

PORN-FREE CHURCH

Raising up gospel communities to destroy secret sins



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Porn in the Church

The High Cost of Silence

by Bill Perkins

Several years ago I performed the marriage ceremony for a young couple. Both had grown up in Christian homes and done well professionally. She had won the state's "Best Teacher" award, and he was a successful salesman. They completed six weeks of premarital counseling with me and also met numerous times with a professional therapist. They seemed on course to have a healthy and fulfilling marriage.

But things were not as they appeared.

Six months after their wedding I received a phone call from the bride. "Bill, I just found out Jason is addicted to porn."

"How did you find out?" I asked.

"I pay the bills and noticed some unexpected credit card charges," she said. "I asked about them and his explanation made sense. I mean, I wasn't even suspicious. And then one day I was looking for something on his laptop and out of curiosity, checked his browsing history. What I saw made me sick. I then did some research on the credit card charges and discovered they were to an online company with a bogus name—it's a porn site, and he has been paying for adult video-chats."

"Did you ask him about it?"

"I asked," she said. "Initially, he denied it. But when I started to power up his laptop, he came clean. He admitted he had been hooked on porn since he was a teenager."

I wish I could tell you their story ended well, but it didn't. Nor do most of the stories I hear from the men and women who contact me after reading one of my books or

hearing me speak. I wish I could say most pastors and church leaders are aware of the extent of the problem and have a system in place to educate, counsel, and protect their parishioners from the growing influence of pornography. But as someone who travels across the United States speaking in all flavors of churches, I don't believe that's the case. I suspect if church leaders were more aware of the high cost of porn in the church, they would more aggressively mobilize the resources needed to combat the problem.

Hiding Creates a Greater Problem

When something is forbidden, or banned on grounds of morality, it becomes taboo. Nothing in the church is more taboo than sexual sins. Indeed, the hallmark of Christian virtue is sexual purity. The Bible repeatedly tells us to abstain from sexual immorality and pursue purity (1 Thess. 4:5; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 1:14; 2:11; 1 John 2:16). And so as believers we should set a high biblical standard of sexual purity and condemn sexual sins.

The problem is, when we hammer away on the evils of sexual sins people decide not to talk about them at all. And since it's not talked about, everyone assumes there is no problem. Or, if there is one, it's with other people.

Since pastors are expected to live lust-free lives, they also refuse to discuss their personal struggle to remain sexually pure. No wonder—if a pastor admits he's got a problem with porn, regardless of how limited the problem may be, he could be fired and blackballed.

Moreover, the taboo nature of sexual sins in the church makes them more exciting to commit. While doing research for one of my books on addictive behavior, I conducted a telephone interview with a leading expert in the field of sexual addictions. He told me, "I believe evangelical Christians have a greater tendency to fall into sexual addictions than any other sub-culture in the United States."

When I asked him why, he said, "Because sexual sins are so taboo in the church people find them more exciting. Once they commit a taboo sexual act, they refuse to tell anyone. Their belief that they have done something bad creates guilt which leads to shame. This shame generates pain which they try to medicate with more sexually taboo activity. The deeper they fall into sexually deviant behavior the more closely they must guard their secret. The longer the behavior continues, the more addictive it becomes, and the more it destroys their core being."

While just his opinion, he told me this without knowing that I am a Christian who writes from a Christian perspective. His thoughts underline the possibility that churches, by refusing to address the problem of porn in the church, are actually creating an environment that fosters porn addictions.

The Apostle Paul addressed the power of the taboo when he said, “The law was added so that the trespass might increase” (Rom. 5:20, NIV). His statement is certainly true when it comes to sexual purity—just tell someone something is wrong and it suddenly excites the flesh (Rom. 7). And so as the church fights for purity we need to recognize the message we’re sending could be creating a bigger problem.

Does that mean we should lower the moral standard? No, it doesn’t. But it does mean we need to avoid placing sexual sins in a category in which they’re so aberrant that those who commit them are anathema. We need to create a place where all sins can be discussed and dealt with. I don’t mean we should have a weekly meeting where everyone stands and confesses their sexual sins. Rather, we need to create a setting where everyone knows someone in the church with whom they can discuss their struggle. We need to follow the admonition of James and confess our sins rather than hiding them (James 5:16).

Crippled Leaders

I could quote to you statistics about what percentage of surveyed evangelical pastors have visited an Internet porn site in the last month. Or I could quote a statistic which declares how many pastors are porn addicts. But frankly, I haven’t seen a legitimate survey with such information. The ones I’ve seen didn’t provide a large enough sampling to convince me they are reliable.

But I don’t need stats, because I’ve talked with enough pastors to know plenty of them are tainting their souls with Internet porn, as are many lay-leaders. This creates a problem, not just for the pastor and leaders, but for the church as well.

Last year, I received an e-mail from a church leader asking for my advice. He told me someone had spotted porn on the pastor’s computer which resulted in his resignation. The pastor claimed he had visited a site just once. And even though an investigation of the computer by an expert had uncovered only a single image with no evidence of Internet porn surfing, the man had to quit his job.

The church was devastated and serious questions were raised about the sexual morality of the remaining staff members. The pastor couldn’t get another job and

may end up stepping away from vocational ministry. In addition to his losses, the reputation of the church was tarnished.

Of course, for a pastor to maintain sexual purity, he needs a band of brothers with whom he can be open and honest. A man who is cultivating those kinds of friendships sets an example for the staff and church to follow. And a pastor who isolates himself and refuses to deal with his struggles with sexual lust, builds a church that does the same thing. In other words, churches follow the example of their leaders.

Porn is an enemy that will infiltrate and destroy churches from the top down, and it will do so without a blink of remorse.

Addicted Women and Teens

According to a May 18, 2010, survey conducted by Today's Christian Women Online, 34 percent of their readers admit to intentionally accessing porn. The results of this are staggering. More women are getting involved in cybersex, more women than men convert online conversations into real-life affairs, and more women are accessing porn while at work.¹

If those stats didn't get your attention this next one will. According to Family Safe Media, the largest group of viewers of Internet porn is children between ages 12 and 17.² In spite of this staggering statistic, most of the Christian parents I speak with deny their kids have or would check out a porn site.

Several years ago I had a speaking engagement at a city-wide men's breakfast on the East Coast. The point man for the event picked me up at the airport and drove me to my hotel. On the way, he mentioned that an image of a dancing naked woman had appeared on the home page of his desktop computer at home and he didn't know where it came from or how to get rid of it. I told him somebody probably visited a porn site and it followed them home and decided to stay.

"It wasn't me," he said.

"Then it must have been your wife," I said.

1 Kevin VeLeu, "Women and Sexual Addiction: Characteristics, Causes and Cure," www.associatedcontent.com, accessed September 22, 2010.

2 Family Safe Media, December 15, 2005, http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html. Accessed September 22, 2010

“No way!” he insisted.

“Then it was probably one of your teenage sons.”

At this point he became indignant and assured me his sons never visit porn sites. “They’re Christians who go to a Christian school and attend a strong church,” he said.

Later that night, I had dinner with the man, his wife and another couple. The topic came up and the other couple insisted their three teenagers have never visited an Internet porn site either.

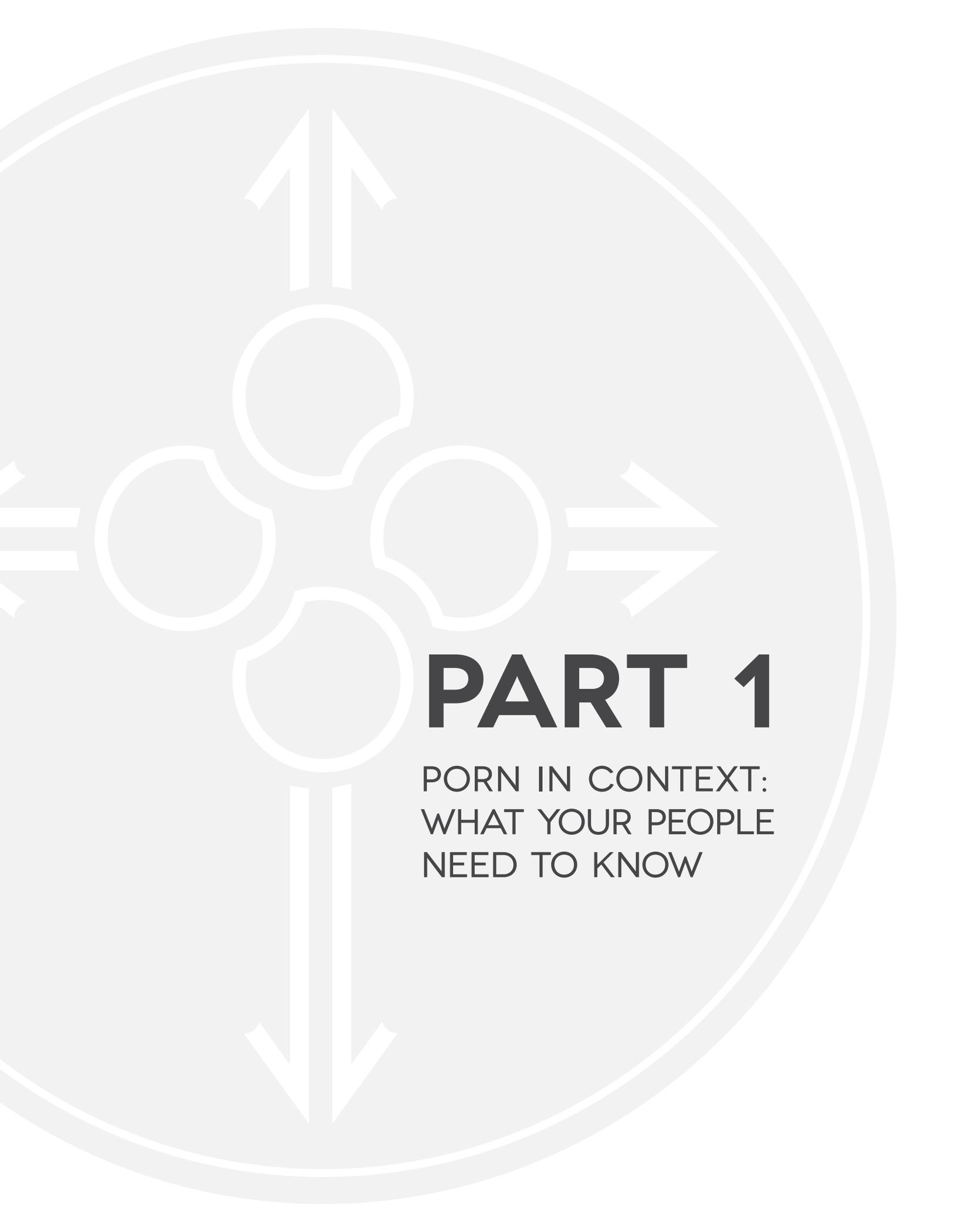
Did these parents know for sure their kids hadn’t visited a porn site? No, they didn’t know for sure. They based their conclusion on the fact that they were all good Christian kids. These two couples are like a lot of believers who think a Christian school and good church serve as a spiritual prophylactic guarding their children from the evils of the world. Unfortunately, by making sexual sins taboo and refusing to talk openly about them, those institutions often have the opposite effect on kids. Those two sets of parents may have been right about their kids. I hope they were. But it’s more likely their children know they’ll be severely punished if they admit such behavior and so they hide it and pretend sexual lust isn’t an issue for them. That keeps everyone happy.

Such misguided thinking is fed by the refusal of most churches to talk openly about the issue of Internet porn. People conclude since nobody else at church has kids or moms who dabble in porn, then it must not be a problem for their family either.

Churches Making a Difference

Fortunately, there are churches in which the pastor and leaders openly admit their struggles with sin. These are the churches that provide counseling and support groups for people to safely discuss and deal with their struggles. They talk about sexual sins just like they do other sins, depriving them of the power they have when they are considered taboo. They offer resources that enable everyone in the church to filter what they can access on the Internet while also providing accountability.

Our strategy to achieve sexual purity has to be like a laser-guided missile. These weapons constantly adapt to the changing terrain as they zero in on their target. Because the moral terrain is constantly changing, we must be adept in adapting as we pursue our target: sexual purity.



PART 1

PORN IN CONTEXT:
WHAT YOUR PEOPLE
NEED TO KNOW

Desensitized

Sex in the Media – The Price Our Kids Pay

by Michael Leahy

New evidence points to the media adolescents use frequently (television, music, movies, magazines, and the Internet) as important factors in the initiation of sexual intercourse. There is a major disconnect between what mainstream media portray—casual sex and sexuality with no consequences—and what children and teenagers need. - American Academy of Pediatrics policy statement issued September 2010

There's an old advertising industry saying that's been around forever—Sex Sells! Well, it's true. Sex sells, it always has, and it sells particularly well to those who don't know any better: your kids.

I remember first hearing that phrase back in the late 70s when I was taking a Mass Communication business course in college. This was about 10 years after the so-called sexual revolution took root in our country. By then, I'd already been secretly getting off on pornography for nearly a decade. Back in our Mass Comm class, as we searched through liquor and cigarette company print ads looking for cunningly disguised phallic symbols or the form of a woman's body hidden in a glass of ice, it dawned on me that while this might be a fun way to pass the time in class, it seemed pretty irrelevant to me in the overall scheme of life. I mean, after all, if you wanted to see a woman's legs or breasts, we all knew just where to find them. And it wasn't on TV or in grocery store rack magazines. It was in porn magazines and videos.

A lot has changed in a few decades. Radio, print, broadcast, and now new media have always been aware of the competitive advantage they had in using any and all things sexual as a way to get and keep their audiences' attention. But never before have they enjoyed being able to operate in such a climate of tolerance of our rapidly shifting sexual values and mores. The result has been an unprecedented

rise in both our use of adult-only pornography and our acceptance of and exposure to increasingly pornographic depictions of sex in all forms of mainstream media consumed by both adults and children. And it's the latter fact that should disturb us all the most, especially parents.

For example, one popular study on the amount of sexual content on television found that the number of sex scenes on TV nearly doubled between 1998 and 2005.³ The study found that 70% of all shows, excluding daily newscasts, sports events, and children's shows, include some sexual content, averaging five sex scenes per hour. Yet out of those shows with sexual content, only 14% included at least one scene with a reference to sexual risks or responsibilities. In other words, they're helping to make porn the norm.

Yet, while literally thousands of studies conducted since the 1950s have proven that there is a link between exposure to media violence and violent behavior,⁴ relatively little attention has been paid to the impact that exposure to a rising tide of sexual content (14,000 sexual images and messages each year on TV alone at last estimate⁵) is having on the average American consumer. One recent study on teens found that watching sex on TV increases the chances a teen will have sex, and may cause teens to start having sex at younger ages.⁶

As a recovering sex addict, TV and the portrayal of sex in the media has been and always will be a key potential trigger for me that could lead to unwanted sexual behaviors. The growing prevalence of sexual images, innuendo and objectification even on basic cable is a constant threat to my sexual sobriety. Song lyrics, music videos, reality TV shows, sitcoms, commercials, print ads, and even the covers of magazines at my local supermarket checkout stand dot the landscape of my life like land mines waiting to explode underneath my feet, should I choose to ponder them for too long.

As I talk with today's youth—the real target of both adult industry and mainstream media pornographers with an insatiable and amoral appetite for profits—this unprecedented level of sex saturation comes as no surprise to most, especially the older ones. The most common response I get when asking college students if they're aware of their juxtaposition to all of the titillating sexual content around them: "Sure,

3 Sex on TV 4, a biennial study conducted by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, www.kff.org

4 American Academy of Pediatrics, Committee on Public Education. Media violence. *Pediatrics*. 2001 Nov;108(5): 1222-6.

5 1999 study by the American Academy of Pediatrics

6 Collins RL, Elliott MN, Berry SH, Kanouse DE, Kunkel D, Hunter SB, Miu A. Watching sex on television predicts adolescent initiation of sexual behavior. *Pediatrics*. 2004 Sep;114(3):e280-9.

we know, we're soaking in it!" they say with an air of confidence in their ability to handle it with no consequences. But when asked how it's affecting them, most only shrug their shoulders, assuming there are none, or implying that if there were they'd somehow be immune to any detrimental effects. Ask the same question of today's teens and pre-teens, and most act as if they aren't even aware or don't really care. For them, this is the new normal.

Of course, the media's influence and the potential consequences of buying into our sex culture's basic beliefs are very real. A 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 46% of high school seniors have had sex, and about one in six have had sex with four or more partners. Worse, of the sexually active students, 39% said they did not use a condom during their last sexual encounter. It follows, then, that those sexually active seniors need education about the consequences of teen sex.

There are other eye-opening numbers. The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the Western world. More concerning is the risky, and often coerced, behavior of young teens. A quarter of teenagers have had a sexually transmitted infection; one in 10 girls who have had teen sex say that the first time was against their will. And despite representing just 25% of the sexually active population in the United States, 15- to 24-year-olds contract nearly half of all new STDs every year.

And don't expect television and gaming producers to change their products any time soon. Some estimates have the increasingly sexualized video game industry topping \$20 billion in 2010. It would take some serious regulatory muscle to slow that economic engine down.

Of course, sexualized online gaming is only a small part of the problem. With reality TV shows like *The Bachelor*, *Temptation Island*, and MTV's ever-changing menu of *Real World*-inspired reality fare, all are adept at setting up unrealistic scenarios in which partnering has no health consequences, or any consequences at all. A study of college students cited by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) indicated that viewing reality television shows "correlated with beliefs in a double standard—that men are sex-driven and men and women are sexual adversaries."

If reality TV were watched mostly by those who already were sexually active, this might have less of an effect on teenagers, who could put the scenarios in a context based on their own experiences. That's not the case, however; less sexually experienced college students watch more reality television than their more experienced counterparts, "which suggests the importance of such programs for sexual socialization."

To a parent in their 30s or 40s, these shows seem transparent and silly. A bunch of girls live in a nice house with one man, and the ones that are most willing to have sex (or, at the very least, make out in salacious hot tub scenes) are the most likely to get the guy. But watching this sexual content (and even the discussion of sex on the shows, which can have an impact equal to the depiction of sex) “hastens the initiation of teen sex,” according to the recent study.

No matter how one feels about teenage sexual activity, the consequences appear to be real and unfortunate. According to another study, even after controlling for other risk factors like family stability and income levels, rates of teen pregnancy increase if there is greater exposure to sex on TV. Movies such as *Juno* (depicting a teen who becomes pregnant and has to deal with the consequences) and old-fashioned after-school specials are the exception to the rule; most television aimed at teens and young adults doesn’t connect sexual activity to STDs and pregnancy.

The media’s messages are impossible to avoid—they are embedded in everything from reality TV to movies (virtually every R-rated movie aimed at teens has included at least one nude scene and, often, several sex scenes), to advertisements (over \$300 million is spent each year on ads for erectile dysfunction drugs), to online and offline games and Facebook. “The media may act as a ‘superpeer’ in convincing adolescents that sexual activity is normative behavior for young teenagers,” the AAP’s policy statement asserts.

Despite the obvious problems with shows like *The Bachelor* and *Joe Millionaire* and *Momma’s Boys*, the conveyor belt of reality dating shows rattles on. In a recent interview, Bachelor creator Mike Fleiss admitted that contestants typically do have sex during the show, and a lot of it (participants are tested for STDs before being sequestered together). According to him, fourth-season star Bob Guiney had the “highest batting average” with “five-and-a-half” couplings (whatever that means).

It’s this enthusiasm that suggests that *The Bachelor* and shows of its ilk, despite their damaging impact on teenagers, aren’t going anywhere. As creator Fleiss told *Reality TV World*, “We weren’t sure going into the series whether or not women would really care and whether or not they would really compete for the love of one guy... [but] once we saw girls hyperventilating and what not, we knew it was working.” Fleiss added that it was best if viewers “hated” the contestants.

While media movers stubbornly claim they’re only reflecting the changing sexual standards and mores already evident in our society, it’s becoming harder and harder for them to make that claim with a straight face while walking to the bank. It’s also

becoming increasingly difficult to draw the line of distinction between the media and the adult entertainment industry. The two have certainly converged when it comes to the recent crop of syndicated cable TV shows that got their start on premium pay providers like HBO or Showtime and the like. While the rather obvious full frontal nude scenes are edited out in order to satisfy the FCC, the scene's heated context and rather blatant sexual innuendo usually remains. The result is a continual "pushing of the envelope" on what's considered normal sexually, and very few viewers continue to think of this mainstreamed product as porn even though, by definition, it usually still is.

Of course, this sexual objectification and desensitization process isn't only harmful to younger kids and teens. It does great damage to adults as well, both in terms of how they view themselves and how they view and act towards others in relationships. The only real lasting solution, in my opinion, is age-appropriate education and increased awareness. That begins through parental instruction and continues throughout a person's life, eventually becoming one's own responsibility. Only after we become self-aware of the truth about who we are as physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, and spiritual beings can we ever hope to experience healthy relationships and true intimacy with one another.

Agonized

Straight Talk to Husbands Who Watch Porn

by Luke Gilkerson

Shelli remembers well the day her husband John called her up to confess his secret obsession with pornography. Years of guilt, shame, and wasted time had finally taken its toll on John, and the emotional dam broke. He knew he needed to tell his wife the truth.

“It took me by complete surprise,” she says, “I didn’t have any clue that it was even an issue.” But after the shock came the hurt. “There was definitely a death of all that I thought was real,” Shelli says. “Everything that we had had prior to that felt artificial...that I was believing a lie, that I didn’t know him, and I didn’t know who he really was, and the way he felt about me was a big lie.”

John and Shelli Mandeville share part of their story on the documentary *Somebody’s Daughter: A Journey to Freedom from Pornography*.⁷ Sadly, John and Shelli’s story of a marriage nearly destroyed by pornography and addiction is all too common. In 2002, at a meeting of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, the divorce attorneys present said over half (56%) of their cases involved one party having “an obsessive interest in pornographic websites.”⁸

Do wives need to lighten up?

In a presentation given at the Witherspoon Institute, Dr. Jill Manning spoke about the impact pornography can have on wives. “It has been troubling and intriguing to me,” reports Dr. Manning, “how many times I encounter derogatory beliefs about this

7 You can purchase a copy of this documentary at SomebodysDaughter.org.

8 Jonathan Dedmon, “Is the Internet bad for your marriage? Online affairs, pornographic sites playing greater role in divorces.” (November 2002). Press Release from The Dilenschneider Group, Inc.

group of women, beliefs that dismiss the magnitude of the issue and the legitimacy of it, by framing them as pathological, overreacting, and frigid women who need to lighten up. ‘After all, he’s just looking?’”⁹

Some women, in fact, have “lightened up.” Not all wives react negatively to their husbands using pornography. Ana Bridges, from University of Arkansas’ psychology department, says in her own research she has met many women who have justified their husbands’ behaviors. “All guys look at porn.” “It’s better than him having an affair.” “At least he’s not always coming to me to get his needs met.”¹⁰

Bridges labels these rationalizations as “permission-giving beliefs:” things we tell ourselves that make certain behaviors seem normal or healthy. Ironically, it is pornography that often teaches and reinforces these beliefs in the first place. If we receive a steady diet of media that portrays illicit sex as the norm, it is easy to get the impression that “boys will be boys.”

How a woman reacts to her husband using pornography, then, is based in part on what she believes healthy sexuality and relationships should look like in the first place. So, what if, just for a minute, we asked ourselves how our relationships could look if we didn’t live in a pornified culture? What if, for a brief moment, men turned their eyes away from the fantasy images—the airbrushed photos, the clever video editing, the breast enhancements, and the thumbnail images that portray women like dogs in heat—and instead focused on what pornography is really costing them and their wives? Before we quickly label distressed wives as overly conservative prudes, what if we peeled back the layers and instead saw women who were mourning the loss of something they should rightly expect from their husbands: real intimacy?

Who says porn is bad for marriages?

John and Shelli certainly understood what porn was costing them. “Accept an impossible appetite and an impossible standard, and it steals from the true beauty of what marriage is supposed to be,” John says. “It’s the perfect theft of growing old together. Who wants to grow old together in a culture where all we honor is what’s young?”

9 The whole presentation can be viewed at SocialCostsOfPornography.org.

10 Ana Bridges, “Pornography’s Effects on Interpersonal Relationships.” www.socialcostsofpornography.org/Bridges_Pornography’s_Effect_on_Interpersonal_Relationships.pdf. To learn more about the myths and facts of pornography use, download *Porn and Your Husband: A Recovery Guide for Wives* at CovenantEyes.com/e-books.

Consider how the research bears this out. Pornography doesn't teach men to serve, honor, and cherish their wives in a way that fosters romance. Pornography trains men to be consumers, to treat sex as a commodity, to think about sex as something on-tap and made-to-order. As Dr. Mary Anne Layden writes, "It is toxic miseducation about sex and relationships."¹¹

In Dr. Gary Brooks' book, *The Centerfold Syndrome*, he explains how pornography alters the way men think. Because the women in porn are only glossy magazine pictures or pixels on the screen, they have no sexual or relational expectations of their own. This trains men to desire the cheap thrill of fantasy over a committed relationship that requires them to connect to another human being. Pornography essentially trains men to be digital voyeurs: looking at women rather than seeking genuine intimacy.

According to a study published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, after only a few prolonged exposures to pornographic videos, men and women alike reported less sexual satisfaction with their intimate partners, including their partners' affection, physical appearance, and sexual performance.¹²

Another study that appeared in the *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* 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.¹³

Dr. Victor Cline's research has shown that sexual arousal and excitement diminish with repeated exposure to sexual scenes, leading people to seek out greater variety and novelty in the pornography they view.¹⁴

French neuroscientist Serge Stoleru reports on how overexposure to erotic stimuli actually exhausts the sexual responses of healthy young men.¹⁵

Dr. Dolf Zillmann reports when young people are repeatedly exposed to pornography, it can have a long-lasting impact on their beliefs and behaviors. Men

11 Dr. Mary Anne Layden, "The Science Behind Pornography Addiction," Hearing for the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, November 18, 2004

12 Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, "Pornography's Impact on Sexual Satisfaction," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol. 18, Issue 5, April 1988

13 Raymond M. Berger and Ana J. Bridges, "The significance of heavy pornography involvement for romantic partners: research and clinical implications," *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, Vol.28, Issue 3, May-June 2002.

14 Dolf Zillmann, Jennings Bryant, and Aletha C. Huston, "Media, Children, and the Family: Social Scientific, Psychodynamic, and Clinical Perspectives," Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers: New Jersey Hove, UK: 1994.

15 Judith Reisman, "The Impotence Pandemic," September 27, 2007.

who habitually view pornography often develop cynical attitudes about love and the need for affection between partners. They begin to view the institution of marriage as sexually confining. Often, men develop a “tolerance” for sexually explicit material, leading them to seek out more novel or bizarre material to achieve the same level of arousal.¹⁶

Dr. Judith Reisman summarizes it well: Pornography causes impotence—an inability to function with your own sexual power. “If he can’t make love to his beloved,” says Reisman, “If he has to imagine a picture, if he has to imagine a scene, in order to actually reach the heights of completion with this person, then he’s no longer with his own power, is he? He has been stripped. He has been hijacked. He has been emasculated. He has, in effect, been castrated visually.”¹⁷

We might say the real problem with pornography isn’t that it shows us too much sex, but that it can’t show us enough about what real sex is. Porn treats sex one-dimensionally, packages it in pixels and rips it from its relational context. It titillates with images of sex but cannot offer the experience of real intimacy.

Am I not enough for him?

“It’s not because you’re not enough, not beautiful, and that he doesn’t find you attractive,” Shelli Mandeville says. “It’s so important that women get that.”

Easier said than done. One has only to glance through online forums and blogs on this topic: many women feel at fault for their partners’ porn use. They feel they have failed their partners sexually. They feel if they were only more attractive or more available their men wouldn’t rush to porn to get their fix. Researchers have found that wives and girlfriends often feel a loss of self-esteem in these situations.¹⁸

However, comparing marital intimacy to pornography is like comparing apples to oranges. “The type of pornography that’s available now was never available in human history,” says Dr. William Struthers, author of *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*. “If you can get on a 50-inch HD television a picture of a woman engaging in a sexual act, the brain’s not wired to expect that kind of thing, because there aren’t women who have 50-inch-HD-TV bodies out there.”¹⁹

16 Dolf Zillmann, “Influence of unrestrained access to erotica on adolescents’ and young adults’ dispositions toward sexuality,” *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 27, Issue 2, Supplement 1, August 2000.

17 “Sexual Sabotage: Pornography, Impotence, and the Mad Scientist Who Started It All,” Podcast for Covenant Eyes, April 9, 2011.

18 Zillmann and Bryant, “Pornography’s Impact on Sexual Satisfaction.”

19 Interview with Dr. William Struthers for *Scratching the Surface* documentary

Even the tabloids show us that the so-called picture perfect women can't possibly compete with fantasy. Why would Tiger Woods cheat on his swimsuit-model-wife Elin Nordegren? Why would Peter Cook spend \$3,000 on Internet porn when he could come home to Christie Brinkley? Why would Charlie Sheen be drawn to a digital harem, being married to Denise Richards?

The answer is that a mind trained for fantasy will find reality dull, no matter how supposedly stunning that reality is. Many men have conditioned their brains with this "digital drug" (as Dr. Struthers calls it). Some men train their minds to be turned on to viewing sex from certain camera angles. Others train their minds to be turned on by certain physical characteristics. Others train their minds to expect variety: many images, many women, many physical types. And this toxic training begins for most men at a very young age.

Take John and Shelli, for instance. John remembers seeing porn for the first time when he was 10 years old. That's when his habit began. "So when you're 12 and 13 and you're not married, you think when you become married, that this whole habit you've created for yourself will just go away because now you'll have a sex partner," John says. "But the problem is, it's not actually a sexual experience, it's a fantasy experience that your body gets trained for. So now, the reality of the marriage isn't the fantasy."

Feminist author Naomi Wolf puts it best. She believes the onslaught of porn doesn't increase but deadens male libido, leading men to see fewer and fewer women as porn-worthy. "For how can a real woman...possibly compete with a cybervision of perfection, downloadable and extinguishable at will, who comes, so to speak, utterly submissive and tailored to the consumer's least specification?" No woman can compete with this. "Today," Wolf writes, "real naked women are just bad porn."²⁰

Steps for Guilty Husbands

John Mandeville offers his words of advice to men: "You're either going to give in and go for it, and sacrifice everything for pixels on the screen, or you make a commitment to what's real—what's a real human sitting next to you, and commit to whatever it takes to make that work." And turning to Shelli he says, "And we had to make that decision together."

20 Naomi Wolf, "The Porn Myth," New York Magazine, October 20, 2003.

Where do men start in making that commitment?

Tell men to accept responsibility. Men often blame their wives for not being attentive enough. Certainly, an inattentive wife can be frustrating to a man, but using this as an excuse for virtual adultery is nothing but cowardice. Counselor Joe Dallas writes, “The wife who is inattentive, indifferent, or downright abusive is responsible for her sins, not his. No woman, no matter how odious, makes her man commit adultery, so if a wife sins, let her account. But let her account for her sins alone.”²¹

Many times men put the cart before the horse when they use this excuse. It may not be her inattentiveness that has been the catalyst. Rather, it may be a sign of him not initiating real romance and true intimacy in the first place.

And, of course, other issues affecting intimacy may require professional counseling.

Tell men, “Talk is cheap.” Fred Stoeker, author of *Every Man’s Battle*, says, “You must give your wife every right to play a role in defining what ‘trustworthiness’ means to her in your marriage.”²² What do wives need from their husbands? They need more than an apology. They need to see their husbands are making every effort to change. Have men ask their wife what she needs to see so trust can be rebuilt.

Tell men to be very patient with their wives. Wives often do not understand a man’s attraction to or struggle with porn. And if she has just found out about the struggle, she may be dealing with a whirlwind of confusion and hurt. Just as men desire patience from her as he distances himself from pornography, they should humble themselves give her the same patience, allowing her the freedom to express the hurt she rightly feels.

Promote accountability. The late psychologist Alvin Cooper believed that there are three main factors that draw people into the Internet porn: Accessibility, Affordability, and Anonymity. He dubbed this the “Triple A Engine” that drives the digital porn market.²³ Like a three-legged stool, kick out one of the legs and it will fall.

The leg of anonymity is the easiest one to remove. When a person removes the secrecy of his Internet use, he eliminates much of the temptation. We do this through accountability: we make ourselves willing to account for where we go and

21 Joe Dallas, “Blaming the Mrs.” March 3, 2010.

22 Fred Stoeker, “Rebuilding Trust in Marriage After Pornography,” April 2, 2009.

23 Christian Perring, PhD. “Internet Addiction and Media Issues” January 21, 2005.

what we see online, allowing trusted friends and colleagues hold us to task on our commitment to stay pure. Use accountability software like Covenant Eyes as a tool in your commitment.

Should a wife be her husband's accountability partner? Yes and no. Yes, a man owes his wife honesty: she should be the one (not him) who decides how much information she hears about the temptations he faces and his sinful choices. But no: a man should not lean on his wife alone to call him to task in this area of his life. Often women, especially if they are reeling with their own emotional pain over his porn use, will not be able to give their husbands the wise counsel they need. Wise men committed to helping this man should be the ones who bear the weight of real accountability.

Tell them to make real intimacy their end goal. The goal is not simply "quitting pornography." That, of course, is admirable, but it only leaves a void. What pornography attempts to imitate is what, in the end, men really desire: intimacy with another human being. This is what husbands must strive for in their marriages.

Husbands must reclaim what pornography has stolen from them. They must choose to break the cycle. They must choose to stand for intimacy in a culture drowning in illusion.

"So we're drawing a line," John Mandeville says, "and whatever it takes, the generation that grows up behind us is going to run where we stumble."

Victimized

The Ugly Connections Between Porn, Prostitution, and Sex Trafficking

by Noel Bouché

Discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things. -Proverbs 2:11-12 (NASB)

In our sexualized, technology-driven society, pornography is everywhere. The Internet has channeled it into homes, schools, businesses, and now (through smartphones) public venues—everywhere one turns, porn or porn-themed sexual content is ubiquitous. This ubiquity begins to normalize the consumption of porn, which is producing devastating social costs, in the broader culture as well as in the Christian community.

The impurity this creates in the Body of Christ is harmful on many levels: intimacy with God is hindered, marriages crumble, leaders fall, and the church's witness of God's love and holiness is weakened. This, in turn, leads to doctrinal compromise. Far too many churches teach nothing about God's design for sex or the harms of pornography. Too many others quietly accept the normalization of porn and tell their people porn use isn't a problem they should worry about.

When the subject of pornography is addressed, it is usually done so from an angle of shaming men for their weakness and perversion while guilt (or scaring) them into better behavior. Time is spent telling people that they shouldn't use porn; not enough time is spent explaining why they shouldn't, and why they should pursue purity.

Well, here's one reason to pursue purity: it is an act of love and justice. How so? Because sexual impurity always works an injustice, first in the home, then in the community. How does that relate to porn? Read on.

Prostitution on Screen

The term “pornography” does not appear in any English version of the Bible. This fact has been used by some to ignore the issue of porn or to dismiss it as “not a problem.” Frankly, such positions are intellectually lazy (and probably veiled attempts at self-justification).

“Pornography” is derived from the Greek word “pornographos,” which means “writings about prostitutes.” That alone should stop us in our tracks. The essence of pornography is the graphic depiction of acts of prostitution. Pornography, then, is not about “sex” in the broad sense; rather, it is about a commercial sex act, one that is illegal throughout most of the world. More importantly for our current purposes, it is an explicit representation of the very thing the Holy Spirit uses to describe mankind’s sin and rebellion—to wit, harlotry (Exod. 34, Hosea 2, Ezek. 16, Rev. 17).

It is important to note that pornography “depicts” acts of prostitution on two levels. First, the fictional scenes “acted out” for the camera might portray consensual, non-commercial sexual liaisons, but generally the featured acts are those typical of a man (or men) having sex with a prostituted woman. This is illustrated most clearly by the pornography industry’s term for the climax; the “money shot” is nothing more than the man (or men) achieving orgasm, at which point the characters’ relationship concludes. It is in this way that pornography serves as advertising for prostitution; men are conditioned to view women as prostitutes and develop a taste for prostitution.²⁴ Indeed, the common slang term for pornography is instructive. “Porn” is derived from the Greek *pornē*, meaning “prostitute.” When society demands more “porn,” it is literally demanding more prostituted and exploited women.

Digging a bit further into the Greek is instructive here. *Pornē* is used at least 12 times in the New Testament, most memorably in 1 Corinthians 6:15. Perhaps more importantly, the related words *porneia* and *porneuō*—which mean illicit sexual activity, immorality, or fornication—occur at least 35 times in the New Testament, including 1 Corinthians 6:18. The command there to “flee immorality” in the context of sexual activity with a prostitute brings us back to pornography.

24 Melissa Farley, *Prostitution & Trafficking in Nevada: Making the Connections* (Prostitution Research & Education, 2007).

How? Because pornography is the recording on film of an actual commercial sex act—a sex act between the performers on account of which they are paid.²⁵ A reasonable person must call that what it is—prostitution. As retired FBI agent Roger Young put it, “What happened to common sense? The fact that there is a camera filming the prostitution doesn’t change the fact of the prostitution.”²⁶

Putting it in the context of Paul’s message to the Corinthian church, modern porn might be thought of as the equivalent of a first century Greek standing in the corner of the temple of Aphrodite and masturbating to the religious sex acts taking place in front of him. I can imagine Paul having a field day tearing apart a Corinthian’s argument that such a scenario did not run afoul of what he penned in 1 Corinthians 6.

This all begs the question of why pornography—if it is prostitution—is legal at all. To answer that, we need to dig into a bit of cultural history.

Free Speech or Sex Slavery?

It is widely assumed in our society that pornography is legal. That is not quite accurate. The production or possession of child pornography, of course, is illegal. Most other forms of hardcore pornography exist in a kind of legal ambiguity. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Miller v. California* that whether pornographic content is “obscene”—and thus not protected by the First Amendment—is based on a three-part test applied by a jury. The problem is that without a bright-line rule, lack of prosecution of pornographers (especially since the advent of the Internet) means that the test is rarely applied. The fact that the test is based largely on unclear and evolving “community standards” heightens the uncertainty.

More important to the discussion at hand, however, is a decision handed down by the California Supreme Court in 1988. In the case of *California v. Freeman*, a pornographer was charged with pandering as a result of producing a pornographic movie. California law—at that time made no distinction between pornography production and soliciting a prostituted woman; the prostitution laws (like those over every other state) were broad enough to make illegal any payment to another person for the performance of a sex act. The court ruled that paying others to have sex on camera could not be prosecuted under the prostitution statute, and effectively made porn production legal in California. Southern California is now the global hub of the multi-million dollar porn industry.

25 22 U.S.C. 7102(3).

26 *Ibid.*

Along with the ambiguity of the Miller test and the Freeman case that made California unique in not treating pornography production as prostitution, another major factor that led to today's pornified culture is the porn industry's successful PR campaign to normalize their product. The industry has spent tens of millions of dollars to promote hardcore pornography as a fundamental expression of "free speech," as implied by the name of the porn industry's trade association, the Free Speech Coalition. Sadly, it has largely succeeded. If members of the porn industry were a law abiding lot, and if porn was a dignified and healthy career path for women instead of a terrible form of exploitation, and if the social costs of the pornography consumption were not so great, perhaps there would be some modicum of legitimacy to the moniker Free Speech Coalition. Instead, it's camouflaging of its violent profiteering would be laughable if it had not caused so many sorrows.

Prostituting Our Daughters (and Sons)

Despite the unfortunate success of both the industry and the mainstream media in glamorizing porn and the lives of "porn stars," the actual experience of a woman in the pornography industry is anything but. The typical performer is in her late teens or early twenties,²⁷ was sexually abused or raped in childhood, addicted to drugs or alcohol, and desperate.²⁸ She likely first entered the industry while still a child.²⁹

While her background is filled with abuse and desperation, the typical performer is exploited further in porn. Not only is she subjected to damaging sex acts with a stream of strangers,³⁰ she experiences grueling schedules, unsanitary conditions, low pay, and terrible health risks.³¹ Further, according to Shelley Lubben, a former pornography performer who now runs a Christian ministry to women in the porn industry and powerfully exposes the horrors of porn, if a woman is in pornography, she is almost assuredly prostituted off camera as well, be it through stripping or escort services.³²

27 Final Report of the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, pp. 229-230.

28 Catherine A. MacKinnon, "Pornography as Trafficking," in *Pornography: Driving the Demand in International Sex Trafficking*, ed. David E. Guinn and Julie DiCaro (Captive Daughters Media, 2007).

29 Ibid.

30 Farley, *Prostitution & Trafficking in Nevada*.

31 P.J. Huffstetter, "See No Evil," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 2003, accessed on August 28, 2009 at <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-pornindustry-jan2003,0,1780031.story>.

32 Listen to the podcast of Part 4 of Shelley Lubben's interview with pureHOPE and Covenant Eyes on the Breaking Free blog, available at <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2010/10/08/ex-porn-star-rips-the-mask-off-of-pornography-part-4-of-4/>

In the end, the average stint as a “porn star” will last all of 18 months, after which these women are generally left poor, broken, addicted, and longing to put the brutal experience behind them.³³

That is the effect on the woman. The effect on the consumer has similar direct and indirect connections to prostitution. As researchers such as Melissa Farley have pointed out, pornography and prostitution go hand in hand. Strip clubs in places such as Las Vegas have porn playing on screens throughout the venue, advertising for the stripping and sex acts available to the customer. More than just an aesthetic aspect, though, is the addictive nature of porn, which trains the consumer even while he develops a tolerance, necessitating different and stronger stimulation. Far too many Christian men have gone through the darkness of a journey that began with “innocent” exposure to sexual content and escalated to soliciting prostitutes to experience fully what they had been consuming.

Traffic Problem

Under U.S. law, sex trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act.”³⁴ The work of a porn producer fits this definition precisely. Moreover, there is ample evidence of manipulation, coercion, and even physical force to compel performance.³⁵ This is true in California and around the globe, where pornography is frequently made using women who have been trafficked into the Asian and European sex trade.

Shelley Lubben reports that hurting, vulnerable women are lured in and coerced into harder and grosser sex than they agreed to—often provided drugs and alcohol to get through the scenes. “The porn industry is modern-day slavery,” she says.³⁶ Who can argue with her?

The Response: Just Purity

All of this is necessary background for Christians to understand the nature of pornography and the impurity and injustice it represents. For too long, the focus of

33 Huffstetter, “See No Evil.”

34 22 U.S.C. 7102(9).

35 Final Report of the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography. See also MacKinnon, “Pornography as Trafficking.”

36 September 15, 2009 Press Release from The Pink Cross Foundation. For other testimonies from former pornography performers, see <http://www.shelleylubben.com/>

preaching and teaching with respect to this topic has focused on self-control alone, with an implicit underlying message that porn is the norm; this is a demonstration of the effectiveness of groups like the Free Speech Coalition...and it is an indictment of the church.

We desperately need solid, biblical, and factual instruction in this area to give guidance to the men, women, and especially young people who are targeted by this sex industry and the evil one to ensnare them in a web of shame, guilt, addiction, and a confusion in the area of their lives where they bear the image of their Creator (Gen. 1:27). There are at least four elements of the message that the church must hear and bring to the world regarding this form of prostitution we call pornography.

The Will of God is Purity

In our sexualized culture, where porn and prostitution are normalized, the church must hear that sexual purity is central, not peripheral, in the life of a follower of Christ. Paul made this clear to the Thessalonians—themselves residents of a sexually promiscuous culture—when he wrote: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess. 4:3, NASB). This message of purification permeates the Scriptures, because it is fundamental to intimacy with God. The one who will stand before God is the one with clean hands and a pure heart (Ps. 24:4), because it is just that purity of heart that allows us to see and know God (Matt. 5:8).

Of course, this would be a depressing message were it not for the power and victory we have through the atoning blood of Christ and the empowering Holy Spirit. All like sheep have gone astray (Isa. 53:6), and sinned, falling short of God’s glory (Rom. 3:23). But we are justified and purified by the blood of Jesus and are to grow in this purity through confession and community (1 John 1:7-9).

Consuming Porn Joins a Man to Prostituted Women

The lie that porn is some kind of “harmless adult fun” must be exposed and rejected. Pornography is a form of prostitution, and when a man or boy views porn and masturbates, he goes through a powerful sexual experience that forms neurochemical connections related to that experience. I will refer readers to books like Dr. William Struther’s *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* for an expert explanation of what current research reveals about this, but it is enough to say that, once again, the laboratory has confirmed the teachings of the Bible.

Members of Christ, which we are, must not become “one flesh” with a prostituted woman. Paul confirms the importance of faithfulness in the Genesis 2 sexual union for both the health of the Body of Christ and its testimony to a hurting world (1 Cor. 6:15-20). Becoming “one” with multiple men or women is a form of double-mindedness, from which we are commanded to purify ourselves (James 4:8).

Acceptance of Pornography Destroys Community

Moses commanded the Israelites not to “profane your daughter by making her a harlot, so that the land will not fall into harlotry and the land become full of lewdness” (Lev. 19:29). There is a direct connection between the prevalence of prostitution and the health of the community. When sexual immorality is tolerated and practiced, relationships fall apart and people are used for pleasure and profit. This is because idolatry rather than the love of God reigns in the hearts of the people, as Paul made clear to the believers at Colossae (Col. 3:5).

Porn consumption replaces God with self on the throne of one’s life. The immorality, impurity, and greed that it represents create a decline into selfishness rather than submission to God’s will and service to others. This is why self-indulgence in pornography and other forms of illicit sex destroys community—most importantly the marriage (or future marriage) relationship, but also other family relationships, work relationships, friendships, church community, and relationship with God.

Of course, it is community that restores this brokenness and prevents it in the first place. We are members of one another (Eph. 4:25), and the secrecy and isolation that sexual sin creates is prevented by open, loving communication and attention to the challenges others are facing. Likewise, that oneness, once broken, is rebuilt through confession (1 John 1:9) and loving restoration (Gal. 6:1-2). Community in the family and the church is where the love and healing of Christ reside, and it must be our focus as we seek to overcome the modern manifestation of the harlotry Moses warned God’s people about.

Purity as an Act of Justice

As has been said, the church must correct the notion that purity is a peripheral or strictly personal matter. It is central, and it directly impacts the lives of others. We read in the Psalms that “righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; love and faithfulness go before You” (Ps. 89:14, NIV). We also know that we purify ourselves when our hope is fixed on Jesus, just as He Himself is pure (1 John 3:3).

From a biblical perspective then, love, purity, faithfulness, righteousness, and justice are all related attributes that flow from the unity of the Godhead; as Amos put it, we have a part in them flowing like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).

Impurity always works an injustice. It harms the individual and separates him or her from God (Isa. 59:2). It harms the women and children exploited in the pornography and prostitution (Shelley Lubben powerfully tells how she hated the unfaithful men in the audience, with the shining marriage bands, as she danced and stripped). It breaks fellowship. It weakens marriages and splits families, leaving children vulnerable and wounded. It fosters hypocrisy and ineffectiveness. It generates lust instead of love.

With respect to the sexual union in marriage, Hosea makes clear that faithfulness and justice are connected, and that it is God's heart. There, God's unfaithful bride plays the harlot, yet He allures her, restores her, and betroths her to Himself in righteousness and in justice, in lovingkindness and in compassion, and in faithfulness (Hosea 2:19-20). Considering the injustices throughout the globe that have their genesis in unfaithfulness, abuse, and the breakdown of the family, it is high time we pursue individual and communal purity with a hunger and thirst for justice (Matt. 5:6).

Idolized

Seven Reasons Why Guys Like Porn

by Luke Gilkerson

Why are men drawn to pornography? It isn't merely because they like looking at naked women. For many guys the draw to pornography can become compulsive.

As disciple-makers and teachers we bear the responsibility of not only using the Word of God to expose the evils of sexual immorality out there in the world, but also allowing the Word of God to expose the evils in the hearts of our own people. Despite the fact that we can preach about porn as addictive, relationship-destroying, and an injustice to women, the fact of the matter is this: Men still like it. We can wag a finger at the purveyors of sexual media, the advertisers, the traffickers, and of course the vile porn industry itself. But no matter what we say about the harms caused by the "supply" side, the fact is men—even Christian men—are a part of the "demand" side. Despite what guys know about porn, we still like to look at it.

Here is the beginning of a testimony from a man brave enough to share his story:

I was around the age of 10 when I discovered something the others hadn't. It was something that finally gave me the attention I had been craving, the affection I'd felt I was missing, and it provided me a feeling of adequacy I yearned for. Pornography.

Initially, I found it almost melodramatic. While I had heard about it, I'd never seen any before. As I think back on it I can remember exactly where I found it, exactly how it was folded, and sadly enough, I can remember the picture on the front in enough detail it makes my heart ache. It's the damage of images that cannot be unseen. This small experience was the first step in aligning myself with a lifestyle that would hijack huge chunks of my life for the next 20-plus years.

Internally, I was hooked. The attention I craved came from the women staring back at me from those pages. No girl I knew in real life would look at me like that. So comforting and so accepting. They didn't judge me; they loved me for who I was. This was my special world and I had decided for me that I was going to do all I could to keep it a secret from everyone.

As my time with pornography continued into my middle-teen years I began to progress with a collection of more magazines, and further to videos if given that chance. Pornography had become a constant vehicle in my life. With the discovery of masturbation, pornography merely became a means to an end. With the onset and proliferation of computers and the Internet, I never stood a chance resisting it and the instances of looking at and using pornography increased exponentially. My compulsion for pornography opened the door (acting as a catalyst) for easy justification for anything and everything.

Of course the details are different from guy to guy, but in the end, it is this kind of raw honesty we want ourselves and the men in our church to embrace. And like a mirror, we who disciple others should use the Word of God to expose the evil that thrives in our shabby hearts.

The View from Solomon's Window (Proverbs 7)

My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you;
keep my commandments and live;
keep my teaching as the apple of your eye;
bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.
Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call insight your intimate friend,
to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words.
For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice,
and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths, a young man
lacking sense,
passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house
in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness.
And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart.
She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home;
now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait.
She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face she says to him,
"I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows;

so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you.
I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen;
I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.
Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves with love.
For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey;
he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home."
With much seductive speech she persuades him;
with her smooth talk she compels him.
All at once he follows her, as an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast
till an arrow pierces its liver; as a bird rushes into a snare; he does not know that it
will cost him his life.
And now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth.
Let not your heart turn aside to her ways; do not stray into her paths,
for many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng.
Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death.

The story is a fairly simple one to follow. Solomon is glancing out his window, looking down on the streets of Jerusalem, and he sees an ignorant young kid walking down the street at night. He comes across a seductive woman who entices him to come home with her. Adultery ensues.

This text reveals to the reader the crafty ploys of this seductive woman. Solomon is giving his reader both a literal and metaphorical birds-eye-view of the situation. It's like watching the suspense movie where you, the viewer, know who the bad guy is, you know where he's hiding, and you know what's up his sleeve, but the unsuspecting victim does not know. If the characters on-screen only knew what you knew, they wouldn't fall into the deadly trap.

That's the view Solomon is giving us. He wants his readers to first see this temptation through the safety of his window so that when they find themselves on the same street on a dark night they aren't falling into the same traps.

This sexual encounter is no accident. Solomon says this woman is "wily of heart." The Hebrew expression literally means "guarded," indicating she has secret strategies that she holds close to her. She has a plan, a scheme. She has premeditated this encounter.

This story—and the lures the woman uses to get the man in bed with her—offer some startling parallels with modern men and modern pornography.

Lure #1: Physical Lust

The first lure, physical lust, is the most directly observable temptation. Solomon states that she is “dressed as a prostitute” (Prov. 7:10). This woman is dressed to kill. She is seductive.

This is the most obvious, in-your-face reason why men are drawn to pornography. Men like to look at naked women, plain and simple.

Men have a God-given sex drive. When a man is attuned to a woman’s form, when he sees a sensual image, or when he fantasizes, this triggers a reflexive release of testosterone in his body and his brain begins to cultivate a desire for sex.

Of course, it is important to remember this sex drive is created by God. When we read the creation account in the book of Genesis, what is the apex of the physical creation? After creating the moon and stars, plants and animals, and the garden of paradise, the pinnacle of the physical creation is the woman. God forms Eve and brings her to Adam, and as they stand naked before each other, he erupts with a poem packed with anticipation and excitement: “This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” It is then God calls his creation not just good but very good.

But when sin entered the picture it changed the way we relate to the created world. Paul comments in Romans 1, as we look at the visible created world our minds should perceive the invisible God. We should notice His eternal power and divine nature, and then as we perceive Him we should be moved to honor and worship Him as the immortal God. But instead, Paul says, we are always exchanging “the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things” (Rom. 1:23). This is idolatry.

Notice what Paul says is our chief problem: we have a worship disorder. Our hearts should be captured with the glory of the immortal God, but instead we become fixated on images of created things. And among all the created things, the image of a woman’s body often ranks at #1 for men. Man’s natural draw to a woman’s beauty becomes twisted, and we make images of women our god—the things that truly captivate us and capture our imaginations.

This is what pornography does. Pornographers are basically modern day idol-makers, only their material is not wood or stone, but pixels on a monitor. Their chisels are camera angles, lighting, makeup, and clever photo and video editing. And as we take these idols into our hearts (Ezek. 14:3) we commit the sin of lust.

Lure #2: Passive Pleasure

“She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face she says to him...” (Prov. 7:13)

This is the woman’s very first move. No words: just an in-your-face sensual embrace, telling him everything he wants to hear with her body language and her gaze. What message is she sending this man? She is easy, vulnerable, and eager. He can have her with no commitment or work on his part. He merely has to follow her home; she will do all the rest.

This is another key reason why guys like porn. The actresses in every digital harem are eager and willing; a man just has to find them (not a difficult thing to do today). This is the lure of passive pleasure.

To want the embrace of a woman is a good desire. To desire sexual pleasure is not itself an evil. God has set up the institution of marriage for the expression of sexual pleasure. Go back only a couple chapters in Proverbs and we read Solomon encouraging the reader to “rejoice in the wife of your youth” (5:18). God calls men not to seek sex, per se, but rather to cultivate the virtues of a godly husband and become a man of character.

But our sexual drive is not neutral. Like everything in our psychological make-up, our sex drive is stained with sin. We have a bent toward passive pleasure, not loving commitment. Godly marriage involves commitment, pursuit, intentionality, romance, love, and respect. Marriage is about taking care of someone other than yourself. Lust involves none of this. This is why pornography is so alluring to some men. Like a lot of temptations, pornography offers a quick fix, a shortcut to pleasure without virtue. Pornography rips sexual pleasure from its relational context and creates a realm of fantasy.

It enables a man to feel like a man without requiring him to be one.

Lure #3: Escape

“I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows...I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian linen.” (Prov. 7:14,16)

These are the very first words out of her mouth. The word “sacrifices” is the word used throughout the Old Testament for fellowship offerings: animal sacrifices presented and slaughtered at God’s altar, with a portion given back to the

worshipper for them to eat. It was usually eaten that day among friends and family. These were the choicest cuts of meat. She's effectively saying to this man, "I have a table with the best foods spread at my house right now."

In verse 16 she continues by describing her couch. Usually people in that culture would recline to eat, and she is describing a special seat reserved for him at her table, covered with expensive, exquisite cloth imported from Egypt. This was the luxury bedding of Solomon's day. She has spared no expense for him. She is inviting him into an experience of comfort, ease, and delight.

For many men, pornography is their place of comfort, their refuge, their escape. For some this is a conscious thing: they justify spending hours and hours looking at pornography because it is their "treat"—the way they wind down or take a break. They "owe it to themselves." For some this is a subconscious motivation: not even realizing it they run to pornography again and again because it is a fantasy world where all the arrangements have been made for them, a world where they can forget their worries, dissatisfaction, and discontent.

The world is full of hardships and difficulties, and when we encounter them something in us justifiably revolts. Something in us longs to return to Eden, before the curse and decay of sin entered human existence. We long for the comforts of Paradise. The gospel tells us there is a day coming when there will be a new heaven and a new earth, when Paradise will be restored to us, when there will be harmony between us and God, harmony among one another, and harmony in creation. The Spirit of God also offers foretastes of this ultimate hope: He whets our appetite for heaven. But when we face the stress of the world's fallen conditions, our sinful hearts don't retreat to that hope. Instead, we retreat by making temporary Edens, small paradises that we can control, paradises centered not around God but rather centered on ourselves.

This is another reason why porn is so alluring: it gives us a ready-made fantasy world into which we can escape.

Lure #4: Secrecy

"For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey; he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home." (Prov. 7:19-20)

She informs him that her husband has gone on a business trip and isn't expected to return until the next full moon. In other words, she is saying, "Don't worry. There is no fear of getting caught."

Often porn is enticing because of its secrecy. Pornography thrives on secrecy.

Psychologist Al Cooper noted this when he coined the phrase “Triple-A Engine” to describe Internet pornography and cyber-sex addiction. According to Cooper, people are drawn to porn because it is (1) Affordable, (2) Accessible, and (3) Anonymous.

- » **Affordable**—porn is relatively cheap or free online.
- » **Accessible**—the Internet brings pornography right into the private corners of your home or office at high speeds.
- » **Anonymous**—no one has to know that you see it; it is secretive.

It’s been said, “True character is who you are when nobody’s looking.” We let our true colors shine when nobody else sees what we’re doing. This applies to the good as well as the bad. Jesus said if you want to pray, fast, or give to the poor from a pure heart, then do these things when no one is looking except your Father in heaven (Matt. 6). Then, He says, you will receive the true lasting reward of doing them. This is living with truly godly character and integrity.

To use the old Latin phrase, we must live *coram Deo*, “before the face of God.” We are to live our lives conscious of God’s presence, omniscience, and all-penetrating gaze. *Coram Deo* means we not only know but also supremely care that God always sees us, that God is sovereign. There is nothing hidden from His sight, and knowing this utterly transforms how we live.

The Internet, home computers, and smartphones have brought this issue to the forefront like nothing else before them. As more and more of us live detached, anonymous lives online, we get a glimpse at what really motivates us, what really makes us tick. Behind closed doors our real motivations surface. Before the age of the Internet, many Christians might have avoided the trap of pornography merely in conformity to Christian social norms. Today, the option of secrecy opens a wide door of temptation.

The anonymity of the Internet has exposed something deep in our hearts, a deeply rooted belief that there is a piece of life that we can totally have as our own, a territory that we can rule outside of God’s sovereign gaze, a small kingdom of our own where we can play by our own rules. But in order to live in this deception, we need secrecy. We desire the anonymity because exposure shatters the illusion that our decisions affect no one else but us.

Lure #5: Pride

Notice how she plays this guy. “I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have found you” (Prov. 7:15). She probably would have said the same thing to the next guy who came along, but she insists that he’s the one and only. She makes him feel desired, wanted, and attractive. Solomon crystallizes this so well when he says: “With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth [i.e. flattering] talk she compels him” (7:21).

Today we might say she is stroking his ego. She is playing to his pride. This is the same ploy used in pornography today: to catch the man up in the fantasy experience where he is the main character. The woman on the screen is selling the lie: she wants him, she notices him.

For many guys, physical lust is not the only thing driving their fixation on pornography, masturbation, and fantasy. It’s also motivated by pride or self-worship. The fantasy world is like a film playing in their minds. When they fantasize they cast their latest crush as the leading lady in the movie in their minds-eye. But the woman is not the main character, is she? He is the main character, producer, and director, all in one. The lady reads the script he wants her to read. In the movie of his mind, the plot is all about him, and she is merely the supporting actress. The fantasy is about how irresistible he is and how she makes him feel about himself.

This, again, is idolatry. One of the reasons why porn is so powerful is because it reinforces our sinful desire to worship ourselves.

Lure #6: False Intimacy

“Come, let us take our fill of love till morning.” (Prov. 7:18)

What a wonderful phrase for a husband to hear from his wife, and yet here it is found in the mouth of an adulteress.

She speaks of the “love” they will enjoy all night long. The Hebrew word, *dowd*, translated here as “love,” is used many, many times in Solomon’s celebrated love poem, the Song of Solomon. It is used as the pet name between the two lovers: “my Beloved.” It is also used to refer to the affectionate, passionate love they share:

How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine, and the fragrance of your oils than any spice! Your lips drip nectar, my bride;

honey and milk are under your tongue; the fragrance of your garments is like the fragrance of Lebanon (Song of Solomon 4:10-11).

This sort of love describes the physical and verbal foreplay between Solomon and his bride before making love.

The forbidden woman is playing on this same deep motivation for love. This is what pornography offers a man. Pornography seeks to tap into a deep part of us that desires closeness and then creates parody of it. Porn is false intimacy.

A lot of single guys have a dreaded fear of being alone. They want to experience love and intimacy. Even married guys experience this, especially if their marriage is not all they hoped it would be.

Of course we were created for intimacy. It is a part of our make-up as God's creatures. But in our sin-soaked hearts, this desire becomes an idolatrous demand. To the man who desires companionship more than God's glory, being alone is his hell. To save himself from this hell, the porn girls in his fantasies become his saviors. But as we bring our twisted desires to Christ and make them subservient to His glory, then and only then do we begin getting a taste of intimacy the way it was meant to be.

Lure #7: The Forbidden

Solomon describes the adulteress as "the forbidden woman" (7:5). The word carries the idea of someone who is foreign or a stranger. She belongs to someone else. She is not his. It's not just that she is an attractive woman: she is an illicit woman. She is off-limits.

This is exactly what our sinful nature does: we crave what we can't have. The Bible calls this covetousness. Paul spoke about this in Romans 7:

[I]f it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me (Rom. 7:7-11).

Follow Paul's logic here. First, Paul speaks about the principle of sin in the members of his body: a drive that lives his bones, something that compels him to live autonomously, to disobey God. Second, he speaks of God's law. He specifically mentions the tenth commandment: You shall not covet. What happens when this sinful drive in him meets God's law?

It was as if covetous desire was laying dormant in Paul—asleep, dead. Then the command about coveting brought his sin to life, arousing the sleeping giant. The command, of course, promises life to those who walk in it (Deut. 5:33), but our sinful drives within actually use the command to stir up more lust. Knowing something is off-limits kicks lust into overdrive and produces what Paul calls “all kinds of covetousness.” This is one more reason why this foolish young man follows her home: she is forbidden, and his sinful heart wants what it should not have.

A few chapters later Solomon sums up the motto of Lady Folly: “Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant” (Prov. 9:13). This is why “the other woman” pulls at a man's heart. Pornography gives a man the feeling that he has been given the key to the back door of forbidden pleasures.

My son, keep my words...

This is the view from Solomon's window. From Solomon's vantage point, he can see this young fool walking into the deadly trap. Solomon offers us more than just a birds-eye-view of this man marching into temptation. Solomon gives us a glimpse into this man's heart.

Seven lures pull this man into the seductress' home. He is enticed by her physical beauty and sexual prowess. He is captivated by her forwardness and the promise of sexual pleasure without personal commitment or cost. He is charmed by the promise of escape from the busy Jerusalem streets. He is tempted by the allure of secrecy: knowing no one will know of his sexual escapade. He is puffed up with pride thinking about her apparent desire for him. He is moved by his desire for intimacy and longs for her bed chamber. And his heart is grabbed by the thought of being able to experience forbidden pleasure.

For any man who has ever dabbled in pornography, these are some of the same lures he has felt tugging at his own heart.

Thankfully, Solomon nor the rest of the Biblical authors leave us—the foolish, easily tempted men—without help. On the contrary, the gospel awakens in us greater affections that can trump and replace the lures of pornography.



PART 2

PROCLAIMING GOOD
NEWS TO THE PORN
ADDICT

Yearning

Sex, God, and the Gospel

by Tim Chester

A recent survey suggested that one in two evangelical men and one in five evangelical women are struggling with pornography. Other surveys bear out these proportions. This means that when you look out on your congregation on a Sunday morning, one in three people are struggling with pornography. What good news are you offering them?

The chances are many of them think they're the only ones who are struggling. They may think they're disqualified from Christian service by their sin, perhaps even from the Christian family. They hide their guilt, terrified of being exposed. Yet at the same time they may long to share their problem. What good news are you offering them?

Or maybe they've told someone and were met by barely masked repulsion. Or maybe the person they told was sympathetic, but didn't know how to bring hope to the situation or how to offer accountability. What good news are you offering them?

Christians need to hear a positive Christian message on sexuality because they are called to follow Christ in a sex-saturated culture. It's not just the proliferation of explicit images, but the slow drip feed of non-explicit material which nevertheless assumes sex outside of marriage is not only a norm, but a moral good.

Unbelievers, too, need to hear the positive Christian message on sexuality. If they don't, then any call to repentance will lack content. Jesus repeatedly makes his call to repentance specific. The rich young man whose heart is set on wealth is called to give his money to the poor. The woman who seeks fulfillment in sexual intimacy is offered living water.

Most unbelievers are sinning sexually as a matter of course. Christian sexual ethics are a mystery to them. They either know nothing of what will be entailed in

following Christ or they find our ethics bizarre. If we don't present a Christian view of sex as good news then our sexual ethics will be a barrier that prevents people professing the lordship of Christ. If you don't address sexuality as part of your evangelism then you'll either store up problems for future discipleship or you'll never win people for Christ in the first place. This doesn't mean you need to talk about sex whenever a gospel opportunity arises. But any ongoing conversation with an unbeliever and any balanced pulpit ministry must regularly address the topic.

Biblical ethics are always gospel ethics—good-news ethics. This means they should always come as good news. Many people seem to think that we have to put up with the restrictions of Christianity because of the compensations of heaven. But the truth is the godly life is the good life. It is the life of joy and fulfillment and freedom. We need to show how Christian sexual ethics are good news.

So let's talk about sex. That means sermons on the subject of sex. It also means that even when sermons are not specifically on the topic of sexuality, illustrations and applications routinely reference sexual issues.

Paul warns us: "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret" (Eph. 5:11-12, NIV). That means we need to avoid talking about sex in a way that might titillate or provoke. But it doesn't mean keeping silent. Our goal is to expose sin as sin; to show that sexual sin is idolatrous (5:5).

It also means celebrating sex as a good gift from God. Earlier in Ephesians 5:3-4 Paul says: "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. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving" (NIV). So, "no" to obscenity or coarse joking. But "yes" to thanksgiving—and in the context of Ephesians 5, that means rejoicing in sex.

Talk about grace

We need to talk not only about sex, but also about grace in the context of sex.

Sex is powerful. It binds two people together in a deep and profound way. The two become one. Indeed it is not sex per se that binds us, but God binds us through sex (Mark 10:9). It is a beautiful and precious thing.

But when this power for good is misused it becomes dangerously destructive. Sex gone bad causes intense hurt and shame. Many people in your congregation will

have sinned sexually—many before conversion, some after conversion. Still others, too, will have been sinned against.

This means that to talk about the wonder of sex within marriage will provoke deep shame in the hearts of some people. So alongside your talk about sex needs to go talk about grace. And not just grace in the abstract, but the grace of God in the death of Christ. Christ dies in our place, bearing our guilt so that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). There is no condemnation for porn users, adulterers, sexual fantasists who are in Christ Jesus. This is not being soft on sin. Quite the opposite. It takes sin seriously, so seriously that the only remedy is the death of the eternal Son of God. Look at the cross and see what God thinks of your sin—the death of his own Son is the only act that can atone for what you have done. But in the act is grace and love and forgiveness and adoption.

There is no condemnation. Churches are full of people desperately trying to self-atone for their lust, desperately trying to sort themselves out, desperately trying to prove they are good enough for God. Our message must be, “It is finished.” Christ has done it all.

So we need to talk about grace because people need grace. But there are two further reasons why we need to talk about grace.

First, we need to talk about grace so people access the help they need. We cannot change ourselves. None of us can break the bonds of sexual sin in our own strength. Many of us know that from personal experience. Rules, vows, software filters cannot do the job on their own. We need God. We need to come to him for help in our need.

But you’ll not come to God if you think he’ll reject you or rebuke you or begrudge you. You’ll not come to God if you think of him as a stern judge, waiting to punish you. You’ll not come to God if you think that, while technically he forgives you because of the cross, he does so reluctantly without rejoicing in you.

This is why William Romaine, one of the leaders of the Great Awakening in Britain, said: “No sin can be crucified either in heart or life unless it first be pardoned in conscience, because there will be want of faith to receive the strength of Jesus, by whom alone it can be crucified.”³⁷ No-one will come to God for the help they need unless they think of God as a gracious Father who is ready to receive them.

37 William Romaine, *The Life, Walk and Triumph of Faith* (1771, James Clarke, 1970), p. 280.

Hebrews 4:16 says: “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (NIV). We need mercy and we need help from God if we are to change. The good news is we can find help at God’s throne because it is a throne of grace. The good news is we can come with confidence because “we have a great High Priest who has gone through the heavens” on our behalf and who can “sympathize with our weaknesses” (Heb. 4:14-16, NIV).

Second, we need to talk about grace if we want a conversation about sex. It’s all well and good talking about sex. But if you want people to talk back to you about their sexual problems then you’ll need to talk about grace. They need to know you will hear them as a fellow sinner. They need to know that when they share their problems you’ll not be horrified, nor will you reject them.

We need to foster a culture a grace in our churches of grace. Too often we create a culture of performance in which everything and everyone appears successful. It’s a tough environment for sinners.

Creating this culture of grace will mean talking about your own struggles. Don’t be too specific—for most people hearing the details of your own struggles with lust will not be helpful. Tell everyone that you struggle, but tell only a few what you struggle with. Talk about your failures more than your successes. Your job is not to preach you, but to preach God’s grace. Talk about how you failed to change, but how God is changing you. Talk about how you failed, but how you are finding comfort in God’s grace and Christ’s finished work. Talk about your struggles, but do so in a God-centered way. Your congregation’s hope is not in following you and your steps to success. Your congregation’s hope is in God and his gracious, liberating power.

Talk about God

A life-with-porn verses a life-without-porn is a poor choice. A life-with verses a life-without. If you set it up in these terms then you won’t produce lasting change. We need to set it up (as it truly is) as a choice between life-with-porn verses life-with-God. We need to show how God always offers more than porn.

This begins with exposing the lie of porn. Behind every sin is a lie. We sin because we have “exchanged the truth of God for a lie” (Rom. 1:23-25, NIV). Porn is no different. Porn makes false promises.

For some porn offers respect: a fantasy world in which I'm potent or admired by others. For others porn offers intimacy: substitute relationships without the risks. For others it offers escape: when life is daunting or boring we turn to porn for quick satisfaction. For some porn may offer revenge: a way of getting back at our spouse who hasn't delivered the sex we want or at God who hasn't delivered the life we want.

But it's all lies. Porn is a performance—carefully cut and edited to create the illusion of power or pleasure. We need to look beyond the frame of the camera. Porn sex is never real sex. It distorts our expectations of relationships, marriage and sex.

And porn never delivers. Whether it's respect, intimacy, escape or revenge, it's not the real thing. It's a cheap fantasy that only leaves us wanting more. People move from softcore to hardcore looking for what porn cannot deliver until they're enslaved.

We need to expose these lies. Then we need to show how God promises more.

If porn offers respect, then the good news is that you don't need to be controlled by the opinion of others. Compare those whose approval you want with God. Who matters most? Whose affirmation really counts?

If porn offers risk-free intimacy, then the good news is that God is in control. Relationships are risky, but God promises to care for those who trust him. He may not provide a spouse, but he will provide himself—a chance to know the Creator.

If porn offers escape from the pressures of life, then the good news is that God is in control. The Bible describes God as a "rock" and "refuge" to his people (Ps. 18:1-3). "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7, NIV).

If porn offers you escape from the boredom of life, then the good news is that God is the source of true and lasting joy. Of course, porn is immediate, quick, easy. But its pleasures are short-lived and empty. We're always left wanting more.

If porn offers revenge, then the good news is that God is gracious. We think we're not getting what we deserve—from our spouse or from God. In fact, we're getting far more than the judgment we deserve. God welcomes us into his family. Thinking of yourself as a son or daughter of God will set you free from resentment and bitterness.

At its root porn is about worship. I want to be worshipped. I can click between women, all of whom are offering themselves to me. Or I can think of myself as the stud sending women into an ecstasy of desire. Or I can think of myself as the romantic heroine, relentlessly pursued by my admirer. I enter a world in which people worship me. It is a world in which I am at the center.

Freedom begins when I stop trying to be at the center and let God be at the center. It begins when I stop serving myself and start loving other people.

Talk about good news

At the moment biblical sexual ethics seem like bad news in our culture. I believe the day is coming when people will again want to hear what the Bible has to say about sex. Sex is everywhere and is everything in our culture. But as a result it's losing its value. The Bible's restrictions are not there to protect us from sex, but to protect sex from us. The restrictions are like the banks that constrain the Niagara River so that it gushes forth in the Niagara Falls. Remove those restrictions and you're left with something more like the Mississippi Delta—wide, shallow and muddy. A biblical approach to sex is good news for married people.

A biblical approach to sex is also good news for single people. Sex has become a substitute god in our culture. It is the source to which we look for meaning, fulfillment, value, identity. People feel lost without it. They feel worthless unless they have the admiration of a lover. It's their savior. But it's a poor savior. When we find sex, we feel loved, potent, justified in the moment. But it doesn't last. Sex is not God and we're left empty, wanting more. And then when we don't measure up, failed sex leaves us crushed.

"You should not..." is not in itself good news. For sinners it's a word of condemnation. Most of the people in your congregation who look at porn know they shouldn't be doing so. If your sermon simply tells them that porn is sinful then you will only succeed in leaving them condemned. That's not gospel. If you simply tell them to stop then you will leave them condemned because they've already tried to stop. That's not gospel.

The gospel says, "You need not...because God is bigger and better than sin."

Consider the approach of Jesus with the woman at the well in John 4. He knows she has had five husbands and the man she is now with is not her husband. He could have told her to stop her sexual sin. But instead he offers her living water. She has

been looking for meaning, satisfaction, identity in sexual intimacy and not finding it. The math tells the story: five husbands plus one. She has made sex her savior and it has not delivered. Jesus gives her good news by offering meaning, satisfaction, identity in himself. He offers true satisfaction (“living water”) and lasting satisfaction (“welling up to eternal life”). Legalism says, “You should not move from man to man and you should not use porn.” The gospel says, “You need not move from man to man and you need not use porn because Jesus offers something bigger and better—he offers living water.”

“This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church” (Eph. 5:32, NIV). So says Paul after talking about marriage. We’re talking about marriage and sex, but it turns out we’re talking about Christ and his bride. God gave us our sexuality to help understand his covenant love. The passions we feel around sex are a pointer to God’s passionate, jealous love for his people. Every conversation about sex is really a conversation about Christ who “loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy” (Eph. 5:25-26, NIV).

Let’s talk about sex. Our message is good news.

Discerning

Counseling Single Men (and Men in General) Toward Lasting Freedom from Pornography

by J. Alasdair Groves

I have heard a lot of theories on how to help men deal with the sins of pornography, masturbation and other expressions of sexual lust. “Just stop it.” “You have to recognize that it’s your parents’ fault for the way they raised you.” “Just change your clothes quickly and do not touch yourself in the process.” “You are just reacting to the unmet needs for love in your life.” Now, all of these have at least some wisdom to them. What is more, they all offer something better than what I did the first time a Christian brother came to me and trusted me by sharing his experience with these struggles. I said “Ew, that’s gross! I can’t believe you do that!” I pray that the Lord has grown me and taught me to be a lot more patient, less judgmental, more encouraging and more helpful than I was that day as a 13-year-old.

In all seriousness, the core help that you as a shepherd offer to a single man is not terribly complex (however challenging it may be in a specific situation). You know that this man is at war with the father of lies who wants him blinded and separated from the love and help of his Lord, and your efforts are going to revolve around bringing light, hope, and compassion into darkness, selfishness, and despair.

In fact, if I could boil down the counselor’s task to one sentence, it would be this: pornography is the evidence that something is wrong between this man and his God, and you have the opportunity to help him figure out what that is and what a change in that relationship looks like. Change in our relationship to God always leads to change in our behavior, emotions, motivation, and life direction.

Putting it another way, your goal in counseling a single man on the issue of pornography—as in all counseling (and all of life really)—is to see change in his

heart. In Luke 6:43-45 (Matt. 12:33-37), Jesus compares the human heart to a tree, pointing out that a fig tree always bears figs, a thorn tree thorns. His point is that human beings will always speak and act out of whatever is in their hearts.³⁸ Jesus actually applies this directly to our sexuality in Matthew 5:27-30, where he says you can commit adultery in your heart even if you don't with your body. This means that we must never be content to settle for mere behavioral change, and that we will always be seeking to see, expose, listen, consider, and change at the level of motivation, thought and desire—i.e. in the heart. Every change in behavior has a motivation; we need that motivation to be a lover of God with heart, soul, and mind.³⁹

Before I launch into specifics, I want to remind us that the way in which you counsel is as important as the content of what you counsel. And this cuts both ways! Having a good manner without good content is just as problematic as having it the other way around. “Truth” spoken without grace is not really truth any more than “grace” without truth is really grace. There is a grave danger for counselors on both sides. If we are going to minister in the name, power, and pattern of Christ, we need to have unwavering commitment to seeing things with the Father's eyes (i.e. as they truly are). This means we approach sinners with the grace and mercy which has drawn each of us and which made Jesus a friend of prostitutes!

In my experience, the biggest reason we err on the side of hammering someone with “truth”—usually limited to some form of “God commands us to be pure” plus a heavy regimen of “self-discipline”—is that our view of sin is fundamentally too small. We have simplified our sinfulness into merely behaviors we consciously choose. We imply that God is pretty happy with us as long as we steer clear of the high-handed and intentional sins.⁴⁰ We imply that grace gets you in, and then all Scripture has to offer is directives on behavior modification. On the other hand, I find that we err on the side of sweet talking someone with “grace”—avoiding any mention that what he is doing is wrong—when we are afraid of what he will think of us. We fear we will scare him off, hurt him or overburden him by bringing him face to face with the kind of life the gospel does call us to (and empowers). We imply that God is a loose cannon who needs a good PR guy, and our job is to put some better spin on his unfortunate comments.

38 This naturally raises the question as to whether a Christian can bear thorns (i.e. can sin). The rest of Scripture makes clear—not least when Jesus himself speaks of forgiving 70 times 7 times in a day—that Christians do still sin. Addressing the heart then is how we grow in sanctification and come to bear fruit in keeping with gospel transformation.

39 For an excellent and thorough discussion of the biblical use of the word “heart”, see *How People Change* by Tim Lane and Paul Tripp (New Growth Press, 2006).

40 When we limit “real” sin to intentional choices we make, we are becoming functional Pelagians! It is only as we recognize that the depth of sin in our selfish hearts comes out in many godless actions which we do not even notice that we will rightly grasp our complete dependence on grace.

In short, we must avoid both of these errors! So we strive to be exceedingly patient, gentle and encouraging, while never allowing the life-or-death nature of the battle to fall from view.

With this word of caution about how we speak, I will come at the issue of counseling single men with regard to pornography from the angle of looking for specific lies to which they are especially vulnerable. As the fictions that a man has believed begin to be exposed and even erased, the actual desires and motivations of his heart become more evident (and are often more troubling than the reasons he formerly believed were leading him to these sin patterns). But, when heart issues are more clearly on the table, the relevance, power and help of the gospel all become more clear as well!

Lies Single Men Believe About Pornography

1. Sex is a Biological Need.

This is a biggie in our culture. Everyone from psychologists to magazines at the grocery checkout suggest to a man that sex is a biological need. Naturally, if sex is a need I have, then it only makes sense that I would need an outlet for it, right? Well, even at face value we'd want to quibble with this. After all, people have been martyred for the faith, so apparently even life itself is not the ultimate need we have (our ultimate need is God and everlasting fellowship with him in perfect, righteous, delightful obedience to him).

You might say, "Sure, in the big picture that makes sense. But I still need food in the sense that it keeps me alive. It's the same with sex. I have a sex drive that needs some kind of expression or I will do psychological or even physiological damage, right?"

This perspective, even if it is subconscious, is extremely widespread. Yet think about the implication of this. If I really need sex in order to stay healthy, if my biology makes me an engine that will overheat if I rev it up with nowhere to go, then a man struggling to keep himself pure from pornography is in a pretty unpleasant squeeze. On the one hand, he is supposed to keep himself pure, because God wants him to. On the other hand, God has given him this need (and in moments of strong temptation, the language of "desperate need" does not feel like an exaggeration at all) that He refuses to give any outlet for. If sex is a need, it is very difficult not to find yourself blaming God for putting you in an impossible situation.

As with all the lies we are debunking, there is a clear grain of truth. Sex, as part of the covenant of marriage, is meant to be about the highest pleasure we can experience.

God created sex to the pinnacle of serving and loving your partner in relationship, and it certainly is exquisitely pleasurable and holds genuine implications for our physical and relational health. A good marriage with good sex will correspond strongly to lower stress, lower blood pressure, better sleep, etc. In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul even says that a desire for sexuality in marriage is an appropriate reason to get married rather than guard your singleness in order to serve the church.

But, this does not make sex a “need.” Think about it. Jesus was not married, and never once had sex. Was this an unmet need? Surely if the perfect human, the man more in tune with the will of God than anyone in history, can forgo sexual intimacy, then it cannot be a necessary component of life as a human being! Scripture knows of our need for the living God, and constantly talks about how God provides for our daily needs. But the daily needs always seem to be Lord’s prayer items: bread, water, clothes, shelter, rather than sex (or even love and significance!).

This may seem simple, but the implication is enormous. It means a single man desires sex, but does not need it. It means a man has no right to sex, no deep and uncontrollable hunger that must be assuaged. This is a good thing! It actually brings relief to those who grasp it. Instead of sexually “starving” yourself, the path of purity is going to be characterized by rich, comforting, clarifying, hopeful, meaningful spiritual nourishment and growth. Now lust is a mere desire, something a man can actually refuse, just as he could refuse to steal a thousand dollars from a close friend even if an easy opportunity presented itself. Sure you want the money or the sexual pleasure, but if it is just a desire, you can say no. To be free of the “need” for sex is to be free of slavery to irresistible temptation.

Even more important is the affect this difference has on one’s view of God. God is no longer a cruel or capricious dad who buys you the bike of your dreams for your birthday but then won’t let you ride it. Instead, he can actually be the giver of “every good and perfect gift,” and you are not going to miss out on his best because you are single, even if you remain single for the rest of your life (James 1:17, NIV). If God always gives us “everything we need for life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3, NIV), then sex is simply one good gift among many which, like good health, riches and athletic ability, we may or may not receive in some degree. Does this man know that God is not holding out on him?

When someone first begins to sense that you do not believe that the physical outlet view is valid, he will likely feel a little threatened—you’ve just undercut the thing that validates the severity of his struggle. He begins to suspect you think he is a wimp and have a load of guilt for him just around the corner. You want him to know you understand how hard this is and that what you are offering is hope and

enormous relief in the freedom of this truth. Believing that life is possible without a “fix” is the first step toward victory and purity.

2. Life is About Sex

You can immediately sense the similarity to the first lie. This one, however, is much harder to recognize in oneself, because it is like a fish trying to notice water. Everything in our culture suggests that sexual fulfillment is essentially the goal of life. This is what we are seeing when attractive women show up in commercials for products they have no real connection to. When we see what the commercial is doing, we laugh at advertisers who want us to think that we’ll end up with a beautiful woman if we buy their brand of breakfast cereal. What goes utterly un-recognized is the premise we unquestioningly share with the advertisers: if something increases your sex appeal/opportunity for sexual gratification, then it is good. We laugh at the idea that a breakfast cereal will make us more attractive and more likely to “get the girl.” We never stop to think that getting the girl might not really be the point at all.

It is very possible to experience significant periods of freedom from using pornography and significant temptation without touching this basic piece of a man’s worldview. To the extent that he is living for sex, however, he will judge his decisions and their consequences on whether or not they brought him closer to getting married, getting girls to notice him, etc. If he does get married, he will continue to function as if sex with his wife was the most important aspect of his life and their marriage. Needless to say, the consequences of this fundamentally self-centered view of life and sex will be subtle but pervasive. If you can hear places in a man’s story where he is living for sex and help him see it too, you will bless him.

3. Marriage Will Make the Problem Go Away

The first two lies both naturally bring a man to this conclusion. I have a biological need. Fulfilling this sexual drive is the basic thing I functionally live for. Ergo, when I finally get married, I will have my outlet and the thing I most want will be in my possession. Problem solved.⁴¹

⁴¹ For the first time in our discussion, the way we think about men who struggle with same sex attraction will be a bit different. Where men lusting after women may conclude that marriage will solve their problems, men who are lusting after men will tend to turn this in one of three dangerous directions: (a) they will try to simply sweep the problem under the rug, hoping that marriage to a woman will indeed make the problem go away, and they will try to find a nice girl who will “cure” them; (b) it becomes a powerful justification for the rightness of gay marriage; or (c) it becomes a reason for bitterness against God who has not given them the natural end point to their struggle that he has given to “straight” men. However, for men dealing with same sex attraction the bottom line is no different in that entering into the context marriage is by no means the answer to the sin and lust of their heart.

If you have counseled married men, you are already aware of how desperately false this is. If you have counseled a man who held this belief coming into marriage, then you already know how disheartening and guilt-inducing it is to realize he is still struggling. In my experience, this always shakes a man's faith in his relationship with Christ, especially if he operates under the impression that he is the only married man who struggles in this way.

Think again about the biological-need fallacy. If the basic reason you choose to look at pornography is that you have this physiological drive and it has to have an outlet, then marriage really ought to be the last word on the issue. If, on the other hand, the fundamental reason you look at pornography resides in the sinfulness of your own heart (and let me say again that the goal of counseling is helping a man understand, repent of and find grace for his very individual, specific patterns of desire, lust, worship etc.) then we should not be at all surprised when the problem continues.

Take this from another angle. Have you ever known a man who only ever looked at one pornographic image over and over and never bothered to look at any other image? Neither have I. The vast variety and novelty of pornographic material is part of the allure. So if even the most beautiful and digitally enhanced of supermodels cannot keep you from eternally going farther afield and searching out new women, new scenarios, etc., why would we ever imagine that your flesh and blood wife, with her physical and spiritual flaws, would? Sin by its very nature always lusts for more.

Here is the big picture: pornography teaches men to be utterly selfish in their view of sex, and see sex as all about their own pleasure and gratification. What does sexual selfishness before marriage produce once you do get married? That's exactly right: sexual selfishness. The only difference is that in marriage he will feel the damage of his sin much more personally.⁴²

I was not someone the right girls noticed in high school. I remember asking a leader in our youth group what I could be doing now to best prepare for being married, thinking that this seemed a very mature and spiritual question that might also get me some good pointers on how to be more smooth with the ladies. His answer was greatly disappointing to me. He told me that he wished he had done a better job of guarding himself from pornography and sexual fantasies and said this was the best thing I could do. I wanted tips to on how to impress girls with my maturity; he gave

42 Another important sub-group of single men to consider is men who have been widowed or divorced. Their temptation here will in some ways be even stronger. "I remember what it was like to have sex with my wife, and I feel cheated that God has taken that away. I can't make it without that outlet!" This attitude will be tempting for almost every previously-married man at some point.

me something much richer—what your heart loves now, it will always love unless you actively confront it.

4. It is Only a Matter of Time Before I Fall

This is probably the most subtle of all the lies that attack a man's perseverance and self-control. Anyone who has been a Christian longer than a week or so has noticed the reality that they still sin. Any gospel-centered church should be preaching the reality that we are not going to be perfect before we get to heaven. While great progress and rich growth is not only possible, but in fact expected as we walk by the Spirit, we all have to face the facts: we are sinners who will continue to act out of fallen hearts till we stand with Jesus and see with fully open eyes just how awful our sinfulness was and just how deep his grace really went.

So isn't it simply a fact that men will fall from time to time? Isn't it actually important and helpful to tell men that we know they aren't going to be perfect and that Jesus still loves and forgives even when they stumble sexually? Yes and no. Yes, God's grace is toward his children and he will forgive the repentant soul, even the seven times seventieth time. And thank God that this is true, not just with lust but with every sin!

But the more important answer is actually "No, it is not a matter of time before you fall." Now we obviously need to be careful not to build up a hope based on a man's own effort! Nor do we want to set the bar far too high in a way that crushes men. If, however, we grasp this truth, it is enormously liberating.

Think of it this way. If a single man is simply holding out as long as he can before his next crash, he has already accepted defeat as inevitable, and is now trying to postpone that defeat as long as he can. He feels like the Germans in December of 1944, fighting and suffering in what he knows to be a lost cause.

An analogy I have shared with a number of men is feeling like you are in a desert—hot, weary and thirsty—and you see an oasis off the side of the dusty path. It is shaded and lush with palm trees and cold water, but you know that you have to keep pressing on down the path because it's wrong to drink from the oasis. The problem is that you know you can only take so much more of the blistering sun before you eventually collapse at the next oasis. The analogy works for most strugglers with pornography and masturbation because their experience is that pornography is a source of escape and sweet refreshment in their hard/boring/exhausting/disappointing world (notice the many heart motives that all lead to the same escape!). Of course they are eventually going to fall into the trap of sin—it is the place they finally get to quench their thirst!

You see the problem. Because pornography is what essentially gets a man through his day/week/month, the question is “how long can you go without what you need” before you’re too weak to keep walking.

Here is a better, more accurate analogy. Pornography is a bottle of deadly poison with sugar around the rim.⁴³ It is literally going to kill your soul if you keep drinking it! Further, life is not an unrelenting desert where God the drill sergeant forces you to pass by the watering holes. Rather, it is a path you walk with a Shepherd who is leading you to still waters where you can drink and green pastures where you will find restoration for your weary soul. Even when the path to the water is going through the desert of the shadow of death, you do not need to bolt off at the sound of a trickle of rancid water; the Shepherd is there and he will take you to water that actually quenches your thirst. When you assume you will fall again, you are smuggling in the belief that pornography is a really great thing you are fasting from. Freedom comes when you realize that raising the poison to your lips is not a given—it’s drinking spiritual death! Hope is when you begin to pray for and desire eyes that see lust as the hideous evil it really is and begin to yearn for the Shepherd’s water instead.

We must not lose sight of the fact that this battle is being fought by the mighty King himself. He will not only conquer, but he delights in raising up warriors clad in heavenly armor (think Ephesians 6) against whom the gates of hell will not stand! In stark contrast, most men feel like the battle is a desperate rear guard action in which they are trying to keep a retreat from becoming a route. The reality could not be more different. The saints of God are backed by the “immeasurable greatness of his power...according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead” (Eph. 1:19-20). The King is with you and that means that victory is not merely possible, but assured. We far too easily buy into a struggler’s view that his King is nearly as weak, helpless, and confused as he is. Jesus Christ does more than offer a little tactical advice or cheerleading as you wrestle a more powerful opponent!

5. It’s Not Really Hurting Anyone

As I hinted at above, the lie that pornography doesn’t hurt anyone is a luxury that only a single man or the blindest and most tragically deceived of married men can

43 Ed Welch’s *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* uses a similar analogy drawn from the book of Proverbs and is the best book on helping people with pornography I know, even though it is not simply for people struggling with sexual addictions.

sustain. Most married men at least see they are keeping pornography secret from their wives, which is pretty strong evidence.⁴⁴

Does pornography hurt anyone? If you don't have a spouse, isn't it really just a victimless crime? Not on your life. Here are a couple of reasons.

(a) Think about the women displaying themselves for your pleasure. Aside from any risk of sexually transmitted disease they may be taking, they are universally being pushed and trained by the demands of male lust toward anorexia/bulimia and a view of themselves utterly bound up in their appearance. Regardless of their responsibility in participating, you are at the very least cheering them on and applauding their descent into a plastic, starved, soulless existence and making it profitable. "Soulless" is a bit strong you think? Yet isn't that exactly what pornography really is—the worship of the body that ignores the presence of a real person actually being there? Treating women as sexual objects (and pornography is the most pure form of this) is to treat someone as if she has no soul and is merely a body.

(b) The pornography industry (and here we are no longer going to be able to make excuses about images that are merely animated, etc.) is inextricably tied into a larger system of desperate evil in our world that abuses and destroys women. We need to be honest about the fact that many seemingly willing participants in the pornography industry are either effectively prisoners of people who use drug addictions to keep them doing what they want, or are in fact literally slaves who were trafficked away from their homes for the purposes of pornography and prostitution. Pornography fuels a fire whose flames are burning anywhere we see prostitution, adultery, a culture of casual sexual encounters that massively increases the rate of divorce and abortions, sex trafficking, sexual predators, and abusers of children (these last almost invariably have vast exposure to pornography before committing their first crime). When you participate with the industry and treat their product as good and desirable (yes, even when you don't pay for it), you are effectively casting your vote in favor of all these tragedies.

(c) This sin is waging war against your soul (1 Pet. 2:11)! I will not belabor the point here as we spoke about the deathly "banquet in the grave" in the previous section. Satan wants this sin to become a walled off area that festers in your life and ultimately leads you to prefer pornography and self-satisfaction to the Lordship of

44 Of course some men don't keep it secret but invite/force their wives to join in watching. This suggests a badly seared conscience. Even with such men, compassionate, prayerful attempts to open their eyes to the evil they are perpetrating will be the first place you have to go.

Jesus. Pornography, left unchecked and un-repented, is literally a gateway to hell. We do no one a service if we are not conscious that this sin (like every other) seeks to own us and to have our allegiance. The wage of sin is death.

6. Pornography is Easier than Dealing with Real Women

This is not, in some senses, a lie, nor will you find many men who explicitly think this. However, when you are not married and are facing the challenges of dating, loneliness, potential rejection, etc., your functional belief will often be that pornography offers you something you want from relationships but can't seem to get. Yes, pornography is much easier than dealing with flesh and blood women who can hurt you, reject you, disdain you, ignore you, betray you. Women are sinners and are fragile, and it is not hard to understand why many men find pornography vastly safer than dealing with real women in the real world of relationships, romantic or platonic.

This is not much different than living as if robbing banks is easier than working at a convenience store for a living. It is easier, but you are comparing two unlike things. Pornography is a mockery of relationships, a hallucination of real relationships. Pornography is like wearing the emperor's new clothes: you and the pornographic world around you simply pretend that you are keeping loneliness and rejection at bay.

So you are going to try to help a man articulate what he is really getting out of pornography that is easier/safer/better than actually relating honorably and genuinely with women. I have spoken to a number of men who came to see that a huge allure of pornography was that the women they looked at never rejected them, always invited and adored them. There is something extremely delicious to a sinful soul about being worshipped, and the more beautiful the worshipper, the more desirable the worship. In pornography, a man treats a woman as someone whose purpose is to make him feel good, not as a person he is called to love, serve and whose interests he is actually to hold above his own!

7. God Can't Forgive Me

This is not specific to singles. Any man who calls himself a Christian and deals with sexual temptation is going to have this feeling at some point. For some men, guilt will be extremely prominent. For others, it will seem absent. You can be confident, however, that every man has the experience that he has done something deeply wrong and that he wants to cover it over.

I will not belabor this point, as it is probably the most straightforward lie to confront with the truth of Scripture. What does the gospel do if not deal with guilt! But recognize that this is likely to be an ongoing struggle for him. Your job here is to be the simple, patient, strong, clear voice of grace that is big enough to deal with these specific, real, and ugly sins, not just the generic “I know I am a sinner” we can all easily pay lip service to!

You will find that dealing with guilt almost always makes a bigger impact than you expect. Frequently men come to me looking for techniques and tools to avoid looking at pornography, but it is when they really hear and begin to believe that they are actually forgiven that we begin to see real growth. One man asked the question this way: “Am I estranged from God when I sin this way?” I told him that there was a grain of truth here (i.e. sin is relational and it does grieve God), but that the answer was a resounding “no,” that this is the whole point of the cross. The next two weeks were some of the most joyously victorious he had experienced in years. He lived in the realization that God wasn’t furious with him, and that he didn’t need to—in fact couldn’t—earn his way back into God’s favor in a hurry. Yes, the shine on this truth faded after a couple of weeks, as always happens with our moments of clarity. But it meant that the next time he fell into temptation, part of our job was simply to remind him that this didn’t put him back in the dog house, needing to work and scrape to get back the joy.

Guilt is a precious gift—it takes us to the cross. But if we come to the cross and then hang back because we fear we are unworthy of it, we are getting the gospel exactly backwards. The cross is for the unworthy. When unrelieved guilt is in play, it is going to be the first place you go and the place you keep coming back to!

Final Thoughts About Lies and Counseling Single Men

Let’s be clear: these won’t all feel terribly relevant to every man. But do you see how each of them clouds and obstructs a man from loving and finding boundless grace from a God who loves him? So we seek out places where men are living with falsehoods that they might see the Living God who is Lord, Shepherd, and Refuge.

Even for men to whom all of these temptations apply, we are anticipating that the guiding work of the Spirit is going to highlight one thing at a time. Where do you see the Spirit moving in this man as you speak about his desire to look at pornography and guilt? Patience as a counselor asks where conviction and grace are coming alive for him today.

Further, we must keep firmly in mind that the core of shepherding a single man as he battles against lust (or battles to battle against lust) is more than exposing lies; it is rather leading his heart always back to his King by way of the gospel. Even if he does fall into every one of the pitfalls we have just discussed, identifying the pitfall is only the first step. His biggest need is to cling to the God who redeemed him at such cost and to know the power of the Spirit. He will not do this if the struggle is hopeless and he is already defeated, or he actually needs the thing he is supposed to avoid, etc.

Moving Forward: Pursuing the Heart

Here are a few thoughts and questions intended merely to suggest a trajectory for you as you help your single friend bring some of his inner world into the light where he can find grace and truth.

Colossians 2:20-3:7

This is my personal favorite passage on dealing with sexual temptations. Do you feel the force of Paul's argument?

1. (2:20-23) You are not going to do this by beating yourself into shape. You'll feel better for a while if you set a bunch of rules, exercise regimens, and plans for how to do more school work so you won't have as much time to be tempted. But it will never be enough. Rules (of themselves) simply cannot stop the flesh.
2. (3:1-4) "Christ is your life." We don't avoid sin by rules and law. Instead we need to awaken to reality: we are with Christ, we are in Christ, we are "raised" with him. It's a done deal! It no longer makes any sense to live for things in this world, because we died here and the time that remains is a mere foretaste of the delightful fullness of righteousness to come. So we "seek the things that are above," which invites application as broad as Scripture itself. This means we want to see the closeness of our Heavenly Father, who welcomes us in our repentance as Jesus portrays in the prodigal son. This means that we never move beyond the love of Christ on the cross, and it means that only knowing his love can penetrate our selfish myopia. It means we can have complete confidence that God's commands are life-giving and that they bring us into his family and out of isolation, into mercy and out of condemnation.

What does this mean? It means that the gospel of Christ really is the thing that sinners need most in their battle with even the most ingrained patterns of sin!

3. (3:5-7) In light of this reality into which the gospel ushers us, we go and put to death all the junk that would drag us away! The struggle against sin isn't about setting rules to keep ourselves in line, it is about a passionate war on anything that would stand between us and our Lover. It is about seeking out the dark spawning grounds of lustful, pornographic desires and getting violent with them as a warrior of the divine kingdom. If this doesn't excite us yet as we face sexual sin, then we know how to pray: Lord, give me a yearning to see my sin put to death for your glory.

What is Your Pornography Use Saying?

"What is your behavior saying?" is one of the most important questions we ever ask in counseling. Pornography is sin, yet it also serves as a vivid diagnostic illustration of what your heart is craving and where you are turning from the gospel to other gods for satisfaction. Pornography and masturbation are always sinful symptoms of sin in the heart. Let me prime the pump with two brief examples:

I find pornography a lot more attractive when I am bored. It is exciting and there is little in my life to be excited about.

Can you begin to speak with this man about finding a passion for godliness in the bigger picture of what God is doing in all of history and also about novelty and excitement as potential idols?

I look at porn when I am angry or discouraged. I think I am getting back at God for not giving me what I need.

Can you help this man see that God is utterly committed to justice for the times he has been wronged and that his hope in discouragement is that he can actually cry out to the God who hears and moves on his behalf? Can you do this while also challenging him to repent of the arrogance of thinking that he has a right to punish God or determine what is good and what he needs?

The Details are (Somewhat) Important

How specifically do you push a man to confess his sin? Is it enough to know he "fell again"? Do you need to know that he went on the Internet and looked at pornography? Should you press him to tell you what sites he visited and what acts he witnessed and how long he viewed these things?

Obviously, it depends on the man and the situation. Here is the general principle: Scripture is very clear about sin that occurs, without ever being graphic or inviting voyeurism from the reader. We know what happened between David and Bathsheba, but we didn't get any lurid descriptions.⁴⁵ It is important that you do know enough about what he did to understand the contours of his sin, without asking him to relive it and without inviting the images into your own head (which will inevitably happen if you push into details too far). The danger in not being specific enough, however, is that the most deeply shameful part of the sin where a man most needs forgiveness goes unmentioned and un-dealt with. The classic example is the man who confesses he has looked at pornography, but doesn't mention that it was same-sex pornography. If he never confesses this, he will actually feel more ashamed, isolated and distant, because he is hiding what he sees as the worst part. He is living as if all your words about grace and forgiveness would change in a flash if you found out what he has really done. The specifics of our struggles reveal the personally unique cravings and lusts of the heart. Christ always meets and redeems us in the specifics, never in general platitudes! When in doubt, ask one more question.

What Does Victory Look Like?

Inevitably at some point, every man I know, who struggles with sexual sin, asks this question. It is a question that gets at the very heart of our understanding of sanctification, and it warrants its own book. That said, here at least a few signposts.

What It Is Not

Victory is not “managing” your sin. We are not aiming for you to cut back the frequency of your pornographic binges to some acceptable standard. A streak mentality—as good as it feels to be on day 54 of not looking at pornography or masturbating—is the death of purity because it puts your performance on center stage. Yes, be excited that it has been a long time (or more than a day!) of being free from the specific sin of pornography. We should celebrate even the smallest of steps away from sin! However, we can't be content with drinking less poison.

Victory is also not some kind of “cure.” Here I know I am on thin ice with many, and I want to be careful not to go too far. Yes, I believe that it is possible to stop looking at pornography altogether. Yes, I am willing to speak of “deliverance” from sin. But, looking at pornography is more choice than disease, and that means that a cure

⁴⁵ I am adapting this from David Powlison's comments in a video about how much a man should confess to his wife in terms of sexual struggle. <http://ccef.org/how-specific-should-husband-be-confessing-lust-his-wife>

mentality essentially elevates the sudden absence of temptation above the steady work of the Spirit in developing a heart of obedience. Further, everyone I have ever talked to who has been “cured” has then been puzzled and discouraged when they eventually continued to deal with temptation, even if they weren’t falling as much or in the same ways as before. I think the idea of a cure brings us dangerously close to thinking of temptation itself as sinful.

Let me put this another way. Struggle is not a bad thing. Instead, struggle is the glorious work of God as he redeems and sanctifies our fallen hearts. The reason we take a negative view of struggle is because we have too high a view of our own ability to be righteous. The only way you ever escape struggle in this life is if you utterly give into sin and embrace it. Losing in our struggle with any sin is a grievous thing that pains our Heavenly Father and ought to make us desperate for the grace of the cross. But struggle itself is only possible through the reviving work of the Spirit and we should seek to fan struggle into flame rather than hold up struggle as evidence that there is something wrong with us. Of course there is something wrong with us—that’s why we struggle against our flesh!

What It Is

I prefer to think of victory in terms of fruit (or battles won, if you prefer combat imagery) that comes from the progressive re-orientation of our hearts. Thus, victory is:

Hating your sin. This eventually becomes a genuine and instinctive disgust when exposed to the vile lewdness that pornography seeks to glorify, even if there is some simultaneous arousal.

Seeking grace. Simply going to the cross and seeking forgiveness more quickly, wallowing in guilt less and loving Christ’s mercy more are all victories. Eventually there is a joy in repentance that leaves a man feeling passionate to honor Christ with sexual purity and it spills over into his struggles with selfishness, pride etc. God’s grace with sexual sin actually teaches us about the depths of mercy in ways I have rarely seen elsewhere. As repentance becomes a brokenhearted delight—like singing and weeping at the funeral of a godly friend—you are tasting victory.

Saying no. You begin to say no to temptations that you previously would have considered inescapable. You get a pornographic video in your e-mail while in your hotel on a business trip and you immediately delete it. Six months ago it was inconceivable to go on a business trip and not watch smut on HBO. In fact, as grace teaches you to see saying “no” as more important and desirable, you begin to

seek out places where you can cut things out of your life that tempt you. Perhaps at first you just stay off the computer after 10 p.m. when your housemates will likely be in their rooms. Then maybe you conclude that you need to stop watching movies alone and that even when you watch with others you need to avert your eyes during scenes that display sexual things even though you might potentially “miss something.” Eventually you may stop watching football altogether for a time, because you can’t seem to draw your eyes away from the cheerleaders and you would rather lose something innocent that you enjoy than expose your soul to those brief moments of sexualized captivation. Saying no becomes an act of faith, not only affirming that God alone gives what is good, but also learning to find joy in self-control.

Pursuing accountability. You start with confession. Over time, you invite brothers around you who are regularly asking you where the pinch points of temptation are in the coming week. Then you are going above and beyond their questions, speaking honestly about the struggles in your heart and where you see the Spirit leading you. It means that accountability is not a shameful necessity, but a wonderful chance to bring your actions and your desires into the light and to beg your friends to make the gospel specific to you once again. “Could you remind me again that Christ forgives me and that I am not condemned, and will you tell me about how you are growing too?”

Victory is in evidence when you begin to delight in absenting yourself from tempting situations rather than feeling like you are fasting while sitting in a restaurant. It’s as simple as seeing your own selfish desires recede as you earnestly serve those around you. It’s finding more refuge and comfort in Scripture (which used to simply bring a guilt trip). It’s a life of repentance over the sins of your heart as well as the actions they lead to. It’s a deeper love of Christ and what he has done for you at the cross flowing out of deeper awareness of your sin. It is a glorious, unmerited freedom yielding a harvest of gratitude rather than a cycle of guilt and despair.

Is this so different from the “right answers” we already knew? No it isn’t. But it springs from a different motivation than the “do not taste, do not touch” that comes so naturally. And it is accompanied by a celebration of Spirit wrought victory, no matter how small, instead of a self-imposed standard of behavioral perfection that hasn’t dealt with the deepest problem.

Make no mistake, the struggle almost always gets harder when a man begins to make real change. Now the enemy knows the fight is in earnest, not merely a compromise on frequency or timing. The enemy will step up his game and do his best to make himself needed.

A Final Reminder

Pornography, like all sins, is an expression of our fallen hearts. It feels more controlling than many sins. We decide to pursue it more consciously than many sins. Yet in dealing with the guilt and destruction of this behavior, we have a chance to help a man taste the surprising joy of grace in a way he will rarely otherwise get.

So let's keep two simple, important things in mind as we seek to love and show mercy to men who are finding the sexual lusts of the flesh compelling.

First, we want to help men see where they are living out of lies that cripple them because we love and care about them. We must never stand above them as superior to them or expose lies in their lives in a way that grinds them down and encourages them to drown in guilt. Jesus was harsher with the Pharisees than most of us would ever dare to be, and yet he exposed the lies on which they were basing their actions without pride or spite, seeking to wake them up in the only way they could hear.

Second, if pornography is an expression of the heart, let's always seek to hear what the heart is saying. True repentance, true turning and true worship are always heart matters, never simply actions. The man who trades pornography for body building so that he can finally impress girls who used to reject him is still expressing the same heart: his life is founded on a faith in the ultimate importance of a woman desiring him. We rejoice that he has turned away from pornography, but he has gained little in the big picture.

“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick,” and yet Christ calls and strengthens us to “walk in step with the Spirit” that we might know him—which is life itself!—and “put to death what is earthly⁴⁶!”⁴⁷

46 Jer. 17:9, Gal. 5:17, (John 17:3), Col. 3:5.

47 For further reading on helping people with sexual addictions and counseling with a view toward heart change, I would recommend starting with (in addition to Welch's *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* of course!): David Powlison on breaking pornography addiction available at <http://ccef.org/breaking-pornography-addiction-part-1> and <http://ccef.org/breaking-pornography-addiction-part-two>. Also Winston Smith on masturbation: <http://ccef.org/its-all-about-me-problem-masturbation>. Lauren Winner's *Real Sex* is, from all accounts, helpful as well.

Learning

Wise and Practical Steps to Freedom

by Luke Gilkerson

Preachers and disciple makers often straddle theological tensions when giving advice: rebuke and comfort, faith and obedience, reliance on God and responsible choices. We walk these tensions not only because different situations dictate different calls to action, but because the Bible itself is filled with these sorts of delightful tensions.

When it comes to counseling and preaching about the iron grip of pornography, it is easy to become “reductionistic” in our approach. Some of us err on the side of simple pragmatism: freedom from sin is formulaic and all the advice is nuts-and-bolts information. This approach believes freedom from unhealthy behavior is the highest end: the bottom-line is “quitting pornography.” Advice coming from this camp stresses reliance on new habits of action: bounce your eyes, get this Internet filter, throw out the porno magazines, get accountability partners you can call on in the time of temptation.

Others err on the side of ivory-tower-theology, preaching the glories of Christ and the gospel, stressing the need for internal change but in a way that seems inaccessible to the one in the trenches. This approach understands (rightly) that overall heart-change is the goal: the bottom line is the gospel of grace penetrating the deepest parts of us and making us into lovers of God. They tell others the reason they love porn is because they haven’t been consumed by the revelation of the gospel: God’s hatred for sin and offer of justification to the sinner. A supernatural work is needed to awaken us to the greater pleasures of God. But to the person who is wandering in the wilderness of sin, lost in a fog of confusion, this goal sounds more like the Promised Land they will never enter. What can be done in the here and now that gives me a foretaste of this freedom?

How do we point to the high water mark of deep and lasting change, while at the same time not lose people who just want to hear some baby steps to freedom?

Back to Proverbs 7: The Way of Wisdom

Chapter 4 of this book looks at seven common lures that often rope men into the trap of pornography. Solomon watches from his lattice to see a young man foolishly marching down the dark alley of temptation. This young man walks straight into the arms of an adulteress.

What is this young man's problem? Solomon answers that he lacks wisdom. What this young fool needs is to see the view from Solomon's window. Here is Solomon's answer to all of us would-be fools:

My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you; keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye; bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart. Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call insight your intimate friend. To keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her smooth words (Prov. 7:1-5).

The biblical idea of wisdom essentially refers to skillful living—the ability to make right choices. As we glance through the Proverbs we see wisdom is not just book knowledge. It is street smarts—practical and fruitful understanding based on the experience of generations. Wisdom, for Solomon, is not merely something that involves mental discernment. Wisdom is also moral skill. It's both knowing what is best and knowing why it is best, thus having the godly motivation to choose it.

Solomon understands sexual temptation is a matter of persuasion. "With much seductive speech she persuades him" (7:21), he writes. That phrase, "seductive speech," has also been translated "persuasive words." Solomon uses the exact same term in the Proverbs to refer to the precepts and teachings he gives to his readers (4:2). In other words, persuasion cuts both ways. One can use persuasion to move someone to good or evil, life or death. You will either be persuaded by the world to sin or by wisdom to godliness.

In Proverbs 7 there are at least four things that mark the path of wisdom, and offer uncomplicated (though not easy), practical steps for the one struggling with pornography.

First, think soberly about the consequences.

Second, repent of pursuing tempting paths.

Third, pay attention to your heart.

And last, walk with the wise.

Think soberly about the consequences.

“Her house is the way to *Sheol*, going down to the chambers of death.” (Prov. 7:27)

Sheol in Hebrew writings is the grave or realm of the dead. Here Solomon is using vivid language to describe the final consequence of lust. Actually, Solomon is playing on words: the man on the street is going to her bed chamber, but really it is a chamber leading to death.

What sort of death does Solomon mean? Is this just hyperbole or something much more serious?

At the very least Solomon is talking about a ruined life. He writes, “As an ox goes to the slaughter, or as a stag is caught fast till an arrow pierces its liver...he does not know that it will cost him his life” (7:22-23). In Hebrew thinking, the liver was thought to be the seat of our passions and feelings. Solomon is using some irony. It was this young man’s passions and emotions that led him into the snare, and now a deadly arrow is lodged in the place where lust began. Solomon says that those who go down this path of sin will suffer great pangs of conscience and inner corruption—death in the heart.

When we speak of the subject of pornography we could form a line of people many miles long who could give one testimony after another about how lust started small for them but led to more costly decisions. We could talk to men who eventually ended up addicted, ruining their relationships, or who went thousands of dollars into debt in order to satisfy their lusts. We could talk to men who know the incredible pain of sexual brokenness. We could talk to the fiancés and wives whose relationships have ended because of pornography. We could talk to thousands of men who ended up in sexual perversions they never thought they would do. “Many a victim has she laid low, and all her slain are a mighty throng” (Prov. 7:26).

And yet for the men in your church—in every church—there is the propensity to

believe they are the exception to the rule. Yes, lust and pornography have cost some people dearly. But not me, they think. Reality check: There are no exceptions. The same arrow aimed at the liver of the foolish man in Proverbs 7 is still sharp and is aimed at the hearts of every man with a pulse. Yes, sin takes its toll on all of us in different ways. Yes, consequences are different for each person. But dabbling in porn always leads to some sort of death. Period.

More importantly, Jesus said there are eternal consequences to lust.

You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery." But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell (Matt. 5:27-29).

Jesus raises the moral stakes of lust to eternity. Solomon's example is of a man and a woman who commit literal adultery. This is a hell-worthy act. But Jesus says that merely looking at someone with lustful intent is worthy of the same fiery punishment.

Jesus' statement in Matthew 5 warrants a close look. Notice, he is not saying that all people who lust go to hell. If that were the case, you would be hard-pressed to find anyone in heaven at all. He is speaking to sinners whose eyes have caused them to lust, people who are already guilty of heart-adultery. His warning to them and to us is that you are in danger of hell if you do not fight your lust. He says those who will face the fires of hell are those who harbored lust in their hearts and did nothing radical about it.

To some Christians this warning rings hollow. After all, if we believe we are saved, if we believe we have been forgiven of all our sins—past, present, and future—then maybe we think this warning does not apply to us. It only applies to other people, right? But remember: in Matthew 5 Jesus is talking to His disciples. He's speaking to the church. He's not addressing merely the outsider. He's saying to the church that they must take lust seriously. If we don't, we may stand before Christ some day, spiritual resumé in hand, only to hear the fateful words, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness" (Matt. 7:23).

Paul writes to the church using similar terms in 1 Corinthians 6.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. 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 (1 Cor 6:9-11).

Paul is not talking about incidents of sin. We all have those. He's talking about unchecked habits of sin—lifestyles of sin. Apparently, there were some in the church at Corinth who got the idea that you could claim to be forgiven of sin and still practice sin. Paul's warning to them was stern: Do not be deceived. Those who make a practice of sexual sin will not inherit the kingdom of God. Period.

This sober warning is meant to bring the disciples of Jesus to their knees. Not only are we to consider the seriousness of sin and the death that it brings, we are meant to ask ourselves the hard question: Do I belong to Christ? Does the Spirit of Christ live in me (Rom. 8:9), enabling and obligating me to put to death the transgressions of the body (8:13)? This is ultimately what it means to be a son of God—what it means to be led by the Spirit (8:14).

We don't fight sin in order to be saved. We fight sin because we are already saved. But when the fight isn't in us, we should be asking whether the Spirit is either.

We are meant to read the words of Solomon and have some sobriety knocked into us. "Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death." Pornography leads to emotional death, relational death, spiritual death, and eventually eternal death. When the girl beckons to us from the other side of the computer screen, do we hear these sobering words ringing in our ears?

Repent of pursuing the tempting paths

"Do not stray into her paths." (Prov. 7:25)

Solomon is saying: Don't be like this fool I saw out my window. Don't stray down the path to her home, "passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness" (7:8-9). This was not a casual evening stroll for the young fool. It was an intentional movement in the direction of temptation. In fact, it could actually be translated that he "marched" down her street. In the darkness of twilight this man is walking quite deliberately toward her house.

Christian musician Rich Mullins tells a similar story. He said for several years he traveled by himself and found that it was too tempting to not watch the porn movies in hotel rooms, so he made a personal commitment to never travel alone. One night he was in Amsterdam, famous for its Red Light District. He says he was in his hotel at night, waiting to hear his friend start snoring so he could be sure he was asleep. He thought, “Maybe it would just be fun to take a walk and be tempted.” He never heard his friend snore that night, and in the early morning hours he finally gave up out of sheer exhaustion.⁴⁸

How seriously do you treat sin? The more we understand why sin is such an affront to God, the more the idea of playing with temptation will seem detestable to us. If we just want to be moralistic, we can look at behaviors that pertain to sexuality and draw arbitrary lines: “Okay, these sorts of activities break the rules, and these other ones do not.” When I have this attitude then I can easily justify the grey areas, places where I allow myself to dance on the edge of the cliff as long as I don’t fall in. This is moralistic thinking divorced from a true Godward orientation of the heart.

But that’s not the wisdom of Solomon. The wise man does not draw the line at the doorstep of the harlot so he can relish in the idea of being tempted. He draws the line at the end of the street because he hates sin. For Solomon, this is where real wisdom begins: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10a) and the “hatred of evil.” (Prov. 8:13).

When Solomon uses the term *yir’ah*, translated “fear,” it is a worship term that captures the idea of both shrinking back in terror and drawing close in amazement. It is a disposition of the heart that both dreads and draws. Solomon says this disposition is the controlling principle of living a wise life. To be wise, we must first have our worship right. We must rightly fear God, stand in awe of him, and in doing so hate the things that rob him of glory and rob us of our joy in Him.

When we fear God we don’t just know where the lines between good and evil are, we come to hate evil because God hates it. Paul would say it this way: “Make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:14), and “sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you” (Eph. 5:3).

When it comes to pornography, we must not just repent of looking at it, we must also honor the holy God by repenting of our yearning to be tempted by it. For those

48 That was the night he wrote the lyrics to one of his better-known songs, “Hold Me Jesus.” Knowing this story brings the words of Mullins’ song to life even more: “I wake up in the night and feel the dark / It’s so hot inside my soul / I swear there must be blisters on my heart / So hold me Jesus, ‘cause I’m shaking like a leaf / You have been King of my glory / Won’t You be my Prince of Peace.”

in your church, this means they must begin to identify with the paths leading to the forbidden woman and repent of flirting with those paths. It is a different stumbling block for each of us: a time of day or night; a certain place; a certain computer; being hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. We must take note of these tempting paths and repent of pursuing them.

Again I ask: How serious do we treat sin? The real problem for many men who face pornography temptation is that the temptation is a part of the whole experience. They revel in getting close to the edge. They make seemingly unimportant decisions that bring them one step closer to the object of lust. They tell themselves, “I’m just going to check my e-mail,” or “I’m just going to see who’s online,” or “I’m just checking my Facebook newsfeed.” Deep down, part of them actually hopes to encounter the temptation.

This attitude of wanting to get close to the edge is itself a sin because it is treating lightly something God hates. It is totally void of the fear of the Lord, of true worship. When we see this attitude rise up in us, we need to recognize that we have already started facing the wrong direction. Men in your church need to be trained to redraw the battle lines. There at the head of her street we have a choice: will we turn around to redirect our worship to God and honor His lordship, or will we walk by her house and choose to be entertained by our idol?

Pay attention to your heart

“And now, O sons, listen to me, and be attentive to the words of my mouth. Let not your heart turn aside to her ways.” (Prov. 7:24-25)

Solomon’s focus is on the heart. The heart walks down the path of temptation long before the feet do.

The “heart” is mentioned over 70 times in the book of Proverbs. It is a word that refers to the seat of our appetites, our knowledge, our emotions, anxieties, joys, furies, bitterness, passions, plans, motives, inclinations, and our will. The heart is our whole inner person.

Solomon knows the heart is the source of all our plans and actions. A signature verse from the book of Proverbs highlights the centrality of the heart: “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life” (4:23). With all vigilance—that is, with diligence, above all else, more than anything—guard your inner life, your heart, because it is the wellspring of all you say and do.

What does it mean to guard your heart? For starters, it simply means to notice. We must first notice when our hearts begin to act like the fool. We must train our minds to recognize when the lures of lust start to pull at us, and train those you disciple to notice the lures that regularly capture their hearts.

When we find ourselves drawn to physical lust, when our eyes lead us astray, we need to learn how to bounce our eyes away and then bounce our thoughts toward the worship of God. When we find our minds easily conjuring up fantasies, we must quickly see this and guard our hearts from them.

Are we drawn to the passive pleasure fantasy affords us? Are we cultivating godly character that moves us toward the romancing and nurturing of one woman in marriage, or have we retreated to the quick fix of adolescent fantasy? Often before we can repent of pornography we must first repent of our passivity. Some of us must learn what Paul commanded: “know how to take a wife for yourself in holiness and honor” (1 Thess. 4:3-8, RSV). For married men this means we must pursue our wives. For single men this means we must learn how to pursue a woman for marriage (or embrace a call to singleness that Paul writes of in 1 Corinthians 7:8-9).

When we find our hearts looking for an escape or a refuge from life, we must notice it and throw ourselves upon God as our refuge before our hearts retreat to some false Eden. We must come face to face with the things deep in our hearts that drive us to want an escape, face our discontentment and bring it before our Father.

When we are drawn by the lure of secrecy and anonymity we must remember and believe with all our hearts that God always sees us, that we live our lives before His face. We must repent of the belief that we can make some part of life completely our own, outside of God’s sovereign control.

When we find our hearts and minds drawn to the fantasy world where all attention is on us, where our pride can flourish, we must actively repent of that attitude and remember that God alone is worthy of that sort of attention. We also must remember that when we make Him central, when we trade self-obsession for God-obsession, His affirmation of us as His children will satisfy us in a way no human affirmation ever can.

When we find our hearts drawn to the false intimacy of pornography, let us pursue real intimacy with Christ, family, and Christian community. This may mean examining all the habits we have created that isolate us from others and making some radical changes. This may mean cultivating that prayer life we’ve always

longed to have. This may mean getting involved in church or a small group where we can know and be truly known. This may mean admitting our isolationism to those who are closest to us and asking for their help.

When we find our hearts drawn to covetousness, drawn to the forbidden nature of pornography, we must stop and recognize this for the sin that it is. Instead of merely fighting this urge with moralism and rules, we must be captured by a better vision, a greater desire. Instead of merely saying to ourselves, “Don’t touch that. Don’t look at that”— which lacks any power to restrain our indulgence (see Col. 2:20-23)—say instead, “I set my mind on the pleasures at God’s right hand. Without Christ I would be shut out from these pleasures forever. But Christ is now my life, and when He appears I will appear with Him in glory” (see Col. 3:1-4).

The good news for those ensnared by porn is this: despite our sinful heart, Christ has promised a new heart to those who trust in Him. This is one of the great and radical promises of the New Covenant ratified by Christ, that God Himself actually writes His laws on our hearts, planting the desire to obey Him into our desires (Jer. 31:33; Gal. 5:16-17). If you are united to Christ, if Christ’s Spirit is in you, this is what God has done in you.

The very desire to repent is a gift of the Spirit within. It is His work in your heart.

Walk with the wise

“My son, keep my words...O sons, listen to me.” (Prov. 7:1,24)

This phrase “my son” is found many, many times in the book of Proverbs, because the whole book is an address from father to son, from teacher to pupil, from master to student. This adds a personal touch to the whole book. Proverbs is not just a classroom textbook. It is an extension of Solomon himself to those he loves.

Why would Solomon write this way? It is because he knew that wisdom isn’t merely taught. It’s caught. Wisdom isn’t something we learn in a vacuum. It is imparted to us in community, not by text on a page but by living examples.

Proverbs 13:20 says, “Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.” God’s path of maturity in the Christian life is the path of discipleship. Wise character comes from walking with the wise. This is why we need one another. We need close and wise friends who eagerly follow Christ and urge us to walk in godliness and grace.

One of the elements of Solomon's story of the naïve youth that is often overlooked is this: one of his great follies is that he is walking alone. We must guard our hearts, to be sure. But we must also allow others to do the same for us. In Proverbs 20:5 Solomon begins saying, "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water." How much our own experience testifies to this! Isn't it true that many times you have no idea what your real motives are, what's lurking deep within you? Our hearts are like deep water: we cannot see to the bottom. But Solomon finishes the proverb: "The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out."

Solomon is telling the fools and the would-be fools to find "men of understanding" to guide them, to help them. For those struggling with pornography in your church, they must understand they cannot find freedom in an isolated vacuum. Someone must guide them to find men of understanding, to find a close, wise friend, or a group of close, wise friends who can walk alongside them and help them to discern what really makes them tick. With skillful questions and probing thoughts, a man of understanding can drop a bucket deep into our hearts and draws out observations about ourselves which we are afraid to admit, even things we have never noticed before. A man of understanding thinks deeper than just what you said or did. He knows how to probe beneath the surface. He is one who really knows you and how to counsel you.

The words "My son" call the preacher and the leaders of a local church to step out from behind the pulpit to offer more than their words of wisdom. The words "My son" remind us the church is a family, and like all families, proper growth cannot happen without real parenting. To the church at Thessalonica, Paul likened himself to "a nursing mother taking care of her own children" (1 Thess. 2:7), and "a father with his children" (2:11) who exhorted and encouraged them to live in a manner worthy of God.

Paul knew preaching was not enough. He was not content to simply preach to the Thessalonians: "We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (2:8). I'll say it again: When it comes to growth in the Christian life, preaching is not enough.

For the long haul, the path to freedom from porn is found in biblical community: accountability, mentoring, and discipleship. Your church must learn the beauty of mutual confession of sin and fervent prayer that brings healing to our sick hearts (James 5:16). We must learn what it means to find those in the church who draw us near to God and, with intentionality and thoughtfulness, stir us up to live holy lives (Hebrews 10:24-25). And when we feel trapped in the sin of lust, we must learn the joy of being restored by spiritually mature leaders (Gal. 6:1).



PART 3

HELPING MEN
MAKE FRIENDS

Beyond the Pancake Breakfast

Using Events to Spark Real Friendships

by David Dusek

In 1992, while getting in a workout at a gym in Portland, Oregon, I was approached by a man who worked for Nike, armed with a clipboard. He asked me if I knew anything about motorsports, to which I promptly responded that I knew exactly nothing about racing. In that particular season of my life, I was a die-hard “gym rat,” and my only real goal was to have biceps so big that I couldn’t bend my arm to shave. Okay, so I didn’t exactly have high aspirations back then, but you have to admit that it would be pretty cool to pack around some enormous guns. The least of my concerns, at that point in my quest to become Popeye, was a bunch of guys driving around in a circle at 200 miles per hour. I feigned interest in the topic, only to be blind-sided with a job offer, of sorts. This guy was looking to put together an “all-athlete” pit crew, which he claimed was a “cutting edge idea.”

Needless to say, today’s pit crews are all athletes, training in the gym and on the track every day of the week, striving to shave a tenth of a second off of a pit stop with millions of dollars at stake. In 1992, however, it was indeed a “cutting edge” concept. While he talked of the opportunity, I chuckled at the ridiculous vision of a crew consisting entirely of athletes, thinking that most athletes had hundreds of more important things to do in any given day than change some guy’s tires and put gas in his car. He went on to tell me that Nike would sponsor us, and the team would pay our way to Indianapolis and put us up in a condo for the entire month of May. You can imagine that my interest in racing was suddenly piqued with the chance to get a free vacation, even though it was to be in the middle of Indiana. The catch? I had to try out for this team of eight men, and 90 had already signed up. Long story short, I made the team and was able to experience qualifying for the Indianapolis 500 from the sidelines, literally.

Let me just tell you that there is nothing else in the world like standing 25 feet away from Mario Andretti moving at 240 MPH. The speed is so fast, in fact, that it is nearly impossible to even make out the color of the car or the number on its side. The car actually leaves a vapor trail much like you see behind an F-14 Tomcat fighter jet at Mach 1. Your eyes HURT from the strain of trying to focus on the car as it passes by you and the sound is near deafening. The atmosphere of the Indianapolis 500 can be rivaled by almost nothing else that I have ever experienced and the excitement is contagious. It's loud, the cars are fast and the pomp and circumstance is unparalleled. For four hours every Memorial Day weekend, thousands of people are engaged in the "Greatest Spectacle in Motorsports."

Unfortunately, just as quickly as my "racing career" started, it ended. Our team failed to qualify that year, and subsequently went bankrupt shortly thereafter. And I was right back to where I was a few months earlier. I was again just a regular guy working out at the same gym, in the same town, with the same job. Untransformed and unchanged.

The Trouble with Catalytic Men's Events

So what in the world does any of this have to do with "accountability"? That is a great question. Let me see if I can draw some parallels for you. For decades, Christian men have flocked by the thousands to catalytic events, from Promise Keepers events to men's breakfasts, and from weekend retreats to wild game dinners. Thousands, perhaps even millions, of men have given or re-dedicated their lives to Christ in the context of these incredible experiences. We gather for a weekend or an evening, watch in awe as we hear of God's amazing miracles in the lives of the speakers, revel in loud worship, get fired up for the Kingdom, rampantly street witness, and travel and eat together as we embark on a God adventure of unrivaled testosterone levels. These often large gatherings of men are really, in some ways, "the greatest spectacle in men's ministry." Much like the Indianapolis 500, we are in the company of thousands of our "closest friends," gathering for a common purpose, where it's fast, it's loud, and the pomp and circumstance is equally unparalleled.

In Indianapolis during the month of May, there is a slow crescendo of activity until that much-anticipated last weekend, when every fan finally gets to hear those legendary words, "Gentlemen, start your engines," and the green flag drops. Four hours of blistering speeds, cheering crowds, and ultimately the checkered flag and trophy presentation that go to that one driver who manages to outrace the other 32 cars to the 36-inch-wide red brick finish line, all define what this event is all about. The entire year has been about this moment.

Then, much like my brief career in motorsports, the race is over. Nearly a half million fans evacuate the speedway in long lines and begin counting the days until the next race, a year in the future. They return home and go right back to the lives they left behind, memories of the sounds and colors of the race already beginning to fade. Within weeks, the experience disappears amidst life, work, and home, and aside from a brightly colored T-shirt of their favorite driver, little remains from the Memorial Day weekend race.

While an incredibly effective part of a ministry system and in some cases, as a standalone event, the catalytic men's gathering often slowly fades into the clamor and demands of "life." I vividly remember returning home from a weekend men's event years ago, excited and committed to be the best husband and man that I could be. I was so profoundly impacted by one of the speakers that I even bought his DVD so that I could watch it over and over again. God had done His part in impacting me, along with likely thousands of other guys in attendance. We were fired up, and nothing...I mean nothing...was going to take us off of our game as godly men.

That is, until I got to work the following Monday and deadlines became my priority. Sales projections, school events, meetings and soccer practices competed for every available moment that I had. I stood idly by as the demands of life slowly eroded away my incredible "mountaintop" weekend with the King of Kings. Then, without pomp and without circumstance, I was right back to where I was before the weekend. I was again just a regular guy working out at the same gym, in the same town, with the same job. Untransformed and unchanged.

So what happened? I can sum it up for you in two words: "No relationship." Sure, we have dozens of men, just like us, sitting in the stadium with us or sitting next to us at the Saturday breakfast or even in the pews on Sunday morning. And we exhibit true prowess in our command of "church speak" and know exactly what to say and do when surrounded by other "church guys." We toss out a few "Praise God" exclamations, sing all the right words on the screen, pray out loud...we might even hold the door open and hand you a bulletin as you enter the church. But the bottom line is most men have hundreds of acquaintances and no real friends. That catalytic event that draws guys together may have incredible short term impact, but there is little to sustain them in the long run. Very few real relationships are formed among the masses packed in stadium seating. No one ever told me that I needed to be connected to men the other 364 days each year, and not just over this predetermined annual weekend of manliness. I just assumed that the whole idea was the radical (but sometimes fleeting) transformation that occurred between the green flag at the beginning and the checkered flag at the end of the event. I thought that the event

was all that I needed and I was “good to go” for another year. Which, of course, left me wondering why everything fell apart around me all the time. I mean, I went to a men’s event and God showed up. Wasn’t that it?

The unfortunate by-product of the vast majority of men having no real relationships with other men is the resulting litany of daily battles. Gambling, marital affairs, parental absenteeism, divorce, alcoholism, errant kids, pornography addiction, and even suicide are the outcome of men living isolated lives. Let’s face it, we men are typically an inch deep and a mile wide, and when the life of a man stays “on the surface” with the men around him, you can be certain he will succumb to one of the aforementioned battles. And when we, as leaders, don’t provide men with ways to get connected at a deeper level, we are setting them up for certain failure.

Events Where Content Matters

When it comes to men, our job is to drive them into the context of small community. These small teams of men are where healing occurs, where addictions are broken, and where legacies are revolutionized. Small groups are where the gloves come off and real issues get hit head-on. This is how the battle against Internet pornography is waged and won. Men fighting for each other, encouraging and supporting each other and holding each other accountable. I know what you are thinking: “We have small groups already and we invite men to get involved. But lots of them just opt out or drop out.” The fact that you have small groups available to men is fantastic! You may even be content with the results. But this may not be the concept that men are avoiding. It might be the perceived value of the content.

Do you remember the Pacer? It was a car, built by American Motors back in the late 1970s, that was nicknamed “The Bubble.” It was, by far, the ugliest car ever manufactured. And not only did it resemble a bloated tick, but it was horribly unreliable. In fact, you would probably have to look pretty hard to see one on the road any more, unless it is pressed flat on a semi-trailer headed for the iron smelter. But AMC did manage to produce and sell more than 280,000 of these atrocities, which leads me to believe that someone liked them.

Did I lose you? Well, check this out. If you want to get men involved, then you have to stop trying to sell them an AMC Pacer. Since I hold the Pacer in such low regard, if you offered it to me for free, I would absolutely say, “No, thanks.” That car holds exactly zero value in my life, now or in the future. Unfortunately, many men don’t perceive value in anything that we offer them at church. While Bible studies are

necessary, lots of guys don't view them as having any value at this moment in their lives. In order to compete with everything that happens in the life of the average man, we need to make it worth their while. We are competing for their time, and in order to win that particular competition, we have to give them something that they can use. Most men today would have a hard time using a 26-week study of Leviticus in their daily lives, but would benefit tremendously from studies such as "surviving the economy" or "becoming better husbands and more effective dads."

Events That Spark Real Friendships

The most important result of these "needs-based" events is the relationships that are formed between the men who attend.

Let's examine the average monthly men's ministry "pancake" breakfast for a minute. If our newfound objective is relationship, think about this old standby that most of us include in our structure of men's offerings. On the first Saturday of the month, a certain and often small percentage of our men gather for breakfast. There is food, some sort of short devotional and the infamous prayer request time. Being wise stewards of time, we keep it brief. When the prayer time arrives, there is usually an awkward silence. No one wants to be the first one to talk, and finally one man stands up and asks for prayer for his aunt in New Jersey who has cancer. This is a noble intercessory request, and we should absolutely pray for others (it's our job). But some need prayer for failing marriages, while others need men to pray to break the shackles of pornography addiction. Those prayers often go unspoken out of embarrassment or fear of judgment, because these men really don't know each other.

When you were courting your spouse, you were probably so enamored with her that you simply couldn't get enough of her. You wanted to spend every available minute you could with her. The more you got to know her, the more you wanted to be with her. A relationship formed and you ultimately vowed your life to her through good times and bad times, for richer or poorer. But had you made a standing appointment to see the object of your affection only on the first Saturday of each month (while maybe taking summers off for time with your family), the likelihood of ever developing a relationship with your future spouse would have been near zero. She may have married someone else, since you didn't devote any time to her, right? Time develops relationship. And men must spend time with other men to establish trust and create a safe place to do battle with struggles like pornography addiction, a safe place where the fear of rebuke and the threat of judgment disappear into the comfort that comes from knowing that they are not alone.

Throughout the Bible, God very intentionally placed men in small community with each other. Solomon boldly pointed out that we should have pity on the man who has no one to help him up when he falls down (Eccles. 4:10b). When Jesus sent His disciples, some 70 in number, He sent them out two by two (Luke 10:1). Paul traveled with both Barnabas and Silas at different points in his life. David loved Jonathan as he loved himself and vice versa (1 Sam. 18:1). King David had an army of hundreds of thousands of men, yet he had just 30 Mighty Men. Of those, King David had three men whom he relied on more than the other 27. And even our Savior Jesus Christ, who had many disciples, had a circle of 12 who were closer to Him. Peter, James and John were closer still and John perhaps the closest of all. And then, to cap it all off, the writer of Hebrews admonishes us to not stop meeting once we start (Heb. 10:25-26). The concept of small teams of men is consistently reflected in the Word, and our mission should be to create a culture that imitates that with the men at our church.

We are keenly aware that most men lack relationship, and we realize that only time will help us to cultivate this critical desire in a man's life. We just reviewed what the Bible says about men locking shields with other men. The logical conclusion must be to put men in a situation where they can gain useful, or valuable, life skills while consistently spending time with other godly men. The key question that I have heard as I have worked with thousands of pastors and men's leaders is "How do I do that?"

Events that Result in Accountability Partners

While I could expend tons of energy (and printer ink) citing dozens of specific examples of methods for engaging men, I am going to stick to the tried and true method of asking you a few questions. These questions will help your men's ministry become less event-focused and help you create opportunities for men to cultivate relationships.

- » What percentage of your men (based on total church attendance) attend your "men's ministry" events? (Be honest!)
- » What is the typical format, if any, of your men's breakfast or dinner (devotion, prayer time, etc.)?
- » What is the time commitment involved in attending your men's breakfast or dinner (the duration of the gathering)?

- » How frequently do you have church-wide men's events or men's gatherings? (weekly, monthly, etc.)
- » Do you provide men with an opportunity to break into smaller groups? (2 to 6 men)
- » Are there opportunities for groups of men to meet with no formal curriculum or program (this would not be Sunday school or a curriculum driven group)?
- » Do men feel safe with the other men or are they guarded and reserved? (In other words, do they talk about sports or what is really going on in their lives? Just eavesdrop!)

If your church is like many others, the number of men who get involved is probably significantly less than the overall attendance by men. It is usually pretty close to the 80/20 rule, meaning that if your church has 100 men, about 20 come to your men's breakfast, etc. Remember why? It's all about competition for their time and the perceived value of your ministry. Focus your ministerial efforts on meeting needs to help men make it through life. You may offer a men's Sunday School class or Bible Study, but my guess is that little is offered by way of a "no curriculum" gathering. I have been meeting with my accountability partner for six years, and do you know that we have never studied a book together? We meet every week to talk about finances, our wives, the kids, work, ministry and the plethora of other things that burden men as the Spiritual leaders of our homes. No program, no studying. That is reserved for a different group of men with whom we meet. Our "two-by-two" time is comprised of each of us volleying tough questions at the other and expecting the other to answer truthfully. My partner has been known to call me while I am on the road to pray for favor and to ask me what I am watching on TV in the hotel room. This guy can even tell when I haven't spent enough time in the Word and calls me out on it without fear of retribution. And I know, with absolute certainty, that "confidence is high" and nothing that is said will leave the room...and so does he. Understand that it took six years to get our relationship to this point, but it started by building trust through relationship and spending time together with no agenda and no format.

Warriors Standing Back-to-Back

Recent statistics indicate that around five out of every 10 men in the church have a significant problem with pornography. Why is this particular struggle so prevalent? Here is a visual that may explain some of it. In point of fact, it is somewhat of a

paradox. It is interesting to note that the armor worn by soldiers in the time that the Old Testament was written covered only the front of their body. The breastplate covered the heart and vital organs but did not wrap around the back. The back side was comprised of leather straps and was consequently completely unprotected, so running away was not a good option. If the soldier retreated, nothing was between the back of his body and the tip of a strategically aimed arrow. Soldiers were outfitted to stand and fight face-to-face. However, the Bible tells us to “flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor. 6:18). What that tells me is that the armor we have may not be tough enough to withstand an attack of sexual immorality and the only battle plan that we have is to run from it. This is the inherent battle we are facing with Internet pornography. Here is the paradox: Even the best armor can't stand toe-to-toe with sexual immorality, and fleeing means that a man is vulnerable. We have half of our men trying to either flee from pornography, only to get shot in the back or sucked back into the battle or trying to face it with inadequate armor. Five out of 10 men we see every Sunday are getting killed by it and we have yet to establish a strategy to minimize the casualties. So what is the battle plan then?

Did you know that, in battle, the only way that a man can cover his back is to stand back-to-back with another man? Two men, back to back, can cover 360 degrees of exposure. One man alone cannot. We absolutely must shift our paradigm from being event-focused to intentionally connecting men. Creating a level of comfort among guys far outweighs a standardized format, regimented order of service or ministry program. If we can get our men to see the value of spending time together by providing them with viable and useful gatherings, then the obvious outcome will be deeper relationships and an awareness that other men are dealing with similar struggles. The embarrassment of feeling as if they are the only one suffering from a particular challenge subsides when men share their lives with each other. Then battle lines can be drawn when one man agrees to meet (weekly, at minimum) with another man or two to combat the issues that bombard men every day. The victory comes when these two men are open, honest, and accountable to one another. The result will be better marriages, stronger families, and a passionate army of guys who will go to battle for Jesus Christ and for your church.

Beyond the Superficial

Creating Friendships with Substance

by Luke Gilkerson

When it comes to Greek mythology, the stories of the Sirens were a favorite among sailors in the Mediterranean. The Sirens were divine beings: captivating and beautiful women with bird-like wings. These creatures perched themselves on a series of small islands somewhere off the coast of Italy. There they sat, not too far from the rocky cliffs, resting in a flowery meadow. What made the Sirens so enchanting were their voices, their song. Ancient sources describe their “siren song”—a beautiful music that would compulsively lure sailors toward the island, only to have their ships capsize on the rocks.

One famous story about the Sirens is found in Homer’s *The Odyssey*. Odysseus, one of the champions of the Trojan War, is making the long journey home with his band of sailors. He is counseled by one of the goddesses to beware of the sweetness of the siren song. She says to him, “There is a great heap of dead men’s bones lying all around the Sirens, with the flesh still rotting off them.”

Taking her advice, Odysseus devises a plan to avoid the Siren’s trap. First he plugs the ears of all his fellow sailors with wax. Then he commands his men to bind him upright to the mast of the ship. He tells them further, “If I beg and pray you to set me free, then bind me more tightly still.”

As Odysseus’ ship sails within an earshot of the islands, suddenly the wind falls into a dead calm. The Sirens see Odysseus coming and begin singing. “Come here,” they sing, “No one ever sailed past us without staying to hear the enchanting sweetness of our song.” Immediately Odysseus is caught in their spell. He is overcome by the song and demands his men to set him free. But his men bind him with stronger ropes until they are out of the Sirens’ range, and the trap is avoided.

The Sirens still sing today. It may not be the same for each man in your church, but make no mistake about it: we are all enticed by things of the world. Every man encounters temptation. Your Siren might be the lure of lust, or greed, or selfishness, or pride, or fear of man, or anger. We have those vices that just seem to grab at our hearts and easily ensnare us (Heb. 12:1). The question isn't whether we encounter temptations. The question is whether we will face them alone. Odysseus needed his men for more than just manning the ship. He needed men who were willing to help him fight temptation, to fight sin.

Real Friendship, Real Brotherhood

Every man in your church must ask himself who his fellow sailors are. Who's on their boat? Who are they really living life with? Who are they close to? It is often a problem, especially among men, that we don't intentionally seek out good friendships. Often we don't seek out wise counsel unless we are seeking "expert" advice. It is easier to stay on the surface with our so-called friends, and as such they are not friends who help us fight sin.

The Bible has a lot to say about real friendship or real brotherhood. The word "friend" means different things to different people, especially in the Facebook-culture in which we live. The word "friend" in a social network world means "anyone who clicked the 'accept' button." A friend on Facebook can be that guy who used to sit behind me in seventh grade math class that I haven't seen in 20 years. Even outside of the online world, if you ask people how many friends they have, some might say, "Oh, I have dozens," or "Hundreds of friends."

But the book of Proverbs offers us this warning: "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Prov. 18:24). Friendship is more than being a mere acquaintance. If your friendship circle is a mile wide and an inch deep, you may think you have good friendships, but you don't have any true brothers. It is possible to feel all alone in a crowd.

This is what we all want: a friend that sticks closer than a brother. That's a rare jewel. It is a great blessing to have those people who have been with you through all of life's ebbs and flows, someone who knows how you tick, someone who is there for you in good times and bad.

Good friends aren't just close friends, according to Solomon's proverbs. They must also be wise friends. "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Prov. 13:20). Some of the men in our churches may have some very close friends, but are they wise friends? Do these friendships make them wiser, or do they reflect more of the world's values?

Exploring the book of Proverbs we find seven qualities (at least) of being and finding a good friend.

1. Good brothers are dependable. Bad ones are fair-weather friends.

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity" (Prov. 17:17). The word love here is the same word to describe the love between Jonathan and King David (Solomon's father): He loved David as he loved his own soul (1 Sam. 20:17). This is close friendship.

But a friend doesn't just love in the fair-weather times: a friend loves at all times. A friend is dependable and loyal. He's there for you when life falls apart. In fact, Solomon says, this is what brotherhood was born for: times of adversity. This is why God gives us good friends. Some of the men in your church have gone through hard times...really hard. And often it is in those hard times we find out who our real friends are. Something in our life fell apart: a marriage ended, we lost a job, we had a death in the family, or we were physically harmed. It was at that time that a good friend stayed by our side when things were worst, and we felt as if that friendship was born for that moment. Some of the men in your church know this proverb to be true from bitter experience, and yet many feel so isolated they only wish they had a story of adversity where a friend came through for them.

Or consider this proverb: "What is desired in a man is steadfast love, and a poor man is better than a liar" (Prov. 19:22). Solomon is saying, what people really want to see in a friend is steadfast, unflinching love. The Hebrew word used here is *hesed*, and it means "radical loyalty." It is the same loyalty that God is said to have for his covenant people: a steadfast love that endures forever. When he says a poor man is better than a liar, he's saying even a faithful friend who has nothing is better than a man of wealth who says he's faithful and then turns his back on you.

This is what people want in a friend: someone who reflects God's character of loyalty, and sticks with you.

2. Good brothers are honest about their sin. Bad brothers hide it.

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Prov. 28:13). This means friends confess sin to each other. Friends are accountable to one another.

Accountability is a buzzword in the Christian community, especially among men. But in order to do accountability well, we need to know what it is.

Here’s a good definition of accountability: Accountability is being honest with trusted friends about our temptations, our sins, and the state of our heart.

There are all kinds of games guys play when it comes to avoiding real accountability. For some it’s sheer avoidance. Some men are really good at just never getting into discussions about personal sin. They keep things on the surface. When their friends start getting personal, they just shut up or plead The Fifth.

Others play the “We” game. They might get into a conversation with their Christian brothers about a struggle they have and end up couching everything in “we” terms. “You know how it is when we are really tired or stressed out and we’re hanging out online, and we see a picture of a hot girl, and we just sort of click on it without thinking about it? Sometimes we just don’t have our defenses up.” That is not a confession. That’s a homily. Instead, they should start their sentences with “I.” “I have a problem.” “I shouldn’t do that.” “I was wrong.” “I sinned when...”

Some men keep their confessions at surface level. They tell someone just enough to soothe their consciences but heavily edit and sanitize their stories.

Some confess their sin to others but play the “elapsed-time-game.” They do something they know is wrong and want to confess it to someone, but they make sure to put a good week or so between the sin and the confession. That way, they can build up a nice track record of behavior so their sin seems somehow less significant. “I gave into temptation, yes, but I’ve really been staying strong for the last 6 days or so.”

Some people are really sly: they play “musical chairs” with their accountability partners. They have more than one person they confess their junk to, so no one person really has the whole picture of how bad they are. They rotate through accountability partners, treating people like confessional booths.

These games are deception—they are ways we bend the truth so we don't have to be brutally honest with anyone. Men in our churches who do this care more about personal image than honesty.

As church leaders we should be challenging our men to crucify their image to go deeper with their friendships. Are they willing to give and receive honest confessions? Are they willing to pursue brother-to-brother accountability?

Where I work, at Covenant Eyes, we hear hundreds of stories from men who have experienced this sort of freedom in confession as they use our Accountability software. These guys have the Covenant Eyes program on every computer or hand-held device they own, and on a weekly basis a good friend or a group of friends receives their Accountability Report of everywhere they've been online. As you can imagine, it totally changes the way they use the Web. They think twice about everywhere they visit, every link they click on. More than this, when they do go to a questionable website they've already put the measure of honesty in place: there's no getting around it. When their partner gets a report that says at 2:37 a.m. on Tuesday they looked up "Sexy college girls" on Google, there's no room for ambiguity. They can use this report to begin having an honest conversation.

Remember what Paul said. "Each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Rom. 14:12), Christians included. Someday we will stand before the One whose eyes are like fire, who sees everything inside us, and we can't cloak our sin in front of Him. Yes, if we are united with Christ we will enter into the full blessings of eternal life, but we will give an account all the same. And right now, brother-to-brother accountability is like a dress rehearsal for that great Day. We drag our sin into the light before a safe brother because we know that someday all of it will be exposed to the light anyway.

3. Good brothers are confidential. Bad brothers are gossips.

Proverbs 16:28 says, "A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends."

After all we've said about confession, we need brothers we can depend on, brothers who will be confidential with the information we give them.

Solomon advises here: Don't be close friends with a gossip. In 1 Timothy 5:13 these people are called busybodies, people who just like to be in the know, who like to be up on what's happening in your life, who like to talk to others about everyone else's

business. Some people just want to be close to you to be close to information about you.

Confidentiality is vital for true brothers. It is so important, it should be a stated agreement between you and your accountability brother: we will not share private information with anyone else.

For some people, this is the biggest hang-up for getting close to someone else. Maybe they've been burned in the past. Maybe someone they know has been burned. They just don't know if they can trust anyone.

As a disciple maker, you can affirm the suspicions of some of the men in your church. Yes, people are sinful. Yes, people can let you down. Yes, you can unwisely give your trust to someone who breaks it. But the critical question is whether you trust Christ as you pursue deep friendships. Say to yourself, "Despite my fears, I choose to believe that God has placed me into a redeemed family—the church—among people who are being changed from the inside out, and as I pray for discernment, God will guide me into relationships with brothers with whom I can be completely honest."

4. Good brothers lovingly confront. Bad brothers are spiritual wimps.

A wise brother confronts our sin. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, profuse are the kisses of an enemy" (Prov. 27:6).

Men must be taught to avoid the extreme of wimpy accountability. You may have had accountability relationships like this. You get together and confess your latest blunder. Your friend confesses his sin too. You pat each other on the back, say everything will be okay, and go home just as unmotivated as before to really do something about your sin. You get back together the next week with the same sad story.

In these sorts of friendships all we're looking for is absolution. We just want to commiserate with someone over our sin and get something off our chest. We just want to have someone tell us our sins are forgiven. Of course, it isn't a bad thing to want an affirming word. We should be reminding one another of the grace of Christ and His forgiveness. But a good brother wisely knows that we don't need cheap peace or cheap grace.

When a friend wounds your pride, it's not intended to harm you, but to heal you. When you need a new heart, you don't need a pharmacist to give you pain

medication that masks the problem; you need a heart surgeon to cut you open. Does being rebuked hurt? You bet. But it's a wound worth receiving.

Remember this proverb: "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17). How does iron sharpen iron? With friction. Sparks might fly. But in the end, the blade is sharper. Real friends are willing to risk some friction with you because they love you more than winning a popularity contest. They don't shy away from the hard conversation. They wisely know how to confront a sin they see in your life without condemning you. A wise friend expects change in your life and in your character.

C.S. Lewis wisely said, "You will not find the warrior, the poet, the philosopher or the Christian by staring in his eyes as if he were your mistress: better fight beside him, read with him, argue with him, pray with him." We need to be brothers who fight sin together.

That being said...

5. Good brothers know when to cut you slack. Bad brothers have a "cop mentality."

Proverbs 17:9 states, "Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends." True friends know how to pick their battles. Sometimes accountability partners can bring a cop mentality into their friendships. They are nit-picky. Like Proverbs 17:9, they repeat your sins back to you over and over again. They don't let stuff go. They point out every little thing they see that's wrong with you. It seems like they are out to get you.

One story from Nate Larkin's book, *Samson and the Pirate Monks*, illustrates this:

You've probably seen that poor fellow who decided one day to be honest in a Christian meeting. Maybe he'd been caught in a sin, so he really had nothing left to lose, or perhaps he was so plagued by guilt that he decided to take the church's rhetoric about grace and forgiveness at face value and bare his soul in a desperate bid for freedom.

I remember a guy who did that. As soon as the fateful words were uttered he looked around, hoping somebody would say, "Me too," but all he heard were crickets. After a pause, a curious investigator launched into spiritual cross-examination. Then a

few concerned “ex-sinners” gathered around him and preached a series of sermons disguised as prayers. Finally, a helpful brother prescribed three Scripture verses to be taken in the morning and at bedtime. Later, the guy was assigned a probation officer—excuse me, an “accountability partner”—who would check in on him for a few weeks to make sure he had actually turned around. [...]

To make matters worse, as he left the meeting that poor guy was struck by the realization that he had just volunteered to become the church’s new topic of conversation. Suddenly he knew that telephone lines were already humming with the latest “prayer request.” Next Sunday, his suspicions were confirmed. The sidelong glances, the awkward silences, the careful distances kept by his former associates, their wives, and others, verified that his disclosure was now common currency in the congregation.

This men’s group did not understand the meaning of the words, “Whoever covers an offense seeks love.” Sometimes love is better served by silence. Sometimes what we need is empathy, not a sermon.

A cop is someone who is just looking over your shoulder for you to screw up. We don’t need any more accountability cops in the church. Christians have come up with some very religious and sanitized ways of being a jerk. But a real friend isn’t someone who merely polices your life. Good accountability partners are fellow travelers, not cops. A real friend is someone who gets in the vehicle with you, helps you drive in the lines, travels with you in life in good times and bad, helps you look out for the potholes, helps you read the road signs, and helps you get to where you are going.

A good friend learns how to balance both confrontation and compassion, persistence and patience.

6. Good brothers are realists. Bad brothers are foolishly cheery.

“Whoever sings songs to a heavy heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda” (Prov. 25:20).

Perhaps you have had this kind of a friend. They think they are bringing you joy, but they are depriving you of the warmth you need. These friends are as worthless as vinegar neutralized by washing soda:

- » The look-on-the-bright-side guy: You tell him you've just lost your job and he says, "Well, at least you have your health." Thanks.
- » The class-clown guy: There's not a serious moment with him. You tell him something serious and he cracks a joke in the name of good fun.
- » The super-spiritual guy: Confess some struggle you're having and all he can say is, "Well, praise God in all circumstances," and walks away whistling his favorite hymn. Again, thanks.

Of course, good friends don't want you to stay in the muck of depression, but this proverb is about the superficial, sing-songy friend who glosses over your heavy heart.

I've mentioned the wimpy accountability partner and the legalistic accountability partner; but this is the cheery accountability partner. We don't need a wimp; we need someone who lovingly confronts us in our sin. We don't need a legalistic cop; we need someone who is compassionate and patient. And we also don't need an eternal optimist; we need a realist. A realist is someone who knows there is more to life than just feeling good. If feeling good is all we need, then foolish optimism is the best medicine. But a real brother wants us to be good, not just feel good. He doesn't want to put a colorful Band-Aid over an open wound. Instead he wants to help you dress it.

This leads to the last point . . .

7. Good brothers focus on your heart. Bad brothers see only the surface.

"The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but a man of understanding will draw it out" (Prov. 20:5). As I mentioned in Chapter 7, this proverb speaks of the depths of the human heart. Why do we do what we do? What really motivates us deep down? Why are we tempted by this thing or that thing? What makes a sin so attractive? Where does our anger come from? Our fears? Our cravings? Our lusts? Our hearts are like deep water. Look all you want, you cannot see the bottom.

But a man of understanding is someone who helps you discern the motives of your heart. A man of understanding thinks deeper than just what you said or did. He knows how to probe beneath the surface. He not only seeks God's wisdom, he seeks to know you.

What is a “man of understanding” like? The book of Proverbs says we identify these wise friends by how they live.

A man of understanding...

- » knows when he lacks wisdom. He seeks understanding diligently. He is always a student of human nature and divine truth (Prov. 2:3).
- » doesn't slander, deride, or use rash words. He knows how to hold his tongue. He's quick to listen and slow to speak (Prov. 11:12; 17:27).
- » doesn't find humor in the things God calls folly. He finds pleasure in wise living (Prov. 10:23; 15:21).
- » is patient, not quick-tempered (Prov. 14:29).

As a church leader, start taking note of the men in your church you believe meet this description and call them aside to challenge them to build genuine friendships with other men. These men could be your eyes on the ground who have the potential to root out hidden sin in the ranks, who will disciple the young and immature into vibrant and influential disciples of Christ.

Fostering Natural Friendships for the Glory of God

These sorts of friendships aren't built overnight. The men of your church won't meet someone today who can discern the motives of their heart tomorrow. But this is the goal we need to strive towards: to be brothers who know one another so well that we become men of understanding to each other.

We need to start small and work up. Experience shows that every friendship goes through different levels of communication.

It starts with cliché communication. “How are you?” “I'm fine.” “How's the weather?”

It moves to fact communication. This is information about things going on in our lives or in the world. It's more than cliché comments, but it also doesn't involve deep thinking or feeling. “The stock market climbed this week.” “I heard Bob was sick.” “The game is this Saturday.” “I have a wife and two kids.”

Then it moves to belief communication. This is where you start talking about opinions. “I agree with you.” “I loved that movie.” “I think abortion is wrong.”

These are your commentaries. This may be where friction is first experienced as differences of opinion arise.

Then it moves to feeling communication. This is where we start showing each other emotion. A belief statement might be: "I'm really struggling in this area." But a feeling statement might be: "I'm really struggling and feel so depressed right now." This is the stage where the walls come down.

Finally, there is transparency. This is when you've built up a habit of communication and you establish a routine of regularly sharing your dreams, confessing your sin, confronting one another, and encouraging one another at the heart level.

Where do you start?

As you are challenging men to build these sorts of friendships, remember real friendship is born out of mutual interest. If you make friendship your focus, you'll never find it. If you make accountability your focus—throwing a bunch of random men into a room to talk about their struggles—you'll probably be disillusioned (and so will they). But if you encourage the men in your church to pursue a common goal, real friendships can be the result.

In his book, *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis said this is one of the differences between the love friends share and the love married couples share. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other. Friends are side by side, absorbed in a common interest. They share the same enthusiasm for something, a hobby, a topic, or a cause.

A Practical Example

Here's an example of this from someone who uses our Accountability software:

The other day I received a Covenant Eyes report for one of my brothers and it looked as though he had visited a site, based on the name listed in the report, which was pornographic. He insisted he had not visited any porn sites that week, so I checked the site. In truth it was not pornographic; rather it was a site mainly targeted toward women which had articles about relationships.

I breathed a sigh of relief, but rather than simply move on, I asked him about the articles he had read. What resulted was a really good conversation about the loneliness in his heart, about wanting a quality relationship with a woman, and an

admission that he sometimes struggles to “stay in the fight.” We were able to talk about feeling empty and being made complete in Christ. He was able to see that, while technically not lust, his reading of those articles was connected to his efforts to find acceptance, approval, significance and even completion in a woman.

Addressing those deeper longings got us to the root of what has fueled his porn indulgence over the years, as well as his general desire to have a woman in his life as a means of personal security.

It was all below the waterline just waiting to be discovered. That conversation was a moment of real significance, full of the potential for change. It happened because the best accountability is conversational.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if every man in your church had these sorts of friends?

Your Sailing Companions

We started with the story of Odysseus, but there's another famous story about the Sirens. This comes from the story of Jason and the Argonauts. The captain, Jason, was warned about the Sirens beforehand, so he prepared himself and his shipmates for the encounter. As they sailed along, a fresh breeze suddenly began to blow, and they saw the island. The Sirens spotted Jason's ship and began to sing with their seductive voices. The sailors were overcome with desire and were ready to cast their ropes from the boat to the shore.

But Jason had brought aboard his ship the legendary Orpheus. Orpheus was a man known throughout the world for his gift of music, his ability to play the stringed lyre. As the story goes, the men began to be overcome with the sound of the Siren's voice, but Orpheus pulled out his lyre and played a melody that filled the sailor's ears, “and the lyre overcame the maidens' voice.” Orpheus' song overcame the spell, and disaster was averted.

Let's contrast these stories. How did Odysseus deal with temptation? He had friends around him who were willing to bind him with stronger ropes. To be sure, when we have these sorts of friends this is a great blessing. It's great to have those friends who can help us change our behavior, keep us clear of disaster.

But the Bible speaks of a sort of fellowship that is better. How did Jason deal with the temptation? How did he defeat the spell of the Sirens? He knew the only way to fight

a spell is with a greater spell. He didn't look for stronger ropes. He brought along a more enchanting song.

This is the sort of change the Bible promises us: not just changing our behavior, but actually changing our hearts. The gospel offers us better promises than the false promises of sin. Those better promises captivate our hearts and put us under a new spell. As C.S. Lewis said in a sermon delivered at Oxford, "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." That stronger spell is the wonder and majesty of Christ.

And when we have gospel-centered friends, they are able to not just get us to change our behavior, they are able to point us to the One who is more satisfying than sin.



PART 4

CREATING SMALL
GROUPS OF HEALING

Beyond the Worship Service

Calling Your Church to Small Group Life

by Stephen Altrogge

Do you remember that scene in *The Sound of Music* where Julie Andrews goes into the spiel about her favorite things? She starts singing about how much she loves raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens and schnitzel on noodles (whatever that means). If she gets bitten by a dog or stung by a bee, no matter, she'll just stop and think about her favorite things. Apparently, thinking about wild geese flying with the moon on their wings is enough to take away all her pain and sadness. That's a pretty sweet list.

I've got a list too, but it goes the other way. I've got a list of my least favorite things. That list includes dental procedures that involve me losing feeling in half of my face, the New York Yankees, any television show that includes the words "most extreme" in its title, and salad. I would guess that you have your own least favorite things list, and that our lists would probably be quite different. But I bet there's one thing that you and I share a common dislike for: telling others about our struggles with sin.

Let's be honest, nobody likes talking about their sin with others. It's a humbling, vulnerable, often uncomfortable process, especially when talking about sexual sin. I can think of about a hundred things I would rather do than tell someone that I'm battling lust.

But here's the funny thing: I regularly meet with the other pastors on staff at my church and talk about my battles with sin, including sexual battles. I regularly invite a small group of men into my life to encourage me, challenge me, correct me, and exhort me. Why?

The reason I participate in a small group (or growth group, cell group, fight club, accountability group, etc.), is because I believe it's biblical and God-honoring.

The "Why" of Small Groups

Go ahead and fire up your Bible software and do a search for the following verse: "Thus says the Lord, 'All my people shall be in a small group and share their struggles and snacks freely with one another.'" You won't find it. At least I hope you won't.

But you will find many principles in Scripture that are difficult to fulfill apart from some sort of small group. And for the sake of clarity, when I say small groups, I don't necessarily mean formal small groups organized within the church, although I think organized small groups are helpful. I simply mean two or more believers regularly gathering together for the purpose of encouraging, challenging, edifying, correcting, and caring for one another. The following principles are applicable to any small group.

Confessing To One Another

Small groups aren't some form of psychological group therapy where everyone gets together and talks about their inner wounds. They aren't spiritual ultimate fighting arenas either, where we bash other people for their failures. Small groups exist to promote fellowship with God and with one another.

In 1 John 1:7 we read, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." There are two dimensions to walking in the light. First and foremost, we walk in the light when we seek to live a holy life that is pleasing to God. Walking in the light of God then leads to walking in the light with one another, which means living a transparent, humble life with other Christians. This doesn't mean confessing all our deepest sins to every Christian we encounter, but it does mean having a few close friends who have access to our lives and can share in our joys, struggles, successes, and failures. Small groups provide an ideal context to "walk in the light" with one another.

This kind of transparent fellowship doesn't usually happen on Sunday mornings when we're taking our kids to children's ministry, saying hello to 25 different people, and then racing home afterwards to catch the football game. Something smaller and more intimate is needed. Something that allows us to walk in the light together with a few other believers.

When we walk in the light two things happen. First, we have fellowship with one another. If we want to have true, biblical, rich, God-honoring fellowship with other Christians, then we must walk in the light. If we don't walk in the light, if we conceal ourselves from other Christians, we won't experience true fellowship with other Christians and we won't grow in godliness. God has designed the Christian life to be a group project. I need you to grow and you need me to grow. We can't do it without each other. We need relationships with other Christians if we are going to grow, and small groups are a way of fostering those necessary relationships.

Second, when we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sins. Now, does this mean that our forgiveness is contingent upon us walking in the light? No, our justification is secure the moment we place our faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. I do think, however, that our sense of assurance of forgiveness is contingent upon walking in the light.

When we confess our sins and struggles to other believers, that is proof-positive that God himself is at work in us. The unbeliever wants nothing to do with the light and makes every effort to keep his sin hidden in the dark. If we walk in the light with other Christians, it assures us that God has placed his spirit in us, God has forgiven all our sins, and God will finish the good work that he began in us (Phil. 1:6).

We need this precious assurance if we are going to overcome sexual sin. Condemnation and despair often follow on the heels of sexual sin. We can't believe we did it again. We can't believe that we're still struggling in the same way. We can't believe that God would ever accept us. It's in these moments of condemnation that we need assurance, and this assurance comes by walking in the light with other believers.

Exhorting One Another

Hebrews 3:12-14 says, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."

Here's how sin works: it deceives and it hardens. Sin is a master propaganda machine, making promise after promise and then never coming through. Sin promises pleasure, satisfaction, peace, rest, and joy, and then leaves us feeling hollow and unsatisfied. The more we give in to sin, the harder our hearts become and the more prone we are to give in to sin again. It's a sick, wicked cycle.

This is especially true of sexual sin. Lust, porn, and masturbation promise to satisfy all the physical cravings that pulse through our bodies. They promise to rescue us from our loneliness and depression, but in the end they just leave us laying in the gutter, unhappy and unsatisfied. The sharp edges of our conscience are blunted, making it easier for us to give in to sexual sin in the future. Sexual sin is a cesspool of lies.

In order to effectively fight against sexual temptation, we need the regular exhortation of other believers. We need other Christians to help us see through the fog, fuzziness, and deceptiveness of lust. We need friends who are willing to both confront and encourage us. Apart from this exhortation, we're in danger of being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." Small groups are an ideal place for this restoration to take place. They are an ideal place for me to confess to other guys that I'm in a heated battle with lust. They are an ideal place for the other guys to pray for me and remind me of the seriousness and consequences of sin. They are an ideal place for sexual sin to be confronted and conquered.

Humility With One Another

Without the power of God we won't overcome sexual sin. Period. Our hearts are too easily ensnared and sin is too deceptive for us to overcome it apart from God. We need grace.

Throughout Scripture it is clear that God loves to be gracious to a particular group of people: the humble. In James 4:6 we read, "But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" Those who are proud are opposed by God. Those who are humble uniquely position themselves to receive the life changing grace of God. Growth in godliness happens in the soil of humility.

Small groups provide a wonderful opportunity to grow in humility. It takes humility to tell others that you fell into sin again. That you got sucked into porn again. That you masturbated again. It becomes clear to everyone that you don't have it all together, and that you're not a super Christian who leaps over temptations in a single bound. You're a weak, frail sinner who desperately needs the help of God and the help of others. You need help so desperately that you're willing to share your secrets with others.

God is in the business of helping desperate sinners. He loves to help those who can't help themselves. Who have come to the end of themselves. Who have no alternative but to humble themselves before the Lord and before their fellow Christians. Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). When we meet with our small group and confess our sins, we are positioning ourselves to receive help from the divine physician.

The "How" of Small Groups

This all sounds great, doesn't it? We get together, we confess some sin, we eat, we encourage one another, we eat, we confess some more sin. Done and done. Sin conquered. Lust vanquished. Holiness achieved. Sanctification complete. All in 90 minutes on a Saturday morning. Who wouldn't want this kind of spiritual domination?

But in reality, it's tougher than it sounds. It's hard to get people fired up about confessing sin, especially if they've never done it before. Even if people see the biblical value of a small group, that doesn't mean that they are going to want to do it. So how do you get this process started? How do you get the fellowship ball rolling in your church? Let me give you just a few suggestions to get you started.

Keep the Gospel Central

This isn't my obligatory shout out to the gospel. I really, seriously mean this. If you don't keep your small group rooted in the gospel you are dooming yourself and everyone else in your group to condemnation, despair, and temporary change.

The gospel really is our only hope for overcoming sexual sin. Do you remember that old hymn that says, "He breaks the power of canceled sin..."? This truth must be kept at the forefront of the battle against sexual sin. In Christ, our sin has already been canceled. Jesus died for our lust, porn worship, and masturbation. God placed it upon Jesus at the cross. Now we can come to God freely, without shame and without fear. When we give in to sin, our instinct is to keep away from God. We talk to God from a distance, promising to do better, promising to change, promising to make up for our failure. We feel like we need to change before God will take us back. But the gospel tells us that God takes us back and then changes us! The gospel tells us that we are to come confidently to God and receive mercy and grace in our time of need (Heb 4:16). The gospel tells us that we are alive to God and dead to sin, and that sin will not be our master (Rom. 6:6).

If you don't regularly remind yourself and the members of your small group of these truths, you won't make progress. You'll meet together and promise to do better, but never make any significant progress in the battle against sexual sin. The gospel is what fuels change and the gospel must be the fuel of your small group.

Start With Yourself

If you want to create a culture of fellowship within your church it's going to have to start with you. You're going to have to take the lead in biblical confession of sin. You're going to have to demonstrate biblical encouragement and correction. You're going to have to model gospel-centeredness for those in your small group.

If this is a new concept for your church, start small. Ask a couple of mature guys to join you in a fellowship group. When you start the group, lay out the biblical vision for small groups and be up front about what you are expecting from yourself and the other men in your group. You're expecting honesty. You're expecting confidentiality. You're expecting every person to be committed to growing in godliness. And most important, you're expecting God to move in powerful ways.

I would encourage you not to make sexual sin the exclusive focus of the group. In fact, I would start much broader, focusing on each person's relationship with the Lord. Then, as time progresses, move to more specific areas of life, such as marriage, parenting, purity, job, etc. Over time you'll get to know each person's individual struggles and you'll know what sort of probing questions you should be asking them.

After a year with these guys, have several of them start leading small groups. You can then bring in new men to train and deploy.

This stuff is probably going to feel pretty awkward at first. Confessing doesn't feel very natural. It cuts against our pride and fear of what others will think. Don't expect to have incredible fellowship and confession and honesty on your first meeting. It takes time to build trust with one another and to become familiar with each other's struggles. It takes time to learn how to encourage, correct, and admonish one another. Have realistic, biblical expectations. God will bless your efforts at biblical fellowship, but like every other type of spiritual growth, it takes time.

Give the Church A Vision for Small Groups

The truth is, people need to be envisioned for small groups. Small groups can feel like just another meeting to add to the calendar. People need to see the wonderful, biblical goals that drive small groups, and have a vision for what God can do through

small groups. This vision won't just happen. You'll need to communicate it clearly to the church. You'll need to explain the reasoning behind it, and the reason you're seeking to implement it. You'll need to help people see that this isn't just another meeting, but a chance to grow in godliness.

Saying these things one time in a sermon won't be enough. It takes time for people to get things in their head and in their heart. Tell it to the church as a whole. Tell it to individuals. Model it to your own small group, then have them model it. As you model it, and preach it, and live it, the vision will spread.

Stick With It

This may sound like a lot of work. News flash: it is. You'll encounter bumps and snags and resistance along the way. Some people may drag their feet, others may refuse altogether. But don't give up! It's worth it. Fellowship is worth it. Overcoming porn is worth it. Having a church full of people who love each other and pursue holiness is worth it. God is worth it.

Beyond the Checklist

Casting a Vision for Real Accountability

by Traylor Lovvorn

Having read thus far, no doubt you are in agreement that accountability and authentic community among men is vital for the health of the families that make up our congregations. While we can readily agree on what is important and what our goals should be concerning accountability, being able to move from where we are to this ideal can be tricky. This chapter will seek to cast a vision for real accountability and to offer practical steps that will help lead men into community that is both authentic and transparent.

All We Need Is Jesus

Maybe you have heard someone say this recently from a pulpit near you. Growing up on a steady diet of this and other well-meaning clichés led me to an isolated and individualistic brand of Christianity that told me I was supposed to be strong and have it together in all areas. This disciplined self-reliance meant that I covered up and kept secret any area where I was not strong and did not have it all together. I was an expert at moving effortlessly between the myriad of masks I used to cover up my weaknesses and insecurities. I felt it was my duty to keep my struggles secretly locked away in order to protect my reputation and to be a good witness to the world. If the people around me saw me struggling, I reasoned, then that would send a message that Jesus was not enough. I could not let that happen, so the cover-up continued.

Unfortunately, the cover-up taking place in my life was pretty significant. I was exposed to pornography as an eight-year-old and would never be the same because of that experience. The knowledge that viewing pornography was wrong was not enough to keep me from going back to it again and again over the next twenty-two

years. Convinced that believers were supposed to experience only positive emotions like happiness and joy while desperately trying to protect my Christian reputation, I stuffed and ignored the painful emotions of sorrow, grief and loneliness.

The more I stuffed, the more I ran to pornography and sexual fantasy to medicate my pain. The more I medicated, the more sin there was to hide and cover up. As I continued this destructive cycle, the discrepancy between the picture of what I thought a godly man was supposed to be and who I knew myself to be grew larger and larger. Because I had only heard sex and pornography discussed in the context of big sins to be avoided, I honestly believed that I was the only Christian man struggling in this area and continued to isolate and hide.

Naming the Problem

The beliefs and feelings that I just described can be summed up in one word: shame. Dr. David Powlison describes shame as “a sense of failure before the eyes of someone else.” When this “someone else” is a perfect and holy Creator and our perspective is vertical in nature, this sense of failure is healthy in that it opens the door to the Gospel and allows us to see our desperate need for a Savior. But when our perspective is horizontal and we are comparing ourselves to peers and fellow believers, shame turns toxic and leads to a deep-seated unease with who we are that causes us to withdraw and hide. Any attempts to establish community and accountability that do not account for and address this underlying issue of toxic shame only piles on a deeper sense of failure and drives men further into isolation and away from genuine community.

In the early 90s, a very popular practice in men’s ministry was to encourage men to assemble into “accountability groups” in order to help in their efforts to live godly lives. This was and still is a very important practice for all Christians, not just men. The problem arises when something good—Christian accountability—is implemented in a paradigm of perfection and behavior modification that is fundamentally flawed. In this paradigm of perfection, accountability groups simply serve as a way of keeping score; a weekly stage to either feel super-proud of our ability to overcome our sin and shortcomings or to get some tough love and moral policing from our brothers when we have fallen short. At any given moment, our feelings range from moralistic pride and haughtiness to despair and despondency. Both of these extremes lead individuals to lonely isolation instead of genuine, authentic community.

My weekly accountability group meeting was always a dreaded event. I did not look forward to these meetings because they served to shine a spotlight on the fact that I was not measuring up to the standard I thought I was supposed to be meeting. Every week I compared my worst with everyone else's pristine mask. Every week I was left with the guilt of lying and pretending to be somebody I wasn't. The deep-seated unease and disgust with who I was intensified and I withdrew into even deeper isolation. I was convinced that God was also disgusted with me and my habitual sin and that He was desperately waiting for me to get my behavior in order. The more separated and isolated I felt from God, the more I would secretly retreat into pornography as a way of numbing my pain.

A New Paradigm

In Luke 8:17, Jesus says, "For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light." Eventually, the secrets that I had carefully guarded for years were exposed and my pristine reputation was annihilated. Due to my repeated acting out, I lost my wife and four children and was divorced in 2002. Reeling with pain, toxic shame, and self-loathing, I started attending a new church and attempted to become an anonymous face in the crowd.

During one of the first services I attended at this new church, the pastor said something that God used to begin the process of breaking me out of the debilitating cycle of toxic shame and self-reliance that had brought me to the end of myself. He said, "The purpose of the law is for us to see our need for grace." At first this sounded like heresy, but there was something deep within my broken spirit that longed for it to be true. As I mentioned earlier, up until this point my Christian experience had always been very individualistic and was based on striving with everything I had to fulfill the law and hide those areas that were less than stellar. But as I scribbled down what he said in my notes, three words seemed to jump off the page at me: "need for grace."

Because I believed that I had everything I needed in Jesus, it was a foreign concept to me to see that I needed anything, especially grace. I had received God's grace as a new believer when I was eleven years old, so I felt that I had taken care of that "need" years ago. Over the next several months, God began to break through my unbelief, lovingly revealing that my shame and neediness was the same as Adam's in the first chapters of Genesis. He showed me that no amount of willpower or discipline would be able to overcome the results of the Fall. The only answer for the Fall and its resulting shame is the redemptive work of Christ on my behalf. I began

to see how I had received God's free gift of grace at salvation, but then picked up a new law that was based on behavior, duty, and my ability to manage my sin. I had gone from law, to grace, and then back to being shackled by the law. For so many years trapped in this paradigm, accountability had served as the "heavy" that was responsible for keeping me in line.

The day I discovered *The Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 60, was a huge turning point in my understanding of grace and the Gospel, and it helped me to realize that it is okay to admit weakness.

Question:

How are you right with God?

Answer:

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ.

Even though my conscience accuses me
of having grievously sinned against all God's commandments
and of never having kept any of them,
and even though I am still inclined toward all evil,
nevertheless,
without my deserving it at all,
out of sheer grace,
God grants and credits to me
the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ,
as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner,
as if I had been as perfectly obedient
as Christ was obedient for me.

All I need to do

is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart.

(Rom. 3:21-28; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Phil 3:8-11 Rom. 3:9-10; Rom. 7:23; Tit. 3:4-5; Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8; Rom. 4:3-5 (Gen. 15:6); 2 Cor. 5:17-19; 1 John 2:1-2; Rom. 4:24-25; 2 Cor. 5:21; John 3:18; Acts 16:30-31)

My "accusing conscience" kept me hidden and isolated for most of my Christian life and fed my feelings of shame and inadequacy. Although I had preached the Gospel for years, seeing it stated so simply in this catechism question made me realize that I did not really believe the Gospel. Sure, I could spout off facts about the Gospel, but practically, my life had been lived as a moralist and not as God's adopted son

who possessed “the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ.” This reintroduction to God’s amazing grace allowed me to step out of the paradigm of striving and performing and into genuine community where I began to remove my masks and to let others get to know who I really was.

Healing Community

The fact is, we are all very needy and we cannot live whole, healthy lives in isolation. We were designed by a God who exists in community to live in community. In Genesis 1:26, God says “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Because we are loved as we are, we have the freedom to connect on the common ground of weakness with others in loving, grace-filled community where it is okay to not be okay. True accountability naturally flows out of this context because we know and trust that others have our best interest in mind and aren’t trying to “fix” us, but remind us of our desperate need for a perfect Savior. To try to manufacture accountability where love and trust is not present will always inflame the legalistic Pharisee in all of us and will result in more hiding and isolation. True accountability is a by-product of genuine, transparent community and was never intended to be “stand-alone.”

Unfortunately, too many accountability groups are like the one I experienced. These groups expose the moralism and behavioralism that is rampant today in the Church. Believing, as I did, that it is up to me to deal with sin on my own, we minimize and gloss over our sin in order to make it manageable. We are forced to put sin into a hierarchy of sorts in order to be sure we are performing well compared to an arbitrary list of behaviors. When we’re not believing the Gospel, we need to think we’re better than we actually are, and we construct all kinds of systems that lead us to that conclusion. But when the Gospel breaks through and we really begin to believe that we possess Christ’s perfect righteousness, we are free to throw the list out the window and deal honestly with our sin and brokenness. We can begin to tackle the deep root issues that drive our behavior and tell the truth about what big sinners we are. Then and only then do we see what a big Savior we have.

Martin Luther’s friend Spalatin was living in this paradigm of performance that led him to believe he was a “little sinner.” In this portion of Luther’s letter to Spalatin, Luther encourages him to be a “real, great, and hard-boiled sinner”:

It seems to me, my dear Spalatin, that you have still but a limited experience in battling against sin, an evil conscience, the Law, and the terrors of death. Or Satan has removed from your vision and memory every consolation which you have read in the Scriptures. In days when you were not afflicted, you were well fortified and knew very well what the office and benefits of Christ are. To be sure, the devil has now plucked from your heart all the beautiful Christian sermons concerning the grace and mercy of God in Christ by which you used to teach, admonish, and comfort others with a cheerful spirit and a great, buoyant courage. Or it must surely be that heretofore you have been only a trifling sinner, conscious only of paltry and insignificant faults and frailties.

Therefore my faithful request and admonition is that you join our company and associate with us, who are real, great, and hard-boiled sinners. You must by no means make Christ to seem paltry and trifling to us, as though He could be our Helper only when we want to be rid from imaginary, nominal, and childish sins. No, no! That would not be good for us. He must rather be a Savior and Redeemer from real, great, grievous, and damnable transgressions and iniquities, yea, from the very greatest and most shocking sins; to be brief, from all sins added together in a grand total.

If our accountability groups are going to be successful, they must be full of “real, great, and hard-boiled sinners” where our sinful, broken human condition is understood and the solution is not “trying harder” but deeper surrender. Accountability groups using a checklist to be “conscious only of paltry and insignificant faults and frailties” and that promote willpower and discipline to modify our behavior will continue to lead to shame and isolation. But when the Church begins to connect with weakness and stops trying to impress with strength, we will begin to see renewal and awakening. Paul’s admonishment in 2 Corinthians 12:9, to boast in weakness, can only be understood from this perspective. When we isolate and hide, the Body of Christ doesn’t know how to minister to itself. The wounded parts are so busy hiding that the real needs among us become difficult to identify. To compound the problem, we compare what we know to be true about ourselves with the pristine and perfect mask worn by others, and we walk away feeling woefully inadequate and isolated even more.

James 5:16 speaks to the healing that takes place in the context of loving, authentic community: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

In an effort to provide a context for James 5:16 to be experienced, a group was started at my church about three years ago for men struggling at some level with pornography and sex addiction. Sex addiction, by its clinical definition, is an intimacy disorder. It is impossible to bring lasting healing to an intimacy disorder without involving community and calling men out of isolation. Every week in our group, men courageously take off their masks and connect with one another at this place of weakness and struggle. Rather than spending time beating each other up over specific behaviors or “fruit sins,” men graciously remind one another that they are deeply loved by the Father. In our group we learn to bring the truth of the Gospel to bear on more deeply buried sins and on the profound ways we’ve been hurt by the sins of others.

This one group has now grown into six groups that have been visited by hundreds of men in the last few years. Two groups for women, many of them spouses of the men struggling with pornography, have also been started so that they too have a place for genuine acceptance and healing. Rather than stuffing emotions and pretending that everything is okay, these groups are learning to be open and honest with what is really going on in their lives. The healing promised in James 5 is taking place as these men and women continue to come out of hiding and connect at weakness...realizing that the Gospel makes it okay to not be okay.

Accountability is a very popular topic in ministry circles today. This e-book is one of many resources being written and developed to provide better strategies and practical how-tos on the subject. But no matter how good and how accurate these strategies and plans are, attempting to apply them in a paradigm of performance and behavior modification will be counter-productive and only lead to more hiding and isolation. Men need to be free to connect with one another at an emotional level and to have a safe place to talk about their struggles, fears, and failures. Spending your time as a ministry leader removing the barriers to open and safe community among the men in your church will automatically lead to more accountability. Attempting to force accountability where authentic community doesn’t already exist will destroy what little community you have.

If you are interested in knowing more about these groups or want to start something like them in your area, Appendix B provides specific information on the structure of the groups and how to get in touch with our organization.

Statistics on Pornography

Statistics can be very compelling if used properly. Below are some statistics that can be used in a sermon or presentation to your church or ministry.

Porn is Big Business

In 2006, the president of the Adult Video Network said the industry as a whole was bringing in about \$13 billion per year.⁴⁹ If you compare that to total gross income for Hollywood movies, that's over twice as much as the top 60 movies from 2006. That year alone about 7,000 new adult movies were released on DVD.⁵⁰

Internet Pornography

According to computational neuroscientist Dr. Ogi Ogas, about 1 in every 25 websites is pornographic, and about 1 in every 8 web searches is for erotic content.⁵¹

A large portion of pornography profits come from sales on the Internet. Online porn generates about \$3 billion every year.⁵² In 2009, the Free Speech Coalition said, "The adult Internet is the fastest expanding segment of the U.S. adult entertainment market."⁵³

49 David Cay Johnston. "Indications of a Slowdown in the Sex Entertainment Trade." *New York Times*, Jan. 4, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/04/business/media/04porn.html> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

50 Matt Richtel. "In Raw World of Sex Movies, High Definition Could Be a View Too Real." *New York Times*, Jan. 22, 2007. http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/22/business/media/22porn.html?_r=1 (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

51 Dr. Ogi Ogas and Dr. Sai Gaddam, *A Billion Wicked Thoughts*

52 Jon Mooallem. "A Disciplined Business." *New York Times*, April 29, 2007. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/29/magazine/29kink.t.html> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

53 Free Speech Coalition. 23 Nov. 2009. <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/6117965/Free-Speech-Coalition-WHITE-PAPER-A-Report-on-the-2006> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

A study released in *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*⁵⁴ examined the credit card receipts from a top adult entertainment seller over a period of two years. This reflected people paying for subscriptions to pornographic websites.

80 to 90% of those who visit pornographic websites only access the free material. There were higher percentages of subscriptions in zip codes that...

- » Have experienced an increase in higher than average household income.
- » Have greater density of young people (ages 15-24).
- » Have higher measures of “social capital” (i.e. more people that donate blood, engage in volunteer activities, participate in community projects, etc.).
- » Have enacted conservative legislation on sexuality (such as “defense of marriage” amendments) or have conservative positions on religion and gender roles.

There were no statistical increases or decreases in porn subscriptions based on voting for the 2004 presidential elections or regions where people regularly attend religious services.

According to a survey published in the *Journal of the American Psychological Association*, 86% of men are likely to click on Internet sex sites if given the opportunity.⁵⁵

Pornography’s Impact on Marriage

The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers (divorce lawyers) reported salient factors present in divorce cases today.⁵⁶

- » 68% of the divorces involved one party meeting a new lover over the Internet.
- » 56% involved one party having “an obsessive interest in pornographic websites.”

54 Kirk Doran. “The Economics of Pornography.” Presented at “Social Costs of Pornography,” Princeton Univ., 11-13 Dec. 2008. Witherspoon Institute.

55 Mark Kastleman. *The Drug of the New Millennium*, 2001, Granite Pub. Co., Columbus, NC

56 Patrick F. Fagan. “The Effects of Pornography on Individuals, Marriage, Family and Community.” *Studies in Catholic Higher Education*, Dec. 2009. <http://www.scribd.com/doc/23930556/The-Effects-of-Pornography-on-Individuals-Marriage-Family-and-Community> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

- » 47% involved spending excessive time on the computer.
- » 33% involved excessive time spent in online chat rooms.

According to the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, prolonged exposure to pornography leads to:⁵⁷

- » An exaggerated perception of sexual activity in society.
- » Diminished trust between intimate couples.
- » The abandonment of the hope of sexual monogamy.
- » Belief that promiscuity is the natural state.
- » Belief that abstinence and sexual inactivity are unhealthy.
- » Cynicism about love or the need for affection between sexual partners.
- » Belief that marriage is sexually confining.
- » Lack of attraction to family and child-raising.

Many wives of porn users develop deep psychological wounds, reporting feelings of betrayal, loss, depression, mistrust, devastation, anger, and sexual inadequacy. More than half of those engaged in cybersex lose interest in sexual intercourse, and one-third of their partners lose interest as well.⁵⁸

Pornography's Impact on Teens

According to a study cited in the *Washington Post*, more than 11 million teenagers view Internet pornography on a regular basis.⁵⁹

57 Dolf Zillmann. "Influence of Unrestrained Access to Erotica on Adolescents' and Young Adults' Dispositions toward Sexuality." *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol. 27, Iss. 2, Supp. 1, pgs. 41-44), Aug. 2000.

58 Jennifer P. Schneider. "Effects of Cybersex Addiction on the Family: Results of a Survey," *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 7, 2000, Pgs. 31-58. http://www.jenniferschneider.com/articles/cybersex_family.html (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

59 Ed Vitagliano. "Caught! Online Porn, Predators Threaten Children, Teens." *American Family Association Journal*, Jan. 2007. <http://www.afajournal.org/2007/january/0107caught.asp> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

In a survey of nearly 29,000 college students:⁶⁰

- » 82% of men and 52% of women said they had been exposed to pornography by age 14.
- » 63% of the men and 18% of the women said they spend some time every week online for sexual purposes.

When a child or adolescent is directly exposed to pornography the following effects have been documented:⁶¹

- » Lasting negative or traumatic emotional responses.
- » Earlier onset of first sexual intercourse, thereby increasing the risk of STDs over the lifespan.
- » The belief that superior sexual satisfaction is attainable without having affection for one's partner, thereby reinforcing the commoditization of sex and the objectification of humans.
- » The belief that being married or having a family are unattractive prospects.
- » Increased risk for developing sexual compulsions and addictive behavior.
- » An inability to contextualize incorrect information about human sexuality as an adult brain would.
- » Overestimating the prevalence of less common practices (e.g., group sex, bestiality, or sadomasochistic activity).

Pornography's Impact on Work

Half of Fortune 500 companies have dealt with at least one incident related to computer porn over a 12-month period. Offenders were fired in 44% of the incidents and disciplined in 41% of the cases.⁶²

60 Michael Leahy. *Porn University: What College Students Are Really Saying About Sex on Campus*. 2009, Northfield Pub., Chicago.

61 Jill Manning. Testimony: U.S Senate Committee on the Judiciary, Nov. 10 2005. "Why the Government Should Care about Pornography." http://judiciary.senate.gov/hearings/testimony.cfm?renderforprint=1&id=1674&wit_id=4826 (accessed Sept. 19, 2010)

62 Gloria McDonough-Taub. "Porn at Work: Recognizing a Sex Addict." *cncb.com*, July 16, 2009. <http://www.cncb.com/id/31922685> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

In 2010, an internal investigation of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) found 31 serious offenders over the past two and a half years, 17 of which were senior officers with 6-figure salaries.⁶³ Most of these cases began in 2008, around the time the financial engines of the U.S. economy started to fail.

Pornography and the Church

In 1994, a survey showed 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).⁶⁴

In March 2005 *Christianity Today* published the results of a study called “Christians and Sex” in their *Leadership Journal*. Out of 680 pastors surveyed, 57% said addiction to pornography is the most sexually damaging issue to their congregation.⁶⁵

In August 2006, a survey reported 50% of all Christian men and 20% of all Christian women are addicted to pornography. 60% of the women who answered the survey admitted to having significant struggles with lust; 40% admitted to being involved in sexual sin in the past year.⁶⁶

In 2002, of 1,351 pastors surveyed, 54% said they had viewed Internet pornography within the last year, and 30% of these had visited within the last 30 days.⁶⁷

In 2003, *Today's Christian Woman* reported:⁶⁸

- » 34% of female readers of *Today's Christian Woman's* online newsletter admitted to intentionally accessing Internet porn.
- » According to a Zogby International survey, 17% of the female population are regular users of pornography.

63 Summary of Pornography-Related Investigations Conducted by the Securities and Exchange Commission Office of Inspector General. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/documents/SECPornSummary.pdf> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

64 Archibald D. Hart. “The Hart Report,” *The Sexual Man*, Word Publishing, Dallas.

65 Christianity Today. “Christians & Sex.” Qtd. in “A Few Scary Thoughts...” SafetyNet Content Filtering, McG Technologies, Dec. 2009.

66 ChristiaNet, Inc. “ChristiaNet Poll Finds that Evangelicals are Addicted to Porn.” Marketwire, Aug. 7, 2006. <http://www.marketwire.com/press-release/Christianet-Inc-703951.html> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

67 “Wounded Clergy.” Hope & Freedom Counseling Services, Media A-Team, Inc., March 2002. <http://www.hopeandfreedom.com/hidden-pages/private/wounded-clergy.html> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

68 “Dirty Girls.” *Conversational Theology*. June 19, 2009. <http://conversationaltheology.wordpress.com/2009/06/19/dirty-girls/> (accessed Sept. 19, 2010).

Starting a Recovery Group

By clinical definition, sexual addiction is an intimacy disorder. As a result, lasting heart-change around this issue does not take place in isolation, but in the context of genuine, transparent community.

Route1520 Recovery Groups offer a safe place for individuals to find support, care, direction, and prayer in community with fellow strugglers. One of the dangers of sex addiction is the secrecy that results when we buy into the lie that we are alone in our struggle with sexual sin. The shame which drives addiction begins to dissipate as individuals allow themselves to be fully known by other members of the group. Our groups provide authentic, transparent community and open discussion around the deep heart issues that drive destructive behavior.

Combining Scripture, prayer, catechisms, and the traditional 12 steps, Route1520 Recovery Groups bring a Christ-centered approach to the recovery process. Believing that individuals cannot change through mere willpower or simply learning biblical principles and trying to carry them out, Route1520 helps men and women take the Gospel of Jesus Christ more deeply into their understanding and into their hearts within the context of authentic community.

If you are interested in starting a Route1520 Recovery Group in your area for sex addiction and/or co-dependency, e-mail us at groups@route1520.com. We offer a comprehensive program for starting and growing Christ-centered recovery groups that include:

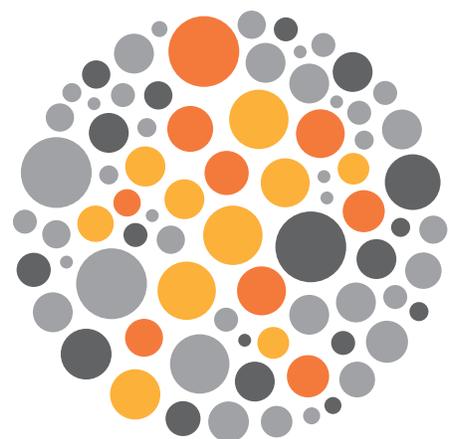
- » Identifying and Training Group Facilitators
- » Establishing a Referral Network with Local Therapists
- » Group Meeting Format and Structure

- » Resources for Weekly Group Discussion
- » A Copy of Route1520's 'Theology of Recovery'
- » Weekly Conference Call for Group Facilitators

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ROUTE 1520
The Journey Home



About the Authors

Stephen Altrogge (TheBlazingCenter.com) works as a pastor at Sovereign Grace Church of Indiana, PA, where his main duties include leading worship, preaching, and working with youth. He also has written a number of worship songs that have been included on Sovereign Grace Music albums. Stephen is the author of the book *Game Day For the Glory of God: A Guide For Athletes, Fans, and Wannabes*, which was published by Crossway Books in September 2008, and *The Greener Grass Conspiracy: Finding Contentment on Your Side of the Fence*, which was published by Crossway Books in April 2011.



Noel Bouché serves as Vice President of pureHOPE (PureHope.net), an organization dedicated to equipping the church to pursue sexual purity and oppose sexual exploitation. His work focuses on building partnerships with individuals, churches, and organizations across the country to develop and distribute Christian solutions to help people thrive in a sexualized culture. He also directs the pureJUSTICE summer internship and speaks regularly about the pureJUSTICE message. He received his law degree with honors from the University of Texas School of Law, and his undergraduate degree from South Dakota State University, where he quarterbacked the football team.



Dr. Tim Chester is a leader of The Crowded House church planting network (TheCrowdedHouse.org) and the author of *Closing the Window: Steps to Living Porn Free* (InterVarsity) which is published in the UK as *Captured By a Better Vision* (IVP). He is also author of *You Can Change* (Crossway) and co-author of *Total Church* (Crossway).



ABOUT THE AUTHORS

David Dusek is the founder and director of Rough Cut Men Ministries (RoughCutMen.org), an international ministry which uses Hollywood action movie clips, relevant current events, and biblical truth to develop assist men in developing authentic, transparent relationships. David works with organizations such as Teen Challenge USA and Officer's Christian Fellowship and has a passion for reaching Christian men where they are the other six days of the week.



Luke Gilkerson is the general editor and primary author of Breaking Free, the blog of Covenant Eyes (CovenantEyes.com), where he serves as the Internet Community Manager. Luke has a BA in Philosophy and Religious Studies from Bowling Green State University and is working on his MA in Religion from Reformed Theological Seminary. Before working at Covenant Eyes he spent six years as a campus minister at the University of Toledo. He lives with his wife Trisha and four sons in Owosso, Michigan.



J. Alasdair Groves is the Director of Counseling at the New England office of the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF.org), and is an adjunct faculty member at CCEF. He received his Master of Divinity in counseling from Westminster Theological Seminary. Alasdair has also served as a pastoral counselor at Westerly Road Church in Princeton, and prior to seminary was a campus minister with the Navigators Christian Fellowship at Dartmouth College. He has a passion to foster genuine relationships in the local church, especially through counseling and counseling training. Alasdair and his wife, Lauren, have two young daughters.



Michael Leahy is an author, communicator, and widely recognized expert on the subjects of pornography, sexual addiction, and the sexualization of the culture. He has appeared on ABC's 20/20, Good Morning America, The View, CNN, CNBC, Fox News, and other national and local media. Michael is the founder of BraveHearts (BraveHearts.net), a ministry dedicated to equipping parents and ministry leaders with the tools and training they need to help build and restore sexual integrity in their families, the church, and culture.



Traylor Lovvorn is a former pastor and was married for 11 years before his secret struggle with pornography and sexual addiction ripped his family apart. After six years of divorce and extensive work in recovery, God miraculously restored his family and he was remarried to his ex-wife in 2008. Traylor is the co-founder and CEO of Route1520 (Route1520.com), a ministry providing hope and healing for men and women who have been impacted by porn and sex addiction. Traylor facilitates a weekly recovery group for men and spends much of his time counseling and encouraging those who are experiencing the reality of sexual addiction. He contributes regularly to LifeWay's Stand Firm devotional for men. Traylor and his wife Melody are sharing their redemptive story in a book entitled *Our Divorce Didn't Work Out* that they hope to publish in 2012. Traylor and Melody live in Birmingham with their four children.



Bill Perkins (BillPerkins.com) has written or collaborated on 20 books including the bestselling book, *When Good Men Are Tempted*, as well as *Six Battles Every Man Must Win*, *6 Rules Every Man Must Break*, and *When Good Men Get Angry*. His most recent book, *The Jesus Experiment*, was released in October 2011. Bill is on the faculty of *Man in the Mirror*, is a regular speaker for Iron Sharpens Iron and speaks at Million Mighty Men events across the country. Bill has conducted business and leadership seminars across the United States for companies such as Domino's Pizza, Alaska Airlines, McDonald's, and Auto-Owner's Insurance. He has appeared on nationally broadcast radio and television shows including the highly rated O'Reilly Factor and Focus on the Family with James Dobson. He has also spoken at chapels for Major League Baseball teams. Bill and his wife Cindy live in West Linn, Oregon.

