

My Pornography Addiction

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My first exposure to anything of a sexually explicit nature came when I was in 5th grade when my next-door neighbor showed me one of his father's Playboy magazines. Although we looked at it for no more than a minute, I remember it being a strange and fascinating experience. I just didn't have the resources to process what was before my eyes. Over the next few years, though, as my hormones kicked in and my desire for the opposite sex increased, I began looking through every women's magazine, clothing catalog, etc. for provocative images. I also began to use the TV—in my house I had free reign to watch whatever and whenever—to seek out sexual stimulation. These "hunting and gathering" rituals were laying the foundation for an approach to sexuality based on fantasy and control.

By the time my early teen years came I knew that what I was doing was wrong. I accepted Christ around this time, but there was no evidence of transformation in my thought life and behavior in this area. The ritual of "acting out" had become an almost daily experience. With much trepidation, I approached my parents and told them what I was doing. It was a gut wrenching and humiliating experience for me. I was so afraid of what they might say, but instead of coming down hard on me my parents told me that what I was doing was a normal part of growing up. I felt relieved, but confused.

With the "normalcy" of my behavior verified by my parents, I continued to act out sexually, though in the back of my mind I still wondered if what I was doing was right. As high school came, my fantasy world deepened and I felt increasingly powerless. About this time I also found a stash of porn magazines that exposed me to material I was quite uncomfortable with. There was now no doubt that what I was doing was sinful, but it was beyond consideration that I was going to tell my parents or anyone else any more about what I was doing.

So, when I went away to college I took my big secret with me. Life at college was actually an improvement for me, as much of my access to materials was cut off. I still found ways to act out on my sexual desires, but my study responsibilities, social activities, and shared living quarters meant fewer opportunities. However, when I went home that summer I found that my family had for the first time bought a computer, which introduced me to the world of porn binging on the Internet.

In college I also met the young lady who would eventually become my wife. When we were dating I shared with her about my addiction, but didn't do a great job of communicating how serious and deep it was. Several months after we were married I reopened the issue of my struggle with her and this time made sure she understood the true depth of my problem. We didn't tell anyone else and the two of us tried to tackle this issue with God's help. We didn't make much headway.

A couple years later we purchased our first home PC. The rationale was that it would be a great tool for use in graduate school. While it was indeed helpful for doing research and preparing papers, the acquisition was horrible for my problem with porn. Now the binging began in earnest—four, five, and six hour marathons often deep into the night, or all day while my wife was at work. Days when I didn't have class were open to study or whatever else I chose, which often turned out to be binging on porn. I just kept looking and searching until I had worn myself out trying to satisfy my lustful appetite. I fully gave myself over to my depraved mind and let the enemy of my soul have his way with me.

By the following Fall, my wife had rightfully become very impatient with me. We had decided that I needed to see a Christian counselor about my problem, but money was an issue so we kept putting it off. The church we attended at the time was dysfunctional and struggling, so there was little aid or refuge there. It was still my wife and I trying to fight this battle alone. I was a mess.

The next Spring, after a particularly stressful semester marked by frequent binging, I told my wife that I'd reached a breaking point and that at the term's end I'd seek whatever help I could find. This resulted in me walking into the

office of the director of student life and telling her about my problem. This was one of the most difficult things I've ever done. I didn't know what to expect. I suspected they might expel or suspend me. That would have been fair. I couldn't have argued with such a decision. "Well God, here I go..."

I walked out of the office stunned. I wasn't expelled. I wasn't suspended. She didn't give me a tongue-lashing or shame me. Instead, she acknowledged the seriousness of the problem, thanked me for my honesty, and told me that the school would provide eight free counseling sessions with a local counselor. What's this? No flogging? No public humiliation? Some of my chains fell to the floor that day. God had broken me down and brought me to the point where I could do nothing but admit my sin and my helplessness. And, when I voiced what He had shown me about myself to another, He responded with mercy and grace. Wow.

A few days later I went to meet with the man whose card and number they had given me. It felt so good to just let it flow and tell Bob the secret I'd been carrying for fifteen years. The power of secret and hidden sin was broken that day and God unleashed His grace in my life. I remember feeling as if I was operating in a bubble of grace for at least a month. I knew that the tide had turned in the battle for my soul. Praise God. More links of the chain were broken. I continued to meet with Bob for the next year and then as needed thereafter.

The Saturday following my initial meeting with Bob I attended a men's accountability group that he had started. The circle of confession grew as I shared my story with these men. For the next three and a half years I was there most every Saturday morning, meeting with other Christian men who were at various stages in the battle against enslaving sexual sin. Some grew in grace while others dropped out. It wasn't a perfect group, but it was certainly a means of grace in my life that I cherish. I still value many friendships that began there.

But though the tide had turned, I wasn't out of the woods yet. In fact, in some ways the worst was yet to come as I began to really face my problem. At Bob's encouragement my wife and I began the serious business of setting up boundaries and creating a haven of purity at home. Just a few months after starting counseling, though, I crossed an agreed upon boundary more than once. It resulted in great stress and alienation in our marriage and was one of the most lonely and desolate times of our married life.

We worked hard to "porn proof" the house – we locked up the TV, got rid of all women's magazines and catalogs, and took the modem out of the computer. This would last for a while, but eventually I'd find a reason to justify putting the modem back in. I found that all the work to "porn proof" the house didn't matter as long as the more radical problem of a corrupt heart went unaddressed. Matters did improve, however, as time went on and I learned from Bob and the Scriptures those habits and investments that make for purity. Sometimes it was weeks or a few months between binges, but the addiction still had a foothold in my heart and our home. Though I was relatively free, I had the recurring thought that "there has to be greater freedom than this available in Christ."

From where I stand today I see that part of my problem was that I'd bought in to the idea that addiction would be something I would struggle with for the rest of my life and that I could never really shake this core identification as an addict. Sadly, I was selling the freedom of the gospel short and underestimated the transforming grace available to us in Christ. I lacked the confidence that God could bring about the kind of liberation from sin that He promises us in the Scriptures. So, over the next few years I went through a cycle of relapse, crisis, growth, then plateau in which the duration between relapse was growing—even to four and five months—but the power of sin was not really broken.

When we moved from the area where Bob and the support group were a few years later, I knew it would be important to link up with a church, counselor, or ministry so that I would not enter into total relapse. Unfortunately, we had moved to a more rural area and after a couple months of searching I began to see that local options were not available. As moving-related stress began to increase, I ended up binging on porn three times within the same week. I couldn't believe what was happening, but it was God's way of showing me that He still had much work to do with me, that I hadn't "arrived" as I had so proudly assumed. I found myself desperate for deep freedom and wanting to be done with this sin for good. But how?

I had catalogued in my mind a website that I had discovered at a time when my need didn't seem so great. I had some other quarrels with their approach, so I'd put it aside for the time being. However, in my new situation I was desperate for help. Also, there was one thing I noticed about their approach then that I had not forgotten in the interceding months—their utter confidence in God to truly liberate people from the bondage of enslaving sin. Isn't this what I was dying for? Even more, isn't this what I believed the Bible taught? After putting it off a few days, I enrolled in their on-line course.

Guess what happened? God showed up! God kept His Word! From the very beginning God used the Scriptures, the course materials, and e-mail exchanges with a understanding and encouraging mentor to work in my heart, to challenge, confront, and transform me. I knew early on that something special was happening in my life, something that brought me considerable excitement and joy. As I worked through the course, God broke the last links of the chains that bound me. The time was right. The season of change was here! God had prepared me for this new work and now saw it through. For the next nine months I was no longer consumed by sexual sin and free from the world of fantasy and ritual that had occupied so much of my time for the previous fifteen years. I learned that God can and will do what He promises us in the Scriptures. I was tasting true freedom from sexual sin and no longer lived under its yoke. I was truly a new man.

I wish I could end the story right there with “and they lived happily ever after,” but I cannot. After nine months of purity, I entered a period of relapse. My wife and I accepted a ministry challenge that separated us even further from our network of support and brought many challenges to our lives. I left off the habits and disciplines that I had learned through years of counseling, reading, and mentoring relationships. To make a long story short, I was ignoring my soul and its Shepherd, the one who had led me to a place of purity. Like the nine who were healed by did not return to thank Jesus (Luke 17:17), I had been freed from my sexual enslavement only to go on my merry way and ignore the Giver of such a great gift. Of course, in doing so I had cut myself off from the Living Water that nourishes our souls and brings life. In my pain, I returned to “the bottle” and relied on the “old friend” of sexual fantasy to comfort and to provide the illusion of control. Of course this neither quenched my thirst nor brought peace to my soul. Instead, it brought personal anguish, marital strain, and even greater upheaval in my heart.

Thanks be to God, this dark season of relapse also woke me from my sleep and forced me to return to the feet of the One who had healed me. It also is the reason I am writing this to you today and inviting you to contact me if you need someone to listen and want to know more about this healer who takes broken people and makes them whole, who does not leave us where we are, but remakes us and calls us to new life. This is good news!

Luke