

HELP!

**HE'S STRUGGLING
WITH PORNOGRAPHY**



brian croft

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You may be reading this mini-book' for one of any number of reasons. Perhaps you know someone struggling in this battle and you want to help him. Or you may be the one who needs the help. This mini-book' may interest you solely because the word "pornography" caught your eye, and it has caused you to thumb through it to see what juicy issues might be discussed. Whatever your reasons, I hope you will consider the important ones that compelled me to write this mini-book'.

First and most obvious is the consuming presence of sexual perversion in our culture fueled by this gross form of entertainment. Through this multibillion-dollar industry lives are wrecked and marriages are destroyed, and its constant influence affects our daily lives. Thus we must be equipped to know how to face it, deal with its influence, and walk in victory from its clutches.

A second reason is the quality of resources currently available. Though several books have tackled the destructive issues surrounding a

bondage to pornography, some diagnose the problem well, while others may miss the root problem but give good practical advice for the daily fight. My prayer for this mini-book' is that the fundamental issue will be clearly and biblically diagnosed, a hopeful solution will be presented, and practical ways to walk in victory over this bondage will empower those seeking help.

Additionally, I have a few personal reasons for taking on this project. It is staggering to realize how many issues I have dealt with as a pastor that directly relate to the allurements, bondages, and destructive patterns that come with a struggle with pornography. What you will find in these pages is the process that I and my fellow pastors walk through with men in my church—whether married, single, young or old—and that has proven to be incredibly fruitful and effective, by God's grace, over the years. My hope is that it will prove the same for your loved one, perhaps you yourself, your pastors, and your local church.

Finally, and most personally, this struggle once gripped me for many years. I was exposed to pornography at a young age and that led to a bondage that followed me throughout my teen years and into college. I gladly yet fearfully took on this mini-book' because the biblical truths that anchor the process

to overcome this struggle brought amazing help and freedom in my own life. Please read on, and may you or your loved one be helped as I have been.

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INTRODUCTION

We are living in an unprecedented time. Pornographic images and sexually explicit material are more readily available right now than at any other time in history. This is confirmed at the shopping malls we walk through, the billboards we drive by, the “retail” catalogs mailed to our homes, and the magazine racks at the store. The estimated financial size of the worldwide sex industry is around \$57 billion, with \$12 billion (just over 20 percent) coming from the United States.¹ The reality of pornography’s influence is more painfully known through the marriages destroyed by it, the pastors shamed and fired because of it, and the people victimized by the sexually related crimes we hear reported on the news almost every day.

Possibly the most sobering effect of this trend is the way it has so deeply affected Christians within the local church. Place the most skilled fireman

¹ William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 20.

alone in a burning building where he is surrounded by flames and never relieved, and he will eventually get burned. Similarly, though we as Christians have been transformed by faith in the person and work of our Savior Jesus, we too have been harmed as a result of being immersed in this sex-saturated culture. How do we as Christians find lasting victory over this struggle and help others to do the same?

We first find victory through the transforming power of the gospel. Regardless of the kind of bondage to sin we face, only repenting of our sins and trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ can bring the lasting freedom that we seek. A common flaw in dealing with the sinful patterns of viewing sexually explicit material is to focus solely on employing methods to stop the behavior (behavior modification) to the exclusion of addressing the root issues of the heart. True, genuine, and lasting change in this struggle, or in any struggle with sin, must begin on the inside. The inward change will bring the lasting change in our behavior.

We must also be wholly committed to the local church if we are to find lasting victory over this struggle. A further common flaw in trying to break the cycle of pornography is to think that one or two random accountability partners are enough. Daily walking in victory over this struggle requires

a community effort and an accountability that stretches far beyond a Christian co-worker asking a man questions once a week regarding which Internet sites he has visited. The victory comes as spiritual guidance, care, rebuke, and marriage counseling are given by the man's leaders; when those most committed to the man's spiritual maturity (other church members) pray for him and his struggle; when the man's accountability partner reports to his pastors and spouse (if he is married) on his progress in this battle, and the man feels the looming presence of church discipline in response to the seriousness of his sin; when more is at stake than merely disappointing an accountability partner who has probably been chosen because of his sympathy with this struggle. Without the close involvement of the local church, few find lasting victory from any sin and live the victorious life Christ purchased for us with his own life.

God's power works through the gospel in the local church so that a true and lasting victory is found over a struggle with pornography and true healing and forgiveness can be experienced. I pray that you are convinced of the same as you read these pages.

1

The Problem: A Defiled Heart

The most insightful and well-thought-out solution will be meaningless if the problem is misdiagnosed. Let's begin by acknowledging what is *not* the problem before we focus on what *is*. The bondage of pornography is not gender-biased. Now more than ever, women too are lured to expose their minds to those images for the purpose of self-gratification. (Excellent, biblically-based counsel for women is found in another mini-book in this series, *HELP! She's Struggling with Pornography*, by Rachel Coyle). The struggle is not the result of a strong and active sex drive. The struggle cannot be blamed on a failed relationship with someone or on parents who failed to love us as they should have done. Though it is a factor in the struggle, the blame cannot even be placed on the easy accessibility of the Internet, television, movies, and inappropriate magazines

resting at eye-level at the store. All these issues can contribute to the struggle, but none of them is the true root of the problem.

The fundamental problem is that our hearts are not right, a condition that dates back to the Garden of Eden. God created the heavens, the earth, and all the living creatures (Genesis 1-2). He also created man and woman in his image (Genesis 1:27), and they were united in one flesh, naked, and not ashamed (Genesis 2:24-25). God saw that all that he had made was very good (Genesis 1:31). Yet Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God's word, eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:6). God told Adam and Eve not to eat from this tree or they would die (Genesis 2:17), yet Satan tempted Eve, and she ate from the tree and gave some of its fruit to her husband (Genesis 3:6). Instead of obeying God's command, they rebelled against him. They wanted to rule, not be ruled by God.

As a result, sin entered the world and affected everything in it, including all those born from Adam and Eve. Since they were the first human beings, everyone born after them has inherited their sinful heart. Therefore, all people born into this sinful world are born with defiled hearts that have a natural disposition to rebel against God and pursue

the pleasures of sin. Our sinful behavior, related to sexual sin or otherwise, can be blamed on one thing and one thing only—our defiled hearts.

Jesus affirmed this. Mark 7:1–23 describes a confrontation that Jesus had with the Pharisees, who were arrogantly putting their faith in their deeds and traditions. They were blinded to what Jesus said really mattered to God—not the external, physical things we do, but the internal, spiritual matters of the heart. In this context, Jesus spoke the following profound words, not just about the corrupt state of our hearts, but also about how our hearts affect our relationship with God. Jesus stated that what goes into a man from the outside does not defile him because it does not go into his heart but into his stomach (vv.18–19). He continued,

*That which proceeds out of the man,
that is what defiles the man. For from
within, out of the heart of men, proceed
the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts,
murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and
wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality,
envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All
these evil things proceed from within and
defile the man.*

What an amazing insight for his Jewish disciples who, for most of their lives, followed strict laws and traditions that said defilement came from foods and other objects declared unclean! Yet the Gospel accounts record that Jesus' consistent teaching was that the kingdom of God is based not on the external but on the internal—the heart.

Our defiled hearts are recognized by the evil actions that flow out from them. Imagine walking up to a giant apple tree with the anticipation of finding big juicy red apples, only to find that most of the apples are puny and rotten. There would be but one conclusion. Though we cannot see the roots and what is going on inside the tree, by observing the kind of fruit it produces we know the tree is sick. Similarly, we cannot see the defilement in our hearts, yet Jesus' teaching shows that something corrupt and sinful exists in our hearts because of the sin and corruption that proceed out of them.

Jesus also listed the sins that proceed out of the defiled heart in verses 21 and 22. There are sins of a *sexual nature* (fornication, adultery, sensuality), sins that *hurt others* (theft, murder, slander), and sins of *blatant self-regard* (covetousness, pride, envy). Part

of this list also connects to the *Ten Commandments* (theft, murder, adultery, covetousness). Mark's list is for his readers to feel the weight of corruption that proceeds from and condemns the heart of man.

Jesus not only identified the problem, but he also demonstrated its seriousness:

*All these evil things proceed from within
and defile the man.*

(v. 23)

The solution to this defilement is not as simple as going through a ceremony to clean our hands (vv. 1-5). It does not help to simply abstain from eating certain foods (v. 19). The situation is much more serious, because our defilement is so engrained in our natures that, even before we can train the smallest child to speak or walk, he or she already shows symptoms of this condition. It is so serious that we cannot stop ourselves from speaking hurtful words to the ones we love the most. It is so serious that we cannot keep ourselves from desiring that which we cannot have, though we already possess so much. It is so serious that we can become enslaved to a particular sin, such as pornography, all the while knowing it is wrong, unfulfilling, and will destroy us.

This corruption is so serious that we are unable to do anything in our own power to change it.

Jesus' teaching is clear. Our longing for the sexual perversion and pleasure of pornography is not due to what we are exposed to, ingest, or experience through life's hurtful circumstances. Our problem is that our hearts are defiled, and we cannot fix them or repair the damage ourselves. We need new hearts. The hope for receiving a new heart will be the topic of Chapter 3. For now, let us turn to the unique consequences that often accompany this destructive struggle.