

Battling Pornography in your Church

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It is a great joy to speak to you today concerning a topic of great seriousness, and great opportunity for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The topic of this conference is “The Call to Joy and Pain”, and one of the greatest joys among the gifts that God has given us is our sexuality. At the same time one of our greatest pains is how, after our rebellion against God, the gift that God gave us to help us know what it is like to be him, to have intimate union with another, has become the thing perhaps most marred by the Fall.

We want to talk today about how to address the issue of pornography in your church. If you are a person who is suffering in this area, this talk is not directly aimed at helping you, though you will find benefit in it. Specifically I wanted to address those of you, perhaps with your own struggles, on the topic of how to help others who are struggling with sexual sin, and especially Internet pornography. How do we, as the redeemed of God, minister to them with the power of the gospel?

Don’t underestimate the problem

You may think that pornography is more of a societal problem in the public at large, but not really much of an issue in your church. Research shows that this is not the case. Pornography, and especially Internet pornography is widespread, its use among Christians is not statistically different then among non-Christians, and its impact on the spiritual lives, marriages, families, relationships and ministries of the people in the congregations you serve is devastating.

Pornography is the most available resource on the Internet.

There are around 4.2 million (12% of total websites) pornography web sites, with around 420 million pages (89% of those pages are hosted in the USA). On peer-to-peer networks like Limewire and Bit-Torrent there are 1.5 billion porn downloads monthly (35% of all downloads).¹

The largest group of viewers of Internet porn is children between ages 12 and 17.²

The Internet pornography industry generates \$12 billion dollars in annual revenue-more than the combined annual revenues of ABC, NBC, and CBS.³ That

¹ <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html>

² Family Safe Media, December 15, 2005

³ Family Safe Media, January 10, 2006

number was \$1 billion dollars in 2002. Worldwide that number is close to \$100 billion dollars.⁴

In 2002, of 1,351 pastors surveyed, 54% said they had viewed Internet pornography within the last year, and 30% of these had visited within the last 30 days. 51% of pastors say Internet pornography is a possible temptation. 37% say it is a current struggle.⁵

According to a study done by the Christian Counseling and Education Foundation (CCEF), over 50% of those who see a Christian pastor/elder for counseling are struggling with Internet pornography, about 2/3rds of them men.⁶

This means that the problem is not just “out there” amongst the godless heathen; it’s right here in our churches. Christians are regularly looking at pornography at a growing rate.

Experts in the area of understanding the enslaving nature of Internet pornography cite three reasons for this rise in sexual enslavement: Availability, Affordability, and Anonymity.⁷

Availability - We just read a small handful of statistics that show how available pornography is. It is easier to find pornography on the Internet than to find a good deal on a set of tires. The variety of pornographic topics readily available for your viewing is staggering. This plays directly into the areas of our own brokenness, and the precise strategies of our enemy Satan.

As Patrick Carnes, one of the leading researchers in the area of sexual addiction says, “Most of us have a part of our sexuality that lies unacknowledged, unexplored, and without a voice, and the Internet offers a way to explore that sexuality.”⁸

Anonymity - It’s impossible to pick up a copy of an adult magazine at the 7-11, or rent an adult movie at the video store without being seen by someone. If your pastor walked into the store you would be standing there, holding the goods, and you’d have a lot of explaining to do. If your wife finds a secret stash of magazines or videos, you are going to have to deal with her anger and hurt.

⁴ Internet filter review, link above

⁵ Christianity Today, Leadership survey, (Dec 2001). Pastors.com (March 2002). Cited by www.ProvenMen.org

⁶ Cited by <http://www.covenanteyes.com/blog/2008/12/18/survey-of-christian-counselors-about-pornography/>.

⁷ This is what is referred to as the “Triple-A Engine” of Internet pornography, a term coined by Al Cooper in the journal of Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity.

⁸ Patrick Carnes, *In the Shadows of the Net*, (Center City: Hazelden), 2001

When you're on your computer, late at night while you're wife is sleeping, or your roommates are out of the house, no one can see you, and this adds to the lure of the Internet. Browser history and cache can be cleared, downloaded files can be deleted, and you think you've gotten away with it.

It is also this anonymity that makes this particular sin enslaving. You know it's wrong, you feel guilty and ashamed, but you can't tell anyone. As long as the person addicted to pornography hides it, the more he/she uses pornography to briefly stop the pain brought on by their silence. Jesus said that, "everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin." (John 8:34) Paul tells us that, "when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness." (Romans 6:16)

Affordability – Magazines and movies cost money, but there are millions of free pornography images and movies available. This makes it especially dangerous for children and students. Unless you use pay-sites, nothing will show up on your credit card statement, adding to the anonymity.

Don't overreact

These facts are alarming, and the response of many church leaders will be to overreact to this mystifying onslaught. When you find out that someone in your church has a porn problem, you will be tempted to discipline him or her severely, rather than move them towards God. This will drive the issue deeper into secrecy, and people who are struggling will move away from God, not toward him. We need a *balanced, biblical* perspective.

Balanced – David Powlison, a counselor with CCEF and editor of the Journal of Biblical Counseling, said "It's easy for your big, obvious sins (like surfing the internet for pornographic material) to conceal the deeper sins that fuel your struggle with pornography. But unless you recognize and repent of the sin patterns underlying your addiction, you won't be fighting the right battle."⁹

Pornography is usually not the primary sin in a person who regularly engages in it. Unless you're "widening the battlefield" in the life of a person, they will never truly change. The goal is never compliance with a command; it is a life of grateful obedience to the love, power, and grace of Christ in all areas of life.

Biblical – If you look at the moral teaching of the New Testament, you'll see that sexual sins are listed right alongside things like anger, bitterness, strife, and pride. Many of these may be the prime contributors to a pornography habit, and sexual sin is often secondary in nature.

⁹ Previously posted on ccef.org but now available on <http://healtheland.wordpress.com/2008/08/23/breaking-pornography-addiction-david-powlison/>.

The person who is hiding their pornography problem is at heart a legalist. They wish to be perceived differently than they really are. A legalistic approach to this, like any sin area, will drive it underground, and besides that – it's unbiblical. Though it's crucial for the pornography user to see the cost of their sin in their own lives and the lives of others, what they need most of all is the grace and acceptance that is theirs through Christ, channeled through you.

In Gal. 6:1-2 Paul says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." We must always keep in mind what we are restoring them to – not just right living, but the gospel!

Determine to address this issue in your church (not in 12-step groups)

There is a tendency of churches when faced with people with a pornography problem to send them to secular 12-step groups, like Sexaholics Anonymous, or Sex Addicts Anonymous. These groups have been helpful to many, like AA has, but I don't recommend that Christian churches send people to these groups for 3 reasons.

1. It moves confession outside the realm of the Body of Christ. They may be confessing their sins, but they're not doing it to the brothers or sisters.
2. 12-step groups are typically not God-centered, Christ-centered, gospel-centered groups. For all the good these groups may do, there is no real change apart from the gospel.
3. The church needs to address all of the life of the believer. Just as we shouldn't send people to secular law courts when they have a conflict, we shouldn't send people who are struggling with sin to another group.

Help people to see the cost of this sin in their lives

Pornography addicts live in a state of unreality and a fog of rationalization. Sin is deceiving. One of the first things that will bring change is to help them see how this is affecting them, how this affects their marriages, their boyfriends and girlfriends, their children, their relationships with others in the church. As leaders we need to lovingly push away the fog that surrounds the person caught up in sin.

The first part of the waking up process begins with seeing that this sin is not solitary; it is not a victimless crime. "I'm not really hurting anybody" is the standard self-justifying refrain of someone who uses pornography. Paul has a different point of view: "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body." (1 Corinthians 6:18) Sin breaks our fellowship with God (Isa. 59:1-2; 1 John 1:6). Every time we are tempted and think about getting in to porn, we

need to remind ourselves that we are not the only one involved in the transaction; we are willfully deciding to break our fellowship with him, and denying His lordship and power in our lives.

Our family and other relationships are affected as well. Sexual sin is not just non-relational; it's anti-relational. Getting in to porn impairs your ability to have relationships with others by providing a substitute for the feelings you are supposed to have when you relate to people without requiring you to invest in the lives of others. Over time this distance increases, especially when you consider that you have a part of your life that is secret while you try to keep up appearances. These declining relationships will cause pain, which will drive you back into the most convenient means of anesthesia – more porn. If left unchecked, sex will become the most important thing in your life, but you will never be satisfied. Though you really don't realize it, you will be slaking your thirst for meaningful relationship with salt.

Pornography plays a role in a growing number of divorces, and the people you minister to need to see the impact it has on a marriage. Pornography is not a supplement to God's gift of marriage; it's a denial of the goodness of God that substantially reduces marital sexual enjoyment. Instruct those who think this is no big deal go online and read the testimonies of women whose husbands betray them daily at their computers. They can say all they want that it's not about their wives, but their wives will never believe them.

Of course, the person who uses pornography doesn't want to consider that the people they are watching might be victims of human trafficking, or hate what they're doing. Have them go to www.thepinkcross.org and read the testimonies of those who have gotten out of the industry.

If you're involved with ministry, pornography will reduce or altogether hamper your effectiveness. It saps your spiritual vitality, and leaves you feeling ashamed, guilty and hypocritical every time you try to serve God.

What Solomon warns his son about the adulteress is just as true for a person involved in porn: "Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?" (Proverbs 6:25-29).

Address your own issues

If this room is a representative example, many of us have struggled with temptation on the Internet, pay-per-view movies, magazines, or just plain television. You have to be the one to set the tone, by addressing this issue in your life, and creating an atmosphere of openness. That means you have to talk about your own struggles with lust.

I saw my first pornography at about the age of 11, and though I had limited access to porn I became obsessed with it. This habit followed me into my adult life, my marriage, and my ministry. It wasn't until some men I was leading with confronted me that I admitted that I had a serious problem. At that time I was spending 2-3 hours a day looking at pornography and it was affecting my whole life - my marriage, my children, my job, my friends, and my flagging ministry. I got counseling, went to 12-step groups, but ultimately found my salvation in the grace of God. As I more and more stand at the foot of the cross and look up at the one who became sin with my sin, as I began to confess and become accountable to others, as I began to build real relationships for the first time in my life, the grace of Christ changed me. Now I'm doing the most unlikely of things: leading a ministry to others who are caught in Satan's trap. I'm both amazed and humbled, and I don't deserve to speak to you today, but I can say, like Paul, "I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

As a leader in the church, people are watching your life. If they never hear about your sin, they will either assume that they are different from you, and you cannot help them, or that you're a hypocrite, and they should join with you in silence and deceit.

Address both men and women

A lot of people assume that pornography and masturbation are a "male problem." This is not true. As you may recall from the statistics under the first point, a growing number of women are looking at pornography. Since "no temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to all," we should expect that women would have their own issues with lust. Although fewer women than men look at pornography today, women have their own issues with masturbation, lust, and romance-lust.

In his chapter in John Piper's *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ* called "Making all things new," David Powlison said, "The culture of romance novels, soap operas, and women's magazines does not draw nearly as much attention as male-oriented pornography. Men do graphic pornography. That's an obvious problem. Women do romance. It's the same kind of problem, though the participants keep their clothes on a while longer, and there's more of a story to tell before they tumble into bed. Romance novels are female pornography. The sin comes wired through intimacy lust first and builds toward erotic lust. The formulaic fantasies offer narrative emotion-candy, not visual eye-candy. Romance tells a story about someone with a name, someone you fall in love with. It builds slowly. It's more than a moment of instant gratification with anonymous, naked, willing bodies. But like male pornography, there is a

progression from soft-core (e.g., Harlequin series), to more openly erotic (e.g., Silhouette series), to frankly pornographic writings that target women”¹⁰

Romance novels are the largest selling category of fiction in America. According to the Romance Writers of America, “Romance fiction became the largest share of the consumer book market in 2007 with \$1.375 billion in estimated revenue (overtaking the religion/inspirational category, which was the largest share in 2006). A 12.9 percent of all market categories, romance outsells the competition and will grow to a 13.3 percent share of the market in 2008 (according to Simba Information estimates)... The “biggest fiction category of them all” in 2007, publishers released approximately 8,090 romance books – an increase of 25.9 percent over 2006 (Norris 2008, 155)”¹¹ When it comes to sin, you usually just have to follow the money. If 71 million people spent over a billion dollars on romance novels last year, these writers and publishers are tapping into something in the fallen human heart. They’re tapping in to a woman’s desire for an intimate relationship, to which we should be guiding them through knowing Christ, building quality relationships in the body of Christ, and loving their husbands.

If the church avoids dealing with women’s sexual issues, we will see the trend worsen, as a generation of children who have grown up on the Internet and are becoming increasingly desensitized to porn becomes adults. We need to call upon the Lord of Hosts to assail the fortress of our culture’s thinking in the area of female sexuality for the sake of the marriages, the children, and the spiritual posterity of His church!

Understand addiction and voluntary slavery

Since the word addiction doesn’t occur in our Bibles is it a valid term to use?

Regular uses of pornography are commonly referred to as “pornography addicts” and “sexual addiction” is a term with rather elastic boundaries that is used frequently to describe someone who can’t stop looking at porn. I prefer to think of addiction as something that *describes* rather than *explains* behavior. Paul said, "For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing." (Romans 7:18-19)

Ed Welch says “Addiction is bondage to the rule of a substance, activity, or state of mind, which then becomes the center of life, defending itself from the truth so

¹⁰ David Powlison, *Making all things new*, in *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, ed. John Piper, p. 76

¹¹ http://www.rwanational.org/cs/the_romance_genre/romance_literature_statistics/industry_statistics

that even bad consequences don't bring repentance, and leading to further estrangement from God."¹²

"This enlarged perspective indicates that in sin, we are both hopelessly out of control and shrewdly calculating; victimized yet responsible. All sin is simultaneously pitiable slavery and overt rebelliousness or selfishness... If you deny the out-of-control nature of all addictions, as some Christians have done, then you assume that everyone would have to power to change himself. Change would be easy. You would simply say, "Stop it. You got yourself into it, and you can get yourself out." There would never be a sense of helplessness or a desperate need for both redemption and power through Jesus. So this cannot be our position."

"At the same time, there will be other problems if you ignore the in-control, purposeful nature of addictions. Victims will be quick to place blame outside themselves. They are left with no way to understand their guilt. The redemptive work of Christ is replaced by an emphasis on "healing" that is not rooted in the grace of forgiveness. If personal responsibility is ignored, addicts are ultimately helpless before their alleged disease. All they see in the future is the fear of passing it on to their children. Scripture counters these fears with "and that is what some of you *were*" (1 Cor. 6:11). Where there is sin, God always offers forgiveness and the power to cast it off."¹³

Pornography addiction is slavery, but it is a slavery that is voluntary. Because it is voluntary we all have the ability to "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph 4:22-24)

Understand the goal – real growth, not outward compliance

In Galatians 4, Paul said he was "again in labor until Christ is formed" in the lives of the believers (Galatians 4:19). As a leader dealing with people with various sexual issues your goal is not that they clean up their lives; it's to see Christ formed in them. If we settle for compliance to a moral code, even God's moral code, we are allowing the person to move away from Christ to the Law, and even if the person stops using pornography, they will subject themselves to a different form of slavery. For most pornography addicts, this legalism will usually result in more sin, but they will hide it from you.

On the other hand, if a person is moving toward spiritual growth, they will be less likely to sin. Paul expresses this formula: "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." (Galatians 5:16) As a person walks earnestly

¹² Edward T. Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*, p.35

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 34-35

with God, the joy and sweetness of that relationship will displace the idols he has been relying upon.

“If our basic disposition is to do God's will in the first place, we may be confident that he will take us to the key points in his plan, even though we may reach them in a wayward manner. While we need always to be doing battle with sin in our lives, the battle should be carried on in a spirit of victory rather than a spirit of defeat.”¹⁴

As a leader, you need to help the person who is struggling to see what the goal is, but also that the sovereignty of God will carry it out, if their basic disposition is to follow Him, regardless of failures and setbacks.

Understand the means – the power of the gospel

The 19th century Scottish preacher Thomas Chalmers said, “It is seldom that any of our tastes are made to disappear by a mere process of natural extinction... But what cannot be thus destroyed may be dispossessed – and one taste may be made to give way to another, and to lose its power entirely as the reigning affection of the mind.”¹⁵

Paul said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation.” (Rom 1:16) Brothers and sisters, if we want to see the lives of people changed, regardless of what sin holds them captive; there is only power great enough to displace their affection, and that is the power of the gospel. No matter how deep this sin has taken root in their lives, or how defeated they feel, there is no other true solution than the cross. In His boundless love, God placed all their sin on His Son, and judged and abandoned Him for them. He cried out “why have you forsaken me” so that they would never have to be forsaken again.

I would recommend a book to you, and to those you minister to; it's called, *A Gospel Primer for Christians*, by Milton Vincent.¹⁶ It's a book that should be read slowly, devotionally, and prayerfully. It exposes your heart to the truth of the gospel in a way that allows the power of that message to soak into your bones.

No matter what we tell the person who is struggling with sexual sin, we always need to bring them back to the cross. We can admonish them, and show them the cross. We can encourage them, and show them the cross. We can hold on to them and weep over their sins, and show them the cross. In Robert Lowery's gospel hymn, *Nothing but the Blood* it says:

*For my pardon, this I see,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;*

¹⁴ Blain Smith, *Knowing God's Will*, p. 36

¹⁵ Thomas Chalmers, *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection*,

¹⁶ Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians*, Focus Publishing

*For my cleansing this my plea,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.*

We can ultimately trust in no other means.

Teach healthy Biblical sexuality in your church

How often do you teach on sex in your church? More often than you teach on the end times and prophecy? Probably not. We assume that our people know what is right and wrong in the area of sexuality (which if you're working with youth might be a false assumption), but we rarely teach on sex as an expression of the glory of God. People need to know more than the fact that sex is for one man, one woman, for one lifetime. I would venture to say that people have a pretty good idea what kinds of sexuality the church does not condone, but less about the goodness of sex. The Bible is full of teaching on sexuality, and yet we mostly avoid teaching on God's view of sex. In many churches people know more about the Rapture, which is barely mentioned in the Bible than they do about what the Bible teaches on healthy sexuality.

We should put away our embarrassment on this topic, and teach our churches about the gift of God that is sex. God is good, everything that God created is good, sex is good, and Christians should celebrate real sexuality more than anyone else, because we know the God who created it.

Sex is the first thing mentioned when, in the garden, God brought Adam and Eve together - "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." (Genesis 2:24-25) Sexual and marriage imagery is used consistently to describe God's relationship to His people.

I wish I had more time to talk about Biblical sexuality, but instead I will recommend a book to you - we should have it in the bookstore - it's called *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, edited by John Piper. It mostly deals with how sex is a gift that God gave us to reflect his glory, but it also deals with the topic of sexual brokenness. In particular on that topic I would direct you to the chapter by David Powlison, called "Making All Things New: Restoring Pure Joy to the Sexually Broken."

Move people toward relationships

Pornography is a substitute for real relationships, starting with God and working its way out through the people in our lives. Larry Crabb in his book *The Silence of Adam* says "beneath *obvious* sin there may be *hidden* sin: an even more serious but less-noticed failure than looking at pornography; a sin that weakens and deceives us to the point where the choice to yield to immoral urges seems reasonable, even necessary. Like an undiagnosed tumor that causes headaches, our deeper sin will continue to bear its immoral fruit until it is recognized and dealt with."

“The root problem beneath our more visible problems is that we don’t strive for depth or quality in our relationships. We’re not richly masculine as husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, or friends. We steer clear of those areas in our relationships that utterly baffle us, because we don’t want to accept our responsibility to move without a code. Any situation that demands we move with courage confronts us with the dreaded question “Do I have what it takes to do what a real man is called by God to do?””

“Sexual health cannot exist without relational health, and relational health requires us to travel down a path that turns in ways we cannot predict.”¹⁷

People who use pornography are looking for relational intimacy, but they are settling for a substitute for it. G.K. Chesterton said that “every man that knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God.” The way that we most often experience the love and grace of God is through the giving and experiencing love and receiving grace from others. Pornography, fantasy, and lust give us some of the feelings of intimacy, but they’re false, which is why they ultimately don’t satisfy us. If we move people toward real relationships with their spouses and others in the church, they have the opportunity to experience the kind of relational intimacy they are seeking.

Again, from David Powlison – “Antoine de Saint-Exupery, a French writer, said, “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood, and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.” This is exactly what God does for you. He wants you to have a vision of something so much better than living within your dark, self-centered imagination. God wants to give you a vision of life as it is meant to be – filled with a real, true, and intimate relationship with him and authentic, loving relationships with others.”

Here at Xenos we have home churches, cell groups, and other smaller group meetings to study the Bible, but also to facilitate depth in relating with others. These groups give you a framework for people to go deep with others so that healing can occur, but also so that those who are self-focused can learn to serve others rather than themselves. You should direct people to not only receive grace and love, but to give it out.

Move people toward accountability and confession

One of the most important aspects of getting away from habitual use of pornography is accountability and confession. This point follows the last, because if there is no context for accountability and confession, it’s probably not going to happen.

¹⁷ Larry Crabb, *The Silence of Adam*, p. 106

Accountability is a relationship, not a policing action. It is your way of saying "I invite you to speak truth into my life. I will be honest with you, and share my struggles." One of the things I recommend to people who have issues with the Internet is accountability software. It keeps track of what you do on the Internet, and sends a weekly email report to someone you have chosen as an accountability partner or partners. For those of you who are interested, I recommend a product called "Covenant Eyes", which I think is the best software of its kind. In the back of the room there is a flyer that I encourage you to take. If you go to sign up, please use a promo code of "Xenos", and you'll get the first month free, and a part of the monthly fee will be donated to our ministry. If you don't get a flyer, you can sign up with the promotional code from their banner on my website: www.briangardner.org.

On that website there is also a paper on being an accountability partner to someone else that stresses in the Resources section. It stresses the kind of relational role you want to have with someone you're holding accountable.

Of course, the Internet is not the only source of lust. There are movies, magazines, and a host of options in our pornified culture. That is why confession must go beyond the bounds of a weekly report.

"Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." (Proverbs 28:13)

"Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much." (James 5:16)

Confession "objectifies" grace; when I can confess my sins and repent of them before my brothers, it means that I understand that I have no righteousness of my own, and therefore, nothing to hide, and nothing to lose. If you don't have same-sex groups that facilitate that, you can start one with men who are willing to share their struggles. This is not another 12-step group - it's a one step group, the step toward the cross to receive grace, comfort, and healing. It's truly exciting to get together with like-minded brothers or sisters and begin to take a stand against sin as we move towards God in fellowship with one another. I'm working on a group study guide that should be available this year. If you send me an email, or watch my web site, you can find out when it is available.

Be patient with change and progress

A serious pornography habit does not go away overnight. You should expect relapse and failure in those you are helping. In the same way that you should widen the battlefield of seeing other issues in someone's life, you should also look for other signs of growth and change. In his article *Breaking Pornography Addiction*, David Powlison lists several factors to look for:

- *A decrease in the frequency of a sin is progress.* It's not good that you are still indulging in pornography, but if you are doing it less, you are going in the right direction.
- *A change in the actual nature of the sin is progress.* If you are no longer having an affair or premarital sex, and now you are battling pornographic fantasy, it's good that your struggle has changed from your actions to your imagination.
- *A change in the battleground is progress.* When your battle has moved from purchasing materials or going onto explicit Internet sites to battling the old fantasy tapes that are still in your mind, that's movement in the right direction.
- *An increase in honesty and accountability is progress.* You are moving forward when you are willing to be truly candid and accountable to a trusted friend, spouse, or pastor and say, "Here's where I'm struggling." An appropriate openness to others is a very significant step towards change.
- *Not always responding to difficult circumstances by indulging in sin is progress.* When your life gets hard, if instead of going straight to your fantasy life, you pray for help and ask others to pray for you, then God is at work.
- *Repenting more quickly is progress.* Learning to go more quickly to the Lord of life, instead of wallowing for days, weeks, and months in the gloom of "I failed again," is a sign that God is at work in your life.
- *Learning to love and consider the interest of real people is progress.* Your immoral fantasies use other people in an imaginary world. Caring for others, even in small ways, means that Jesus is changing you.

Look for signs that the person is moving forward, and encourage them, rejoice over them, give thanks to God for them.

Remember that your response to each person needs to be different. Paul said "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." (1 Thessalonians 5:14) There is no one-size-fits-all approach to speaking the truth in love.