

CLOSE TO HOME



DEALING WITH
pornography



“Hi, My Name’s Steve* and I’m a Porn Addict”

My first experience with pornography was at a corner store when I was nine years old. On a dare, I picked up a *Playboy* magazine and found that those glossy pictures aroused feelings of excitement that I had never felt before. They also triggered feelings of shame.

As a teen, I continued to explore the world of pornography. Although I felt ashamed, the insidious power of porn was greater than my ability to resist it. It became my big secret.

Like many who struggle with sexual temptation, I thought marriage was the solution. While my marriage provided temporary relief, in time I was lured back into the world of porn. Fortunately, I could share my struggles with my wife. But knowing how very hurtful it was to her, I didn’t say enough. A cloud of deception hung over us.

All this time I was an active member of a Mennonite church. There, I heard two messages: Pornography is a repulsive sin, and there is no mercy for people caught in it. This condemning culture actually drove my addiction deeper underground. Sexual addiction thrives in a world of secrecy, shame, and isolation.

A few years later, I attended seminary to prepare for pastoral ministry. During that time my addiction progressed into more deviant and dangerous forms. I began going to peep shows, renting X-rated videos, consuming more and more porn, and masturbating compulsively. I kept pleading with God to release me from this dungeon. Instead, my feelings of despair and isolation only drove me deeper into the addictive cycle.

Grace finally came in an unexpected way. I befriended a young man who was an

alcoholic and I began attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings with him. I found a spirit of hope and acceptance that I had never experienced before. Somehow this community of broken people had found a pathway to healing.

That introduction to the 12-step movement led me to Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA). The relief I felt at my first SAA meet-

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ing overwhelmed me. Here was a group of men who weren’t put off by my story, who were being honest with one another, and who were dealing with their addiction.

I also began seeing a Christian therapist. It was another great relief to share my dark secret with him and to begin untangling the web of deceit and despair in my life. Above all, he helped me to see the roots of my addiction. Porn had become my drug of choice—something I used to dull my feelings of shame and insecurity.

In the decade since then, I have experienced significant healing. Especially with the easy access of the Internet, I still experience the draw of porn, but the compulsion is almost gone. Sex is now something I celebrate with my wife in a healthy and respectful relationship.

I yearn for the day when I can share my story in my congregation without fearing rejection. But the 12-step recovery movement gives me hope. It is a testimony to the power of God and of a caring community to transform broken people.

*name changed to protect identity

What is pornography?

Pornography is any sexually explicit material designed to produce sexual arousal and lead toward sexual activity that is often degrading, harmful, abusive, or humiliating. It comes in many forms: videos, magazines, strip clubs, phone sex, cable TV, internet chat rooms, websites, and live cam sites.

Pornography has moved into the mainstream media, as increasingly explicit sexual material is used in TV, movies, and advertising. Especially through Internet technology, using pornography is more accessible, anonymous, and affordable than ever before.

An addiction

Most beginning users have no idea how addictive porn can become. Occasional use tends to lead toward more frequent and compulsive use. Over time, images that once sparked sexual arousal lose their power, and stronger images are needed to generate the same effect.

Many who will be addicted to porn don't realize what negative effects it will have on their lives: secret double lives, broken trust with spouses, fear of being discovered, time stolen from important relationships, and a sense of despair and hopelessness.

You may be addicted to pornography if:

- You are unable to resist looking at it.
- You are preoccupied or obsessed with it.
- You have failed in your efforts to stop using it.
- You spend a great deal of time using pornography, masturbating to it, rationalizing your use of it, and nursing feelings of shame.
- It interferes with your family life and your job or schooling.
- You need to increase its intensity or frequency in order to get the buzz you want.
- You are tense and irritable when you are unable to use it.

Pornography, the Bible, and the Christian story

The first chapter of the Bible reveals that God created human beings, both male and female, in God's own image. God declared them to be "very good" (Genesis 1:26, 31). In calling people to be fruitful and multiply, God declared human sexuality to be good.

The Song of Solomon gives us a positive picture of strong sexual desire in a mutual, respectful, loving relationship. In this love poem, both the woman and the man are awed and attracted by the beauty of the other's body and character. Each yearns to satisfy the other's desire and to be satisfied. They both give and receive in the mutual delight of healthy sexuality.

Sexual desire is a gift of God, and part of who we are as created beings. It enhances the awe we feel for our boyfriend or girlfriend, our wife or husband. It is meant to be consummated within a loving marriage relationship.

Pornography distorts and abuses this gift. It encourages the viewer to desire sex

Sexual desire is a gift that is meant to bring joy into our lives in the context of loving, mutual relationships.

without mutual relationship. People in pornographic pictures are treated as objects for sexual gratification, not as human beings to be valued, honored, and loved. Often, deception is used to cover up such distorted use of God's good gift.

Jesus spoke out against making people into mere objects of desire: "Everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

The story of King David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12) is not about pornography as such, but it parallels the destructive process of porn use. Casually looking over the city one day, King David's eyes latch onto a woman bathing. Even though he does not know her, he wants to have her for his sexual pleasure.

David finds out that the woman is Bathsheba, married to Uriah, a soldier who is out of town. Ignoring this relationship, David orders her to be brought to his palace and has sex with her. Bathsheba soon sends word to David that she is pregnant with his child.

Desperate to cover up his actions, David has Uriah brought back from the battlefield so that he would have sex with his wife. But Uriah does not sleep with Bathsheba. In the end, David arranges for Uriah to be sent to the front lines where he is sure to be killed. After Uriah dies, David takes Bathsheba as a wife. The evil of David's actions are eventually exposed when God's prophet, Nathan, confronts him.

David's actions were similar to those of porn users: looking and lusting, taking and using, hiding and lying. We are told that he repented of his sin and experienced God's healing and restoration. Unfortunately, however, we are not told how the episode affected Bathsheba, or what healing she experienced, if any. The suffering of people used in pornography is one of the hidden tragedies of the industry.

Jesus came to draw people into a life of wholeness. He announced that he had come to proclaim liberty to the captives, healing for the sick, and forgiveness of sins. Like any other addiction, porn addiction is destructive. But God can help users break the pattern as they face it head on, reach out to God and others for help, and make new beginnings toward the wholeness that God intends.

Steps toward healing

If you are compulsively attracted to pornography, here are several important steps toward healing:

1. Acknowledge that you need help.

Breaking the hold of an addiction involves an admission of its control over your life.

2. Tell your spouse and/or other trusted loved ones. One of the powers of an addiction is in its secret nature; breaking the secret will be difficult, since it carries a deep sense of shame. Your trusted loved ones may be perplexed or hurt. But ultimately they will be glad to know and eager to help. Ask them to pray for you, remind you of your goals, and encourage you along the way.

3. Talk to your pastor or spiritual mentor. Ask him or her to put you in touch with a professional counselor who will help you break the cycle of addiction.

4. See a counselor as long as it takes to establish new patterns of thought and behavior. A counselor will ask:

- why you have come for help
- how you first started using pornography
- the types of pornography you use and how your use has changed over time
- the frequency, settings, and triggers of your use of pornography
- ways pornography has negatively impacted your life and the lives of those you love
- support systems or coping strategies for times of temptation
- ways to rebuild intimate relationships damaged by your use of pornography

5. Give your pastor or Christian counselor permission to:

- explore how pornography has affected your relationship with God
- discuss what forgiveness might look like in your life
- pray with you for God's strength to resist temptation
- study Scripture and other resources on healthy sexuality.

6. Finally, beware of people who tell you that change is simply a matter of turning to God and deciding not to use pornography. You have probably tried that many times—and failed. Healing from a porn addiction is a long journey, and you need support to break habits that are deeply rooted. The good news is that as you do so, God will be with you every step of the way.

Lies pornography tells about sex

Lie #1: Pornography doesn't hurt anyone.

Lie #2: Sexual domination is more enjoyable than mutual sexual pleasure between equals.

Lie #3: Pornography offers intimacy.

Lie #4: Sex is primarily for self-gratification.

Lie #5: Pornography offers accurate information about sex.

For further awareness

Carnes, Patrick J., David Delmonica, Elizabeth Griffin, and Joseph Moriarity. *In the Shadows of the Net: Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behavior*. Hazelden Information Education, 2004.

Carnes, Patrick J. *Out of the Shadows: Understanding Sexual Addiction*. Hazelden Publishing and Education Services, 3rd edition, 2001.

Reid, Rory C. and Dan Gray, *Discussing Pornography Problems with a Spouse: Confronting and Disclosing Secret Behaviors*. Murray, UT: Sexual Trauma and Recovery, 2002.

Websites

porn-free.org Christian site for breaking sexual addiction: offers prayers and Bible verses for recovery.

sca-recovery.org Extensive web resource for understanding how the 12 steps can be used to address sexual addictions.

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**Local resources for help with
pornography addiction:**

**For more information on other Close to Home
titles, go to:**

www.mennomedia.org/closetohome



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