

HELP!

**SHE'S STRUGGLING
WITH PORNOGRAPHY**



rachel coyle



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First printed 2011

ISBN

All Scripture quotations, unless stated otherwise, are from the New American Standard Bible, The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

Published by Shepherd Press

USA web site—www.shepherdpress.com

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Designed by **documen**

Printed by Orchard Press, Tewkesbury

CONTENTS

Introduction	4
1 What Is Pornography?	11
2 Understanding Addiction	21
3 God's Provisions for Victory	29
4 Cultivating Christlikeness	44
Conclusion: Continue in God's Grace	57
Personal Application Projects	60
Where Can I Get Further Help?	63

INTRODUCTION

While strolling through the aisles of a local chain store, Kate suddenly felt a strong urge for a chocolate candy bar. Her craving was so powerful that she forgot what she was shopping for and headed to the candy aisle. "I must satisfy this desire," Kate silently told herself. Her stomach ached for something sweet as she searched the rows and rows of options, wondering what would satisfy her mounting hunger. Suddenly, she spotted something she had never tasted before. "Great New Taste!" the label announced. "Satisfaction Guaranteed!" it promised. "No More Hunger Cravings!" it claimed. "That's the one I must have," Kate convinced herself.

Hastily, Kate grabbed the candy bar and tore off the wrapper, telling herself she would pay for it later. She felt out of control, unable to wait any longer to satisfy her desire. The candy bar looked delicious and pleasing to the eye. A rich chocolate

shell, coated chewy caramel, and almonds blended in soft chocolate nougat. Kate bit off a large chunk and slowly chewed the candy, thinking only about how good it tasted. All her senses were captivated by the chocolate candy bar. It seemed so gratifying that she convinced herself she would never need any more candy again after finishing this one.

Kate soon noticed a strange, unexpected texture in her mouth. Instead of eating almonds, she found she was chomping on gritty gravel. Her throat became parched as an intense thirst strangled her. The caramel and chocolate nougat fell apart in her mouth as they turned into thick mud. The taste was unbearable! Her throat closed off and her stomach churned at the thought of what could be in the mud—in her very own mouth. Shocked by the sudden realization that what she had enjoyed for a moment was actually filthy mud and grit covered in a chocolate candy shell, she spewed it out of her mouth and onto the floor, right there in the middle of the store. Humiliated, she gagged and coughed while frantically searching for water to remove the rancid taste.

After a long moment at the water fountain, the atrocious flavor cleared away. Kate glanced down at the remainder of the bar still in her hand. Her thoughts turned to how good that first bite had tasted

... *and she longed for more.*

This is the way pornography operates. It is sin covered in an appealing package. The “candy coating” deceives you into believing that pornography will deliver what it promises: satisfaction, happiness, a thrill, or whatever you are looking for at the time. And, at first, it seems to deliver what it promises. But the pleasures of sin are short-lived (Hebrews 11:25). In time, your attitude toward pornography develops into a love-hate relationship: you realize it does not give full satisfaction, yet you crave more.

No New Problem

Ecclesiastes 1:9 tells us that “there is nothing new under the sun.” Sexual sin is nothing new. However, it seems rampant in our culture. Many Hollywood movies or current television shows make light of preserving sex for marriage. Secular musicians write graphic songs about sex. Innuendoes and seductively dressed actors and actresses appear in commercials selling everything from hamburgers to cars. Nearly every women’s magazine features articles about sex. Scantly-clad men and women are plastered on billboards and magazine covers—and the list goes on. It seems that we cannot get away from this issue;

sex dominates our society. Therefore, it is no surprise that pornography is an increasing problem.

For years, pornography was assumed to be a problem that only men struggle against. The subject is taboo among many Christians today—especially women. It is rare to hear a preacher or speaker refer to pornography as a problem that women struggle with *as well as* men. While some of the particular details of the battle differ for women and men, women can *and do* become enslaved to pornography, even in Christian circles. Whether we avoid this issue because of ignorance or fear, the reality is that many women are embarrassed, fearful, and unsure of where to turn for help. The following are true stories of three women whom I call Denise, Michelle, and Heather.¹

In the Real World

Denise had been a Christian for a couple of years when she approached me for discipleship. We began meeting together weekly to discuss Bible study and application. Over the course of several weeks, Denise opened up the darkest secret of her heart in a desperate plea for help: she was in bondage to

¹ These are pseudonyms for actual counselees of mine.

pornography. It had been going on for over ten years. Was there any hope for complete freedom? Did she just have to learn how to “cope” with her problem? Denise needed hope and help, and she had come to me for both.

Michelle struggled too. She confided in me about her on-off involvement with pornography that had gone on for more than a decade. She started looking at pornography during college with her friends. A few years later she heard the gospel and placed her faith in Jesus Christ, but that did not mean instant freedom in her case. She no longer sought out videos, but impure memories were triggered when a movie, article, or book suggested anything sexual. Even “clean” romantic comedies or television shows brought back a flood of memories, sending her mind down a hazardous road. She continued to struggle with pornography’s common counterpart: masturbation. She was given some inadequate counsel by a well-meaning friend: just pray for freedom and claim it. Michelle tried, but it wasn’t enough. The struggle continued.

Heather also came to me for counseling, trusting me enough to share how deeply enslaved to pornography she had become. She had been secretly struggling for years. For her, it had digressed to more

perverted and hazardous sexual sins. Pornography had become such a part of her life that it was painful to even consider giving it up. And yet she wanted to for the sake of obedience to Jesus Christ.

Can you relate to any of these women? Or do you know a woman who can? Perhaps you still doubt that pornography is an issue for women. Here are some statistics for those who find numbers more convincing.

Top Ten Reviews, a research organization, has conducted research concerning Internet pornography. Here are their statistics concerning women:

- ▶ 13% of women (surveyed) admit to accessing pornography at work
- ▶ 17% of all women struggle with pornography addiction
- ▶ 1 in 3 visitors to all adult (pornographic) websites are women
- ▶ 9.4 million women access adult (pornographic) websites each *month*²

2 “Internet Pornography Statistics,” at: www.toptenreviews.com; accessed August 1, 2010.

Setting Captives Free is a ministry that provides biblical help for men and women who want to be free from pornography and other sexual sins.³ Because this is a biblically-based program, the majority of men and women enrolled are churchgoers. As of February 2004, 3,535 women were enrolled in the program, forming 13 percent of the ministry's total enrollment. Three years later, 7,653 women were enrolled in the same course.⁴ In just three years, the number of *women* seeking help more than doubled! If over 7,000 women *in our churches* are currently seeking freedom from sexual sin (including, but not limited to, pornography), the number of women living with this secret might astound us.

As you read this booklet, where do you find yourself in all this? Are you curious about pornography? Do you indulge in it? Maybe you are the woman that others seek out for help. Think about where you are, where you want to be, and what you hope the wonderful counselor Jesus will teach you through his Word, the Bible, as we learn together.

3 For more information, visit: www.settingcaptivesfree.com.

4 From email correspondence with Jodi White, Mentor at Setting Captives Free, on February 18, 2004 and February 7, 2007.



What Is Pornography?

Most people assume that pornography consists of visual images—pictures or movies portraying some form of sensuality or sexual act. The truth is that it exists in many forms; we must not limit it to visual images.

Defining Pornography

Consider Webster's Dictionary definition of pornography: "Obscene writings, drawings, photographs, or the like, especially those having little or no artistic merit."⁵ Merriam-Webster provides a more thorough definition: "1) the depiction of erotic behavior (as in pictures or writings) intended to

5 "Pornography," *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language* (San Diego: Thunder Bay Press, 2001), 1506.

cause sexual excitement ... 3) the depiction of acts in a sensational manner so as to arouse a quick intense emotional reaction.”⁶

These definitions force us out of the “box” we typically put pornography into. Pornography includes *any* representation of sensual or erotic behavior. This is how I define it: “Writings, literature, magazine articles, books, billboards, drawings, photographs, Internet images, movies, television, *and things like these* that portray, describe, or visually show sensual material or sexual acts, often resulting in sexual arousal.” Need I be more specific?

Pornography for Women

As women, things that entertain our imaginations attract us. Soap operas, romance books, television, movies, and magazine articles appeal to women. They tantalize our minds, conjure up secret fantasies, and ultimately influence our emotions. Unlike men, a woman’s sexual arousal is primarily connected to our feelings and emotions rather than sight. To overcome bondage to pornography, a woman has to be wary of *anything* that influences her emotions in such a way

6 “Pornography,” Merriam-Webster online dictionary, at: www.merriam-webster.com.

that she becomes sexually aroused. (That influence is reserved for her husband alone.)

IMAGES

We all know that images can be pornographic. Visual erotic images are readily available, even in our own homes, via television, magazines, catalogs, and the Internet. They are plastered all over the streets and highways of the world on billboards. Seductive pictures are not difficult to come by.

MOVIES

Pornographic movies are also readily available. Some stores specialize in erotic movies, but you can browse your local video rental store and find them in the midst of family-friendly films. And for those who would never rent a video, there's pay-per-view television, the Internet, and even cell phones.

Today, many movies rated PG-13 and R in the United States contain highly suggestive or downright graphic sexual scenes. In the United Kingdom, films rated 15 often have explicit sexual content; even some 12-rated films contain significant sexual content. Regardless of the rating, even sexual innuendoes can generate impure images in the

mind's eye. Sexual scenes and innuendoes in movies can be an immense obstacle for women.

TELEVISION

A number of television shows and commercials flash sexually charged images into our homes. They are filled with innuendoes and nearly-naked men and women, which can trigger improper thoughts or desires. And then there are soap operas, a socially acceptable format for women. Soaps regularly include simulated scenes of sexual acts, which puts them in the category of soft-core pornography.⁷ Other television programs, including popular sitcoms, promote pornography in their episodes by making positive comments or jokes about it.⁸

Please beware: What we allow into our minds will affect our thoughts and judgments. When we fill our minds with the toxins of soap operas and sexually charged television shows, they *will* influence our perspective of sex and may weaken our consciences to the dangers of pornography.

7 "Soft-core," Merriam-Webster online dictionary. See also "Pornography" at www.answers.com.

8 Popular sitcom *Friends* features an episode entitled "The One with the Free Porn" (1998) (episode list at Internet Movie Database, www.imdb.com).

INTERNET

This is the vehicle of choice by many people today, including women. Through the Internet, we have access to everything, from images to personal contacts, just with a click of the mouse. The convenience and impression of privacy the Internet offers makes it easier for women to indulge in any form of pornography.

BOOKS

Erotic literature is pornography. Erotic romance novels can arouse us to the point of desire for sexual release. Steamy novels enable us to escape into a fantasy world, drawing up graphic pictures in our minds. This is one of the most prominent yet most acceptable formats for women.

MAGAZINE ARTICLES

Over forty years ago, *Cosmopolitan* was tagged as “the woman’s *Playboy*”—not because of pictures, but because of its sexually charged articles.⁹ Imagine how much more shameless this magazine is today. You don’t have to pick up a *Cosmo* to find

9 *Technical Report of the Commission on Obscenity and Pornography*, vol. 3, *The Marketplace, The Industry* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1971), 85.

pornography these days. Sex articles smear the pages of many magazines, covers feature men and women *au naturel*, with similar images splashing the pages inside, and even article *titles* openly address sexual issues in a distasteful manner.

MUSIC

When you hear music, do you really *listen* to the words? Some of the music today is pornography for the mind. If you pay attention to the music resounding through the speakers at the mall or your gym, you may hear musicians use explicit language to depict sensual acts. Others are more covert, merely implying the theme of sex. Music is particularly powerful (and potentially dangerous) for women.¹⁰

Pornography's Common Counterpart: Masturbation

I would be remiss if I did not address the issue of masturbation. Some women indulge in masturbation apart from pornography; others use pornography and do not masturbate. But the two usually accompany

¹⁰ Patricia Schiller, "Effects of Mass Media on the Sexual Behavior of Adolescent Females," in *Technical Report*, vol. 1, *Preliminary Studies*, 191-195.

each other. You may think, “I enjoy romance novels but I don’t masturbate or anything.” Beware, because it is often the next stage in a progression from pornography. And when masturbation produces a high, it is like fastening a padlock on the chains of sin: it is the surest way to bondage.

Webster’s defines masturbation as “the stimulation or manipulation of one’s own genitals, especially to orgasm; sexual self-gratification.”¹¹ Is it sinful? There are differing views on this subject. Unfortunately, we cannot look up the word *masturbation* in a Bible concordance and find a list of verses about it. We have to consider the biblical principles surrounding this issue. Here are three reasons why I believe masturbation is sinful.

MASTURBATION IS SELFISH

The motive of masturbation is to please oneself. It is possible to engage in the act and even experience arousal apart from lustful fantasies; sometimes Michelle would masturbate out of sheer boredom. She could stimulate herself without fantasizing, reading, or looking at pornography. But this was still a *self*-centered act of *self*-gratification: she was completely focused on pleasing herself. Scripture advises us,

¹¹ Webster’s, 1184.

... *whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

(1 Corinthians 10:31b, emphasis added)

Can a self-centered act truly be done to God's glory?

MASTURBATION ENCOURAGES IMPURE THOUGHTS

Sexual fantasies or images almost always accompany masturbation. Using pornography can make you want to masturbate for sexual release. Philippians 4:8 instructs,

Finally, brethren, whatever is true ... honorable ... right ... pure ... lovely ... of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

If a thought does not pass the "Philippians 4:8 Test," it does not belong in your mind.

MASTURBATION EASILY ENSLAVES

I have reserved the most important point for last. Even if you do not agree with my first two objections, I plead with you to consider this one. I have already said that the high that masturbation produces is like putting a

padlock on the chains of sin. The act feeds the desires of the flesh, which God strongly warns us against:

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

(Romans 8:6–8)

The more we feed the flesh, the hungrier it becomes. Ultimately, we become slaves to our flesh. Proverbs 5:22 describes the entrapping capacity of sin:

*His own iniquities will capture the wicked,
And he will be held with the cords of his
sin.*

Masturbation will capture you and wrap you in its chains. Your flesh—your desire for physical pleasure—becomes consuming and powerful. You eventually feel overcome by it. Listen to the instruction from Romans 6:

... and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness ... For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

(vv. 13-14)

If you choose to masturbate, sin will eventually master you.¹²

¹² For more information, see articles on masturbation at www.settingcaptivesfree.com.