

# Addictions:

Why we do what we hate and how to stop

(Specific to pornography)

## 1 How did I get here?

Take a moment to reflect on why you are involved in this Bible study, and what you hope to accomplish. To help with this reflection, read 1 Thessalonians 1:9, 1 John 2:13, Romans 12:21, and 1 John 5:4.

What does the word “addiction” mean to you?

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What do you hope to achieve personally in this study?

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Maybe you do not believe you have any addictions. Maybe someone else in your group thought this study would be a good idea, and you are just going along with it. Maybe someone you know or love told you that you have an addiction, and you disagree. Maybe you know you have habits that you would like to curb, before they become an addiction. Maybe you know you are steeped in an addiction that seems insurmountable, and you want to get out, even though you feel helpless to do so.

Even if you truly do not find yourself ensnared by an addiction, odds are very high that you know someone who is. This study can help equip you to lift that person up and help them out of the pit. It is also possible that you could, at some time in the future, undergo very strong temptation that could lead to an addiction. This study can help you identify that potential and the situations that might push you over that boundary.

What is an addiction? The Bible does not specifically use the word “addiction.” A person who knows personally what an addiction is knows what it feels like to be stuck in bondage to it, to be unable to escape it, and bound to serve it. They will know that it causes distance between them and God. They will notice similarities between those experiences, and what the Bible is talking about when it refers to “idols.” They will relate to the compulsion people in the Bible felt to worship and be bound to their idols.

The Bible calls addictions idols.

Now look at Romans 3:10. Are you vulnerable to addiction/idol worship?

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1 Cor 10:12 says, “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”  
Based on this verse, who has room to believe that he or she is not vulnerable to giving in to temptation?

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We are created to worship... Something. It’s been said that there is a hole in us that longs to be filled. People all over the world, including every one of us, seek to fill this hole.

As Christians, we know that only God can truly fill that hole through verses like Leviticus 19:4: “Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I *am* the LORD your God.” Another verse is Luke 4:8: “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” In John 4:13, Jesus tells the woman at the well, “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”

In practical experience, we know that we have all tried to fill that hole with other things. These things are idols. In simple terms, an idol is anything to which we give glory that rightly belongs to God. Isaiah 2:8 says, “Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.”

What idols have you worshipped in the past?

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What idols are you clinging to today?

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Getting back to the notion of worshiping God over idols, let's consider what happens when we allow an idol to take a place in our heart. We are supposed to worship God, but sometimes we choose to worship something else. When we do this, we diminish the value of God in our hearts, and we withdraw from Him.

Read Exodus 32:7-14 and Acts 7:38-42. How does the golden calf of the Israelites and God's reaction to it compare to the idols we face today?

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Another attribute of idols that we need to consider is their tendency to gradually draw us further and further from God. Read Romans 1:24-29, and consider: Where will our addictions take us?

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Addictions are a pit. It only takes one step to fall in, but it takes a lot of digging to get back out. It snowballs, and although sin is sin, there are varying degrees to which we allow ourselves to be ensnared and mastered by it. As we experiment further with sin and wade deeper into its depths, we become less sensitive to its effects.

As we consider varying degrees of sin's grip, we often compare ourselves with others around us and in society. The temptation is to think that there are others far deeper in its clutches, and our position is not that bad. What we need to realize is that first of all, sin is sin (Romans 3:23.) Also, if our focus is not to escape sin and run toward the shore, the temptation to wade out a little deeper will overcome our reasoning. From our current vantage point, going a little further in won't hurt that much more. Depths of our addiction that once seemed repulsive to us can quickly become palatable as we allow ourselves to become numb. Left unchecked, we can even move to illegal acts with very serious consequences.

The situation is urgent. We need to break the bondage of our addictions, and turn back to worshiping the one true God! Look back at your answers to the questions at the beginning of this lesson. Would you reevaluate some of your thoughts? If so, how?

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## 2 What is an addiction?

As we can see throughout the Bible, an idol is something we worship instead of God. So, how can we know when we are submitting to idol worship? We know when we've put something in God's place as the object of our worship. We can recognize when we are doing that by looking in the Bible for examples of what it looks like to worship God.

Look up the following verses and write how each inspires you to worship God.

1 John 4:19

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Psalms 122:1

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We have feelings of love, or emotional attachment, to the object of our worship. Also, the act of worship becomes the highlight of our day. Rightfully, only God should occupy this status in our lives, but often we elevate other people, things, or events to that level. When we consider this carefully, we may be surprised to find that we actually have more idols than just those things that are commonly considered major addictions!

Here are a couple of verses that reveal the more sinister side of idol worship. When an activity in our lives takes on these characteristics, we can more readily identify it as an idol.

John 3:19

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Romans 16:18

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When we have an idol, we will try to protect it and keep its worship secret. We will also become a slave to it. Our schedule will revolve around it, and we will go to great lengths to ensure that we have sufficient time and resources left in a day to give it worship.

While this study addresses the concept of addictions and idols in general, its primary focus is on pornography. Pornography has proven to be a common addiction among men in general, sadly to the inclusion of Christian men and specifically those of our brotherhood. The need of our brethren is practically crying out to be addressed, as so many of us find ourselves unable to remove the hooks that this insidious temptation embeds in our flesh.

Often, we have trouble understanding what it is that motivates us to succumb to this temptation. Just thinking about your experience, what is at the root of your motivation when you struggle, and ultimately give in, to pornography? (What activities or environment are you in during times of struggle?)

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Let's take a moment to consider how many experienced Christians articulate the reasons that pornography's grip on men is so strong. These reasons are not intended at all to excuse our behavior, but rather to expose the roots of pornography's appeal so that we can meaningfully apply Scripture to the temptation.

Many men say that the pictures and videos never reject them, so it feels "safe" to retreat into a fantasy world where their masculinity is never threatened or questioned. What does Psalms 118:8 tell us about putting our confidence in man (particularly when the man we have confidence in is our self?)

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Christian men have also stated that viewing pornography is not foremost about sexual release. It is instead about being in control, again in a fantasy world. That is, in the real world, we don't always know how to handle the challenges presented by work, family, and everyday life. However, in a fantasy world, we are always at the helm and always able to direct and predict each challenge and its response. How does Jeremiah 10:23 address this thinking?

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Consider the earlier passages regarding worship along with Psalm 1:1-2. This gives us the best suggestion for the use of idle time, and promises that worship of God becomes a thing of joy when we do it earnestly. What could David have done differently to prevent this situation? What can we do to occupy ourselves, avoid boredom, and thereby avoid periods of intense temptation?

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Once Satan has piqued our interest, he then tempts us to rationalize our behavior. If we are married, we might repeat Adam's sin of shifting the blame to our wife. This often comes in the form of saying that our wife does not provide us with enough sexual satisfaction. Read 1 Corinthians 7:3-4. In light of this passage, who is responsible for a couple's sexual satisfaction—the husband or the wife?

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In probably his most effective lie, Satan tells us that viewing pornography is not a real sin, or that it's not a major one, since you are not really having sexual relations with the person on the screen or page. How does Matthew 5:28 address that?

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Even if Satan does hit us with this lie, also remember the final point from the last lesson. Even though we may not be having physical contact at this moment, if we do not reign in these temptations before they take root, they will drag us deeper and deeper into serious sin.

One final lie we may succumb to is the thought that viewing pornography is not quite so bad because the people we are viewing make money from the experience. In doing that, we shift the blame at least partially to the object of our lust. Read the classic blame-shifting story in Genesis 3:12-19. How many individuals sinned? How many could blame someone else for their temptation? How many escaped the consequences?

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One final point regarding blame-shifting to the object of our lust, particularly in today's environment: You need to realize that the person on the other side of the screen or page is just as much a slave to sin as you are. Also, that person most likely isn't getting rich from tempting you. The way the modern pornography industry works, the only one getting rich is the one who "owns" the person you are looking at. That person may be another human being's slave as much or more than they are Satan's. Couple this with the fact that many of the girls in the industry are far, far younger than you might think, and see if you start to view with pity this person who you thought was entrapping you. Then, before you are tempted to shift the blame to the "owners," read Ezekiel 33:11, 14-16 and comment:

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To finish up today, let's start reading the account of David and Bathsheba. Please read 2 Samuel 11:1-5 and think about the following questions:

What was David doing at the beginning of this account?

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Where did this lead, and what did David do to encourage the process?

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Do you think it was entirely an innocent accident that David saw Bathsheba on her rooftop?

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David started with a small temptation, and let it snowball quickly into something out of his control. What lesson can we learn from this, and can you apply it in your own experience?

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### 3 Why is pornography so compelling?

The last lesson made the point that many men pursue pornography not primarily for sexual reasons, but to get a sense of control. When we do that, who are we controlling? Read Philippians 2:3, then answer the question: When we view pornography, what are we doing to the person on the other side of the screen or page?

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Are we esteeming that person, or are we making them our servant? Are we elevating ourselves above them? Read Galatians 5:13, then think about how we should treat that person.

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Many men also claim that viewing pornography makes them feel more masculine. What really makes us a man? Read Jeremiah 9:23-24 and comment:

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Pornography may temporarily make us *feel* more masculine, but it does not actually *make* us more masculine. The real source of masculinity is God and His plan for us as men. If our glory is in the Lord rather than in ourselves, we can know that our masculinity comes from God, regardless of what the voices in the world and our flesh are telling us.

In addition, many men feel drawn to pornography due to the emotional excitement of an illicit sexual release. Research has also shown that viewing pornography encourages the release of chemicals in the brain very similar to illegal drugs. When we are in the midst of this influence, the temptation can seem very large and insurmountable. However, what can we remember about the duration of sin's pleasure from Hebrews 11:25?

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But of course, the main thing that makes pornography so compelling is, as any man can tell you, that men are stimulated visually. We can memorize and recall images very easily. God knows this, too. He designed us this way on purpose, to complement the design of the woman and make sexual relations within a marriage enjoyable and compelling. Read Proverbs 5:15-21 and comment on God's design for men's eyes and brains.

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As with so many of God's good gifts, Satan has taken the building blocks God intended to use to make satisfying marriages, and has turned them directly against that purpose. Satan has also raised up a host of his servants to help him do this. The pornography industry is truly an industry. Untold millions of dollars, along with countless hours (not to mention the ruining of lives and corrupting of souls) are spent every year engineering images that men will find impossible to turn down.

Read Psalm 36:4. Is this just a battle with our biology that we have to accept as part of life, or is Satan actively employing his servants after you?

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Read Nehemiah 9:37. Can you relate to this?

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Think about how many resources have you poured into the pornography industry. Even if you haven't paid a cent of money to acquire pornography, think of the time you have lost and the cost taken from other parts of your life—such as lost sleep, feelings of guilt, inability to concentrate, and strained relationships.

The visual component is so strong that we need a way to combat it. God gave us a tool for this fight through the words of Job in Job 31:1. How does this speak to you?

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Job said that he made a covenant with his eyes before he asked the question, "Why then should I think upon a maid?" Job knew that the battle starts in the mind, and that the eyes fuel the mind, where lust is concerned. As we go about our daily lives, we are confronted with images in advertising and people we see. If we can discipline ourselves to avoid seeing such things, and to turn our eyes immediately when we do, we will go a long way in cutting off the fuel for lustful thoughts. That in turn will curb our desire to actively seek pornography.

Are you willing to make a covenant with your eyes today?

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Making a covenant with your eyes is a great step, but how can we ensure that we will keep that covenant? Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, and comment on how you can be sure to keep this covenant.

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Let's continue our reading of the story of David and Bathsheba. Read 2 Samuel 11:6-27 and consider the following:

How did David handle his sin?

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Did it work? What did it drive him to do, and what was the eventual cost?

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We just saw the consequences of covering up our sin, so let's get back to the idea of a covenant. A covenant with yourself is hard to keep if you are only accountable to yourself. Accountability with someone else is the only way to motivate yourself to keep that covenant. Hopefully by now, you have some level of comfort with the rest of your study group. All of you are here for the same reason, and all of you understand the weakness of the flesh and the difficulty of fighting Satan in this area. This meeting is an excellent opportunity to make yourself accountable to someone who understands your struggle. We will talk more specifically about accountability in the next lesson, but for now just realize that you must commit to confidentiality. A commitment to confidence will ensure that everyone feels comfortable being fully honest in their accountability.

Decide among your group members how you want to proceed. If you have a small group, it may be best to share accountability with the group as a whole. If you have a large group, you will probably want to connect with just one or two other people as accountability partners.

Then, commit to sharing the answers to the following accountability questions at each group meeting:

- Were you free from pornography since our last meeting?
- Did you keep your covenant with your eyes?
- If you struggled, what led to your fall?
- If you did not struggle, what led to your victory?
- Double check, have you been truthful in these questions, or have you minimized them at all?

As you share in these accountability questions, pray for each other. (James 5:16.) Pray specifically for recovery from the week's failures, if necessary, and that any images seen would be removed from your brother's mind. Also pray for strength to overcome in the coming days, particularly if your brother knows a trial is upcoming.

It may also prove helpful to add to this list as necessary for each individual. For example, if you know that you tend to struggle in times of boredom, have your group ask you how you are handling boredom. If there is a specific billboard or website that tempts you, have them ask you if you are avoiding it.

## 4 Transparency and Accountability

So far, we have focused mostly on the dangers and sinfulness of our addictions, but there is good news—We can heal! God promises to give us grace in measure to our trials, as in I Corinthians 10:13 – “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”

The first step to healing is transparency. Consider John 3:20-21. According to this passage, how can we achieve transparency?

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We need to come to the light. James 5:16 spells this out for us. How can you come to the light today?

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Confessing an addiction is embarrassing, and the devil will try to convince us that confessing is unnecessary or even potentially harmful. Again looking at James 5:16, is that true? What is the truth about what confession will do for us?

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Confession is invaluable as a first step to lasting healing, but don't expect a one-time confession to solve your addiction. Consider II Peter 2:22 and Luke 11:24-26. Has this proven true for you in the past?

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It is so true that we are weak. Despite our best intentions, we don't succeed in overcoming our sinful nature on our own. God knows this and has expressed it in Psalm 103:13-14 — “Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.” In the next session, we will explore more encouraging passages on this topic. For now, though, we explore the concept of accountability. Accountability is an ongoing relationship with ongoing confession and encouragement. An addiction is a deep-rooted idol that will take time and dedication to remove from our lives.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 and comment on how teaming up with an accountability partner can help you overcome your addiction.

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What does transparent accountability look like? Confession brings our sin into the light, while accountability keeps it there. If we attempt to give in to our weakness, our accountability partner must know. Some practical ways of achieving this are:

- Keep regular meetings/e-mails with your accountability partner. A daily e-mail report is a good idea, but a weekly face-to-face meeting is also important to keep the relationship personal and honest.
- It is also a good idea to have an emergency channel through e-mail, instant messaging, or telephone to ask for prayer in times of sudden or intense temptation. (II Timothy 2:22)
- For internet accountability, there are several options for automatically reporting your internet activity to an accountability partner, or storing an indelible history on a remote server.
- Another practical accountability step is to keep the computer in the living room, or some other location in plain sight.

Selecting an accountability partner and maintaining that relationship requires some careful consideration. Trust is vital, as is maintaining the right type of motivation and encouragement. The concerns can be summed up effectively in the saying, “Proper accountability should motivate, not commiserate or berate.”

An accountability partner that berates us for our failures does not set us up for victory. Consider Job 16:1-5 and Matthew 7:1-5 and comment.

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On the other extreme is the type of accountability that commiserates. This is when two people struggling with an addiction just confess to each other regularly without encouraging each other to climb out of the pit. This is not really accountability, but just perpetuates the sin-confess-sin cycle. According to Proverbs 27:6, what are we doing to our accountability partner if we participate in this type of commiseration?

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Proper accountability should motivate. Although we want to pull the beam out of our own eye before tending to our brother, we can still convict each other of the sin we're in and encourage our brother to a closer walk with God. Consider again the first part of Proverbs 27:6, as well as Ecclesiastes 4:10. What does a motivating accountability look like?

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Let's resume the story of David and Bathsheba. Read 2 Samuel 12:1-14 and consider the following:

David's sin eventually caught up with him. How did this happen?

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What was his response when confronted?

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Did this free him from the consequences of his sin?

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At the end of this study, we will discuss setting up a more permanent accountability relationship to last beyond this study and into the future. Start thinking about that as you answer your group accountability questions for the week.

- Were you free from pornography since our last meeting?
- Did you keep your covenant with your eyes?
- If you struggled, what led to your fall?
- If you did not struggle, what led to your victory?
- Double check, have you been truthful in these questions, or have you minimized them at all?

## 5 Discipline and Being Disciplined

In the last session, we touched on the short-lived success of a one-time confession, and our human tendency to return to our sin again and again. In this session, we will explore the idea of discipline, and how it brings about lasting change.

Read 1 Timothy 4:7-8, paying careful attention to the word “exercise.” With that in mind, what kind of process do these verses imply?

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Discipline requires time and patience. Overcoming sin, particularly an addictive sin, is not something that comes quickly and easily. Exercise takes time and patience, but it also takes effort. Although we need to be patient as we discipline ourselves, we must also fervently work at it. Read 1 John 1:5-10 and offer your thoughts on the time and effort that exercising discipline requires.

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It may still be discouraging that changes don't come as quickly as you would like. That discouragement is actually encouraging! The important thing right now is that you are dissatisfied with your sin and want to change it. Why do we want to change our lives? Read 2 Corinthians 5:17 and offer your thoughts.

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We are a new creation in Christ. As that new creation, it is against our new spiritual nature to sin. Sin is unwelcome in our lives, and it makes us miserable, because we feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit calling us to perfection.

Think again about physical exercise. If we want exercise to fulfill its purpose, we have to do it regularly. If we only exercise once in a while, or give up for long periods of time, we will lose all the benefit that we gained from it. Thinking about godly exercise, read Luke 9:23. How often must we practice godly exercise?

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That verse also mentions the idea of “taking up the cross.” What does this mean, in the context of overcoming addictive sin?

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We naturally do whatever we practice. If we practice at something for a long time, it becomes natural for us to simply do it. Why do we find ourselves naturally feeding our addictive sin nature, according to 2 Peter 2:14?

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The key, then, is to stop practicing sinful behavior and start practicing righteousness. Look at Hebrews 5:13 and comment.

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The Bible tells us which habits to stop exercising, and which ones to replace them with in its list of the works of the flesh and fruits of the spirit. Read Galatians 5:19-26 and think about your own habits. Which of these specific habits do you want to see less of in your life, and which do you want to see more?

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All this said, it is still discouraging to try, try again, and keep on failing. While it is incorrect to say that God excuses our failures or even that He expects us to fail, God does know how weak we are, and has a plan in place for when we do fail. First, read Psalm 103:13-14 and comment on God's view of our weakness.

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Next, read Hebrews 12:1-3. What does God expect us to do when we fail?

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One final point on exercise and discipline—what is its source? How do we practice godliness? We have talked a lot about the results of exercise, but not how to go about it. Read Joshua 1:8 and 2 Timothy 3:16 and give your answer.

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Let's continue the story of David and Bathsheba by reading 2 Samuel 12:15-23.

How did God's punishment of David play out? Look back to verse 12:12 for more insight.

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How did David react to this? Did he hold a grudge against God, or did he call his punishment unfair?

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How can you apply this to your situation?

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Commit to a daily habit of reading and prayer, and add that to your regular accountability questions:

- Were you free from pornography since our last meeting?
- Did you keep your covenant with your eyes?
- If you struggled, what led to your fall?
- If you did not struggle, what led to your victory?
- Double check, have you been truthful in these questions, or have you minimized them at all?
- Were you faithful in having regular devotions in prayer and meditation on the Word of God?

## 6 How do my actions affect my wife?

If you are married, your wife will suffer from the consequences of your addictive sin. If you are not married, addictive sin will set up patterns that will affect your future interaction with a potential wife.

This lesson will focus on the husband-wife relationship, and the challenges that having a problem with addictive sin will introduce. If you are not married, this lesson can still be of value to you, as it will help you understand what you could possibly face in the future, or if your addiction is affecting another close relationship. (Parents, for example.)

Read Genesis 2:18 and Psalm 118:8. If you are married, can your wife help you overcome your addiction? If you are not married, will getting married solve your addiction?

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Often, the Devil deceives us with the lie that what our wife doesn't know won't hurt her, or if we keep our addiction secret, we can continue to dabble in it without alerting her. What does Luke 12:3 tell us about this?

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She will find out somehow, because it will show in you that something is wrong as you continue to indulge your addiction. Guilt is visible on a person. See Psalm 32:3-5. Can you relate to this? If you can, do you think your addiction shows through for you as much as it did for the songwriter?

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The Devil will also try to tell us that this sin really does not affect our wives—that it is internal to us, and she will not suffer any harm. Consider Mark 10:8. What does this tell you, especially considering that your addiction is harming you.

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Another way our wife might suffer harm from our addiction is revealed in 1 Peter 3:7. According to that verse, how might our whole family suffer as a result of our addiction?

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Telling your wife about your addiction is extremely hard. You should be prepared to need counseling for one or both of you after taking this step. Ultimately, your wife can become a support to you, but it is a difficult journey. Look at each of the following verses and comment on how your wife can be a help to you in each area.

James 5:16

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Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

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Your wife can provide you with accountability and affirmation, but it most likely will not be easy for her to take that step. It is likely that she will become depressed and detached, or she may be angry and seek to “punish” you for the pain you caused her. She will also likely worry about when and how often you will succumb to your addiction in the future.

There are things she will need to hear, but she will need to hear them from someone else, another counselor. She will think you are choosing someone else over her because she is not pretty or satisfying enough. A counselor will have to help her understand that the problem is not something she can fix by herself, and that your love for her is different from your lust for your addiction. She will need to come to the understanding that this is a problem with the sin nature of man, which is inherent in all of us, including herself. Once she has come to terms with that, she will be better able to focus on becoming a godly support to you.

However, she needs some assurance that you are serious about this problem. Read Matthew 7:16 and James 2:26. What do we have to do in order to restore our wives' confidence in us?

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We have to be serious about this problem in a way that she can see. There needs to be evidence that we are taking steps to get out of the pit. Getting and maintaining accountability, as well as taking part in this Bible study will help.

One more point that is worth mentioning—sometimes, in a well-intentioned effort to turn our lust from pornography to our wives, men will take and keep pictures of their wives as an attempted substitute for the pornography. We need to understand that, although a wife will sometimes agree to this, she does so uncomfortably and out of a sense of obligation. The problem with this is twofold. One, it will not work to remove a man's desire for pornography—personal testimonies speak to this. Two, it treats the wife as an object of lust rather than a focus of love. It is not healthy for the marriage relationship.

What is the marriage relationship, from a spiritual point of view? For the answer, read Ephesians 5:30-32.

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What, then, according to Ephesians 5:28-29 should be our reaction?

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Now, having discussed such a painful topic, it might be particularly helpful to regain our sense of hope through this story of inspiration, originally shared by Dr. Donald Barnhouse. Let's take a quick break from David and Bathsheba to consider it. It's the story of a man's love for his wife conquering the lust warring within his flesh:

One day I was visited by a young man in his thirties, who had a personal problem. He told his story something like this:

"I work for such-and-such a company and I have a private office. Several months ago my secretary was absent and I had to use another girl. One day she brought papers for my perusal; she got too close, and when she leaned over my desk, she let her hair trail across my face. I fought it down, but after all, I am a man, and toward the end of the day I put my hand on her and she came right back to be kissed. Even while kissing her, I was visualizing my two children running to meet me and my wife standing in the door. I hated what I was doing, but I kept on. I had the greatest desire to push her from me, but I kept pulling her to me; my body was doing one thing and my mind was doing another.

"When I went home that night, I hugged my children so hard that one of them cried, and when we got him to laughing, I told them that it was because I loved them so much. I had tears in my eyes and my wife's eyes were shining. We all clung together in one of those moments that are indescribable. My wife was extremely happy, because I walked around the house that evening, touching familiar things that we had scrimped to buy, expressing my love for the home and for her, and before God I was never more true. Next day, the office intrigue began all over again. I was never more miserable in my life.

"Before a month had gone by I realized that my lust and my love were in a terrible battle. When I came home, there was everything I wanted in life. When I went to the office, the machine of my body seemed geared to something terrible that was purely mechanical, and which I wanted to get out of more than any fly ever wanted to get off flypaper. I heard my wife tell someone that I was becoming more and more of a homebody, and that all I wanted to do was stay at home. And it is true. I follow her around the house, talk with her in the kitchen where she is working, and watch her as she puts the children to bed.

"This morning, when I left the house, she told me that she thought she was the happiest woman in the world, because I showed so much that I loved her alone. I could hardly talk. In fact tears came to my eyes, and when I lifted a lock of her hair to dry them, I said to her, 'I love you more than life itself.' She cried and I crushed her to me until she screamed and smiled at the same time. Then I ran off to my train. But now what shall I do?"

With the husband's consent, I called the wife to my office and told her the story. Fear leaped to her eyes, but I reassured her. We took a taxi and went to his

office. He was expecting us, and I stood by as they embraced and she said, “I know, I know, I understand, it’s all right.” Then I called the other girl into the office. The scene that followed typified the mortal struggle between the flesh and the spirit, both striving for the mastery of the body. But the wife was not striving; she knew that the mind, soul, and heart of her husband had never been away from her. She understood the glandular warfare of his body, and that his lust had sprung to life in response to the lure of strange flesh. She looked at him with complete understanding and love.

The secretary stood there speechless. I said to her, “She knows all about it. She loves him and he loves her completely; he has never had any thought toward you except one of animal lust. You were never wanted except physically, and you are not wanted at all from now on. Do you understand?” I asked her to wait in the hall while I prayed with the couple. As I left, I saw the secretary dabbing at her eyes; I stopped and talked to her about her need of Jesus Christ.

As you read this story, did you see elements of your own struggle in this husband's?

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This man was in a dangerous position. What steps got him that deep into temptation before turning around? Can you think of a Scripture passage that might have prevented this situation much earlier?

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Thankfully, he did turn around. How hard would that be at that stage of temptation? What Scripture passages come to mind as you consider this?

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Finally, support each other in this meeting’s accountability check:

- Were you free from pornography since our last meeting?
- Did you keep your covenant with your eyes?
- If you struggled, what led to your fall?
- If you did not struggle, what led to your victory?
- Double check, have you been truthful in these questions, or have you minimized them at all?
- Were you faithful in having regular devotions in prayer and meditation on the Word of God?

## 7 How do I repent?

What is repentance? Often, when we think about repentance, we think of the time in our lives when we turn away from the world and toward Christ. We already took a look at 2 Corinthians 5:17. Read it again while thinking about the conversion experience and offer your thoughts.

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The Devil can easily attack us with the thought that our struggle against the flesh is evidence that we are not converted. When we repent, as mentioned earlier, we are a new creature and sin is no longer welcome as part of our nature, so we feel a conviction against it. However, we still struggle against the flesh, even though we are converted. Look at Romans 7:14-25 and offer your thoughts.

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Repentance is also the continual struggle against the flesh that we experience as converted people. As we find ourselves failing in that struggle, we learn from the experience and repent from that specific failure. If the failure is a habit, particularly an addictive habit, we must repent from the activities that feed that habit.

Now, we don't want to come away from this thinking that it's okay to cater to the flesh and still be confident in our salvation. A key point to realize in Paul's argument is that a struggle against the flesh must be evident. Nowhere in this passage is Paul excusing sin or conceding that it's just "something we all deal with." On the contrary, the realization that the Holy Spirit indwells him inspires him to an intense desire to do battle with and defeat the flesh nature! Paul comments again on this in 1 Corinthians 9:25-27. Read that passage and offer your thoughts.

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Another key point is that repentance must come from the heart. Read 2 Corinthians 7:9 and examine your motive for repentance.

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We can't just repent because the consequences of sin hurt us personally. We must repent because our sin hurts God, and strains our relationship with Him.

Conversion results in a changed heart. A changed heart results in a struggle against the flesh, and the struggle against the flesh results in victory and lasting change! We have talked a lot about the need for lasting change, but how do we go about that? How do we practice those habits that lead us out of the pit of addiction and into a new life of obedience and freedom? Let's now explore what that looks like in day-to-day life.

Read Matthew 5:29-30. It seems these verses are written specifically for sexual addictions. Share your thoughts on what this might look like in your life.

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Certainly, we don't want to literally remove a piece of our body. Practically, what "cutting off" means is removing the opportunity to sin. For addictions to Internet pornography, this could mean installing filtering software or putting the computer in an open area, where the screen is easily visible to passers-by. It might mean getting rid of possessions (books, videos, artwork, magazine subscriptions) that gets our mind in a lustful mode. It might mean taking a different route to work that avoids the billboard or bar that draws you. What are some practical steps you can take this week to reduce temptation in your life?

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It is necessary, then, to "put off" the works of the flesh. We've already taken a look at the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21. Look again at that list and select three of the

works from that list that you see in your life. Beside them, write down specifically how that work is manifested in your life.

**Work of the flesh**

**Evidence in my life**

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Make it your goal in the next few weeks to “put off” these works of the flesh. Now, if we remove something from our lives, it leaves a space. If we are not intentional about filling that space, our flesh will do it for us. And, it will likely just replace it with another work of the flesh! It is not enough that we just stop doing something, but that we replace it with something else. Now, read Galatians 5:22-23. Take three of these fruits of the Spirit to heart, and list practical ways you can “put on” each one in place of the flesh works you are putting off.

**Fruit of the Spirit**

**How I can practice it**

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It's also helpful to realize what our addiction is crying out for. Pornography is something we know we can't have, but we want it anyway. Read Judges 14:3 for a classic biblical account of someone wanting something God doesn't want for them. How did this story end?

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Realize that although we know what we want, God knows what we need. And in His infinite wisdom, He has provided for our sexual desires in a way that is best for us. Read Philippians 4:11 and reflect on God's promise.

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God has a prize in store for us. He wants us to overcome. We know this, and so often, we are burdened down with having struggled with the same temptation over and over again in failure. Consider Ezekiel 18:21. How does this promise encourage you?

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Let's take one more look at the account in 2 Samuel. Finish reading 12:24-31.

In our previous readings, David sinned horribly and was punished severely. What tone does the story take in this passage?

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Verse 25 is particularly interesting. Nathan the prophet is named here. Considering his earlier role in this story, what does this imply about his relationship with David? How does this encourage you regarding your earthly relationships, that have been affected by sin?

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David repented, and God rejoiced in it. David and Bathsheba gave birth to Solomon, and David was given victory over the Ammonites. This should encourage us—is God done with us when we sin?

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Finally, support each other in this meeting's accountability check:

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- Were you faithful in having regular devotions in prayer and meditation on the Word of God?

## 8 What about my relationship with God?

When we give in to the temptation of addictive sin, it affects our relationship with God. You are probably all too familiar with the feeling extra fear, unworthiness, and apprehension about approaching God after giving in to temptation. Read Isaiah 59:2 and comment on what sin does to our relationship with God.

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Sin separates us from God. Our sin nature separated us from Him before we were converted, and now continued sin hampers our ability to stand in communion with Him. See Psalm 66:18, and see what sin does to our prayers.

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The bad news is, yes, our yielding to our idols hampers our ability to pray, praise, commune with, and receive blessing from God. The good news is, if we turn from our sin and return to Him, He will heal us. Read Jeremiah 36:3 and comment on its promise.

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In the last session, we talked about “putting off” and “putting on.” The idea is that if we want to change a behavior, we can’t just drop the old behavior. We need to put a new one in its place. Let’s now explore why the fruit of the Spirit, which we want to put on, is so much better than the work of the flesh we hope to put off.

First, let's look at Jeremiah 2:13 and see how it describes the work of the flesh. Pay special attention to the kind of water that sin represents in this picture.

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Now read John 4:13-14, describing the results of having the Spirit in us. What sort of water does the Spirit give us, and what are its results?

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We experience a vacuum, or thirst, in our lives when we are not filled with the Spirit. Only the Spirit, given through the shed blood of Jesus Christ, can truly fill that void. Left to itself, our flesh will try to quench that thirst with all sorts of things that the world offers. But, those things do not satisfy. We keep getting dragged back to it. As we talked about early in this study, we become a slave to those things. It is not so with Christ. In Him, we are free to move forward with life, unburdened, and with a passion and purpose—not with the nagging doubts and continual strain that the flesh leaves us.

This is not merely a cultural thing, as some would argue. We don't feel nervous under sin and free when we walk with Christ, simply because we've been taught or conditioned to feel that way. It really is true that sin burdens us, slows us down, and generally makes life miserable, no matter how we were brought up. There is no shortage of stories about celebrities, politicians, and other public figures of all sorts of backgrounds who were brought low by sin.

Let's distinguish the world's view of repentance from God's with 2 Corinthians 7:10.

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Worldly sorrow brings about shame. Shame focuses on the worldly consequences of sin, and it offers no hope of healing or resolution. Shame makes us say, "I am bad, because this is who I am." It buries us deeper in the pit, gives us an incentive to hide our sin in more secrecy, and continue the cycle of despair.

Godly sorrow brings about conviction. It focuses on the truth of God’s Word, and on restoring our relationship with Him. Conviction makes us say, “This is not who I am. Through the grace of God, I am made better than this.” It motivates us to turn from our sin so that our lives glorify Christ, rather than motivating us to hide our sin to minimize our pain.

According to 1 Corinthians 1:2, if we have given our lives to Christ, what are we?

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We are made saints in Christ. We must remember this, even though we don’t always feel like it. It feels counter-intuitive to assert that we are saints, even though we struggle with addictive sin. It feels like we should conquer our addiction, then call ourselves saints. However, that is not what the Bible says, and this is key to healing. When we turn to Christ in repentance, we are called to be saints. It is a title that Christ confers on us, not something we confer on ourselves after achieving some victory in our own flesh—we are fighting the battle in our own flesh, if we approach it this way. The only way to fight this battle is with the Spirit, and that is given to us through the shed blood of Christ. Then, the victory comes through persistent prayer and battle, alongside the Spirit. We fight, not because we are afraid of the earthly consequences of our sin or being found out. We fight, because the Devil is assaulting our home country, the Kingdom of God!

So, here we are in the midst of battle. It is unpleasant. We grow weary of the fight. We tire of giving in to our sin and dealing with the separation from God and the strain on our earthly relationships. We ask, “When will it be over?” We might feel as though this is a battle that will never end until our life here on earth is over. That is an exhausting thought. Thankfully, it is not true. We can heal. Please read Hosea 14 and comment.

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This is a beautiful picture of a people who were mired in sin, and finally awoke to realize the bondage they were in. They renounced their old idols, realizing that they had no power to save. They acknowledged their sin before God. They agreed with God that their sin was wrong, to the point that they found it repulsive and had no more desire for it. They realized that sin's promises were deceitful—like candy-covered poison. They turned to the living God, and drank from the springs of living water that never run dry. They then stood in disbelief at the life they used to live, wondering why they ever thought that would bring them fulfillment, and they rejoiced in the peace and freedom they now enjoyed.

If you have been working at overcoming your addiction for some time, you have probably felt like this before, sometimes even for weeks or months at a time, only to find yourself slipping back into old habits. Don't give up. Persist. God will bring you through.

Let's examine the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Please read Genesis 39:1-12 and consider the following:

What led Joseph into the place of temptation? Would he have had any opportunity to avoid it? How were the circumstances different here from David's experience with Bathsheba?

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How was Joseph's response to temptation here different from David's? Why do you think that was?

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What lessons can you apply to your life from these accounts to ensure you'll respond more like Joseph in times of sudden temptation?

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Finally, support each other in this meeting's accountability check:

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- If you struggled, what led to your fall?
- If you did not struggle, what led to your victory?
- Double check, have you been truthful in these questions, or have you minimized them at all?
- Were you faithful in having regular devotions in prayer and meditation on the Word of God?

## 9 Controlling our thoughts

As we learn to rein in our addictive behaviors and replace them with healthy godly activities, our minds will boil with memories of the sights and sensations we experienced when we were in the habit of giving ourselves over to our idols. Our flesh will long for opportunities to experience those pleasures of sin again. As this happens, we will find ourselves dwelling on those thoughts.

When that happens, the Devil will tempt us to believe that it's okay to entertain the thoughts. After all, we've taken control of our body, so as long as our desires are contained within our minds, everything is "better."

What does Proverbs 23:7 tell us about the thoughts hidden in our hearts?

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Also consider Matthew 5:27-28. According to that passage, where does the act of adultery really occur?

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While it's true that sanctification from addictive sin takes time, and we need to be encouraged and persevere, we must not confuse improvement with victory. Our goal is not merely to be less sinful, but to have victory over sin. Read James 4:8. What two things does God call us to do to break the bondage of sin and dwell in His presence?

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That thought is reiterated in Isaiah 55:7-8. Read that passage and comment on the benefits God has prepared if we control our thoughts along with our actions.

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We can't let ourselves be convinced that we can eliminate the outward symptoms of our sin and still entertain sin in our hearts. If we do continue to entertain sinful thoughts, what does Luke 6:45 say will eventually happen outwardly?

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In 1 Chronicles 28:9, David is telling Solomon how to be a successful and godly king. Read that and reflect on what role our thoughts play in lining us up with God's will.

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Early on in this study, we looked at Job 31:1. Please read that again and focus on the part of the verse that talks about thoughts. Job mentioned two things: what his mind did, and what his eyes did. In this verse, which of these actions fuels the other?

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The first few verses we examined spoke of our thoughts influencing our actions, but in this verse, Job indicates that our actions influence our thoughts. If, as indicated in 2 Timothy 3:16, all scripture is true, which of these statements is true, and what does that mean to us?

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If our thoughts fuel our actions with our eyes, and our actions with our eyes fuel our thoughts, that creates a vicious cycle that can be very difficult to break. Often, people in the middle of the struggle to overcome addiction to pornography will say that the thoughts are becoming so intense that they feel compelled to look at something a “little” pornographic to “relieve the pressure” a little bit. This is a clever trap of the Devil. Giving in will not relieve the pressure. Instead, it will turn it up. The thoughts will become even more intense, requiring another dose of “stronger” pornography to “relieve” those thoughts. It goes on and on until we are deep back into sin and have to severely break the cycle once again.

Once again, we've established that we have a sinful behavior (our thoughts) which we must put to a stop. How do we do that? A general answer is in Proverbs 16:3. Read that and comment on the direction your thoughts have been taking lately.

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Philippians 4:8 gives us a practical way of steering our thoughts away from sin. Read that now and comment.

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This is the same idea as putting off and putting on of works of the flesh, except it applies to our minds. What are some thoughts that meet the criteria in Philippians 4:8? Look at 2 Peter 3:1-2 and Lamentations 3:20-22 for ideas, but come up with things specific to your life that you can think about to replace the sinful thoughts that try to occupy a place in your mind.

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The best practical step to controlling our minds is found in Ecclesiastes 10:18. Our minds wander when we are not occupied. Do you find yourself succumbing to lust and pornography when you are otherwise idle? (Hint: You aren't getting much else done when you're feeding your addiction.) How are some other ways you could constructively fill that idle time?

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To finish this session's discussion, here are some excerpts from an account from someone who struggled intensely with their thought life for years. Hopefully hearing this frank discussion of his struggle will help you understand more about yours.

... I began by developing fantasies about whoever was pictured in the magazine. Even though I knew it was wrong, I liked that experience. I liked the sense of power that came with enjoying the pictures. I found pornography intoxicating.

... I'd look at pornography, and then overlay what I saw there onto female acquaintances. Eventually I constructed an entire "tape library" of imaginary fantasy tapes about various women.

... I knew that looking at sexually explicit material and spinning fantasies were wrong. I was full of guilt, and struggled a lot to overcome it. God was gracious, and I overcame a lot of temptations. I'm thankful that I never carried out my fantasies in actual fornication. Sometimes I would go six months between indulgences in pornography. But the fantasy life and masturbation persisted for over twenty-five years. It is only in the past year that God has really helped me to come to terms with it, and to experience the joy of consistently choosing purity. I've gained a deeper desire to overcome the sin of indulging in pornographic thought, and I've shut the door on the "tape library."

... I would say that my thought life was an almost continuous struggle... I was a sexual predator in search of prey, looking for prospects in my surrounding environment. I never acted it out to the point of adultery or even making advances towards someone. But my mind engaged in a secret life that I sought to have satisfy me, though I knew it couldn't and didn't satisfy... The pornography had such a tremendous power and hold on me that it constantly needed to be fueled through my eyes and imagination.

... Let me use the metaphor of my eroticized soul becoming a toxic waste dump. I had tried to contain the obsession with pornography in the waste dump. But the toxic waste was leaking out. It was corrosive, and it seeped through the walls. In my relationships I sometimes wondered whether I was operating in a seductive, predatory mode or a wholesome, relational mode. Would I commit adultery if I had an opportunity? Would I go on to molest children? Would I get aroused homosexually? I saw I was capable of anything.

... Since last year, God has enabled me not to indulge in mental sexual adventure, or lewd jokes, or pornography. That shock therapy I experienced in seeing what I really was and where it led, and seeing how much Christ loved me, has simply shut the whole thing down. It doesn't mean I don't have the impulse sometimes, but the capacity to say, "No, I want you, Lord, and not that. You are most important, and I can't have you halfheartedly," has been really enhanced. It's nothing that came out of me. God's love broke the shackles, the bondage to this sexual idol, and caused me to cry out to Him for help. He keeps reminding me that I must keep relying on Him.

Can you identify with this man's thought struggles? Does any Scripture come to mind?

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Do you believe you can achieve this level of control over your thought life? Consider Scriptures that we have already read. What practical steps can you take to start taking back this part of your life from the Devil?

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Let's finish the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife by reading Genesis 39:13-23, and answer:

What did Joseph's obedience earn him in the short term?

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How about in the long term?

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Overcoming can be very difficult in the short term, though hopefully the consequences won't be as severe as what Joseph faced. Focus on the long-term benefit. What benefits, earthly and spiritual, can you see as a future result of overcoming?

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Finally, support each other in this meeting's accountability check:

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- Double check, have you been truthful in these questions, or have you minimized them at all?
- Were you faithful in having regular devotions in prayer and meditation on the Word of God?

## 10 Where do I go from here?

We have spent the last several weeks exploring how to heal from addictive sin. We've looked into what an addiction is, what makes it so compelling, why we give in, how it affects those we love and our relationship with God, and some practical ways of overcoming. Now, you hopefully find yourself on the path to lasting healing. A good question to ask now is, where do we go from here?

First, you may find yourself on the path to recovery for a while. During this time, it is important to remember some reassurances from the Word. Please read Hebrews 12:6 and comment on how this is comforting news.

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If we encounter difficulty on the path to recovery, we will feel the Spirit's conviction. This is an encouragement, because we know from the verse above that God still loves us as long as He is chastening us for our sin. Conviction from the Spirit is evidence of the Spirit's presence.

Another reassurance is in Psalms 103:10. Please read that verse and write the ways it encourages you.

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Another common lament from those who have dealt with addictive sin is the loss of time and other wasted resources, as well as damage to relationships, reputations, and lost opportunities. Please read Joel 2:25 and comment on the good news this verse gives us.

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When we have made significant progress in healing, our hearts should go out to others who are trapped in the same pit we found ourselves in. Read Matthew 10:8 and comment on the responsibility of those whom God has given victory.

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We talked extensively about putting off the works of the flesh and putting on the fruit of the Spirit. As we progress in putting off the shackles of addictive sin, we should start replacing it by putting on a mission for God. Read Hebrews 13:21 and write what having a mission means to you.

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You may be doubtful that God can use you. Rest assured He has a plan for you, and He will carry that out if you are in His will. Read Jeremiah 29:11 and comment how God can use you.

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A mission we can all participate in is outlined in Deuteronomy 4:9. Read that verse and comment on how you can make a difference.

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Warning the next generation is an important goal. We should be willing to speak openly and freely about the topics in this study. If we are approachable to our children (or other children we may be able to positively influence), they will be willing to talk to us and learn from our experience.

Pornography is rapidly becoming more and more available, particularly to the younger generation. Not only is obscene material available through computers, or even portable computers, in more and more private venues, but it is now even available on many different types of handheld devices. We need to speak to the next generation about whether these things are absolutely necessary, given the constant temptation they offer. If they are necessary, then we need to discuss with them the importance of staying accountable for their use of these devices.

Accountability is difficult for youth to keep among themselves. Hanging out in private with other youth is a common way of getting introduced to pornography. Maybe you have met someone during this study, or maybe you yourself had an introduction to pornography, right in the church parking lot or at a “trusted” friend's house.

1 Kings 12 contains the story of Rehoboam, who forsook the counsel of wise men and went with the advice of his inexperienced friends. This decision led to the division of the kingdom of Israel. It is vital that we stand for our youth and encourage them down the right path, even though it may not be easy to get them to hear us. When doing this, we must remain patient and remember the days when we were young, and recall the tendency we have even now to harden our hearts to counsel.

Where are you at now in the journey? Where do you see yourself in the next few weeks, months, and years? How do you see yourself using your victory for the good of God's kingdom?

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Another important mission for you to continue is your accountability. This should actually never end, as it will keep you from falling back into old habits (1 Corinthians 10:12 and 2 Peter 2:22) and will mutually help those you keep accountability with (Proverbs 27:17.)

Can you commit to a plan for continuing your accountability into the future?

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What other mission might God have for you? Is there some spiritual goal or mission (not necessarily related directly to purity) that has been on your heart, but you have been reluctant to pursue? Will being an overcomer help you gather the courage to approach that goal?

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Let's finish this study with our accountability questions for this session, and encourage each other going forward.

- Were you free from pornography since our last meeting?
- Did you keep your covenant with your eyes?
- If you struggled, what led to your fall?
- If you did not struggle, what led to your victory?
- Double check, have you been truthful in these questions, or have you minimized them at all?
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