

Overcoming Pornography Addiction



BEYOND
TODAY
BIBLE STUDY AID

It's a problem . . .



Jeff is frustrated. Jeff is depressed. He doesn't want to look at porn. He's managed to not look at porn for three days, but tonight for some reason, almost against his will, he feels compelled to sit down in front of his computer. He has the urge to look at porn. He clicks to open his browser. Porn makes him feel guilty. That guilt in turn triggers him to watch more porn.

Maybe Jeff is you. Maybe you've tried hundreds of times to stop, but you just can't. Maybe this is the first time you've ever made an effort to stop. Maybe you have a loved one who you want to help stop.

Sexuality is everywhere. It's in our music, our movies and television, and in the commercials and ads on Facebook. High speed Internet access has made pornography free and easier to get than ever before.

Life is better without porn

Even in our secular society many are noticing the frightening side effects of Internet pornography. Unconnected relationships, self-esteem issues and poor sexual performance. More and more non-religious websites (such as yourbrainonporn.com) are dedicated to encouraging people to stop porn addiction. Stopping a porn addiction increases self-confidence, restores a healthy sex life in marriage, and enables more genuine relationships with those closest to us.

Besides these physical benefits, overcoming porn addiction is essential to restoring a strong, healthy relationship

with our Creator God. Sins like porn addiction and lust separate people from God. Repentance (a true change from sinful behavior to godly behavior) will enable you to have a deep, personal relationship with God.

It's hard to quit

Wanting to overcome is easy. Actually overcoming a sexual addiction is hard. Porn rewires your brain. The chemicals released while viewing porn are so psychologically addictive that porn addiction has been compared to heroin addiction. It can seem impossible to stop.

With God, you can overcome

With God's power and influence in your life, you *can* stop a pornography addiction. You *can* overcome! You can break free from sexual addiction. You can regain meaningful relationships with God and with others. You can live your life without the shame and guilt that pornography brings. To accomplish this enormous, life-changing task though, we need help. We need God.

Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

God wants you to break free of your pain. God wants to wipe away the pain of addiction. He sent His son to die to bring you out of a sinful life (John 3:16).

With strength from God, a lot of bravery, hard work, and with support from others, you can use this booklet to gain traction in your fight. This booklet is about understanding what porn does to your brain and how it affects you, and it will give practical ways to fight and overcome. You can use it not just to overcome pornography addiction, but also to wipe away

sexual lusts and to regain a pure mind.

If you know someone who struggles with pornography addiction, you can use this booklet to better understand how to support them and help them through their trial. You, with God's power and your loved one's desire to change, can make all the difference in their life.

Break free and live a transformed life

Jeff is sitting at his computer. His cursor hovers above the address bar. Before he starts to type in his favorite adult website address, he stops. He reaches out to God in prayer. With new resolve he closes the Web browser. He pushes his chair away from his computer. Jeff is overcoming. With God's love and guiding hand, he's turning his back on his former addiction. He's choosing a life of loving obedience to His heavenly Father and enjoying the benefits of a life free from sexual addiction.

Make a commitment now

You can also make the choice to overcome. God wants you to break free from porn addiction. There is nothing that you can't do if God desires it. He is waiting for you to make a commitment to do whatever it takes to make overcoming a reality.

As you read each chapter of this booklet, make God your partner in overcoming. Pray to Him and ask Him to strengthen you and open your heart to the truth of His Word in the Bible. You've take a big step in your journey to overcoming by reading this far. God's hand is outstretched, and He is ready to lead you to victory in overcoming pornography addiction.



What is pornography addiction?

by Roy Fouch, Ph.D.

When we think of addiction, we most often think of being addicted to chemicals. The truth of the matter is that people can also be addicted to behaviors. Some of these behaviors include eating, gambling and sex. And the number one type of sexual addiction is habitual viewing of pornography.

What is pornography? It's pictures, videos, writing, or other material that is sexually explicit. It often involves the depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writing) intended to cause sexual excitement.

The word “pornography” comes from two Greek words that mean “prostitute” and “writing,” so the original meaning is “writing about pros-

titutes.” But today, even though there are still lots of salacious books, pornography is largely about visual images—in magazines, movies, videos and the Internet. Modern technology has brought us photography, videography and the Internet. Now anyone with a TV or computer can watch porn 24/7 in the privacy and secrecy of his own home. This has made it extremely easy to become addicted—a tragic consequence of scientific achievement.

In a study of 932 sex addicts conducted by Dr. Patrick Carnes, 90 percent of men and 77 percent of women indicated that pornography played a significant role in their addiction (*Don't Call it Love: Recovery from Sexual Addictions*, 1991, New York, Bantam).

What's wrong with pornography?

Pornography is destructive to the mind and heart of the viewer even when he's not addicted to it. God gave the Ten Commandments to steer humanity toward a happy, healthful life and away from the automatic penalties of disobedience. The Bible is filled with praise for God's wonderful laws. Psalm 119 is by far the longest chapter in the Bible at 176 verses. It's entirely about praising God for His Word and His laws. Verse 97 says: "Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day." Verse 9 is helpful for people struggling with pornography addiction. It says: "How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word."

The seventh of the Ten Commandments is "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). This brief umbrella command refers to all the various kinds of sexual sins. And sexual sins are the most self-destructive of all. In 1 Corinthians 6:18, the apostle Paul wrote: "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body."

And Jesus Christ revealed the spirit of the law: "But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery in his heart" (Matthew 5:8). Therefore lust (sexual fantasizing and craving) is a sin against God. What Jesus said applies just as much to looking at a *visual image* of a woman. It's the same principle if a woman is lusting for a man. Therefore, virtually all deliberate viewing of pornography is sinful because of its lustful nature.

What's wrong with just looking? God designed our minds, hearts and

bodies as they are so people would be attracted to the opposite sex. He made men to be more visually-oriented, and He made women to be beautiful. God's plan is to motivate men to get married and for each man to enjoy his wife for the rest of his life. This is somewhat summed up in Proverbs 5:18-19, which says: "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love."

At the same time, God doesn't want any man to see any naked woman other than his wife, and doesn't want any woman to see any naked man other than her husband. That way, all the excitement is focused on one's spouse. And no man has his mind desensitized because he is comparing his wife's body with a thousand other nude bodies that he's seen on the Internet. So viewing pornography is never harmless, even when it's not yet an addiction.

Pornography is addictive!

Peering at porn often starts as casual curiosity, but that often becomes the appetizer for more and more indulgence in what God forbids. The frequent viewings become a habit, and the habit soon becomes an addiction.

Viewing porn excites the mind and sexually arouses the body. A natural consequence is the carnal desire to act out sexually and relieve the sexual tension. Most often, this is done by masturbation. Pornography and masturbation are both habit-forming, and the two together become a powerful force for addiction. The self-stimulation to a sexual climax is momentarily pleasurable, and it can initially elevate

Internet pornography affects Christians

By now we are used to hearing statistics such as a fifth of our youth are solicited while surfing the Internet and that a virtual flood of pornography is increasingly available to online users.

But one fact many may not be aware of is the debilitating effect of pornography on Christians. *The Southern California Christian Times* reported that “those who have dealt with the issue of sexual addictions say the Christian community is far from exempt when it comes to the lure of pornography on the Internet. Unlike other addictive behaviors, sex carries an enormous stigma that is not easily bridged in Christian circles.”

But how extensive is this particular problem? This article continued: “Although securing data is difficult because of the nature of the lifestyle, other studies suggest that 10 percent of the Christian community is sexually addicted.”

And yet Christians hesitate to ask for needed help partially because, as Steve Watters, Internet expert for Focus on the Family, stated: “There is an increased pressure in the church for people to look their best and not demonstrate anything that represents weakness, especially if it’s sexual addiction.”

But this is no time to put our heads in the sand. The salvation of sufferers may be at stake. Addicts should be able to consult confidentially with their pastors and other competent professional counselors without fear.

Sources: *Southern California Christian Times*, *The Washington Times*.

a person’s mood, providing a momentary “high.” That usually results in the temptation to repeatedly replicate these feelings, potentially producing an obsessive-compulsive pattern if not stopped in time by the obvious red flags.

Addictive behaviors often cause chemical alterations in the neurotransmitters of the brain which, in turn, alter moods. These changes can temporarily dull pain or produce pleasurable sensations. They therefore reinforce the addiction.

Typically, people who are quickly attracted to this form of addictive behavior do so to escape some emotional state such as depression, loneliness, anxiety, fear or shame, or to escape from the reality of their circumstances. As a man once told me, “In that world, I’m king.”

However, for most addicts, there is a flip side of the coin. Many feel intense shame and grief for the addiction because it goes contrary to their own belief systems and consciences.

Faulty beliefs about self

Some people become sexually addicted even though they came from a healthy and wholesome family background. They first look at pornography out of curiosity and thrill-seeking and then are gradually seduced by the lure of the eroticism.

But more often than not sex addicts have dysfunctional backgrounds and usually have distorted views of themselves.

Dr. Patrick Carnes, a pioneer in sexual addiction, has identified four core beliefs of most sexual addicts. Many of the core beliefs that addicts have are acquired from family systems that are dysfunctional. Dysfunctional families are those where poor boundaries exist among family members, emotional needs are not being met, or where abuse of one form or another might exist. Individuals who come from families where addictions have occurred have a greater probability of, or predisposition for, acquiring addictive behavioral patterns.

Here are the core beliefs Carnes outlines in his book, *Out of the Shadows*.

1. I am basically a bad and unworthy person.

2. No one would love me as I am.

3. My needs are never going to be met if I have to depend upon others.

4. Sex is my most important need.

Dr. Carnes believes that the roots of sexual addiction begin in childhood. He writes: “When a child’s exploration of sexuality goes beyond discovery to routine self-comforting because of the lack of human care, there is potential for addiction. Sex becomes confused with comforting and nurturing.”

As with other forms of addiction, a number of characteristics are common to sexual addiction. Here are some to be aware of when confronting porn addicts.

Denial

Denial is a defense mechanism that maintains the addictive behavior by failing to admit or minimizing the seriousness of the behavior. The first step towards overcoming any addiction is acknowledging that you have a problem. Only when you can truly be honest about your actions and

their consequences and take personal responsibility can a healing process begin.

Compulsivity and dependence

Compulsivity is a recurring impulse that is difficult to resist. The tension of a negative emotional state is relieved when a behavior or chemical is introduced that causes a neuro-chemical reward. That “reward” reinforces and perpetuates the behavior. When this process is repeated multiple times, it creates a physical and/or psychological dependency.

Tolerance and escalation

Over time, what used to produce a desired effect and state of mind becomes less effective, and this is called tolerance. What typically happens is that the individual needs more of the drug or behavior to get the desired result. With pornography, the cravings tend to degenerate to porn that is more erotic, explicit, kinky or violent. Or the person may act out sexually in more high-risk behaviors such as going to strip clubs, using “escort” services, or connecting with prostitutes online. This escalation leads to increased levels of shame and guilt, which leads to increased desire to “medicate” the mental pain through escapism, and the cycle of dependency increasingly gets reinforced.

Powerlessness and unmanageability

At this point in the downward spiral of addiction, the individual begins to suffer consequences that may impact areas of life such as marriage, family, spiritual life, financial, legal, and possibly others. It’s often at this point that one finally seeks help. The best way to



Some people become sexually addicted even though they came from a healthy and wholesome family background. They first look at pornography out of curiosity and thrill-seeking and then are gradually seduced by the lure of the eroticism.

start the recovery process is to seek the help of our all-powerful Heavenly Father. At this level of enslavement, we need God's help to emancipate us from the sinful bondage.

How pornography progresses from bad to worse

According to Dr. Victor Cline, an expert on sexual addiction, there is a four-step progression of this addictive behavior:

1. Addiction: Pornography provides a powerful sexual stimulant or aphrodisiac effect, followed by sexual release, most often through masturbation.

2. Escalation: Over time, addicts

require more explicit and more deviant material to meet their sexual needs.

They desire (even think they *require*) rougher, more deviant, more explicit, and kinky kinds of sexual material to get their “high” and “sexual turn-ons.”

3. Desensitization: What was first perceived as gross, shocking, disturbing, in time becomes common and acceptable. Tragically, healthy sexual relations with one's spouse seems boring.

4. Acting out sexually: There is an increasing tendency to act out behaviors (including violent behaviors) viewed in pornography—imitating what one has seen.



Coming out of slavery to sexual sin

Let's now learn about slavery, our slave masters, and how we can be freed from this form of slavery.

Slavery

In John 8:34, Jesus said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin." Repeated sins quickly enslave us, much more than most people realize. Sins quickly begin to affect us and those we love, put distance between God and us, and increasingly control us.

In Romans 6, Paul explains about being slaves to sin. He said that as Christ died for us, we must put to death our old sinful way of life and

"should walk in newness of life" (verse 4). To grow spiritually, "we should no longer be slaves to sin" (verse 6). In verse 12, he concludes: "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts."

Paul goes on to tell us we have a choice. We can choose to be a slave to sin with the eventual consequence of death or a voluntary slave to God which leads to righteousness and eternal life. In verse 16, he wrote: "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?"

Our evil slave masters

Without God, we are slaves to the downward pulls of our own *human nature*. Jeremiah described it this way: “Who can understand the human heart? There is nothing else so deceitful; it is too sick to be healed” (Jeremiah 17:9, Good News Bible). “What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions” (Galatians 5:19,

Whatever lies one may have bought into, they must be identified and with the help of God, and they must be discarded.

GNB). We must resist the “pulls of the flesh.”

The pervasive and insidious influence of the corrupt *world* around us is another slave master. The apostle John wrote, “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:16). Without God, we’re “in bondage under the elements of the world” (Galatians 4:3). In Romans 12:2, Paul wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

The third and most powerful of the evil slave masters is Satan, “our adversary the devil” and “the tempter” of mankind (1 Peter 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:5). He is called “the prince of the power of the air; the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2). That indicates that his evil influences are broadcast to everyone who “tunes in” to him. Remember James 4:7, which says: “Therefore sub-

mit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Satan is “a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). He’s such an effective liar that he “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). We must identify Satan’s lies and with God’s help be willing to root them out of our hearts and minds. We must replace them with the truth of God’s Word and move away from irrational thinking to rational thinking. One phrase used by Alcoholics Anonymous that describes it well is “stinking thinking.”

Here are some common lies that Satan influences addicts to use: “I work hard all day” and “my wife doesn’t fulfill my needs” and “I deserve this” (pornography, phone sex, affairs, strip clubs, etc.). “I have a very high sex drive, that’s the way God made me.” “I’m just looking at pictures (or chatting on the Internet).” “I’m not actually doing anything harmful.” “How can sex be a problem? I choose to look at pornography, masturbate, Internet chat, and I can stop anytime I want.”

Whatever lies one may have bought into, they must be identified and they must be discarded.

So we have to contend with three powerful slave masters in addition to our own genetic predispositions for addictive behavior! We have only one hope for survival and liberation—“our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). But if we rely on God to fight our battles for us, we can be “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Romans 8:37).

Emancipation

The perspective I share with you is the one I believe is the most effective

The 12 steps of alcoholics anonymous adapted for sexual addicts

1. We admitted we were powerless over our sexual addiction—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

—From *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, page 170.

and beneficial to a person coming out of any form of sexual addiction or behavior pattern.

To be emancipated from slavery to sin, we must admit to ourselves and God that we need His help to overcome the powerful grip of sin and to break free from Satan. This coincides with the 12 step philosophy of recovery programs such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (SLAA), and Sexaholics Anonymous.

In my 30 years of counseling experience, I have found that the most powerful change agent in the recovery process from addictions is the role of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. It is obvious that the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous and the subsequent 12 step programs found the spiritual component essential to the process. Have others succeeded

without this spiritual component? Absolutely, but the programs and processes that have endured the longest and helped the most have had this spiritual component.

Step 1: The first of the 12 steps is one of acknowledgement. We admit we are powerless over our compulsive behavior and that our lives have become unmanageable.

Step 2: As Christians, we believe that power comes from the Creator God, the God of the Bible. True Christians know that through repentance (sorrow and a change of direction) of our sins, including pornography or other forms of sexual sin, we can receive God's forgiveness, grace and blessings. In John 10:10, Jesus said: "The thief [Satan] does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly."



From slavery to freedom

Next we'll take a look at practical as well as spiritual solutions and strategies to overcoming an addiction to pornography, and even the temptations to indulge in viewing pornography. These strategies can be useful in overcoming all forms of sexual addiction.

Triggers

The first concept to understand is that of triggers. These are factors which stimulate the desire for viewing sexually explicit material and stimuli. Some of the common triggers I hear about are boredom, depression, anger, loneliness, rejection, anxiety, fear, stress, sadness, shame, guilt and low self-esteem. Most of these are emotional states from which the individual

seeks relief. Triggers can be visual or auditory as in movies, music, magazines or even in looking at someone in a way to become sexually aroused. It is also possible to become aroused by another person's behavior. In today's world many people have become increasingly provocative in their interactions with others. Often this type of behavior occurs in a work setting, but I have known (counseled or spoken with) a number of people who have been tempted and acted out even in faith communities. The adversary, the devil, has infiltrated all social contexts.

When you can identify the triggers in your own life, you can begin to develop safeguards and alternative responses to these triggers. This is what we in the addiction field call

relapse prevention strategies or plans. These plans are an integral part of recovery or emancipation from sexual slavery or idolatry.

Emotional triggers

With emotional types of triggers, like those mentioned above, we need to find alternatives to managing these emotional states that are infinitely better than pornography or any kind of escapism. This often involves a holistic approach—addressing mind, body, and spirit. Nutritional enhancements including foods, vitamins and herbs can positively affect mood and brain chemistry. Exercising regularly can help with mood issues and stress management. In situations where extreme forms of depression or other mental issues exist, medication might be needed along with counseling. In these cases, seeking the appropriate medical or professional help is recommended. Often people will self-medicate by using drugs, alcohol, or engagement in behaviors to elevate mood or cope with stress when there are more effective means of coping with these conditions.

Electronic triggers

When the triggers are electronic in nature, like a computer and the Internet, safeguards need to be put in place. There are software programs that prevent sexually explicit material from being accessed. The addicted person should have someone else install the program so that only the friend or significant other has the password. Spyware programs are also available to alert an accountability partner of an attempted access. The same type of safeguards can be utilized with television programming.

Visual triggers

When real people in one's environment have a provocative effect, this can be more challenging. But with all triggers, there are solutions. One obvious solution is to never let your eyes linger on the tempting sight, but move out of eyesight from the person who has become a spiritual stumbling block. This is implied by what Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-30. Another concept that works, if applied consistently, is "bouncing of the eyes." This strategy merely means making a conscious decision to look the other way when one sees something that has a sexually erotic effect. This is in contrast to ogling and lusting for a person who is sexually stimulating and/or provocatively dressed. Taking second and third looks should also be avoided. One finds something else to look at or just look away. Job was a good role model. He said he made a "covenant with his eyes" (Job 31:1). For that verse, the Good News Bible says: "I have made a solemn promise never to look with lust at a woman."

Matthew 6:22-24 offers a principle that can be applied to the idolatry of sexual sin. "The lamp of the body is the eye. If, therefore, your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in you is full of darkness, how great is that darkness? No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." The principle here is specifically about serving God versus materialism and the lust for money. However, when we put the lust of the flesh through our visual

sense ahead of righteousness and our love of God, we are in a similar place with the same question to answer: What do we want to serve, God or pornography?

Gateway to other sexual sins

Pornography opens the door to other forms of sexual sins. While it starts with fantasy stimulated by visual images, it often leads to other forms of sexual sins. Similar to drugs, where one is often looking for a better high, those seeking pornographic highs often seek material that is increasingly stimulating—from soft porn to hard porn, from still pictures to videos, from viewing relatively “normal” sex to viewing increasingly perverted and even violent sex. For many, it eventually leads to other forms of sexual sins such as phone sex, Internet sex, prostitution and extramarital affairs. As mentioned in the previous article, 70 to 90 percent of sexual addicts started with pornography.

One point I wanted to make before looking at other relapse prevention strategies is to remind everyone about setting healthy boundaries in relationships. This means that if you are married, you need to avoid intimate conversations with anyone of the opposite sex or being alone in a private room with that person for any length of time. You should also avoid flirtatious or sexual conversations, because they can lead to sexual fantasies or lust. When married, your intimate conversations should be reserved

Three Bible tips on avoiding pornography and lust

1. Looking with lust is mental adultery.

“You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell” (Matthew 5:27-29).

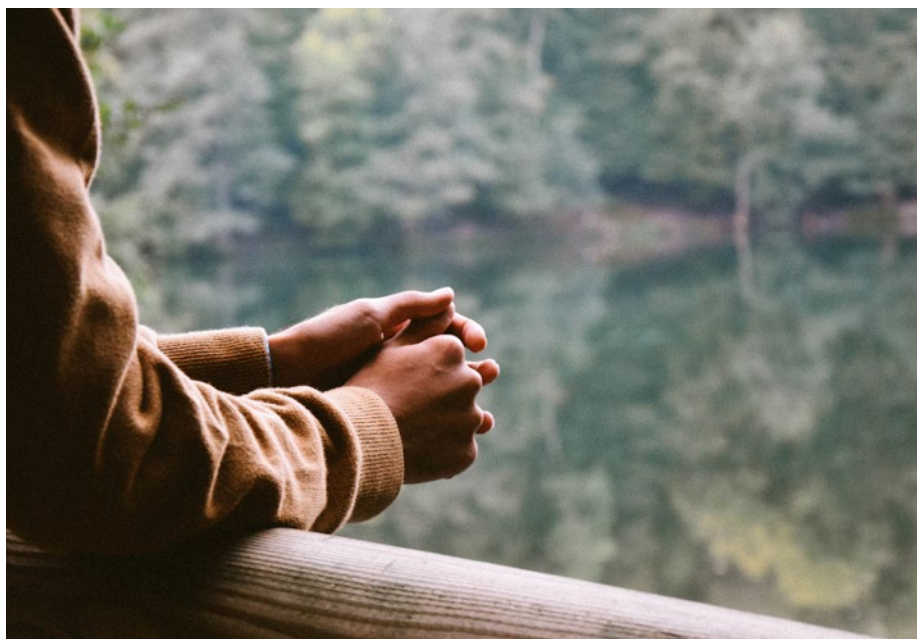
Jesus used hyperbole here to make a strong point: If the only way to avoid lust were to pluck out an eye, that would be better than eternal death. Thankfully that’s not the only way!

2. Like all sins, the best way to avoid pornography is to avoid the source. Block such sites on your computer, etc.

“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 Corinthians 6:18).

3. God’s Spirit can give us help to avoid giving in to lust.

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).



When you can identify the triggers in your own life, you can begin to develop safeguards and alternative responses to these triggers. These plans are an integral part of recovery or emancipation from sexual slavery or idolatry.

for your spouse. If there is a problem in your marriage, seek a counselor, preferably a Christian counselor, to help with communication and relationship issues.

Be proactive with relapse prevention

Returning to relapse prevention, I would strongly encourage being proactive, especially in spiritual ways. This means a spiritual approach to each and every day that will strengthen you against temptation. The apostle James wrote: “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (James 4:7-8). And then strive to stay close to God!

In Matthew 6:33, Jesus Christ stated: “Seek first the kingdom of God and

His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.” “All things” can include the mental, emotional and spiritual resources you need to defend yourself against temptation. It has been my experience in working with people with sexual addictions and weaknesses that if they start their day with prayer and time in the Bible, they are much better prepared to deal with the world’s temptations and stresses and Satan’s attacks. Among other benefits, having the mind filled with godly thoughts is effective in blocking out negative thoughts and temptations.

When you are tempted, God and Jesus Christ are only a prayer away. As Jesus admonished His disciples, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation” (Luke 22:40). A prayer can be worded, “Father, please help my eyes

to be pure for you. Please uplift my mood to cope with whatever distraction is pulling me down spiritually, Father.”

There are many other resources people can access to support their efforts in overcoming pornography addiction or other forms of sexual addiction. There are support groups in practically every community across the country and around the world. Many are in churches. It is such a pervasive problem that more and more people are seeking and finding help in these groups. Some of them are treatment groups run by professionals. Others are run by men and women who have made major progress in overcoming these problems and are helping others. Men and women can find these resources by looking online for meeting places. One Christian 12-step group that I think is doing a good job is Celebrate Recovery. It tends to address all forms of addictions, but there are some that are specific to sexual issues. It has a spiritual approach that includes God at the center, repentance, self-examination, making amends to injured persons, and helping others as a final way to support and continue one’s own healing.

Relying on mentors, accountability partners, sponsors and similar support persons is also helpful, because they give you someone to turn to in your hour of need. Of course the most important source of help is our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. God is there for us if we would only call upon Him.

I am recommending two books that I have heard are very helpful as well: *Being God’s Man in the Face of Temptation* by Stephen Arterburn and

At the Altar of Sexual Idolatry by Steve Gallagher. There are other good books on this subject and some include workbooks that offer daily exercises to help heal, guide and direct toward recovery.

Other books and authors that may help those struggling with sexual addictions are: *A Hunger for Healing* by J. Heath Miller; *Pure Eyes* by Craig Gross; *Surfing for God—Discovering the Divine Desire Beneath Sexual Struggle* by Michael John Cusick; and *Growing in Christ while Helping Others* by John Baker.

Two final thoughts to leave with those who have engaged in pornography and other sexual sins: 1) Please contemplate the pain and suffering that such sins inflict on an innocent partner such as a spouse. The damage done to a spouse and a marriage is usually extreme and needs its own healing process. 2) Please contemplate how dysfunctional lifestyles and bad habits are often passed down from generation to generation. What kind of role model are you for your children, grandchildren, and nieces and nephews? What kind of legacy will you leave for future generations?

Please also read related articles in the *Breaking Free Journal* at <http://breakingfree.ucg.org>. And the *Breaking Free* staff expects to add more and more related articles as time goes by.

Those of us engaged in counseling and writing regarding addictions regularly pray for all those who suffer from any addiction. We pray that God will bless you with success in breaking free from any bondage—and that you will remain free and filled with the joy that comes from living a good and godly life.



Breaking free from sexual addictions

by John Cafourek

Sexual addiction occurs in many forms and can be very destructive spiritually. How can it be overcome?

“When Dan’s therapist told him that he was sexually addicted, he was outraged! He thought his therapist was exaggerating. Dan was certain his real problem was depression. He was simply down all the time, and he wanted to be happier. True, his life had left a trail of broken relationships and he had some sexual problems, but that was because he was so down all the time” (*Out of the Shadows*:

Understanding Sexual Addiction, page 177).

Denial is an all-too-common human defense mechanism. Patrick Carnes, an acknowledged expert on sexual addictions and author of about a dozen books on this topic, lists denial as symptomatic of the initial stage of progressive sexual addiction. The addicted person refuses to admit, even to himself, that he needs help. He thinks he can handle his own problems.

What is sexual addiction?

Obviously, not every person who has some difficulty or problem involving sex and sexual relationships is sexually addicted. However, since sexual addiction is progressive, it's possible for difficulties or problems to become exacerbated and to ultimately develop into addictions.

In his book *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*, Dr. Carnes provides some important insight into identifying some of the common symptoms indicative of sexual addiction. "A way to understand sexual addicts...is to compare them with other types of addicts. A common definition of alcoholism or drug dependency is that a person has a pathological relationship with a mood-altering chemical. The alcoholic's relationship with alcohol becomes more important than family, friends, and work. The relationship progresses to the point where alcohol is necessary to feel normal. To feel 'normal' for the alcoholic is also to feel isolated and lonely, since the primary relationship he depends upon to feel adequate is with a chemical, not other people.

"Sexual addiction is parallel. The addict substitutes a sick relationship to an event or a process for a healthy relationship with others. The addict's relationship with a mood-altering experience becomes central to his life...

"Addicts progressively go through stages in which they retreat further from the reality of friends, family, and work. Their secret lives become more real than their public lives. What other people know is a false identity. Only

the individual addict knows the shame of living a double life—the real world and the addict's world" (pages 14-15).

The anatomy of addiction

How does addiction actually begin? Perhaps not surprisingly, it starts with the acceptance of delusional thought processes about oneself, allowing them to become rooted in one's personal belief system. As a consequence, addiction stems from faulty core beliefs about oneself that affect how we perceive reality.

Each person develops a belief system that is the sum of the assumptions, judgments and ideas that he or she

The great Creator God has designed human sexuality to be a wonderful blessing. God revealed His intent and purpose for sex when human civilization began.

holds to be true. This belief system contains potent family messages about such things as one's value or worth, relationships, needs and sexuality. When these core beliefs become inaccurate or faulty, they have the potential to provide fundamental momentum necessary for the development of sexual addictions.

What are some of these irrational beliefs? Perhaps the most common is the perception of not being a worthwhile person. Addicts believe that other people would not value them as a person if everything about themselves was known, including their addiction. They also believe that sex is their most important need. Sex is viewed as the only thing that makes their isolation bearable. Consequently, faulty personal core beliefs become

the anchor points for sexual addiction.

Impaired thinking

Interacting faulty beliefs produce distorted views of reality. Denial leads the list. Ignoring the problem, blaming others and minimizing the behaviors become part of a defensive repertoire. Arguments, excuses, justifications and circular reasoning abound amidst impaired thinking patterns. Even consequences such as venereal disease, unwanted pregnancy, lost jobs, arrests and broken relationships are either overlooked or attributed to factors other than the addiction.

Slicing through this mental fog to both recognize and deal with denial and self-deception is essential to recovery and overcoming. “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. Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren” (James 1:14-16).

The addiction cycle

Addictive experiences tend to progress through a four-step cycle, intensifying with each repetition:

1. *Preoccupation* is the mood or trance in which the mind becomes completely engrossed with thoughts of sex. This mental state creates an obsessive search for sexual stimulation.

2. *Ritualization* is the formation of special routines leading up to sexual behavior. The ritual intensifies the preoccupation, adding arousal and excitement.

3. *Compulsive sexual behavior* is doing the actual sexual act, the end goal of the preoccupation and ritualization.

4. *Despair* is the feeling of utter hopelessness and sense of powerlessness that results from once again having engaged in sexually addictive behavior.

A self-perpetuating cycle

Since the end result is very disappointing and very painful, why would anyone repeat this addiction cycle? The reason is that the cycle becomes self-perpetuating. Ironically, much of the pain felt at the end of the cycle can be numbed or obscured through sexual preoccupation. This reengages the addiction cycle all over again. Hence, sexual addicts become hostages and slaves to their own preoccupations. Jesus Christ gave this concise warning about the enslaving potential of all sin: “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin” (John 8:34).

God’s revealed purpose for sex

We live in a society that presents “the joy of sex” as the rightful pursuit of everyone. It seems, in fact, suspicion may likely be attached to anyone who refrains from engaging in sexual activity. The so-called sexual revolution insists that we discard any “inhibitions” and “sexual hang-ups.” This preoccupation with sex pervades many facets of life.

The great Creator God has designed human sexuality to be a wonderful blessing. God revealed His intent and purpose for sex when human civilization began. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). This is a reference to the union of the sexual organs of husband and wife and implies that marriage is intended to be

Tools of recovery

A. Michael Johnson, Ph.D., lists the following tools and more on his website www.sexual-addict.com:

- **Accountability partners and agreements**

Being accountable to someone is an important anchor for sobriety. Make an agreement with someone to check in daily if at all possible. That person should have a list of questions—very specific questions—to ask you and that you have agreed to answer honestly. Your partner may be a member of your group, a friend in recovery, your therapist or a good friend. An accountability partner must be someone you trust and with whom you feel safe. It is not recommended that you ask your life partner to be your accountability partner. Related tools include sponsors and a support network.

- **Avoid triggering situations**

You don't have to go to business meetings at nude bars. You can tell the others that going to such places interferes with your spiritual growth. If you can't avoid

some triggers such as working on a computer, make it safe for yourself. Install blocking software (so that you don't know the password), keep your door open, turn the screen toward the door, put the computer at home in a public area and never go online when you are alone.

- **Balance your life and service**

- **Carry recovery with you at all times**

That may be reminders, cues, instructions or anything else that will help. Those things might include:

- » Phone numbers of recovery friends.
- » Photographs of loved ones.
- » Cost card (add up the costs of your addiction).

- **Combat physical inactivity**

Spend time doing fun activities and getting involved in sports, exercise and other physical activities. This is useful for all addicts and particularly important for those who became sedentary with their addictions such as cybersex addicts.

- **Combat isolation**

Spend time with people. Isolation is a part of your disease. Find ways to be in contact with people.

- **Interrupt your acting out**

Develop and memorize a set of strategies to help you avoid acting out. Use these daily.

- **Meetings**

In these meetings you learn valuable information about your disease and how the 12-step program works. Members give and receive support, work the steps and share experience, strength and hope in a safe environment. At first, attend as many meetings as you can. If possible, attend meetings daily for the first 90 days and practice abstinence to the best of your ability.

- **One day at a time**

- **Prayer and meditation**

- **Professional help**

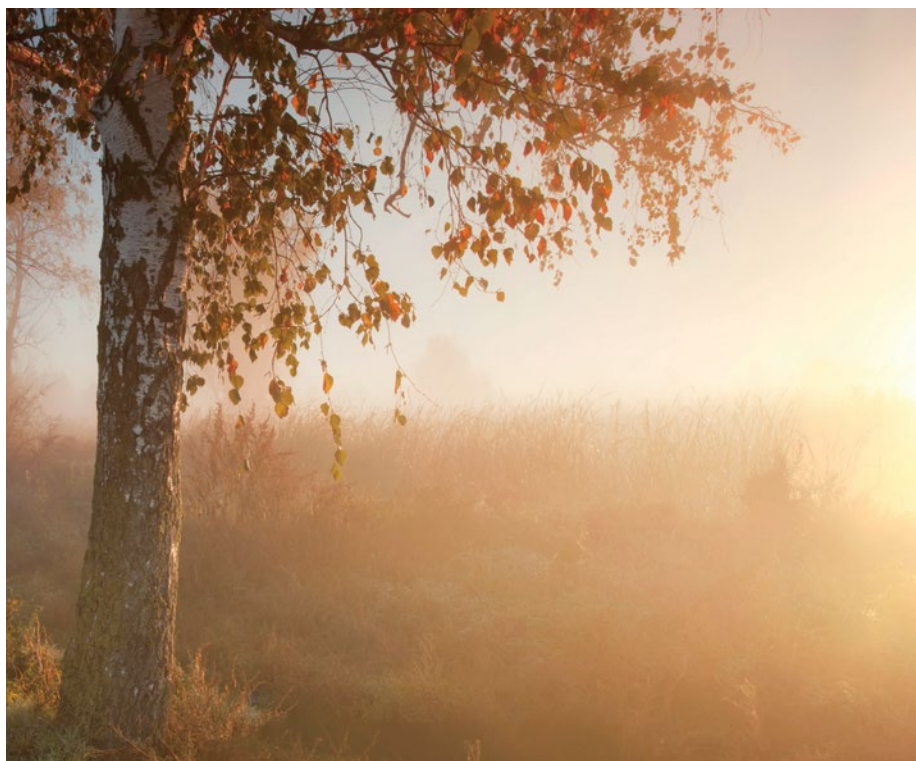
Your addiction may have been a subconscious way of self-medicating yourself for wounds you carry from your earlier life. It is important to

work with a professional who understands sexual addiction or is willing to learn. This is another way to keep yourself on the path of recovery. Remember that recovery is much more than abstinence from sexually addictive behaviors. You may want to seek out group therapy, individual therapy or both. If possible, including your spouse in therapy, both individually and as a couple, can be a great benefit to the recovery of both and to your relationship.

- **Set boundaries**

- **Telephone**

The telephone is your life-line between meetings. Get phone numbers from other members in your program. Get used to calling someone daily. It is an important way to break out of the isolation that is so strongly a part of the disease. You may be shy and hesitant at first, but by training yourself to call someone, it will be easy to place that call when that moment of crisis arises. And it will!



an intimate relationship.

This understanding is confirmed by Paul in 1 Corinthians, where he calls sexual intercourse becoming “one flesh” (1 Corinthians 6:16). In the same context, Paul wrote, “Flee sexual immorality” (1 Corinthians 6:18), explaining that sex outside of marriage is sin and that it brings penalties on the sinner. In contrast, in Hebrews 13:4, Paul affirms that the sexual union between a husband and wife is the lawful function of human sexuality. The marriage bed is undefiled, he explained. Paul then immediately warned that other sexual acts outside of marriage do defile a person spiritually.

Christ’s statements in Matthew 5:27-30 explain how it is possible to commit sexual sin in our mind alone—apart from any action whatsoever. We

are commanded to guard and control our thoughts as well as our actions. Jesus Christ later also inspired Paul to write about our thoughts as the battlefield on which we win or lose the struggle: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Levels of addiction

Sexual addiction is generally categorized into three levels. The presence of one or more of these sexual behaviors does not always involve addiction. Various sexual crimes, for example, may or may not be addictive behaviors. The behaviors designated as level

one have in common general cultural acceptance. Some are regarded as illegal, but the reality is that widespread practice conveys a public tolerance. Though often considered by society to be less destructive, each of these can be devastating when done compulsively. Level one addictions generally include masturbation, compulsive relationships, pornography, prostitution and anonymous sex.

Level two addictions include exhibitionism, voyeurism, indecent phone calls and indecent liberties. These behaviors are deemed sufficiently intrusive to warrant stiff legal sanctions. They are all punished when actively prosecuted. Both prosecutors and the general public, however, often view these acts as nuisance offenses. The commonality of all of these addictive behaviors is the fact that someone is victimized.

Level three sexual addictions share in common the violation of some of our most significant boundaries. Rape, incest and child molestation entail basic transgressions of laws designed to protect the vulnerable. A number of additional detestable behaviors and addictions are intentionally not being mentioned in this listing.

Breaking free

Breaking the hold of sexual addiction is very difficult to do. All forms of addiction are vicious because they further the inability to trust others. However, without help from others, the addict often fails to regain control because the addiction feeds itself. Also, few forms of fixation or excitement are as supercharged with social judgment, ridicule or fear. This makes seeking help especially difficult for the sexual addict.

One of the best proven paths to recovery is the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, but adapted to a particular sexual addiction. The 12-step program helps members restore their network of human relationships, especially in their family. Members are taught how to live the program, leaving behind their double life and its delusion and pain.

Battling a pornography addiction

Sex sells! Pornography, one of the greatest sexual scourges afflicting human society today, is a \$57 billion industry. Porn revenue is larger than the combined revenues of all professional football, baseball and basketball franchises! It also exceeds the combined revenues of ABC, CBS and NBC television networks.

Overcoming an addiction to Internet pornography may necessitate the use of some special computer safeguards. For example, various software programs filter Internet content but still allow normal Web surfing. They can be used to block out offensive websites.

If you install this type of program yourself, you will easily know how to get around it. Therefore, it would be better to have your spouse or some other trustworthy adult set up the software on your computer.

Three good ones are CyberPatrol, CyberSitter and NetNanny. They cost less than \$40. All have free trials, so you can take each for a test drive before you buy. You'll find them at, respectively:

- www.cyberpatrol.com/
- www.cybersitter.com/
- www.netnanny.com/

Both America Online and MSN



The process of overcoming sexual addictions is neither simple nor easy. Spiritual freedom, however, is made available to us through Jesus Christ. "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

offer ways to limit access to the Internet's darker side. Like the filtering software, you might want to have your spouse or other trustworthy adult set up the account. This way, you do not have any of the passwords. While these controls are meant primarily for children, they can help adults avoid problem websites.

You could also use an Internet service provider that does filtering. Below are links to two such companies:

- www.characterlink.net
- www.bsecure.com

If you need something more adult, check out accountability software. One such program is X3watch, which is

offered by XXXchurch.com, a ministry that battles online pornography. With this program, you designate an accountability partner. X3watch makes a record of any questionable sites you visit and e-mails the list to your accountability partner. It also makes a note if you close the program. X3watch is free. You can get it at www.x3watch.com.

Here are some additional websites that may prove to be helpful in recovery from an addiction to pornography:

- Sex Addicts Anonymous:
www.sexaa.org.
- Dr. Patrick Carnes, author and expert on this topic: www.sexhelp.com.

Overcoming sexual addictions

The process of overcoming sexual addictions is neither simple nor easy. Spiritual freedom, however, is made available to us through Jesus Christ. “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). The first step in the process of attaining this freedom is to recognize and acknowledge our sins. Remember King David’s example of repentance. “For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me” (Psalm 51:3).

The next step involves changing direction in our life, turning away from sin and toward obedience to God. Deep, heartfelt repentance before God can provide a marvelous cleansing process, a spiritual catharsis that releases the guilt and shame induced by sin. “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).

The struggle against sin is a long and difficult process. It’s not only essential that we continue to “put to


death” (Colossians 3:5) the old sinful carnal nature within us, but that we also allow Christ to transform us through the power of the Holy Spirit, the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2). Sinful habits must be rooted out and replaced with habits of obedience to God. As Paul expressed it, “And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Romans 6:18).


It is possible to break the bonds of sexual addiction. If you need help in this area, ask God to give you the courage to honestly face the problem. Be willing to seek counsel from the ministry and, if recommended, to obtain specialized professional help as well.


Most importantly, beseech Almighty God to accomplish His will in your life.


“But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life” (Romans 6:22).


What's Inside

2  Introduction

5  What is pornography addiction?

10  Coming out of slavery to sexual sin

13  From slavery to freedom

14  Breaking free from sexual addictions

Cover photo: Comstock/Thinkstock

© 2018 United Church of God, an International Association — www.ucg.org
P.O. Box 541027, Cincinnati, OH 45254-1027

Contributors: Milan Bizic, John Cafourek, Roy Fouch, Jonathan Magee, Darris McNeely, John Ross Schroeder, Melvin Rhodes, Jim Tuck. Reviewers: Peter Eddington, Darris McNeely, Steve Myers. Design: Mitchell Moss

109/1809/2.0