

Pornography is printed or visual material used to fantasize about sexual activities. This includes romance novels, lingerie ads, chat rooms or anything that might aid in sexual fantasy. Porn affects both men and women, and is sin in any and every situation. Porn should not be viewed for any reason by anyone (including couples).

There have been a lot of articles written about why people hate porn and the damaging effects of pornography. The problem is that most people who say they hate porn also love it. People who love porn love it more than their spouse, more than their friends, more than their family, more than anything they own and more than God. Why?

WHY PEOPLE LOVE PORN

Porn is an escape. It is a door that leads out of life's routine. Porn is a way out of hard work, screaming kids, tedious chores, difficult conversations, and the diligent pursuit that is necessary to make a marriage work. Someone once said, "life is hard and then you die." Porn, on the other hand, is an easy way out. When you are looking for a way out from life's difficulties, porn says, "This is the way."

Porn is accessible. It's easy to find, and sometimes it even finds you at your most vulnerable moments. Porn doesn't require you to do the dishes, take out the trash, take the kids to school, or even cuddle. Porn says, "I'm here for you to do with me as you please." It is an open door to stranger experiences that otherwise would not be available to you. It always offers something crazier, more dangerous, and more scandalous for you to enjoy.

Porn feels good. Sex feels good. Explicit, out of bounds, naughty sex feels better. Why? Because when you know you are doing something you shouldn't, your adrenaline bleeds into your body. Your heart races, your pupils dilate, and your body responds as though you're afraid. Your five senses open up wide allowing you to experience more. So the pleasure that porn offers is heightened. It is all of the pleasure of an extramarital affair, because that's what it is.

Porn is anonymous. It is sex with a stranger and feels as though there are no strings attached and no victims. No fear of pregnancy or STDs. It seems that porn allows one to escape the consequences of an extramarital affair. You don't have to acknowledge their heart or feelings. You can strip away their flesh from their personhood for your enjoyment at seemingly no cost and no one has to know – not even the object of your orgasm.

THE PROBLEM

Porn is an *escape*, but **everything is still waiting on you**. And now the difficulties of life are paired with the guilt and shame from acting out with porn. You didn't escape anything. You complicated life's problems. You made them more difficult for yourself. Had you doubled down, prayed, leaned on your re|engage group and worked through the challenges that faced you, they would have been easier without porn. Porn isn't a way out; it's like a revolving door that keeps putting you back in the room with your problems. Only now they are bigger.

Porn is **accessible**, but **it is expensive**. It costs you your dignity, your confidence, your joy and, most importantly, your intimacy with Jesus and oneness with your spouse. Every single time you look at porn, you pay this price. Five seconds after your orgasm from porn you are not kinder, more confident, more joyful, closer to Jesus or more one with your spouse. You've taken a very intentional step away from all of these things. That's really, really expensive. It's never worth what it costs. It is a slippery slope of addiction leading to a dark place.

Porn **feels good**, but **it is not as good as what God has for us**. If a momentary feeling of pleasure is most important to you, porn will do. So will heroin, and other immoral acts. A life of oneness free from shame, however, is much better than five minutes of erotic pleasure. Porn takes from you in exchange for a momentary orgasm. Abstaining from porn and working towards oneness in your marriage gives life to you. This requires determination, hard work, and a commitment but offers freedom. Porn makes you its slave. Porn offers you pleasure outside of marriage, but then that pleasure inside your marriage becomes less available, every time. Porn removes more pleasure than it offers.

Porn is **anonymous, until it's not**. Porn is sex with yourself. It is an enslaving addiction and the only way to get free from it is to say, "I'm addicted to porn." That is the first step. The irony is that the anonymous sex you explored won't let you go until others know about it. There's nothing anonymous about that, unless you plan to die in anonymity and addiction. Satan would love that.

Porn and masturbation are selfish. Marriage calls us to be selfless. Porn tells your spouse they aren't good enough. Porn tells your wife her body isn't right. Porn tells your husband he's not man enough for you. Porn leads to guilt and shame for the viewer and insecurity for their spouse. Insecurity is the enemy to intimacy. Porn wants to destroy your life and your marriage.

The truth is porn hates you. Porn hates your children and wants to see your relationship with them die. Porn hates your marriage and wants to see it end. Porn hates your relationship with Jesus and will work hard to come between you. Porn is a terrible lover who will take infinitely more than it can give.

HOW TO HEAL FROM PORN

Confession

Admit you have a problem. Confession is your responsibility. Don't wait until you are asked. Confess your sin first to God as David did in Psalm 51:1-4. Confess to other believers quickly. Text them immediately and say "I have something I need to confess." Confess fully: "this is what I've done." Confess your sin so that you may be unified with others and The Spirit. If you are on the receiving end of a confession, listen, pray and seek to help in recovery. See James 5:16.

Prayer

Pray honestly about your fight. God knows the details of your struggle. He sees your most vile thoughts. Let Him in on all areas of your life. Ask for His help in overcoming this every morning. See Romans 8:5-11.

Remove Access

Chronic confession without repentance is futile. Repentance is turning from your sin and turning to God. List all the ways in which you have access to porn. What does it mean to remove access?

- If you struggle at the convenience store, do not go in the store.
- If the TV causes you to stumble, get rid of it.
- If the Internet causes you to stumble, REMOVE ACCESS.
- If you access porn on your phone, why do you still have a phone?
- If you get around accountability software, then get rid of the device altogether.

Are you willing to do **anything** to get well? Are you willing to get rid of your phone and your laptop in order to experience victory here? Does that sound legalistic? Read the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:27-29.

Assign Consequences

What should happen the next time you look at porn? Read Matthew 18:15-17 and consider who should know the next time you look at porn. Should your family get involved? Parents? The church? Your reengage group?

What privileges should you lose if you look at porn again? Consider what should be cut out of your life if you continue in your sin. What are you asking your spouse to do if you continue to look at porn?

Pursue your Spouse

You have one, and only one, legitimate outlet for sexual release and that is your spouse. If that well has run dry, then your plan of recovery needs to include radical, consistent, patient and loving pursuit of your spouse. This might take a long time and will require the help and encouragement of others.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:3-9 and understand your role as the husband or wife. Masturbation and pornography are not solutions to "burning with passion." Your marriage covenant was not "I will love them if they" but "I will love them unconditionally." What does "unconditionally" mean? Do you still agree to that promise you made?

Pursue Jesus

This is the most important step to recovery. You cannot remove something and not fill the void it has left in your life. You cannot be intimate with Jesus at the same time you are doing something that caused Him to suffer and die. Your own mind won't allow it. But there is grace. And God loves you and wants all of you. He is pursuing you even in the midst of your sin.

"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." – Matthew 10:39

Read the beginning and end of Romans 8. God is not counting your sins against you and He is not far from you.

IF YOUR SPOUSE IS LOOKING AT PORN

If you are the spouse of someone struggling with porn, you might feel hurt by his or her confession. Remember that "hurt people, hurt people" but it is not OK to hurt anyone. Take time to pray, seek help from others, and be solution-oriented, not just angry.

Openly share your hurts with others. It is natural and understandable if you feel hurt and betrayed. Your reengage group should provide a safe place for you to work through your hurts with honesty, patience and encouragement. At the same time, pray that your spouse will continue to work on your marriage. Forgive your spouse (Lessons 4 and 5) and grow in your intimacy with Jesus. Remember, how you handle your spouse's confession will have a great impact on whether or not they will continue to confess to you or seek prayer from you in the future.

Lesson 15 (Completion) talked about how God has designed marriage so that each spouse helps the other become more like Jesus. If your spouse struggles with porn and masturbation, even in the midst of hurt and betrayal, you have the privilege of helping your spouse grow to become more like Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." What role do you need to play for your spouse today? Do you need to admonish them, encourage them, or help them? Can you be patient in the midst of their growth?

Finally, remember that you are the only outlet that your spouse has for sex. Consider asking how you can, from a sexual intimacy perspective, help in their recovery.

For additional resources on this lesson see MarriageHelp.org/Porn.

QUESTIONS/PROJECTS:

Answer questions 1-5 by yourself first, then share them with your spouse before group time. Some of these questions will be discussed during your group time.

1. When is the last time you have intentionally looked at or lusted after someone other than your spouse? How did you access it? What triggered it?
2. If you were to view porn, who in your life can you confess it to? How would you want them to respond?
3. Do you think your spouse can be tempted to view porn? What can you do to help your spouse be less tempted?
4. How can you create a safe place for your spouse to confess when they fail?
5. If your spouse is looking at porn, what support is God telling you to provide for them?
6. **Action Item:** If you struggle with porn, confess it to your spouse today then start building a health plan using the steps under "How to heal from porn."