

ESCAPE THE BONDAGE OF PORNOGRAPHY And Become Free to Love

Though this article is devoted to presenting solutions, let's start by mentioning just a bit about the scope of the problem. According to Christianity Today magazine (12/01), 37% of pastors surveyed admitted to *currently* struggling with pornography. According to Focus on the Family (3/2000 Pastor's Family Bulletin) 63% of men attending "Men, Romance and Integrity Seminars" admit to struggling with pornography in the past year. According to the New York Times (10/2000), the pornography industry is larger than the NFL, NBA, Major League Baseball, and the Hollywood movie industry all combined and is outdistancing them by leaps and bounds.

Men who suffer from this scourge should know that they are not alone. (Note: For simplicity's sake, this article will address pornography addiction among men. Women may certainly apply these principles also.)

We also must break the silence about the fact that the degree of depravity in modern porn is rapidly accelerating. The actual content bears very little resemblance to the pornography of a generation ago, in which the activities depicted were typically not too different from the normal sex of a husband and wife. The content of modern porn is focused more and more upon the absolute *physical and psychological annihilation* of the women involved. This is rarely acknowledged because there is such a stigma associated with having viewed the material which would allow one this knowledge.

Until just about three years ago (this essay is being written in December, 2003) the magazines in the convenience stores where we buy our gas did not depict penetration. Crossing that boundary was a rather significant development. Only in the past year or two have we begun to see billboards advertising the most hardcore porn stores displayed along our major roadways. To think of porn as it is now is misleading, because it is not standing still, but advancing relentlessly.

The pornography of Playboy magazine has advanced onto our prime time television screens. Abercrombie and Fitch is selling adolescent porn catalogues in major malls across America. The xxx-rated catastrophic assault upon the bodies and spirits of women which passes for erotic today is migrating at this minute from the hardcore porn

stores and into the corner convenience stores. The illegal material depicting hardcore images of pre-adolescent girls and women with animals is writhing in the hidden underbelly of the internet and watching eagerly for any opportunity to advance the next incremental step toward acceptance.

It's not pleasant being the bearer of bad news to those who have been blessed to avoid this plague. But it is important for everyone to know that when we talk about pornography today we are not talking about cute, All-American gals in bunny costumes. One big reason the pornographers are getting away with what they're doing today is because practically no one acknowledges what they're doing today.

If we are to defeat our enemy, we must know who he is, and what he's up to. Our enemy is the one who hates life, and therefore, particularly hating the bearers of all life, he sets out to eradicate everything life-giving about the sexuality of women. This helps explain why pornography is moving so rapidly away from depicting acts which could result in procreation, and focusing instead upon the utter decimation of the creatures whom God made to be his partners in creating life.

The first woman spoke with poetic perfection of the role she had been given by her creator. "Behold, I have begotten a man with the help of the Lord." Eve, as all women do in one way or another, became God's partner in the creation of human life. We refer here to all women, and not just mothers, because women give life in so many ways, not only with their bodies, but with their spirits, hearts and minds as well.

Just as Satan launched his assault upon life by targeting Eve, so he continues today to focus his attack upon women.

Women have a special role to play in leading the counter-attack against the enemy of life. Women, recognize the glory of what God has done in making you his partners in life-giving. Recognize that you deserve to be loved by men who are capable of giving real, authentic love. And recognize that men who are addicted to pornography are in bondage, and are not free to love.

Women, do not date or allow yourselves to be courted by men who are addicted to pornography. (For information on how to gauge the spiritual condition of a potential suitor, visit www.godofdesire.com, and read principle six.)

Yes, men can recover, and we're going to talk about how. But it takes time. Christopher West, author of "Sex, love, and the Marriage Covenant," has stated that he and many other authorities in this area recommend that a person have at least a year of abstinence before being considered ready for a real relationship. Pray for the man who is recovering, and give him this article, but don't consider marriage with him.

Women, if you're married to a man with this addiction, fight together with your husband to drive this evil from both of your lives. Don't downplay or minimize or rationalize the severity of this affliction. You cannot coexist peacefully with pornography. It has taken

everything, even life itself, from many others. It has the power to destroy your husband's life and your own as well. Use every resource at your disposal and never stop fighting until the enemy is destroyed. It must be driven from your life, or it will drive life from your heart.

Men, don't try to find deliverance from pornography through a relationship with a woman. Find deliverance first, and then you'll be able to engage in an authentic relationship with a real woman. If you're addicted to pornography, and you're also married, then you have to make a choice between your wife and your porn. It is a choice between life-giving love and an enemy who offers only despair and death. Choose well. And accept all of the help your God and your brothers in Christ will so gladly lavish upon you.

THE ROAD TO REDEMPTION

The first step is to repent, to turn from our sin and ask the Lord to forgive us and deliver us from our affliction. Psalm 51 is perfect for this. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Spend some time meditating upon the entirety of this Psalm, praying it slowly, verse by verse.

The next step is given us in James' epistle. "Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed." In addition to confessing directly to God, it is critical that we find another Christian with whom we can be honest about our affliction. "The truth shall set you free."

Even Jesus himself was not able bear the weight of his cross alone, and Simon the Cyrene was pressed into service to help him. We must share the weight of our crosses with our Christian brothers. In the words of Galatians 6, we must "bear one another's burdens."

This is particularly important in the case of pornography, because pornography is a sin of such desperate loneliness. It thrives in hidden away places, in the darkness and despair of total separation from our loving Father and our brother and sisters in Christ.

But the light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it. We can and we must allow other Christians to help us come into the light.

There is no feeling in the world quite like the joy we experience when we share the brokenness and shame of this awful affliction with another Christian and receive in return the unconditional love of Christ. We simply need to find a trustworthy person and tell him. A priest or pastor is a good choice. But any person whom we know to be living in the light of the Gospel can help us to begin this journey of restoration.

Once we've repented, confessed, and shared the truth, the next thing to do is to take concrete steps to avoid the near occasion of sin. The steps required will be different for

different people. There is no single, magical step. We will probably have to take one step and then another and then another, in an ongoing process of discovery. The important thing here is our willingness to do our part in allowing the Lord to heal us.

For many men this will mean avoiding the internet completely, or even getting rid of our computers. There are computers available at libraries and Kinko's and, for many men, this will be the way to go for awhile, maybe for a long while. Many men, including men who depend upon the internet for their livelihoods, have taken this step.

Matt Smith, www.porndestroyswomen.org, is a well known television personality and speaker on chastity. He is the national spokesperson for Lifeteen, and he makes his living in large part as their webmaster. He has not had an internet connection in his home for years now. He relishes the freedom from temptation this gives him. Another man who is very active in purity-related ministry and holds a high-ranking position in his firm went to his IT director and asked to have his computer set up in such a way that he could not access the internet from work. His IT director was delighted to do this and informed him that many other men at the firm would benefit from such a step. These two men formed a strong evangelistic bond as a result this step being taken.

Some men use a laptop computer and the wireless connections at Starbucks for their internet connections. Other men will benefit from an internet filtering service such the one offered by BSafe Online (www.bsafeline.com). BSafe includes a feature that automatically emails a report on our web-surfing activities to our pre-selected accountability partners.

We must not be reluctant to take concrete steps to keep temptation at bay.

None of these steps alone will suffice, and none will substitute for purity of heart, but the desire for purity of heart will lead us to want to take these kinds of steps.

As mentioned previously, the steps needed will keep changing as we learn more and more about our enemy, and as he continues to change his tactics. When we vigorously resist a powerful adversary we begin to learn things about him which we never knew and never could have known before engaging the battle.

THE TROUBLING SADNESS OF LEAVING SIN BEHIND

It's a surprising thing. We might have thought that we could learn about sin by giving in to it. But that isn't true. We don't learn about our enemy by surrendering to him. We learn about him when we fight him. The longer and harder we fight the more we learn. One thing we learn is that fighting sins to which we are deeply habituated is painful, and there is often a sense of sadness and loss as well. After all, sin is really nothing other than temporary relief from some painful condition. When we suffer, and life is certainly replete with suffering, Satan offers us relief. But he offers us relief which is disordered, and calculated to lead always to greater suffering.

It is good for us to have at least this rudimentary sketch of the anatomy of temptation ready at hand when the tempter strikes. We must not be thrown off course by the very compelling fact that he, the tempter, does indeed offer us relief from our difficulties. The relief is brief, and twisted, but it is relief. If it were not, sin would not be so addictive. For is it not true that, for most of us, our most debilitating sins are sins to which we are deeply habituated? We are habituated because we crave relief from the very real sufferings we experience in this fallen world.

To give up a form of relief which we have come to crave is a terribly difficult thing to do. We must be prepared for the frequent sadness and occasional real depression we are likely to experience during our time of withdrawal from any particular habitual sin. Theologians have long used the word *acedia* to describe this sort of spiritual listlessness or emptiness. Thomas Aquinas defined *acedia* as sadness arising from the fact that the good is difficult. Yes. Yes it is difficult.

As a matter of fact, it is impossible. That's why Jesus came and gave his life for us. We lack the power to escape sin. For the wages of sin is death and the wages for sin must indeed be paid, paid in full, right down to the last dime and nickel and penny.

JOINING CHRIST ON THE CROSS

On the hill at Golgotha Jesus paid the price for us all. From the depths of his heart of infinite love he spilled for us the blood which alone has the power to deliver us from the deadly condition of being trapped in sin.

There is no recourse for us, no redemption, no escape from sin, other than to go right into the heart of the sinless one in the moment when our sin is heaped upon him and he pays the price for our freedom.

For us to resist sin really means nothing other than choosing to unite ourselves with Christ as he is crucified for us. Alone, we lack the power to suffer enough to outlast the tempter. But when we unite our suffering with the suffering of Christ on the cross we partake of all of the power of salvation given to us by our creator. His suffering is sufficient. His gift of himself on the cross does have the power to deliver us.

When Satan offers us relief from our torment we must learn to turn to Jesus and to unite ourselves with him on the cross. There are many, many ways that Christians have done this over the centuries. We can picture Jesus hanging there by those nails. We can picture the faithful women together with John and with Jesus' mother, uniting their pain and their love with his as he dies. We can meditate upon the words he spoke as he died, listening as he speaks them to us.

"I thirst."

"This day you will be with me in Paradise."

“Behold your mother.”

Another way is to meditate upon one of Christ’s wounds, and to place all of our own sufferings into that wound, so that our savior can bear for us what we cannot bear for ourselves.

The technique of meditative prayer is not what matters most. What matters most is simply that we be faithful in the face of our temptation, and that we not abandon the Lord as he suffers for us. We must stay there with him until the evil one is defeated in our hearts.

Christ was taunted and tempted by the crowds to come down from the cross and end his torment. We are taunted and tempted by the evil one who offers us relief from our sufferings, if only we will deny Jesus and his cross.

John’s Gospel tells us that Jesus, having loved his friends, “loved them to the end.” He did not come down from the cross. He gave everything for us. We must accept the gift of his life, his love, his blood. We must not come down from the cross and accept the awful lie offered us by the evil one in place of the love of our savior.

The one who is a liar from the beginning and the father of lies promises us that if we partake of his fruit we surely will not die.

We know better though, don’t we? We who have been wracked by the torment of habitual sin know the horror of being driven further and further into darkness and despair and shame and being driven further and further away from the love of our brothers and sisters in Christ who wish to share with us the light of his everlasting life.

All who have experienced habitual sin, addictive sin, know its terrible, simple formula. It gives us less and less satisfaction, less and less of the relief which was its initial promise, even as its consequences escalate to greater and greater levels. In the final stages of addictive sin we’re embracing a lie which has come to offer almost no relief at all, and we’re doing so in the face of the ever increasing likelihood of absolute annihilation.

For that is in reality the final consequence of accepting the lie of the one who hates us. We die the death which absolutely and forever annihilates our capacity to experience love.

It is a fact of life in this fallen world that we will suffer and die. But we have a choice to make nonetheless. Our choice is to accept the lie of the evil one, the lie which promises that we need not die, and to receive as our reward the death which is everlasting. Or we may choose to suffer and die with Christ, and rise with him to new life in the light of his love.

When we are hurting, wounded and vulnerable, and the tempter comes speaking his soothing lies that we need not suffer this way, offering us the sad and short-lived relief of sin, we must tell him, “No. You are wrong. I do have to suffer and die. And I WILL NOT do it with you. I will stay here on this cross and suffer and die with the one who loves me, for he has promised that with him I will rise to new life. I have trusted and have come to believe in his promise. And through this faith I have become a child of the living God. I am not yours. I AM HIS. Amen.”

FORMING A NEW SUPPORT TEAM

We need to regularly keep before ourselves evidence of Christ’s love for us, of his death and resurrection. There is no better way to do this than to surround ourselves with Christians who are living in the light of his everlasting love.

And so we must learn to form the strongest possible bonds with our brothers and sisters in Christ. No matter how broken and alone we may be, it really isn’t as hard as it may seem to forge those bonds. What we must do is find the events where the people whose faith is most burning and alive tend to hang out. Then we go to those events. The rule is simple. Come often, come early, and stay late. That’s important enough to repeat. Come often, come early, and stay late. The stay late part is critical because the lukewarm people start leaving early, and the later we stay the higher percentage of really committed people there are in the room. And this is when we begin to make the connections that can truly sustain our lives.

When we first start hanging around at these events we’re likely to feel pretty awkward, especially when the event ends and most people start rushing for the door. Satan will surely do his best to make us feel uncomfortable enough that we’ll want to join the exodus. There is a good way to overcome this, however, and it is very, very effective. It is miraculously effective. The way is simply to look around and pick out someone who seems like they might even be more awkward than we are. Instead of languishing in remorse or bitterness over the fact that the beautiful, popular people aren’t rushing to greet us, we take the initiative to befriend the ones who are even more left out than we are.

When we do that, we give God room to work his miracles of restoration. He shows us that we’re already being healed, that we’re already capable of being instruments of his love, and that we can be an important part of his church. If we just do this, and stick around till the last few people leave, the miracle will happen. We will ultimately find ourselves surrounded by a family of committed Christians who would walk right into the jaws of death in order to help us defeat our enemy. That’s a good way to live.

LEARNING TO PRAY

This mosaic of recovery has no more essential element than developing a prayer life. There are two principle components to this. One is to learn to turn quickly to prayer

when temptation strikes, and the other is prayer on an ordered schedule that becomes part of the rhythm of our daily lives.

We begin by learning not to wait until later to pray. It isn't enough to plan to go the chapel later or read scripture after work or attend a prayer meeting this evening. When temptation strikes, we must PRAY NOW! Later may be too late.

Think of temptation like a train, with Satan shoveling coal into the engine. Once the temptation train gets started, Satan calls in his demonic cohorts and they stoke that engine for all they're worth, shoveling faster and faster until that train is moving so fast it would take slamming into a mountain to stop it. Temptation with a full head of steam behind it can do an awful lot of damage.

But, when the satanic stoker first starts to shovel, while that temptation train is sitting still, it doesn't take much to stop it from ever beginning to move. Even a small stone placed on the tracks at that point can do the job. We must PRAY NOW. We mustn't get frustrated about not having the will power to say some long, fancy, formal prayer. We must pray whatever prayer we *can* pray.

When we first experience desire that we recognize as beginning to tend toward lust, we might try this prayer: "God of Desire, my desire is for you." This way, we don't just repress or turn away from the desire, but instead we complete it, and bring it to the fruition which God had in mind when he made us capable of desiring women, and desiring sex. We recognize that God is in fact drawing us toward him. "God of Desire, my desire is for you." This is a prayer that can bring great freedom.

There is a time and place for keeping custody of the eyes, and looking away from the object of temptation. That is often necessary, especially in the beginning phases of the battle against impurity. But that is not the ultimate solution. The ultimate solution is not to have to look away, because in every situation we recognize the truth of who we are as sons of God and who women are as daughters of God. "To the pure, all things are pure."

Men, remember, the fact that we can be attracted to women and desire women is a good thing. It is God given. We cannot overcome lust by trying to destroy the good work God did in making us attracted to feminine beauty. The real problem is not that we desire too much, but that we desire too little. We must learn to complete our desires in accord with the fullness of God's plan.

God made us sexual creatures from the beginning. We were created in sex. Sex means so much more than our twisted world realizes. (For more about the God-given glory of human sexuality, read Principle 2 of the 12 part treatise on dating and courtship at www.godofdesire.com.)

It can be tremendously helpful to come to understand that lust is overcome not by taking something away from it, but by adding something to it. Lust is less than the truth. The

challenge for us as men is to learn to add in the whole truth of the glory God has given us in our sexuality, in making humans male and female in his image.

Another helpful prayer goes something like this: “Lord I know that this woman belongs to you. You have created her for eternity. You have given her beauty and you have made me so that I may be attracted to beauty. Lord, I know that ultimately you are the source of all beauty, all love, and all desire. I know that beyond my desire for women is my desire to be united with you. God of desire, my desire is for you.”

Many of us have wondered why God had made us capable of being attracted to and desiring so many women, when we can only be called to marriage with one. The answer is that if God had made us capable of desiring only the one woman we are called to marry, that would in effect deprive us of the power of choosing whom to love. The Lord has the highest regard for our capacity to choose love. God had to allow us to be attracted to many women so that we would be able meaningfully to choose to marry only one from among all women.

Every time we experience attraction and desire we should recognize the great gift of freedom the Lord has given us. Ultimately, he is inviting us to choose him, to choose to desire him above all else, and every desire should be a reminder of that invitation.

This may sound like pie in the sky, but it is not. Such redemption is very real, and it is ours, if we can only believe—if we can believe that Christ died on the hill at Calvary in atonement for our sins, our lusts, our using of the women around us--if we can believe that the blood he spilled there is sufficient to wash us clean--if we can believe that he is indeed resurrected, and that he offers us all the gift of himself, his spirit of love, so that we can become capable of being the kind of men who will give love only and will never again be willing to use the women around us in any way.

It’s good to know that such redemption is possible, and that squelching our desires and looking away all the time is not the ultimate solution.

But, for most of us, the journey to the redemption of our desires is a long one, replete with much struggle, and in the beginning there will be many times when we’ll simply have to look away, and to say a simple prayer. The simplest and best prayer of all is to say the Lord’s name. “Jesus.” It’s okay just to say it and keep saying it.

It can also be helpful to turn to the Lord with our bodies when we pray. What we do with our bodies to fight temptation is not inconsequential. After all, we’re not being tempted in minds only, but in our bodies as well. We need to fight back, and to seek the Lord, with both our minds and our bodies.

Getting on our knees is ideal. But in the cubicle at work that may not be feasible. Some like to lift their hands in prayer, but depending on the person and the setting it can be enough simply to turn our palms upward and lift our heads and eyes a bit toward the heavens as we say, “Jesus.” This is a very, very powerful and highly effective way to

place that small stone that stops Satan in his tracks. Just think of how much harm is done to the evil one if he knows that presenting us with temptation only causes us to turn quickly to the one who loves us and has the power to defeat him. It's fine just to repeat Jesus' name, and to go on repeating it.

Just as sin leads to sin, so prayer leads to prayer. Many of the more ambitious prayers we seek to do will only become possible when start by calling upon Jesus' name.

It is also a good idea sometimes just to get up and walk away from the computer. We might walk outside and breathe in the glory of God's creation, or simply walk to the water cooler or bathroom at work and say a simple prayer as we do.

QUICK CONFESSION

While we're on the topic of quick prayer, let's also talk about quick confession. When we're beginning to break habits of sin, the chances are that there will be setbacks. The critical thing in these cases is to cut the time between the fall and the direct confession to God as close as possible to zero. When we sin we are wounded by Satan. Sin breeds the proclivity to sin; in other words, sin makes us vulnerable to more sin. Sin dims the light of the Lord's love in our hearts, and Satan takes advantage of that darkness to call in reinforcements and try to do more damage.

The Lord is ALWAYS ready to forgive and restore and equip us to continue our journey into his love. Don't wait, but CONFESS NOW. It's best to get on our knees, but don't wait for an opportunity to do so. Say a prayer of confession directly to God immediately.

Then confess the sin to another Christian as quickly as possible. Cut the time between the sin and the direct confession to another Christian as close as possible to zero. Consider this to be like calling in reinforcements after learning that the defenses have been overrun and the enemy is ransacking the fortress.

Peter's first epistle says that "your enemy the devil is prowling like a roaring lion looking for souls to devour." We shouldn't fight him alone. He's big and strong from feeding on so many souls, many of which have been lost to this scourge of pornography. We must let God show us his love and shower down his healing through our Christian brothers.

Now, a bit about choosing the right person with whom to share this struggle. A priest or pastor is obviously a good choice for a personal and private confession. But we'll probably need someone else, someone who is not as busy as a priest or pastor, to be a regular accountability and prayer partner in the beginning phase of this struggle.

The critical and essential thing here is to have one trustworthy and well-formed Christian who knows the whole truth about our struggle. There's a saying in twelve step groups that "you're only as sick as your secrets." It's true. We have to let someone know exactly what's going on. We should call that person when we face strong temptation. We should call that person to share the good news when things are going

well. And we should call that person as quickly as possible after giving in to temptation. This is a plan that Satan hates because it works. Satan will try very hard to try to stop us from doing this. Don't let him. Make the connection and make the call!

HABITS OF PRAYER

These words from Psalm 36 "Sin speaks to the sinner in the depths of his heart," can help us understand what we're trying to accomplish here.

Over time and through regular prayer, we can change the condition of our hearts such that temptation rarely penetrates them so deeply or threatens us so seriously. In other words, temptation and sin will no longer speak so deeply to our hearts, and we won't have to spend so much of our lives trying to root them out. After all, our real goal is not simply to avoid sin, but to be free, and in freedom to attain purity of heart.

From the time of Christ, Christians have made special efforts to spend time with God in the morning, noon, evening, and night. There are many ways to go about this prayer. The particular form or formula is not as important as is the willingness to regularly consecrate at least a couple of time periods each day to being in union with God. At least one of these time periods should include reading scripture and giving it lots of opportunity to slowly sink in. The Psalms and the Gospels are considered by many people to be the best choices for this daily scripture devotion.

It's also important that we spend some each day just being with God. Silence doesn't come easily to most of us in this culture. But we can't forge a deep relationship with God if we don't give him the chance to reveal himself to us apart from all distractions. Perhaps the best piece of advice here is to keep what little silence we can, rather than getting despondent over not being able to stay quiet for longer.

Any place can be good for prayer, but we should note that Jesus went out of his way to find places to pray that afforded him some peace and quiet. We ought to do the same thing whenever we can.

If we do resist daily temptation through prayer and action, and if we forge a well-ordered prayer life, we'll begin to see some remarkable changes in our lives.

A SUMMARY OF OUR STEPS

We begin with a desire to turn from our sin and to the Lord who loves us. We confess the sin directly to God and also to another Christian. We practice sharing both our failures and our successes with another Christian who will walk this walk with us. We practice turning from temptation to prayer as quickly as possible. When we fail, we confess as quickly as possible both to God and to the person who is sharing our journey. We practice turning away from near occasions of sin by making changes in our lifestyles in ways both small and large.

We strive to grow in understanding of our sexuality as we live it out every day in our attractions toward and desires for women. We seek not to repress our sexuality or appreciation of feminine beauty, but to complete it with the whole truth of God's plan for having made us as women and men in his image.

We spend time alone with God meditating upon his word, upon his love for us, and particularly upon his suffering, death, and resurrection. We develop strong bonds with our brothers and sisters in Christ to fill up the void in our hearts with the Lord's love. We develop habits of virtue which steadily drive from our lives our previous habits of sin. Through words and deeds we share this great Good News with everyone we meet.

Now let's close with a few words about this Good News.

GOD'S PROMISE

"I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36).

No matter what we've done, no matter what has been done to us, the promise is that we were made for love, and the Lord will renew, restore, and make us able to love with a love that is sure and pure and true.

There is one last thing which must be said before closing. We who have lived in the dark despair of habits of deadly sin must come forth into the light to celebrate the goodness of the life to which our Lord is calling us. There will be struggles and temptations and bad days and even depression. Still, when he offers us the opportunity, we must say yes to joy, yes to going for walks, yes to riding bicycles and playing with children and spending time in the company of other Christians celebrating the love of our Savior. We must say yes to good music and beautiful art and random opportunities for frolicking. We must say yes to celebrating our deliverance from darkness and yes to dancing in the light of his love.

"LET EVERYTHING THAT HAS BREATH PRAISE THE LORD!"

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