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Lust

Not Just a
Guys' Problem



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Lust

Not Just a Guys' Problem



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Introduction

Not Exactly Harmless . . .

By Kelli B. Trujillo



When you read the word *candy*, what immediately comes to mind?

Yummy. Fun. Addictive. Chocolate. Treat. Savor. Enjoy.

We all know candy isn't good for us—no real nutritional value, just extra calories that can pack on the pounds and sugar to rot the teeth. But most of us (save the hard-core nutritionists in the audience), don't view candy as poison—instead, we see it as relatively harmless. Sneaking some here and there feels naughty . . . and fun.



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Not Exactly Harmless . . .

It's this attitude toward candy (admittedly descriptive of my own relationship with the mini-Nestle crunch bars poorly-hidden away in my freezer) that provides the context for a slang term that's growing in popularity: "eye candy." Though certainly associated with beautiful women, more and more often on television, in magazines, and in conversation among female friends, "eye candy" is used by women to describe attractive men.

At its most basic (and according to most slang dictionaries), "eye candy" simply means someone (or something) who's attractive to look at. But the connotations here are obvious: like actual candy, this someone is being consumed, but by the eyes (and mind) rather than the mouth. There's sensory pleasure involved in just looking at the person—it's a bit naughty, a bit fun, and all in all is basically harmless . . . right?

We good Christian women know the correct answer to the question: *Of course not! Lust is a sin!* But let's put aside the guise of prudery for a moment and be blatantly honest: most of us can instantly think of a face (or body) of an attractive guy (other than our husband, if we have one) who stirs up a feeling of sexual desire in us. There are attractive guys in the world—it's a fact we'd be foolish to ignore.

Some of us may be caught in lust patterns that are quite obvious—like internet flirting, secret and obsessive thoughts about a male friend, or pornography addiction. Others may be lusting in less overt ways, like fixating on fictional heroes in Christian romance novels, regularly





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comparing our husbands' midsections to the chiseled washboard abs in *People* magazine, or privately carrying on an "innocent" crush on a celebrity or real-life acquaintance who—let's face it—is just plain hot.

The truth is there's no "innocent" version of lust. When we treat lust lightly, we're making a grave mistake. Jesus didn't treat it lightly at all. "If your right eye causes you to sin," he said, "gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell" (Matthew 5:29). And the sin he's using such extreme language to emphasize? "I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman [or a man] lustfully has already committed adultery with her [or him] in his [or her] heart" (5:28).

The articles and Reflect questions in this download are meant to aid you in your desire to take Jesus' challenge to heart as you honestly assess how to overcome the lure of lust. Agnieszka Tennant's article "Desire Happens" addresses the reality of physical attraction, inviting you to consider how you can best react to those natural desires when they strike. Linda LaMar Jewell's story of her battle with romantic fantasies will challenge your idea of what lust really is. Next, you'll explore two articles that detail the stark reality of the reach of pornography in the lives of growing numbers of Christian women. Finally, you'll be challenged to make strategic choices that can help you resist the lure of lust in entertainment and in your personal relationships.





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Not Exactly Harmless . . .

Jesus doesn't just call us to cut back on lust or merely avoid the "worst" forms of it; he calls us to a no-eye-candy diet. Lust is to have absolutely no part of our way of thinking and living. That's a tall order! But God doesn't leave you to combat lust on your own—he's with you, providing the power to overcome temptation and the avenues to escape it. As you read through this download, invite God to challenge you, convict you, and equip you. Prepare yourself so you can honor him the next time you're tempted by seemingly harmless "eye candy."

Grace,

Kelli B. Trujillo

Managing Editor, KYRIA downloads,
Christianity Today International



Leader's Guide



How to use “Lust—Not Just a Guys’ Problem” for a group study

“Lust—Not Just a Guys’ Problem” can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. **Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.**
2. **Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.**
3. **Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.**
4. **Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.**
5. **When working through the “Reflect” questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.**
6. **End the session in prayer.**

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Desire Happens



You see, you want. Then what?

By Agnieszka Tennant

There are times in the lives of most Christians when a vital force inserts itself into our consciousness and demands to take over. We see someone, and we crave.

Sometimes we want and can have—with God's and everyone's blessing. Desire does take place between husbands and wives, sweetly, as in the wistful songs by the husband-and-wife duo *Over the Rhine*. After recovering from a near-divorce, Karin Bergquist and Linford Detweiler put to music this aching confession: "You're my water / You're my wine / You're my whisky / From time to time. / You're the hunger / On my bones / All the nights / I sleep alone."





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But even married people who feel this marvelous hunger in their bones are occasionally broadsided by unwieldy yearning. Misguided cravings do not discriminate between the single and the married, the celibate and the promiscuous. They plop onto your lap unannounced. You see someone, and suddenly you want to do something—often, something that is not yours to do. Like it or not, think healthily about it or not, pray against it or not—desire happens.

What do you do when it pays its impromptu visits? Indulge in thought only? Deny it's there? Seek an exorcism? Curse yourself? Eat chocolate?

Nancy Trejos wrote in *The Washington Post* about another unreliable solution. She described how some Shiites, the majority who regained power in Iraq after the 2003 invasion, have resurrected an odd custom from before Saddam Hussein was in power. *Mutaa*, or "enjoyment marriage," is a contract that provides already married men with a religiously sanctioned opportunity to have sex with someone other than their wives. All a guy has to do is support the willing woman financially. The *mutaa* can last a few minutes or several years. If it sounds like prostitution, that's because it is, say women's rights activists. But Shiite Muslims argue that *mutaa* provides humanitarian aid to war widows and young divorcees. How noble is that?

Such moral evasions aren't just a Shiite thing. King Solomon pretended that his polygamy wasn't harming anyone. Then there are the happily married people who go to church, yet find themselves illicitly entangled.





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Desire Happens

Before her death of cancer in 2003, psychologist Shirley Glass, named by *The New York Times* "the godmother of infidelity research," described trends of what she called "the new infidelity." One, Glass noticed a rise in emotional affairs between colleagues since women started getting traditionally male-dominated jobs. Two, internet interactions were contributing to the rise of thrilling imbroglios. Three, even though they involved no sex, emotional affairs could be more threatening to marriages than one-night stands. (The myth of a soulmate not only creates marriages; it destroys them as well.) Four, Glass reported that most people who had affairs didn't go looking for them and reported having satisfying marriages.

My conversations with Christian women echo these findings. They are attracted to their husbands. But on certain occasions, they find themselves wanting other people, often men they meet through work. Intimacy developed in Christian settings—Bible study groups, churches, ministries, and seminaries—can catch us off guard. As men and women work together for a cause greater than themselves, their common vigor makes them attractive to each other. Church fathers and mothers discovered long ago that spiritual intimacy and sexual intimacy are kissing cousins. So it was only half-jokingly that my friend and I swore in our senior year of Bible college that we wouldn't pray with a man during the first three dates. Why get so cozy?

Desire happens. Even to the most pure-minded among us. And it is not—in and of itself—sinful. As Augustine taught, desires must not so much be denied as rightly ordered. There's a space—be it small—between yearning and sin, between desire and giving in. In this moment, we get to choose. We can choose to follow at our urges' behest. We can choose the way of denial.





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We can choose to drown in shame. We can call a friend. We can pick up a good book, the Good Book perhaps. We can flee temptation by whatever means work best for us.

I try to subvert the devil by giving thanks. Desire triggers a prayer in me, something like: *Thank you, God, for giving me eyes to see and for sight. For giving me dreams to dream and for dreaming. For the beauty that suffuses the world.*

It's not a formula, and it's not a given. It may not work for everyone. But for me, it's a way out. I refuse to wallow in guilt over getting caught in sudden delight, something that God—as I readily point out to him—wired inside me. So I thank him instead. Once an honest conversation takes place between me and God, the misguided desire loses its intensity. "There, there," I say to it. "You've made your point. I am alive in a beguiling world."

And a familiar hunger—for the man I wed seven years ago—returns to my bones.

Agnieszka Tennant, former editor for CHRISTIANITY TODAY magazine, is working on her doctorate in how religiously-rooted norms influence world politics. This article was first published in the April 2007 issue of CHRISTIANITY TODAY.





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Desire Happens

Reflect

- *It would certainly be a lot easier to avoid lust if God suddenly pushed a magic button, rendering all the attractive guys in the world ugly and obliterating all feelings of sexual attraction between non-married people. Why do you think God doesn't work this way? Why does he allow us to experience—and struggle against—sexual desire for those we aren't married to?*
- *Do you agree with Agnieszka Tennant that sexual or physical desire for a person you aren't married to isn't, in and of itself, sinful? Why or why not?*
- *Read **James 1:13–15**. What's a modern-day example of how the ideas in this verse play out? Describe a scenario in your own words.*
- *Agnieszka writes that "There's a space—be it small—between yearning and sin, between desire and giving in. In this moment, we get to choose." She then enumerates several possible responses to yearning and desire. What are some helpful ways you've found to respond to feelings of desire for a man who isn't your husband?*



Affairs of the Mind



Why romantic brain candy
isn't all that sweet

By Linda LaMar Jewell

The tall, handsome man looks deeply into my eyes. My skin tingles as he pulls me toward him and gently lifts my chin. He leans down to kiss me . . .

"Whoa, *stop!*" I tell myself, "This is a fantasy."

After gaining so much ground in the battle to stop destructive romantic fantasies, I'm surprised how easily I can allow my thoughts to drift from reality.

My mind is in turmoil with conflicting thoughts: Go on!

What happens next?

Real life happens next.



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Birthplace of a fantasy

Sexual fantasies can be addictive and lead to dissatisfaction. I give my "dream man" all positives and no negatives—then compare my husband unfavorably with an unrealistic portrait of another man. When I hold my husband to unrealistic expectations, I can easily become disappointed and discontented with the way he expresses love.

Christian counselor, sex therapist, and author of *For Women Only: God's Design for Female Sexuality and Intimacy*, Dr. Shay Roop says, "Many times women believe their expectations are far beyond their husbands' abilities and never explore those expectations with their spouse. Better communication regarding romantic or sexual needs can reduce frustration and go a long way to increasing real, not fantasized, intimacy."

I began indulging in romantic fantasies during my teen years. Throughout high school, fodder for fantasies ranged from the local star basketball player to Elvis. As a young woman and then a young wife, I continued to fantasize about local heroes and movie stars.

I didn't intentionally set out to fantasize about someone other than my husband or to dishonor him. But when we'd hit tough stretches in our marriage—when I felt my husband didn't meet my emotional needs, when I felt he didn't give me affectionate hugs, attention when I needed it, or acceptance instead of criticism—I found it easier and more comforting to escape into a world I could control. One where my fantasy man did what I wanted, how and when I wanted.





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I used to rationalize my fantasies by telling myself I wasn't hurting anyone, no one knew, and it wasn't as if I were having a physical affair.

But the more I fantasized, the more critical I grew of my flesh and blood husband—after all, he wasn't perfect like my fantasy men. Soon, we shared less time together; to escape each other he watched more TV in the basement and I read more novels in the living room. We laughed together less and drifted apart emotionally and physically.

Eight years into our marriage, I became a Christian.

I began to study the Bible and apply to my life and relationships what I was learning. One day after reading my Bible, I felt convicted about my thought-life and wondered, *Do fantasies impact my marriage?* I took an honest, painful look at how my inward thoughts affected my outward behavior toward my husband. As I created fantasies to satisfy my romantic needs, I proportionally tuned out relating with my husband.

That realization hit me hard: I was as much to blame for our declining emotional intimacy as he was! With this new perspective on my destructive attitudes and behaviors, I became determined not to allow fantasies to disrupt or ruin my marriage—no matter what. And in the process, I discovered a lot about the truth behind fantasies.





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Tearing off the mask

Like the Phantom of the Opera hiding his grotesqueness behind a mask, something ugly and vile hides behind the mask of fantasy: it's the Evil One trying to entice me from God's will for my life and marriage.

With that realization, whenever I began to fantasize, I did two things: I'd force myself to acknowledge that my fantasy guy had faults and imperfections (he had bad breath, left up the toilet seat, threw his dirty underwear on the floor). If that didn't work, I'd visualize snatching the mask off the fantasy face—and finding an ugly black snake with a darting tongue and lethal bite. Who wants to kiss a snake?

As a child, I learned the old jump-rope singsong: "Cindereller, dressed in yellor, went upstairs to kiss her feller, made a mistake and kissed a snake. How many times did she kiss that snake?"

As an adult, I learned that every fantasy adds one more time that I kiss that snake.

Reflecting on foolishness and wisdom, King Solomon wrote, "Whoever digs a pit may fall into it; whoever breaks through a wall may be bitten by a snake" (Ecclesiastes 10:8). Fantasies become a pit. And when I break through God's wall of protection, I'm inviting that snake to bite me.

Controlling the images

I can train my mind away from fantasizing. How? The best way is through prayer—but not for the man I'm fantasizing about (who's usually a real person). When I first started to





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tame this indulgence, I realized that praying for the man I was fantasizing about made me think more about him. Rather, I've learned to pray for his wife and children. If he's not married, I pray for strong, healthy relationships with the wife and children God may have in store for him.

Next, I pray for God to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5). I ask him to show me the destructive nature of romantic brain candy and to give me something worthwhile to think about.

In 1 Corinthians 10:13 the apostle Paul promises that "no temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." I ask God to show me the way out.

Then I pray for my spouse. I focus on thanking God for my mate's good traits. If I can't think of anything, I ask God to show me something good. I pray that I'll be the kind of spouse my mate needs and wants; the kind of wife Proverbs 31:11 describes: "The heart of her husband safely trusts her . . ." (NKJV).

Finally, I pray for mind protection when I see, hear about, or meet a man I might be attracted to. My former pastor is intelligent and has a great sense of humor—things I find appealing. When I first began attending church, I asked God to protect me from fantasizing about my pastor. God's been faithful to my request.





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Getting straight

I admitted to God that what I'd been doing wasn't pleasing to him. I journal, so I wrote a letter to Jesus, asking him to forgive me for my fantasies, to help me understand why I let them happen, and to give me the strength to resist.

Why is God interested in my thought life? In Matthew 5:27–28, Jesus equates our thought life with adultery: "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a [person] lustfully has already committed adultery . . . in his [or her] heart."

The apostle James writes, "After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death" (James 1:15). I turn away from God when I indulge in my illusions. Like many poor choices, the short-term gain isn't worth the long-term price.

Ashamed of my fantasies, I was reluctant to admit them to my husband and ask for forgiveness. But I felt God prompting me to confess. While I prayed for the right time and words, I felt cowardly to face him. Finally, I mustered up the courage and told him that for years I'd indulged in sexual fantasies. I asked for his forgiveness because I felt I'd betrayed him emotionally. He seemed surprised, but said he forgave me.

Afterwards, I felt clean and lighthearted—doubly forgiven by Jesus and my husband. I also noticed that after my confession, God filled me with great respect for my husband.





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A good reality

Getting rid of the fantasies meant I needed to find something to take their place. I needed to be proactive and focus on distracting myself. I took up new activities such as exercise, writing, and speaking. Reading the Bible, especially Proverbs and Psalms, comforted and helped me.

I would underline and memorize Scripture that fed my soul and recall it when I needed it most. I like to ponder Psalm 16:11: "You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (NKJV). To me, this means that Jesus will show me how keeping my thoughts pure will bring new life to my marriage. Being aware of God's presence and maturing in my love-relationship with Jesus spills over into joy in my marriage with my husband. Jesus' right hand signifies power—and Jesus has the power to change me, to bring pleasure in my marriage.

Keeping from fantasy triggers

I made a point of learning my weaknesses and fleeing from them. Sometimes a certain song opens the door to a fantasy, so while driving, I turn the radio to my local Christian station or pop in a tape of a church sermon or a non-romantic audio book. These keep my mind engaged in productive activities.

I shy away from reading romance novels and read books that give me a glimpse of the woman God created me to be. I also read topics related to my husband's interests so I can converse more intelligently about things that are important to him.





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Finally, the silver screen can unleash unhealthy romantic daydreams. For me, one good chick flick can be worth years of mental reruns—with me as the scriptwriter, director, and heroine. So I guard vigilantly what I watch.

Today, real life is better than yesteryear's fantasies. I thank God when he lets me see that my husband shows his affection when he washes my car. I make wiser, intentional choices and avoid my trigger points. I'm more alert, willing, and able through prayer and Bible reading to weed out a fantasy before it sends down deep roots.

When I return home from work, I smile in response to my husband's grin when he meets me at the door. And I know now that the best time for a warm hug is after we've been cutting up and laughing with each other. When he reaches over to hug me, I look into his smiling Irish eyes and know the satisfaction of being connected emotionally with my flesh and blood husband. Reality is a better place to live—it's more full of life than fantasies can ever be.

Linda LaMar Jewell, a freelance author, speaker, and seminar manager for CLASServices, Inc., has been married 22 years. This article was first published in the Winter 2006 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.





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Reflect

- *Linda's story reveals why many women may not at first recognize their problem as lust: their thoughts may be primarily romantic fantasies rather than solely sexual ones. So what is dangerous about nurturing romantic fantasies about other men (even fictional ones)? Explore the negative consequences of this type of thought pattern.*
- *Let's get down to brass tacks here: How would you define lust? Use the following Scripture passages to inform your definition: **Job 31:1, Proverbs 6:25–26, Matthew 5:27–30, Galatians 5:16–17, and 1 John 2:16.***
- *For men, lust often is overtly sexual, manifested in struggles with pornography, masturbation, and sexual thoughts. For women, lust may include these struggles but may also take very different forms that tap into our need for emotional intimacy. What manifestations of lust do you think women are particularly vulnerable to? Why?*



Dirty Little Secret

Men aren't the only ones lured by internet porn.

By Ramona Richards



Maggie had promised herself she would stop. But at the end of another long day filled with work and errands, church and choir practice, carting her daughter to school and helping her with homework, she was beat. After she'd finally gotten her daughter to bed, Maggie fixed herself a cup of peppermint tea and sat down to read her email. She vowed that was *all* she'd do.

It was a promise she broke less than 15 minutes later.



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One of her emails was from Bob, a man she'd met in a chatroom who'd helped ease the loneliness that had followed her divorce. After a sweet greeting, Bob wrote that he'd thought of her when he read a story online, and he included a link to the story. Maggie knew she shouldn't read it; she suspected it was an erotic story that would tap into an addiction she'd been trying to break for several months. But his words were enticing: She'd been on Bob's mind when he read it, and his interest in her made her feel important.

She clicked the link.

The story's heroine was smart, funny, and beautiful, and Maggie felt flattered. The story also aroused her, recalling the delicious intimacy and the physical "high" of sex she missed so much since her divorce. Maggie didn't want to let go of that, so she read another story. Then another. Some of the stories had links to photographs that showed couples gently caressing each other, then becoming more intimate. The high continued as long as she clicked.

As Maggie finished a fifth story, she reached for her teacup and discovered it was ice cold. Startled, she looked at the clock. It was after midnight, and she'd been surfing a porn site for more than three hours.

Disgusted, Maggie turned off her computer and went to bed. The high was gone and she felt lower than when she'd started. Tears flooded her pillow as she begged the God she'd known and loved for years to give her help, direction, and answers. She'd never felt so alone.





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Not just a man's issue

Unfortunately, Maggie *isn't* alone. One of the great myths about pornography addiction is that it's only a male problem. Although the church has begun to recognize that pornography addiction is almost an epidemic among Christians, most ministry programs still focus on men as addicts and their wives as victims.

Yet the statistics are both startling and terrifying: One out of every six women, including Christians, struggles with an addiction to pornography. That's 17 percent of the population, which, according to a survey by research organization Zogby International, is the number of women who truly believe they can find sexual fulfillment on the internet.

Surprisingly, many of the women who find themselves drawn to online porn sites are much like Maggie, a respected business owner. These women are wives, moms, and sisters who all profess faith in Jesus Christ; they have normal jobs, attend church regularly, and sing in the choir. Though their lives appear normal on the surface, they're hiding a dirty little secret from their families, friends, and colleagues.

So how—and *why*—does an average Christian woman become addicted to pornography?

According to Marnie Ferree, a licensed marriage and family therapist and clinician at the Woodmont Hills Counseling Center in Nashville, one of the few centers in the country that treats female sexual addiction, the draw

Oprah has noticed this trend too! To learn more, read "Oprah, Porn, and Jesus" by Bonnie McMacken **here**.





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of pornography can be as complicated as childhood sexual abuse—or as simple as unresolved loneliness. Marnie, a recovered sex addict and the author of *No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Shame*, counsels more than 50 women each year and fields calls from almost that many each month.

Typical of the type of women Marnie counsels is Julie, a young wife and mother from Georgia, who first saw pornography as a child in the home of a relative, and whose curiosity led her to explore it further as she grew older. She and her husband later rented X-rated videos after hearing it would help their faltering sex life. "That's the ugliest lie out there," Julie explains. "Instead of bringing you closer, it drives a wedge between you and your spouse!" As many couples who turn to porn experience, their marriage continued to falter, since they now also were dealing with unrealistic expectations. As the problems persisted, Julie's husband withdrew from her and she turned to porn to ease her increasing loneliness. "I was using it as a tool to escape the problems in my marriage."

Loneliness also is the reason Rose, a single mom, turned to porn. She didn't go looking for it in the beginning. "I was seeking companionship. In chatting with other lonely people struggling in their marriages, I learned of some internet sites I could visit to make friends and have fun. At first, the sexual talk in these chatrooms seemed harmless and non-threatening. My loneliness and craving to feel wanted drew me into relationships I really didn't want."

Lacey, who's 30 and single, wasn't particularly lonely, but she was in search of her "soulmate." She'd developed her





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ideas of romance and love from popular novels, and believed much of a woman's worth is based on her sexuality—which led her to internet pornography.

Women desiring to find companionship often prefer cybersex and online chatrooms to porn sites that offer only pictures and graphic stories, but they eventually start surfing both. All forms of pornography can stimulate the user, releasing chemicals in the brain that act on the body in much the same way as cocaine does. It's an exhilarating but unfortunately short-lived euphoria. The loneliness returns, leaving the woman wanting more contact and more stimulation, thus creating the cycle of addiction.

This need for connection doesn't always stop at cybersex, which leads to one of the more alarming statistics about a woman's addiction to pornography. "More than 80 percent of women who have this addiction take it offline," says Marnie Ferree. "Women, far more than men, are likely to act out their behaviors in real life, such as having multiple partners, casual sex, or affairs."

The lure of a triple threat

One of the lures of internet pornography lies in the fact you don't have to go anywhere or spend any money to become seduced by it. More than 70 percent of porn sites offer free images and stories to draw in people. The abundance of sexually related "spam" (unwanted emails) also lures many unsuspecting computer users. According to Marnie, easy access is one of the three A's of pornography: accessibility, anonymity, and affordability (based on research reported by the Sexual Recovery Institute of Los Angeles). That combination makes becoming an addict incredibly easy.





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And, since more than 25 million people visit porn sites every week and one out of every ten websites is dedicated to explicit sex, this industry is quite profitable. The mere financial details about online pornography are overwhelming. Seventy-four percent of all revenue collected online comes from porn sites, which amounts to almost \$1.2 billion annually. Thirty-one percent of all online users have visited porn sites, and 60 percent of all website visits are sexual in nature.

Beth, a former missionary and one of Marnie's clients, knows about this firsthand. "I would spend hours on the computer surfing for porn. At one point, I spent three to five hours daily. I neglected the very thing I longed for: relational intimacy with my friends."

Rose neglected her housework, even her children. Julie neglected her husband and her home, often spending all day on the computer. Maggie says it was her spiritual life that suffered the most: "When you're not doing it, you're thinking about it. Pornography crowds out God and everything else."

Lacey agrees. "The thought of reading porn, or alternatively, the condemnation I felt once I'd fallen into sin, took a lot of time. I would go to church and think about how I didn't deserve to be there."

"It's an insidious industry," Maggie says. "I hate it. And I hate that I kept going back."

Most women addicted to pornography struggle to understand themselves and why they have a compulsion they can't ignore. They long for help, yet they hesitate to seek it because they feel ashamed and alone.





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"No one *plans* to get hooked on this," Maggie says. "I thought this would be an answer to my loneliness, but it only made it worse. I was so ashamed of what I was doing that I isolated myself."

"I always felt condemned," says Lacey. "I felt like an insect—scared of coming into the light—and I wanted to stay in the shadows as much as possible." Julie also felt "very removed from church and my girlfriends. I felt like I wasn't human. Like I was the only one dealing with this."

Beth agrees. "I thought no other women struggled with this addiction. By feeling all alone, I lost hope." Rose is even more blunt. "I thought the Lord never would forgive me."

The path to hope and healing

The first step toward healing for an addict is to realize she's *not* alone. She needs to know there are people out there who understand and can reach out to her in love.

"Women addicted to porn need professional therapy with a Christian counselor and a renewed sense of kinship with other women who understand," says Marnie. "The worst thing you can do with these women is lecture them about praying more or asking God for help. They've already done that, often to the point of despair. They do need to be held accountable for their sins, but they also need help, support, and unconditional love."

The first few people Maggie turned to for help told her all she had to do was get rid of her computer. "That's nonsense," she explains. "I use my home computer every day for my business. That wouldn't stop my addiction, only one way to access it."





Lust—Not Just a Guys' Problem

Dirty Little Secret

Lacey also sought help many times, with similar results: "I'd told friends and pastors, but I discovered that many people who should be able to help aren't completely equipped to deal with a woman's addiction to porn." She finally found assistance in the same place she'd found her addiction: the internet. "Setting Captives Free helped me the most," she says, referring to the internet-based ministry that offers a free 60-day interactive online course—available to individuals and churches—for people trapped in sexual addiction. "The journey to recovery isn't easy. Am I 'there' yet? No. Breaking this cycle is one of the hardest things I've ever done."

Rose also found help on the internet from Pure Life Ministries, which provides numerous resources, including guided studies with qualified counselors and curriculum to be completed at home, to help sexual addicts. Beth and Maggie eventually turned to a Christian counselor to assist in their recovery process. Julie sought help from her husband, then gave up her computer for a while and still limits her use.

Donna Rice Hughes, president of Enough Is Enough, a nonprofit organization dedicated to exposing the ills of internet porn and to making the internet safe for families, says a program isn't enough. "I don't believe true healing can happen without the power of Jesus' blood," she says. "Many people in the church struggle because while they've changed their behavior, the images from pornography exposure still are there. Christ has to renew their minds."





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Donna also strongly recommends internet filtering tools, as well as getting an accountability partner who can check the monitoring feature most of these programs offer. "God calls us to understand our culture and the temptations we face, and warns us to guard our hearts and minds. We can't just ask him to protect us and not take practical steps. We have to do everything we know how to do, then pray for spiritual protection, because in many ways this is a spiritual battle."

As Maggie worked with a trained therapist to overcome her addiction, she also found help in reading the Bible and journaling. There's a verse in Corinthians that hit home for her: "We must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever" (1 Corinthians 6:16, MSG). "I love that verse," she says. "I'm making it my life's theme."

Beth, who underwent counseling with Marnie Ferree, knows healing is a matter of taking small steps. And someday she hopes to use her experiences to help others.

"God's calling me to take steps of faith out of hiding and shame," Beth says. "The truth is, many people, well-meaning Christians especially, aren't aware of how prevalent this struggle has become among women. But there are those who understand." As well as a God who freely offers his healing and hope.

Ramona Richards, a freelance writer and editor, lives in Tennessee. Many names in this article have been changed to protect privacy. This article was first published in the September/October 2003 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.





Lust—Not Just a Guys' Problem

Dirty Little Secret

NEED HELP?

These ministries offer assistance to women struggling with pornography addiction:

Woodmont Hills Counseling Ministry Offers workshops and a private counseling center that specializes in sexual addictions, especially in women 866-464-HEAL (toll-free) www.bethesdaworkshops.org

Faithful & True Ministries Ministries for sexual wholeness, counseling, and consultation 952-903-9208
www.faithfulandtrueministries.com

National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity Offers information, resources, and referrals www.ncsac.org

Pure Intimacy (Focus on the Family) Offers information on pornography and sexual addiction www.pureintimacy.org

Pure Life Ministries Aimed mostly at helping men, but some women have found help through their programs directed at breaking free from sexual sin www.purelifeministries.org

Setting Captives Free Offers online programs to help believers break free from addictive sins, including pornography
www.settingcaptivesfree.com

Reflect

◦ *Ramona Richards notes that one in six women (including Christians) is addicted to pornography. What's your gut reaction to this statistic? Does it surprise you? Why or why not?*





Lust—Not Just a Guys' Problem

Dirty Little Secret

- *Why do you think pornography use is growing among women? What factors might drive a woman to pornography?*
- *Even if you don't personally struggle with pornography, we're all vulnerable to its lure in some way. Identify one woman from this article whose situation or feelings you can relate to. How does her story speak to you?*



My Secret Struggle

Three single women describe their battle with lust and pornography.



When I was five, I visited my teenage cousins, who watched porn in front of me with their friends. They didn't realize they would cause me harm. I played those images over and over in my head for years. My parents also watched porn after they thought I was asleep. But I hid and watched the films from a distance. At nine, I began to think about sex often, and my preoccupation grew worse every following year.



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My Secret Struggle

By 18, I was out of control. Walking down the street, I'd imagine people around me naked and sexually active. I became sexually active around that time, but I couldn't enjoy even a simple kiss because I always felt unclean.

Thankfully, a friend introduced me to Jesus. When I gave my life to Christ, I felt the Holy Spirit helping me overcome the addiction. The devil tried to convince me I was missing life's biggest pleasure; he did everything he could to keep me in bondage. I finally experienced a two-year healing process that wouldn't have been possible without God's power and grace.

Today I don't watch anything on television about sex. Whenever I encounter sexual images in our culture, I just close my eyes. I'm glad God never gave up on me—and never will.

—Katie

I began watching pornography when I was 11 and continued until I was 20. At first, I ordered and watched it on cable, but not frequently, because I knew my parents would catch me when the bill came. However, once I figured out how to get free porn on the internet, I was addicted.

My desire for porn was intense. The images burned into my memory and kept popping into my mind even after I watched them, enticing me to watch more. I soon desired porn throughout the day—when I woke up in the morning or when I sat in class listening to my teacher.





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Watching porn often led to masturbating. After I'd give in to the desire for porn and masturbation, I'd feel a sense of filth and disgust come over me. I almost couldn't stand being in my own body because of how I'd just used it. I'd hear voices condemning me for what I'd just done, and I'd grow depressed. This depression often lasted days or weeks. I'd look at more porn just to get rid of the depression.

When I became a Christian at 16, I continued to look at porn sometimes. But now I knew I wasn't helpless in the face of this desire. The blood of the Lamb had conquered my flesh. I had no excuse. Slowly, the feelings of condemnation and depression far outweighed the brief "pleasurable" feeling I achieved from watching porn and masturbating. The after-effects became too painful. I hated my addiction. It felt like bondage.

Once I decided to believe Jesus had already freed me from this addiction, I noticed porn gradually had less hold on me. Even now Satan sometimes reminds me of my former addiction. My body may react and want to engage in those activities again, but I don't entertain the thoughts. I take every thought captive in Jesus' name. I also remind myself of the years of pain, secrecy, and bondage I experienced. And God's grace sustains me.

To those struggling with this addiction: know God is able to deliver. He can break the bondage, but you first must admit this addiction is wrong and reach a point where you hate being enslaved. Then confide in a Christian who can help you through the healing process. Satan loves secrets; he uses them to bring shame and condemnation. Expose him! With accountability, support, and God's amazing power, you can be free.

—*Nelda*





Lust—Not Just a Guys' Problem

My Secret Struggle

I was nine when a friend introduced me to the collection of pornography magazines her father kept in his bedroom. Over the next few years, I channel surfed late at night and stopped on various red-light romp fests out of curiosity. Because I was a virgin and "good church girl," I didn't want to be as innocent and naive as everyone believed I was.

Although I still haven't had sexual intercourse, I've seen the negative impact of even the limited amount of pornography I've watched. My habit impacted my self-esteem and my view of relationships. Those images dictated my definition of love between a man and a woman. I now tend to identify love only with sexual acts, and I worry sex is all men want from me.

I try to focus on what God says about love, especially in 1 Corinthians 13. And I concentrate on 2 Corinthians 10:5: "Casting down every thought and imagination that goes against the knowledge and Word of God." That Scripture has been my stronghold and saving grace the last few years as I uproot the destructive images from my imagination and replace them with the truth of God's Word and his whispers in my ear during the midnight hours of life.

—Nicole

These personal testimonies were first published on ChristianSinglesToday.com in 2007.





Lust—Not Just a Guys' Problem

My Secret Struggle

Reflect

- *If a friend candidly confessed to you that she was struggling with pornography use, what would you say, think, or feel? Why?*
- *What stands out to you most from these raw and honest stories about lust and pornographic addiction? Explain.*



Cut the Bleep Out



It's healthy to revisit how you censor entertainment.

By Lindsey Learn

How to censor what we watch, read, and listen to is a continual debate among believers. I've been revisiting how I censor entertainment after listening to a friend's conviction on the subject.

My friend almost lost his marriage and family from a sexual addiction. Now on the road to recovery, he and his wife have cut out anything remotely sexual from their entertainment. Close friends screen their movies for hints of sex, scantily clothed women, and dirty language.



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Cut the Bleep Out

They don't watch much TV. How could they? Is there a drama or comedy on TV that doesn't have sexual themes? While their convictions stemmed from avoiding temptation, the practice has proved to be extremely revealing and healthy in their journey to become more like Christ. In turn, their practices have led me to consider my own.

I'm not sure I could cut as much as my friends have. I really enjoy being generally informed in pop-culture references and current entertainment—even if that means letting a few things slide past my filter. Sometimes, my pride sways me to watch, read, and listen to whatever I want. But despite my pride and social desires, I'm attracted to the idea of flushing out the dirt on my journey toward holiness.

A friend challenged me once, "Seriously, if you walked into a room where a couple was having sex, would you pull up a chair and grab some popcorn?" Struck and appalled, I thought, *No! I would never do that!* But I had been doing that. Although now I try to rent movies without sex scenes or I fast forward through those parts, it's difficult to always apply that conviction.

I'm currently reading a novel about broken people and their broken relationships. The narrative has included some graphic language about their obviously broken sexual lives too—and it bugs me. Several times I've thought, *Is this worth it?* Out of curiosity and the love of storytelling, I've continued reading, eager to see what happens to the characters. I know redemption is coming—the title of the book basically gives that away—but how do I know when to say, "Enough"?





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Cut the Bleep Out

I understand that sexual content isn't the only subject we should be leery of exposing ourselves to. There are many other reasons to censor our entertainment. I'm still working on what's going to be best for my spiritual life. My specific convictions aside, I've found this practice spiritually beneficial. Though it will look different for many of us, consider revisiting how you censor entertainment—what it does to your mind, your heart, how it defines your life, and how it affects your journey toward holiness.

Lindsey Learn is assistant editor at Christianity Today International for *YOUR CHURCH* magazine, TheYourChurchBlog.com, BuildingForMinistry.com, and ChurchSafety.com. This article was published on Kyria's [blog](#) in April 2010.

Reflect

- *What are some examples of sexual content you've recently seen on television (even in advertisements)? Do you think you've grown desensitized to it? Why or why not?*
- *Does the choice to not watch TV seem extreme to you? Why or why not?*
- *Read **Psalm 101:2–3** and **Philippians 4:7–8**. These passages emphasize that God plays a part in guarding our minds, but we also must play an active role. Translate the ideas from these passages into everyday life for an average woman: What practical choices can she make to live this out?*





Lust—Not Just a Guys' Problem

Cut the Bleep Out

- *In addition to censoring entertainment, the articles in this download have recommended additional ways of combating lust, from prayer to counseling to accountability. What strategies for combating lustful thoughts have been effective for you personally? What additional safeguards do you feel challenged to put into place?*



Playing with Fire



As my marriage cooled, I was tempted by my coworker's advances. How far was I willing to go?

By Jan Wilson

I rushed from the exam room to the nurses' station. Female laughter bubbled up from a semicircle of chairs that surrounded a newcomer. The office manager called me over.

"Jan," she said, "meet Greg. He'll be updating our computer system over the next few months." Greg stood and offered his hand. His eyes were cappuccino brown, his smile warm and welcoming. We exchanged polite chitchat before I hurried to see the next patient. *Nice looking, nice manners*, I thought. *Good thing I'm married*. Before the day was over, he was joking with the staff like he'd known us for years.



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Playing with Fire

Greg came to the clinic nearly every day. Lights danced in his eyes whenever he saw me; smiles came easily when I saw him. At a farewell party for one of the staff, he wandered in and scanned the room, then sat directly across from me. Our eyes met and held each other in silence as heat filled my face and my pulse quickened. When the guest of honor entered the room and the gang yelled, "Surprise!" I finally looked away. When Greg mingled with the staff, I watched from the corner of my eye, straining to hear every word, curious to know more about him.

I attempted nonchalance a few days later when I asked if Greg was working. "He's at the administrative office today." I was disappointed, but minutes before quitting time, his deep voice filled the hallway. I pretended to look for a brochure filed in the hall closet so we'd run into each other.

His smile was the reward I was looking for. His eyes spoke admiration and warmed me. Later, he stopped me near the break room.

"You're a beautiful woman, you know that?"

I laughed.

"I'm serious. You do know that you're beautiful, don't you?"

"You have good taste. Thank you," I joked, but inside I was melting. I floated back to my office.

Hoping to see Greg between patients, I lingered in the hallways more now. Meanwhile, at home, my husband of





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20 years, Bud, and I were still recovering from the constant demands of graduate school. We'd divided the household tasks to keep things running smoothly, but in the process we drifted apart emotionally.

One day, after the clinic closed, Greg waited in the parking lot for me. As we talked, his attention was intoxicating. He complimented my face, my clothes, and my hair. I thought about him often, looking forward to our next brief meeting. I daydreamed about having long, intimate conversations with him. I didn't let myself imagine kissing him, but the excitement up to that point was enticing enough. I kept telling myself that as long as I didn't do anything, I'd be OK.

When time allowed, I often ate lunch outside at a nearby park. One day as I watched some preschoolers at play, Greg sauntered up to the table. "Mind if I join you?" I didn't. He slid in next to me and we talked. I wished the time would never end.

By now I thought about Greg all the time and struggled to remain faithful to Bud. Many days I woke up famished for more of this excitement. I savored the appreciation and admiration Greg gave me. Part of me was greedy for more, but another part was frightened by the intensity of the desires that had overtaken me. What had begun as a fantasy had become stronger than I was. I didn't know how to make it stop.

For years I'd prayed daily on the phone with my friend Pauline. Several months after I met Greg, I finally told her about him. Over the next eight months, I called her regularly to pray, confessing whenever I'd initiated another contact





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with Greg. She was never shocked or disgusted with me. Instead, she demonstrated God's unfailing love. Through her persistent, specific prayers, God began to dismantle the deception that held me captive. My inability to change my desires became clearer to me with each subsequent encounter. I confessed that left to my own strength, I'd fall before the day was over. One day I'd resolve to run away *from* Greg, the next day I'd fantasize about what it would be like to run away *with* him.

The Bible revealed the way of escape from this torment. It describes our Savior as "him who is able to keep you from falling" (Jude 24). This truth challenged the excuse that I wasn't strong enough to do the right thing. I couldn't keep myself from falling, but God could. In truth, I wasn't really sure I *wanted* to be kept from falling. This deadly mind game brought intense emotional pleasure with the promise of even more. But Jesus said, "My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). So, as I learned to lean on his strength, my resolve to make the right decisions grew.

Then the Spirit led me to the next step—and the most difficult: I had to tell my husband. When we first met, Bud and I built our friendship on honesty. We told each other just about everything. The burden of hiding my attraction to Greg was heavy. When I finally confessed, Bud listened and tried to understand. By God's grace, he didn't get angry. His loving support surrounded me, and I no longer felt alone. His prayer for my release during the most difficult times demonstrated the depth of his love.

On the 4th of July, Bud and I watched the town fireworks explode over a moonlit river. I realized my relationship with





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Greg was like those fireworks; it sizzled and sparkled and vanished in smoke. My relationship with Bud was more like the moon, quietly changing but enduring. Finally, I decided to invest the time and energy I'd spent on Greg into my marriage. At the time my emotions argued with the decision, but I trusted God to bring them into line with his will.

Now when I heard Greg's voice in the hallway, I waited in my office or walked in the opposite direction. Gradually, the days I avoided him began to outnumber the days I sought him out. Before long, his project was over and we gathered for his farewell party. I sat near the back of the room and slipped out without saying good-bye.

Looking back, I can see several factors that left me susceptible to the enticement of adultery—depression, exhaustion, unmet needs, and sinful desires.

As a nurse, I'd been trained to identify and meet people's needs, but had ignored my need for appreciation and attention. The marathon of trying to balance family, work, and graduate school had left Bud and me depleted. While I focused on my studies, he assumed the burden of childcare and household responsibilities. After three years of grueling schedules, we'd forgotten how to appreciate each other.

Although I'd prayed daily and still attended church, I'd been so busy that my emotional "cup" was nearly empty. So when Greg showed concern about my needs, I responded. The thrill of a near-affair was an addicting antidote to my emotional numbness. But what seemed wonderful at first really was a trap designed for my destruction. The warning in Proverbs





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14:12 strengthened me: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." Meeting with a trained Christian counselor helped me to regain a sense of God's unconditional love for me and to be honest about my needs.

From childhood, I'd escaped the dullness and difficulties of life in daydreams. As a woman, I imagined a man who put me on a pedestal and desired me with deep passion. I thought if I kept this fantasy deeply buried, it would be harmless. But this dormant desire to be worshiped made Greg's admiration so intoxicating. Eventually, through prayer, deep soul searching, and the godly counsel of my friend, I saw the proud nature of my thoughts and the sin of not confessing them. As the Lord brought about a gradual change in my heart, I repented. First he forgave me, and then he delivered me from emotional entrapment. I learned firsthand that God is able to keep me from sin.

Although the enemy tried to divide Bud and me, God used this experience to strengthen our relationship with him and with each other. Instead of fighting the temptation alone, I learned to ask God for his strength. It came to me through my husband. When I faltered in my resolve to remain faithful, I didn't hide my weakness anymore or pretend everything was all right. I told Bud about it. It wasn't just my problem now, it was *our* problem.

We're both more honest about our vulnerability to temptation now, and we take special care to focus on each other during those times. I warn Bud when I think a woman is trying to tempt him, and I depend on him for similar warnings. Our level of trust and honesty has deepened because of what we've been through together.





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It's a deadly deception to believe the sinful thoughts we tuck away are innocent until we act upon them. Even if we only take them out when no one is looking, they're dangerous. When unconfessed, these thoughts shape our lives, bear fruit, and eventually bring death (James 1:15).

With God's help, my husband's love, and the support of my faithful friend, I finally put aside my mind games. And I thank God I did.

Jan Wilson is a freelance writer who lives in Massachusetts. Some names in this article have been changed. This article was first published in the March/April 2005 issue of TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN.

Reflect

• *Jan's attraction to Greg wasn't overtly sexual—it was more of an emotional attraction. She writes, "his attention was intoxicating. . . . I thought about him often, looking forward to our next brief meeting. I daydreamed about having long, intimate conversations with him. I didn't let myself imagine kissing him, but the excitement up to that point was enticing enough." Jan drew a line, attempting to guard her thoughts against overtly romantic thoughts. So, is this lust? Why or why not?*





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- *Read 1 Corinthians 10:12–13. Imagine yourself in scenario similar to Jan's: you're feeling tempted by a man you find attractive; your mind keeps being drawn to thoughts about him. Practically speaking, what could you do to stop these thought patterns in their tracks?*
- *If you can, describe a time when you faced this type of temptation or struggled with a lustful thought pattern. How did God help you get through it?*
- *Desire happens. Temptation to lust will come your way. There are attractive men in your world, in magazines, on the internet, and in fiction and fantasy. Yet God calls you to a higher standard for your thought-life and emotional connections with others. How has God specifically challenged, convicted, or encouraged you through these articles and through Scripture?*



Additional Resources

Books, articles, and Bible studies to help you further



Books

Breaking Free: Understanding Sexual Addiction and the Healing Power of Jesus by Russell Willingham (InterVarsity Press, 1999; 200 pages). When you find yourself addicted to sex, torn by feelings of guilt and shame, there is hope if you will find the courage to face your addiction and ask for help. Using strategies and insights from personal experience, this resource will point you to Jesus, the only one who can offer forgiveness and true healing.

Every Woman's Battle: Discovering God's Plan for Sexual and Emotional Fulfillment by Shannon Ethridge (WaterBrook, 2003; 208 pages). When does an affair begin? Not with the first forbidden touch . . . but with the first forbidden thought. Unexpectedly, you find yourself enjoying a powerful emotional bond with another man. The door you thought was locked so firmly—the door to sexual infidelity—is suddenly ajar. The only way you can survive the intense struggle for sexual integrity is by guarding not just your body, but your mind and heart as well. *Every Woman's Battle* can help you learn to do that.



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Additional Resources

Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction by Mark R. Laaser (Zondervan, 2004; 208 pages). Deeply ingrained patterns of thought and behavior keep people stuck on a treadmill of sin, even as they long for a walk of purity. This book offers a path that leads beyond compulsive thoughts and behaviors toward sexual integrity and self-control. Sensitive to the shame of sexual addiction without minimizing its sinfulness, Dr. Laaser traces the roots of sexual addiction in families and in culture, and shows how sexual sin poisons the lives of pastors and laypeople alike. He provides a complete program for treatment and recovery from sexual addiction, including the all-pervasive internet pornography.

No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Shame by Marnie Ferree (Xulon Press, 2002; 284 pages). This book bravely addresses the taboo subject of female sexual addiction with frankness, compassion, and vulnerability. Readers will be surprised at the definition of this problem and the number of women who struggle with it. This definitive work combines the best clinical knowledge with the truth of biblical principles. *No Stones* points the way to redemption.

Sex Is Not the Problem (Lust Is) by Joshua Harris (Multnomah, 2005; 192 pages). Lust has become pervasive in our culture to the point that sexuality has become a negative—contaminating what God intended as a gift. Learn how to reclaim sexuality and sex as God originally planned as you cut through the deceptive lies of lust. See through new eyes and enjoy a life of purity as you follow the steps in this countercultural guide.





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Additional Resources

Online Articles

“Are Chick Flicks ‘Emotional Porn’?”—*It depends on how you view them*

By Laura Leonard (from *her-menutics*, CHRISTIANITY TODAY'S blog for women)

“Christian Sex Rules”—*A guide to what's allowed in the bedroom*
By Louis and Melissa McBurney (from MarriagePartnership.com)

“Conquering Lust on the Job” By Jeff Wright and Mick Bates
(from FaithintheWorkplace.com)

“Cybersex Temptation”—*An interview with Dr. Mark Laaser*
By Jim Killam (from MarriagePartnership.com)

“Naked Truths”—*Movie critics weigh in on what makes nudity in film wrong, right, and R-rated*
By Jeffrey Overstreet (from ChristianityToday.com)

“Pornification Nation”—*Modern-day abolitionist Lisa Thompson talks about the disturbing impact of our hypersexualized culture . . . and what she hopes you'll do about it.*
By Camerin Courtney (from Kyria.com)

“Surviving Temptation Island”—*7 strategies for protecting your marriage*
By Ginger Kolbaba (from Kyria.com)





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Additional Resources

Bible Studies

“Confronting Sexual Addiction”—This three-session Bible study from ChristianBibleStudies.com examines lust's pervasive influence in our culture, our own battle with sinful desires, and how to combat the crippling effect of guilt in this area of our lives.

“Dealing with Sexual Temptation”—This single-session Bible study from ChristianBibleStudies.com delves deep into the topic of temptation, using “Desire Happens” (also in this download) as its launching point.

“Living in a Culture of Sexual Immorality”—This single-session Bible study from ChristianBibleStudies.com explores the challenge Christians face as we navigate life in a sex-obsessed culture.



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