



Pornography can be as addictive or enslaving as any drug, and in our pornographic society, more and more Christian men (and some women) are struggling with this alluring and destructive sin.

The inevitability of temptation in our culture:

Tim Challies:

We are not raising sons wondering if they will someday encounter pornography; instead, we are raising sons and equipping them to deal with the when rather than the if. Already I am preparing my son for the inevitable reality that at some point he will be invited to look at pornography, at some point he will encounter it, and he needs to be prepared. He needs to know what pornography is, he needs to know how it will harm him, and he needs to be equipped to run the other way. (<http://www.challies.com/christian-living/hope-in-a-pornified-world>)

The spiritual frustration and anguish of pornography:

*Is there anything more discouraging than losing the fight against lust? It saps your spiritual passion. It makes your faith feel hollow. It stifles prayer At moments you're so overwhelmed by shame that God seems a million miles away. (Joshua Harris, *Not Even a Hint*, 20)*

Biblical Principles

1) Looking at pornography is sin.

1 Thessalonians 4:3. *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality [porneia].*

Galatians 5:19. *Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality ...*

Matthew 5:28. *But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*

2) The only hope for conquering pornography is Christ.

The sacrifice of Christ is sufficient to cover sexual sin of all kinds, including pornography. Moreover, because of Christ's victory over sin, obedient purity is possible for a believer in this area, even if there has been repeated, habitual sin in the past.

1 Corinthians 6:11. *Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

Romans 6:17-18. *But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.*

Romans 13:12-14. *The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*

3) The key place of pornography is the heart, not the Internet:

The problem with pornography is not the eyes, the hormones, or the Internet: it's the *heart*—the moment-by-moment thinking. In a word, the *imagination*.

Proverbs 6:25. *Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her capture you with her eyelids.*

Proverbs 7:25. *Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways, do not stray into her paths.*

Rephrased:

Do not desire a woman's beauty in your moment-by-moment thoughts; do not let your imagination turn to her ways.

4) The heart of pornography is usually driven by three sins.

1. Selfish pleasure

2 Timothy 3:1, 4. *But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God ...*

In God's design, sexual pleasure is to be found in giving pleasure to one's covenant partner. Pornography is by its very nature self-focused sensuality.

Pornography is a wholly selfish act that eclipses the concerns, needs, and well-being of everyone around you. (Heath Lambert, Finally Free, 154)

2. Arrogance

Only arrogant men look at pornography

The choice is simple and clear: you can look at porn, or you can be humble. But you cannot do both. (Lambert, Finally Free, 108, 109)

It is impossible to look at porn and be humble. Because this is true, it gives us a key weapon in the fight against porn. (111)

3. Discontent

Solomon says in Proverbs 5:18-19 that a man is to find his sexual satisfaction, exhilaration, and enjoyment in his wife. A husband who is looking at sexy models on the Internet is in essence saying that he is discontent with the woman God has given him.

Proverbs 5:18-19. ... rejoice in the wife of your youth. As a loving hind and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; be exhilarated always with her love.

Observation:

A husband who is looking at pornography is not obeying those biblical commands.

In the same way, a single man who is looking at pornography is expressing his discontent with his current God-given singleness and its accompanying requirement of sexual self-restraint.

Point:

To counsel men (or women) who are struggling with pornography, you must address the heart of discontentment as the key issue.

Biblical Solutions to Pornography

- 1) Be constantly thankful for your spouse, especially when confronted with pornographic temptation (Prov 5:18-19).

The temptation to look at pornography is counteracted by *thankfulness*, which is the opposite of being discontent. When a married man sees an alluring woman or a lust-stimulating photograph, he should capture and redirect his thoughts by praying, *Thank you, Lord, for my wife. Thank you that she is the one whom you have given me and that in her I find my joyful sexual satisfaction.*

Pornographic temptation is counteracted and replaced by fulfilling the biblical commands to rejoice, be satisfied in, and exhilarated by your spouse (Prov 5:18-19).

Ephesians 5:3-4. *But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.*

John Piper:

The fire of lust's pleasures must be fought with the fire of God's pleasures. If we try to fight the fire of lust with prohibitions and threats alone ... we will fail. We must fight it with a massive promise of superior happiness. We must swallow up the little flicker of lust's pleasure in the conflagration of holy satisfaction. When we "make a covenant with our eyes," like Job did (Job 31:1), our aim is not merely to avoid something erotic, but also to gain something excellent. (Future Grace, 336)

How a man's wife compares with the impossibly beautiful women he sees on the Internet is irrelevant. A man honours God when he intentionally and persistently cultivates a heart of thankfulness, joy and satisfaction in his wife as God's gift to him for sexual satisfaction.

Question: What about singles?

We must admit that the thankfulness principle is harder for singles to apply than for married people. However, they too can be thankful for the gift of singleness (1 Cor 7:7) and *in anticipation* for the spouse that God will hopefully give them one day.

A suggested prayer for singles:

God, thank You for making me a sexual creature with sexual desires. I don't ask that You remove my desire, but that You help me to please You with it in my thoughts and actions Fill me with confidence that You have good things in store for me—something much better than what lust has to offer. (Joshua Harris, Not Even a Hint, 37)

2) Consider the consequences of viewing pornography (Prov 5:4-5, 8-14).

It is axiomatic that people caught in the grip of sexual lust are heedless of the consequences. According to Solomon, the adulteress *does not ponder the path of*

life (Prov 5:6). Those who are allured by pornography need to be taught to thoughtfully consider its consequences.

Solomon warns that the consequences of sexual sin range from enslavement to lust, a seared conscience, blackmail, the financial drain of child support, venereal disease, public shame, bitterness, anger, incapacitating guilt, destruction, and death (Prov 5:4-5; 7:25-27; Prov 6:24-29; 5:9-11). While viewing pornography may not immediately produce all those results, it does always produced the following.

- God's displeasure
- enslavement to sexual lust
- crushing guilt feelings
- spiritual paralysis and frustration
- a ruined marriage
- disqualification from ministry
- diminished interest in sex with one's spouse due to sinful comparing and dissatisfaction
- increased temptation to other sexual sins, such as prostitutes, sexual abuse, and fornication
- increased anger toward one's family as guilt builds up
- a growing distance and secretiveness as the person continually seeks seclusion to view pornography
- lying and deceit to hide pornography

3) Pursue divine accountability (Prov 5:20-21).

Proverbs 5:20-21. *For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress and embrace the bosom of a foreigner? For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, and He watches all his paths.*

Point:

While a crafty man might be able to hide his Internet habits from his wife or parents, and while he might be able to lie to his accountability partners in his Bible study, there is no hiding from *God*. God is our primary accountability because He is always there.

Illustration:

It was Job's understanding of his divine accountability that led to his famous commitment in Job 31: *I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I gaze at a virgin? Does He not see my ways and number all my steps?* (Job 31:1, 4)

Further warning:

1 Thessalonians 4:6. *For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things ...*

Positive motivations:

A person who is tempted to look at pornography must be encouraged to love pleasing God more than pleasing self.

1 Thessalonians 4:1, 3. *Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.*

Romans 13:13-14. *Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality But put on the Lord Jesus Christ ...*

4) Pursue human accountability (Prov 5:7, 12-13).

Human accountability includes parents, wives, spiritually mature men and women, and helpful peers. Sanctification is a corporate project.

A note about accountability partners:

Accountability partners should be mature believers, not peers who consistently report their failures to each other but offer little true help to stop their immoral behaviour: *True accountability also requires someone who possesses the biblical knowledge and practical wisdom to guide you toward purity.* (Lambert, *Finally Free*, 55)

Proverbs 5:7, 12-14. *Now then, my sons, listen to me and do not depart from the words of my mouth And you say, "How I have hated instruction! And my heart spurned reproof! I have not listened to the voice of my teachers, nor inclined my ear to my instructors! I was almost in utter ruin In the midst of the assembly and congregation."*

A warning:

Accountability groups can become a form of Protestant confession, in which a mere admission that one has looked at pornography is wrongly viewed as having adequately dealt with the sin.

Joshua Harris:

One common mistake I've made is to assume that confession to my accountability group is the same thing as repentance. In other words, I would think that merely telling someone else I sinned meant I'd turned away from the sin and adequately dealt with it. But this isn't necessarily true. Repentance involves a change of heart and involves an ongoing choice to put sin to death. (Not Even a Hint, 142)

The *when* of accountability:

Accountability is not primarily about confessing sin *after* you have looked at porn; it is about seeking help *as you are being tempted* to look at it.

Heath Lambert:

Many accountability groups function as an opportunity for a delayed confession of sin. You must change this pattern if you want to be free from porn. You must begin to reach out to your accountability partners when you are tempted instead of waiting for a meeting to confess your sins after the fact You will not experience dramatic change in your struggle as long as you use accountability to describe your sins instead of declaring your need for help in the midst of temptation. (Finally Free, 49)

Some software helps for human accountability:

- <http://www.everaccountable.com>
- <http://www.covenanteyes.com/services/internet-accountability>
- <http://www.x3watch.com>
- <http://www.mobileministrymagazine.com/bibles-for-mobile-devices/#accountability>

5) Take radical practical steps to avoid tempting situations.

There is no point in a man weeping, praying, and making vows never to look at pornography again if he is not willing to take radical steps to restrict his opportunities to do so.

Lambert:

Many people struggle with pornography because it is so easy for them to get it. The simple truth is that if you keep pornography easily available, you will look at it sooner or later.

I can guarantee failure if you wait to begin the fight against porn until you are alone in the dark with your computer. (Finally Free, 60, 64)

Romans 13:14. *But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.*

Proverbs 5:8. *Keep your way far from her and do not go near the door of her house ...*

2 Timothy 2:22. *Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

Jesus' principle of radical amputation:

Matthew 5:27-29. *You have heard that it was said, "You shall not commit adultery"; but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.*

Christians who are struggling with pornography must be willing to take radical steps to avoid exposing themselves to the opportunity to look.

Jerry Bridges:

The place to start controlling the cravings of our physical appetites is to reduce our exposure to temptation. (The Pursuit of Holiness, 114)

Some suggestions:

- Don't spend time with friends or co-workers who look at pornography.

1 Corinthians 15:33. *Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals."*

- Radically restrict your movie, television, and reading habits, avoiding both hard and so-called soft porn. For example, stop pretending that R or PG-13 movies don't affect you: they do. Furthermore, their sensual images and sexual immorality are sin.

Joshua Harris:

Here's the mistake I have often made. I know that media contains a certain amount of sinful content that is dangerous. But instead of seeing how much I can avoid, I spend my energy trying to see how much I can handle. (Not Even a Hint, 118)

John MacArthur:

Many of the films and television programs produced for the mass market routinely include images, themes, and story lines that tempt people to sinful thought patterns. Once the suggestive pictures and thoughts are planted in the mind, they reside there as potential temptations anytime we think of them. (The Vanishing Conscience, 189)

Kelsea's experience:

"I wasn't experiencing romance in my own life and desperately wanted to, so I turned to what I call 'soft porn' romance novels" The scenes of illicit passion she'd filled her mind with were leading to impure desires.

[Eventually] Kelsea repented and threw away her books. After that she began to read Christian romance novels, but even then she found herself tempted. "The sex scenes aren't at all graphic in a Christian romance, but just the whole romance thing would bring back other scenes I'd read in secular novels. Lately I've come to the realization that I can't read any of it. (in Harris, Not Even a Hint, 70)

A biblical theology of entertainment:

Ephesians 5:3-4. But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

- Cancel your membership at the gym.
- Avoid the bookstores, magazine stands, and DVD rental stores.
- Don't flick from tv channel to tv channel—your chances of coming across something bad are too high.
- When you travel, don't turn on the hotel room's television.

Internet:

Because it's the most accessible and most easily concealed form of pornography, the Internet is *the* battlefield for most people. Some suggestions:

- Don't allow teenagers to have a computer or Internet connection in their room.
- Get a cell phone that *can't* talk to a satellite (i.e., that doesn't have Internet service)
- Don't surf: use the Internet only for specific tasks, not as a form of entertainment.
- Don't surf when you are feeling down or lonely.

Boredom and curiosity lead many boys and men into experiences that become more like drug addiction than is often admitted. (Al Mohler,

<http://www.albertmohler.com/2013/10/09/how-pornography-works-it-hijacks-the-male-brain>)

- Don't use your computer late at night or after your spouse, parents, or roommates have gone to bed (Prov 7:8-9).
- Set up your computer screen so that anyone who walks by your office or room can see what you're looking at.
- Use accountability software.

6) Purify your imagination by resisting the first hint of evil desire.

*At the first suggestion of lust, exterminate the thought before it hatches and begins to bring forth its diabolical offspring. (John MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience*, 207)*

2 Corinthians 10:5. ... *and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ ...*

Proverbs 6:25. *Do not desire her beauty in your heart, nor let her capture you with her eyelids.*

Proverbs 7:25. *Do not let your heart turn aside to her ways ...*

Complaint: *But it keeps coming back into my mind!*

MacArthur's observation:

*Satan will take all the garbage out of your past and try to drag it back through your mind so that you relive it. That is precisely why pornography is so spiritually destructive. Once you implant a lurid image in your thoughts, you cannot take it away. (MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience*, 189)*

When lurid images from old pornography sessions come into his mind, or when he sees an alluring billboard, movie advertisement, or woman, encourage the counselee to combat temptation in the following ways:

- Thank God for His gracious forgiveness of that past sin (Rom 5:1; 8:1).
- Thanks for one's spouse (Prov 5:18-19).
- Redirect the thoughts to Scripture memory verses (Ps 119:9, 11; Phil 4:8). These verses may not necessarily be verses reproving sexual sin. Other subjects will be fine: most young men need to think about sex *less*, not more.

7) Persevere if there has been failure.

2 Peter 1:5-6. *Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance ...*

Jerry Bridges:

Our old desires and our sinful habits are not easily dislodged. To break them requires persistence ... (The Pursuit of Holiness, 97)

MacArthur:

Be instantly repentant over your lapses And when you confess your sin, name it. Let your ear hear the specific sin you are repenting for If you hold back from naming your sin, it may be that you secretly want to do that same sin again. (The Vanishing Conscience, 208)

Point:

Don't let one failure turn into a renewed lifestyle of pornographic lust.

8) Pursue marriage in a wise and self-controlled manner.

Generally speaking, perpetual frustration is not God's plan for sexual desire.

1 Corinthians 7:1-2. *Now concerning the things about which you wrote, it is good for a man not to touch a woman. But because of immoralities, each man is to have his own wife, and each woman is to have her own husband.*

9) Encourage young men who have struggled with pornography to pursue appropriate friendships with older Christian women and subsequently with women their own age.

Point:

This encourages young men to relate to women as friends, rather than merely as sex objects. Starting with spiritually mature women in a family setting takes away the threat or pressure of the relationship (Does she like me? Do I like her? Could we date?). This reflects Paul's instruction to Timothy to relate to *older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity* (1 Tim 5:2).

Question: Is looking at pornography grounds for divorce?

Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5:28 that looking at a woman with lust is tantamount to committing adultery in the heart was not intended to make looking at pornography grounds for divorce. Although both acts are reprehensible, when it comes to adultery, we rightly maintain a distinction between the sins of looking or thinking and the sin of acting.

Proved by illustration:

Two married men go to a topless bar. One looks at the dancers; one goes to a back room and commits sexual acts with one of the dancers. One man has committed adultery, and his wife has biblical grounds for divorce. The other husband has sinned in a tragic and destructive way, but he has not committed adultery.

A word on modesty:

Al Mohler:

Pornography: men are tempted to look at it; women are tempted to commit it.
(paraphrased from Harris, *Not Even a Hint*, 87)

Joshua Harris:

When you dress and behave in a way that is designed primarily to arouse sexual desire in men, you're committing pornography with your life. (*Not Even a Hint*, 87)

Recommended resource: *Damsels in Distress*, Martha Peace

Summary:

- 1) Counteract temptation by being constantly thankful for your spouse, intentionally fostering an attitude of joyful sexual satisfaction.
- 2) Consider the consequences of pornography.
- 3) Pursue divine accountability.
- 4) Pursue human accountability.
- 5) Take radical steps to avoid temptation.
- 6) Purify your imagination.
- 7) Persevere when there has been failure.
- 8) Pursue marriage in a wise manner.
- 9) Develop appropriate relationships with members of the opposite sex.