

Is This Dirty Little Secret Destroying Your Marriage?

Pornography can rip a marriage right in two. It's threatening an increasing number of Christian marriages, according to those who counsel couples in the church.

Trena Mewborn—director of counseling at Lakeland's First Baptist Church at the Mall—sees it in about half the couples who come to her. But she told *CBN News* shame has kept it a largely hidden crisis in the church.

"That was the feeling: that nobody else in my church struggles; Christians don't look at pornography. Christians don't struggle with sexual sin," she said.

Greg Dyer got hooked on porn at 15.

"I can still picture the first images that I saw," he said. "That was always a part of my life, pornography was."

From Addiction to Affair

After years of hiding drug, alcohol and porn addictions, he left his wife, Cathy, when he went from the porn to a full-fledged affair. She was totally blindsided.

"I hadn't seen any of it. He was very good at hiding it," Cathy recalled. "And so I think one of the reasons probably it came out is he was just tired of hiding it."

But Greg repented after a frightening Holy Spirit encounter.

"You know that little voice in your head that you know you should listen to?" Greg asked. "It just said, 'What are you doing? I've protected you through the drugs, through all the alcohol, through all the unprotected sex that you've had, I've protected you. If this is how you're going to live, I'm done."

I'm not going to protect you through that anymore.'"

Kevin Conrad—leader of the support groups at Lakeland's First Baptist Church at the Mall—now helps men like Greg fight their way free. But was once himself a porn addict, though he had good Christian parents and was saved at age 9.

"That still does not shield one from the temptations of the world," he explained. "I was never deceived about the right or wrong about that, yet I continued to do it."

Rearranging Life Around Pornography

His lust for the X-rated material went into overdrive when it hit the Internet.

"I began to rearrange my schedule in order to view pornography," he admitted.

And when it was revealed, his addiction deeply hurt his wife.

"She has subsequently struggled in our relationship with the security of the love and attention and devotion and affection that I owed to her as her husband," Conrad said. "So that's been the real tragedy in our marriage."

Matt Russell was hooked from age 18 on, and almost lost his marriage over the pornography before he finally wised up and repented.

"Something Different or It's the End of Us"

"I feel it was the third or fourth time I got asked to leave the house," he said with a laugh. "And I don't mean to make light of that, but it was like one of those watershed moments with us."

"I was very angry," Matt's wife, Danielle, said of the times she discovered he was still using porn. "Very angry, very hurt. Probably more hurt."

Matt remembered thinking, "There has to be something different or it's the end of us. I mean, there's only so much, even as two believers, that she can take."

They started going to Trena Mewborn and Kevin Conrad's church in Lakeland, Florida, where Pastor Jay Dennis makes fighting pornography and sex addiction a very public top priority.

Danielle was so relieved to hear other men and wives talk about the crisis porn had caused in their homes.

"I Really Had Felt Alone"

"How much it meant to me to hear that I wasn't the only female that was going through this," Danielle exclaimed. "Because I really had felt alone in most of my marriage."

Counselor Mewborn oversees Lakeland's First Baptist Church at the Mall's support groups and highly recommends such groups to those struggling to break free and stay free of pornography.

"And there's a lot more power in a team," she said, "even if it's just a team of two or three than it is when you feel like you're the Lone Ranger."

Matt Russell agreed, saying, "To think that you can go at it alone is foolishness."

Greg Dyer added, "You have to have help. God has to help. I couldn't have done it by myself. There's no way."

Can't Win by Yourself

Mewborn has counseled hundreds of addicts. She stated, "I personally don't know anyone who has successfully battled a really bad addiction by themselves."

"It's isolation that Satan wants you to employ because he can pick you off," Matt said.

Pastor Jay Dennis, author of *Our Hardcore Battle Plan*, believes the enemy has fooled people into thinking they can have both a good Christian walk and a hidden sexual life.

Dennis told *CBN News*, "Satan has convinced many men and I've heard them say, 'Guys will be guys.'"

Well, Conrad has seen these lusts steal people's careers, spouses and children.

"But most importantly and most tragically is their relationship and their ability to fellowship with Christ," he said.

You Don't Have to Give In

Dennis said in reply to that, "Jesus Christ came and lived a perfect life, faced every temptation that we face, went to the cross, died for our sin and He rose from the dead so that we wouldn't have to be the way we are, that we could change, that we wouldn't have to give in to our sinful natures."

After Cathy and Greg Dyer put their marriage back together, Cathy co-wrote with Pastor Dennis *Our Hardcore Battle Plan for Women*, a book to help those married to porn addicts and users.

She totally supports Lakeland's First Baptist Church at the Mall's open battle against the X-rated material, saying, "The more we as a church start putting it out there, I think the more people will feel like they can go to someone, they can ask for help, they can seek out some friends for accountability."

A grateful Danielle said of her husband, Matt, "We're in a place where it's safe for him to talk about it. If he says 'I'm struggling with this,' he's not going to be shunned. He has people he can call and say 'this is a struggle I'm having

right now' and they will rally around him."

Pastor Dennis had hopeful words, saying, "I can tell you from having dealt with many men who have broken free, that the joy returns, the peace returns; they're not worried about getting caught. They're not worried; the guilt is gone, the shame is gone."

But the Florida pastor warns the truth of the matter is the porn lifestyle and the God lifestyle cannot be held in balance. Eventually one is going to shove the other out of the way.