

Pull the Plug on Porn

If you or someone you love is struggling with a porn addiction, take these steps to freedom.

At a men's conference I sponsored last weekend in Philadelphia, some of my friends took the stage and got gut-level honest about their temptations. I was so proud of their courage. Shay, a young father from Ohio, admitted that he was exposed to hard-core pornography when he was only five years old. He began modeling what he saw in X-rated videos when he was just six.

Another guy from Pennsylvania told the men in the audience that he began watching porn when he was a preteen—and this led him to sex with dozens of girls in high school. Until recently this man still battled the shame of his porn habit even though he was a lay leader in his church.

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Jason, a youth pastor in northwestern Pennsylvania, preached to the men on Friday night about how to reclaim purity in our sex-saturated culture. Like so many of the guys in our conference, Jason had been exposed to porn at a young age. His lust could not be satisfied by masturbation or kinkier videos, so his addiction drove him to seek out multiple girls for instant gratification. That's where porn leads.

Thankfully all these guys eventually found Christ and discovered the grace to escape the porn trap. They are happily married today, and they've been freed from the shame of past failures. But I meet many Christian men who are not so fortunate. A huge percentage of men in church have given up trying to resist temptation.

If you are one of those men (or women) who wears a fake smile when you go to church, pretending to be an “overcomer” when you really are a prisoner of lust, then please consider taking these radical steps. (And if you know someone who is battling this monster, please consider forwarding this message to him or her.)

1. Spill your guts. The first step toward repentance is honesty, and it must be brutal. To repent means to turn 180 degrees, so this decision cannot be half-hearted. It’s not enough to whisper a quiet prayer under your breath. To break free from a life-controlling habit as powerful as porn, you must talk to someone else. And you should do it sooner, not later.

James 5:16 says, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed” (NASB). I have prayed with many guys about their porn addictions, and they have testified that the power of their sin broke the moment they admitted it. Sit down with someone (preferably a more mature Christian you know and trust) and put all your cards on the table. If you humble yourself, God will give you grace to change.

2. Get ruthless. Sin is deceitful. It loves to make up excuses such as, “No one knows about your habit, so it’s not hurting anyone,” “I deserve this little treat” or “I can play with fire and not get burned.” Don’t believe the lies. Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup, and many men today forfeit their relationship with God by compromising with porn.

You can’t break free from sexual sin by slowly backing away from it or taming it like a pet. The Bible tells us to “flee” from immorality (2 Tim. 2:22). You must lay the axe to the root of your problem. Cut off all access to porn. Say goodbye and slam the door in its face. And if you can’t stop looking at it on your phone or computer, get rid of your phone and computer.

3. Keep no secrets. Guys addicted to porn struggle with constant shame. They can't enjoy prayer or worship because they feel condemned. They can't share their faith with others because they feel like hypocrites. And many Christian men are so full of guilt they turn to alcohol or drugs to numb their pain.

It's not enough to confess your sin to a brother once. You must stay in relationship with people who love you enough to confront you. Find one or two accountability partners and make a covenant with them to live transparently. And don't wait until you fall to call for counsel. Contact them whenever you feel tempted. Send up a flare and ask for help before it's too late.

4. Refocus your life on others. Lust is ultimately about self-gratification. When a young man gets hooked on porn, he can't grow up emotionally. This is why some adult men in their 50s and 60s act like 13-year-olds when it comes to sex. They are stuck in perpetual puberty.

You will never break free from the bondage of sexual sin simply by gritting your teeth and trying to forget the images you saw in magazines or videos. You must totally redirect your energies toward serving others: your spouse, your children, your church and the needy people around you. Throw yourself into selfless ministry and starve your illegal urges.

5. Stay filled with the Spirit. None of these previous steps are possible without the Holy Spirit, who is our promised Helper (see John 14:16). Self-help is not the answer. Ask the Spirit to fill your life with His refining fire. He will go to the root of your unholy desires, burn up your lust and give you supernatural ability to resist temptation.

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