

7 Keys to Breaking the Bondage of Pornography

One of my elders at church taught a class Sunday on **pornography**. He was vulnerable and honest about his own serious struggle with pornography after being exposed to it at a very young age through **sexual deviancy** among the adults in his home. I found his lesson relevant to men who've struggled with **pornography**, women who've struggled with **pornography**, men who haven't struggled with **pornography** and women who haven't struggled with **pornography**. Since that probably covers all the readers here, I thought I would share the progression of his thoughts.

1. Pornography is sin. Despite the near mainstream acceptance of pornography in many cultures (certainly here in Seattle), we need a biblical framework for understanding the issue.

Matthew 5:28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

See also 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 and Galatians 5:19-21.

2. However, don't elevate the sin above what it is—simply sin. Adam, the elder teaching this lesson, shared how in a moment of deep angst over his use of pornography yet again, he was confronted by another elder at our church. Did he have the same angst when he yelled at his wife? When he was angry with his children? The elder exhorted him to not minimize the sin, but also not to allow it a place of importance above other sins. In a twisted way (because we often do twist such things), elevating the sin of pornography can make fighting the struggle a legalistic idol and source of pride for those who struggle less than others.

Romans 1:29-32 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

3. Hate the sin, and speak truth with patience and grace to yourself and others with overcoming the struggle. Paul's words in Romans 7 don't excuse our sin, but it does explain our sin.

Romans 7:15-8:1 For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Adam shared his story of his wife's response to him when he first confessed his use of pornography to her. He waited until late in the evening to tell her. Then he got up off the bed to leave the room in shame. She asked him where he was going, and he told her he figured she didn't want to be around him right now. She said, "Why would I want that? I love you!" Adam recounted with tears how her words ministered grace to him that kept him walking his struggle with pornography in the light.

In contrast, he knew another man who told him his wife's response was along the lines that if she ever caught him using pornography again, she would immediately divorce him. This further pushed this man into isolation and shame when he needed to admit his sin and walk in the light with his wife. Adam pointed out how his own wife's gracious response helped him walk in the light and confess his sin, which has been key to moving forward in his struggle successfully.

There is a tension here. We need to make sure that in our patience and grace we remember that grace also means to speak truth. Consider Bonhoeffer's words in *Life Together*: "Reproof is unavoidable. God's word demands it when a brother falls into open sin ... Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin."

4. If you struggle with pornography, you are not alone. Pornography is impacting all kinds of things in our culture—fashion, crushing expectations regarding physical appearance and sexual performance, and so forth. Many believe it is now the number one educator for teaching American children about sex. One survey showed 50 percent of Christian

men and 20 percent of Christian women said they were addicted to pornography. 60 percent of Christian women said they struggled with lust. This is a big struggle affecting many people you know.

When Adam first introduced a class on sexual immorality during announcements at our church 10 years ago, a number of wives and girlfriends came up to him after the service to thank him for giving them the freedom to talk with their significant other whom they thought was struggling with pornography. Many men talked with him in the weeks afterwards as well, though not immediately after service. It was a widespread struggle, and one man speaking in the light gave freedom to others to join him.

5. Work out the sin and struggle in community. Adam recounted leaving work after a particularly stressful day feeling a strong desire to watch porn and masturbate. He texted another elder exactly that. That elder had struggled as well, and the power of the temptation each felt seemed to dissipate when they brought it into the light. I am thankful for a gospel-centered church that is safe for people to struggle in the light with their sin. We need to be safe places where others can be honest about their sin. No struggle with sin can be won in the dark.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

Galatians 6:2 Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

6. Know that you are defined by Jesus, not your sin! Consider these truths from Scripture on how God thinks of and speaks of you regardless of your struggle.

- I am God's child (John 1:12)
- I am confident that God will perfect the work He has begun in me (Philippians 1:6)
- I am hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3)
- I am chosen before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4, 11)
- I am adopted as his child (Ephesians 1:5)
- I am given God's glorious grace lavishly and without restriction (Ephesians 1:5,8)
- I am in Him (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:30)
- I am forgiven (Ephesians 1:8; Colossians 1:14)
- I am included (Ephesians 1:13)
- I am sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13)
- I am alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:5)
- I am raised up with Christ (Ephesians 2:6; Colossians 2:12)
- I am God's workmanship (Ephesians 2:10)
- I am a dwelling for the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:22)
- I am not alone (Hebrews 13:5)
- I am His disciple (John 13:15)
- I am set free (Romans 8:2; John 8:32)

7. In conclusion, hear this encouragement from Galatians whether your struggle is pornography or other sexual sins, anger, greed or something else.

Galatians 5:1 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

If you struggle, bring it into the light. And if you don't struggle, be ready to walk with those who do bring it into the light. They need safe places to be honest about the temptations they face and the sins they commit, because light heals.

Adapted from Wendy Alsup's blog, . Wendy has authored three

books including By His Wounds You Are Healed: How the Message of Ephesians Transforms a Woman's Identity. She is also a wife, mom and college math teacher who loves ministering to women.