

# Your Brain on Porn

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Luke Gilkerson



5 proven ways pornography warps your mind and 3 biblical ways to renew it.

# The Great Porn Experiment

“It seems so obvious,” says Damon Brown, a regular writer for *Playboy*. “If we invent a machine, the first thing we are going to do—after making a profit—is use it to watch porn.” In the last 150 years, pornography has ridden on the heels of new technology, from the photograph to the film projector, from VHS to DVDs, from the World Wide Web to smartphones. “You name it,” Brown says, “pornography planted its big flag there first, or at least shortly thereafter.”<sup>1</sup>

We’d like to believe Christians are immune to the prevalence of pornography, but Paul Fishbein, founder of Adult Video News, is right when he says, “Porn doesn’t have a demographic—it goes across all demographics.”<sup>2</sup>

Pastors agree. In March 2005, *Christianity Today* published the results of a study called “Christians and Sex” in their *Leadership Journal*. Out of 680 pastors surveyed, 57% said addiction to pornography is the most sexually damaging issue to their congregation.<sup>3</sup>

We are only beginning to see the effects of mass-produced porn on our culture. The Internet generation—those who have grown up with online media in the home—is only just now entering adulthood. Surveys from young adults confirm it: many saw pornography for the first time when they were very young, and today consuming Internet pornography is a weekly, or even daily, affair for many college-age men and women.<sup>4</sup>

Does this really matter? Some people would say there is no documented research showing the damaging effects of pornography. Some people don’t believe pornography can harm us.

Those people would be wrong.

In the early 1980s, Dr. Dolf Zillmann of Indiana University and Dr. Jennings Bryant of The University of Alabama wondered whether continued exposure to video pornography had any impact

on people’s sexual beliefs and their attitudes towards women. For their experiment, 80 male and 80 female

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college-age participants were divided into three subgroups, and each group was shown 4 hours and 48 minutes of media.

- ▶ The first group, the “Massive Exposure Group,” was shown 36 non-violent pornographic films over a six-week period.
- ▶ The second group, the “Intermediate Exposure Group,” was exposed to 18 pornographic films and 18 regular films over a six-week period.
- ▶ The third (control) group, the “No Exposure Group,” was shown 36 non-pornographic movies over a six-week period.

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Later, these groups were asked a variety of questions ranging from their personal preferences to social issues.<sup>5</sup> The results are interesting from a psychological perspective, and also because of what the Word of God says about the nature of lust and sexual immorality.

### Finding #1: Watching Porn Decreases Our Sexual Satisfaction

God is not the enemy of pleasure. He is the Creator of it. The Bible proclaims it. Even the demons know it. But is it human beings who are most likely to forget it.

The demon Screwtape, in C.S. Lewis' *The Screwtape Letters*, reminds his young demonic apprentice of this truth. "[God's] a hedonist at heart. All those fasts and vigils and stakes and crosses are only a facade. Or only like foam on the sea shore. Out at sea, out in His sea, there is pleasure and more pleasure. He makes no secret of it; at His right hand are 'pleasures forevermore.' ...He has filled the world full of pleasures."<sup>6</sup>

Sex is one of these God-created pleasures. To highlight the goodness of sexual pleasure, God inspired King Solomon to write a little book of romantic melodies called "The Song of Songs"—a title that means "the best love song of all." This book expresses—at times in erotic detail—the pleasure and joy of marital sexuality.

But like all good things, sin aims to twist this pleasure.

In their experiment, Zillmann and Bryant found a direct correlation between the amount of pornography one viewed and one's overall sexual satisfaction in real relationships. Participants from the Massive Exposure Group reported *less* satisfaction with their intimate partners: they were less likely to be pleased with their partner's physical appearance, affection, and sexual performance.

Zillmann and Bryant concluded that porn consumers eventually compare their spouse with images of porn models. Another study appearing in the *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy* in 2002 found similar results. When men and women were exposed to pictures of female centerfold models from *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, this significantly lowered their judgments about the attractiveness of "average" people.<sup>7</sup>

When people become more and more entrenched in pornography, this ends up only deluding and deadening their libido. Dr. Mary Anne Layden concludes, "Having spent so much time in unnatural sexual experiences with paper, celluloid and cyberspace, they seem to find it difficult to have sex with a real human being." Pornography, she says, "is toxic miseducation about sex and relationships," training men and women to expect online "designer sex" in the real world.<sup>8</sup>

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This comparison isn't merely about body type or sexual performance. Someone exposed again and again to pornography can also end up comparing *the whole fantasy experience* to their sex lives. Instead of being drawn to one woman or one man, they end up being turned on by the *variety* and *novelty* porn offers them.

Neurobiologist Peter Milner explains that our brains are wired to be attracted to that which is unfamiliar and novel. This inward drive is what helps us to learn new things and adapt to our environment. But, he explains, it is possible "to become addicted to novelty and uncertainty."<sup>9</sup> Over time the brain that feeds on erotic media is trained to equate sexual excitement with the novelty and variety of pornography. Eventually the familiar face, body, and sexual performance of a spouse doesn't arouse the way it used to.

For all of Solomon's romantic wisdom and marital passion, even he was ensnared by a lust for "variety." In 1 Kings 11 we learn Solomon eventually accumulated 700 wives and 300 concubines because "he loved many foreign women" (v.1). Solomon was a man who

*"Pornography essentially trains men and women to be consumers, not lovers; to treat sex as a commodity; to think about sex as something on-tap and made-to-order."*

was richer than Bill Gates, more spiritually influential than Billy Graham, smarter than Einstein, and yet he had a harem bigger than Hugh Hefner's.

Pornography essentially trains men and women to be *consumers*, not lovers; to treat sex as a *commodity*; to think about sex as something on-tap and made-to-order. As Dr. Judith Reisman rightly concludes, pornography "castrates" men visually, training them to retreat into the realm of fantasy if they want to be aroused.<sup>10</sup>

### ► Finding #2: Watching Porn Disconnects Us from Real Relationships

"Casual sex" is not new to our generation. Even 2,000 years ago, the apostle Paul planted churches in places like Corinth—a city with a reputation that would make a Las Vegas pimp blush. In Corinth, sex was a religion—literally. The temple to Aphrodite was home to thousands of priestesses—glorified prostitutes—who serviced the worshippers. The loose sexual mores of Corinth were even lower than those of the rest of the Roman Empire, and the verb "corinthianize" was coined to describe this lifestyle of decadent sin.

Paul's word for this way of life was *porneia*: a persistent lifestyle of sexual immorality. To the church in Corinth, surrounded by these depraved influences, Paul writes, "Flee from sexual immorality....Because of the temptation

to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband” (1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2). Paul commends a habit of regular sexual intimacy between husbands and wives because the temptation to sin is, at times, very strong (7:3-5). For Paul, sexual passion found its proper expression in marriage, not in the sensual Corinthian culture.

Today, watching pornography is one expression of casual sex, the opportunity to experience sexual pleasure without the bother of marital commitment. We see this especially among the younger generations who have taken up the habit of “sexting,” sending racy photos or videos of themselves to others—essentially becoming someone else’s pornography. As one 17-year-old girl put it: “There’s a positive side to sexting. You can’t get pregnant from it, and you can’t transmit STDs. It’s a kind of safe sex.”<sup>11</sup>

Pornography is not only an expression of casual sex but feeds a desire for it. After their experiment, Zillmann and Bryant concluded, the more porn someone saw, the more likely they were to prefer sex without emotional involvement. After watching less than five hours of pornography over a six-week period, the Massive Exposure group was more likely to *devalue* marriage, the idea of having children, and the importance of faithfulness

in a relationship. They also showed a greater acceptance of premarital sex.

Dr. Gary Brooks, author of *The Centerfold Syndrome*, explains how pornography alters the way men think about romantic relationships. The glossy magazine pictures or pixels on the screen have no sexual or relational expectations of their own. This essentially trains men to desire the cheap thrill of fantasy over a committed relationship. Pornography trains men to be digital voyeurs, to prefer *looking* at women more than seeking out genuine intimacy.<sup>12</sup>

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We might say the real problem with pornography isn’t that it shows us *too much* sex, but that it doesn’t show us *enough*—it cannot possibly give us an experience of real intimacy. Porn treats sex one-dimensionally, packages it in pixels, and rips it from its relational context. It only titillates us with images of sex but cannot offer the experience of closeness with another person.

### ► Finding #3: Watching Porn Lowers Our View of Women

“You come of the Lord Adam and the Lady Eve,” said C.S. Lewis’ Aslan. “And that is both honor enough to erect the head of the



poorest beggar and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth.”<sup>13</sup>

The Scriptures tell us both men and women are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28). The implications of this doctrine are far-reaching. As image-bearers we “reflect” God in a way no other creature on earth does. As far as God is concerned, to assault someone made in His image is a great crime (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). Knowing we are made in God’s image should impact how we see ourselves and one another.

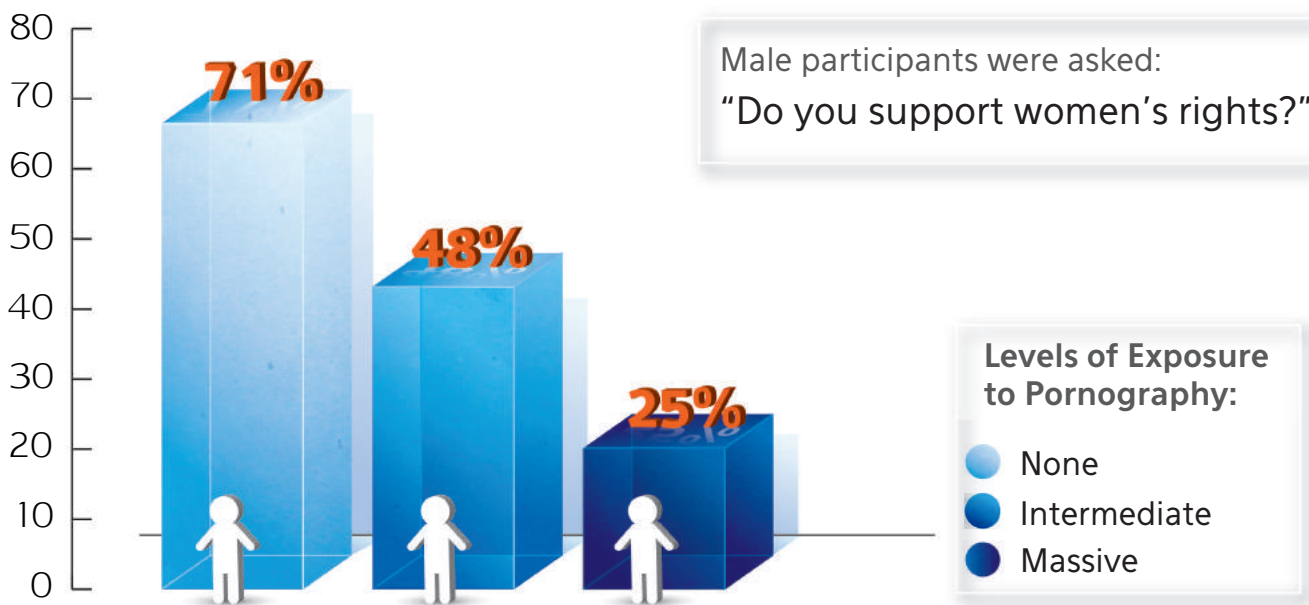
It is not only men who bear this image, but women as well. In human history the failure to appreciate this fact has led to all manner of abuses to women. And in our increasingly sexualized culture, it is women who are often the most dehumanized as they are constantly rated for the size, shape, and harmony of their body parts. Often pornography, and even mainstream media, portrays women as people

who are *glad* to be used and objectified. It isn’t surprising to find women increasingly devalued in our porn-saturated culture.

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In the Zillman-Bryant experiment, the Massive Exposure Group was far more likely to believe women in society really fit the stereotype of the women they saw in pornographic films. They were more likely to believe all women are really “as hysterically euphoric in response to just about any sexual or pseudosexual stimulation, and as eager to accommodate seemingly any and every sexual request” as the porn girls.

Participants in the experiment were asked to rate their overall support for women’s rights. Men in the Massive Exposure Group



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showed a 46% drop in support compared to the No Exposure Group. And among *women* participants, this drop was an alarming 30%.

“Free porn” is a misnomer. Pornography always costs somebody something. And it’s the women and girls in our culture, surrounded by boys and men with porn expectations, who often end up paying the highest price.

Naomi Wolf, writing for *New York Magazine*, puts it best: “Today real naked women are just bad porn.” The onslaught of porn doesn’t train men to value women as people made in the image of God, but instead trains people to see fewer and fewer women as porn-worthy.<sup>14</sup>

#### ► Finding #4: Watching Porn Desensitizes Us to Cruelty

David’s daughter Tamar was beautiful, and David’s son Amnon secretly loved her from a distance. Amnon described his obsession and lust as so great, it “tormented” him to the point of being ill (2 Sam. 13:2). Eventually he hatched a plan to get her into bed. When the moment came and they were alone, he forced himself upon her and raped her. Then, the Scriptures say, after he had his way with her, he “hated her with very great hatred” (v.15) and threw her out of his house.

A story like this shows the insidious nature of lust. True love leads us to serve one another as human beings created in God’s image. Lust leads us to *use* one another, to see others as

expendable. And just like in the case of Tamar, a mind that only sees women as objects of lust, can also easily be numbed to cruelty towards women.

In Zillmann and Bryant’s experiment, when asked how common certain sexual activities were in society— activities like anal sex, group sex, sadomasochism, and bestiality—the percentages given by the Massive Exposure Group were two to three times higher than the No Exposure Group. Pornography led them to believe these sexual activities were more common.

*“True love leads us to serve one another as human beings created in God’s image.”*

Watching pornography also conditioned participants to trivialize rape. Participants were asked to read about a legal case where a man raped a female hitchhiker and then recommend a length for the rapist’s prison sentence. Males in the No Exposure Group said 94 months; the Massive Exposure Group cut this by nearly half, recommending only 50 months.

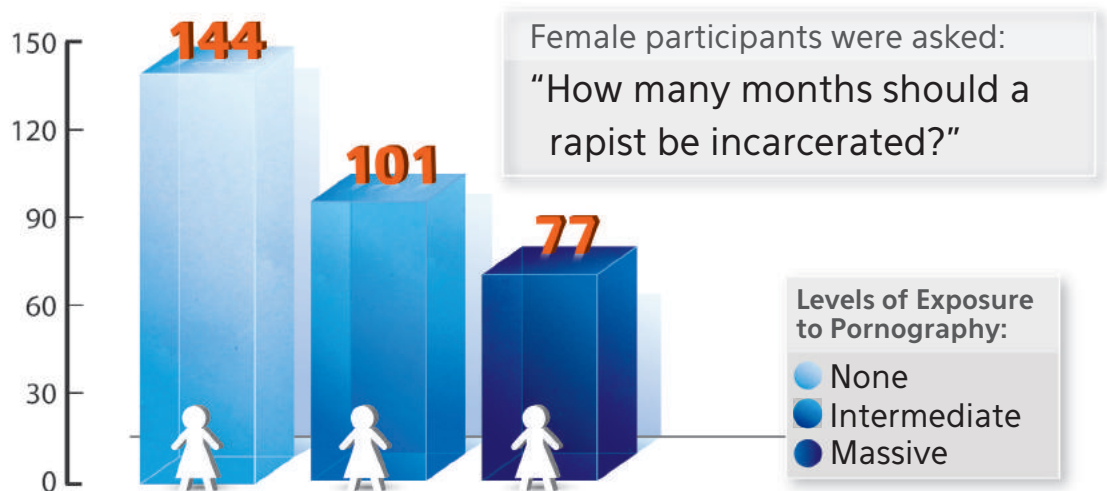
Pornography essentially desensitizes us to sexual violence and cruelty, even when the pornography is considered “non-violent” in nature. Unfortunately, aggression is common in pornography today. A 2000 study discovered the presence of violence in 42% of online pornography.<sup>15</sup> Today, it is not uncommon for even the youngest Internet

users to be exposed to graphic material. By the age of 18, for instance, 39% of boys and 23% of girls have seen acts of sex involving bondage online.<sup>16</sup>

In a 2007 presentation, Robert Wosnitzer, Ana Bridges, and Michelle

Chang released the results of their study of the 50 top selling adult DVDs. After analyzing 304 distinct scenes in these films, they found 3,376 acts of verbal or physical aggression—that’s an act of aggression every minute and a half. About 90% of scenes contained at least one act of aggression. Verbal aggression, such as name-calling, was present in about half of adult video scenes. In 73% of instances, men were the aggressors, and when women were the aggressors, most of the time they were being aggressive to another woman. In 95% of the scenes, the person receiving the aggression reacted neutrally or positively to it. Positive or healthy sexual acts, such as kissing or compliments, were found in only 10% of scenes.<sup>17</sup>

These numbers give us a glimpse of the sexual education porn consumers receive. Routinely, pornography depicts acts of aggression, cruelty, and degradation, and teaches viewers that women enjoy these acts.



### ► Finding #5: Watching Porn Makes Us Want to Watch More Porn

As Solomon said, sex is *intoxicating* (Song of Songs 1:4). To his students he wrote, “Rejoice in the wife of your youth...be intoxicated always in her love,” but do not get drunk on the embrace of a forbidden woman (Prov. 5:18-20).

Solomon had no knowledge of the human brain the way we do today, but his words on the intoxicating nature of sexuality take on a new richness as we study the effects of pornography on the mind and body.

Two weeks after the Zillmann-Bryant experiment, all participants were given an assortment of pornographic and non-pornographic films to watch in private. Those who were exposed to more pornography were significantly more likely to want to watch hardcore porn.



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Continually watching pornography has been shown to produce an escalation effect. Fifteen years after this experiment, Dr. Zillmann continued research in this area, finding that the habitual use of pornography led to greater tolerance of sexually explicit material over time, requiring the viewer to consume more novel and bizarre material to achieve the same level of arousal or interest.<sup>18</sup>

The hot-button issue today is the question of “porn addiction”—can someone become literally *addicted* to pornography? In a 2008 survey, over 90% of therapists believed a person could become addicted to cybersex.<sup>19</sup> Some have proposed calling this “hypersexual disorder,” and recent studies in neurochemistry confirm these findings. In his book *Wired for Intimacy*, Dr. William Struthers discusses at length the various hormones and neurotransmitters triggered by watching pornography. He writes:

As men fall deeper into the mental habit of fixating on these images, the exposure to them creates neural pathways. Like a path is created in the woods with each successive hiker, so do the neural paths set the course for the next time an erotic image is viewed. Over time these neural paths become wider as they are

repeatedly traveled with each exposure to pornography. They become the automatic pathway through which interactions with women are routed. The neural circuitry anchors this process solidly in the brain. With each lingering stare, pornography deepens the Grand Canyon-like gorge in the brain through which images of women are destined to flow. This extends to women that they have not seen naked or engaging in sexual acts as well. All women become potential porn stars in the minds of these men.<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, the “addiction” label may or may not be helpful. There is no medically diagnosable line one crosses from being a non-addict to being an addict—it is a gradual move. Author Michael Leahy, a self-proclaimed recovering sex addict, has been to more than 200 college campuses with his *Porn Nation: The Naked Truth* presentation, and he says the No. 1 question he hears from college students is, “Can I look at porn *recreationally* without becoming addicted to it, and is there anything wrong with that?” Even in light of his past, Leahy chooses not to focus on the addictive character of pornography, but rather on its sexually exploitative message. “So,” Leahy responds, “do you think it’s okay if I beat and berate my wife just once a month? I mean, I’m not addicted to it.”<sup>21</sup> Usually reframing the question this way helps young men and women to see the problem of pornography differently.

Regardless of the specific labels we use, the intoxicating nature of pornography cannot be denied. The more we watch pornography, the more pornography we want to watch: it is like a toxin that gets into our blood. This is one great example of what Paul calls “the law of sin,” sin’s persuasive pull, which he says resides in the physical members of our bodies (Rom. 7:22-24). We can become captive to the impulses of our brains and bodies when they are trained by sinful indulgence.

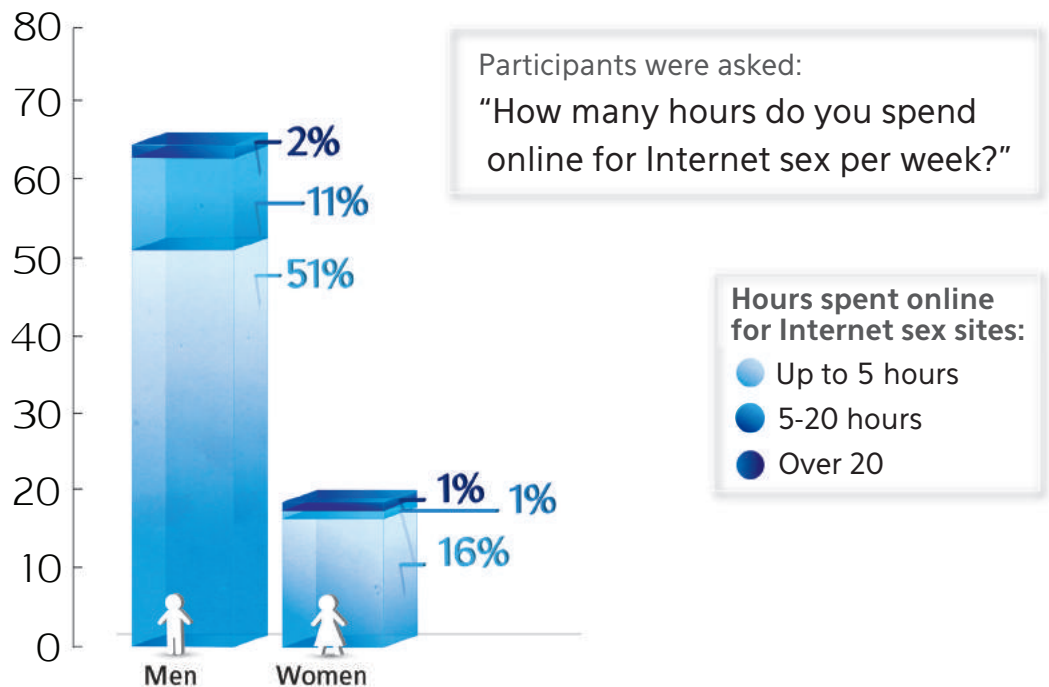
### ► 25 Years Later: The Explosion of Internet Porn

At a 2011 conference, Dr. Mary Anne Layden commented about Zillmann and Bryant’s 25-year-old research. “When this study was done, that was called the ‘Massive Exposure Group’—seeing five hours of porn over a six-week period—“I now call that the ‘Friday Afternoon Group.’”<sup>22</sup>

Her statement is far from an exaggeration. A recent survey of 29,000 people at North American universities shows 51% of men and 16% of women spend up to five hours *per week* online for sexual purposes, and another 11% of men spend

anywhere from five to 20 hours per week. What used to be “massive” exposure is now common practice.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the Internet has not only increased the public’s exposure to porn, but has also changed the way it is consumed. Dr. Jill Manning believes Zillmann and Bryant’s findings have *greater* applicability in the modern age because Internet porn tends to be more interactive and consumer-driven. Viewers can select exactly who and what they want to see, custom-tailored to their greatest specifications.<sup>24</sup>



# First Steps to Freedom: Renewing the Mind

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This paper outlined five ways pornography warps our minds.

- 1. Watching Porn Decreases Our Sexual Satisfaction.** It trains us to desire the variety and “designer sex” of porn more than the familiar sexuality of marriage.
- 2. Watching Porn Disconnects Us from Real Relationships.** It trains us to detach emotional involvement from sexual experience.
- 3. Watching Porn Lowers Our View of Women.** It trains us to see women as sexual commodities, not people created in God’s image.
- 4. Watching Porn Desensitizes Us to Cruelty.** It numbs us to the seriousness of verbal and physical aggression.
- 5. Watching Porn Makes Us Want to Watch More Porn.** It taps into the neuro-circuitry of our brains, making us desire the rush of sexual energy from porn again and again.

For those who have been entrenched in pornography, how do we reverse these mind-warping effects? How do we renew our minds (Rom. 12:1-2)?

## ► Keep in Step with the Spirit

The Bible does not describe us merely as wayward, broken, and needing a “moral boost” but as those who are *dead* in sin (Eph. 2:1). Dead men and women do not need reform: they need resurrection.

For the follower of Christ, the ultimate goal is not merely “quitting pornography,” but is something far richer and more comprehensive. If merely modifying behavior was the most important thing, there are any number of psychological tips and tricks one can use. But for the Christian, as it should be for all people, the goal is not merely *recovering* from pornography, but being *remade* by God Himself into the image of the perfect Man, Jesus Christ.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Just as sure as pornography stirs up lustful cravings in us, the Holy Spirit is a source of new, holy cravings. Romans 8 tells us all true Christians have the Spirit of Christ within them (v.9). Galatians 5 says we are given the “desires of the Spirit” (v.17), and when we keep in step with these desires (v.16) the lusts of the flesh (leading to sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality) will not have their way in us.

This is what the old Scottish minister Thomas Chalmers called “the expulsive power of a new affection.” Laws, rules, and regulations can only tell us *what* is bad and *why* it is bad, but they do not change our *desire* for sinful things. These sinful longings can only be conquered by implanting new “affections,” new cravings, that counter our sinful cravings. This is what the Spirit does in us: He shares His own desires with us, changing us from the inside out.

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Paul tells us we must “keep in step” with the desires of the Spirit with us (Galatians 5:16). How do we do this?

## 1. Actively Hope in the Gospel.

“Walk in the Spirit.” In the original language, Paul’s phrase literally means, “walk as *you have been walking* in the Spirit.” How had the Galatians been walking in the Spirit? In Galatians 5:5 he says, “For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.” Keeping in step with the Spirit, therefore, first has something to do with *hope*.

The gospel Paul declared is a message of anticipation and expectation, what Paul calls the “hope of righteousness.” Our great hope is that one day Christ will judge the world (Acts 17:31). He will destroy sin and death forever. He will recreate the world, and we will be just like Him (1 Cor. 15:51-55). This is our astounding hope.

For Paul, faith in the gospel does not merely mean we assent to these grand promises but that we *give ourselves wholly* to them: we center our lives on them. Far from being a passive thing, faith is active. It engages the mind and the heart. As the author of Hebrews says, faith is the assurance and essence of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1): it is the *delightful conviction* that the things we hope for are real.

Walking in the Spirit means we stir up this hope in us, or as Paul says, we “eagerly wait” for it (Gal. 5:5). We all have hope, but it is

not a perfect hope. We all suffer from the distractions of the world and sin. It is for this reason the apostle Peter urges us: “set your hope *fully* on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:13, italics added).

Practically speaking, this means just as we have fed our minds on pornography, we should now feed our minds on eternity. Just as we have spent hours engrossed in sexual media, we should spend time filling our imaginations with the eternal promises of God. We must, as Paul says, set our minds on the things of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5), on the glories of our inheritance as God’s children (v.17).

It is amazing how this renewed hope combats the mind-warping impact of pornography. When our imaginations are filled with anticipation of the coming kingdom of God, we become more and more determined to taste this future hope in the here and now. The apostle John reminds us that though we are now children of God, “what we will be has not yet appeared,” but we know when Christ appears we will be like him, because we shall see Him face to face (1 John 3:2). He follows this glorious promise with the practical application: “Everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:3). Knowing we are destined for an eternity of breathtaking purity and holiness, we purify ourselves here and now because we want to have a taste of this future hope.

As intense as pornography is, it cannot compare to the life-sustaining hope we

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have in Christ. Far from shutting down our desires, actively hoping in God's promises fully engages our desires in ways we never dreamed of. C.S. Lewis reminds us,

Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased....Do you think I am trying to weave a spell? Perhaps I am; but remember your fairy tales. Spells are used for breaking enchantments as well as for inducing them. And you and I have need of the strongest spell that can be found to wake us from the evil enchantment of worldliness.<sup>25</sup>

## 2. Actively Obey the Word.

When Paul writes, "keep in step with the Spirit," the word he uses is the same as that of an army marching in line, a platoon following their marching orders. Lest we think keeping in step with the Spirit is a purely mystical experience, Paul says it is very practical. Keeping in step with the Spirit means obeying His clearly revealed orders.

We cannot claim to keep in step with God's Spirit if we ignore or disobey the writings He inspired—the Scriptures. Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit speaks clear words to the church. Growing up in a Jewish context, Paul understood this. He knew all the writings of the prophets were "breathed out by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). No less than 32 times in Paul's letters he uses the phrase "it is written," pointing to the writings of the prophets who came before him. Paul also knew the Spirit was inspiring him and his fellow apostles (Eph. 3:5). "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction," Paul says, "that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

To keep in step with the Spirit we must know and obey the Book He inspired. We must explore the Bible and learn what God thinks. We must renew our minds with His thoughts.

Take, for instance, the five main ways pornography warps the mind. Exploring the Bible, we can "reverse engineer" the bad training pornography has given us and replace it with God's thoughts.

1. **God is the creator of sexual satisfaction and has designed marriage, not pornographic fantasy, for its enjoyment** (Song of Sg. 4:9-16; 1 Thess. 4:1-8).
2. **God has defined good sex as an expression of "oneness," not emotional detachment** (Gen. 2:24).



**3. God has created women in His image. They are not sexual commodities but are worthy of great honor** (Gen. 1:27; 1 Pet. 3:7).

**4. God has designed sex as an expression of affection, not aggression** (Deut. 22:25; Eph. 5:28-30).

**5. God redeems our fallen sex drive so sex is an act of love and giving, not selfishness** (1 Cor. 13:4-7; Gal. 5:22-23).

Each of these ideas is only a seed, but the more the mind engages with the Bible around these truths, the more our thoughts are renovated. Over time our minds will be rewired to see things God's way. As we do this we are "sowing to the Spirit" and in time will reap a harvest of eternal life (Gal. 6:8).

### 3. Actively Engage in Community.

When Paul says we are to "walk in the Spirit" he is writing to a church community, not just to random individuals reading his letter in their private corners. Keeping in step with the Spirit of God is a community activity, something we do together.

In other words, we keep in step with the Spirit by keeping in step with one another. We must live lifestyles of encouragement and accountability.

Nothing slays the power of sin like confession. James writes, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed" (James 5:16). In

confessing our sins to *God* we are promised forgiveness. In confessing sin to *others* we are made whole.

Sin must be *habitually* exposed to the light of confession. This is called *accountability*: being honest with another trusted believer about our temptations, sins, and the state of our heart. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, after eating of the forbidden fruit, our knee-jerk reaction is to hide—to hide from God and from one another. Accountability is the willingness to habitually and regularly allow others access to your heart, your motives, your secret desires, your dark thoughts, and, of course, your sinful actions.

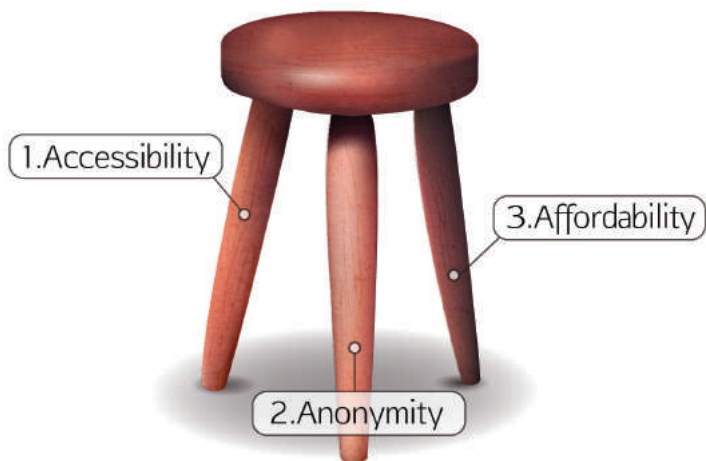
How does this relate to pornography? The late psychologist, Dr. Al Cooper, believed three main factors draw people into online sexual activity:<sup>26</sup>

1. *Accessibility* (porn is accessible easily from any Internet connection)
2. *Affordability* (millions of free or very cheap images are available online)
3. *Anonymity* (home computers and Smartphones have made it very easy to be secretive)

He dubbed this the "Triple-A Engine" of Internet porn.

These three factors work like three legs on a stool: remove just one of the legs and the stool will fall (or at least make it awkward to sit on).

The easiest leg to remove is the leg of *anonymity*, or secrecy. We do this by becoming accountable to others about the time we spend online, taking away the option to hide our Internet activity.



One way to do this is through the use of Covenant Eyes Internet Accountability. This software program monitors your home computer, work computer, or smartphone and then sends a detailed report of your Internet activity to a trusted friend, spouse, or mentor. Covenant Eyes, which pioneered this concept, also rates websites for mature content, flagging specific web searches and sites.

Confession of sin is not the only goal of Christian community. In the face of each other's weaknesses, we need to encourage one another to fight sin. The author of Hebrews says, "let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not

neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (Heb. 10:24-25).

This can be called "responsive accountability." When we give an *account* of our sins to someone else, in return, they should listen and then give an *account* of God's gospel promises to us.

In this text, God calls us to "stir up" one another—that is, to urge, to spur on, to provoke, to motivate each other—to love and good deeds. Each time we meet together we should be contemplating and praying, "God, show me how I can really motivate my friend to resist temptation and instead love You and others wholeheartedly." We are to have a hardcore intentionality and thoughtfulness in our friendships.

Like the embers of a red-hot fire, we stir up the fire not by adding heat to it, but rather by exposing the glowing embers to the air, helping to bring out of the embers the energy that is in them already. If the Spirit of God is in us, He has already planted His holy desires into our hearts. He has etched his law on our hearts (Jer. 31:33-34; Ez. 36:25-27). But He has also placed us in the family of the church, among trusted friends who are also filled with His Spirit, in order that we might stir up in each other what God has already put in us.

# Endnotes

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