

Mentioning the Unmentionable

Note from Stephen Strang: *Please listen to my podcast with Jody Mitchell about the issue of pastors and porn. Usually I write an article, but Jody wrote such an excellent guest editorial, I am sending it out to my newsletter list instead of writing one myself. Please read it and share with others:*

Several years ago, I was preparing to speak at a credentialing class for pastoral candidates. My husband suggested we go for pizza and review the final presentation. Armed with ALL my research papers, we sat in the only pizza place in the little town.

Our waitress (Let's say Anne) walked up, greeted us and asked, "Are you a writer?" I replied, "No." "Are you a preacher?" "No." "Are you a teacher?" Again, "No!" She persisted, "What are you doing?" Looking at my husband, then back to her, I reluctantly said, "I am speaking on pornography, how it destroys the brain and impacts relationships negatively." I was sure I had ended the conversation.

Instead, her eyes got very big and she said, "Oh, I am so glad you are doing that. My uncle was addicted to pornography. He died in front of his computer with his pants down and spent all his money on that stuff. My aunt had to sell her house to have money to live on after he died." There were more details to her story. As I listened, I thanked God for this uncomfortable conversation that confirmed my obedience to His direction in my life.

Variations of Anne's story are repeated across the country in our churches and in our pulpits. I could do nothing to change the end of her uncle's story, but I am a therapist today and as a member of "Safety Net* Organization, I can make a difference to those whose stories are still being told.

Talking about pornography is an uncomfortable conversation.

Just like I tried to avoid it in the restaurant, I run into people who do not want to talk about this issue. But if we are going to be ministers of God's grace, we must find ways to lovingly help people by having uncomfortable conversations.

Pornography is an aggressive, creative, money-driven industry that invades our homes and lives through the Internet. Pornography's impact is well researched. One excellent resource is *The Impact of Pornography in the Digital Age* published by Barna with Josh McDowell. Pastor Rick Warren's website, <http://www.pastorrickwarren.com>, has specific testimonies to the power of God. <http://www.pastorrickwarren.com> is a great resource for information and recovery.

All the research concludes pornography is damaging to our bodies, our brains and, consequently, to the quality of our lives and relationships. This information explains the verse in 1 Corinthians 6:18 (ESV) where Paul writes, "Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral sins against his own body." Researchers can now see pornography induced brain rewiring/damage on MRIs; this is not unlike seeing an MRI that shows brain damage from drug and alcohol abuse. One does not wake up in the morning and say, "That's what I want my MRI to look like."

Can the brain be rewired? Yes, God created it to do so and that has given hope not only to those caught in destructive habits, but also to those who have had strokes and need to relearn to walk and talk. Rewiring takes a lot of work and time but it can happen.

To rewire the brain from the damage of pornography use, important, uncomfortable elements are necessary. Basic elements are:

1. **Find a safe environment.** That means shame and/or guilt are not used when any stories are told. Jesus did not come down, point His finger and righteously say, "If you would just follow the commandments I gave you, you would be fine!" A good

Christian therapist does not shame. Satan shames. Guilt and shame stymie ministry. Experiencing the freedom of God's grace releases effective ministry.

2. Be ruthlessly transparent! God loves each one. His love is the qualifier, not human goodness. Reporting failures and admitting weaknesses to a safe person feels like an invitation to annihilation. Freedom is worth it.

3. Submit to accountability! In the case of pornography, filters like Covenant Eyes or Accountable 2 You app are necessary for accountability. To admit a lack of trustworthiness is another necessary blow to pride.

4. Tolerate uncomfortable feelings! No one like to feel pain, inadequacy, rejection, fear of failure, disrespected, lonely or unseen. Part of being free is realizing these feelings are tolerable and numbing or ignoring them is fruitless. Feelings and accomplishments don't define us; God does.

5. Commit to the time it takes to rewire the brain! Moving from seeking quick fixes and immediate gratification to accepting the rhythms God created to live well in His world takes commitment and perseverance, qualities the Bible says give real character.

Recognize that when Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is here," He is inviting us to live in His kingdom today. Find a community, a group of people and a therapist who understand the qualities of His kingdom. Living God's way allows our character to be shaped by Scripture. Romans 12:2 (MEV) says, "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind... proving what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." {eoa}

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