

Sexual Addiction and Pornography in the Church

"I can't understand how he can do this when he knows it hurts me so terribly. Sometimes it seems like he doesn't have much, if any, empathy for me. Sometimes it seems like he doesn't even know I'm alive."
LadyBerry99¹

At 34 years of age Geoff had everything going for him, a godly, loving wife, two children, and a growing career. A respected man in church he led a young couple's small group with his wife, and he was considered a godly husband. Then one day it came crashing down. His wife discovered pornography on his phone. When she confronted him, he confessed that he had been addicted to porn since he was eleven years of age. He confessed as well that he had been having an affair with a co-worker for the past year. Devastated his wife asked him to leave the house. The trap he had laid in his life by not dealing with his sin early led to a ruined life at home, at work, and in the church.

Not Alone

Geoff is not alone. Sexual addiction is not only pandemic in American culture it is pandemic in the Church. Recent Barna Group research² on pornography use in America revealed the following:

- Pornography use remains a growing problem. Today, **three in five U.S. adults** (61%) report viewing pornography, and half of those who use porn say that "no one" knows.
- Additionally, 84 percent of reported porn users say **they do not have anyone** in their life helping them avoid pornography.
- Common **assumptions** about porn use are proving to be **untrue**. For example, while pornography use is more prevalent among men and non-Christians, a significant proportion of **women** and **Christians** also **view** pornography.
- The ripple effects of pornography include a notable **decline in mental health** and well-being. Meanwhile, 44 percent of U.S. adults believe "watching pornography has little impact on the other aspects of an individual's life."
- Many **Christians** also hold **conflicting beliefs** about pornography. Over **three in five** Christians (62%) tell Barna they **agree** a person can **regularly view** pornography and live a sexually healthy life.
- Many congregants **want** their church to address pornography. Only **10 percent** of U.S. Christians and churching adults say their **church offers** programming to help those struggling with

¹ LadyBerry99, "Brokenhearted from my husband's porn addiction," Reddit, April 5, 2024, https://www.reddit.com/r/Christianmarriage/comments/1bwwefq/brokenhearted_from_my_husbands_porn_addiction/

²Beyond the Porn Phenomenon by Barna Group, Copyright © 2024 by Barna Group. ISBN: 978-1-956730-76-0

pornography. Meanwhile, **over half** (58%) say it's **important** to them that their church is **addressing topics** of pornography and compulsive sexual behavior.

- While many churches may not be running specific programs to help porn users, **75 percent** of U.S. **pastors** say they are individually **ministering** to those who struggle with porn. They indicate that **half** of those who've sought help from them (51%) **are married men**.
- **Two-thirds of pastors** (67%) have a personal history of **porn use**, with almost **one in five** (18%) saying this is a **current** struggle. Additionally, an overwhelming majority of pastors (86%) feel porn use is common among Christian pastors.
- Nearly **nine in 10** youth leaders (89%) say they **wish** teens were taught about sexual health and behaviors by a **parent**, however, **seven in 10** believe **“friends” and “social media”** (69% each) have the **biggest influence** on what young people learn about sex today.
- Barna's latest data reveals **more than half** of survey respondents **ages 18–38** (55%) admit they've **sent** a nude image of themselves or someone else via text, email, social media or app (by generation, this is 52% among Gen Z and 57% among Millennials). An even **higher percentage** of survey respondents ages 18–38 (74%) say they've **received** a nude image

Our Sin Is Not Our Identity

“Our battles are first won or lost in the secret places of our will in God’s presence, never in full view of the world.” Oswald Chambers³

Sin has consequences (Rom. 6:16) that left unconfessed lead us away from God, away from friends and away from community. Left unchecked it leads to isolation from God. The blessing of His presence is gone. The best thing we can do when we acknowledge our sin is to bring it to God and ask for forgiveness and help to find freedom from it. This process of recovery to freedom from sexual addiction is not short or without hard work and pain but it is imperative if relationship with God, family and friends is to be restored.

Trying to hide our sin from God leads to keeping the sin close like a pet, nurturing it, feeding it, thinking God will overlook it. Biologically what we are doing is reinforcing neural pathways in our brain until they become habit...habits that are tough to break. If we do not confess and get help, our sin will define us, and we buy into the lie that it is part of who we are; like freed slaves who run back again to our old master thinking that is where we belong. We do not belong there; we are made to be free (John 8:36; Galatians 5:1).

Sin is not the master of a person who has committed her life to Christ, no matter how far away from God she may be (Romans 6:14). We may not walk in the power of the Spirit, but we do have it available to us (Ephesians 1:19-20). Our sin is not who we are, it is not our identity. Sin was put to death when we

³ Oswald Chambers, “Where the Battle Is Lost or Won,” My Utmost for His Highest, December 27, 2017, <http://utmost.org/where-the-battle-is-won-or-lost>.

were “crucified with Christ” (Romans 6:6; Galatians 2:20), our born-again self is alive, but the old self is still there and still sins (Romans 7:22-23). Yet, because of Christ, the penalty of sin is gone. As we put our faith in God to walk in his power, the power of sin is diminished.

In Christ we have a new identity. The sins we commit can be overcome (Hebrews 12:1) and in the power of the Holy Spirit we can fix our eyes on Jesus Christ to live in the full enjoyment of our position and freedom in Him.

Hebrew’s 12:1 tells us to throw off the sins that “so easily entangle us.” This is not fun or easy, but it is always worth the work. The promise of God is that He will join His strength with our willingness (1 Corinthians 10:13). When God brings a sin to our attention it is best that we confess it at once. This is a gradual and lifelong process, by which we become in practice what God has made us in position: His beloved children, with all the rights and privileges of heirs.

When we stumble, and we will, we have the promise of 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” Hebrews 4:16 tells us, “Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Safe and secure in Jesus’ sacrifice, we have no need to fear the eternal consequences our sin deserves. Not resisting temptation and continuing in sin does not cause us to lose our salvation, but it does cost us intimacy with God. To regain that intimacy, we must turn to Him and ask for help to remove it from our lives.

That help starts with confession of sin and the word of God, leaving isolation to return to community with men or women who can help in finding the root trauma that has enabled the sin, and rewiring the brain to replace the neural pathways of sin with pathways of godliness.

Geoff had to go through a process of unlearning the sinful habits of his life and replacing them with new ones by building new neural pathways in his brain. It was not a short process nor an easy one. His wife had a hard road of working through betrayal trauma. It is not enough to only help and support those who are struggling with sexual addiction. Pornography use and sexual addiction is an everyday reality for many men and women that dramatically affects loved ones and others who are close to the addict. Confronting today’s porn pandemic means acknowledging the problem and understanding what it takes to promote healing for everyone affected.

If you are struggling with sexual addition please check out the resources available for men [here](#) and women [here](#).