

FIGHTING PORNOGRAPHY



INTRODUCTION

Pornography use and addiction are absolutely rampant. The always-online nature of life in the modern West, the absolutely unprecedented rate of production of online porn, and the increasingly permissive (and even encouraging!) social attitudes toward porn use have dissolved nearly every natural safeguard that used to help protect people. And though pornography cuts against every aspect of Jesus's vision for healthy sexuality, marriage, and community in general (Gen. 1-2; Matt. 5:27-30; 1 Cor. 6:15-20), it is just as pervasive of a problem in the church.

The good news is that there is good news. The gospel declares that Jesus has dealt with all of our sins once and for all, that he offers complete forgiveness, that he brings real freedom from our slavery to sin of every kind, and that his work can fully heal our relational discord with God, our loved ones, and ourselves (Heb. 4:16). The gospel promises that, one day, he will finally deal justly with pornography and its dehumanizing effects once and for all. No matter how long you've been struggling with porn, no matter how much personal or relational damage it has done, and no matter how dark it has gotten--the grace of God is greater still. The gospel, properly understood, leaves no space for crippling shame. Since all of this is true, any of us can have boldness to talk about our relationship to porn.

Sadly, church communities can feel like impossible places for men and women to talk about our struggles. We hope and pray that the conversation here will play a part in helping to normalize talk about pornography--not to dismiss it's sinfulness--but to say that it is ok and safe to talk about among followers of Jesus. In fact, refusal to talk about this sin is one of the biggest factors that keeps individuals and whole communities stuck in it. The below principles are written primarily for the person who is currently battling the sin of porn use, but they should also be helpful for anyone trying to help another in their struggle, for spouses, and for parents.

GROW - PURSUE HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP

As tempting as it can be to try to focus all of your attention on this one issue, it is best thought of as one part of our holistic process of growing toward Christ-likeness. Committing to pursuing Jesus alone and in community is huge. Often, one's struggle with porn is tied to more sinful areas of the heart than simply lust. David Powlison wrote this about one friend: "Tom's fight with sin focused on just one thing—his struggle with pornography. But underlying that struggle was Tom's anger at God, self-pity, envy, and, a hugely significant issue, his belief that God owed him a wife." Holistic pursuit of Jesus and remembering his loving grace is vitally important. We need to remember what he's done for us and what he promises us, daily.

Resources: David Powlison's article titled [Breaking Pornography Addiction](#); Door of Hope [Community Groups](#); David Dunham's [Addictive Habits 31-Day Devotional](#); a few good books on general spiritual formation: Chris Nye's [Distant God](#), Donald Whitney's [Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life](#), Brian Hedges' [Christ Formed in You](#)

SHARE - INVITE YOUR COMMUNITY IN

Sin thrives in isolation. Finding a few men or women you can confess everything to, who know how to pray and how to ask good questions, and who can celebrate your victories with you is incredibly important (1 Jn. 1:5-10). If you're married, maintaining a healthy and appropriate level of transparency with your spouse is vital, as well. For some, creating a formal accountability partnership or group is

extremely helpful. Living life transparently in Christian community--including avenues that aren't specifically focused on this one sin struggle--is a huge part of the healing process.

In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way: "The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light... In confession the light of the gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light. The unexpressed must be openly spoken and acknowledged. All that is secret and hidden is made manifest. It is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted. But God breaks gates of brass and bars of iron."

Resources: Jaime Owens' article [Are There Good and Bad Kinds of Accountability?](#); Heath Lambert's chapter [Using Accountability to Fight Pornography](#) from the book [Finally Free](#); Door of Hope handout on [confession](#); Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book [Life Together](#)

LEARN - CULTIVATE GENUINE HEARTBREAK

If you've found genuine repentance from pornography to be difficult, it might be helpful to educate yourself on its evils. Porn use has disastrous effects on the individual, on relationships, and on the world at large. Sexual sin takes the mechanism by which God spiritually (and even physiologically) unites a husband and wife together, and uses it to reprogram our brains to bond with the rituals and technology associated with orgasm. The porn industry is notoriously abusive, and each click funnels money toward those abusers--perpetuating exploitation, degradation, and even sex trafficking. Our contribution to the demand increases the supply (and all of the tragic heartbreak that goes along with it). God doesn't hate porn because he's a buzz kill, he hates it because he loves every victim in the long chain of victims and desires to liberate and heal them. May we all allow him to build in us the deep desire to be part of his healing work rather than enablers of abuse (Rom. 12:1-2).

Resources: Justin Holcomb's article [Porn is Not Harmless, It's Cruel](#); Joe Carter's article [9 Things You Should Know About Pornography and the Brain](#); Culture Matters podcast episode [The Evil Empire of Pornography](#); Chris Hedges' [chapter](#) on the evils of pornography; the documentary series [Brain, Heart, World](#); [Get the Facts PDF](#) from Fight the New Drug; William Struthers chapter [Your Brain on Porn](#) from his book [Wired for Intimacy](#)

GUARD - IMPLEMENT PRACTICAL SAFEGUARDS

A truism from the world of addiction recovery research is that people are especially vulnerable to relapse when they're hungry, angry, lonely, tired, and/or sad. Obviously, no one can prevent experiencing any of those things, but we can choose to preemptively build safeguards around ourselves so that, when those moments come, we can't turn to our addictive behaviors to cope. One of the most important things men and women who struggle with online pornography can do is an honest, extremely thorough inventory of when, where, and on what devices they struggle. Identifying those avenues and then systematically closing them one-by-one can be one of the most important steps toward freedom. Everything from accountability software (like Covenant Eyes, Ever Accountable), to services like Circle Go, to content blockers (like "Screen Time" on iOS), to locking certain devices away physically, all the way up to getting rid of particular devices altogether must be fair game. By doing absolutely whatever it takes to limit our vulnerability to temptation, we honor God (Matt. 5:29-30).

Resources: Paul Jeun's article [8 Tips for Fighting Pornography](#); Heath Lambert's chapter [Using Radical Measures to Fight Pornography](#); subscribe to the [Pure Desires Podcast](#) for more ideas; [x3 Watch monitoring software](#) (free option); [Covenant Eyes](#) accountability software for computers and phones; [Circle Go](#) content filter

JOIN - COMMIT TO A STRATEGIC GROUP OR PROGRAM

Many people have found incredible benefit in intentional recovery programs. Depending on the nature of your struggle and your temperament, committing to a focused, somewhat long-term group focused on fighting porn use could be a key part of your recovery process. There are options within Door of Hope, in the greater Portland area, and even online-based programs with a lot of flexibility.

Resources: [Change Groups](#) (including Genesis and Mending the Soul groups) at Door of Hope; the [Fortify](#) program; [Pure Desire](#) groups; [423 Communities](#)

LOVE - FOCUS ON WHAT'S MORE BEAUTIFUL

You've probably heard the quote that goes something like this: Say you want someone to specifically *not* think about an elephant. If you tell them "don't think about an elephant," an elephant will immediately pop into their mind's eye. The key is to get them to think about something else. All too often our struggles with pornography involve constantly thinking about our struggles. But there is great power in what Thomas Chalmers called "the expulsive power of a new affection." A key part of learning to forget about porn is falling more deeply in love with the genuinely good, the genuinely beautiful, and genuinely true all around us (Phil. 4:8). As we remind ourselves of the goodness of the God that we serve and the radical generosity of the gospel, as we let our affection for our neighbors and brothers and sisters in Christ wash over us, and as we intentionally cultivate our love for our spouses--we'll find it much easier to forget about pornography.

Resources: Check out [A World Free: The Pure Hope Podcast](#); Jonathan Grant's book [Divine Sex](#) captures the unique beauty of God's vision for sex; both Jen Wilkin's book [None like Him](#) and Michael Reeves' book [Delighting in the Trinity](#) point us to the incredible goodness of God himself

EMBOLDEN - REMEMBER THE SHAME-KILLING GOSPEL

Remember that porn's relational and social consequences don't go away overnight. Partners and spouses can suffer deep attachment wounds when their loved ones disclose porn use. These wounds take significant time to heal, even after you've successfully repented and left porn behind. This factor (and many others) can contribute to a sense of shame. Though we *should* be grieved and heartbroken over our sin, any thought that suggests we are somehow disgusting, unlovable, or irredeemable must be thoroughly rejected. Jesus said, "it is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick" (Luke 5:31). Sinners are the object of his radical love. Tim Keller put it well when he said, "The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." The Lord is always waiting for us with open arms. If you truly believe that, you'll feel free to share your sin with the Lord and with the church, and you'll begin to put your shame to death.

Resources: David Powlison's book [Making All Things New](#); Curt Thompson's book [The Soul of Shame](#); Tim Keller's book [The Prodigal God](#); McDavid, Richardson, & Zahl's book [Law and Gospel](#)