

Urgent Care: Pornography & Sexual Addiction



CONGREGATION & VISITORS



URGENT CARE:

Pornography and Sexual Addiction

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Leader's Guide

How to use "Urgent Care: Pornography and Sexual Addiction" by BUILDING CHURCH LEADERS.

Welcome to Building Church Leaders: Urgent Care. You've purchased an innovative resource that will help equip you and your leaders to minister in the crisis situations that often leave us speechless.

Urgent Care handouts give a succinct and practical overview of the issues relevant in your situation. All of the authors are familiar with ministry in the aftermath of pornography use and sexual addiction, and a certified counselor has reviewed all of this material. We hope you use their hands-on advice, theological guidance, and careful warnings in order that you may offer the best ministry possible in the toughest of situations.

These tools are specifically designed for easy and quick use by church leaders in crisis situations. If you have an urgent need, select the article most relevant to the demands you face, and follow the article's guidance. If time is on your side, use these handouts to launch a discussion and training for leaders in your church.

Select & Copy

This specific theme is designed to help equip pastors and leaders who need to minister to the friends, family, and the congregation affected by pornography addiction. Simply print and photocopy the handouts and distribute them as needed. (You do not need to ask for permission provided you are making fewer than 1,000 copies, are using the material in a church or educational setting, and are not charging for it.)

The following articles cover a variety of topics. For example, to learn the basic facts about Internet pornography, read "Cybersex Temptation." For advice on how to help addicts escape the grip of pornography, see "Battle Strategies" and "Reclaiming a Misused Gift." To learn how the subject can be handled from the pulpit, see "When Fantasy Becomes Reality." For an overview of action steps and important concerns that need to be remembered, see "Quick Guide for Action."

Pray

Ask God to equip your church to minister sensitively and with great hope—even in the saddest situations.

Need more material, or something on a specific topic? See our website at www.BuildingChurchLeaders.com.

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A Quick Guide For Action

Key points for caregiving ministry.

Urgent care situations often require an immediate response from church leaders. This overview outlines major steps you should take in addressing pornography and sexual addiction. These action steps are explored in greater depth and detail in the remainder of this packet.

Immediate Concerns

1. The emotional stability of the addict and his family demand first attention. Deep pain, anger, and/or hurt will be in play.
2. You may need to try to forestall permanent “solutions” (quick divorce, violence, rash acts) born in anger or despair.

Keep in Mind

1. Lies foster addictions. Truthfulness may hurt like an incision, but it begins the healing process.
2. Lust has its attraction. It needs to be replaced with something better rather than preached into submission.
3. Spouses and families must be involved at some point in the recovery process.
4. Addicts are great liars.
5. Addicts often need to be referred to professional caregivers, who are better equipped to ask the right questions and remain objective.

Things to Say

1. Insist on the whole story being told. Buried secrets have a way of returning and destroying tentative new trust.
2. Stand for righteousness, but in an inviting way that makes the right more compelling than the wrong.
3. Use the power of prayer, Scripture, and worship to reach deeper than the intellect.
4. Radiate hope for the ability to make things right. Believe in the people even when they no longer believe in themselves.
5. Do not be afraid to advise your friend to seek professional counseling.

Things Not to Say

1. Do not denounce persons, only sin.
2. Do not allow confidences to be broken.
3. Do not tell someone that confession to a spouse solves the problem then and there.

Plan Ahead

1. Do not expect an easy solution. Sexuality is difficult to master.
2. Have a plan in place to make a referral to a counselor specializing in sexual addiction.
3. Establish an accountability group for the recovering addict.

An Unwelcome Intruder

Pornography is making itself at home in too many Christians' lives.

Ezekiel 20:7

by Madison Trammel

In the early 1990s, a friend of mine took a pastoral training course at the Master's College in Santa Clarita, California. The class met once a week, surveying many of the topics one would expect in such a setting. But the professor also spotlighted a less popular subject: sexual sin. Every week, without exception, he recounted the story of a friend who had been disqualified for ministry by moral failure.

The failure could be an affair or an addiction to pornography. The saddest part, the professor said, was how easy it was to come up with such stories. He had more than enough to fill a semester.

According to an oft-cited statistic, the average child today is exposed to pornography by age 11. Christian musician Clay Crosse says he first saw a "girlie magazine" in fourth grade. I suppose I should feel fortunate. I didn't encounter pornography until age 12 or 13.

The first movie I watched, a tape of the *Debbie Does* variety, made me sick. The second one electrified me. It was the most exciting, magnetic thing I'd ever seen. Throughout high school, whenever I was at a friend's house with cable, I felt drawn, irresistibly, to search for porn.

In the 1989 movie *Parenthood*, Keanu Reeves's character reassures a 15-year-old boy (and his mother) that the boy's obsessive pornographic viewing and masturbation is normal. "That's what little dudes do," he says. It was only later—as a rededicated Christian talking with friends about how to resist sexual sin—that I discovered how true Reeves's statement was. If there is a Christian man who doesn't have a problem with lust, often pornography, I've never met him.

Of course, it's not just "little dudes" who consume porn. Consider the following statistics, compiled by Proven Men, a ministry of sexual purity and transformation:

- 60 percent of Christian men have sought some form of pornography.
- 16 percent of married Christian men use pornography to masturbate.
- 25 million Americans spend one to ten hours a week viewing Internet pornography.
- Half of the country's cybersex addicts are women, who often prefer explicit chat rooms to images.
- 70 percent of Internet porn viewing is done during business hours.
- In 2002, the adult video industry produced 11,000 titles—20 times more than Hollywood—and brought in \$4 billion.
- Total pornography revenue in 2001 was between \$10 billion and \$20 billion, more than the revenue of any professional sport.

Pornography can no longer be considered a "man's issue." Nor are pastors less susceptible than parishioners. In "Tangled in the Worst of the Web," Christine Gardner reported that 33 percent of pastors polled, compared to 36 percent of laity, admitted visiting a sexually explicit website.

When my wife and I first moved to Florida, we visited one of our area's leading churches. Dynamic and growing, it needed a police officer to regulate the crush of traffic leaving its services. The senior pastor was a sincere and persuasive teacher, unafraid to speak boldly against sin, including sexual sin. Yet several years later, we learned he'd been fired for an entanglement with lust and pornography.

No one is invulnerable, it seems, to porn's allure. And though many blame the Internet for multiplying the temptation, it's not like porn was hard to find pre-World Wide Web. In 1988, a LEADERSHIP editor, writing an intro for "The War Within Continues," bemoaned the new accessibility of video pornography: "The VCR, barely known five years ago, has made sexually oriented material much more easily available and brought it into many homes for the first time."

For Christians seeking to avoid explicit imagery, it's becoming harder and harder to find a safe haven. Beyond the video stores, cable pay-per-view menus, Internet sites, and even cell phones that peddle hard-core porn, there's the quasi-porn on display on billboards, primetime television, and the magazine rack at Borders. As Amy Sohn concluded in her *New York Times* review of the book *Pornified*, "The real proof of our culture's decline may not be that so much pornography is available these days, but that you no longer have to look at pornography to get porn."

Despite porn's ubiquity, however, Christians seeking to rise above it have reason for hope. For me, the following story provides an apt image. In 1999, a church called Jesus in the City took over the building of an adult video store in Minneapolis. "We do relish the fact that right in the very offices where they handled this business, we're now having prayer meetings," said Steve Harrison, one of the church's ministry partners.

As Christians striving to live lives of purity, we cannot escape our pornographic culture—or our own proclivity toward lust. Not completely. Not yet. But we can create enclaves of prayer and recaptured innocence within it; we can invite God's Spirit into places where sexual sin once paid the rent.

—*Madison Trammel*

Sexual Addiction Warning Signs

Behavioral and emotional evidence that someone has entered dangerous territory.

Ephesians 5:11–14

by Prodigals International

These are indicators that a person may have a secret problem with pornography, cybersex, or other forms of sexual addiction:

- Preoccupation with looking at the opposite sex or other visual, sexual stimuli
- Flirtatious behavior
- Evidence of pornography usage on the computer, or with video tapes or magazines
- If married, insisting on an individual Internet account and email address
- Unexplained credit card bills (or having a separate credit card that only one spouse uses)
- Unexplained absences or patterns of late-night working, especially when the reasons given are inconsistent or contradictory
- Having a separate post office box to receive correspondence from affair partners or people they met in chat rooms
- Staying up late, after everyone's gone to bed, so he or she can log onto the Internet privately
- Emotional and spiritual distance between the husband and wife
- Sudden increase in demands for sex, especially sexual practices that make either spouse uncomfortable
- Sudden decrease in interest in sex. If the addict is channeling all sexual energy into pornography, fantasizing, and masturbation, the result may be low or no interest in physical intimacy within the marriage. Treatment specialists call this behavior sexual anorexia.
- A sense that the spouse is "not there" mentally and emotionally during lovemaking
- Increase in moodiness, anger, and harsh blaming
- Loneliness, and never having learned to have healthy relationships. This often stems from having been deprived of healthy love, touch, and nurture when the person was young.
- Having been abused as a child: physically, sexually, emotionally.
- Coming from a family in which at least one other addict (not necessarily a sex addict) was present.

—Adapted from Prodigals International, www.prodigalsonline.org
and MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP Magazine, © 2000 Christianity Today

Cybersex Temptation

Porn is as close as your home computer and it's hooking Christians.

1 John 2:16

Interview with Dr. Mark Laaser by Jim Killam.

Dr. Mark Laaser knows both sides of sexual addiction. For 25 years, beginning as a college student and continuing through his career as a pastor and counselor, he lived a secret life that included pornography, affairs, and encounters with prostitutes. Today, nearly two decades into recovery and a healed marriage, Laaser is the executive director of Faithful and True Ministries, and also director of the Institute for Healthy Sexuality of the American Association of Christian Counselors. He has worked with hundreds of addicts and their families and has consulted with many church congregations and pastors after their clerics' sexual sins were exposed.

His book *Faithful and True: Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addictions* was published by Zondervan in 1992, when the Internet was still in its infancy. Since then, he has watched "cybersex"—pictures, videos, chat rooms, clubs, and more—become the number one issue in sexual addiction.

You have referred to pornography as a building block to sexual addiction. Obviously the Internet fits very well with that.

The scary part about the Internet is, first, there are forms of perversion available there that almost defy description. The second and the most powerful problem with the Internet is that it's available in the privacy of your home. In the "old days," you had to go to various red-light areas. You had to drive; you had to expose yourself to public humiliation.

Would you call Internet sex an appetizer for the more public expressions?

I think your average person who gets hooked into it will be on a downward spiral. It's going to feed the appetite for sexual expression. If you're left untreated, left unhealed of a pornography addiction, eventually your mind is going to want to express sexuality in some fashion.

Does the Internet attract and make sex addicts out of people who otherwise might not have been addicts?

There might be some people who have kind of drifted along at a very low level that have the vulnerability factors, but then the immediate access of the Internet comes along and hooks a lot of people who might not otherwise have degenerated so rapidly.

We tend to think of this as a male problem. Are women at risk, too?

We're seeing a dramatic increase in the number of women who are hooked into pornography and other more behavioral ways of acting out. Historically we would have said women are addicted to romance novels or women are addicted to chat rooms. That's still somewhat the case, but it's changing. If you look at women 30 to 35, in that age range and under, they're getting more visual. They're getting more aggressive and they're acting out in direct ways, like with masturbation.

Culture is rewiring the female brain. And I literally mean rewiring—neurochemically, neuroanatomically, women are getting rewired to be more visual and aggressive.

How does that happen? Just from repeated exposure?

Your brain does not create new brain cells, but it does have the ability to create new connections. So neurochemically, you literally can rewire the connections in your brain. There's good news and bad news to that. The bad news is you can rewire your brain toward sin, but Romans 12:1-2 ["... be transformed by the renewing of your mind"] says you can rewire your brain for good things as well.

So, someone with a pornography habit will actually physically need it?

Your brain after a while will adjust to that, and it will want more of that to achieve the same effect. That's why we see sex addicts who deteriorate over time.

You wrote in *Faithful and True* that our culture abuses us sexually by bombarding us with unhealthy sexual images. As a recovering addict, how do you deal with that?

If you're aware of it and you acknowledge it as a bombardment, then you know it's something you've got to deal with. If you are not acknowledging it, just letting it in on a daily basis while being desensitized to what's happening, then all of these things are kind of getting into your mind unconsciously. We have a program that we follow in terms of calling, reaching out, talking to people about what's going on.

So a key is not isolating yourself?

One of our teaching principles is that fellowship equals freedom from lust. We feel that if you're in fellowship in your marriage, in your church, in your community of friends and if you're experiencing fellowship, love, healthy touch, and nurture in those ways, you're not nearly as vulnerable to these stimuli.

So if you're getting bombarded and you're feeling tempted, you need to back up and look at the larger picture. Where am I in my marriage? Where am I in my relationships?

The phrase I've heard is that as you feed one side you starve the other.

Sex in its many forms is a substitute for healthy love and healthy nurturing. If an addict is in the depths of temptation it's generally because he or she is starved for friendship, love, healthy touch, and so on.

What would you say to someone who knows he or she has a pornography problem?

The number one mistake Christians make is that they think they have to deal with this alone—that if they're getting tempted this way, they can battle it on their own. We need to have an accountability group: healthy relationships with other Christians where we can honestly talk about what we're dealing with.

With sexual sin, if loneliness is one of the sources of the problem, then to think that you can do it alone sometimes increases the level of that loneliness.

Keeping your marriage in mind would help too, right?

When I see something that tempts me, I need to remind myself of my commitment to a higher form of marriage and sexuality. My vision for the one-flesh union is such that

the desire of my heart is to allow myself only to be attracted to my wife and her body, at whatever age.

And that goes completely against the tide of our culture, which is obsessed with the physical side of sexuality.

The paradox is, if you focus on your emotional and spiritual relationship, the physical attraction will increase.

When should a person who's struggling with sexual sin seek outside help?

If it's something you're stuck on. If it's a minor thing, you may not need to be in some serious recovery program. But I still think you need to confess it, talk about it, get some help, figure out where some of the loneliness and anger are coming from, and deal with it.

Would you first confess it to your spouse alone?

I would involve more people right away. You need some wise counsel about how and when to tell your spouse. You don't just rush in. A lot of guys make the mistake thinking that if they confess it to their spouse the problem will be over. That's not what happens.

Never?

It probably happens occasionally. But, even in those cases, I feel that the people might be kind of white-knuckling what's underneath.

The main thing to try to remember is that all of these sexual issues are symptoms. They're not the problem. They're a symptom of loneliness, feeling disconnected, feeling depressed, feeling angry. There are deeper emotional and spiritual issues that need to be addressed.

So, if you're hooked, if this has become a habit, think of it as a symptom that's telling you there's something in your life that's on disconnect. Where is that coming from? It could be that the source of disconnect is with your spouse. So just telling her that you have a problem with pornography on the Internet is not necessarily going to help that.

Where should someone turn? You're a little rough on the church in your book.

I guess the bottom-line question would be: Is the church a safe place to talk about these kinds of sins? Or are you going to get judgment?

I think all of us in the church need to look at any level of any kind of sin and say, is our church the kind of place where we feel safe to talk about our mistakes and still receive grace? Or are we going to church trying to convince ourselves and others that we are something that we're really not?

Is there a perverse positive in all of this, that because Internet pornography has become so pervasive it's forcing the church to address sexual issues?

Sexuality is a tremendous gift of marriage. What this whole thing is doing is forcing Christians to take a look at what God really intends for the sacred union of two people in

marriage, and what Paul meant when he talked about a one-flesh union, in light of what the world is teaching about sexuality.

How does your view of sex addiction compare with what Scripture says?

All of the words for lust in the Bible are somewhat synonymous with the words for selfishness. Healthy sexuality is not selfish. It's not designed to gratify biological needs; it's designed to express the fullness of an emotional and spiritual relationship. As such, I think you should be more concerned with affirming your partner than whether you're getting a particular form of sex that day.

You have said many times that sex is not a man's greatest need. That's contrary to what some other Christian authors are saying today.

I think men are deceived. If you concede that our human biology is what drives us, then sex is really important. But, if we men are striving to have a heart for God, then I think our hunger for God is our biggest need. As we seek to find Christ in our marriages, then I believe that is our greatest need.

But for a long time you did pursue illicit sex as if it were your greatest need. Guys hooked on the pursuit of pornography today might feel the same way, even though they know it's sin.

And that's the question: What is my pursuit? What goals, what vision do I set my heart on?

We're teaching men a higher way. God has given us a biology of desire. There's no question about that. We are going to be stimulated by the sight of a naked female and want to act on that. That's part of who we are. But, we can override our basic human biology with a heart for God, and a heart for a one-flesh union, and a heart for our wives. If we can't do that, then God's playing an awfully dirty trick on us by asking us to be monogamous.

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From MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP Magazine, Fall 2000 issue.

Reclaiming a Misused Gift

Crisis counseling for porn and sex addicts helps uncover secrets and change attitudes.

Colossians 3:5

by James D. Berkley

People caught in the crisis of sick sex need intensive care. Their hurt and wounds have produced a perversion of one of their most basic drives. Condemnation hardly helps; they probably already hate themselves. They need comprehensive care, probably from specialists. And they need the spiritual wisdom and support of their pastor.

Crisis counseling involves several steps:

Help the person bring to the light what has been hidden. Then the problem takes on specific dimensions and can be attacked. Denial plays a great part in continuing sexual problems; admission begins the healing process.

Because of this, the counselee needs a noncondemning listener who will help measure the dimensions of the problem. Many counselors ask questions such as: When did this start? How often do you do it? Have you ever quit for any significant length of time? What factors surrounded your return? When are you most tempted? How much of your time is taken in thought about this problem? Simply talking rationally and openly about the obsession begins the process of disarming it.

Tackle the immediate legal, marital, or other social consequences. A betrayed and disgusted spouse may need to be brought into the counseling. The problems of arrest or public disclosure or church discipline may need to be worked through. Counselees need a guide as they walk through these disheartening consequences.

Develop a preliminary plan to break the habit. Certain activities can be restricted immediately: trips to the strip club; buying certain magazines; visiting unhealthy sites on the Internet; spending time with acquaintances who share the misconduct. Structures of accountability can be set up. If the counselee binds himself to report any untoward activities to someone else, he has one more reason not to give in.

A wife who inherits some of the bitter results of her husband's lust, for instance, certainly must be involved in the recovery. It's amazing how the very process of explaining lusts to one's wife dries up the wells of that lust. The idea is to encourage the counselee to make plans and report them.

The key at this step is the cooperation and absolute desire by the counselee to make a change. One way to increase the desire is to concentrate on what is being *lost* through continuing in unchecked lust, rather than in what must be given up "to be good."

Work toward fundamental changes of attitude. Through skilled counseling, the behavioral roots of obsession can be laid bare, such as childhood factors, dubious self-perception, misunderstandings, and past failures. Then a healthy and reconstructed ego can move toward appropriate sexuality. Most often, this kind of care is beyond the limitations of a parish pastor, and most refer such cases.

But questions of sin and guilt and wholeness are precisely in the province of pastoral care. Only the Father can forgive. Only Jesus' work can cleanse. Only the Holy Spirit can empower a conscience to live in the light.

—Copyright © 1989 by Christianity Today, Inc. From "Called Into Crisis," by James D. Berkley

Battle Strategies

When lust attacks, use these methods to identify it and overcome its power.

James 1:15

by Anonymous

This anonymous author, a Christian leader who fought a battle with lust, shares the strategies he uses in the combat.

1. Recognize and name the problem. If it's lust, call it lust. You must admit your condition before it can be treated.

2. Stop feeding lust. Cutting off desires through diversion, not dwelling on them when they begin, and trying to eliminate some of the mystery can help in the early stages of lust.

3. Demythologize it. Sexual stimulations promise a lie. *Playboy* centerfolds and other pictorial subjects represent an unrealizable ideal of sexuality that does not include feelings of impotence, awkwardness, monthly menstrual periods, and many other reminders of humanity. Life is far different from what porn portrays it to be.

4. Confess its real price. All the time lust was demanding its tribute from me, in the form of irritation with my wife and in the subtle and progressive loss of intimacy with my wife and with God, my own self-respect also was gradually deteriorating.

5. Trace its history. For some people, lust comes from trying to win back the love of a distant parent, or earning vengeance against a disappointing God, or overcoming feelings of physical inadequacy by feeding myths. Friends and, sometimes, professional counselors can help you identify the cycle of lust by exploring its history with you.

6. Study sex in perspective. From God's perspective, sex is a powerful dimension of humanity, but it was never meant to preoccupy or gain dominion over the creation. Getting an idea of what God had in mind won't tame the obsession, but it can be a picture to remember when the obsession flares, providing a counterpoint, a balance leading to alignment.

7. Build fantasies on God's ideal. It may help to channel your fantasy life toward your spouse. As you become creative and loving and healthful when thinking about sex, the obsession lessens. When a fantasy pops into mind, try to direct it and control it.

8. Work on some positive addictions. Tennis, maybe, or scuba diving or hang-gliding. When I'm tempted to go to a sexually explicit movie, I seek out a safe, constructive film to occupy my evening. The obsession fades, at least temporarily.

9. Recognize the humanity of your victims. As long as the obsession can make you blind enough to care about satisfying only your needs, you will continue. But once you realize what you are doing to others, including the very real objects of your lust and your own family, obsession becomes more difficult.

10. Obsession comes out of a legitimate set of anxieties; follow them to their authentic source. I need God. I need a father. I need female friendship. I need to be hugged. I need to be loved, and to love. Let these real needs be met when the obsession arises, and the sexually based substitute may lose its grip.

How to Start an Accountability Group

Those who struggle with pornography can find strength from their peers.

James 5:16

by Christopher Easley

An accountability group exists to help people of God stay pure and faithful in their walk with him and help them overcome pornography and sexual addiction. Here are four benefits to such a group:

1. It helps each member submit every part of life to God's will, because it keeps each member accountable to acting in a holy way.
2. It acts as a safeguard against lustful habits by bringing into the open each member's behavior. If he starts going down a dangerous path, the others can call him to purity.
3. Group meetings provide a regular time of encouragement and prayer for each member.
4. It builds strong friendships between Christians, who become vulnerable with one another and encourage each other.

Choosing Whom to Invite

Coed groups have difficulty providing accountability to sexual purity. Pray about whom to invite. Each person you invite should seek to follow Christ in everything, care about their character, be able to keep a secret, care about others, and not belittle others when they fail. No one who gossips about others should be invited. Vulnerable information will be shared at group meetings, and you want the group to be a safe place to share. You need to know those you invite well enough to know that they fit these criteria.

The larger the size of your group, the harder it is for the members to build friendships with each other. This causes problems for the group, as the effectiveness of the group is built on trusting the other members. If someone in an eight-member group knows five of the members well but doesn't know the other two, he probably won't be as open or vulnerable during meetings as he would be if he knew everyone in the group. So use discretion concerning how many people to invite.

Instructions on the Invitation

Once you have your final list of people to invite, write an invitation. Some helpful guidelines are:

1. Include a short explanation of the purpose of this accountability group.
2. Make it clear that this requires a commitment to come to regular meetings and to invest in the lives of the other members.
3. Ask the recipient of the invitation to pray about whether God wants him to join the group.
4. Ask the recipient to respond by a given date, usually about four weeks after you send out the invitations.
5. It may be helpful to include a page upon which they can write questions about the group.
6. Don't include the details about when and where the first meeting will be. You want your first meeting to be a strong start to a group of committed members. Only those who commit to being members of the group should be invited to the first meeting.

7. Don't mention the names of the others whom you are inviting. The recipient's decision to join should be a decision between him or her and God, not dependent on who else might be in the group. If someone decides not to join the group, his decision should be respected and remain confidential.

Preparing

Once you have everyone's final response, you can officially start the group. Even if only one person out of those you invited is interested in starting a group with you, start the group.

Set a time and place for your meetings with the other members. The place needs to be private, somewhere everyone in the group feels safe from intrusion. Plan a minimum of 45 minute, or multiply the number in the group by five—whichever is more. I strongly recommend having weekly meetings. It will be difficult to maintain effective accountability if you meet less frequently.

Content

There are two crucial parts to an effective accountability group meeting. The first is a time in which each member shares how he has sinned and the temptations he has faced since the last meeting, and how he fared concerning the temptations he mentioned at the previous meeting. You can facilitate this sharing in several ways. One is for the leader to ask these questions of each member at every meeting:

1. What sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations did you face?
3. How were you delivered from those temptations?
4. Are you unsure if any of your actions, thoughts, or words since our last meeting were sinful or not? If so, which ones?

Another method is to go over at the first meeting what each member will share each week and skip actually asking them the questions each week.

Someone may confess a sin of which they appear to be ashamed. If you observe this to be the case, ask him if he has been able to receive the Lord's forgiveness for his sin. If he says he still doesn't feel forgiven, lay a hand on him (ask permission first) and say, "You are forgiven in the name of Christ." It is important to affirm that we have been forgiven for our sins when we repent of them. You may be tempted to respond, "That's okay" but this is neither true nor helpful. "You have been forgiven through Christ" is the truthful response to a confession of sin.

Remember to ask them about how they fared concerning the sins and temptations that they mentioned at the last meeting. Take notes on what the various members share at each meeting so that you can remember during the prayer time and at the next meeting.

After everyone shares, the leader of the week can ask if anyone would like to be kept accountable throughout the week beyond the group meetings. This is the time to determine how each member can get the accountability he or she wants and needs.

The second essential part is group prayer for each member concerning what he or she has shared.

Format

Start with a short opening prayer. This helps focus everyone on God and acts as a clear sign that the meeting has officially started. The leader can then ask an icebreaker question, which starts a discussion about low-key issues before entering into sharing our sins and temptations. This is helpful because it is hard to start a meeting initially with sharing deep, personal problems and difficulties, even if everyone knows that's what the meeting is for. Close by having each person pray for the person on his left or right.

Feel free to experiment with formats. Try one format for a couple of meetings, and if it doesn't accomplish the goal, change it. You want to find a format that works and stick with it; that way everyone can become familiar with it and be the leader of the week if you ask them to be.

Leadership of the Accountability Group

Leaders have the responsibility of making the final call on decisions, but a good leader will get feedback from all the members affected by the decision before making it. Many decisions can be made as a group. It's your call whether to put decisions up to a vote or not.

Leadership of individual meetings can rotate from person to person. Once you've settled on a familiar format for meetings, ask the other members if they would like to lead the meetings once in a while. The weekly leader would be responsible for preparing any discussion questions or devotional thought for the meeting. Anything that you would do as the leader at one of the meetings, the leader of the week should do on their week.

—Christopher Easley

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Recovery for the Spouse

The person living with the addict needs special care and support, too.

Matthew 5:27–28

by Prodigals International

Getting someone free from the bondage of pornography and sexual addiction also means providing care to others who are caught in its wake, especially spouses of the addict. Here are nuggets of wise counsel you can give to these hurting people.

- **Draw a line in the sand.** Don't ignore his behavior; it will only get worse. Let him know gently but firmly that he must seek help. One pastor's wife tolerated—and covered up—her husband's pornography addiction for two years because she feared he'd lose his ministry. But those two years took a terrible toll on their marriage. And when his addiction came to light, the backlash from his church was much greater because he hadn't voluntarily sought help earlier.
- **Find support.** As soon as possible, the spouse should begin meeting with a counselor and a support group. The spouse may say, "Why should I see a counselor? I'm not the one with the problem." But the offended spouse must not decline to seek help. The wounds are just too deep.
- **Educate yourself.** Read Marsha Means' book, *Living With Your Husband's Secret Wars* (Revell, 1999), or other books written for the spouses of sexual addicts.
- **Deepen the relationship with God.** Encourage people to begin spending time daily with God, if they are not already doing so. Praying, reading the Bible or other devotional literature will give the strength to face the months ahead.
- **It's not about you.** It's not the wife's fault that the husband uses pornography. His behavior is about a broken place inside him.
- **Ask him to account for his time.** While it's not healthy for the marriage to become the spouse's primary accountability partner, it is appropriate to ask that he now account for his time. Ask him to keep in touch by phone during the day, and to say when he'll be late from work. The spouse may resist this level of accountability, but it is a legitimate request to help begin to rebuild trust.
- **Release revenge.** While it's completely appropriate for you to feel and express both hurt and anger over the addiction, avoid being punitive or abusive, either verbally or physically. Forgiveness should be the ultimate goal.

Be supportive of your spouse's recovery. But don't try to manage it. He needs another man to hold him accountable.

—Adapted from Prodigals International, www.prodigalsonline.org. Used with permission.

When Fantasy Becomes Reality

How to escape the pain of sexual immorality.

Proverbs 7:1–27

by Kevin A. Miller

I. Introduction

1. *Proverbs 7:6–15*. What you have here is an enticing temptation. Some of you may have faced something similar and know how enticing it can be. In fact, if you're a human being, you are going to encounter times in your life when you are sorely tempted to sexual immorality. Do you know how to emerge out of these kinds of situations with your character in tact or even stronger because it's proven itself in the test?

II. Sexual Immorality Will Kill What's Important to You

1. *Proverbs 7:21–27*. The message of this text could not be more clear. Sexual immorality will look good. It will feel good. It will smell good. And you'll want to go there. But God in his wisdom is saying: Count the cost, because you will dearly regret it. It will kill everything that's most important to you.
2. *Oxen, stags, and birds*. The Bible gives three word pictures—strong images—to show us what will happen. All three are animals that are soon going to be dead. They've been hunted or trapped, and they're about to be killed.
3. *"Her bedroom is the den of death."* The Bible is teaching us that when it comes to sexual immorality, what looks like it will delight you will actually destroy you. What starts out tasting like honey is going to turn into poison. So when we hear this phrase, "Her bedroom is the den of death," in our culture we think, *That sounds like a pretty good movie. I might want to rent that.* Our first instinct is not, *God, keep me pure, because impurity will destroy me.* We want the easy lie, and we are losing our capacity to stomach the hard truth, which is what the Bible gives us.

III. What Dies with Sexual Immorality

1. *Your closest relationships*. The relationships you care about, the people that matter to you in your life—that's what gets damaged. While you're in your fantasy, you're slowly killing off relationships in your life. You're killing off the relationship with a spouse or with friends or with the church people who care about you. God wants to spare you the pain of isolation. He wants to spare you the pain of ruined relationships. So he's saying: The cost is too high for immorality. Don't go there.
2. *Your freedom to make responsible choices in your life*. A Christian who spent a lot of time in strip bars wrote an article about his painful journey there and back, and he described it in three stages: awakening, obsession, and possession. Possession is a frightening state to be in. Addiction is not what God wants for you. He wants you to be a free human being. So he warns you, don't give in to immorality, because it can take you that way. The cost is too high.

IV. Immorality Kills Our Relationship with God

1. *God wants to be seen, enjoyed, and pursued by us*. Impurity begins to give us cataracts over our vision, and we begin to lose the capacity to see and enjoy God. Sexual idolatry could take a turn where it's got such a grip on you, you know full well it's an idol for you, and it's competing with and beginning to obscure who God is.

2. *God is not a killjoy.* Most people assume the Bible warns against sexual immorality because God is a killjoy. No—God is a keepjoy. He wants to keep joy in your life, and he knows if you go there it's going to start to erode your relationships, kill off your own freedom, and damage your relationship with him. He wants to save you from that, and he's telling you, the best for you is not giving into immorality.
3. *It's not too late.* Many of you are thinking you've already felt that move from awakening to obsession and to possession. God does have mercy on those who have fallen. He wants your best. He has mercy. Healing is difficult, but it's possible. It's going to take some hard choices. But it is possible for you.

V. Reduce the Chances of Falling

1. *Avoid situations you know are tempting for you.* I sometimes hear people say, "I can handle this. I've got will power. That's not going to bother me." Don't kid yourself. Build fences around your life and around those tempting situations, so you don't even have to use your will power. Some of you are right now spending a lot of time on the computer when you know full well that visiting porn sites is a problem for you.

Are you willing to be aggressive and put some things in place in your life that are going to protect you? You may need to change your policy about who you go to lunch with. Or you may need to change your address so you stop getting all those stupid porn sites. You're not going to win the battle by will power alone. Make your battle easier by setting up some fences, putting holy boundaries into your life.

2. *Build relationships of accountability.* One reason immorality has so much power is that it makes you hide from other people, and then you try to handle it on your own. When you get in the sphere of sexual temptation, the cone of delusion comes down over you and you start believing ridiculous things. Do you have somebody in your life whom you can be honest with, whom you can report to, who will walk with you through these things?

VI. Count the Cost of Sexual Immorality

1. *Take an accounting.* Immorality is always going to look good, but we forget that after this short, short pleasure, there's going to be a long, long pain. We need to know the consequences so it will sober us up.
2. *What steps will you take?* Because you will face these situations. And you may need to avoid situations you know are tempting for you. You may need to build in more aggressive boundaries around them. You may need to build honest friendships that are going to protect you when you begin to lose your way.

VII. Conclusion

God loves us. He wants the best for us. He wants to save every one of us from the tremendous pain that comes from sexual immorality. That's why he is saying in his wisdom: Listen to me. Pay attention to my words. Don't let your heart stray that way, because her house is the road to the grave and her bedroom is the den of death.

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Further Resources

Books and resources to equip you to respond to sexual addictions.

-  **BuildingChurchLeaders.com.** Leadership training resources from Christianity Today.
 - “Giving Help to the Hurting” Assessment Pack
 - “Shepherding Others” Training Theme and PowerPoint
 - “Spiritual Care” Training Theme and PowerPoint
 - “Confidentiality” Training Theme and PowerPoint
 - “Launching a Lay Counseling Ministry” Practical Ministry Skills
 - “Counseling Church Members” Practical Ministry Skills
-  **LeadershipJournal.net.** This website offers practical advice and articles for leaders.
-  **www.xxxchurch.com.** Features accountability software and other nonjudgmental and creative means to tackle the problem of pornography.
-  **Sexaholics Anonymous** www.sa.org. Operates a 12-step program on the AA model. This site provides self-assessment tests and meeting information.
-  **Covenant Eyes.** www.CovenantEyes.com. Online accountability software.
-  **Victims of Pornography** www.victimsofpornography.org. This site includes resource lists and information to raise awareness of the issue.
-  **Pure Life Ministries** www.purelifeministries.org. Founded by a former sex addict and his wife, this ministry offers live-in treatment programs of 6 months to 12 months.
-  **Prodigals International.** www.prodigalsonline.org
-  **Setting Captives Free.** www.settingcaptivesfree.com

A Biblical Guide to Counseling the Sexual Addict by *Steve Gallagher*. A road map of counseling for pornography and related issues, from the founder and president of Pure Life Ministries. (Pure Life Ministries, 2005; ISBN 978-0971547094)

Every Man's Battle by *Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker with Mike Yorkey*. Teaches men to avoid the assault of sexual images and achieve victory with their eyes. (WaterBrook, 2000; ISBN 978-1578563685)

Faithful and True by *Dr. Mark Laaser*. Offers help and hope to those struggling to maintain sexual integrity and self-control. (Zondervan, 1992; ISBN 978-0310208365)

False Intimacy by *Harry W. Schaumburg*. Explores the roots of sexually addictive behavior and offers direction for restoration. (NavPress, 1992; ISBN 978-0891097112)

Pure Desire by *Ted Roberts*. A recovered porn addict offers a battle plan for churches and leaders to wage war on spiritual addiction. (Gospel Light, 1999; ISBN 978-0830723355)

The Sexual Man by *Archibald Hart*. Presents a psychological and biblical perspective on healthy male sexuality. (W Publishing Group, 1995; ISBN 978-0849936845)

When Good Men Are Tempted by *Bill Perkins*. Helps men understand and overcome sexual temptation. (Zondervan, 1997; ISBN 978-0310215660)

When His Secret Sin Breaks Your Heart by *Kathy Gallagher*. A collection of letters to wives of sexually addicted men. (Pure Life Ministries, 2003; ISBN 978-0971547018)