



# PORN

---

# AND THE

---

# PASTOR

The Life and Death Consequences  
of Addiction in Ministry

EDITED BY

C. JEFFREY ROBINSON AND GARRETT KELL





# PORN

---

# AND THE

---

# PASTOR

The Life and Death Consequences  
of Addiction in Ministry

EDITED BY

C. JEFFREY ROBINSON AND GARRETT KELL

*Porn and the Pastor: The Life and Death Consequences of Addiction*  
Copyright © 2018 by SBTS Press

SBTS Press c/o Communications  
2825 Lexington Road  
Louisville, KY 40280

SBTS Press is a division of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise) without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by United States copyright law.

Printed in the United States of America.

Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. ESV® Text Edition: 2011. The ESV® text has been reproduced in cooperation with and by permission of Good News Publishers. Unauthorized reproduction of this publication is prohibited. All rights reserved.

ISBN-13: 978-0692175224

ISBN-10: 0692175229

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
C. JEFFREY ROBINSON AND GARRETT KELL	
<b>01 PORN AND THE RAGE AGAINST MAN AND HIS MAKER</b>	<b>9</b>
JEREMY YONG	
<b>02 I WAS A PORN-ADDICTED PASTOR</b>	<b>17</b>
GARRETT KELL	
<b>03 FOUR REVELATIONS ABOUT PORN FROM YOUR WIFE'S PERSPECTIVE</b>	<b>27</b>
NIKKI DANIEL	
<b>04 THE PORNOGRAPHY ECOSYSTEM</b>	<b>33</b>
JOHN HENDERSON	
<b>05 HOW DO I FIGHT THIS SIN?</b>	<b>45</b>
DEEPAK REJU	
<b>06 DEVELOPING HONEST ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	<b>55</b>
ERIK RAYMOND	
<b>07 DELIGHTING IN YOUR WIFE</b>	<b>67</b>
BRIAN DAVIS	
<b>08 THOUGHTS ON THE RESTORATION OF FALLEN PASTORS</b>	<b>73</b>
JARED C. WILSON	
<b>09 RESTORING A PASTOR AFTER A STRUGGLE WITH PORNOGRAPHY</b>	<b>87</b>
GARRETT HIGBEE	
<b>10 DON'T RUSH TO RESTORE A FALLEN PASTOR</b>	<b>101</b>
JONATHAN LEEMAN	
<b>11 PURSUE GOD, NOT PORNOGRAPHY</b>	<b>105</b>
DENNY BURK	
<b>12 RECOMMENDED RESOURCES</b>	<b>119</b>



## **PORN: A TOXIC OPPONENT AMONG GOD'S MINISTERS**

---

Virtually everyone who has attended a local church for very long has seen it. A pastor confesses an adulterous relationship or an elder announces a fellow pastor is taking time away to overcome issues related to pornography. Most of us know pornography is a plague in our culture, but few know that many pastors struggle with it as well. With the proliferation of the Internet during the past two-plus decades, the accessibility of porn is at an unprecedented level. In porn, Satan certainly has a potent weapon at his disposal, one he aims often at local church leaders.

As porn use has risen in the church and has infiltrated the lives of church leaders, an entire host of questions have arisen regarding the care for those who have fallen alongside questions as to how best to protect the purity of local churches.

This ebook is a small attempt to examine a problem that only seems to grow in magnitude. In this volume, we seek to attack porn in the pastoral ministry from a number of practical angles: How do we restore a pastor who has succumbed to porn's deadly grip? How do we minister to a man in the middle

of porn addiction? Is he still fit for ministry? If so, when should he return? You'll read the powerful story of a pastor who was addicted to pornography but who was, by God's grace, able to overcome it and continues to enjoy a fruitful ministry today. We also examine how a porn addiction affects a pastor's wife and family and how a God-called man can guard his heart and mind against this loathsome intruder.

We pray it will please the Lord to use this ebook to minister to God's men, their churches, and their families, and that porn use among God's people will become an issue that is approached with blood-earnest seriousness by local churches. Like a deadly rattlesnake, porn is not an issue to be trifled with, and it must be confronted intentionally, vigorously, and perennially among the people of God.

Jeff Robinson and Garrett Kell  
Editors



## PORN AND THE RAGE AGAINST MAN AND HIS MAKER

---

*Though man insists on demoting God and objectifying his  
created people, this does not change the fact that there is only one  
king who has ownership of man.*

by Jeremy Yong

To rage against man — made in the image of God — is to rage against God himself.<sup>1</sup> Burned in the fire in the rage against man are God’s good purposes for his created people. This rage against man and God is easily identified in the sins of murder and chattel slavery, but where it is not so easily identified or admitted is in the sin of viewing pornography.<sup>2</sup>

---

1. For treatment of this specific idea, see Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 16. In discussing God’s required penalty for murder in Genesis 9:6, Hoekema states, “The reason that murder is here said to be such a heinous crime that it must be punished by death is that the man who has been murdered is someone who imaged God, reflected God, was like God, and represented God. Therefore, when one kills a human being, not only does he take that person’s life, but he hurts God himself — the God who was reflected in that individual. To touch the image of God is to touch God himself; to kill the image of God is to do violence to God himself.”

2. Of course this rage against God and man are found in the production of pornography in general. For the purposes of this chapter, I mostly limit discussion to the viewing of pornography.

Linking porn use with raging against God may sound melodramatic to those who sit passively staring into their mobile devices seeking to pleasure themselves. But would you not, as a parent, feel raged against if the babysitter you entrusted your children to was found preying on them? Would you not feel deep, personal betrayal — along with soul-numbing grief — knowing that you and your children became the means to someone’s carnal ends? If your answer is yes, then you understand that raging against your children is also raging against you.

Imagine therefore God’s offense when his created people — made in his image — use one another as a means of satisfying their beastly ends with no regard for one another, and especially no regard for God and his purposes. In raging against man — made in the image of God — we rage against God himself.

It’s my hope that this chapter helps further cultivate in readers a holy hatred of lust and pornography — rooted in a godly jealousy for Christ and the beauties of the king, a holy hatred that compels Christians to renounce ungodliness while yearning for Christ and all that is Christlike.

To that end, we must remember God’s purposes for his created people — made in his image. By looking at God’s design and purpose for mankind, we see the identity of the God-created man and the objective of his God-given mission. And we explore how the sin of pornography not only rages against man but also against God Himself.

### **Made in the image of God: Man and his mission**

In the beginning, God created man and woman “in His image” (Gen 1:26-28). Therefore, they possess inherent dignity and worth as God’s created people. Being made in the image of God, man was designed and charged to rule for God, under God, and like God.

Ruling for God, we are to seek God's glory and not our own. Ruling under God, we are to rule according to his will, with his purposes and passions driving ours. Ruling like God, we are to rule righteously as God himself is righteous. In short, we are to have God's own heart towards God's created people — a heart fixed on cultivating lives lived for God and with God. Being made in the image of God, we are to be ambassadors of God's righteousness to the ends of the earth and for his glory.

But the sin of man wreaked havoc both in man and on his mission. The image of God, while not lost, was marred. Where man was to rule for, under, and like God, depraved man now lives for himself, under his own authority, and unlike God in unrighteousness suppressing God and his truth, pursuing "things that ought not be done" (Rom 1:28). These things, while they are many, include the production, manufacturing, selling, and, more specific to this chapter, viewing of pornography.

**Porn: The often-unseen rage against man and his maker**

Some of Satan's most wretched, yet effective, internet poison in this digital age is pornography. Through the screen, the forbidden woman calls from the web to Christians on the narrow path of the kingdom of God.

One reason porn is such an effective tool is because it not only lures people away from the glories of Christ but also sets viewers against the throne of Christ. We focus on two ways porn works to set viewers against Christ.

First, instead of cultivating lives for God's glory, porn viewers cultivate God's people for their own perverted glory. Viewers browse God's human beings as if they were their own exotic zoo animals, determining with darkened minds which ones have more utility for sinful carnality.

The sinful viewer, being an image bearer, certainly exercises

a type of dominion and rulership, but it is not one that cultivates lives to the glory of God; it is a twisted one. It is a rulership and dominion that works directly against God's purposes for his people. Sinful man snatches up what God designed for his glory and uses it for his own pleasure. Who are the convenient means to the sinful ends of man's self-glorification? Image bearers of the covenant-keeping God. Those designed for his holiness are objectified for debauched appetites.

Though man insists on demoting God and objectifying his created people, this does not change the fact that there is only one king who has ownership of man. So, when we use God's people as if we owned them, we set ourselves against God, squaring our shoulders against his holy and righteous throne.

In pornography, man claims ownership (even if temporary) of God's image bearers, making them bend their knees to his own wretched pleasure. But only God has ownership of his people, and to claim otherwise invites the king's judgment. What is expected from the king when man misappropriates the king's people?

Let us not forget the heinous examples of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas (1 Sam 1-2), who did what was right in their own eyes and ruled over God's people for their own glory. As priests of Israel, they possessed a unique office that called for pastoral responsibilities. But instead of cultivating lives for God's glory, they depleted the lives and resources of God's people — even using their bodies for sexual immorality (1 Sam 2:12–29). What were the means to the end of self-glorification? Their God-created office, God's created people, and God himself. With rebellious hearts that had no knowledge of God, they claimed ownership of what rightly belonged to God, and the Lord put them to death (1 Sam 2:25).

Secondly, porn users attempt to claim ownership of what

belongs to only God. Porn users cultivate life for their own twisted pleasure, thus setting themselves against the throne of God. To rage against man — made in God’s image — is to rage against God himself.

Another way porn works to set man against the throne of God is in the way porn teaches viewers to profit off the things God hates. To Christ in his holy fury, sin is something to be destroyed. To porn users though, sexual immorality is something to be capitalized on.

Just think of the sins committed by and against those who act in pornography. Some commit acts of sexual immorality as a means of attaining financial gain. Others use sexual immorality for internet fame. Still others enjoy the carnality and sensuality involved in it. Consider also the disheartening fact that many who act in pornography come from backgrounds of sexual abuse. The road they were once made to walk becomes a road they “might as well” walk. In these horrendous misfortunes and sins, we see the devastating crash of human souls.

But where God’s image bearers ought to spring into action with eyes towards salvation, sinful man has eyes on capitalism. Where God sees devastation in the crash of souls, sinful man sees opportunity for pleasure. It is obvious that pornography is some of the vilest entrepreneurialism imaginable as it peddles sinful opportunity in the rebellion and victimization of others. Taking pleasure in the things God hates sets man against God’s throne. In viewing porn, people choose, or learn, to exploit rebellion against God for their own benefit, even picking up where other victimizers left off. Though not rebelling against the king in the same way as those they exploit, porn users’ exploitation is treasonous insurrection nonetheless. It goes against all that the king stands for.

To rage against man — made in God’s image — is to

rage against God. Though originally designed to be God's ambassador of righteousness, sinful man becomes a consumer, partaker, and ambassador of evil, being opportunistic and capitalistic with the very sins Christ came to die for. This is why pornography is such a devastating Satanic weapon. It not only drags man away from the glories of Christ but also works to set man against the throne of Christ.

### **Pursuing Christ: Raging against lust and porn**

Christian, if you wrestle with lust, you must see the wretched effects of pornography and what it does to your heart towards God. The struggle with porn is not merely a problem of drawing boundaries (installing software on mobile devices, only using your computer in certain places, etc.). If you struggle with lust and porn, your fundamental problem is a love problem. You have not fully embraced God's loves as your loves. What is lacking in your heart towards God's created people is God's heart towards his created people.

With God we are never without hope. Just as there is salvation for God's enemies who repent and believe in Christ, so there is sanctification for his children who struggle in Christ. In Christ and his spirit, saved sinners have both the example of, and empowerment for, Christlikeness — living for, under, and like God. By God's design, sinful image bearers are to turn to Christ who is the image of God for rescue and empowerment. Being united to Christ, we learn to live as God intended us to live. Where man once used God's people for his own glory, in Christ we learn to cultivate man for God's glory. Where man once made a pattern of capitalizing on the sins of others, God teaches us to have his heart toward his created people.

As you face the vileness of your own indwelling sin, God

calls you to look to Christ. Jesus lives only for the glory of God and desires all of his created people to do the same. In the face of man's sin, Christ sees not opportunity for more sin, but opportunity for the work of redemption and restoration. Where sinful man revels in the sin of others, Christ laments and issues words of warning (Luke 19:41-44). When sinners are opportunistic with the blindness of rebellion, Christ is moved to sorrow and weeping (John 11:35). Where sinful man capitalizes on God's created people, Christ shows righteous indignation (Matt 21:12-13).

Just as Christ responds in holiness, love, and compassion, so we, born of his spirit, are called to do the same. In Christ we are trained to renounce ungodliness and live godly lives for him (Titus 2:12). By God's grace in regeneration, we who were once hostile to God have become obedient from the heart to the will and ways of our savior (Rom 6:17). And by God's grace in sanctification, we will continue to grow in godliness and hatred of sin, so we might live all the more for God — under his good will, in his righteousness, and to the ends of his created world. As we grow more in the likeness of Christ our Savior, and as our loves become more like his loves, we come to see men and women given to sexual immorality as those who are to be prayed for, not preyed upon. Their misfortunes and rebellion cease to be something to delight in and be capitalized on; instead, they become something that softens our hearts to mourning, and compels our spirits and bodies to action desiring to see the enslaved move from life under sin and death to life under grace in Christ. Having been united to Christ, we learn to love what he loves and hate what he hates, with a holy zeal for Christ, cultivating Christlikeness in ourselves and in others.

May this help us discern and “approve what is excellent,

and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:9-11). May knowing God’s will for his created people compel us to rage against indwelling sin, lust, and porn; and as we strive to know Christ and make him known, may we as pastors never resuscitate the very sins Christ put to death through his own death on the cross.



## I WAS A PORN-ADDICTED PASTOR

---

*Coming into the light was scary. I handed over the reins of control to God, and other people. For so long I tried to control my world by covering up my sin, but God summoned me to surrender.*

By Garrett Kell

I was a pastor who loved God and my church, all while hiding my secret sin. I soon learned that God knows how to discipline the hypocrites he loves.

I became a Christian when I was 21 and a pastor when I was 25. At times I wonder if I should have become a pastor so quickly. Thankfully we serve a Father who's never thwarted by our questionable choices.

### **The town**

At the end of a dusty highway two hours west of Dallas, Texas, you'll find a small town I called home for seven years. The fields surrounding Graham are littered with oil pumps that keep the community's economy alive. The townspeople are friendly, and visitors feel like they've walked into the 1950s.

It's a place where doors are unlocked and pastors still get discounts for meals.

Graham didn't lack churches; there were around 40 when I first arrived. This wasn't the kind of ministry I envisioned for myself. I wanted a city with 10 million people with no churches and no knowledge of God. Instead I found myself in a town with 10,000 people and 40 churches, and most everyone said they knew God.

But it became evident I was supposed to be in Graham.

### **The church**

Graham Bible Church was born in 2003 out of a prayer meeting. I was asked to preach by 13 new friends who wanted to see God change their tiny town. I loved that group with all my heart. The fondness of those early days still brings tears to my eyes.

Our music was usually brutal, but we sang with fervor, and I trust God was pleased. I was an inexperienced preacher, but I taught the Bible as clearly as I could. We laughed and cried together.

Immaturity led to foolish decisions in preaching and leadership, but God blessed us in spite of them. Our storefront gathering grew from 13 to a fire-code-violating 120 in about nine months. The growth was encouraging, but also disillusioning. Things were going so well in those early years that I began to think God was willing to overlook the sin I was hiding.

### **The sin**

Though ministry was going "well," it was not well with my soul. I was deeply discontent. My life wasn't going according to my plans.

At the time, I was dating my college girlfriend long-distance.

She wasn't ready for marriage, and I was unwilling to let her go, even though deep down I knew God didn't want me to marry her. Our six-year relationship was entangled with sin, which made dying seem easier than breaking up. We were engaged twice and got 50 days away from marriage before we finally ended things for good.

My unwillingness to fully surrender to God — along with my insecurity, discontentment, fear of man, and desire for a strong reputation — created an environment in my heart that allowed pornography to thrive. For my first three years of pastoral ministry, I secretly struggled with this sin.

I knew my sin grieved God, but my confessions were aimed more at hushing my guilt than getting the help I needed. Every two or three months I would indulge in a binge of pornography. This was followed by grief, private confessions of how much I hated sin and how much I loved Jesus, and personal resolutions to never do it again. I remember feeling like the Israelites on spin cycle in the book of Judges. Sin. Grief. Weeping. Peace. Over and over and over again.

During this time I shared vague confessions with an assortment of friends. I confessed I was “struggling with purity stuff” without being specific about how much or how often. Each time I confessed, I really thought this would be the last time and that I could get past this struggle on my own. Instead, the deception only grew darker. No one had a clear view of what was actually happening in my life.

Living a lie is tiresome.

What made matters more difficult was the abundance of fruit God was producing through me. Our church had several hundred people coming. Lives were being changed. So I assumed

God was overlooking my sin. I assumed I was somehow exempt from the destruction so many others had known.

### **The letter**

Near the end of 2006, I began dating the woman who is now my wife. Carrie was aware of my past struggles with sexual sin and was encouraged by the progress I'd made. About the same time, a friend named Reid Monaghan and I started making plans to plant a church in New Jersey.

On the eve of flying to Jersey to film a promo video for the new church, I wrote the letter. I felt that if Reid and I were to work together, I needed to be honest about my past. So I composed an account detailing my sexual sins from the time I'd become a Christian up to that day.

That trip to Jersey began an intervention that I believe saved my soul, my marriage, and my ministry. Carrie and I met Reid at a coffee shop and through tears he said, "I love you, brother, but after reading your letter, I don't feel like we can move forward as partners. And to be honest, I don't think you should be a pastor right now."

No one had ever gotten in my face like that — or at least I had never listened. Most people were willing to overlook my struggles because of my perceived giftedness or personality. But Reid didn't care about any of that. He loved God, and he loved me.

Carrie and I returned home, met with a few trusted friends outside our church, and then set up a meeting with our elders. As I handed them a copy of the letter, I said, "My life and ministry are in your hands. Tell me what to do."

## **The anvil**

An anvil is a hard surface on which an object is laid to be struck. 2007 was the anvil on which I was struck by God's gracious hand. It was the most brutal year of my life, and I trust many of those elders' lives as well. My sin put those brothers through great anguish. They were good men who loved Christ and only wanted to see him magnified in their town. But I thrust a mess into their hands that neither they nor I knew how to navigate. Somehow, the content of the letter was passed on to another person in our church. That person shared with others, and, well, if you've ever lived in a small town, you know what happened next. Rumors spread quickly, with speculations about every kind of darkness imaginable.

The elders suggested we hold a meeting for me to publicly confess my sin. We didn't have meaningful membership at the time, which left the meeting open to anyone who'd like to attend. As you can imagine, all sorts of people — some who had never even visited our church before — showed up.

Time moved slowly as I sat on stage that evening. My greatest fears were coming true, yet I was thankful for it. Living a lie is tiresome — the ever-present fear of someone finding my search history, the devil blackmailing my heart with shameful reminders, and me pretending to be okay when I wasn't.

For the next hour I chronicled my sin for everyone in attendance. Another elder facilitated questions. Some people wept. Some yelled. Some stared with eyes that pierced more deeply than a sword. Some hugged afterward. Some walked away and never spoke to me again.

The following day, the church received calls from people who couldn't attend and asked if we could do it again. We did. Months of private meetings, interventions, counseling

sessions, and tearful conversations followed. I often felt “done” with the process, but God assured me he would determine when we were done.

During those months, my dog died, multiple elders resigned, and at least a dozen families left the church. On top of that, I had a near-fatal accident 50 days before my wedding. I was doing yard work when gasoline exploded, covering 12 percent of my body with severe second- and third-degree burns. While I was being prepped for a careflight, Carrie called the hospital to ask how I was. The person replied, “Yeah, he got burned real bad; he’ll be okay. God sure knows how to give us what we deserve, doesn’t he?”

Burns and barb-sharp words hurt, but nothing was more painful than seeing my sinful choices shipwreck the faith of people I loved. Many were able to forgive and move forward. But not all. Some felt unable to sit under the preached Word since they feared the preacher might be a fraud like me. I won’t share details of their struggles and straying here, but my soul is still haunted by the devastating way my sin affected so many.

### **The light**

There’s something freeing about the light, even if it makes you wince because you’ve been in the dark for so long. That year God reached into the darkness of my image-protecting hypocrisy, and pulled me into his liberating light. It was through this deliverance that I learned to trust him in ways that had only been theoretical before.

Coming into the light was scary. I handed over the reins of control to God, and other people. For so long I tried to control my world by covering up my sin, but God summoned me to surrender. I could do nothing in those days but open my

hands and allow him to work through imperfect people and an imperfect process in his perfect way.

I became convinced God could be trusted with the consequences of my disobedience. I also learned he wasn't just working on me in the process; my sin and confession became the conduit through which he worked in many other people. Their self-righteousness, unforgiveness, and unbelief were exposed as well. Swirling around so many of us were feelings of betrayal, shame, grief, confusion, anger, and fear. Yet in all the swirling, Jesus remained steady. He proved to be my good shepherd, and theirs.

A few months into the process, several beloved mentors encouraged me to leave and begin afresh elsewhere. But deep down, I knew that unless my church fired me, I should stay, no matter how awful the process. God convinced me through his Word that my sin had made this mess, and that I needed to remain and endure its effects.

At one point, I remember lying face down on my bedroom carpet. I cried out, "I've confessed every sin I have ever committed, God. I don't know what else to do!" He didn't speak audibly to me, but I sensed him saying, "Now, I will begin to use you." The Lord had crushed me because he loved me, and because he wasn't finished with me yet.

### **The restoration**

After about a year, God closed that chapter of our church's life. Behind us were lessons learned and more collateral damage than I can bear to consider at times. The next chapter brought a new day with a new atmosphere in our congregation.

Many began confessing their own hidden sins. Self-righteousness was expelled, and supernatural healing came

for me and for the church family that remained. I stayed on as the pastor for another two years before God led me away from that flock.

I shudder to think what would have happened had God never exposed my sin and crushed me as he did. It was the worst and best year of my life. I would never want to go through it again, but I wouldn't trade the nearness to God I gained from it for anything.

Here are five lessons I learned that can help others struggling with secret sin:

*1. The pressures to pretend are real.*

You don't need to be a pastor to know the pull to pretend you have it all together. None of us like to be exposed. Our shame always seeks asylum in the dark. Our first parents knew this when they scurried into the shadows of Eden (Gen 3:8).

If you're a pastor, remember that the pressure you feel to look capable and impeccable is not from the Father. It's Satan who disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). Don't fall for his call to conceal who you really are.

*2. Hypocrisy must die.*

Following my confession, a dear friend delivered a pointed message. With a firm yet gentle tone, he said, "Jesus was very patient with sexual sinners, but he was very hard on hypocrites. You can't follow Jesus while pretending you don't really need him."

He was right. I preached sermons about needing Jesus, while only pretending to be living what I was preaching. If you don't take off the mask of hypocrisy and breathe the air of honesty, your soul will shrivel. The deception grows darker.



You will begin to believe you are safe in your sin. Jesus died for our hypocrisies and rose to empower us to put them away.

If you don't take off the mask of hypocrisy and breathe the air of honesty, your soul will shrivel.

*3. The time for honesty is now.*

If you're hiding sin, you can come up with reasonable-sounding excuses to wait until next time to be honest. Your flesh will freak out, reassuring you it will never happen again. Don't fall for that trick. Today is the day to confess everything.

Jesus promised that everything done in the darkness will come into the light of God's judgment (Luke 12:2). Yet there's mercy for those who bring it into the light on their own before that great day. If you have unconfessed sin, will you resolve to be honest about it with God and another close, trusted Christian friend? If not, why not? What hinders you from honoring God by doing this? Whatever reasons you come up with will reveal the idols you're trying to draw life from instead of Jesus.

*4. You can't do this alone.*

You need someone in your life who knows you — who really knows you. Not who generally understands how you struggle, but who has a pulse on the state of your affections and sin struggles today. We all need someone along with whom we're constantly confessing and repenting and trusting in Jesus.

*5. Jesus will never leave you.*

No matter what honesty might cost you, Jesus will be with you (Matt 28:20). He promises to never leave you or forsake you (Heb 13:5). He promises you are complete in him (Col 2:10). He promises nothing will separate you from his love (Rom

8:31–39). He promises to complete the good work he began in you (Phil 1:6). He promises to walk with you through whatever dark days accompany your honesty (Ps 23:4).

Jesus has been so kind to you, hasn't he? Dear friend, his kindness is designed to lead you to repentance (Rom 2:4). Today is the day to lay it all down.

And churches who may be left in the wake of a fall, don't despair. The Lord will care for you as you care for your pastor and for one another. Labor in prayer, seek wise counsel, and rely on Jesus, who remains the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).

## FOUR REVELATIONS ABOUT PORN FROM YOUR WIFE'S PERSPECTIVE

---

*The destruction of pornography extends directly to the wives  
of men using it.*

By Nikki Daniel

A laptop gently closes. An internet history is thoroughly deleted. A browser is hastily closed. Many wrongly believe that pornography is a private matter. But what about the wives of Christian men who use pornography? What is their perspective? I separately interviewed seven women whose husbands have a history with pornography. Their ages range from mid-twenties to late-fifties. Their stories are heartbreaking:

*“After the confession, I saw him as a dirty man. Where was the repentance? The guilt and shame? Yet, in a weird twist of emotions, I felt unworthy to sleep with him. I don’t look like those women. I don’t perform like them.”*

*“I avoid thinking about it because I still cry about it. I avoid looking for signs of it because it’s too hurtful.”*

The destruction of pornography extends directly to the wives of men using it. The women interviewed seem to have a healthy respect for their husbands, and they do not believe that their husbands are awful men. They all gave insightful interviews that reveal four things: Your porn usage makes your wife feel inferior, your continued porn usage hurts your wife more the longer it occurs, your porn usage torments your marriage, and taking steps away from porn gives your wife hope and trust.

**Your porn usage makes your wife feel inferior**

When asked about their initial feelings upon finding out about their husband's pornography usage, the wives had the following to say:

*“I began noticing he wasn't himself and felt a distance between us. I thought it was something I did, and I tried repeatedly to ask him about it. He put me off and made excuses. I felt shocked, first of all, then it moved to hurt, then it moved to full blown anger. He deceived me! It's adultery! I started to feel unattractive and wondered how I could ever keep up with those images he was seeing.”*

*“It makes me very self-conscious. It makes me feel like I don't add up and that I am never enough.”*

*“I am a very self-conscious person anyways, but that multiplied greatly when I found out about his struggle. I began shutting him out and not wanting him to be anywhere near me because I convinced myself that he didn't want me if he felt the need to look at them. Our marriage has suffered greatly because of the walls I have put up in response.”*

*“I felt neglected and that I was not enough. I was shocked that this godly man, who handed me Passion and Purity by Elisabeth Elliot before we were married, was involved in this sin.”*

*“I felt betrayed. I felt like I wasn’t enough for him as a wife and that is why he had to look at that. I mostly tried to take the blame on myself and what I had done to cause him to go that direction.”*

### **Your continued porn usage hurts your wife more the longer it occurs**

When asked how old their husbands were when they were first exposed to pornography, the answers were shocking. Most men were initially exposed as mere boys (most answers were between ages six and 12). It was a snowball effect for these men. The older they got, the more they looked. A prominent part of all of these ladies’ stories is that their husbands seemed to show genuine sorrow and would swear off pornography only to return to it again and again.

*“I have been more offended at every occurrence. I think it feels like a slap in the face. Like, ‘Hello? We’ve already been down this road, and it was hell, so why would you go back there?’”*

*“Out of the blue one night, he confessed that he was looking at porn again. I sat there, stunned, disappointed, wondering how this could happen again.”*

*“I love my husband. However, in the midst of his most recent confession, I think I all but hated him. I think I was seriously considering divorce. I was ready to leave.”*

### **Your porn usage torments your marriage**

Even the strongest marriages decay under the sin of lust. Fighting, distance, and decreased sexual intimacy are all results of succumbing to this temptation.

*“Connecting emotionally, spiritually, and sexually began to fall apart. Things were miserable. We were fighting every night. These were not just little arguments, but disastrous bouts. I thought about that time just the other day and wept.”*

*“Sex had not been easy from the get go. He confessed to a continued addiction that led to an online/phone affair. This made our sexual intimacy, or what had been a lack thereof, make complete sense.”*

*“We became distant and felt like there was a huge gap between us. I have to say we went months without any intimacy. At that time I felt very low.”*

*“I thought I should pack up and go, thinking about our kids and not wanting them exposed to that. How could I trust him when he lied again? If he’s looking at porn, will he eventually have an affair?”*

### **Taking steps away from porn gives your wife hope and trust**

For those wives who have husbands who are currently experiencing victory over the temptation of pornography, there is much blessing. The Lord has given these women grace to extend a hand of forgiveness to their husbands as they take steps away from porn.

*“The Holy Spirit shifted my thoughts onto the work he was doing. The disgust I felt was replaced with overwhelming compassion. His confession actually brought us closer, and that was all God. My response of grace was the key that truly empowered him to gain true victory.”*

*“I would forgive when he came to me because I could see his struggle and understood its grip.”*

*“I am starting to see that I am not the cause of this struggle nor does he love me any less. I am proud that he is taking steps to overcome this.”*

*“I trust him now more than ever because I can see what God is doing in his life as he seeks help to overcome this struggle.”*

*“He has accountability partners, and there are filters on every device. It makes me feel proud and feel loved that he reached out for this help. I feel he really values our marriage and wants better for it.”*

Husbands, I hope you are filled with a desire to confess and turn away from pornography. Jesus “breaks the power of canceled sin,” and his blood “can make the foulest clean.” Be encouraged by 1 Samuel 12:20-25, which still has incredible application for us Christians:

Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet do not turn aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for

they are empty. For the Lord will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the Lord to make you a people for himself. ... Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away.

For husbands who are ready to take steps away from pornography, consider talking with your pastor and/or a biblical counselor. Here are some additional resources to consider:

- “Fighting Porn by F.A.I.T.H.” by Gavin Ortlund (<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/fighting-porn-by-f-a-i-t-h/>)
- “Overcoming An Addiction to Pornography and Embracing Purity, Part 2” by Dave Jenkins (<https://cbmw.org/topics/manhood/overcoming-an-addiction-to-pornography-and-embracing-purity-part-2/>)

Wives, if you have discovered that your husband is using pornography, remember that we are to extend grace to sinners. Although devastating, this is not the end. Come alongside your husband, and help him in throwing off this sin that so easily entangles.



## THE PORNOGRAPHY ECOSYSTEM

---

*Deadly to the human soul and destructive to human life, pornography flourishes within a broader ecosystem of sins, struggles, and situations. It never operates in isolation.*

By John Henderson

The Rosary Pea vine carries a toxin called abrin, one of the deadliest on earth. If the coating breaks, ingesting a seed from the vine can kill a human being. Because of their vibrant colors, people actually use the seeds in jewelry and for rosary prayer beads. The vine thrives in tropical environments and can spread aggressively under the right conditions, which means it's nearly impossible to eradicate without also addressing the provisions by which it thrives.

The same could be said about pornography. Deadly to the human soul and destructive to human life, pornography flourishes under the right conditions — within a broader ecosystem of sins, struggles, and situations. It never operates in isolation. It incubates under the right combination of factors. Pornography feeds upon other sins the way cancer feeds on sugar, and it feeds other sins the way cancer feeds other

diseases. We cannot separate and quarantine sexual sin. It's better we accept its connection to aspects of our lives we might think unrelated and might prefer to leave untouched.

This is important — not simply to understand pornography, but to wage war against it. We cannot choke out weeds without also killing their seeds, without treating the soil in which they take root, and without limiting the fertilizers we use to feed them. We are much more doomed when we try to defeat pornography without addressing the streams that water it.

In this chapter, we aim to understand pornography in relationship to everything else we think, feel, and do, in order to put pornography to death through the only means by which it actually dies — comprehensive life transformation by the gospel of Jesus Christ. We will consider the composition of the soil from which it sprouts, the fertilizers by which it thrives, and the harvest it produces. In doing so we hope to gather biblical, Christ-centered counsel for comprehensive heart and life change.

### **The seedbed of pornography**

In Proverbs 7, Solomon tells the story of a foolish young man who plunges his life into ruin through sexual immorality. The highlights of the account offer incredible insights into various precursors to sexual sin: the pretense of folly, the pride of life, and the praise of man.

#### *The pretense of folly*

Folly pretends to be wise. The foolish man assumes he is not so foolish, and interacts with the elements of his world as if he is in control. He thinks to bring fire to his chest and not be burned (Prov 6:27). The story bears it out:

My son, keep my words and treasure up my commandments with you;  
keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of  
your eye;

bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.  
Say to wisdom, “You are my sister,” and call insight your intimate friend,  
to keep you from the forbidden woman, from the adulteress with her  
smooth words.

For at the window of my house I have looked out through my lattice,  
and I have seen among the simple, I have perceived among the youths,  
a young man lacking sense,

passing along the street near her corner, taking the road to her house  
in the twilight, in the evening, at the time of night and darkness.

The young man lacks sense because he passes along the street near the corner of the forbidden woman as if immune to her smooth words, as if able to get close without falling prey to her schemes, as if going in to her will not cost his life. The woman is a figure for all sexual immorality, and the way she and the young man relate to one another represents how pornography speaks to us, and we respond to it.

Consider how many forays into pornography begin with thinking ourselves wise enough and strong enough to dally with the world without falling head first into it. Scrolling the internet, late night television binges, casually scrolling social media, flirtations at work, unchecked fantasies, unaccountable travels from home, access to devices without filters — a mere sampling of ways we foolishly pass along the street near her corner under the pretense of safety.

### *The pride of life*

Any sense of entitlement will tune us more strongly to the

wavelengths of pornography. If you think you deserve the attention and pleasure of attractive women, then you're set up to be easily seduced. If you love the idea of men or women at your beckon call, willing to take their clothes off at your bidding, then pornography will eat you alive. Listen to the story unfold:

And behold, the woman meets him, dressed as a prostitute, wily of heart.  
She is loud and wayward; her feet do not stay at home;  
now in the street, now in the market, and at every corner she lies in wait.  
She seizes him and kisses him, and with bold face she says to him,  
"I had to offer sacrifices, and today I have paid my vows;  
so now I have come out to meet you, to seek you eagerly, and I have  
found you.  
I have spread my couch with coverings, colored linens from Egyptian  
linen;  
I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.  
Come, let us take our fill of love till morning; let us delight ourselves  
with love.  
For my husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey;  
he took a bag of money with him; at full moon he will come home."  
With much seductive speech she persuades him; with her smooth talk  
she compels him.

Notice how the woman appeals to the pride of the young man. She flatters him. She gives him the opportunity to possess the wife of another man, which appeals to his arrogance. It offers the chance to conquer, to be better than other men. Whatever failures he faced earlier in the day can be erased through a victory in the bedroom. Whatever thirst for power he carries can be satisfied by drinking the opportunity she offers. No fear

of the Lord. No humble love for his neighbor. No concern for the marriage of this woman; only a selfish thirst for a sexual achievement.

The images of wealth, pleasure, and love are presented as objects he's entitled to claim. She says, "I'm all yours. We can do whatever you please. You're the one in control." Oh the power! No proud man or woman can resist. Of course, the scene is thick with irony. Thinking he's about to triumph, he follows her to the slaughterhouse.

*The praise and fear of man*

From my point of view, the praise and fear of man compose the lifeblood of pornography. The images of pornography are designed to convey a strategic and powerful message to the viewer: You're attractive. You're intoxicating. You're an incredible lover. You're great. The men and women always say yes to you. They want you. They smile at you. They worship you.

Human praise is an integral part of the seduction in Proverbs 7. Notice in the passage how the woman praises the young man. She came out to find him and no one else. She's pleased with him above others. She desires him, not her husband. The way she seizes him, kisses him, and looks at him expresses an intense desire for him, which he finds absolutely intoxicating. If we love the praise of others, then we will love pornography.

At the same time, the men and women captured in the images of pornography never reject you. They never tell you no. Pornography provides a world where you can receive validation and approval without the fear of rejection and disapproval. No matter how ashamed of looking at pornography you may be, it never criticizes you.

Pornography also offers the illusion of privacy and safety. The woman lists the reasons why they won't be caught. Her husband is on a long journey. What the husband doesn't know won't hurt him. What you do in the privacy of your bedroom is no one else's business. It will be their little secret. No one will know. Pornography thrives in the dark, in a life filled with secrets.

### **The nourishment of pornography**

Not only does the condition of our hearts determine whether or not pornography takes root, what we feed our hearts in daily life influences the degree by which pornography grows. Sexual sin spreads under certain conditions.

#### *Anxiety and stress*

Living in a state of anxiety, stress, and worry tends to increase our desire for the soothing pleasure of sexual sin, especially pornography. When combined with masturbation, it may not remove anxiety, but it will take the edge off. It distracts us from the burdens of life. It numbs us to the objects of our worry.

Like alcohol or pain medication, pornography can act like a powerful sedative. It helps release physical tensions and calm agitated emotions. It enables us to avoid the root causes of our anxiety by quieting all the deafening noise of daily deadlines, expectations, and responsibilities. The Lord tells us to call on him in a day of trouble, to not worry, and to entrust ourselves to him. Pornography offers the alternative, an attractive and immediate false god.

#### *Fantasy and control*

A vibrant fantasy life increases our desire for pornography. The tendency to take refuge in mental happy places when life

becomes painful, or just plain boring, encourages a pattern of seeking refuge in other kinds of fantasy happy places, like pornography. Rather than face our troubles, experience pain, and wait upon the Lord, we can envision erotic images and embed ourselves in erotic storylines. We control when and where we go. Rather than embrace and serve within the mundane details of life, pornography brings a sense of excitement and energy.

Though the Lord gives us imagination as part of bearing his image, we can use it to serve idols. Our capacity to create can be misdirected into sexual fantasy. An imagination best employed to understand the rich imagery of Scripture, to compel our worship of God, to stir up our hope for the kingdom of Jesus Christ might be wrongly employed to play out sexual escapades.

### *Sensuality and worldliness*

An overall desire for sensual excitement nourishes pornography. Pleasure is a good gift from God, but we can worship the gift more than the giver. Having our senses thrilled can become a consuming desire, so can avoiding sensory pain. Rather than seeing the things of the world as a means to love God and others, we can love those things more than God and others. This is at the heart of worldliness.

A love for the world and the things of the world will always make sexual sin attractive. The Apostle Paul points to the examples of worldly men: “They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity” (Eph 4:19). Paul is quick to say, “That is not the way you learned Christ” (Eph 4:20). In Christ we are new creations, no longer enslaved to the passions of the flesh,

and “the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality” (Gal 5:19). If we use food, drink, media, and other created things as means to serve the flesh, then we establish conditions under which pornography thrives.

This is one reason why regular, faith-driven prayer and fasting helps combat sexual sin. It starves the sinful flesh as a whole, submitting us more completely to the Father, tethering us more tightly to Jesus Christ, and filling us more fully with the Spirit.

*Disappointment, anger, and self-pity*

Sometimes the indulgence of pornography and masturbation expresses a kind of spiritual temper tantrum. When people disappoint, wrong, or betray us, sexual pleasure becomes more tempting. It even feels more justified. Alongside his sexual sin, Samson bore a fiery temper and tended toward self-pity. In fact, his life tended to swing between fits of anger and fits of immorality. Our flesh is prone to the same swings. Meditating on our disappointments, fuming in anger, and stewing in self-pity stirs up the desires of the flesh for pornography.

*Relational laziness and escapism*

“Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgment” (Prov 18:1). Real-life relationships can be challenging, and the sinful flesh hates sacrificial love. We love escape. The responsibilities of relationships, whether in marriage, family, or church, can be weighty and even painful. It takes energy to initiate conversation. It takes effort to seek and serve others. When conflict comes, it takes humility, time, and energy to resolve it biblically.



Pornography, on the other hand, is easy. Interactions with the people in pornography do not require work or sacrifice or humility or conflict resolution or joyful service. They serve us. The people exist for us. We don't have to speak or listen. We don't have to share and give — only take and receive. A mindset and pattern of relational laziness and escapism only encourages our affinity for pornography.

### **The harvest of pornography**

Indulging pornography yields a host of effects that, in turn, strengthen our desire and attachment to sensuality and pornography in the future. The sin we indulge in today always gives shape and power to the temptations we face tomorrow.

#### *Shame, covering, and hiding*

After Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the forbidden fruit, their eyes were opened to good and evil in a new, dreadful way (Gen 3:7). No longer were they naked and unashamed. They were naked and ashamed, which is one reason they immediately make fig leaf coverings for themselves. Perhaps their fears were averted for a little while, until they heard the sound of the Lord drawing near. All of a sudden their little coverings were not enough. They “hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden” (Gen 3:8). The trees God created for their food became a means to avoid his presence.

Taking bites from the fruits of pornography produces a similar pattern of effects. We feel ashamed. Without genuine repentance, we cover ourselves with self-righteous works and temporary fixes. Maybe we read the Bible a little more, we make sure to attend a church service, we vow to never look at

pornography again. Or maybe we run to television, video games, and food. Maybe we use permissible things to hide behind. None of this actually works, because our attempts to cover and hide only make pornography more attractive tomorrow.

*Dehumanization*

Pornography, by nature, dehumanizes. It dehumanizes the people captured in the images and stories portrayed. It uncovers their nakedness. It robs their dignity. It turns them into objects of lust and self-serving pleasure. It enslaves them to the sexually deviant whims of their employers as well as the carnal appetites of the consumer.

It also dehumanizes us, the viewer. We become creatures of lust and craving. Biological drives begin to rule us, and carnal appetites begin to control us instead of the Word and spirit of God. We become more like animals and less like the humans he created us to be.

*Impatience, frustration, and inability to endure affliction*

Anytime we feed the flesh, though soothed for the moment, it gains the upper hand in our lives. When we fuel fire, it grows hotter (Prov 30:15-16). And when we fuel the fire of selfish pride in our souls, we only grow more selfish and proud. When we grow more selfish and proud, we grow more impatient and frustrated with God, people, and inconvenient circumstances. Thus, we become more vulnerable to the temptations of pornography, for it offers immediate, self-serving gratification at the expense of others, and our flesh loves gratification at the expense of others.

Habitual indulgence of the flesh weakens our tolerance for adversity. Sensuality, by definition, hates and resists

pain and suffering. It craves physical comfort and pleasure. The longer we indulge pornography, or any other emotion-numbing substance, the less capable of enduring affliction we become, which only makes us more susceptible to sensual escape in the future.

### *Entanglement and escalation*

Sin is sticky. If we cling to it, then it gladly clings to us. Indeed, we cannot throw ourselves into a pit of tar and then expect to climb out and walk away. The moment our bodies are submerged into the substance, we're stuck. All of our movements only move us deeper into the hole. Gravity works against us. The chemical composition of tar and skin make it impossible to pull out.

Indulging pornography sexualizes our view of the world, which causes us to notice sensual images more easily. Posters of women in skimpy clothes, certain words, certain sounds, specific memories will jump out like never before. Our dreams become sexualized. Even non-sexual images become sexualized: a modestly dressed woman at work, a man working out at the gym, a harmless joke, these can become sexual in our minds, because pornography paints our whole world in sexual colors. Indulging pornography feeds our craving for more. It develops our appetite for it. It clings to us. Our flesh always wants more, to push the limits, to go further. It will not stop until it destroys our lives and relationships.

### *The gospel*

If we want pornography eradicated from our lives, then we must deal with these kinds of conditions head on. All the pretenses of folly, every ounce of pride, and any desire for

human praise need to be extinguished through the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are not strong, but weak, and must learn to relate to God and this world as those who are poor in spirit (Matt 5:3). We cannot handle the world, so why pretend? We cannot last a single round in the ring with Satan, and we must learn to live a simple, sober Christian life.

We do not exist on high, but below, and we must assume the proper posture of humble servants, unworthy of mercy, let alone exaltation. Blessed are we in Christ, but not entitled. Someday we will be exalted with Christ, but not now. The fear of man brings a snare, so we must wean ourselves from the intoxicating potion of human praise in order to live more fully for the praise of Jesus Christ (Prov 29:25).

As those who have been chosen by God, holy and beloved, we receive hearts with new capacities to face life honestly, peacefully, and enduringly. Christ is our refuge. Christ is our peace. At his right hand there are pleasures forever. He helps us suffer the loss of all things and count them as rubbish. Christ bears our shame. In his righteousness, we stand before God the father. Through him, we become more fully human, and by his mercy we endure every form of trouble. In Christ, we die to sin. No longer must we live entangled to it or defeated by it.

Every part of the soil, every possible condition, and every ounce of harvest connected to pornography in our lives has been, and will continue to be, addressed through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel offers rich counsel against pornography directly, but it also brings about the kind of comprehensive life transformation that makes it difficult for pornography to take root and spread. The Lord wants our entire being. Praise God for the promise that his redeeming hand will not cease before finishing what he began in us (Phil 1:6).

## HOW DO I FIGHT THIS SIN?

---

*Grace — God's undeserved favor — is something you teach, but it's also something you need. God's grace triumphs over sin, and you need God's help to get rid of your porn problem.*

By Deepak Reju

You're a pastor and you have a porn problem. You know something has to be done about your sin. But how do you, as a pastor, fight this sin? I hope to pull you out of the ditch and give you a hopeful direction.

Porn struggles are addictions — something harmful that you habitually return to because of your lack of self-control. Let Scripture speak into this. Terms like *desires run amok* or *voluntary slavery* help to make sense of your struggle.<sup>1</sup> You've voluntarily chosen this sin, and have done it so often that your desires for porn rule your heart and mess up your life.

One principle will undergird everything — as a sinner, you need God's grace, just like every member of your church. The lie is that you're a super-Christian so you don't need help. As a

---

1. Ed Welch, *Crossroads: A Step-by-Step Guide Away from Addictions* (New Growth Press, 2008).

pastor, as someone who teaches God's Word to God's people, you are marked by a greater maturity than the rest (Titus 1:5-9). But depravity corrupts you, just like every believer in your church (Rom 3:11-12). Pride, selfishness, anger, self-pity, self-righteousness, idolatry — like a drop of poison in the king's cup, these sins seep into your heart and dull the effectiveness of your ministry. Grace — God's undeserved favor — is something you teach, but it's also something you need. God's grace triumphs over sin, and you need God's help to get rid of your porn problem.

### **Building a solid firewall**

Picture a hospital scene, where a man rushes in, screaming, "I'm bleeding! Help me! I'm going to die!" Now imagine me as the triage nurse, looking him directly in the eyes, saying, "Calm down and tell me about your struggles. Why are you so scared?" That would be ridiculous, right? A proper response to acute bleeding is to stop the bleeding and put all the other issues aside temporarily. So it is with porn struggles. We'll address heart issues, accountability, faith, and other things later. First things first: We've got to stop the tide of pornography from seeping into your heart and mind by building a solid, impenetrable firewall. The goal is to let nothing in.

Don't think that because you are a pastor you're beyond using the common means that porn strugglers typically use. Pastors who overestimate themselves, and underestimate their sin, get themselves in trouble. Rather, you need to be defined by "sober judgment" (Rom 12:3) about your sin. See sin for what it is in your life — self-deceiving, dumbing down your spiritual senses, fooling you into thinking you can handle this on your own.

The goal is to cut off access to pornography. Be brutal about halting access. A passive approach won't work. The devil is too smart. He'll take advantage of your weaknesses. Jesus insists that you need a radical approach to your sin:

If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell (Matt 5:28-30).

Jesus' metaphors are very active and violent — tear out your eye; cut off your hand. He's not passive when it comes to sin. How aggressive are you when it comes to fighting your sin? Have you grown so comfortable with it that you tolerate it too much? Have you lost that edginess needed to fight your porn problem?

Picture your sinful flesh as a dragon, a hungry beast who is never satisfied with just a little. Your goal is to starve the beast. Literally, put it to death (Gal 5:24), and make no provision for it (Rom 13:14).

Be wise about building a firewall. If you are struggling with porn, you've shown that you shouldn't trust yourself. A good rule of thumb: Protect yourself from yourself. Be willing to sacrifice your freedom for the sake of your holiness. Any freedom you allow yourself on this issue will be taken advantage of by the devil and your flesh. Build your firewall as if you don't trust your sinful nature to do you good but, as expected, to wreak havoc in your life.

Do you have basic internet filter programs on your computer, like Covenant Eyes? If not, what is getting in the way

of your doing so? Pride? Overconfidence? Shame? Have you made a habit of guarding your eyes? Do you look away when you see something, or do you linger? Danger zones are typical times and places where you stumble. Are you rearranging your life so that it is harder to access porn in those danger zones? For example, if you access porn while alone in your office, shift the screen on your desk so it is visible at all times. What about your phone? Have you set up the restrictions on your phone so you can't access dangerous content? If not, why not? Do you proactively make plans when you are vulnerable? Or are you letting your struggle get the upper hand? If you fall, do you have a plan for what to do next?

### **Repentance, faith, and forgiveness**

When you stumble, do you feel guilt and then return to it like a dog returning to its vomit (Prov 26:11)? Or do you experience a godly sorrow for what you've done? If you are grieved over this sin, that's a good sign. Godly sorrow leads to repentance and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death (1 Cor 7:9-11).

Ask yourself whether you have genuinely renounced this sin. Are you merely going through the motions — confession, scrambling to make changes — but are not really grieved over the sin? Repentance is turning your back on sin. But it's more than that. It's a change of heart that leads to a change of life. Does your life demonstrate repentance? It's not just in what you do (like taking practical steps to build a firewall), but also your heart attitude (grief over this sin).

What should be most intimidating is the fact that your sin of pornography consumption is an offense against a holy, righteous, morally pure God (Ps 51:4). Does that thought scare you? Does that grieve you?



The absence of sin is not the same thing as faith. We don't trust in a system of redemption, but a personal Savior. I know you know this. I know you preach this.

But it is possible to preach truth each week and not let it affect your heart. Do you feel distant from Christ? Does your faith feel hollow? If this describes you, you're in a spiritually dangerous position. Turn to Christ right now, and pledge to fight every temptation that cuts off your heart from the truth of Jesus.

No matter how far gone you are in your sin, don't ever forget that even for you, there is forgiveness in Christ. Pornography is not the unforgivable sin, even for the pastor, "to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood" (Rev 1:5).

### **Your internal life**

Consider a few more battlefronts with your heart and mind. First, there are lies and self-justifications that perpetuate your sin:

- "I can control it."
- "I'll do it just one more time."
- "Pornography hurts no one but me."
- "I need this. I'm burning and can't bear it anymore. Something has to give."
- "If my life were better, I wouldn't be tempted to do this."
- "I'm stressed out, and I need some relief."
- "God will forgive, so it doesn't matter."

Do you recognize any of these lies? What are the lies you tell yourself? The devil wants you to buy into self-justifications and lies because they perpetuate your sin. Repent of the lies. Put them to death. Don't believe their sparkly promises. Put your

hope in the promises of God (Exod 14:14; Isa 40:10, 29; 54:10, 17; Ps 18:3; 46:1-2; Matt 6:31-33; John 3:16, 36; Eph 3:16-19; Phil 4:6-7).

Second, as pictures and images get imbedded in the hard drive of your mind and heart, they become a playground for your sinful flesh. Your corrupt imagination can take those images and turn them into a full movie reel. You arouse yourself and indulge yourself as you do so. Accountability shouldn't be limited to your external behavior, but should reach into your mind and heart. Does your accountability partner ask you about your fantasy life?

Third, ongoing struggles with porn can lead to battles with doubt. Sometimes the building up of guilt and shame over the course of this struggle can make you condemn yourself ("What's wrong with me?" "Why can't I get my act together?") and second guess God ("Is God going to help me?" "Have I messed up so badly that God doesn't care?"). Pastors struggle with doubt. Don't be ashamed to admit this fact, because it's true. As you struggle with porn, the evidence of your sin stacks up, and you wonder, "Maybe I'm not saved after all," or "Maybe God has abandoned me," or some other dreadful thought. Unbelief takes root.

Fight the unbelief. Don't bottle this up. Tell others about your porn struggles, and the doubt that follows. If you are confident in what Christ has done for you on the cross, and in his imputed righteousness for you, don't let doubt get the upper hand. Lean in on the truth that you are justified in Christ.

Fourth, we know that there are desires and motives that drive what we do. As heart-oriented creatures (Prov 20:5; Matt 12:33-37; Luke 6:43-45), we want to know the deep purposes of our hearts. Do you act out because of stress? Are you longing

to be affirmed? Are you struggling with the boredom of a piteistic life and want more adventure? Are you longing for more intimacy and creating false paradises? Are you using porn as a means of escape? The reasons are never simple, and often as you map out the topography of your sin, you see that porn struggles are not just about lust. What drives you to act out?

The war of your desires sits behind everything — every deed, thought, feeling, and action. The flesh's desires are battling the spirit's desires. As you kill off your carnal desires, you retrain your desires for more holy things. Is your greatest affection for Christ, or are you running on spiritual fumes? Training takes time. Every step of obedience, every moment of joy in the Lord, every lie put to death, every promise of God owned, every tinge of affection that grows for Christ — each of these trains your heart and moves you in a holier direction.<sup>2</sup> You probably preach this truth to your members, but now you get to live by it.<sup>3</sup>

### **Relationships and accountability**

The pastorate is very isolating. The pressure of appearing godly, and expectations placed upon you, make it hard to figure out where to get help. Don't believe the lie that you can go at this alone. Don't let the fear of revealing your sin get the upper hand.<sup>4</sup> No sin should ever be fought in isolation. If you agree with me, then the question is: Who do you tell?

If it is possible to share with someone within your church, I think that's best. As a shepherd, you have wounds, hurts, and struggles. Let fellow leaders or church members take the

---

2. Rarely do I see porn struggles change overnight. Usually we're thinking of a trajectory — consistent movement in a holier direction, with normal ups and downs, depending on the day.

3. Holy desires lead to holy living — obedience, faithfulness, love, trust, and hope.

4. The more you let these fears grow, the more likely you'll be paralyzed by them.

responsibility given to them in Scripture to take care of you. Is there another pastor in the church who you can tell about your struggles? If not, is there a mature Christian man in the church to whom you can confess? Ask them to hold you accountable, but take it upon yourself to be proactive in going to them with your sin. Don't let the overwhelming burdens of the pastorate be an excuse for you to not deal with your sin.

If you can't tell someone in your church, find a professional counselor in your community, who has experience helping porn strugglers and who can walk with you through these struggles.

Your wife should also know about your struggles. The first ditch you can fall into is not to tell her anything because you are ashamed and you don't want to hurt her. Or, you could err by telling her everything — in a cathartic effort to cleanse your conscience, you tell all without regard to what it does to her soul. Think of your wife's weaknesses, not just physically but also emotionally (cf. 1 Peter 3:7). If she stands as your primary accountability, the emotional toll of your confessions over time will degrade the trust in your marriage. Maybe not initially, but with time, I've always seen it get to this place. That's why I think your main accountability should be another man, whom your wife can access directly when she has questions or concerns. Let another guy bear the brunt of your struggles, not your wife.

She should know if you are struggling, but only in general terms. Think in terms of a dirty laundry bag: She needs to know the size and shape of the problem but not the details of what's in the bag.

What then is her role? To be an ally with you against your sin. She prays for you. She stays aware of the sin in general terms. She helps you porn-proof your life and home with a substantial firewall on all devices in the home. She enjoys a rich

sex-life with you. She helps you to find joy in Christ and in life. You get to do all of this together.

As you share with her, realize that the feeling for her is one of betrayal. That's the most common word I hear wives use.<sup>5</sup> Porn degrades the trust in marriage. So show your wife you'll fight this sin and work to rebuild trust.

### **Fight the war, not just one battle**

It might seem a bit much to do all of this, but any military strategist knows you can't win a war by fighting on just one front. You tactically plan for a multi-front war — a robust firewall, repentance, faith, forgiveness, good accountability with men, rebuilding trust with your wife, and putting to death lies, doubts, and fantasies.

The blessing of being an undershepherd is that there is a chief shepherd. He's ultimately in charge, not you. Your soul, just like the souls of everyone else, is in his hands. As you fight this war, remember that God has not forgotten you. He's by your side.

---

5. Telling you that your wife will feel betrayed (and not saying anything more about it) is like walking you up to a landmine, pointing it out, saying, "Good luck," and walking away. Not very thoughtful, is it? If deceit has been a part of this sin — if your wife discovered your sin, you have been hiding it from her, you lied or cheated — then initially your words are not meaningful for her. Deceit destroys trust, especially in your words. Your actions early on will speak louder than your words, and your actions — not your promises — will rebuild her trust. I will often ask the wife, "What does repentance look like to you?" And then whatever the wife says, I'll tell the husband to follow suit.



## DEVELOPING HONEST ACCOUNTABILITY

---

*Accountability is not only important but also essential, and nobody is going to do it for us. Pastors must be convinced of the need for accountability, not only for others but also for themselves. And they must be committed to taking intentional steps to ensure it exists.*

By Erik Raymond

Years ago, I was talking with a friend in his unfinished kitchen. As we spoke, I looked around and, while I could see he completed a lot of work, there was still much left to do. The irony struck me as I took a long drink of my water. Looking up to the unfinished ceiling, I heard my friend offer to come by a couple of nights after work that week to help me with some projects around my house. Can you see the irony? The guy who helps everyone else doesn't take time to finish his own home. This in no way diminishes my friend's work ethic or his desire to help. It merely illustrates a reality familiar to many of us; we can often neglect taking care of our own house while helping others with theirs. As is so often the case, what is true in the physical is reflected in the spiritual. Tragically, we can even overlook some of the most fundamental measures we so frequently prescribe to others for their spiritual health.

One such measure is the development of honest and intentional accountability. By accountability, I am not so much referring to one specific practice but rather an intentional attitude that stems from theological convictions. Many pastors may feel isolated and without anyone to understand their struggles, but the truth is, we have to fight, and we can't do it alone. Accountability is not only important but also essential, and nobody is going to do it for us. Pastors must be convinced of the need for accountability, not only for others but also for themselves. And they must be committed to taking intentional steps to ensure it exists.

In what follows, I hope to convince you of the need for intentional accountability and provide some practical steps toward its implementation.

### **The need for accountability**

According to recent research, 14 percent of pastors and 21 percent of youth pastors admit they use pornography on a regular basis. The study notes, “the isolated nature of ministry is a key factor. Pastors and churches build the isolation together. All too often, pastors fear honesty and congregations fear their pastor’s vulnerability.”<sup>1</sup> But it’s not just pornography. Nearly three-fourths of pastors surveyed admit to marital problems and burnout. Other surveys reflect similar data, indicating that seven in 10 pastors are fatigued, fighting depression, and do not have a good friend or confidant.<sup>2</sup>

These statistics reveal that it’s a fool’s errand to think that

---

1. David Kinnaman. “The Porn Phenomenon.” Barna Group, last modified June 19, 2016. <https://www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/>.

2. From a study by Dr. Richard J. Krejcir from the Francis A. Shaeffer Institute of Church Leadership and Development (2007 “Statistics on Pastors”) via <http://blog.thrivingpastor.com/the-pastor-and-accountability/>



we can just do nothing. We must assess our personal vulnerability and implement a reasonable strategy for personal accountability.

But remember, statistics can be helpful, but they will not carry us over the finish line. They help us see where we are, but they do not tell us who we are. When thinking about the need for accountability, we must start with what the Bible says about us and our ministry.

### **We are not yet glorified**

The Bible makes glorious promises about the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. We will one day be fully conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; Phil 3:21). But we are not there yet. We have tasted the dawn of the new creation, but its sun has not risen to noonday prominence. We are still waiting. And, therefore, we are still groaning with anticipation for it to come (Rom 8:22-23). In the meantime, what are we doing if not wrestling through the reality of living with indwelling sin (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:19ff; Col 3:5-14). Pastors know this. Those who are reading this could add five more verses to fill out this truth further. But we forget it, don't we? The reality of being not yet glorified means we are still fighting personal sin.

### **A glorious ministry requires radical intentionality**

What would you do to preserve the honor of Christ? There is likely nothing you wouldn't do. The glory of Christ is everything to us. And the privilege of serving and making much of him in ministry is our gracious dessert. What a calling! I think this is the type of heartbeat that the Apostle Paul reflects in his writing. In 1 Timothy he famously calls himself the "chief of sinners" (1 Tim 1:16). But, in rehearsing his resume, he recalls God's mercy. This prompts him to praise God for appointing him to this service (1

Tim 1:12). Therefore, he doesn't want to do anything that would hinder or discredit his ministry (2 Cor 6:3). So what does he do? He takes radical steps to ensure he finishes.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified (1 Cor 9:24–27).

Paul is aiming for his flesh. He realizes the ministry is a glorious ministry. His service is a humbling privilege. And he wants to do this as long as he can while making the most significant splash for the glory of Christ possible. To do this, he needs to take radical measures to combat his own heart. Do you share Paul's grace-inflamed gratitude for ministry? If you do, then you will also share Paul's commitment to radical intentionality when considering how to combat sin and remain qualified.

### **Practice what you preach**

Faithful pastors walk up to the pulpit each week to preach God's Word. Sadly, as we walk back down to the pew, we often forget that everything we just preached also applies to us. I'll highlight a few concepts that likely find their way into your sermons but can quickly be forgotten or assumed.

*Believe what you preach*

Faithful ministers of the gospel believe the Bible. We believe it is the very Word of God. We've likely defended the veracity and authority of the Scriptures. But, to our shame, we can be susceptible to a functional bibliology that is common among the more liberal theologians. Pastor, do you believe the Bible you preach? Do you believe your sermons?

*Be humbled by your heart*

As I mentioned earlier, the presence of indwelling sin should quickly sober us up from any shameful imbibing of the tonic of pride. Our hearts are deceitful and untrustworthy (Jer 17:9). We know how to tell others this, but do we believe it ourselves? If we do, then we will want to be intentional about accountability. Does your own heart humble you?

*Be impressed by the Word*

Isn't it wonderful to be able to preach the Word of God and commend people to it? It is the universal remedy for all that plagues humanity. I've often marveled as I preach, looking out among my church family, to consider how many different struggles and afflictions are pressing upon people. But what do we commend to them? We send them to the God of the Word and the Word of God for the good of their souls (Ps 19:7-11). Pastor, are you impressed by the Word?

*Be grateful for the church (you need community too)*

As pastors, we are always commending the church. We know that God has provided the covenant community with people who are gifted to serve one another (Eph 4:11-16). We comfort, admonish, encourage, exhort, forgive, and pray for one another,

just to name a few. God has assembled the church so we can work together in the process of sanctification. We need the community. If we neglect one another and our responsibilities together, then there could be dangerous spiritual implications (Heb 3:12-13). But sadly, it is pastors — the ones who promote community — who often feel the most alone. We can find ourselves retreating from our church family and from meaningful relationships. Pastors can ignore the very warning signs that we would find alarming within others. Pastors need their church family just as much as anyone else. Are you grateful for your church family? And, not only as a pastor, but are you thankful as a member?

*Be encouraged by the character of God and his gospel*

There are many reasons why pastors may retreat into isolation. Most of these involve some degree of prideful wrestling with the reality of not being God. We can be guilty of trying to control things when it is God who is sovereign. We may try to maintain a public persona when it is the gospel that should be our basis for identity and acceptance. We chafe under accountability, but it is God who has ordained it. We may resist confession of sin because it would crumble how people view us morally, but it is to Christ's righteousness alone that we cling. When we remember who God is, we can embrace his providence in our lives. When we remember the gospel, we can be encouraged that it wonderfully provides new beginnings. It frees us from the tiresome treadmill of performance and the arduous act of pretending. When we simply believe the Bible we preach, we can open ourselves up to accountability. Are you encouraged by God and his gospel?

## **Spheres of accountability**

If you are convinced of the need, how do you think about accountability? I try to think in concentric circles, working from my relationship to the Lord all the way out to my church family and friends. I'll run through these spheres below and provide some suggestions for developing accountability.

## **Developing accountability**

Walk through these spheres and develop a plan for intentional accountability:

### *Five Spheres of Accountability*

1. You are accountable to the Lord.
2. You are accountable to your wife.
3. You are accountable to your leadership.
4. You are accountable to your congregation.
5. You are accountable to your friends.

### *Accountability to the Lord*

This is where everything begins. If there is no sense of accountability to God, then it will little matter what other measures we put in place. Sin could be described as a lack of fear of God (Rom 3:18). The fear of God has been explained as both terror fear and worship fear. Terror fear refers to sober consideration of judgment while worship fear has to do with reverence through proper worship.

In both cases, the result is humility before God because of who he is and who we are. If we are going to have intentional accountability, then it must begin with a healthy fear of God. We must spend time poring over God's Word, not just for our sermons but also for our souls. We must spend time in prayer, not only for the needs of our people but for our

own needs. Accountability is about keeping short accounts with the Lord. Throughout the day we should be regularly confessing, repenting, and requesting God's help for dealing with sin and living in a manner worthy of the gospel. The Scriptures drive us to intentional reflection which then fuels precise confession. Set aside time to meet with God throughout the day in prayer.

Perhaps you could observe regular meetings of prayer to consider your heart in light of a previous pattern of sin or tendency of your heart. I do this each morning and evening, but I also try to do it around midday. We have the privilege of being freed up to devote ourselves to the ministry of the Word and prayer (Acts 6:4). Let's not neglect to devote some time throughout the day to tending to our own heart as we have our most important meetings of the day with the ultimate accountability partner.

#### *Accountability to your wife*

Under God, this should be a married pastor's closest relationship. Because they are in covenant together, they need to be honest and open. Since pornography is not an isolated sin but an expression of many different but related desires, there should be regular conversation about all matters of life. The husband's purity is one aspect that should be open to question.

To help encourage openness in this relationship, husbands can remind their wives that they desire godliness and purity. Give them permission (not that they need it) to ask questions whenever they want about whatever they want. And when husbands receive questions, it is most helpful not to be defensive and frustrated, but rather to be appreciative

that his wife cares enough about him, their marriage, and the glory of God to ask. Further, since pornography directly and deeply affects the relationship with his wife, the pastor should be honest and upfront about his struggles. Apart from God, it is likely that no one loves you like your wife. Treat her with the utmost care, love, and respect. And invite her into your intentional accountability.

*Accountability to your leadership*

The leadership of the church, especially the staff and elders, should think carefully about intentional accountability. As pastors, we have a front-row seat to the devastating effects of sin. Also, since the staff and elder teams are responsible for implementing various systems and structures in the church, they are an excellent place to start when considering implementing some practical levels of accountability. I have heard of churches requiring that staff members download Covenant Eyes (or a similar software) on all devices and computers. Other churches implement types of yearly and quarterly review of questions about personal and spiritual health. Desiring God provides a questionnaire that staff members of Bethlehem Baptist Church fill out weekly. It addresses several issues ranging from diet, rest, personal devotions, and pornography. The precise method is not as important as a practice of intentional accountability. Each church can figure out the specifics of what works best in their context. The important thing is doing something.

*Accountability to your congregation*

By referring to congregational accountability, I am not suggesting that the pastor should stand up every Sunday

morning and recite a list of sins and temptations from the previous week. Instead, I am talking about the reality that the pastor is accountable to the members of his church. Pastors can slide into a leadership mindset that can eclipse their status as a fellow member. We need to remember we are not above the sheep but rather one who has been called to lead other sheep. Pastors can remind themselves and others by tactfully and appropriately sharing how they may struggle or get discouraged. Also, pastors must remember that it is assembled congregation, not the individual pastor, that has the final authority under heaven and the Scriptures (Matt 16:13-19; 18:15-20).

#### *Accountability to friends*

Pastors tend to immerse themselves in their ministry to the exclusion of other relationships. It is wise to enlist at least one (if not more) brother whom you can talk with regularly. Ideally, this would be a godly man who knows you, loves you, and wants what is best for you, your family, and your church. I have heard older, seasoned ministers speak of the value of having such a friend that they can “dump the truck” with during seasons of intense discouragement, temptation, and burnout. But it is not only during seasons of difficulty that a friend like this is valuable. His regular, scheduled conversations will help keep the rhythm of intentional accountability.

I realize that we could establish meetings, write questionnaires, install software, and do our devotions every single day and still fall on our face. But this should not dissuade us from deploying wisdom to help us to serve in the glorious ministry of the Word faithfully.



## **Conclusion**

The Lord provides everything we need to combat every problem we face. Neither the solutions nor the problems are easy to face. Often they make us uncomfortable and increasingly reliant upon God's grace. However, it is here that we find ourselves met by God and his means to sanctify and strengthen us. May we as pastors never neglect our own house because we are too busy working with others or too prideful to give it attention. Instead, may we give ourselves to intentional accountability with those who love us and are likewise partnering for the advancement of the gospel.



## DELIGHTING IN YOUR WIFE

---

*How you treat your wife is actually an expression of what you believe about the gospel and the love of Jesus.*

By Brian Davis

“Rejoice in the wife of your youth,” the writer of Proverbs says. What a lovely call. Unfortunately, many married men will not enjoy the sweetness of this exhortation. They will trade in their actual wife for a digital version of a forbidden woman. Her color-corrected lips may drip honey, but her feet lead down to death. It is foolish and destructive to stray toward extramarital sexual satisfaction. But God has something better and far sweeter for you in marriage — something that is blessed, lovely, and worthy of rejoicing.

The source of that blessedness and rejoicing is delighting in your own wife: “Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth, a lovely deer, a graceful doe. Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love” (Prov 5:18-19).

### **Grounds for delighting in your wife**

The Lord made sex to be delightful in marriage. Even so, as with all meaningful Christian pursuits, joy is bound up in faithfulness. And faithfulness requires effort.

The quest for delight in your spouse begins and ends where all pursuits for the Christian life do — being satisfied in Jesus. This means being content with where and with whom he has you. The secret of contentment is recognizing that your earthly circumstance is never the basis for your joy — Christ is.

Being satisfied with Jesus means being satisfied with the spouse that he gave you. As you seek to delight and rejoice in the goodness the Lord has provided in your spouse, you weaken the force of lies that discontentment produces. Discontentment is the springboard for all kinds of sins, for it questions the present goodness of God in our given situations and relationships. Rather than encouraging us to trust the goodness of God in the exact moment we are in, discontentment prompts us to complain and overlook what God has provided for us. Feeding discontentment can utterly destroy a marriage. But we must not feed discontentment; we must oppose it and expose it for the lie that it is. One way to do this in a marriage is to, as the proverb says, “rejoice in the wife of your youth.”

My wife is the perfect spouse for me. Not because she is perfect or because I am perfect — we both readily acknowledge that is not the case. My wife is the perfect spouse for me because she is the spouse given to me by my perfect Father. “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord” (Prov 18:22). The happy finder of a wife should be filled with gratitude to the Lord, knowing that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights” (James 1:17).

You should rejoice in the wife of your youth precisely because she is the wife of your youth who the good Lord has provided. My delight in my bride is not primarily dependent on her but on my view of Christ and his sovereign grace. It is an act of faith that expresses trust in Jesus by expressing love to your spouse. How you treat your wife is actually an expression of what you believe about the gospel and the love of Jesus. This was Paul's whole argument in that great and weighty call of Ephesians 5:25-30.

Many men have blamed their wives for their own sexual sin and lack of faithfulness. Not only is this totally untrue, but this is the exact opposite of gospel love. In the gospel, Jesus showed us his love for us when we were at our worst, not our best. We are called to show Christ-exalting love to our spouses not because of their merit, but because of our commitment to them. Each of us are called to cherish our wives specifically because they are our wives. Make no mistake: If you do not cherish and delight in your wife, it is not her fault but yours. It is not her lack of anything, but it is your lack of love. This is true in every expression of marital love, including sexual intimacy. I should delight in my wife because she is my wife.

### **You are responsible for delighting in your wife**

The Bible is full of exhortations to pursue purity. We are to recognize the sinful desires in us and respond with a holy violence against them: "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col 3:5). This kind of holy hostility reveals itself in several ways. Cut off access to devices and opportunities where stumbling seems probable: "If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is

better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell” (Matt 5:29). We are also encouraged to take up Joseph’s strategy of running away: “Flee from sexual immorality” (1 Cor 6:18). Both are necessary acts of obedience.

There is another precious remedy married men have against Satan’s devices, one that is far too rarely referenced and encouraged to pursue — sexual intimacy. Consider this instruction from Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:2-5:

But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.

Here we see that robust sexual engagement is not only a fountain of joy but also protection against the devil. God has equipped each marriage with a wonderful weapon: their sex life. I want to encourage you to exert effort towards cultivating delight in your wife as a means of fighting against sexual sin. Here are three suggestions:

*Recognize your wife.*

It is incredibly harmful to only view sexual intimacy as the height of romantic affection. That thinking seems to flow more from Hollywood than the Bible. What that may do is create a culture in the marriage where sex is not seen as

an expression of the marriage by faith but an expression of occasional heightened feelings. Paul had no problems encouraging couples to have sex and to have sex frequently, as an aid against spiritual warfare:

Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control (1 Cor 7:5).

As spouses we are partners in life devoted to Jesus and this means we have the tremendous and delightful privilege of sexually satisfying each other to be strengthened against temptation. God has given you a wonderful ally, and he has provided you with a way to fight sexual sin: Pursue sexual intimacy with your wife, whom you adore.<sup>1</sup>

*Reserve your attention for your wife.*

The context of the Proverbs 5 passage is the father discouraging his son from giving himself up to sexual temptation. “Keep your way far from her, and do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your honor to others” (Prov 5:8-9). Part of cultivating delight in your wife is choosing to delight in your wife sexually, but part of that is refusing to delight in others sexually. In order to reserve your sexual attention

---

1. For some sexual intimacy is very challenging. Perhaps you or your spouse have experienced sexual abuse or have physical hindrances to sexual intercourse that makes this exhortation seem unrealistic. First, rest in the fact that Jesus knows the most intimate areas of your life and that he is with you in this struggle. Second, trust that God has created your spouse to walk through this. They cannot fix this struggle, but they can serve you uniquely in it. God is not cruel, and your spouse can be a constant reminder of his grace toward you. Finally, you and your spouse must seek help from gifted biblical counselor and a physician. Pursue this by faith, trusting that God will work through your desire to obey him and bring you joy and whatever healing he knows is best for you.

for your wife you must restrict yourself from giving sexual attention to others. Self-control is not only keeping yourself from indulging in a given activity but also keeping yourself from things that would challenge your exclusive delight in your wife. You must protect your delight in your spouse and work to silence all voices or pictures that would tempt you to do otherwise. This should mean that there are some things that you never watch. There are some shows, movies, and images that tempt you to compare your wife with someone else. Identify those things and avoid them. Keep your way far from them and don't go near their door.

*Rejoice in your wife.*

The inspired, holy, powerful word of God contains this encouragement: "Let her breasts fill you at all times with delight; be intoxicated always in her love" (Prov 5:19). In intimacy is a means of grace, whereby each spouse is to be both strengthened in the satisfaction of the other and strengthened to defend themselves from sinning sexually against their spouse and the Lord (1 Cor 7:2). This means that married couples can and should partake of this means of grace as often as we possibly can. While there is a real duty in sexual intimacy, there is a real delight as well (1 Cor 7:3).

As the proverb asks, "Why should you be intoxicated with a forbidden woman and embrace the bosom of an adulteress?" Your sovereign, good king, who in himself is the source of all true satisfaction has given you joy and sexual satisfaction in your bride. Labor to love her.

My married brothers: Rejoice in your bride.



## THOUGHTS ON THE RESTORATION OF FALLEN PASTORS

---

*Let us remember, friends, that none of us who enjoys the privilege of ministering the gospel is greater than Christ's church, locally or universally. We may have been given a platform, but we are of service to him and at his disposal.  
We are to be subject to the church.*

By Jared C. Wilson

When a pastor has disqualified himself from his ministry, is he disqualified from ministry altogether? If so, for how long? Forever? Can he ever be restored? If so, how soon?

These sorts of questions are not new, but they do seem more relevant than ever. While there are lots of articles out there on “fallen pastors,” I’ve been surprised to discover few deal with these questions in an in-depth way. I won’t pretend to provide a comprehensive treatment of this difficult subject in this post, but I do want to share some biblical reflections and practical implications I’ve been ruminating on for a while. This subject hits fairly close to home, as I think it does for many. It behooves us to think carefully and biblically about these matters.

### **What disqualifies a pastor?**

What I find interesting these days is not how many pastors have fallen into disqualification but how many have not. We live in a day and age where any guy with a speaking gift and an entrepreneurial, creative spirit can plant a church and even be successful with it. But gifting is not qualification. Some seem to discuss this subject as if we do not have clear biblical guidance on what qualifies a man for the office of elder/pastor. Except we do. Here is a rough list, a composite from the three primary qualification passages (1 Tim 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5):

1. Sexually/maritally faithful
2. Good manager of household
3. Humble
4. Gentle
5. Sober
6. Peaceful
7. Financially responsible
8. Hospitable
9. Self-controlled
10. Upright in character
11. Committed to holiness
12. Able to teach
13. Spiritually mature (not a new convert)
14. Respectable (and respected by outsiders)
15. A good example to the flock

Evangelicals seem to most often discuss disqualification as it relates to adultery — which, to be clear, is disqualifying — but we rarely bring in the disqualification conversation as it relates to short-tempered, argumentative, or otherwise un-

self-controlled pastors. The “fall” of Mark Driscoll is probably the closest my particular tribe has come to reckoning with the full-fledged (dis)qualifications for ministry, but it is still not a widely understood concept in the age of the celebrity minister. In fact, I think in many tribes and traditions, the “other biblical qualifications for ministry” have been neglected for a long time. How else to explain that it is typically only once a domineering, financially irresponsible, unsober pastor commits adultery that he is finally removed from his office?

The bottom line is that the bar for the pastoral office is set rather high. It is not open to anybody who “feels called.” Beyond giftedness and ambition, it requires maturity, testing, and a long obedience in the same direction. Because of this, when a pastor has become disqualified, we are dealing with a problem at a different level than even the serious problem of discipline-worthy sins among the laity. It’s not because pastors are supposed to be super-Christians or have more favor with God than lay people, but rather that the leadership office demands a higher standard.

### **Can disqualified pastors be restored?**

The first thing we should say is that we are often talking about two different kinds of restoration without knowing it. Many of evangelicalism’s problems with the scandals of celebrity pastors who disqualify themselves stem from an inability — or an unwillingness — to distinguish between a restoration to vocational ministry from a restoration to the fellowship. In regards to the latter, the answer ought to be an unequivocal yes. Any believer who has fallen morally, pastor or not, ought to be fully restored to the Christian community, given their repentance and the restoration process of their church.

This is why we must be careful with our criticism as well. Sometimes when we argue against the restoration of certain ministers to the pulpit, it sounds as though we are denying their ability to rejoin the fellowship of believers. And sometimes when we are upset about the high standard some set for the pulpit, we call others graceless when they are in fact ready to welcome any repentant sinner to the warmth of Christian fellowship.

What we are talking about here is more specifically this: Can a pastor who has disqualified himself in some way be restored to the pastoral office? In other words: Can a disqualified pastor become re-qualified? This is a rather controversial question. For many, the *how* and *when* are nonstarters because they answer “no” to this first consideration. For instance, John MacArthur wrote in a 1991 article:

There are some sins that irreparably shatter a man’s reputation and disqualify him from a ministry of leadership forever. Even Paul, man of God that he was, said he feared such a possibility. In 1 Corinthians 9:27 he says, “I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified.”

When referring to his body, Paul obviously had sexual immorality in view. In 1 Corinthians 6:18, he describes it as a sin against one’s own body — sexual sin is in its own category. Certainly it disqualifies a man from church leadership since he permanently forfeits a blameless reputation as a one-woman man (Prov 6:33; 1 Tim 3:2).

I tread lightly here, but I’m going to disagree with Pastor MacArthur. First, if a previous sin forever disqualifies a man, Paul would have already been disqualified for his life of murderous persecution of Christians. Certainly sin committed after one

is in union with Christ is in a certain way more serious than sin committed pre-conversion — not serious as in damnable, of course, but serious as in contrary to the new nature — but if any person could ever be deemed forever blameworthy, that would seem to preclude them even from the fellowship. Grace either covers all sin repented of, or it covers none.

I also do not find MacArthur's exegetical case convincing. He puts 1 Corinthians 9:27 in the context of 1 Corinthians 6:18 to argue Paul has in mind sexual immorality. But that does not seem at all to be what Paul is talking about in the immediate context of chapter 9. Verse 27 caps off a long explanatory passage on Paul's missional philosophy, teasing out his concern to be "all things to all people" (v. 22). He does of course mention "self-control" (v. 25), but it is in relation to training. This does not exclude any consideration of guarding against sexual immorality, of course, but the "disqualification" referred to in verse 27 doesn't seem to be connected to a moral failing but a missional one.

In other words, it appears from the trajectory of his reasoning throughout the chapter that the "qualification" in question is about commending himself to both Jew and Greek (vv. 19-23). He does not want to fall short of missional versatility. This is why he spills a lot of ink earlier in the passage on payment for ministry and the like. He then goes on to discuss his discipline in relation to the ceremonial law as a missional consideration. He is speaking largely to contextualization and personal usability. With this in mind — again — we do not take sexual propriety entirely out of the equation, but it would seem that the disqualification he has in mind is more to do with disqualifying himself from access to preaching to people groups (as he mentions in the verse in question) than disqualification

from the ministry entirely. I take the immediate context to be of more guidance in understanding 1 Corinthians 9:27 than I do a verse three chapters previous.

All of that said, we obviously know sexual immorality is disqualifying for pastors because of the more direct references that give us the biblical qualifications for ministry. One of these is found, as MacArthur mentions, in 1 Timothy 3:2. But the question we're really asking is if this disqualification is permanent. Even if we take 1 Corinthians 9:27 to refer to a moral failing, it says nothing about the permanence of such a disqualification. MacArthur adds the word "permanently" to his exposition, but it is not found in the text. What we can agree on, I assume, is that those who seek qualification for pastoral ministry — according to 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5 — must have a well established reputation for and widespread affirmation of the qualities listed therein. (I'm going to come back to that last sentence in a minute, so don't forget it.) On this subject, another pastor, John Piper, said in a 2009 interview:

Is it possible to restore a pastor who sinned sexually but who is repentant? Or is such a pastor disqualified because he no longer meets the qualification of being "above reproach"?

I'm afraid if I answer this the way that I should, it will give so much license to restore pastors too quickly. But since I should, I should.

Ultimately, I think the answer is yes. A pastor who has sinned sexually can be a pastor again. And I say that just because of the grace of God and the fact that "above reproach" can be restored, probably.

I agree with Piper on this, and I think there is a lot entailed in the "probably" that we should tease out. But first, do we have

any biblical precedent for the restoration of a fallen pastor? Well, in fact, of a certain kind we do.

**What does the restoration of Peter tell us about the restoration of disqualified pastors?**

Let's be clear here that we are not discussing relational conflicts or a ministerial "falling-out." Some speak this way about Peter's denial of Christ and the subsequent reunion with his Lord, but this does not do justice to the terrible sin Peter has committed. On the other hand, we have a few examples in Acts and in some of Paul's epistles referring to intramural debates and relational conflicts that prompt the parting of ways between ministers of the gospel, but Paul does not refer to those men as being disqualified from ministry. (He does speak that way about those one-time ministers who embraced heresy or otherwise "fell away" from the faith, of course.) So we have to put Peter's denial of Jesus in the right category.

Jesus has warned, "But whoever denies me before others, I will also deny him before my Father in heaven" (Matt 10:33). This makes the public denial of Jesus (by any believer) a denial of eternal impact. Compounding this, Peter was even told by Jesus he would do this, and Peter gave his word he would not (Matt 26:35), so now we have a betrayed trust on top of a betrayed witness. Can we agree that any minister who denies even knowing Jesus when put on the spot has entered disqualification territory? With this in mind, let's revisit the restoration scene found in John 21:15-19:

When they had eaten breakfast, Jesus asked Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said to him, "you know that I love you."

“Feed my lambs,” he told him. A second time he asked him, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said to him, “you know that I love you.”

“Shepherd my sheep,” he told him.

He asked him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was grieved that he asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.”

“Feed my sheep,” Jesus said. “Truly I tell you, when you were younger, you would tie your belt and walk wherever you wanted. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will tie you and carry you where you don’t want to go.” He said this to indicate by what kind of death Peter would glorify God. After saying this, he told him, “Follow me.”

Is this scene instructive in any way for the consideration of pastoral restoration? Even though it is not a didactic passage but rather a narrative, I think so.

First, the larger point is that restoration for sinners is possible. Glory! This is simply, for all believers, a wonderful picture of the gospel. Why did Jesus repeat the question three times? There is no significance in the linguistic difference in the “loves” (*agape*, *phileo*), as that appears to be a literary penchant of John’s, but rather Jesus is echoing and thereby covering Peter’s threefold denial. The gist? You cannot out-sin the grace of God. As far as your sin may go, the gospel goes further still.

Second, it seems obvious to me that the restoration in view here is not simply to the fellowship but also to leadership. Some proponents of permanent disqualification miss the gravity of what is taking place in this beautiful moment. The interjection between each question and answer of “Feed/tend my lambs” would seem to indicate that Peter is not simply being restored



to “good graces” with Jesus but also to the ministerial office. He is certainly not dismissed from his apostleship and of course goes on to preach and write authoritatively. This is after he has publicly denied knowing Jesus.

Third, beyond those two primary facts — restoration is graciously total, and re-qualification for ministry is possible — everything else we deduce about restoration from this passage must be an inference. For instance, some argue from Peter’s restoration scene that restoration to ministry can be — dare we say, should be? — immediate. It is to this question that I turn next.

### **How soon can fallen pastors be restored?**

If not never, when? Some say, citing Jesus’s restoration of Peter, immediately. I think not.

To discern from Peter’s restoration a “Jesus and me” approach to pastoral qualification is to miss the robust ecclesiology embedded in John 21 and provided throughout the rest of the Scriptures. There are two important elements in John 21 that are at the least necessary prerequisites for restoration of fallen pastors: (1) godly grief (John 21:7) and (2) the verdict of the congregation as representative of Christ on earth (Matt 16:19).

To put it bluntly, Jesus is not here in person to tell us, “Yeah, this guy’s ready.” So what do we have? We have his word (the Bible), and we have his body (the church). The answer to the question, “How soon can a fallen pastor be restored?” cannot really be answered definitively in terms of time frame. It may take some longer than others. Some may not ever be restored. The point is — it’s not really up to them. The restoration is performed, as in all discipline cases, by the church where the

disqualification has taken place. There are too many factors that may be involved in different cases. But I think we can say “not immediately,” for these reasons:

*Discerning godly grief is necessary.*

Peter’s grief is especially noted. How can we know this grief is godly grief (2 Cor 7:10) and not simply grief over being found out (or “caught”), or worse, a feigned sincerity meant to fool? Well, Jesus himself cannot be fooled. He could look right into Peter’s heart and see his repentance. The church, as Christ’s representative in matters of church discipline today, is of course not omniscient. We determine repentance credible in a variety of ways and act accordingly. Typically, church discipline processes involve steps members must submit to in order to show their cooperation and demonstrate their grief over their sin. For repentant adulterers, this can entail things like opening up their phones and email to their hurt spouse, cutting off all contact with their affair partner, and so on. For habitual porn users, it can involve installing software. For members disciplined for all kinds of sins, it may involve regularly meeting with an accountability partner and/or a counselor. The stipulations vary, but steps toward restoration are taken.

Some may say that is not very gracious, but biblical church discipline is not punitive or condemnatory. It is, in fact, a grace applied. Most folks acknowledge we don’t restore unrepentant members to the fellowship. So once we make repentance a requirement, we’re necessarily asking, “How do you know if one is repentant?” Obviously there are ways to create an interminable succession of legalistic hoops for someone to jump through. That is graceless. We

are simply discerning repentance. That is biblical, and it is gracious because there are more parties at stake than simply the sinner in question — there is the body, the reputation of the church, and the credibility of our witness for Christ. No single sinner is above all of these considerations, and to treat them so is to deny grace to others. No, properly administered, discipline is a grace (Heb 12:11).

*Restoration to fellowship is not the same as restoration to the pastorate.*

For any person who has fallen into discipline-worthy sin, restoration to the fellowship can be relatively immediate. I say “relatively” because of the considerations above. But paying penance is not a biblical virtue. Like the father in the parable, we seek with love the restoration of every wayward member, pastor or not, and run to receive them when they indicate interest in returning to the family. But, again, restoration to the fellowship is not the same as restoration to the pastorate. Remember those qualifications?

*Peter did not restore himself.*

The church, as Christ’s representative, must affirm the qualifications of any person to the office of pastor. Christ in person can qualify a man immediately or immediately restore that man once he’s fallen. Christ’s church, however, has further instruction on how it can make these determinations. To return to an earlier claim: Those who seek qualification for pastoral ministry — according to 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1, and 1 Peter 5 — must have a well established reputation for and widespread affirmation of the qualities listed therein. And those qualifications are not things that can be determined

in immediate fashion. They aren't determined quickly when we establish a pastor in the first place, and they shouldn't be jumped over when we consider the restoration of a pastor who's disqualified himself.

You cannot tell if someone is a good manager of a household the first time you meet him. You see the witness of his family life over time. Similarly, when a guy cheats on his wife, you don't determine he's a good family man soon after the revelation. It will take more time, given the offense, to see him walk in repentance, to gain that reputation back. This is the case with any point of disqualification, although some levels of discernment can occur more quickly than others. It is not an immediate thing for a pastor who has been disqualified for a long pattern of verbal abuse or coarse jesting to gain a reputation as a gentle, peaceful man. It is probably less immediate still for a pastor who has been disqualified for a pattern of alcohol addiction or sexual immorality to gain a reputation as sober-minded or a "one-woman man."

This is parallel to the biblical qualification of "not being a new convert." Obviously we are speaking to a (presumably) Christian person who is newly repentant, but the underlying principle is the same. Repentance is an immediate re-entry to the fellowship, but re-entry to the pastorate takes the testing of time.

This is not graceless. It is how Christ protects his church and, incidentally, how he protects repentant sinners from rushing too soon back into the same pressures that revealed their undeveloped character to begin with.

Even if a pastor in light of restoration is planning to assume the pulpit of another church or plant a new church, his restoration to ministry should still be affirmed by his previous

community. There are some extreme cases where this may not be possible, but it should be normative for disqualified leaders humbly submitting to discipline.

So, how soon? I don't know. Not never. Not immediately. Somewhere in between, given the time by the church to discern and affirm one's qualification. I track, again, with John Piper:

Forgiveness comes quickly, expensively, and immediately, on repentance. But trust doesn't, cannot.

If a pastor has betrayed his people, and it has wounded a church grievously and wounded his wife grievously, he can be forgiven just like that. Wiped away. The blood of Jesus covers it. But as far as re-establishing trust, which is essential to a shepherd/sheep and wife/husband relationship, how long does that take? A decade? It takes a long time, a long time, until memories are healed.

And very practically I think this is what I would say: A man who commits adultery, say, in the ministry, should immediately resign and look for other work. And he should make no claim on the church at all. He should get another kind of job and go about his life humbly receiving the discipline and sitting and receiving ministry, whether in that church or in another church. And then the church should turn that around if it believes it should, not him.

Let us remember, friends, that none of us who enjoys the privilege of ministering the gospel is greater than Christ's church, locally or universally. We may have been given a platform, but we are of service to him and at his disposal. We are to be subject to the church.

The gospel is not expendable. But our ministries are. If you are a fallen pastor eager for restoration to ministry, I urge

you not to see your time away or the discipline involved in the meantime as graceless. It may be your next lesson in just how big God's grace really is. You may cheapen grace rushing back into that pulpit, assuming you can only be validated by a return to platform, if only because you remain unwilling to see just how greatly grace can sustain you and satisfy you outside of the spotlight. He is good enough to supply your every need.

## RESTORING A PASTOR AFTER A STRUGGLE WITH PORNOGRAPHY

---

*The leadership culture of most churches is not poised to provide spiritual care for our pastors or to help shepherd them well. Anyone quick to cast stones on the clergy must again remember that pastors are first people. Shepherds are first sheep. Pastors in fact need to be pastored.*

By Garrett Higbee

Jim was a pastor in a rural church and was by all outward appearances doing very well. His people loved him, his elders trusted him, and the church was growing. He preached the gospel and loved the sheep. He worked tirelessly and led his elder team in prayer. From what people could tell he had a good family life. The truth was he was a good leader. However, he had few friends, was not fully transparent with his leaders, and his marriage was struggling. Jim found himself exhausted, and a pattern of watching late night movies was not helping. He would go to bed after everyone else even though his wife had asked him to try to get to bed early with her. Jim's movie watching was a distraction from all his worries at first, but as time went on he

was watching movies that contained more illicit scenes. Months later he began to look for movies that had ratings for sexually explicit material. He had not graduated to internet pornography, but he knew he was on the brink of a problem that could mean the end of his ministry. He was scared to come clean and felt ashamed. He was not sure how to tell his wife because he did not want to hurt her, and he feared telling his elders because he thought they would either judge him or fire him.

Can you relate?

In this chapter I want to look at how local churches and their leaders can help pastors, from stepping past temptation to restoring them to a right relationship with God, family, the fellowship of the church, and, if appropriate, their position in the church.

### **Problems in current pastoral culture**

Pornography is only one way a pastor can fall into unhealthy sin patterns. To properly address the real and growing problem of pornography in the pastorate, we need to look at an underlying issue of the leadership culture of most churches today. In his book *Dangerous Calling*, Paul David Tripp points out a fundamental problem that leaves most pastors vulnerable to sin. He notes that pastors often live “in this day-by-day ministry community fundamentally unknown and uncared for.”<sup>1</sup>

Pastors experience the same temptations that are common to all men (1 Cor 10:13), but they also deal with unique temptations and trials as spiritual leaders (Acts 20:27-31; James 3:1; Heb 13:17; 2 Tim 4:3-5). The stress of the non-stop expectations, the fear of being exposed for weakness, little margin for a healthy

---

1. Tripp, Paul David, *Dangerous Calling: Confronting the Unique Challenges of Pastoral Ministry*. (Crossway, 2015), 31.



family life or life-giving hobbies, and spiritual warfare are just a few reasons pastors are often vulnerable to temptations that can become a larger sin pattern over time. Amidst these struggles, a common sin where more and more pastors are finding escape is pornography. In 2016, Barna released an extensive study on pornography. In it, they found that more than half of the pastors (57 percent) and youth pastors (64 percent) queried admitted they struggled with porn, either currently or in the past.

Recognizing the problem of pornography in the pastorate certainly raises alarm. We could easily conclude that half the pastors in the church are simply not fit to serve. The reality is that there is a bigger problem here. The leadership culture of most churches is not poised to provide spiritual care for our pastors or to help shepherd them well. Anyone quick to cast stones on the clergy must again remember that pastors are people first. Shepherds are sheep first. Pastors in fact need to be pastored. There is only one high priest, one perfect man. His name is Jesus Christ, but even he sympathized with our weakness and knew temptation yet did not sin (Heb 4:15). Yes, there are standards of character and morality that must be upheld (1 Tim 3:1-7). But where is a pastor to turn when they are struggling in their marriage, feeling burnout, or beginning to turn to inappropriate habits to cope? How do those closest to them help catch things early and not overreact? We need to rethink care for our pastors.

Do we have a category for pastors to struggle with sin that is not disqualifying? Do churches have a category for restoration of a struggling pastor? I believe we can walk most pastors caught up in a struggle with pornography through a series of redemptive steps toward restoration. It will take a mindset of humility, careful discernment, and patience from the leaders of

the church. It will be a process that takes time but not as much time in many cases as replacing a pastor. It will take mutual transparency but could set a precedent for catching sin early and creating a redemptive leadership culture. If done well, it can bring an authentic atmosphere that trickles down into the life of the church.

### **Prevention over intervention**

While I want to suggest a specific set of guidelines for restoring a pastor, I am persuaded that prevention is our best defense against this proliferating issue. Before we set a path for restoration we need to consider early intervention. Pastoral health is in need of regular assessment by both the pastor himself (1 Tim 4:16) and his staff and elders (Heb 3:12-14). Scriptures leave little room for poor life habits or character issues to be unaddressed in leadership (1 Tim 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-16; James 3:1; 1 Peter 5:1-11).

Pastors are not perfect, but when habits are entrenched and when sin characterizes the man, it is often too late to restore them to the pulpit. All of us have heard of otherwise gifted and godly men falling into adultery that devastates their family and disqualifies them from pastoral ministry. Most of these situations did not happen because of one bad choice. They are fueled by a series of poor choices over time.

### **Defining the problem**

Pornography is best defined by Scripture as a form of sexual immorality. *Porneia* in the Greek is often translated fornication. It refers to any form of sex outside of marriage. We know from Scripture that even fantasy or coveting another woman in lustful ways is seen as adultery at the spiritual level (Matt 5:27-28).

Viewing pornography is a form of lust that is sinful, and it is also a gateway to more illicit materials or acts (Eph 4:17-19).

While all pornography is immoral, there are different degrees of sexual sin that warrant differing consequences. It is helpful to look at sin on a continuum. Sexual sin does have a unique set of consequences (1 Cor 6:18). Some factors are the private and public nature of the sin (who is impacted), what is an isolated incident versus a regular habit, and how severe it is. Did they stumble onto a sex scene in a movie but quickly turn the channel? Did they linger but then became convicted and shared it with an accountability partner? Was it premeditated with late night viewing on an internet site? Did they have to get caught? Has it gone past viewing to flirting or sexually inappropriate activity?

### **Assessing the problem**

I have found a few categories to be helpful in assessing where a pastor is in terms of spiritual health, and I believe these are drawn directly from Scripture. Consider the progression of sin in James 1:13-16:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

According to this Scripture we are all tempted by our own evil desires. It seems temptation is inevitable, but when we allow that temptation to entice our mind, will, and emotions, we allow distraction to set in. Like a fish looking at a shiny lure, if we look

too long we become enticed. If we act on this or let it hook us, a debilitating pattern of sin can develop. Finally, as the sin is “full grown,” it leads to death, which indicates a deliberate sin pattern. In the case of a pastor, this leads to what many would consider a disqualification from Christian leadership.

Ephesians 4:17-19 describes this same pattern in another way:

Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

In this example, we see a focus on sensuality, or in some translations, a growing lust. In verse 18, hardness of heart is described as cause of the decline. Verse 19 uses the word callous. Once this heart condition sets in, there is a growing discontent that produces a greed for increased sensual pleasure. If confessed when distracted by temptation, there is great hope. If a pastor comes clean when debilitated by a pattern, there may be a path back to ministry depending on the length and severity of the sin. After that, most pastors will need years to be restored to any fruitful Christian leadership and may never be in the pastorate again.

These passages indicate that there are stages or degrees of unhealthy patterns that increase if not resisted and repented of. The illustration below is an attempt to apply this to pastoral health. While the categories are not completely discreet, they can help us to consider how to restore a pastor based on where they land on the arrow.

### **Continuum of pastoral health**

It is helpful to set a target for what a healthy pastoral life might look like. “Dependent” pastoral leadership is where we want a pastor to be, and where we would want to restore a pastor who is not disqualified. One only has to look as far as the Proverbs and the Psalms to see the Lord’s emphasis on spiritual disciplines that lead to life and health. In the New Testament, the focus on a wholehearted devotion to Christ is used to describe those who serve him best. Let’s look at some common habits and characteristics that accompany each category. I want to start with healthy pastoral habits and then look at some of the consequences related to a drift from intimacy with Christ and the progression of sexual sin.

#### *Habits of healthy pastoral leadership:*

- Quiet times are for one’s own edification
- Real and regular times in prayer
- Godly and grace-based mutual accountability
- Regular communication and prayer with his spouse
- Regular affection and intimacy with his spouse
- Healthy home-work balance
- Filters and accountability software are in place
- Pursuing Christ and purity are rhythms in their life and leadership culture

#### *Habits of distracted pastoral leadership:*

- Quiet times are mostly spent preparing for sermons
- Prayer is rote or minimal unless in front of others
- If accountability exists, confession is non-specific and irregular
- Infrequent communication and prayer with his spouse

- Growing periods without intimacy with his spouse
- Little margin for marriage or family
- Lust is increasingly distracting with periodic failures
- Avoiding sin takes increased energy

*Habits of debilitated pastoral leadership:*

- Quiet times are nonexistent or empty due to shame or busyness
- Sermon prep becomes arduous
- Prayer is periodic moments of crying out halfheartedly for escape
- Accountability is avoided, and sin is hidden for fear of being judged or fired
- Intimacy with his spouse is more often mechanical or nonexistent
- Often irritable or distant at home
- Lust is an everyday battle with more regular failures
- More time is spent hiding the sin than avoiding it
- Fear of being found out while deeply desiring to be rescued

*Habits of disqualifiable pastoral leadership:*

- Quiet times are perfunctory or nonexistent
- Sermons prep becomes dissonant and the spiritual life dry
- Prayer is sometimes desperate but often hollow
- Accountability is deceptive for fear the whole thing will be found out
- Attentiveness at home may increase due to guilt, or may be even more distant
- Intimacy with spouse is compensatory or nonexistent

- Lust is not really a battle because he has given in
- Sin is “full grown” (harder pornography, strip clubs, prostitution, or adultery)
- Usually the only way out is if he is caught

### **Restoration**

Restoration is first and foremost a process. It can take months, even years, depending on the depth of the sin. The restoration process has some universal truths to it. However, there are clear distinctions between each level of drifting from Christ and the purity of mind required to be healthy as a pastor.

I would suggest policies and processes related to being admonished and being restored be laid out for all levels of leadership. It is helpful to have one or two elders take a special interest in the pastor by developing a deep and mutual accountability going forward. If the whole culture of leadership is transparent and grace-based, most pastors in the distracted stage can easily be nurtured back to a healthy and sustainable future in ministry.

You will see that once a distracted pastor begins to give in to temptation, things become much more complicated. A more thorough assessment and careful steps should be taken. A debilitated pastor may need time away and counsel before being restored, or they may need to step away from ministry all together. What constitutes disqualification is best determined by the elders looking closely at Scripture and seeking outside counsel from godly men they trust. I have outlined categories that are meant to be guidelines, not hard and fast rules of engagement toward restoration.

*For the distracted pastor*

A distracted pastor likely needs gentle correction as well as spiritual care. They are entering a danger zone. With appropriate and intentional care, they can be restored to health without having to take a sabbatical or extended leave of absence that is ultimately forced upon them. The type of care and correction for this level of unhealthy leadership depends on the church and its elders. I would suggest a few ways to restore a pastor who is distracted from his first love and from the healthy leadership of his family and flock:

- Privately confront obvious patterns of distraction with humility and hope
- Ask questions to get at what is at the core of this pattern
- Assure the pastor who is repentant that unless there is deception, or they are characterized by frequent and hidden sin, their job is secure
- Establish grace-filled mutual accountability and biblical counsel
- Marriage counseling is likely warranted in the short term
- A time away with their spouse may be appropriate, perhaps a week-long break to focus on restoration
- A review of rhythms, rest, and margin is needed

*For the debilitated pastor*

The pastor that is debilitated by sexual sin but shows evidence of being truly repentant needs more immediate counsel and a thorough review of the type and depth of his sin. At the same time, he should be receiving elder care and a path toward restoration. Depending on the public exposure and the severity of the sin, intervention and restoration may include a



wider circle of confession and accountability. The question of disqualification depends on factors like the level of deception, the level of exposure, and the frequency and history of the issue (Prov 28:13; Matt 18:15-20; Luke 17:3). Leadership may want to consider a category of temporary disqualification that may include a leave of absence, intensive counsel, and a comprehensive process of reconciliation.

- Privately confront obvious patterns of sin with grace
- Assign a counselor and ask for regular progress reports
- Document how long, how frequent, and how severe the sin issue is
- Ask questions to understand the core of this pattern
- Assure the pastor who is repentant that you want to help and desire to see him restored
- Establish grace-filled, mutual accountability and biblical counsel
- The pastor's wife should be involved, and marriage counseling should be part of the process
- A more significant time away from the weekly responsibilities is often needed
- Elders need a time to review the depth of the sin and the progress in counseling
- It is helpful to have a designated team to help with the process and restoration as appropriate

*For the disqualified pastor*

The pastor that is disqualified still needs care and a path to restoration. While there may be deep hurt, feelings of betrayal, and a need to protect the congregation, there is a place to help the pastor and family as well. The church needs to be informed

to the level of knowledge that helps them to be warned and to be redemptive. The restoration starts with those closest to the pastor and expands as the elders see readiness to confess by the pastor and readiness of those hurt or offended to receive the pastor back into a restored relationship.

If a pastor is resisting the elders or tries to position himself back to the pulpit, the elders have a responsibility to protect the flock and take steps to bring biblical discipline, always praying for restoration over time (Matt 18:15-20). This stage takes significant time and the risk is high for divisiveness and hurt.

I would recommend a crisis management and care team to be assembled with a point person who works closely with the elder board chairman to develop a restoration plan. Each phase is focused on different goals, but they often overlap during a three-to-six month time of concentrated restoration. All phases must be executed, and the elders must approve the completion of each phase before moving forward. The crisis management team usually includes an elder, a counselor, a trusted senior pastor from another church, and, if needed, a mediator trained in peacemaking. This team ultimately submits recommendations to the full elder board that has final authority over the process.

The goal in this process should always be redemptive, attempting to restore the pastor to whatever level possible if repentance is sincere. However, it is not always possible to restore a pastor, for instance, when repentance is lacking. It may also be that his spouse wants to dissolve the marriage in the case of infidelity, or the church just can't trust his leadership even though his sin only warrants temporary disqualification. Therefore, whether the pastor is restored to his position is a case-by-case scenario that should be carefully considered by

elders and consultants who have not only the pastor in mind but also his family and the entire congregation.

### **Conclusion**

The sin of pornography is a problem that must be addressed in our churches today. Contemporary leadership culture often does not provide a helpful place for pastors to be transparent, shepherded, and restored if they fall into the sin of sexual immorality. The best path of protection with sexual immorality is always prevention. Part of this is accomplished by pastors being accountable to other elders and/or other members in the church. However, the path of intervention and restoration is one that warrants more careful thinking and attention. Churches would be served well if their leadership and laity plans ahead of time the ways that they can aim to correct the distracted, reinstate the debilitated, and restore the disqualified, in order to demonstrate to a watching world and to one another the matchless, holy, restoring grace of the gospel of our Lord Jesus.



## DON'T RUSH TO RESTORE A FALLEN PASTOR

---

*So yes, forgive the repentant pastor. Who of us is without sin? But to love him, love those he has hurt, love the church, love our watching neighbors and love God, please don't rush to restore him.*

By Jonathan Leeman

Many Christians struggle with what it means to forgive a pastor who has committed a grievous act. Recently, a Memphis megachurch pastor admitted to a “sexual incident” with a high school student 20 years ago in Texas. I’m not in a place to render judgment over another church’s matters. Yet how should we think about forgiveness of a pastor?

Christians struggle with this question because Christianity centers on the idea of forgiveness. Step one in becoming a Christian is acknowledging that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness.

When the pastor is exposed, some push the message of forgiveness. “Who of us is without sin?” they might say,

drawing from Jesus in John 8. Meanwhile, others object: “But how can we trust this guy?”

I side with the second group.

A pastor occupies two offices, or roles: the “office” of pastor and the “office” of church member. The requirements for these offices are different. To be a pastor, you at least need to meet the qualifications Paul gave to his disciple Timothy:

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money (1 Tim 3:2-3).

“Above reproach” doesn’t mean a pastor is sinless. It means that if everything about his life is brought into the light, people would still trust him and follow him in the way of godliness.

Typically there are two requirements of holding the “office” of church member: that one be baptized and repentant.

Forgiveness ordinarily (not always) involves two things: forswearing resentment (subjectively) and restoring a person to their previous office or role (objectively).

To “forgive” a pastor means we don’t personally hold his sin against him and that we restore him to his office of church member. If he is repentant, he meets the qualification of membership.

That doesn’t mean we should restore him to the office of pastor. Our forgiveness does not mean he magically meets those qualifications. His life, quite simply, is not above reproach.

By analogy, new-installed President Gerald Ford pardoned Richard Nixon for crimes he might have committed against

the United States while president. Ford didn't explicitly make a distinction between Nixon as president and Nixon as citizen. But the pardon effectively pardoned Nixon as citizen. It prevented him from being indicted and sent to jail. It did not restore him to the presidency.

Or think of the church members of the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina — remarkably, amazingly — forgiving Dylann Roof after he killed nine of their members. That act of forgiveness did not release Roof from the state's claim on him in his "office" or role as a citizen.

Or think of a battered wife. She can forgive the man, but that doesn't mean she must continue to affirm the abuser as her husband.

In all these examples, two or more offices or roles are at play. And both need to be considered.

It's important to forgive repentant pastors, but not to restore them to pastoral office for years or perhaps ever (depending on the nature of the sin) because Paul's qualifications pertain to the character. A pastor is an extraordinary ordinary Christian.

A pastor is a teacher and a pattern-setter. An example. Therefore, he must be above reproach and trustworthy. Paul even tells Timothy that his salvation and the salvation of his hearers depends upon Timothy keeping a close watch on his life and his teaching (1 Tim 4:16).

### **Teaching and life must go together.**

So yes, forgive the repentant pastor. Who of us is without sin? But to love him, love those he has hurt, love the church, love

our watching neighbors and love God, please don't rush to restore him. Some just shouldn't be restored.

THIS CHAPTER ORIGINALLY APPEARED ONLINE AS AN EDITORIAL IN *THE WASHINGTON POST*, JANUARY 11, 2018. IT IS REPRINTED HERE WITH PERMISSION.



## PURSUE GOD, NOT PORNOGRAPHY

---

*This ubiquitous evil in our culture has become a ubiquitous evil in our pews. We should have no delusions about that. And that means that we have this thing among us threatening holiness, witness, marriages, fatherhood, childrearing, and every other precious gift that the Lord has given.*

By Denny Burk

*Time Magazine* published a cover story in March 2016 titled “Porn and the Threat to Virility.” I’m not being hyperbolic when I say that this is one of the saddest, most horrific articles that I have ever read. But it’s not sad and horrific in the sense of war or violent crime. It’s sad and horrific because it narrates the kind of slow motion suicide that our culture is committing against itself.

The article is about pornography use among young men. At the heart of the article is the backlash against internet pornography use among young men who have been heavy users throughout their adolescence and young adulthood. The author, Belinda Luscombe, writes:

A growing number of young men are convinced that their sexual responses have been sabotaged because their brains were virtually marinated in porn when they were adolescents. Their generation has consumed explicit content in quantities and varieties never before possible, on devices designed to deliver content swiftly and privately, all at an age when their brains were more plastic — more prone to permanent change — than in later life. These young men feel like unwitting guinea pigs in a largely unmonitored decade-long experiment in sexual conditioning.

The rest of Luscombe's article recounts what these young men have been consuming for the last decade and what the results have been in their adult relationships with real women. Many of them are simply unable to experience a response with a real woman. They are only able to respond to pornography. In fact, they prefer it.

I was stunned by this article for a couple of reasons. First, our civilization has not even begun to understand what this crisis means. This is not a story about adolescent hijinks going a little too far. This is the story of broken men who have had their minds rewired to love darkness. And to understand this, you've got to wrap your mind around the scope of this thing: Pornography has been a pervasive part of these young men's lives for the better part of a decade.

In 2007, broadband internet access reached over 50 percent of American households. In 2013, smartphone ownership exceeded 50 percent of the population in our country. What that means is at some point around 2007, more Americans than not had access to moving pornography. And by 2013, more Americans had access to this content at any time and any place through their smartphones.

The average young man first encounters this material when he's 11-13 years old, which means many kids are younger than that. That means countless young men have spent the better part of the last decade with access to pornographic videos. For many of them, everything they have learned about sexuality has come from pornography. Their preferences have been shaped by this.

This is a civilizational calamity because pornography use eviscerates manhood. It doesn't teach men virtue and honor. It mires them in passivity and morose private self-indulgence. It teaches them to view women at a distance and as objects to be used and discarded. It renders them completely unprepared for marriage and for fatherhood. If you don't have marriage and fatherhood, you don't have a civilization anymore. All you have is ruins.

This is an unfolding crisis for us. Pastors will tell you that none of the other issues they deal with — alcoholism, drug use, marital problems — comes close to the number of professing Christians that they talk to who are in the throes of this particular sin. This ubiquitous evil in our culture has become a ubiquitous evil in our pews. We should have no delusions about that. And that means that we have this thing among us threatening holiness, witness, marriages, fatherhood, childrearing, and every other precious gift that the Lord has given to us. This is potentially an existential problem for us because porn use undermines holiness, and the Bible says that without holiness, no one will see the Lord. And none of us is going to be the exception to that.

In 2 Timothy 2, Paul warns the congregation against false teachers. But right in the middle of it, he issues this command to Timothy: “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness,

faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22).

You cannot pursue God and pursue pornography. You can pursue one or you can pursue the other, but you cannot pursue both. This text is telling us how to pursue the narrow way that leads to life. There are at least three imperatives implied by what Paul writes in this verse: He’s telling us to (1) flee lust, (2) pursue the fruit of the spirit, and (3) embrace Christian fellowship.

### **“Flee youthful desires”**

The first thing is to flee youthful lusts. Before we can figure out what Paul is commanding Timothy, and us, to do in these texts, we have to figure out what he’s telling us to flee from. The word that’s translated as “passions” is the Greek word *epithumia*. It’s a term that simply means “desire.” It refers to the human experience of longing or craving for something, the longing or the craving in our hearts that motivates us to make the decisions that we make.

In Romans 7, Paul gives a chapter-long meditation on what he thinks about desire, or *epithumia*. What he says there should inform what we think Paul is saying in 2 Timothy 2:22. He says in Romans 7, “I would not have known about desire except that the law was saying ‘you shall not desire.’” Paul says everything he knows about desire, *epithumia*, he learned from the law, particularly from the 10th commandment, which you hear translated often as, “You shall not covet.” The Greek translation of the 10th commandment uses the same term for desire that Paul uses. In fact, Paul is getting this term from the 10th commandment.

Like Paul, if we want to understand “flee youthful desires,” we have to understand the 10th commandment, which says

this: “You shall not desire your neighbor’s house, you shall not desire your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exod 20:17).

When Paul singled out the 10th commandment in Romans 7, he did so because it may very well be the hardest of all commandments. Commandments two through nine address our deeds; the 10th commandment addresses our desires. Why? Because our desires aren’t neutral. They always have an object. And if you desire something that’s sinful — sexual or otherwise — your desire itself is sinful. That means that even if you never actually committed adultery with another woman, for example, the 10th commandment says that if you had desires commensurate with those deeds, you have already sinned. That means that the desires that we must flee from are any desires for something that God has forbidden us from. It’s certainly not limited to illicit sexual desire, but it does include illicit sexual desire.

Why does Paul use the term “youthful”? These desires are youthful in the sense that they are undisciplined. In other words, maturity and experience usually have a moderating effect on the way we experience our desires. The younger you are, and the less experienced you are, the less self-control you bring to your desires.

Viewing pornography is the opposite of fleeing youthful lusts; it is the embracing of youthful lusts. And every walk down that path is an open rebellion against God’s Word in the 10th commandment. It is a surrender to indwelling sin, the very sin that God calls you to repent of.

Practically, this means that you have to flee from the situations that provoke sin in you. This means that you do not

do the things, hang out with the people, or go to the places that you know are going to arouse these kinds of desires in your heart. It might mean not owning a television, or not having cable or internet access at your house. It might mean owning a flip phone instead of a smartphone. Cut off your hand — do not be a fool about this.

Lose your smartphone. Save your soul.

### **Pursue the fruit of the spirit**

Paul contends that being a Christian is not just about being against something. It's about being for something. In this case, we are being called to shun evil desire and instead to pursue its opposite — righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Three of those four virtues are actually listed as fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5: “The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such there is no law.” So when Paul commands Timothy, and us, to pursue righteousness, faith, and peace, he's commanding us to pursue what the Spirit is already doing in us. He's not calling you to do this alone. This is what the Spirit of God is already working inside of you to do.

Your active pursuit of these things is not at odds with grace. It is the evidence of grace in your life. Your active striving against sin is not legalism. It is the evidence that the Holy Spirit is having his way with you. The absence of that striving is the evidence of the absence of the Spirit. You can't just stop doing the bad things. You have to start pursuing the good things, because you aren't pursuing abstractions — you're pursuing God. And when you pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, that's evidence that you're pursuing God.

If you're trying to flee pornography, and your efforts consist merely in stopping one thing without the active pursuit of righteousness, you're going to falter. You're going to focus on what you think you're missing instead of engaging your heart and your mind in something that is much better than what you're giving up. The fight for holiness is a fight for joy, for what Thomas Chalmers famously called the "expulsive power of a new affection." It's leaving an inferior thing to pursue a better and more satisfying thing.

In practical terms, that means that you don't just sit on your couch staring at your computer, wondering how long you can hold out. It means you get up and get to work. You pursue righteousness. You do the things that make for good character. You work hard. Proverbs says, "It is by his deeds that a lad distinguishes himself if his conduct is pure and right." Don't leave yourself one minute to waste on pursuit of youthful lusts. Pursue love. Pursue faith. Read your Bible. Pray heaven down into your life and into your relationships and into your work. Listen to the Word preached. Pursue the means of grace that God has given you that sustain faith and confidence in King Jesus.

If you give yourself to those things, you will learn self-control and love and goodness and a thousand other beautiful things that God wants to do in your life. Flee youthful lusts to pursue the fruit of the spirit.

### **Embrace Christian fellowship**

That last phrase, "along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart," is not a throw-away phrase. That last phrase is telling you how to pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. It's telling you that you must not do it alone. Pursue these

things with a group of other people who are also pursuing these things. That's the church.

Flee youthful lusts, and pursue the fruit of the Spirit, and embrace the fellowship that leads to sanctification. I want to give you just a handful of practical things that you can do to flesh this out.

*Confess your sin*

“Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another,” James says. Your secret sin is an open scandal in heaven, and what you're hiding now is not really hidden. Confess this to God, but also find a trusted friend you can confess to.

*Pursue accountability*

If you've got areas in your life that you are intentionally keeping in the dark, you've not only got to confess your sin, but you've got to attach yourself to people who can help keep you accountable. And those people can't be people who are mired in the same problem you are. They have to be people who have proven faithfulness in this area and can actually pull you forward in constructive ways. And I would add that you should pursue this accountability with somebody in your church. Your accountability ought to be under the purview of the discipline and order of your church.

*Cut off your hand and gouge out your eye*

Be willing to take extraordinary measures to beat this. There is nothing that you can lay down that the Lord won't replace with more joy. If you need lay down your smartphone, then do it.



*Realize what's at stake*

Jesus said, "Enter by the narrow gate, for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life and few are those who find it." If you're looking at pornography, you are walking down the broad road. You're not walking down the narrow path that leads to life. So everything is at stake in this. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters." You can serve God, or you can serve an idol. You cannot serve both.

*Define struggle in terms of victory, not in terms of defeat*

I hear a lot of guys talk about this as a struggle. What they mean by struggle is they try hard not to look at this material, then they fall, they try hard again, then they fall again, they try some more, then they fall some more. And so, for them, struggle means entrenched patterns of defeat. That's not biblical struggle.

Biblical struggle is not embracing patterns of defeat but embracing patterns of faithfulness. Test yourself on this. If your struggle is just patterns of defeat with no progress, you're not doing biblical struggle. So don't call it that. You need to take even more extraordinary measures to see progress if that's where you are.

The grace of the Lord Jesus is sufficient for this. Flee youthful lusts. God has enabled you to do this. The Holy Spirit of God is working in you to do this, if you know him.



---

## EDITORS

**Garrett Kell** is the pastor of Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia, and associate council member of The Gospel Coalition. He and his wife, Carrie, have five children.

**C. Jeffery Robinson** is the editor of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary blog. He is pastor of Christ Fellowship Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and serves as senior editor for The Gospel Coalition. He is also adjunct professor of church history and senior research and teaching associate for the Andrew Fuller Center at Southern Seminary.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Denny Burk** is a professor of biblical studies at Boyce College, the undergraduate school of Southern Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He also serves as associate pastor at Kenwood Baptist Church in Louisville.

**Nikki Daniel** is a pastor's wife from Augusta, Georgia. Nikki and her husband, Bert, have two sons and a daughter. She enjoys homeschooling, and writing. Nikki graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in advertising from the University of Houston and a Master of Arts in theological studies from Southern Seminary.

**Brian Davis** is a pastor at Risen Christ Fellowship in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He completed a church planting internship at Imago Dei Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, and a pastoral internship at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. Brian and his wife, Sonia, have two sons and a daughter.

**John Henderson** serves as associate pastor at Del Ray Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. He also serves as a board member of both the Biblical Counseling Coalition and the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors. John and his wife, Ruth, have been blessed with five children.

**Garrett Higbee** is the executive director of Harvest Bible Chapel's Biblical Soul Care Ministries in Chicago. He is also the founder and president of Twelve Stones Ministries, located in Brown County, Indiana. He has more than 25 years of

experience in biblical soul care, and he is a frequent conference speaker around the country. He and his wife, Tammy, have three children and live near the Harvest Bible Chapel campus in Elgin, Illinois.

**Jonathan Leeman** is editorial director at 9Marks and has served as an elder at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington D.C. He is the author of books on the church, including the forthcoming *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age*.

**Erik Raymond** is the senior pastor at Redeemer Fellowship Church in Metro Boston. He and his wife Christie have six children. He blogs at Ordinary Pastor. You can follow him on Twitter @erikraymond.

**Deepak Reju** is the pastor of biblical counseling and family ministry at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. He is married to Sarah and they have five children. He is a graduate of Southern Seminary (M.Div., Ph.D.) and author of several books, including *She's Got the Wrong Guy: Why Smart Women Settle* (New Growth, 2017).

**Jared C. Wilson** is the director of content strategy for Midwestern Seminary, managing editor of For The Church, and author of more than ten books, including *Gospel Wakefulness*, *The Pastor's Justification*, and *The Prodigal Church*. You can follow him on Twitter @JaredCWilson.

**Jeremy Yong** is senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Hacienda Heights in Hacienda Heights, California, and

associate council member of The Gospel Coalition. He is a graduate of Southern Seminary (M.Div., D.Min.). Jeremy and his wife, Melanie, have four children.

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### **Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace** [Zondervan]

by Heath Lambert

This work lays out eight gospel-centered strategies for overcoming the deceitful lure of pornography. Each chapter clearly demonstrates how the gospel applies to this particular battle and how Jesus can move readers from a life of struggle to a life of purity.

### **How Can I Overcome Lust?** [Reformation Heritage]

by Ryan M. McGraw

This work considers the foundational principles of overcoming lust in general, identifies the nature of sexual lust in particular, and applies biblical principles for finding a path through it. As McGraw shows, overcoming sexual lust is made possible by union with Christ as the Spirit makes us like Him through God-given means.

### **Your Brain on Porn** [Free ebook from Covenant Eyes]

Our culture is highly sexualized, and in many cases pornography use is actually glorified. But research shows that pornography use actually changes the way you think. Download this ebook to learn the five proven ways pornography warps your brain, and three biblical ways to renew your mind. There are many other excellent articles and resources at this site.

A PUBLICATION OF:



**TGC**

TO DOWNLOAD DIGITAL COPIES OF  
THIS BOOK, GO TO [PRESS.SBTS.EDU](http://PRESS.SBTS.EDU)