

When A Man's Eye Wanders Breaking The Power Of Pornography

by Jeff Olson

The man behind the desk was restless. He couldn't wait for the day to end. Though he was good at his job, his heart was no longer in it. He used to find work challenging and rewarding. Now it just bored him. He lived with a nagging sense that there had to be more to life than the routine of going to work and making ends meet.

Something important was missing in his life—he just didn't know what it was. From his family to his faith to his recreational life, he had simply been going through the motions for longer than he could remember.

As he collapsed in front of his home computer, thoughts of escape and risk turned his attention in a familiar direction. Forbidden images had been lingering in the back of his mind all day, but now they were all he could think about. Once he logged on to the Internet, he found himself typing in familiar addresses that would eventually take

him to Web sites where he had been many times before.

As the images started to load onto his screen, he knew there was no turning back. He felt a rush of excitement as he surfed one Web page after another. The thrill of it all was working for him. Looking at sexually graphic images made his bored heart feel alive again. Self-absorbed in his own fantasy, relief came easily.

For a few moments, he enjoyed the passing high. But then shame tore through him like a violent storm. He felt dirty and weak. As he breathed a heavy sigh, he put his hands over his face. He couldn't believe he had done it again.

At some level, he knew his problem was out of control. He wanted to reach out for help, but he felt too ashamed. What would others think of him? How could he ever tell anyone

the truth? He was afraid of losing everything he cared about, and yet he didn't know how long he could go on living a double life.

Disgusted with himself, he vowed to stop. This was how he usually tried to resolve his inner turmoil. He begged God for forgiveness and promised that this time he meant it. He almost believed the worn-out line he was telling himself. But he knew deep down that it wasn't over. If something didn't change, it was only a matter of time before he would cave in to the temptation again.

Sadly, this man's story is not uncommon. Scores of men carry around a dark secret that is stealing their honor and poisoning their relationships.

The public's awareness of the problem seems to be growing. But the Christian community has a long way to go in acknowledging the

scope of this cancer within its own camp. The truth is that a multitude of Christian men, young and old, and from all walks of life, regularly look at sexually explicit images.

Not all men who have looked at porn are addicted to it, but many are. And anyone who takes a casual glance or accidentally runs across it is in danger of getting hooked.

Tragically, most men don't admit to having a problem until they get caught. Some foolishly believe they're in control of their habit. Others feel hopelessly out of control and live in a solitary confinement of their own choosing. But it doesn't have to stay that way. There's a way out of the swamp of sexual self-destruction.

If you are a man who struggles with looking at pornographic material, or if you know a man caught up

in this problem, the following pages are offered to show men that they are not alone. Together, we'll become more aware of the problem of pornography and the multiple aspects involved in a man's struggle with looking at sexually graphic images. And because of the resurrection of the One who sacrificed His life for us, we'll also discover that there is a way for a man to be restored to the original glory and life that God created him for all along (Rom. 6:4).

What Is Pornography?

Over the years, our secular culture has loosened its definition of porn. What used to be thought of as X-rated material 30 years ago is now sometimes considered R-rated or even PG-13. Though some may

adjust their definition to suit their own agenda, this booklet defines porn as any image or description of nudity or sexually graphic activity that is made and viewed for the purpose of stirring up inappropriate sexual arousal and behavior.

Of course, not all descriptions or images of nudity and sexual behavior (such as those found in educational material or medical textbooks) are pornographic. Even the Old Testament book *Song Of Solomon* contains graphic imagery of sexual interaction between a man and his wife. But unlike porn, the intention is to teach about God's design for human sexuality—not inflame sexual immorality.

There are several forms of pornography. This booklet will not address transsexualism, sadomasochism, homosexuality, bestiality,

voyeurism, and child pornography. The focus here will be on the two most common forms of pornography—"soft core" and "hard core."

Soft-core pornography features naked or scantily clothed women. It highlights breasts and genitalia but shows no sexual intercourse. Hardcore pornography includes all of the above, but also displays various types of sexual intercourse, forced and unforced, between two or more people.¹

Producers of X-rated images have a history of effectively exploiting the latest technology to deliver their product. As cable TV became more popular in the 1970s, pornographers began pumping sexually graphic images into television sets across America. As the use of VCRs began to grow in the 1980s, the porn industry promptly switched from

16mm film to the increasingly popular video-cassettes. “Amateurs” also began using camcorders to make and sell homemade sexually explicit videos. And since the popularity of cable and satellite television and the Internet in the 1990s and 2000s, pornography has been aggressively peddled on TV and computer screens worldwide.

Selling porn, however, may not have become the thriving industry it is today without a decision made by the US Supreme Court in 1973. In that year, the Supreme Court ruled in *Miller vs. California* that pornography was protected by the First Amendment. While lawmakers and the public continued to debate whether it should enjoy Constitutional protection, it was only a matter of time before the X-rated industry grew to the massive size it is today.

The Size Of The Porn Industry

The Money From Porn. Selling pornography is big business. In the last 40 years, the porn industry in the US has exploded from a small-scale operation of \$5-10 million annually into a giant industry with a yearly revenue of \$13.3 billion in 2006—larger than all the combined revenues from professional football, basketball, and baseball franchises for that same year.² Worldwide, the numbers are even more shocking. The sex industry sales for 2006 are reported to be \$97 billion.³ And that doesn't take into account all the money that is made under the table.

The Availability Of Porn. Adult bookstores and other outlets for hard-core porn outnumber McDonald's restaurants in America nearly 3 to 1.⁴ X-rated

material can be obtained just about anywhere. It's sold at gas stations, corner grocery stores, and in hotels across America. And the Internet has taken it to a completely different level. Gone are the days when men have to leave their homes or their jobs to find sexually explicit images. With a click of the mouse, those with access to the Internet have the "luxury" of selecting from over 4.2 million pornographic Web sites.⁵

In the last few years, cell phones and video iPods are now able to download and display adult videos. Yearly revenues from mobile-phone porn worldwide is growing rapidly and is soon expected to be in the billions.⁶

The Consumption Of Porn. It's estimated that over 40 million adults in the US regularly visit porn sites on the Internet.⁷ In 2005, 55 percent of movie rentals in hotels were

pornographic.⁸ In 2002, one in four American adults who were surveyed admitted to seeing an X-rated movie in the previous year.⁹

Studies show that the use of pornography in the Christian community is just as rampant. Some estimate that roughly 70 percent of Christians struggle with pornography.¹⁰ According to a study published by *Leadership Journal* in March 2005, 57 percent of pastors said that an addiction to porn is the most sexually damaging issue in their congregation.¹¹ In another survey, 51 percent of pastors said that cyberporn is a personal temptation, and 37 percent admitted that it is a current struggle.¹²

With sexually graphic material more widely available and regularly viewed than ever before, it's important that we be aware of the potential dangers.

The Dangers Of Pornography

Some sarcastically jest that the worst harm porn can cause is a paper cut. They couldn't be more wrong. Pornography isn't a harmless vice. The truth is that society, women, marital relationships, and individual users all suffer devastating consequences.

Detrimental To Society. Since the inception of *Playboy* magazine in 1953, mainstream society has slowly become more tolerant of X-rated images, but not without severe consequences. Researchers have noted that a regular exposure to pornography can lead to rape and child molestation. In one study, 86 percent of convicted rapists confessed to regular use of pornography, with 57 percent acknowledging that they tried to reenact a

pornographic scene during the rape.¹³ The same study revealed that 87 percent of molesters of girls and 77 percent of molesters of boys regularly used hard-core porn.¹⁴ Another study found that 51 percent of male students exposed to violent pornography indicated a likelihood of raping a woman if they could get away with it.¹⁵

In a more general sense, pornography has a detrimental effect on public attitudes about sex. It cheapens sex by taking it outside the marital context. It also promotes a casual and unrealistic view of sex that completely ignores the threat of unwanted pregnancies or contracting a sexually transmitted disease. Watching porn exposes you to the lie that sex is impersonal and that you can have it with anyone, at any time, and without any consequence.

Degrading To Women. Women are regularly exploited in the world of pornography. Some of the saddest stories one will ever read are those of women who participated in the making of X-rated films. In many cases, women are coerced into humiliating, degrading, and abusive activities to sexually please the male characters. In fact, most females who enter the video-porn industry (at least those who enter of their own free will), do one shoot and quit because it is such a demeaning experience.

Pornography's vicious propaganda is responsible for spreading the lie that women are available and willing at a moment's notice to fulfill a man's sexual demands. In most cases, it portrays women as mindless objects who exist only to service a man's every sexual whim. Ultimately, it encourages females of

all ages to give away one of their most precious and intimate gifts and allow others to exploit it for monetary or sexual gain.

Damaging To Marriages. It's only a matter of time before a husband transmits the infection of porn into his marriage. Contrary to what some would have us believe, sexually explicit material does not enhance the sexual relationship of a husband and wife. It ruins it. And gaining back the intimacy and trust that is lost is a long and bumpy process.

Pornography creates unrealistic demands about the frequency of sex, specific sexual acts, and the nature of a woman's sexual response, just to name a few. Real life seldom lives up to what is represented in the fake world of X-rated pictures. When a husband demands that reality imitates his fantasy, sex

becomes empty for him and degrading to his wife. In the end, both feel resentful and less interested in having sex with each other.

Further, looking at sexually graphic images does not make a husband want his wife more. It makes him want her less. One researcher found that when men were shown pictures of *Playboy* models, they later described themselves as having less marital love than other men who were shown non-pornographic images.¹⁶

Many men who visually devour sexual images unfairly compare their wives to what they have seen. And no wife can live up to the youthful, flawlessly shaped, enhanced image of a centerfold. One wife said, "Although I was careful with my clothes and figure, I found that my husband was increasingly critical of the way I looked.

... I wasn't attractive enough to compete with eternally young, surgically altered models. ... In the end, he lost all interest in me as a sexual partner. This had a devastating impact on my view of my worth as a woman. It created such despair in me that I began to let my appearance go."¹⁷

In extreme cases, looking at porn can lead to sexual abuse in the marital relationship. It is sexually abusive for a husband to coerce his wife into reenacting something he has seen in pornography. One husband printed out his favorite X-rated pictures from the Internet and kept them in a notebook. Several times a week he would thumb through the notebook like a catalog, pick out a scene, and then force his wife to act it out.

Destructive To Users.

Pornography corrupts the minds of its viewers. Men

who repeatedly look at sexually graphic images are so affected by what they see that they can only view females as sexual objects. Instead of learning how to enjoy and enhance the mind and the heart of a woman, they end up focusing on her body and fantasizing about how to exploit her physical beauty.

Slowly but surely, viewing nude images conditions men to undress women in their thoughts and imagine what it would be like to have a sexual encounter with them. In fact, most men who stop looking at porn are shocked to learn just how much looking at it had affected their view of females as sexual objects.

Looking at porn also affects how men view themselves. It leaves a man feeling shallow, dirty, weak, and utterly disqualified from serving in God's

kingdom. And the more he looks, the more his heart loses touch with the life he was designed to live.

Viewing sexually graphic images is another vice that keeps a man from seeing and becoming who God created him to be. And as porn continues to blind his heart and take him further away from where true life is found, it's only a matter of time before looking at X-rated images will turn into an enslaving addiction where there is a "continual lust for more" (Eph. 4:18-19).

The extent of bondage can range from a level-one addiction (serious) to a level-three addiction (severe). In a level-one addiction, a man no longer has a mere casual interest in X-rated material—he's obsessed with watching it. He's gone from occasionally running across it to deliberately going out of his way to view it.

In a level-two addiction,

he attempts to connect the fantasy world of porn to the real world. It's not uncommon for a man to try to recreate in real life what he's been viewing. He may try to act out with his wife what he has seen, with or without her knowledge or consent. As his struggle escalates, he may turn to phone or cybersex, try to pick up women for one-night stands, or even solicit a prostitute.

Many men remain in a level-one or -two addiction for years and never progress any further. If men progress to a level-three addiction, and there are many who do, they get involved in more severe forms of porn, including child pornography and sado-masochism. And because pornography is a disinhibitor that dulls the conscience as to what is wrong and harmful, it can also move to serious criminal behavior such as

rape and child sexual abuse.

Men enslaved in an addiction to pornography will identify with one or more of the following statements:

- I regularly seek out pornography.
- I often spend parts of the day looking forward to viewing pornography.
- I shift back and forth between feeling that my problem is out of control or under control.
- I often compare my wife or girlfriend to the women in pornography.
- I often choose to look at pornography rather than be sexually intimate with my wife.
- I refuse to tell others about my secret problem.
- I tell lies to cover my struggle.
- Looking at pornography has led to serious problems in my life—loss of a job or marriage,

financial debt, a sexually transmitted disease, getting arrested, or an unwanted pregnancy.

An addiction to porn doesn't develop overnight. It slowly sneaks up on a man, and there are multiple factors involved.

What Makes A Man Vulnerable To Porn?

Pornography is designed to capture a man's attention. It features young, physically attractive women, and it capitalizes on a natural curiosity about nakedness and sex. Though its lustful appeal is as ancient as the Bible—"The lips of a seductive woman are oh so sweet, her soft words are oh so smooth" (Prov. 5:3)¹⁸—there are a web of factors involved that explain how men come to struggle so much with this vice.

Men Are Aroused Visually. God has wired men to be sexually aroused by sight. In a matter of seconds, a man can shift from feeling no sexual arousal to full sexual arousal simply from what he sees. Pornographers prey on this physiological reality by parading unclothed women with pretty faces and firm bodies to catch a man's eye.

Early Exposure To Porn. Vulnerability to X-rated material rests as much in a man's history of being exposed to porn as it does in his visual makeup. Although past experiences never excuse current behavior, our histories do influence and shape how and where we struggle.

Many men who get caught up in viewing pornography as adults were often introduced to it as young boys or teens. Some were first exposed

to it in their homes. They found it stashed in a family member's room or hidden in the garage. Others were introduced to porn by kids at school or neighborhood friends. Today, a whole new generation is being exposed to it over the Internet.

For most young boys, seeing porn is exciting. Looking at it makes them feel alive. Even stealing glances of it in secret adds to their sense of thrill. And it ignites a natural curiosity and craving to see more of the female body. One man recalled what it was like when he first discovered a *Playboy* magazine in his father's desk drawer. He had never seen a naked woman, and it excited him. He looked at the magazine dozens of times, until one day it was gone. He never forgot what he saw or how it made him feel, and it stirred within him a desire for more. And knowing that

his Christian father secretly looked at porn gave him permission to further pursue his burning desires.

Repeated Exposure To Porn. Many men were not only introduced to sexually explicit material at a young age, but they were exposed to regular doses of it. For some, it was out in the open in their own homes or at least not well-hidden. They regularly encountered it in their friends' homes as well. And many of the neighborhood boys had their own private stash, which they shared with each other like baseball cards.

Cable, satellite TV, and the Internet have only heightened the level of exposure, bringing into homes a steady stream of movies and Web sites containing sexually explicit scenes. X-rated images are understandably eye-catching and feed into a young male's natural desire

to explore the mysteries of a woman's physical beauty. But few, if any, are warned of the dangers or the fierce and enslaving force they will encounter.

Childhood Sexual Abuse. In some cases, those who regularly view porn have a history of being sexually exploited in their childhood or teenage years. (To read more about the damaging effects of sexual abuse, see RBC's booklet *When Trust Is Lost* CB922.)

Sexual abuse, especially when the abuser is a man, can cause a young male victim to question his own sense of honor and masculinity. The mixed feelings swirling around the abuse leave him confused and ashamed. The very event or series of events that he despised also brought some degree of emotional or physical pleasure.¹⁸ Young victims don't know how to make

sense out of such mixed feelings. Many feel dirty and responsible for the abuse. Boys abused by older males may even begin to doubt their own heterosexuality. As a result, some victims may turn to pornography as a way of escaping their shame by proving they can be sexually aroused by a woman.

Other males who were sexually abused by an older female use the fantasy world of X-rated images to try to alter sexually traumatic events in their past. This is why some men comb the Internet looking for a specific kind of woman or scene that reminds them of the abuse. This then becomes the basis of a sexual fantasy in which they can relive and rewrite what occurred.

One man, for example, who was sexually seduced and then mocked by an older female cousin,

searched porn for women who reminded him of his abuser. Whenever he found a suitable imitation, he would drift off into a fantasy where he would rewrite the story of what happened to him. Instead of being humiliated and rejected, he imagined that his abuser affirmed and accepted him.

Despite their vulnerabilities, many good men who are engulfed in the world of X-rated images hate what they're doing and wish to stay away from porn. Although the toll it takes on them can be enormous, a part of them desires to keep looking at sexually charged material.

Why Men Continue To Look

Physical Reasons.

Viewing pornography inevitably leads to fantasy and self-stimulation. And

a steady diet of X-rated images and self-release eventually affects a man's body chemistry. The more habitual it becomes, the more his body begins to look forward to the same sexual stimulus and high. This physical dependency does not remove a man's responsibility from looking at sexually graphic images, but it does start to explain why so many men remain tangled in the web of porn.

When an addicted man is cut off from pornography, he experiences physical withdrawal symptoms. This sets off a strong urge to regain a sense of balance. Many sexual addicts report that the withdrawals from a sexual addiction are more prolonged and intense than the withdrawals from drugs or alcohol.¹⁹

There is, of course, much more going on than just a physical attachment. As strong as the attachment

can be, there are even deeper reasons that explain why a man continues to look at porn.

Personal Payoffs. Men don't just become addicted to X-rated material. They become addicted to what looking at it does for them that they can't seem to live without. And the payoff is much more than sexual gratification. Viewing porn seems to satisfy something very important in the core of a man's heart. As we take the time to look inside the hearts of men hooked on porn, we'll discover that there are at least three personal payoffs that keep them coming back for more.

1. Easy Escape. A man sometimes runs to the world of X-rated images simply to check out from the pressures of his life. Whether coming from his job, his marriage, his family, or his church, a man can feel stressed and worn out

by the demands that have been placed on him.

And with very little effort, he can indulge in sexual fantasy and easily find the break he often feels he deserves.

Along with trying to escape, men are also looking to fill what's missing inside.

2. False Affirmation. All men have a God-given desire to be strong. We deeply long to know we have what it takes to be assertive and to deal with the challenges of life. Tragically, the world is full of men who are unsure of themselves. Instead of feeling confident, most men have people and events in their lives that have left them feeling weak and inadequate in many key areas.

While most men try to hide their doubts and insecurities behind a fake yet well-rehearsed front,

their hearts continue to long for affirmation—like lungs craving oxygen. And looking at X-rated images can seem to give a man what he craves.

The fantasy world of porn is a place where an insecure man can go to feel better about himself. Imagining that the attractive woman he's looking at responds to him willingly and is pleased by him provides a powerful boost to his self-confidence. Even though it's short-lived and artificial, fantasizing about the sexual conquest of the beauty in the image helps him gain a false sense of strength and self-assurance.

3. *False Adventure.*

One of the things that often shows up missing in the life of a man absorbed in the world of porn is adventure. We all have a God-given longing to take some risks and at times to step outside

of our comfort zones. God meant for us to dare great things and to put ourselves on the line for a larger cause. We are, of course, not meant to live careless, foolish lives. There's a time to weigh the risks and count the cost. But there are also times to follow God into the risk of the unknown at the cost of everything else.

While it's the best thing that can ever happen to us, being in a friendship with God and following His call to advance His kingdom is at times anything but safe. In fact, following the living God into unfamiliar territory is the biggest risk and adventure we will ever take.

The problem is that a deep level of adventure is absent in the lives of many men. Instead of walking with God into risk, which requires stepping out in faith, many men tend to live predictable lives and play

it safe when it counts the most. Sadly, too many men who claim Jesus as their Savior live more like the third servant in the parable of the talents (Mt. 25:14-30). Unlike the first two faithful servants who took a risk and went out and increased the money their master had entrusted to them, the third servant held back and played it safe. He took the money his master left him to manage and hid it in the ground.

Over and over again, the stories of the Bible show that adventure is very much a part of following God. But when men hold back and refuse to step out with God into the unfamiliar territory of a relationship or a new direction in life where the outcome is uncertain, they end up feeling empty and bored at a core level. In their boredom, many men use porn to try to fill what's missing.

Viewing X-rated pictures can instantly put feelings of excitement and drama back into a man's life. Even the risk of getting caught provides a thrill that lifts a man out of his doldrums. And while many know that looking at porn is wrong and that the thrill is short-lived, they cling to it because it's the only answer they can come up with for their boredom.

Consider the biblical story of David and Bathsheba. The story indicates that one of the main reasons David was in a position to catch a glimpse of a bathing Bathsheba was that he was not living as he was meant to. At the time of year "when kings go off to war" and lead their troops into battle, David, the warrior-king, stayed behind (2 Sam. 11:1-2). The story implies that his decision left him bored—and it got the best of him.

Late one evening, restless and unable to sleep, the king got up from his bed and started walking around on the palace rooftop. He didn't go out that night because he was lonely and missing his men. He was out there pacing back and forth like a caged lion because he was bored and missed commanding his army. Then he caught sight of a beautiful woman taking a bath. The thrill over seeing Bathsheba for the first time apparently swept him away. The more he looked, the more alive he felt. And even though she belonged to another man, he used his power as king to take her for himself.

Spiritual Reasons.

Recognizing what men get out of pornography is vital. It opens the door for men to see how they use porn to deal with stress and to fill what is painfully missing in their lives. It also helps

them to begin to see the spiritual reasons they remain ensnared.

1. Idolatry. Many men learn to rely on porn to resolve their insecurities, emptiness, and stress. That is why they come to think of it as one of their greatest needs. This is nothing less than idolatry.

As pornography grows to be an idol in a man's life, he starts to believe that it's something he can't live without. He no longer has a "take it or leave it" attitude toward it. In many cases he thinks that if he doesn't rent that DVD or check out that new Web site, he'll miss out on something he desperately needs.

2. Unbelief. Many Christian men know that filling their minds with sexual images is wrong and reduces their capacity to relate to others in a healthy way. But in the deep recesses of their heart,

they don't care. In most cases, it's not that a man *can't* let go of pornography, he *won't* let go because he believes nothing else will fill his emptiness.

Beneath a man's idolatry is often an unspoken struggle to believe that God has something better for him than what he is able to find in the world of porn. Men tend to think that the self-confidence and adventure they get out of the fantasy world of perfect bodies and sexual seduction is as good as it gets.

Isaiah 22 gives us an example of this kind of spiritual unbelief in the hearts of God's people. The prophet Isaiah foresaw Jerusalem being attacked by a foreign army. Instead of turning to God for help and provision, the people chose to handle the situation themselves. When their efforts failed, hopelessness

set in. Resigning themselves to defeat, they said, "Let us eat and drink, . . . for tomorrow we die!" (v.13). In other words, "We might as well live it up today, because today is all we have."

When a man doesn't believe that God offers a better alternative, he will take matters into his own hands and begin to settle for whatever he can get. In many cases, one of the things that adds to a man's unbelief is the incomplete understanding of Christianity that reduces following God to little more than living a clean life and keeping a list of external rules. Many men who have fallen into sexual sin have tried to conform outwardly to the legalistic standards of their religious community. But it didn't make much of a difference. If anything, it made their boredom worse. One man said that if rule-keeping is the best that

Christianity has to offer, he'd prefer to stay with porn.

Mere rule-keeping doesn't do much for one's heart (2 Cor. 3:6). By itself, it's boring and often unable to compete with the exciting world of sexually charged images. But part of the good news of Christianity is that following Jesus is a lot more than simply following a list of do's and don'ts. Jesus didn't sacrifice His life just so we could straighten out our behavior. He rescued us from sin and death to restore us to Himself and to live more of the life and purpose we were created for. For God sent Jesus into the world "that we might live through Him" (1 Jn. 4:9).

3. *The Evil One.*

Idolatry and unbelief are not all that stand between a man caught up in porn and the fulfilling life that is available in Christ. There's also a real enemy who will

do anything he can to keep us from a relationship with God that he himself turned his back on so long ago.

It's critical to understand that a man's struggle with porn is consistent with Jesus' warning that there is a "thief" who is out to "steal and kill and destroy" the "life" we can have through Him (Jn. 10:10). This in no way implies that a man is off the hook for giving in to the temptation to look at sexually explicit images. But it does help us understand the evil one's part in inflaming a man's battle.

The Bible refers to Satan as the "god" of this present age (2 Cor. 4:4). He is the driving force behind a dark industry that dangles X-rated images in front of men to lure them away from who they can become and the higher road they are meant to walk. He is even the one

who orchestrates some of the moments of sexual enticement.

A man is, of course, always completely responsible for succumbing to sexual temptation. But the idea to indulge oneself doesn't always come from the beast within. There are times when a man can be going about his day and suddenly feel a strong urge to view porn. Whether it's triggered by a pop-up ad on the computer, a TV commercial, or a "random" thought that seems to come out of the blue, the temptation isn't something that was sought. It's as if it stalked him. Sometimes the temptation originates from the evil one who is prowling around like a hungry lion "looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

Ultimately, Satan is the author of the sinister lie that God doesn't offer anything better than the

the immediate pleasures of sin. The evil one has been peddling different versions of this lie ever since that fateful day in Eden when he lied to Eve about her Creator (Gen. 3:1-4). He can be especially convincing in a moment of sexual temptation, whether he arranged for the temptation or not. And the more often that men buy into his lies, the more they will become ensnared.

The Limits Of Self-Restraint

Many men try—and fail—to break free from the grip of porn through sheer grit and willpower. In most cases, the harder a man tries the white-knuckle approach, the harder it is to resist. To simply encourage a man who is addicted to porn to just stop looking at it is like saying, "Do not handle! Do

not taste! Do not touch!” (Col. 2:21). Paul said that this approach may “indeed have an appearance of wisdom” but it lacks “any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (v.23).

Men who have become addicted to porn should avoid vulnerable situations. But self-restraint alone doesn't tackle the core issues involved in a man's struggle. While viewing porn is a serious problem, we must realize that it is also a glaring symptom of a man who is not living as God designed him to live. It's important to see that sin is not merely breaking rules. Sin is falling “short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). It is falling short of the dignity God placed in us that we were always meant to reflect. That is why it's not enough for men to simply stop looking at sexually graphic pictures. Of course that is one goal, but

the deeper answer is to help men recover more of the glory and life God always intended for them to live out (2 Cor. 3:18).

The story of Christianity is a story that gives us back a life that was lost. And in ways men who are caught up in porn have yet to discover, they can have more of that life right now.

When Jesus emerged from the tomb, He launched an incredible process of restoration that will have its ultimate fulfillment when He returns (Rev. 21:5). Until then, each one of us has free access to the power of His resurrection the instant we accept Him as the only One who can rescue us from the penalty and power of sin.

The remaining pages are offered as a starting point on how to find more of the new life that is available only through Jesus.

How Can You Move Toward Freedom And Life?

I love to watch the TV show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* just to see the ending when the crowd yells, “Bus driver—move that bus!” The show tells the story of a family who has fallen on hard times and whose house is in serious need of repair. It then follows a community of people who come to the family’s rescue to rebuild their home beyond their wildest dreams. The speechless look of joy on their faces chokes me up every time. It’s a powerful image of a deep restoration we all long for (Rom. 8).

If your heart and life are in disrepair because of an obsession with porn, one of the first steps toward being restored is to confess to God and to others that you have a problem.

By Admitting Your Secret. A man caught up in porn rarely breaks free on his own. You must begin talking about your secret problem with someone who is experienced in dealing with sexual addictions. And it helps to come clean with a few trustworthy men. There will be times when you will miss indulging in pornography so badly that the involvement of others in your life will be what keeps you centered and aware of what is really going on. Lasting transformation always involves confessing sin and struggling through life with the help of others (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:16).

If your secret is exposed before you confess, you need to end the lies and own up to it. You need to admit how far it has gone and stop minimizing it. And you need to stop blaming your problem on others. Satan knows that if a man won’t

take full responsibility for his own choices, he will remain a prisoner to the lie that his problem is everyone else's fault. Like Adam, who blamed his wife and his God when he was caught in the first sin (Gen. 3:11-12), a man who points the finger of blame at everyone but himself will end up feeling trapped like a helpless victim.

Admitting to having an out-of-control sexual struggle may be one of the hardest confessions you will ever make. Satan wants you to hide your struggle so he can get you alone and deceive you with lies such as "It's not that bad" or "You've gone too far this time" or "You really do deserve a break." Satan will be relentless in his attack. He will try to wear you down because he knows the power available to a child of God to resist him, and that forgiveness is only a prayer

away (Jas. 4:7; 1 Jn. 1:9).

Opening up to others can be risky. You need to be careful about those you confide in. You need to talk with men who are aware of their own brokenness and capacity to lust—men who won't define you by your sin or pelt you with self-righteous stones of condemnation. You need a fellowship of men in your corner who will keep your struggle confidential and who will pray with you, challenge you, and believe in you.

Talking with a few good men requires an investment of time and heart where conversations go beyond work, sports, and other hobbies. At times, the discussions will be painfully uncomfortable. But with others involved, you will have a "band of brothers" from whom you can gain strength and who will dream with you about

the man you could become for others and for Christ (1 Th. 2:11-12).

By Wrestling With Your Story. Once you come to the point of admitting your sexual addiction, you then need to wrestle with and understand the story of how you have gotten to this place. Patterns of wrong behavior often point to a long history of a hurting and empty heart searching for life in all the wrong places (Jn. 4:13-18).

Although this is no time for excuses, there are often painful relationships and events in your story that you need to explore with the help of others and God. Most men who are ensnared in the web of porn have learned to deny how much they've been hurt in life. Even if they do admit to taking some hits, they try to tell themselves that it was not a big deal. The

truth is that getting hurt is part of living in a fallen world. And some of the wounds we suffer are often a much bigger deal than we let ourselves believe.

As you honestly reflect on the key moments of your story, name the actual hurts of your life that left you feeling confused and insecure. Write down what happened and how it affected you. Many men need to write out how being exposed to porn at a young age affected them. Others need to face and put on paper the disappointment of a busy dad who left them feeling unaffirmed or the sting of a shaming parent who made them feel like a loser.

Thinking through and writing out the shaping events in your own personal story will be difficult, but it will provide you the chance to start challenging the truthfulness of what you've

believed about yourself. If, for example, you've been ignored or kicked in the teeth by others, it has probably left you feeling unsure about your own adequacy and strength. But with the help of your heavenly Father and the caring men in your life, you can explore the pain of your own story, confirm who you really are in Christ, and put words to your real strength and potential. Then you will be able to see your true worth as a man and begin to stop believing the untrue messages that held you down for so long.

Coming to see the truth will take time, but Jesus said that knowing the truth "will set you free" (Jn. 8:32). That's why the evil one wants no part of this. He fears that revisiting the painfully defining moments of your story will expose and free you from his lies. He also knows it offers

you the opportunity to rebuild your faith in God.

Men who regularly seek out pornography are in a serious crisis of faith. They may put on a good front and appear to be content in their Christian life, but their secret struggle betrays how empty they feel and what they truly believe about God. As you think through your story, however, it also creates an honest context to challenge and wrestle with your unbelief.

Like Jacob or the prophet Jeremiah, there are times for you to openly struggle with God (Judg. 6:1-22; Jer. 20:7-12). Leveling with God about what you really think and feel about the heartaches of life can prepare you to see God in a brand-new light. When you talk to your Father from your heart (and not just your head), you can start to hear His deeper voice of truth

that will restore your faith in Him.

Though you may wrestle back and forth with God and still have lingering doubts, you can grow to be more certain that God really does offer a whole lot more than what you've found in the X-rated world. As you catch more of a vision of the life God wants to restore in you, you will start to believe that there really is good reason to stop searching for answers in the false world of pornography.

By Walking Away From Your False Search. Part of the promise of Christianity is that you can be restored and live out your God-given strength and purpose. If you truly realized all you are and all you have in Christ, and the plans God has for you to help advance His kingdom, you would unload your porn and never go back to it. You would be like the

man who found a great treasure in a field, and then went out and sold everything he had to buy the field (Mt. 13:44).

Walking away from porn isn't easy. But if you surrender to God and allow yourself to find the life your Creator meant for you, you will see that there's a lot of godly incentive to walk away from it—not only because it's immoral and fake, but also because God has made you for a life that is so much better than what you've been settling for.

Jesus rose from the dead to bring us back to a life of “freedom” and “ever-increasing glory” where we are set free to live more as we were originally designed. This is why a Christian man does not lose heart but wants to renounce his “secret and shameful ways” (2 Cor. 3:17–4:2). As you leave your heart open to believe that there truly

is a life of noble strength, adventure, and purpose for you in God's kingdom, you'll want to do whatever it takes to stay away from porn.

The bottom line is this: God has something far superior to offer, but you won't find it if you continue to hold on to the idol of pornography. As the prophet Jonah realized while he was running from God, "Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs" (Jon. 2:8). At times, it can be tough to believe there is more to this life than what our idols offer, especially when you can't immediately see it like an image on a screen. And Satan is not about to let up with his lies. He's going to keep trying to convince you that the world of sexually graphic images is as good as it gets. But that's why faith is so important. Sometimes faith in the promise of

something better is all we have to get us through (2 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:39-40).

Although the ongoing hassles and heartaches of life in an imperfect world can make it hard to believe, there is so much more that God has and wants for us. There's a larger story we belong to. And if you confess your sin and walk away from porn, you can return to God, find your place in His story, and begin to really live.

By Living For God's Larger Story. Once you turn away from the false world of pornographic images, you won't find a God who is waiting to hammer you with shame and condemnation. As in the parable of the lost son, when you turn toward God you will find a caring Father who embraces you with love and showers you with forgiveness (Lk. 15:22-24). And He doesn't stop there.

Similar to the father of the prodigal, God will restore a repentant man to his original position of honor and significance by giving him the privilege of playing a vital role in His larger story of rescue and renewal.

God's larger story is of epic proportions. Good is in a constant war against evil; danger lurks at every turn; and sacrificial, glorious works wait to be done. And whether we are aware of it or not, we find ourselves living in the middle of it.

It's exciting to realize that there are bigger things happening all around us. Even more thrilling is that we get to join in the action. We are not meant to be passive spectators who merely read and know about the facts of God's story. We are called to be participants in the great drama that is unfolding (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

When you were tangled and lost in an X-rated world, you learned to settle for so little. But the further from porn you get, the more in touch you will be with the deeper things of life. Regardless of your job or your financial means or even your moral failures, you will find in God's story a renewed direction for your life (Jer. 29:11). You will begin to see yourself as a husband, or father, or friend, or neighbor in a new and exciting way.

God calls you to reengage in His story and to plug back into the redemption and restoration that are coursing through the drama. Even though past choices to indulge in porn may cause you to suffer some painful consequences, God still invites you to join in the mission and adventure of laying yourself on the line for a cause greater

than your own interests (2 Cor. 5:15).

Being given the honor of partnering with God in advancing His kingdom will pump a sense of life and purpose back into your heart. Just think of it! The King of kings summons you to be a warrior who fights to see others rescued, restored, and released for His kingdom.

With time and careful reflection, you will start to gain more insight into God's unique purpose for your life. As you pay close attention to those good things that make you feel alive or the parts of life that scare you or break your heart, you will begin to see more clearly where you are called to serve and to attempt great things for God. Whether it involves a love for the outdoors or the arts, an injustice or heartache that you or someone close to you has suffered, or even a

certain activity you vowed never to try again, these will begin to define where God will summon you to deploy your strength and compassion for others and for Him.

God's story is no ordinary story. And while playing your role in it can be risky and will take some getting used to, engaging in what matters for eternity turns life into the meaningful adventure it truly is. You will begin to see that the freedom and life you have been searching for in all the wrong places is found in an intimate friendship with Jesus Christ (Jn. 15:15).

Following Jesus will take you in directions where the stakes are high. But the real danger is to ignore His call. The truth is that it's only in and through Jesus that you can find forgiveness and the spiritual enablement to really live.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

An Affair Of The Mind

by Laurie Hall (Focus On The Family, 1998).

Samson And The Pirate Monks by Nate Larkin (W Publishing Group, 2007).

The Sacred Romance

by Brent Curtis and John Eldredge (Nelson, 1997).

Wild At Heart by John Eldredge (Nelson, 2001).

OTHER RBC BOOKLETS ON RELATED TOPICS

When We Just Can't Stop—overcoming addiction (CB961).

Designed For Desire—God's design for sexuality (CB932).

When Disappointment Deceives—how to handle the lies that mislead us (CB041).

One helpful Web site to visit is: www.xxxchurch.com

The complete text of all the RBC booklets is available at www.discoveryseries.org.

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