

When A Man's Eye Wanders Breaking The Power Of Pornography

by Jeff Olson

Greg wondered if the day would ever end. He was good at his job, but he did only what he had to. Work bored him—and the phone rang constantly. Each call was another drain on his energy: finish those reports, schedule another appointment, follow up with a disgruntled customer, pick up milk at the store, and don't forget about the committee meeting at church. Between phone calls, he stared aimlessly. As the day dragged on, the monotony of his day and the demands on his life left him feeling pointless, overwhelmed, and annoyed.

As he sat in his car after work, the thought of going home wasn't much comfort. A different set of pressures waited for him there. Once again, thoughts of escape and risk turned his thoughts in a familiar direction.

Forbidden images had been lingering in the back of his mind all day, but now they were all he could think about. As he made his way across town, he found himself turning

down familiar streets that would eventually take him where he had been many times before.

Being seen at the liquor store was a risk. But as he paid for the magazine, Greg knew there was no turning back. Driving to a secluded parking lot, the boredom of the day was gone. He felt pleurably nervous and alive. Once he parked the car, he began to thumb through the pages. The danger worked for him. Naked images ignited his passions. Self-absorbed in his own fantasy, relief came easily.

For a few moments, Greg enjoyed the passing ecstasy. But then self-hatred and shame tore through him like a violent storm. He felt so foolish. He breathed a heavy sigh and put his hands over his face. He couldn't believe he had done it again.

At some level, he knew

his problem was out of control. He wanted to reach out for help, but he felt too ashamed. What would his family and friends think of him? How could he ever face them? He was terrified of losing everything, and yet he didn't know how long he could go on living a double life.

Disgusted with himself, he vowed to stop. This was how he usually tried to resolve his dilemma. He begged God for forgiveness and assured himself that this time he meant it. He almost bought the worn-out line he was telling himself. But driving home, he knew deep down that it wasn't over. It was only a matter of time before he would cave in to the temptation again.

Greg's story is not unique. A sizeable number of men are sitting on a secret—a secret that is destroying their honor and poisoning their

relationships. Pornography is the “dirty little secret” few wish to talk about.

The Christian community generally doesn’t acknowledge the widespread use of sexually explicit material within its own camp. The truth is, however, that a multitude of Christian men, young and old, and from all walks of life, regularly look at pornography. Not all men who have looked at pornography are addicted to it, but many are. And anyone who takes a casual peek or even accidentally runs across it is in danger of getting hooked.

Tragically, most men don’t admit the problem until they get caught. Some foolishly believe they’re in control of the problem. Others feel hopelessly enslaved. Like Greg, they live in a solitary confinement of their own choosing. But it doesn’t have

to be that way. There is a way back. There is a way out of the swamp of sexual self-destruction.

If you are a man who struggles with pornography, or if you know a man battling with this problem, the following pages are offered to show you that you are not alone. Together we’ll consider the dangers of pornography, the multiple aspects of a man’s struggle, and a way out. We’ll also find hope in the assurance that “he who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy” (Prov. 28:13).

What Is Pornography?

Pornography is any written or visual material that depicts nudity and/or sexually explicit activity for the purpose of causing sexual

arousal. Of course, not all descriptions or photographs of nudity, sexual organs, and sexual activity (such as those found in educational material or medical textbooks) are pornographic. What makes material pornographic is its calculated intent to cause sexual arousal.

There are several forms of pornography. This booklet will not address forms such as transsexualism, sadomasochism, homosexuality, bestiality, voyeurism, and child pornography. The focus here will be on the two most common forms of pornography produced and consumed—"soft core" and "hard core."

Soft-core pornography features naked or scantily clothed women. It highlights breasts and genitalia but shows no sexual intercourse. Hard-core pornography includes

various forms of sexual penetration, forced and unforced, between two or more people.¹

Sadly, pornography is highly profitable and widely available—and it doesn't seem to be going away. While lawmakers and the public argue over whether it should enjoy First Amendment protection, pornography continues to spread like wildfire.

The Extent Of Pornography

The Growth Of Its Use. In less than three decades, pornography has grown from a small-scale operation of \$5-10 million annually into a giant industry with yearly sales of \$12-13 billion.² That's as much as the gross revenue of the three major television networks combined.³

In 1996, Americans squandered more than \$8

billion on hard-core videos, peep shows, “adult” cable programming, computer pornography, and sex magazines. That rivals the amount that rock and country music recordings are able to generate annually. It’s far more money than Hollywood’s yearly domestic box-office receipts.⁴

In the same year, pornographers produced more than 8,000 videos. That’s approximately 22 new films each day. Rentals of hard-core films increased from 75 million in 1985 to 665 million in 1996.⁵ So the number of people using pornography is growing fast. On the Internet, the *Playboy* Web site alone averages about 5 million hits a day.⁶

The Growth Of Its Availability. Gone are the days when men had to go out of their way to find pornography. Today they

can get it just about anywhere. It’s available at gas stations, grocery stores, video rental outlets, hotels, the workplace, and even in the home. Those with access to the Internet no longer need to worry about being seen buying “men’s” magazines or renting adult movies. With a click of the mouse, husbands can download sexually graphic images and stories while their wives tuck their children in bed in the next room.

Producers of pornography have been quick to use new technology to dispatch their product. As the use of VCRs began to spread in the late 1970s, the pornographic industry promptly switched from 16mm film to the increasingly popular video-cassettes. During the 1980s, “amateurs” began using camcorders to make and sell homemade sexually explicit

videos. Since the advent of the Internet in the 1990s, pornography has been aggressively peddled on computer screens worldwide.

Pornographers no longer rely on magazines to transmit their material. With pornography available on videocassette, cable and satellite television, X-rated computer software, and the Internet, we must be more aware of the potential dangers.

The Dangers Of Pornography

Some sarcastically jest that the worst harm porn can cause is a paper cut. They couldn't be more wrong. Pornography isn't a harmless vice. The truth is that society, women, marriages, and individual users all suffer devastating consequences.

Detrimental To Society. Since the inception of *Playboy* magazine in the 1950s, mainstream society has slowly become more tolerant of pornography, but not without severe consequences. Researchers have shown that regular exposure to pornography can lead to rape and child molestation. In one study, 86 percent of convicted rapists confessed to regular use of pornography, with 57 percent acknowledging that they tried to reenact a pornographic scene during the rape.⁷ The same study revealed that 87 percent of molesters of girls and 77 percent of molesters of boys regularly used hard-core pornography.⁸ Another study found that "51 percent of male students exposed to violent pornography indicated a likelihood of raping a woman if they could get away with it."⁹

In a more general sense, pornography has a detrimental effect on public attitudes about sex. It devalues sex by taking it outside the marital context and stripping it of any emotional connection. It promotes a view of sex that is casual, impersonal, and sometimes violent.

Degrading To Women. Women are regularly exploited in pornography. Countless women have disclosed how they and many others were abused in the making of pornographic films. In many cases, women are coerced into humiliating, degrading, and abusive activities to sexually please the male characters.

Pornography is responsible for spreading the lie that women are available and willing at a moment's notice to fulfill a man's sexual demands. In most cases, it portrays

women as mindless objects who exist only to service a man's every sexual whim. It further propagates a demeaning view of both women and men as being nothing more than animals interested in sex.

Damaging To Marriages. Whether a man is married or single, he is in danger of transmitting the infection of pornography into his current or future marriage. Contrary to what some would have us believe, sexually explicit material does *not* enhance sex between a husband and wife. Pornography creates unrealistic demands about the frequency of sex, specific sexual acts, and the nature of a woman's sexual response, to name just a few. Real life seldom lives up to what is represented in the fake world of pornography. And when a husband demands that reality imitate his fantasy,

sex becomes empty for him and degrading to his wife. In the end, both feel resentful and less interested in sex with each other.

Further, pornography doesn't create a desire to be close. It destroys intimacy in a marriage. One researcher found that when men were shown pictures of *Playboy* models, they later described themselves as having less marital love than other men who were shown non-pornographic images.¹⁰

Many men who devour pornography with their eyes compare their wives to what they have seen. And no wife can live up to the youthful, flawlessly shaped, enhanced image of a centerfold. One wife said, "Although I was careful with my clothes and figure, I found that my husband was increasingly critical of the way I looked. . . . I wasn't attractive enough to compete with eternally young, surgically

altered models. . . . In the end, he lost all interest in me as a sexual partner. This had a devastating impact on my view of my worth as a woman. It created such despair in me that I began to let my appearance go."¹¹

Understandably, many wives have a difficult time surviving the fallout from pornography. One wife who caught her husband looking at pornography on the Internet likened it to a bomb exploding in her heart and marriage. Another wife felt hurt, used, and degraded after she caved in to her husband's demands to watch and reenact a pornographic video. Her struggle to forgive and to believe in him is enormous. Learning to trust her husband again is a long and bumpy process.

Destructive To Users. Pornography corrupts the minds of its viewers. Emotionally and

sexually exciting images set off a physical chain reaction, which burns images that can remain etched in a man's mind for years.

Pornography also teaches men to dehumanize women by viewing them as sexual objects. Men who repeatedly look at pornography lose their ability to give women the respect they deserve. Instead of enjoying the mind and heart of a woman, they focus on her body—undressing her in their thoughts and picturing what it would be like to have a sexual encounter with her. They can mistake a woman's innocent, friendly smile as a flirtatious come-on of a centerfold model. In many cases, they find it difficult and uncomfortable to imagine themselves being involved with a woman in any other way than physically.

As pornography pollutes the mind, it often

turns into an enslaving sexual addiction where there is a “continual lust for more” (Eph. 4:18-19). This is why the Old and New Testaments of the Bible tell us that sexual sin captures the body and soul. The book of Proverbs reminds us that “the evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast” (Prov. 5:22). This is precisely how men feel who are in sexual bondage.

Men with an addiction to pornography will identify with one or more of the following statements:

- I regularly seek out pornography.
- I often spend parts of the day looking forward to viewing pornography.
- I feel out of control and unable to stop.
- I often compare my wife or girlfriend to the women in pornography.
- I often choose to look at

pornography rather than be sexually intimate with my wife.

- I refuse to tell others that I struggle with pornography.
- I tell lies to cover my struggle.
- Looking at pornography has led to serious problems in my life (such as a threat to or loss of job or marriage, financial debt, promiscuous or criminal behavior).

The extent of addiction can range from a category one addiction (mild) to a category three addiction (severe). In a *category one addiction*, a man no longer has a mere casual interest in pornography—he’s obsessed with it. He’s gone from occasionally running across it to making a conscious effort to seek it out. In a *category two addiction*, he attempts to bridge the fantasy world of pornography to the real

world. It’s not uncommon for a man to try to recreate in real life what he’s seeing in pornography. He may try to enact with his wife what he has seen, with or without her knowledge or consent. As his problem deepens, he may hire prostitutes or try to pick up women for “one-night stands.”

Many men live in a category one or two addiction for years and never progress any further. If men progress to a *category three addiction*, and there are plenty who do, they get involved in more severe forms of pornography, including child pornography. They also move to serious criminal behavior such as rape and child sexual abuse.

An addiction to pornography doesn’t happen overnight. It sneaks up on a man over time, and there are multiple factors involved.

Why Are Men So Vulnerable To Pornography?

Pornography is designed to seize a man's attention. It features young, physically attractive women, and it capitalizes on a natural curiosity about nakedness and sex. Though its lustful appeal is as ancient as the Bible—"The lips of a seductive woman are oh so sweet, her soft words are oh so smooth" (Prov. 5:3)¹²—there are other matters involved that explain how men come to struggle so much in this specific area.

Men Are Aroused Visually. God has wired men to be sexually aroused by sight. In a matter of seconds, a man can shift from feeling no sexual arousal to full sexual arousal because he is stimulated primarily by

what he sees. Pornographers prey on this physiological reality by parading unclothed women with pretty faces and firm bodies for any man to see.

History Of A Man's Sexualization.

Vulnerability to pornography rests as much in a man's history of sexualization as it does in his visual makeup. Sexualization occurs when a child or teenager is unconsciously programmed to interpret smiles, looks, statements, interactions, or events as sexual.

Although past experiences never excuse current behavior, our histories do influence and shape the areas in which we struggle. Therefore, we need to take a man's life story into account if we are to understand how he came to struggle with pornography. And while every man's past contains its own unique

reasons, there are some common themes in most men's lives that direct and sway them toward a struggle with this problem.

✿ Our past experiences influence and shape the areas in which we struggle. ✿

1. Early Exposure To Pornography. Most men who struggle with pornography as adults were introduced to it as young boys or teenagers. In some cases it was openly displayed in their homes. Some were introduced to it by neighborhood friends. Others found it stashed underneath their father's mattress or hidden in a closet.

For many young boys, pornography was the

source of their first sexual experience, creating a strong link between sexual arousal and pornography. One man recalled what it was like when he discovered a *Playboy* magazine in his father's desk drawer. He had never seen a naked woman, and it aroused and excited him. He looked at the magazine again and again, until one day it was gone. He never forgot what he saw or how it made him feel, and it stirred within him a desire for more. And knowing that his Christian father looked at porn gave him permission to feed his burning desires.

2. Repeated Exposure To Pornography. Many men were not only introduced to sexually explicit material at a young age, but they were exposed to regular doses of it. For some it was out in the open in their own homes or at least not well-hidden. They

regularly encountered it in their friends' homes as well. And many of the neighborhood boys had their own private stash, which they shared with each other like baseball cards.

The advent of cable television increased the level of exposure, bringing into homes R-rated movies containing sexually explicit scenes. The next generation of strugglers will undoubtedly tell of their repeated exposure to sexual images through the Internet.

3. *Childhood Sexual Abuse.* In many cases, those who regularly view pornography were sexualized as a result of childhood sexual abuse. In some cases, pornography was directly involved. (To read more about the damaging effects of sexual abuse, see RBC's booklet *When Trust Is Lost* CB922). Sexual abuse, especially

when the abuser is a male, can cause a young male victim to question his own sense of honor and masculinity. The ambivalent feelings swirling around the abuse leave him confused and ashamed. The very event or series of events that was despised also brought some degree of emotional or physical pleasure.¹³ Young victims don't know how to make sense out of such ambivalent feelings. Many feel dirty and responsible for the abuse. Boys abused by older males may even begin to doubt their own heterosexuality. As a result, some victims may turn to pornography as a way of proving they can be sexually aroused by a woman.

Other men use pornography to try to alter sexually traumatic events in their past. This is why some explore pornography for a specific kind of woman or

scene that reminds them of the abuse. This then becomes the basis of a sexual fantasy in which they can relive and change what occurred. For example, one man who was sexually abused and then mocked by an older female cousin, searched porn for women who reminded him of his abuser. Whenever he found a suitable imitation, he would drift off into a fantasy where he would rewrite the course of those events to his liking. Instead of being humiliated and rejected, he imagined his abuser liking and praising him.

Despite their vulnerability, many men desperately wish to stay away from pornography. It's a battle that takes most to the brink of despair. Yet even with all the problems pornography causes, men continue to seek out opportunities to look.

Why Do Men Continue To Look?

Physical Attachment. A steady diet of pornography and self-stimulation eventually affects a man's body chemistry. His body begins to look forward to more of the same sexual stimulus and release, much like a drug addict's body craves cocaine. This physical conditioning does *not* remove a man's responsibility, but it does start to explain why many men find sexually graphic images so hard to resist.

When an addicted man is cut off from pornography, he experiences withdrawal symptoms. This sets off a physical urge to restore a sense of balance. Many sexual addicts say that the withdrawal from a sexual addiction is more prolonged and more painful than the

withdrawal from drugs or alcohol.¹⁴

One man recalled a time when a lightning storm damaged his VCR and television set. After a week of not being able to watch “adult” videos, he could hardly stand it. He felt agitated and had trouble sleeping. He tried to busy himself with other things, but it didn’t help. Finally, he became so desperate that he checked into a motel room that showed X-rated movies.

There is, of course, much more going on than just a physical attachment. Regular viewing trains a man’s body to crave more. But he can retrain his body as he begins to address the larger issues in his soul by understanding what he gets from his habit.

The Payoff Of Pornography. Men don’t just view pornography—they use it. And what they’re using it for is a

stronger urge than their desire to stop. Otherwise they would quit looking. So what is it that they are getting? Most men are after male affirmation, easy relief, subtle revenge, and/or personal sabotage. Looking at pornography for these reasons is not immediately obvious to a man, until they’re pointed out (Prov. 20:5). In fact, most think that pornography simply provides the opportunity for sexual release. But this limited perspective prevents them from seeing the larger payoffs of pornography that keep them coming back for more.

1. Male Affirmation. Men often feel insecure as males. Many of their self-doubts are tied to their perceived inability to please a woman. In some cases, issues of childhood sexual abuse when a man was aroused by an older male can add to a man’s

insecurity. In the fantasy world of pornography, however, men can have women respond to them sexually, giving them an illusion of intimacy and adequacy that affirms their masculinity without the threat of failure or rejection.

2. *Easy Relief.* Viewing pornography inevitably leads to self-stimulation. But the relief that men get is not just physical. The relief is an easy escape from boredom, stress, or emptiness. With very little effort, a man can look at sexual images and get a rush of adventure and excitement that temporarily lifts him out of the doldrums or pressures of life.

One man referred to pornography as his “outlet.” He would usually buy a magazine or visit an X-rated theater during his lunch hour, especially if his day was not going well.

Pornography gave him an easier and more pleasing world to escape to.

Although a man enjoys the illusion of a woman responding to him sexually, it's not the lack of companionship that drives him back to pornography. While loneliness can trigger the use of pornography, most of the men I've counseled report much stronger feelings of boredom or stress. They feel purposeless, uptight, and worn out. And fast, simple relief is only minutes away—the time it takes to drive to an “adult” bookstore or to log on to the Internet.

Consider the biblical story of David and Bathsheba. The story indicates that one of the main reasons David was in a position to lust after a bathing Bathsheba was that he was not with his armies as he should have been. Instead of leading his troops

into battle (2 Sam. 11:1-2), he stayed behind, where in his inactivity he became vulnerable to a wandering eye. And because he was King, he didn't have to settle for just looking at Bathsheba. He could arrange to have her—and he did.

3. *Subtle Revenge.* For many married men, looking at pornography is as much about revenge as it is relief. It can be a subtle yet powerful means of getting back at a wife they perceive as unresponsive, critical, unsupportive, or unfaithful. When a husband indulges in pornography, it may be his way of punishing his wife and showing her that he doesn't need her. Over time, he sends a subtle, vindictive message. One man put it well when he admitted that nearly every time he looked at the women in pornography he was saying to his critical

wife, "I'd rather have them than you."

Many Christian men with a habit of using pornography are taking a subtle swipe at God as well. Every time they choose to look at pornography, they are in essence saying, "At this moment, I'm going to turn my back and forget You like You've forgotten me." Pornography is their way of suppressing the truth of God (Rom. 1:18), whom they assume has let them down.

Another side of revenge is power. For those men who often feel controlled by a parent, sister, wife, or female superior, pornography can provide an illusion of power and domination. In the fantasy world of porn, he is in charge and the women are submissive to him.

4. *Personal Sabotage.* The payoffs of male affirmation, relief, and revenge are powerful

enough to hook a man on pornography. But there is more. Sexual obsession sinks its hook deeper into a man's heart by sabotaging the honor and dignity God has placed within him. A sexually addicted man often assumes that he could *never* again pray with his family, share Christ with his neighbor, talk seriously with his children about life and the Lord, confront a difficult situation, or be a good friend.

Some men who enjoy leadership and public service use their roles to try to offset the terrible feelings and guilt they have locked up in a secret closet of their lives. Many others use their problem as an unspoken excuse to withdraw from activities and relationships that are out of their comfort zone.

While most men don't consciously seek to sabotage their character, they *allow* it

to happen. It's important for each addicted man to ask himself: "Why do I keep going back to that which makes me feel so awful about myself? Why do I choose behavior that robs me of the honor and enjoyment of honest and close relationships? What could I possibly get from that?" Although they may not be consciously aware of it, many continue to use pornography because feeling bad about themselves takes them off the hook. Self-contempt actually reinforces the kind of self-obsession that allows them to avoid the higher road they were called to walk.

Certainly men *should* feel bad after they've looked at porn, but not in the way they normally do. The sorrow they usually feel is not a productive godly sorrow. It doesn't lead them to a greater sense of forgiveness and a growing

desire to serve God and others (2 Cor. 7:10). The sorrow men typically feel is a worldly sorrow that drives them further from meaningful relationships and endeavors and deeper into a self-absorbed, safer way of life.

Men who use pornography find self-imposed shame easier to live with than the risk of rejection by others. They instinctively know that the path of real honor and dignity leads to the risks of honest relationships. Although deep inside they want to open up and be more involved with others, they feel inadequate or fearful that others won't be able to accept them as they are.

Men hate failure as much as rejection. For some, using pornography is a way to avoid the threat of failure. The shame they feel takes them out of

commission. It tells them they have nothing worthwhile to give. It renders them useless, and enables them to hide in the dark shadows of immorality and avoid the potential agony of failure.

A Crisis Of Faith And Hope. Recognizing what men get out of pornography is vital. It opens the door for them to see *how* they use porn to deal with the difficulties of life apart from trusting in God. The fundamental reason men keep going back is that deep within their souls they're in a crisis of faith and hope. They've lost a strong faith in God and they see little hope of life improving. Consequently, they regard the payoff of pornography as both needed and deserved.

1. It Feels Needed: The Idolatry Within. In a crisis of faith, many men come to think that pornography and

what it provides is *necessary*. They don't have a "take it or leave it" attitude. In many cases there is the thought, "I'll miss out on something that I desperately need if I don't click on this Web site or look at another magazine." The illusion of intimacy and adventure is seen as one of their greatest needs. It's their best friend. Thinking about it, planning for it, and looking forward to it helps them make it through the day. Looking at it no longer feels like a choice. It becomes a must.

Sexually explicit images can become idols. They can be a false god that numerous men trust in to cope with the deep struggles of life. As one man put it, "It's an outlet. And with my pressures and responsibilities, I need one."

**2. It Feels Deserved:
The Cynical Anger
Within.** Many Christian

men know that filling their minds with sexual images is diminishing their capacity to relate to others in a healthy way. They know it's wrong, but in their hearts they don't care. In most cases, it's not that a man *can't* let go of pornography. He *won't* let go because he feels he deserves to look. Brewing deep within his soul is a rarely acknowledged level of cynical rage that justifies his excursions to the unreal fantasy world of perfect bodies and sexual seduction.

Men are usually surprised by the degree and intensity of anger in their souls. Why are they angry? Because others don't appreciate them. They believe others require too much of them or expose their inadequacies. They're angry about the lack of meaning and fulfillment in life. Christian men are especially angry and

disillusioned with a religious system that hasn't lived up to its billing. They've jumped through all the hoops, and their lives are still not working out as they thought they would. They're angry with a God who often seems distant and uncaring. And worse, they seriously doubt that things are going to get better. In this angry, cynical crisis of hope, they believe they deserve a break.

The Bible gives us an example of this cynical attitude in the hearts of God's chosen people. The prophet Isaiah foresaw Jerusalem as being attacked by enemy armies. Instead of turning to God for protection and provision, His people chose to handle the situation themselves. When their efforts failed and the enemy started closing in, they adopted a cynical, hopeless attitude. Resigning themselves to

defeat, they said, "Let us eat and drink, . . . for tomorrow we die!" (Isa. 22:13). In other words, "We might as well live it up today because there's no hope for tomorrow."

This is the same cynical attitude found in the hearts of men who regularly look at pornography. One man said, "No matter what I do, my wife is never going to appreciate the things I do for this family. This is never going to change. Whenever I'm struck with the hopelessness of this fact, the urge for pornography seems entirely reasonable."

Men involved in a self-destructing habit withdraw from others and God by turning to an idol they feel is needed and deserved. They lack faith in the One who suffered the ultimate price to be able to accept them. They lack the hope and vision for the kind of men they could be and what

they could accomplish for God. As a result, they lose the purpose that comes from living for the sake of something greater than themselves. The situation may seem bleak, but the Spirit of God can rebuild faith, renew hope, and awaken a purpose that can replace and put to death an idolatrous demand for pornography.

What Are The Limits Of Self-Restraint And Denial?

Many men try to break their sexual addiction through sheer willpower. In most cases, however, the harder a man tries to stop, the harder it becomes to resist. Simply telling a man who is addicted to pornography to stop using it is like saying, “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” (Col.

2:21). Paul said that “such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (v.23).

Wisdom, of course, says that it makes sense for vulnerable men to avoid situations where they can access pornography. But the problem runs much deeper than hormones or behavior. Self-restraint alone misses the larger issues of pain and sin that are at the root of this struggle.

Furthermore, a man doesn't help himself by denying an attraction to pornography. Denial just feeds the attraction. In fact, admitting to how much he wants to look at pornography is an important part of the journey toward freedom.

How Can Men Move Toward Freedom?

Pornography seems to make everything better—until it makes everything worse. Ironically, the journey to freedom and change is just the opposite. Everything usually gets worse before it gets better. The one thing a man can expect to encounter is the unexpected. It is a trademark of God to use the unusual to bring about His purposes. The same God who used a 100-year-old man and a 90-year-old woman to start a family and a nation that would centuries later bear the Savior of mankind (Gen. 17:17; Rom. 4:19) also invites men on an unusual path toward freedom. The following ideas can serve as starting points to a journey that will eventually break the power of pornography.

By Admitting Their Problem. An addicted man can seldom change on his own. He must begin talking about his problem with someone who is experienced in dealing with sexual addictions and with a few trustworthy men—preferably before he is caught. If he's been caught, he needs to stop the lies and own up to his problem. Lasting change involves confessing sin and struggling through life with the help of others (Jas. 5:16).

Admitting to having an out-of-control sexual struggle is one of the hardest confessions a man may ever make to another person. And Satan wants men to hide their struggles so he can get them alone and deceive them with lies such as “the problem is under control” or “you will never change.” But men who start to talk about their

struggles with others who can help them change will begin to see that there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Talking with other men can be a risky process. A man needs to be careful about those he chooses to confide in. He needs to talk with men who are aware of their own capacity to lust—men who won't be horrified or cast self-righteous stones of condemnation. He needs men who can keep his struggle confidential and who will pray for him, challenge him, and dream with him about who he could become for others and for God (1 Th. 2:11-12).

Talking with a few men requires an investment of time and heart where conversations go beyond work, sports, or hobbies. At times the conversations will be painfully uncomfortable. But if others are involved, a man will have a band of

allies who can help him begin to address his sexual sin and look forward to the redemptive work God will do in his heart and life.

By Understanding Their Own Story. Not only must addicted men admit and talk about their problem, they must also seek to understand the story of how they have gotten to this place. There are formative events in every man's history that are important for him to discuss with a friend or counselor. Satan wants us to hide our stories from one another. He knows that thinking through the defining moments and the themes of our lives has the power to break through our layered hearts, expose his lies, and rebuild our faith in God.

Most addicted men have learned to stuff the pain of loss and mistreatment. As men share their own personal story with a

trusted friend or counselor, it is for many of them their first opportunity to *name* what has affected them and to deeply *feel* the harm of what has been done to them. Most need to face the destructive effects of being inundated with sexually graphic material at a young age. Some need to feel the loss of innocence as a result of sexual abuse. Many need to feel the disappointments of relationships and unfulfilled dreams. As men discuss and think about their stories, loss and harm can begin to penetrate and touch their hearts. It makes it real rather than academic and opens the door for them to start grieving (Mt. 5:4).

Thinking through the shaping events of their own personal stories provides the chance not only to grieve but also to consider and question what they've learned about themselves, about women, about

relationships, and about God. Asking deep questions from their own heart allows men to reconsider the truthfulness of what they've learned. More important, it sets the stage for them to struggle with their God.

Men who regularly seek out pornography are in a crisis of faith. That's the core of why they turn to idols like pornography. Struggling with the questions and doubts that surface when men wrestle with the details of their story is what God uses to restore those men to faith in Him. Honest struggle can take them to the place where God reveals Himself, calls them by name, and reminds them of His goodness.

God doesn't always answer our questions of why (Ps. 22:1-2). God didn't answer Jesus as He cried out on the cross, "My God, My God, why have You

forsaken Me?” (Mk. 15:34). Instead of answers, He gives us something far better—undeniable reminders of how He has moved on our behalf and memories that assure us He hasn’t abandoned us (Ps. 73:21-28). In David’s case, it was the reminder of his forefathers’ exodus from Egypt that restored his faith (Ps. 22:3-5). For others, it is the recollection of the time when they came to know Christ as their Savior or when God miraculously spared their life or intervened and met a pressing need.

All Christian men have memories of how God touched their lives with goodness. For many, the memories are remote, but they aren’t gone. And in the presence of heartfelt struggle over doubt and confusion, God brings to the edge of their awareness irrefutable memories of His

hand in their lives to build a stronger conviction that He is good and trustworthy (Ps. 77:10-20). The more they remember, the less they want to turn away from Him by looking at pornography. The faith that comes out of struggling with questions is captured in the words of C. S. Lewis: “I know now, Lord, why You utter no answers. You are Yourself the answer. Before Your face, questions die away.”¹⁵

By Facing The Log In Their Own Eye. As men begin to come to terms with their stories, it can prepare their hearts to take responsibility for what they’ve done with the harm that’s been done to them. Another one of Satan’s strategies is to get us to blame others for the choices we make. Like Adam who blamed his wife and his God when he was caught in the first sin

(Gen. 3:11-12), the evil one wants us to feel like helpless, innocent victims who point the finger of blame at everyone but ourselves.

A man involved in pornography tends to blame his struggles on his wife, his job, his family, his circumstances, and his God. Satan knows that if a man won't take responsibility for his own reactions, he will remain a prisoner of what others have done to him. But as a man begins to apply God's standard that he has a log in his eye and others have a speck of wood in theirs (Lk. 6:41-42), he can start to feel a redemptive sorrow that takes him beyond what others have done and toward a repentance without regret (2 Cor. 7:10).

As a man starts to grapple with how he has responded to being hurt, it paves the way for him to

confront and humbly own up to his angry commitments to protect himself through distance and deception. He can start to feel and grieve the pain that he caused when he filled his mind with sexual images that made him withdraw from others. He can begin to painfully admit how his use of pornography has betrayed the trust of others and brought sorrow to the heart of his God who died for him.

It's difficult for men to feel sorrow over the harm they have caused. Many would prefer to hide from sorrow by being angry with themselves, or to become hardened by blaming others and God. But if a man feels the sorrow and stays with it long enough, the Spirit of God can begin to make him feel so desperate that he is willing to do whatever it takes to come back home to his heavenly Father.

By Returning Home.

Many men who are involved in pornography feel orphaned by God. They feel abandoned and left alone to struggle with life. The truth is, however, that God didn't orphan them. Like the prodigal son, they ran away from home (Lk. 15:11-13).

When God's children wander away from Him, He often uses their own sinful choices to bring them to a point of productive frustration and desperation. When a man's heart is seduced and given over to the false god of pornography, life may have to knock him around before he will come to his senses. For example, it wasn't until the prodigal son squandered all that he had and was eating with pigs that he finally realized his predicament (Lk. 15:14-19).

God gives a man over to the consequences of what he

has attached his heart to (Rom. 1:24). And experiencing these consequences can be redemptive as it wakes him up to the agonizing yet exciting truth: "I am a mess. I've been wounded, but I've hurt many in turn. The good news is that I can come home. By God's grace I am forgiven, and I can be different for Him and for others."

As a man begins to comprehend and accept God's response to his sin, his attachment to the shame of pornography will begin to loosen. God isn't shocked by his sin. It saddens Him for sure, but He quickly reminds him that Jesus' death paid the price for his sin (Col. 1:14). He didn't just pay for *some* of our sins. He paid for *all* of them. Although our sin may result in serious consequences, God doesn't see our sin as an excuse to

withdraw from Him and others. Instead, He urges us to use the reality of our sin and our shame as a reason to come to Him for restoration and the faith and hope to live for a higher calling.

God is the only One who can break a man down without crushing his spirit. He alone is able to help us to admit our sin and move from self-absorbed thoughts to a growing concern for others.

By Living Out Love.

A desire to love, as a result of knowing that we are fully loved and accepted by God, is the best solution to pornography and its effects. Changed by God's love, men find the desire to reject an industry that exploits the physical beauty of a woman and the gift of sex that God intended to be deeply enjoyed between a husband and wife.

Furthermore, men who

are changed by the love of God will begin to see women in a different light. Rather than seeing women through the eyes of sexual lust, they can begin to see women through the eyes of love. Instead of just looking at women as sexual objects, they can begin to see women as fellow image-bearers of God who have likely been wounded by a world filled with lust, anger, and betrayal. They can begin to notice that women struggle with loneliness in a way similar to their own struggles with failure. They can think about how to interact with women for their benefit, instead of thinking about how to take advantage of them.

The enslaving forces of pornography don't stand a chance when love is at work. Alongside of the freedom to love, men can begin to know a purpose that comes from answering

God's call to join in a story that is so much bigger than their own. Unlike pornography, which conquers and enslaves, God liberates them from the chains of regret to live for a larger purpose.

By Living For A Larger Purpose. A man who returns home doesn't find a heavenly Father who is waiting to pound him with shame and disgust. What he finds is a forgiving Father who showers him with compassion and celebration (Lk. 15:22-24). And He doesn't stop there. God also restores a man to a position of honor, responsibility, and significance by giving him the privilege of playing a vital role in His larger story to reconcile the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

Our redeemed hearts identify with God's story. And we don't just want to read about it—we want

something more. We want to be a *part* of the story, to enter into the themes of redemption and renewal coursing through the drama. We want to participate in the adventure and suspense of laying ourselves on the line for a cause that is greater than ourselves (2 Cor. 5:15). The good news is that any man can do this, no matter what he's done.

With a renewed faith in what God has done for him in the past and a rekindled hope in what He is going to do in and through him in the future, a man has a purpose to live for today. Regardless of his vocation or financial means, he can know the honor and meaning of being a warrior for God's purposes. And playing a part in something larger than himself transcends the difficulties and sorrows of life and puts his own life into perspective.

With eyes of growing faith and hope, a man can begin to see that God is doing something exciting in which he can invest himself. Getting caught up in God's larger story turns life into the meaningful adventure it was meant to be. While it's risky and unpredictable at times, it's anything but boring for a man to use his words, his gifts, his interests, his burdens—whatever they may be—to build relationships with people. He can begin to share the gospel and the difference that Jesus has made in his life.

Seeing life from this perspective radically changes a man's attitude about his family, job, and friendships. What he used to dread when he was addicted to porn is now seen as an opportunity to tell others about Jesus. Pursuing the opportunities will stretch a man further than he could

possibly imagine, but it doesn't have to be oppressive. Like a good physical workout energizes the body, playing a part in God's larger drama energizes the soul with a deep sense of purpose because he knows that his labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

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