

The Truth About Porn

30 Day Newsletter

Day 1— General & Male Statistics

Pornography is a real problem inside and outside the church; it’s a real problem—period. I’ve shared some statistics leading up to this newsletter, but I want to *really* give you some statistics as we officially kick this thing off.

I have cited my sources. They are reputable. And if you look at other sources, you will find these numbers to be comparable. I’ve heard people irresponsibly throw pornography statistics around, and all this does is make people doubtful of the problem or that you even know what you’re talking about.

What you will find from these statistics about males and the ones tomorrow about females is that, yes, porn does affect more men than women; more people are looking at porn than you think; very young people are looking at porn than what you might think, and porn does not show partiality to married men or preachers.

Here are the numbers.

Male Pornography Statistics	
<i>Statistics</i>	<i>Sources</i>
The first exposure to pornography among men is 12 years old , on average (Covenant Eyes). Douglas Weiss in <i>Clean</i> cites the average age as 11 years old .	Covenant Eyes ¹ ; Weiss ²
80% of 15-17 year olds have multiple exposures to hardcore porn.	Weiss
The percentage of young men (in the U.S.) looking at sexually explicit material ranges from 56 – 86 % .	Weiss ³
1 in 5 mobile searches are for pornography.	Covenant Eyes
It is estimated that approximately 13% of the U.S. population regularly views internet pornography, 75% of whom are males.	P.J. Wright qtd. in Weiss ⁴
Only 43% of teens believe porn is bad for society, compared to 31% of young adults 18-24, 51% of Millennials, 44% Gen-Xers, and 59% of Boomers.	Covenant Eyes
1 in 5 youth pastors and 1 in 7 senior pastors use porn on a regular basis and are currently struggling.	Covenant Eyes

¹ <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>

² Weiss, Douglas. *Clean*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013

³ This is cited from a study done in 2009 by Deborah Braun-Courville and Mary Rojas in the United States.

⁴ P.J. Wright, “U.S. Males and Pornography, 1873-2010: Consumption, Predictors, Correlates,” *Journal of Sex Research* (2011), doi: 10, 1-12.

There are 68 million daily pornographic search engine requests on the internet (25% of total search engine requests).	Weiss
34% of daily internet users receive unwanted exposure to sexual material.	Weiss
According to the <i>Sexual Recovery Institute</i> , <i>sex</i> and <i>porn</i> are among the top five search terms for kids under 18 . <i>Sex</i> is actually the number one topic for internet searches, and more than 1.3 million porn sites will pop up at the user's request.	Hitz & Curtis ⁵
Gary Rose, CEO of <i>The Medical Institute</i> , shared on <i>Focus on the Family</i> (July 8, 2005), that the average teenager spent 3-4 hours per day watching television, and 83% of the programming most frequently watched by adolescents contained some sexual content.	Hitz & Curtis
Researchers investigating male porn users have found rates of porn <i>addiction</i> hovering around 28% . ⁶	Wilson ⁷
68% of divorce cases involved one party meeting a new lover over the internet. 56% involved one party having "an obsessive interest in pornographic websites."	Covenant Eyes

I'm sorry for sharing this depressing information, but I'm not sorry. People have been skirting this issue for too long. Whether intentional or not, for whatever reason, the church has been awkwardly silent on how bad an issue this really is in congregations of the Lord's people. And we are not helping young men and women by remaining silent on the issue, assuming, "If it's not spoken about, then it's not a problem."

I would venture to say that most of these boys and girls, men and women, do not want to be in the porn sin cycle. Like me, they looked at an image at a very young age, and they had no clue that it would be something that affected them for years. "Solomon wrote of a young man's road to trouble in Proverbs 7... Not one [young men] realizes that he is on the road until he has traveled it for quite a while."⁸ And so it is.

If you are on the newsletter to learn how to help others, then please stay with me through the end. And if you the one in this sin cycle, then remember this: "You cannot avoid the costs of sexual impurity. You might as well fight."⁹

Day 2: "Female Statistics" coming tomorrow...

⁵ Hitz, Shelley and Curtis, S'ambrosia. *A Christian Woman's Guide to Breaking Free from Pornography: It's Not Just a Guy's Problem*. E-book, Body and Soul Publishing, 2012

⁶ As you will learn on Day 9 of this newsletter, "porn addiction" is a very specific moniker, and is much more narrow a term than many people use make it out to be. Thus, this number of 28% might seem rather low to you at first reading.

⁷ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain On Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction*. E-book, Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

⁸ Weiss, Douglas. *Clean*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013

⁹ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man's Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

Day 2: Female Statistics

When I have conversations with other Christians about the problem of pornography, I try to bring attention to the fact that some girls and women struggle with this sin as well. But what most people hear me say is, “Women have *just as* much of a problem with porn as men do.” That is NOT what I am saying. All I am saying is that there are women (probably more than you think) that have a problem with pornography as well.

I readily admit that the statistics of women who view pornography in its many forms is lower than that for men. Nonetheless, it is a problem! I will let these sourced statistics speak for themselves.

Female Pornography Statistics	
<i>Statistics</i>	<i>Sources</i>
17% of women struggle with pornography addiction.	Weiss
Women are 2x more likely to use a chat room than men.	Weiss; Hitz & Curtis ¹⁰
1 in 3 visitors to adult websites are women (Weiss). 33% of the 40 million Americans who regularly visit porn sites are women (Hitz & Curtis).	Weiss; Hitz & Curtis ¹¹
9.4 million women access adult websites each month.	Weiss
The percentage of young women (in the U.S.) looking at sexually explicit material ranges 31 – 56 % .	Weiss
70% of women admitted to keeping their cyber activities a secret.	Weiss; Hitz & Curtis
In one survey, 41% of the women surveyed (<i>total = 241</i>) said that they read romance novels that contain sexually explicit scenes. Within the 14-18 year old age bracket, over half of the girls (53%) claimed to read these kinds of novels.	Hitz & Curtis ¹²
In one study, 34% of churchgoing women reported that they intentionally visit porn websites online.	Hitz & Curtis ¹³
In one study, 82% of women in the married relationship stated they struggled with depressing during their relationship with their sexually addicted husband.	Weiss ¹⁴

One of our problems with “coming to” on this fact that women struggle with porn too is this: we are bad about projecting our own experiences and proclivities on to every other person within

¹⁰ Hitz & Curtis cite the Internet Filter Review for this statistic.

¹¹ This latter statistic of 33% comes from statistics from the Education Database Online in 2011.

¹² These statistics come from a survey conducted by Shelley Hitz, the author, who conducted a survey on her website and received responses from 241 Christian girls and women.

¹³ Hitz & Curtis cite purehope.net for this statistic, though the original webpage cited cannot be found now.

¹⁴ This percentage is taken from two studies performed by Dr. Douglas Weiss and are quoted in *Clean* from another book he wrote— *Partners: Healing from His Addiction*.

our demographic sector. For example, I was exposed to pornography at an early age and according to some addiction models, I was *addicted* to porn. Thus, I tend to project my same experiences on to all other men. This is unfair.

Others unfairly project on all women what they've heard about how women are not visually stimulated, and so people conclude, "Women don't struggle with porn." Many women don't struggle with porn. And these women that don't struggle with porn can be bad about projecting their lack of struggle onto every other woman. And so, it's common for women in the church to say, "I don't think that's a problem for women in my church," because they don't struggle with it personally and neither do their closest friends. This is unfair. And it makes women who *do* struggle with porn feel as if they are the only female in the world who has this problem.¹⁵

I'm reminded of this story that I shared in a Five Minute Bible Study article in 2017.

I was riding in the car with two young girls raised in the church several years ago. The youngest girl, being about 14 at the time, had an I-Pad in her hand. She was the epitome of innocence. We were joking about our favorite movies. Amidst the joking, it was revealed that her favorite movie was Magic Mike... Many other young women have answered me honestly when asked if they deal with lust. The consensus is unanimous so far.

It's been six years since I wrote that, and in that passing of time, other girls/women in the church have shared the same problem with me.

Another mistake we make is in lumping all types of porn into the same pot. As the statistics above note, women are 2x more likely to use a sex chat room than men. There is the other statistic about women being prone to erotic romance novels. Pornography isn't *just* visual porn in a magazine or video. Visual *and* written porn are both porn.

As to why women are more attracted (generally) to written pornography, Dr. Julie Draumeni-McBride says:

"Erotica has this interesting emotional element that a lot of women are drawn to where the stories capture this more erotic romantic theme and sequence that hits at the heart of this script that a lot of women are looking for in this highly erotic or emotional way, and so they're really drawn to these stories. It leaves more to the imagination and speaks more to this emotional piece that women seem to be really drawn to"¹⁶

Whatever the motivations and appeal may be, I'll let the statistics in today's newsletter speak for themselves.

¹⁵ "Do Women Struggle with Porn?" *Consider Before Consuming*, 13 November 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0h69vXBCxLup9MdqKcr3cP?si=12311278104e47d2>

¹⁶ "Female Porn Use, Addiction Models, and Sex Ed Pt. 1." *Sisters on the Front Lines Podcast*, 13 November 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2t3H8MeRS1RTY1aixyWdbQ?si=41938ec7b0174f45>

Don't just assume that the women or the girl sitting next to you in the church pew isn't looking at pornography secretly. I've tried to be inclusive in this newsletter to address both men and women. While *most* women may not have this problem, *many* women do, and that number is growing with each decade of time that passes.

Day 3— My Battle w/ Porn (Aaron)

Maybe you feel like I'm some larger-than-life, shiny preacher who can't relate to the sexual sin you're going through. I've had people who spoke to me as if I was a celebrity. To them I was "so strong." This bothers me. We do preachers and ourselves a disservice when we regard them this way. Preachers aren't celebrities; they are weak men who have dealt, and some currently are dealing with, real, secret sin in their life. It's just not typical that you hear about these sins openly.

Part of this over-beautification of preachers is the preacher's fault: he can suffer from pride and doesn't want to risk shame for the sake of confessing past or current sins. The preacher can also suffer from shame just like everyone else, and he has to overcome this sense of shame just like the girl that "went too far" with some boy and loathes herself for it. Part of this is the fault of church cultures we have built at times: some members actively speak out against publicly discussing quote, unquote "inappropriate" topics from the pulpit. Some preachers have even been told not to tell anyone about their sinful past or present for sake of *reputation*. I'm not speaking to how prevalent these issues may or may not be, but all these reasons and others are why you might have a misconception of how *upright* I am. It is only in the last five years or so that I have spoken publicly and *more* freely about the sins of my past and present.

So, to help you feel more comfortable speaking to others about your past, let me tell you about the past of a not-so-shiny preacher – Aaron.

My relationship with pornography started when I was around 10 years old. I say, "right around," because I can't remember with certainty if I was actually 9 years old or not. I was at my cousin's house. He showed me a woman's lingerie magazine. I was curious more than anything. I didn't have a real sex drive at that age obviously. I wouldn't hit puberty till I was 12. More than anything, I was influenced by my cousin to be like him; I got a thrill from sneaking around and taking risks. Fear of my cousin and what he might do if I told anyone was a factor as well.

It would have been 2002 or 2003 when my cousin showed me that magazine. It was still the days of dial-up internet. Smart phones weren't a thing yet; even personal cell phones weren't things that kids commonly had. We had to sneak into the living room at night and catch X-rated channels on Dish network. We watched anything we could get our eyes on. He taught me how to masturbate, though I didn't really see all the hype about this at the ripe age of 10 yrs. old. My cousin and porn taught me everything I knew or thought I knew about sex until my dad had "the talk" with me years later, and even then, I still had false conceptions of what sex was like for years to come because of what I had seen in porn.

Eventually I did hit puberty, and that's when I no longer needed a cousin to motivate my pursuit of porn. I quickly learned how to get on my dad's and the family laptop and erase the search history after looking up porn. This went on for seven years unchecked. No one in the world knew this except my cousin. But there was something else no one knew...

Many people who have never been controlled by porn don't know the shame cycle that comes with this particular sin (at least for someone with a conscience). It's impossible to precisely relate to someone how it is that you can fervently hate looking at porn, have the sincerest change of heart (repentance), pray and weep to God for forgiveness, and then within two hours be sitting in front of a screen looking at it again! The control that lust can exert on an individual in the dark, in secret, when no one else knows what you're doing, is difficult to relate or comprehend.

I share all this to relate myself to those of you who are actively in the heat of this struggle. You're not alone. Also, know that there is real hope. I remember at 14 years old praying to God, but without hope, because I truly believed my enslavement to pornography was something I would *never* escape. It took 12 years, but I escaped. I share this to inform those of you who have never been in this fight. It's very real. And yes, it's a widespread problem in the church. We must talk about it. Sin thrives in the dark (John 3:19-21; Rom. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:5); we must expose it (Eph. 5:11).

I've only been *clean* from porn for about 7-8 years, and though I wasn't looking at porn in that time, the effects of that lust bled into my dating relationships afterwards. I can't express to you in a brief newsletter how important it is and how many reasons there are to start squashing porn out of your life today! You might think it's really just a *small* thing, and maybe it does start that way (if there is such a thing with sin), but it never ends small; it always has further reaching effects on your life than what you ever imagined it capable of.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me,” (1 Cor. 15:10).

Day 4— Podcast: Matt Tison on the stigma of talking about porn and sexual sin.

Today I want to direct you to a podcast recorded between myself and Matt Tison. Matt Tison gladly agreed to come on the Five Minute Bible Study Podcast and discuss the stigma that surrounds public discourse about pornography in the church. Please watch or listen to the full podcast, but in order to whet your whistle, here are some exchanges excerpted from the discussion.

What do you think about the stigma that exists in the church regarding the discussion of sex and pornography?

Matt: I think [porn] is something that needs to be talked about in the church. I heard from a Christian in the church in the past that we don't need to talk about homosexuality in the church, because it's not a problem for us. Uhhhhh... I don't know about that. I think that we're finding it is a problem, it's just not a problem that people are feeling comfortable coming out with and saying they're struggling with. And another thing is, it may not be a problem now, but it's bound to become a problem. And I think we've seen that... I think pornography is the same. It should have been talked about a long time ago before it became the problem that it is now... We need our brothers and sisters to know that, we know that this is a temptation and we want to give each other all the tools we can to help one another through this. And I absolutely think there is value in being clear and candid, censored when needed and sensitive when needed, but still open and understanding that this is a major issue that people struggle with in the church.

Aaron: I 100% agree... If the older brethren in the church, especially those who have struggled with this, if they would speak from a place of wisdom (and of course they're gonna have the ability to be more sober about it than a 20 yr. old), I think people don't have to worry about it becoming an uncivil conversation. But the problem is, I don't think you see 50 yr. old preachers talking about it... because the way pornography distribution has changed over the last 10 years with high speed internet and personal smartphone use, it's really our generation that's at the beginning of that change of distribution; we're really the ones (the 20-35 yr. olds) that would be more willing to talk about it.

Why is there hesitation to discuss the topic?

Do realize that the reasons I list below are theories. These are not based on any verifiable outcomes, but they are logical reasons that may be contributing to our silence on this subject.

1. It's an uncomfortable subject. Yes. I think this has got to be the biggest reason. Sex and porn are very private affairs. They touch on the most intimate sector of our person and life.
2. Older generations have an assumed code of "we just don't talk about that." It was considered "improper" to discuss such a subject openly. Right or wrong, that's the culture they grew up in.
3. "It's inappropriate to discuss this publicly." This reason is offered by very sincere hearts. I've heard Ephesians 5:12 cited, "For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret." It's difficult to interpret this to say that we shouldn't talk about things like porn altogether. Why? Because in just the previous verse Paul said, "And have no [participation] with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (v. 11). How do you expose something by remaining obscure and silent about it? It seems Paul is discouraging "participation" in works of darkness. He is shaming talking about these dark sins casually, for entertainment, or for any reason other than exposure and destruction.
4. Guilt. Many, many people are guilty of looking at pornography. It took me about five years from the last pornographic image I saw to feel like I could talk about the subject openly.
5. Naivety. I've learned since starting this newsletter project that many people are simply ignorant about how rampant porn is within the lives of average church members. People

that are struggling, have struggled with, or know someone close to them who has struggled with pornography, these are the people who likely signed up for this newsletter and shared it with others. Many assume too much when they assume no one in their circle or church is dealing with this issue.

6. Pride. One brother told he believes this is the biggest reason why we don't talk about this publicly. He was making the point that preachers want too often to cast off this seamless image, a clean exterior, and they don't want to talk about their sinful pasts. Perhaps this is true. I certainly don't want to cast shade on all preachers and accuse them of this, but perhaps there is truth to this.

Ultimately, I think people mostly like to live in blissful ignorance. If we don't talk about secret sin, it doesn't exist. That's the general consensus. Life is so much more colorful and peaceful when we don't have to think about and get messy in the secret struggles of others, who, on the outside look clean and put together. Douglas Weiss says this in his book *Clean*:

The church as a whole has a “don't ask, don't tell” policy of engagement with lust and sexual immorality. Simply put, this policy by the leadership and male culture of the church is that they are committed by “tradition” not to ask questions about your sexuality. If you go to church, there is almost an oath that you won't be asked directly about your sexuality. You won't be asked about whether or not you are looking at pornography. You will never be directly asked if you are masturbating. You will never be asked if you are flirting with women or having affairs (pp. 144-145).

What will it take to get past this stigma? And what will it take to get to an “ask, tell” policy of engagement? If you have any input, please respond to this email. I would love to hear your feedback.

Day 5— Today's Porn Is a Different Kind of Beast

Since the early 2000's, there have been several technological advancements that completely changed how men and women consume porn. These advancements are wins for the porn industry but losses for our individual battles against lust. The things I share with you in today's newsletter may open your eyes, and if it does, good! If you've been shuffling around all this time saying, “Porn is porn, it's no different today than it ever was,” you're ignorant and you need to pick your head up out of the sand. There's a legitimate reason why men and women today often feel like it's impossible to break free from the porn-cycle. Part of the answer lies in modern porn distribution and consumption.

One of the things that has radically changed the porn industry and porn consumption was the introduction of the internet, namely high-speed internet. Next came personal computers (laptops). Then came hand-held computers (smartphones). Now, almost everyone, including most middle school aged children walk around with a 24/7 porn gallery in their hand. In 2023 there is something called online algorithms that tailor search results on your computer and phone specifically to the things that you look at the most. If you look at one porn image, it will start feeding you more and more of this content to satiate your appetite. You like a specific type of

porn? It will, through trial and error, identify the *specific* type of porn you like and make sure to gratify your unique interests. Next is the new world of virtual reality (VR). Now porn and virtual sex is available in ways never before imagined. You can now put on goggles and interact with porn as if you are in the same room as the person in the image or video, and it will respond to you.

Let's back up to the revolutionization of porn that started with the introduction of highspeed internet in the early 2000's. Gary Wilson cites several ways that high-speed internet has completely changed the game of porn distribution and consumption in his book *Your Brain On Porn*. He breaks it down a little more precisely than I just did.

First, porn offers an endless buffet of novel "hotties" at the swipe of a finger. You can view porn for an entire lifetime without seeing the same image or video twice.

Second, internet porn offers countless artificially enhanced body parts.

Third, static images from magazines can't compete with today's hi-definition videos of intense sex, not to mention virtual reality (VR). This constantly surpasses expectations and causes viewers to become more bored with vanilla porn much quicker than would be the case otherwise.

Fourth, online porn offers 24/7 access of free, private consumption of porn with no feeling of guilt from outside spectators watching you buy a magazine in a gas station or movie in a movie store.

Fifth, there are no physical limits on internet porn consumption like there is with your belly after it has consumed too much. Individuals can satisfy themselves with porn for hours, only needing to stop for the bathroom and sleep.¹⁷

We are lightyears past the point where an individual had to shamefully go into a gas station or video store and check out a dirty magazine or video tape to satisfy their lust for porn. You can now access it wherever, whenever, without shameful judgment from outsiders, and no one will know but you. And now, porn is so individual specific that it's like getting tailored for a new suit. Your measurements are taken, and the product is manufactured just for you, the way you like it.

Especially since I started advertising this newsletter, I've had members of the church respond to me with skepticism that porn is really that big of a problem. Many Christians are duped to think that this is a sin that only affects church members in faraway lands, young men only, young men that *look* mischievous, no one born before the 90's, and the power of today's porn is no worse than it was 20 years ago. Don't be naïve. Wake up! This is a different animal. And it will continue to evolve as the devil maliciously uses technology to exploit the lusts of mankind. I'm afraid to even think about where the porn industry will be 20 years from now.

¹⁷ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain on Porn*. E-book 2nd ed., Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

The good thing is this: no matter how much porn evolves, there are proven tools to beat it! The basic principles of overcoming sin have never changed; the nuanced ways that we apply those principles may need tweaked over time, but the same principles apply, and we will get to those later in this newsletter. We can counter-assault porn in the church, but we first must unite in admission that this is a real problem, and it's effecting more men and women than we like to think. Stop playing "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" and join with me in "exposing the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11).

Day 6— How Has the Church Dealt with the Problem of Porn?

I was recently asked to make a short video for an online, men's, pornography support group giving reasons *why* porn is sinful. I thought about the efficacy of this, but I went ahead and made the video. Later, I was talking to another brother about this. I asked him, "Do you think it's helpful to address *why* porn is sinful? Should I dedicate a day of my newsletter to this question?" His answer was straightforward and pinpoint accurate. He said, "In the church, the *only* preaching on porn that we've done to this point is to say that it is sinful." That's right. I don't think many Christians in the church are scratching their heads, thoughtfully wondering whether or not this secret practice of looking at pornography is against the will of God and His written word. We've preached that. We know that. But we need more than that.

Matt Tison and I partly addressed this on our podcast about the stigma of talking about porn in the church. In that conversation, I referenced the account of a young preacher who told me he had a problem with porn. He had previously gone to an older preacher and told him about the same problem; he was looking for wise counsel and guidance. But this is what the older preacher told him: "Don't tell anyone about this. If you do, it will ruin your reputation." The preacher didn't give this young man any resources. There was no admonition for the need of faithful accountability with another brother. There was only a proverbial "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled" (James 2:16). This is disgraceful, but dare I imagine that this is what many men and women struggling with porn have been told over the years? I would like to think this example is an outlier, but my fear is that it is not.

"If we don't talk about secret sin, it doesn't exist." This is how many Christians think about certain shameful sins that happen in the dark and away from everyone. People are trained to only whisper about certain sins, especially sexual sins, because in some generations we "just don't talk about that." Just not talking about it doesn't make the sin go away. It does the opposite. It gives sin a plush environment to spread further and deeper. This manifests itself in generational sin, repeated consequences, and victim upon victim.

We must do more than just preach from the pulpit of the church "Don't do that; it's sinful!" Here are some things we need in each congregation of the Lord's church.

- Men and women in each congregation who struggling members can go to, these members can be sure they will be heard and helped: no more faith-without-works responses.

- Confession cultures: this is a church culture where members feel free to actually confess their sins to one another and actually do it, because they know they will receive compassion and accountability from others in the congregation when they do. And part of creating a culture of confession has to start with the leaders. If the sheep never see or hear the shepherds admitting fault and being vulnerable, they will follow the leader. One brother told me this over a private message:

“I've heard a lot of preachers and people in the Lord's church say, ‘Don't sin.’ And a whole lot of brethren who act as if they've never sinned a day in their whole life. However, in my 21 years of being in the Lord's church; I really haven't heard too many Christians admit to sin, and far less who said how they overcame an addiction.”

- Real accountability: this looks like one brother telling another brother that they will walk in-step with them through this struggle, and then they actually do it. This starts off with daily and weekly check-ins, but it's ultimately a life-long relationship. Ideally, this accountability relationship is established with someone in your home congregation.
- Empathy: for those who do *not* struggle with porn, we must empathize with those who *do*. This means, when they confess their secret sins, they are in an extremely vulnerable spot, and they must not be met with shock and disgust. They must receive empathy and compassion. Even if you can't wrap your mind around the sin of pornography, you must try and sympathize with this person from a place of temptation that you have and treat them the way you would want to be treated (Matt. 7:12).
- Proven resources: we need men and women who take the time to find proven resources that will help others overcome. Recommended methods will need to be tweaked for each individual, so this will take time. This newsletter will give you such proven resources.

There are other things the church needs to implement on a congregational level, but this is a start. I would ask you to respond to this with other action plans that you believe need a place on this list.

Ultimately, we have to do more than just preach against pornography from our pulpits. We need to bear each other's burdens in this specific area, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). The good news is that I have seen fruits of this! There are men and women in Christ who are doing this very thing, and I pray their efforts spread like fire!

Day 7— Myths About Porn (Pt. 1)

Myth #1

Sexual Desire Is Sinful

Though no one says this, our minds can be tricked in to thinking that sex and sexual desire altogether is sinful. I believe this happens, because in the church, sex is rarely publicly discussed unless it's in a negative context (i.e., premarital sex is wrong, adultery is wrong, sexual

immorality is a problem, young people—don't have sex). Rarely is sex talked about in the proper context that God designed for it. This can lead those who are battling with sexual temptation and trying to practice abstinence to feel guilt when they experience natural and God-given sexual desire and urges. Young men can feel guilty for having nocturnal emissions. Young women can feel dirty for experiencing sexual tension that comes and goes. A young man may hold a girl's hand for the first time, a girl that he likes very much, get "excited" and feel guilty.

Sexual desire is a gift from God. This is implied in the mandate and blessing to reproduce (Gen. 1:28). It is more explicit in the Song of Solomon (see 4:6, 9-16; 7:7-9, 12). Sex was made to be enjoyed between one man and one woman in the context of marriage, exclusivity, and love. The natural urges and physiological responses of your body are not something to feel guilty about in and of themselves.

Myth #2

Once an Addict, Always an Addict

The discussion of porn as addiction will take place on Day 9. Regardless if porn properly fits the definition of "addiction" or not, one thing I know from experience: it can be recovered from. The "once an addict, always an addict" motto can be unnecessarily psychologically defeating for those trying to overcome "addictions." You can enjoy a life free of porn or desire for porn. You may not feel that way right now, but you're reading a newsletter from someone who is speaking from the other side. This is real.

Caveat: I am *not* saying this is as easy for one person as it is another. But I do believe that anyone can overcome porn and their desire for it. I think some men assume that my breaking free from porn was easier than theirs for whatever reason. It wasn't easy. Take my word for it.

Myth #3

You can break the porn cycle by simply cutting off porn consumption over an extended period of time.

This is the idea of cutting something out of your life without filling it back up. Dr. Leigh calls this "unwiring" the brain without "re-wiring" the brain with positive replacement stimulation and behavior.¹⁸ Think of porn as food and needing a meal replacement for this meal that you're cutting out of your life. If you don't replace this with some sort of positive food, you're gonna get hungry, and what do you think you're going to eat when you do? This isn't rocket science. It's why a lot of people avert their attention to things like lifting weights, running, or some other activity that is repetitive and increases positive energy.

Myth #4

Fasting is unimportant and isn't worth mentioning when it comes to quitting porn.

¹⁸ Leigh, Trish. "How Long Does It Take for a Brain to heal from Pornography?" *YouTube*, uploaded by Dr. Rish Leigh, P*rn Brain... <https://youtu.be/vTcz5hi120M?si=GfGmDfljBvMKQOp2>

Like Myth #1, no one ever says this. But if you will notice, Christian books about defeating porn rarely recommend fasting. In the four books on the subject that I just finished reading, I don't recall fasting being discussed a single time, and if it was mentioned, I don't remember because of how little significance was given to it. There are many spiritual benefits to fasting, especially in the midst of strong fleshly temptation. This discipline is God approved and recommended for a reason (Joel 2:12; Luke 4:2). I plan to talk more about fasting on Day 21 "How to Overcome Porn."

Day 8: "Myths About Porn (Pt. 1)" coming tomorrow...

Day 8— Myths About Porn (Pt. 2)

Myth #5

No one understands what I'm going through ("Woe Is Me" Syndrome).

Presumably every man in the heat of the battle against porn succumbs to the "woe is me" syndrome. This is especially true for men and women who do not confess their sin and do not have support from others. It is self-imposed, or shall we say flesh-imposed, and it is one of Satan's greatest tricks to keep the sinner in captivity.

Myth #6

Confessing my porn habit shows weakness.

Our culture seems to still maintain that a strong man doesn't show any sign of weakness. To confess a physical or spiritual weakness like a porn habit would go directly against this philosophy. And so, we continue to bottle up our pain and rot away. Confession, meekness, and humility are all cast as "weak." This is a lie, and if you hear a false message overwhelmingly more than you hear the truth, you will believe the lie.

Myth #7

Marriage will cure my porn habit.

Here is a real quote from a real single man in the book *Every Man's Battle*.

"The whole problem of impurity has been a mess. I've been hooked [on porn] for years, and I'm counting on marriage to free me. I'll be able to have sex whenever I want it. Satan won't be able to tempt me at all!"¹⁹

This is not a unique thought process. Many, many young men believe this myth, especially young men that are practicing abstinence until marriage. Many married, Christian men have gotten married only to find out that sex doesn't solve the problem. More on this on Day 28.

Myth #8

¹⁹ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man's Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

Porn and masturbation are healthy.

The book *Your Brain on Porn* by Gary Wilson is a very valuable resource in understanding this lie.²⁰ For years, and still today, the mainstream public health community has cast porn and masturbation as healthy, normal behavior. Most voices in society even recommend these behaviors for youths and married men and women (Day 12). Gary Wilson is no theist, but his book with well documented research evidence proves that it doesn't take a theistic worldview to understand that porn and masturbation are *not* healthy. There is actually a rising subculture in our society that is recognizing this lie and speaking out against it. You don't have to go back to the 1950's to find examples of widespread, public promotion of smoking as a healthy behavior. While smoking as a "healthy behavior" has been successfully debunked, porn has taken its place. But there is already multiplying research connecting porn consumption and masturbation with erectile dysfunction (ED) and inability to have sex.²¹ ED is a rapidly rising problem, but as Wilson notes, pharmaceutical companies and the medical industry at large don't make money by recommending abstinence from porn and masturbation.²²

Myth #9

If I can just quit porn, my problems with sexual temptation will be over.

People don't realize how extensive their sexual habits are and how much sexual stimulation they are receiving from common things throughout the day. Re-wiring the brain from porn requires taking a 24-hour inventory of sexual stimulation cues.

As Fred Stoeker says, "The visual sensuality of immodest dress, movies, commercials, and all the rest will feed your eyes and ignite you sexually."²³

Men think they can renew their minds by cutting off hard porn but maintain the same movie viewing, the same gym times, the same social media habits, etc. In the age we live, men are sexually stimulated beyond their realization. There will be more said about this when I discuss "Microstimulations" on Day 13.

Day 9: "Pornography Addiction—What is addiction, and does porn addiction really exist?" coming tomorrow...

Day 9— Pornography Addiction

Warning: the information in today's newsletter may be more in-depth than most of you are interested in reading about. However, if you are someone who is counseling others about pornography use, I would encourage you to investigate this discussion of pornography addiction.

²⁰ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain on Porn*. E-book 2nd ed., Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man's Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

You would be surprised to learn that there is so much controversy and public discussion about what addiction is and whether or not habitual pornography consumption can be properly called an addiction. There are various reasons why some people shy away from the term “addiction” and others jump to use it.

In today’s discussion, I want to address the following as briefly as I can:

- What is an addiction?
- What are motivations for *not* using the term “addiction” with pornography?
- What are motivations *for* using the term “addiction” with pornography?
- Words of caution when using the term.

I’ll be honest, I’m still taking in everything I’ve learned and continue to learn on this *addiction* .debate, but I do believe that there are pros and cons to using the phrase “porn addiction” that everyone at least needs to be informed about.

What is an addiction?

After reading this, you may notice just how many times the word “addiction” is commonly used in conversation without definition or qualification. It’s almost as if people label any behavior as an addiction if it is performed more than once (i.e., repeatedly). I’ve heard people say eating food (in general) is addictive. The fields of neurology and mental health have seen a need to be more precise about the definition and usage of this word which has led to the formulation of certain criteria or hallmark signs of addiction. That being said, not everyone in these fields are on the same page.

For example, “Addiction is not a specific diagnosis in the fifth edition of The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)—a diagnostic manual for clinicians that contains descriptions and symptoms of all mental disorders classified by the American Psychiatric Association (APA).”²⁴ We will speculate about the motivation for this momentarily, but first notice the other side of the coin.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) gives this definition of addiction:

A chronic, relapsing disorder characterized by compulsive drug seeking, continued use despite harmful consequences, and long-lasting changes in the brain. It is considered both a complex brain disorder and a mental illness. Addiction is the most severe form of a full spectrum of substance use disorders, and is a medical illness caused by repeated misuse of a substance or substances. (emphasis mine)

Gary Wilson sums up addiction with the “Three C’s”: 1) *craving* the substance/behavior, 2) loss of *control* in using the substance/behavior, or 3) despite negative *consequences*.²⁵ Compare and contrast this with the NIDA’s definition above and books you may read on the subject of

²⁴ “Substance Use Disorder defined by NIDA and SAMHSA” <https://wyoleg.gov/InterimCommittee/2020/10-20201105Handoutfor6JtMHSACraig11.4.20.pdf>

²⁵ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain on Porn*. E-book 2nd ed., Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

pornography.²⁶ These three C's capture the main features that most people include in their definition, though they leave off the features of addiction being a) chronic, b) effecting long-lasting changes in the brain, and c) being restricted to physical substances (i.e., drugs).

What are we to make of all this, and does it really matter? Let's quickly filter all this information so you can decide for yourself.

What are motivations for *not* using the term “addiction” with pornography?

It appears to me that there are two main motivations for avoiding the term “addiction” in relation to pornography use, and they both come from very different camps.

First, mainstream mental health professionals and spokespersons want to continue normalizing the use of pornography. By and large, pornography consumption is still viewed and advocated as “healthy,” even within marriages. I can only speculate as to why this narrative remains so popular: 1) porn is a tremendously lucrative industry, 2) pharmaceuticals profit greatly from sexual dysfunction (i.e., erectile dysfunction) related to porn use, 3) many mental health professionals themselves consume porn and don't want to accept it is unhealthy, 4) moral depravity, 5) pride—many professionals have normalized porn for decades and are too prideful to accept they were wrong. Again, these last four points are speculation on my part.

Second, others are worried about the harmful psychological effects that come with the now stigmatized and ambiguous label of “addiction.” A Christian counselor friend of mine, years ago, introduced this idea of avoiding the term “addiction” for alternative descriptors such as *dependance*, *habit*, and other more general terms. Why? The term “addiction” has become associated with something that is chronic and unshakeable (see NIDA definition), and this unnecessarily discourages recovery in individuals who are trying to overcome substance use or compulsive behavior like porn use. For example, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) are known for the motto “one and addict, always an addict.” Yet, not everyone who consumes alcohol is an addict and not everyone who consumes porn is an addict.²⁷ Thus, labeling all consumers as addicts can pose an unnecessary and even harmful roadblock to cessation and recovery (see footnote).²⁸ You can *completely* recover from compulsive porn use. The term “addict,” as it is typically understood, implies you cannot.

What are motivations *for* using the term “addiction” with pornography?

Many Christians and anti-porn spokespersons are highly motivated to use the term “addiction” in connection with pornography use, because they realize how harmful pornography really is when most of the mental health community remains blind or dishonest about its harms on socialization,

²⁶ Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker cite the “Four-step addiction cycle— preoccupation, ritualization, compulsive sexual behavior, then despair” in their book *Every Man's Battle* (Waterbrook Press, 2000).

²⁷ “Only about 10-15% of humans or rats that use addictive drugs (except nicotine) ever become addicts,” (Ibid.).

²⁸ James Clear says, “The third and deepest layer [of behavior change] is changing your identity.” He gives the example of a smoker. If a smoker is trying to quit, he needs to change his identity to that of a non-smoker. Thus, when someone asks him if he wants a cigarette, instead of saying, “No thanks, I'm trying to quit,” he says, “No thanks, I don't smoke.” Though this might seem a small and insignificant distinction, it's changes like this on the atomic level can lead to long-lasting habit change (*Atomic Habits*. Penguin Random House, 2018).

sexual health, marriage relationships, and more. The word “addiction” is a powerful word packed full of pent-up connotations. Thus, it is understandable why many jump to use this term and with great regularity.

Gary Wilson makes the best case that I’ve read or heard for why pornography consumption can be addictive and should be classified as an addiction.²⁹ His arguments are largely based on 1) the parallel effects that pornography has on the brain compared to drugs like morphine, heroine, and cocaine, 2) reports of some withdrawal-like symptoms from heavy consumers, and 3) exhibits of the three C’s of addiction in those same consumers. He makes a pretty convincing case, in my humble opinion, that pornography consumption *can* be addictive, depending on what definition one is operating under. Nonetheless, Wilson wouldn’t claim that everyone who consumes porn regularly is *addicted*.

Words of caution when using the term.

That was a lot! So, what should you and I take away from all this? Here is what I think: take it or leave it.

We should be able to give a clear definition of addiction if we are going to use the word. The word has too many definitions with such a wide range of meanings, that it can cause more confusion than understanding by just throwing the word around.

We should not throw the word around willy-nilly. Understand that, though porn addiction may be legitimate, not everyone who has looked at porn more than once is a porn addict. I have found that we tend to project our own experiences with porn on everyone else who has had struggles with this sin. This can lead us to assume that everyone struggles with it to the same degree and/or that certain groups (i.e., women) never struggle with it at all. Applying the term “addiction” to every person who struggles with the sin assumes too much about the makeup and tendencies of each individual.

Understand that porn *can* be overcome. If the definition of addiction being a “chronic” issue is true, then it can never truly be overcome. However, I can say from personal experience, that at one time I could relate to the three C’s of porn addiction, and yet I have overcome this sin and am eight years clean. I don’t even have the desire to look at porn today, though I could if I wanted to. I know other men who can say the same. There are online discussion forums full of men and women who testify to the same. You *can* overcome porn. Change your identity. Don’t let a label contribute to your enslavement.

Day 10— Dopamine: How Porn Keeps You Coming Back

Warning: Like with Day 9, today’s newsletter will include a more technical discussion about the brain and the pleasure chemical—dopamine. Some people may find this to be more than they

²⁹ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain on Porn*. E-book 2nd ed., Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

care to know. However, I truly believe that understanding the reward center of your brain can help you in your fight against porn more than you might realize.

What is dopamine?

Deep inside the brain, there is something called a *reward center*. You've got one. Your dog's got one. A monkey's got one. The reward center's job is to release a pleasure chemical called *dopamine* into our brains in response to behaviors that we perceive as positive...³⁰

Your brain generates different amounts of [dopamine] in response to all sorts of experiences, from kissing, to looking at something beautiful, to eating a great meal.

Dopamine is your body's way of telling you, 'This is awesome. We should do this as often as possible.' Certain activities, like drug use and porn consumption, turn up your brain's dopamine production as high as it can go.³¹

What causes me to seek more of this pleasure chemical?

How much dopamine you experience from something depends on your *baseline level* of dopamine when you arrived there and your previous dopamine *peaks*. This is why, when you repeatedly engage in something that you enjoy, your *threshold* for enjoyment goes up and up and up.³² (*emphasis mine*)

In other words, we all have a baseline level of dopamine circulating in our bloodstream that is the result of everyday activities. Some people experience a higher baseline level (threshold) due to varying factors in their life. Some people also experience very high peaks of dopamine surging in their bloodstream. For example, a skydiver might experience higher peaks of dopamine than a boring librarian. As a result, the skydiver will require very high forms of stimulation to experience surges in dopamine, whereas the librarian might have a very high surge of dopamine from simply watching a scary movie. Huberman stresses repeatedly in his literature and conversations that dopamine baselines and dopamine peaks have a large impact on a person's experiences, drive, and excitability. All of these factors play into why you seek more of this pleasure chemical.

How does this relate to pornography consumption?

When a man looks at pornography, the brain is excited. The reward center is stimulated, and it releases dopamine, telling the brain, "This is awesome. Look at more of this." Depending on

³⁰ "How Porn Can Affect the Brain Like a Drug." *Fight the New Drug*, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-affect-the-brain-like-a-drug/>. Accessed 3 November 2023.

³¹ "How Porn Can Become an Escalating Behavior." *Fight the New Drug*, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-become-an-escalating-behavior/>. Accessed 3 November 2023.

³² Huberman, Andrew, "Neuroscientist: DELETE Your Social Media NOW! – Here's Why!" *YouTube*, uploaded by Motivation Madness, 31 October 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqMTqy4X6h0&list=LL&index=2&t=130s>

how long, how often, and how shocking the porn is you look at, your baseline level of dopamine and your dopamine peaks may go up, meaning that you will require more porn, and potentially different or more exciting porn in order to experience surges in this pleasure chemical. This is called *escalation*.

However, there's another important aspect to this cycle. Huberman says,

Please remember this. When you experience something or you crave something really desirable, really exciting to you, very pleasurable, what happens afterwards is your baseline level of dopamine drops. So, these peaks in dopamine, they influence how much dopamine will generally be circulating afterward. And you might think 'Oh, a big peak in dopamine, after that I'm going to feel even better because I just had this great event.' Not the case. What actually happens is that your baseline level of dopamine drops.³³

This drop in your baseline level of dopamine will leave you *feeling* very low or depressed. This decrease in drive, emotion, and excitement can feed into the pleasure-seeking cycle by driving the person back to the thing that gave them that surge in dopamine. If the stimulant is porn, then the person goes back to watch porn in hopes that it will "fix" the drop in dopamine below baseline and the associated negative feelings that come with it.

How this helped me understand my pornography problem.

I wish I knew this stuff a long time ago. Information can be very powerful. The cycle of how this pleasure chemical goes up and down in relation to stimuli like porn and how that affects our emotions explained a lot about my behavior that never made sense before. I found myself in a cycle of looking at porn, putting it away, praying to God for forgiveness, and then minutes or hours later looking at it again! I found myself chasing more exciting forms of porn. Yet, I hated what I was doing! This makes a lot more sense given this understanding of dopamine response.

Does this mean I wasn't responsible for what I was doing? Absolutely not. It means quite the opposite! You have control over your emotions, and once you understand how this reward system works, you become empowered in cutting off the factor that is feeding the cycle. This doesn't make the battle with porn child's play all the sudden, but it does weaken the "mystical" power that porn used to have.

More Resources

If you found this information helpful, I recommend the following resources for further learning:

- "How Porn Can Affect the Brain Like a Drug." *Fight the New Drug*, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-affect-the-brain-like-a-drug/>. Accessed 3 November 2023.

³³ Huberman, Andrew, "Neuroscientist: DELETE Your Social Media NOW! – Here's Why!" *YouTube*, uploaded by Motivation Madness, 31 October 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqMTqy4X6h0&list=LL&index=2&t=130s>

- “How Porn Can Become an Escalating Behavior.” *Fight the New Drug*, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-become-an-escalating-behavior/>. Accessed 3 November 2023.
- Huberman, Andrew, “Neuroscientist: DELETE Your Social Media NOW! – Here's Why!” *YouTube*, uploaded by Motivation Madness, 31 October 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NqMTqy4X6h0&list=LL&index=2&t=130s>

Day 11— Jonathan Edwards: Porn & the Church

Jonathan Edwards graciously agreed to sacrifice over an hour of his time to discuss the subject of pornography as it relates to church culture. You can find the link for the podcast at the end of this newsletter. “Porn & the Church” is obviously a very broad title, so I chose five specially crafted questions to give sound structure to our dialogue.

I selected a brief excerpt from Jonathan’s answers to each question I asked. I have given you those excerpts below as a tease to incite you to listen to the entire conversation on the podcast. If any of the answers quoted leave you confused or having questions, do realize there may be more context from the conversation that will help clear up any confusion; this is another reason to listen to the full podcast episode.

1. *Question: Generally, what are your first thoughts about the issue of porn and Christians in the church?*

Jonathan: “The flesh really wants to hide. It wants to hide from God. It wants to hide from brethren. So yes, I would say it’s likely that shame and fear and the number one motivations why people don’t want to talk about this.”

2. *Question: How would you sum up the history of how we (as a brotherhood) have handled this subject?*

Jonathan: What I’m concerned about, specifically with porn is, if you gossip, if you backbite, if you slander, that’s fine, as long as you don’t look at porn. And as long as you’re not engaging in some promiscuous behavior, the moment that porn comes into someone’s life...

3. *Question: What is your take on the issue of porn among women in the church? Is there a need to even address women in this discussion?*

Jonathan: Yes, I do believe it affects women... Even though [Matthew 5:28] is focused for a male audience, the way I apply it for these sisters is to encourage them and tell them 1) you’re not alone, 2) you can overcome, and 3) the resources, though they are geared for a male audience, we will find a way to help you overcome these struggles as well.

4. *Question: What do you think we need the most or more of (as a church) as we go about fighting Satan for sexual integrity and freedom from porn?*

Jonathan: If someone ONLY has boundaries and they say, “I won’t look at [porn] anymore...” You know what I’m good at? We’re really good at convincing ourselves not to do it. Like, we’re motivated for a week, but after a week, “It’s cold outside. I don’t want to go for a run.” And so, suddenly, I can circumnavigate, I can get around the boundary I set for myself. If I ONLY have boundaries it doesn’t work. Spiritual formation is THE key... One MUST be filled with the fruits of the Spirit.

5. *Question: If someone comes to you and confesses they have a porn problem, what do you recommend to them and what would you recommend others do?*

Jonathan: The first thing I do is validate that they’re a human being. You don’t know what it took for them to come forward; I don’t know what it took for them to come forward. I don’t know their family of origin or their past. I don’t know who they’re related to and how much fear they have about how it’s all gonna fall apart. I don’t know if their wife or their husband is going to feel like they’ve been betrayed. It’s so nuanced; it’s so complicated. So, the first thing I do when someone comes to me and says, “Hey, I’ve been looking at porn for years, and I can’t seem to get over it...” the first thing I tell them is, “Thank you for telling me. I’m so glad you did. And I need you to know that you’re more than porn.”

Links for the Podcast w/ Jonathan Edwards

Spotify

Apple Podcasts

Day 12— Is Porn Healthy?

Is the consumption of pornography a healthy behavior? This is an important question to explore, because mainstream society tells us it is, and this can place seeds of doubt in people’s minds about whether they need to actually quit consuming it or not. There are Christians who justify their use of pornography; there are some who do not even view the use of it as sinful. Even if you are not a Christian, I want to appeal to you from a mental health standpoint.

You may already be aware that the practice of prescribing pornography for individuals and married couples or sexually active couples is very common in mainstream mental health counseling and treatment. I offer the following quotes from a relevant 2016 online article on this very subject.

“A startling number of sex therapists recommend commercial pornography to patients.”³⁴

“One study, published in the late 1990s, found that 253 of 279 (approx. 90%) professionals surveyed in the United States and the Czech Republic reported that sexually explicit materials had been useful in their practice.”³⁵

³⁴ Tyer, Meagan. “A prescription for porn: should sex therapists recommend pornography to patients?” *The Conversation*, <https://theconversation.com/a-prescription-for-porn-should-sex-therapists-recommend-pornography-to-patients-70115>. Accessed 9 November 2023.

³⁵ Ibid.

“In a more recent study on this topic, from 2008, around a third of sex therapists in the US reported using pornography [in sex therapy], even when that was specifically defined as involving violent, dehumanizing or sexist content.”³⁶

“Given the lack of evidence in support of therapists recommending pornography as treatment, and a growing recognition of the harms associated with even mainstream, commercial porn, we need to ask why this practice has been allowed to continue for so long and who really benefits from it.”³⁷

In Gary Wilson’s book *Your Brain on Porn*, which I have cited heavily in this newsletter, he emphasizes the overwhelming evidence born out in research how that regular pornography consumption and masturbation have a negative impact on mental and physiological health. This is a lie you and I have been fed.

In the meantime, therapists continue to prescribe porn to married and/or sexually active couples as a way to spice up their sexual relationship. It is commonly recommended by therapists that couples sit and watch a pornographic video together before engaging in sex. I have read and heard of multiple accounts where husbands (including preachers) “have” to have an open porno magazine on the bed while making love to their wife in order to even perform. Some things you don’t need a research study to tell you it’s stupid, ignorant, depraved.

In response to why the mental health world still promotes porn consumption as healthy behavior, Wilson says, “Drug companies can’t sell any medications by someone quitting porn.”³⁸ He goes on to say, “Big Tobacco’s campaign to cast doubt on the link between smoking and disease is now a classic case study in a science called agnotology: the study of the cultural production of ignorance. Agnotology investigates the deliberate sowing of public misinformation and doubt in a scientific area.”³⁹ Has society ever intentionally lied to us about anything? I’ll let you answer this question and decide for yourself why we are still being fed that porn is healthy.

You will find out on Day 15 of this newsletter the extent to just how unhealthy porn can be on an individual’s all-around life.

My final word to you today is, stop listening to the lies. If you are being willingly duped into thinking pornography is somehow healthy for you, and that’s why you continue to use it, you know better.

Day 13— Microstimulations: How Modern Fashion, TV, ads, social media, and more making quitting porn so difficult.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain on Porn*. E-book 2nd ed., Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

³⁹ Ibid.

It is my personal opinion that this topic is one of *the* biggest reasons why so many men and women do not have success conquering porn, especially men. Generally, men are more visually oriented, and our society has enough sexually oriented eye candy that it can seem near impossible to avoid it! You *can* escape the sexual exploitation. But you *can't* starve the eyes from sexual gratification by *just* turning off porn, and you *won't* quit porn by *just* turning off porn.⁴⁰ If you can, I would like to know your secret. Please share.

All the little, everyday things in society, short of pornography, that give men sexual gratification are what I am calling microstimulations. *Every Man's Battle* captures the essence of what I'm talking about:

The visual sensuality of immodest dress, movies, commercials, and all the rest will feed your eyes and ignite you sexually.⁴¹

Society has been marketing sex for decades, and what used to shock people no longer shocks anyone.

Why has this battle so intensified that anyone watching television will be sexually assaulted, or slimed, within minutes of turning on the tube? Why do we celebrate sexual humor, suggestive language, open adultery, and fornication? And why are so many Christian men watching it?⁴²

You may have sworn off porn two days ago, but your eyes are still getting sexually gratified unless you do something to protect your eyes from all the *accepted* filth that bombards them every single day.

Some of you have never thought of these microstimulations of sexual gratification. Fred Stoeker didn't.

Those days revealed to me just how much I'd been stealing from Brenda (his wife) by watching sensuous R-rated movies and inspecting the lingerie catalogs. Those things provide far more sexual gratification than we might expect.⁴³

But other men think it's no big deal. They don't believe that looking at all the women walking around the grocery store in their booty shorts is feeding into their lust problem, specifically their porn problem. Joshua Harris spells out what many men are thinking when he writes:

Surely God will understand if we break our diet and nibble a little lust now and then (get too intimate on a date here, watch a questionable movie there, or indulge in an ungodly

⁴⁰ Of course, when I make this statement, I am speaking to Christian men who are not practicing sex outside of marriage and/or men who are married and have a unhealthy sex life or no sex life with their spouse. If you are having premarital sex or have a healthy sex life with your spouse, it is understandable how one could quit porn without starving the eyes from the microstimulations that are everywhere.

⁴¹ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man's Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

⁴² Weiss, Douglas. *Clean*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013.

⁴³ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man's Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

fantasy). This is the same kind of thinking behind the age-old question asked in youth groups: “How far is too far?”⁴⁴

What’s the answer to this problem?

First, you have to admit that you actually are getting pleasure from watching women walking around in skin-tight clothes, actresses in movies who are dressed *sexy*, *hot* scenes in movies that pull up short of sex, tabloids that show the year’s sexiest woman, etc.

Second, you have to agree that sexual purity is receiving no sexual gratification from anyone or anything but your wife, if you are married.⁴⁵

Third, you have to trust me and other men who have gone through the same thing you are going through right now. These little snacks keep your lust alive, and make it that much more difficult to keep the porn in the trash can.

“You have to take by faith that once you get your eyes and mind under control, the sexual pressure will drop off dramatically. You bring most of the sexual pressure onto yourself through visual sensual stimulation and mental fantasy.”⁴⁶

Fourth, you have to take action. Start starving your eyes.

Totally [starve] your eyes of all things sensual besides your wife. For singles, this means starving your eyes of all things sensual.⁴⁷

This idea of starving the eyes is also new to a lot of guys. One man said, “I’d never been in gross sexual sin, but I’d never really guarded my eyes either.”⁴⁸ I suppose most men in the clutches of porn right now could say the same thing.

Where do you start?

Your first step is listing your own “greatest enemies.” What are the most obvious and prolific sources of sensual images apart from your wife? Where do you look most often? Where are you weakest?⁴⁹

With no food for the mental fancies, the sexual fever that draws your mind to sin in these situations will be broken.⁵⁰

For you married men, this will not only help you quit porn, it will also help restore a desire for your wife if this desire has been replaced by fantasies and pictures.

⁴⁴ Harris, Joshua. *Not Even a Hint*. Sisters, Multnomah Publishers, 2003.

⁴⁵ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man’s Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

When you starve your eyes and eliminate “junk sex” from your life, you’ll deeply crave “real food”—your wife. And no wonder. She’s the only thing in the cupboard, and you’re hungry!⁵¹

I encourage you to watch *The Biggest Reason You’re Having Problems Overcoming Sin* at this time.⁵² This is an excerpt from a lesson I gave over a year ago where I gave a mock scenario of one man’s day from sunrise to sunset, detailing all the microstimulations he might encounter. Watch this and then start on your list. What are your weaknesses? Where do you look most often?

Day 14: Social Media—Good or Bad?

In June of 2017, I wrote an article entitled *Why Your Son Doesn’t Need Instagram* on Five Minute Bible Study. I said the following:

Over the last 2 months, I have periodically been getting friend requests on Instagram from (I’m assuming) fake profile users. All the profiles were women, and all the profile pictures were of a bare woman’s chest. Instagram didn’t used to have this problem, but apparently they do now. With that being the case, I deleted my account.⁵³

In 2017 I was 24 years old. I believe I was one year clean of having looked at any pornography. I wasn’t really tempted by these fake profiles I remember. But I also knew I had better not be playing around with temptation. Now, 30 years old and six years later, I have Instagram, and I haven’t had these fake profiles pop up ever since I reactivated my account.

In 2019 a friend convinced me that if I wanted to reach people evangelistically, I needed to start using TikTok. So, I gave it a try reluctantly. If you’ve ever used TikTok, then you know why I deleted it not long afterward.

TikTok works off of *algorithms*. Artificial intelligence takes your information and feeds you videos that it thinks you will like. I’m convinced that one of the pieces of information it uses is your sex, and it doesn’t forget this. I never saw any porn on TikTok, but without asking, videos were fed to my news feed of girls dancing inappropriately, wearing next to nothing. Even if you swiped away immediately and tried to train the algorithm not to send these, it did anyway. It might slow down the rate at which it fed these inappropriate videos, but they were still there. I decided I didn’t need this. Even though I had been clean from porn for about four years, I remembered enslaved to it I *had* been, and I didn’t need that junk in my hands.

Even on Facebook, there are plenty of opportunities to feed your eyes and get sexually gratified. At this point, I’ve unfollowed or unfriended all the female friends that post pictures from the beach and rarely ever get any sponsored ads featuring lustful images or videos, but that’s only

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² <https://youtu.be/abdsVVXPXvk>

⁵³ Battey, Aaron. “Why Your Son Doesn’t Need Instagram.” Five Minute Bible Study, <https://fiveminutebiblestudy.com/why-your-son-doesnt-need-instagram/>. Accessed 10 November 2023.

because I have no desire to watch these things *now*. Years ago, when I was weaker in this area, those pictures and videos were fed to my Facebook ad because I would still *slowly* scroll past them, and from time to time I would stop and watch for a few seconds if it was something I would tell myself was *innocent*.

The moral of the story is, you don't need social media if you're trying to quit porn. Go back and read Day 13 if you have already forgotten everything I wrote about microstimulations. You can't starve your eyes if you're still consuming breadcrumbs. Enough breadcrumbs, and the next thing you know, you're back on a pornographic website, and the cycle starts all over again.

I tell every man that confesses their porn problem to me that they need to get rid of social media. Do they take my advice? No. But I tell them anyway. If they really want to quit, then they will do everything they have to. They will go to any length. If they're not willing... then they don't want to quit bad enough. This is me telling you the same thing.

There are many good uses for social media. That's why I still have it. But when you're in the heat of battle, the good doesn't outweigh the bad.

Day 15: Effects of Porn on Depression, Loneliness, Socialization, and More

Have you or do you find yourself looking at porn regularly? If so, it is likely that you have experienced some form of depression. I'm not talking about clinical depression that needs treated with antidepressants; I'm talking about depression that is the result of looking at porn over and over without satisfaction and with great shame. In today's letter, I am relying heavily on other sources and have supplied those sources in the footnotes.

Gary Wilson, in his book *Your Brain on Porn*, talks about how porn affects depression, loneliness, socialization, productivity, and more areas of daily life.⁵⁴ Instead of paraphrasing, I have chosen to just share several quotes from his book.

[Chronic overconsumption of porn] can make us hyper-aroused by our favorite enticements, such that immediate wants weigh heavier than they should relative to longer term desires. It can also sour our enjoyment of—and responsiveness to—everyday pleasures. It can drive us to seek more extreme stimulation.

Porn users are given little reason to suspect that porn can cause symptoms. Instead society has put their problems in neat little boxes that do not take account of internet overuse. Today's porn users are regularly diagnosed with, and prescribed treatment for, social anxiety, low self-esteem, concentration problems, lack of motivation, depression, and other conditions.

⁵⁴ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain On Porn: Internet Pornography and the Emerging Science of Addiction*. E-book, Commonwealth Publishing, 2017.

Inability to control use and use that interferes with one's life are two cardinal signs of addiction. Priorities have shifted due to changes in the brain that we'll look at later. In effect, life's natural rewards, such as friendship, exercise and accomplishment, can no longer compete. Your brain now believes that IT—in this case internet porn use—is an important goal, and equates it with your survival...

As users manage to abstain from porn, their desire to connect with others generally surges. Often, so does their self-esteem, their ability to look others in the eye, their sense of humor, their optimism, their attractiveness to potential mates, and so forth. Even those suffering from severe social anxiety often explore new avenues for social contact: smiling and joking with work colleagues, online dating, meditation groups, joining clubs, nightspots, and so forth. In some cases it takes months, but for others the shift is so rapid that it catches them by surprise.

Results suggest that abstaining (from porn and masturbation): 1) increases the ability to delay rewards, 2) renders people more willing to take risks, 3) renders people more altruistic, and 4) renders people more extroverted, more conscientious, and less neurotic.

All these quotes are taken from Gary Wilson. He says more on porn's affect on quality of life in his book, but this should be enough to get the point across.

I would recommend that you read this article by *Fight the New Drug*: "How Porn Can Impact Mental Health and Fuel Loneliness."⁵⁵ *Fight the New Drug* is a non-religious and non-legislative organization that exists to provide individuals the opportunity to make an informed decision regarding pornography by raising awareness on its harmful effects using only science, facts, and personal accounts. Their website has many good articles and podcast episodes that speak to porn's negative effect on quality of life.

As you are finding out in this newsletter, you don't just look at porn in the evenings, put it away, and go on with your life. Looking at porn is a terribly destructive habit that affects so many parts of your life to the point that it can consume you entirely. You won't be the same person anymore.

To be fair, not everyone will be consumed by porn to this extent. But if you do have a porn habit and you are feeling lonely, depressed, anxious, and worthless, you don't have scratch your head any longer and wonder why.

Day 16: Effects of Porn on Faith and Christian Living

⁵⁵ "How Porn Can Impact Mental Health and Fuel Loneliness." *Fight the New Drug*, Accessed 13 November 2023, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-impact-mental-health-and-fuel-loneliness/>

If everything we learned from yesterday about porn-induced depression, loneliness, anxiety and more is true, then you can see very easily how porn can have a significant impact on your personal faith and life as a Christian. I am talking about when viewing porn becomes a sin-cycle.

There are some men and women that only look at porn from time to time. From the ages of 18 to 22 yrs. old I looked at it maybe once a year. After each occurrence, I felt deeply penitent, put the filth away, prayed, and was able to move on relatively well. The lengthier the passage of time was between each episode, the more the weight lifted. But from the ages of 11 to 17 yrs. old, I looked at porn monthly, weekly, and sometimes daily. I felt very guilty, repented, and prayed after each infraction, but in little time I was looking at it again. This latter cycle is especially what I'm talking about in today's newsletter.

As I said yesterday, people rarely just look at porn, put it away, and go on with their life with little to no consequence. That would be the exception. For the *Christian* in the porn sin-cycle especially, this has powerful consequences on your entire spiritual life.

Porn Can Make You Spiritually Impotent

Impotent means "ineffective, helpless, or powerless." The person that finds him/herself in the porn sin-cycle will soon feel impotent. Add to this the feelings of guilt, hopelessness, doubting, lack of peace, lack of spiritual motivation, and more. But I think the word "impotent or helplessness" sums it all up well.

Today's letter is especially for those of you who are going through this right now. I want you to know that if you are feeling these things, you aren't alone. There are thousands of men and women across the world feeling the same way you do, but because this is a secret sin, you probably aren't talking to anyone else about it, and you are feeling very isolated and alone in this state. I know what you're feeling. I've felt all these things before.

I felt helpless as young as 12 yrs. old. No one else knew what I was doing in secret, I didn't know anyone that could relate to how I was feeling. I was enslaved to pornography, and I hated it, yet I kept going back as a way of relief only to feel worse and worse. I got baptized at 14 yrs. old for the remission of my sins. I became a Christian. I thought this might be my turning point. But only days later I found that this didn't bring me relief from the habit and the feeling of helplessness.

I've looked grown men in the eye who were experiencing this same feeling of helplessness. I've told them, "I know what you're going through. I've lived it. And I escaped." Some believe me, some don't. I hope you believe me right now. It's true.

Things That Make Your Spiritual Helplessness Worse

1. Keeping to yourself and not talking to anyone.

The devil wins when he can get you isolated and alone. Solomon confirms this: "But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up" (Eccl. 4:10). There are many

factors that play into your porn habit. If these factors persist, getting rid of the porn tonight won't last. Loneliness and seclusion are one of those factors.

There are two ways of being lonely and secluded. You can literally become a hermit who doesn't talk to anyone and hardly gets out. Or you can be the person who carries a heavy secret around. One brother told me he could be in a room full of people, people that he knew very well, but feel entirely alone. This latter type of loneliness is often found in suicidal people who otherwise seem very happy in life, but one day you find out they killed themselves. People who remain enslaved to porn but try to fight it on their own, in secret, can battle with this same type of isolation. That's just what Satan wants. Thankfully, there is a solution:

“Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him” (Eccl. 4:12).

2. *People giving you bad advice.*

The porn sin-cycle can make a Christian question whether or not he/she is actually a Christian. This can be compounded by good-intentioned people giving bad advice. Some people think the person with a porn habit doesn't know that what they are doing is a sin, and if they just knew, then they would snap out of it! “We need to hear a sermon against pornography!” someone might think or even say out loud, as if the average person's problem is just a lack of conviction about sin. Another person chooses rather to offer the sage white-knuckle advice, “Just stop it!” Isn't that all you needed: someone to tell you what you already knew and say, “Just stop it!”?

Some people really do doubt the sinfulness of pornography. One brother reminded me recently that this is true. But predominantly, those who struggle with this sin are not needing the sin pointed out to them. They are needing the cure. They are needing a lot of things that we have and/or will be addressing in this newsletter.

3. *Bad Theology*

Theology is the study of God. It's a fancy word that we use to refer to what someone believes about God. What we believe about God and inseparable subjects like sin, salvation, and more can have a huge impact on our battle with porn.

Some people have an idea about grace, faith, and works in their head that is really merit based. It's the idea that I have to do as much as I can (i.e., earn as much as I can) and God's grace will fill in the cracks where I'm lacking. These people have a difficulty overcoming the porn cycle, because their goodness is never enough, and they are reminded of that every day.

Some people have an idea about grace, faith, and works in their head that as long as we believe we're saved by grace, God's grace will unconditionally cover our sin though we were to look at porn 1,000 times a day, repentant or not. These people don't ever overcome porn, because there's no reason to overcome it.

Some people have an idea about grace, faith, and works that as long as we have faith in God, we will *want* to do good, and somehow this *desire* to do good overrules our daily enslavement to

porn. There are many reasons why this person has difficulty overcoming porn; I won't narrow it down to a single item.

4. *Preaching ONLY Grace or ONLY Judgment.*

Some pulpits and some preachers seem to *only* preach about the grace of God. Other seem to *only* preach about the judgment of God. It can seem that way at least. It's difficult to maintain a balanced spiritual diet, especially if we aren't just teaching through the text of scripture which is invariably balanced. A pulpit that unjustly preaches *only* grace can lead people to think that grace is absolutely unconditional. On the other hand, a pulpit that unjustly preaches *only* judgment can lead people to have an unhealthy and ungodly fear that doubts God's grace and forgiveness. Both of these have serious ramifications. We should consider this and examine the spiritual diets we are offering people.

Conclusion

In today's newsletter, more than anything, I want to relate to you how thousands of other people feel right now. They are going through the same thing you are. You're not alone. And I also wanted to expose some of the underlying things that might be contributing to the way you're feeling.

Sometimes you just need to know you're not going crazy, you're not the only person in the world dealing with this insanity, because the porn sin-cycle mimics insanity to a degree. There is real power in being felt and understood. This *alone* will not deliver you from porn, but it's a good place to start.

Keep on reading, and we will eventually get practical and offer real resolution options for your problem.

Day 17: Effects of Porn on Your Brain

Warning: Today's newsletter will include quotations from authors that use plain, explicit language when referring to consuming pornography and associated behaviors. If this makes you uncomfortable, please skip today's newsletter.

The brain is a supercomputer. It's incredible the things the brain can do and is doing right now as you read the words on this screen. We know a lot more about the brain than we did when dial-up internet was invented in the 1980's, but we still don't know the half of it. I'm going to refer to experts about the parts of the brain we do understand in today's newsletter. More specifically, I want to share how pornography harmfully effects the brain and how consuming it and masturbating to it has consequences you may not have thought about before.

The reason that people have so much difficulty quitting pornography is because looking at nude images and masturbating to those images over and over literally and inevitably changes the brain matter, neurochemical pathways, neurochemical production, and much more inside our

personalized supercomputer. Mark Gungor, a marriage counselor, says this in his seminar about healthy sex within marriage:

There is no way in the world you can keep [masturbating] over and over and over again and not retrain your body. Everybody knows this. When it comes to anything physical, athletes know this, they train, they do the same repetitive action over and over again in order to train their bodies so their bodies respond in a certain way... The military knows it. You train young men to react in a certain way. They do the same drills over and over and over and over again. Why? Because you train your body so that without thinking you act in a certain way! How [is our culture] teaching our young people from the age of 13, to masturbate two, three, five, sometimes seven times a day, thinking that it will not retrain them?⁵⁶

Now, Mark Gungor is no neuroscientist, so I decided I would quote one to validate this point. Here is what neuroscientist Dr. David Eagleman says about what repetitive behavior does to the brain:

What you do over and over becomes reflected in the structure of the brain... For example, if you spend months learning to read Braille, the bit of your cortex that represents touch from the index finger will grow. If you take up juggling as an adult, visual areas of your brain increase.⁵⁷

When you watch porn multiple times each week, not to mention multiple times each day, there is no way you can avoid changing the brain's very chemistry and structure which, in turn, leads to very deep-seated habits that are very difficult to undo. If you are in the porn-cycle right now, this will resonate with you.

This “rewiring” and “reshaping” of the brain can have many collateral consequences.

Porn and masturbation can legitimately lead to sexual dysfunction.

This point is not a scare tactic. This legitimately happens. Sexual dysfunction is at an all-time high and still climbing, and there is good evidence linking it to the digitalization and overconsumption of pornography and masturbation.

Leonard Sax says this about the rise in male sexual dysfunction in his book *Boys Adrift*:

In one Harvard study, 69 percent of men who sought help for sexual problems were experiencing “compulsive masturbation”—meaning that they were masturbating more than they thought they should be, and/or they were sometimes masturbating in inappropriate places or at inappropriate times. Fifty percent of the men in the same study

⁵⁶ Gungor, Mark. “Mark Gungor Full Marriage Seminar.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Bro James, 16 November 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWkPOFz3RSk>

I highly recommend watching Gungor's full presentation, and especially the segment of this video from the following timestamps: 3:40:55—3:46:02. Here he talks about the harmful effects of masturbation in more detail.

⁵⁷ Eagleman, David. *Livewired*. Vintage Books, 2020

were described as being “pornography-dependent,” meaning that they could not achieve an erection without pornography.⁵⁸

I’ve been seeing more and more young men in my office—men age eighteen to twenty-eight—who are dealing with the consequences of their overuse of pornography by asking for Viagra or Cialis or Levitra, because they find it difficult to get aroused by real women. **One in three college men now reports erectile dysfunction.**⁵⁹ (*emphasis mine*)

Andrew Huberman, a neurobiologist, explains more about porn and masturbation induced sexual dysfunction. In the interview quoted below, he is trying to get at how it is that men who consume porn and masturbate at high rates can and do experience a preference for looking at images of people having sex over having real sex with real women and building relationships with those women. *Note: Huberman explicitly states that he does not believe all pornography consumption is bad. I do not agree with Huberman on this point obviously.*

There’s an additional issue with pornography which is not often discussed, which is, remember, guys in particular, the brain is a learning prediction machine, and I’m not trying to say that all pornography is bad, but there are good data to support the idea that if your brain learns to be aroused by watching other people have sex, it is not necessarily going to carry over to the ability to get aroused when you’re one on one with somebody else, especially young kids who are consuming a lot of pornography. The brain is learning sexual arousal to other people having sex. [So you’re going to] create challenges in sexual interactions with a real partner.⁶⁰

This all adds up to men, young men, being unable to perform sexually due to erectile dysfunction and young men who don’t want to have sex with real women anyways, because they prefer female shaped pixels. If you don’t think this epidemic of sexual dysfunction is real, why are there so many ads for male enhancement drugs on TV nowadays? Drug companies don’t stay in business unless there’s business.

Gary Wilson echoes everything we’ve said to this point in his book *Your Brain on Porn*.

A 2015 study on sex clinic patients found that 71% of men who masturbated to porn more than seven hours a week reported sexual functioning problems...⁶¹

Several research groups have now linked porn use with impulsiveness or the inability to delay gratification. This has ominous implications for meeting life goals while using porn. Such results align with a finding that moderate porn use, even by non-addicts, correlates with shrunken grey matter in regions of the brain associated with cognitive function.⁶²

⁵⁸ Sax, Leonard. *Boys Adrift*. Basic Books, 2007

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Huberman, Andrew & Peterson, Jordan. “Masturbation Has DANGEROUS Effects on Dopamine” *YouTube*, uploaded by The Motive, 18 October 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GbCnr4gBjE>

⁶¹ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain on Porn*. E-book 2nd ed., Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

⁶² Ibid.

I can tell how much porn a man watches as soon as he starts talking candidly about any sexual dysfunction he has ... A man who masturbates frequently can soon develop erection problems when he's with his partner. Add porn to the mix, and he can become unable to have sex...⁶³

Wilson makes several interesting observations in his book about porn consumers experiencing escalation in the genres and intensity of porn they consume.

Brains are plastic. The truth is we are always training our brains – with or without our conscious participation. It's clear from countless reports that it's not uncommon for porn users to move from genre to genre, often arriving at places they find personally disturbing and confusing. What might be behind this phenomenon? ⁶⁴

One possibility [for this escalation] is boredom or habituation meeting the developing adolescent brain. Teens are thrill seeking and easily bored. They love novelty. The stranger the better... Lesbian porn grows boring, so he tries out incest porn. Novelty and anxiety ensue – and both increase sexual arousal. Before he knows it he has climaxed and a new associating beings imprinting his sexual circuits.⁶⁵

In *The Brain that Changes Itself*, psychiatrist Norman Doidge suggest that the intense stimulation of today's porn hijacks and rewires 'brain real estate' that would otherwise be devoted to making social ties rewarding.⁶⁶

Conclusion

It's amazing what the brain can do. It's also scary. Because of porn and masturbation, there is an epidemic of sexless marriages that is a combination of men preferring porn over their wives and men who want to have sex with their wives but simply can't perform because of porn and masturbation induced sexual dysfunction.

If you're single, consider these things now while you're unmarried. You have time to correct this, and the good news is that sexual function *can* be restored.

For more on this topic of how porn affects the brain, read the following article from Fight the New Drug:

“How Porn Can Change the Brain.” *Fight the New Drug*,
<https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-change-the-brain/>, Accessed 16 November 2023.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Day 18: Mast****ion—Right or Wrong?

Warning: Today's newsletter will be very plain. The term "masturbation" and some anatomical terms will be used throughout. If this makes you uncomfortable, please skip today's newsletter.

Here we are. Some of you were probably just waiting to see what I would say about masturbation. I know this can be an uncomfortable topic. It's definitely an uncomfortable word to utter. I've obviously used the word, and it will be used quite a bit more in today's letter especially, but I will be sober and try to maintain some level of dignity.

What Is Masturbation?

Before getting too deep in discussion, I think it's important to define masturbation. *Masturbation is the act of rubbing one's genitals with the intent of inciting sexual arousal or release.* This is my own definition, though you are welcome to compare it to other more respected definer of words. You will find my definition to be quite comparable.

There are at least two reasons I believe it is important to be precise about what we are coining *masturbation*.

First, one of the most common arguments offered to *prove* that masturbation is normal, healthy, and an expected human behavior is that even children masturbate. Is this true though? It depends on what we are calling masturbation. Children certainly touch and play with their genitals. But are they being sexual when they do this? Every adult touches their genitals when they take a shower, but is this masturbation? No. Touching one's genitals is normal; you can't hardly use to the restroom and perform proper hygiene without touching your genitals, man or woman. The key part of the definition here is "*with the intent of inciting sexual arousal or release.*" Children don't even know what sexual arousal is; they don't have a sex drive, unless it is some exceptional case. I certainly agree that children touch their genitals and may even play with their genitals, but to call this masturbation is either ignorance or deception.

Second, I believe some people can feel guilty for masturbating when they haven't actually masturbated. Just because your genitals itch and you scratch them, that doesn't mean you masturbated. Without getting descriptive, there might be other things you have to do involving your genitals that is not masturbation. Again, the *intent* is an important factor I believe.

Why Do You Masturbate?

This is another important question to answer. Many of you probably think this is a no-brainer. Allow me to give you pause, and I'll explain why in a moment.

I'll have to admit, I used to believe that *all* masturbation was *lust* based. And I will still admit that *when it comes to men*, I believe *all* masturbation is lust based. You may disagree, and that's fine. But when it comes to guys, I agree with these authors:

One guy told me that he and his friends use the acronym LIA to refer to masturbation. It stands for “lust in action.”⁶⁷

Masturbation is a symptom of uncontrolled eyes and free-racing thoughts.⁶⁸

An old roommate in college was reading a devotional for men that touched on lust and sexual temptation. The author said, “[Men] don’t masturbate to a sunset.” That’s a clever way of saying that when a man masturbates, he is either actively looking at something sexually stimulating or he’s thinking about it. You don’t get an erection by just touching your penis. Again, others may argue with this, but that’s what I believe about men having been one, and I believe any man trying to argue otherwise is lying to himself to justify his lustful habit or he is using a different definition for masturbation.

When it comes to women, I pause to say *all* masturbation is lust based because of what some women testify, and because I’ve never been one to say otherwise.

To be clear, when *most* women masturbate, I believe it’s safe to say this is lust based. They may not even be masturbating to a picture or video. They might be thinking of some romantic love affair that is stimulating for them. This would still be lust based. However, some women claim that they masturbate, not to fulfill some lust in their head, but to experience a release of pent-up sexual tension. It is claimed that this tension is so intense that they feel they *have* to release it. Men can also have a build-up of sexual tension, but there is a natural phenomenon men experience called *nocturnal emissions* that helps relieve this in the absence of masturbation or sex. I have read that women experience this as well. Nonetheless, some women claim that the pent-up sexual tension is worse and unbearable if not released through some form of stimulation.

I’m not here to argue with any woman about their need to release sexual tension that builds up. I will take your word for it. The only thing I will say is this: consider that your body *can* be brought under subjection (1 Cor. 9:27). This may be difficult, but it can be done. It’s difficult to stop watching porn, but it can be done. It is likely that our sexual behaviors, habits, and tension are the result of what we feed on regularly and/or how we have rewired our brain over time by past sexual experiences.

“So, what are you saying Aaron? Is masturbation right or wrong?” is the question you’re asking right about now. My answer is: if it’s lust based—yes. If you’re a man—yes. Lust is the most obvious and clearly sinful motivation for masturbation. But there is one more thing to consider...

A Biblical Case Against All Masturbation

What I will share now is not something I have made a firm decision about. I am not convinced, yet, that a biblical case can be made that *all* masturbation is wrong, even masturbation that is *just* to relieve sexual tension building up in the body. However, there is a compelling case to be made based on God’s design for sex.

⁶⁷ Harris, Joshua. *Not Even a Hint*. Sisters, Multnomah Publishers, 2003.

⁶⁸ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man’s Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

I first read about this years ago in Joshua Harris's book *Not Even a Hint*. If you would like to read his entire chapter about masturbation, buy his book and read Chapter 6: "Self-Centered Sex: How Do I Deal with Masturbation?"

The basis for Harris's argument that all masturbation is sinful can be summed up in this statement from pp. 103 in his book: "*Masturbation is built on a self-centered view of sex.*"⁶⁹ He says, "*Marriage and sex are inseparable in God's design,*" and masturbation is nothing more than having sex with yourself.⁷⁰ This is a compelling thought when you consider a couple of passages.

In 1 Corinthians 7:1-5, Paul talks to husbands and wives. He makes a couple of interesting statements in light of this discussion about masturbation. "The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does" (v. 4). Does this mean that my wife (or future wife) has authority over when and how the sexual tension building up in my body can be released? In other words, is Paul leaving room for husbands and wives to relieve their own sexual tension through masturbation, or is he placing their sexual urges and the fulfillment of those urges in the control of the other spouse? It seems that sex was indeed meant to be inseparable from marriage, and your wife (or husband) is the thing God gave you to fulfill your sexual desires. That would seem to leave little room for self-pleasure.

Notice what else Paul says. "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control" (v. 5). There seems to be very little room for masturbation in those verses too.

Read on. "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion" (v. 8-9). What does it mean to "burn with passion" and what was God's solution to this burning with passion? I believe it's clear from the context that this "burn(ing) with passion" is strong sexual desire or sexual tension. And God's prescription to relieve this was not masturbation but a marriage partner who would have authority over your body and help you relieve that sexual desire with sex.

I'll have to admit, this is a compelling case to be made against all masturbation. Whether or not it can be definitively said that masturbation is absolutely right or wrong in *all* circumstances, I do know that there are many, many sexless marriages in the world and church where spouses turn to themselves instead of their spouse to fulfill the built-up sexual tension in their body. This is one contributor in the downfall of the marriage institution.

Conclusion

Refer back to Day 17 "Effects of Porn on Your Brain" to be reminded of how habits like masturbation can literally rewire the brain the point that it makes a person unable to be sexually excited by their spouse. Masturbation is a much bigger issue than a lot of people make it. You

⁶⁹ Harris, Joshua. *Not Even a Hint*. Sisters, Multnomah Publishers, 2003.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

can make excuses, you can tell yourself lies, but I am fully convinced that masturbation is destroying marriages and it's destroying many marriages before they even begin.

I plead with you to seriously consider these things. Bring your body into subjection. Take back control, and honor God with your mind *and* body. You will be glad you did.

Day 19: Porn in My Head—Dealing with Images You Can't Get Out of Your Head

Today's topic is one that I've never heard addressed in any book I've read on pornography or sexual temptation. I can't say that I've heard anyone say anything about this consequence of porn consumption at all, ever, besides to say it is very real.

What is the *it* that's real? I'm talking about the brain's ability to remember pornographic images from the past. Even though you have no desire to look at porn, and you are trying everything you can to quit the habit, these old images can and will pop up in your mind's eye at completely random moments. They are unwelcome thoughts and images, but they won't go away. They are like house guests who were invited into your domain at one point in time, but they have long overstayed their welcome, and they just won't LEAVE even after you have made it abundantly clear that it's time to go!

Are you somehow inviting these dirty images into your mind subconsciously? Does the reappearance of these images mean that your heart really isn't pure, and you need to trust God harder or try harder? This phenomenon really bothers ex-porn consumers, because not only do they want to quit porn, but they also want to have a pure heart that desires God, and it seems impossible to have a pure heart when you have dirty pictures in your head, regardless how frequent these pictures come to visit.

Why Is This Happening to You?

I want to reassure you about one thing: these old memories of pornographic pictures and videos popping up in your head are not indicative of your current heart condition. They are an unwelcome reminder of what you used to be. They are seeds planted by the evil one to make you spiritually depressed and entice you to go back for just one last helping of lust. Assuming that you are not willingly recalling these images, you do not need to feel guilty about them randomly popping back into your mind, something you have no control over.

Remember what James defines as sin. *Desire* and *enticement* are not sin in themselves; rather, sin is born after we allow evil desires to take a foothold and grow. "But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:14-15).

The phenomenon under discussion is a reminder that there are sometimes long-lasting consequences to sin. You can be truly forgiven by God for looking at porn, but you will have to live with the consequences of what you did. Your brain has an uncanny ability to imprint on

extremely shocking, stimulating experiences, and once that imprint is made, in some cases, it is impossible to permanently delete from the brain's hard drive.

What Can You Do About It?

I know what I've said to this point is not what you wanted to hear. Some of you told me in advance that you were really looking forward to today's message. Perhaps you wanted me to give some hack, a deep secret that you hadn't heard yet, something that would wipe these old images out of your mind for good. I'm sorry.

I do have *something* for you, nonetheless. Firstly, I hope what I have said to this point has been reassuring. Sometimes it's helpful just to know that you aren't doing something wrong and that you're not on some level of super-depravity that most other men and women have never experienced. What you're experiencing is common to man (1 Cor. 10:13).

Secondly, I want to share responses from men who have dealt with this same problem, and many of them are still dealing with it. I asked these men the following question: "Do you have any thoughts on my Day 19 topic 'Porn In My Head—Dealing With Images You Can't Get Out of Your Head?'" I thought these responses were worth sharing.

This first man is happily married and hasn't looked at porn for several years.

When I find myself struggling with [porn in my head] due to immoral late-teenage years, I strive to replace evil with good. I take the thoughts in my head and begin dissecting them to replace them with godly things. That seems to help me personally. In addition, I think it's easy for us to underestimate the power of prayer and God's word. There's rarely a time when I face temptation that I don't feel better after talking to God about it.

(Anonymous)

This man is single and stopped looking at porn approximately one year ago.

"Porn In My Head" is a legitimate battle. I know from my experience it gets more and more intense the longer I go without watching porn. I go from not thinking much about what I've seen to having dreams or just constantly thinking about something spicy.

What has helped me overcome that has been fasting. That was the most effective method last year when I decided to quit [porn], I starved my mind by starving my body. But when you're not fasting, you've also got to watch what you feed your mind and sometimes you've got to get radical. I remember going through a period where I got radical about what I was consuming by deleting all of my Spotify playlists except my religious church music. All of my music is clean now! I focused on only consuming spiritual things (Philippians 4:8-9).

Also, prayer needs to go with fasting. To me a time of fasting means I'm praying a lot.

“Porn In My Head” has been the downfall that has often caused me to get back in the routine of looking at porn off and on. I used to justify *thinking* about pornography without *looking*. I would say to myself, "I'm not watching anything bad, right?" Wrong. There are no loopholes. Porn in your head is still porn. (*Anonymous*)

This man is happily married, hasn't looked at porn in years and doesn't have any desire to look at it.

It's hard to get rid of something without putting something else in its place. The best replacement for obsession is a new obsession. But your mind eventually wanders back to the ruts you've dug. In those moments, you have to get out of your head and into your body. An extreme form of "getting into your body" is a cold plunge or hard exercise. Just getting out of your comfort zone is helpful. (*Anonymous*)

One other married man who hasn't looked at porn in years told me this:

I know you understand how each hit of dopamine and serotonin just layer and reinforce these images in the mind every time we pull them back up and think about them. So, as far as getting those images out of your head, I think the key is setting your mind to win each little battle daily so you can win the overall war. Those images have been reinforced, usually for years and years, and it may take even longer to get rid of them. There are some images I don't know if I'll ever get rid of, but I do know I can get rid of the feeling it once gave me.

One of the steps I've taken to achieve this is staying so “prayed up” that I don't fall into temptation as often (Matthew 26:41). When these images come up, I try to replace them with prayer, asking help from the ultimate Helper. I try to think of other good thoughts that will give me a "good hit" of neurotransmitters like my family time or a fond memory. If for some reason that isn't enough, it really helps to “personify” that image. What if that was my wife or daughter? Because it is someone's daughter. What if that was one of my daughter's friends if she gets older? How could I look at someone like that lustfully and be walking in step with Christ? It's crazy how we can look at a body all day long without realizing who that person is. So, if we put a loved one or relative's face to that person, it makes it easier to respect that person and not want to bring the picture up in my mind anymore. (*Anonymous*)

I thought all these answers were insightful and have real merit.

Conclusion

I would like to leave you with a message of hope. I, myself, haven't looked at a pornographic image in eight years. Yet, I too have pornographic images in my brain's hard drive from when I was 10 years old. I don't reckon my mind will ever be wiped completely clean of those images. But I will tell you this with 100% honesty. Today, and for the last five years at least, those images rarely pop into my head. I truly do believe this is related to filling my head with good things and dwelling on the word of God constantly. That's called “meal replacement” for short.

You may never get rid of the porn in your head, but you can take the necessary action to get your mind off the images when they do come. And, by the grace of God, you can and will get to a point that those images become very infrequent visitors in your mind's living room. Fast, pray, meal replace, and do everything else recommended by your fellow Christian brothers in this letter.

Day 20: Podcast—Kelan Owen on Working with Men to Beat Porn & the Effectiveness of Support Groups

You have made it to day 20! We are two-thirds of the way through this newsletter. This is the third and final podcast within this series, and today's featured episode is a guest interview with Kelan Owen of Oklahoma. I believe Kelan is 22 yrs. old. He has a personal history with pornography that he speaks about openly in the first part of our conversation, but he is also involved in a very important work focused on a support group with men battling with porn. I encourage you to listen to the full episode. The links for the episode are below.

Links for Podcast w/ Kelan
Apple Podcasts
Spotify

Day 21: How to Overcome Porn (Pt. 1)

Introduction

This is the day of the newsletter many have been waiting for! I hope today's letter doesn't disappoint! I have often experienced disappointment when listening to "How to..." speeches on topics in general. There is usually a bunch of hype, but when the "How to" advice actually comes, it's often very generic and underwhelming. Rarely do these speeches lend anything *new* to the conversation. In contrast to this, I wanted today's information to be truly helpful and impactful. Thus, I've made my goals for "How to Overcome Porn" to be as follows: organized, prioritized, specific, thought provoking, and effective. I'm going to give you advice that has helped many men and women overcome porn use, myself included.

Warning! There is no magical formula for overcoming porn. No one can wave a wand over your head, say a magic word, and set you free in this way. The Holy Spirit does not mysteriously set you free. I echo the words of Fred Stoeker:

I'm not saying that God cannot take the desire from you. He can! He's just never done it in my life or the tens of thousands of people I've worked with over the years. That includes pornographers. Ninety-nine percent of them had to make a decision. They had to make a decision to not walk by magazine racks of adult magazines and to stay faithful to their wives and their family.⁷¹

⁷¹ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man's Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

You're going to have to do the heavy lifting. I can't do it for you. The Holy Spirit won't do it for you. "Holiness is not some nebulous thing. It's a series of right choices."⁷² The plan is relatively simple, but the execution will take real grit, more grit than you've been putting forth if you have been in the porn sin cycle for years.

Douglas Weiss says you will need to do three things to become porn free, and I agree: **1) commit to be clean, 2) have a plan, and 3) be honest and accountable.**⁷³

Commit to Be Clean

Committing to be clean involves adopting a new mindset. If you've been struggling with porn to no avail, then the truth is plain: you need a new mindset. This new mindset will have two features at least.

1) Urgency

Many men and women lack *urgency*. They like to *read* about overcoming porn, they like to *think* about being pure, they like to *romanticize* about it, but they don't like to *practice* purity. Desperate times call for desperate measures and a real sense of urgency! A porn problem cannot be handled with kid gloves. The longer you let the sin live, the stronger it becomes, and escape gets more and more difficult.

Weiss draws attention to the healing of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19 when making this point about the need for urgency. The first thing to take away from these men who came to Jesus to be healed is that they were desperate! If you want to be healed, you have to get desperate, and that means doing *whatever* you have to in order to get there.

Unfortunately, many men and women are not desperate enough. Stephen Arterburn said this about a man named Kirk who had met with him about his porn habit, "I didn't meet with Kirk again because I knew he didn't hate his sin."⁷⁴ I've dealt with multiple Kirks over the years. I've told men repeatedly they need to download an accountability software on all their digital devices, but they wouldn't do it because, "It costs \$20/month." I've advised men to delete all their social media. These men were still struggling with porn after months of checking in with me. They wouldn't delete social media, because they didn't believe what I said about microstimulations and that they were getting sexual gratification from it. Other examples could be given. The point is: some individuals are tired of being enslaved to sin, they're just not tired *enough*. Get there first.

2) Resolve

Resolve to get clean. Fred Stoeker and Stephen Arterburn recounted, "Before we started winning our own battles for purity, we had a number of false starts—partly because we hadn't really made a decision. We sort of wanted purity, and sort of didn't."⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Weiss, Douglas. *Clean*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013

⁷⁴ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man's Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Resolve is what Jesus had in the garden of Gethsemane when He prayed to the Father to provide another way if it were possible.⁷⁶ But ultimately, Jesus was resolved to do the Father's will.

Weiss says, "In this war [for sexual purity], the naïve pay the heaviest price."⁷⁷ The naïve think they can eventually beat porn without fasting. They don't need to pull out every plug like deleting social media. "These guys like Aaron are a little too eccentric." That's fine if you think that way. I just have one question: "How is your way working for you?"

If you want to have a resolved mindset that's built to win, listen to Douglas Weiss. He sums up the authority of our bodies in the following way, "**God, wife, me, pee.** Yes, you can summarize sexual authority in those four words. God is the first owner. Your wife is the second owner. And you are the third owner, which gives peeing rights only."⁷⁸ This not only includes whatever is in between your legs, but it includes your eyes and brain too.

Get these two things down first: urgency and resolve. Until you have *committed to be clean*, there's absolutely no point in reading what comes next.⁷⁹

Day 22: How to Overcome Porn (Pt. 2)

Note: Today's message is the longest of the 30-day newsletter. It was difficult to keep this brief and effective at the same time. Please set aside several minutes to read Day 22. This message picks up directly where Day 21 left off. Please review Day 21 if necessary.

Have a Plan

The second thing Weiss suggested was to have a plan. No good soldier goes into battle without a plan, and overcoming porn is spiritual warfare!

I truly think many men and women mess up at this juncture, because they equate *activity* with *productivity*. They falsely claim to be *struggling* with porn, but if Jesus struggled carrying the cross like many people *struggle* with porn, He wouldn't have made it two feet! Doing *something* (i.e., talking to others in an online chat, downloading an accountability software alone) as opposed to *nothing* is not the plan! Having a real plan and executing that plan is the plan! People are soooooo dishonest with themselves when it comes to this business. Have a plan!

⁷⁶ On this point of Jesus' resolve, I strongly encourage you to watch this sermon by Todd Bernard. Bernard, Todd. "Grit." *YouTube*, uploaded by Chapel Grove Church of Christ, 6 September 2022, https://youtu.be/NzKU5_v-Olg?si=-kU1tjA4YUG3WrVP

⁷⁷ Weiss, Douglas. *Clean*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ If you would like a more in depth study of how to spiritually renew your mind and establish resolve, watch the following sermon by myself, Aaron Battey. Battey, Aaron. "Renewing the Christian Mind." *YouTube*, uploaded by Chapel Grove Church of Christ, 21 February 2022, <https://youtu.be/I9qamfbvPEw?si=LpQ3s6s89-Kv9NuN>

I loved, loved, loved what Jonathan Edwards shared during our podcast conversation about porn and the church. He said that in order to overcome porn you have to have strong ABS.⁸⁰

Accountability
Boundaries
Spiritual Formation

These three categories really do cover all the bases of forming a plan to overcome porn. I heard someone say about coffee quality recently, the quality of a cup of coffee can be traced back to one or more of three issues: 1) the farming of the coffee bean, 2) the roasting of the coffee bean, and/or 3) the brewing method used. That's right. In like manner, the success of your plan to overcome pornography can be traced back to one or more of these criterion: **1) Was there real accountability in place? 2) Were there effective boundaries? 3) Was the person dedicated to spiritual formation?** Beyond everything else I've already said about urgency and resolve, if you repeatedly find yourself back at the drawing board with overcoming porn, you can point to a failure in one or more of these three areas of defense.

For the rest of today's letter, I am going to break down these three categories of accountability, boundaries, and spiritual formation. I will explain what is meant by each category, and then I will give multiple specific interventions for each one.

Accountability

Accountability is the act of being responsible to someone outside of yourself. This is extremely important in overcoming porn, because we are so prone to make excuses for ourselves and lie to ourselves. We need someone outside of ourselves to hold us to the standard of God and tell us the truth. Very, very few people can overcome porn by themselves, and if they do, it's probably because they are having sex outside of marriage as a replacement. This is my opinion.

Here are six specific actions you can take in being accountable to someone else for your porn use.

1. Accountability Partner

This is nothing novel, but as simple and oft repeated as it is, you would be surprised at how many men and women resist this advice. A major motivation for resisting this is shame. The person is so ashamed to admit and keep on admitting out loud that they are indulging in this gross sin of porn. That's really a nice way of saying they're too proud. It is extremely rare to find someone who has overcome porn without becoming vulnerable and honest with an accountability person. With that said, just telling someone you have a problem is not the same thing as having an accountability partner. There must be regular, ongoing accountability that involves a commitment and active role by both parties.

2. Accountability Software

There are software programs that can be downloaded to phones, computers, and tablets that monitor on-screen activity and send reports to your accountability person that you

⁸⁰ Jonathan got this acronym from a podcast that he couldn't remember. Thus, we are unable to cite the primary source here.

have listed on the software. The most famous software is *Covenant Eyes*. There will be more about accountability software on Day 23. For now, just understand that this is completely ineffective unless you have an accountability partner who receives reports from the software. Accountability software is *essential* (in my book) if you use digital devices, especially if you use computers and/or smartphones.

3. *Check Ins*

You will need regular and ongoing check-ins with your accountability partner. Your partner will need to be the one to check in on you some days/weeks, but the majority of the time, you will need to be responsible for checking in with your accountability person. If you are freshly quitting porn, daily check-ins are initially advisable. Those can eventually be spread out as needed. Even if you “recover” from porn, it is good to annually check in with your accountability person. Many people end up looking at porn again around the one-year mark of being clean. Maintain accountability.

4. *Bookend Check Ins*⁸¹

This is a proactive step you can take before going into an environment where you are known to relapse. For example, if you have a habit of looking at porn on your lunch break at work, have a bookend check-in with your accountability partner by texting or calling them before you go on lunch and then again after lunch is over. The first text might say, “Hey, I’m about to go to lunch. This is a weak spot for me usually. Please pray for me, and I’ll text you again when I go back to work so you know that I didn’t have a slip up.” Your accountability partner will know that if he/she doesn’t get a text or call back after the stated time period that something must have gone wrong. You will also be more conscientious about sinning, because you know that you must give an account when lunch is over.

5. *Integrity Plan*⁸²

An integrity plan is a written list of all the potential or secret outlets available to you that could be used for viewing porn. This will take some time and can be updated as time progresses. This plan needs to be very specific, and it needs to be shared with your accountability partner. Your accountability partner can then reference this plan whenever you have slip-ups, and he/she can remind you of the plan at those times. Furthermore, violating the plan does not mean you actually looked at porn. For example, if one of the items on your plan was to delete all social media from your phone, and all you do is re-download *Instagram*, you have not yet looked at porn, but you have already violated the integrity plan you made. This is something that you would still tell your accountability partner about. For a person who is techy, his/her integrity plan may be longer and more specific than the middle-aged man who can barely use his phone.

6. *Surveillance Camera*

This one might sound too intense for a lot of people, but if you keep falling and are desperate enough, consider putting a *Ring* camera or some other type of surveillance

⁸¹ “17 Porn Free Pro Tips.” Porn Free Radio, 4 October 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/71CNr4a6xUc3ndMd8jIRLw?si=fc2b05308aad4624>

⁸² Ibid.

camera in the location of your house or work where you are most prone to relapse. If you work in an office, place it in the office and give access to your wife or accountability partner. They can check the camera throughout the day, and if you have turned the camera off, that is a red flag that maybe something is going on. This would deter masturbation certainly, and the awareness that someone else is watching or could be watching provides an added layer of conscientiousness.

Boundaries

One of the best books I've ever read is *Atomic Habits* by James Clear.⁸³ His four-step approach to breaking a bad habit is supremely simple and effective if carried out: 1) Make it (*the undesired habit*) invisible, 2) Make it unattractive, 3) Make it difficult, and 4) Make it unsatisfying. When we set boundaries to stop porn use, we are implementing commitments or actions that make viewing porn difficult.

Here are twelve specific boundaries you can implement to make viewing porn difficult.

7. *Consequences*

Pre-commit to a consequence that you will be held accountable to if you break your integrity plan or relapse into looking at porn. This negatively reinforces the sin. Here are several ideas suggested by Douglas Weiss:

- No media for one, two, or three weeks.
- No cell phone for one, two, or three days.
- Walk to work.
- Pick up trash for two to four hours.
- Give money to a political or nonprofit organization you really disagree with.
- Eat a raw onion.
- Runt two miles (if you're not in shape).
- Eat Ben and Jerry's at 10 PM (if you are in shape).
- Leg lunges for half a mile or one mile.⁸⁴

I believe the most beneficial consequence you could select would be fasting for 24-48 hrs. While as, most of the consequences listed above have little to no benefit, fasting is not only something that negatively reinforces the sin, it has inherent spiritual benefit. Most people do not fast to begin with, because it's difficult and unattractive.

8. *Internet Free Phone*

It may be necessary to get a phone without internet accessibility. There are many smartphone options available for kids that do not have internet availability. *Gabb* is one such brand.⁸⁵ There are other phone options like the *Light* phone which has no app or browsing capabilities, but it still has many of the tools (i.e., calculator, alarm, etc.) that

⁸³ Clear, James. *Atomic Habits*. Penguin Random House, 2018

⁸⁴ Weiss, Douglas. *Clean*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013

⁸⁵ *Gabb* website: <https://gabb.com/product/gabb-phone-z2/>

you would still want to have on a phone.⁸⁶ There are many alternatives available to your current phone that has internet access 24/7 in your pocket.

9. *The “M” Rule*⁸⁷

If there is something that you have masturbated to in the last 30 days, that thing needs to go. This could be a lot of things. Your smart watch might need to go. I won’t give you other ideas.

10. *Remove Non-essential Tech*

Tablets are a great example of non-essential tech. What person *needs* a tablet? Perhaps there are exceptions, but if all you do with your tablet is watch YouTube videos, Facetime, play games, read books, or take notes, then get rid of it. It’s not worth the temptation to look at porn to have a tablet for entertainment or convenience.

11. *Public Computers*

Place your computer in a public location of the house or workplace that is visible to anyone walking by. This is actually an old tip that was especially helpful with clunky desktops that weren’t mobile. Today, with personal and easily mobilized laptops, this requires more commitment, but you can tell the people in your house about the commitment to place the computer in the middle of the living room, and this will provide an extra layer of accountability. In that case, if they see you working on your computer in the bedroom or somewhere else, they will know something is amiss.

12. *No Zones*

The bathroom and bedroom should be no-zones where you are not allowed to use your phone or other digital devices, including TVs. Like the last idea, this one needs to be made public with your spouse or whoever is living with you for added accountability. Many people have extra temptation looking at porn in the bedroom and bathroom, because these are private areas. If there are other environments where you are tempted to use your devices to look at porn, make those no-zones too.

13. *Downtime*

Create curfews on your router, digital devices, etc. Apps like *Freedom* have this capability. Smartphones have this capability. This prevents you from using your phone after 10 PM, for example. Most people are tempted the most in the evenings anyway when it’s dark and they are lonely.

14. *Filtered Wifi*

Change the primary DNS (the lookup service) on your internet router. This is essentially changing the settings on your internet router so that it has parental controls and blocks or filters certain web addresses from the router level instead of the device level. This is most effective if you have someone else protecting the password access to the controls. You can do this yourself if you’re techy enough, but there are sites like *SAFEDNS* which

⁸⁶ *Light* website: <https://www.thelightphone.com/>

⁸⁷ “17 Porn Free Pro Tips.” Porn Free Radio, 4 October 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/71CNR4a6xUc3ndMd8jIRLw?si=fc2b05308aad4624>

make the process much easier.⁸⁸ I heard this tip from Matt Dobschuetz on *Porn Free Radio*,⁸⁹ and he strongly recommends this is to protect yourself and your kids from inappropriate content. An added benefit of using filtered wifi in addition to accountability software like *Covenant Eyes*, is that filtered wifi also protects smart TVs and any digital device that is connected to the router for internet. *Covenant Eyes* is still recommended in addition to this, because most phones can still access the internet via a data plan.

15. *Work Computer Rules*

Don't take your work computer home unless you have to. If you must take it home, download a website blocking software like *Freedom*⁹⁰ onto the device. The majority of companies will not have a problem with you downloading this software onto the work computer, because less distraction leads to more production, and there is a priority within businesses today to decrease distraction in the workplace. Some accountability software like *Covenant Eyes* may not work on workplace computers due to how the software operates and network restrictions on the company side.

16. *Vintage Media*

If you have a problem with viewing porn while online gaming, then go back to using gaming systems that do not have online access (i.e., Super Nintendo, N64, Sega Genesis). If movie streaming services like *Netflix* are a source of lust, get rid of this subscription and go back to DVD or blue ray players that make your movie selection limited and deliberate.

17. *Other People's Property*

Make a personal commitment and inform your accountability partner that you will not use other people's property to look at porn. Ask your friends or spouse to password protect their devices and keep that password secret.

18. *Rearrange the Environment*

There is actually something to physically rearranging the environment where you perform certain tasks that throws your brain off and curbs habitual behavior. I did not make this up. I first read this from James Clear who says, "*We mentally assign our habits to the locations in which they occur in the home, the office, the gym. Each location develops a connection to certain habits and routines.*"⁹¹ Gary Wilson specifically suggests moving your furniture around for the same reason.⁹² For example, if you usually look at porn in your recliner in the living room, move the recliner to a different part of the living room or a different room entirely. This will make your brain have to consciously think about looking at porn whenever you then sit in the recliner. If you want to get really extreme, get rid of the recliner or have a friend keep it for you temporarily.

⁸⁸ SAFEDNS website: <https://www.safedns.com/>

⁸⁹ "17 Porn Free Pro Tips." *Porn Free Radio*, 4 October 2023, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/71CNr4a6xUc3ndMd8jIRLw?si=fc2b05308aad4624>

⁹⁰ *Freedom* website: <https://freedom.to/>

⁹¹ Clear, James. *Atomic Habits*. Penguin Random House, 2018

⁹² Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain on Porn*. E-book 2nd ed., Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

Spiritual Formation

You have probably heard that in order to quit a bad habit you have to replace it with a good one. Well, it's true. It's so simple that we are prone to ignore it as *too* simple, but it's essential. That's what spiritual formation is about. While we shed the old, sinful habits that all add up to our looking at porn, we must "put on the new man" (Eph. 4:24). This will revolutionize your heart. Many men and women do not like the idea of boundaries. Why? They will say, "I don't want to have to have software that keeps me from looking at porn. I want to not *want* to look at porn!" That's a very noble thought, but this doesn't account for how deeply seated the old, wicked habits are in our flesh. And unfortunately, it takes more than a day to renew a heart that has been corrupted by years of porn consumption. The goal is to cut off the porn use, stop feeding the flesh, and slowly building up the inner man by feeding him with the words and methods of the Spirit.

Here are ten specific spiritually forming actions you can take in renewing your heart.

19. *Read*: Read the Bible
20. *Meditate*: Meditate on the Bible or Spiritual Things
21. *Study*: Study the Bible or Bible-based Books
22. *Memorize*: Memorize Scripture
23. *Journal*: Journal About Struggle or Bible Studies
24. *Conversation*: Converse with Others About Spiritual Things
25. *Teaching*: Listen to Sermons or Spiritual Podcasts
26. *Fasting*
27. *Praying*
28. *Singing*: Listen to Spiritual Songs

Conclusion

That's the short of what it takes to overcome porn. You have to commit to be clean with a sense of urgency and resolve. Then, and only then, must you make a plan that is made of strong ABS: accountability, boundaries, and spiritual formation. I have provided you with 28 specific actions to overcome porn. These actions are organized, specific, and effective. If you will do these thing, you will be clean and spiritually strong. It won't happen overnight, but it can happen.

Day 23: Accountability Software

As I mentioned in Day 22, you need accountability software. While I gave 28 specific actions you could take to overcome porn, not all of those actions are what I would call *absolutely necessary*. Some of those actions are case specific. However, when it comes to accountability software, this one is absolutely necessary if you ask me. If you have digital devices, especially a smartphone, you need this.

Douglas Weiss says this in his book *Clean*.

A fun thing to do with singles is to ask everyone to get their cell phones out and lift them up. Then ask them to keep them up if they have access to the Internet on their phones. To those who don't put their hands down, I ask how many have accountability software like

Covenant Eyes that offers Internet activity reports to an accountability partner... It isn't smart at all to have an open porn store 24-7 in your pocket or purse.⁹³

What Is Accountability Software?

Accountability software is something that you download on to your digital device, and it essentially tracks your online activity. For example, *Covenant Eyes*, monitors all online activity and takes random screenshots from your device. Those screenshots are sent to the email of the person that you have signed up to be your accountability person. He/she can't see the screenshots in full, they are blurred, but they can see enough to know if you have been looking at inappropriate images. Furthermore, the software will send an email alert to your accountability person if there is suspicious activity on your device. This prompts your accountability person to contact you and verify that everything is okay. Different software goes about surveillance differently, but this is generally how they work with nuanced differences.

How Do I Choose?

Accountability software is available for purchase online, and there is an abundance of options to choose from. Some are cheaper than others, but I operate under the old adage "You get what you pay for." I haven't looked into more than three or four software sites, but this seems to hold true from what I have researched.

You are welcome to do your own research and find an accountability software that works best for you and your devices. I encourage this. Below, I am going to share two accountability sites that I am familiar with and one that I am intrigued by but have not actually used. I will give some pros and cons to each service.

1) Covenant Eyes⁹⁴

Cost— \$17/month or \$184/annually

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pretty airtight. This is one of the boasts of covenant eyes.• Compatible with iOS (Apple) software. Because iOS is highly advanced in security, many apps are not able to provide high level surveillance on iOS devices. Covenant Eyes is one of the better ones on this front.• This software does offer a <i>Panic Button</i> that the user can press in the heat of temptation. This shuts off	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expensive

⁹³ Weiss, Douglas. *Clean*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013

⁹⁴ <https://www.covenanteyes.com>

<p>internet access in the moment. This is a great emergency feature.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sends an alert to the accountability partner if the user uninstalls the app. • Simple. • Good customer service. • Sends informational emails to the accountability partner to help them in encouraging and assisting the user. 	
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I have been an accountability partner for men using *Covenant Eyes*. The only complaint about this software and the main reason men stop using it is the price. However, if you would give the whole world for your soul, it's worth \$17/month. Consider how much you spend on streaming services or anything else that is non-essential. This motivation is rarely because the person cannot actually afford it.

2) Ever Accountable⁹⁵

Cost— \$10/month or \$89/annually

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable. • Good about giving detailed reports when suspicious activity is detected on the user's device. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not as effective on iOS devices. • Not as airtight as Covenant Eyes. There are some loopholes.

I have been the accountability partner for one man who used *Ever Accountable*, and he is still using it. I have been impressed with the sensitivity of the software. There have been many times where I received a “suspicious activity” email from the site, was encouraged to check in with this man, and it turned out to be nothing to worry about. From these experiences, I consider the software to be pretty sensitive, and that's a good thing. However, there are some apps that he has informed me do have loopholes. This can pose a problem. This software does offer a *Panic Button* that the user can press in the heat of temptation. This shuts off internet access in the moment. This is a great emergency feature.

3) Bark⁹⁶

Cost— \$14/month or \$99/annually

Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perhaps the widest coverage of any accountability software on the market. • Monitors online gaming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some reports that the software caused iOS software to become inoperative or that the <i>Bark</i> software itself caused

⁹⁵ <https://everaccountable.com>

⁹⁶ <https://www.bark.us/>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acts as a internet filtering and blocking site also (see Day 24 for more on this). • Allows the operator to manage screentime. • Has a “Location Alert” feature. • Offers a <i>Bark Phone</i> for \$29/month. • Especially good for kids. 	<p>technical complications with the user’s phones.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because this software has such a widespread surveillance and level of control, some adults may feel like it infringes on their privacy too much.
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I have never used *Bark* before. I found it via another website that reviewed the top available accountability software on the market. However, I am intrigued from what I have read about *Bark*. I think it would be a potentially good option for adults too. I have talked to and read reviews from customers/parents who have given glowing reviews and others who stopped using the software because it caused glitches on their children’s phones. Apparently, the software has not been absolutely perfected, though it does have a lot of good reviews to its name just the same.

Conclusion

The bottom line is, if you have a porn problem, get an accountability software. If you don’t want to get clean, then don’t get one. If you are a parent of children, you definitely need some type of accountability software for the devices in your home. Do understand, an accountability software by itself will not solve your problems. As with anything, you will likely find some loophole in the system where you can weasel out some porn somewhere. Thus, if you are *just* taking the action from Day 22 of getting an accountability software and you’re *still* having frequent relapses, don’t be surprised. This is one tool in your toolbox, but it’s not a magic wand.

Day 24: Internet & Phone Blockers

You might have compared the title of today’s newsletter with yesterday’s “Accountability Software” and thought, “Aren’t these the same thing?” While there is some overlap, accountability software and internet blocker/filtering software are different in their functionality.

What’s the Difference?

Accountability software performs constant surveillance of the digital devices that it is specifically downloaded on. It sends reports to your accountability partner that you add to the software. This all takes place on the individual device level.

Internet Blocker or Filtering software gives parental controls over internet usage and takes place on the internet router level. While most accountability software does not block sites or allow you to select certain sites to be off limits, internet filtering software does allow for this.

For example, one internet filtering software called *Qustodio* offers the following features. Some of these features are only available under the premium subscription.

Safety

- Safe Search
- Web filtering
- Games & apps blocking
- Web activity alerts
- Blocked website alerts

Balance

- Daily time limits
- Restricted times
- Pause the internet
- Games & apps time limits

Visibility

- 30-day activity reports
- Panic button
- App download alerts
- YouTube monitoring
- Calls & messages monitoring

Location

- Location monitoring
- Saved places alerts

As you can tell, this service goes beyond *just* internet filtering and is comparable to *Bark*, the program that was reviewed and recommended from Day 23.

Again, because most filtering software works on the router level, this also helps monitoring on smart TVs or any digital device connected to the internet router.⁹⁷ This is something that accountability software cannot offer.

Gary Wilson highly recommends *OpenDNS*.

I highly recommend OpenDNS or some other kind of web filtering service, especially if it comes with a 3-minute delay before new settings take effect. That way, even if you falter, the 3 minutes give you enough time to realize you really don't want to do this, and unset those settings. Block all sexual, dating and blog categories. Tumblr is a sneaky one you can't afford to let loose.⁹⁸

Note: Wilson's comments are based on the assumption that you, the person struggling with porn, are in charge of the password protected settings. I highly recommend that if you are married, make your spouse responsible for the password, keeping it secret from you. Otherwise, ask your accountability partner to be in charge of this if they are willing.

⁹⁷ Please verify this with the individual service that you purchase. This is my understanding of how filtering software operates generally. There may be exceptions.

⁹⁸ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain on Porn*. E-book 2nd ed., Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

If you are interested in purchasing an internet filtering software, here are several to choose from:

- *Bark*⁹⁹
- *OpenDNS*
- *SafeDNS*
- *Freedom*
- *Qustodio*
- *K-9*
- *Esafely*

Ad Blockers

Also consider downloading an ad blocker software onto your devices. These do exactly what they sound like; they block unwanted ads on your sidebar, some of which have inappropriate and enticing images. *AdblockPlus* is free. I have recently downloaded this on my computer. This serves as an extra layer of protection.

Conclusion

The goal in all of this software business is to crack down on loopholes for accessing porn. By using all of these tools together, you are giving yourself the best chance to reset, focus on spiritual formation, and starve the flesh of this bad habit. No single tool will help you overcome porn. They all work together to function as your armor.

Day 25: Continuous Sin—Am I “continuing in sin” if I’m still struggling with porn daily?

Day 25 and Day 26 switch the conversation about porn back to the spiritual side of things. One of the greatest enemies in the pursuit of being porn free is *doubt*. *Sin* leads to *doubt*, which leads to *depression*, which leads to more sin, and the cycle continues monotonously. We start doubting that God will forgive us for looking at porn for the 500th time. We repent, but the frequency of our sin makes us question whether or not we are “living in sin” (Rom. 6:2). This is how the mind works, especially the very conscientious mind. Today, I want to define what it means to “continue in sin.” I believe if we have a biblical perspective of what it means to *continue in sin*, we can conquer our doubts and trust in the promises of God to include His forgiveness. This will greatly help as we battle porn.

Defining “Continuing in Sin”

If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and *walk in darkness*, we lie and do not practice the truth. (1 John 1:6)

What shall we say then? Shall we *continue in sin* that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? (Romans 6:1-2)

⁹⁹ *Bark* is a hybrid between accountability software and internet filtering software.

Both of these verses talk about the same concepts: *walking in sin, continuing in sin, or living in sin*. Pick whichever phrase you prefer. The goal now is to give some definition of what this is. In order to do this, we must also define repentance.

What is repentance?

Many have in their head that an individual is *walking in sin* and has not actually *repented of sin* unless there is a *long* amount of time that transpires between sins. If someone looks up porn at 1 PM, repents and prays for forgiveness at 1:30 PM, but looks up porn again at 5 PM, it would be common for people to look at the behavior pattern and say, “They never really repented.” Unless days, weeks, and months linger between each episode of pornography use, it is easy for the sinner to accept this same conclusion, “I never really repented.” And if you never really repented, then you never were forgiven upon praying to God. That’s a logical progression of thought.

It's possible we borrow this view of repentance from the false doctrine of “Once Saved, Always Saved,” more properly coined Eternal Security. This doctrine teaches that if a person has faith in the Lord Jesus, he is then eternally secure, unable to lose his salvation. If, after he has a *salvation experience*, he “continues in sin,” then he wasn’t saved to begin with. This is a crude rendition of what the doctrine teaches, but that generally gets the point across. It’s a very similar thought pattern to the one about repentance above.

What’s wrong with this concept of repentance? The main problem: it’s based on an ambiguous and unfounded length of time that must take place between infractions. This is not based on what repentance truly is: **a change of heart/mind**.¹⁰⁰ When you boil repentance down and scrape off the foam, you are left with “a change of heart/mind.” The idea is a 180 degree turn in the direction of your mind to stop doing evil and start doing good.

To be clear, I’m not talking about just being *sorry* for what you did. Notice the distinction between sorrow and repentance in scripture.

Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your *sorrow led to repentance*. (2 Corinthians 7:9)

Sorrow and repentance are related just as a cause is to its effect. One leads to the other. Godly sorrow leads to repentance, but sorrow is not repentance itself. The same is true of repentance and *behavior change*.

Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should *repent*, turn to God, *and do works* befitting repentance. (Acts 26:19-20)

Again, repentance and *doing works (behavior change)* are related just as a cause is to its effect. One leads to the other. Repentance leads to behavior change, but repentance is not precisely the

¹⁰⁰ *metanoeo* (G3340), x34, Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 6:12; Luke 13:3; 2 Cor. 7:10; Rev. 2:5; *BDAG*— prim. “a change of mind.”

same thing as behavior change. A person can truly repent (have a legitimate change of heart motivated by sorrow) and not experience *sustained* behavior change. Read that again. I'm not saying the person won't experience some length of behavior change. I said the person may not experience *sustained* behavior change. There's a difference, and we need to understand this.

Case Study: Nineveh

Consider the story of Jonah and Nineveh. Jonah preached repentance to the city of Nineveh. And they truly repented. Notice the text:

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them. (Jonah 3:10)

“God saw their works.” That's divine commentary to confirm that Nineveh truly did repent. Nonetheless, this is what Jonah did in response:

So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. (Jonah 4:5)

Why did Jonah do this? Didn't Jonah know that the city had truly repented? Yes, he did. But Jonah also knew what many people don't know today. He knew that a person(s) can truly repent, truly be forgiven, but not experience *sustained* behavior change. They can fall back into sin, and many times they do.

Now, if Nineveh went back to their wicked ways 39 days after having repented, would that mean that they hadn't actually repented in the first place? No. What about if they went back to sinning on Day 2, would that mean that they hadn't actually repented in the first place? No. If someone truly repents, then they've repented. No amount of time must pass for their repentance to become officially official. The all-knowing God knows whether a person's heart has truly changed or not, and even if for a very brief time, their behavior will demonstrate that. If the person does go back to looking at porn at 5 PM, that doesn't nullify the fact that he truly repented at 1:30 PM. It just means that his repentance was *short lived*.

Continuing in Sin

To “continue in sin” does not mean that a person has yet to go three whole days or five whole days without committing the same sin (i.e., sustained behavior change). “Continuing in sin” is a way of describing the absence of repentance. However, if I repent of my sin at 1:30 PM, pray to God for forgiveness, and resolve to not sin again, then I am no longer “continuing in sin.” At 5 PM, when I sin again, at that moment in time, I am continuing in sin, *until* I repent of my sin (have a change of heart), confess my sin (agree with God's word), and pray to God for forgiveness. If we are already a Christian and we respond to sin in this way, then John says, “[Christ] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” I will have more to say about this on Day 26.

Am I “continuing in sin” if I'm still struggling with porn daily?

This is the question we set out to answer. I hope the answer is obvious at this point, but I have learned better than to assume. No. I do not believe that a person is “continuing in sin” *just* because they are struggling with porn daily.¹⁰¹

It might seem as though I’m splitting hairs, but I object. Sometimes even slight misunderstandings or misarticulations of theology can have great consequence. For example, where you place baptism, before or after initial salvation, can have a profound consequence on theology. The placement of baptism in relation to salvation may seem rather small, but it still divides many churches today. In a somewhat similar fashion, our articulation of repentance has a great effect on how we view our ongoing struggle with pornography. If we misunderstand and misarticulate repentance as requiring some lengthy amount of time between incidents of sin or else “He didn’t *really* repent,” we can easily find ourselves doubting the forgiveness of God. This unnecessarily incites more shame and doubt, and it incites the porn user to go back to the only thing promising even a morsel of pleasure and escape ... more porn.¹⁰²

Conclusion

Today’s message is not intended to lessen the sinfulness of sin. No. Today’s message is intended to get biblically right what we often get unbiblically wrong. It is intended to empower the Christian to keep seeking God in the spiritual war’s hottest moments. The war against porn is not settled by a single battle. When Satan wins a small victory, give him no reason to rejoice. Turn to God for deliverance. It is by this continual turning to God that the hope of final deliverance from pornography will be realized. And it *can* be realized!

Now, with all that said, if you keep sinning in the same circumstance and using the same approach, something has to change. Activity is not productivity. Lynwood Smith said, “If I had an ox that fell into a ditch every Sunday, I would fill in the ditch or get rid of the ox!” Many times, the reason we daily go through the sin cycle of looking at porn, repenting, asking forgiveness, and looking at porn again is because we refuse to enact real accountability and self-imposed consequences for our actions. “Make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:14). Do hard things. Today is its own battle, and you have God on your side. Do it.

Day 26: Forgiveness—Will God Forgive Me If I Look at Porn Six Times in the Same Day?

Today’s newsletter goes hand-in-hand with yesterday’s message about repentance and “continuing in sin.” I dipped my toes into today’s material on Day 25 when I go into repentance. I want to drive the point home that it’s possible to sin six times in the same day and six times

¹⁰¹ I define “struggling” as someone who frequently sins, yet he/she does not want to sin, and he/she consistently repents of the sin when committed. This may happen multiple times in a single day. People who frequently sin but do not repent of the sin are not “struggling” even if they experience shame or sorrow for the sin.

¹⁰² Yes, porn does offer real pleasure. The Hebrew writer says that Moses rejected the “passing pleasures of sin” (11:25), and in saying this, the Holy Spirit confirms that there is real pleasure in sin. Unfortunately, that pleasure is very temporary, and even though the porn user knows this, the promise of real, temporary pleasure often wins out over the incessant guilt that comes from sin without forgiveness. That’s why an understanding of true repentance, trust in God’s promise of forgiveness conditioned on true repentance, and a proper articulation of all this is so important to the Christian in the porn sin cycle.

receive forgiveness from God.¹⁰³ I believe there are people truly disbelieving that God would do such a thing. Maybe it's not even that they disbelieve God *could* do such a thing, but they disbelieve that He *would* forgive us six times in the day for the same sin. But the word of God says differently. The sooner you understand this, the better off you will be in the war against porn.

Matthew 6:12, Luke 17:3-4 & Ephesians 4:32

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. (Matthew 6:12)

Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and *if he repents, forgive him*. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and *seven times in a day returns* to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall *forgive him*. (Luke 17:3-4)

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even *as God in Christ forgave you*. (Ephesians 4:32)

I did not randomly select three verses on forgiveness to emphasize the concept that God forgives. I purposefully selected these three passages about forgiveness, because, together, they answer the question: "Will God forgive me if I look at porn six times in the same day?"

These verses teach that how God forgives us, in this way we are to forgive others, and how we are to forgive others is based on how God forgives us. Thus, if we understand how we are to forgive others when they sin against us, then we will know with certainty how it is that God forgives us when we sin against Him.

How are we to forgive others? Notice two features of how Jesus instructs His disciples to forgive others in Luke 17:3-4.

1. Forgiveness is *conditioned* on repentance. Just like God's grace is conditioned on faith/faithfulness, forgiveness is conditioned on repentance. It is not unconditional. Thus, "Will God forgive me if I look at porn six times in the same day?" Yes ... if you repent. Refer back to Day 25 to review what true repentance is and is not.
2. Forgiveness (conditioned on repentance) knows *no limits*. While as, it's easy for us to feel justified in saying, "Sin against me once, shame on you. Sin against me twice, shame on me," God does not think this way. It's hard for humans to comprehend the idea of forgiving someone that has sinned against them multiple times in the same day! Peter speaks for all of us when he asks Jesus in Matthew 18:21, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?" That's why we doubt the forgiveness of God after looking at porn for the third time in the same day, even though we have repented and prayed after each occurrence. It escapes us to comprehend that God would actually

¹⁰³ DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND me. I am not encouraging sin. I am saying this on behalf of people who find themselves in sin cycle's, like with porn, where they WANT to quit sinning, and yet they seemingly can't escape! This really happens. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, thank God and try to muster empathy for those in this insanity mimicking state.

forgive us for repeated transgression, because most people have never seen this in real life.

As hard as it is to believe, Matthew 6:12, Luke 17:3-4, and Ephesians 4:32 teach us that God WILL forgive us seven times in the same day! Yes, even 490 times in the same day (Matthew 18:22)! And we must believe this!

Your Sins Are Forgiven

When I am sitting across a table from someone who is doubting the forgiveness of God, I direct them to 1 John.

If we confess our sins, *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins* and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

I write to you, little children, because *your sins are forgiven you* for His name's sake. (1 John 2:12)

And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and *in Him there is no sin*. (1 John 3:5)

And *whatever we ask we receive from Him*, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. (1 John 3:22)

Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that *if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us*. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, *we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him*. (1 John 5:14-15)

Some people might abuse these select passages from 1 John to teach unconditional salvation. We must avoid this mistake. At the same time, we must avoid reading right over the text and missing the promises of God! Notice again what he says:

- He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins...
- Your sins are forgiven you...
- In Him there is no sin...
- Whatever we ask we receive from Him...
- If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.
- We know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.

Don't abuse the text to teach that we can do whatever we want under the sun without repentance, and God will still forgive us. But likewise, don't disbelieve the promises of God that He WILL forgive us and listen to our prayers if we come to Him in repentance. He. Will. Forgive. You. Even though it be seven times in the same day, He will forgive you. Even if it's while eating green eggs and ham in a box with a fox, He will forgive you. The forgiveness of God, conditioned on repentance (for the Christian), knows no limits.

It is after realizing all this that the words of Joshua Harris resonate with me.

I am astonished by how many Christians honestly have more faith in their sin, than in Jesus' blood to forgive the sin.¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Trusting in the forgiveness of God more than our sin is essential to overcoming porn. But we must never let the grace of God become a license to sin. We are being sanctified daily into the image of Christ. That process is a daily grind, constantly struggling with the flesh, enduring painful growth, seeking growth in holiness. When we lose this mindset, we become complacent. The struggle with sin becomes complacency with sin. There's no fight anymore. That's when we need to start doubting the forgiveness of God, not that He *can't* forgive us, but that He *won't* forgive us. But as long as you are sincerely repenting, God is sincerely forgiving.

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:12-14)

Day 27: Porn's Effect on a Marriage

I'm not married and never have been. I never really stopped to think about how porn use might impact the other partner in a marriage relationship until several years back. I found myself at the table with a husband and wife. The husband was confessing to me that he had struggled with porn for years. His wife had found out. She was crying. She said she felt like she wasn't *enough* for him.

In October 2021 I wrote an article on my website entitled "Is Pornography a Scriptural Reason for Divorce?"¹⁰⁵ It took two years from the publication date before anyone commented on the article. Three separate, random women on the internet commented on the article. Their comments raised my awareness more. I share excerpts from two of those comments here.

"[My husband] is committing a sin that is demeaning me and shows no love in it. He then expects more sexual acts that I am not comfortable with. I love the man I am with, but I have spent 14 years of feeling not good enough, not young enough. I am tired. This has caused me severe depression." (Anonymous)

"My husband has been involved in porn for years. I didn't realize how serious until 25 years ago. It is hard, and his addiction has caused me great pain and hurt. He has broken me mentally and physically. Only one time did he seek help. He can lie with such sincerity, I believe him." (Anonymous)

¹⁰⁴ Harris, Joshua. *Not Even a Hint*. Sisters, Multnomah Publishers, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Battey, Aaron. "Is Pornography a Scriptural Reason for Divorce?" *Five Minute Bible Study*, <https://fiveminutebiblestudy.com/is-pornography-a-scriptural-reason-for-divorce/>. Accessed 5 December 2023.

A brother in the church was willing to share his personal account of how porn affected his wife and marriage in a way he did not expect.

“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body” (1 Cor. 6:18). So many people don't understand the depth of sexual sin. Not only is it against our own body, but when we're married, we are one, and naturally the spouse is heavily affected by that sin also. When I was caught by my wife in my sin, I confessed everything and immediately felt a weight off my chest. What I didn't realize though, was the beginning of my wife's trauma dealing with this. She not only felt extremely hurt but now had to deal with feeling like she wasn't enough, always wondering where my mind and eyes were, where my heart was at. When you've been married for ten years and hit with something like this, it changes your world. She was mentally, physically, and emotionally drained. My heart broke for her in ways I can't even explain. This was the beginning of our journey to fully understand how God intends marriage to be. We studied together, went to counseling, and poured into each other to repair the damage. Now, over six years later, the wounds have healed, our marriage is better than we ever knew it could be, but it's an ever present thought we both stay in conversation about to keep our marriage strong. (Anonymous)

Fred Stoeker is correct when he says, “Women take it personally when they find out what men are doing in secret.”¹⁰⁶ If a young, unmarried man confesses to me that he is struggling with porn, I tell him, “It's a good thing you are doing what it takes to overcome porn now, because when you get married one day, your wife is going to be less understanding and gracious than I am when she finds out you have been secretly looking at porn.” This seems to hit a cord with them as it should. It doesn't take a whole lot of horse sense to understand how and why porn has devastating consequences on a marriage.

How Porn Effects a Marriage Partner

There are several ways in which porn use negatively effects the other spouse in a marriage relationship. Whether we are talking about a husband looking at visual porn or a wife fantasizing over written porn, the following list applies.

1. *Porn makes a spouse feel betrayed.*
2. *Porn destroys trust.*
3. *Porn destroys intimacy in general.*
4. *Porn causes sexual dysfunction.*

For evidence of this point, go back and read “Day 17: Effects of Porn on Your Brain.” Mark Gungor, Gary Wilson, and *Fight the New Drug* all speak to this point directly. There is strong evidence correlating porn consumption and sexual dysfunction. Wilson's book *Your Brain on Porn* cites numerous comments from users on online public forums who attest to the inability to perform sexually with their spouse or partner, though these same people attest to being able to attain sexual arousal from porn. More on this tomorrow.

¹⁰⁶ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man's Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

5. *Porn normalizes sexual violence during intimacy.*

“Dr. John D. Foubert, a researcher who has studied sexual violence for 25 years, argues that sexual violence is clearly linked to porn use. *‘The research connecting pornography and sexual violence is conclusive. There are over 100 studies showing that pornography use is both correlated with and is the cause (shown through experimental studies) of a wide range of violent behaviors. Over 50 studies show a strong connection between pornography and sexual violence.’*”¹⁰⁷

“88% of scenes in porn films contain acts of physical aggression, and 49% of scenes contain verbal aggression.”¹⁰⁸

Two Types of Porn-Stricken Spouses

I do want to make one clarification before wrapping up this discussion about porn’s effect on marriage. There are two very different types of porn-stricken spouses. It’s very important that we don’t just lump all spouses who are caught looking at porn into the same group and cry out, “Castrate them all!

First, there are husbands who sincerely do not want to look at porn. They hate looking at porn as much as their wife hates them looking at it. I can relate to these men/women. We’ve discussed these type of men primarily in this newsletter. These individuals are truly repentant about their porn use, but they’re also stuck in the sin cycle because their sin is in the dark and all the other factors that make breaking the shackles of sin so difficult. When these men are found out by their spouse or they come confessing, they need to be spoken to plainly. They need the full weight of responsibility in overcoming their sin placed on their shoulders. I’m not suggesting less. However, I believe wholeheartedly that these men also need empathy, compassion, and patience from their spouse and accountability partner. I know of no one who quit porn overnight.

Second, there are husbands who are deceitful, lying dirtbags. I get angry just thinking about these kind of husbands. They aren’t sorry they have a porn problem; they are only sorry their porn problem got exposed. They repeatedly lie. They don’t want to stop looking at porn; they just want their spouse to stop nagging them about it. This type of unrepentant personality cannot be helped until major spiritual heart surgery takes place. I believe that wives married to these type of men, after establishing that they are indeed married to this type of man, need to set clear boundaries for the relationship and follow through with those boundaries. Furthermore, I believe the church should follow Matthew 18:15-19 if the offending spouse is a Christian. There is no excuse for this type of behavior, and *it does exist* in the world and in the church.

¹⁰⁷ Daniels, Julia. “Porn and Marriage — What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You.” *Ever Accountable*, https://everaccountable.com/blog/porn-and-marriage-what-you-dont-know-can-hurt-you/?mtm_campaign=20802170836&mtm_kwd=&mtm_source=google-ads&mtm_medium=x&mtm_content=&mtm_cid=Cj0KCCQiAsburBhCIARIsAExmsu5encz93SKQ_hhz4A49zW2FFRc8LtEuBsrulUP2PFcHnS1CzDBI6gaAiXHEALw_wcB&gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCCQiAsburBhCIARIsAExmsu5encz93SKQ_hhz4A49zW2FFRc8LtEuBsrulUP2PFcHnS1CzDBI6gaAiXHEALw_wcB. Accessed 5 December 2023.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>

Conclusion

Recently, I read someone who said that porn use in marriage is almost always exposed with time. It may take years for the truth to come to light, but it *will* come to light. As Fred Stoker said, “You cannot avoid the costs of sexual impurity. You might as well fight.”¹⁰⁹ You can’t avoid the cost of porn in your marriage. You might as well fight it. Better yet, fight it before you ever get married. Be proactive. The good news? You can win the fight, and your marriage can heal. I know married men that can testify to this fact. You can join them.

Day 28: Why Sex in Marriage Doesn’t Solve Porn Habits

If you’re a young man or woman who thinks sex in marriage will somehow magically make your desire for porn go away, you are mistaken. I don’t say this from personal experience obviously; I say this from listening to married man after married man. After the fourth or fifth time hearing this from a married man who struggled with porn, I believed it. A married man emailed me at the start of this newsletter to add another testimony to this fact. I would encourage you to believe this, or be prepared to experience disappointment soon after you get married.

Many naïve young men truly do believe that marriage will fix all their problems. A young man named Mark said, “The whole problem of impurity has been a mess. I’ve been hooked for years, and I’m counting on marriage to free me. I’ll be able to have sex whenever I want it. Satan won’t be able to tempt me at all!”¹¹⁰ Fred Stoeker says, “Young singles believe that marriage creates a state of sexual nirvana.”¹¹¹ But they don’t know what they don’t know. I, myself, thought at one time that marriage would be my salvation from porn. It just seemed logical to me that once I started having sex I wouldn’t *need* or *want* porn. I was stupid. Joshua Harris affirms, “Sadly, what many couples discover is that lust doesn’t stop prodding them after they’ve ‘gone all the way.’ There is no such thing as ‘all the way’ with lust.”¹¹² Lust and habits both die hard.

Your purity must *not* depend upon your mate’s health or desire. God holds *you* responsible, and if you don’t gain control before your wedding day, you can expect it to crop up after the honeymoon. If you’re single and watching sensual R-rated movies, wedded bliss won’t change this habit. If your eyes lock on passing babes, they’ll still roam after you say “I do.” You’re masturbating now? Putting that ring on your finger won’t keep your hands off yourself.¹¹³ (*emphasis mine*)

A couple of married men who had a history of unwanted porn use within their marriage reached out to me and volunteered to help me in any way they could with this newsletter. I asked them to write a paragraph speaking to the fact that sex in marriage doesn’t solve porn habits. They readily accepted the request. This is what they wrote.

I often thought when I was younger that pornography was preparing me for marriage. I thought porn was portraying sex, intimacy, and love. But I found out, once I got married,

¹⁰⁹ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man’s Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Harris, Joshua. *Not Even a Hint*. Sisters, Multnomah Publishers, 2003.

¹¹³ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man’s Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

that the sexual relationship I had with my wife was not as fulfilling as porn had been. Sex with my wife wasn't dirty or nasty like porn; it was just simple. Because of porn, sex wasn't good enough. *My wife has made comments like, "You have issues with sexual intimacy in our marriage, because I can't compare to porn."* And she was right. She is right. It's a struggle to turn those things off, to let go of those things and embrace reality. Marriage is not an *off switch* for porn or the effects of porn. I've been married for almost four years, and I still struggle with porn and lust. You get into cycles of wanting to break free, but you're too ashamed to bring it up to your wife again, because you can't stand to hear the disappointment in her voice. That, in and of itself, shows that the issue of pornography consumption does not *just* have consequences for you. It affects those you love. You drag them down with you. Marriage doesn't stop porn, it just compounds the number of people that will be hurt. Now add kids to the mix. Young kids don't know why their parents are always fighting, and no one can measure what that does for their mental health and wellbeing. Again, the area affected by porn grows wider. Marriage won't stop porn. You have too. You have to kill porn at the root. Porn is not the root—unbridled lust is. Start with lust if you are going to be successful in getting rid of pornography. (Anonymous)

Marriage does not fix your porn addiction, you cannot decide to indulge in an activity and think, "One day down the road when the time is right, I will set it aside." Porn is perhaps the toughest addiction I know of to battle, and I have battled several. Porn turns God's intentions with marriage into a complete 180. Objectifying women, thinking of them as a means to an end of our own desires, all while increasing our lustful appetites, is exactly the opposite of how marriage points us toward contentment and relationship with Jesus. Being one in mind, body and soul is such a blessing and gift from God that we continually benefit and learn from almost daily. (Anonymous)

Why Is This the Case?

It seems so logical that the desire for porn *would* go away once you're having real sex with a real woman. So, why doesn't it? There are a couple of real factors I would urge you to consider.

1. Porn reduces the satisfaction of real sex with a real person.

There is only a very, very small percentage of the population that can physically measure up to the men and women found in pornography, and even then, no one can measure up to fake effects from video and image editing.

When men look at sensual things, it can make them less satisfied with their wives. Likewise, when women fantasize about the perfect husband, it can make them less satisfied with the mate God has given them.¹¹⁴

Even then, real sex between two loving people is not what you find portrayed on porn. Porn dramatizes sex and creates a false narrative in the minds of young men and women who have never had sex. When they finally do have sex, they wonder why their spouse isn't responding

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

and behaving like the women/men they've seen portrayed in porn. This is disappointing upon discovery, and the words from the testimony above come back: "Sex with my wife wasn't dirty or nasty like porn; it was just simple." Real women can't measure up to fake women and fake sex. But that's not all!

2. Porn rewires the brain.

I talked about this on Day 17 "The Effects of Porn on Your Brain." Porn literally changes the growth and neurochemistry of the brain. We imprint on our experiences. That means, whatever we learn to become sexually stimulated by (i.e., pornography), our brain remembers this, creates a picture of it (as it were), and the brain can eventually imprint on that stimulation so much that it fails to recognize other forms of sexual stimulation (i.e., real sex with a real woman). Douglas Weiss explains why this is.

If you wait until marriage to have sex, including not viewing pornography, you sexually bond and connect only to your wife. You will not crave others; you will only crave her... Our brain cannot separate reality, fantasy, and pornography. Neuroimaging has shown us that our brain lights up the same way, whether we view a real object or imagine that same object.¹¹⁵

The converse of what Weiss say is also true. If you watch and masturbate to porn before you ever get married and have real sex, you sexually bond and connect to fantasies and your hand. This is why many men who have consumed and masturbated to lots of porn can't perform sexually with a real woman. The good news is, Gary Wilson says this can be reversed and gives testimonies of this being reversed in his book *Your Brain on Porn*.¹¹⁶ So, I'm not saying you are forever doomed if you have rewired your brain to the point that you don't get turned on by your spouse or you have sexual dysfunction.

When you starve your eyes and eliminate "junk sex" from your life, you'll deeply crave "real food"—your wife. And no wonder. She's the only thing in the cupboard, and you're hungry!¹¹⁷

This certainly takes time, but it can be done! And it's not something that only some 1% of superhuman men or woman can accomplish. It will just take you actually implementing honesty, urgency, strong ABS, and being patient.

Conclusion

I'm sure that if you're a married man struggling with porn and reading this newsletter, each day tears you up. But I try to always leave you with a message of hope. I couldn't think of a better message to leave you with than the one that my brother-in-Christ shared from yesterday's letter. I leave you with his words of encouragement.

¹¹⁵ Weiss, Douglas. *Clean*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013

¹¹⁶ Wilson, Gary. *Your Brain on Porn*. E-book 2nd ed., Commonwealth Publishing, 2017

¹¹⁷ Arterburn, Stephen and Stoeker, Fred. *Every Man's Battle*. Water Brook Publishing, 2000.

[After confessing my porn habit to my wife] we studied together, went to counseling, and poured into each other to repair the damage. Now, over six years later, the wounds have healed, our marriage is better than we ever knew it could be, but it's an ever present thought we both stay in conversation about to keep our marriage strong.

Day 29: Recommended Books

When I came up with the idea to write this newsletter, I realized I needed to read up on the subject more than I had. Though I had a lot of personal experience to go off, I hadn't read a tremendous amount about porn recovery besides *Every Young Man's Battle* by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker and *Not Even a Hint* by Joshua Harris some years back.¹¹⁸ I asked other brothers-in-Christ for recommendations, I looked up top reads on the internet, and I got to work. If you have paid any attention to the footnotes of the newsletter, then you already know what books I read. Here they are:

Your Brain on Porn by Gary Wilson

Clean by Douglas Weiss

Every Man's Battle by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker

I also consumed many articles and podcasts, some of which I will share in tomorrow's newsletter about recommended resources. Out of the books I have read, I put forth the following as highly recommended reads. I will give a brief synopsis of each to include the primary strength of each book.

1. *Not Even a Hint* by Joshua Harris

Harris's book is not specifically about pornography, though he certainly touches on the subject quite a bit. Like most books that deal with porn, it's more about sexual purity in general: how to guard your heart against lust. His approach is not so much about giving specific actions for an individual to take in extinguishing lust. He sets out more to help the reader understand how lust works, how things like media, porn, and traditional dating can feed into lust, and explaining how sex and intimacy fit into God's design for relationship between a man and woman. If I remember correctly, I got the impression that this book was aimed more at a *single* audience. He talks considerably less about the marriage relationship than other books I read.

I especially like Harris's book because it is short and simple. Most people don't like to read. That's okay. *Not Even a Hint* is only 172 pages, but even then, the pages are smaller than a normal size book, making it comparable to a traditional 100-page book.

One of the strengths of *Not Even a Hint* is that Harris talks about sex, intimacy, and sexual immorality without putting an image in your head at the same time. What do I mean by this? The book *Every Man's Battle* has a lot of good content as is manifested by how often I have quoted it within this newsletter. The problem is, *Every Man's Battle* often gives unnecessarily detailed

¹¹⁸ This former title is not to be confused with *Every Man's Battle* by the same author that I have cited frequently in the newsletter already.

descriptions of men's accounts from past immoral sexual encounters or lust that the author's experienced. By the time you're done reading some of those accounts, you're thinking about the very thing that the book was supposedly written to help you stop thinking about! It's rather counterproductive. Harris's book doesn't do this. He does address sexual immorality and its associated subtopics directly, but he avoids detailed personal accountings involving lust.

One more strength of Harris's book is his chapter entitled "Self-Centered Sex—How Do I Deal with Masturbation?" In all the books I have read, the author might make passing remarks about masturbation, but this is the only one that devotes a significant amount of space to this particular subtopic. I find that many men and women are interested in knowing more about the morality of masturbation, and it is very difficult to find anything that speaks to it with any real depth. While I'm not sure that I agree with every facet of Harris's reasoning on this subtopic, I found it very thought-provoking and quite helpful overall.

Harris does devote his last three chapters to "Strategies for Long-Term Change." He gets a bit more practical here, and while his advice is wholesome, it's not as detailed as I would like for a handbook on "How to Quit Porn/Lust." To be fair, this book isn't supposed to be a handbook. I think the next book on this list compliments *Not Even a Hint* in broaching this more practical and specific need.

2. *Clean* by Douglas Weiss

Douglas Weiss is an addiction counselor and has spent many years personally dealing with people, especially men, in helping them achieve sexual integrity. The book's subtitle is "A Proven Plan for Men Committed to Sexual Integrity." It takes about three chapters to warm up, but after that, I was very impressed with the book overall.

Like with *Not Even a Hint*, *Clean* explains a lot of the *why* behind sexual immorality and lust. He does a very good job of this I think, and that's manifested by how many times I quote him in this newsletter. He writes to singles and married individuals both, though he does seem to be especially mindful of married men. His twelfth chapter specifically addresses marriages. However, the extent to which he focuses on married men doesn't make the material any less practical to single readers in my opinion. And single men/women need to consider these things in advance of marriage anyway.

There were two things I especially liked about Weiss's book. First, he brings up several things that I had not read in other books, especially in regard to *specific interventions and considerations* for the person quitting porn. For example, he gives a specific list of optional consequences a person could make for him/herself if they were to act out and look at porn after committing to quit. I have since heard this idea recommended on *Porn Free Radio*, but I have not read this in any other book. Along this idea of consequences, Weiss recommends what he calls "Spank the Dog." "Get a rubber band and place it around your wrist for at least thirty days. Every time you lust, objectify, double take, rubber neck, or have a past image hit your brain, snap the rubber band. You will be amazed at how much of the time your brain is actually going

the wrong way.”¹¹⁹ These are the types of specific interventions Weiss sprinkles throughout his book that I found to be refreshing and practically helpful.

Secondly, Weiss gives an actual *plan* for overcoming porn. As an addiction counselor, the reader can trust that the author is not just blowing smoke, he’s not just saying stuff that sells books, he is recommending a proven plan with specific actions to take that will get you out of the porn cycle if you take his advice. The *plan* is the whole book essentially. He doesn’t have one specific chapter entitled “A Step-By-Step Plan for Defeating Porn.” However, in most of his chapters, there are lists of things that an individual should implement if they want to take action in a certain sector of this battle which is multi-dimensional in nature.

3. *Atomic Habits* by James Clear

This book is not about pornography at all. Rather, Clear approaches the subject of habit forming and habit breaking with a unique take that I believe is revolutionary for overcoming porn or any bad habit for that matter. I believe that if an individual would truly take to heart and practice the wisdom shared by Clear about habits, he/she would be able to achieve the Accountability and Boundaries portions of the strong ABS acronym and overcome porn most efficiently. Combine his advice with the advice in this newsletter about Spiritual Formation, and I believe you have a winning combination.

Atomic Habits is one of the best books I have ever read. I read it with a brother-in-Christ a year ago, and I was astonished by the richness of every single chapter. Every book I read, there are always one or two chapters that I give a 1/10 rating. In contrast, every *single* chapter of *Atomic Habits* had something that hit the nail on the head for me. His writing is extremely efficient. There is little to no filler. Every illustration used is perfect for the point being made. The specific material itself for forming new habits and breaking old ones was so simple yet tremendous. Clear articulates and categorizes habit formation in a very simple and practical fashion. He is also very good at taking quite complex points from neuroscience, psychology, and other high levels of study and making them easily digestible for simple people who have little to no knowledge of these fields.

His winning formula for forming a new habit is a four-step approach: 1) Make it (*the desired habit*) visible, 2) Make it attractive, 3) Make it easy, and 4) Make it satisfying. The method he recommends for breaking a bad habit is the complete opposite of this: 1) Make it (*the undesired habit*) invisible, 2) Make it unattractive, 3) Make it difficult, and 4) Make it unsatisfying. He, of course, explains what each one of these things mean and how they can be exercised within each chapter of the book.

I recommend *Atomic Habits* to everyone, whether they are trying to quit porn, smoking, or anything else. It’s an enjoyable read, and I 100% buy in to Clear’s method.

4. *Your Brain on Porn* by Gary Wilson

¹¹⁹ Weiss, Douglas. *Clean*. Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2013

I will write a quick word about *Your Brain on Porn*, because it was very helpful to me, although I don't recommend it to everyone. There are two reasons for this.

First, Wilson's book is written, not on a scholastic level, but on a "higher level" shall I say. He gets in to brain neuroscience and neurochemistry that was a bit cumbersome for me at times. Nonetheless, I read through it, and I did learn quite a bit. Wilson cites a lot of research as he tries to give evidence and make an argument that porn can be an addiction, and mainstream medicine and mental health are willfully ignorant and dishonest about the negative effects of porn on society. I found what he wrote to be quite refreshing in this regard.

Second, there are many quotations in Wilson's book that go into far more detail than anyone needs in my humble opinion. He frequently cites firsthand accounts from public, online chat sites where individuals discuss their sexual problems and problems related to porn use. Some of these are quite insightful, others go into too much detail. I skipped many of these quotations for this reason.

If you want to understand porn from a scientific level, I recommend reading *Your Brain on Porn*. A lot of the same truths can be learned from *Fight the New Drug* which I will feature in Day 30, but Wilson does offer some unique quotes and interpretations on what is happening in the current war on porn.

Conclusion

If you are someone who is struggling with porn, I would recommend that you read the first three books reviewed here, and if you are only going to read two books, I would recommend *Not Even a Hint* and *Atomic Habits*, probably in that order. Although, I do highly recommend reading *Clean* as well because of his specific action plans and advice. Those are a good compliment to this newsletter, and they were very foundational in the writing of this newsletter. These books will not only equip you, they will also encourage you as you fight for freedom.

Day 30: Recommended Resources

This is the last official day of the newsletter. I want to wrap things up with a listing of some recommended resources about fighting pornography and maintaining sexual integrity. Since I covered books yesterday, I will restrict this to non-book resources. I only have three recommendations.

1. *Porn Free Radio* by Matt Dobschuetz

Porn Free Radio is a podcast that Kelan Owen recommended to me in our podcast conversation from Day 20. I had never heard of this podcast, but Kelan said it was very, very good. I listened for myself, and I have to say, I've been very impressed with *Porn Free Radio*. Matt Dobschuetz, the host, is a porn coach and a recovered porn addict by his description. He has a website called recoveredman.com where the podcast episodes can be found and where he offers online coaching. I don't know anything about the effectiveness of online porn coaches, I'm only speaking to the podcast he runs.

Dobschuetz has a excellent, easy-to-listen-to voice, and it doesn't take long to realize that he knows what he is talking about. I first listened to his episode "17 Porn Free Pro Tips" as I was preparing for Day 22 of this newsletter "How to Overcome Porn." I found that episode to be very helpful, and I included many of those tips in that day of the newsletter. He is very practical, honest, compassionate, and realistic. I think all of these are important character traits when talking to others about this subject. He has over 300 episodes on the subject of porn. It's hard to find a podcast or a resource of any kind that is *just* about porn. On this podcast, you have months of material to scour through.

To top it off, I emailed Matt after finding his contact on the website. I was wanting to know if he had podcast episodes that spoke to wives dealing with their husband's porn problems. He responded promptly the next day with links. I was impressed.

2. *Fight the New Drug*

I recommend *Fight the New Drug* podcast and website resources, especially if you are wanting evidence-based research about pornography. I will let their website explain what they are.

Mission:

Fight the New Drug (FTND) is a non-religious and non-legislative nonprofit that exists to provide individuals the opportunity to make an informed decision regarding pornography by raising awareness on its harmful effects using only science, facts, and personal accounts.

Vision:

We aim to decrease the demand for sexual exploitation through education while helping individuals live empowered lives free from the harmful effects of pornography.

Values:

Fight the New Drug is research-based, education-focused, sex-positive, and freedom-preserving.¹²⁰

FTND doesn't perform research; they more or less aggregate the research that is available and package it in a way that is easily accessible and consumed. They have podcast episodes called "Get the Facts." These episodes are dedicate to research findings on a particular subtopic of pornography. I found these to be the most helpful piece of their website and podcast, though I prefer reading these on the articles section of their website as opposed to listening to the podcast version, because the "Get the Facts" podcast episodes are read by an AI voice that is quite difficult to listen to. I have cited several of their articles throughout this newsletter.

It's hard to know if FTND is a religious organization. They keep this a mystery. The best I can tell, they do this intentionally to have as large a reach as possible. Their content is science based and not Bible based.

¹²⁰ "About FTND." *Fight the New Drug*, <https://fightthenewdrug.org/about/>. Accessed 7 December 2023.

3. *Covenant Eyes*

While *Covenant Eyes* is an accountability software, their website covenanteyes.com also features downloadable books and a written blog. The books are only for subscribers. So, I guess this would be another reason to use *Covenant Eyes* as an accountability software. However, the blog is free to read for all. They have some good articles, and their e-books are very diverse in topic range. *Covenant Eyes* is a Christian based organization. I have found their statistics page to be especially helpful and in keeping with statistics on porn that I have found elsewhere.

Conclusion

There are certainly other great resources out there. This newsletter itself was written to be a resource of its own that I can point people to in the future! Eventually I will take the content of this newsletter, build on it, and turn it into a book. If you found the newsletter to be helpful, please tell me. I *think* what I have written is impactful, but I don't *know* if it truly is unless readers like yourself give me feedback. So, if this newsletter has helped you, please reach out, and tell me what subjects were especially helpful to your understanding and growth of the subject. I pray God will bless this work and you as you help others or seek help for yourself.