

# PORNOGRAPHY AND THE LOCAL CHURCH

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Two thousand years ago, the Holy Spirit, speaking through the Apostle Paul, warned believers in Jesus about sexual immorality. Writing to the church in Ephesus, in a letter that would be shared worldwide in coming years, the apostle declared, “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.”<sup>1</sup> Given this ancient warning, we should not be surprised that sexual immorality is a besetting sin with which we struggle in affluent western culture. As with greed, sexual sin involves the elevation of the self ourselves over God and others.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, today such self-centred idolatry is common among Christians as well as in society at large.<sup>3</sup>

Pornography is a particularly insidious aspect of sexual immorality. The goal of this article is to provide those who are responsible to shepherd God’s people crucial information about why they must and how they can come to the aid of users. Through the ancient prophet Jeremiah, God promised, “Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.”<sup>4</sup> This article will discuss the prevalence and consequences of pornography and appropriate responses to pornography use.

## Research Methodology

The research starting point for this article has been interviews with people for whom pornography has been a personal problem and with those who are seeking to help them find freedom. The latter group includes leaders of church ministries geared to children, youth, and adults, in addition to counsellors and pastors. Interviews have also included denominational leaders, former pastors who now have the responsibility to assist churches under their oversight to be healthy and helpful to their congregants and others. The selection of the twenty-one interview subjects who participated in this study involved fervent prayer for God’s guidance and for discernment in learning from their lived experience. This pastoral approach was

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<sup>1</sup> Eph. 5:3 (All scripture references are from the New International Version). See also Eph. 4:19, 5:5; 1 Cor. 5:1-11, 6:10; Col. 3:5. The Apostle Peter issues a similar warning in 2 Pet. 2:14. Jesus too identified both sexual immorality and greed in his challenge to clean out the sin in His followers’ inner lives. See Matt. 23:25; Mark 7:20-22.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 10:6-14 identifies immorality as one expression of idolatry. Col. 3:5 also identifies greed as idolatry.

<sup>3</sup> The prevalence of pornography, one expression of sexual immorality in the Christian community and society at large, will be briefly described and documented later in this article.

<sup>4</sup> Jer. 3:15.

chosen in the belief that understanding and assisting those who need freedom from pornography must include conversations with those who need help and those who help them. In addition, the writings of other researchers and practitioners have been consulted.

## Prevalence of Pornography

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines pornography as “representation of sexual behaviour in books, pictures, statues, motion pictures, and other media that is intended to cause sexual excitement.”<sup>5</sup> The purpose of pornography is sexual arousal. Sensual images have been around for thousands of years in the sculpture and art of ancient religions.<sup>6</sup> In Europe, the advent of the printing press in the mid-fifteenth century facilitated the creation and circulation of pornographic materials.<sup>7</sup> However, the rise in popular use of the internet in the 1990s and of smart phones in the 2000s has made pornography more available, accessible, and affordable than ever for people of all ages.<sup>8</sup> Smart phones have brought the internet into a majority of pockets and purses around the world.

While the internet is a significant tool for helpful information and communication, it is also massively infected with pornography.<sup>9</sup> For example, just one of the many pornographic websites worldwide, Pornhub, a Canadian pornographic video sharing and pornography site, reports as follows for the year 2019:

Pornhub keeps on growing and it doesn't show signs of letting up. In 2019 there were over 42 Billion visits to Pornhub, which means there was an average of 115 million visits per day. One-Hundred-Fifteen Million - that's

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<sup>5</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Pornography,” last modified Feb. 10, 2020, accessed April 16, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pornography>; Lorne Campbell and Taylor Kohut, “The Use and Effects of Pornography in Romantic Relationships,” *Current Opinion in Psychology* 13 (2017), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2016.03.004>; Jason S. Carroll, Laura M. Padilla-Walker, Larry J. Nelson, Chad D. Olson, Carolyn McNamara Barry, Stephanie D. Madsen, “Generation XXX: Pornography Acceptance and Use Among Emerging Adults,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 23, no. 1 (Jan 2008): 8, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.3402/snnp.v3i0.20767>.

<sup>6</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Pornography.” See also numerous Old Testament references to Asherah poles, as in Ex. 34:13.

<sup>7</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, s.v. “Pornography.”

<sup>8</sup> Josh D. McDowell, *The Porn Epidemic: Facts, Stats, and Solutions*, 6-11, September 25, 2018, accessed December 4, 2019, <https://www.josh.org/wp-content/uploads/Porn-Epidemic-Executive-Synopsis-9.25.2018.pdf>; Cooper refers to the “Triple A Engine.” See Al Cooper, “Online Sexual Activity in the New Millennium,” *Contemporary Sexuality* 38, no. 3 (March 2004), <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=14000844>.

<sup>9</sup> Cooper, “...the most viewed topic on the Internet is sexually explicit material.” See also P. J. Carnes, “Cybersex, Courtship, and Escalation arousal: Factors in addictive Sexual Desire,” *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 8, (2001): 68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720160127560>.

the equivalent of the populations of Canada, Australia, Poland and the Netherlands all visiting in one day!

This year must have been an adventurous one because there were over 39 billion searches performed, which is 8.7 billion more searches than last year. Celebrities, trending terms, and characters – if you can think it, it’s probably been searched for.

In 2019 there was a record amount of video uploads, over 6.83 million new videos were uploaded to Pornhub. To put this in perspective – if you strung all of 2019’s new video content together and started watching them way back in 1850, you’d still be watching them today!<sup>10</sup>

Pornhub also reported that the mobile viewing of pornography from its site, by the end of 2019, which is growing significantly in many countries, had grown to 84 percent in the United States and 77 percent in Canada.<sup>11</sup> This is remarkable growth from a mere 1 percent of online pornography viewed on mobile devices in 2008.<sup>12</sup> Given this ready accessibility of pornography, it is not surprising that, in the United States, a reported 29 percent of teens (12-17) and 48 percent of young adults (18-24), most of whom carry smart phones, come across pornography daily or weekly without seeking it out or that 32 percent of teens and 49 percent of young adults say all or most of their friends regularly view pornography.<sup>13</sup>

The pornography industry is big business. A two-year-old estimate places its net worth at about \$97 billion. In comparison to Hollywood, which releases roughly 600 movies a year for \$10 billion in profits, the pornography industry releases 13,000 films annually for close to \$15 billion in profits.<sup>14</sup> This industry, which is after pocketbooks, is capturing minds in the process.

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<sup>10</sup> *Pornhub Insights*, “The 2019 Year in Review,” The Year in Numbers, December 11, 2019, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>.

<sup>11</sup> *Pornhub Insights*, “The 2019 Year in Review,” Devices and Technology, December 11, 2019, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.pornhub.com/insights/2019-year-in-review>.

<sup>12</sup> Katie Fustich, “Ten Year Pornography Survey Reveals Surprising Statistics,” *Daily Mail*, May 26, 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-4545854/10-year-pornography-survey-reveals-surprising-statistics.html>. See Appendix A for a chart in the *Daily Mail* article illustrating the rise of mobile porn use from 2008 to 2017. The chart shows copyright by Pornhub; however, the author was unable to find it on the Pornhub site.

<sup>13</sup> “Teens & Young Adults Use Porn More Than Anyone Else,” Barna Group, Jan 28, 2016, accessed January 31, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/teens-young-adults-use-porn-more-than-anyone-else/>.

<sup>14</sup> Strange but True, “How Big Is the Porn Industry?” last modified February 19, 2017, accessed on December 4, 2019, [https://medium.com/@Strange\\_bt\\_True/how-big-is-the-porn-industry-fbc1ac78091b](https://medium.com/@Strange_bt_True/how-big-is-the-porn-industry-fbc1ac78091b).

Local church pastors hope their congregants are not involved with pornography, yet they see statistics that are concerning, statistics that they hope are not true in their own congregations. For example, Covenant Eyes, a ministry that provides filtering software and helpful information, reports that one in five youth pastors and one in seven lead pastors are themselves struggling with regular pornography use, adding up to 50,000 American church leaders. Covenant Eyes also reports that 64 percent of Christian men and 15 percent of Christian women admit to watching pornography at least once a month.<sup>15</sup> If these statistics are accurate, concerned church leaders are asking themselves why more people in the churches that they lead are not coming forward for help.<sup>16</sup>

When one turns to scholars who have studied the incidence of pornography use among Christians, assertions about its prevalence vary significantly. In his book, *Addicted to Lust: Pornography in the Lives of Conservative Protestants*, University of Oklahoma sociologist Samuel Perry defines American Conservative Protestants according to their theological beliefs. He identifies Protestants as those “who believe that faith in Jesus Christ *alone* grants them eternal salvation...” and conservatives as those “who view the Bible as inerrant, supremely authoritative, and best interpreted literally.”<sup>17</sup> Perry interprets data gained from the General Social Survey (GSS)<sup>18</sup> to support his conclusion that pornography use by Protestant men under 40 years of age, who affirm that the Bible is the “actual word of God and is to be taken literally, word for word,” has hovered at around 40 percent since 1984, while it has increased about 15 percent for other American men. Perry also identifies the same 40 percent level of use, since 1988, “for Protestant men under 40 who have had a ‘born-again

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<sup>15</sup> Covenant Eyes, *Stats on the Porn Industry*, accessed on December 4, 2019, <https://www.covenanteyes.com/pornstats/>. For pornography use by clergy, see also Zeba S. Ahmad, John Thoburn, Kristen L. Perry, Meghan McBrearty, Sadie Olson, and Ginger Gunn, “Prevalence Rates of Online Sexual Addiction Among Christian Clergy,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 22 (2015):344-356, <http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.student.twu.ca/10.1080/10720162.2015.1082079>.

<sup>16</sup> Steven Jones (National President, the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada), telephone interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., October 31, 2019; Paul Siemens (Care Pastor, Northview Community Church, Abbotsford, B.C.), interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 18, 2019; Michael Mawhorter (Church Lifecycles Team staff, the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in British Columbia and Yukon), interview by the author, Fort Langley, B.C. November 19, 2019; Brian Stewart (Lead Pastor, The Life Centre, Abbotsford, B.C.), interview by the author, Fort Langley, B.C., November 19, 2019; Thaleia Sawatzky, (Care Pastor, Northview Community Church, Abbotsford, B.C.) interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., December 3, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Perry, *Addicted to Lust: Pornography in the Lives of Conservative Protestants* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), ix, Kindle.

<sup>18</sup> The General Social Survey, is a project of NORC at the University of Chicago. NORC is an independent, non-partisan research institution. Since 1972, the GSS has been gathering data on contemporary American Society. See NORC, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.norc.org/Pages/default.aspx>.

experience’ or who have tried to convert someone to Christianity.”<sup>19</sup> Perry asserts further that, while “[i]n the 1970s around 26% of women who affiliated with a ‘fundamentalist’ Protestant denomination reported viewing an X-rated movie in the past year,” a percentage that increased to 37 percent in the 2010s and to 49 percent in 2016.<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, Lyman Stone, a Research Fellow at the Institute for Family Studies<sup>21</sup> and an Adjunct Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute,<sup>22</sup> believes the GSS contains more encouragement to conservative Protestants than Perry’s understanding of the data suggests. Says Stone, “But when I cut the data by religious identity and *religious attendance* (that is, actual religious behaviors that signal costly commitments to faith and who actually participates in church life), the difference becomes stark.”<sup>23</sup> According to Stone, when these variables are applied to the data, one learns that the percentage of Protestant males who viewed an X-rated film in the previous year, while at 45 percent for those who attend worship services only several times a year, drops to approximately 15 percent for those who attend weekly.<sup>24</sup> While this revelation may come as a relief to church leaders, it still indicates a significant spiritual and moral problem among devout followers of Jesus. Furthermore, both Perry and Stone acknowledge that pornography use is growing among conservative Protestants.<sup>25</sup> That said, Perry insists that pornography use among conservative Christians is not increasing as much, or leading to as much addiction, as pornography opponents fear.<sup>26</sup>

Church leaders should not overestimate or underestimate the extent of pornography use in the lives of those for whom they are responsible.<sup>27</sup> Dan Gowe, the founder of Men’s Group in Vancouver, BC, suggests that one way to do that is to take an anonymous, informal survey in a worship gathering. Gowe conducted such a survey in a vibrant, urban, evangelical church with a large young adult representation.

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<sup>19</sup> Perry, 28. Pornography use in this study involves viewing an X-rated movie at least once in the previous year.

<sup>20</sup> Perry, 96.

<sup>21</sup> See Institute for Family Studies website, accessed March 31, 2020, <https://ifstudies.org>.

<sup>22</sup> AEI, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://www.aei.org>; *Wikipedia*, “American Enterprise Institute,” last modified March 26, 2020, accessed March 31, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American\\_Enterprise\\_Institute](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/American_Enterprise_Institute).

<sup>23</sup> Lyman Stone, “The Truth About Conservative Protestant Men and Porn,” last modified June 19, 2019, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-truth-about-conservative-protestant-men-and-porn>.

<sup>24</sup> Stone. See Appendix B for a graph by Stone showing these results.

<sup>25</sup> Perry, 27. Stone.

<sup>26</sup> Perry, 29-36.

<sup>27</sup> It is all too easy to pick up and pass on faulty statistics. One must be on the lookout for source, bias, the population being studied, the date of the study, the behaviour defined as using pornography, the period of time (day, week, month, year, ever), and frequency of use. Frequently, these factors are not made explicit when statistics are given in non-academic writing.

Worshippers were asked to respond on their cell phones to statements regarding their own pornography use. Due to the volume of response, the church's server crashed, but not before 170 males and 193 females had completed the survey. Of the respondents, 70 percent of males and 29 percent of females sought out pornography repeatedly on the internet or elsewhere, 60 percent of males and 21 percent of females feared that pornography was becoming an addiction for them, and 84 percent of males and 62 percent of females would like help overcoming the problem of pornography if they knew there was a way out that really worked and that they would not be judged, shamed, or exposed by stepping into it.<sup>28</sup>

## Consequences of Pornography Use

Given the prevalence of pornography use both in the population at large and in the Christian community, church leaders will want to clarify for themselves how pornography is impacting its users' lives. They will be most concerned about the damage it inflicts on its users' relationships with God. While God says, "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality...",<sup>29</sup> men and women involved in pornography are viewing and masturbating to orgasm aided by images of men and women to whom they are not married. Although the images being used for sexual arousal are virtual, the men and women pictured in those images are real. Such violation of the seventh commandment, "You shall not commit adultery," is an offense against God. Furthermore, Jesus' Sermon-on-the-Mount definition of adultery as "look[ing] at a woman lustfully" is as applicable to sensual thoughts and arousal by means of pornography as it is to lustful thoughts when encountering a woman in person.<sup>30</sup> Pornography harms its users' fellowship with God, the vibrancy of their faith, and the effectiveness of their service for Him.<sup>31</sup>

Those who have struggled with pornography use report other significant harms that began for them as early as childhood.<sup>32</sup> As a six-year old, Henry

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<sup>28</sup> Dan Gowe, interview by author, Vancouver, November 28, 2019. See Appendix C for Gowe's chart showing the questions asked and the responses from male and female respondents to his informal survey.

<sup>29</sup> Eph. 5:3.

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

<sup>31</sup> 1 John 1:5-7; 2 Tim. 2:21-22; Heb. 9:14. See also Mary B. Short, Thomas E Kasper, and Chad T Wetterneck. "The Relationship Between Religiosity and Internet Pornography Use," *Journal of Religion and Health* 54, no. 2 (April 2015): 581. <http://dx.doi.org/https://www-doi-org.ezproxy.student.twu.ca/10.1007/s10943-014-9849-8>; Alina Baltazar, Herbert W. Helm, Jr., Duane McBride, Gary Hopkins, and John V. Stevens, Jr., "Internet Pornography Use in the Context of External and Internal Religiosity," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38 no. 1 (2018): 32-40, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.student.twu.ca/10.1177%2F009164711003800103>.

<sup>32</sup> Cooper. For an extensive review of literature related to children and youth, see also Antonia Quadara, Alissar El-Murr, and Joe Latham, *The Effects of Pornography on Children and Young People: An Evidence Scan*, (Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2017), <https://www.safersurfing.org/wp->

encountered pornography in an alley garbage can. Although he did not know what it was, he reports that it intrigued and altered him. When he was in grade five, he babysat at a neighbour's house where he happened upon pornography in the basement bathroom. He returned to that pornography stash every time he babysat. This led to stealing money from his parents to buy pornography at the corner store. Soon other rebellious behaviours, which included drugs and pornography, were a way of life for him. His first experience of intercourse came at fifteen years of age, at which time he left home to live with the girl who was a bit older. Decades of pornography use and broken relationships followed. Even after finding Jesus in midlife, his road to freedom has been long and difficult.<sup>33</sup>

The average age of childhood exposure to internet pornography is eleven years of age (which means for many first exposures when they were younger than that).<sup>34</sup> The harms to children and teens who develop an obsession with pornography are considerable. Psychiatrist W. Dean Belnap reports that childhood exposure to pornography “imprints, in the nervous system of the brain, pathways and neural structures that sometimes are premature to the slow, healthy states of development.” He states further, “If [children] are imprinted early, they become motivated and fascinated to indulge in sexual things.” He asserts that pornography tends to interfere with the prefrontal cortex of the brain resulting in a loss of free agency.<sup>35</sup>

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[content/uploads/2018/11/rr the effects of pornography on children and young people 1.pdf](#). The report contains much helpful information. The reader must also be aware that its authors are critical of moral bias in some studies. See also an annotated list of resources in Appendix 1 of the same study, [https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/appendix\\_1\\_evidence-library\\_the\\_effects\\_of\\_pornography\\_on\\_children\\_and\\_young\\_people.pdf](https://aifs.gov.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/appendix_1_evidence-library_the_effects_of_pornography_on_children_and_young_people.pdf); Elena Martellozzo, Andy Monaghan, Joanna R. Adler, Julia Davidson, Rodolfo Leyva and Miranda A. H. Horvath, “‘...I wasn't sure it was normal to watch it...’ A quantitative and qualitative examination of the impact of online pornography on the values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of children and young people” (NSPCC, Children's Commissioner, Middlesex University London, CATS, Forensic Psychological Services, Research Bods) June 2016, <https://www.teachhealth4kids.com/downloads/230616-i-wasnt-sure-it-was-normal-to-watch-it.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous interview by author, name withheld by mutual consent, Abbotsford, B.C., November 18, 2019. All individuals interviewed by the author, who are identified only by a first names, have had their names changed in this paper, by mutual consent, in order to protect their privacy.

<sup>34</sup> Julia Beazley, ed. *How Pornography Harms - What the Church Needs to Know*, revised 2019, p. 23, accessed on December 4, 2019, <https://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca/Resources/Documents/How-Pornography-Harms-What-the-Church-Needs-to-K>. Estimates vary as to the average age of first exposure. Dr. Dave Currie, Ph.D., uses the figure of 9 ½ years. Dave Currie (Founder of Doing Family Right), interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 29, 2019. In the study by Elena Martellozzo et al, p. 31, “At least half of the stage 2 sample had been exposed to online pornography; of those who had seen it, 94 % were exposed by age 14.”

<sup>35</sup> W. Dean Belnap, “Pornography 101: Harms of Pornography,” accessed December 9, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXFFmwaUoTw>.

Pornography use by children and teens has the potential to impact users and their sexuality for life.<sup>36</sup> Exposure to pornography is associated with many issues such as “poor concentration, low motivation, depression, social anxiety, negative self-perception, erectile dysfunction, decreased interest in sex with a partner, more forgiving attitudes towards violence against women and increased comfort with the idea of rape, [and] increased likelihood to have an affair.”<sup>37</sup> It also offers an education about relationships and sexuality that is “dishonest, inaccurate and harmful. It teaches that sex is detached from intimacy, love, mutuality or respect. That it is impersonal and adversarial.”<sup>38</sup>

In response to the current prevalence of pornography, the dating expectations of some teenage girls appear to be changing.<sup>39</sup> Interviews indicate that teenage girls

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<sup>36</sup> It should be noted that Cranney, Koletić, and Štulhofer found in a study with Croatian adolescents “a buffering effect of delayed first exposure for male pornography use in middle and late adolescence,” an effect which they believe deserves more systematic study. See Stephen Cranney, Goran Koletić, Aleksandar Štulhofer, “Varieties of Religious and Pornographic Experience: Latent Growth in Adolescents' Religiosity and Pornography Use,” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 28 no 3 (2018): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2018.1480195>. For examination of obsession, compulsion, and consequences, see also Al Cooper, David L. Delmonico, Eric Griffin-Shelley, and Robin M. Mathy, “Online Sexual Activity: An Examination of Potentially Problematic Behaviors,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 11 (2004): 129-142, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10720160490882642>; Belinda Luscombe, “Porn and the Threat to Virility: The First Generation of Men Who Grew Up with Unlimited Online Porn Sound the Alarm,” *Time* 187, (Mar 31, 2016): 40-47, [https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Annex-13-TIME-Cover-Story-featuring-Wilson-Porn-Induced-Erectile-Dysfunction-Is-It-a-Virility-Threat-Time.com\\_.pdf](https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Annex-13-TIME-Cover-Story-featuring-Wilson-Porn-Induced-Erectile-Dysfunction-Is-It-a-Virility-Threat-Time.com_.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Julia Beazley, p. 23; Alina Baltazar, Herbert W. Helm, Jr., Duane McBride, Gary Hopkins, and John V. Stevens, Jr., “Internet Pornography Use in the Context of External and Internal Religiosity,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38 no. 1 (2018), 36, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.student.twu.ca/10.1177%2F009164711003800103>. See Appendix D for the problems reported by 751 male and female students at a conservative Christian university in the study conducted by Baltazar et al. See also Carroll et al, 6-30, for a study of 813 university students. Also see Campbell and Kohut as examples of scholars who argue that “pornography use can have a range of possible effects on the relationship that are not exclusively negative.”

<sup>38</sup> Beazley, p. 9. See also Raymond M. Bergner and Ana J. Bridges, “The Significance of Heavy Pornography Involvement for Romantic Partners: Research and Clinical Implications,” *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy* 28, No. 3, (January 9, 2011): 193-206, <http://pascal-francis.inist.fr/vibad/index.php?action=search&terms=13719466>.

<sup>39</sup> L. Collins, PhD, Marc N. Elliott, PhD, Sandra H. Berry, MA, David E. Kanouse, PhD, Dale Kunkel, PhD, Sarah B. Hunter, PhD, and Angela Miu, MS. “Watching Sex on Television Predicts Adolescent Initiation of Sexual Behavior Rebecca,” *Pediatrics* 114: 280-289, <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/pediatrics/114/3/e280.full.pdf>; Julia R. Lippman and Scott W. Campbell, “Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don’t...If You’re a Girl: Relational and Normative Contexts of Adolescent Sexting in the United States,” *Journal of Children and Media* 8, no. 4 (June 6, 2014): 371-386, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2014.923009>; Jeff R. Temple, Jonathan A. Paul, Patricia van den Berg, Vi Donna Le, Amy McElhany, and Brian W. Temple, “Teen Sexting and Its Association with Teen Sexual Behaviors,” *JAMA Pediatrics* 166, no. 9 (September 1, 2012): 828-833, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/archpediatrics.2012.835>; Jeff R. Temple and Hyejeong Choi, “Longitudinal

are influenced in everyday life. In her interactions with fifteen- and sixteen-year-old girls, soccer coach Andrea learned that the many girls on her team think that all the boys at school are involved with pornography. The girls believe that when a girl dates a boy, he expects her to send him a nude picture of herself. If she does not, she does not expect to be asked out by him again. Andrea also has learned that girls on the team go online to view pornography in order to see what the boys expect of them sexually.<sup>40</sup> This sort of teen girl experience is confirmed by Pastor of Care Thaleia Sawatzky. In addition, Sawatzky observed that teen girls' exploration of same-sex pornographic material is contributing to confusion regarding sexual orientation for these girls.<sup>41</sup> Marriage and Family Therapist Jill Manning adds, "The pornography industry tells youth that pornography will aid them to prepare for healthy sexuality. In fact, it handicaps them, creating fear and insecurity."<sup>42</sup>

The harms resulting from pornography involvement persist long after the teen and even the young adult years. In their book *More Than Talk: A Covenantal Approach to Everyday Communication*, Bill Strom and Divine Agodzo cite experimental studies that compared men and women exposed to a steady diet of filmed pornography with those who watched non-pornographic films.<sup>43</sup> A study by Manning found that those who watched pornographic films tended to "dislike their spouse's sexual performance, affection, and attractiveness; judge their spouse as not being sexually curious; wonder if marriage and monogamy were worth it; view out-of-wedlock sex as common and okay; [and] report having an unhappy marriage."<sup>44</sup> Using data in the GSS on 20,000 married adults who are married or have been married, Doran and Price "found that individuals who reported seeing an X-rated movie in the last year were 25% more likely to be divorced and 101% more likely to have had an extramarital affair. They were also 12% less likely to report having a very happy marriage (if they were still married) and 7% less likely to report being

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Association Between Teen Sexting and Sexual Behavior," *Pediatrics* 134, no. 5, (November 2014), e1287-e1292, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-1974>.

<sup>40</sup> Anonymous telephone interview by author, Abbotsford, B.C., April 4, 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Thaleia Sawatzky, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., December 3, 2019.

<sup>42</sup> Jill Manning, Internet Safety 10, "What is Pornography?" (video), accessed November 4, 2019.

<https://internetsafety101.org/whatispornography>; Tracy L. Tylka, Ashley M. Kroon Van Diest, "You Looking at Her 'Hot' Body May Not be 'Cool' for Me: Integrating Male Partners' Pornography Use into Objectification Theory for Women," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 39.1 (2005): 67-84, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0361684314521784>.

<sup>43</sup> Bill Strom and Agodzo, Divine, *More Than Talk: A Covenantal Approach to Everyday Communication*, 5th edition. (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 2018), 157.

<sup>44</sup> Jill C. Manning, "The Impact of Internet Pornography on Marriage and the Family: A Review of the Research," *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 13 (2006): 131-165, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10720160600870711>. Cited by Bill Strom and Agodzo, p.157.

very happy in life in general.” They also found that pornography use correlated with less sexual satisfaction and more infidelity.<sup>45</sup>

Those who struggle with pornography addiction also report feelings of shame and hopelessness.<sup>46</sup> Henry felt so sick and tired of his way of living that he wanted to kill himself.<sup>47</sup> Sawatzky reports heightened shame for women. Their first conversation with anyone about their own pornography use is usually with a counsellor, if they have had the courage to seek help. While the women who have come to Sawatzky for help expect that men might well use pornography and talk to each other about it, they do not feel pornography use is expected of women and do not tend to confide in each other when they use it.<sup>48</sup>

Men and women using pornography for arousal, masturbation, and orgasm describe to Sawatzky that they are not actually having sex.<sup>49</sup> She believes that they do not realize the addictive nature of what they are doing and the way in which pornography use can alter brain chemistry.<sup>50</sup> Sawatzky observes that Christian married couples are increasingly using pornography to add variety to intercourse. She notes with respect to female partners: “It wrecks their sense of self. They feel less than, not beautiful, not good enough. Some are turned on by it. They experience the whoosh. But it comes to the point where they can’t have sex with

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<sup>45</sup> See also Kirk Doran and Joseph Price, “Pornography and Marriage,” *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 35, (2014): 489-498, <https://rdcu.be/b3B4F>.

<sup>46</sup> Myles Chisholm and Terry Lynn Gall, “Shame and the X-rated Addiction: The Role of Spirituality in Treating Male Pornography Addiction,” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* 22 (2015): 259-272, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10720162.2015.1066279>; Jeffrey J. Ford, Jared A. Durtschi, Darrell L. Franklin, “Structural Therapy With a Couple Battling Pornography Addiction,” *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 40 (2012): 336-348, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2012.685003>; Shane W. Kraus and Patricia J. Sweeney, “Hitting the Target: Considerations for Differential Diagnosis When Treating Individuals for Problematic Use of Pornography,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 48, no. 4 (2019): 431-435, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1301-9>; Nathan D. Leonhardt, Brian J. Willoughby and Bonnie Young-Petersen, “Damaged Goods Perception of Pornography Addiction as a Mediator Between Religiosity and Relationship Anxiety Surrounding Pornography Use,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 55, no. 3 (2018), <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2017.1295013>.

<sup>47</sup> Anonymous interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 18, 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Thaleia Sawatzky, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., December 3, 2019; Perry, *Addicted to Lust*, 179.

<sup>49</sup> Jesse W. Abell, Timothy A. Steenbergh, and Michael Boivin, “Cyberporn Use in the Context of Religiosity,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34, no. 2 (2006): 165-171, <https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.student.twu.ca/home/ptj>.

<sup>50</sup> Donald L. Hilton, Jr., MD, “Pornography Addiction—a Supranormal Stimulus Considered in the Context of Neuroplasticity,” *Socioaffective Neuroscience & Psychology* 3, No. 1 (July 19, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F009164710603400206>; Luscombe; Simone Kuhn and Jurgen Gallinat, “Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated with Pornography Consumption: The Brain on Porn,” *JAMA Psychiatry* 71, no. 7 (July 2014): 827-834, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2014.93>.

each other without it.”<sup>51</sup> Sawatzky is concerned that holy sexuality may be disappearing.

Counsellor Dave Currie reports that 65 percent of his counselling is sex related. He argues that the PMO sequence—Porn Masturbation Orgasm—creates havoc for sexual fulfillment in committed relationships: “[T]he brain gets trained that something other than real sex is the real thing.”<sup>52</sup> Currie is certified with the American Association of Sexual Addiction Therapy (AASAT) in the specialization of intimacy anorexia, another of the troubling harms of pornography.<sup>53</sup> Psychologist Douglas Weiss, a recovered pornography addict and the founder of Heart to Heart Counseling Center and the AASAT, coined the term “intimacy anorexia” to describe a “relationship disorder that is marked by a lack of intimacy...It occurs when someone in a relationship actively withholds emotional, spiritual and sexual intimacy from their spouse or partner. This lack of intimacy harms the marriage, damages the relationship causing pain and loneliness and impacts the spouse or partner significantly.” Sexual addiction, including pornography addiction, is a cause of this disorder.<sup>54</sup>

When considering the consequences of pornography use, church leaders should be aware that various academic studies have found that pornography’s impacts are most pronounced for members of religious groups that are most opposed to its use. Using the GSS, Richard Patterson of Cornell University and Joseph Price of Brigham Young University studied self-reported happiness, as “means of assessing individual well-being,” for men and women who did and did not use pornography.<sup>55</sup> They learned that “[m]en who attend church regularly and have

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<sup>51</sup> Thaleia Sawatzky, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., December 3, 2019. See also Valerie Voon et al, “Neural Correlates of Sexual Cue Reactivity in Individuals with and without Compulsive Sexual Behaviors,” *PLoS ONE* 9, no. 7 (July 11, 2014): 1-10, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0102419>.

<sup>52</sup> John D. Foubert, “The Public Health Harms of Pornography: The Brain, Erectile Dysfunction, and Sexual Violence,” National Center on Sexual Exploitation, accessed on April 11, 2020, [http://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/Freedom-Agenda\\_FOUBERT\\_PublicHealth\\_FINAL.pdf](http://endsexualexploitation.org/wp-content/uploads/Freedom-Agenda_FOUBERT_PublicHealth_FINAL.pdf); Voon, et al.

<sup>53</sup> Dave Currie, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C. November 29, 2019.

<sup>54</sup> Doug Weiss, <https://www.drdougweiss.com/what-is-intimacy-anorexia/>, accessed April 11, 2020. Psychologist Doug Weiss, Ph.D., is the founder and president of the American Association of Sexual Addiction Therapy. He first mentioned intimacy anorexia in 1998 in the film *Sexual Anorexia, Beyond Sexual, Emotional and Spiritual Withholding*. In 2010, he published the book *Intimacy Anorexia*. AASAT certified therapists and coaches are available in Canada, England, Singapore, and in twenty-two states in the U.S.A. See <https://www.drdougweiss.com>, accessed April 11, 2020; <https://aasat.org>, accessed April 11, 2020; “Intimacy Anorexia,” *Wikipedia*, last modified March 1, 2020, accessed April 11, 2020; “Intimacy Anorexia,” *Elements Behavioral Health* blog, Nov 20, 2012, accessed April 11, 2020, <https://www.sexualrecovery.com/blog/intimacy-anorexia/>.

<sup>55</sup> Richard Duane Patterson, Joseph L. Price, “Pornography, Religion, and the Happiness Gap: Does Pornography Impact the Actively Religious Differently?” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 51, no 1 (Mar 2012): 81, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2011.01630.x>.

not reported seeing an X-rated movie in the last year report the highest level of happiness....” At the same time, “[m]en who do not attend church regularly and report watching an X-rated movie in the last year report the lowest level of happiness....” Patterson and Price discovered that “[t]he happiness gap, or the difference in the fraction of men who report being very happy when comparing pornography users and nonpornography users” is significantly greater for individuals who are regular church attenders. The same is true for women.<sup>56</sup> Further, they found the largest happiness gaps for individuals from groups that have the strongest attitudes against pornography use.<sup>57</sup> Patterson and Price theorize that the greater happiness gaps for churchgoers and adherents to groups more strongly opposing pornography may be either from cognitive dissonance or club goods. In other words, the psychic costs for churchgoers using pornography may be imposed by either the pornography users themselves (cognitive dissonance) or by the religious groups (club goods).<sup>58</sup>

Samuel Perry agrees that pornography use, especially compulsive use, “does indeed have concrete, negative effect on peoples’ mental health and personal relationships....”<sup>59</sup> Further, he argues that the negative effects of pornography use are “decidedly worse for conservative Protestants,” that is, “uniquely damaging to their mental health, spiritual lives, and interpersonal relationships.”<sup>60</sup> He acknowledges that “much of the content of pornography is filled with misogynistic and racist messages.”<sup>61</sup> His explanation of the negative effect of pornography, however, points beyond the use of pornography itself to “the cultural meaning this activity has for a group in combination with the various cultural idiosyncrasies of that group that exacerbate its influence (e.g., sexual exceptionalism, complementarianism, pietistic idealism, biblicism).”<sup>62</sup> In short, he considers that the uniquely harmful effects of pornography use in the lives of conservative Protestants are caused by “the inner dissonance caused by moral incongruence,” which he defines as “the experience of violating one’s own moral values.”<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 88. According to Patterson and Price, “[c]lub good models developed by economists suggest that the club provides a benefit to members by fostering the provision of semi-public goods. In the case of religion, churches create enforcement mechanisms to reduce free riding. Consequently, the psychic costs of deviant activity should be higher for individuals who belong to religious groups with strong social norms.” 79.

<sup>59</sup> Perry, 184.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, xii, 224-225 note 22.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 77, 179. See also Joshua B. Grubbs, Samuel L. Perry, Joshua A. Wilt, and Rory C. Reid, “Pornography Problems Due to Moral Incongruence: An Integrative Model with Systematic Review and

Lyman Stone agrees with Perry that “struggles with pornography are indeed harming the relationships of many people and seem to be especially painful for conservative Protestants.”<sup>64</sup> Yet Stone offers an alternative explanation to Perry’s conclusions about moral incongruence. Stone argues that, like a husband who professes to be egalitarian but does not live it out, it is not surprising that men or women who profess to believe pornography is sinful but do not live out their conviction suffer from “psychological discomfort, even distress.”<sup>65</sup> Stone asserts that violating our own standards of behaviour “ought to create” such feelings and that “virtually all people have some kind of standard to which they hold their spouse.” Furthermore, he insists that the GSS data shows that “Protestant males...who abstain from porn are as happy or happier than married men of other faiths who abstain from porn, while married Protestant males who have viewed pornography in the last year are far happier with their marriages than men of other faiths who did so.” He concludes, “Our porn issues are not severe enough to offset the fact that our lifestyle model of chastity until marriage<sup>66</sup> and commitment within marriage<sup>67</sup> is, in fact, the most strongly happiness-associated lifestyle in America today.”<sup>68</sup>

## **Prevention of Pornography Addiction**

The potential harms associated with pornography raise the question as to how men and women can stay free from pornography in the first place. Asked about prevention, Currie is emphatic about the necessity of preparing children to use the internet safely. When parents ask for help because their son or daughter has accessed pornography online, Currie tells them to go home and apologize to their child for not doing more to protect them. Prevention requires having age-appropriate conversations with children, starting when they are very young. These conversations must include instructing them about how to respond to naked pictures. Currie also urges parents to put a filter on their home internet for their

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Meta-Analysis,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 48, 397-415, August 3, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-018-1248-x>.

<sup>64</sup> Stone.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Nicholas H. Wolfinger, “Counterintuitive Trends in the Link Between Premarital Sex and Marital Stability,” June 6, 2016, accessed March 31, 2020, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/counterintuitive-trends-in-the-link-between-premarital-sex-and-marital-stability/>.

<sup>67</sup> Wendy Wang, “Who Cheats More? The Demographics of Infidelity in America,” January 10, 2018, accessed March 31, 2020, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/who-cheats-more-the-demographics-of-cheating-in-america>.

<sup>68</sup> Stone. For evidence that adherence to religion enhances marital satisfaction, see F Jafari, L Neisani Samani, N Fatemi, S Ta’avoni, and J Abolghasemi, “Marital Satisfaction and Adherence to Religion,” *Journal of Medicine and Life*, 2015; 8 (Spec Iss 4): 214-218, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5319260/>.

children’s protection. He recommends KidsWifi.<sup>69</sup> It “filters, monitors, and controls all their online devices, even devices brought by visiting friends.”<sup>70</sup>

When it comes to children encountering pornography, Sawatzky observes:

Parents expect it in their sons but don’t prepare their daughters. They also don’t prepare their daughters for the dating and naked pictures issue. Parents train their kids about inappropriate touching but not about inappropriate sending of pictures. Christian parents think their kids know better.<sup>71</sup>

Sawatzky urges parents to be wise about phones for young children, including concerns about music, and sleep overs. Various internet sites such as Covenant Eyes<sup>72</sup> and Protect Young Eyes<sup>73</sup> have numerous helpful resources to educate both parents and their children. Covenant Eyes’ “Safe Digital Conversation Guides” offer age-specific suggestions to assist parents to talk with their children.<sup>74</sup> Sawatzky also recommends that parents read a book called *Good Pictures Bad Pictures* to their children to explore what pornography is, why it is dangerous, and how to reject it.<sup>75</sup>

Much has been written about the important preventative role played by accountability in relationships for both men and women.<sup>76</sup> Currie quotes the last line of a TED talk on addiction: “The opposite of addiction is not sobriety. The opposite

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<sup>69</sup> See <https://kidswifi.com>, accessed December 10, 2019. Another device offering screen time management and parental control is Disney Circle. See <https://meetcircle.com/about>, accessed May 8, 2020.

<sup>70</sup> Dave Currie, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 29, 2019.

<sup>71</sup> Thaleia Sawatzky, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., December 3, 2019.

<sup>72</sup> <http://covenanteyes.com>, access December 10, 2019.

<sup>73</sup> <http://protectyoungeyes.com>, accessed December 10, 2019.

<sup>74</sup> <https://www.covenanteyes.com/shs-optin/>, accessed December 10, 2019.

<sup>75</sup> Thaleia Sawatzky, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., December 3, 2019; Kristen A. Jenson, Gail A. Poyner, and Debbie, Fox, *Good Pictures Bad Pictures: Porn-Proofing Today’s Young Kids* (Richmond, WA: Glen Cover Press, 2014). For more on the importance of and approaches to parents talking with children, see Thomas Lickona, PhD, “Should We Teach Kids About Porn’s Harms? Yes, and Here’s How,” *Psychology Today* (Nov 18, 2019), accessed on April 14, 2020, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/raising-kind-kids/201911/should-we-teach-kids-about-porns-harms-yes-and-heres-how>.

<sup>76</sup> Jenifer Ann Williams, “Recovery: The Impact of Accountability, Spirituality, and Hope(ASH) on Internet Pornography Addiction” (EdD diss., Liberty University, 2019), <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/2200>; Perry, *Addicted to Lust*, 147-176; Sarah Diefendorf, “After the Wedding Night: Sexual Abstinence over the Life Course,” *Gender and Society* 29, no. 5 (October 2011): 657-659, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243215591597>. Christian ministries dedicated to recovery from habitual pornography use consistently advise accountability in relationships, often with the help of accountability software on digital devices. See, for example, Covenant Eyes, accessed, December 11, 2019, <https://www.covenanteyes.com>.

of addiction is connection.”<sup>77</sup> The “one another” statements of the New Testament remind believers that they are not meant to walk alone as followers of Jesus. They are meant to “be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love,” “accept one another...just as Christ accepted [them] in order to bring praise to God,” “confess [their] sins to each other and pray for each other so that [they] may be healed,” and “love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”<sup>78</sup> Followers of Jesus need each other to follow Jesus well.

Pastor of Care Connie Siebert cautions that accountability is not simply reporting to another. It involves active participation in each other’s lives. Genuine, healthy accountability invites vulnerability and provides encouragement towards God-honouring patterns of thought, conversation, and behaviour.<sup>79</sup>

Artist, pastor, and spiritual director David Darbey, who describes himself as a self-recovered sex addict of 30 years, argues that “[t]he sexual problem is not the core problem. The core problem is spiritual weakness.” The only sure safeguard against any sexual addiction, according to Darbey, is a close relationship with Jesus Christ. Referencing Psalm 84’s multiple statements about the presence of God such as, “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked,” Darbey contends that when being in the presence of the Lord is the most important thing in individuals’ lives, they will not succumb to pornography.<sup>80</sup>

As churches fulfill their mission, they are simultaneously preventing pornography use. The mission, with which Jesus left every local church, “to make disciples...teaching them to obey everything [Jesus] commanded [us],” is a lifelong assignment.<sup>81</sup> Steve Jones, president of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada and former local church pastor for 30 years, is clear that sexual purity is a discipleship issue.<sup>82</sup> David Horita, regional director of the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in British Columbia and Yukon and a veteran pastor and church planter, calls the ninety-plus churches, which he supports, to develop a

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<sup>77</sup> Dave Currie, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 29, 2019; Johann Hari, “Everything You Think You Know About Addiction is Wrong,” TEDGlobalLondon, June 2015, [https://www.ted.com/talks/johann\\_hari\\_everything\\_you\\_think\\_you\\_know\\_about\\_addiction\\_is\\_wrong?language=en#t-870077](https://www.ted.com/talks/johann_hari_everything_you_think_you_know_about_addiction_is_wrong?language=en#t-870077).

<sup>78</sup> Eph. 4:2; Rom. 15:7; Jas. 5:16; 1 Peter 4:8. For full, categorized lists of one-another passages in the New Testament, see Jeffrey Kranz, “All the ‘one another’ commands in the NT,” March 9, 2014, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://overviewbible.com/one-another-infographic/>.

<sup>79</sup> Connie Siebert (Pastor of Care, South Abbotsford Church, Abbotsford, BC), interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 14, 2019.

<sup>80</sup> David Darbey (Artist, Pastor and Pornography Spiritual Director), interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C. October 24, 2019.

<sup>81</sup> Matt. 28:18-20.

<sup>82</sup> Steven Jones (President, Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada), phone interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., October 31, 2019.

holistic discipleship plan. He asserts that everything on which a church spends time, energy, and money must contribute to making disciples who are motivated not by guilt but by their identity in Christ and their desire to be like Him.<sup>83</sup>

This makes every ministry, including the preaching of God’s Word, preventative when it comes to sin of any sort. While the pulpit is not the place for pastors to express their own struggles with pornography, Henry is clear about the need for pastors to speak about themselves with “honesty and transparency from the pulpit.”<sup>84</sup> Sawatzky urges preaching pastors to tackle issues of sexual morality when they come up in their preaching: “Don’t dodge the difficult verses!”<sup>85</sup>

### **Assisting Those Who Struggle with Pornography**

Many children, teens, and adults have surrendered their minds and bodies to pornography, with devastating consequences. If preventative measures have not been in place or the surrender has occurred regardless, shepherds after God’s own heart must leave the ninety-nine and go after the sheep that is lost.<sup>86</sup> Likening discipleship to a journey down a river, Horita contends, “As we help people get down the river, there will be a need for various lifelines. Most everyone will need some sort of lifeline at some point.”<sup>87</sup>

Henry advises, “Don’t shame anyone that comes to you.... By the time they’ve got to you, [those who are addicted to pornography have] already cried a lot.”<sup>88</sup> Sawatzky agrees,

There is a huge freedom that they experience when they actually disclose [pornography use] with a trusted person who treats it with confidentiality and with dignity. I say, ‘You are welcome at [our church] with your muck. God loves you still.’ Being heard, being understood, not being tossed out of the church because of the sin, is what is needed to find healing.<sup>89</sup>

Currie adds, “Power grows in secret. If you don’t break the silence, you don’t break the power.” But, Currie warns, there is a danger: “When people come forward and

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<sup>83</sup> David Horita (Regional Director, Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in British Columbia and Yukon, interview by the author, Fort Langley, B.C., November 25, 2019.

<sup>84</sup> Anonymous interview by the author, November 18, 2019.

<sup>85</sup> Thaleia Sawatzky, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., December 3, 2019.

<sup>86</sup> Jer. 3:15; Lk. 15:3-7.

<sup>87</sup> David Horita, interview by the author, Fort Langley, B.C., November 25, 2019.

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 18, 2019.

<sup>89</sup> Thaleia Sawatzky, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., December 3, 2019.

ask for help and they don't get it, they never come forward again." Currie has developed a conversation guide to assist with such critical conversations.<sup>90</sup>

Pastor Craig Thiessen is delighted by the small but significant start taken by his church's men's ministry towards helping men find freedom from pornography.<sup>91</sup> At least twice a year, the men's ministry runs a "His Shop" series in an automotive shop. In the spring of 2019, about forty men responded to the His Shop invitation to view and discuss the six videos of the Conquer Series, Volume 1.<sup>92</sup> After viewing each presentation, the group debriefed and divided into small groups for discussion, sharing, and prayer. Noting that numerous ministries have DVD series,<sup>93</sup> Dennis and the other members of the men's ministry team reviewed several. He says, "We had reservations about our series choice but it came down to something that would start the conversation."<sup>94</sup>

On the first evening, Darbey shared his experience of finding freedom from pornography and offered to meet for twelve additional weeks when the Conquer series was over, using his study guide *God's Little Book of Fire*,<sup>95</sup> and to provide a trained mentor to anyone desiring that level of help. Six men continued to meet for twelve weeks after the initial series was over, after which four chose to continue meeting with a mentor. One of these men found the study guide potent but that it is the relationship with a trained mentor that is enabling him to unpack its vital truths, to draw closer to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to find more complete freedom.<sup>96</sup>

Darbey asserts that three things must happen if men and women are to get free from sexual addiction.<sup>97</sup> First, they need to develop a close relationship with Jesus Christ to overcome the issue of spiritual weakness. Although prayer and worship are important, says Darbey, the most effective means of starting and stoking a passionate love of Jesus is significant time every day in God's Word: "The focus is always to discern what God is saying to us. This is life-changing."

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<sup>90</sup> Counsellor Dave Currie, PhD, can be contacted through his ministry's website, <https://www.doingfamilyright.com>.

<sup>91</sup> Craig Thiessen (Lead Pastor, Ross Road Community Church, Abbotsford, BC), interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 18, 2019.

<sup>92</sup> Available for purchase at Conquer Series, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://conquerseries.com>.

<sup>93</sup> Valiant Man—DVD Program, accessed April 17, 2020, [https://www.careforcelifekeys.org/usa/asp/resources/?category\\_1=Programs&category\\_2=Valiant%20Man](https://www.careforcelifekeys.org/usa/asp/resources/?category_1=Programs&category_2=Valiant%20Man); Pure Desire Ministries, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://puredesire.org/collections/store-collection>; Restored Ministries, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://www.restoredministries.ca/programs>. Setting Captives Free, accessed April 17, 2020, <https://settingcaptivesfree.com/>; XXXChurch, accessed April 17, 2020, [https://www.x3workshops.com/?utm\\_source=XXXchurch&utm\\_medium=website&utm\\_campaign=X3watch-sales&utm\\_content=top-nav&utm\\_term=xxxchurch-visitors](https://www.x3workshops.com/?utm_source=XXXchurch&utm_medium=website&utm_campaign=X3watch-sales&utm_content=top-nav&utm_term=xxxchurch-visitors).

<sup>94</sup> Anonymous interview by author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 12, 2019.

<sup>95</sup> David Darbey, *God's Little Book of Fire* (Abbotsford; BRV Publishing, 2019).

<sup>96</sup> Anonymous interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C. October 31, 2019.

<sup>97</sup> David Darbey, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C. October 24, 2019.

Second, Darbey calls those who struggle with pornography to complete surrender: “Only when we are surrendered to the Lord Jesus Christ, are we free from the power of sin.” Complete surrender to Jesus requires repentance from sin and a commitment to live a life pleasing to Him.<sup>98</sup>

Third, Darbey believes freedom is found with the help of a spiritual mentor who comes alongside as a genuine, humble, respectful friend and support person. The mentor must be one who is walking in freedom, able to listen well, and willing to challenge. Darbey points to Paul’s instruction, “Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.”<sup>99</sup> Darbey also points to James 5 to underscore the significance of such mentoring:

“My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.”<sup>100</sup>

The three elements advocated by Darbey are characteristic of other successful pornography ministries, one of which is led by Gowe. Since Gowe found freedom from alcoholism and pornography addictions several decades ago, he has been learning how to apply these essentials in one-hour small group experiences. Gowe developed his addictions as a teen. Shortly after a last-gasp prayer to Jesus to rescue him, he tried to buy opium from a fellow who, it turned out, had just become a Christian. The man he hoped would sell him opium prayed for him instead. Amazingly, he was set free from his addictions.

Enrolling at Regent College in Vancouver, BC, to train for ministry, Gowe experienced some continuing struggles with lust that troubled him. Learning from his failures, from those who came alongside to help, and from other ministries such as Living Waters<sup>101</sup> and Neil Anderson’s Freedom in Christ Ministries,<sup>102</sup> Gowe developed an AA-like meeting format he called Men’s Group.<sup>103</sup> These weekly, God-focused groups, described on the Men’s Group website, emphasize scripture memory, prayer, praise, worship, and surrender to the Lord Jesus. At the end of each meeting, participants practice renouncing unclean thoughts and announcing who they are in Christ. Together they proclaim: “I announce that I belong to my

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<sup>98</sup> 2 Cor. 5:15.

<sup>99</sup> Gal. 6:1.

<sup>100</sup> James 5:19-20.

<sup>101</sup> Living Waters Canada has since changed its name to Journey Canada. Its website, accessed April 8, 2020, can be found at <https://www.journeycanada.org>.

<sup>102</sup> Freedom in Christ Canada, accessed on April 6, 2020, <https://www.ficm.ca/index.htm>; Freedom in Christ Ministries U.S.A., accessed on April 6, 2020, <https://ficm.org>.

<sup>103</sup> Dan Gowe, interview by the author, Vancouver, B.C., November 28, 2019.

Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Lord Jesus, I worship you!” The leader, a person who has learned to walk in freedom, plays the key role of godly mentor.<sup>104</sup>

Care pastor Paul Siemens knew that pornography was a troubling issue for Christian men, yet, despite the size of the church in which he serves, only a handful of men, perhaps five a year, ever approached him for help. As he sought God’s direction about how to come alongside those needing help, he heard about Men’s Group. After research and careful planning, Siemens launched a group at his church. He invited Gowe to describe Men’s Group to the 70 men who were at a Wednesday night men’s Bible study. When Men’s Group was launched shortly thereafter, enough men came to make a start. Siemens says,

It doesn’t take a lot of men. Ten to twelve is an optimal size. There is an energy. We do it at 8:00 p.m. Guys with young kids can get them to bed first. Guys with older kids can help them with homework. Some men are experiencing freedom for the first time in twenty years. Others are still struggling. They are all finding community and help.<sup>105</sup>

Men’s Group is proving to be effective in about a dozen churches in BC’s Lower Mainland. Its simplicity makes it readily transferrable. The free, weekly, hour-long meetings make it accessible. Follow-through is built in because the meetings continue year-round. The format is suitable for women, who meet in their own groups. Gowe advises doing an anonymous survey in a weekend service with a sermon on sexual purity, a video testimony from the Men’s Group website, and an announcement that a Men’s Group is being launched. Those interested in joining are directed to the website and asked to arrange an appointment for a personal conversation before the first meeting.<sup>106</sup>

Currie urges men and women to see a counsellor trained in sexual issues, particularly if they have not found freedom after several months of trying other alternatives. Currie and his fellow counsellors assist those seeking freedom to admit their addictions and commit to a clear path to freedom. For Charles, counselling was an essential component for both his wife and himself in the saving of their marriage as he sought freedom from pornography and she sought freedom from the pain of betrayal.<sup>107</sup> Besides counselling and accountability, Currie’s *Doing Family Right* offers recovery group experiences—Regroups, they call them—in which participants work

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<sup>104</sup> Men’s Group, accessed December 11, 2019, <http://www.mensgroup.ca/about-2/>.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Siemens, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 18, 2019.

<sup>106</sup> Dan Gowe, interview by the author, Vancouver, B.C., November 28, 2019.

<sup>107</sup> Anonymous interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 12, 2019. *Doing Family Right* also offers help for spouses who struggle with a sense of betrayal because of their partners’ pornography habits.

through a rigorous, AA-like, twelve-step program focused on freedom from sexual addiction.

Currie observes that sometimes men and women are more comfortable getting help away from their local church. His Doing Family Right website itself is a resource for people who are looking for encouragement and empowering information as they seek freedom from pornography use.<sup>108</sup>

Doing Family Right works in tandem with Dr. Doug Weiss' Heart to Heart Counseling Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Those who struggle with pornography can receive telephone counselling from Heart to Heart at reasonable rates.<sup>109</sup> For Henry, who has benefited from various ministries yet continues to require consistent support even while serving as a group leader with Doing Family Right, Heart to Heart phone counselling has been a lifeline.<sup>110</sup> Because not all counsellors are equally competent to deal with sexual addiction issues, church leaders are urged not to wait until a congregant requires referral to identify counsellors who are highly competent to deal with habituated pornography use.

The same internet that brings sexual temptation to congregants is a source of plentiful, relevant information both for freedom seekers and those who desire to help them. In addition to those already mentioned, Careforce Lifekeys,<sup>111</sup> Covenant Eyes,<sup>112</sup> Evangelical Fellowship of Canada,<sup>113</sup> Family Life Canada,<sup>114</sup> Focus on the Family Canada,<sup>115</sup> Josh.org,<sup>116</sup> Pure Desire Ministries,<sup>117</sup> Restored Ministries,<sup>118</sup> Setting Captives Free,<sup>119</sup> and XXX Church<sup>120</sup> offer resources. Church leaders are urged to

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<sup>108</sup> Doing Family Right, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.doingfamilyright.com>.

<sup>109</sup> Heart to Heart Counseling Center, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.drdougweiss.com>.

<sup>110</sup> Anonymous interview by the author, November 18, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Careforce Lifekeys, also associated with the name Valiant Man, is a ministry founded by Dr. Allan Meyer and Helen Meyer of Australia, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.careforcelifekeys.org/pages.asp?id=49>.

<sup>112</sup> Covenant Eyes provides knowledge resources in the form of e-books, guides, and videos in addition to filtering and accountability tools, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.covenanteyes.com>

<sup>113</sup> EFC, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.evangelicalfellowship.ca>.

<sup>114</sup> Family Life: A P2C Ministry, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.familylifecanada.com>.

<sup>115</sup> Focus on the Family Canada, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.focusonthefamily.ca>.

<sup>116</sup> Josh McDowell Ministries, a Cru Ministry, provides a wide variety of resources on topics ranging from apologetics to spiritual growth, to youth and family, to sex and relationships, and more. Accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.josh.org/resources/sex-relationships/#sexuality>.

<sup>117</sup> Pure Desire Ministries International was founded by Dr. Ted and Diane Roberts. The two Conquer video series are just some of their many resources, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://puredesire.org>.

<sup>118</sup> Restored Ministries is the ministry of Matt Cline of Edmonton, Alberta with a vision to see sexual health restored in churches, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.restoredministries.ca/>.

<sup>119</sup> Setting Captives Free 2.0 was established by Mike and Jody Cleveland to help men and women find freedom through the gospel of Jesus Christ, accessed December 12, 2019, <https://settingcaptivesfree.com>.

<sup>120</sup> XXXChurch is currently led by Rich and Brittini. XXXChurch offers freedom from pornography and unwanted sexual patterns through online accountability and online small groups with like-minded participants. Accessed December 12, 2019, <https://www.xxxchurch.com>.

diligently seek God’s heart to discern which approaches and which resources are best suited to the individuals in their care.

Conversations with men and women who have found freedom from sexual addiction frequently reveal that breaking the power of pornography in their lives has taken great perseverance over extended periods of time.<sup>121</sup> Pornography habits that are hardest to break may, in part, be due to the length of time pornography has been used and the frequency of its use. Freedom seekers often have benefited from several different ministries, learning from each as they gain more and more freedom.

Pastors and other local church leaders must themselves be living in freedom to be most effective in helping others.<sup>122</sup> Aware of the discouraging statistics regarding clergy involvement with pornography, Darbey references the Sovereign Lord’s revelations to Ezekiel in chapter eight. When Ezekiel followed instructions to dig into the wall of the temple, he found a hidden doorway. Instructed to go through the door, Ezekiel came upon the seventy elders of Israel in idol worship. Thereupon, Ezekiel’s supernatural guide queried him: “Son of man, have you seen what the elders of Israel are doing in the darkness, each at the shrine of his own idol? They say, ‘The LORD does not see us....’”<sup>123</sup> Darbey believes that sexual purity begins with church leaders. When church leaders, in the power of the Holy Spirit, live in the light of God’s goodness, righteousness, and truth, there is hope for those within their care.<sup>124</sup>

One of the challenges of addressing complex needs, especially in smaller churches, is that to do so is very labour and resource intensive. For that reason, church leaders may be wise to consider teaming up with other churches to establish a ministry of coming alongside those who struggle with pornography. Alternatively, church leaders may discern that it is best for them to establish a recovery ministry that addresses more than one area of dysfunction. Many churches are unilaterally or collectively choosing Freedom Session as such a ministry.<sup>125</sup> One church began using Freedom Session several years ago with 20 participants. Of its current 80 participants, about one third come from the host church, one third from other churches, and one third from no church. Although large group teaching includes

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<sup>121</sup> Williams, 56, 68-72; Kelsey Burke and Trenton M. Haltom, “Created by god and wired to porn: Redemptive Masculinity and Gender Beliefs in Narratives of Religious Men’s Pornography Addiction Recovery,” *Gender & Society* 34, no. 2 (Apr 2020): 252, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0891243220905815>.

<sup>122</sup> This is not to negate the value of pornography users supporting each other in their bids for freedom; however, the efficacy of the efforts of pastors and church leaders are significantly limited if they are trying to minister from a place of either hypocrisy or defeat. Jesus said it best, “Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?” (Matt 15:14).

<sup>123</sup> Ezek. 8:1-12.

<sup>124</sup> Eph. 5:1-20.

<sup>125</sup> David Horita, interview by the author, Fort Langley, B.C., November 25, 2019; Freedom Session, accessed April 6, 2020, <https://freedomsession.com>.

both men and women, they are separated in small groups. Finn, a facilitator in the program, points out: “The specifics of people’s struggles are always in the small group. Freedom Session is very effective with all addictions as long as the person who is afflicted completely buys in.” Because Freedom Session is open to people struggling with any of life’s challenges, even such issues as people-pleasing, many find it an easy and safe place to attend.<sup>126</sup> In Alan’s long journey to freedom, the various inventories required of him by Freedom Session helped him to finally understand the roots, triggers, and patterns behind his pornography obsession. Freedom Session also played a key role in empowering him through the Holy Spirit to cleanse his mind from pornographic thoughts.<sup>127</sup>

When asked what he would say to other local church leaders about addressing sexual purity, Dennis did not hesitate: “Start with something! There is no silver bullet. Failing to address the topic is not helping.”<sup>128</sup> In response to the same question, Gowe’s answer was just as clear, “Care for your people! You don’t have to be a porn addict to help a porn addict. The reward is immense!”<sup>129</sup> Darbey, who devotes much of his energies to helping men find freedom as they grow in their love for Jesus, agrees: “I’ve seen men turn around. The most exciting thing is the love that they have for the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>130</sup>

## Conclusion

Local church leaders know they must never take their eyes off their disciple making mission – helping people to find the Lord Jesus Christ and to follow Him fully. They must be ready to throw lifelines to those whose discipleship is being hijacked by various sins and dysfunctions. Pornography use is one such distraction – for some, nothing less than bondage – that is robbing men and women of freedom, the joy of their salvation, vibrancy of spiritual life, and effectiveness in service for God. Addressing pornography use—preventing exposure to pornography and assisting pornography users to come to repentance and freedom—is an important disciple-making mission of the church.

Rather than wait for pornography users to come to them, pastors and other church leaders are wise to be proactive. Equally important, they should not sensationalize pornography use or treat sexual sin as worse than any other sin.<sup>131</sup> For Christians, regardless of the claims of those who justify it and even recommend it,

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<sup>126</sup> Connie Siebert, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C. November 14, 2019; Anonymous interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 14, 2019.

<sup>127</sup> Anonymous interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., October 31, 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Anonymous interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., November 12, 2019.

<sup>129</sup> Dan Gowe, interview by the author, Vancouver, B.C., November 28, 2019.

<sup>130</sup> David Darbey, interview by the author, Abbotsford, B.C., October 24, 2019; Luke 7:36-50.

<sup>131</sup> Perry has a lot to say about “sexual exceptionalism,” his label for treating sexual sin as worse than other sins. Perry, *Addicted to Lust*, x,13, 64-72, 87-88, 101, 133, 146, 179-189, 266.

pornography use is off limits, yet it is a sin that can be forgiven and from which there is freedom in Christ.

Church leaders will find that some men and women are able to discontinue their pornography use with relative ease, once they have brought it into the light, fully repented of their sin, and established an accountability relationship. Internet filters and accountability software help to make pornography harder to access and to hide, although their greatest usefulness may be helping to facilitate conversations between those seeking consistent freedom and their accountability partners or mentors.

Leaders will also find that other men and women who are repenting of pornography use have a long road to recovery ahead of them. They will need a godly mentor to guide them. Surrendering fully to the Lord Jesus Christ and developing the abilities and practices of feeding themselves spiritually through substantial Bible reading and study will be essential. Group ministry such as Freedom Session and Men's Group are ideally suited to facilitate the relationships and practices that are essential for freedom. Leaders will encourage those who are struggling not to give up, no matter how disappointing their relapses. Expert, godly counselling may be part of the solution for some. And long-term follow up through ongoing support by a mentor or involvement in a group will be needed by many.

For leaders, living out the call to journey with fellow disciples as together leaders and congregants learn to walk in freedom, brings its own immense rewards. As the ancient song of ascent declares:

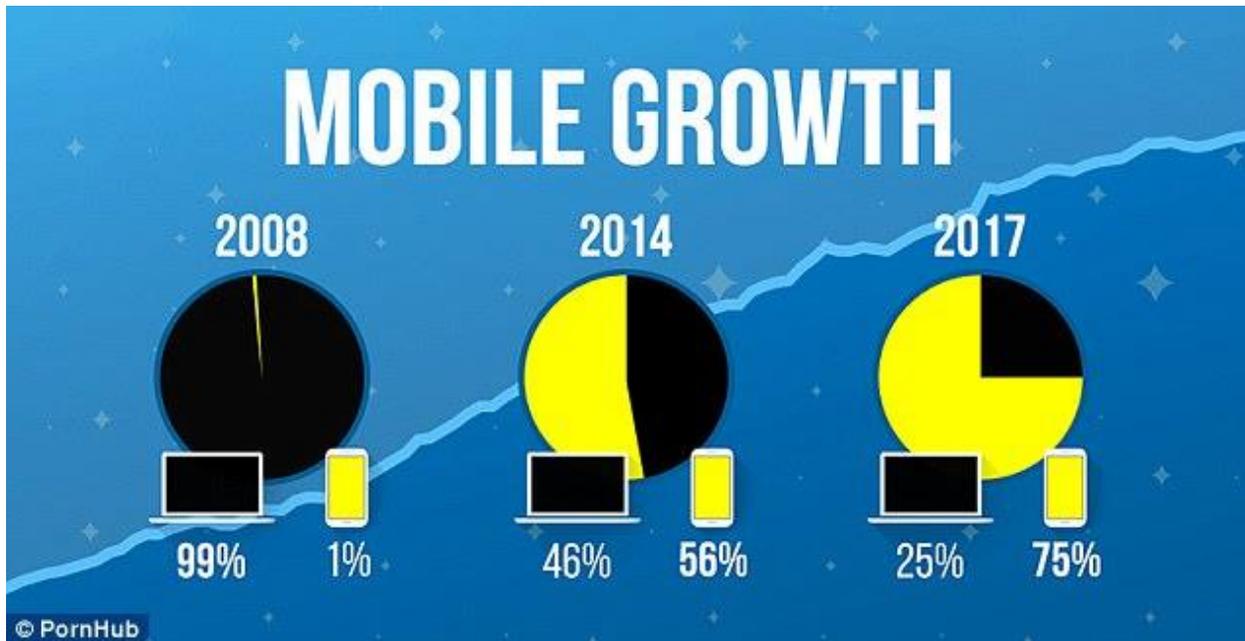
When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed. Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy. Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Psalm 126.

## Appendix A

### The Growth of Mobile Pornography Viewing on PornHub

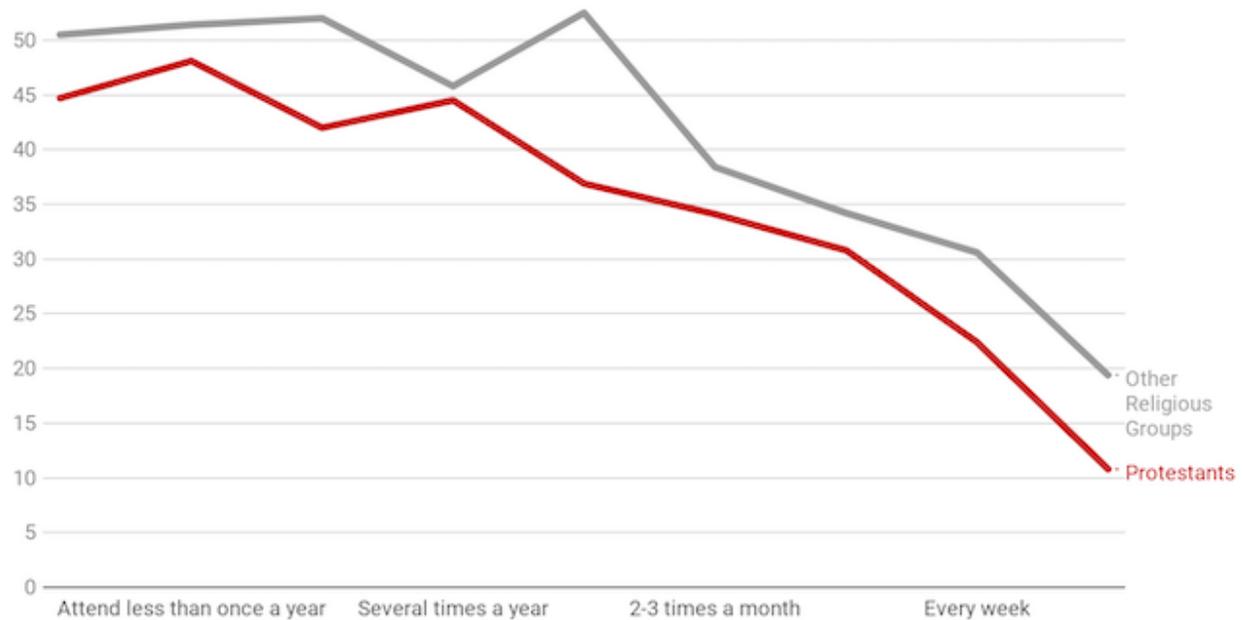


Source: Katie Fustich, "Maybe they found something more stimulating! Porn site reveals people are watching far LESS adult content than they did 10 years ago," Dailymail.com, May 26, 2017, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-4545854/10-year-pornography-survey-reveals-surprising-statistics.html>

## Appendix B

### Religiously Devout Protestants Are Less Likely to Watch Pornography

General Social Survey, 1976-2018, Males age 50 and under, share who viewed an X-rated film in the previous year



Other includes men of all other religious groups, including the unaffiliated and nonreligious.

Created with Datawrapper

Institute for  
**Family Studies**

Source: Lyman Stone, "The Truth About Conservative Protestant Men and Porn," last modified June 19, 2019, accessed December 10, 2019, <https://ifstudies.org/blog/the-truth-about-conservative-protestant-men-and-porn>.

## Appendix C

Informal Anonymous Survey Conducted by Dan Gowe in a Vibrant, Urban,  
Evangelical Church

Respondents: 170 Males and 193 Females	M Yes	F Yes
Have you accidentally encountered pornography on the internet or elsewhere, knew you should stop watching, but kept on watching anyway??	82%	45%
Have you sought pornography repeatedly on the internet or elsewhere?	70%	29%
Have you feared that pornography was becoming an addiction for you?	60%	21%
If you know that there was a way out that really worked and that you would not be judged, shamed, or exposed by stepping into it, would you like help overcoming this problem?	84%	62s%

From chart by Dan Gowe

## Appendix D

### Problems Experienced as a Result of Viewing Internet Pornography A Survey of 751 Male and Female Students in a Christian University

Problem	Male	Female
Worsened my relationship with God/Christ	43%	20%
Led to an increase in my own sexual behavior (from masturbation to intercourse)	40%	25%
Increased negative emotions (e.g.: guilt, shame, low self-esteem, etc.)	26%	12%
Led to more permissive attitudes concerning sexual behavior	22%	15%
An increasing amount of time spent viewing Internet pornography	21%	4%
Lost interest in spiritual things	20%	4%
Damaged relationship with other people (from intimacy to withdrawal from others)	10%	0%
Attitudes about or toward the opposite sex deteriorated	10%	2%
Has affected the quality of school work	9%	0%
Has led to a decrease in family values (e.g.: less committed to marriage, etc.)	6%	1%
Has led to a dissatisfaction with my partner (e.g.: their performance or looks, etc.)	5%	0%
Increased aggression (sexual or non-sexual) toward the opposite sex	5%	4%
Have spent too much money viewing Internet pornography	2%	0%
Has led to reprimands at school, job, or other	2%	0%

Source: Alina Baltazar, Herbert W. Helm, Jr., Duane McBride, Gary Hopkins, and John V. Stevens, Jr., "Internet Pornography Use in the Context of External and Internal Religiosity," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 38 no. 1 (2018), 36, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.student.twu.ca/10.1177%2F009164711003800103>

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