

CHAPTER EIGHT

Kiss of Death: The Secret Sin of Pornography

I would think the goal of every married man is having and keeping his wife as his best friend. Every mutually beneficial marriage requires constant work. No husband needs—or wants—additional burdens working against his marriage.

Pornography, one of the fastest growing vices in our culture, constantly attacks healthy marriages. It's a burden we don't need. Each day, pornography causes more husbands to lose their wives as their best friends.

Let's be clear: Pornography isn't just a "male thing." Women are also struggling with pornography and it's rapidly increasing among them. But I'm focusing on husbands and husbands-to-be here.

More than ten years ago at the marriage conferences Brenda and I were conducting, I felt led by the Holy Spirit to publicly discuss my eleven-year addiction to, and deliverance from, pornography. Brenda has graciously allowed me to do this because, somehow, my public confession of this hideous secret sin helps couples at the conferences. In fact, some couples have shared with me that my discussing it publicly has saved their marriages. Many men, too numerous to count, have said that sharing my pornography addiction kept them at the conference because they knew it was going to be real.

God's grace has kept me clean since 1995. With every hope that God will use my failure and His rescue to help your marriage, here's my story.

My Self-Seduction into Pornography

How do we get seduced into pornography? A coffee buddy of mine told me this: "The pornography imprinted on the pages becomes imprinted on the mind." In other words, *what you see becomes what you think*. Pornography creates visual temptation and mental sexual sin. Is it any wonder it causes problems for more than a few of us husbands who want to keep our wives as our best friends?

I don't enjoy detailing my fall into pornography. I'm embarrassed by it. But if it will help you or keep you from becoming addicted, then my embarrassment is a small price for me to pay. And I do love telling others about God's gracious deliverance. Seeing that look of hope in their eyes is priceless. I honestly believe that sharing my personal battle will help

some of you to know that I've been where you are. What I'm about to say is real; not some made-up story to which no one can relate.

And here's the good news: God has forgiven me and delivered me in spite of myself. He can and will deliver you, if you ask Him.

Pornography addicts can be single or married, of any color, creed, or economic background. We're athletes, we're elementary school boys, we're computer programmers, we're pastors, we're custodians, we're politicians, we're truck drivers, we're CEOs. What binds us together is an addiction to visual images that imprint our minds and leads to mental—and perhaps physical—sexual sin.

Sadly enough, many men are introduced to pornography before the age of ten. The men of my generation usually found their father's stash of pornography magazines. Today, younger boys are discovering their dad's pornography websites on the Internet.

Some single men believe they use pornography to keep themselves pure. Their thinking is that they're safe if they simply masturbate to a seductive picture instead of "going all the way" on a date. But sexual purity is a matter of the mind and heart, according to Jesus. Consider his perspective as found in Matthew 5:19: *"But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."* How can you stop looking at women lustfully? Consider them your sister or somebody's mother created in God's image. Period.

The same goes for married men, of course.

My prayer for any of you struggling with pornography is that this chapter will help you find freedom from this addiction. Again, I want to remind you that there is hope for you. My personal struggle was even more difficult because during my eleven-year addiction, I felt there was no one I could talk to about it.

I was wrong. I had friends. I needed to trust them. No one can break the addiction of pornography for you but God and someone to whom you can be accountable. A biblical, Christian counselor certainly can help. I now have someone with whom I am accountable. It's made a remarkable difference for me.

Why is someone else's perspective so important in dealing with pornography addiction? Well, I certainly never saw it coming. If someone had told me that I—a guy who had been preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ for twelve years—would become addicted to pornography, I wouldn't have believed it myself! How could it happen?

Frankly, I was ripe for it. I was a 29-year-old virgin and my sex drive was killing me. I was new to town. Single Christian girls with whom I could even talk were nowhere to be found. For me, having girls around to talk to as friends has always helped me to see them as people. When they weren't around, it was easy for me to simply view them as sex objects.

So, regretfully, I did begin viewing girls as sex objects. Are you old enough to remember the song, *I'm A Girl Watcher*? I was definitely a "girl watcher." It wasn't easy to change this first-step habit toward pornography. First, you admire women with their clothes on. The natural progression is to want to see them without their clothes.

Jesus often had women who were His friends around Him. I always wondered if that helped Him keep His sex drive under control? He was fully human and fully God. As a man He probably had a sex drive, even if He never acted on it. Hebrews 4:15 says, "*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been **tempted in every way**, just as we are—yet without sin.*"

I believe Jesus understands our struggle in this area. *And it may be a good practice to develop friendships with single women for the sole purpose of being "just friends," with no benefits!*

I was a full-time Christian worker in a *supposedly* Christian environment. That should have created a buffer zone or safe place for me, but it was just the opposite. President of Promise Keepers and former Colorado University football coach, Bill McCartney at the 1996 *Atlanta Pastors' Conference*, said that, "Seventy percent of men in ministry have had an affair or inappropriate conduct with women." A lot of them must have been from the city where I was working. You see, my job was working with pastors. More than a few of them in this particular city had a reputation for womanizing.

My required membership was in an historic and prestigious church, which didn't have any single Christian girls my age. Maybe the preaching of religion for religion's sake, self-effort, and the impracticality of the religion being preached wasn't appealing to my peers. Neither was the life-changing Jesus Christ, nor the indwelling Holy Spirit empowering us to live a daily, victorious life, preached from the pulpit.

My pastor—who was also my boss—daily, bragged to me of his reputation for being sexually active until he got too old to continue. Even other pastors encouraged sleeping around. Some of the men in church thought that I was a homosexual because I wasn't sleeping around and I didn't have a girlfriend. My pastor's chauffeur told me, "Young as you are, you should be humping (having sex) every night."

It would be easy to blame my addiction on my environment or my circumstances, **but I am totally responsible for the wrong choices I made.** No one held a gun to my head. I refused to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit yelling at me not to watch pornography. It would have been helpful having godly men to set an example for me. I didn't, but it is still no excuse.

Did I mention that more than one married woman at this prestigious church had propositioned me? One pastor in town suggested that I date his secretary. I later discovered that he was hoping that we would date, so if she became pregnant, it would be assumed that the baby was mine. Supposedly this pastor was sleeping with his secretary, even though he was married with eight children at the time. His present wife had been the former babysitter for him and his first wife.

This was quite a town for adultery and divorce among pastors. In fact, one out-of-town, married pastor who, came to preach was told by my pastor in my presence, "I'll get your alcohol, but you've got to get your own women." These men often traveled to conventions, flying their wives *and mistresses* in to join them. The police and newspapers said that when these conventions of this particular denomination were held in their cities, that alcohol sales and prostitution went up!

I was Director of Christian Education for the eastern half of the state. When I was asked to teach a seminar, I always insisted on teaching evangelism because it seemed that so many of these *Christian* state leaders didn't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, or at least didn't live like it. As often as possible, I taught biblical marriage principles because of the immorality, even though I wasn't married.

How did it happen? I was lonely. I had no Christian fellowship with my peers and no accountability partner. I seemed surrounded by people with no regard for sexual purity. I had no women friends my age I could treat as sisters in Christ. Ultimately, it was about feeling sorry for myself.

These are not excuses. Instead, they're warning signs that I ignored.

It happened one night, while I was staying at the home of my boss and pastor. He and his wife had gone to bed. I stayed up to watch TV. I didn't have a TV at my apartment, so this was a treat for me. I was flipping channels to watch something to unwind. I hit the *Playboy* channel—and left it there. Women were undressing and having sex everywhere!

My eyes were pleased, yet I felt guilty immediately. I knew that I shouldn't be watching this stuff. But instead of turning the TV off, I turned the volume down. I tried to

listen to hear if my hosts were coming down the hall. I kept my finger strategically positioned on the TV remote's previous channel button, so the channel could be changed at a moment's notice and I'd appear innocent.

Can anybody relate to this? I couldn't believe my eyes, nor could I see enough. I thought, "I know this is wrong, but this is *only one night*, I'm never going to do this again, and I'm not committing a sin with someone else. I know it is wrong, but God will forgive me." Whether it was Satan's lie to me or me lying to myself, I bought it. What Satan didn't bother to tell me was that I could become addicted. Nor did he tell me about the long-term addiction, the guilt, the secrecy, and fear of being discovered—compared to only *momentary pleasure!*

I was up into the wee hours of the next morning. In bed that night, I fantasized having sex with the women. I masturbated in the bed and loved it. The release and sensation felt so *good!* I was hooked! I was a virgin. Actually now, I was a technical virgin. I knew I wasn't going to have sex with anyone before I got married. So what was the harm in getting a release? I wasn't hurting anyone.

My self-deception gave me no idea of what I was *willingly* getting myself into.

I was ashamed. I felt so guilty. I knew that I needed to ask God to forgive me, but I somehow wanted to earn the right to come before Him. This is another of Satan's lies. I bought into the "You're a preacher, so your sin is greater. How can God forgive you?" routine. But I couldn't do anything to be right on my own before God, and neither can you. My helplessness was overwhelming and depressing.

The only thing I could do to get right with God was ask for, accept, and believe in God's unconditional forgiveness. There were still consequences for my sin, but God totally forgives. Psalm 103:10, 12 describe His forgiveness: "*He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities....As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.*" It is a gift.

You have to come as you are and accept Christ's forgiveness. God makes us righteous.

So there I was, signed, sealed, delivered, and forgiven. My problems with pornography were over, right? Hardly. My thoughts gravitated to pornography when my mind wasn't occupied with other plans or work responsibilities. I didn't have a TV, but bought a few *Playboy* magazines, even masturbating once while looking at one of these magazines.

Up and down stretches of self-denial were common. I kept telling myself, "I can stop whenever I want to." Sound familiar? I was up and down spiritually, too. The cycle was

sinning, confessing the sin, asking for forgiveness—promising never to do it again, never wanting to do it again, shame, knowing God forgave me—but not feeling cleansed from my sin, feeling good and clean again—as time passed, but somehow finding myself relapsing into watching pornography again and again. I was supposed to be one of the more spiritual men in town. In truth, I was no better than the worst of the pastors committing adultery. The only difference was I had no partners in my circle of sin. But the difference was just that in my case, no one but God and me knew about my *secret sin*.

One specific incident in the spring of 1984, on a Saturday night, I watched pornography, which led to masturbating. The next morning, I was to preach in one of my favorite churches in the state. I loved this church and its godly pastor. I drove two hours one way each week to teach discipleship, my passion (yeah, I know it sounds crazy to be addicted to pornography and loving discipleship—*there's no logic to sin*), to this church's leadership. I would stay over that night, usually at the senior pastor's home, and drive back the next morning.

I struggled with not confessing my sin and trying to preach as though everything was right in my relationship with God. I debated with God during the two-hour drive to this church. Before I got up to preach, the pastor introduced me as this “godly, pure, young man amidst many immoral preachers.” He prayed that I would stay pure.

As I stood to begin preaching, I was so convicted by the Holy Spirit that I confessed my sin silently (but not with specifics from the night before), then the tears came. I finally gained my composure and preached my sermon.

The response to the sermon was most unusual that I had seen up to that point in my life. No one moved. Usually, at least kids made frequent bathroom runs, but this day, no one did. I gave the invitation to this sermon on *forgiveness*, challenging parents to forgive their children and for children to forgive their parents. It seemed like revival broke out! The people actually began right there in church asking each other for forgiveness. I sensed the power of God as never before. It seemed that during my brief time of brokenness and humility, God used me as His vessel to communicate His incredible love. I was forgiven. What a powerful experience this was!

I wish I could tell you that my (at the time one-year-long) affair with pornography ended that Sunday. It should have, but it didn't. I genuinely felt sorry for my lifestyle, but I did sin again with pornography. It wasn't right away, but it wasn't long before I was being

defeated by pornography again. If I wasn't going to preach, then I could watch pornography any time. If I was going to preach, I wouldn't watch it the night before.

What a stupid sense of righteousness, thinking somehow timing affected the influence of my sins.

Deliverance: Finally

I experienced this torture for eleven years. I was so tired of giving into the temptation of pornography, then feeling so guilty and unworthy to ask God's forgiveness for committing the same issue again and again. Does God get tired of forgiving me for doing the same sin over and over again? No!

In 1994, having been hired by another denomination, I became the first African American to work in their state association. After a few months, I proved to my supervisors that my position needed to be upgraded to reflect the actual work that I was doing. As a result, my title was changed to Director for Black Church Relations. I was also given a corresponding raise! Life was good!

During this year, a revival had broken out in Brownwood, Texas at the church of Dr. John Avant. Henry Blackaby joined him to travel around the country to hold meetings. Their format was this: John would retell the story of how God brought revival to him and to his church. Then Henry Blackaby would challenge people to prepare their hearts. After he prayed, he would then ask people to come to the microphone and publicly confess their sins. No music was played.

I traveled to witness one of those meetings. That moment of response was powerful. The first to respond were the teenagers. The adults soon followed the teenagers' example. God began convicting me to confess my sin of pornography. But I didn't, the meeting ended, and I was safe again.

However, the Executive Director of our state convention brought the idea back to our state office. So we held a similar time of confessing sin at our state office. A few people began to confess their sins after a time of prayer. God was speaking so loudly to my heart that I couldn't ignore Him, no matter how hard I tried. I told God, "There is no way that I'm going to confess my sin of pornography here! The white conservative Christian community is always saying that we African Americans are more immoral than other races. I'm not giving them fuel for their fire."

Recently, I'd been involved in a conflict with a staff person about the pictures our denomination was using when it dealt with immorality. These pictures were always of

African Americans and Latinos. There I was, the only African American on staff, the first in the history of this state organization, having to confess my sin. I fit the profile over which I had the conflict. To make things more interesting, the staff person with whom I'd argued was in the room! I didn't want to confess in this pressure arena. But God wouldn't let me off the hook.

Finally, I yielded. I got up, not knowing what to expect, thinking the worst—"I'm just fulfilling the profile." I confessed my sin of pornography publicly to this group of subordinates, peers, and superiors. To my surprise, the older men surrounded me and laid their hands on me as they prayed. There was no condemnation then, nor did I ever hear anything about my confession "on the grapevine" later.

There appeared to be no change of attitude toward me. Several men of my age and younger, after the session was over told me that they, too, struggled with pornography. I told them that they should have joined me up there. They said they were too afraid. I let them know I loved them and I also let them know I was upset with them. I wished they had confessed too, so I wouldn't have been the only one.

But it didn't matter. They remained in slavery. I was free and *felt* free! The weight of all the years of lying was *finally* lifted off my back. I even felt better physically (Psalm 32:3-5, New Living Translation).

The hardest part of my confession wasn't over, however. I knew that I needed to go home and confess to Brenda, my wife. I left the building immediately after the session to tell Brenda, praying as I drove home. I sat her down and told her of my addiction to pornography. I told her it started before we were married, but I hadn't been able to stop. I didn't go into a lot of detail. (Our wives don't need unnecessary baggage.) I asked for her forgiveness. She graciously forgave me. She has never asked me about it since, even in the heat of an argument. I am blessed to have her as a wife.

Finally, it was over. I couldn't go back to life as I had known it before. I would forever battle with the seductive calls to return to pornography, but it was and is no longer in charge in my life! Praise God! *And sin loses power its in the light!*

My public confession had brought me immediate humiliation—in the best sense of that word—and spiritual freedom from the bondage of pornography. Free at last, thank God Almighty!

Pornography Lies to You

Sexual satisfaction is the lie pornography promises but can't deliver. Many men think this satisfaction will be long term. They don't understand the dynamics of addiction.

Pornography will please you, but it is only temporary. You can never see enough of it, thus, the addiction. Few men anticipate their bondage to pornography. This enslavement takes away any pleasure you receive, putting you in a position of slave, not master. So what begins as a little secret pleasure is the beginning to a life of secret guilt.

Pornography is about selfishness. Pornography is about me, myself, and I. "Me-ism" is the new theology of today's postmodern culture, Christian and secular.

Pornography is about self-deception. The deception for some is that the girl of your dreams is yours and all she wants to do is have sex with you. Through pornography, she is always waiting for your call. Being in charge somehow makes you the *man* you always wanted to be or thought you should be. You feel better about yourself for the wrong reasons. Therefore, when you are not having your pornography fix, maybe you feel less self-confident and less of a man. This is wrong and Satan's lie.

You don't need to live in a fantasyland to be a man. Don't focus on what you don't have, or who you think that you aren't. Focus on what you *do have and those who love you just the way you are*, imperfections and all. Maybe you aren't a ladies' man. It's not the end of your world. You can't be anyone else, only an imitation of someone else. But no one can be a better you than you are right now!

Learn to enjoy being all you are, instead of trying to be an imitation. You are possibly missing out because you have fallen into the deception that you aren't special just the way you are. Follow your dreams, not the dreams others have for you.

A possible consequence of a pornography addiction is that you'll always be a *recovering* pornography addict. This is similar to a former alcoholic always being a recovering alcoholic. The worst place for both of these kinds of addicts is to be in places that cater to their vices.

Recovering pornography addicts must be careful about what they allow themselves to see on TV, on video, at the movies, even at church, when women bending over exposing their cleavage! After all, we addicts must learn, know, and abide by our limitations. What once seemed so innocent or harmless may for some have eternal consequences. That's a heavy, but all-too-real, price tag for an initial fleeting moment of pleasure.

Maybe pornography's biggest lie says that by breaking your addiction and obeying God that you'll miss out on seeing that special body. But that's saying that something can be better for you than what (or perhaps who) God has for you. This is the ultimate lie! Don't fall for it! We already know the destructiveness of pornography!

Could an Accountability Partner Help?

David Guy is one of my best friends, a former board member of my non-profit organization, and a prayer partner. Until he moved ten years ago, he was also my face-to-face confidant and accountability partner who helped me stay on the right path through our regular meetings. He still is my confidant, but now by phone.

David and I would get together for breakfast after each of my trips. We'd specifically talk about women I met on my trips. We discussed the women to whom I may have been attracted and why. We talked about any women who may have approached me—that usually takes about five seconds—usually there are none. We talked about my responses to those situations, and why I responded as I did.

For me, David provided peace of mind and understanding. I can admit to a guy that I have human tendencies, and that I'm not blind to good-looking females.

I don't act on my feelings, yet I believe it's crucial to be able to tell a trusted friend (you only need one) that I have feelings and discuss them. I can even tell him, "If I wasn't married, I would have talked to her." He listens without condemnation.

Brenda, my wife, knows that David and I meet. That being said, whenever a woman has approached me, I've always told Brenda. This is another step of accountability. I talk with David because Brenda doesn't need to, nor want to, hear all the stuff that I need to talk about. She doesn't need the burden, nor do I want Satan tempting her with lies and for her to feel that she needs to compete with other women. (I doubt if she would. She is a pretty tough lady and we learned before we got married to be brutally honest with each other.) This style of communication is easy and works for us, but we realize that this strategy of accountability may not work for all couples. (We'll look at that aspect in greater length later.)

Pornography Impacts Your Sex Life

What if you're married and masturbating to pornography (either on the Internet or in your mind) feels better than sex with your wife? (I said, "If you're married," because if you're single and having sex, you shouldn't be. You are creating an entirely different set of problems for your life.) What do you do?

My addiction began before my marriage. You would think that once you have a real woman with whom you could have real sex that the pornography addiction would end. No such luck. The pornography accompanied me into my marriage.

Within marriage, pornography can become a copout. Maybe you're not pleased with the sex in your marriage, or you want more of it, or you're angry with your wife. Maybe your wife is angry with you, and won't even think about giving you sex when you're ready for it. You've decided you aren't going to have sex outside of your marriage. Does pornography offer any real benefits? Think about it: In your mind, you can have sex with a babe who is there just for you. You don't have to please her or talk to her, get her in the mood, and it is all about you. No question like, "Was it good for you?" to worry about.

What if pornography leads you to masturbating? Masturbating is the next step while viewing or after viewing pornography. I don't know what percentage of men masturbate after being influenced by pornography, but all of the men with whom I've counseled or just talked with have gone on to masturbate. What if your masturbating is better than sex with your wife? What do you do?

If you are enjoying masturbation more than having sex with your wife, you have a problem. *First*, you should know that sex is a gift from God designed as the highest expression of love between a husband and his wife. *Second*, sexual intimacy is about giving pleasure to your spouse. Masturbation is totally about pleasing yourself. In marriage, sex is about satisfying your spouse and your spouse satisfying you. Thus, you experience the maximum sexual pleasure as you communicate to each other what you enjoy and what you don't.

Your sex life can be **improved** as you develop intimacy with your wife. Intimacy is established outside of the bed through emotional, intellectual, and spiritual communication. The key to mutually fulfilling sex is intimacy, which is a barometer of the closeness of the relationship. Intimacy includes sex, but it is so much more. (*Just ask your wife!*) If there are problems in the bed, it is usually because the problems outside of the bed haven't been resolved, or sometimes even discussed.

I believe as you get to know your wife again or maybe for the *first time* as a person specifically designed by God to be your companion for life, then one of the results will be better sexual intimacy. That intimacy is much better than masturbation could ever be. Sexual intimacy requires vulnerability; masturbation doesn't.

Sexual intimacy is about faith; masturbation is about control. Sexual intimacy is about serving your spouse; masturbation is about serving yourself. Biblical sexual intimacy will motivate and stimulate your wife to want to have incredible sex with you!

What about using pornography to “get ready” for sex with your wife? Get real. Pornography probably encourages you to have sex with your wife because you get an erection from it. It has little or nothing to do with giving your wife pleasure. This is a selfish act. You are just using your wife. Without her knowing it, she becomes your unpaid prostitute.

Pornography Will Affect Your Wife

Is it my imagination or are most women always concerned about their looks and is this why they always seem to be in front of a mirror? A woman once told me that it is hard to be a woman because when she enters any room, she always gets the *once over*, not just from the men, but also from the women. These women critics evaluate how well they are dressed. Passing this *once over* can open or shut the door to acceptance or rejection by the women in the room.

Discovering her husband is addicted to pornography can devastate a wife, causing her to feel rejected or feel less than a woman. Her possible questions: “How am I going to compete with these perfect women? How could you rather have sex with your hand than my body? What did I do wrong? If you don’t find me attractive, who will?” This may send her into the bed of another man just for the affirmation that she is still attractive to someone.

One pastor’s wife who discovered her husband was a practicing homosexual, responded by seducing a man in their church. When questioned, she confessed, “I know it was wrong, but I needed to reassure myself that I was at least attractive to *some* man.”

Your wife’s discovery that you prefer sex with an imaginary partner may lead her to depression, and/or ultimately, divorce.

“For the woman to have sex with her husband, she has to open herself to him. What he is doing is a physical intrusion to her. It is invasive. In order to have sex with her husband, she has to decide to become vulnerable to him. Thus, the physical union requires a depth of emotional involvement in order for her to fully enter into the act. She becomes both physically and emotionally open and moldable in order to receive him into her. This requires a great deal more trust for her than for him.”

Abel Ortega and Melodie Fleming, authors of *The Dance of Restoration: Rebuilding Marriage After Infidelity*.

Guys, think about this! Until I read this except from this book, I never even thought about how my wife must feel when I penetrate her to have sex. She is completely vulnerable to me. I can't even imagine (and don't want to, either) thinking about anything penetrating me. And I've never been crazy about my yearly physical exam when my doctor puts his finger up my butt—that ain't even cool or comfortable.

In order to have sex with us, our wives totally give themselves to us, emotionally and physically. I'm slowly beginning to understand why wives get so upset with their husbands when they get caught staring at another women, with pornography, and certainly an affair.

This knowledge *is revolutionizing* my approach to having sex with Brenda. Sure I still enjoy sex, but I'm much more aware of Brenda. And I try to be more sensitive of serving her sexually, and this begins long before getting in the bedroom.

For those of you who are Christ-followers, God wants us to become completely emotionally, intellectually, physically, and spiritually vulnerable to Him.

As you read of penetration, some of you men were molested by men in your family or other men who should have been safe for you to be around. I'm so sorry this happened to you. If this happened to you, **YOU ARE NOT LESS OF A MAN!** And it wasn't your fault. These are Satan's lies. And it isn't uncommon for such an experience to eventually lead you into pornography or other sexual deviations. **GOD DOESN'T LOVE YOU ANY LESS!** You need to know this. Many men, who have read this chapter, have shared with me of their molestation and I hope these brief comments help some.

The Dance of Restoration is must reading whether your marriage is trying to recover from an affair, or not. You'll learn a lot about your wife and yourself!

Confessing Your Secret Sin to Your Wife: Yea or Nay?

Brenda is an incredibly strong woman. When praying for a wife, I prayed that she would be tough because of the nature of ministry and because of some of the specific places I believed God would take us.

When I confessed my pornography addiction to Brenda, it wasn't because I was worried about her hearing about it from the ladies with whom I worked. I confessed to her because I didn't want anything between us. I didn't want the past coming back, surprising us, and biting us in the butt. I wanted to bury my past sin once and for all. I didn't want Satan to have an opportunity to cause division between us nor have any leverage over me.

As more and more men confide in me about their addiction to pornography, I'm finding that once they come clean with God, they usually desire to come clean with their

wives too. Can there be a more honorable and natural motive? The man feels good because he has unloaded his burden. He is free and feels good.

But his sharing this knowledge with his wife may be unloading his burden on her. More than one problem may exist with the pornography issue. First of all, it is done in secret. The man may battle it for years without his wife's knowledge. He is used to wrestling with it on his own. It is not like being married to an alcoholic or a drug addict, where the couple often works together in the fight against the addiction.

But telling your wife about your victory over pornography usually results in her asking herself and you questions immediately, such as, "How long have you been addicted to pornography? Why did you become addicted to this? Did you masturbate? If you did masturbate, did you use me just as your sex object? Are you a sex addict? Why didn't you come to me for help? Why are you coming to me now?" So try to understand from her perspective the *element of surprise* she has to *begin* to process.

You also need to understand that her method of processing may be different from yours. Most men are compartmentalized; most women are holistic. This is why most of us men can fight with our wives one moment and can want to have sex the next, because one thing doesn't have any connection with the other for us. But for your wife, *everything is connected to everything!* So when we try to have sex with our wives immediately after a misunderstanding, she may often say to us, "Don't touch me!" This is because she is still processing the conflict.

Another concern after the surprise is usually a series of relationship-evaluating questions. Basically, she wants to know what went wrong, when, and why. These answers run deep and may hurt both of you. Just remember, you betrayed her! And so, have the greater responsibility in restoring your relationship. These concerns/questions of surprise and the relationship are not listed in order of importance:

- What is wrong with me?
- Aren't I woman enough to satisfy your sexual needs?
- Did I do something wrong which you felt that you couldn't talk to me about?
- How long have you been addicted to pornography?
- Did this pornography lead you into an affair?
- With whom did you, or are you, having the affair?
- For how long did you have the affair?
- Did you get STDs from your affair?

- Did you end your affair? Is it over for good? How do you know?
- How do I know that you are telling me the truth right now?
- Can I ever trust you again? Can you be patient with me, while my trust in you is being restored?
- How can we rebuild our trust in each other again?
- Are you willing to go to counseling with me to help us?

So should you tell your wife about your battle with, and/or victory over, pornography? There was a time when I would say without hesitation, “Yes, every man who has struggled with pornography should tell his wife about it.” I no longer say this. Let me tell you why.

Years ago, in San Diego, after speaking at a *FamilyLife Marriage Conference*, I went to dinner with Bill, one of my prayer partners, a judge, who lives there. As we discussed the possibility of writing this chapter, he said that once he asked his wife this question. He said, “Honey, I haven’t done this, but if I ever had an affair and it ended, would you ever want me to tell you about it?” After thinking about his question for quite some time, she said, “No, I would never, ever want to have to process such information.”

It is critical that we confess our problem with pornography confidentially to someone as soon as possible. However, you may need to ask yourself if your wife needs to, wants to, or can process such information.

I’m not telling you that you should tell your wife, nor am I telling you not to. I am strongly recommending that you become an excellent student of your wife. You want to build her up, not tear her down.

One criterion should be the spiritual maturity of your wife and you. You don’t want your wife blaming herself for your addiction to pornography. She may feel it is her fault because she may think that she isn’t *woman enough* for you; her breasts aren’t big enough, she isn’t pretty enough, too fat, or she isn’t good in bed. Neither do you want her worrying constantly about whether or not she can trust you. Gary Smalley says that it takes the average woman **two years** for her trust to be restored once it has been broken.

After confessing my pornography addiction to the couples at this conference in San Diego, men too numerous to count and some women shared with me how my confession gave them the courage to confess their pornography to their wives. In those cases, they felt their confessions saved their marriages.

But one husband confessed his pornography addiction to his wife and she left the conference. She had some physical issues, resulting in an unhealthy self-image. And unfortunately, this wasn't the first time this husband had confessed his pornography addiction. He asked me to write his wife. She thought he was over it and he had a relapse. Their lack of communication had both of them thinking their marriage was at one level, when it was actually at another stage. His pornography issue may have simply been a manifestation of a deeper problem.

Husbands confess their one-night stands to me. Some say they could never tell their wives, while others do.

So, I passionately encourage prayer, counsel with a godly pastor, and a consistent time of victory over pornography before taking any action. I'm not saying that there is a right and wrong answer for everyone, because everyone's circumstances as a couple are different. The issue is: "What is best for us as a couple?"

Restoring Your Relationship with God, Yourself, and/or Your Wife (whether you have told her or not)

Restoring your relationship with God begins with *confession*. Confession is agreeing with God that indulging in pornography is wrong.

The second is *repentance*, which means to turn your back on sin. In other words, stop doing the sin! Emotion needs to be a non-issue here. It is not about feeling sorry for your sin and then doing it again, which is what I did for eleven years. 1 John 1:9 says, "*If we confess our sins, He (God) is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*"

Third, *accept God's forgiveness*. This acceptance of God's forgiveness is by faith, not feeling. Forgiveness is not a process. Emotional healing is a process. You may feel relieved after confessing. That's wonderful. But you may feel the same, with no emotional change. That's all right, too. God's forgiveness is a fact, based on His integrity and character, not our emotions.

After asking God for forgiveness, *forgive yourself*. Don't listen to Satan's lie saying, "You're no good." After God's forgiveness, any negative thoughts are from Satan, not from God. Remember, fact, not feeling. Also know that God's forgiveness is complete.

What if your wife doesn't know about your pornography addiction and you don't feel it is wise for you to confess it to her? Then examine how your indulgence in pornography has caused you to emotionally withdraw from her. Pray about what would be the best first

step toward rekindling the relationship. Think about dating your wife on a regular basis; once a month or twice would be good. Once you start, don't stop!

If you are *really* brave, ask your wife to evaluate your marriage on a one-to-ten scale (with ten being the highest rating). Be sure you clarify the rating values before she answers! If your wife says your marriage is a seven or below, ask her how can the two of you get it to a nine. Don't get defensive. Most husbands and wives have a different perspective as to the health of their marriage. Usually your wife will give a lower score than you will. Ask her what should be the first issue you as a couple need to work on. Then you, as the servant-leader, make sure that the two of you begin to consistently work on this first issue.

Whatever the specific issues for improvement are in your marriage, don't forget to pray together. It doesn't have to be a half hour of time on your knees. Start with five minutes a day when neither of you is tired. There are several excellent books about couples praying together on the market, if you need that kind of jumpstart.

If you do confess your pornography with your wife, ask her the same questions about your marriage. Again, I would encourage praying and reading the Bible together. Listening and hearing (understanding) your wife is going to be so critical. Your patience with her as she works through her emotional process of forgiving you and reestablishing her trust in you will take time. Don't rush her or get angry with her. Remember, you're the one with the pornography problem. She may not want to have sex with you for awhile. This may be one of your toughest tests. If this happens, ***remember you betrayed her***. The betrayer wants to get back to normal, while often the one betrayed needs to continue talking about it as he or she processes it. If you've asked God for forgiveness, He has forgiven you, but the no sex for a while is consequence of your actions and a small price to pay when compared with divorce. ***Don't make her feel guilty for not having sex with you!***

If she doesn't want to have sex with you while she is learning to trust you again, don't go back to masturbating. Pray and get one close Christian male friend to pray with you and for you. If Brenda and I were counseling both of you, we would take you to 1 Corinthians 7:1-5. This passage deals with the sexual relationship between a husband and wife. Specifically, it says that in a marriage, your body belongs to your spouse. But you can't beat your wife over the head with this verse.

If you decide your marriage requires counseling, let me suggest that you pray as a couple for God to lead you to a Christian counselor who will be best for your particular

situation. Try to agree together on a counselor, so he or she isn't viewed to be on one spouse's side and against the other. Ask to speak with people this counselor has helped.

If your counselor isn't using the Bible as his or her ultimate counseling authority, find another counselor. If a counselor asks you to violate biblical principles, then stop the counseling sessions immediately. If this counselor tells you to separate and live in different places, stop the counseling sessions immediately.

Whether you have or haven't confessed your pornography to your wife, one of the keys to restoring and/or reviving the relationship is consistency, not perfection.

Overcoming Pornography: Getting & Keeping the Victory

For me, overcoming pornography (and improving our marriage in general) was like improving my ability to jump. I hate to break the stereotype, but even though I'm an African American, I'm not an outstanding jumper. I'm good, just not outstanding.

My college basketball coach at Moody Bible Institute, Steve Irwin (not the late Crocodile Hunter), had us run and jump to try to touch the rim as part of our conditioning drills. At 5'7", I had never touched the rim. But Coach Irwin's drills conditioned me, for the first time in my life, to touch the rim! I was a happy Negro!

I went to the downtown Chicago YMCA to lift weights so I could jump higher. Coach Irwin showed me two drills specifically designed to isolate my calf muscles, which held the key to my ability to jump. One exercise was to place a board about two inches thick under the balls of my feet, then put weight on my shoulders, and squat from a standing to a sitting position. I worked out with sixty pounds on my back and soon, I was touching the rim consistently and easily! My jumping improved about *six inches!*

Before long, I was able to (on a good wood floor) take one step and grab the rim. My increased jumping ability enabled me to block the shots of guards as tall as 6'3". A couple of times, I was able to pin the ball against the backboard. I could fly *briefly*. There were a few surprised looks as my jumping helped me to play better defense and games are won with defense!

What was amazing about my newfound ability to jump was how quickly it diminished when I went two weeks or more without lifting. So as long as I wanted to continue to enjoy the increase in jumping, I had to continue lifting weights on a regular, weekly basis.

What does my jumping ability have to do with pornography and marriage? I believe that you have to *keep working at it*. I have to keep in place my protections against my falling

back into pornography again. I can't, and neither should you, act just by feelings. There were times I hated lifting weights, but I loved the results.

Maybe the best way to overcome pornography is to be proactive. Maybe you should consider talking to your daughter or son when they are about 10 years old. Steve Farrar recommends getting to your kids before their peers do. He thinks we should consider talking to our kids about sex by age seven (*Point Man*, p.241-248).

If your son or daughter brings the issue of pornography up, discuss it. My friend Steve said his 13-year-old son's friends exposed him to pornography. Steve's son told him about it. Steve said their conversation gave his son the freedom to talk about it to his friends, whose dads are Christians and have pornography magazines.

Safeguards for Success

Some of my ***specific safeguards*** against pornography include the following:

1. I have learned to say "No" to myself about things that aren't sin for me. For example, it isn't a sin to look at a beautiful woman if she crosses your line of vision. I might even have fun with it and say, "Good job God." I hope you aren't offended—I'm just having fun. It isn't sin to take a second and third look, but doing so doesn't make me closer to Brenda. Some of you may be saying this is lust; but unless you are mentally undressing her and have sex with her in your mind, biblically it isn't. So I don't look at other women a second or third time.
2. Brenda has become ***my standard of beauty***. When I have erotic dreams now, I dream of Brenda, which is a tremendous gift from God.
3. As a pastor, I stopped counseling women by myself, especially after two women propositioned me.
4. I remind myself that *I still can fall*.
5. When women, even the ones in the church, wear low-cut dresses revealing their cleavage I now look away. In the past, it was a "freebie." I used to look, saying to myself, "It isn't my fault if they are wearing this kind of dress. They must know what they are doing and that I can see their breasts." If a woman wearing a dress showing a lot of her breasts approaches me to talk, I now just focus on her eyes and don't let my eyes wonder south. It is a discipline and it's hard, but so worth it because I also realize that this is someone's wife, daughter, or mother.
6. I also try to now look at women more as my sisters. Having three daughters also helps me in my personal war against pornography.
7. I am actively developing a more respectful attitude toward women.
8. I seldom go to the video store for entertainment. I had to ask myself, "Why am I always coming to the world for entertainment?" I'm not saying people should stop

renting movies. I'm just saying that I have to be careful and not allow myself to go beyond my limitations. Seeing all those movie covers with women wearing little clothing doesn't help me at all. The urge to rent movies with nudity in them rises in me. I'm careful where I go on the Internet. When Victoria's Secret commercials come on, I change the channel.

9. I had to admit to myself that *I couldn't handle it*. I relate it to Joseph in the Bible, who was approximately 30 years old and a virgin running from Potiphar's wife. I believe he literally ran. I think if he tried to walk, he wouldn't have made it. Paul tells Timothy to "flee" from lust. My nature is not to change channels if I see nudity or the potential for it, but I do change it because I don't want to revert to my former situation. For some it might require canceling your local TV cable. It may require unplugging the TV in your hotel room when you travel. I often stay with friends when I've traveling because of the rich fellowship and another source of accountability and protection regarding pornography. It may mean not going to certain movies on "Boys Night Out."
10. I try to keep myself out of situations that are dangerous for me.

Saying "No" to the pull of your addiction the first time can be the hardest, but the more you say "No," the easier it becomes and more freedom and control you gain over your addiction.

What if you have a relapse? Tell your accountability partner. It is not the end of the world. Satan will tell you it is, but it isn't. In learning to walk, most babies fall many times before they master walking. The critical issue isn't how many times you fall; it is getting up after every fall. God will always forgive you. He's the one that commanded forgiving "seventy times seven." Don't give in to Satan's lie that you will never get it right. God doesn't stop loving us, even if we fail. He's waiting to celebrate our victories with us, and more of them every day!

Don't let the enemy use your struggle as a means to discourage you about your walk with God. He can't take you from the Father. In John 10:28-30 Jesus said, "*I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of **My hand**. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.*" Romans 8:37-39 reads, "*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation (this includes Satan), will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*"

Don't compare with others you may know who are also trying to break the cycle of their pornography addiction. We're not in competition with anyone.

Every day, I must say "No" to pornography. Another preventive step is praying with Brenda. We don't pray about pornography, we praise God for who He is, for our girls, each other, family, friends, and for events of the specific day. Praying with Brenda reinforces my commitment to her and the girls.

"What kind of legacy am I going to leave?" This is the question that helps me fight pornography's lure. Every man needs to see the *Big Picture*. We have to look beyond our present momentary pleasure to the consequences of our actions. Galatians 6:7-8 is clear about this: *"Do not be deceived; God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."*

Do we really want to reap the fruit of pornography? I don't think so.

Last, but certainly not least, is my relationship with Christ. God has been and continues to be *so good* to my family, me, and the ministry He has given me. I don't want to lose it. Pornography certainly isn't worth the risk. To me, there is nothing like walking with God as He develops the intimacy between the two of us. For over ten years, since publicly announcing my addiction, He has been teaching me and exposing me to so much, I don't want to jeopardize that by a short momentary pleasure whose long-term goal is to destroy my family and me.

This is walking by faith, not by feeling. It is the freedom not to be controlled by anyone or anything but God, who loved and loves us so much that He allowed His own Son, Jesus Christ to die for our sins, so that we could have eternal fellowship with Him!

A Word to Wives

I've discovered that quite a few women read my books because of their husbands, which is commendable. Ladies, you are investing in your marriage. As you have read this chapter, you may be wondering if your husband is wrestling with pornography. May I suggest that you not ask him about it, but pray for him instead? Maybe your prayer should be:

Dear Lord, if my husband is involved in pornography, would Your Holy Spirit convict him that this is wrong and move him to confess his sin both to You and me, and quit this destructive sin? Will You please forgive him and give me Your strength to forgive him and not hold a grudge against him? Lord, help me not to unintentionally act differently towards him. Help us to discuss it so I may help him so he won't have a relapse.

Ladies, if you should ask your husband if he is involved with pornography, I ask you to be willing to forgive him immediately, with no resentment. Forgiveness doesn't eliminate accountability and responsibility. I'm not justifying his actions. But you must understand he is becoming vulnerable to you. If this happens, it is time for reconciliation. Your actions here may help serve as another accountability motivation because he doesn't want to lose you.

These are merely some of my prayerful suggestions. Please listen to the Holy Spirit.

A Final Reflection

Let me say a word about my deliverance from my pornography addiction. It is not the norm, according to Christopher McCluskey, a Christian sex therapist: "The vast majority of men have had to seek Christian counseling and participate in a support group for men with this struggle because the addiction is usually much more than the simple lure of naked women.

Men can so easily 'sexualize' their emotional needs and seek to meet all of their legitimate and emotional needs through sexual fulfillment. There is a real healing and maturing process that needs to occur for these men—they are stunted at an adolescent level of psychological development and are usually incapable of connecting with a woman on a healthy, intimate level until they do this work, even if they do stop using pornography.

Their use of pornography and masturbation is usually just the tip of the iceberg—the real struggle is not the lure of sexual temptation, although it is HUGE all by itself, but it's all the other emotional baggage wrapped up in their misuse of their sexuality."

This therapist is saying that there is often more to the addiction besides resisting the temptation and stopping the destructive behavior; the motivation of the behavior must be healed.

So please don't feel guilty or unspiritual if your addiction doesn't end in the way mine did. Whether God heals you all at once or through counseling and a support group, it doesn't matter. Let me encourage you that you can be delivered through the grace of God. Seek Him and His healing power.

Resources:

Now Choose Life!: One Man's Journey Out of the Grip of Pornography by Dr. Janet K. Wheeler

Faithful and True by Dr. Mark Laaser

False Intimacy by Harry Schaumburg

Breaking Free by Russell Willingham

Affair of the Mind by Laurie Hall

S.O.S. (Sick of Sex) by Robyn McKelvey

Intimacy Ignited: Fire Up Your Sex Life With the Song of Solomon, Dr. Joseph & Linda Dillow and Dr. Peter & Lorraine Pintus, NAVPRESS

When Two Become One by Chris & Rachel McCluskey

The Marriage You Always Wanted by Dr. Gary Chapman, Moody

Intimate Issues by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus, WaterBrook

Intended for Pleasure: Sex Technique & Sexual Fulfillment in Christian Marriage by Ed Wheat, M.D. and Gaye Wheat

If You Are Trying to Overcome An Affair:

These are two of the best! I use them to help restore marriages. They work!!

Affair Repair: Breathing Life into Broken Relationships by David & Lisa King,
www.1010mediagroup.com

The Dance of Restoration: Rebuilding Marriage After Infidelity by Abel Ortega & Melodie Fleming, Living Ink Books

Action Points

1. What are the most common places in which you encounter pornography? How can you avoid pornography in those places?
2. How do you think pornography could hurt your marriage?
3. How do you think your wife would respond if she discovered you were addicted to pornography?
4. How would you respond if you discovered your wife was addicted to pornography?
5. How have—or will—you tell your children to deal with pornography?
6. What would the impact on your marriage be if your wife discovered you were masturbating more often than making love to her?
7. What would the impact on your marriage be if you discovered your wife was masturbating more often than making love to you?
8. What limits have you set for yourself regarding pornography?
9. Do you have a friend who will keep you accountable regarding sexual purity? If not, who is a likely candidate?
10. Are you willing to pray specifically for your pastor(s), your family, your friends, and yourself to be sexually pure? Schedule three times this week to do exactly that.