



# **PORNOGRAPHY**

LIES, TRUTH AND HOPE



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# Acknowledgements

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# *Introduction* 1

Pornography is everywhere: the internet, smartphones, television, movies and magazines. Christians recognize that sexuality is a good and precious gift from God. Yet, in a society filled with tantalizing sexual images and messages, it can be difficult to safeguard this gift and protect it from desecration and exploitation. How does one treasure this gift and resist false claims about sex? How does one affirm by word and deed that all are created in God's image and deeply loved by God?

On one hand, these are deeply personal and moral questions. How does one live in a way that is truly open before God, with nothing to hide? How does one remain sexually whole and honourable? How does one follow Jesus in truly loving and respecting others?

Pornography also raises questions of justice, both at individual and structural levels. What does pornography say about men and women and how they should relate to one another? Who benefits and who loses when some are objectified or used for the pleasure of others? What is the relationship between pornographic messages and sexual assault or other types of interpersonal violence? Who is most vulnerable to exploitation or negative stereotyping in the pornography industry and why? And what must be done to protect children from pornography and sexual abuse?

Fortunately, Christian faith speaks to all these issues. Jesus offered abundant life to all and a vision of life that is holistic, joyful and fulfilling, not only in

the future when God's reign is complete, but also here and now on earth. Paul could therefore urge believers, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect...Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour." (Romans 12: 2, 9-10)

This booklet is offered in this spirit and with this hope, to help better understand the dangers of pornography, and enable loving and effective action in order to prevent and overcome the harm it causes.

May God's peace and courage be with you.

How can young people keep their way pure?  
By guarding it according to your word.  
With my whole heart I seek you; do not let  
me stray from your commandments.  
I treasure your word in my heart, so that I  
may not sin against you. (Psalm 119:9-11)

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever  
is honourable, whatever is just, whatever  
is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is  
commendable, if there is any excellence and  
if there is anything worthy of praise, think  
about these things. (Philippians 4:8)

Christians affirm that God created the world and declared it good. This includes human beings and their bodies. The current *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* states,

We believe that human beings were created good, in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26-27, 31; Romans 8:29)... As creatures made in the divine image, we have been blessed with the abilities to respond faithfully to God, to live in harmony with other human beings, and to engage in meaningful work and rest. Because both Adam and Eve were equally and wonderfully made in the divine image, God's will from the beginning has been for women and men to live in loving and mutually helpful relationships with each other. (Genesis 2:18-23; Ephesians 5:21-33)<sup>1</sup>

In addition, human sexuality is good, one of the ways in which a person expresses love to another. The *Song of Solomon* provides a wonderful example of sexual desire expressed in the context of a loving, respectful marriage relationship. Both individuals share their delight in the other, in a mutually reinforcing dance of joy. There is no hint of wanting to use or violate the other for one's own gain or pleasure.

When Jesus came, he demonstrated God's love for all people, and especially those most vulnerable

<sup>1</sup> *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, Article 6. "The Creation and Calling of Human Beings," Herald Press, 1995, 28.



to being used or abused by others. He welcomed children<sup>2</sup> and included women among his followers.<sup>3</sup> He talked at length with the Samaritan woman and praised Mary for sitting with the men like a disciple and urged Martha to do the same.<sup>4</sup>

Jesus also warned men not to lust after women as if they were objects. In fact, such thoughts are as serious as adultery and demand drastic preventive actions. While Jesus may not have meant to literally tear out one's eyes, men were responsible not to violate women through any thoughts or actions.<sup>5</sup> Further, husbands should not divorce their wives, leaving them unprotected and without support.<sup>6</sup>

Jesus' followers continued to offer new freedom for men and women to work and worship together. One prominent couple was Priscilla and Aquila. They worked with Paul and accompanied him on his missionary journey from Corinth to Ephesus. They then stayed behind to encourage the church there and together gave valuable instruction to the charismatic teacher Apollos.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 18:1-5, 19:13-15, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 18:15-17. In Matthew 18:6-10, Jesus also declared stern consequences for those who harm or ensnare children. The Greek word for 'stumbling block' means to impede or snap shut as in a trap. See Myers, Ched and Elaine Enns, *Ambassadors of Reconciliation*, Volume 1, Orbis Books, 2009, 59, 138-139.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 27:55-56, Mark 15:40-41, Luke 8:1-3.

<sup>4</sup> John 4:4-42, Luke 10:38-42.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 5:27-30.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 5:31-32. In that time, women could not initiate divorce, so they were not addressed in the same way.

<sup>7</sup> Acts 18.

Leaders in the early church also taught respect and equal sexual rights in the marriage relationship.<sup>8</sup> They emphasized mutual submission and rejected self-indulgence or selfishness.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Paul urged believers not to use their "...freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence...For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" (Galatians 5:13-14) Those who follow Christ are to live by the Spirit, whose fruit is "...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23)

<sup>8</sup>1 Corinthians 7:3-5.

<sup>9</sup>Ephesians 5:21, 25-33.

# Defining Pornography 3

While most people have a sense of what pornography is, it is difficult to define precisely.<sup>10</sup> Sociologist Diana Russell describes it as "...material that combines sex and/or the exposure of genitals with abuse or degradation in a manner that appears to endorse, condone or encourage such behaviour."<sup>11</sup>

The word *pornography* is drawn from the Greek words *porne* (female captive, slave or prostitute) and *graphos* (writing or drawing). The origin of the word links graphic portrayal of women with bondage and inequality. As Gail Dines and Robert Jensen explain: "Pornography's central ideological message is not hard to discern: Women exist for the sexual pleasure of men, in whatever form men want that pleasure, no matter what the consequences for women. It's not just that women exist for sex, but that they exist for the sex that men want."<sup>12</sup>

Today, both men and women use pornography, and both are used in graphic ways. There is great social pressure to accept and even embrace sexual images and materials. As Pamela Paul observes, "...in

<sup>10</sup> This booklet focuses primarily on adult pornography. We recognize, however, that child pornography is a serious, horrific and devastating reality. It is also a criminal offense to use, possess or make child pornography.

<sup>11</sup> "Anne E. Menasche interviews Diana Russell," *Against the Current*, 69, July-August 1997. By comparison, Russell defines "...erotica as sexually suggestive or arousing material that is...respectful of all human beings and animals portrayed." Of course, erotic material can also be used in negative and degrading ways, so it is difficult to make firm distinctions between these terms.

<sup>12</sup> "Pornography Is A Left Issue," by Gail Dines and Robert Jensen; December 06, 2005, *Znet*, [http://www.zmag.org/content/print\\_article.cfm?itemID=9272&sectionID=1](http://www.zmag.org/content/print_article.cfm?itemID=9272&sectionID=1).

recent years, women's magazines regularly discuss pornography from a new perspective: how women can introduce it into their own lives. While many women continue to have mixed or negative feelings toward pornography, they are increasingly told to be realistic, to be 'open-minded.' Porn, they are told, is sexy, and if you want to be a sexually attractive and forward-thinking woman, you've got to catch on."<sup>13</sup>

Pamela Paul argues, however, that "Many of the women who say they are open to pornography are not open to what most men consider arousing..."<sup>14</sup> Ana Bridges agrees. In her discussion of the sexual scripts found in conventional pornography, she cites a 2007 study which found that a "...content analysis of fifty best-selling adult videos revealed a grim 'reality' characterized by inequality and violence. Nearly half of the 304 scenes analyzed contained verbal aggression, while over 88% showed physical aggression. Seventy percent of aggressive acts were perpetrated by men, and 87% of the acts were committed against women."<sup>15</sup>

Since these scripts tend not to attract women, the industry has responded by developing pornography targeted more toward female tastes, which feature

<sup>13</sup> Paul, Pamela, *Pornified: How Pornography is Transforming our Lives, our Relationships and our Families*, Times Books, 2005, 109.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 120, 132.

<sup>15</sup> Bridges, Ana J. "Pornography's Effects on Interpersonal Relationships," *The Social Costs of Pornography: A Collection of Papers*, edited by John R. Stoner, Jr. and Donna M. Hughes, Witherspoon Institute, 2010, page 4 in online paper. Presentations available at: <http://www.socialcostsofpornography.com/videos.php>.

more romantic and relational elements. This recognizes that while men seek physical release, women often look for emotional connection. In either case, pornography tempts men and women to seek pleasure and fulfillment in ways disconnected from real lives and relationships.

While this may be legal with regard to adults, pornography that involves children is not. Both Canada and the United States have laws prohibiting the creation, possession and use of child pornography. Child pornography is defined as "...the visual representation of minors under the age of 18 engaged in sexual activity or the visual representation of minors engaging in lewd or erotic behaviour designed to arouse the viewer's sexual interest."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court undermined the 1996 Child Pornography Protection Act when it ruled that virtual or simulated images of children are permissible.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Legal Dictionary at: <http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Child+Pornography>.

<sup>17</sup> Paul, *Pornified*, 191 ff.

One misconception is that adult pornography has no victims: it's a harmless, pleasurable activity which damages no one. Yet, research and experience increasingly show that pornography does cause harm: to one's relationship with God, to human relationships, to the user, to those in the industry and to society in general.

### **Harm to one's relationship with God**

Using pornography can interfere with one's relationship with God. Ezekiel reports God asking him: "Mortal, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, each in his room of images? For they say, 'The Lord does not see us, the Lord has forsaken the land.'" (Ezekiel 8:12)

Written in the context of idolatry, this poignant passage highlights the truth that anything hidden from God damages this relationship. All areas of life, including one's most intimate thoughts and actions, need to be held in the light of God's love and God's intentions for human life and relationships. Whatever cannot be brought before God honestly and openly creates a barrier, hindering one's ability to worship God fully. Such barriers also limit God's healing power and become roadblocks in the way of following Jesus.

In reality, such barriers can lead to death. As James 1:14-15 explains: "...one is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death." By

contrast, a generous spirit infused with God's light and God's word will give birth to life and blessing.

## **Harm to human relationships**

Pornography has long-term negative effects that will damage and even destroy intimate relationships. Often used as a masturbation tool, the pleasure of sexual stimulation becomes associated with isolation and degrading depictions of women and men. This can lead to an "affair of the mind," replacing a real human to human relationship with objectified, idealized and distorted fantasies.

This reality is exacerbated by the internet which so easily creates "...the phenomenon of anonymous intimacy – the feeling of a relationship, but one that hasn't been, and likely never will be, face to face. The most immediate example...is internet pornography where extremely intimate visual and verbal information is shared between utter strangers...This anonymous intimacy has a strange effect. It provides just enough connection to keep us from pursuing real intimacy."<sup>18</sup>

Not only does pornography get in the way of authentic relationships, it also creates serious havoc in existing ones. According to one study:

...discovering a partner's online sexual activity results in feelings of hurt, betrayal, rejection, abandonment, devastation, loneliness, shame, isolation, humiliation, jealousy and anger.

<sup>18</sup> Hips, Shane. *Flickering Pixels, How Technology Shapes Your Faith*. Zondervan, 2009, 113-114.

More than one in five of those surveyed had separated or divorced as a result of their spouse's cybersex addiction. Half reported their spouses were no longer sexually interested in them, and one third said they were no longer interested in sex with their partner.<sup>19</sup>

Women especially often "...feel inferior and cheated, incapable of living up to airbrushed and surgically enhanced perfection."<sup>20</sup> They feel betrayed and wonder what their partner is thinking about when they are together.

Even more disturbing, one researcher reported that pornography use resulted in "...an increased negative attitude to women, decreased empathy for victims of sexual violence, a blunted affect, and an increase in dominating and sexually-imposing behaviour." Further, "Pornography leads to decreased satisfaction with a romantic partner... Even short, experimental situations involving a one-time exposure to popular pornographic depictions create negative consequences for males' evaluations of their romantic partner's attractiveness and how in love with them they feel."<sup>21</sup>

Survivors of domestic violence also often mention how pornography is part of the abuse, as their partner demands them to be like a "porn star" or

<sup>19</sup> Paul, *Pornified*, 233, reporting on a study by psychiatrist Jennifer Schneider.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>21</sup> Bridges, 9 and 14-15 in online paper.



perform sexual acts that are demeaning and violent. Further, pornography is linked to sexual assault. One study of women entering a program for abuse survivors "...showed that a partner's pornography use nearly *doubled* the odds that a woman reported being sexually assaulted by her partner... Fifty-eight percent identified their partner's pornography use as having played a part in their sexual assault."<sup>22</sup>

Yet, pornography's harm is not limited to women. As one analyst observed, "... it eventually becomes self-objectifying. A man starts to feel like a computer himself when he realizes that he's dependent on computer images to turn him on...the completely lonely, isolated man having sex with an imaginary airbrushed woman on a computer screen. It's truly pathetic, even tragic."<sup>23</sup>

## **Harm to the user**

Pornography has a powerful addictive quality. One becomes increasingly desensitized, causing cravings for ever more graphic and degrading images. It can also lead one to act on these fantasies, and engage in dangerous and immoral behaviour.

Ongoing brain research provides new understanding of how addictions work. While the effects of substance abuse are more familiar, it is increasingly clear that certain behaviours can have similar effects

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 17, reporting from Shope, J.H. (2004) "When words are not enough: The search for the effect of pornography on abused women." *Violence Against Women*, 10, 56–72. Emphasis is in the original.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Schwarz, clinical director of the Masters and Johnson Clinic in St. Louis, quoted in Paul, *Pornified*, 105.

on the chemistry and neural pathways of the brain. As counsellor Peter White explains:

What is now generally understood is that powerful self-produced chemicals such as adrenaline, serotonin, dopamine and endorphins are manufactured in varying quantities by the brain during certain behaviours. These behaviours become addictive when they cause changes in the brain that are 'intense, powerful and arousing' to the individual, resulting in one becoming 'addicted to the way their behaviours can influence their own neurochemistry.'<sup>24</sup>

White continues:

Normally, our bodies handle these chemicals well and we are able, for example, to enjoy sex with our spouse, for the thrilling and intimate experience that it should be. However, tolerance and problems arise when orgasm is paired with novelty, as novelty is a potent dopamine enhancer. Sex addiction in any of its forms usually involves a high dosage of novelty: frequent 'anonymous' sex, use of prostitutes and especially internet pornography. As these 'new' scenarios/stimuli

<sup>24</sup> White, Peter G. "A Group Design Proposal: Residential Treatment of Internet Pornography Addicts Including Observations of the Genesis of Sex Addiction Among Citizens in Western Culture," 2012, and quoting Schneider, J. P. & Weiss, R. *Cybersex exposed*. Hazelden.2001. White is a Registered Clinical Counsellor and member of Highland Community (Mennonite Brethren) Church. His work focuses especially on healing relationships.

are paired with orgasm, sex often takes on a compulsive nature as the brain learns to anticipate the same heightened amount of dopamine production with each subsequent experience and increasingly pairs the production of dopamine with sexual stimuli.<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, in men, sexual images or experiences cause testosterone to be released into the blood stream in greater quantities. This "...hormone inclines both male attention and perception toward that which is sexual. These two, testosterone and dopamine, acting in concert with one another, produce the perfect recipe for sexual addiction."<sup>26</sup>

Women too can experience this kind of compulsion. A cycle of addiction is created, for when the excitement generated by pornography dissipates, "...the loneliness returns, leaving the woman wanting more contact and more stimulation..."<sup>27</sup> This can lead to dangerous behaviours. As one therapist reports, "More than 80% of women who have this addiction take it offline..." and are more likely "...to act out their behaviours in real life, such as having multiple partners, casual sex or affairs."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Peter White, email correspondence, May 20, 2013. Gary Wilson notes further that "These supernormal versions of natural rewards can override our brain's satiation mechanisms-the 'I'm done' feeling..." See <http://yourbrainonporn.com>, 2/01/2013, retrieved June 28, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> White, email correspondence, May 20, 2013.

<sup>27</sup> Richards, Ramona, "Dirty Little Secret," *Today's Christian Woman*, September/October 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Marnie Ferree in Richards, "Dirty Little Secret," *Today's Christian Woman*, September/October 2003. Ferree is a licensed marriage and family therapist at Woodmont Hills Counseling Center, Nashville, TN.

Pastor Brad Burkholder argues the same is true for men: “In my experience with men dealing with porn, porn is the ‘gateway drug’ to affairs, prostitutes, strip clubs, divorce, etc. I believe that if I wouldn’t have confronted porn when I did, I would have had an affair... By God’s grace I dealt with porn before whatever was NEXT. I see this over and over again. Porn is where we enter but where we exit is someplace we would never imagine.”<sup>29</sup>

### **Harm to those in the industry**

Pornography also does much damage to the people involved in the industry. As detailed in the film *The Price of Pleasure*, “The content in pornography is getting harsher and harsher. Joe Gallant, of Black Mirror productions, admits that he thinks the future of American porn is violence. Torture-like scenes are already produced to titillate and sexually arouse.”<sup>30</sup>

Further, porn is linked to human sex trafficking, including children. Vulnerable people, most of them women and girls, are lured into the industry by the promise of a job. As one young victim/survivor explained:

All around us we see this glamorized image of the sex industry...What we’re seeing is just the surface. We don’t see the damage that is really happening, that the sex industry

<sup>29</sup> Pastor Brad Burkholder, Hesston Mennonite Brethren Church, email correspondence, June 28, 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Study Guide by Jason Young for *The Price of Pleasure: Pornography, Sexuality & Relationships*, a film by Chyng Sun & Miguel Picker, Media Education Foundation, 2008, 13: [www.thepriceofpleasure.com](http://www.thepriceofpleasure.com).

really is trafficking, that the vast majority of people that are in the sex industry as a whole are there because they were sexually abused as children, that they didn't have any other option or choice.

A pimp got to them when they were young... when they were a young teenager and he sexually exploited them, and they found themselves just like me, with nowhere else to go and no other hope. And you know that money is hard to come by...

Our culture has created this myth that the sex industry is appealing, that you'll be beautiful and that you're sexy and you're attractive. They don't show the horrifying nature of being raped day in and day out.

...The effects of pornography in my life were so damaging...In my mind, pornography is a lot more harmful than even prostitution, because you take a picture or video of someone, they are forever exploited at the age and time that they are, so you can take a girl off the streets, and the exploitation stops, but their photos and videos are out there forever, and people who have done extensive pornography, they have to move, hide, have facial changes, name changes, just so they're not recognized, and it's so traumatic.<sup>31</sup>

## Harm to society

In the end, pornography damages everyone and society at large. As an editorial in *Christianity Today* describes it:

...because porn literally rewires the brain, creating neural pathways that change how users understand the world, we know that porn warps how men and women see each other. Porn is demonic not because it is addictive. It is demonic because it always flattens three-dimensional humans – especially women – to a collection of body parts meant for others' gratification, sullyng the full glory that God intended them to reflect. And often it leads addicts to flatten women too, despite their beliefs or intentions.

When that happens, a whole society suffers, as ours is now, paying for it in countless broken families and lives...<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Excerpted from "The Thin Line between Trafficking and Pornography," Interview with Jessica Richardson by Katelyn Beaty and Nathan Clarke, November 2, 2011, Her.meneutics blog: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2011/november/thin-line-between-trafficking-and-pornography.html>. Used by permission.

<sup>32</sup> "An Equal Opportunity Destroyer," *Christianity Today* editorial, September 2010, Vol. 54, No. 9, 71.

## **Pornography promotes lies about women<sup>33</sup>**

*Lie #1: Women are property.*

Advertising uses beautiful women as props to sell beer, cars, music, etc. The message is that if you buy the product, you'll get (or attract) the beautiful woman. Likewise, cyber-porn sites charge fees to provide access to naked women (and men) whose images you now "own." Pornography displays women like merchandise, exposing them as openly as possible for the viewer to consume. Women's body parts – breasts, buttocks, crotches – are photographed as if they are commodities. Porn teaches us that women are for sale.

*Lie #2: A woman's value depends solely on the attractiveness of her body.*

Pornography causes men to separate physical images of women from all the other valuable characteristics that women possess – their heart, soul, intellect, and personality. Porn sends the message that sexualizing women's bodies is preferable to interacting with them as whole people. Women are rated by size, shape, and harmony of body parts. Physical attractiveness, according to a narrowly defined sexual stereotype, dominates all other attributes of women. In pornography, a woman's primary value is her worth as a sex object.

<sup>33</sup> Adapted from *Pornography Lies* by Beth Graybill, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns Director, 1999-2004.

*Lie #3: Women enjoy rape and degradation.*

Pornography eroticizes rape and other forms of sexual violence and makes them seem arousing. In a typical porn scenario, women are shown being raped, fighting back at first, and then starting to enjoy it. In the world of porn, no means yes. Women are shown being tied up, beaten and humiliated in hundreds of degrading ways while begging for more, or they are portrayed as sex-crazed temptresses who deserve the mistreatment they get. This is far from reality for most women. Pornography teaches men to enjoy abusing women for entertainment, and not to take no for an answer.

*Lie #4: Sexism is sexy.*

John Stoltenberg, of *Men Against Pornography*, argues that pornography eroticizes male supremacy. The so-called sexual freedom represented by pornography is the freedom of men to act sexually in ways that maintain sex as a basis for women's inequality. To raise men's consciousness on this issue, Stoltenberg asks men in workshops to imitate the poses in which women are normally depicted in porn scenes. As the men quickly discover, such positions are seldom arousing for the person in the subservient position. Pornography helps keep in place the broader power inequities in society between men and women, by making injustice a sexual turn-on.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See Stoltenburg, John. *Refusing to Be a Man: Essays on Sex and Justice*. Revised, UCL Press, 2000, and *What Makes Pornography Sexy?* Milkweed Editions, 1994.



## **Pornography promotes lies about men**

*Lie #1: Men's needs for intimacy are only physical.*

Pornography promotes the belief that men's needs for intimacy are confined to sexual release, which they can satisfy alone and by themselves. Men can have "intimacy" without committing to a life-long relationship.

*Lie #2: Men's biological needs for sex are irresistible.*

Pornography promotes the message that men have uncontrollable needs for sex and their happiness is tied to unlimited sexual freedom. Pornography is viewed as a "natural and safe" way to achieve sexual fulfillment.

*Lie #3: Men enjoy seeing violence and rape.*

Many porn images link sex with violence, and the degradation and humiliation of women. This promotes the impression that men take pleasure in the pain, discomfort and violation of others.

*Lie #4: Men have the right to possess women and their bodies.*

Pornography encourages the belief that women are a resource for men to use, whenever and however they want. It also assumes men have the right to use multiple women, without any responsibility for what happens to them or how women experience the relationship.

## **Pornography promotes lies about sex<sup>35</sup>**

*Lie #1: Sexual domination is more enjoyable than mutual sexual pleasure between equals.*

Porn sites regularly depict group sex, gang-banging and sadomasochism (pleasure from inflicting or suffering pain or abuse). Men are shown forcing sex on young women (cheerleaders, co-eds, school girls) who act as if they enjoy it. In the real world, of course, such behaviour causes terror, physical pain and mental anguish. Consuming such images on a regular basis sexualizes youth and innocence in ways that can foster an acceptance of child sexual abuse and incest. Pornography normalizes sexual domination.

*Lie #2: Pornography offers intimacy.*

Sex may be part of intimacy, but intimacy is much more than sex. Pornography says that sex will meet our deepest desires for human connection. But intimacy means being known and loved for who we really are. In fact, pornography increases the isolation many men already feel. It uses the language of romance (porn sites speak of “looking for love” and offer a choice of “love mates”) to confuse sexual fantasies with the intimate knowledge and personal caring of actual, flesh-and-blood relationships. Pornography tries to substitute an eroticized image for a real person.

<sup>35</sup> Adapted from *Pornography Lies* by Beth Graybill, MCC U.S. Women's Concerns Director, 1999-2004.

*Lie #3: Sex is something done primarily for self-gratification.*

Pornography promotes the myth that sex is about my personal sexual gratification, not about giving and receiving love. It unnaturally elevates sex and depicts it as a right or entitlement, not as a God-given gift. It turns voyeurism into a sport by fostering an obsession with visual stimulation. And it sends self-centered messages about choosing thrilling and exotic sexual partners, to meet one's needs alone. Pornography's self-centered focus can detract from a person's ability to give love.

*Lie #4: Its portrayal of sex is accurate.*

Pornography is one of the major sources of sexual information for young men and thus helps construct male sexual attitudes. It focuses on the sex act alone and promotes the message that men are to dominate, bigger is better, force is acceptable. This is contrary to the Christian message of equality and mutuality. It contradicts our belief that sexuality is a good gift from God, that strength is not for hurting, and sexual satisfaction requires both giving and receiving love. Women and men are to be respected as persons, not for the size or perfection of their sexual body parts.

### General data<sup>36</sup>

- The annual revenue from the pornography industry in the U.S. in 2006 was \$13.3 billion or \$44.67/capita. This was more than the combined revenues of NBC, CBS and ABC. In Canada, the 2006 revenue from porn was \$1 billion or \$30.21/capita.
- 55% of the movie rentals in hotel chains are pornographic “adult entertainment” movies.  
-Adult Video News
- A new pornographic video is created in the U.S. every 39 minutes.
- 61% of those purchasing pornography earned more than \$50,000/year; 35.3% earned over \$75,000/year.
- 50% of all Christian men and 20% of all Christian women say they are addicted to pornography.<sup>37</sup>
- A 2008 survey of over 800 college students found that:
  - 86% of men said they had viewed pornography in the last year, 48.4% were viewing pornography weekly, and 19.3% were viewing pornography almost every day

<sup>36</sup> Unless noted otherwise, this information comes from *Internet Filter Review*: <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>, retrieved June 28, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> *Covenant Eyes*, “Pornography Statistics: Annual Report 2013,” <http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats>, retrieved July 18, 2013.

- 31% of women had viewed pornography in the last year and 3.2% were viewing pornography weekly.<sup>38</sup>

- A team of scholars from New York University, the University of Massachusetts, and the University of Rhode Island examined 304 scenes from the most popular of all videos released in 2005. The research team found that:
  - 89.8% of the scenes included either verbal or physical aggression;
  - 48% contained verbal aggression, mostly name-calling and insults;
  - 82.2% contained physical aggression;
  - 94.4% of the aggressive acts were targeted at women.<sup>39</sup>

## Internet Pornography<sup>40</sup>

- 42.7% of internet users view pornography.
- The largest age group consuming internet pornography is 35–44.

<sup>38</sup> Jason S. Carroll, Laura M. Padilla-Walker, Larry J. Nelson, Chad D. Olson, Carolyn McNamara Barry, and Stephanie D. Madsen, "Generation XXX: Pornography Acceptance and Use among Emerging Adults." 2008. *Journal of Adolescent Research* vol. 23 no. 1: 6-30, retrieved June 28, 2013 from StopPornCulture.org.

<sup>39</sup> Study Guide by Jason Young for *The Price of Pleasure: Pornography, Sexuality & Relationships*, a film by Chyng Sun & Miguel Picker, Media Education Foundation, 2008, 13: [www.thepriceofpleasure.com](http://www.thepriceofpleasure.com).

<sup>40</sup> Unless noted otherwise, this information comes from *Internet Filter Review*: <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>, retrieved June 28, 2013.

- The average age of first internet porn exposure is 11 years old.
- 1 in 7 youth have received sexual solicitation.
- 100,000 websites offer illegal child pornography.
- 9 out of 10 internet porn users only access free material.<sup>41</sup>
- 24% of smartphone owners admit to having pornographic material on their mobile handset.<sup>42</sup>
- At the 2002 American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers convention, attorneys present reported that 56% of their recent divorce cases resulted from a spouse's compulsive internet porn use.<sup>43</sup>

### **Child pornography<sup>44</sup>**

- Approximately 20% of all internet pornography involves children.
- In a study of arrested child pornography possessors, 40% had both sexually victimized children and were in possession of child pornography. Of those arrested between 2000 and 2001, 83% had images involving children between the ages 6 and 12; 39% had images

<sup>41</sup> *Covenant Eyes*, "Pornography Statistics: Annual Report 2013," <http://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats>, retrieved July 18, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Paul, *Pornified*, 233.

<sup>44</sup> Unless noted otherwise, this information comes from *Stop Porn Culture*: <http://stoppornculture.org/index.php/facts-and-resources/facts-and-figures>; retrieved on June 28, 2013.

of children between ages 3 and 5; and 19% had images of infants and toddlers under age 3.<sup>45</sup>

- 85% of men arrested for possession of child pornography had sexually exploited a child, according to a 2008 study by Michael Bourke, chief psychologist for the US Marshals Service.
- Four out of five 16-year-old boys and girls regularly access porn on the internet, and more than a quarter of young patients at a leading private clinic are being treated for addiction to online pornography, according to a 2012 report by the Independent Parliamentary Inquiry into Online Child Protection in the United Kingdom.
- Between 1996 and 2004, the "...number of child porn cases handled by the FBI's cyber-crime investigators increased twenty-three-fold."<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, *Child Pornography Possessors Arrested in Internet-Related Crimes: Findings from the National Juvenile Online Victimization Study*, 2005.

<sup>46</sup> Paul, 190, from David B Caruso, "Internet Fuels Child Porn Trafficking" *Associated Press*, January 15, 2005. Cases went from 113 in fiscal 1996 to 2,645 in fiscal 2004.

### Reflections from women<sup>47</sup>

- “I have struggled much with my husband’s addiction to pornography. He has shared with me and God has given me compassion for him, even though he is not always successful in resisting it.”
- “When he [my husband] is in bed with me, I wonder what is on his mind. I don’t trust his touches to be genuine expressions of love for me.”
- “I am infuriated by how pornography devalues women and makes me feel unattractive and undesirable.”
- “Because of having a father who was ‘into’ pornography, I am very sensitive to having any kind of porn around my family, my friends and my boys.”
- “I know pornography is evident in my community/school, but I feel ignorant and naïve when it comes to recognizing it or responding to it. What is healthy admiration for the beautiful bodies God created and when does it become pornographic?”
- “I am embarrassed and ashamed by my struggle with pornography which I have wrestled with since I discovered my older brother’s collection at age 10.”

<sup>47</sup> From “Naming Porn: Mennonite Women Speak Out about Pornography,” by Brenda Martin Hurst (with seminar participants at the MC USA convention in Charlotte, NC, July 2005), *The Mennonite*, September 20, 2005.



- “Counsellors, trusted female friends and books showed me that my use of pornography was one of the many ways that I attempted to control and self-medicate my pain.”
- “I feel peer pressure from friends outside and inside the church to use pornography to enhance my sex life.”

### **Reflections from men<sup>48</sup>**

- “There seems to be a whole realm of pornography dedicated to the idea of humiliation and power, subservience and punishment – and that just does not appeal to me at all.”
- “I don’t see how any male who likes porn can think actual sex is better, at least if it involves all the crap that comes with having a real live female in your life.”
- “I’ve noticed that I find myself thinking more sexually about women I see on the street after I’ve had a prolonged exposure to porn.”
- “I’ve definitely noticed that naked images that used to arouse me don’t anymore, so I had to move on. I found that I was getting numb to basic images. I needed to keep progressing to more explicit stuff.”
- “Ultimately it was just boredom...More than anything else, it was making me jaded. I wasn’t

<sup>48</sup> Paul, *Pornified*, 20, 39, 47, 70, 84-85, 86, 212, 232 respectively.

finding pleasure in the little things, either with women or with life in general. Things that used to be erotic bored me.”

- “I like it [porn] when the girl is really submissive, I’m embarrassed to say. It’s become more severe as time has gone on. Which is weird because it doesn’t correspond to how I am with an actual woman. I’m gentle, very concerned about how the woman is doing. But for some reason, with porn, in order for me to get excited, I need to notch it up one level. It’s got to be more extreme. Seeing women demeaned is somehow a turn-on...I think most men like the portrayal of women as submissive.”
- “I don’t think any amount of pornography is okay. Any time you take a human being – a person’s soul – and turn her into an object rather than a person who has thoughts and feelings – you’re not living a whole life. You’re not relating to that person as you would want to be related to yourself. When I was using porn, I treated women like cans of soda pop that I could pick up and drink in. I wouldn’t want to be treated that way. Once I came to that realization, pornography depressed me to no end.”
- “During that period of my life, sex had nothing to do with expressing love or affection...I became more selfish, because with porn, it was all about me – me feeling better, me getting more pleasure, me getting more excited. It was completely self-centered.”

Pornography, like other addictions, is a cycle that can be broken, but it takes intentional work. Some steps can be taken immediately but most will require long-term changes and commitments. A shorthand plan involves three A's: Admission, Accountability and Action.

## **Admission**

Admit you have a struggle with porn. Here are common signs of an addiction.<sup>49</sup>

- Preoccupation with porn or sex, e.g. not being able to stop thinking about it.
- Using porn or engaging in sex online more often or for longer periods of time than intended.
- Repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back or stop using porn.
- Restlessness or irritability when attempting to limit or stop sexual behaviour online.
- Using porn or online sex as a way of escaping problems or relieving feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety or depression.
- Returning to sex online day after day in search of more intense sexual experiences.

<sup>49</sup> Based on material from *In the Shadows of the Net: Breaking Free of Compulsive Online Sexual Behaviour*, by Carnes, Patrick J., David Delmonico, Elizabeth Griffin and Joseph Moriarity, Hazelden Information Education, 2004.

- Lying to family members, therapists or others to conceal this behaviour.
- Thinking about illegal sexual acts such as downloading child pornography or soliciting illegal sex acts online.
- Jeopardizing or losing a significant relationship, job or career opportunity because of porn or online sexual behaviour.
- Incurring significant financial consequences as a result of engaging in online sexual behaviour.

## **Accountability**

Be accountable not only to God but to others. Your partner should know about the problem, but it is also important to have accountability partners who accept you unconditionally and can hold you responsible for ending your pornography use.

- Share your struggle with others. Choose a trusted friend, prayer partner or pastor.
- Join a support group. Groups such as those offered by 12-step programs can give long-term support and accountability.
- Seek professional help. A trusted counsellor who shares your faith commitments and offers both unconditional acceptance and accountability can be invaluable. This person can help you look at

the psychological needs that pornography fills in your life, and help redirect those energies.<sup>50</sup>

- Cultivate your network of friends. It is important to surround yourself with friends who will build you up and support you in your efforts to be faithful.
- Recognize the harm done to your partner. Be patient and sensitive as you seek to rebuild trust and a restored relationship.

## Action

Take concrete actions to end your addiction to pornography. Overall, it is important to move from secrecy to disclosure, from independence to interdependence, from isolation to finding support. Here are some specific suggestions:

- Pray for help and meditate on what is good, just, pure, lovely and noble.
- Memorize scriptures such as Psalm 107:1-22, 119:9-11, Philippians 4:8, Galatians 5:22-23, James 3:17 and 1 John 1:9.
- Find a Christian community and participate in regular worship.

<sup>50</sup> William Struthers observes that many men who struggle with pornography have a number of personality traits or psychological patterns. These include being controlling, highly introverted, narcissistic, curious, depressed, dissociative, distractible, having high anxiety and/or low self-esteem. See Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*. IVP Books, 2009, 64.

- Take precautions to avoid temptation. Know your weaknesses and remove sources of temptation.
- Identify your triggers. Learn when you are prone to use pornography and develop an action plan for those times.
- Count the cost. Some of these changes may involve feelings of loss and grief, so it is helpful to find tangible reminders about the real and potential costs of using pornography. Some keep pictures of their family taped to the computer to remind them of what they could lose by succumbing to cyber-porn.
- Reward yourself. Pay yourself for each day you successfully avoid pornography. If you stumble, give the accumulated money to your favourite charity.
- Train your eyes. Train your eyes to “bounce away” from visual images that stimulate lust.<sup>51</sup>
- Remember God’s love for you. God created you and longs for you to find healing and wholeness in all areas of life. Allow God’s love to keep drawing you toward full life and whole relationships.
- Care for yourself physically through exercise, good food and adequate rest.

<sup>51</sup> For more information, see Steve Arterburn and Fred Stoeker. *Every Man’s Battle, Winning the War on Sexual Temptation One Victory at a Time*. WaterBrook Press, 2009.

Discovering that a partner or family member is using pornography can have profound consequences and involve intense emotions. It is important to find help for yourself. Here are some suggestions.<sup>52</sup>

- Find or start a support group for partners of sex addicts.
- Find a helpful therapist.
- Talk with someone who has been through a similar experience.
- Spend time in nature or other settings of beauty.
- Reach out to friends and nurture those relationships.
- Care for yourself physically through exercise, good food and adequate rest.
- Find ways to release anger, grief and other strong emotions.
- Use music, art and humour to help you in healing.
- Remember God's love for you. God created you and longs for you to find healing and wholeness in all areas of life. Allow God's love to keep drawing you toward full life and whole relationships.
- Pray for courage and grace to let go of how this experience has harmed you, and move toward the release and freedom offered by forgiveness.

**Action steps for everyone<sup>53</sup>**

- Refuse to accept the pornography industry and their portrayals of people, especially women, children and people of color.
- Speak out against the sexism and racism found in pornographic images.
- Use blogs, books, poetry, websites, songs and social gatherings to bring awareness to the harm caused by pornography.
- Ask critical questions about pornography's effects on women and men, girls and boys.
- Strategize with others to adopt public policies that address and prevent the harm caused by pornography.
- Organize the community against strip clubs and "adult" novelty shops.
- Protest businesses that support the proliferation of pornography.
- Petition hotels to block pornography channels as the default position, rather than the reverse. Assuming people want pornography normalizes and promotes its use.

<sup>52</sup> Adapted from *Partners of Sex Addicts Resource Center*: [www.posarc.com](http://www.posarc.com).

<sup>53</sup> Adapted from *Stop Porn Culture*: [stoppornculture.org](http://stoppornculture.org), retrieved May 10, 2012.



## **Actions steps for congregations**

- Model mutuality and respect in all relationships:
  - Have teams of male and female leaders at all levels.
  - Use respectful language and tone in all relationships.
  - Avoid jokes and words that demean others.
  - Expect all congregational leaders to lead balanced lives and use healthy problem-solving skills.
- Offer classes for parents on how to keep their children safe online and teach them about the dangers of pornography and other media messages.
- Offer classes for all ages about healthy relationships and sexuality, using resources such as *Body and Soul: Healthy Sexuality and the People of God*, and the *Circle of Grace* safe environment curriculum.
- Plan sessions for youth related to coming of age, identity, relationships and sexuality, and offer them assertiveness and safety training classes.
- During pre-marital counselling, address topics such as mutuality, sexuality, communication, conflict, violence, power, control and decision-making. Speak directly about the damage caused by pornography.
- Plan worship times for dealing with sexuality, using the *Body and Soul* curriculum.<sup>54</sup> Find ways

to celebrate the positive aspects of sexuality, as well as name the ways it is misused through pornography and abuse. Lament the harm done and honour steps toward healing.<sup>55</sup>

- Host 12-step or other support groups in the church.

### **Action steps for parents**

Safe-guarding children in today's world can seem especially difficult and challenging, but there are many ways to help children grow and flourish:

- Most importantly, be a good role model. Treat your spouse and children with deep respect and loving affection.
- Give your children unconditional love and let them know how special they are.
- Talk with your children about their lives, both what is good and what is distressing to them. Let them know they can always come to you with questions and concerns.
- Teach children about appropriate touches and teach them to say no whenever they feel uncomfortable with someone and their behaviour.

<sup>54</sup> *Body and Soul: Healthy Sexuality and the People of God, Worship Leader Guide*, Faith and Life Resources, 2010.

<sup>55</sup> A helpful resource is *Psalms of Lament* by Ann Weems, Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.

- When children start using online media, teach them about potential dangers in an age-appropriate way. Install internet filters, while also recognizing this may not fully protect them from exposure to violence and pornography.
- Work out an online safety family contract with your children and explain why this is important.

## **A Family Safety Contract**

### *Parents' Promise:*

- We will set reasonable rules and guidelines for using online media.
- We will listen carefully to you.
- We will not overreact if you tell us about a problem you are having on the internet and will work with you to solve it.
- We will learn to know the services and media you are using.
- We will learn to know your online friends, just as we learn to know your other friends.
- We will invite you to help plan family events using the internet and online media.

*Children's Promise:*

- We will tell you if we see anything that makes us uncomfortable.
- We will not share personal information or photos without your permission.
- We will not respond to messages that are mean or make us feel uncomfortable.
- We will not meet with anyone we “meet” online without your permission and knowledge.
- We will not share our internet passwords with anyone except you, even our best friends.
- We will be good online citizens and not do anything that hurts others or is against the law.
- We will allow you access to all our online accounts, and be your friend on Facebook.

## Hopeful stories from people today

### *A man's experience*<sup>56</sup>

I was introduced to the world of pornography in sixth grade. Walking home from school, my friend asked me to come to his house to look at some magazines he found in his dad's closet. Some would say it was boys being boys. Curious. Ignorant.

Porn wasn't a "problem" for me until my mid-20s when suddenly it was free and anonymously available on my computer. I knew I needed help to fight the lie Satan repeated over and over to me: "You can't tell anyone about your addiction to porn! You're a pastor's kid. You're a missionary. They'll never forgive you." Ignoring that lie, I finally talked to my wife. That was one of the best choices I have ever made.

...We all need someone to talk and pray with about purity. If you don't have that someone yet to hold you accountable, start asking God for someone. An anonymous place to begin is the Christian Web site [www.xxxchurch.org](http://www.xxxchurch.org)....

We've taught abstinence and shame at the price of purity. Sex isn't bad. God made sex. Sex is good. When it comes to sexuality and intimacy, there are three areas where I think the church could do a better job of communicating God's design:

<sup>56</sup> Excerpted from Brad Burkholder, "My dirty little secret," *Christian Leader*, April 2011, <http://www.usmb.org/my-dirty-little-secret>. Used by permission.

- *Transparency.* As church leaders we need to talk honestly about lust, sex and intimacy. Follow Jesus' example (Matthew 5:27-30).
- *Small groups.* There are some great resources... that deal with marriage, intimacy and lust. Start a group. Join a group.
- *Seminars.* Parents need to be equipped and encouraged to teach their children about sex, porn and intimacy. I've now held two seminars on the subject. Parents loved being able to talk openly about how to connect with their kids.

My prayer is that God will use my past sin and current struggles to encourage us all to talk about purity, intimacy and our dirty little secrets.

#### *A woman's experience*<sup>57</sup>

Maggie had promised herself she would stop. But at the end of another long day filled with work and errands...she was beat. After she'd finally gotten her daughter to bed, Maggie fixed herself a cup of tea and sat down to read her e-mail. She vowed that was all she'd do.

It was a promise she broke less than 15 minutes later.

One of her emails was from Bob, a man she'd met

<sup>57</sup> Excerpted from Ramona Richards, "Dirty Little Secret," *Today's Christian Woman*, September/October 2003. Maggie and Bob are not their real names. Copyright 2003, Ramona Richards. Reprinted by permission.

in a chat room who'd helped ease the loneliness that had followed her divorce. After a sweet greeting, Bob wrote that he'd thought of her when he read a story online, and he included a link to the story. Maggie knew she shouldn't read it; she suspected it was an erotic story that would tap into an addiction she'd been trying to break for several months. But his words were enticing; she'd been on Bob's mind when he read it, and his interest in her made her feel important.

She clicked the link.

The story's heroine was smart, funny and beautiful and Maggie felt flattered. The story also aroused her, recalling the delicious intimacy and the physical "high" of sex she missed so much since her divorce. Maggie didn't want to let go of that, so she read another story. Then another. Some of the stories had links to photographs that showed couples gently caressing each other, then becoming more intimate. The high continued as long as she clicked.

As Maggie finished a fifth story, she reached for her teacup and discovered it was ice cold. Startled, she looked at the clock. It was after midnight, and she'd been surfing a porn site for more than three hours.

Disgusted, Maggie turned off her computer and went to bed. The high was gone and she felt lower than when she'd started. Tears flooded her pillow as she

begged the God she'd known and loved for years to give her help, direction and answers. She'd never felt so alone...

"No one plans to get hooked on this," Maggie says. "I thought this would be an answer to my loneliness, but it only made it worse. I was so ashamed of what I was doing that I isolated myself."

...The first step toward healing for an addict is to realize she's not alone. She needs to know there are people out there who understand and can reach out to her with love.

"Women addicted to porn need professional therapy with a Christian counsellor and a renewed sense of kinship with other women who understand," says Marnie Ferree.<sup>58</sup> "The worst thing you can do with these women is lecture them about praying more or asking God for help. They've already done that, often to the point of despair. They do need to be held accountable for their sins, but they also need help, support and unconditional love."

...As Maggie worked with a trained therapist to overcome her addiction, she also found help in reading the Bible and journaling. There's a verse in Corinthians that hit home for her: "We must not pursue the kind of sex that avoids commitment and intimacy, leaving us more lonely than ever." (1 Corinthians 6:17, The Message) "I love that verse," she says. "I'm making it my life's theme."

<sup>58</sup> Ferree is a licensed marriage and family therapist at Woodmont Hills Counseling Center, Nashville, TN



*A couple's experience: "Cynthia and Luke"<sup>59</sup>*

Cynthia recalls explaining her story to the therapist during that first meeting. Six weeks prior, during a late-night encounter she wished she could forget, she had discovered that her husband of five years had a hidden addiction to pornography on their computer. Newly with child, she sat in the therapist's office filled with anguish and fear, pouring out her anxiety and confusion regarding her husband and their marriage. She worried about whether she could trust him at all and what else might be hidden. She had seen the internet history and was aghast at the portrait of a man it seemed to portray. Who was this person? And how could he have done these things? Her therapist listened knowingly, for this "script" sounded all too familiar. He felt he knew this couple already.

Luke was, by all accounts, a good young man. He longed in his heart to live righteously, to be faithful to his wife, to be honest in his endeavours at work and to be charitable to others. Further, Luke sincerely desired to please Jesus with his life, even in his addicted state. The words "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" kept knocking around on the inside of his skull as a perpetual indictment. He could recall the shame and the fear that so marked his days during that period of inner conflict and hiding from Cynthia.

<sup>59</sup> A composite story of common experiences, written by Peter G. White, Registered Clinical Counsellor, British Columbia, 2013. Luke and Cynthia are fictional names.

Like so many other men, he initially refused therapy, believing that Cynthia's discovery was the answer to the prayers he'd so desperately offered up since he was twelve. When the urges showed up again just a couple of months later, however, he reluctantly agreed to accept help. Luke met with the therapist a few times on his own and was astonished at the man's ability to "see" him without having met him before. His description of Luke's insides was uncanny, as was the story he told of Luke as a young boy. "You straighten me out on the parts that I get wrong" he'd said; Luke needed to do little correcting. After learning just how common his tragic profile was, he determined he would change it.

Initially, the effort was excruciating. Cynthia was hurt and angered by her husband's betrayal. She was astounded by his presumptive bids for closeness after being so distant from her for all of those years. She was also petrified by the thought of this poison somehow influencing their unborn child. Luke was similarly bewildered. He didn't know how to navigate the feeling of having...well, feelings. So long had he numbed and avoided them that the fullness and intensity of his affection for his wife—this beautiful woman that had been there all along, but whom he could only now see—was simply overwhelming. They needed help.

They attended therapy for a couple of years. Initially they each went on their own, interspersing their individual appointments with regular couple's meetings. Luke steadily cultivated that person he knew existed inside, the one he had hidden behind

the mask he had presented to others for so long. In therapy he learned how to take ownership for his actions, and how not to project blame to his wife and the world when he felt shame or hurt. He was learning to loosen his grip on the control he tried to exert on people and his environments. He was learning not to worry about others' impressions of him.

In fact, Luke was surprised to discover how little his recovery had to do with learning how not to look at pornography. He found there was little difference between striving to live a good life and the process of recovery itself: that all of those principles provided in the life, teaching, and Person of Jesus, applied equally to both.

About six months into the process of healing, Luke relapsed. Like so many others, he had allowed himself to be depleted by the rigors of his work and, in his case, the yet unprocessed emotions he felt about becoming a father. Together, he and Cynthia worked through this with their therapist. Cynthia was surprised by the compassion she felt toward her husband this go-round, for Luke hadn't abandoned her in his shame and usual withdrawal. Rather, Luke had acted like a man. He had owned every aspect of his decisions and rapidly sought to make adjustments to his lifestyle in order not to find himself in the same position again. He made no lofty promises—those grating words he had issued so often in the past, which Cynthia had grown to so despise. Instead he set about focusing on practical change in his life. Confession, accountability,

transparency and connection; he pursued them all.

Through all of this, Cynthia was learning that she needed a community of support: a few trusted women with whom she could candidly speak about her emotional reality and the way she was impacted by Luke's actions. She discovered that in nearly every case of taking the risk in relationship and leading with her own "weakness," she found a welcome reception—often relief—in the eyes of the other. She was learning to care for herself, to not suffer under the weight of her own secrets, and she felt supported by Luke in the process. Additionally, Cynthia had successfully learned to put to rest any notion about her attractiveness or her appeal to Luke having played a part in the development or the continuation of his addiction. She appreciated their therapist's uncompromising insistence that Luke own his problem. Luke steadily endorsed this perspective, for he too had learned how unrelated his problem was to any of these former concerns of Cynthia's.

Today, Cynthia and Luke still attend therapy from time to time, but their reasons for doing so have changed substantially. Now their intent is to continue enhancing their capacity to communicate openly and honestly with one another. Cynthia still deals with the odd intrusive thought about her husband's vulnerability and trustworthiness, but whenever that is the case, she feels the freedom to confront him directly with her concerns.

Luke still deals with temptation periodically, but the infrastructure of support he has established with

Cynthia's help, gives him the resources he needs to keep his commitments and his integrity. The two of them possess, as Parker Palmer likes to say, "larger hearts," hearts broken open, as opposed to apart, by their own courageous efforts and by God's good grace.<sup>60</sup> Their marriage is a much more spacious, much more fulfilling place for them to be.

### **Hope and guidance from the Bible**

One of the central messages of Christian faith is that God offers grace and the possibility of a new start. Over and over again in the Bible, God came to people who had sinned or been cast aside and called them toward new life.

Hagar, for instance, was a young Egyptian slave used by her masters Abraham and Sarah to provide them an heir. When Hagar ran away, God did not abandon her but promised to multiply her offspring, just as God has promised Abraham. And when Hagar and Ishmael were finally forced away for good, God stayed with them in the wilderness. Not only were they able to survive, but they were freed from slavery and able to provide for themselves.<sup>61</sup>

David lived at the other end of the spectrum, as Israel's most beloved king. Despite many accomplishments, however, he succumbed to using his power for his own pleasure. When he saw the woman Bathsheba, he demanded that she

<sup>60</sup> Palmer, Parker J. *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. Jossey-Bass, 2004, 177-181.

<sup>61</sup> Genesis 16 and 21:1-21.

be brought to him and then arranged to have her husband killed. Unfortunately, we know nothing of how Bathsheba felt, or what her life was like in David's house.

We do know that God was displeased and asked the prophet Nathan to confront David. Afterwards, David prayed, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me." (Psalm 51:2-3) Certainly, David could not escape the consequences of his actions completely. Yet, God did not forsake him or Bathsheba, and their second son, Solomon, became Israel's next king.<sup>62</sup>

When Jesus came, he began his ministry with these words from Isaiah: "The Spirit of God is upon me, who has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, who has sent me to proclaim release to those who are captives and recovery of sight to those who are blind, to let those who are oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of God's favour." (Luke 4:18-19, An Inclusive Version)

True to this vision, Jesus showed special concern throughout his life for those who were outcasts or considered impure because of illness, disability, poverty or sin. He healed people, even those with leprosy or a defiling bleeding disorder, so they could return once again to their families and communities. He ate with those who were despised and invited tax collectors to join his circle of disciples. Even the

<sup>62</sup> 2 Samuel 11-12.

woman caught in adultery was not condemned but offered the opportunity to start again.<sup>63</sup>

Peter also needed the chance to start over. Although one of Jesus' closest friends, Peter denied him vehemently when things got tough. Nevertheless, Jesus did not reject him but invited him to reaffirm his love and willingness to follow him wherever that would lead.<sup>64</sup>

Paul was another leader who needed to turn around. Originally a fierce opponent of the disciples, Jesus invited Paul to see things in a new way and go in a different direction.<sup>65</sup> For Paul, this was not a minor adjustment, but a complete reversal and conversion. He had to move from firmly resisting change to radically reshaping his faith and way of life.

God continues to offer this grace of repentance and transformation. Truly, "If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9.) God wants to adopt everyone as children.<sup>66</sup> And God in Christ has shown us how to live in this family, in the way of love, the way of love for all.

<sup>63</sup> John 8:3-11.

<sup>64</sup> John 21:15-19.

<sup>65</sup> Acts 9:1-23.

<sup>66</sup> 1 John 3.

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## Websites

- *Abuse: Response and Prevention:* [abuse.mcccanada.ca/sexual-abuse/pornography](http://abuse.mcccanada.ca/sexual-abuse/pornography). Created by Mennonite Central Committee, includes information, stories and worship resources.
- *Christian Recovery International:* [christianrecovery.com](http://christianrecovery.com). Provides links to resources for the Christian community.
- *Covenant Eyes:* [covenanteyes.com](http://covenanteyes.com). Provides accountability and filtering services as well as other resources to protect families and individuals online.
- *Faithful and True Ministries:* [faithfulandtrue.com](http://faithfulandtrue.com), Eden Prairie, MN.
- *Internet Filter Software Review:* [internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com](http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com). Compares the best internet filters at Top Ten Reviews.
- *Partners of Sex Addicts Resource Center:* [posarc.com](http://posarc.com). Provides information, stories, links and other resources.
- *Porn-free.org.* Christian site for breaking sexual addiction; offers prayers and Bible verses for recovery.
- *Safe Families:* [safefamilies.org](http://safefamilies.org). Provides resources for parents, Boston, MA.
- *Sexual Compulsives Anonymous:* [sca-recovery.org](http://sca-recovery.org). Based on the 12-step program, New York, NY.

- *Sex Addiction Help*: [sexhelp.com](http://sexhelp.com). Created by Dr. Patrick J. Carnes, Director of the Gentle Path program at Pine Grove Behavioural Center, Hattiesburg, MS.
- *Stop Porn Culture*: [stoppornculture.org](http://stoppornculture.org). Progressive, feminist organization, Arcata, CA.
- *XXXChurch*: [xxxchurch.com](http://xxxchurch.com). Tips for awareness, prevention and recovery from pornography addiction.

## Building Healthy Sexuality

In *Sexuality, God's Gift*, Anne Krabill Hershberger and Willard S. Krabill identify the following elements needed to build healthy sexuality.<sup>67</sup>

1. *A proper theology of the body*, that we are body, mind and spirit, and that all of this is God's good creation: "Having a proper theology of the body would lead us to feel exuberant about the way our bodies allow us to express ourselves, enjoy a wide variety of sensations, reach out to others in fostering relationships, experience this good creation, and reflect the image of God."
2. *A proper theology of sexuality*: "Of all people, we as believers ought to have the most positive attitude toward our bodies and toward our sexuality. We are the ones who know the God who made them. We who know God best should best reflect the true nature of human sexuality....In the Bible we will find an affirmation of gender differences, a blessing from God when we allow love to permeate our relationships, and a sense that each individual is valuable – as a sexual person."
3. *Respect for males and females*: "If we really believe that God has created us sexual, male and female, and that each is of equal value and unable to exist without the other, we will have difficulty giving hierarchical value to the

<sup>67</sup> Summarized from *Sexuality, God's Gift*, ed. by Anne Krabill Hershberger, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Copyright © 2010 by Herald Press, 17-33. Used by permission.

genders...Our own sexuality is enhanced by honoring and respecting the sexuality of others.”

4. *Integration of sex and life*, or the understanding that our sexuality is an integral part of who we are and reaches through our whole life: “The attitudes, the caring, the tenderness, and the messages communicated all day ...are all the prelude to yet another message, a message of ‘love.’...Our bodies should say the same thing the rest of our being is saying; otherwise we live a lie.”
5. *An affirmation of the sexuality of all people*: “We cannot and should not deny the sexuality of anyone – whether male or female, young or old, parents or children, ill or well, handicapped or those without visible handicaps, mentally brilliant or dull, married or single.”
6. *Sound sex education*: “Whatever the setting for spiritually sound sex education, the messages communicated must be accurate, clearly defined, developmentally and culturally appropriate, and pertinent to the students. The basic message is that our sexuality is a good gift from God and is given for our pleasure...Another important message is that sexuality is far more than anatomy, physiology, and the sexual response system. It is most of all a matter of communication, relationship, and commitment.”

7. *Celebration of sex:* “The whole biblical story is about relationships – human beings’ relationships to God, to each other, to themselves, to family members, to brothers and sisters in Christ, to orphans and widows, to the ‘least of these,’ and to enemies. In all of these relationships, the people interacting are doing so as sexual beings. They cannot do otherwise, since to be human is to be sexual.

...We realize a sense of peace and true sexual freedom when we are part of a community that honours our sexuality and our uniqueness, that frees us from compulsive genital expression and preoccupation, and that shows us how to trust each other. We can only imagine what would happen if the male half of the human race and the female half of the human race could achieve true peace with each other, living together in harmony, equality, love, mutual respect, and honor.”

## Theological Principles Regarding Sexuality<sup>68</sup>

We believe that God calls us to become faith communities that reflect healthy sexuality. We call each other to sexual wholeness, believing that spirituality and sexuality are interwoven in our longing for intimacy with God and with others. We discern the following convictions:

1. God created humanity in God's image, embodied as female and male, and declared us good. God's incarnation in human form also affirms that flesh is good. Our bodies and sexuality are to be celebrated (Genesis 1:26-31; Psalm 139; Song of Songs; Mark 10:6; John 1).
2. God created all human beings for relationship with God and with others (Genesis 1-3; Ruth; 1 Samuel 18:1-4, 20; John 11).
3. God's intentions for human sexuality include communion, procreation, creativity, and pleasure (Genesis 1, 2:24-25; Proverbs 5:18-19; Song of Songs; Isaiah 54:1; 1 Corinthians 5-7).
4. As sexual beings, we embody desires that are significant, powerful, unitive, and sacred (Genesis 2:24; Song of Songs 8:6-7; Mark 10:8).
5. Because of human sinfulness, God's good gift of sexuality is vulnerable to being distorted, abused, and exploited. Through Jesus, God offers redemption from all human sinfulness and restoration to sexual wholeness and goodness.

<sup>68</sup> From *Body and Soul: Healthy Sexuality and the People of God, Coordinator Guide*. Copyright © 2010 by Faith & Life Resources. Used by permission.





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1-888-622-6337.**

**[mcccanada.ca](http://mcccanada.ca)**

## **Programs in Canada which address abuse response and prevention:**

- *End Abuse*, MCC BC
- *Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Response Resource Team (SMARRT)*, MCC Ontario
- *Voices for Non-Violence*, MCC Manitoba

### **Free MCC Resources:**

- *Abuse: Response and Prevention: A Guide for Church Leaders*, booklet, 2010. Available in English, German and Spanish versions.
- *Home Shouldn't be a Place that Hurts*, brochure. Available in Chinese, English, French, German, Spanish and Swahili versions.
- *Created Equal, Women and Men in God's Image*, booklet, by Linda Gehman Peachey, 2009.
- *Understanding Sexual Abuse by a Church Leader or Caregiver*, booklet, by Heather Block, 2003, Revised 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2011.



