexual purity for you and your family, especially with respect to relationships, television programs, movies, reading material, and recreation.

Sexual purity is an important topic, not only for our young people, but for all of us. None of us is immune to the temptations that Satan will throw at us. Those of us who are parents should study this with our children of appropriate age, seeking the Bible's answers, direction and strength.

We encourage you to look up these passages in your own Bible. The NIV text is provided as a convenience (1984 version, except where noted).

If we can pray with any of you, or assist you in any way, please let us know. If you are a woman and would prefer to speak with another woman, we ask that you contact our wives. *In any case, do not let Satan get a foothold in your life.* Know that the elders love each of you, and we pray that God will continue to watch over all of us and our families.

Introduction

Definitions

What is “sexual immorality” as is mentioned in the Bible? It is a number of things, to be sure. Let’s start by taking a look at the word in the original Greek, and what that word meant. Here is what the Enhanced Strong’s Greek Lexicon says:

4202 πορνεία [*porneia* /por·ni·ah/] n f. From 4203; occurrences; AV translates as “fornication” 26 times. **1** illicit sexual intercourse. 1A adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc. 1B sexual intercourse with close relatives; Lev. 18. 1C sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman; Mk. 10:11,12. **2** metaph. the worship of idols. 2A of the defilement of idolatry, as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols.¹

Notice that “sexual immorality” is the word is *porneia*, the root of the word pornography, which essentially means the depiction or written description of illicit acts for the purpose of sexual enticement. Pornography today is found on television, the internet, in printed material, in theatres, on smart phones, and even on the radio.

Another word the Bible uses in discussing sexual purity is “lewdness”, also sometimes translated as “lasciviousness” or “debauchery”. The Strong’s reference on this word is:

766 ἀσέλγεια [*aselgeia* /as·elg·i·a/] n f. From a compound of 1 (as a negative particle) and a presumed selges (of uncertain derivation, but apparently meaning continent); Nine occurrences; AV translates as “lasciviousness” six times, “wantonness” twice, and “filthy” once. **1** unbridled lust, excess, licentiousness, lasciviousness, wantonness, outrageousness, shamelessness, insolence.²

n n: noun or neuter

f f: feminine

AV Authorized Version

¹Strong, J. (1996). *The exhaustive concordance of the Bible : Showing every word of the text of the common English version of the canonical books, and every occurrence of each word in regular order.* (electronic ed.) (G4202). Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship.

AV Authorized Version

²Strong, J. (1996). *ibid* (G766).

Some of these words may not be familiar to us, but notice that “lewdness” refers to unbridled lust, excess, and shamelessness. These are things we can all understand.

So when the Bible speaks of sexual immorality or impurity, it essentially is referring to thoughts and activities which are outside of God’s purposes and teachings regarding our sexuality. With this background, let’s take a look at the scriptures, to see what God’s purposes and teachings are for us.

God’s plan for a man and a woman

1 Corinthians 7:2-4 (NIV 2011)

² But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. ³ The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife,^m and likewise the wife to her husband. ⁴ The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife.³

- ☞ With whom should a man have sexual relations?
- ☞ With whom should a woman have sexual relations?
- ☞ When you are married, to whom does your body belong?
- ☞ Are the husband and the wife to meet each other’s sexual needs within their marriage?

God’s plan was that the sexual relationship be reserved for marriage between a man and a woman. Along with all of the other ways they are to help each other, they are to meet each other’s sexual needs as well.

So often the struggle comes before marriage, when young people who are sexually mature face the challenges of keeping themselves pure. But don’t think that the problem of impurity evaporates at the altar. Satan will try to destroy our relationship with our spouse through a variety of temptations. Not only should we learn to exercise self control and discipline in our lives before marriage, but we must also guard our hearts and actions once we are married.

^m Ex 21: 10; 1 Pe 3:7

³ *The New International Version*. (2011). (1 Co 7:2–4). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Turning to God's Word

The source of the problem

Matthew 15:19

²*For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.*

- ☞ Where does sexual impurity originate?
- ☞ What other things can originate in our heart?
- ☞ Understanding this, why is it important for us to be careful about our thoughts?
- ☞ How can our thoughts of another man or woman be influenced by our following them on Facebook or communicating with them by email, texting, or sending them Facebook messages?

Mark 7:20-23

²⁰*“What comes out of a man is what makes him ‘unclean.’”* ²¹*For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery,* ²²*greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.* ²³*All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean.’”*

- ☞ What really makes us unclean or impure - what people see on the outside, or what is on the inside?
- ☞ What are deceit, lewdness, and folly, and why are they listed with sexual immorality, theft, murder and adultery?

1 John 2:16

¹⁶*For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.*

- ☞ Do sinful cravings come from God?
- ☞ Where do sinful things come from?

Our behavior

Romans 13:13-14

¹³Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. ¹⁴ Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

- ☞ From the passage, how are we to behave?
- ☞ How are we to be clothed?
- ☞ Are we to be thinking about ways to gratify our sinful nature?

Acts 15:29

²⁹You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

- ☞ What things were the new Gentile Christians told to avoid?

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

¹It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. ² And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

- ☞ What was the sexual immorality that the Corinthian church was facing?
- ☞ How were the Corinthians dealing with this problem?
- ☞ How did Paul say that should have handled the problem?

Ephesians 5:3-5

³But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴ Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵ For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

- ☞ How much sexual immorality should a Christian have in their life?
- ☞ Is it proper for God's people to be involved in sexual immorality or impurity?
- ☞ What other things did Paul say were out of place in a Christian's life?

- ☞ Instead of obscenity, foolish talk and coarse joking, what should be in a Christian's life?
- ☞ Who does Paul say will not inherit the kingdom of Christ and of God?

Matthew 5:27-28

²⁷ *"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.'*^a *²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

- ☞ Is "just looking" wrong?
- ☞ What did Jesus say has already happened when someone looks lustfully at a woman?
- ☞ Would you expect that looking also means watching on TV, the internet, using a smart phone app, following someone on Facebook, or magazines?
- ☞ Would you expect that it is also wrong for women to look at men this way?

James 1:27

²⁷ *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*

- ☞ If we really want to be religious in God's eyes, what does James tell us we should do?
- ☞ What does it mean to keep ourselves from being polluted by the world?

Job 31:1

¹ *"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl."*

- ☞ How did Job work to keep his thoughts pure?
- ☞ Does it take a strong personal commitment to live a life of sexual purity?

^a Exodus 20:14

Galatians 6:7-8

⁷ *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.* ⁸ *The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature^a will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

- ☞ Is it possible to fool or deceive others, such as friends, family, or the church, with regards to our sinful nature?
- ☞ Can we fool God with regards to our sinful nature?
- ☞ If we sow (plant) to please our sinful nature, what will we reap?
- ☞ What will we reap if we sow (plant) to please the Spirit?

James 4:7

⁷ *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.* ⁸ *Come near to God and he will come near to you.*

- ☞ What will happen when we resist the devil?
- ☞ What will happen when we draw close to God?

^a Or *his flesh, from the flesh*

The Costs

Romans 1:18-32

¹⁸ *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,* ¹⁹ *since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.* ²⁰ *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.*

²¹ *For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.* ²² *Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools* ²³ *and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*

²⁴ *Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.* ²⁵ *They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen.*

²⁶ *Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones.* ²⁷ *In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

²⁸ *Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done.* ²⁹ *They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,* ³⁰ *slanders, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;* ³¹ *they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.* ³² *Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

- ☞ How were these men suppressing the truth (verse 18)?
- ☞ Has God made the knowledge of himself plain and understandable (verse 19)?
- ☞ Instead of glorifying and thanking God, what happened to these men (verses 21-23)?
- ☞ What are the truths of God regarding our sexuality (see the Introduction)?
- ☞ What lies might Satan tell us so that we would engage in sexual immorality?
- ☞ What does it mean to “worship and serve” – how much attention does that involve (verse 25)?
- ☞ What do verses 26 and 28 mean when it says “God gave them over”?
- ☞ What did these people not think worthwhile (verse 28)?
- ☞ What was their attitude toward God’s warnings about their behavior (verse 32)?

1 Corinthians 5:9-11

¹⁰I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – ¹⁰not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. ¹¹But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.

- ☞ When Paul told the Corinthians not to associate with sexually immoral people, what did he mean?
- ☞ What were Paul's instructions about associating with someone who calls themselves a Christian, but is sexually immoral?

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

⁹Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders ¹⁰nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

- ☞ Will sexually immoral people inherit the kingdom of God?
- ☞ Were some members of the Corinthian church sexually immoral at one time?
- ☞ How were they made pure in God's sight (verse 11)?

Galatians 5:19-21

¹⁹The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

- ☞ What are the acts of the sinful nature?
- ☞ Will those who follow their sinful nature inherit the kingdom of God?

Jude 7

⁷In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

- ☞ What punishment has been given to those in Sodom and Gomorrah who were perverted and sexually immoral?

Revelation 21:7-8

⁷ *He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.* ⁸ *But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.*”

- ☞ What does this passage say is reserved for those who are sexually immoral?
- ☞ Who will God claim as His own son?

Revelation 22:14-15

¹⁴ *“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.* ¹⁵ *Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*”

- ☞ Who will have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city of heaven?
- ☞ Who are outside the city of heaven?

1 Corinthians 10:6-10

⁶ *Now these things occurred as examples^a to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.* ⁷ *Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.”^b* ⁸ *We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died.* ⁹ *We should not test the Lord, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes.* ¹⁰ *And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.*

- ☞ What happened when some of these people committed sexual immorality?
- ☞ Is it reasonable to expect that God will exact a cost in our lives if we commit sexual immorality?

Hebrews 13:4

⁴ *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

- ☞ Are we to honor marriage?
- ☞ What does it mean to keep the marriage bed pure?
- ☞ What will happen to adulterers and the sexually immoral?

^a Or *types*; also in verse 11

^b Exodus 32:6

Our Bodies

1 Corinthians 6:13

¹³The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

☞ How are we to use our bodies?

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

¹⁸Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

☞ Are we to flirt with or walk casually by sexual immorality (verse 18)?

☞ When someone commits sexual sin, who are they really hurting?

☞ As Christians, who lives in our bodies?

☞ Why is a Christian not their own?

☞ What are we to do with our bodies?

Repentance

2 Corinthians 12:21

²¹*I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.*

☞ Why was Paul concerned about his return to the Corinthian church?

☞ What should those who have sinned done?

Revelation 9:20-21

²⁰*The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. ²¹ Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

☞ Are there people who will not repent of sexual immorality, even after seeing God's punishments?

Revelation 2:14

¹⁴*Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. ¹⁵ Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. ¹⁶ Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

☞ What did the Lord have against this church?

☞ What did the Lord tell this church to do?

Revelation 2:20-21

²⁰*Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.*

☞ What was going on at the Thyatira church?

☞ Was this person repenting of what she was teaching others?

Old Nature, New Nature

Colossians 3:5-10

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ^b⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

- ☞ Why is the wrath of God coming?
- ☞ What is it that we should put to death? What does that mean?
- ☞ Paul also tells the Colossians that they should rid themselves of what things?
- ☞ How is our new self being renewed? What does that mean to you?

2 Peter 2:17-22

¹⁷These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. ¹⁸For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. ¹⁹They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. ²⁰If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. ²¹It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. ²²Of them the proverbs are true: “A dog returns to its vomit,”^f and, “A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.”

- ☞ How were these men trying to get Christians to return to their old lives (verses 18-19)?
- ☞ What is reserved for people who try to lure Christians back to sin (verse 17)?
- ☞ Are those living sinful lives really free (verse 19)?
- ☞ What does Peter say about the condition of those who return to their sinful nature (verses 20-22)?

^b Some early manuscripts *coming on those who are disobedient*
^f Prov. 26:11

Holy Lives

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

³*It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control his own body^a in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.*

- ☞ What does this passage say is God's will (verses 3 and 4)?
- ☞ Does Paul also warn that it is wrong for Christians to hurt or take advantage of each other in this matter (verse 6)? What does this mean?
- ☞ To what kind of lives does God call us?
- ☞ If someone rejects these teachings, who are they rejecting?

Hebrews 12:14-16

¹⁴*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. ¹⁶ See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.*

- ☞ Will we get to see the Lord if we do not lead holy lives?
- ☞ Is it right to take steps to teach God's will regarding sexual immorality?

1 Peter 4:3-5

³*For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. ⁴ They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. ⁵ But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

- ☞ Can we expect that others will tease or ridicule us for living a life of purity and holiness?
- ☞ Will they have to give an accounting of their own lives? To whom will they give account?

^a Or *learn to live with his own wife, or learn to acquire a wife*

The Progression

Ephesians 4:17-19

¹⁷ So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. ¹⁹ Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

- ☞ What is the progression described in verses 18 and 19?
- ☞ What does indulging in impurity lead to (verse 19)?

James 1:13-15

¹³ When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; ¹⁴ but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.

- ☞ Does God tempt people?
- ☞ What is the progression of temptation and sin described in this passage?
- ☞ What is the end result of sin?

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Discussion questions

- ☞ Can we really repent if we keep pictures, magazines, mail, email or internet addresses? How would we really repent of sexual impurity?
- ☞ Facebook is increasingly becoming a factor in divorces – some reports indicate that Facebook is a factor in one third of divorces today. Discuss why this might be the case. Describe the progression that might lead from Facebook “friend” to something quite different. How can Christians guard themselves from this progression?
- ☞ How might a husband or wife increase their transparency with their spouse to protect their marriage?
- ☞ Why do you think that smart phones such as an iPhone or Android phone are becoming a growing problem with regards to pornography? How can Christians address this problem in their own lives?
- ☞ Why is it wrong to engage in sexting, exchange sexual photos or videos directly or through on-line services, or engage in sexual conversations with others? What scriptures in this study address this?
- ☞ What are some subtle ways that Satan will try to tempt us into sexual impurity?
- ☞ Read Genesis 39. What did Joseph do when faced with sexual temptation?
- ☞ 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 says that sexual sin is against a person’s own body. However, is it true that sins of sexual immorality may affect others? Discuss how this happens.
- ☞ What responsibility do you have in helping others to live sexually pure lives? How might your commitment to help others in this way affect your dress, speech, and entertainment?
- ☞ How do you think God will reward you for living a life of sexual purity?

Model of Infidelity
The Progressive Steps of Unfaithfulness

Attraction	Physical or personality We can't help the attraction, but we can decide what to do with it!
Proximity	Often in the same place with the other person... at work, church, ball game, neighborhood.
Interaction	Planning one's day in order to be with the other person. Deciding what to wear, where to go and when...because this other person will be there. RED FLAG!
Disclosure	Private, personal things; things about spouse, problems between you and spouse. Becoming better friends with other person than with spouse.
Equity	Other person begins to reciprocate, share personal things with you, problems between him/her and spouse. EMOTIONAL ADULTERY!
Physical Adultery!	

Read **1 Corinthians 10:13** and **2 Timothy 2:22**.

The protection: God centeredness, as Paul taught in **1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**.

Breaking Pornography Addiction - Part 1

By: [David Powlison](#)

Can God change those who are addicted to pornography? Yes, God can and does bring people out of their isolated, imaginary world of sexual addiction into the real world of authentic, loving relationships with God and people. David Powlison explains that change happens as people are lovingly challenged to face their behavior honestly, understand its roots, and turn to God for help. True change from God will bring freedom from pornography addiction by transforming the sexual addict's imagination and behavior.



Have you ever said anything like this?

“I’ve tried to stop so many times, but somehow I’m still end up in front of the computer surfing websites.”

“Cold showers, prayer, avoiding situations—I’ve tried everything. Is there any hope for me?”

“I know I should get help, but I am too ashamed.”

“I thought only men struggled with pornography, but I spend way too much time in my own little fantasy world.”

If you have, it’s likely that you are feeling trapped by an addiction to pornography and sexual fantasies. You feel guilty and ashamed, but you just can’t seem to stop. Maybe you are starting to notice that your relationships with the real people in your life are being affected by your struggle.

There is no magic bullet to free you from your addiction, but when you ask Jesus for help, he will come to you mercifully and firmly. Jesus welcomes all kinds of strugglers into his kingdom, and his Spirit will provide the deep down change you long for.

Change happens when you face your behavior honestly, understand the roots of your behavior, and then go to God to work true change in your life. The true change that comes from God will affect not only your behavior, but your imagination and desire life. Do you believe God can do this? Take a step of faith; read this booklet, and ask God to use it to begin to change you.

WHAT IS PORNOGRAPHY?

The first part of the word pornography, “porné,” means immorality and the second part, “graph” means to write, draw, or portray. Pornography is about picturing, imagining, and fantasizing about immorality.

Pornography has been around for centuries. But the widespread availability of pornography means the problem touches more people than ever before. Soft core pornography is everywhere you look: television, movies, magazines, billboards, and even posters at bus stops. And it’s not just in the media. In our world, both men and women dress to attract attention and to elicit romantic or erotic feelings in others. We are all bombarded with pornography every day—it’s the atmosphere we live in.

And pornography isn’t just a male problem. Both sexes have immoral fantasies. Women might be more captured by romantic literature and men by erotic pictures, but the end result is the same—you are committing adultery in your thought life.

FANTASIZING IMMORALITY IS WRONG

Perhaps you have been told that fantasizing immoral images and actions isn’t really wrong. It’s true that it’s a different kind of wrong than having an actual affair, but it is still sin. Jesus made this clear when he said, “anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). It’s important for you to acknowledge that what you are doing is wrong, because you won’t fight well unless you are able to say, “This is an enemy. When I do this, I sin.”

WHAT DOES PROGRESS LOOK LIKE?

What does progress in your struggle with pornography look like? In all typical human struggles (like anger, anxiety, escapism) winning doesn’t mean achieving perfection. It means having a new goal and a new direction. Your direction in life determines your final destination. Where are you headed? Are you going in the right direction? Going in the right direction in your struggle with pornography means learning to fight your temptation to *sin*, to handle your *guilt* when you fail, and to understand and avoid the *circumstances* in which you are tempted.

Making progress in these three areas does not mean you will suddenly get teleported from the mire in which you now live to the mountaintop of freedom from all temptation. Change in these areas means taking many small, incremental steps in the right direction. For example:

- *A decrease in the frequency of a sin is a true good.* It’s not good that you are still indulging in pornography, but if you are doing it less, you are going in the right direction.
- *A change in the actual nature of the sin is progress.* If you are no longer having an affair or premarital sex, and now you are battling pornographic fantasy, it’s good that your struggle has changed from your actions to your imagination.

- *A change in the battleground is progress.* When your battle has moved from purchasing materials or going onto explicit internet sites to battling the old fantasy tapes that are still in your mind, that's movement in the right direction.
- *An increase in honesty and accountability is progress.* You are moving forward when you are willing to be truly candid and accountable to a trusted friend, spouse, or pastor and say, "Here's where I'm struggling." An appropriate openness to others is a very significant step towards change.
- *Not always responding to difficult circumstances by indulging in sin is progress.* If your life gets hard and instead of going straight to your fantasy life, you pray for help and ask others to pray for you, then God is at work.
- *Repenting more quickly is progress.* Learning to go more quickly to the Lord of life, instead of wallowing for days, weeks, and months in the gloom of "I failed again," is a sign that God is at work in your life.
- *Learning to love and consider the interest of real people is progress.* Your immoral fantasies use other people in an imaginary world. Caring for others, even in small ways, means that Jesus is changing you.

UNDERSTAND YOUR DEEPER STRUGGLE

How do you get going in the right direction? You start by understanding your struggle. It's easy for your big, obvious sins (like surfing the internet for pornographic material) to conceal the deeper sins that fuel your struggle with pornography. But unless you recognize and repent of the sin patterns underlying your addiction, you won't be fighting the right battle. I learned this when I counseled Tom,¹ a single, Christian man in his late thirties who had been struggling with pornography and masturbation since he was a teenager. He had tried all the right things: accountability, memorizing the Bible, exercise, cold showers, and being involved in ministry. But he still struggled.

When I asked him to keep a record of when he was tempted, he said to me, "I already know when. It's usually on Friday night. It's my temper tantrum with God." I thought his big struggle was with pornography, but all of a sudden he was talking about anger at God!

Then he said, "I'm tired and lonely on Friday nights. I think about my single friends on dates and my married friends with their wives, and I feel sorry for myself. I get angry at God because I think he owes me a wife, and I don't have one. By 9 o'clock the temptation to sexual sin is overwhelming, and I give in."

Tom's fight with sin focused on just one thing—his struggle with pornography. But underlying that struggle was Tom's anger at God, self-pity, envy, and, a hugely significant issue, his belief that God owed him a wife. Tom's desire for a wife had become what the Bible calls a "lust of the flesh." A lust of the flesh is any desire (even a desire for a good thing like a wife) that dominates our lives,

anything we organize our lives around except God. Tom's lust for a wife fueled his sins of self-pity, anger at God, and then pornography.

Tom was also a legalist. He believed that when he tried to be a good Christian God owed him goodies (such as a wife), and when he did something wrong he despaired. Tom's imagination was much more than a sexualized imagination. It was full of envy, grumbling, and believing that what he did would either pry goodies from God or release a whirlwind of punishment. His imagination didn't include the gospel, forgiveness of sins, understanding God's love for him, or understanding the help that's available from the Spirit of God. Underneath all of Tom's sins was unbelief. He was living as if God wasn't with him and wasn't able to help him in his time of need.

As Tom faced these deep sin patterns and confessed them to God, he started to grow and change. His entire Christian life had been about managing one moral failure, but now his Christian life began to sparkle. He was fighting a much broader battle, and God gave him a wider vision to see the real battle and the real grace of God that was available for his whole life, not just one area of temptation.

You can take the same journey that Tom did. Start a journal, and keep track of what's happening in your life when you struggle with pornography. Answer these questions:

- When does it happen? What is going on? What happened that day?
- What were you thinking about? What was the nature of the temptation?
- What did you do about it? Did you act on it?
- If you didn't act on it, how did that happen?
- If you did what did you do after you fell?
- How did you recover? What was the after-effect?

Keeping this journal will help you see what is really going on in your struggle with pornography. As you start to grapple with your deeper sin patterns, you'll see that your problem is much bigger, your need for grace is much deeper, and your goal is much more magnificent than you ever imagined.

YOU GO TO GOD

What do you do when you see the scope of the battle you are fighting? How do you begin taking those small steps in the right direction that will add up to deep down change? *You go to God*. These four words—so simple to say and so hard to do—are at the center of how you fight against sin.

Why is this so hard? Because your natural instinct is to turn to yourself, instead of to Jesus. This is true of all sin, but it's obvious in your struggle with pornography because it's a solitary pursuit. Your pornographic sins are, by definition, only about you: what you want, what you hope for, and what you long for. When you are facing hard or disappointing circumstances—boredom, loneliness, money problems, fighting with a spouse, distance from a friend—it's easy (and instinctive) to turn in on yourself and try to escape your troubles by going to your fantasy life.

After you sin, it's easy (and instinctive) to stay turned in on yourself, but in a different way. Now, because you feel guilty, you chew on yourself, kick yourself, and are dismayed with yourself. But even your guilt is all about you.

Your only hope for deliverance from this never ending cycle of self is going to Jesus. How do you recover from defeats? You recover from defeats by going back to the God who offers mercy and forgiveness to you through the death of his own Son on the cross. Jesus died so you could be forgiven.

How do you face hardship, boredom, hurt, betrayal, and loneliness? By going to the God who is there, who is not surprised by sexual sin, who hears you, who cares about you, who wants to be in relationship with you. He is able to change your instinctive patterns.

Breaking Pornography Addiction - Part Two

By: [David Powlison](#)

Can God change those who are addicted to pornography? Yes, God can and does bring people out of their isolated, imaginary world of sexual addiction into the real world of authentic, loving relationships with God and people. David Powlison explains that change happens as people are lovingly challenged to face their behavior honestly, understand its roots, and turn to God for help. True change from God will bring freedom from pornography addiction by transforming the sexual addict's imagination and behavior.



Practical Strategies for Change

Imagine that your heart, your true inner self, is a room filled with your thoughts, feelings, experiences, and perceptions. Some are good and full of light, and some are bad and full of evil and darkness. There are two ways to clean out the evil and darkness and bring light and goodness to the whole room. You can eject the evil bodily: Fight the sin! Say no! Call your accountability person. Repent. Remember the Bible. Cry out to God for mercy. That's one-half of the battle.

The other way you fight sin is to flood your heart with light. When the room of your heart is filled with light, the shadows, the darkness, and the evil will be pushed out. You don't just put off your sins; you have to put on something new. Part of winning your battle with sexual sin is learning a new way of living.

TALK TO GOD

This new way of living starts with pouring your heart out to God. Begin by praying through Psalm 25. This psalm provides you with a pattern to follow as you deal with sin, hard circumstances, and guilt. In the first few verses of the psalm David turns to God and talks to him about the difficulties in his life. He says, “Do not let me be put to shame.” And “no one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame” (vv. 2–3). Then he immediately starts asking God to help him deal with his sins. He doesn’t want to end his life in shame and failure, so he prays, “Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior” (vv. 4–5). David specifically asks God to remember his own character, “Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old...according to your love remember me” (vv. 6–7). He wants God to look at his life through the lens of his compassion, goodness, and forgiveness.

Right in the center of the psalm, there’s this wonderful verse: “For the sake of your name, O Lord, forgive my iniquity, though it is great” (v.11). This is the heart of what it means to go to God—a radical giving of your life into the hands of another. David is putting himself in God’s hands and trusting him for everything he needs. He is pleading with God on the basis of his character to pardon him, change him, teach him, instruct him, grow him, and make him different.

David goes on to pray about his troubles, his afflictions, his loneliness, his stress, his hurts, and his enemies. After he prays about all the problems that bring temptation into his life, he asks God to meet him and “free me from anguish,” (v.17) and again to, “take away all my sins...guard my life and rescue me” (vv.18, 20).

Do you see how praying through this psalm will lead you out of your world of sin, guilt, and the difficult circumstances that are the occasion for your stumbling? Pray this psalm to God and insert your troubles, your sins, and your need for forgiveness into it. As you pray, God will begin to reverse the turning inward that sin, guilt, and hardship bring. And he will draw you to himself—to the one who, for his name’s sake and by his mercy must and will work in you.

LISTEN TO GOD

Don’t stop with pouring your heart out to God, listen to what he says about sexual sin.

Listen to what God says in Proverbs 5:15–23. This passage is about finding sexual fulfillment in marital faithfulness, and the consequences of not doing so. Pay close attention to this verse, “For a man’s ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths” (v.21). Your struggle with sexual sin will change when you understand that it is not a private struggle; your whole life is lived in public, before God. Remembering that you are not living in your own little private world, but that you are living in God’s world where he sees everything will make it much more difficult to sin. Use this passage to remind yourself that when you look for sexual fulfillment outside of marriage you will be “ensnared,” and held fast in “the cords of sin,” and that the way forward is living in “full view” of God.

Listen to what God says in Matthew 5:27-30:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your

whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Jesus sets the bar high for our thought life, and then gives a radical prescription for dealing with your lust. You are to tear it out, cut it off, and throw it away. He is telling you how to break your addiction. Your fight must be vigorous and resolute. You must roll up your sleeves, see that your enemy is you, and fight against your desires.

GET A NEW VISION

Because pornography is a sin of the imagination, true change has to reach your thought life. You can’t “just say no” to an evil imagination. You have to appeal in a more profound way to your imagination by working to replace the evil, dark, and wicked in your mind with the good, light, and pure.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery, a French writer, said “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood, and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.” This is exactly what God does for you. He wants you to have a vision of something so much better than living within your dark, self-centered imagination. God wants to give you a vision of life as it is meant to be, filled with a real, true, and intimate relationship with him and authentic, loving relationships with others.

Isaiah 61 and 62 will give you that kind of vision. These chapters are full of life and hope. Read them, and notice how Jesus promises to help you. He binds up the brokenhearted. Aren’t you brokenhearted by your continuing struggle with sin? He brings freedom to prisoners. Don’t you feel imprisoned by your sexual sins? He comforts those who mourn. Don’t you mourn when you fall into sin one more time? Fill your mind with the promises in these chapters: Jesus will give you gladness instead of mourning and praise instead of fainting under guilt. He will replace your shame with a new name, a beautiful crown, and a royal diadem: a new imagination.

BUILD REAL RELATIONSHIPS OF LOVE

The prophet Isaiah said, “‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips’” (Isaiah 6:5). Then an angel brings a coal of fire that cleanses his lips. This is what God is doing in you as you struggle with sexual sin. You are unclean, and you live in the middle of unclean people. But there’s an altar on which the Lamb of God has been sacrificed. From that altar comes a coal of fire, and you are cleansed.

Now you say to God as Isaiah did, “Here am I. Send me” (Isaiah 6:8). There are things to do. There are people to love and treat differently. Building real relationships of love with real people is crucial to the transformation of your imagination. You have spent way too much time in your private fantasy world.

It's time to build same-sex friendships with people who will hold you accountable and care about you. It's time to build healthy brother-sister relationships with the opposite sex as well. Leave your fictional world of pretend relationships and, if you are a man, start viewing women as your sisters, as people to protect instead of prey upon. If you are a woman, start treating men as your brothers. If you're married, begin the hard work of building an honest relationship where sexuality becomes one of the fruits of your unity as a couple.

BUILD ACCOUNTABILITY INTO YOUR LIFE

Becoming accountable to others is crucial to breaking your pornography addiction. But who should you confess to? Start by confessing to God, and then also confess to someone who can help you grow, who will hold you accountable, who can counsel you, pray for you, and encourage you. Who should that person be? Pick a same-sex friend who's trustworthy, who will ask you hard and pointed questions, who loves you and is willing to hang in there with you over the long haul.

If you're married, should you confess to your spouse? The ideal is that your spouse would be your most faithful and helpful accountability partner. But this sin directly affects your spouse, because in your mind you are betraying him or her. So you have to think carefully, with the help of a wise friend, counselor, or pastor, how you can confess to your spouse without hurting him or her more. As in all sharing, you don't need to go into every gory detail, you can share just enough in a generic way that your spouse knows what you are confessing, so he or she can offer you real forgiveness. This will dissipate the cloud that sexual fantasies have put over your marriage, and then the sexual union that happens afterwards can be fresh and in the context of mercy.

Any sharing (in any relationship) should not become a source of temptation. The Bible is full of stories about sexual sin, and they are told in a way that leaves us with no illusions, but is never arousing.

MINISTER GOD'S GRACE TO OTHERS

As God blesses you and changes you, minister to others the grace you have been given. Let God send you to those who are struggling as you have struggled. There's protection from sexual sin in knowing that later this afternoon or tomorrow you're going to be talking to someone else who struggles. You will want to talk to them with a clear conscience and a bright heart. If you can't, it will be your opportunity to go to God again and ask for mercy and help.

The transformation of your life from your isolated, private, imaginary world of romantic and erotic desires will happen as you learn to live in the real world where there is a real God to trust, need, know and love, and where there are real people with whom to reconcile, to love, and to serve. Crying out to God for help, thanking him for help received, praising him for who he is, and being willing to be sent by him to love others is how God will continue the life long work of transforming you and making you useful in his world.

Clean Heart New Start

I. Introduction.

- A. The area of sexual relationship often causes our relationship with God to short circuit.
- B. How do we return to fellowship with God?

II. Steps. (1 John 1:9)

A. Call it sin - do not rationalize.

- 1. You do not call sex sin.
- 2. The misuse of sex is sin - outside of God's context of marriage.

B. We confess our sin.

- 1. We agree with God that it is sin and that it is forgiven.
- 2. The person and life of Jesus Christ is the basis of our forgiveness.
- 3. What about your future sins?
 - a. Even your past sins were future 2000 years ago.
 - b. In Jesus we have forgiveness. (Ephesians 1:7)
 - c. Jesus was pierced for our transgressions. (Isaiah 53:4-5)
 - d. Christ's death is the bases for all of our forgiveness.
- 4. The forgiveness of David after committing adultery. (Psalm 51)
 - a. When we sin against others, we first sin against God.
 - b. David asked god to give him a clean heart.
 - c. David could do nothing to substitute his sin - Jesus had to pay for it.

C. We acknowledge that we are forgiven. (Psalm 103:12)

- 1. God puts our sins away as far as the east is from the West - it goes on for eternity.

D. We forgive ourselves.

- 1. When we do not forgive ourselves we produce a guilt that is not from God.
- 2. We say that our standard is higher than God's standard and deny the power of the cross.
- 3. It is Satan's deceit to not forgive ourselves.

E. Bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance. (Matthew 3:8)

- 1. By a decision of our will we make the choice that is indicative that we have truly repented.
- 2. How would this look?
 - a. Daniel made a decisive decision not to defile himself.
 - b. We must make a decisive decision not to continue in the sin.
 - Perhaps you will break up with the person.
 - Perhaps you will make a decision not to be alone with the person.
 - c. The most powerful sex organ that you have is your mind. (Romans 12:1-2)
 - We must yield the control of our mind to God.
 - This might manifest itself in refusing to look at pornography.
 - d. Guard your eyes. (Matthew 6) Job made a commitment with his eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. Our eyes are not garbage cans.
 - e. Avoid situations that are tempting sexually. (Romans 13:14)
 - f. Find someone to hold you accountable. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)
 - Two are better than one.
 - They lift each other up. The Bible is telling us to come together in a relationship with another believer of the same sex to hold us accountable.

F. Go to the other person and ask for repentance.

- 1. Even if you want to call it love, it is sin.
- 2. Asking will promote healing.

G. When sin does enter our life though there is no condemnation.

- 1. The Holy Spirit convicts.
- 2. The Holy Spirit does not condemn.
- 3. God loves you.

III. Conclusion.

- A. God created sex for marriage.
- B. When we break this outside of marriage we have forgiveness.

STUDY GUIDE

Clean Heart New Start

Part 1: What do you see?

1. Summarize the steps to return to fellowship with God after having committed a sexual sin in your own words.

2. What does it mean to confess our sin? How might this differ from a popular understanding of confession?

3. Look up two of the following Scriptural passages on bringing forth fruit in keeping with repentance: Romans 12:1-2; Matthew 6; Romans 13:14; Ecclesiastes 4:9-10. How do these passages give us a picture of the changed heart?

Part 2: What do you think?

1. Why is it that sex is not a sin, but sex outside of marriage is a sin?

2. Which of the steps was the most striking to you? Explain.

3. Why is it that when sin does enter our lives there is no condemnation? What is it about Christ's work that allows for the Holy Spirit to convict instead of condemn us?

Part 3: What will you do?

1. What attitude towards sex do you need to change in light of this message? How and in what circumstances are you to properly think about it?

2. What attitude towards regaining fellowship with God do you need to change in light of this message? How does Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross relate to this?

3. Holiness is serious business. What steps will you take to keep yourself from situations that are too tempting? How will you advise others?

Purity

I. Holiness. (Ephesians 4)

A. A description of the culture - a continual lust for more. (Ephesians 4:19)

1. Similar to what we have today.
2. When the court has to choose between morality and freedom and expression, morality loses out.

B. Paul's insistence on holiness.

1. When this is said, business is meant.
2. Paul wants them to live in another way.
3. Holiness is not an option for the Christians.
 - a. Ephesians was written to ordinary Christians.
 - b. Holiness is to permeate everything that we do.
 - c. Most Christians note that the world is failing and that in comparison they are doing pretty well - this is an improper attitude.
 - d. God wants us to be holy as He is holy.

C. There is a fundamental bedrock change in the life of the one who becomes a Christian.

D. The Ephesians did not come to know Christ in the way they were living.

E. A description and definition of holiness.

1. A putting away of the old way of life.
 - a. The example of a radical culture change.
 - b. There has been a fundamental change in our lives, but we have brought with us in the new kingdom old habits.
 - c. Sin and temptation are deceitful.
2. Being made new in our attitudes.
 - a. We begin to see sin as God does and turn from it.
 - 1) Being saved from sin.
 - 2) Changing our attitude toward sin.
 - 3) Breaking from sin in habit.
 - b. We may only be made new in the attitude of our minds through the Word of God.

F. Putting on the traits of the new self.

1. It is not enough that we simply put off the old characteristics.
2. God wants us to be like Him.
3. The fruit of the Spirit.
 - a. We often get so preoccupied with dealing with particular sin that we forget to put on the new self.
4. Holiness is conformity to the character of God. (1 John)
 - a. God is light.
 - 1) There is not an external standard to which we conform to holiness.
 - 2) God Himself is the standard.
 - 3) Something is holy because it is like God.
 - b. God is love.

G. Practical application of Paul.

1. Holiness in its outworking is very practical.
 - a. Stop lying.
 - b. Stop stealing.
 - c. Do not let your anger come from a self-motive.
2. Holiness affects our relationships with other people.
 - a. True holiness will make us a better person in every relationship.
3. Holiness covers every aspect of our lives.
 - a. We not only to put off sin, but to put on righteousness.
 - 1) From stealing to giving.
 - 2) From unwholesome talk to building others up.
 - a) You must maintain the joy.
 - 3) From malice to kindness and forgiveness.
4. Holiness results in absolute moral purity.
 - a. There is not to be even a hint of any kind of impurity.
 - 1) The words are absolute.

- 2) The only specific sin that is contrasted to holiness is immorality or impurity.
(1 Thessalonians 4:3, 7)
- a) More than just adultery between a man and a woman.
- b) Has to do with lust of the eyes, of the heart, etc.
- c) Memorize Job 31:1.
 - i. Job made a covenant with his eyes.
 - ii. The tendency was not a sin in itself—he did something about it.
- d) 1 Timothy 2:9.
 - i. God holds girls accountable for their dress.

II. Achieving holiness.

- A. Activity in the Word of God.
 - B. A commitment to holiness. (Hebrews 12:14)
 - 1. Pursue holiness.
 - a. “Press on.” (Philippians 3:11-12)
 - b. Athletic imagery.
 - c. Commitment is written across the face of those verses.
 - 2. We will never pursue holiness without commitment.
 - C. Avoid the two extremes of self-effort and no effort.
 - 1. In the pursuit of holiness it is important to know what our part is and what God’s part is.
 - 2. You work because God is at work in you. (Philippians 2:12-13)
 - a. The fruit of your salvation expressed.
 - b. Not self effort but personal responsibility and dependence upon the Spirit of God to enable us.
 - 3. The Christian life is a struggle. (Colossians 1:29)
 - a. Paul was conscious of the struggle and of the power of God.
 - b. We should not have a problem in joining human responsibility and divine enablement.
 - c. The Spirit of God works on us and in us, but almost always with our involvement.
- We are to be involved in the Christian life.

Application questions.

1. Why is it simply not enough to put off the “old self” as described by the speaker?

2. The speaker says that holiness results in absolute moral purity. Explain this.

3. In order to achieve holiness we are to avoid the two extremes of self-effort and no effort. What does this look like in real life? How will you apply this principle to your own life? Explain

Strategies for Change

TALK TO GOD

- Devote to Daily Morning Prayer
- Pray with others
- Confess to God Daily in Prayer
- Write down your struggles to God
- Rewire your Brain - Triggers



LISTEN TO GOD

- Read the Bible Daily
- Challenge yourself to Complete the Bible
- Read Christian Books to Inspire yourself
- Write down your daily Insights



GET A NEW VISION

- Set Goals for yourself
- Set Monthly Goal for yourself
- Clear vision on WHO / HOW you want to be



BUILD REAL RELATIONSHIPS OF LOVE

- Daily meet with Christians
- Be committed to Spiritual growth
- Involve, Serve, Help with Ministry
- Build close friends



BUILD ACCOUNTABILITY IN YOUR LIFE

- Confess to friends
- Create a team to support you
- Don't discriminate



MINISTER GOD'S GRACE TO OTHERS

- Involve in Teaching the Bible to others
- Share your faith with others
- Help your friend Overcome too

