

Why Some of Your Spiritual Struggles Are So Stubborn

If your experience was anything like mine, you were exposed to porn at a young age. I was 12 years old when a friend showed me a magazine, and it grabbed hold of me.

From that point onward, I felt this inexplicable draw to porn. I fell headlong into lust. It consumed me.

When I got saved, some struggles left immediately. I stopped living like a frat kid, going to parties and drinking excessively. I used to cuss like a sailor, but I was instantly set free from that. But my struggle with porn proved far more stubborn.

I spent years of my life spinning my wheels as I tried to break free. Despite all my efforts, time and again, I found myself back in a dark place, struggling and desperate for answers.

I knew I was hurting God's heart. I was hurting my wife, Lisa, in ways I couldn't even understand. I was constantly weighed down by shame, stuck in a cycle of defeat. I was convinced God had so much more for me, but I just felt stuck.

Perhaps you know the feeling ...

What I didn't realize back then was that every time you look at porn, you build and reinforce strong neural pathways in your mind. Any sexual release gives you a powerful surge of dopamine and other neurotransmitters, which imprints the experience on the brain and causes you to crave it again. In marriage, this reinforces the bond between husband and wife. With porn, however, it has disastrous effects. Every time you use it, it strengthens your attachment to whatever you are looking at and causes you to desire it in the future.

Now, a neural pathway may seem like a nerdy science term, but the concept is really quite simple. Think of it like a path through the woods. The more you walk it, the more worn it gets, and the easier it becomes to travel in the future. Over time, these reinforced patterns of behavior become so deeply ingrained that they operate like superhighways in our brains. They become our default programming—things we do by default without even thinking about them.

The Bible has a different word for neural pathways. Strongholds.

To get free from porn, you are going to have to tear them down.

The apostle Paul says it this way:

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5, NIV).

Notice the intensity of the language here: “Weapons. “Fight.” “Demolish.” “Take captive.”

This is not casual. It’s war. And this war is being fought in your mind.

When was the last time you demolished a stronghold in your life and brought it into submission to the authority of Jesus?

If you feel like you’ve just been spinning your wheels, you’ve probably been trying to fight your battles on the fruit level rather than addressing the root—the thoughts, beliefs and the established patterns of thinking that in turn shape your behavior.

To start winning the war against porn, or any other stubborn habit in your life, you have to start fighting it on the right battlefield. Only once you begin taking your thoughts captive and renewing your mind according to God's Word will you step into the victorious life God intends for you. I'm not saying it will be easy. It will feel like an all-out war at times, and there is much ground to take back from the enemy. But I promise; it will be worth it.

That's more than three decades of freedom speaking right there, so you can take that to the bank. {eoa}

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