

Wading Through the Porn Jungle

BIBLE VERSES

"I will not set anything godless before my eyes. I hate the doing of transgression; it will not cling to me" (Psalm 101:3).

"You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27-28).

"For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality, so that each of you knows how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not with lustful desires, like the Gentiles who don't know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5).

LEADER PREPARATION

- Go to <http://xxxchurch.com> and look for the men's and women's confessions. Print out enough copies of the first two pages for each gender to give to small groups for discussion.

- Look at the resources and information provided on the following Web sites:
 - www.lifeway.com

 - www.pureintimacy.com

 - www.moralityinmedia.org

 - www.namb.net

- Go to the Web site www.christianitytoday.com and review the article "Help for the Sexually Desperate" by John W. Kennedy.

- Go to the Web site www.internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com to learn about Internet filter software.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This week we look at a serious issue that hinders countless numbers of Christians and dims the church's effectiveness: pornography. Few want to discuss this problem openly, since it touches on such deeply personal issues as identity and sexual habits. Yet if we let it remain in the closet, it will fester and grow more serious.

You aren't likely to have any members of your class or small group openly confess to having a problem with pornography. However, you can explore the issue and reveal what Scripture teaches about lust and the need to maintain a clean mind and a pure heart.

Warnings about the danger of pornography stretch back more than 20 years, to the 1989 execution of Ted Bundy, the serial killer whose pornography addiction fueled his actions. Though many ignored the truth about the root of his crimes, in a death-row interview he described discovering pornographic magazines at the age of 13—and how his growing addiction ultimately went from fantasy to reality.

While few will go to such extremes as Ted Bundy, pornography is often at the heart of divorce, lack of marital intimacy, and feelings of inadequacy and dismay among those trapped in its deceitful web. Despite its widespread acceptance in American society, pornography is clearly a violation of God's Word and the prohibitions against lust and sexual immorality.

Long ago, Job set a standard for maintaining purity. In the midst of defending his integrity, he declared, "I have made a covenant with my eyes. How then could I look at a young woman?" (Job 31:1).

Soon after, he also remarked, "If my heart has been seduced by [my neighbor's] wife or I have lurked at his door, let my own wife grind [grain] for another man, and let other men sleep with her" (Job 31:9–10).

Strong words, but how many people today would be willing to make the same declaration?

Scripture makes it clear that lust is wrong, even in the confines of our minds. This is why Jesus took the Law's prohibition against adultery a step further: "But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

Paul also warned against sexual immorality in 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5, telling the church that God's will is for us to abstain from sexual immorality and not give in to lustful desires.

In this session, avoid projecting the attitude of condemnation and finger pointing, which are two habits that prompted Christ to rebuke the Pharisees (Matthew 23:23–25). However, don't shy away from discussing how sexual immorality—even something done in private—can have long-lasting repercussions. Emphasize that the church has no business telling people to remain pure if we can't embrace purity ourselves.

Also, bring out the principle of accountability, which is demonstrated in James 5:16, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.”

When men and women maintain the kind of close relationships that are to typify the body of Christ, they are less likely to live in isolation and give in to the temptation of pornography.

TEACHING PLAN

Invading the Church

Think pornography isn’t a problem in your church? Neither did the pastor who doubted that many Christian men looked at porn. When he surveyed his congregation, 60 percent admitted viewing it over the past year and 25 percent in the past month.

Pornography has invaded Christendom. A poll by Second Glance Ministries found that 50 percent of all Christian men and 20 percent of all Christian women are addicted. They are part of a wider demographic hooked on porn: research for a 2008 *Christianity Today* story showed that 70 percent of American men ages 18–34 view it monthly.

Such statistics reflect society’s moral confusion. A 2008 study by the Barna Group found that among evangelicals, profanity (16 percent) and pornography (12 percent) were the most common moral transgressions. Founder George Barna comments, “The consistent deterioration of the Bible as the source of moral truth has led to a nation where people have become independent judges of right and wrong, basing their choices on feelings and circumstances.”

Fueled by the Internet, pornography has grown into a multi-billion-dollar industry that outranks mainstream Hollywood. And it is not a “victimless” crime. Divorce lawyers are seeing its increasing influence in the form of crumbling marriages.

Several studies indicate that porn is related to greater involvement in deviant sexual practices. In Great Britain, porn is blamed for a 20 percent jump in sexual assaults perpetrated by kids as young as 11 years old.

While pornography affects both genders, it is particularly damaging to men. In his book, *The Centerfold Syndrome*, psychologist Gary Brooks lists five principal symptoms linked to so-called “soft porn” like *Playboy* and *Penthouse*:

1. Voyeurism: Obsession with looking at women instead of interacting with them
2. Objectification: Rating women by size, shape, and body parts
3. Validation: The need to validate masculinity through beautiful women
4. Trophyism: The idea that beautiful women are “collectibles”

5. Fear of true intimacy: The inability to honestly relate to women despite deep loneliness

Though few Christians want to openly talk about this issue, keeping it hidden will only allow the problem to fester. Discuss the following:

- How do you see pornography affecting our society?
- Where does it confront you even if you aren't looking for it?
- What impact is its prevalence making on your children?
- What steps can you take to remove suggestive material from your home?
- Who can serve as an accountability partner to ask you tough questions about purity?

Scriptural Opposition to Porn

Scripture opposes porn and the activities that can result from its use. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the crowds, "You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:27–28). The same warning applies to women who lust after handsome men.

Porn is a violation of biblical standards on many levels. If you are married, it goes against the admonition of Hebrews 13:4 to respect marriage and keep it undefiled. Because it involves lust, which Christ linked to adultery, it breaks the Seventh Commandment. It goes against Paul's instruction in 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5, to abstain from sexual immorality and avoid giving in to lustful desires.

Sexual imagery is powerful, seducing people with appeals to vanity, pride, and the innate drive that God placed within us. Sex isn't bad, but the Lord created it for procreation, tenderness, intimacy, and communication between husband and wife. Wandering outside biblical boundaries inevitably leads to heartache and disaster. If you haven't taken steps to avoid the lure of pornography, today is a good day to start.

However, focusing too much attention on avoiding sin can multiply its attraction. Two tools that will help your efforts to remain pure are illustrated in James 5:16, which says to confess our sins to each other and pray for one another so that we can be healed. Accountability to a friend or your spouse, coupled with a consistent prayer life, will keep the Holy Spirit active within you. The more of Him you have, the less chance your flesh will rule your actions.

ACTION PLAN

Divide your class or small group into same-sex trios. Send each group to separate parts of the room, or even separate rooms, so they can talk in confidence. Tell each group to take a Bible with them.

Give males a copy of the men's confessions and females the women's confessions from the XXX Church Web site. Ask them to select one person to read aloud several confessions.

In the groups, have the reader review these Scriptures: Deuteronomy 6:4–7, Psalm 101:3, and 1 Thessalonians 4:3–5 and ask these questions:

- What conflict do you see between the use of pornography and these Scriptures?
- How do you feel when you read these passages and compare them to your personal life?
- Do you know someone who struggles with pornography? How can you reach out to him or her?
- Is there a support group you can recommend to them? If not, how could you help start one?

Bring the groups back together. Ask if anyone can relate to these struggles, what needs they reveal in the person's life, and what steps might have been taken to avoid the problem.

Encourage the group members to enlist an accountability partner. Encourage them to be proactive in what they look at and what their children look at, particularly on television. There are many Christian watchdog groups fighting soft pornography on television. Consider adding to their ranks.

First and foremost, encourage group members to look into their own hearts to see if there is anything wayward there, and pray for God to take it away.

LESSON BY

Ken Walker is a member of Celebration Church in Huntington, West Virginia. He works in the Storehouse, a food and clothing outreach to low-income residents and also participates in regular outreach activities in the community.