

PASTORAL CARE FOR WIVES WITH HUSBANDS
ADDICTED TO PORNOGRAPHY

BY
THOMAS P. GORZALSKI

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

PROF. JOHN SCHUETZE, ADVISOR

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MEQUON, WISCONSIN

MARCH 7, 2018

ABSTRACT

The goal of this thesis is to equip pastors to provide pastoral care to wives who are married to a husband addicted to pornography. Pornography addiction is a widespread and prevalent issue. In the recent years, Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary has been educating pastors about the dangers of pornography and teaching them how to stay away from it. While most young pastors are starting to feel competent to help counsel a man who is addicted to pornography, many feel less equipped to counsel the women impacted by their husband's pornography addiction. But the reality is for every husband addicted to pornography, there is a hurting wife. With this thesis, I do not want to perpetuate the myth that men are the only one's who view pornography. General statistics state that two thirds of porn users are men and one third are women. For the sake of narrowing the scope of this thesis, I will focus on pastoral care to wives with husbands addicted to pornography.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: WHY DOES THIS ADDICTION HURT WIVES SO MUCH?.....	4
Porn is a form of infidelity.	4
Porn rewires the brain.....	6
Porn is secretive.....	9
CHAPTER 2: HOW DO WIVES REACT TO THIS ADDICTION?.....	14
Devastation: How Can I Compete With That?.....	14
Reactions of Avoidance.....	16
Anger: How Could He Do That To Me?.....	20
Psychological Effects	22
CHAPTER 3: HOW CAN THE PASTOR HELP?	23
Listen!.....	23
Initiate Contact and Be Available.....	24
Take the Problem Seriously.....	25
Be Knowledgeable About the Subject.....	25
Refer to a Professional Counselor	26
Use Specific Law and Gospel.....	27
Believe Her	28
Normalize Her Feelings.....	28
Be Compassionate	29
Help With Isolation	29
Manage Anger	30

Empower Her.....	31
Instruct and Encourage Forgiveness.....	31
Establish Boundaries	32
Rebuilding Trust.....	34
Be Proactive.....	36
CONCLUSION	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	38

INTRODUCTION

Accessible. Affordable. Anonymous. These are three reasons why Internet pornography has been a recent epidemic. Twenty years ago if someone wanted to watch pornography, he would have to drive to a XXX theatre or buy a magazine in a shady gas station. Today no driving or face-to-face transaction with a clerk is necessary. If someone has an Internet browser on his cell phone he now has access to a whole world of pornography. Anyone who owns a laptop, iPhone, tablet, Kindle or Xbox has easy access to pornography. Also, the price is right for most porn users. Most often, it is free. Sure, there are some users who rack up large credit card bills to watch the raunchiest pornographic videos, but there are literally billions of free pornographic images and videos available. Men and women can spend hours watching pornography for free without anyone ever knowing. When someone is deciding whether or not to watch a sexually explicit video, pornography whispers in his ear, “No one will ever know.” The easy accessibility, the affordability and anonymous nature of pornography creates a perfect storm for a pornography epidemic.

Because of this, large amounts of people are frequently watching Internet pornography. *XXX Church* estimates that 40 million Americans regularly visit Internet pornography websites. Out of those 40 million porn users, roughly two-thirds are men and one third are women.¹ *Time Magazine* reported that 46% of men and 16% of women ages 18-39 view pornography at least once a week.² Christians are not immune to this problem either. *Covenant Eyes* reported from a survey in 2014 that about 64% of self-identified Christian men and 15% of women access porn

¹ XXX Church. “Stats.” Accessed Sept 3, 2017. xxxchurch.com/stats.

² Time Magazine. *Porn*. March 31, 2016.

every month.³ Pornography has infiltrated into the homes of men and women, young and old alike.

Pornography use has a variety of consequences, but perhaps one of the most devastating issues is how it damages marriages. Someone might turn to pornography to spice up his marriage but instead it ends up hurting it. The American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers has figured that 56% of all divorce cases involved one member having an obsessive interest in pornographic materials.⁴ Pornography addictions not only damage marriages but they can also destroy marriages. And more often than not, it is the husband who is the one compulsively viewing pornography. This creates a group of heartbroken women who are victimized by their husband's porn use.

As men and women struggle with pornography addictions, the church is in a position to help. Historically, churches have shied away from talking about the topic of pornography. In recent years more books and resources have been made available to Christians struggling with pornography. During my experience at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, several class periods were dedicated to teaching future pastors about pornography addictions. Because of this, more young pastors and seminarians are beginning to feel comfortable talking about pornography and realizing that this is a prevalent issue. These classes focused on either helping the pastor stay away from pornography or helping others break free from this addiction. Unfortunately, the wife

³ Covenant Eyes, "Pornography Statistics." 2015. PDF. 20.

⁴ Jonathan Dedmon, "Is the Internet bad for your marriage? Online affairs, Pornographic Sites Playing Greater Role in Divorces." Press Release from The Dilenschneider Group, Inc., Nov. 14, 2002. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Is+the+Internet+Bad+for+Your+Marriage%3F+Online+Affairs%2C+Pornographic...-a094221879>, (Last accessed Dec. 1, 2017).

married to a porn addict was overlooked at the seminary level and has often been overlooked in other resources as well.⁵ In some situations, counseling someone with an addiction is almost easier than someone victimized by it. But the reality is for every husband addicted to pornography is a woman who is hurt by it. The goal of this thesis is to give an overview of this topic and answer the question: **How can the pastor help wives married to a husband addicted to pornography?**

⁵ I am not trying to criticize the classes I had about pornography at WLS. Nor am I even advocating that even more class hours should be dedicated to this issue. I am just giving one example about how there are more resources available to someone addicted to pornography than there are for wives victimized by their husband's porn use.

CHAPTER 1: WHY DOES THIS ADDICTION HURT WIVES SO MUCH?

While every sin is hurtful in a marriage, there are certain aspects of a pornography addiction that makes this sin particularly hurtful to wives of porn addicts. While scholars differ on definitions of the term, “addiction,” the definition I will use for this thesis is a compulsive behavior that cannot be broken by will power alone. In this chapter I will examine some of the main reasons why a husband’s pornography addiction is painful to their wives.

Pornography is a Form of Infidelity

When someone says a husband is “cheating on his wife,” the normal thought is that this man is sleeping with another woman who is not his wife. That is the traditional understanding of adultery. Although pornography might not involve physically having sex with another person, it has similar characteristics of an extramarital affair. Studies show that the effects of a pornography addiction can be just as damaging to a marriage as an affair:

The emotional distance fostered by pornography and “cybersex” (interactive computer contact with another regarding pornographic sexual issues) can often be just as damaging to the relationship as real-life infidelity, and both men and women tend to put online sexual activity in the same category as having an affair. The estrangement between spouses wrought by pornography can have tangible consequences as well: when the viewing of pornography rises to the level of addiction, 40 percent of “sex addicts” lose their spouses, 58 percent suffer considerable financial losses, and about a third lose their jobs.⁶

In our society people seem to have the idea that pornography is permissible because it does not affect anyone else. But this is not true. In the previous quote, Patrick Fagen presented several damaging side effects of a pornography addiction: it impacts finances, careers and marriages. In

⁶ Patrick Fagen. “The Effects of Pornography on Individuals, Marriage, Family, and Community.” Marriage Research Institute.” 2009. PDF. 6-7.

fact, a husband with a pornography addiction is more likely to get a divorce as opposed to a man who does not watch pornography. He might never have sex with another woman, but pornography can cause just as damaging consequences as an affair.

Sex was created for married couples and in both pornography and adultery, sexual pleasure is sought outside of the marriage. God designed sex to be an intimate union for husbands and wives to enjoy. Any form of sexual infidelity hurts this union. Women often have the same feelings about a pornography addiction as an extramarital affair:

For many women, discovering that their husbands watch porn is similar to uncovering an extramarital affair. As a result, they experience a variety of emotions: anger, hurt, sadness, betrayal, and rejection. They believe their husbands would rather be with the women they view in pornography rather than their wives. Often they feel that they have been replaced by a computer image. The woman on the computer screen is “the other woman.” Because of this, many women are devastated when they discover their husbands have been looking at porn.⁷

In a pornography addiction, even though a husband is not sleeping with another woman, the wife might view the porn star on the screen as “the other woman.” In this situation a wife can have the same emotions and reactions as an affair. While pornography might not be considered as immoral as sleeping with another woman, spouses often place it in the same category of infidelity.

Steve Gallagher, a former sex addict now founder of *Pure Life Ministries*, asked his wife, Kathy, how she felt after she discovered his sex addiction. She said, “Our sexual intimacy had been cheapened because it was shared with many others... The pleasure he wanted from our union could be found or purchased on any street corner or in any massage parlor.”⁸ Kathy was hurt because something designed to be special in a marriage was bought on a street corner or

⁷ Kleoponis, Peter. “The Effects of Pornography on Wives and Marriages.” *Covenant Eyes*. 2010. Accessed Oct. 20, 2017. <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2010/07/06/the-effects-of-pornography-on-wives-and-marriages>.

⁸ Steve Gallagher. *A Biblical Guide to Counseling the Sexual Addict*. Pure Life Ministries: (Dry Ridge, KY 2004), 91.

massage parlor. Although this quote is not directly applied to someone addicted to pornography, wives with husbands addicted to pornography could say a similar message: “The pleasure he wanted could be found with a click of a button on a laptop or an iPhone.” Seeking out sexual pleasure from Internet pornography hurts the marriage bond, even if another woman is not physically involved. Pornography turns sex into an easily accessible, selfish pleasure instead of a selfless act of love.

The fact that Internet pornography is harmful to marriages is not surprising. Jesus said, “But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:28). Jesus knew that sleeping with someone else isn’t the only way to commit adultery in a marriage. Lusting and pornography are forms of adultery. Adultery of any kind can hurt marriages. In this thesis I do not intend to answer the question, “Is pornography biblical grounds for divorce?” But it is apparent that there are similar elements to a pornography addiction and an extramarital affair. In both scenarios, wives are hurt.

Porn Rewires the Brain

Pornography has often been compared to drugs. Drug addiction impacts the brain. So does pornography. Drug addiction makes the person want more and more. So does pornography. Drug addiction is not an easy habit to quit. The same is true of pornography.

A growing body of research shows that Internet pornography is warping men’s brains and creating addictive behavior similar to that of a drug addict. One reason for this is that pornography and drugs similarly affect dopamine in the brain. Dopamine is the “pleasure” neurotransmitter in the brain. It is released after activities like eating a good meal when hungry, drinking a cold glass of water when thirsty, or when a husband makes love to his wife.

Dopamine makes a man long for his sexual partner. This is the same chemical released with most

addictive drugs and the same chemical that is released when a man watches pornography. Instead of dopamine making a husband crave his wife, it rewires his brain to crave the release in pornography and then he cannot stop those cravings. What starts with pleasure, turns into compulsion.

In addition, using pornography frequently creates tolerance. Drug tolerance occurs when the person's response to the drug is diminished so that he will need more of the drug or a more intense drug to have the same effect. The same effect happens with pornography addictions:

Over time we grow increasingly tolerant to certain stimulants. With drugs and food, tolerance typically means eating more frequently or consuming larger amounts. With Internet porn, a man can overcome the tolerance effect two ways. He can increase the amount by spending more time viewing porn. Or he can overcome his tolerance by escalating the intensity of the image he sees. That's why men move from the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue to soft porn to hardcore porn to degradation, bestiality, rape or other scenes typically deemed repulsive and shocking.⁹

When a man first looks at pornography, it rarely ever begins with a hardcore graphic pornographic scene. It often starts with an image, and then moves to more hardcore images, then videos, and then obscene and repulsive videos. The reason why men move down the darker and darker path of pornography is tolerance. If a wife catches her husband looking at a picture of a woman in a bikini, she might be offended. But if she finds her husband watching hardcore pornographic videos, she will be devastated.

After a man gets hooked watching hardcore videos, he does not find as much enjoyment looking at "softer" images that he used to find pleasurable. William M. Struthers described this process with an analogy of a hiker going through the woods:

As men fall deeper into the mental habit of fixating on these images, the exposure to them creates neural pathways. Like a path created in the woods with each successive hiker, so do the neural paths set the course for the next time an erotic image is viewed. Over time these neural paths become wider as they are repeatedly traveled with each exposure to

⁹ Michael John Cusick. *Surfing for God: Discovering Divine Desire Beneath Sexual Struggle*. (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN, 2012), 127-128.

pornography. They become the automatic pathway through which interactions with women are routed... This extends to women that they have not seen naked or engaging in sexual acts as well. All women become potential porn stars in the minds of these men.¹⁰

As a man goes farther down the path of pornography, the more it influences his sex life. The neural pathways get wider and wider as men begin to fascinate on more and more sexual images. Pornography is often photo-shopped and airbrushed. But the longer a man watches these videos and stares at these images, the more it rewires his brain into thinking that this is realistic. For the married man this subconsciously makes him less satisfied with his own wife: “While porn actors are not really an option for most of us, spending time in their company can give us the impression that we live in a world with many available alternatives. And when we believe we have other attractive choices, we’re instinctively less committed to the partner we already have.”¹¹ Internet pornography provides a man with images and videos of thousands of naked women. This rewires a man’s brain to become less content looking at his own wife. The rewiring of the brain is not an easy process to reverse.

When a wife discovers that her husband is watching pornography, she might demand him to stop. And rightly so. But the problem with this demand is that pornography, like most drugs, is highly addictive. A husband, especially if he is a Christian, might want to stop watching pornography. He knows it is wrong. He knows it hurts his wife and he desires to stop. But he physically cannot. To make his wife happy, he might promise her that he will never look at pornography again:

Though he desperately wants to promise her it’s over, that it’ll never, ever happen again, as he hears other men share about their relapses in his Sex Addicts Anonymous meetings, he

¹⁰ William M. Struthers. *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*. (IVP Books: Downers Grove, IL), 2009. 85.

¹¹ Heidi Reeder. “It Doesn’t Hurt to Look, Does It? The Real Effect of Pornography on Relationships.” *Psychology Today*, March 7, 2014. Accessed September 4, 2017. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/i-can-relate/201403/it-doesn-t-hurt-look-does-it>.

knows he can't honestly make that promise. He believes the best he can tell her is, "All I can do is be honest with you, go to my meetings, . . . call my support people, go to my counseling sessions and live it out one day at a time."¹²

Even if a man is called to repentance and wants to get all the help he needs, a relapse at some point is almost guaranteed. His brain has been rewired and reversing this process takes time. This puts the wife in a difficult situation. Not only will she be asked to forgive the sexual sins her husband committed in the past, forgiveness will be needed in the future for all possible relapses.

The way pornography rewires the male brain causes pain to wives on many different levels. Tolerance makes a man want to watch grosser and grosser sexual videos. This causes husbands to look at even more naked pictures and videos of other women to receive the same amount of pleasure as before. While he does this, he instinctively becomes less satisfied with his wife as well. On top of this, the addictive nature makes pornography a hard habit to break. When a husband's brain is rewired to enjoy pornography more than his wife, wives will understandably experience hurt and pain.

Pornography is Secretive

Pornography is a sin that is often kept hidden. Men addicted to pornography often carry around shame and guilt for years without confessing. The reason for this is that sin hides. Adam and Eve hid after they sinned (Genesis 3:7). When David slept with Bathsheba he hid his sin and it tormented his conscience: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long" (Psalm 32:3). Sin hides and the same is true for the sin of pornography. A man could have many reasons for hiding this sin: he might not want to hurt his reputation, he might be plagued with shame and guilt, he might be embarrassed, or he might be afraid of the consequences that will happen after he confesses. The result is men hiding their sin of

¹² Barbara Steffens and Marsha Means. *Your Sexually Addicted Spouse: How Partners Can Cope and Heal*. (New Horizon Press: Far Hills, NJ, 2009), 54.

pornography for long amounts of time.

Likewise, porn is a relatively easy addiction to hide compared to other addictions. Pornography does not leave a smell of alcohol on his breath, the scent of smoke on his jacket, bloodshot eyes, slurred speech, or needle tracks on his arm. This addiction has few outward symptoms. A porn addict can watch pornography on his computer in the basement and then come upstairs and kiss his wife on the cheek without her ever knowing. Since pornography is an easy sin to hide from others, some husbands have hidden this addiction from their wives for years.

Porn addicts rarely tell their partners that they have an addiction. Men who have a pornography or sex addiction are unlikely to disclose that information to their partner before they get married. Deborah Corley interviewed 62 self-identified sex addicts and asked about if they disclosed their habits to their partner: “Of the addicts who knew about their addiction prior to committing to their marriage or partnership (68.8%), over half (55.7%) withheld all or most information about their problematic sexual behavior.”¹³ For a man to disclose a pornography addiction to his fiancée before getting married is unlikely. After getting married, the man with the pornography addiction often continues to live in this lie.

When a woman discovers her spouse’s pornography addiction, the lying aspect has been cited as being just as painful as the sexual sin. Spencer Zitzman and Mark Butler interviewed fourteen women whose husbands frequently used pornography. In nine of the fourteen interviews, the wife mentioned how her trust was shattered. One woman named Katy said that the lies her husband told her hurt even more than his act of watching pornography: “Knowing that he’s using [pornography]...is bad enough. But knowing that he’s lying about it and

¹³ Deborah Corley, “Impact of Disclosure of Relapse for Self-Identified Sexual Addicts.” *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 20:157–170, 2013.

deceiving me...that's worse to me."¹⁴ A woman named Jennifer reported that this secret addiction made her question her whole marriage: "I felt like I didn't know who he was, and so I didn't know what to think of him, or what to feel about him. I felt like he was a stranger to me.... I didn't trust anything.... Everything comes into question. That is an awful existence."¹⁵ Trust is foundational to marriages. Discovering their husband's lie is a painful experience.

Learning about her husband's pornography addiction forces women to question her husband and even bigger life issues. Jill Manning discussed why women begin to have doubts in other areas of life after her husband's betrayal:

Generally speaking, North American women are socialized to seek, if not to expect, marital and intimate relationships that foster equality between partners and that are founded on mutual respect, honesty, shared power, and romantic love. In stark contrast, pornography promotes and eroticizes the antitheses of these relational and marital ideals: power imbalances, discrimination, disrespect, abuse, violence, voyeurism, objectification, and detachment. Consequently, when a North American, married woman discovers that her husband has been secretly consuming pornography, the discovery not only devastates her sense of self and trust, but often threatens the foundation upon which she has constructed and framed her relational world. She is suddenly confronted with how psychologically, spiritually, and sexually split her supposedly 'modern man' really is. It's not uncommon for women in this situation to say things such as, 'I have no idea who he is anymore,' 'I now feel like I've lived a lie the entire time I've been married,' or 'I thought we had a good marriage until this was revealed.'¹⁶

The lying aspect of a pornography addiction has harmful effects. Generally speaking, women expect marriages to be an intimate bond. Women want their husbands to show them love, respect, and honesty. This is the expectation for marriages. When this expectation is not met because of a pornography addiction, a wife questions not only her husband but also her previous

¹⁴ Spencer Zitzman and Mark Butler, "Wives' Experience of Husbands' Pornography Use and Concomitant Deception as an Attachment Threat in the Adult Pair-Bond Relationship." *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 16:210–240, 2009. 222.

¹⁵ Zitzman and Butler, 223.

¹⁶ Jill Manning, "The Impact of Pornography on Women: Social Science Findings and Clinical Observations," in *The Social Costs of Pornography*, edited by James R. Stoner Jr. and Donna M. Hughes, 69–88. Princeton, New Jersey: Witherspoon Institute, 2010.

belief system. She might think, “What else in my life have I been lied to about?” Her husband has been unfaithful so now she questions if any man in general could ever be faithful.

In addition, after a woman learns about her husband’s secret pornography addiction, she now has her own secret to carry about her husband’s problem. A husband’s pornography addiction is not a subject most people will feel comfortable talking to others about. Pornography addictions can be even harder to talk about than if her husband struggled with alcoholism or drug abuse. No woman desires to tell someone about how her marriage is crumbling because of a pornography addiction. Once a wife learns about her husband’s lies, she, too, can begin to tell lies to her friends and family:

Often when a woman is in love with a sex addict, her family and friends beginning to ask questions about the relationship, and she finds herself lying, or at least pretending that nothing is wrong. Because she feels she must keep her shameful secret, the woman who loves a sex addict begins to isolate from her family and friends.¹⁷

Pornography is a hard subject to talk about. If “masturbate” isn’t the most uncomfortable word to say in the English language, it is at least in the top five. When friends and family members ask a simple question like, “How have you and John been lately?” Instead of having the awkward and difficult discussion, it is much easier for a wife to answer, “Everything’s fine. We are good.”

The wife begins to be just as secretive as her husband.

Women tend to avoid talking to their supportive friends about their husband’s pornography addiction. This is true even if a woman has a strong social network:

Women, by nature, tend to maintain a more active support system than men. But, even women seem to reject that same support when they need it the most. Why is this? First, they carry guilt and shame that rightly should be carried by the unfaithful spouse. This wrong reaction then leads them into a second unhealthy response: They buy into their unfaithful spouses’ system of hiding the sin. Third, fear convinces them that others would abandon them if they knew the truth about their marriage. Therefore, they conclude they don’t need an authentic support system, but rather fair-weather friends to maintain the good

¹⁷ Douglas Weiss. *Women Who Love Sex Addicts: Help for Healing from the Effects of a Relationship with a Sex Addict*. (Discovery Press: Fort Worth, TX, 1993), 127.

image.¹⁸

A wife of a porn addict might have a strong support system. Maybe she has loving and mature friends from church that would love to give her care and support. But the secretive nature of pornography often keeps women from asking for help. A woman might have several reasons to keep her husband's pornography addiction a secret. Whether it is guilt, embarrassment or fear, the husband's secret leads to secretive wives. Pornography addictions hurt wives because it forces them to become isolated. The secretive nature of pornography is most harmful because it prevents the wife and her husband from receiving help. As long as his pornography addiction is a secret, the couple cannot begin the healing process.

¹⁸ Joann Condie "Nothing to Hide: Hope for Marriages Hurt by Pornography and Infidelity." Focus on Family, 2004. PDF. 9.

CHAPTER 2: HOW DO WIVES REACT TO THIS ADDICTION?

When a woman discovers that her husband has been watching pornography, she will respond with a plethora of emotions. Wives of porn addicts have described their experience with words like, “devastating,” “shocking,” “surreal,” “floored,” “horrible,” “emotional,” “freaked out,” “stunned,” “numb,” “depressed,” “out of control,” “an emotional roller coaster,” “angry,” and “the most depressed I had ever been.”¹⁹ Humans are complex and deal with situations in different ways. While not all wives of porn addicts respond the same way, in this chapter I will examine some of the most common reactions and emotions that women experience when dealing with their husband’s addiction.

Devastation: How Can I Compete with That?

A common reaction when a wife learns about her husband’s addiction is intense devastation. Hearts break when women discover that their husband has been lusting after women in pornography. After the initial discovery of a husband’s porn habit, women have commonly responded with the thought, “How can I compete with that?” One of the co-authors of *Hope After Porn*, Cindy Beall, told the story about her reaction when she first caught her husband watching pornography:

I’ll never forget the first time I walked in on my husband looking at Internet pornography. Immediately my heart sank, and I remember this sick feeling wash over me. The thought that began to plague my mind instantly was, “*How will I ever be able to compete with her?*” If I think about that day I can remember exactly what the woman looked like. How she was posing and what her facial expression was. I would tell you what she was wearing but that’s just it...she wasn’t wearing anything. She was very well endowed and made me look like I was just about to get my first training bra.²⁰

Cindy immediately compared her body to the woman in the picture. This image was etched into

¹⁹ Zitzman and Butler, 221.

²⁰ Cindy Beall, Laura Booz, Kay Bruner and April Mabrey, *Hope After Porn: Four Women’s Tales of Heartbreak and How Their Marriages were Saved*. (Covenant Eyes: Owosso, MI, 2014.) PDF. 16. Emphasis mine.

Cindy's long-term memory. Years later, Cindy still remembered the picture of the porn star: her face, her expression, and her body. It tormented her. In comparison to this woman, Cindy felt ugly and inferior. She knew her husband was attracted to this woman and Cindy knew she could never look like that. Cindy felt devastated knowing that she could not compete with the Internet porn star.

Pornography makes women feel like they have to compete with impossible standards. Internet porn stars are often young and attractive to begin with but on top of that they are also airbrushed and photo-shopped. This creates an impossible standard of beauty for the average housewife:

Pornography invading the home can also lead a wife to feel old, unattractive, and sexually undesirable. It's no secret that most of the women in pornography are just over 18 years of age. Furthermore, thanks to plastic surgery, makeup, and digital photographic enhancement, most of the women in pornography do not exist in real life. They are too "perfect." A wife in her mid-thirties, who has had a few children, might be very beautiful; however, she does not look like a 19-year-old. Because of this, she may think, "*How can I compete with the young girls in porn?*" This can lead her to feel ugly, undesirable, and rejected by her husband."²¹

Women tend to think that their husband's pornography addiction is their fault. "If only I were prettier, more available, sexier, skinnier, I wouldn't be in this problem," they tell themselves. The gut instinct is for wives to look in the mirror to make sense of this sin. It's not about his weakness, but about hers; not about his failures, but hers. This is false guilt. In some situations, husbands manipulate their wives and tell them that it is her fault. Some men tell their wives that he would not turn to pornography if only she were prettier or more available. By doing this he is shifting the blame as a way to cope with his own shame and moral failure. Whether her husband blamed her for his pornography habits or not, women tend to blame themselves for their husband's addiction.

²¹ Peter Kleoponis, "The Effects of Pornography on Wives and Marriages." Covenant Eyes. 2010. Accessed Oct. 20, 2017. <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2010/07/06/the-effects-of-pornography-on-wives-and-marriages>.

Vicki Tiede told a story about a woman named Jessica who tried to stop her husband from looking at pornography by fixing herself:

I worked really hard at the beginning of my journey to exercise, eat less, and look my best in hopes of making my husband want me again. Although I was a size 0, I still believed I was fat and somehow did not measure up to the world's standards of beauty. I was always comparing myself to other women. I knew that was wrong thinking, and I tried so hard to begin healing that mindset of my distorted self-image, but over time my husband looked at pornography, any ground I had gained was quickly lost. It just confirmed what I had always believed was true— I would never measure up, and I just wasn't enough for my husband to want me and only me. I tried to compensate by controlling my environment— keeping my house perfect and putting things back where they belonged. I lost a lot of joy during this time.²²

Jessica thought that her husband's pornography addiction was her fault. She tried to fix this problem by losing weight and looking prettier. When this strategy did not work, she was even more devastated. "It's my fault," is a common thought that is coupled with low self-esteem.

Jessica mentioned that even though she was a size 0, she felt fat compared to other women. It is not healthy for women to constantly compare their bodies to other women, especially the photo shopped women in pornography. Pornography is an addiction that changes the brain. A more seductive outfit or getting in slightly better shape will not cure the husband's addiction. After a woman learns about her husband's pornography problem, she may deal with her feelings of devastation by making herself more attractive, but this tactic does not work. When she realizes that she is incapable of fixing her husband, this will lead to devastation and despair.

Reactions of Avoidance

As a woman processes her husband's pornography addiction, she might react in a way that prevents her from truly dealing with this problem. In this section I am going to look at three of these reactions: denial, minimization and fear. All three of these reactions are used in some way as an attempt to avoid the pain:

²² Vicki Tiede. *When Your Husband is Addicted to Pornography: Healing Your Wounded Heart*. New (Growth Press: Greensboro, NC, 2012), 45.

Part of the way people protect themselves from the intense pain of relational disappointment is to avoid looking honestly at their relationships. To maintain peace and happiness and avoid further hurt, it's tempting to deny what's going on. When you look at the relational problems that exist in your marriage, your illusions will shatter. "I can't believe this is happening" or "God wouldn't allow this to happen."²³

Both men who are addicted to pornography and women who are married to the addict have a tendency to believe that the pornography addiction will go away on its own. Some wives assumed their husband would stop once she discovered his habit because he would finally realize how much it hurt his wife. Some Christian men have prayed many times that God will remove this temptation, but fail to seek any other type of help and assume that they will break the addiction on their own. Contrary to these thoughts, pornography addictions rarely go away on their own. Avoiding the problem only helps mask the pain.

Most women at some level experience a form of denial during the coping process. Denial is a defense mechanism people use to deal with anxiety and emotional discomfort. For wives with a husband addicted to pornography, denial is manifested in several different ways. The following is a list of quotes that a wife who is in denial might say:

- "He is a Mr. Charming and Wonderful, so how could he have such a problem?"
- "He was my first sex partner and he is more experienced, so this sexual behavior must be normal."
- "I married him so I am stuck with this. I made my bed and now I have to lay in it."
- "If he has a sex problem that means there is something wrong with me."
- "He is just being considerate not to bother me, that is why he masturbates late at night."
- "I know he'd never do anything to the kids."
- "All men want sex a lot, and that's just the way they are."
- "I am too embarrassed to even think he has a problem because we are a 'happy family.'"
- "He deserves some time for himself. He works so hard you know."
- "I grew up in a sheltered lifestyle. This must be how real people have sex."²⁴

²³ Harry Schaumburg. *False Intimacy: Understanding the Struggle of Sexual Addiction*. (Navpress: Colorado Springs, CO, 1997), 111.

²⁴ Weiss, 95.

When a woman is in denial about her husband's pornography addiction, she often looks at his other good characteristics to try to cover up his pornography problem. Failing to see the pornography addiction through her husband's camouflage of good characteristics is a form of denial. "Denial may seem like the only shield of protection, but in the end it is a cruel illusory wall against the cancer that has infiltrated the skeletal structure of the soul."²⁵

Related to denial is minimization. A simple definition of minimization is saying, "This behavior is not that bad." It is the opposite of exaggeration. When women fall into minimization, they downplay the significance of their husband's pornography problem. Here are some examples of women minimizing their husband's addiction:

- "All men do this."
- "It's only a phase."
- "He needs more excitement than I can give."
- "That's the way he grew up."
- "The only way he knows I love him is to stick by him."
- "What should it matter if I don't know everything he does?"
- "It could be worse; he could be an alcoholic or drug addict."
- "He is such a good mate/husband/father, even though he does this."
- "He doesn't beat me."
- "He's a good provider."
- "He's responsible in other areas."
- "He pays the bills regularly."
- "He goes to church."
- "He helps other people."
- "It doesn't really bother me."
- "At least he always comes home to me."
- "I'm the one he's married to."²⁶

As women downplay their husband's addiction, they avoid dealing with their negative emotions. Her husband might also be responsible for minimizing his pornography usage. The longer a woman believes that her husband's problem is "not that bad," the longer she will avoid

²⁵ Schaumburg, 137.

²⁶ Weiss, 119.

confronting him about the problem.

Related to both of these emotions is fear. Fear is a powerful emotion that prevents women from facing her husband's problem. This is understandable because confronting a pornography addiction will lead to some type of change in life. It might lead to an uncomfortable conversation. It might lead to something more impactful like a brief separation or possibly a divorce. Change can be scary and instead of tackling the change head on, fear often prevents women from having the hard conversation about her husband's addiction. Here are several examples of fears women had about their husband's pornography addiction:

- "I was afraid to stay and I was afraid to leave."
- "I was afraid of what he would do to my kids."
- "I was afraid I wasn't woman enough for him."
- "I was afraid I could never please him sexually."
- "I felt like there was something wrong with me."
- "I was afraid I couldn't raise my kids by myself."
- "I was afraid to let anyone know what was really going on in our lives."
- "I was afraid people would tell me I had to stay."
- "I was afraid people at church wouldn't understand."
- "I was afraid to confront him."
- "I was afraid if I changed nobody would like me, including myself."
- "I was afraid I was at fault."
- "I was afraid I was only good for sex, and that my sex wasn't ever good enough."²⁷

Women have countless reasons to fear when attempting to face her husband about his addiction. Fear, denial, and minimization often work together to avoid confronting the problem. A woman might deny or minimize his pornography use because she is afraid of what change might happen next in her life. When a wife who is married to a porn addict experiences an emotion of avoidance, she might feel like she is protecting herself but in the end the problem is only prolonged.

²⁷ Weiss, 136.

Anger: How Could He Do That?

Anger is a common reaction when a wife first discovers that her husband has been watching pornography. Wives naturally feel this way because it is difficult to learn that the man who has exchanged marriage vows with her and promised to be faithful to her has been lusting after other women. But there are healthy and unhealthy ways to handle this anger. Joann Condie told a story about a woman named Stephanie who was enraged when she first learned about her husband's pornography use:

Stephanie was intently searching the Internet for stats to use in a presentation when she stumbled upon sites used by her husband, Michael. She became nauseated by the sexual scenes she saw and later discovered even more violent and repulsive material when she checked the history file...Stephanie immediately called Michael's office and demanded he come home at once. She refused to answer his anxious questions and slammed down the phone. When he rushed into the house, worried and shaken, she screamed hateful, angry words about his pornography use and called him horrible names. Stephanie demanded he move out of the house or she would ruin his career. All attempts by Michael to confess his addiction and consider a solution were met by Stephanie's escalating anger.²⁸

Stephanie's angry response was like adding gasoline to the flame. This resulted in even more damage than what was initially dealt by the adulterer, Michael. Over-reacting with extreme anger is often an attempt to control an out-of-control situation. Stephanie did not know all the facts about Michael's pornography use. He might have had one slip up or a major addiction, but Stephanie did not even wait to hear Michael's side of the story. This happens when a wife assumes the worst before attempting to hear all of the facts.

In some cases, a wife's anger is a form of self-righteousness. While I do not want to make it sound like wives are responsible for their husband's sexual addictions, no wife is perfect in a marriage. Although she may know she has sinned against her husband in some way, it is not uncommon for a wife to respond with self-righteous anger when she learns about her husband's porn habit. Her sins might look small in comparison: "Anger toward a mate or lover is, for some

²⁸ Joann Condie, 8.

women, the strongest part of the initial anger they feel. It is to look at his shortcomings: affairs, pornography, masturbation, and so forth. It is much harder to look at her shortcomings.”²⁹

Because pornography has such a social stigma, a wife’s anger or overreaction might seem like a minor sin compared to her husband’s sexual sins. Self-righteous anger does not help lead the husband to recovery.

April married Darren at the young age of nineteen. They were both Christians and Darren was even studying to become a pastor. April supported Darren and was excited about their future together serving in ministry. One night while Darren was in class, April was at home surfing the Internet and stumbled upon a recent search history. The results devastated her. Darren had been watching pornography. In tears April confronted Darren when he got home. Darren promised that he would change but for eight years Darren did not shake his porn habits. He only became craftier at hiding his habit. His persistent pornography use and his web of lies crushed April. She described not only being angry at her husband but also at God:

In many ways I was angry at Darren and at God because I felt that both of them had the power to change things for the better but decided against it. In deep despair I ran from love, honesty, joy, and self-control. I wanted to hurt those who had hurt me, but instead I only caused deep scars on my heart that I will carry until the day I die.³⁰

April believed that both God and Darren could change the situation but neither did. In result of this, April felt hurt, isolated, and angry enough to want to physically harm those who hurt her. Wives who are angry with God show that their faith is possibly in a fragile condition. When hardships occur in the life of the Christian, it is tempting to doubt God’s love. This is certainly true for the wife of the porn addict. Anger, albeit a natural reaction for wives who discover their

²⁹ Weiss, 146.

³⁰ Beall, Booz, Bruner and Mabrey, 13-14.

husband's pornography use, can have destructive consequences that prolong recovery.

Psychological Effects

Approximately 70% of wives dealing with a husband's betrayal fit the criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These symptoms can include nightmares, obsessive thinking, fear, replaying the initial discovery, insomnia, depression and anxiety.³¹ Another symptom that most wives will experience at some point is hyper-vigilance. A woman with hyper-vigilance becomes obsessed with her husband's addiction and constantly monitors his behavior and potential triggers (websites, lingerie ads, attractive women). Other women have reported physical problems as well such as back pain or headaches. Physical problems often follow psychological problems. PTSD symptoms are a red flag that this woman will benefit from professional counseling. Wives are hurt emotionally, psychologically, physically and spiritually when their husband has a pornography addiction.

³¹ Covenant Eyes, "Porn and Your Husband: A Recovery Guide for Wives." (Covenant Eyes: Owosso, MI, 2015.) PDF. 6.

CHAPTER 3: HOW CAN THE PASTOR HELP?

Pastors are in a unique position to help women who are hurt by their husband's pornography addiction. Jill Manning and Wendy Watson conducted interviews with twenty-two women who sought out clergy to discuss their husbands' pornography use. From these interviews, they arrived at the conclusion that women seek out pastors for support before other support groups for two reasons: 1) Clergy are safe and confidential. Other support groups, like family or friends, might be judgmental and evoke shame. 2) Wives often have a hunch or gut sense that there is something wrong in their marriage even if she does not have all the details about her husband's pornography use. Clergy, therefore, are perceived as someone who can validate her feelings.³² In this section is a list of practical guidelines for pastors to follow when helping the wives of a porn addict. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, nor will all of these steps apply to every woman. Instead, the intention of this chapter is to equip pastors with a general framework to consult when ministering to spouses who are hurt by pornography.

Listen!

This point might be obvious, but it is important for pastors to listen while counseling a woman who is married to a porn addict. While it might seem like common sense to follow this rule, it is tempting for pastors to immediately attempt to solve all her problems. Wives react to their husband's pornography addiction in different ways. For a pastor to know how she is coping with her husband's porn use, he needs to listen. It is impossible for the pastor to offer helpful advice in counseling before he first knows how she is feeling. Since pornography is a stigmatized topic, the pastor could be the first person she told about this problem. The act of allowing the woman to

³² Jill Manning and Wendy Watson. "A Qualitative Study of the Supports Women Find Most Beneficial When Dealing with a Spouse's Sexually Addictive or Compulsive Behaviors: Insights for Pastoral Counselors and Clergy" *Pastoral Psychology* 56:31-43, 2007. 37.

tell her story and share her feelings about her husband's porn use is an important part of the healing process. When she tells her story there might be tears and awkward silences but a pastor needs to be patient and allow her to share. Transparency is critical for the healing of not only the porn addict but also the victimized wife. Allowing the wife to tell her story and having the pastor actively listening to her is the first step toward healing.

Initiate Contact and Be Available

Since pornography addiction is often marked by shame and embarrassment, pastors should initiate contact with the wife of the porn addict. After she discovers her husband's pornography addiction, there is no guarantee that she will contact the pastor to talk about it. If a man confesses the sin of pornography to the pastor in his office, the pastor most likely will ask him if he has told his wife yet. If the man has not done so, the pastor should encourage him to tell his wife before his next counseling session. Whenever the husband tells his wife about his pornography addiction, the pastor should later call to set up an appointment with the wife. This meeting could be individual or with her husband. The wife will most likely want to talk about this issue but she might be too embarrassed to set up the meeting herself. Having the pastor initiate contact with the wife solves this problem.

Once a pastor has started counseling with a wife of the porn addict, she will most likely have much to talk about. She never planned to be married to a man with a sexual addiction and this new lifestyle will be intimidating. Most likely, she will continue to think of questions outside of the counseling session. The small act of a pastor giving his cell phone number to her and saying "you can call or text me anytime you need to," goes a long way. As the pastor initiates contact with the wife and is available to talk with, the wife will begin to feel comfortable talking about her husband's pornography addiction.

Take the Problem Seriously

Society often tries to trivialize pornography and minimize the damage it does to marriages. Maybe a friend told the wife of a porn addict that she should be happy that her husband isn't sleeping with someone else. Maybe the latest Hollywood movie portrayed that there is nothing wrong with "just looking" at someone else. Maybe the recent *Cosmo* blogger suggested watching pornography with your husband to spice up the bedroom.

Pastors might be tempted to minimize this issue as well, but instead it is important to take this problem seriously. Over half of all divorces involve one spouse having an obsessive interest in pornographic materials.³³ Learning about a husband's pornography addiction is a red flag that this marriage is in a frail condition. Not only are marriages harmed by pornography but souls are under attack as well. This is true for both the husband who watches pornography and the woman whose trust in God is shaken because she blames God for giving her this husband with a pornography addiction. Pastors need to take this problem seriously.

Be Knowledgeable About the Subject

As technology changes and improves, there seems to be more and more different ways to view pornography. New apps and devices are constantly being developed which create new ways for men to view pornography. With that said, it takes some effort to stay updated about modern pornography usage. The pastor might not know about the easy accessibility of pornography or the statistics about how many people struggle with this temptation. If the statistics are true, then there are members in the church who are struggling with pornography. The pastor is wise to be knowledgeable about pornography and the resources available for helping counsel those who are addicted to it.

³³ Fagen, 8.

If a wife talks to the pastor about her husband's addiction, she will most likely be willing to research the problem as well. Pastors can share resources and books with this woman, but it would be even more productive if he would research this problem with her. A pastor is not weak to admit that he does not know everything about this subject. On the other hand, pastors are not wise when they pretend to know more about the subject than they actually do. The best-case scenario would be for a pastor to research this issue beforehand and stay informed. But even if he could not, a pastor could say, "I don't know much about this subject, but I would love to do some research with you about it."

Refer to a Professional Counselor

Pastors need to be straightforward in stating how he can and cannot help this woman in counseling sessions. The primary goal of the pastor in counseling is to help with spiritual matters. This goal needs to be made evident to both the pastor and the wife of the porn addict. Often in the case with pornography, a husband's porn use is the tip of the iceberg to other marriage problems. Pornography use within a marriage is a multi-faceted problem: there is the husband's addiction, the wife's coping, the marital stress as a couple and many more issues. Pornography use alone will be devastating to wives but if his pornography use leads to an extramarital affair then this will be a very difficult case. Having the couple talk out all of these issues will take lots of time and effort. When a wife discovers her husband's pornography addiction, almost all couples will benefit from seeking professional marriage counseling. The pastor and the professional counselor will have different, complimentary roles that help the wife of a porn addict.

Certain pastors might feel equipped to offer practical tactics to help someone struggling with pornography, but a professional counselor would do an even better job. The pastor needs to

be up front with the wife that the primary goal of pastoral counseling is taking care of spiritual matters. This will prevent the wife from having false expectations about their counseling sessions and better understand the referral to the professional counselor. The pastor can help normalize professional counseling instead of making it a taboo topic. In an interview one woman mentioned how relieved she was when the pastor suggested professional counseling: “One [clergy] in particular, took it very seriously and said ‘You have a very serious problem and you need to get help,’ and I was like, ‘Thank you! Finally.’”³⁴ In certain cases the couple might refuse to go to professional counseling. Whether this is a financial decision or another reason, this puts the pastor in a difficult situation. In this instance, a pastor should still focus on the primary goal of spiritual matters but he might play a larger role in the recovery process.

Use Specific Law and Gospel

True healing after this devastation can only come through the power that God gives us: the law and the gospel. This is the most important step for the pastor. The law is used in this situation to remind her that we live in a broken world with sin and betrayal. The gospel is used to comfort her and give her true joy during this difficult time. Pastor Kent Reeder, the chairman of Conquerors Through Christ, pointed out the importance of using specific law and gospel as opposed to generic uses: “The pastoral counselor should be adept at clearly and unambiguously speaking specific law and gospel into this situation for the wife. This can be directed at her at times, but it also should be directed at the husband. There is not room for generic, pandering law and gospel in a situation where emotions can run so high.”³⁵ When a wife comes to a pastor after her husband betrayed her with pornography use, the pastor has the opportunity to speak God’s Word specifically into her life. Instead of simply stating, “God can help you during this rough

³⁴ Manning and Watson, 38.

³⁵ Kent Reeder: Personal Interview. October 9, 2017.

time,” the pastor can be more precise by saying, “Jesus knows what it is like to be betrayed by those close to him. He understands the feelings that you are going through. But even though your husband broke your trust, God is always reliable and trustworthy. He will never let you down.” During this hard time, the wife might think her life is ruined because of her husband’s actions. The pastor can comfort her by reminding her of her true identity. Her identity does not come from being the wife of the porn addict but her main identity comes from being a child of God. No one can take that identity away from her. Her husband might refuse counseling and have no desire to stop watching pornography, but that does not change her status before God. The husband might never truly love her again but God’s love will never fail. The law and the gospel are the only way to truly help the porn addict and the victimized wife.

Believe Her

Amanda walked into Pastor Smith’s office and closed the door. She had puffy red eyes and Pastor Smith knew something was wrong. “Last night I caught Jim watching pornography on his iPhone,” Amanda said. “Jim?” Pastor Smith thought to himself. “But Jim’s a great guy! He serves on the property committee and comes to church almost every Sunday!”

When a woman initially discloses to her pastor that her husband has been using pornography, this might surprise the pastor. Her husband might have a great reputation in the community. He could be an involved church member serving on the leadership team and teaching Sunday school. No one would have guessed that he was struggling with pornography. For the pastor, initial shock often accompanies the disclosure of sexual addictions. But even if the porn user is a surprising suspect, the pastor should believe the wife.

Normalize Her Feelings

“It’s okay to feel this way.” This is a powerful expression that a pastor can use. Wives of porn addicts will likely have many emotions that she has not experienced before. Her depression might be new and confusing. Her deep anger might surprise her. Her restless nights might terrify her. On top of this, her friends might tell her not to feel bad because “at least he isn’t having an affair.” Because of this, wives might feel ashamed for even having these emotions. For the pastor to simply tell her that this is an appropriate situation to have these feelings is beneficial.

Be Compassionate

The wife of the porn addict might be in a dark place of devastation. Her husband has broken her heart and trust. The only thing that can truly free her from this dark place is the warm message of God’s love. Pastors reflect God’s love by being compassionate to these women. A woman who is married to a porn addict might take up more time and energy than any other church member for a time. But as she is in this dark place of her life, she needs to feel love and compassion from her pastor.

Help with Isolation

Tarah, an intelligent and extroverted wife, once said in a counseling session: “This may sound bizarre, but I think it’s easier for someone to have heard a cancer diagnosis than this because at least they can talk about it with other people and get their support. I can’t talk at all because people would only judge—they wouldn’t understand.”³⁶ Tarah’s words echo the thoughts of many women who have been hurt by their husband’s pornography use: the loneliness, the frustration of not knowing where to turn for help, and the fear that no one would understand.

³⁶ Deborah Laaser. *Shattered Vows: Hope and Healing for Women Who Have Been Sexually Betrayed*. (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI. 2008.) 24.

Pastoral counselors can help the wife of the porn addict with her feelings of isolation.

When the wife seeks help from the pastoral counselor, he should ask her if she has already told anyone else about the problem. Chances are that the pastor might be the first one that she told. Pornography is an uncomfortable subject topic to talk about. She might be reluctant to tell others about this issue because of the embarrassment. But it is not healthy for the wife to have a heavy secret burdening her. Does this woman have any other trustworthy friends or family of the same gender that she could confide in? If she does not, the pastor could possibly introduce her to a mature woman in the congregation who has experienced something like this. Possibly, if there is a support group for women married to sex addicts meeting in the community, the pastor could introduce her to that. For obvious reasons, she does not need to become a billboard telling everyone about her husband's pornography addiction. But she needs to tell someone.

Isolation is dangerous for porn addicts and the victimized wife, but there is power in community. Wives may find it difficult to talk to other women about their husband's pornography addiction, but it is important to develop friends in the Christian community during this confusing journey. After Darren and April sought counseling and recovered as a couple, April mentioned: "Looking back, I would have done one thing differently. I would have let others into my disappointment before it turned into despair."³⁷ It might be difficult for women to open up to someone else about the hurt caused by her husband's pornography addiction, but stepping out of isolation and into community leads to healing.

Manage Anger

It is common for women to feel anger after their husband hurts them with their pornography use. In Ephesians 4:26, the Apostle Paul wrote: "Be angry and do not sin" (ESV). Pastors can point

³⁷ Beall, Booz, Bruner and Mabrey, 14.

out that there are healthy and unhealthy ways to be angry. God is angry about the sin of pornography. God hates that she is going through intense pain. Wives of porn addicts can mimic God's anger by being upset at her husband's sin. She can show him the pain that he caused, but she needs to beware of excessive and selfish anger. Name-calling, personal attacks, and explosive tantrums only add more problems to this situation. Unfortunately, often healthy and unhealthy forms of anger blend together. The pastor can give guidance to the wife with her feelings of anger and teach her an appropriate way to handle her anger.

Empower Her

A wife of a porn addict often feels helpless and out of control. Due to their grief and pain, society can view these women as helpless victims. Their situation might be difficult right now and it is tempting to think that it will last forever. Pastoral counselors can empower these women by giving them hope through the gospel. They might not be in control of what their husband does, but they can control how they respond to situations. As women are given the tools to regain control over their emotions, the helpless victim mentality slowly disappears.

Instruct and Encourage Forgiveness

Most secular counselors of sexual addictions encourage the victim to forgive their spouse. Mira Kirshenbaum in her book, *I Love You but I Don't Trust You*, wrote about the necessity of forgiveness in restoring trust for couples healing after infidelity:

Forgiveness isn't just the cherry on top of the sundae of reconciliation. It's absolutely essential. Without forgiveness, the hurt and anger never really end. What's more, you can't trust someone you don't forgive and just as important you can't trust someone who doesn't forgive you. But when you forgive, along with everything else you've done...trust can be restored and the relationship can thrive again.³⁸

Kirshenbaum pointed out that it is impossible to trust someone again without forgiveness.

³⁸ Mira Kirshenbaum, *I Love You but I Don't Trust You: The Complete Guide to Restoring Trust in Your Relationship*. (The Berkley Publishing Group: New York, 2012.) 190-191.

Forgiveness is a critical step for a married couple to move forward in their relationship. This does not mean that wives should not tell their husband's about the pain he caused by his pornography habits and sweep it under the rug. But forgiveness leads to healing and repairing the broken relationship.

For Christians there is an obligation for offering forgiveness to others. As the Lord's Prayer states: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." Jesus instructs his followers who have been forgiven to show that forgiveness to others. This includes wives who have been hurt by their husband's sexual mistakes.

Pastors should instruct wives about the difference between vertical and horizontal forgiveness. God forgives sins of people. That is vertical forgiveness. Now out of love for God for the forgiveness he showed us, we forgive others. That is horizontal forgiveness. A wife might say that she cannot forgive her husband because of the terrible thing he did to her. She might say how she relives that moment over and over again and cannot forget it. In that situation it is necessary for the pastor to tell the wife that forgiving is not the same as forgetting. Wives can still offer forgiveness to their husbands even when there is still pain in her heart. Sinful humans might not ever fully forget the sins that were committed against us, but it is still our obligation to offer that forgiveness to others. For wives who continue to hold the grudge, she is only hurting herself. The pastor can encourage her to let go of her grudge and forgive her husband even if she is still angry with him. She might decide that she wants a divorce or that she isn't ready to move back together after separating, but she can offer forgiveness. Forgiveness is a fruit of faith that is often difficult to show when a spouse causes the intense pain. It is helpful for pastors to talk through forgiveness with the wife of a porn addict.

Establish Boundaries

In the physical world, boundaries are easy to see. Walls, fences, signs all display property lines. If someone crosses the line, ignores the signs, jumps over the fence, they are trespassing into an area where they should not be. Boundaries are the guardrails that prevent someone from driving into a ditch. Henry Cloud and John Townsend in their book *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life*³⁹ discuss the idea of creating boundaries in our lives that prevent us from crossing the line into an damaging behavior. Establishing boundaries is an essential step for the recovering porn addict to help prevent him from sliding back into his previous porn habits. Some potential boundaries for recovering porn addicts is setting up Internet filtering software, switching from a smartphone to a phone with no Internet browsing capabilities, and having an accountability partner. These boundaries can help him abstain from using pornography and rewire his brain back to a health.

Boundaries can also be helpful for wives of porn addicts. The counseling pastor can point out that she cannot control the behaviors of her husband, but she can control how she reacts. The wife can monitor her thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviors. Certain boundaries are especially valuable for when a wife has hyper-vigilance and obsessively thinks about her husband's addiction. When a wife has hyper-vigilance she might over-react and tell her husband that he is never allowed to go on the Internet again. She might have trouble concentrating on anything else during the day except for her husband's porn use. Starting a journal and writing about her feelings everyday, distracting herself with volunteering or other activities, dedicating only thirty minutes everyday to sit and think about this issue are some helpful boundaries that prevent her from falling into the ditch of hyper-vigilance or intense anger.

³⁹ Henry Cloud and John Townsend. *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life*. (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1992).

The pastor can help with establishing boundaries for the wife married to a porn addict, but this is not his main responsibility. In counseling a porn addict or his victimized wife, professional counselors will have a better knowledge of helpful boundaries than most pastors. If the couple is not getting professional counseling, the pastor might have a bigger role in helping create boundaries. Boundaries will vary on a case-by-case basis. No boundary is a silver bullet that will automatically heal the damage done to the marriage. Healing takes time and work, but boundaries help during the recovery process.

Rebuilding Trust

Rebuilding trust after a pornography addiction is a long and difficult journey. The wife might have forgiven her husband for his past sins but that does not mean that trust is automatically restored. Their relationship will not be the same as it was. This process might take weeks, months, or years. The formula for rebuilding trust is **time + trust = earned trust**. As a couple is open and honest with one another, trust can be restored.

In the beginning steps of recovery, the boundary lines might be stricter than usual. The wife might want to look at her husband's search history everyday. She might worry when he shows up fifteen minutes late from work and assume he is spending that time watching pornography. The relationship is not going to be the same right away. Rebuilding trust after adultery has been compared to wearing a cast after breaking a bone:

Adultery correlates to the broken leg. Rebuilding trust correlates to the time of wearing a cast. The things you will both do as you are rebuilding trust will not be normal. They will be clumsy and awkward and limiting and in the case of adultery recovery they will also be scary. Scary because you know neither of you can live this way for the rest of your lives. The transparency and accountability of the infidel needed by the spouse will be abnormal for a time. But as both of you heal, like in the case of the broken leg, when healing is nearly complete, the cast will come off. Your walk will again be awkward for a while until the healing is complete. Then one day you will notice that your walk feels normal for the

first time in a long while.⁴⁰

One of the most damaging aspects of pornography addictions is the secretive nature of it. To heal from this addiction, transparency is key. The husband has broken his wife's trust and to gain it back he needs to be honest. He needs to tell the truth not only about his struggles with pornography but also everything else in his life. Constantly being open and honest about everything is helpful but it can also be clunky like wearing a cast. A husband could lose his patience with his wife when she asks to see his search history again or asks him another question about his past. He might not appreciate it when his wife grills him after coming home from work fifteen minutes late. It can be frustrating to share every social media password and give access to every bank account. But like wearing a cast, the pain and clumsiness is temporary. Eventually the couple can heal and return to a healthy relationship.

Pastors help by checking up on the couple during this process of rebuilding trust. He will encourage the husband to continue to be open and transparent to his wife about his recovery. As the husband slowly accomplishes this goal, the pastor can point this out to his wife. The husband's role is to earn back her trust and the wife's role is to be his cheerleader. The pastor can encourage the couple to be patient with one another during this slow and sometimes frustrating time of their life. As he does this the pastor gives hope to the couple that their relationship might be awkward now but that it is healing.

One woman interviewed discussed her process of rebuilding trust and breaking away from hyper-vigilance.

I have told him that his sobriety is up to him. My 12-step program has taught me that I can't control it so let it go. I have accepted that 'snooping' and lie detector tests are horrible for my own recovery so I refuse to do them. If I am working my own program

⁴⁰ Gary and Mona Shriver. *Unfaithful: Hope and Healing After Infidelity*. (David C. Cook: Colorado Springs, CO, 2009), 136.

and am healthy, I trust my higher power to reveal to me what I need to know. If a sex addict is acting out, there are usually signs.⁴¹

In this quote I appreciate the effort shown that it takes in a marriage to rebuild trust after a pornography addiction. The wife of a porn addict was working through her own 12-step program. She suffered from hyper-vigilance in the past but because of her professional counseling she is in a healthier state. The husband will also have his own recovery process as well. Rebuilding trust is a long and difficult process, but it is possible. Professional counselors and the counseling pastor can work together in helping this couple through the difficult journey of rebuilding trust. The broken bone can heal.

Be Proactive

A pastor is wise when he initiates the conversation of pornography in his congregation. For years pornography has been a touchy subject and sadly many churches have failed to talk about this issue that impacts many of its members. The pastor can be proactive by mentioning pornography in sermons and Bible classes. Since pornography has a social stigma, when the pastor talks about the subject he shows that he is not afraid to talk about uncomfortable topics. He can tell stories about people he has helped overcome pornography addictions and couples who have healed after the pain. By doing this, a pastor makes the church a comfortable place to talk about uncomfortable topics.

One pastor told me about how he brings up the topic of pornography in pre-marriage counseling. Before the first session, he sends a questionnaire to the couple to fill out so that they can discuss the results. One question is, “Describe your connection to pornography. How many days per month do you watch porn of any type?” This practice prevents couples from keeping

⁴¹ Jennifer P. Schneider, Robert Weiss and Charles Samenow, “Is It Really Cheating? Understanding the Emotional Reactions and Clinical Treatment of Spouses and Partners Affected by Cybersex Infidelity.” *Sexuality & Compulsivity*: 19:123–139, 2012. 132.

their pornography use a secret before getting married. The pastor mentioned how for one couple this was the first time the woman discovered that this was an issue for her future husband. This proactive approach allowed the young couple to work through this issue before they were married.

Church members are struggling with the sin of pornography. A pastor is naïve when he assumes that his church members aren't watching pornography or that there aren't wives sitting in his pews who are hurt by this sin. As the pastor proactively discusses this issue in his church, he normalizes this taboo topic and opens the door for conversations. In doing so, he can help porn addicts and the victimized wives.

CONCLUSSION

Right before watching pornography no man ever says, “I can’t wait to hurt my marriage and break my wife’s heart.” No one says that but ample research suggests that is exactly what happens when a husband frequently watches pornography. When men consume pornography, their wives are hurt by their actions and her pain can manifest in different forms. Whether it is anger, low self-esteem, fear, or depression, wives will be hurt by their husband’s pornography use.

As more and more wives are hurt by their husband’s porn consumption, the church is in a unique position to help. But to actually help, the church needs to stop hiding from this issue. For the sake of marriages, relationships, and souls, it is time for the church to speak up. Pornography and the pain it causes can no longer be a taboo topic in churches. Pastors need to take the first step in starting the discussion by talking about it in sermons, Bible classes, and conversations. As pastors do this, people will feel more comfortable to approach their pastor about this uncomfortable topic. When the husband confesses to his pastor his sins of pornography, the pastor should not only offer him spiritual counseling but also remember to initiate contact with the porn addict’s wife. As the counseling pastor uses law and gospel to lead the porn addict to repentance and offer him the good news of forgiveness, the same law and gospel will be used to heal the heart-broken wife. The gospel message is the only true remedy to heal both the porn addict and his wife.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beall, Cindy and Laura Booz, Kay Bruner, April Mabrey, *Hope After Porn: Four Women's Tales of Heartbreak and How Their Marriages were Saved*. Covenant Eyes: Owosso, MI, 2014. PDF.
- Condie, Joann, "Nothing to Hide: Hope for Marriages Hurt by Pornography and Infidelity." Focus on Family, 2004. PDF.
- Corely, M. Deborah. et al. "Impact of Disclosure of Relapse for Self-Identified Sexual Addicts." *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 20:157–170, 2013.
- Cloud, Henry and John Townsend. *Boundaries: When to Say Yes, How to Say No to Take Control of Your Life*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1992.
- Covenant Eyes, "Pornography Statistics." Accessed December 1, 2015. PDF.
- Covenant Eyes, "Porn and Your Husband: A Recovery Guide for Wives." (Covenant Eyes: Owosso, MI, 2015.) PDF.
- Cusick, Michael John. *Surfing for God: Discovering Divine Desire Beneath Sexual Struggle*. Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN, 2012.
- Dedmon, Jonathan. "Is the Internet Bad for Your Marriage? Online affairs, Pornographic Sites Playing Greater Role in Divorces." Press Release from The Dilenschneider Group, Inc., Nov. 14, 2002. Accessed Dec. 1, 2017. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Is+the+Internet+Bad+for+Your+Marriage%3F+Online+Affairs%2C+Pornographic...-a094221879>.
- Fagan, Patrick F. "The Effects of Pornography on Individuals, Marriage, Family, and Community." Marriage Research Institute. 2009. PDF.
- Gallagher, Steve. *A Biblical Guide to Counseling the Sexual Addict*. Pure Life Ministries: Dry Ridge, KY 2004.
- Kirshenbaum, Mira. *I Love You but I Don't Trust You: The Complete Guide to Restoring Trust in Your Relationship*. The Berkley Publishing Group: New York, 2012.
- Kleoponis, Peter. "The Effects of Pornography on Wives and Marriages." Covenant Eyes. 2010. Accessed Oct. 20, 2017. <http://www.covenanteyes.com/2010/07/06/the-effects-of-pornography-on-wives-and-marriages>.
- Laaser, Deborah. *Shattered Vows: Hope and Healing for Women Who Have Been Sexually Betrayed*. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI. 2008.

- Manning, Jill. "The Impact of Pornography on Women: Social Science Findings and Clinical Observations," in *The Social Costs of Pornography*, edited by James R. Stoner Jr. and Donna M. Hughes, 69–88. Princeton, New Jersey: Witherspoon Institute, 2010.
- Manning, Jill and Wendy Watson. "A Qualitative Study of the Supports Women Find Most Beneficial When Dealing with a Spouse's Sexually Addictive or Compulsive Behaviors: Insights for Pastoral Counselors and Clergy" *Pastoral Psychology* 56:31–43, 2007.
- Reeder, Heidi. "It Doesn't Hurt to Look, Does It? The Real Effect of Pornography on Relationships." *Psychology Today*, March 7, 2014. Accessed September 4, 2017. <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/i-can-relate/201403/it-doesn-t-hurt-look-does-it>.
- Schaumburg, Harry. *False Intimacy: Understanding the Struggle of Sexual Addiction*. Navpress: Colorado Springs, CO, 1997.
- Schneider, Jennifer P. and Robert Weiss, Charles Samenow, "Is It Really Cheating? Understanding the Emotional Reactions and Clinical Treatment of Spouses and Partners Affected by Cybersex Infidelity." *Sexuality & Compulsivity*: 19:123–139, 2012.
- Shriver, Gary and Mona. *Unfaithful: Hope and Healing After Infidelity*. David C. Cook: Colorado Springs, CO. 2009.
- Steffens, Barbara and Marsha Means. *Your Sexually Addicted Spouse: How Partners Can Cope and Heal*. New Horizon Press: Far Hills, NJ, 2009.
- Struthers, William M. *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain*. IVP Books: Downers Grove, IL, 2009.
- Reeder, Kent. Personal Interview. October 9, 2017.
- Tiede, Vicki. *When Your Husband is Addicted to Pornography: Healing Your Wounded Heart*. New Growth Press: Greensboro, NC, 2012.
- Time Magazine. *Porn*. March 31, 2016.
- Weiss, Douglas. *Women Who Love Sex Addicts: Help for Healing from the Effects of a Relationship with a Sex Addict*. Discovery Press: Fort Worth, TX, 1993.
- XXX Church. "Stats." Accessed Sept 3. 2017. xxxchurch.com/stats.
- Zitzman, Spencer and Mark Butler, "Wives' Experience of Husbands' Pornography Use and Concomitant Deception as an Attachment Threat in the Adult Pair-Bond Relationship." *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity*, 16:210–240, 2009.