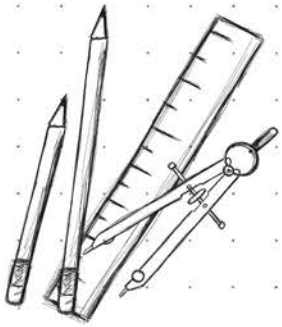

Hobbies & Habits

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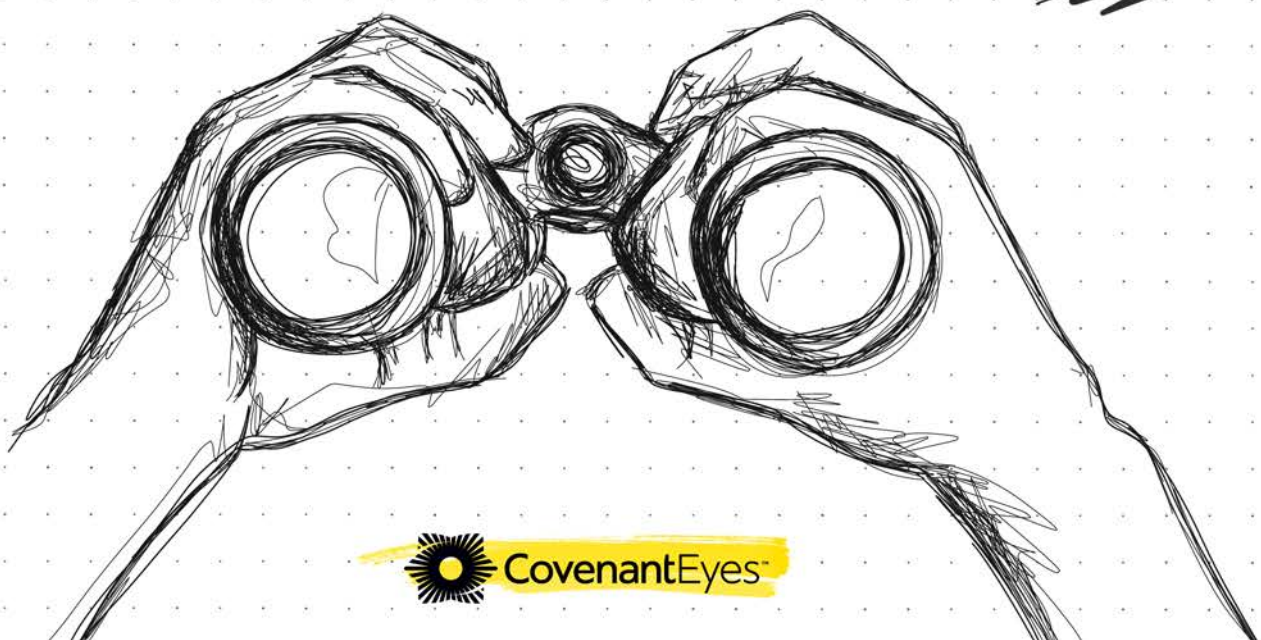

CovenantEyes™

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A LITURGY FOR ONE BATTLING A DESTRUCTIVE DESIRE

Jesus, here I am again,
desiring a thing
that were I to indulge in it
would war against my own heart,
and the hearts of those I love.

O Christ, rather let my life be thine!
Take my desires. Let them be subsumbed
in still greater desire for you, until there remains
no room for these lesser cravings.

In this moment I might choose
to indulge a fleeting hunger,
or I might choose to love you more.

Faced with this temptation,
I would rather choose you, Jesus—
but I am weak. So be my strength.
I am shadowed. Be my light.
I am selfish. Unmake me now,
    and refashion my desires
according to the better designs of your love.

Given the choice of shame or glory,
let me choose glory.
Given the choice of this moment or eternity,
let me choose in this moment what is eternal.
Given the choice of this easy pleasure,
or the harder road of the cross,
give me grace to choose to follow you,
knowing that there is nowhere apart from your
presence where I might find the peace that I long for,
no lasting satisfaction apart from your reclamation of
my heart.

Let me build, then, my King,
a beautiful thing by long obedience,
by the steady progression of small choices
that laid end to end will become like the stones
of a pleasing path stretching to eternity and
unto your welcoming arms and unto the sound
of your voice pronouncing the judgment:

Well done.

Douglas K. McKelvey. 2017. *Every Moment Holy*. Nashville: Rabbit Room Press.
Used with permission. Learn more at www.everymomentholy.com

PART 1

UNDERSTANDING THE CAGE

Chapter 1

WELCOME TO RAT PARK

Once upon a time, there was a rat.

He was a lonely rat. He lived in a dark little mesh cage, about the size of a piece of paper, with some musty old straw and a bottle filled with tepid water and a handful of food pellets once a day.

To his right and left he could hear (but not see) his brothers and sisters in identical cages with identical piles of straw and identical bottles of tepid water. Sometimes one of them would be taken away, and when they were brought back to their cage they would chitter through the bars about pushing buttons and exploring mazes and being given pieces of cheese as a reward. The little rat always listened to these stories with wonder and hope, for being taken away would break him out of his monotony of days, but he was never chosen.

But then, one morning, he woke up and something was different.

Not his straw or his food pellets... but there were now two bottles of water. He sniffed at his old one and tasted it. It smelled the same and tasted the same. He sniffed at the other, which was dyed blue, and something was different. He tasted it, and something about it was strange. He didn't like it at first. It burned in his throat, and his mind got all foggy and he stumbled around, and when he could think again there was a bruise on his nose and his droppings, usually tucked away in a corner, were scattered all over the cage.

But it was different, and that was better than nothing.

Both bottles were still there. He drank from the old one at first, eyeing the new one suspiciously. He gingerly rubbed at the bump on his nose, and tried to push his droppings back into their corner.

*

... It was different, and that was better than nothing.

Soon the boredom got to him, and he tiptoed over to the new bottle again. Maybe it wasn't so bad as he had thought. He sipped it, and the taste was less strange, and the odd rush of blood to his head felt better, and after a couple of days he realized that drinking the strange water made the boredom between feedings go away, and soon he had lost track of all days and nights and all sense of time and seasons. He mostly slept now, but he didn't care, because even if he wasn't happy, at least he was numb.

Then, one day, after drinking the water and passing out, he woke up in a very strange place. He was lying on a bed of fresh cedar shavings in a box much larger than his old cage. There

were bright green trees and bushes and yellow and pink flowers painted on the wall, and there were cardboard tubes and boxes strewn around, and five other rats were looking down at him, sniffing him, inviting him to play.

And play he did, chasing them around and climbing through the tubes until he was thirsty and had a splitting headache. The rats showed him where the water was, and again there were two bottles, one of the same old tepid stuff and one of the blue water, which had helped the days disappear. He sniffed at them both. Something inside him, like a little fire in his belly, drew him to the blue water, but he didn't want it. Not really. Not when there was so much to see and do and so many other rats to play with.

So he drank from the old, plain, tepid bottle and went back to playing until his headache was so bad that he couldn't handle it, and he just had to forget everything for a little while. He drank from the blue bottle then, and passed out in a corner, and when he woke up he went back to playing and didn't drink the blue water again until he couldn't stand it any longer—a few hours longer than the day before—and within two weeks he wasn't drinking from the blue bottle at all. He didn't need to. The world was no longer his cage, but his park.

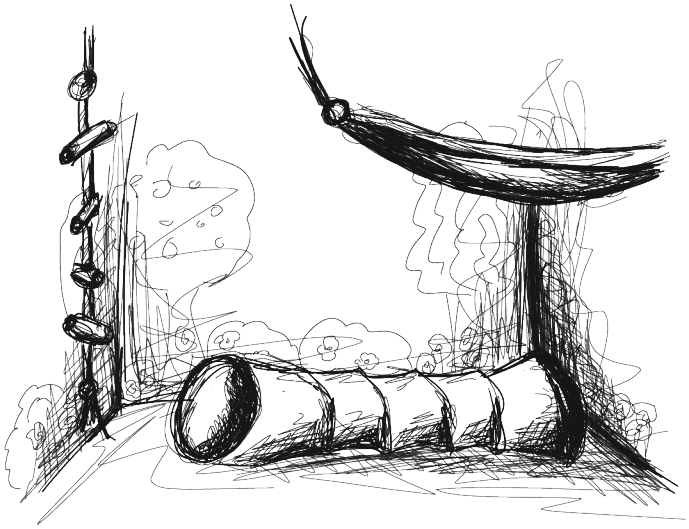
The previous story was not a fairytale. In the 1970s, Dr. Bruce Alexander of Simon Fraser University realized that the drug and addiction testing on rats took place in small, isolated cages. But rats are social creatures by nature, and their small cages resembled neither their preferred woodland habitats nor the free range and easy food access of a large city's restaurant district.

So he and some colleagues created a "social cage" made out of plywood, which they dubbed Rat Park. They conducted a series of addiction experiments using morphine (a close cousin to heroin), and in every case found that the rats in Rat Park were more likely to avoid the morphine-laced water than those still in isolation, even when they experienced withdrawal symptoms for avoiding it.[1]

Rat Park did not negate the prior research. Drugs are still addictive; they still harmed the rats' brains. But what Rat Park did demonstrate is this: for many, drugs are a form of escapism. If you take away the reason someone needs to escape (loneliness, feeling "trapped" at a dead-end job, etc.), their desire for that drug may also drop.

In short, addiction recovery is not merely about stopping the neurological need for a substance. It must also be about changing your "hobbies and habits" to decrease the need in the first place.

And that is what this book is about.



Chapter 2

WHY WE TURN TO PORN

You likely already know that porn is bad for you. Maybe it's causing a strain in your marriage; maybe it's causing physical issues in your sex life. Maybe you believe it's sinful, but you still can't stop.

It's helpful and even important to know what's going on neurologically when you view porn; it can provide additional motivation to quit. But precisely because porn use is addictive, we need more than this knowledge to truly find lasting freedom.

Plenty of other resources have covered the specific neurological effects of porn, so I won't belabor the point here (see the appendix if you would like more information). In brief:

1. **Pornography reshapes how you think.** It causes people to have a lesser view of women and be more accepting of sexual violence, as just two examples.[2]

2. **Pornography rewires your sexuality.** Viewing porn fires off a chemical cocktail. Long-term, porn rewires the viewer's brain to need more and more variety. Eventually their spouse or partner will not be enough to fill—or even awaken—their sexual desires. After all, one person can't compete with the variety of millions of videos and images.[3]

3. **Quitting porn results in temporary withdrawal symptoms.** No, porn users don't generally get "the shakes." But for many men going through a "reboot" process, quitting porn and masturbation often have some temporary side-effects, including a rollercoaster of emotions, or "flatlining," which is a complete loss of libido for several weeks. These side-effects do eventually pass in most men, but they can be extremely defeating if they aren't managed well.[4]

In short, these details show us the contents of the drug-laced water in our cages. So why do we keep drinking it, even though it leaves a bad taste in our mouths?

The Cages that Drive us to Porn

The reality is, for most of us, the addictive nature of porn isn't really what keeps us clicking. It's part of the puzzle, of course, but the addictiveness in many ways has more to do with why we

have a hard time quitting porn use than why we turn to it in the first place.

So why do we use it?

While the individual reasons for porn use may change from person to person, it's likely several different factors may be at play.

Porn and our Sexual Templates

As children, our brains our highly malleable. This malleability is a wonderful thing. It allows children to learn languages and skills more easily and rapidly than adults, for example.

However, the neuroelasticity of a child's brain means children are also more likely to be formed by early negative experiences. Think of a sapling in a windy area; if someone ties it to a stake to the trunk while it's growing, it will grow straight. However, if the stake is bent, or if it was not tied to a stake in the first place, the trunk is more likely to be bent or tilted.

Now, every child will experience some "wind" and some "bending" as they grow up. It's a reality of our broken world. A child who grows up in poverty may be more likely to hoard food as an adult; a child whose parents obsessed over appearance may develop an eating disorder. In short, our templates are formed early, and often before we're aware of what is occurring.

This early templating is especially pronounced when it comes to our sexuality. Our sex drive is one of our strongest biological imperatives, and early sexual experiences can result in lifelong struggles. Counselor Jay Stringer notes that recreating past trauma can be one of the greatest sexual hits of all; porn is often one way to replicate childhood sexual abuse.[5]

This book will *not* cover porn use that results from sexual abuse; that's the job of a licensed counselor. It's worth mentioning for a few reasons, though.

First, even if you don't believe you need counseling, it may be helpful to examine yourself and your porn use. What attracts you? What initially attracted you? Ask yourself what in your childhood may have led you to that particular type of porn. Even without specific trauma, looking deeply at the things you fantasize about may point to a deeper longing and ultimately provide the path to healing.

Our sex drive is one of our strongest biological imperatives, and early sexual experiences can result in lifelong struggles.

Second, porn itself may have been the traumatizing factor. This is true for Millennials in particular. Those born between 1980 and 1995 were the first generation to spend their formative years on the Internet. We were online before anyone truly understood what that meant, and that means that we were more likely to stumble across pornographic content before our parents had a clue that porn was so easily accessible. We stumbled across it and liked what we saw even as we were ashamed by it, and eventually, for many of us, it slowly transformed into a habit.

A 2016 survey by the Barna Group found that 38% of 18-24 year olds seek out porn at least weekly, and approximately 25% of teens aged 13-17, older Millennials, and Gen-Xers seek it out weekly.[6] For many of these people, porn has become their Friday night entertainment, or their pre-bedtime ritual. It wouldn't take much time at all for them to transform curiosity intermingled with shame into a habit.

Porn as a Refuge

Weekly and daily porn users are only a fragment of the porn-using population. An even greater number uses porn occasionally. The Barna study also found that about 39% of people age 18-50 seek out porn monthly or occasionally. (Teens use it the least; only 28% report seeking out porn at the same rate.)[7]

These more sporadic porn users are likely using it as an emotional reaction to something. These triggers may involve an argument, a stressful day at work, or even simple physical lust.

One helpful mnemonic device for these moments of vulnerability is "HALT":

1. Hungry
2. Angry

3. Lonely

4. Tired

Other emotional factors that may be at play include stress, anxiety, depression, fear, boredom, rejection, and shame.[8]

Willpower is lower in these emotional states; if you're hungry, you may just want to distract yourself from the grumbling of your stomach. Angry or tired? Porn is soothing. Lonely? Porn offers a false intimacy, a false companionship.

All of these feelings are very common, and every single person on earth participates in some self-soothing behavior. Cartoonist Charles Schultz was very shrewd when he gave Linus, his wisest character, a security blanket! Most of us stop lugging around blankets or teddy bears or other physical talismans by the time we graduate Kindergarten, but in reality we simply graduate to other behaviors. For some, it's food, or video games, or movies, or books. For others, it's alcohol or drugs. Or there are shopaholics or compulsive cleaners.

But let's face it: for most of us, binging on ice cream, or even working out our anger at the gym, doesn't seem to give us the same rush as porn does. Because pornography taps into one

of our strongest drives—our sexuality—and because it's so easily accessible online, porn has become the drug of choice for many. And it can also be a very hard one to quit.

To Do:

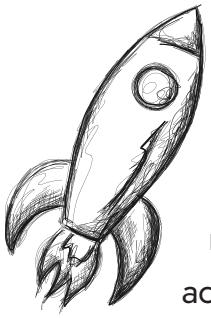
Take some time to fill out the Time and Trigger Inventory in the Worksheet section. How do you normally spend your time? What triggers make you turn to porn?

Chapter 3

THE SECRET TO FREEDOM

Recently, some front-line workers who fight against pornography addictions have noticed how some unique factors, which are seemingly disconnected from porn, have helped contribute to successfully quitting porn.

Two people stand out. The first is Jay Stringer, a licensed mental health counselor and ordained minister. In his years of counseling men and women for unwanted sexual behaviors, including pornography use, he started noticing trends among his patients, linking certain childhood traumas or certain life states to certain types of pornography. He recently commissioned a large-scale study of porn users which largely confirmed his own personal findings. While the results of Stringer's study are still being evaluated, he did tell a group of Covenant Eyes employees that one big recurring factor in porn use was a sense of **purposelessness**. Porn users see themselves as failures, they have unmet needs, they feel guilty and overwhelmed. They're stuck in dead-end jobs without hope of upward mobility. In short, they didn't know who they were or where they were going in life, and that drove them to porn to soothe themselves.[9]



Meanwhile, Alexander Rhodes, founder and manager of the online recovery organization NoFap, noticed a related trend. By studying data gathered informally from NoFap's users, he found that those who were most successful in abstaining from porn included other activities—sports, hobbies, etc.—as part of their recovery process.[10]

A simple exercise will demonstrate why this works. Take a moment to look at this picture of an elephant. Study its features for a minute or two, until you can close your eyes and envision it.

Now take out your phone and set a timer for two minutes. In these two minutes, I want you to do one thing: *don't think about the elephant*.

Don't think about it.

Don't think about its long trunk, its tusks, its ears, its saggy skin.

Don't ask yourself whether it lives in a zoo, or if it has any family.

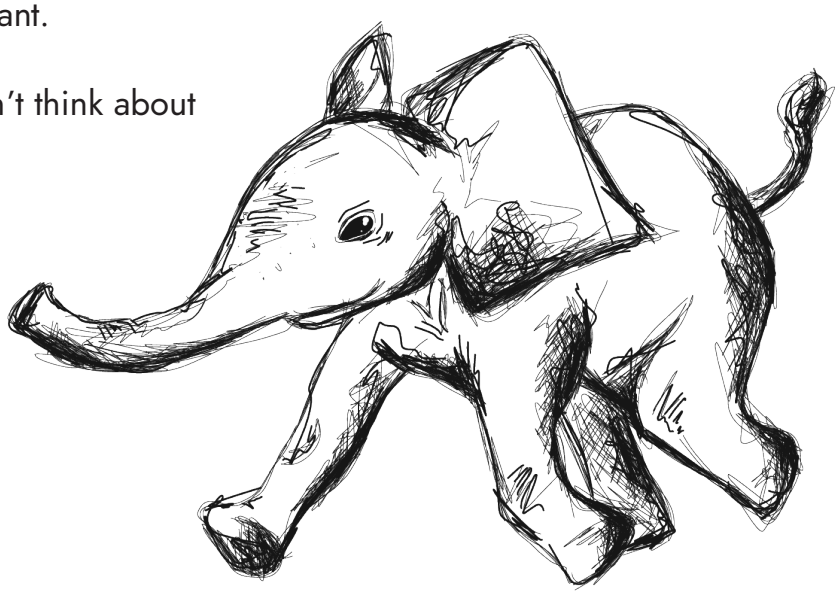
Don't think about the elephant.

For two whole minutes, don't think about the elephant.

Were you successful?

If the answer was no, why not? If the answer was yes, why?

Chances are good, if you

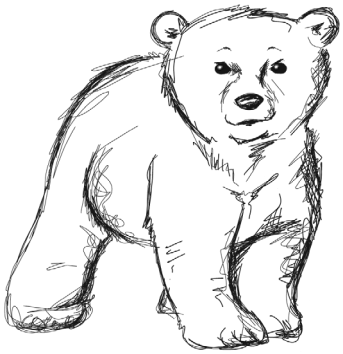


had trouble not thinking about the elephant, it's because you were fixating on the task. Maybe you even repeated the phrase "Don't think about the elephant" to yourself multiple times.

But if you were successful, it's probably because you didn't think about the task much at all. Maybe you were thinking about your dinner plans, or a movie you recently saw. Maybe you even started out thinking about the elephant, but then allowed your train of thought to wander to other zoo animals.

Finding Freedom by Changing Our Focus

Often, when we decide to quit porn we fixate on it, making it harder for ourselves to resist. We may believe that mentally thinking, "No, don't go there! Don't click that," will help us resist the temptation, and in the heat of the moment, it may help. But in the end, when we focus all of our willpower on NOT doing something, it ironically makes it harder to resist that thing… and at the same time it makes it harder to resist other temptations as well.

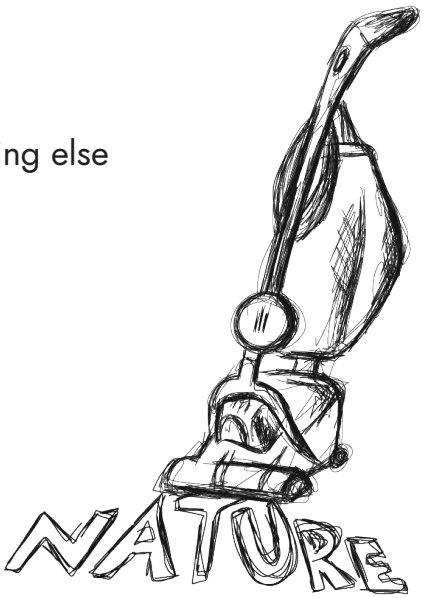


This was confirmed in research conducted by social psychologist Daniel Wegner in the 1980s. He asked one group of participants not to think of a white bear for five minutes, and ring a bell if they did, then to think about white bears for another five minutes, again ringing the bell when they thought about it. He then compared the results to a group of participants who were only asked to think about the white bear. Lea Wineman explains,

> "At that point, the participants thought of a white bear even more often than a different group of participants, who had been told from the beginning to think of white bears. The results suggested that suppressing the thought for the first five minutes caused it to "rebound" even more prominently into the participants' minds later."[11]

So where does this leave us?

The better option is to not simply not think about pornography anymore, but to think about something else instead.



The emphasis there is "think about something else." Aristotle once postulated that "Nature abhors a vacuum"; it's true of human nature as well. It's not possible to simply think of nothing, and if we're not proactive about choosing what to think about instead, we may actually wind up thinking about worse things.

Jesus illustrates this in a parable in Matthew 12:43-45:

> When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.

Jesus' focus is on the evil spirit… but what's the man's role in all of this? Notice that the house is empty when the spirit returns to it. It's as if the man kicked a terrible roommate out of his apartment, but he never took the roommate's name off the lease or changed the locks. He never filled the emptied room. And the man went on a business trip and didn't leave a house sitter, and when he came home the roommate had returned and had added seven of his freeloading friends to the lease.

Many people treat pornography similarly. They quit cold-turkey for a while, but they never find something to fill the void left by porn, and they eventually either return to porn or turn to a different vice. One person even told us he saved his marriage after he successfully quit porn, only to lose it in the end because, as he told us, "I never replaced porn with something else."

*

If we want to find lasting freedom from pornography, simply quitting porn won't be enough.

Remember our morphine-addicted rat friends? Morphine is highly addictive, but rats that were moved to Rat Park were more likely to avoid morphine than their isolated counterparts, even when it meant experiencing physical withdrawal symptoms. Three big components helped reduce their desire for the drug:

1. The rats were moved out of isolation into **community**.
2. They were moved from a cage to a park-like **environment**.
3. Their new "park" had lots of **activities**.

If we want to find lasting freedom from pornography, simply quitting porn won't be enough. We need to find community, and change our environment (not just the paint on the wall, but things like what we have on in the background for noise), and train ourselves to new habits.

That's the purpose of this book. We'll be exploring how our habits and even our physical environment can be tweaked to reduce our temptation to view porn, and how we can use our hobbies and habits to build a sense of purpose into our lives. And slowly, we'll learn how to fill our cravings for porn with something better.

PART 2

FIRST STEPS FORWARD

Chapter 4

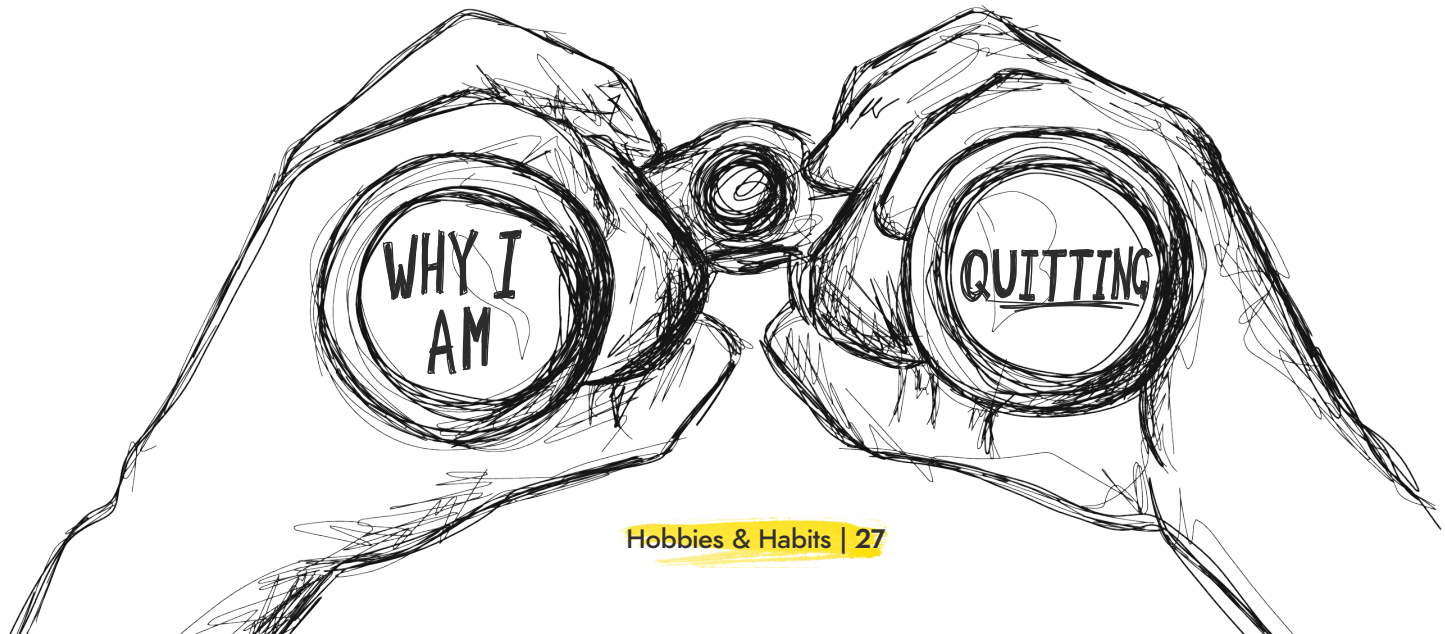
WHO DO YOU WANT TO BE?

Why are you quitting porn?

For many people, that feels like an easy question. Many Covenant Eyes users come to us after the point of crisis: their marriage is falling apart, or they started having sexual performance issues with their partners, or they simply decided they didn't want to be that person anymore.

Others are more reluctant. Maybe they got caught by a parent or partner or boss, but they don't really think it's that big of a deal.

The harsh reality is, you'll never successfully quit porn if you don't actually want to stop using it in the first place. Even those



who *want* to quit aren't always successful if they lose sight of why they're quitting. So your first step is to determine why you personally want to quit.

When people come to him to quit porn use, Alexander Rhodes starts by having them make three lists.[12] For those already at a crisis point, these lists codify why they're quitting; for those more ambivalent, the lists will help you decide whether porn is actually fulfilling all of its promises.

1. Make a list of all the negatives that watching porn has on your life. Try to focus on the personal reasons. This may include items like the following:

* I love my wife, but I can't get an erection anymore.
* My boss caught me watching porn over lunch break, and he says if I get caught again I'll be fired.
* I've lost about an hour every week watching porn.

2. Make a list of all the problems you'll face if you quit porn. Porn is filling some itch in your life, so list it! Some reasons may include:

* I'll get bored.
* I'm single, so I'll lose the only way I can have sex.
* Sex with my boyfriend will get boring if I don't pick up tips from porn stars.

3. Make a list of all the positives you think you'll get from quitting porn. Again, focus on your own personal reasons.

These may include:

* My wife promised to stick this marriage out if I promise to quit porn.
* I'll stop feeling ashamed of myself for watching it.
* I'll be a better mom if I'm not distracted by the thought of porn all the time.

Next, take some time to review those lists. Do you notice any common trends in what you want to gain and what you're scared to lose?

Now we're going to take what you've learned about yourself and answer one final question: **Who do you want to be?**

In a sense, we're crafting your own personal mission statement—not just for while you're working on quitting porn, but for your whole life. That's a big job, so don't worry about getting it perfectly right at first; you can always go back and rewrite it, or even change it completely as your goals shift and as you discover a new hobby or passion.

Right now, an important part of your answer should include how porn is keeping you from meeting that goal. Your answer may look something like one of these:

* I want to be a wonderful husband and father to my family (but porn is breaking my family apart).

* I want to write a novel before I'm 30 (but porn has filled my brain with so many distractions that I can't put a coherent thought together).

* I want to keep my body at peak capacity so I can race in a triathlon one day (but porn is wearing me down mentally and even physically).

Now take that mission statement and **write it down**. Put it on a sticky note or an index card, and stick it somewhere you'll see it regularly, like your wallet or your bathroom mirror, or turn it into a wallpaper for your computer or phone.

(You don't have to include the part about how porn is holding you back from your goal here, especially if someone might see it, but it's still helpful for you to remember that part every once in a while. Just don't dwell on it.)

Now that you have your personal mission statement, keep it in mind as you read the rest of this book. We'll be offering a lot of suggestions, so it will be handy as a filter so you can figure out what tips work best for you.

Chapter 5

HARNESSING THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

Once upon a time, two friends flipped a coin.

They were the nerdiest of the nerds. Both had been inventing worlds since childhood; both wrote poetry inspired by epic legends, and had started sharing their works with each other to make their writing better. And both loved few things more than debating the merits and cultural impact of literature.

One day in particular, the friends were discussing the untapped potential of Science Fiction as a genre, and they came to an agreement: based on a coin toss, one would write a space travel story, and the other would write a time travel story.

And so it was that, with the publication of *Out of the Silent Planet*, Jack kicked off his non-academic writing career, eventually publishing timeless classics as *Mere Christianity* and *The Chronicles of*

Narnia. And though his friend never did write that time travel story, it's not because he stopped writing; instead, "Tollers" wrote a fantasy book about creatures known as Hobbits that gained no small amount of renown.[13] And in a back room of an Oxford pub, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien continued to meet and discuss literature—their own literature—with each other and with a group of other friends and colleagues, and together changed the face of fiction.

The Life-Changing Power of Fellowship

The secret that Lewis and Tolkien stumbled across is the power of community. During the twenty years that their writing group, the Inklings, met, they focused on refining their respective works, reading aloud to each other, and polishing and critiquing each other's writing. The Inklings' collaboration and their accountability to each other as writers helped them hone their work, polishing them so that Tolkien and Lewis's books in particular could become enduring classics.

Nothing is ever created in a vacuum; the lone genius is perhaps the greatest myth of all creative works. In *Bandersnatch*, Diana Pavlac Glyer writes,

> Michelangelo? He was the center of a group of 14 artists who painted that ceiling. [...] Shakespeare wrote his plays while standing on the stage as an actor among actors; Edison's real innovation was designing the first industrial lab where employees carried out research and development, often working side by side all night long. Thomas Wolfe struggled

until Maxwell Perkins came alongside and convinced him to cut 90,000 words from his first novel.[14]

What does this have to do with quitting pornography? Everything!

Since pornography is usually viewed in secret, most people want to break free in secret. This may be well-intentioned; if nobody knows we're watching porn, we believe nobody can be hurt by it, and that coming clean will only hurt our families.

In reality, the secrecy of pornography is one of its biggest lures. Psychologist Al Cooper notes three primary lures for online sexual activity, which he calls the Triple-A engine: Accessibility, Affordability, and Anonymity.[15] The fact that you can watch porn and both keep it a secret from your family and be completely unknown to the performer is an extremely powerful feeling. And that means the best solution to the secrecy is to bring your struggles into the light and into community. Just as a three-legged stool can't stand if one leg is broken or removed, so too does our porn use break when we break the leg of anonymity.

A number of tools and organizations exist to do precisely that (you can learn more in the appendix). One key tool to support this is Internet Accountability. This service, provided by Covenant Eyes, sends a report of your online activity to a person you trust. This person, known as your Accountability Partner, can then use these reports

to start conversations about where you struggle online. Our Accountability Partners can do more than just function as cops, out to punish us when we fail. Rather, they can help us identify the heart issues behind it: the work stress, the depression, the insecurities, and the other "cages" that drive us to porn.

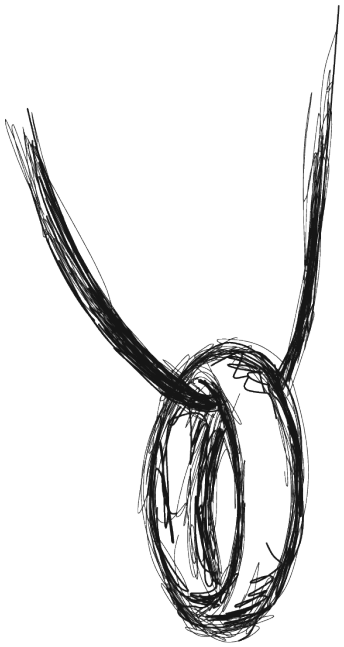
But the real trick to successful accountability is that it looks at more than our pornography use. The best accountability relationships are about knowing and being known—about sharing goals and dreams, and about placing our behaviors (both negative ones like porn and positive ones like hobbies) firmly in the context of who we are and, more importantly, who we want to be.

This brings us back to Lewis and Tolkien, whose friendship spanned for decades. Their friendship started as a purely academic one; it was a few years before they began sharing bits and pieces of their own writing. But they always propelled each other forward to deeper thought. In fact, Lewis, one of the foremost Christian apologists of the 20th Century, may never have become a Christian had it not been for conversations with Tolkien and another Inkling named Hugh Dyson.

This sort of push, which focused as much on personal growth as it did on chasing literary goals, may have helped to inform Frodo and Sam's relationship in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. From the very beginning, Sam kept an eye out for "Mr. Frodo, Sir." He catches up with Frodo when he tries to slip away. He keeps a watchful eye on Gollum. When Frodo loses the strength to climb Mount Doom, Sam picks Frodo up and carries him the last few

steps. In reality, Frodo never would have completed his quest had Sam not stuck by his side every step of the way.

On Tolkien's side, it's not much of a stretch of the imagination to imagine the Inklings as playing Sam to each other, pushing each other to finish their books. It's also safe to draw an analogy between Frodo's journey and our own. More specifically, we all have our Rings, our "besetting sins" (Hebrews 12:1), our unique temptations that keep coming back to haunt us (we're focusing on pornography as the besetting sin here, but there are others).



We need a Sam to beat our temptations. We need a friend for the fight. We need someone who knows our deepest burdens and our secrets, and who can stand next to us, encouraging us and occasionally picking us up when we fail. And our Sams—our Accountability Partners—can push us not only to freedom from porn, but to improve our lives in general.

Choosing a Partner

If you're ready to get rid of porn from your life, you need to find someone (or a group of people) as a companion on the road. This person is going to become very important in your life; you're going to share about your pornography use, which is hard enough, but you're also going to talk to them about your life goals and, ideally, share your progress on new hobbies you may pick up. In short, accountability means finding the Sam to your Frodo, or even the Tolkien to your Lewis.

So how do you choose this person? If you're lucky, one or two people have already come to mind, but for most of us it's probably not that simple. You may not know anyone you trust that much. Don't let that discourage you, though! Any relationship will take time to get to that level; the trick is to find someone you think might be that person for you in the future.

As you look for an accountability partner, look for someone who is:

1. Godly – this person should have similar beliefs and spiritual goals as you.

2. Trustworthy – you will talk about deeply personal issues, so make sure this person has a reputation of not gossiping.

3. Challenging, but not condemning – this person should give you tough love when you need it, but from a position of love, not condemnation.

4. Mature – this person should come from an experienced perspective.

5. At a similar place as you, relationship-wise – if you're single, a married person won't understand the challenges of single, and vice versa. (This is not a requirement, but it helps.)

6. Similar interests – this isn't strictly necessary, but having an accountability partner with similar hobbies and interests will help as you move forward and explore new hobbies.

As a final thought, your primary accountability partner should be the same gender as you. Although both men and women view

porn, it often impacts them differently. Women feel an additional burden of shame, since it's not considered "normal" for them to be addicted (even though it is increasingly normal). Second, when men and women are in close relationship, there is a greater risk of misreading (or abusing) the closeness for romantic interest. This is especially true if one or both of you is married; if you're trying to save your marriage after porn use is discovered, the last thing you want to do is open yourself up to even the perception of a romantic entanglement with the person who is supposed to be holding you accountable.

If you're married, we recommend not having your spouse be your sole accountability partner. Although they have the right to know as much about your recovery process as they want to know, putting them in the position of accountability partner will hurt them, and make them feel like your parent or babysitter instead of your co-laborer.

Starting the Conversation

Now that you've found an Accountability Partner, it's time to get things started! A strong accountability relationship will look different from person to person, but here are a few key things to consider:

1. Share your goals

The heart of finding freedom from pornography is remembering who you want to be, and focusing on becoming that person. Share the mission statement

you wrote in the last chapter with your accountability partner, and focus your conversations on progress towards that goal, rather than progress away from pornography. Yes, porn will by

Online Accountability Groups

Whether you can't find someone to be your partner, or whether you want extra support, sometimes finding an online support group can provide the help and encouragement you need to find lasting freedom. Although they will lack the personal insight into your life, they will still be able to cheer you on, or encourage you as you struggle.

Although there are many online accountability groups, two in particular stand out. The first is **nofap.com**, a secular organization that seeks to help men and women find freedom from pornography and masturbation. In particular, NoFap provides a robust forum where members can share success stories, ask questions, and support and encourage each other. For women in particular, **dirtygirlsministries.com** provides a safe space to share details about what still feels like a taboo topic: being a woman who struggles with porn.

necessity be part of your conversations, but every time you talk about a temptation or slip-up, the conversation should focus on

Why Not Just Use a Filter?

When you're struggling with porn temptations, it may seem like the best bet is to install a filter to block porn. It's true, they can be helpful tools! However, filters only act as fences. They can be broken, and they don't help address the heart issues that lead to your porn use in the first place. We recommend them for extra protection, but not the sole method of protecting yourself.

A recent study by the Barna Group helped illuminate this. When they compared people who used only a Filter to people who used Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability, they found that 49% of Filter-only users sought out porn at least monthly, and the

moving away from pornography and towards something better.

2. Make a plan

You have an aspirational goal for who you want to be, but you still have to address your porn-viewing habits. For example, if porn has been your go-to activity for stress relief or insomnia, you need to come up with some other way to respond. You and your accountability partner should come up with ideas together, so he or she can ask you how those strategies are working, and help you adjust them as necessary.

Part of your plan should include a technological solution, such as Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability. This service monitors your online activity and sends an Accountability Report to your Partner, highlighting where you may have struggled through the week—a great tool to have specific conversations about your struggles. In addition, an optional Filter is available to help block pornography.

3. Put it in the calendar

Every week for nearly 20 years, the Inklings met twice a week. On Tuesdays some would show up in the Rabbit Room in the back of the Eagle and Child pub in Oxford to generally hang out and debate theology or quote Homer in the original Greek or any odd assortment of topics. It was "a gathering of friends, an assembly of those who had much in common and much to share."[17] On Thursdays, members would meet in Lewis's rooms at Magdalen College. In those more formal (and private) meetings, they would read aloud from their works and critique and gather feedback. Not everyone would meet every week at either meeting, but the routine was still important; it gave them both structured and unstructured spaces to enjoy good companionship, collaborate, and help each other grow and develop as writers and thinkers.

That consistency is key to our own accountability. You won't struggle with porn every week, and in fact sometimes you may go for weeks without facing the temptation. But if you get out of the habit of meeting, it's harder to get back in the habit when

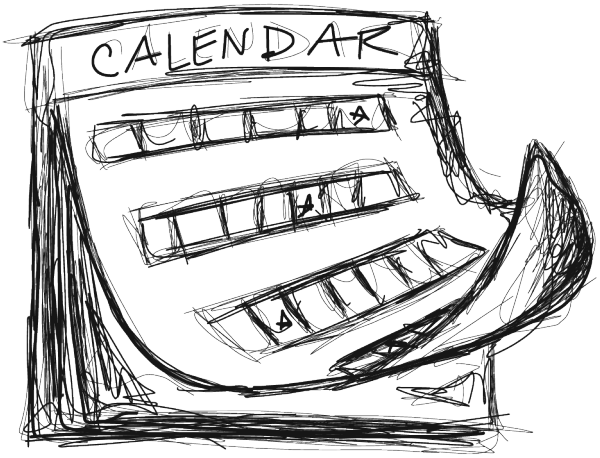
(continued)

other 51% sought it out occasionally. By contrast, only 24% of Covenant Eyes users sought out porn monthly or more frequently and 38% sought it out occasionally—and 37% of Covenant Eyes users never tried to seek porn out at all.[16]

Why the difference? Because users of Internet Accountability, who talked through their online choices with a trusted friend, weren't simply trying to keep themselves from porn—they were addressing the reasons they were attracted to porn in the first place.

In short, filters only address behaviors, but true change stems from addressing heart issues. And that's why Covenant Eyes—and this book—exists.

you need the support. A more regular meeting (whether it's grabbing coffee or just chatting via Skype) will help you develop your accountability relationship and build trust—not just to talk about pornography, but to talk about what's really going on in your life, and to share private personal goals.



If you can't regularly schedule meetings, make sure to pull out your calendars during each meeting to schedule your next one immediately. If you don't, it's easy to postpone your next meeting indefinitely. Even if you expect that you'll have to reschedule, it's easier to ensure that it's a priority when it's already on your calendar.

We may not want to change the world through collaborative writing, but by following the communal example of the Inklings, we can transform the thing that's most fundamental to our ability to live joyful lives: our hearts.

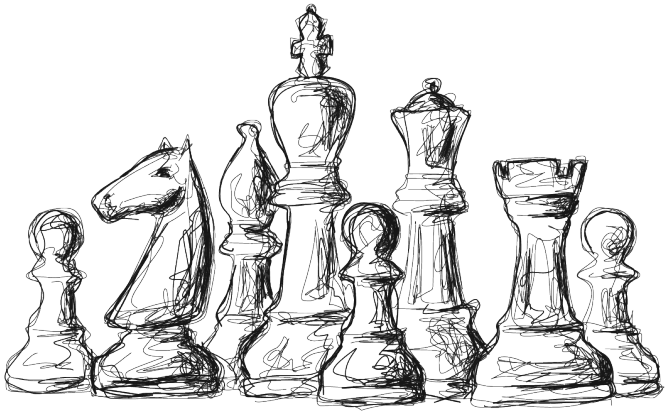
Chapter 6

RESHAPING OUR CAGES

Near the edge of Appalachia, where the farmlands of Ohio begin to transform to rolling tree-covered hills, stands a former prison known as the Ohio State Reformatory. Opened in 1896, it was closed after nearly a century due to overcrowding and inhumane conditions.[18]

Which is perhaps why it was chosen as the perfect location for the classic film *The Shawshank Redemption*.

It is in these inhumane conditions that protagonist Andy Dufresne is falsely imprisoned; it is there that he is routinely abused by both wardens and other prisoners. And it is there that he devotes his energy into making prison life as comfortable as possible for himself and his fellow inmates. He decorates his own cell with posters and with small stone carvings. He breaks into the Warden's office and plays Mozart over the PA system. He improves



the prison library and tutors fellow inmates. In the setting of a prison that had been closed for being inhumane, Andy Dufresne finds and nurtures the humanity of them all.

Like Andy Dufresne shows us, one of the best ways of supporting ourselves in our efforts to quit porn is to take a good, hard look at our environment, and change it.

How Your Environment Shapes You

Sometime today (right now, if you can), stand up and walk around your living space—whether that's a dorm room, an apartment, or your own house. Take a mental inventory of a few things:

1. **How is your furniture arranged?** Is the TV the focal point? Are chairs arranged for easy conversation, or for solo activities?

2. **What sorts of decorations do you have?** Are your walls covered with art prints? With photos of attractive celebrities? Photos of family and friends? Do you collect figurines of "well-endowed" video game characters? Do you have a lot of plants?

3. **How is the lighting in each room?** Do you have lots of lamps? Do you keep the curtains drawn at all times?

4. **What is the main function of each room?** Is it primarily to work? To eat? To hang out and talk to people? To relax? To work out? How does the room itself reflect this?

Pay particular attention to the room where you most often view

pornography. What is it about this room that enables you to use porn? Is it more private than some of the other rooms in your home?

There are entire fields of study devoted to interior design and psychology, but the good news is, you don't have to be a *feng shui* master to start recognizing some of the impacts of room layout and décor. In your own brief survey of your home, hopefully you've realized one thing: your physical environment can have more of an impact on you than you'd expect.

Some of this is obvious: if you have a wall calendar of bikini models in your dorm room, you're training yourself to see women as sexual objects every time you glance at it (and probably making any female guests uncomfortable). Others may be subtle. If you always keep your curtains drawn and your room dark, you're creating an environment that fosters extreme privacy and secrecy.

Reshaping Your Environment to Reshape Your Habits

Now that you've explored your own home, it's time to rearrange it. Depending on your stage of life, you may have limited control over your personal environment. If you own your own home, your only limits are your time and budget; you have freedom to rip up your carpets and repaint at will. On the other hand, if you live in a dorm room on campus, you might not even be able to convince your roommate to take down his poster of Slave Leia.

Fortunately, unless you live in a literal prison like Andy Dufresne, you have some control over your environment, and even a few

simple tweaks can make a world of difference.

1. Rearrange your furniture to support your life

Stephen King, author of the short story that was later adapted into *The Shawshank Redemption*, once dreamed of having a large oak writing desk, one that would dominate a room and emphasize his importance as a writer. But when he finally got the desk of his dreams, it did him no good. He said, "For six years, I sat behind that desk either drunk or wrecked out of my mind, like a ship's captain in charge of a voyage to go nowhere." Eventually he ditched his dream desk and remodeled the room into a living space with a small desk in a corner and a couch and TV and a comfortable rug now dominating the room instead. It was now a space where his wife and children could come up and watch basketball games or a movie or generally hang out. "Put your desk in the corner," he advises writers, "and every time you sit down there to write, remind yourself why it isn't in the middle of the room. Life isn't a support-system for art. It's the other way around."[19]

Take another look at the rooms in your home, and especially the room where you are most likely to watch porn. How are they laid out? What's the focus? Are the chairs facing the TV for a more isolated viewing experience, or are they even slightly tilted toward each other to encourage conversation?

In short, as King asked, is your home supporting your life or your porn?

The Canadian Decorators' Association explains it this way:

> Determine what tone and message you want the room to convey — and use your furniture to express that. "Four chairs facing each other in a circle in front of a fireplace says, 'Come in, sit down, relax and have a great … 'A wing chair or chaise lounge in a corner with a small table and lamp suggests a quiet retreat after a busy day."[20]

Use your personal mission statement to guide you as you rearrange your furniture. If your goal is to be the best husband and father ever, consider moving your favorite chair down to the basement, or wherever your kids play indoors, to encourage yourself to hang out with them. If you're a student in the dorms and your goal is to be a doctor, try turning your desk so that it's facing away from the TV. Keep experimenting until you find a good room layout that works for you.

Do your best to increase the light in each room. A dark room fosters secrecy; a well-lit room promotes openness. Light brings happiness and may even boost productivity. Chloe Taylor explains,

> How the space is lit is also very important for the overall ambiance. The best lighting source is, of course, the sun, so the number and size of the windows in the room can boost one's happiness, increase sadness or enhance anxiety.

A 2002 study concluded that the presence of daylight was one of the most important factors in increasing sales volume, thus telling us that natural light improves human performance too.[21]

Basically, don't keep your curtains drawn during the day, and get plenty of lamps! Do what you need to do to rearrange your room to turn it from an isolated cage to an open, welcoming place—in effect, your "park."

2. Replace your decorations

Now that you've rethought the purpose of each room and adjusted the layout, it's time to change up the overall feel of the rooms through decorations.

Start by getting rid of obviously problematic decorations. Anything with a specifically sexual focus—pinup girls, statuettes of highly sexualized anime girls, etc.—should go straight into the trash. Objects with sexual imagery as a feature but not the main focus, such as a cast photo of *The Avengers* that includes Black Widow in revealing clothes, should go into storage for a while. Even if you're not lusting toward a specific image, you'll want to put away images that reinforce the use of the human body for sex instead of as unique individuals with personal needs and desires.

Once you're done, you may find that you have some free space on your walls. Put some new art up! Consider using photos of family and friends to remind yourself

of who is important in your life, and what relationships are at risk if you continue to use porn. You can also review your mission statement and hang art that reminds you of your goal. If you want to be an author, hang up library posters, or photos of your favorite authors. If you're a code monkey who wants to be an executive, put up a poster of Steve Jobs.

Add plants and nature imagery into your décor. Having plants around (specifically flowers) can increase happiness and decrease stress, and keeping other ornamental plants around may boost memory and performance.[22] Even if you have allergies preventing you from keeping plants indoors, there may be benefits to using fake plants and other nature imagery. One study with prisoners found that inmates in solitary confinement, locked away for 23 hours, were quieter and better behaved when permitted to spend a mere 45 minutes every other day in a room that projected ocean and mountain images on the walls.[23]

And, of course, you can always decorate with art that you simply like. You don't have to want to be a master painter to hang a print of the Mona Lisa, nor do you have to want to be a mountain climber to put up a photo of the Matterhorn. Regardless of what you do to decorate, the most important thing is that it lifts your spirits when you're in that room.

3. Find a safe place for your technology

You may be limited in how much redecorating you can do, and it's only one step in creating an atmosphere that discourages your porn use. We live with our phones attached to our hips; we may view porn the most frequently while we're in the bathroom. So while we're considering how to rearrange our space to make us feel happier—and less likely to need porn to relieve stress—we should also consider how to arrange our technology to minimize temptation, or at least make it harder to follow through on it.

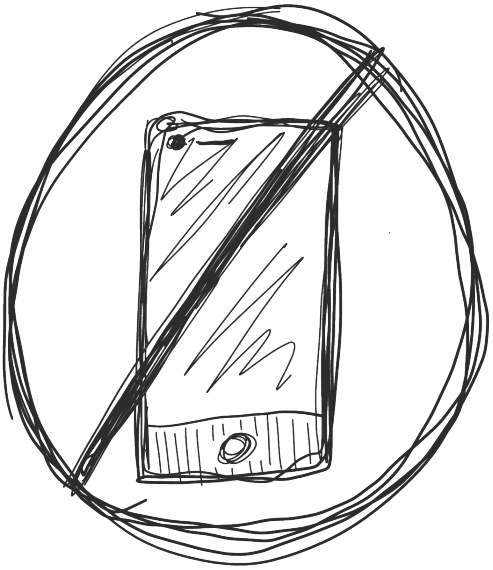
...we should also consider how to arrange our technology to minimize temptation, or at least make it harder to follow through on it.

One of the simplest pieces of advice is also among the oldest: position any computers in a public place, with the screen facing the room. The knowledge that someone could wander behind you and see what you're looking at is one of the simplest deterrents of all.

Unfortunately, that trick only works if you use a computer with a monitor that is placed on a desk. Most of us do our browsing now on phones or tablets. If we use a computer it's a laptop on our lap or a coffee table, not a dedicated desk. So there are a few

additional steps we have to take to secure them, and discourage porn use.

The first, as we discussed in a previous chapter, is to install Covenant Eyes on your devices. Internet Accountability is in many ways the mobile version of having someone in the room, able to stare over your shoulder at any moment. But there are a few other steps that you may want to consider.

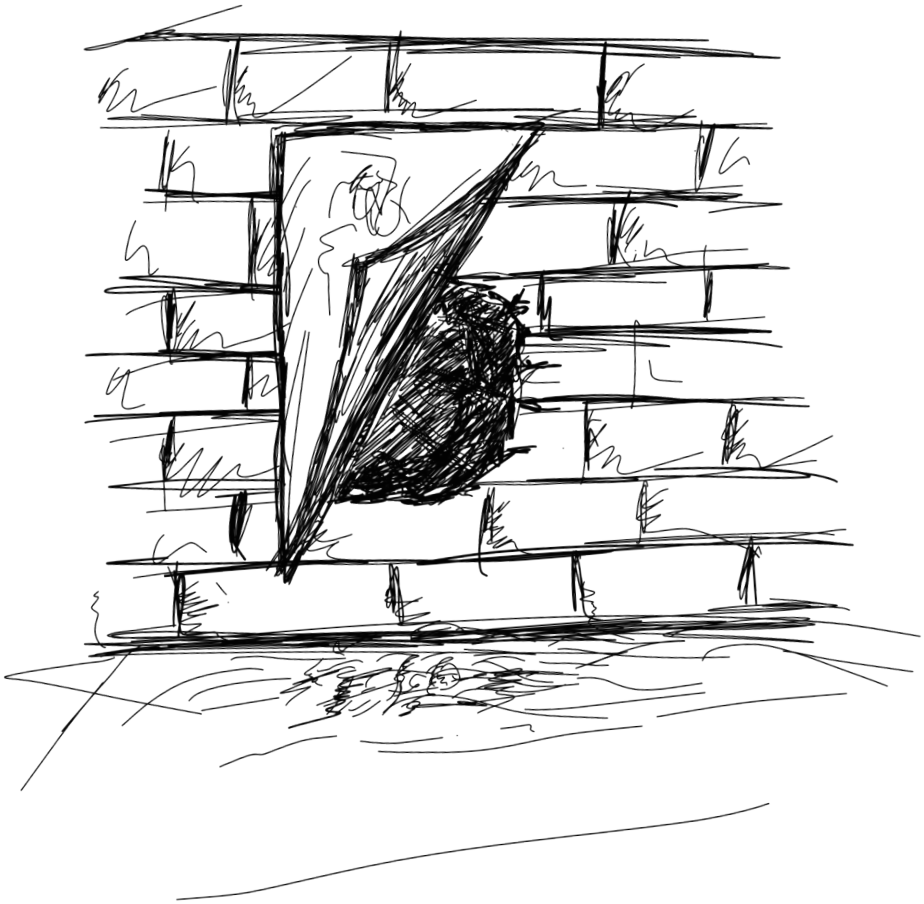


For one, create a technology basket. Literally, buy a basket and stick your phone and tablet in it at strategic times, like family dinners or when you go to the bathroom or bedtime. Keep it in the hall, out of easy reach to help reduce the temptation to just glance at it. If you absolutely need to be connected to your phone to monitor calls or texts from your job, consider buying a Bluetooth headset or a smartwatch to notify you of important messages.

Set a rule to not bring phones into your bedroom. If you use it for an alarm clock, buy a dedicated clock instead. If you need to keep your phone in your room for some reason, resist the temptation to keep it next to your bed. Put it on your dresser or somewhere across the room so you have to physically get up to check it. If you're married, consider keeping it in your spouse's night stand to increase their likelihood of waking up if you decide to grab it and sneak out of the room for a late night porn viewing session.

Freedom Behind a Poster

In the final act of *The Shawshank Redemption*, two specific things help Andy Dufresne escape his literal prison. One is a small stone-carving hammer, ostensibly used to carve a chess set and other small figurines. The other is a poster, used to cover the hole he carves in the wall over the course of 20 years of imprisonment. Now, Andy uses pinups of famous actresses, so the analogy breaks down; still, his literal escape was effected because he remodeled his cell (in multiple ways). And while we don't need to scrape away in secret at our escape, our lesson from Andy remains true: it's amazing what a little sunlight and art can do.



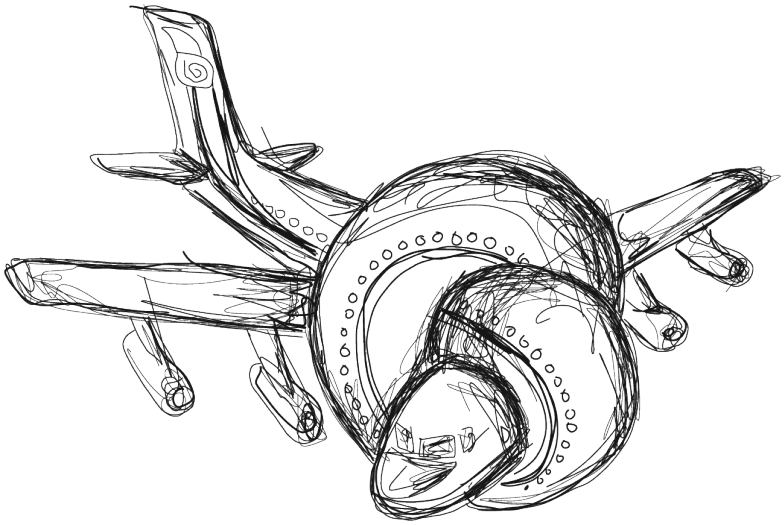
Chapter 7

YOU ARE WHAT YOU CONSUME

Scott, a Covenant Eyes employee who was leading a Bible study in his home, decided one week that they would take a break to just do something fun instead. The group chose to watch the classic comedy *Airplane!*. When they got to a scene featuring nudity, Scott grabbed the remote to fast forward…

…and hit pause instead.

Embarrassed, Scott then tried to fast-forward, and hit rewind instead. Then he overshot when he fast forwarded. In the end, the group wound up seeing the scene they were trying to avoid three or four times.



This may sound like a silly incident, and one that could have been easily avoided

had the group just simply watched the scene in the first place. Still, Scott was operating on an important principle: what you see matters. The messages that are communicated through movies and TV and music and video games and books matter. They feed into our soul, consciously or unconsciously.

The messages in the media we consume become internalized, and guide our thinking whether we think it will or not. "Keep your heart with all vigilance," Solomon writes in Proverbs 4:23, "for from it flow the springs of life." If we watch movies where having sex is the sole goal for the protagonist, we too will believe it's the most important thing. If we listen to music where cheating on our partners is glorified, we'll want a share of that glory.

Pornography is, of course, an extreme example of this. One study, described in full in the Covenant Eyes ebook *Your Brain on Porn*, found that even just three hours a week of pornography led to lowered views of women, including a decrease in sexual satisfaction with their own partners.[24]

Beyond that, though, our entertainment choices may be conditioning us for porn and other unhealthy behaviors. Movies, for example, often treat women as prizes to be won by the goofy and often ugly main male character. In video games, female armor is frequently sexualized and impractical compared to

male armor. In anime, the pervert character is treated as comic relief instead of as a creepy, voyeuristic stalker. In music, sexual violence and vengeance is often glorified. In comic books, female superheroes are put in tight spandex and seductive poses. And the list goes on.

In Psalm 101:3-4, David sings:

> I will not set before my eyes
> anything that is worthless.
> I hate the work of those who fall away;
> it shall not cling to me.
> A perverse heart shall be far from me;
> I will know nothing of evil.

It's the most basic of principles, really. If you want to quit training your mind to porn, you need to stop trivializing sexuality. You need to learn to recognize the brokenness of treating fellow humans as objects to be bought, consumed, and discarded. And that means you may need to cut some movies or games from your life for a time.

Out with the Old Messages

Identify your triggers

Sometimes harmful media is obvious: movies about sorority girls are probably not a wise choice for people trying to quit porn, for example. Other times, triggering media may be less obvious. If you're single and you turn to porn every time you watch a romantic comedy, for example, you might need to cut RomComs.

Start by identifying your triggers. These will include emotional, physical, and mental states like we mentioned in Chapter 2, but they may include more subtle things. Do you often view porn after looking at Instagram? Or after reading a specific web comic?

While you're thinking that through, take an inventory of how you spend your time in general. How much time do you spend watching Netflix or playing video games or just sitting there, killing time on Facebook every day or week? Looking at this time critically will help you as you start exploring new hobbies to take the place of porn.

We've created a Time and Triggers inventory in the Worksheets section of this book, but it may be even more beneficial to you to track what's going on in your life for a week or two. This might help you identify triggers you never would have considered.

Define your "good"

Sit down with your Accountability Partner (and your spouse, if you're married) and talk through your media collections. If you tend to own a lot of physical copies of media—DVDs, video game disks, CDs, etc.—you should have this meeting in your home, or bring most of your collection with you. Together, you should decide on your definition of "good" or "safe" entertainment. Some criteria may include:

1. The overall message of this movie or show is positive or redemptive.

2. Women are treated as people, not prizes.

3. Sex scenes are implied, not explicit.

4. Violence, especially against women, is illustrative of evil, not glorified or gratuitous.

5. Song lyrics don't glorify sex, drugs, or violence.

6. It doesn't trigger any fetishes you have (e.g. prominently-featured high heels).

Your big focuses as you create your definition of "good" media should be on (a) the overall message and (b) what may be triggering to you personally. For example, the 2017 movie *Wonder Woman* features Diana Prince in a revealing costume. The fact that it is clearly modeled after ancient Greek and Roman armor, not lingerie, may mean that you and your Accountability Partner decide it is okay for you to watch the movie, or she may still be baring too much skin for you right now.

Once you have your definition of "good," put all of your physical media into these four categories:

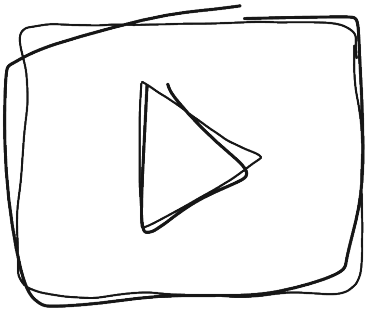
1. **This media is good for me.** You may decide to skip a specific scene or two, but you're generally free to enjoy this.

2. **This media is good, but not for me right now.** A lot of PG-13 movies or games rated T for Teen may fall in this category. Once you've been porn-free for a while, you may be okay to watch it, but for the time being you should either put the copies in storage or hand them to your Accountability Partner, to return them to you when you all agree you're ready.

3. **This media is not good for me, but may be fine for others.** Many video games allow excessively customizable, sexualized female costumes. You may never be able to handle them in a healthy way, but others may be able to. Donate these movies or games to charity, or give them (permanently) to a friend.

4. **This media is not good for me or others.** Sexual content may be gratuitous and unavoidable. These items should go straight into the trash; you may even want to physically break the disks.

Make a plan for streaming content



Unfortunately, these days most people can't just throw away physical copies. Subscription models like Netflix and Amazon Prime have largely replaced owning movies or music. You'll have to take extra steps to limit yourself to what's good on those. These ideas are meant as a starting point. You and your Accountability Partner should discuss other possibilities.

Use a content filtering service like VidAngel.

VidAngel works with streaming video services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and even HBO. It allows you to filter shows and movies on those platforms based on a set of criteria you choose. They offer sex and nudity filters, profanity filters, and violent content filters. This means you can watch, say, *Stranger Things*

but skip scenes of implied sex. Learn more at **https://www.vidangel.com/.**

Plan ahead.

Before you watch a movie (streaming or in theaters) or download a video game, look up reviews to see their content. PluggedIn (**http://www.pluggedin.com/**) evaluates inappropriate content against a film's redemptive values while trying to avoid spoilers, allowing you to determine whether a film is appropriate or not. They also offer reviews of video games, TV shows, and music, though not to the depth of their movie reviews.

You should also consider having your accountability partner pre-screen content for you. Have them watch questionable movies a day or two before you and determine if it's going to cause you any issues. If they're a gamer, have that person play a few hours or all of the game before you do; if they're not, they can still screen some scenes on YouTube.

In With the New Messages

It's important to remember that the object of sorting through your media choices is not to just set up a new set of restrictions on your life. This isn't about putting you into movie jail or taking away everything you love about life. To paraphrase Romans 12:9, we should not just hate what is evil, but we should actually

love what is good. We're looking to replace the ugly with the beautiful. As Fr. Thomas Loya explains in *Transformed by Beauty*, "When we pursue beauty, it elevates how we see and interface with everything, especially with the human person. Everything in life should be approached as an art, where we see the intrinsic beauty of it. This inspires us to imitate beauty, and in turn, it influences how we act and regard everything and everyone."[25]

We pursue beauty by actively seeking it out: by looking for entertainment options that help us intentionally change how we see the world.

A few online communities do this particularly well.

The first is the Rabbit Room **(http://rabbitroom.com/)**. Named after the room in the Oxford pub where Tolkien, Lewis, and other Inklings met, it was founded by musician Andrew Peterson and his brother, author Pete Peterson, to foster spiritual formation through books, music, film, and art. Discussions range from contemplating the nature of evil in *Stranger Things* to finding the crucified Christ in *Home Alone* to celebrating courage through visual storytelling in *The Dragon Lord Saga* to finding bravery in creative acts in *Henry and the Chalk Dragon*.

For gamers, *Gamechurch* (**http://gamechurch.com/**) explores deeper themes found in video games, like the balance between work, life, and the prioritization of tasks in Slime Rancher, or how the sometimes over the top heroics of Destiny 2 fuel our imaginations to prepare ourselves for very real fights against evil.

That, of course, is the key to everything we choose to watch or read for entertainment. As Chris Casberg says, "As an athlete exercises and prepares their body for competition at the gym, we need to exercise and prepare our imaginations for our own struggles by regularly consuming stories that uplift and inspire us".[26]

So how will you train your imagination?

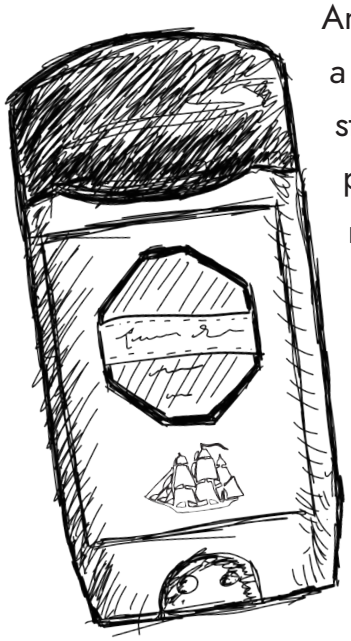
PART 3

FILLING OUR TIME WITH SOMETHING BETTER

Chapter 8

WHY WE DON'T NEED WILLPOWER TO FIGHT PORN

Even if you don't know Terry Crews by name, you've seen his face. The former NFL player-turned-actor has been in TV shows (such as *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* and *Arrested Development*) and movies (such as *Idiocracy* and *The Expendables*) and Old Spice commercials. He's hosted awards ceremonies (such as the 2017 *MovieGuide* gala). And he has a lovely wife and five children to round it all out.



And yet, despite all his outward success, he also had a porn problem. "If day turns into night and you are still watching [porn]," he explained, "you've got a problem."[27] It wasn't until his wife, in a screaming match over the phone while he was on set, told him not to bother to come home that he finally sought freedom through technological solutions (including Covenant Eyes) and through therapy (for both him and his wife). And almost a decade later, they're still together, and Crews is porn-free.

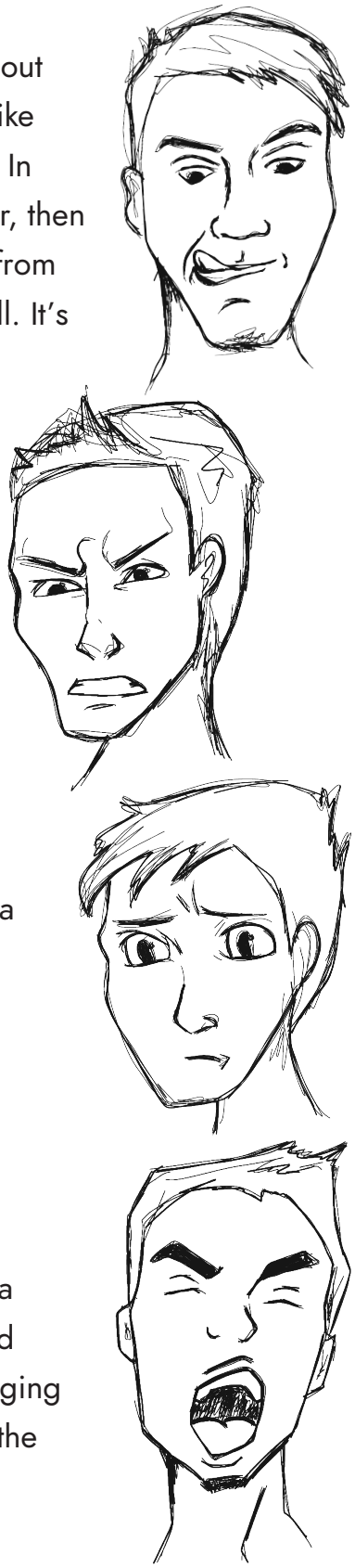
But he's more than porn-free. He and his wife

are open about the problem, about how it made him objectify women, and about how shame in particular—the belief that you *are* bad—kept driving him back to porn. "When you believe you are bad, you go right back to the dirt," he explained in a Facebook Live video.[28]

The solution, Crews found, was not mere willpower. In moments of weakness, like when you're hungry, angry, lonely, or tired, willpower will fail. You're relying on mental fortitude alone to fight against neural pathways that have been carved into your brain since the first time you made the choice to view porn. That's why going cold turkey doesn't work.

Think of your triggers—your anger, your stress, even your visceral responses to seeing a photo of friends in swim suits on the beach—as a mountain stream. If there's just a little bit of water, like a minor deadline, it's easy enough to divert the stream. But if there's a lot of water, a "rainstorm" of sleepless nights and job stress and a sick kid and lingerie ads on Facebook, it becomes much harder. The water naturally pours down the preexisting channels, and eventually into the same old scuzzy swamp of pornography. And willpower alone is like trying to block the water with

your foot without giving it anywhere else to go.



That's where self-discipline comes in. We're not talking about punishment, like a parent spanking their child, but rather like an athlete who works with a coach to strengthen her body. In our stream analogy, if willpower is trying to block the water, then self-discipline is digging trenches to send the water away from the pond, into a reservoir or a crystal clear lake or waterfall. It's taking the stresses and making something useful or even beautiful out of them.

Crews identifies five steps to self-discipline:[29]

1. **Remove temptations.** For Crews, this meant deleting his Twitter account and other sources of temptations, and installing Covenant Eyes on his computer.

2. **Develop healthy eating and sleeping patterns.** If two of the four terms in HALT are literal physical states—hunger and tiredness—then setting yourself a bedtime and eating regular, nutritious, filling meals will reduce the stress that leads you to porn.

3. **Do something else, and don't wait for it to feel right!** Channel all of your anger and loneliness into something creative. As Crews says, "Sexual energy is creative energy." Doing something else, like picking up a book or playing guitar or running a mile instead of watching porn, will feel awkward and uncomfortable at first, but that's because you're digging new neural pathways. You're telling your brain that the

old way of responding is wrong, and you're sending it to do something new. Eventually, these new practices will become habits, and your old way of doing things, of fleeing to pornography, will fade away.

4. **Celebrate your victories.** Obviously, porn shouldn't be part of your celebration, but schedule breaks, treats, and rewards for yourself. Maybe you treat your family to a fancy meal out for every two weeks that you're porn-free. Or buy yourself something cool that you've been eyeing. If you're focusing on a creative hobby instead of porn, like drawing, celebrate accomplishments there too! Maybe you drew for two hours instead of watching porn. Maybe you drew something that you're particularly proud of. Celebrate those accomplishments!

5. **When you trip up, forgive yourself and move forward.** You will fail, especially early on. You're working against years of porn habits. Of course you're going to go down the wrong trail. The important thing is to pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and keep moving forward. Don't wallow in self-pity, don't beat yourself over the head, and most importantly, don't give up! You didn't dig the original channels to the swamp of porn in a day; you're not going to solve them in a day, or even necessarily a month or a year. But that doesn't mean you should just give up. Keep on trying, and eventually you will train yourself away from pornography.

We've already covered the first point, and the second, fourth, and fifth are all fairly self-explanatory. But what about the third? What about those new habits we're supposed to build?

Take out your mission statement again and read it over. Now think back to your childhood. You have a pretty good idea of who you want to be now, but who did you want to be back then, when you were five and ten and fifteen? Did you spend all your free time writing or drawing? Did you rock out on air guitar to your favorite bands? Maybe you spent your free time collecting bugs, or trying to build machines out of LEGOs. Often what we did in childhood points us to things we'd truly enjoy as adults.

Of course, your childhood may have been disrupted by porn or other abuses, and you never had a chance to mess around with hobbies. Or your parents forced you into soccer games and other after school activities, and you simply didn't have the time to figure out what *you* liked. That's okay! Regardless of whether you've dreamed of learning guitar since you were three, or whether you were dirt poor and your most valuable toy came from a fast food kid's meal, this should be a time to explore and try new things.

The rest of the book is divided into seven different types of hobbies: creative hobbies, physical hobbies, practical hobbies, intellectual hobbies, experiential hobbies, generous hobbies, and social hobbies. As you read over them, it will feel like a lot! But don't let information overload get you down. Start by reading over the rest of the book, and make notes on one or two things from each category. Use the worksheet on page 135 as a guide. Then pick one thing to try out first. If it sticks, great! If not, go back to your list and try out something else.

Don't be afraid to experiment as you try out different hobbies, and feel free to jump around and try something different from day to day—but make sure you try out each hobby on a good

day; don't judge whether you enjoy it on the days you're already frustrated and on the brink of viewing porn.

You may try something out and dislike it immediately. Or you may find a hobby that you enjoy for a few weeks, but you grow quickly bored with it. That's okay! You're exploring and looking for what sticks. In the end, you'll likely find one or two core hobbies that you truly love, and that help transform your world.

Chapter 9

COUNTERING EMOTIONAL PAIN WITH CREATIVE HOBBIES

Before his tragic death in 1997, Rich Mullins was a force in the Christian music industry. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, he wrote a number of beloved songs, both for other musicians like Amy Grant and for himself. Fans loved him for his view of the beauty and holiness of God and for his own humility in his struggles, which included pornography.

That's right. The man who wrote popular praise tunes like "Awesome God" and "Step by Step" struggled with porn. And it became the inspiration for one of his most beloved songs.

One night, on tour in Amsterdam, Mullins lay in bed, waiting for his bandmate in the next bed to start snoring so he could go out and walk through the Red Light district "because sometimes it's nice to be tempted." But there was just one problem. His bandmate never did snore that night. And finally, after a long night of tossing and turning, he picked up a notebook and wrote,

---

And 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[30]

Rich Mullins wasn't the only Christian musician to put words to his struggle with porn. Christian musician Audrey Assad has been outspoken about her own struggles. She says, "I write about things that are feeding me, things that are hard for me to process or that I am struggling with. I create from a place of catharsis from struggles or trauma." She adds, "My encouragement and my suggestion for artists—and for anybody—is to do the emotional and spiritual work of having your sight and your identity redeemed and having your traumas be healed. And you will make beauty in that pain and in that process. There is no shortcut around this process. This is my experience, so that's my encouragement."[31]

What does it mean to have your sight redeemed? In part, it means doing what Rich Mullins and Audrey Assad did: using their pains, their temptations, and their traumas not to wallow in self-pity and porn, but to learn, over time, to harness it as a creative force.

Author Neil Gaiman puts it this way:

> Life is sometimes hard. Things go wrong, in life and in love and in business and in friendship and in health and in all the

> other ways that life can go wrong. And when things get tough, this is what you should do.
>
> Make good art.
>
> I'm serious. Husband runs off with a politician? Make good art. Leg crushed and then eaten by a mutated boa constrictor? Make good art. IRS on your trail? Make good art. Cat exploded? Make good art. Somebody on the Internet thinks what you do is stupid or evil or it's all been done before? Make good art. Probably things will work out somehow, and eventually time will take the sting away, but that doesn't matter. Do what only you do best. Make good art.
>
> Make it on the good days too.[32]

Actor Jim Carrey began painting for similar reasons; he explains about his art, "You can tell what I love by the color of the paintings. You can tell my inner life by the darkness in some of them. You can tell what I want by the brightness in some of them."[33] Writer Flannery O'Connor's short stories reflected her struggles with Lupus, as well as her life on a farm with her mother; one friend, upon reading the short story "Greenleaf," in which a woman is gored by a bull, saw the elder O'Connor so clearly in the story that she accused O'Connor of "getting away with murder."[34] And the first book of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *The Inferno*, is full of local and political figures who he chose to condemn to Hell.

The reality is, art has always been one of the best outlets for emotional release. It is cathartic and transformative, taking

our pain, our stresses, our frustrations and turning them into something beautiful.

Getting Started with Creative Hobbies

Creative hobbies *should* be one of the easiest starting points for adding a new activity. Most of us started out doing something creative as kids, whether it was coloring or drawing or telling ridiculous, fanciful stories or pounding away on a toy drum or sculpting things out of Play-doh. And yet, at some point as we grew up, we were told that we are not creative, or pushed toward more "practical" pursuits, or we simply compared our own work to our friends and gave up. At this point, we may have forgotten we ever were that person.

If you know exactly what you've always enjoyed, great! Start there. If you don't have ideas, we've provided some starting points and suggestions for exploring your creative side. Don't be afraid to pick up something and try it for a week or two, only to decide it's not your thing. The possibilities are truly endless, so keep looking until you find something you truly enjoy.

Whatever you pick, tell your Accountability Partner about it. They'll be able to encourage you as you're beginning, and point out improvements as you practice.

Visual Arts

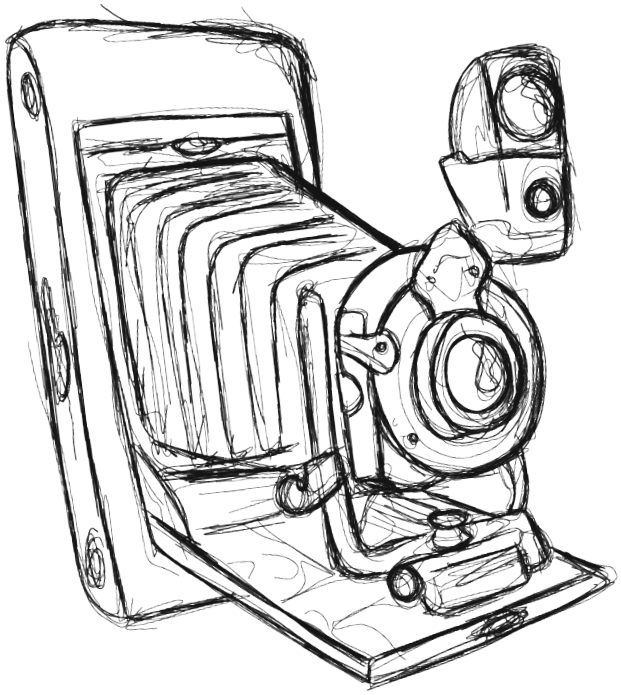
When most people think of creative arts, they think of visual arts first. Paintings like the Mona Lisa may come to mind, or you may just simply remember that kid who was *always* drawing in school. Visual arts are also one of the creative fields where people get

discouraged early, because it is so easy to compare your own stick figure art to the kid whose art looks like it's about to come alive.

Still, don't let that discourage you! Like all good things, it takes practice, but there are plenty of online tutorials or how-to books available.

Photography

If you own a smartphone, you already have the first tool you need to start learning photography! It's true that your average smartphone camera lacks the sophisticated capabilities of a DSLR, but you can still use it to experiment with framing each shot or experimenting with the Rule of Thirds to build visual interest. If you're just starting out, don't take a one-and-done photo. Every time you take a picture, try taking multiple shots from multiple angles; even without using an Instagram filter, this will help you sort through and figure out what works in photography and what just doesn't.



Whether you're an amateur or a professional photographer, consider starting a photo series of non-human subjects as a "recovery" hobby. This may involve taking a daily photo that indicates your emotional state (a close-up of a flower for a good day; cracks in the cement for a bad one); this would also serve as a visual history of your recovery process. Or take a daily walk with the goal of taking one

picture of, say, a particular tree in your neighborhood, and watch how it changes through the weather and seasons.

Drawing

Have you ever doodled during a meeting or a class instead of taking notes? Then you've got a start on drawing. It takes practice to draw realistic faces or even a realistic bowl of fruit, but there are plenty of how to draw books. They may be cheesy, but you can even consider starting with a child-oriented how to draw book on, say, dinosaurs or Disney characters may be a great introduction to the basics of breaking images into shapes and using white space in pictures, while also ensuring that you're focusing on safe topics. If you have the basics down, books like John Hendrix' *Drawing is Magic* will give you prompts and a space to draw, and also encourage you to develop your own unique style.

As with photography, consider coming up with a series for yourself while you're in recovery (like a different animal every day, or illustrating a favorite book).

You may also want to consider creating a set of 10 minute

prompts to turn to when you're fighting off porn in the heat of the moment. Create two sets of index cards, one with a set of action words or job descriptions (e.g. running, astronaut), and one with a set of nouns (e.g. monkey, ninja). Keep them handy, and when you're struggling, instead of opening a web browser, shuffle each deck and draw whatever comes out (e.g. an astronaut ninja). Set a timer for at least 10 minutes to give yourself plenty of time to push past the temptation and get into the act of drawing itself. (You can see a similar concept in action at **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlsaQ_zCFtU**).

Writing

If you're completely out of the habit of creativity, writing has one of the lowest barriers to entry, in that (1) everyone was forced to learn the basics of writing in school and (2) the tools to write are as inexpensive as a pen and a spiral notebook (or that computer and word processor you already own).

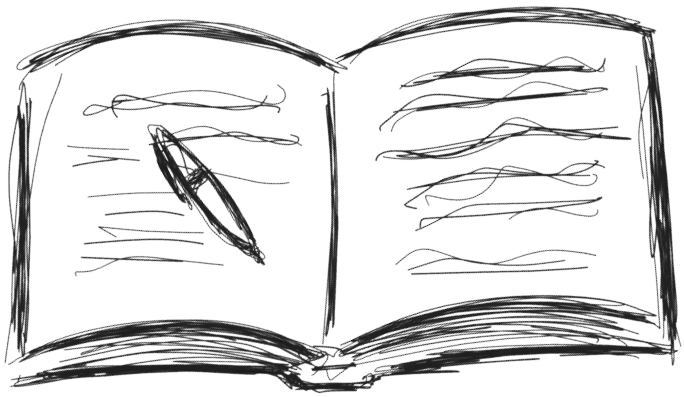
For a lot of people, writing can also be one of the scariest hobbies, though, precisely because it conjures up memories of writing papers. Fortunately, you're not going to be graded on what you write, so just dive in and write down any ideas in your head.

Journaling

Keeping a journal is the easiest way to start writing. First, it's a simple recording of your day: no imaginative power required. Second, it's a great way to start reflecting on your porn use, and

what may be triggering it, like certain pileups of stress, or going out drinking with certain friends. Third, it will help you track progress; you'll be able to look back to a recording of where you were when you started your journey to quit porn. Poet Luci Shaw explains,

> A journal offers a way of entering into the process of personal reflection; discovering insight; and growing in maturity, self-understanding, and God-awareness. [...] I can deal with emotional difficulties as I write from the inside out. I can also grow artistically and spiritually as my secret thoughts find their most compelling and honest avenues of expression.
>
> [...] Journal writing is central to helping us see how we've grown, where we've come from, if we have learned from our mistakes and successes, or if we see ourselves repeating the same cycle of futility—of not moving on, not processing things. We can discover a great deal by reading back in our journals.
>
> [...] If I am in pain, feeling lonely or depressed or just downright miserable, writing in my journal offers comfort.



> I write it all down, and somehow it is cathartic. Much of that pain inside me feels chaotic. I can't analyze it. As I write it down on the page, it is drawn out of me, and I can see it with better perspective. There is pain on the page![35]

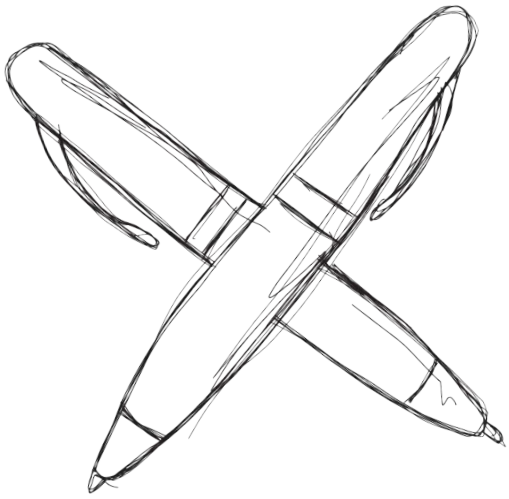
Fiction

One of the reasons people are drawn to porn is that it is a world where they feel in control; they can project themselves onto the actors, or imagine themselves as the director. Don't like the way a scene is going? Click on to the next video, and the next.

One solution, then, is to tell a better story, one where you're actually in control of the characters and plot.

Although many people have novels brewing in them, that may be the worst place to start. A novel is an ambitious project. A better plan is to start small, with a short story. Maybe take some of your characters and explore their backgrounds. If you truly don't know where to start, write a fictionalized version of your own hopes for the future, like a short story about what you're doing after you've been porn free for several years. There are also several online groups that supply ideas; just search for "writing prompts" and you'll find hundreds or thousands.

If you feel ready for a full novel but don't necessarily feel the need to publish it, consider doing a writing challenge like National Novel Writing Month, where the goal is to write 50,000 words in a single month. (Officially, it takes place every November, but feel free to do it on your own time, and have your Accountability Partner check your progress.)



If you decide to pursue writing more seriously, find a writer's workshop or take an online course, such as those offered by author Jonathan Rogers (**http://www.jonathan-rogers.com/online-writing-courses/**). Although it's easy to be possessive about your own words, critique and feedback is invaluable to honing your skills. As we saw earlier, even Tolkien and Lewis needed feedback.

Wherever you are in the writing process, though, avoid sex scenes or vivid descriptions of underclothed people. It may be tempting to switch from pornography to erotica, but you need to detox. You need to separate yourself from the idea that people, fictional or not, are meant to be used primarily for sex.

Poetry

Poetry has a bad reputation as being boring or incomprehensible, but it is a profoundly important form of communication. They convey deep and complex emotions; set to music, they create shared experiences through singing together. The biggest example of poetry's importance is the Psalms. David Taylor notes that in the Psalms the meaning of life is revealed through poetry; the truth about God is revealed through metaphor.[36] If you want to begin to appreciate poetry, the Psalms are a good place to start. We've also included a copy of "A Liturgy for One Battling a Destructive Desire" from *Every Moment Holy* on page 6; consider printing it off and keeping it handy for when you're about to break down and browse for porn for a poetic prayer for freedom.

If you already appreciate poetry, then it's time to start writing! If you have no intention to share your poems, and just want to express your emotions in a more lyrical way, freeverse is a great way to start. If you're serious about poetry, on the other hand, experiment very specifically with form (sonnets, villanelles, or even just haiku or rhyming couplets, at first). Although you may ultimately stick with freeverse, exploring structured poetry requires you to work with constraints, stretching your thoughts and your poems in unexpected ways (such as trying to find unique words that rhyme with "free" or "heart" to reduce repetition).

Although most poets start writing as an emotional outlet, those serious about their craft should consider writing about specific topics. Searching for poetry prompts online will give you plenty of places to start.

Music

Music can be one of the most cathartic of creative hobbies. As U2 sings in "The Miracle (of Joey Ramone)," "I've got music so I can exaggerate my pain / and give it a name." There's a Biblical basis for this as well; in 1 Samuel 16, King Saul is plagued by an evil spirit that takes off when David comes in and plays the lyre for him.

If you've always wanted to mess around with music, the best way to encourage your own success is to give yourself a reason to practice and improve beyond simply "it would be cool to be a

rock star." For example, you only need to learn basic guitar chords and know how to keep rhythm to lead weekly worship in a small group. (When you're struggling emotionally, pulling out a guitar and playing through a bunch of praise choruses or pop songs can be a great outlet.)

If you have a basic level of training in music from school band or choir, consider joining a community group. Many communities have local orchestras or choirs. If you live in a large metropolitan area, you can probably even find multiple ones at different skill levels. Then practice your pieces daily... and pull out your sheet music when you're tempted by porn and work on that one hard stretch of music instead.

Other Creative Hobbies

The listed hobbies are of course just a drop in the bucket of creative acts to pursue. Check with your local parks and recreation department or your local community college to see if they offer short courses in pottery, woodcarving, lapidary (the art of stone polishing), or other unusual hobbies. If you have a local community theater, try out for a play (and maybe try to convince your accountability partner to join you). Porn is ugly, but the world is a beautiful place. Go out and add to the beauty.

Chapter 10

REDEEMING THE BODY WITH PHYSICAL HOBBIES

One of the primary ways porn hurts not just us but, indirectly, those around us, is that it reduces our view of the human body to a collection of sexual organs.
We look around at others and evaluate them not based on their character or personality or intelligence, but on their "hotness" (never mind that attractiveness is only temporary anyway). And we may even categorize everyone else, especially those who annoy us, as "mouth breathers" or crass anatomical terms—reducing the body to something less than human.

But the body is so much more than that! Even if you ignore the mind and soul attached to every human body, it's an amazing machine. There are 206 bones in the human body, and over 600 muscles.[37] There are so many nerves in the body that they can't even be counted. The University of Tennessee

estimates that there are close to 100 billion nerves in the human body.[38] By comparison, the total world population is a mere 7.6 billion.[39] And in peak condition, the body can achieve miraculous feats. The world record for a marathon is 2:02:57—or 13 MPH,[40] the best NBA players can jump nearly 4 feet vertically,[41] and the strongest man can deadlift over 1,000 pounds.[42] Or think of how amazing a pregnancy is; porn trains us to only pay attention to the resultant stretch marks, but women are capable of cultivating an entire separate human life within their bodies for nine months.

So how do we begin to recognize the human body not as a sexual object, but as an amazing container for the human soul? Bodybuilder Jared Zimmerer hints at it:

> Bodybuilding teaches a person about beauty and aesthetics through hard work and the human body—God's masterpiece in all of creation. [...] the original intent was to try and perfect the form of the body in its natural state in order to appreciate man's ability to build himself—but I would argue, to also appreciate the true Creator of that body. When a person sees a beautiful sunset or a valley they are in utter awe of the creation and the Creator of it. I think bodybuilding and fitness take that to its best representative, the human person.[43]

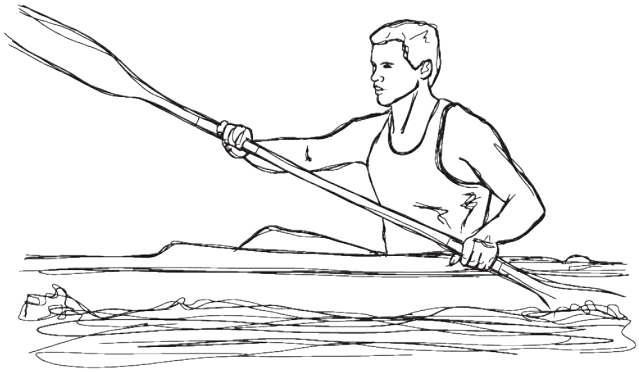
Getting Started with Physical Hobbies

Not everyone is a natural athlete. In fact, some of us actively avoid activity. Others of us practically started running before we walked, and haven't stopped running since.

No matter where you're at, we are the only ones who can take care of our own bodies and their physical health, and that includes maintaining a certain level of fitness. As you hone your own fitness, you should also develop a deep admiration for the fitness of the men and women working out around you, cheering them on as they grow stronger as well, and accomplish amazing feats.

Of course, there's an additional benefit to exercise: when you work out, especially vigorously, your body releases endorphins, producing a natural high.[44] Or, in layman's terms, if you're angry or stressed, go to the gym and lift some weights for a while. You'll feel better naturally.

It is worth noting one thing, though: physical activities, especially in co-ed locations like big box gyms, may lead to the temptation to let your eyes linger a little too long on the woman on the treadmill next to you. Ask your accountability partner to check in with you specifically on that sort of issue; if you find yourself stumbling because of your gym, then you should probably try out a different activity.



Running

Running is probably the easiest way to start a workout routine, plus it has the benefit of flexibility; it's good to work out on a routine, but you can often run as a response to stress. If you tend to want to watch porn after a bad day at work, for example, you can fairly easily run a mile instead. If the weather is bad or it's late at night, there are often 24-hour gyms, and every public gym has a set of treadmills. It also requires relatively little training to get started; read some blog posts for some tips to prevent tendon issues, and consider exploring some Couch to 5K training plans, but otherwise a decent pair of tennis shoes and a quiet street is all you need.

If you decide to start running for any sort of duration, make sure you find a way to distract yourself. Invest in a good sports armband and earphones so you can blast away any thoughts, or find a good entertaining audiobook. Or drag your Accountability Partner out to run with you, and sign up for races together. Even if one of you walks the entire time, a 5K should take less than an hour.

CrossFit

Yes, there are plenty of stereotypes about CrossFit athletes out there. Yes, CrossFitters are like a cult, with their own strange vocabulary like "WOD" and "AMRAP" and "One Rep Max." But if you're new to weightlifting, CrossFit is a surprisingly good place to start, especially if you find a smaller gym with a good community and an emphasis on form. (Bad form on a lift can cause injuries, so if your gym never makes form corrections, you should probably find a new one).

In fact, community is the best part of CrossFit. It's not like a normal gym; it's a class where you start to develop friendships based on shared goals. The best gyms will help you adjust workouts to your level of fitness, but also push you to lift a little heavier or run a little faster. The workouts are often so intense that you have no time or energy to gaze at others You'll be cheering everyone else on, from the 53-year-old housewife who has never lifted weights before to former college football player. And they'll be cheering you on as well.

Team Sports

If you're a more advanced athlete and have the time to commit to games, many communities and churches offer sports leagues. Like CrossFit, sports allow you to strengthen your body in a community-oriented setting, with the added benefit of working toward the shared goal of winning.

If you're a parent, consider volunteering as a coach for your son or daughter's league. You'll encourage your child's physical fitness and watch their miraculous bodies literally grow and change before your eyes.

If you're involved in team sports either as a player or a coach, do be careful to not put too much value on winning. Yes, it's the goal, and you should work hard to win. But you don't want to turn the league trophy into an idol… or turn it into a new source of shame if you lose.

Other physical activities

Check your community to see what sort of other physical activities are available in your area. Figure skating, dance lessons, and yoga can hone your dexterity. If you live in a temperate area with lots of rivers, there may be nearby kayak rental places to help you work out your arms, and also spend some time enjoying nature. If you're interested in rock or mountain climbing, some gyms offer rock walls, and unless you live in the plains states, you may only be a day trip away from some ledges for an outdoor experience.

Whatever you try, look for that natural endorphin mood boost… and revel in how amazing the human body can be.

Chapter 11

REBUILDING PRIDE WITH PRACTICAL HOBBIES

In a large room in a Maryland prison, 20 inmates gathered each week, carefully watched by the guards to ensure they didn't hurt each other or their teacher with the provided supplies. The teacher? A grandmotherly woman named Lynn Zwerling. The potential weapons? Knitting needles.

But they didn't use the needles to attack each other. Instead, they made hats. Hats as a gift for someone they had hurt. Hats for charity. Hats for the nearby Baltimore City public school district. "They say to themselves, 'I used to be that kid going to school without a hat,'" said Zwerling.[45]

Zwerling's goals with her prison knitting program were to help build empathy and patience and a sense of responsibility among the prisoners. But she also tapped into something deeper: a sense of pride in creating something useful.

Many people are driven to porn precisely because they lack that sense of purpose and value to their work. The reality of our fallen world is that we often work hard to no result (we grow "thorns and thistles," as it's so eloquently put in Genesis 3:18). Student

loan debt is a good example of this futility. One long-term study reported that the High School graduating class of 2004 took out an average student loan debt of $30,000, and reported in 2012 earning an average hourly wage of $14.45. Assuming a 40 hour workweek for 52 weeks, that comes to an annual salary of... $30,000.[46] And of course, that number is an average, meaning that there are debt-free people earning $75,000, and there are people carrying vastly more debt who are working at a fast food joint, unable to turn their expensive and hard-earned degree into a paying job in any remotely related field. So we get home from meaningless, frustrating jobs, and we turn to porn because it gives us a sense of control and importance.

Part of our process of fighting porn in our life, then, needs to be rekindling a sense of pride. Not false pride, saying we're awesome and deserve better, but the honest sense of accomplishment from hard work.

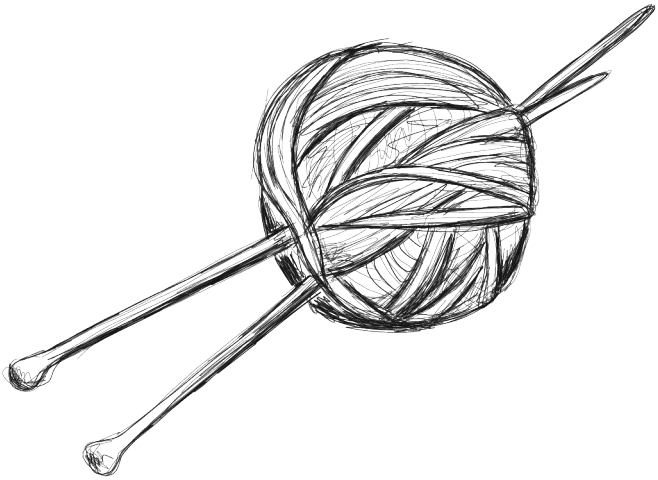
In an ideal world, this would mean moving to a very meaningful career, but as you may have already discovered, that can be very difficult, or even seemingly impossible. Fortunately, learning new, practical hobbies can accomplish the same thing.

Knitting and Sewing

Most of you reading this are male, and your first gut reaction to the thought of knitting and sewing is probably the same as that of many of the prisoners mentioned at the start of this chapter: they're stereotypically girl activities. But that can actually be one of the advantages of these sorts of hobbies as well: they're unique. You'll be the only one of your friends who knows how to knit a scarf or a hat, or who knows how to make a blanket

featuring the logos of your favorite sports teams. They also make fantastic, personal gifts to friends or family. Knit your wife or daughter a pair of slippers in their favorite colors! Sew a stuffed animal for your son to drag around on adventures! Maybe even make your own cosplay outfit for the next time you go to Comic-Con, or for the next superhero movie premiere.

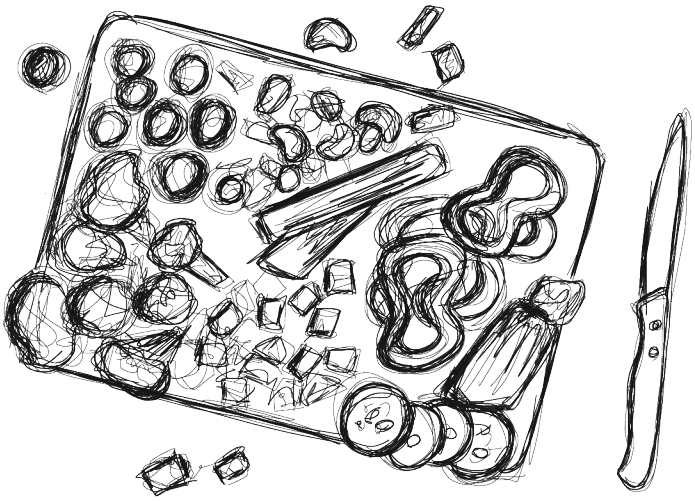
Knitting is a particularly good hobby if you like to fidget. Once you hit a basic proficiency, it's not difficult to knit one, purl one (a common stitch pattern) without watching what you're doing. So you can throw a movie on while you knit a scarf for your Accountability Partner.



Even if you have no intention of ever getting into sewing as a long-term hobby, go to your local craft store and look for a small sewing kit, containing a few needles and a small variety of thread in multiple colors. Learning to sew on a button and mending small rips in clothes are basic but invaluable life skills. If you don't have any spare buttons laying around, a craft store may have a bin of mismatched or discounted buttons; buy a dozen or two, as well as some scrap cloth. In the heat of the moment, turning your energy and frustration away from porn and to practicing sewing buttons on in a row may help diffuse your desires for porn.

Cooking and Baking

Food is a basic necessity for survival, and yet for many of us, our definition of cooking is limited to boiling water for noodles or adding eggs to a cake mix. But learning how to cook from scratch can be an incredibly satisfying hobby, both from a basic survival angle and because you get to eat the end result. Almost everyone appreciates a good, homemade cookie. Almost everyone is impressed by a multi-course, gourmet home-cooked meal.



It's worth noting that while cooking and baking are related, they are not synonymous, and it's very possible to be good at one and terrible at another. Cooking is an art; it often involves eyeballing the meat for doneness and adding seasoning to taste. Baking, however, usually requires much more careful measurements and precise timing. It's not too hard to gain a basic proficiency in both, but you may find that you prefer cooking more than baking, or vice versa. Either way, whether you're furiously chopping vegetables or kneading a lump of dough, it's great—and tasty—therapy.

If you have the basics of cooking down but want to take it to the next level, consider subscribing to a meal kit service like HelloFresh or Blue Apron. These services provide multiple meal options and allow you to pick 3-4 per week. They provide all but a few of the most basic ingredients (usually oil, salt, and

pepper), and they let you experiment with ingredients you may never try on your own (like duck or asparagus). If you tend to eat out a lot, having fresh ingredients on hand encourages you to cook instead, to make sure that the food doesn't go to waste. Multiple meal services exist; don't be afraid to try different ones out for a week or two to find the one that best matches your food preferences and skill level.

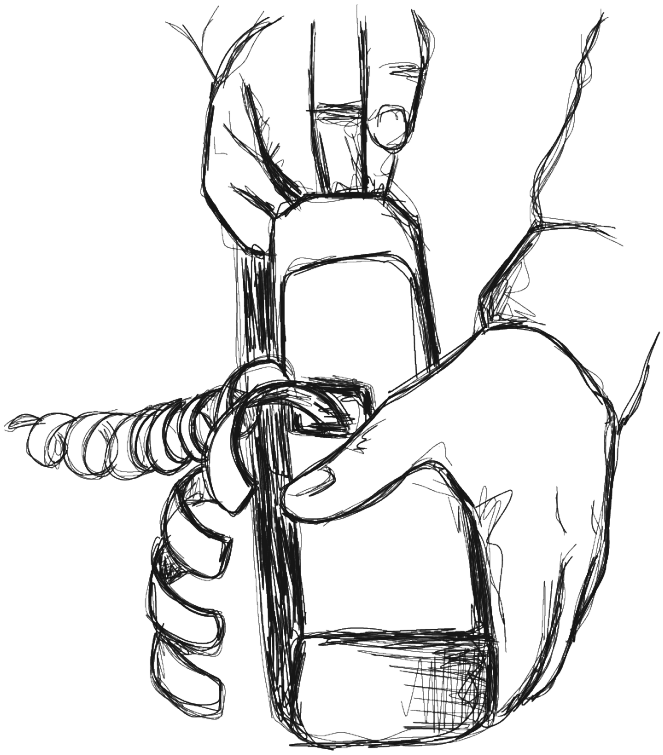
If you're a good baker, your next step may be to take a cake decorating class to learn how to work with fondant or ice your cakes amazingly. It's one thing to go to your local grocery store or bakery and order a Star Trek themed cake for your friend's bachelor party; it's another to do the decorating yourself and show off your skills.

Finally, cooking and baking are fantastic opportunities to spend time with your whole family. If your kids are old enough to handle knives, set them to chopping the vegetables, and let them have some of the fun of throwing the prepped food into a sizzling hot frying pan. Or make cupcakes and buy a set of decorative frosting tubes and let everyone decorate one or two. Use your time cooking together to rebuild the relationships that porn may have damaged.

Woodworking

Next to sewing a button and cooking a basic meal, learning to use a hammer and nail is a basic life skill that everyone should acquire... but, of course, woodworking goes much farther than that. Unlike cooking or knitting, woodworking lets you build functional objects that may last for decades, or even generations.

Even if you don't aspire to Ron Swanson levels of manliness, making your own furniture and hewing your own canoes, there are plenty of simple, small-scale objects you can make as long as you have access to a bandsaw and lathe. Simple things, like an end table or a small bookshelf, will help remind you of the importance of skills like "measure twice, cut once," and give you a cool talking piece for your living room. If you feel like getting fancy, learn how to use a scroll saw and make a beautifully patterned jewelry box for your girlfriend.



If you don't have access to any of these yet, or just want to experiment before you commit to buying expensive equipment, check your local hardware store or **woodcraft.com** for beginner kits for birdhouses or clocks.

Other Practical Hobbies

Even if none of these pique your interest, there are plenty of other practical hobbies. Do you like spending time outdoors? Start a garden! Even if you're in an apartment, you probably have a balcony or window space to grow some tomatoes or herbs. Love antique cars? Pick up some mechanical skills; even if you can't afford to buy and refurbish a classic car yet, you can pick up the skills to change your own oil and keep an old clunker on the road cheaply. You may also be able to find classes in leather working or coffee roasting near you. Whatever your interests, find something that you can create and look at and see that it is good.

Chapter 12

REKINDLING CURIOSITY WITH INTELLECTUAL HOBBIES

"Why is the sky blue?"

"Why is the grass green?"

Curiosity integral to human nature. Our earliest growth is propelled by it as we try to make sense of the words our parents say; if our parents tell us not to touch the hot stove, we may reach for it anyway, just to learn if they are going to enforce their own orders, and to learn what "hot" means. The most renowned leaders, including Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and Elon Musk, still put a very heavy emphasis on learning for personal growth and development.[47]

But somewhere along the line, our curiosity was killed off. Maybe our parents ignored our questions. Maybe we had awful teachers. Or maybe, our curiosity drew us to Google the thing we were most curious about—and most scared to ask adults about—and that search completely hijacked our curiosity.

Sex.

And searching for sex brought us to porn, which in so many ways is the antithesis to curiosity. Pornography replaces "curiosity" with "novelty," making you search for a new fetish instead of a new piece of knowledge. It replaces active learning about, say, social injustices with the passive retraining of our brains to devalue and even help enslave women (see *Stop the Demand* at **http://www.covenanteyes.com/stop-demand/** for more information on the connection between porn and the literal enslavement of women and children through sex trafficking). Porn removes your gaze from the vastness of the universe and moves it to a microscopic view of sexual anatomy.

But the world is big and beautiful, and to fight pornography temptations, we need to lift our gazes to see how wonderful the world really can be.

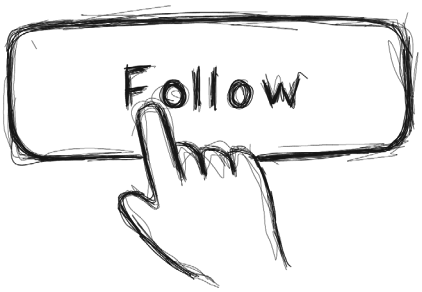
Studying with a Purpose

Pull out your mission statement again. What did you write down? Try to set aside some time each week to study in order to help you become who you want to be. If your focus is on being a fantastic spouse and parent, then you'll want to read marriage and parenting books and blogs. If you want to be an artist, study the art styles of the great artists from history. If you want to be a better pastor, then you had better be filling your mind with theology. Whatever you want to be, start investigating the theory behind it.

Online sources

We live in a fortunate age where we can easily find a wealth of information within minutes. A few searches, and you can get

deep into virtually any topic you can think of. There are tons of blogs and podcasts to explore any topic you'd enjoy, from mythology to mathematics. A number of universities offer free online lectures. Plenty of experts are on Twitter, or have public Facebook profiles.



There are some precautions that you ought to take, however. First, it can be very habitual to open a new tab or browser window and start typing in pornography without even thinking about it. As much as possible, set your browser to prevent that sort of exposure to porn. Set Google to Safe Search. If possible, set your browser to prevent incognito mode. And, of course, use Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability to monitor where you go online. All of these will help prevent force-of-habit visits to porn and accidental exposure.

Second, be critical of the websites that you rely on. It can be very easy to get caught in an echo chamber and assume you have achieved a fullness of knowledge because everyone on a given website agrees with you, but in reality you're probably looking at incomplete information. It may be wise to follow at least one or two websites that offer an opposing viewpoint, just to ensure you check your assumptions. This is especially true if you get excited by things like politics, pharmaceuticals and vaccines, GMO foods, environmental issues, and other volatile subjects.

Reading

A 2014 study found that only 28% of adults read as many as 11 books a year (less than one a month), and 24% never cracked

open a book at all.[48] Often, bad reading assignments in high school and college kill nearly all desire to read for pleasure. This is truly unfortunate, as it often requires the maturity and experience of adulthood to appreciate some of the classics of literature (here's looking at you, *Great Expectations*). But nonfiction books provide greater depth on subjects than websites can usually provide, and classic literature (which has withstood the test of time for one or many reasons) can develop your imagination and empathy for other people and perspectives.

Many leaders, such as Bill Gates, publish annual reading lists; they will often be focused on particular areas of expertise, but they will also offer a breadth of knowledge. Other leaders, like Tim Challies, publish annual "reading challenges." These are largely self-directed, but focus on picking a variety of books (e.g. "A biography," "A book more than 100 years old," or "A book with a one-word title"). And, of course, you can always create your own challenge, like "A book about every U.S. president" or "All of the books I should have read in my college literature class that I didn't finish" (his 2018 challenge is available at **https://www.challies.com/resources/the-2018-christian-reading-challenge/**).

Finally, if you're just trying to rediscover reading, don't be afraid

to throw in a book aimed at kids or teens every once in a while! You may even want to start with a lighter weight classic, like *The Chronicles of Narnia* or *The Hobbit*. Yes, you will want to mix in deeper topics, like following C.S. Lewis's kids books with *Mere Christianity* or with *Planet Narnia*, which offers a new theory on the books, but remember, you're not reading for a grade anymore. You're reading to build your imagination, and open your eyes to a breadth of topics you've never before considered.

Experiential Knowledge

For many people, the joy of discovery is in putting it to use. There are plenty of ways to hone your critical thinking or observational skills without having to read.

Puzzles

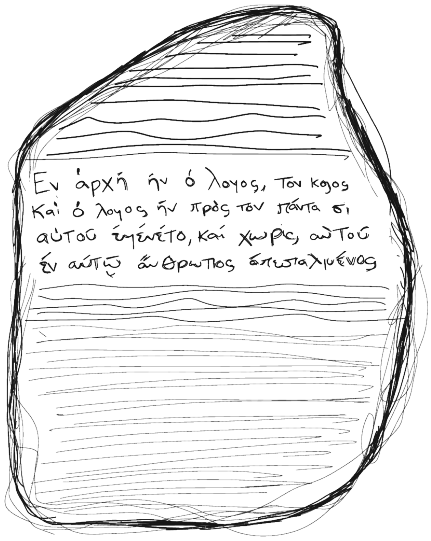
One way to start thinking critically again is to start doing written puzzles. Crosswords, Sudoku, and logic puzzles all force you to stretch your logic and problem-solving capabilities. These also have the benefit of being fairly short time-killers; consider keeping a book of Sudoku puzzles by your computer or phone so that, if the urge to view porn strikes, you can grab it instead.

Language learning

Perhaps you always wanted to travel, or you've always wanted to read the New Testament in the original Greek. Or maybe you're just rusty on that high school Spanish you took years ago. While it's harder to learn languages as an adult, there is evidence that it's very good for your brain; those who are fluently bilingual are more cognitively creative and mentally flexible than those

who only speak one language, and they show symptoms of Alzheimer's and dementia later.[49]

Programs like Rosetta Stone allow you to learn from home, or you can check your local community college for a class. If you're trying to refresh yourself on a language you learned a while ago, check for good language podcasts, foreign films with subtitles, or music to practice your comprehension skills. Immersion is the best teacher, so if you live in a diverse area, consider learning one of the local languages and volunteering at a community center where you can practice. You'll achieve fluency more quickly, and learn more about other people and their unique cultures and perspectives in the process.



Spending time outdoors

It's easy to forget how big the world really is when you're online all day. Going outside is often one of the best things you can do for your mood in general, due to the vitamin D from the sun; finding a naturalist hobby will encourage you to go outdoors more regularly than you may be used to, and rekindle an appreciation for the beautiful complexity of creation.

Check your local nature center to see if they offer guided tours to identify plants, birds, or insects. Even if you don't fall in love

with, say, bird watching, you'll at least have been introduced to a greater biodiversity in your area than you ever realized.

If you live in or near the country, where there's little or no light pollution, consider studying astronomy. "The heavens declare the glory of God," Psalm 19:1 exclaims, and few things are as marvelous as a clear night sky. When you wake up in the night and feel the urge to watch porn, go outside instead. Learn the names and mythology of the constellations, and greet them as old friends. Buy an inexpensive telescope and study the face of the moon. And wake up your family to stare at the sky with you! Learn to see—together—just how big and intricate and beautiful the universe really is.

Chapter 13

FINDING TRUE VARIETY WITH EXPERIENTIAL HOBBIES

What if you learned to take delight in the ordinary?

Over 5,000 men and women proudly proclaim that they do so in the Dull Men's Club, an international club with membership across the U.S. and Britain.

One man collects milk bottles from across the world.

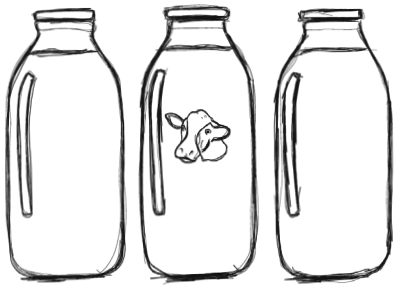
Another takes photos of famous graves.

Yet another takes photos of traffic circles.

One woman follows tourist signs to random locations, just to see where she winds up.

"It's bright being dull," proclaims one member.[50]

These things may seem silly, but the members of the Dull Men's Club have tapped into something very profound: namely, that you can have a lot of fun noticing the variety in the small things. Milk bottles contain a multitude of design and variation. Traffic



circles or roundabouts often contain small gardens or statues. What we take for granted may be the product of love and care.

This is a far cry than the variety offered by pornography. Porn acts like a drug, calling you to harder forms and more variety to get the original fix. Worse, since it's tied to our sexuality, it reduces pleasure in our partner to the point of causing sexual dysfunctions. Exploring our environments, on the other hand, helps us increase our joy and happiness in simple things. It helps us look up on the terrible days and see all of the good in the world. And, like the members of the Dull Men's Club, it helps us learn to delight in the ridiculous... especially ourselves.

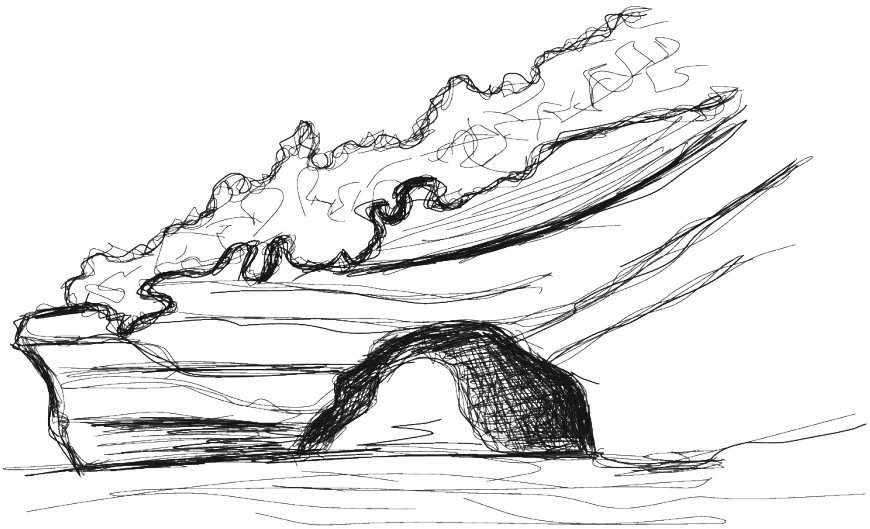
Be an Explorer

One of the allures of porn is the secrecy; trying to sneak it in without getting caught heightens the adrenaline rush (which is part of the reason porn users engage in increasingly risky behaviors; they need to if they want to keep the same rush). But there are significantly healthier (and safer) ways to get a rush as well.

Start by exploring the great outdoors. Depending on where you live, there may be beautiful nature areas where you can hike, bike, kayak, and cross-country ski. Many opportunities like this may be near your home; your new Saturday afternoon tradition could be to hike the local trails.

Make it a goal to mix some bigger trips in there. Take a week to go camping, or hike different parts of the North Country Trail. The forced technology detox may do you a world of good, and you may find that few things are more exhilarating than

conquering a difficult hike to finally look down from the top of Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore to Lake Superior, some 60 feet below. Consider bringing your Accountability Partner with you for extra time to bond as well. After all, accountability works best when it's about friendship, and that means your friendship should be about shared experiences, not just your personal struggles with porn.



Be a Tourist

How long have you lived where you live? And how well do you really know your home town? Many of us limit ourselves to a very small range: our homes, our workplace, school, church, a handful of stores and restaurants, and a movie theater. But many towns, even small ones, boast several museums, parks and nature areas, and historical sites. How many have you visited? Of those, how many have you visited more than once?

Consider scheduling a Saturday every month or two with your friends and family to tour your local community or state. You'll probably want to start with art, history, or science museums for the cultural significance, but you will probably also discover a number of quirky, highly topical museums; Michigan, for example, boasts a shipwreck museum and a steam railroad museum. If your tastes trend more toward the quirky, check out Roadside America for more offbeat collections; the Paul A.

Johnson Pencil Sharpener Museum in Logan, Ohio, for example, is only a few minutes away from the World's Largest Washboard (and more relevantly, is located in the welcome center for the beautiful Hocking Hills State Park).

You can also set up a scavenger hunt for yourself. Simply walk around town, and see how many interesting things you can notice. Count the historical buildings, the statues and monuments, the murals, the unique signs, and other things. Look for interesting brickwork. If you're in a more rural area, drive around and take pictures of every barn or grain silo or water pump you can find. Or consider a location-based goal. One man I know made it his goal to visit every town in Kansas—a bigger challenge than you'd expect, as some towns boast fewer than a dozen residents. Another elderly couple made it their goal to visit every Cracker Barrel restaurant in the U.S.—all 644 of them.[51]

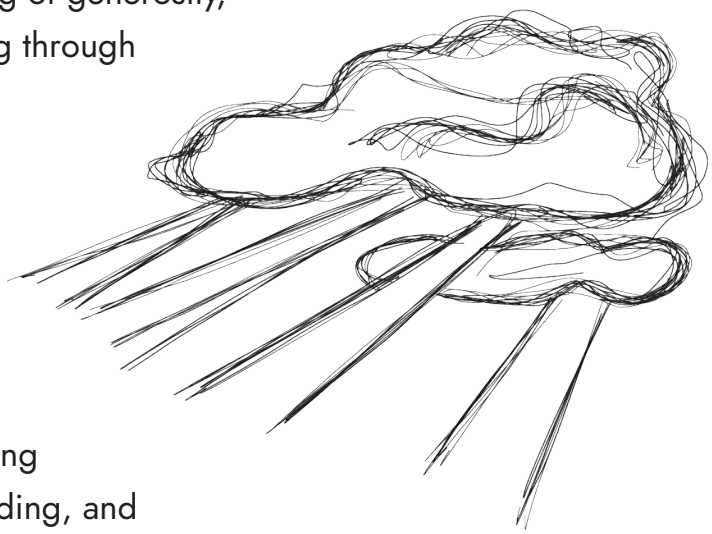
Yes, some of these suggestions are a little offbeat. Find a tourist idea that fits your own tastes, whether that's to visit every zoo in the U.S. or dip your fingers in every lake you see. The point is to start looking again, and noticing things you've never really seen even if you've driven past them every day for years. Open yourself to the variety around you, and see the world through renewed eyes.

Chapter 14

COUNTERING SELFISHNESS WITH GENEROUS HOBBIES

Have you ever watched generosity in action?

It's amazing, and even overwhelming. Watching friends, family, and even complete strangers pull together to help cover unexpected medical bills through GoFundMe, seeing a community pull together to donate goods after a hurricane, or watching someone gift an expensive ticket to an event simply because they couldn't attend last-minute and wanted someone else to enjoy it in their place. Watching, and especially participating in, this sort of outpouring of generosity, is like a sudden burst of light breaking through the clouds; it's a true reflection of a loving, providing God.

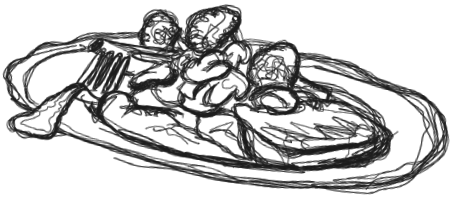


By contrast, porn is one of the most selfish acts possible. It takes and it uses. It says, "My sexual pleasure is more important than your desires." Porn stars are often coerced into filming scenes that are uncomfortable, degrading, and

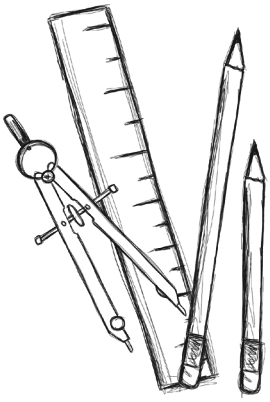
outright abusive; they often have to take drugs just to get through the filming.[52] And then we often take what we learn from porn and try it out with our real-life sexual partners, begging and cajoling until they finally, often reluctantly, break down and do whatever we ask, even to their own great discomfort, or even pain. Porn takes, and takes, and takes, and it strips those around us of even their barest humanity, and it is still not satisfied.

We need to stop telling people what to do and start asking how we can help them. We need to stop taking for ourselves and learn to start giving.

Start Serving Your Family



It may be that, in your porn use, you have been neglecting your primary responsibility: your immediate family. When was the last time you helped keep your home clean and in order without being asked? When was the last time you helped your kids with their homework? When was the last time you offered to cook dinner for your parents, or took your grandmother out to lunch? Your family doesn't need you to merely be passively present in their lives; they need you to be active and involved, reaching out in love and helping them when they're in need.



If you already have kids or hope to have them in the future and want to make sure they don't get caught in the same porn traps as you, it's especially important to find the right balance between being a strict disciplinarian and over-confiding in your kids. As Jay Stringer notes,

often the roots of our sexual fantasies come from parents who were too distant or over-confided in us[53]; we need to be careful to ensure we don't put our kids in the same position. That means spending time with them, playing with them and helping them while still realizing that your primary role is "parent," not friend. Your kids need you much more than you need them.

In general, be more intentional in how you serve your family (even if "family" really currently means "your college roommate"), but also consider how you can involve them in hobbies and activities. Cook together with them, or consider instituting a family board game night. Go on walks together. Whatever you do, work to break down the barriers your porn use has created.

Serving Invisibly

Workplace and home frustration are both common drivers to porn. You may have worked hard on a project only to have a boss ignore your work, reject it, or even claim credit for himself. Or you fixed a tricky plumbing problem, only to have your spouse barely acknowledge your efforts.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to take pride in your work; that was the point of chapter 11, after all. But it is a common temptation to think that our work *deserves* that recognition—to turn others' admiration into an idol. And, when we don't get it from our boss or teacher or partner, we look for porn stars to tell us we did a good job.

We need to learn to take pride in our *own* work and stop

worrying about whether it will be appropriately appreciated. One way to do so is to volunteer our time for behind-the-scenes jobs.

If you have a Habitat for Humanity organization in your community, volunteering for them is a great place to start. You'll be working hard to build, repair, or simply clean homes for people with few means, and you'll be doing it as just another faceless grunt in the crowd. And that's good! Continually serving humbly like that will remind you that it's the work itself that's important, and how it helped someone, and not whether you got praised for it.

If you don't have a Habitat for Humanity, or simply want to start smaller, look for small opportunities to help in your neighborhood. When you take a walk, keep a plastic bag and a bottle of hand sanitizer in your pocket. When you see garbage laying on the sidewalk or in someone's yard, put it in the bag, and when you're done with your walk, throw the bag in the trash. Probably nobody will realize you've helped the make the area a little more beautiful—but you'll know, and you should take pride in what you did without boasting about it. Similarly, look for opportunities to help your neighbors. Support their GoFundMes anonymously. Wash your elderly neighbor's car, or fix the loose panel in their fence. Do it because it needed to be done, not because you expect thanks. Break yourself of the need to be recognized for everything you do. In the end, the work itself is

what matters, and doing the work in humility is a mark of good character.

Learning to Listen

Because porn strips people of their humanity, we need to relearn to see everyone not as objects to be used, but people to be loved. One way to do this is by reaching out to directly serve those who have nothing to offer you. Once every month or two, spend a few hours serving at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. Get to know the people who come there, and listen to their stories of suffering and anguish. To be sure, many of these people will be hard to love. Treat them with dignity and respect anyway. Every single person you meet is worthy of it by the simple virtue of being a person, bearing the image of God (Genesis 1:26). But you may only be able to remind yourself of that by looking those who society treats as worthless directly in the eye and serving them with a smile and an open ear.

If you aren't ready to start volunteering but live in an area with a large homeless population on the streets, start engaging with them. Most of us instinctively look away when we see people begging because we either don't want to give them money to fuel their drug addictions or we fear for our own safety, but they of all people could use a simple smile and a hello. If you can spend either the time or the money, consider going deeper to truly understand their humanity and their situation. If you have time, buy them a hot chocolate or a water bottle and some protein bars (see more tips at **https://www.bowery.org/homelessness/tips-help-homeless/**). If you can't buy fresh food, keep some fast food or grocery store gift cards in your wallet

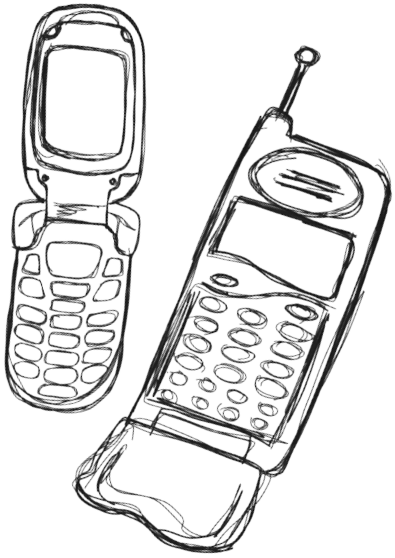
to hand out, and take a minute to ask their name and if you can pray for them. It can be a simple prayer, like "Dear God, please bless Bob today and provide him what he needs to stay healthy, Amen." Even such a simple act will help reaffirm their membership in the human race... and your own.

Chapter 15

COUNTERING FALSE INTIMACY WITH SOCIAL HOBBIES

The world's population is growing larger and larger, and yet for some reason most of us are feeling more and more isolated. And often one of the biggest driving factors for this is the technology that's supposed to bring us together.

Our phones.



Or, rather, our social media accounts, always at our fingertips. One recent study found that those who spend more than two hours a day on social media are more than twice as likely to report feelings of isolation than those who spent half an hour a day or less on social media.[54] Now, the study is clear that these numbers are correlations, not causation; it could be that feeling isolated at work or home is driving people to social media instead. Regardless, the study points out the fact that we have, in many ways, forgotten the importance of face-to-face interactions and of physical touch—a hug or a fist bump—and we try to replace it with Facebook... or with porn.

This is especially true for the growing number of singles worldwide. For most of human history, marriage and family gave us forced human interaction whether we wanted it at the time or not. As recently as 1960, over 80% of men were married at age 30. In 1980, about 70% were. In 2001, it dropped to approximately 55%. In 2013, only 40% of 30 year old men were married.[55]

Whatever the reason, the reality is, we crave intimacy but aren't getting it. Even those who are married may not be truly intimate with their spouses. Ashamed of our secrets, afraid of being rejected by our spouses, we turn to what we assume can't hurt us: pornography.

We already talked about the importance of deep relationships in chapter 5. Hopefully, if you've already begun to try out new habits, you've been keeping your accountability partner up to date on what you're trying out, and developing that friendship. But you need to build other friendships as well. Most of them won't become particularly close, nor do they need to. Some friends will disappear from your life for one reason or another, and new ones will come in. That's okay! Continue to build friendships through your life. Studies have found that people with strong friendships are less likely to die young and are more likely to engage in healthy behaviors[56]... and that includes reducing your stress, and your desire for porn.

That being said, it can also be hard to forge new friendships as adults. This is especially true if you have kids, since your own availability suddenly becomes tied to theirs. Still, there are plenty of opportunities to develop new friendships if you know where to look.

Bible Studies and Reading Groups

In recent years, many churches have eschewed Sunday and Wednesday evening services, instead preferring to push people to small community or life groups. If you're serious about faith, this is the first place to start in your search for mature adult friendships. Life groups help you dive deep into a specific Bible passage or topic while also getting to know some of the people in your community.

Note that this is different from accountability groups. You may also be in one of those, but accountability groups are by design focused on specific sin issues; they very easily become about policing each other instead of learning more about God and each other. Small groups should be about encouraging one another in general. Your porn may never even come up, nor does it have to. The other members should be praying for you and asking you about the rest of your life—family, work, school—and you should do the same for them.

If you're a college student, look for campus ministry chapters (such as Intervarsity or Cru) and start attending their meetings, usually weekly. If you're out of college, check with your church pastor to learn what groups are available. Don't be afraid to try out a few different groups until you find one that fits the best...

but do try to find one to attend regularly. It's in the regular gatherings and discussion that growth and friendship happens.

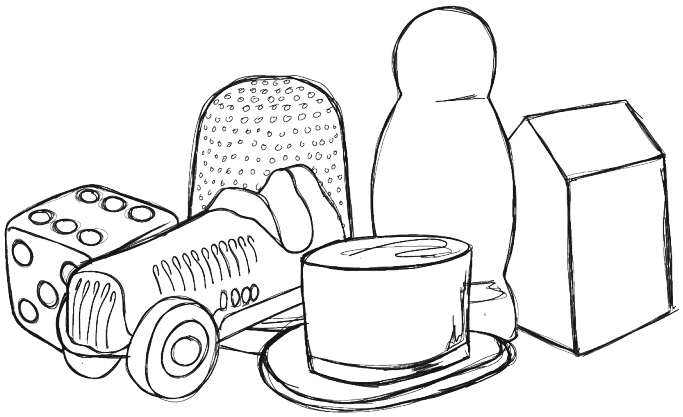
If you're not religious, you can accomplish something similar by joining a reading group. Check your library, or grab a few parents or coworkers that you know and have fun reading and discussing a book of your own choice.

Board Game Groups

Board games have gotten significantly more sophisticated since the publication of Monopoly and Risk. Starting with the release of Settlers of Catan in 1995, strategy-oriented board games have exploded in popularity. With a variety of complexity levels, and ranging in theme from history to science to steampunk, board games are a great way to hang out and have fun with friends.

Chances are good you already know someone who owns Settlers of Catan and Ticket to Ride. Try scheduling a weekly or monthly game night with friends.

Admittedly, such a regular game night is much easier when you're in college; even when overloaded with homework, most college students manage to make room for weekly late-night events. This gets vastly more difficult if you're a parent with young kids, but that doesn't make it impossible. Try to find a friend or two from work (or the parents of your kids' friends), and plan a monthly game day. This will let you get to know your



coworkers or kids' friends' parents better and let you have some fun in the process. Or schedule a gaming weekend as an annual get-together with now distant college friends.

If you can't pull off your own gaming weekend, or just don't know anyone who owns any good games, check with your local coffee and comic shops. Often, they will host semi-regular game days, allowing people to come in and try out (and hopefully buy) games. There's usually a small core of regular attendees; if you choose to become one yourself, some of these may become your closest friends.

Community Classes

We've discussed signing up for classes to learn pottery or a foreign language. Take that hobby and extend it into a friendship! Be intentional about talking to people in your classes and getting to know them. At the least, you already have a common interest in the class, and you may discover more.

This will require intentionality on your part. Most people are content keeping conversation in the classroom, but that doesn't mean they aren't interested in hanging out afterwards. Pull out your phone and put a time to hang out and grab coffee on your calendar while you're talking to them. Invite them to your game night, and then follow up a day or two later.

Do be careful about how you approach and view people of the opposite sex. You don't want to give mixed signals, especially if your marriage or dating relationship is already at risk from porn. This doesn't mean you can never hang out with people of the opposite sex, but make sure your spouse or significant other is at least in the loop. It may be advisable to stick to the Billy Graham rule (avoid spending time alone with people of the opposite sex to whom you are not married) until trust has been rebuilt.

Online Communities

Depending on where you live, your options for building a solid friend group may be limited. While you should still strive for face-to-face time with friends, there are plenty of online communities available to build relationships (assuming you and your accountability partner have decided it's fine for you to be on Facebook, of course).

Start by searching for groups related to your interests. In Chapter 7 we mentioned GameChurch and the Rabbit Room as two possibilities; both have vibrant online communities addressing different aspects of faith and culture. But there are hundreds of thousands of groups out there! Superhero fangroups, gardening, weaving: the options are limitless.

Whatever your interests, do a preview skim (or have your accountability partner do one) to make sure member posts are clean. Unfortunately, many groups will post things like fan art featuring sexualized poses. You're looking for friends based on a common interest, not a new source of porn.

When you find a group that looks like a good, healthy community, start engaging! Sometimes it may feel like people all know each other, but everyone was new to the group at some

When to Fire Your Friends

Motivational speaker Jim Rohn is quoted as saying, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." Who are your closest friends? What do you do when you hang out? How do they motivate you? And, more importantly, are they dragging you down?

You may have some friends—even long-time ones—who share your interests and hobbies but also encourage bad behavior (porn, heavy drinking, etc.). If so, it may be time to step back. Don't just disappear on them completely, of course. You may want to talk with them, possibly one-on-one, to explain that you're trying to break some bad patterns in your life, and that you don't want to go to bars anymore, or talk trash about women anymore. If they seem to understand, great! It may be okay to keep hanging out with them in certain environments. But if they don't understand, and especially if they mock you for trying to change your lifestyle, it may be better to stop hanging out.

Whatever you decide, don't ghost them. Don't disappear without an explanation. Even if they try to bring you down with them, they deserve at least that much respect.

point. Again, though, be careful about your interactions with members of the opposite sex. You don't want to mislead them, and you also don't want to give your spouse something new to worry about. Keep interactions directed at the topic at hand, and invite your spouse and accountability partner to join the group as well. You'll be boosting transparency with them… and growing in friendship in the process.

Conclusion

Your life has been telling you a story.

Maybe it's been your boss, your teachers, your parents, your spouse, telling you that you've failed. You're not good enough, your work isn't important enough, you're not strong enough, you're not smart enough. You're not enough.

And outside the people you know, the music you listen to and the movies and TV shows you watch sell you on the drug: that sex is everything, that a good sex life is all you need.

And so, like a bored and lonely rat, you keep going back to the drug they make most readily available: porn.

But there's one thing about all those voices and all those stories they've been telling you about you.

They're lying.

The world is bigger and more beautiful than you realize. You are far more valuable and far more loved than you will ever know.

Author Jonathan Rogers says, "The act of creativity is speaking the counternarrative of what the world is telling us."[57]

What story will you tell?

Appendix 1

THE SPIRITUAL SIDE OF RECOVERY

This book has been focused on very pragmatic aids to recovery: steps which will help any person, regardless of belief system, live a happier, healthier life. And in fact, all of us at Covenant Eyes believe that porn is bad for *everyone*, regardless of faith or creed. The biological and social research into pornography prove it.

That's why this book was written with a fairly light religious touch; sure, there are references to God and Jesus, but we want to help everyone find freedom.

But many of us (including the author) believe that, in the end, all of our human efforts are meaningless without spiritual regeneration which comes only through Jesus Christ.

Genesis tells us that in the beginning, God created the world perfect: no death, no pain. The first man and woman were unashamed and naked: a perfect innocence between them, with no fear of harm or assault. There was no sexual brokenness between them because there was no sexual brokenness. They

lived in perfect communion with each other and with God—until they doubted His love for them and sought to be like him. And their first action after breaking his commandment was to cover their nakedness. While their first sin didn't involve their sexuality, sexual brokenness was the first result.

There were a few specific outcomes of this original sin. A big one was the curse: men in particular were cursed that the fruits of their labor would be "thorns and thistles."

But there was mercy, too. God killed an animal and clothed them in its skin. He covered their nakedness, their brokenness, with better clothes.

The effects of the curse still linger to this day. Most of this book focuses on finding meaningful labors—a direct act against the thistles and weeds that so many of us encounter to this day. But the book of Ecclesiastes calls out that "everything is meaningless" unless we put it in context of eternity, which has been written on our hearts. "Remember your creator in the days of your youth," Solomon concludes. Otherwise your greatest successes will be in vain.

This is even true of all of our efforts to follow God's own commands. God set the rules for what it means to live up to His standards—to be good enough. But looking at even the basics—the Ten Commandments, found in Exodus 20—all of our attempts at goodness are just thorns and thistles. After all, who hasn't disrespected their parents at some point? Who hasn't told a lie? Who hasn't coveted their neighbor's oxen (or, in more modern terms, their game console or their job or their girlfriend)? "For all have sinned," writes Paul in Romans, "and fall short of the

glory of God." And that falling short means we are separated from God. Nothing we do will ever be good enough to win acceptance from him.

This is where Jesus comes in. Jesus, who is God in human form, came to Earth and lived the only sinless life. He offered healing and forgiveness, peace and restoration. Everything he did was meaningful, and he made it clear that just about everyone was missing the point of the laws God had put in place. The religious rulers had turned them into meaningless rituals when God had intended for them to bring healing.

But nobody likes to hear that their works are meaningless, and the religious leaders eventually had enough. They used a loophole in Roman law and had him put to death using the most shameful method possible, even though his innocence was clear even to the Roman governor.

Now, here's the thing about death. Death was the biggest result of the original disobedience, and most of us, whether we realize it or not, have been working our way towards death for our entire lives. Just look at the science of pornography as evidence. It's destructive and harmful to the viewer and the participants alike. It's deadly—potentially literally for the performers. That's true of all sin. In Romans 6:23 Paul essentially says death is the paycheck for all of our evil deeds.

But Jesus, being totally innocent, did not earn the paycheck of death. It was the most meaningless wage for the most meaningful life ever lived.

Or would have been, if death had been the end.

Because Jesus went willingly to his death, he turned his meaningless death into a meaningful act: a blood sacrifice, sufficient to cover all our sins and heal our brokenness. And because he is God, he didn't stay dead. A few short days later, he came back to life, and has now returned to Heaven, where he's preparing a place for us, and where he's interceding for us.

There are many things to highlight about the crucifixion and the resurrection, but for now we'll only highlight two.

The first is the most important part: it is only by putting our faith in Jesus that we can be made right with God. Remember, the product of our labor is only ever thorns and thistles. It can never bridge the gap between us and a perfect God. But by putting our faith in Jesus, God has mercy on us. He restores us, and he promises us that one day, no matter how broken we are here on Earth, we will be made whole again.

The second aspect of all of this is that when we stop putting our faith in our works and instead put it in Jesus, our lives have meaning and permanence. Most of us try to put our faith in specific aspects of ourselves: our job performance, our libido, our marriages and families, whatever. But when we get fired or lose our sex drive or get a divorce—and chances are, *something* will happen at some point in our lives—we lose our sense of who we are. Even the hobbies called out in this book run the risk of giving us a false sense of identity. But what happens when we build our identity on being an artist and then we break our arm? Or on our intellect, but the doctor finds a brain tumor? Or an athlete, but we age and our muscles stop responding? If you've built your identity on something temporal, then when something happens you'll go into crisis; but if you build your identity

instead on who Christ has made you to be, your life will be secure when something inevitably happens. When you dedicate your works to His eternal purpose, they will take on an eternal significance.

Obviously, this is an extremely condensed version of the Gospel. We highly encourage you to get plugged into a local church and to read the Bible for yourself to learn more about Christ's regenerative work.

If you'd like more information about how the Gospel applies specifically to the problem of pornography, we highly recommend you read *Your Brain on Porn* (available at **www.covenanteyes.com/brain-ebook**) or take *Overcome Porn: The 40 Day Challenge* (**www.covenanteyes.com/challenge**). Many of our other resources interweave the Gospel as well. Almost all of them are free.

Again, this book has been focused on one particular aspect of healing, one that's applicable to everyone regardless of religious belief. But to a Christian, this book ought to help us put our identities on as new creations, and more than that, to find where God is calling us. As Frederick Buechner once wrote, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's great hunger meet."[58] We hope that you continue to use this book as a guide to help you find that hunger as reflected in your own life... and your own gladness.

Appendix 2

FURTHER RESOURCES

Ebooks

Your Brain on Porn
By Luke Gilkerson

www.covenanteyes.com/brain-ebook

Our culture is highly sexualized, and in many cases pornography use is actually glorified. But research shows that pornography use actually changes the way you think. Download this ebook to learn the five proven ways pornography warps your brain, and three biblical ways to renew your mind.

The Porn Circuit
By Sam Black

http://www.covenanteyes.com/science-of-porn-addiction-ebook/

Science shows us that acting out with pornography taps into our powerful neurochemistry, and this can quickly lead a person to use porn habitually. The good news is that the brain has a

lifelong ability to wire and rewire itself. Discover why people become obsessed with pornography, and how to break the cycle of porn use.

Coming Clean

By Luke Gilkerson

http://www.covenanteyes.com/accountability-partner-ebook/

Christian accountability is about creating a culture of grace, not guilt. This ebook explores reasons why accountability often fails and gives the building blocks for a good accountability relationship.

More Than Single

By Lisa Eldred

http://www.covenanteyes.com/singles-guide/

When you find yourself "stuck" in singleness, waiting to move on to the next phase of life, it can feel incredibly frustrating. Many people believe they have no recourse other than turning to porn. In this book for singles, learn how to discover freedom from porn and joy in singleness.

Email Challenges

Overcome Porn: The 40 Day Challenge

http://learn.covenanteyes.com/porn-free-challenge

Overcome Porn: The 40 Day Challenge is a focused, step-by-step email series designed to help you put porn behind you forever. Each day, you'll receive an email with:

1. Articles that will educate you and encourage you on the road to freedom
2. Exclusive video content
3. Practical action steps to retrain your brain

RecoverED

http://learn.covenanteyes.com/pied-challenge/

A recent study showed a 400% increase in erectile dysfunction among men ages 18-30 since 1992. Another informal study found that such men had one factor in common: frequent use of internet pornography. And when they stopped using porn, their ED went away.

RecoverED is designed to help men start on the journey to freedom. You'll get 10 days of science and encouragement as you start your reboot process.

Tools and Organizations

NoFap

www.nofap.com

NoFap is a science-based, secular, and sex-positive organization that helps people reboot from pornography and recover from porn-induced erectile dysfunction and other sexual dysfunctions. They offer practical tips and an active community of people encouraging each other on the journey to freedom.

Dirty Girls Ministries

www.dirtygirlsministries.com

Dirty Girls Ministries is a faith-based group that provides help and support to women who personally struggle with porn use. They feature a five-step recovery process and a supportive community.

Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability

www.covenanteyes.com

Covenant Eyes monitors the websites you visit and sends an Accountability Report to your Accountability Partner. This Report is designed to help jumpstart conversations about what you see and do online. Internet Filtering is available as an optional add-on.

PART 4

WORKSHEETS

About THESE WORKSHEETS

This book has been filled with a lot of really practical ideas about building new habits to replace old desires (pornography in particular). You may feel overwhelmed and not have a clue where to start!

In order to give you a practical place to start—and give you a place to store ideas for when you want to try something new—we've created a set of worksheet pages to help you brainstorm.

Now, it's important to remember that these worksheets are not homework! They're not meant to feel like a chore. They're meant to be practical helps for you. So to that end, we encourage you to use them however you like. We've laid them out in a style inspired by the popular Bullet Journal setup, but if that's not your native language for planning, just look at the questions each page asks and fit them into your own personal style. Some ideas may include:

* Using a project management software like Trello or Google Keep.

- Tracking things in a spreadsheet.
- Marking dates in your calendar for when to try a new activity, and what activity to try.
- Sticky note reminders in strategic locations (your wallet, your bathroom mirror, etc.).
- A private photo album (paper or digital) of things to try and inspiration.
- An email conversation or shared Google document with your accountability partner.
- Mind maps.
- A LEGO tower, with brick colors coordinated for the type of activity (red when you try something physical, yellow when you try something creative, etc.)

Even if you use these pages, use them in the way that works best for you! That may be straight bullet lists, or it may be sketches, or even stickers.

Again, the important thing is not how you fill out the worksheets, or even that you fill them out at all. **The main thing is that you find a place to start with new hobbies, a place to track your progress, and a place to store ideas for when you want a change of pace.**

PHYSICAL HOBBIES

Sample worksheet!

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER 10

MY MISSION STATEMENT IS be an awesome dad to my kids

A PHYSICAL HOBBY WILL HELP ME BY setting a good example of healthy living.

I WANT TO TRY Crossfit

MY FIRST STEP:

Join a Crossfit Box.

TO DO THIS, I NEED...

- [x] Investigate local boxes
- [x] Make sure it fits into budget
- [x] Talk to wife
- [x] Try a free intro session
- [x] Plan WODS into schedule

MY MILESTONES

- [x] Intro Session
- [x] On-Ramp
- [x] Deadlift 175 lbs
- [x] 50 Burpees in under 5 minutes
- [x] Register for Crossfit Open
- [x] Deadlift 200 lbs
- [ ] Deadlift 225 lbs

HOW IT'S GOING

WEEK 1

M

W — Intro! (6 Benchmark, 190 lb deadlift)

F

Sore from squats. Haven't done those since college! *still sore Fri

WEEK 2

M — Ugh. Burpees.

W

F — Did a full pushup!

WEEK 3

M

W

F — 205 lb Deadlift!

Mon — stayed up too late, watched porn. Definitely paid for it in the WOD.

WEEK 4

M — Love my Box!

W

F

TO QUIT OR NOT TO QUIT

WORKSHEET
FOR CHAPTER 4

THESE ARE ALL THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS PORN HAS ON MY LIFE:	THESE ARE THE PROBLEMS I'LL FACE IF I QUIT:	THESE ARE ALL OF THE BENEFITS I EXPECT FROM QUITTING PORN:

THIS IS WHO I WANT TO BE:

TIME AND TRIGGER INVENTORY

WORKSHEET
FOR CHAPTER 7

THESE ARE THE WAYS I SPEND MY TIME:

THESE ARE ARE ALL OF MY POTENTIAL TRIGGERS:

MAKING A MEDIA PLAN

WORKSHEET
FOR CHAPTER 7

DEFINING MY "GOOD"

THESE THINGS ARE GOOD...

I WILL PUT THESE THINGS AWAY FOR NOW...

MY PLAN FOR STREAMING INTERNET

I WILL GET RID OF THESE THINGS

HOBBIES BRAINSTORMING SHEET

WORKSHEET
FOR CHAPTER 8

START THINKING THROUGH WHAT YOU LIKED TO DO AS A KID, THAT MIGHT GIVE YOU GOOD IDEAS.

> WHEN I WAS A KID, I ENJOYED...

> MY FAVORITE SUBJECT IN SCHOOL WAS...

> MY FAVORITE ACTIVITY IN GYM CLASS WAS...

> MY FRIENDS AND I LIKE TO DO THIS WHEN WE HANG OUT...

> IF I COULD BE AN EXPERT AT JUST ONE THING, IT WOULD BE...

CREATIVE HOBBIES

WORKSHEET
FOR CHAPTER 9

MY MISSION STATEMENT IS _____

A CREATIVE HOBBY WILL HELP ME BY _____

I WANT TO TRY _____

> MY FIRST STEP:

> TO DO THIS, I NEED...

> HOW CAN I GET BETTER AT THIS?

> HOW IT'S GOING

PHYSICAL HOBBIES

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER 10

MY MISSION STATEMENT IS _____

A PHYSICAL HOBBY WILL HELP ME BY _____

I WANT TO TRY _____

> MY FIRST STEP:

> TO DO THIS, I NEED...

> MY MILESTONES

> HOW IT'S GOING

PRACTICAL HOBBIES

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER 11

MY MISSION STATEMENT IS _____

A PRACTICAL HOBBY WILL HELP ME BY _____

I WANT TO LEARN HOW TO _____

> MY FIRST STEP:

> TO DO THIS, I NEED...

> HOW IT'S GOING

INTELLECTUAL HOBBIES

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER 12

MY MISSION STATEMENT IS _____

AN INTELLECTUAL HOBBY WILL HELP ME BY _____

I WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT _____

> MY FIRST STEP:

> TO DO THIS, I NEED...

> HERE'S WHAT I'M LEARNING:

EXPERIENTIAL HOBBIES

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER 13

MY MISSION STATEMENT IS _____

_____

_____

AN EXPERIENTIAL HOBBY WILL HELP ME BY _____

_____

_____

I HAVE ALWAYS WANTED TO _____

_____

> MY FIRST STEP:

> TO DO THIS, I NEED...

> LOCAL PLACES TO VISIT

> HOW IT'S GOING

GENEROUS HOBBIES

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER 14

MY MISSION STATEMENT IS _____

A GENEROUS HOBBY WILL HELP SHAPE MY CHARACTER TO SUPPORT THIS MISSION BY

I CARE (OR WANT TO CARE) ABOUT THIS SOCIAL ISSUE: _____

> WAYS I CAN GET INVOLVED IN MY AREA...

> MY FIRST STEP:

> TO DO THIS, I NEED...

> HOW IT'S GOING

SOCIAL HOBBIES

WORKSHEET FOR CHAPTER 15

MY MISSION STATEMENT IS _____

SOCIAL HOBBIES WILL HELP ME BY _____

I ENJOY DOING THESE THINGS WITH FRIENDS: _____

> THESE SOCIAL GROUPS EXIST IN MY AREA

> MY FIRST STEP WILL BE...

> WHO I CAN INVITE

> HOW IT'S GOING

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