

Relieving Your Marriage of Pornography's Plague

If the gospel is good for anything, it must have an answer to the worst problems humans face. As believers, we know that intellectually, but the body of Christ frequently hides from some of the really bad stuff. Pornography and your Christian marriage may seem like things that should not be said in the same sentence. But in 21st-century culture, it's something we must acknowledge and find God's answer for.

I hear from people every week who struggle with this. I hear from the small-church pastor who feels he has no one to help him out of his addiction to pornography, the godly wife who just found out her husband has been watching porn for years, the young Christian woman who weeps in shame over her continued failure to stop engaging in internet pornography.

Although statistically more men than women get hooked by sexually charged images and videos, pornography is an equal-opportunity destroyer. Men and women, married and single, Christian and unbeliever, young and old—it affects them all. Our sexualized society spends multi-billions of dollars on this. It starts young; your 10-year-olds, or younger, can watch it on their cellphones while riding the bus to school. That's a whole article—or book—in itself.

Dr. Juli Slattery, psychologist, author and media professional, has stated that she no longer asks couples whether pornography is an issue for them; she asks what role pornography is playing in their relationship.

So what is a Christian to do? Refusing to address pornography is putting your head in the sand, especially if you're married or contemplating marriage. But as with all human brokenness, God has an answer—if you're addicted, if your spouse is

addicted or if you want to proactively protect your marriage.

Pornography and Relationships

Pornography, like any addiction, lessens your ability to enjoy what God intended for you in marriage. Those images don't go out of your head. Pornography is all about sexual stimulation without having to do the work of intimacy. It's totally selfish. And that's one of the big reasons why pornography is never acceptable for a believer.

True relationships are mutual. A godly marriage is more about learning to love well, not primarily about getting your own needs met. You married, or will marry, a flawed human being, one who will never live up to the superficial and completely unrealistic images offered by pornography. True intimacy requires vulnerability, forgiveness, communication, change, unselfishness and more. Pornography short-circuits that from happening.

It's not all about you. If you cannot accept that, both as a human being and as a follower of Jesus, please don't get married. Ever. A healthy marriage takes work, and even if you do everything right, it doesn't guarantee everything will "work out." But if you do want a healthy, intimate relationship, pornography must be dealt with and rejected.

If You Struggle with Pornography

Pornography is highly addictive to the human brain. It gets its hooks in you and will not let go. As with tobacco, alcohol, cocaine or any other addictive substance or behavior, it will only leave by being militantly driven out and replaced. Personally, I believe that only happens through a healing and delivering miracle of God combined with your own absolute and never-ending determination to live in freedom. Isn't that the way to overcome any variety of sinful addiction?

There is hope! If this is your struggle, decide right now to agree with God about His right to ownership of your life, mind and body. This is not about shame and guilt; the enemy loves to heap that on you. God is just as willing and able to deal with your sin in this area as any other sin. He is eager to forgive, heal, cleanse and transform you.

Briefly, the way to find freedom from pornography is to bring it into the light, get with other believers on the same journey, militantly guard your heart and eyes and hungrily take into your being everything God makes available to you. If you're married, tell your spouse. Connect with a same-sex spiritual friend as an accountability partner. Plead the blood of Jesus over your mind, heart, sex life and relationship, if married, every day.

I've written a more extensive article on finding freedom from pornography, including some suggestions for other resources.

If Your Spouse Struggles with Pornography

It's normal to feel overwhelming loneliness, shock, rejection, anger and more if you discover your spouse has been engaging with pornography. It's likely you will also feel guilt: *If I had been more sexually appealing and agreeable, my spouse wouldn't have done this.*

Please hear me carefully. Your spouse's struggle with pornography is not about you! Yes, you are a flawed human being and undoubtedly have been less than a perfect spouse. But your spouse is completely responsible for their own behavior here, as in every other area. It may be one of the hardest emotional steps you must take, but put this back on your spouse. It's not about you.

What do you do now? First, take care of your own heart. Bring your feelings of anger, rejection and guilt before God. Ask Him to show you how He sees you. Spend some time listening to what He has to say to your heart. Accept His healing in your

soul. You will need to walk the journey of forgiveness—not saying everything is OK but setting your spouse free for God to deal with.

Letting your spouse own their responsibility does not mean you are powerless in your relationship. If your spouse is enlisting your support in breaking free from pornography, you can be a great help to them. Don't parent or micromanage, but listen. Ask how you can be a tool God uses in their journey of freedom. Otherwise, if your spouse has a hard heart in the matter, seek help. Even with your spouse's bad behavior you can find the life of meaning God has for you.

Before It's a Problem

If you are in a relationship and contemplating marriage or if you are married and want to guard against the destruction of pornography, deal with this issue proactively. Don't think it won't affect you just because you are in love or are both Christians.

I strongly encourage every couple to talk about pornography. Where have you been exposed to it? How did you respond when you saw it? What feelings come up around this topic? Shame? Guilt? Anger? Who would you feel safe talking with if you struggled with pornography? If this has been a struggle for you, what have you done about it? How safe do you and your spouse or intended spouse feel talking about this together?

A godly marriage is a place where each one is accepted with unconditional love, and that love is a vehicle for healing and growth. That does not mean you accept bad behavior! It does mean you seek God's intervention for both your own heart and for your spouse.

Genetic factors, early messages about sex and sexuality, hormonal differences, cultural circumstances—these and many others affect one's vulnerability to pornography addiction. If you or your spouse or intended spouse is vulnerable, work

together to put extraordinary safeguards in place. Sometimes when it comes to media, environment or other avenues, it's "Others can. You cannot."

Pray about it together. Pray for your own heart and for your spouse in this area. No fear, no shame, no guilt. Live in the light. Stay humble. Keep God in charge of the future of your marriage. It's too big a burden for you to carry yourself, and He's well able to carry you through.

Your Turn: What role has pornography played in your relationship? What are you going to do about it now? Leave a comment below. {eo}

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This article originally appeared at .