

Pornography: Sin Crouching at the Door

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Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it” (Genesis 4:6-7, NASB).

I repeat: sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.

We cannot help it that the enemy is at our gate. What we can do is make sure he stays out.

Pornography is a tool of this enemy.

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If the statistics are accurate . . .

- 10% of Americans spend an hour per week looking at porn online. About 5 million of these spend 11 hours or more a week.¹
- 15 years ago, 9 out of 10 men raised in Christian homes were exposed to pornography as a child.² This was before the Internet was widespread.
- Over 50% of pastors say that pornography addiction is the most damaging sexual issue in their congregations.³
- A recent survey suggested that 50% of Christian men say they are addicted to pornography.⁴

It is simply the sinful world in which we live. Pornography is not just at the door of our churches anymore. It is in our midst.

¹ MSNBC/Stanford/Duquesne Study, Washington Times, 1/26/2000.

² 91% of men raised in Christian homes were exposed to pornography while growing up (compared to 98% of those not raised in a Christian home) according to a confidential survey of 600 men – Hart, Archibald D. (1994). The Hart Report. *The Sexual Man*, Word Publishing, page 95.

³ In March 2005 *Christianity Today* published the results of a study called “Christians and Sex” in their *Leadership Journal*, saying 57% of pastors surveyed said addiction to pornography is the most sexually damaging issue to their congregation.

⁴ Reported on Marketwire.com (August 7, 2006). “ChristiaNet Poll Finds That Evangelicals Are Addicted to Porn.”

If the stats are accurate, it is likely that many people in this room are losing this battle with lust because of pornography. First, look at these stats and remember: you are not alone.

Some of you might be thinking, “This isn’t me. I’m not one of those guys.” You may not be. But look to your right and your left. Chances are, the men you sit next to are struggling. This is not just a personal issue. This is an issue for the whole church to wrestle with.

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Did you know that over the past 170 years, pornography has always ridden on the heels of new technology and at times been the driving force behind new technology? Why? *Because sin is crouching at the gate of your heart and the gate of your home.* Pornography uses technology to get closer and closer to the gate of your heart and your home.

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- **Photography:** Did you know that in the 1840s, the earliest photographs, called daguerreotypes, were quickly used to create nude displays of women in risqué poses? A few years later the word “pornography” entered the English language. By the way, the word pornography comes from a combination of two Greek words: “graphe” (which means writing) and “pornē” (which means prostitute).

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- **Movies:** Did you know that when the movie projector was invented a century ago, many of the first movies were not the sort of damsels-in-distress-tied-to-train-tracks movies or the Charlie Chaplin-style slapsticks? They were stilted porn shorts called stag films, and they were shown in brothels.

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- **Magazines:** In 1953 pornography started to come into the mainstream of American capitalism with the advent of Playboy magazine. It wasn't long after that Penthouse and Hustler followed suit. This was a major shift for pornography, because earlier it was seen as an underground industry. After Playboy, porn was still taboo in our culture, but it was being consumed by upwardly mobile Americans, and it was done in the open. *Here we see sin crouching a little closer to the door of your heart and your home.*

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- **VHS Tapes:** Did you know that the history of the VCR is directly linked to the history of pornography. In 1978, fewer than 1% of American homes had VCRs, and more than 75% of VHS tapes sold were pornographic. One of the reasons why VHS became so popular over other video formats is because video rental stores helped drive the VHS market, and the first video rental businesses were primarily sellers of pornography.⁵

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⁵ See Janet Wasko, *Hollywood in the Information Age*; James Lardner, *Fast Forward: Hollywood, the Japanese and the Onslaught of the VCR*

- **Internet:** And now, the Internet has changed everything. Now you no longer need to drive to the seedy shop on the other end of town to buy magazines or videos. You can have them pumped into your home at high speeds. When the Internet went mainstream in 1994, Playboy developed one of the first online magazines. A recent study shows that pornography makes up over a third of all Web content. *Again, pornography crouches just a little closer to our door.*
- And these aren't just small-time businesses that are hosting these sites: over 70% of the hundreds of millions of pornography images online are owned by 20 large U.S. companies. Pornography doesn't wait for new technology to get closer to the gates of your home; pornography now drives technology. The reason we have Internet technologies such as streaming audio and video, flash, pop-up windows, high speed Internet connections, and security improvements for ala cart pay services, is because pornography investors pumped money into them.

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- **Cell Phones:** With the development of cell phone technology, pornographers didn't waste any time getting on board. People are calling it "pocket porn." Pornographers are actually building websites designed specifically to be accessed by cell phones.

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Pornography is no longer the underground industry. Pornography is a business run like any Fortune 500 company. In the US, the adult industry is a 13 billion dollar per year business. The Internet is the fastest expanding segment of the industry, at about 2.5 billion dollars per year. And that's just the stuff people pay for. A recent study estimates that 80-90% of people who watch porn online watch only the free stuff.

The enemy is at the gate: "sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

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Moreover, pornography isn't just easy to access, it is also highly addictive.

"Modern science allows us to understand that the underlying nature of an addiction to pornography is chemically nearly identical to a heroin addiction" (Dr. Jeffrey Satinover).

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When someone uses a street drug like cocaine, this tricks the brain into releasing dopamine. This is where the feeling of being high comes from.

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Pornography releases the same hormone.

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When viewing porn the brain also releases oxytocin. This is a strong bonding hormone that is also released the first time mothers hold their newborn baby or when lovers hold hands or make love. Oxytocin creates a bonding effect. But instead of bonding to another person, the brain is bonding to pornographic images, to a fantasy experience.

Pornography is essentially overexposure to erotic stimuli that exhausts our normal sexual responses.

This leads to what Dr. Gary R. Brooks calls the “centerfold syndrome.” Pornography turns men into virtual voyeurs: they develop a fascination with merely looking at women instead of interacting with them. Use of porn over and over will train the mind to objectify women, to rate them by the size, shape, and harmony of their body parts.

So what happens for a man when real women suddenly do not measure up to the pixels on the screen?

- Sometimes, it means that it becomes difficult to be aroused by or connect to our wives or future wives.
- Today, more and more couples are confessing to pornography being one of the leading causes of their divorce. Some statistics show that in 50% of divorces, pornography is named as a contributing factor.

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If you wanted to see pornography a generation ago, you would buy a pin-up calendar or a magazine. But today, because of the Internet, you have a limitless storehouse of images to tap into, and people are building a *HUGE library of these images in their brains*.

This isn't limited to still photos, but full-length videos, live chat and women stripping for webcams, and any and every fetish you could ever think of—all at the click of a button.

Clinical psychologists are seeing men and women line up outside their doors to confess their sex addictions, and every time, when you ask where all these people have come from, the psychologists say that it is because of the Internet. The Internet has accelerated porn addiction today: what in earlier times took years to develop now takes only a few months.

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So we've talked about how porn is at the door of our hearts and homes, how addictive it can be, and how it can damage our relationships. But nothing is as sad as seeing how this affects one's relationship with God.

Pornography is one of the biggest forms of sex-worship today. When someone goes back to pornography again and again, they are giving their heart over to lust.

If the greatest commandment is to love God with all our mind, heart, soul and strength, then the greatest sin is when we fail to give Him that love.

- Pornography robs our minds, our hearts, our souls, and our energy of the love God should receive.
- It robs Him of our attention and our affection.
- Intentionally looking at pornography is a blatant disregard for God's purposes and commandments about our sex drive. It is offensive to Him. He hates it.
- He hates it so much, He will make it a priority to discipline His children so they are rid of it.

What sort of men, husbands, and spiritual leaders could we become if we made a radical break from pornography?

- Some men look at porn and are so weighed down by guilt and shame over it, it's like they are under a rock and can't get up. They want to get so much closer to God, but they feel they can't because they fall into this sin again and again.
- Some men look at porn and it's become such a regular part of their life, they don't think anything of it. It's just part of the norm. And if their consciences are hardened about this issue, how else have they hardened their hearts? What kind of men could they become if they felt the sting of conviction once more and broke free from this sin?

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So we know the problem, sin is crouching at the door, at the gates. What's the solution?

First, we need to guard the gates of our heart.

Proverbs 4:23 – "Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life."

These are the first gates we are called to guard: the gates of our own hearts.

Who does this command apply to? Only certain people? All of us?

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There are different experiences we have all had with pornography online: a spectrum of experiences. Where are you on this spectrum?

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- Stage 1: Ignorant – I didn't know pornography was out there online.

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- Stage 2: Aware – I know porn is out there online, and I know I might be tempted to view it.

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- Stage 3: Tempted – I have seen links to pornography and have thought about clicking on them but I have resisted.

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- Stage 4: Dabbling – I have clicked on links to pornography or searched for porn, maybe only brief glances, or maybe I've lingered on these sites for a while.

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- Stage 5: Using – I habitually go to pornographic websites.

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- Stage 7: Addicted – I compulsively go to pornographic websites and I cannot seem to stop.

No matter where you are on this spectrum, sin is crouching at the gate of your heart. No matter which one describes you, God has called every one of us to guard the gates of our hearts. Whether you are already in the thick of sin and you need to kick sin out the door, or if you want to make sure you never get to dabbling, using or addiction, we all need help in this battle. We all need to guard our hearts.

Whether you are tempted, just clicking, lingering, using, or addicted, remember: you are not alone.

As with all sins, when we want to guard the gates of our hearts, it all starts with taking the sin seriously.

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Psychologist Al Cooper, a pioneer in the study of why people are drawn to cybersex, wrote about the "Triple-A Engine," that which drives our attraction to Internet porn.

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Pornography is . . .

- Accessible (just the click of a mouse and I can see it)
- Affordable (much of it is free online)
- Anonymous (no one will know I'm watching it)

Here's the key: What if you could take away one of the legs of this stool? *It wouldn't stand.*

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That's what accountability is all about. It takes away the anonymity, the secrecy.

Accountability: giving an account of your actions to someone else.

Here's testimony from a seminary student: *"Before I went to seminary, I was living a **secret life** on the Internet; my eyes were going to places they should not have. But by the grace of God I found Covenant Eyes, and my life was profoundly transformed. I would not have even gone into seminary if not for Covenant Eyes."*

Note how the removal of secrecy helped him get to the root of his sin. That's exactly what accountability is all about. Bringing someone else into the secret areas of our lives and being open and honest about the things with which we are struggling.

This is how Covenant Eyes works. When this student downloaded the software, he had some good friends that started receiving regular reports of everywhere he went online. First, this completely changed the way he viewed his time on the Internet. It was no longer a secret thing. Second, it brought other men into the battle with him. He was able to find true camaraderie and gain true victory over this sin.

Here's a man who went to seminary because he finally began to break free from lust in his life. How many more people could start doing great things in the kingdom of God if they were able to climb out of the pits in which they live? If they could just open their hearts and tell someone, they would begin to find freedom.

Johnny LaLonde, a Christian counselor who personally uses Covenant Eyes, says, *"I have Covenant Eyes so that there is a continual reminder for me that **what we do in secret matters**. To remind myself that what we do in secret is seen by our Father in heaven. And that what we do in secret can destroy us. I keep it on my computer to remind me that I can expose what goes on in my heart and in my life."*

Note again how removing secrecy is one of the keys to breaking temptation.

What is accountability? There are many different attitudes people have about this.

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Accountability is a concept that's been around a long time. The Bible says time again that when we confess our sins, yes, even our secret sins, to each other, that we will experience God's cleansing power and forgiveness.

Even secular groups have embraced the idea of accountability. If you go an AA or NA meeting, members are required to have sponsors. These are people who hold them accountable to the 12-step process that AA has made so famous.

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Accountability is not about being a cop - The accountability cop is someone who just lets me know he's watching me, and that I better not screw up. His job is to enforce the legal code. As long as I don't cross the line, I don't hear from him. The motto of the cop is, "I'm watching you."

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Accountability is not just about being a coach - The accountability coach is an encourager and a trainer. His main objective is to tutor me, to give me the Biblical principles he thinks I need to succeed. The motto of the coach is, "Try harder." This is okay, but again, the coach isn't the best model of accountability.

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Accountability is about being a good spiritual cardiologist - The accountability cardiologist doesn't just see me crossing the line or not crossing the line: he wants to get to the bottom of things, he wants to see what sins lie underneath the surface of my sins (like the reasons why I am looking at porn online). He gets together with me on a regular basis and asks me probing questions that help both of us see why I do the things I do.

This is what we are to be to one another as men in the Body of Christ: we confess our temptations and weaknesses and even our most shameful sins. Then we help one another to get to the bottom of our sin. We help one another before temptation festers into sin, and before sin festers into corruption.

CLICK SLIDE

"Sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it."

So sin crouches at the door of your heart, but it also crouches at the door of your home. Sin is not only coming after you: it's coming after your children.

Our children are growing up in a sexualized culture:

- Sexual themes are all over television today: Desperate Housewives, Swingtown, Sex and the City, Gossip Girl, Rock of Love, Friday Night Lights, or the new 90210.
- The Internet is also a big gateway into your home. The largest group of Internet porn viewers are teenagers. High percentages of teens encounter pornography accidentally the first time they see it.
- And more and more cases are coming into the news: teens who are not only watching pornography, but those who are actually making homemade pornography and distributing it among their friends at school.

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In 1996 officials of the U.S. Department of Justice stated, "Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent (and obscene) material been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions."

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Are filters the best answer?

- For young children, filters are a great tool to keep them away from things that might pop-up online.
- But eventually those same kids are going to enter puberty and become curious about sexuality.
- Eventually they are going to grow up and enter a world where they aren't always going to have a filter for protection.
- Filters are good, but if they merely become a fence that holds them back from doing what they want to do, eventually they will get around the filter. They'll go to a friend's house. They'll beat the filter.
- This is why filtering plus accountability is a great tool for parents.
- If you start early, modeling real accountability in the home, this will prepare your children for the long haul in life.
- A filter is a good technological tool. But accountability is a great relational solution.

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Here's a letter we received from a pastor:

"I would just like to say thank you for your service to our children. My 13 year-old son, accessed a porn site without knowing that we had installed Covenant Eyes, and my accountability partner confronted me immediately, thinking it was me. Knowing it was not me, I immediately confronted my son. . . .

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"He admitted fault, and what happened afterwards was a great breakthrough that brought us closer together, and more importantly, brought him closer to God. This was truly a timely God-send. Again, thank you so, so much for being true servants. One young life was spared the anguish and frustration from one of the greatest enemies of our time."

And we receive emails like this all the time, of stories about how parents have a chance to model accountability for their children. They talk openly about what they see online. They start to have open conversations about sexuality, about pornography, and not just one-time talks.

Use accountability to guard the gates of your heart and your home.

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Let me give you a "what if."

What if the church today was full of men and women who could say this along with the apostle Paul, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me” (2 Corinthians 12:9b)?

We all have weaknesses. Sometimes our biggest areas of moral weakness can actually become the places where God’s glory shines the brightest.

Think about how God continually used weak people to show Himself strong.

- He used a stuttering Moses to be the mouthpiece of his law.
- He used the youngest son from a small tribe, David, to kill a giant.
- He used uneducated fisherman to bring the gospel to the Roman Empire.
- And yes, he can use sinful, weak-willed men who are easily given to lust.

God uses the weak when they are willing to boast about those weaknesses without trying to hide them or mask them. When it comes to the area of lust and pornography, it means being willing to say, “Yes, I am weak. Porn is a temptation for me. I am not what I should be. I am not what I want to be. But by God’s grace I am not what I was!”

WHAT IF whole small groups, whole church groups, and even whole churches and Christian organizations started to boast in their weaknesses before each other?

I'll leave you with a testimony from a pastor and former porn addict, Tal Prince, who has used our software for a long time:

CLICK SLIDE

“I dare you to live your life out loud, and boast in your weaknesses. It is in our weaknesses as followers of Jesus Christ that He is most glorified and magnified. None of us are as shiny and perfect as we would like people to think we are—if we were, then God saved us because He has good taste. I can assure you, that is not the case.

“I’ve been using Covenant Eyes for over 6 years now, and it’s an essential part of my continued recovery in this area of my life. I recommend it at conferences and to people I talk to whether they are addicts or just need the accountability—and really, who doesn’t need accountability?”