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YOUR BRAIN ON PORN

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

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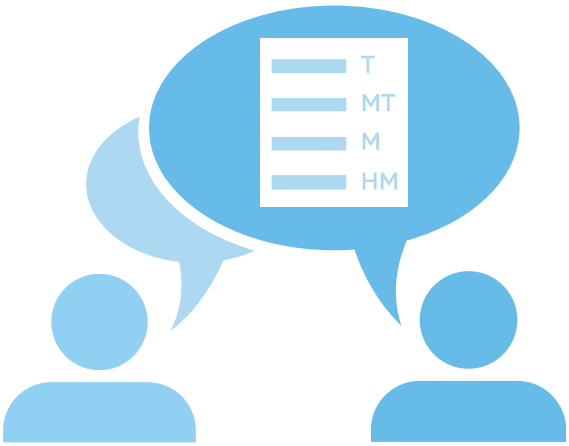

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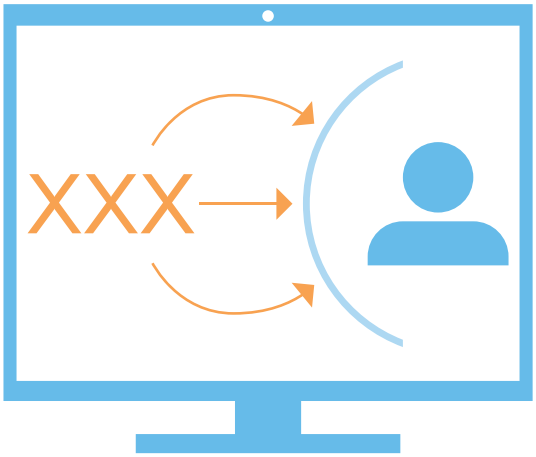

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CHAPTER 1

PORN ON THE BRAIN

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

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

> *"Porn doesn't have a demographic—it goes across all demographics."*
>
> *Tweet this!*

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

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

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

Recent studies are now validating her theory.

DESENSITIZED TO PLEASURE

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

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

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

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

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

HYPER-SENSITIZED TO LUST

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

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

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

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

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

CRIPPLED WILLPOWER

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

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

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

Our brains are designed by God to weigh consequences and situations and judiciously choose when to allow cravings through, but hypofrontality means the

porn-saturated mind has a very limited ability to do this. The prefrontal region is one of the things that makes humans unique—filled with rationality and conscience. For this reason, one could say that viewing porn, in a very real sense, makes us *less human*.

THE FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEM WITH PORN

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

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

> *"Porn is essentially wrong because it presents men and women as sexual commodities."*
>
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THE GOSPEL SAYS:

- "This is my body, which is given for you" (Luke 22:19).
- "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17).

VS.

PORN CULTURE SAYS:

- "This is her body taken by me."
- "Relax, for there is nothing wrong with your fantasies."

> *Jesus: "This is my body, which is given for you."* VS. *Porn: "This is her body taken by me."*
>
> *Tweet this!*

THE GOSPEL SAYS:

- "Your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3).
- Treat "older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity" (1 Timothy 5:2).
- "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

VS.

PORN CULTURE SAYS:

- "Your life is found in your hidden adventures online."
- "Treat older women as cougars and younger women as barely legal."
- "This is real life, that we would never be denied our every sexual desire, no matter how misogynistic or demeaning."

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

CHAPTER 2

5 WAYS THAT PORN WARPS YOUR MIND

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

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

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

The results were fascinating…

FINDING #1: WATCHING PORN DECREASES OUR SEXUAL SATISFACTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

> *"Porn essentially trains men and women to be consumers, not lovers; to treat sex as a commodity."*
>
> *Tweet this!*

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

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

When people become more and more entrenched in pornography, this ends up only deluding and deadening their libido. After years working with men and women entrenched in pornography, Dr. Mary Anne Layden concluded, "Having spent so much time in unnatural sexual experiences with paper, celluloid and cyberspace, they seem to find it difficult to have sex with a real human being." Pornography, she says, "is toxic miseducation about sex and relationships," training men and women to expect online "designer sex" in the real world.[12]

This isn't merely about comparing someone's body type or sexual performance. When someone is exposed to pornography again and again, they can start comparing *the whole fantasy experience* to their normal sex lives. Instead of being drawn to one woman or one man, they end up being turned on by the *variety* and *novelty* porn offers them.

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

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

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

FINDING #2:
WATCHING PORN DISCONNECTS US FROM REAL RELATIONSHIPS

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

"Casual sex" is not new to our generation. Even 2,000 years ago, the apostle Paul planted churches in places like Corinth—a city with a reputation that might make a Las Vegas pimp blush. In Corinth, sex was a religion—literally. The temple to Aphrodite was home to thousands of priestesses—glorified prostitutes—who serviced the worshippers. The loose sexual mores of Corinth were even lower than

those of the rest of the Roman Empire, and the verb "corinthianize" was coined to describe this lifestyle of decadent sin.

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

Pornography, however, is not only an expression of casual sex but feeds a desire for it, as the Zillmann-Bryant study confirms. We see this especially among the younger generations who have taken up the habit of "sexting," sending racy photos or videos of themselves to others—essentially becoming someone else's pornography. As one 17-year-old girl put it: "You can't get pregnant from it, and you can't transmit STDs. It's a kind of safe sex."[15]

> *"Porn trains men to desire the cheap thrill of fantasy over a committed relationship."*
>
> *Tweet this!*

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

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

FINDING #3:
WATCHING PORN LOWERS OUR VIEW OF WOMEN

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

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

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

> *"Porn doesn't help men value women but rather to see fewer women as porn-worthy."*
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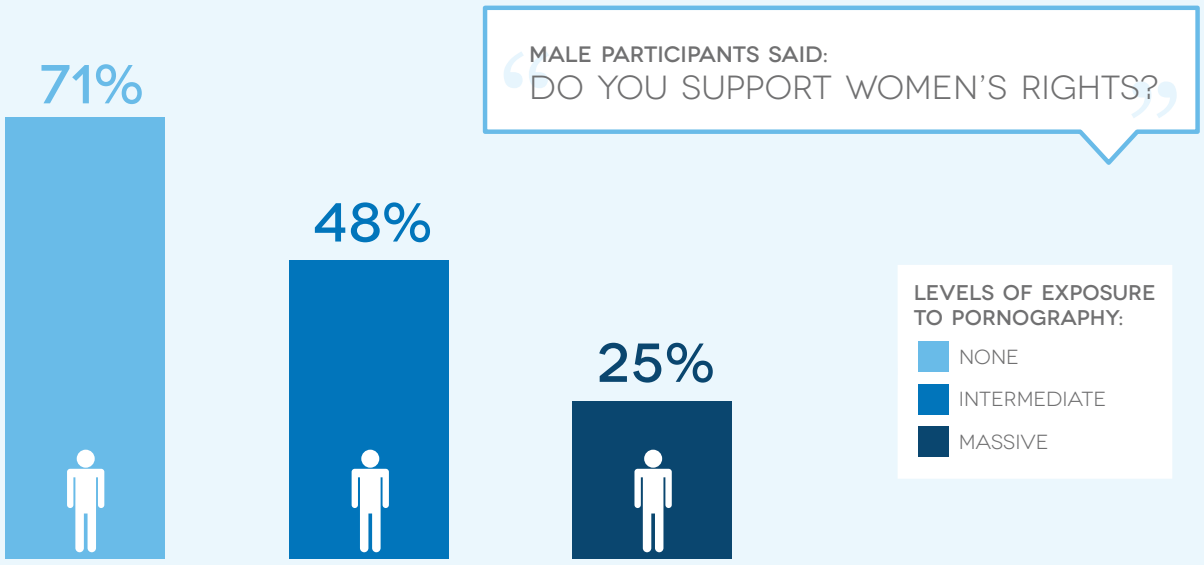


Contrary to the message of pornography, the Scriptures tell us both men and women are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28). The implications of this doctrine are far-reaching. As image-bearers we "reflect" God in a way no other creature on earth does. As far as God is concerned, to assault someone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

It is not only men who bear this image, but women as well. In human history the failure to appreciate this fact has led to all manner of abuses to women. And in our

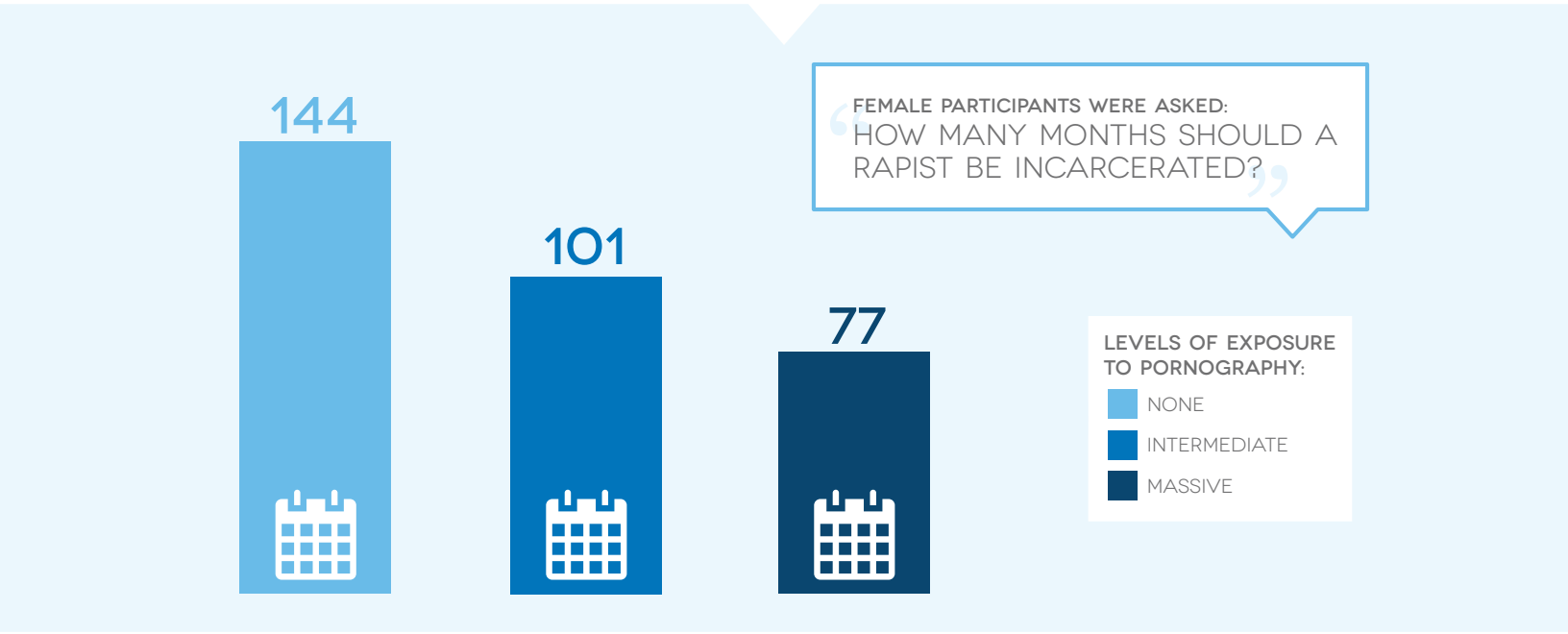
increasingly sexualized culture, it is women who are often the most dehumanized as they are constantly rated for the size, shape, and harmony of their body parts. Often pornography, and even mainstream media, portrays women as people who are *glad* to be used and objectified. It isn't surprising to find women increasingly devalued in our porn-saturated culture.

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

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

FINDING #4:
WATCHING PORN DESENSITIZES US TO CRUELTY

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



Watching pornography also conditioned participants to trivialize rape. Participants were asked to read about a legal case where a man raped a female hitchhiker and then recommend a length for the rapist's prison sentence. Males in the No Exposure Group said 94 months; the Massive Exposure Group cut this by nearly half, recommending only 50 months.

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

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

> *"Often porn portrays women as people who are glad to be used and objectified."*
>
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These numbers give us a glimpse of the sexual education porn consumers receive. Routinely, pornography depicts acts of aggression, cruelty, and degradation, and teaches viewers that women enjoy these acts.

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

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

FINDING #5:
WATCHING PORN MAKES US WANT TO WATCH MORE PORN

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

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

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

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

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

> *"90% of therapists believe someone can become addicted to cyber sex."*
>
> *Tweet this!*

Cambridge Neuropsychiatrist Valerie Voon's research demonstrates that the brains of habitual porn users show great similarity to the brains of alcoholics. A brain structure called the ventral striatum plays a significant role in the reward

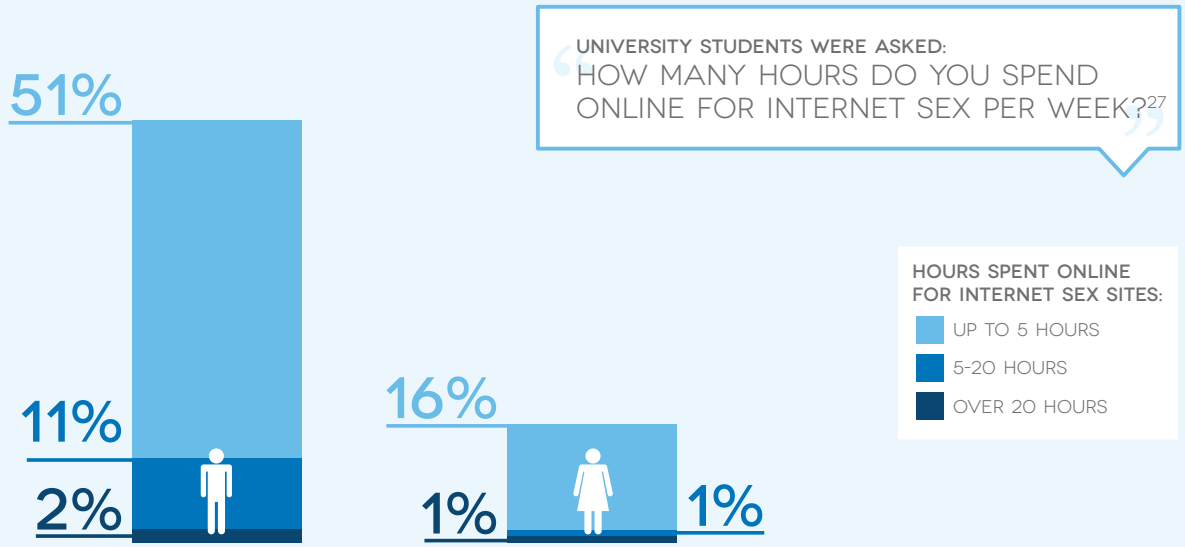
system of the brain—the pleasure pathways. This part of the brain "lights up" on an MRI when an alcoholic sees a picture of a drink, and the same structure lights up when a self-confessed porn addict sees a pornographic image.[25]

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

30 YEARS LATER: AFTER THE EXPLOSION OF INTERNET PORN

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

Her statement is far from an exaggeration. A recent survey of 29,000 people at North American universities shows 51% of men and 16% of women spend up to five hours per week online for sexual purposes, and another 11% of men spend



anywhere from five to 20 hours *per week*. What used to be "massive" exposure is now common practice.[27]

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

PORN SHAPES OUR SEXUAL BELIEFS

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

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

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

CHAPTER 3

5 BIBLICAL WAYS TO RENEW THE MIND

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

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

This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

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

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

1. **WE MUST WALK IN ACCOUNTABILITY** where we can share our darkest secrets and be reminded of our highest calling. To walk in the Spirit, we must confess our sins to each other, pray for each other, and stir up one another to live according to our true identity.
2. **WE MUST INTERNALIZE SCRIPTURE,** the inspired words of the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit, we need to renovate our thoughts according to the truths He has revealed, rejecting the lies pornography has fed us.

3. **WE MUST WALK IN PURE PLEASURE,** taking great delight in holy and wholesome longings—finding pleasure in all that is honorable, pure, lovely, and excellent. To walk in the Spirit, we need to pursue pure pleasures with sincere gratitude until pornography loses its luster.

4. **WE MUST WALK IN OUR TRUE IDENTITY,** listening to cry of the Spirit in our hearts, "Abba, Father," which confirms our new identity. To walk in the Spirit, we need to learn to relate to God, from the depths of our soul, as dearly loved adopted sons and daughters, believing that we belong to God and that our ties to sin are broken forever.

5. **WE MUST STIR UP THE HOPE** the Spirit inspires in us—the hope of righteousness. To walk in the Spirit, we need to wait eagerly for this hope, putting faith in God's promises that we are destined for an eternity of purity, and longing to see that purity spill over into our present lives.

1. WALK IN ACCOUNTABILITY

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

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

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

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

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

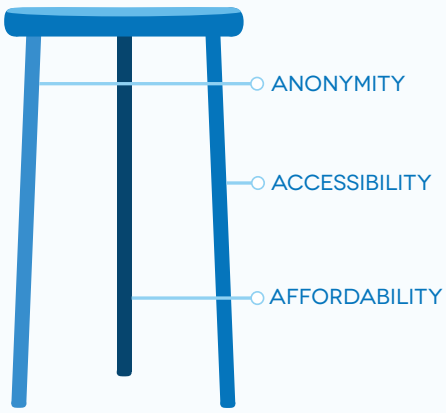
Christian accountability is meant to be a dialogue. When we give an *account* of our sins to others, in return, they should listen and then give an *account* of God's grace back. When sin is confessed, it is not to merely assuage a guilty conscience. In this text, God calls us to "stir up" one another—that is, to urge, to spur on, to provoke, to motivate each other—to love and good deeds. Each time we meet together we should be contemplating and praying, "God, show me how I can really motivate my friend to resist temptation and instead love You and others wholeheartedly." We are to have a hardcore intentionality and thoughtfulness in our friendships.

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

PUT INTO PRACTICE

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PORNOGRAPHY

The late psychologist, Dr. Al Cooper, believed three main factors draw people into online sexual activity:[31]



1. ANONYMITY
Home computers and smartphones have made it very easy to be secretive.

2. ACCESSIBILITY
Pornography is accessible from any Internet connection.

3. AFFORDABILITY
Millions of free or very cheap images are available online.

He dubbed this the "Triple-A Engine" of Internet porn. These three factors work like three legs on a stool: remove just one of the legs and the stool will fall.

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

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

GET INTERNET ACCOUNTABILITY

2. WALK ACCORDING TO THE WORD

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

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

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

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

1. PORN PROMISES GRATIFICATION but only decreases our sexual satisfaction. But GOD IS THE CREATOR OF SEXUAL SATISFACTION and has designed marriage for its enjoyment (Song. 4:9-16). For single men and women, it means pursuing wholesome, intentional relationships with each other (1 Thess. 4:4). For the present time it also means surrendering to God's providence and timing (Ps. 37:5), believing that dying a virgin is not a tragedy, but is infinitely superior to pornographic indulgence (1 Cor. 7). After all, the Son of God did. For married men and women, this means renewing our minds towards our spouses, choosing to make them our standard of attractiveness. It means returning again and again to the enjoyment of sex in marriage (Prov. 5:18-19; Song. 7:11-13).

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

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

4. PORN DESENSITIZES US TO AND EROTICIZES CRUELTY. But GOD HAS DESIGNED SEX AS AN EXPRESSION OF AFFECTION, not aggression (Deut. 22:25; Eph. 5:28-30). God has promised to maintain the cause of the afflicted and destitute (Psalm 82:3; 140:12), and that includes those whose brokenness has led them to a life of prostituting themselves for the camera. God redeems prostitutes

like Rahab and brings them into the fold of His people (Josh. 6:25). He forgives their sins and defends their honor (Luke 7:36-50). As the church, we should do the same.

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

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

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

PUT INTO PRACTICE

ACCOUNTABILITY AND THE WORD

One of the best ways to regularly expose our minds to God's Word is through Christian community. Accountability relationships can become great vehicles for learning and understanding the Word of God.

How can we do this practically? With our accountability partners or group, decide on a book of the Bible or a Biblical topic to explore together. Find detailed and readable commentaries about that book or topic. Throughout the week, write down interesting points we are learning and how we feel convicted to live differently as a result. When we come together, talk about what was learned.

In the Discussion Guide in the back of this book, statement #21 says, "The Bible is consistently shaping the way I think and live. I spend regular time reading or hearing

God's words, and as a result of that time, I have determined to better trust and obey God in specific ways." Every time you meet, assess how much or little this statement describes you and share your thoughts with your partners.

3. WALK IN PURE PLEASURE

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

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

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

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

The Holy Spirit longs for all things that God calls good. And lest we think this means we must constantly walk around in a holy fog and avoid physical pleasures, God calls us to embrace whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy—wholesome pleasures become a means to practicing God's presence (Phil. 4:8).

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

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

> In context, Paul is arguing against hyper-religionists trying to saddle Christians with arbitrary rules and prohibitions. These teachers wanted to enslave believers to the old belief that if a defiled person touches something (food, drink, or even another person), this something becomes defiled. Paul cleverly turns this around, saying if someone is pure, then whatever they touch becomes pure!
>
> I'm arguing that we need to look at pleasure and the good gifts of this earth through the eyes of redemption. When our hearts are cleansed and transformed by God, the very things that used to cause us to stumble can now become friends of faith. Not *all* things, of course; anything specifically against the will and commands of God, regardless of what kind of pleasure it seems to offer, will always destroy our souls. But the good things of this earth, created by God to be received with thanksgiving and praise—things such as friendship, good food and fine drinks, laughter, sex, and family life—can be redeemed to season our life and faith in many positive ways. God can even give us the power to take what we formerly misused and transform it into an instrument of praise.[30]

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

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

PUT INTO PRACTICE

ACCOUNTABILITY AND HOLY DESIRES

A great way to transform our desires is to talk with our accountability partners or groups about our indulgence of unholy or holy pleasures.

Practically speaking, use Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability Reports (if you use Covenant Eyes) as a starting place. Our partners should look over these Reports to see if we've been indulging in pornography online or if we have been venturing into "gray areas." Covenant Eyes Accountability Reports highlight specific websites and web searches that are mature, making it easy to identify red flags. If you are not currently using Covenant Eyes, get started now.

In addition to this, we can talk to our partners about whether we are experiencing wholesome pleasures and expressing sincere gratitude to God. A number of statements in the Discussion Guide in the back of this book address this (#8, #9, #10, #13, #14, #16, #18, #20, #22, #23). The goal of talking to our partners about these issues is to express whether our hearts are truly satisfied in God and the good gifts He has given to us.

4. WALK IN YOUR TRUE IDENTITY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Knowing these truths, Paul's first and primary application in the whole letter is this: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (6:11). Paul does not say we are *dying* to sin (a process). He does not say we *should die* to sin (a command). He said that because we are intimately united with the risen Christ, because His resurrected life flows in our veins, we should consider ourselves *already dead* to sin.

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

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

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

This, the New Testament says, is the key to unlocking God's power for change. It is not God's *wrath* that affects deep repentance in us, but rather, God's *kindness* (Rom. 2:4). Being filled with all of God's fullness happens not by knowing God's

power but by comprehending the breadth and length and height and depth of His love—a love that "surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19).

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

PUT INTO PRACTICE

ACCOUNTABILITY AND OUR IDENTITY

Living in the light of our new identity might sound abstract, but one of the best ways to start is to make it a main topic of your accountability discussions.

The ultimate goal of Christian accountability is not merely calling one another out on our sins as much as it is calling one another up to our true identity in Christ.

Pay close attention to statement #17 from the Covenant Eyes Discussion Guide in the back of this book which states, "I am resting completely in what Christ has done for me—not obsessing about my own failures nor putting stock in my own performance." On a regular basis, we should discuss with our accountability partners or group how much or little this describes us.

As we talk to our accountability partners, if we feel defeated by sin, we should remind one another to reckon ourselves dead to sin—because we are. If we feel stable or if we feel we are making progress in holiness, we should celebrate this but always remind one another that our true identity is not found in our performance, but in what Christ has accomplished for us.

5. WALK IN HOPE

In the same letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, "For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness" (Gal. 5:5). Keeping in step

with the Spirit and having hope are intimately connected: the Spirit kindles in us a fresh hope for the things God has promised.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- If you are sexually pure, you will be living in the will of God for your life (1 Thessalonians 4:3).
- If you fill your mind with that which is honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praiseworthy, then God's peaceful presence will be with you (Philippians 4:8-9).
- If you are not enslaved to your lusts, you will be free to serve others in love (Galatians 5:13).
- If you are sexually pure, your life will be fruitful, and that fruit will be full of goodness and truth (Ephesians 5:8-9).
- If you are sexually pure, your mind will no longer be foggy, your heart will be teachable, and you will be filled with the very life of God (Ephesians 4:17-19).
- If you are sexually pure, your heart will not be enslaved to the worship of sex, which means you can wholeheartedly devote yourself to the true and living God (1 Kings 11:4).
- If you are sexually pure, you will be more prepared to be a great lover and to enjoy sexual intimacy with your spouse or future spouse (Proverbs 5:18-19).
- If you are sexually pure, you will keep your marriage bed undefiled (Hebrews 13:4).
- If you are sexually pure, you will no longer waste time but instead make the most of it (Ephesians 5:16).
- If you are sexually pure, you will be an honorable person (1 Thessalonians 4:4).

- If you are a sexually pure person, you will not be enslaved to your passions (1 Corinthians 6:12).

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

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

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

> Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased…
>
> Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness.[29]

Walking in hope is a mentality shift. Instead of walking around with the belief that sin is inevitable and thereby unconquerable, we live with the expectation that sin is defeated and holiness is inevitable.

PUT INTO PRACTICE

ACCOUNTABILITY AND OUR HOPE

One of the best ways to stir up this kind of hope is through our accountability relationships.

If your partners notice pornography or other sexually explicit material on your Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability Reports, they can help you by walking through the memory of the temptation and helping you develop a strategy that fills us with hope for the future:

- "Right before you started looking at this material, what was going through your mind?"
- "What was the trigger for you to start entertaining this temptation? Was it something you saw or did, or was there some mood or disposition of your heart that was prevalent?"
- "The next time you experience that trigger, what Bible promises can you repeat to yourself that remind you of God's blessings to those who are pure?"
- "As you go about your day, what are some Bible promises you can say to yourself that give you the hope that sin can be defeated?"

Need help finding a good Accountability Partner who will help you with this? Watch our "Choosing an Accountability Partner" video at cvnteyes.co/pick-partner

KEEPING IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT

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

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

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

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

CHRISTIAN ACCOUNTABILITY:
A DISCUSSION GUIDE

APPENDIX

DISCUSSION GUIDE

The following is a personal assessment designed to help you develop a life of godly humility, purity, and integrity. To the best of your ability, fill out this assessment before speaking with your Accountability Partner or Accountability Group, and then use this as a template for conversation.

The aims of this list are to help you:

1: Remember and summarize the temptations you have faced, the choices you have made, and the state of your heart;

2: Discuss these matters with trusted Accountability Partners;

3: Talk concretely with others about ways to guard against sinful actions, thoughts, and motives; and

4: See your need for God's grace—for overcoming both the guilt and the grip of sin.

It may be difficult to get through all of these questions in a single meeting, so choose those which are most pertinent for you.[1]

Fill out the following questionnaire before meeting with your Accountability Partner or Accountability Group. Use it to spark discussion and encouraging conversation.

1. Several sources were consulted to compile and adapt this list of questions, including John Wesley's Band Meeting questions, Bethlehem Baptist Church's pastoral accountability questionnaire, the Life Transformation Group system by Neil Cole, *A Spiritual Formation Workbook* by James Bryan Smity and Lynda Graybeal, Grace Brethren International Missions, Mark Driscoll's sermon "A City in a City," "Talking About Idolatry in a Postmodern Age" by Tim Keller, "Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair'" by David Powlison, and *Gospel-Centered Discipleship* by Jonathan Dodson.

SEXUAL PURITY

1 = HELP! (CIRCLE A NUMBER) 9 = STABLE

1. I have avoided looking at pornography or other sexually provocative images online or offline. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

2. I have avoided images, interactions, or stories online I knew could be seductive or titillating (but wouldn't necessarily be considered "pornographic"). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

3. I have kept my eyes from second glances and kept my mind from entertaining thoughts about someone (other than my spouse). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

4. I have actively avoided known triggers of sexual temptation or titillation. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

5. I am successfully fighting the desire to be noticed by or to attract the attention of other men or women (other than my spouse). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

6. I have not spent time with a man or woman in a way that could be viewed as compromising to my purity (or my faithfulness to my spouse). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

STEWARDING MY TIME, TALENTS, AND TREASURES

7. I am intentional about showing love to others by the way I serve them with my gifts/talents. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

8. I have been intentional about spending appropriate time with my family/household. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

9. My family/household is enjoying joy and harmony. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

10. My time with technology or media has not displaced time with God, family, friends, work, or my neighbors. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

11. I have spoken to and about others with edifying words, not with words that damaged them or their reputation. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

12. I pray about my financial expenditures, and I am intentionally generous with others. People can tell from my financial expenditures that God is my greatest treasure.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

13. I am intentional about the use of my spare time to pursue wholesome activities.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

14. I am intentional about my diet, exercise, and sleep habits.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

15. I am not creating the impression that I am better than I am. I do not exaggerate or make much of myself.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

16. I am feeling energized for the week ahead.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

SATISFACTION IN GOD

17. I am resting completely in what Christ has done for me—not obsessing about my own failures nor putting stock in my own performance.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

18. Regularly focusing on the gospel gives me great joy that overcomes life's disappointments.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

19. When I hear disappointing news, I do not complain or live in doubt or fear, but instead I am inspired to pray and trust in God's care and providence.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

20. I am enjoying prayer, and I am praying for others and myself with consistency.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

21. The Bible is consistently shaping the way I think and live. I spend regular time reading or hearing God's words, and as a result of that time, I have determined to better trust and obey God in specific ways.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

DISPOSITIONS OF THE HEART

22. Though Christ is the one I want to put at the center of my life, there are specific people, experiences, or objects that I am tempted to make a chief source of my significance, satisfaction, and fulfillment.[2] (Check all that apply.)

- ○ SEXUAL PLEASURE
- ○ FINANCIAL SECURITY
- ○ SPOUSE
- ○ FUTURE SPOUSE
- ○ GIRLFRIEND/BOYFRIEND
- ○ PARENT
- ○ HOBBY
- ○ CAREER
- ○ MY IMAGE
- ○ FRIEND
- ○ HEALTH
- ○ COMFORT
- ○ OPINIONS OF OTHERS

23. I am currently fighting these dispositions in my heart. (Check all that apply.)

- ○ PRIDE
- ○ RESENTMENT
- ○ SELF-PITY
- ○ UNFORGIVENESS
- ○ BITTERNESS
- ○ COVETOUSNESS
- ○ CRITICAL SPIRIT
- ○ DECEPTIVENESS
- ○ DISCONTENTMENT
- ○ DOUBT
- ○ GRUMBLING
- ○ INGRATITUDE
- ○ WORRY
- ○ IRRITABILITY
- ○ JEALOUSY
- ○ PREOCCUPATION WITH THE OPINIONS OF OTHERS

2. Often this can seem like a difficult assessment to make, so ask yourself some critical questions. What am I most afraid of losing? What do I long for most passionately? What gets me up in the morning? What do I run to for comfort? What do I complain about most? What angers me the most? What has caused me to get angry with God? What makes me happiest? What do I want to have more than anything else? What do I make the biggest sacrifices for? Whose approval am I seeking?

OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

What am I doing about these dispositions of the heart? (mentioned on the previous page)

What on my Internet Accountability Report should draw my Partner's attention?

What do I hope none of my Accountability Partners ask me about?

When it comes to my habitual sins, is there a time of day, a place, a person, or a mood that tends to open the door to more tempting situations?

What good habit do I believe God wants to form in my life? Have I taken specific steps to develop that habit?

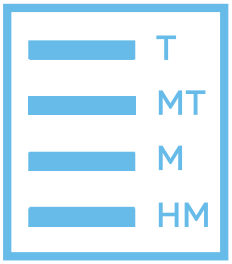
What am I praying for? Have I received any specific answers to my prayers?

How can my Accountability Partner(s) pray for me?

BREAK FREE FROM INTERNET PORN

When someone you trust receives a report of the websites you visit, it changes how you use the web. It breaks the anonymity of web use, and reduces the temptation to click on inappropriate links. These reports are designed for the conversation—to talk about where you struggle online and help you find freedom.

HOW COVENANT EYES WORKS



ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTS

The websites you visit, the search terms you use, and the YouTube videos you watch… all are listed in an Accountability Report that is designed to start a conversation.

UNLIMITED PARTNERS

Send Accountability Reports to your spouse, brother, friend, and anyone else at no extra cost. Choose the people that will best suit your needs.

PANIC BUTTON

Struggling with temptation online? The Panic Button cuts off Internet access until you feel stronger. To reinstate the connection, call our Customer Support team for free assistance.

OPTIONAL INTERNET FILTERING

Want to block the bad stuff? Our Internet Filter, which uses our age-based content ratings, provides an extra level of protection for kids and adults.

GET STARTED WITH COVENANT EYES

Start protecting yourself online! The first Internet Accountability username costs $9.99/mo. Add Filtering for just $1.50/mo. Learn more and sign up at **www.covenanteyes.com**

Available for: **Windows®, Mac OS®, Android™ phones and tablets, iPhone®, iPod touch®, and iPad®**

1.877.479.1119 support@covenanteyes.com www.covenanteyes.com

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