

5 STEPS TO QUIT P * R N

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RESOLUTION

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LIVE A LIFE OF SEXUAL WHOLENESS



Based on Biblical truth, psychology, brain science, and years of helping people overcome porn use, this guide will help you live a life of sexual wholeness.

These steps are intended to kickstart your journey to freedom from porn, rather than being an end in and of themselves. Each of the five steps is intended to be implemented into daily life.

1 GET A RENEWED VISION FOR SEX, MARRIAGE, & SINGLENESS

All you have to do is get on social media or stream the latest movie to witness the spectrum of varying views in our world of sex (sexual intercourse and sexual activity), marriage, and relationships. A common view portrayed is that sex is a meaningless act that is purely physical. That it has no more significance than a handshake or hug. In past decades, the Christian purity movement swung to the opposite end of the spectrum, teaching a kind of sexual prosperity gospel. It often portrayed sex as this kind of ultimate achievement in life within the context of a marriage relationship. Still, others have taught that sex is dirty or that sexual desire is something that God frowns upon.

Different than any of these views, Jesus taught a sexual ethic that was about human flourishing, something deeply spiritual and sacred, yet not ultimate. In Matthew 19:4-6, Jesus taught that the context for sex was marriage, which he defined as one man and one woman in a lifetime relationship before God. Throughout scripture, we see that God's design for sex was given for procreation (Genesis 1:28), bonding (Genesis 2:24), pleasure (Proverbs 5:18-20), and to foreshadow eternity in heaven where we will be united in a deeply relational way with Jesus (Matthew 22:30, Ephesians 5:31-32).

Different from Jesus, some may think that marriage should only last as long as romantic feelings of "love" last. But that is a recipe for disaster. As authors David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen point out, "New Testament scholars also agree that love in the New Testament is not just an attitude or feeling, but is an action, and it involves the whole person."¹ See, love is not a feeling, it is an action of provision and protection. It is an act of providing for someone's needs emotionally, financially, physically, and so on. And it is an act of protecting someone from harm, whether physically, emotionally, relationally, and so on. This is one reason why Jesus can command us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). You cannot command a feeling but you can command an action.

While love can result in deep feelings of affection toward someone, these are the outflow of moving toward someone through provision and protection. Feelings of love may come and go, but Jesus affirmed God's design for marriage as a lifelong commitment. As one author, Richard B. Hays shares "... in making the covenant of marriage, you make a covenant to love one another as God has loved you—that means to love one another unconditionally, freely, sacrificially. In making the covenant of marriage, you promise to become servants of one another in love."² Love is a choice and marriage is a beautiful display of God's love and commitment to humanity.

“FEELINGS OF LOVE MAY COME AND GO, BUT JESUS AFFIRMED GOD'S DESIGN FOR MARRIAGE AS A LIFELONG COMMITMENT.”

¹ David P. Gushee, Glen H. Stassen, Kingdom Ethics, 2nd Ed (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2016), 77.

² Richard B. Hays, The Moral Vision of the New Testament (New York, New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 375.

In addition, some may think that monogamy is boring and that having a variety of sexual partners throughout life leads to greater happiness. But studies that have been done show the opposite. Research shows that those who experience the greatest satisfaction in their sex lives are those with one sexual partner for a lifetime.³ More, sexual activity releases neurochemicals in the brain such as dopamine and oxytocin.⁴ Oxytocin is what is referred to as the “bonding hormone”. During sexual activity, oxytocin deeply bonds two people together emotionally and relationally,⁵ like two pieces of fabric sewn together, never to be separated. More and more satisfying connection happens as two people pursue sexual activity together.

Think of a world where the sexual ethic of Jesus is lived out by all and the goodness, beauty, and flourishing that would result. Sean McDowell, in his book *Chasing Love*, lists the following benefits and more:⁶

- There would be no victims or users of pornography.
- There would be no sexual exploitation, sexual trafficking, or sexual abuse.
- There would be no sexually transmitted diseases.
- There would be no rape.
- There would be no pregnancies outside of a loving, committed marriage.
- There would be no crude, degrading humor.

Doesn't this sound like the flourishing most of us desire for society?

One thing to note is when we use the term “sex” in our world, we tend to think of sexual intercourse, although this is actually just a small part of what “sex” truly means. Sex is not what we do, it's who we are. While not everyone may have sexual intercourse, we are all sexual beings. We all have sexed bodies with x or y chromosomes. We all are created in the image of God as either male or female which influences how we view life and interact with one another and the world around us.

Whether or not we are married and pursuing sexual activity, or single, the Bible describes both marriage and singleness as equal ways of honoring God in this life. One is not better than the other. Jesus was single, Paul was single, and everyone in life will be single—whether for a lifetime, their years prior to marriage, or after a spouse dies.

Further, the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 7:7 (NLT), said “But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another.” Here, Paul makes it clear that both marriage and singleness are gifts from God. You are not less spiritual if you are single and you are not more spiritual or obedient to Christ if you are married.

Your primary purpose in life, whether single or married, is to love God and love others. Both singleness and marriage each have unique ways of making that easier or more challenging.

³ Olga Khazan, “Fewer Sex Partners Means a Happier Marriage,” *The Atlantic*, October 22, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2018/10/sexual-partners-and-marital-happiness/573493/>

⁴ Jamin Brahmhatt, “This Is What Happens To Your Brain When You Have Sex,” interview by Hallie Gould, *The Thirty*, February 2, 2022, written, <https://thethirty.whowhatwear.com/what-happens-during-sex/slide5>

⁵ Jamin Brahmhatt, “This Is What Happens To Your Brain When You Have Sex,” interview by Hallie Gould, *The Thirty*, February 2, 2022, written, <https://thethirty.whowhatwear.com/what-happens-during-sex/slide5>

⁶ Sean McDowell, *Chasing Love* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing, 2021), 18-19.

2 UNDERSTAND THE HARMS OF PORN

Today, the greatest counterfeit of Jesus' sexual ethic is pornography, which has become the new sex education for an entire generation.⁷ Porn is a stark contrast to the meaningful, loving, and bonding design for sex that Jesus affirmed. So why is it wrong to look at porn and how is it so harmful?

The harms of porn can be boiled down to three categories: its harms on self, its harms on relationships, and its harms on society at large. Let's look at each of these.

“THE GREATEST COUNTERFEIT OF JESUS' SEXUAL ETHIC IS PORNOGRAPHY...”

PORN'S HARMS ON SELF:

- Watching porn releases a high level of dopamine in the brain, causing a euphoric feeling of happiness and pleasure.⁸ Over time, watching porn can lead to fixed neurological pathways in the brain.⁹ For many, this becomes an addiction that is extremely difficult to break.¹⁰
- Similar to a drug, tolerance builds up in the brain after repeatedly viewing pornography.¹¹ This can lead to the desire for more explicit and taboo forms of porn, and a desire to watch more and more porn.
- Consistent porn use leads to frontal lobe atrophy.¹² This area of the brain is responsible for impulse control, higher reasoning, and judgment. Over time, this can lead to a loss of control over behaviors and a lack of rational decision-making.
- Porn can lead to toxic stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental and emotional challenges.¹³
- Porn use can lead to erectile dysfunction, problems with arousal, difficulties in reaching orgasm, and decreased sexual satisfaction.¹⁴

⁷ Rothman, E.F., Beckmeyer, J.J., Herbenick, D., "The Prevalence of Using Pornography for Information About How to Have Sex: Findings from a Nationally Representative Survey of U.S. Adolescents and Young Adults," Arch Sex Behav 50, (2021): 629-646. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-020-01877-7>

⁸ De Sousa, A., & Lodha, P., "Neurobiology of Pornography Addiction - A clinical review," Telangana Journal of Psychiatry, Vol 3, (2017): 66-70, doi:10.18231/2455-8559.2017.0016

⁹ Hilton, Donald L Jr. "Pornography addiction - a supranormal stimulus considered in the context of neuroplasticity," Socioaffective neuroscience & psychology, vol. 3 20767 (19 July 2013), doi:10.3402/snp.v3i0.20767

¹⁰ Brand M, Snagowski J, Laier C, Maderwald S. "Ventral striatum activity when watching preferred pornographic pictures is correlated with symptoms of Internet pornography addiction", Neuroimage, (April 1 2016): 129:224-232, doi:10.1016/j.neuroimage.2016.01.033

¹¹ Banca, P., Morris, L. S., Mitchell, S., Harrison, N. A., Potenza, M. N., & Voon, V., "Novelty, conditioning and attentional bias to sexual rewards," Journal of psychiatric research, (January 2016): 72, 91-101, doi: 10.1016/j.jpsychires.2015.10.017

¹² Hilton, Donald L, and Clark Watts, "Pornography addiction: A neuroscience perspective," Surgical neurology international, vol. 2 19 (February 21, 2011) doi:10.4103/2152-7806.76977

¹³ Camilleri, Christina, "Compulsive Internet Pornography Use and Mental Health: A Cross-Sectional Study in a Sample of University Students in the United States", Frontiers in psychology, vol. 11 613244, (12 Jan. 2021), doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2020.613244

¹⁴ Park, B. Y., Wilson, G., Berger, J., Christman, M., Reina, B., Bishop, F., Klam, W. P., & Doan, A. P., "Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dys-functions? A Review with Clinical Reports", Behavioral Sciences, Vol 6 no. 3 (August 5, 2016) <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs6030017>

PORN'S HARMS ON RELATIONSHIPS:

- Porn is directly responsible for fueling the use and abuse of others, as people become desensitized and begin to view others as mere commodities.¹⁵
- Porn teaches that sexual pleasure is to be taken, not given, and teaches unrealistic expectations for sex.¹⁶
- Married couples who watch porn are twice as likely to get divorced.¹⁷
- Watching porn lowers sexual and relational satisfaction.¹⁸
- Porn use leads many to a devaluation of monogamy, marriage and child-rearing.¹⁹
- Feelings of hurt, betrayal, and rejection are often experienced by a spouse of a porn user.²⁰

PORN'S HARMS ON SOCIETY:

- Porn fuels sexual harassment, sexual abuse, and sexual violence.²¹
- Porn teaches the sexual objectification of people and leads to sexism.²²
- The porn industry profits from non-consensual content and the abuse of others.²³
- Porn is strongly interlinked with the human trafficking industry globally. Many performers on film are victims of sex trafficking themselves, coerced into participation in sexual acts.²⁴
- In recent years, porn has been leading to an increase of child on child sexual abuse.²⁵

¹⁵ "Desensitization: A Numbed Pleasure Response," Your Brain On Porn, accessed June 6, 2022 <https://www.yourbrainonporn.com/tools-for-change-recovery-from-porn-addiction/rebooting-basics-start-here/desensitization-a-numbed-pleasure-response/>

¹⁶ Wright, P. J., Tokunaga, R. S., Herbenick, D., & Paul, B., "Pornography vs. sexual science: The role of pornography use and dependency in U.S. teenagers' sexual literacy," *Communication Monographs*, (October 12, 2021) doi:10.1080/03637751.2021.1987486

¹⁷ Samuel Perry, interview by Steve Inskeep, NPR, October 9, 2017, written, <https://www.npr.org/2017/10/09/556606108/research-explores-the-effect-pornography-has-on-long-term-relationships>

¹⁸ Park, B. Y., Wilson, G., Berger, J., Christman, M., Reina, B., Bishop, F., Klam, W. P., & Doan, A. P., "Is Internet Pornography Causing Sexual Dysfunctions? A Review with Clinical Reports," *Behavioral Sciences*, Vol 6 no. 3 (August 5, 2016) <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs6030017>

¹⁹ Jill Manning, "Hearing on pornography's impact on marriage & the family," U.S. Senate Hearing: Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Property Rights, Committee on Judiciary, Nov. 10, 2005. https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/manning_testimony_11_10_05.pdf (accessed June 6, 2022).

²⁰ Jennifer P. Schneider, "Effects of cybersex addiction on the family: Results of a survey," *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity* 7 (2000): 31-58.

²¹ Foubert, J. D., Brosi, M. W., & Bannon, R. S., "Pornography viewing among fraternity men: Effects on bystander intervention, rape myth acceptance and behavioral intent to commit sexual assault", *The Journal of Treatment and Prevention*, Volume 18, 4 (2011), doi:10.1080/10720162.2011.625552

²² Stanley, Nicky, Christine Barter, Marsha Wood, Nadia Aghaie, Cath Larkins, Alba Lanau, and Carolina Överlien, "Pornography, Sexual Coercion and Abuse and Sexting in Young People's Intimate Relationships: A European Study," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 33, no. 19 (October 2018): 2919-44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516633204>

²³ Kristof, N., "Why do we let corporations profit from rape videos?," *New York Times*, April 16, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/opinion/sunday/companies-online-rape-videos.html>

²⁴ John-Henry Westen, "Want to Stop Sex Trafficking? Look to America's Porn Addiction," *Huffpost*, March 13, 2015, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/want-to-stop-sex-traffick_b_6563338

²⁵ Kierra Powell, "Child advocacy group reports influx of child-on-child sex abuse cases," *WVTM13*, January 23, 2017, <https://www.wvtm13.com/article/child-advocacy-group-reports-influx-of-child-on-child-sex-abuse-cases/8631671#>

3 IDENTIFY HOW & WHY YOU STRUGGLE

Perhaps you've learned a distorted view of sex through society, porn, or unhealthy religious teachings. What beliefs or perceptions do you have that you would like to see changed? How can you move towards exploring healthy, biblical, and accurate teachings on sex, marriage, relationships, and singleness?

Or perhaps you are struggling with today's biggest counterfeit-porn. Perhaps you find yourself going back to it over and over despite your best efforts to stop. It's important to recognize that your porn use is not random, it reveals deeper longings and desires. To say it differently, there is a deeper cause to why you look at porn, and you must discover that if you want to experience freedom.

God creates every human being with desires—or heart longings—that drive everything we do. The Bible lists seven including our need to be accepted and appreciated, the assurance of safety, and the affirmation of our feelings. All of our actions, our thinking, our beliefs, and the good or bad choices we make are in an attempt to get our heart longings met and when we are unable to find healthy ways to fulfill these longings, we turn to unhealthy behaviors.

I've experienced this first-hand. Growing up, I experienced deep hurt, confusion, and trauma. I experienced bullying, my father's anger, and a deep sense that I didn't belong anywhere. I became addicted to porn. When life felt too much to bear, I'd turn inward, get depressed, and struggle with suicidal thoughts. These patterns continued in my life until I started to explore their cause and find what I was truly longing for. It was only then that God started to bring true healing and freedom.

WE SEE THAT UNMET LONGINGS LEAD TO BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE BIBLE:

- In Genesis 3, after sinning against God, Adam and Eve were naked and afraid so they hid.
- In 1 Samuel 21-24, David had unmet longings for safety leading to anxiety when Saul was seeking to kill him.
- In Job 3, Job had unmet longings after losing his family, health, and wealth that he felt so depressed he wished he had never been born

MAYBE YOU:

- Watch porn to find pseudo-acceptance or love when you feel rejected or inadequate.
- Watch porn to feel desired by the person on the screen when you feel unwanted or unknown.
- Watch porn to feel a sense of safety when all else feels unsafe in your life.

God invites us to begin to shed our porn use as we learn what we are longing for in it and experience true fulfillment through Him and one another. So how do we do that? Let's explore that in the fourth and fifth steps.

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4 GET INTO A SPIRITUAL & RELATIONAL GROWTH ENVIRONMENT

To grow, we need to move towards healthy relationships with both God and people. When it comes to our relationship with God, we need to be honest with Him about our fears, struggles, hopes, and dreams. We need to be spending time with Him by talking to Him each day, allowing Him to speak to us through His Word, and being aware of His presence throughout each day. We need to allow Him to meet the longings of our hearts and look for the ways that He has and is meeting our longings.

In addition, we were created as relational beings by a triune God who has eternally existed as one God in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Rather than only needing God's help, or just trying self-help, we need others-help. The New Testament uses the words "one another" one hundred times! Most usages of the phrase are in the context of loving one another, supporting one another, and having healthy unity and relationships with one another. This overwhelmingly reveals that we need one another!

Recent research has been done on the impact of relationships, or lack thereof. For example, loneliness is as lethal as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and lonely people are 50% more likely to die prematurely.²⁶ We need to develop safe relationships in our lives. Relationships with people who won't judge us, offer unsolicited advice, or tell our business to others. We can share everything with them and they'll simply listen, offer encouragement, and ask how they can help.

We have the option of experiencing health and healing as we live openly with safe people. Doing so helps us to understand why we return to destructive behaviors, and to steer ourselves well to prevent future harmful choices. Healing begins when we start to connect rather than cope. We need to develop a lifestyle of reaching out rather than acting out.

I stayed trapped, for years, in porn addiction and a multitude of other struggles, as I isolated myself rather than engaging in a healthy spiritual and relational environment. I was seriously limiting my growth by only occasionally sharing about how I was really doing and what I was struggling with. In 1 John 1:7, we are instructed to walk in the light, having fellowship with others and being cleansed from all sin by Jesus. Walking in the light is a daily lifestyle of being fully transparent with Jesus and these safe people about our emotional well-being and struggles. Implementing this into my life is one of several steps that God used to set me free from porn use nine years ago.

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WE WERE
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5 FULFILL WHAT YOU'RE TRULY LONGING FOR

Harvard University recently shared findings from a study that has been going on for over 80 years. They started the study in order to discover the key to happiness and health. The current head of the study said that by and large “good relationships keep us happier and healthier period.”

The results from this study profoundly underscore the fact that we all have needs that can be met only through our relationships with God and other people. A flourishing life can happen only in connection with God and others. If the God-given longings of our hearts are met in healthy ways, we will feel valued, capable, lovable, important, understood, embraced, and secure. We'll experience a life of wholeness. Doesn't this sound like the thriving life we all long to experience? This is possible, but only in the context of a relationship with God and others.

Further, we don't just fall into our unhealthy choices, we go through recurring patterns and cycles before ending back in the places we swore we'd never go to again. We experience unmet longings, start believing lies, and then respond through unhealthy behaviors. What we need is help in the moments right when our reactive thinking and feeling begin. We need support, encouragement, help, and love, to grow and overcome unhealthy choices.

So practically, here's what that looks like. When you encounter an “activating event”—a situation where a longing goes unmet, where you're tempted to turn to porn—take a moment to “press pause” and walk through this process:

1. Identify the unmet longing you're feeling. Is it rejection, feeling unsafe, feeling unappreciated, worrying about something? What happened today, yesterday, or last week that brought this on?

2. Acknowledge the God-given longing that underlies that sensation. For example, if you're feeling rejected, you're feeling an unmet longing for acceptance. Or, if you're feeling insecure in some way, the God-given longing that's being unfulfilled is an unmet longing for the assurance of safety.

3. Counter the negative core beliefs you might be telling yourself with the truth. For example, “I'm feeling worthless and inadequate, but God says I am of great worth in His sight”. Or, “I feel rejected, but I know that I matter and am accepted to both God and the important people in my life.”

4. Seek the fulfillment of that longing in healthy ways. Call or text a friend and share that you feel devalued, process that with them, and ask them to remind you of your true identity. Reach out to God, tell him how you are feeling and why, and close your eyes and visualize his love and acceptance of you. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you believe the truth and to continue to experience freedom.

As mentioned previously, watching porn releases dopamine in our brains leading to feelings of pleasure and happiness. What's amazing is God also designed our brains to release dopamine when we connect in meaningful ways with other human beings.²⁷ This beautifully displays that rather than coping with porn, we can receive what we are longing for, even down to a neuroscientific level, in the healthy ways God designed us to.

Repeating these steps when you experience an activating event, can re-program your heart and rewire your brain to live into sexual wholeness and experience the fulfillment of your longings. We've seen God use this process in hundreds of people's lives to bring healing and freedom and we trust He will use it in your life as well.

As you work through each of these five steps continually, and take further action asking God to bring healing and freedom, we trust that He will. As Jesus is at work in us and we take steps to experience growth in healthy environments with other people, we can truly see our deepest hurts healed, overcome our unwanted behaviors, and thrive in life.

²⁷ Nicklas Balboa, Richard D. Glaser, “The Neuroscience of Conversations,” *Psychology Today*, May 16, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/conversational-intelligence/201905/the-neuroscience-conversations#:~:text=As%20we%20communicate%2C%20our%20brains,a%20sense%20of%20well%20being.>

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