

Back Infections and Heart Infections

My husband Ray knew something was wrong as soon as he got out of bed.

His lower back, where he'd had back surgery six weeks before, was wet. His t-shirt was wet. The sheet was wet. His fingers glistening with a strange wetness from reaching back to investigate, he asked me to check what was going on. I saw a rivulet of fluid pouring out of the top of his surgical incision. Something was really, really wrong.



As I gently pressed the skin around the incision, pus kept flowing out. He had a serious infection under the incision. It had been hidden, but it literally rose to the surface of his body and forced its way out. His problem wasn't that pus was being discharged from the inside to the outside—that was just the symptom, the manifestation of the true problem: a deep and serious infection.

He'd had the infection before he was forced to be aware of it. There were indications: fever, and just not feeling right.

The Lord is quite adept at using the physical to show us truths about the spiritual and emotional. I started seeing parallels between the two worlds.

The undealt-with, unhealed spiritual and emotional hurts in our souls don't just sit there under the surface—our awareness—forever. It's like emotional pus. Eventually it

starts leaking out sideways: addictions, anger, isolation, rebellion, self-destruction. These are the presenting problems that drive people to seek help through recovery programs such as [Re:generation](#) and [Celebrate Recovery](#), or counseling.

Just as a rivulet of pus wasn't Ray's true problem but merely a symptom, our heart issues are the true problem that Jesus wants to point to and say, "Let Me heal them. You can't do it on your own."

Ray's infection was so large that he needed "wash out" surgery. He needed a skilled surgeon, in the sterile, controlled environment of the operating room, to open up his incision and clean out the infection. Before he even got to the OR, the doctor ordered IV antibiotics to attack and disarm the destructive power of the multiplying bacteria. By the time the surgeon got to the washing-out stage, Ray's infection had been disarmed, turned into "clean gunk." No bacteria was left, just the debris of the now-dead bacteria.

In the spiritual realm, it's truth that functions like powerful antibiotics. Truth attacks the destructive power of lies and decision. There is still leftover debris of lies—bad thinking habits and bad behavior habits—but when the lies are disarmed, it's a lot easier to replace the old habits with new, healthy, godly habits.

This was a serious infection. The day after surgery, they put in a PICC line that threaded a tube from his upper arm into a vein, ending just above his heart. This is a very effective way to infuse health-building antibiotics into his body, medicine that can't be taken orally—it has to be pumped directly into his bloodstream. He gets five antibiotic infusions a day, which we can do at home instead of needing to be hospitalized or having to go a doctor's office (which would be hard to do at 6 a.m. and 9 p.m.!).

The PICC line allows us to keep a constant level of antibiotic

in his blood. He needs this constant flow to attack the infection over a long period of time. We also need a constant infusion of truth into our souls, into our minds, to counteract the destructive power of lies and deceptions and schemes. In fact, one study revealed that it takes a minimum of four infusions of truth weekly through time in the Word for spiritual growth and healthiness.

I like thinking about the infusion of truth through God's Word as I connect the tubing to Ray's PICC line catheter. God is so good to give us physical lessons to show us spiritual truths!

Ray sure couldn't heal himself on his own. He pointed out that he had to surrender control over this entire "adventure" (to use my dad's word to describe his cancer journey). There was absolutely nothing he could do to fix the spinal stenosis that squeezed nerves, causing shooting pains down the backs of his legs, and he couldn't heal the infection that came later. He had to place himself in the hands of the surgeon both times. He had to place himself in the hands of the anesthesiologists to put him to sleep and wake him up. He had to place himself in the hands of the nurses to administer his pain meds and the IV antibiotics. He had to surrender control to those who knew how to help him.

At any point, he could have shut down the process—not having the surgery, or walking out of the hospital, or refusing the home infusions of IV antibiotics. He could have refused to wear the back brace after the spine surgery; he could have refused to submit to the BLT restrictions (no bending, lifting or twisting).

But that would have also shut down the healing.

When we have soul sickness—a heart infection, if you will—we need to entrust ourselves into the hands of people more educated in the healing process than we are. We need to surrender our false sense of control and invite others to lead

us from sickness into health. And we need to not shut down the process by thinking we know better, or thinking we're fixed or even just "good enough." We need to not push back against restrictions suggested by those who know better than we do what it will take to help us climb out of our pits to get to the place of spiritual and emotional health.

God provides help for physical challenges like infections, and through the "one anothers" of scripture He provides help for spiritual and emotional challenges as well. And He lets us connect the dots to learn transferable concepts from each.

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Pornography – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at pornography from a biblical worldview perspective. He clearly chronicles the physical, emotional and spiritual harm created by pornography and lays out the scriptural warnings to protect us from its degrading effects.

Pornography has been tearing apart the very fabric of modern society, but the problem has been made much worse with pornography's proliferation through the Internet. Studies show that 40 million adults regularly visit Internet pornography sites.^{[\[1\]](#)} To put that in perspective, that is ten times the amount of people who regularly watch baseball.

When I first started writing about pornography in the 1980s, it was already a multi-billion dollar-a-year business mostly promoted through so-called “adult bookstores” and pornographic magazines. With the development of videos, DVDs, and the Internet, pornography has become ubiquitous.



The wages of sin are enormous when pornography is involved. Revenue from Internet porn exceeds by nearly a 2 to 1 ratio, the combined revenues of ABC, CBS, and NBC.[{2}](#) And sales of pornographic material on the Internet surpass the cumulative sales of all other products sold online.[{3}](#)

The current estimate is the there are over 4 million pornographic websites representing almost 400 million pages of pornographic material.[{4}](#)

Pornography is not just something a few men view in the late hours in the privacy of their homes. At least 70 percent of porn is downloaded during work hours (9 am to 5 pm). A percentage of those who do so admit to accessing pornography at work.

And pornography also affects those in church. According to *Leadership Journal*, 40 percent of pastors admit to visiting a pornographic website.[{5}](#) And at one Promise Keepers Convention, 53 percent of men admitted to visiting a porn site the week before.[{6}](#)

The impact pornography is having on young people is alarming. It used to be that when you would ask someone when they first saw pornography they would tell you a story about seeing a porn magazine at a friend's house when they were in middle school or high school. Now a child in grade school has already seen images that were only available in an adult bookstore a few years ago. At one time these images were inaccessible to youth; now they are merely a mouse click away. The average age of first exposure to Internet pornography is 11 years old. And

the largest consumer of Internet pornography is the 12-17 age group.[{7}](#)

How should we define pornography? What is the effect on individuals and society? And what is a biblical perspective on this? I deal with each of these questions in detail in my book, *Christians Ethics in Plain Language*.[{8}](#) In the next section, we address some of these questions.

Definition and Types of Pornography

How should we define pornography? Pornography has been defined as material that “is predominantly sexually explicit and intended primarily for the purpose of sexual arousal.” Hardcore pornography “is sexually explicit in the extreme, and devoid of any other apparent content or purpose.”[{9}](#)

Another important term is obscenity. In the 1973 Supreme Court case of *Miller v. California*, the justices set forth a three-part test to define obscenity:[{10}](#)

- (a) The average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest.
- (b) The work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law, and
- (c) The work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

What are the types of pornography? The first type of pornography is adult magazines, which are primarily directed toward adult male readers. The magazines with the widest distribution (*Playboy* and *Penthouse*) do not violate the *Miller* standards of obscenity and thus can be legally distributed.

The second type of pornography is video. Videocassettes or

DVDs are rented or sold in most adult bookstores and the Internet. They have become a growth industry for pornography.

The third type of pornography is motion pictures. Ratings standards are being relaxed, and many pornographic movies are being shown and distributed carrying R and NC-17 ratings. Many of these so-called "hard R" rated films would have been considered obscene just a few decades ago.

A fourth type of pornography is television. As in motion pictures, standards for commercial television have been continuously lowered. But cable television poses an even greater threat. The Federal Communications Commission does not regulate cable in the same way it does public access stations. Thus, many pornographic movies are shown on cable television.

A fifth type of pornography is audio porn, which includes "Dial-a-porn" telephone calls, the second fastest growth market of pornography. Although most of the messages are within the *Miller* definition of obscenity, these businesses continue to thrive and are often used by children.

A sixth type of pornography is "cyberporn," or Internet pornography. Virtually anyone can download and view hard-core pictures, movies, online chat, and even live sex acts through the Internet.

Addiction to Pornography

Victor Cline, a psychologist, documented how men become addicted to pornographic materials, then begin to desire more explicit or deviant material, and finally act out what they have seen.[\[11\]](#) He maintained "that memories of experiences that occurred at times of emotional arousal (which could include sexual arousal) are imprinted on the brain by epinephrine, an adrenal gland hormone, and are difficult to erase. This may partly explain pornography's addicting effect."[\[12\]](#)

Other research showed that biochemical and neurological responses in individuals who are aroused release the adrenal hormone epinephrine in the brain, which is why one can remember pornographic images seen years before. In response to pleasure, nerve endings release chemicals that reinforce the body's own desire to repeat the process.[{13}](#) Kimberly Young, an authority on Internet addiction, found that 90 percent of those who became addicted to cyberporn became addicted to the two-way communication functions: chat rooms, newsgroups, and e-mail.[{14}](#)

Psychologists identified a five-step pattern in pornographic addiction. The first step is *exposure*. Addicts have been exposed to pornography in many ways, ranging from sexual abuse as children to looking at widely available pornographic magazines.

The second step is *addiction*. People who continually expose themselves to pornography "keep coming back for more and more" in order to get new sexual highs. James L. McCough of the University of California at Irvine said that "experiences at times of emotional or sexual arousal get locked in the brain by the chemical epinephrine and become virtually impossible to erase."[{15}](#)

A third step is *escalation*. Previous sexual highs become more difficult to attain; therefore users of pornography begin to look for more exotic forms of sexual behavior to bring them stimulation.

A fourth step is *desensitization*. What was initially shocking becomes routine. Shocking and disgusting sexual behavior is no longer avoided but is sought out for more intense stimulation. Concern about pain and degradation get lost in the pursuit of the next sexual experience.

A fifth step is *acting out fantasies*. People do what they have seen and find pleasurable. Not every pornography addict will

become a serial murderer or a rapist. But many do look for ways to act out their sexual fantasies

In my book *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I discuss in further detail the issue of pornographic addiction as well as describe the social and psychological effects of pornography.

Social Effects

Defining the social effects of pornography has been difficult because of some of the prevailing theories of its impact. One theory was that pornography actually performs a positive function in society by acting like a “safety valve” for potential sexual offenders.

The most famous proponent of this theory was Berl Kutchinsky, a criminologist at the University of Copenhagen. His famous study on pornography found that when the Danish government lifted restrictions on pornography, the number of sex crimes decreased.[\[16\]](#) Therefore, he concluded that the availability of pornography siphons off dangerous sexual impulses. But when the data for his “safety-valve” theory was further evaluated, many of his research flaws began to show.

For example, Kutchinsky failed to distinguish between different kinds of sex crimes (such as rape and indecent exposure) and instead merely lumped them together, effectively masking an increase in rape statistics. He also failed to consider that increased tolerance for certain crimes (public nudity and sex with a minor) may have contributed to a drop in the reported crimes.

Proving cause and effect in pornography is virtually impossible because, ethically, researchers cannot do certain kinds of research. As Dolf Zillman said, “Men cannot be placed at risk of developing sexually violent inclinations by extensive exposure to violent or nonviolent pornography, and women cannot be placed at risk of becoming victims of such

inclinations.”[{17}](#)

Nevertheless, a number of compelling statistics suggest that pornography does have profound social consequences. For example, of the 1,400 child sexual molestation cases in Louisville, Kentucky, between July 1980 and February 1984, adult pornography was connected with each incident and child pornography with the majority of them.[{18}](#)

Extensive interviews with sex offenders (rapists, incest offenders, and child molesters) have uncovered a sizable percentage of offenders who use pornography to arouse themselves before and during their assaults.[{19}](#) Police officers have seen the impact pornography has had on serial murders. In fact, pornography consumption is one of the most common profile characteristics of serial murders and rapists.[{20}](#)

Professor Cass Sunstein, writing in the *Duke Law Journal*, said that some sexual violence against women “would not have occurred but for the massive circulation of pornography.” Citing cross-cultural data, he concluded, “The liberalization of pornography laws in the United States, Britain, Australia, and the Scandinavian countries has been accompanied by a rise in reported rape rates. In countries where pornography laws have not been liberalized, there has been a less steep rise in reported rapes. And in countries where restrictions have been adopted, reported rapes have decreased.”[{21}](#)

Biblical Perspective

God created men and women in His image (Gen. 1:27) as sexual beings. But because of sin in the world (Rom. 3:23), sex has been misused and abused (Rom. 1:24-25).

Pornography attacks the dignity of men and women created in the image of God. Pornography also distorts God’s gift of sex which should be shared only within the bounds of marriage (1

Cor. 7:2-3). When the Bible refers to human sexual organs, it often employs euphemisms and indirect language. Although there are some exceptions (a woman's breasts and womb are sometimes mentioned), generally Scripture maintains a basic modesty towards a man's or woman's sexual organs.

Moreover, Scripture specifically condemns the practices that result from pornography such as sexual exposure (Gen. 9:21-23), adultery (Lev. 18:20), bestiality (Lev. 18:23), homosexuality (Lev. 18:22 and 20:13), incest (Lev. 18:6-18), and prostitution (Deut. 23:17-18).

A biblical perspective of human sexuality must recognize that sexual intercourse is exclusively reserved for marriage for the following purposes. First, it establishes the one-flesh union (Gen. 2:24-25; Matt. 19:4-6). Second, it provides for sexual intimacy within the marriage bond. The use of the word "know" indicates a profound meaning of sexual intercourse (Gen. 4:1). Third, sexual intercourse is for the mutual pleasure of husband and wife (Prov. 5:18-19). Fourth, sexual intercourse is for procreation (Gen. 1:28).

The Bible also warns against the misuse of sex. Premarital and extramarital sex is condemned (1 Cor. 6:13-18; 1 Thess. 4:3). Even thoughts of sexual immorality (often fed by pornographic material) are condemned (Matt. 5:27-28).

Moreover, Christians must realize that pornography can have significant harmful effects on the user. These include: a comparison mentality, a performance-based sexuality, a feeling that only forbidden things are sexually satisfying, increased guilt, decreased self concept, and obsessive thinking.

Christians, therefore, must do two things. First, they must work to keep themselves pure by fleeing immorality (1 Cor. 6:18) and thinking on those things which are pure (Phil. 4:8). As a man thinks in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7). Christians must make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14).

Pornography will fuel the sexual desire in abnormal ways and can eventually lead to even more debase perversion. We, therefore, must “abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Second, Christians must work to remove the sexual perversion of pornography from society.

Notes

1. Mark Penn, *Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes* (NY: Twelve, 2007), 276.
2. Ibid., 277.
3. George Barna, *Boiling Point: Monitoring Cultural Shifts in the 21st Century* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2003), 223.
4. Truth in Porn, www.truthinporn.org.
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13. J. L. McGaugh, “Preserving the Presence of the Past,” *American Psychologist*, February 1983, 161.
14. Kimberley Young, Paper presented to 1997 convention of the American Psychological Association. A full treatment can be found in Kimberley Young, *Caught in the Net: How to Recognize the Signs of Internet Addiction-and a Winning Strategy for Recovery* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1998).
15. Quoted in Kenneth Kantzer, “The Power of Porn,” *Christianity Today*, 7 February 1989, 18.

16. Berl Kutchinsky, "The Effect of Easy Availability of Pornography on the Incidence of Sex Crimes: The Danish Experience," *Journal of Social Issues* 29 (1973): 163-81.
17. Dolf Zillman, "Pornography Research and Public Policy," in *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*, ed. Dolf Zillman and Jennings Bryant (New York: Academic, 1989), 387-88.
18. Testimony by John B. Rabun, deputy director of the National Center for Missing and Exploited children, before the Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice of the Senate Judiciary Committee, 12 September 1984.
19. W. Marshall, "Pornography and Sex Offenders," in *Pornography: Research Advances and Policy Considerations*.
20. *The Men Who Murdered*, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, August 1985.
21. Cass R. Sunstein, "Pornography and the First Amendment," *Duke Law Journal*, September 1986, 595.

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Gambling – Is It Good for Society? A Christian Perspective

Kerby Anderson looks at the harmful effects of both legal and illegal gambling. He considers the negative impacts on society, government policy, and the economy when gambling is prevalent in a culture. From a Christian worldview perspective, he considers how gambling introduces problems such as covetousness, poor work ethics, and destroyed family units.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Gambling used to be what a few unscrupulous people did with the aid of organized crime. But gambling fever now seems to affect nearly everyone as more and more states are legalizing various forms of it.

Thirty years ago, gambling was a relatively rare phenomenon with casinos operating only in the distant Nevada desert and a few states with lotteries or pari-mutuel betting. Today, legalized gambling is permitted in forty-seven states and the District of Columbia. More Americans are gambling than ever before, and they are also gambling more money.[\[1\]](#)

The momentum seems to be on the side of those who want legalized gambling as a way to supplement state revenues. But these states and their citizens often ignore the costs that are associated with legalized gambling.

Types of Gambling

Gambling comes in many forms. Perhaps the most popular type of gambling is state-sponsored lotteries. This would include the weekly lottery games, as well as the daily lottery numbers and scratch-off ticket games.

A second type of gambling would be casinos. Gambling in this venue would include jackpot slot machines, video card game machines, various casino card games such as poker and blackjack, and other casino games such as roulette.

Sports betting is a third type of gambling. Someone can bet on the outcome of a sporting event or a particular part of a sporting event. Usually, bets are placed on a bookmaker's odds so that the actual bet is against the point spread. Sports betting would also include illegal office pools and even weekend golfers who bet dollars or cokes for each hole.

Pari-mutuel betting (horse racing, dog racing, and jai alai)

is another form of sports gambling. Horse racing is legal in 43 states with over 150 racetracks in the United States.

Convenience gambling (also called retail gambling) includes stand-alone slot machines, video poker, video keno, and other games. These are usually found in bars, truck stops, and convenience stores.

Online gambling represents a new frontier in the spread of gambling. The availability and accessibility of Internet gambling appears to have greatly increased the number of people gambling on a regular basis.

Bad Social Policy

Legalized gambling is bad social policy. At a time when Gamblers Anonymous estimates that there are at least 12 million compulsive gamblers, it does not make a lot of sense to have the state promoting gambling. State sponsorship of gambling makes it harder, not easier, for the compulsive gambler to reform. Since about 96 percent of those gamblers began gambling before the age of fourteen,^{2} we should be especially concerned about the message such a policy sends to young people.

The economic costs that gamblers themselves incur are significant. The average compulsive gambler has debts exceeding \$80,000.^{3} And this figure pales in comparison with other social costs that surface because of family neglect, embezzlement, theft, and involvement in organized crime. Compulsive gamblers affect the lives of family, friends, and business associates. Some of the consequences of gambling are marital disharmony, divorce, child abuse, substance abuse, and suicide attempts.

Proponents argue that state lotteries are an effective way to raise taxes painlessly. But the evidence shows that legalized gambling often hurts those who are poor and disadvantaged. A

national task force on gambling found that those in the lowest income bracket lost more than three times as much money to gambling (as a percentage of income) as those at the wealthiest end of the spectrum.[{4}](#) One New York lottery agent reports that “seventy percent of those who buy my tickets are poor, black, or Hispanic.”[{5}](#) And a National Bureau of Economic Research “shows that the poor bet a much larger share of their income.”[{6}](#) The study also found that “the less education a person has, the more likely he is to play the lottery.”[{7}](#)

A major study on the effect of the California lottery came to the same conclusions. The Field Institute’s California poll found that 18 percent of the state’s adults bought 71 percent of the tickets. These heavy lottery players (who bought more than twenty tickets in the contest’s first forty-five days) are “more likely than others to be black, poorer and less educated than the average Californian.”[{8}](#)

Studies also indicate that gambling increases when economic times are uncertain and people are concerned about their future. Joseph Dunn, director of the National Council on Compulsive Gambling, says, “People who are worried about the factory closing take a chance on making it big. Once they win anything, they’re hooked.”[{9}](#)

The social impact of gambling is often hidden from the citizens who decide to legalize gambling. But later these costs show up in the shattered lives of individuals and their families. One study in *The Journal of Social Issues* found that as gambling increases, there is an increase in “(a) proportion of divorce and separation; (b) disagreement about money matters with one’s spouse; (c) lack of understanding between marital partners; and (d) more reported problems among children of gamblers.”[{10}](#)

Psychologist Julian Taber warns, “No one knows the social costs of gambling or how many players will become addicted . .

. the states are experimenting with the minds of the people on a massive scale.”[{11}](#) Families are torn apart by strife, divorce, and bankruptcy. Boydon Cole and Sidney Margolius in their book, *When You Gamble—You Risk More Than Your Money*, conclude, “There is no doubt of the destructive effect of gambling on the family life. The corrosive effects of gambling attack both the white-collar and blue-collar families with equal vigor.”[{12}](#)

The impact on crime is also significant. The crime rate in gambling communities is nearly double the national average.[{13}](#) Researchers calculate that for every dollar the state received in gambling revenues, it costs the state at least three dollars in increased social costs (for criminal justice and social welfare).[{14}](#)

Bad Governmental Policy

Legalized gambling is also bad governmental policy. Government should promote public virtue, not seduce its citizens to gamble in state-sponsored vice. Government is supposed to be servant of God according to Romans 13, but its moral stance is compromised when it enters into a gambling enterprise.

Citizens would be outraged if their state government began enticing its citizens to engage in potentially destructive behavior (such as taking drugs). But those same citizens see no contradiction when government legalizes and even promotes gambling. Instead of being a positive moral force in society, government contributes to the corruption of society.

Ross Wilhelm, professor of business economics at the University of Michigan, says,

State lotteries and gambling games are essentially a “rip-off” and widespread legalization of gambling is one of the worst changes in public policy to have occurred in recent years. . . . The viciousness of the state-run games is

compounded beyond belief by the fact that state governments actively advertise and promote the games and winners.[{15}](#)

The corrosive effect legalized gambling has on government itself is also a cause for concern. As one editorial in *New York Times* noted, “Gambling is a business so rich, so fast, so powerful and perhaps inevitably so unsavory that it cannot help but undermine government.”[{16}](#)

Legal and Illegal Gambling

One of the standard clichés used by proponents of legalized gambling is that by instituting legal gambling, illegal gambling will be driven out. This argument makes a number of faulty assumptions. First, it assumes that people are going to gamble anyway; and so the state might as well get a piece of the action. Second, it assumes that given the choice, people would rather gamble in a state-sponsored program because it will be regulated. The state will make sure that the program is fair and that each participant has an equal chance of winning. Third, it assumes that if the state enters the gambling arena, it will drive out illegal gambling because it will be a more efficient competitor for gamblers’ dollars.

While the arguments seem sound, they are not. Although some people do gamble illegally, most citizens do not. Legalized gambling entices people to gamble who normally would not gamble at all. Duke University researchers have found that the lottery is a “powerful recruiting device” because one-fourth of those who otherwise would not gamble at all do bet on lotteries.[{17}](#)

Second, legal gambling does not drive out illegal gambling. If anything, just the opposite is true. As legalized gambling comes into a state, it provides additional momentum for illegal gambling. The Organized Crime Section of the Department of Justice found that “the rate of illegal gambling

in those states which have some legalized form of gambling was three times as high as those states where there was not a legalized form of gambling.”[\[18\]](#) And one national review found that

In states with different numbers of games, participation rates increase steadily and sharply as the number of legal types of gambling increases. Social betting more than doubles from 35 percent in states with no legal games to 72 percent in states with three legal types; the illegal gambling rate more than doubles from nine percent to 22 percent; and commercial gambling increases by 43 percent, from 24 to 67 percent.[\[19\]](#)

Legalized gambling in various states has been a stimulator of illegal gambling, not a competitor to it.

The reasons for the growth of illegal gambling in areas where legalized gambling exists are simple. First, organized crime syndicates often use the free publicity of state lotteries and pari-mutuel betting to run their own numbers games. The state actually saves them money by providing publicity for events involving gambling. Second, many gamblers would rather bet illegally than legally. When they work with a bookie, they can bet on credit and do not have to report their winnings to the government, two things they cannot do if they bet on state-sponsored games. This explains why illegal gambling thrives in states with legalized gambling.

Another important issue is the corrupting influence legalized gambling can have on society. First, legalized gambling can have a very corrupting influence on state government. In the last few years there have been numerous news reports of corruption and fraud in state lotteries. Second, there is the corrupting influence on the citizens themselves. Gambling breeds greed. Research has shown that the number of compulsive gamblers increases between 100 and 550 percent when legalized

gambling is brought into an area.^{20} Every day, otherwise sane people bet large amounts of money in state lotteries because they hope they will win the jackpot. Moreover, states and various gambling establishments produce glitzy ads that appeal to people's greed in order to entice them to risk even more than they can afford.

Government should be promoting positive social values such as thrift and integrity rather than negative ones such as greed and avarice. They should be promoting the public welfare rather than seducing citizens to engage in state-sponsored vice.

Economic Costs

Legalized forms of gambling (state lotteries, pari-mutuel betting, and casinos) are often promoted as good economic policy. Proponents say they are painless ways of increasing billions of dollars in state revenue. But there is another economic side to legalized gambling.

First, the gross income statistics for legalized gambling are much higher than the net income. State lotteries are one example. Although about half the states have lotteries and the figures vary from state to state, we can work with some average figures. Generally, the cost of management, advertising, and promotion is approximately sixty cents of each dollar. In other words, for every dollar raised in a lottery, only forty cents goes to the state budget. By contrast, direct taxation of the citizens costs only about one cent on the dollar, so that for every dollar raised by taxes, ninety-nine cents goes to the state.

Second, gambling adversely affects a state economy. Legalized gambling depresses businesses because it diverts money that could have been spent in the capital economy into gambling that does not stimulate the economy. Boarded-up businesses

surrounding casinos are a visible reminder of this, but the effect on the entire economy is even more devastating than may be at first apparent. Money that could be invested, loaned, and recycled through the economy is instead risked in a legalized gambling scheme.

Legalized gambling siphons off a lot of money from the economy. More money is wagered on gambling than is spent on elementary and secondary education (\$286 billion versus \$213 billion in 1990).^{21} Historian John Ezel concludes in his book, *Fortune's Merry Wheel*, "If history teaches us anything, a study of over 1,300 legal lotteries held in the United States proves . . . they cost more than they brought in if their total impact on society is reckoned."^{22}

Biblical Perspective

Even though the Bible does not directly address gambling, a number of principles can be derived from Scripture. First, the Bible emphasizes a number of truths that conflict with gambling. The Bible, for example, emphasizes the sovereignty of God (Matt. 10:29–30). Gambling, however, is based on chance. The Bible admonishes people to work creatively and for the benefit of others (Eph. 4:28), while gambling fosters a something-for-nothing attitude. The Bible condemns materialism (Matt. 6:24–25) while gambling promotes it.

Gambling breeds a form of covetousness, whereas the tenth commandment (Exod. 20:17) admonishes people not to covet. Coveting, greed, and selfishness are the base emotions that entice individuals to gamble. Christians should be concerned about gambling if for no other reason than the effect it has on the "weaker brother" and how it will affect the compulsive gambler. State-sponsored gambling makes it more difficult for compulsive gamblers to reform. Legalized gambling becomes an institutionalized form of greed.

Second, gambling destroys the work ethic. Two key biblical passages deal with the work ethic. In Colossians 3:23–24 the apostle Paul wrote, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” And in 2 Thessalonians 3:7,10, he stated, “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. . . . For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

The Twentieth Century Fund research group commented, “Gambling’s get-rich-quick appeal appears to mock capitalism’s core values: disciplined work habits, thrift, prudence, adherence to routine, and the relationship between effort and reward.”[\[23\]](#) These core values of the work ethic are all part of the free enterprise system and are part of the Christian life. Gambling corrupts these values, and replaces them with greed and selfishness. Rather than depending on hard work, gamblers depend on luck and chance.

Third, gambling destroys families. Gambling is a major cause of family neglect. Many of the social costs associated with gambling come from a get-rich-quick mindset. As people get caught up in a gambling frenzy, they begin to neglect their families. Money spent on lottery tickets or at racetracks is frequently not risk capital but is income that should be spent on family needs. According to 1 Timothy 5:8, a person who refuses to care for his family is worse than an unbeliever. Parents must provide for their children (2 Cor. 12:14) and eat the bread of their labors (2 Thess. 3:12). When gambling is legalized, it causes people to neglect their God-mandated responsibility to care for their families, and many of those families then often end up on welfare.

Fourth, gambling is a form of state-sponsored greed. Romans 13:4 teaches that government is to be a servant of God, providing order in society and promoting public virtue.

Legalized gambling undercuts government's role and subverts the moral fabric of society through greed and selfishness promoted by a state-sponsored vice.

Since gambling undermines the moral foundations of society and invites corruption in government, Christians must stand against attempts to legalize gambling.

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The Happiest Place on Earth?

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Disneyland has long positioned itself as “The Happiest Place on Earth.” And Disney goes to great lengths to maintain that illusion. Their parks are as close to spotless as you can get; you never see wrappers, gum or spilled popcorn on the ground, since they get swept up within a minute of hitting the pavement by an army of “cast members,” from custodians to ride workers, who are devoted to maintaining the fantasy. Every Disney park cast member is trained to be assertively friendly in making things right and keeping people happy. When a friend’s child lost the ice cream scoop from his cone, within moments a Disney person replaced it for free.



Recently I met a couple of Disney reps who were exhibiting at a convention. In talking about the company policy of propagating the illusion of “the happiest place on earth,” they told me that every employee is drilled with the four keys to their success: Safety, Courtesy, Efficiency, and Show. Keep everyone safe, be unfailingly kind and courteous to every guest, “git ‘er done,” and be show-ready and show-perfect at all times. Both of these ladies’ faces lit up as they talked about Disney values and how much they enjoyed their part in keeping the fantasy going.

This resonates with me. When my husband and I visited Disneyland not long after we were married, it was the best day of my life—even better than our wedding day! I never enjoyed myself so much as I did that day, and Disney’s unflagging efforts to keep their park the happiest place on earth was the reason why. So I get it.

What I get even more is why it’s so successful, and why it’s so important.

Disney’s desire to provide a great experience and make people

happy touches one of our most basic—and universal—heart desires: to return to Eden. We long for perfection. We long to experience no pain and no need. We long to be completely immersed in an ocean of love and affection. We long for what is wrong to be set right. We long for evil to be banished and for good to rule the day.

We long for intimacy with our Creator. And many of us don't even know that's what we're longing for, but I believe that's what's at the heart of all addictions.

All these things we had in Eden, and we lost in Eden. But the story's not over, and God has promised to make everything right. Our longings WILL be fulfilled one day.

In the meantime, we can visit Disneyland or Disneyworld. They will pass away, God's word says, but the real reality of what we're longing for will come to pass (read the end of Revelation). Count on it.

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_happiest_place_on_earth

New Media and Society

Kerby Anderson provides an overview of the ups and downs of the new media such as Facebook and Twitter, and their impact on us.

How is the new media affecting the way we think and the way we interact with others in society? I want to look at the impact the Internet, social networks, and portable media devices are having on our world.

Rachel Marsden doesn't think it is positive. Writing in *The Wall Street Journal* she says:

Spare me the stories of your "genius" tech-savvy child who can name every country on Google Earth, or how, because of your iPhone, BlackBerry and three cell phones, you juggle 20 tasks at once and never miss any business—even at 4 a.m., because you sleep with your portable devices. Does anyone care that technology is destroying social graces and turning people into rude jerks?[\[1\]](#)

She isn't the first to notice that the new technology and new mobile devices are changing the way we interact with others. And, as we will discuss later, they apparently are also changing the way we think, affecting everything from creativity to concentration.

Rachel Marsden wonders, "When did it become acceptable for technological interaction to supersede in-person communication?" I have news for her. It happened long before cell phones were invented. When I was a graduate student at Yale University, I noticed something odd about my academic advisor. Whenever the phone would ring, he felt he had to answer it. He could be advising me or we could be deep in the midst of a discussion of a research project. But if the phone rang, he stopped the conversation and answered the phone, staying on the phone until that conversation was over. I began to think that the only way I could ever have a sustained conversation with him would be to call him on the phone.

Of course, mobile devices make it even easier to ignore face-to-face interaction. Now the world revolves around the person who has instant access to others using these devices. Rebecca Hagelin says that narcissism has crept into our world. In 2006, *Time* magazine voted "You" as the "Person of the Year." So much of media and advertising today is about indulging your fantasies.

Rebecca Hagelin is concerned about the impact this is having on our children. “Young people spend hours every day updating their Facebook pages, post and e-mail countless pictures of themselves, and plug their ears with music to create a self-indulgent existence shut-off from everyone around them.”[\[2\]](#)

While some of the impact is positive, much more should concern us and cause us to change our behavior.

The Internet and the Way You Think

Can the Internet change how you think? That was a question columnist Suzanne Fields asked recently.[\[3\]](#) If you go to Edge.org, you will notice that the question they pose for this year is slightly different. It is, “How is the Internet changing the way you think?” They pose this provocative question because of the impact of computer chips, digitized information, and virtual reality on the way we think and how we receive information in this “collective high-tech electronic ecosystem for the delivery of information.”

I have also been wondering about the impact of the Internet and the new media on our thinking. Unlike Suzanne Fields, I wasn't wondering *if* the Internet was changing our thinking but *how* it is already changing the way we think. There were two reasons why I have been thinking about this.

First, look at the younger generation being raised on the Internet. If you haven't noticed, they think and communicate differently from previous generations. I have done radio programs and read articles about the millennial generation. They do think differently, and a large part of that is due to the Internet.

A second reason for my interest in this topic is an *Atlantic* article by Nicholas Carr entitled “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” He says, “Over the past few years I've had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been

tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry, reprogramming the memory.”[\[4\]](#)

It’s not that he believes his mind is going, but he notices that he isn’t thinking the way he used to think and he isn’t concentrating like he used to concentrate. “Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I’d spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That’s rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages.”

He believes this comes from using the Internet and searching the web with Google. And he gives not only his story, but he also gives many anecdotes and as well as some research to back up his perspective.

For example, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University explains, “We are not only what we read. We are how we read.” The style of reading on the Internet puts “efficiency” and “immediacy” above other factors. Put simply, it has changed the way we read and acquire information.

Now you might say that would only be true for the younger generation. Older people are set in their ways. The Internet could not possibly change the way the brains of older people download information. Not true. The 100 billion neurons inside our skulls can break connections and form others. A neuroscientist at George Mason University says, “The brain has the ability to reprogram itself on the fly, altering the way it functions.”[\[5\]](#)

The Internet does appear to be altering the way we read and think, but more research is needed to confirm if this true. If so, parents and educators need to take note of what is happening in our cyberworld.

BlackBerries, Twitter, and Concentration

Have portable media devices altered our ability to concentrate? That certainly seems to be the case. Nearly all of us have noticed that people with a BlackBerry sometimes seem distracted. And after they answer an e-mail, they seem to spend a few minutes trying to recollect their thoughts before they had the interruption.

An article in *Newsweek* magazine documents what many of us have always suspected: there are two major drawbacks to these devices.[\[6\]](#) The first is distraction overload. A study at the University of Illinois found that if an interruption takes place at a natural breakpoint, then the mental disruption is less. If it came at a less opportune time, the user experienced the “where was I?” brain lock.

A second problem is what is called “continuous partial attention.” People who use mobile devices (like a BlackBerry or an iPhone) often use their devices while they should be paying attention to something else. Psychologists tell us that we really aren’t multitasking, but rather engage in rapid-fire switching of attention among tasks. It is inevitable they are going to miss key information if part of their focus is on their BlackBerry.

But another hidden drawback associated is less creativity. Turning on a mobile device or a cell phone when you are “doing nothing” replaces what we used to do in the days before these devices were invented. Back then, we called it “daydreaming.” That is when the brain often connects unrelated facts and thoughts. You have probably had some of your most creative ideas while shaving, putting on makeup, or driving. That is when your brain can be creative. Checking e-mail reduces daydreaming.

We also can see how new technology affects the way we process information and react to it emotionally. The headline of one

article asked this question: Can Twitter make you amoral?[\[7\]](#) Research was done at the Brain and Creativity Institute of the University of Southern California to see the impact of social networks like Twitter.

What the researchers found was that human beings can sort information very quickly. And they can respond in fractions of seconds to signs of physical pain in others. But other emotions (like admiration and compassion) take much longer to register. In fact, they found that lasting compassion in a relationship to psychological suffering requires a level of persistent, emotional attention.

So how does that relate to a technology like Twitter? The researchers found that there was a significant emotional cost of heavy reliance on a rapid stream of news snippets obtained through television, online feeds, or social networks such as Twitter. One researcher put it this way: "If things are happening too fast, you may not even fully experience emotions about other people's psychological states and that would have implications for your morality."

The point of these studies is that media does have an impact. A wise and discerning Christian will consider the impact and limit its negative effects.

Social Networks

Social networks such as Facebook and MySpace create an interconnected web of friends and family. People who study these networks are beginning to understand the impact they are having on us.

At a social networking site, you find someone and ask to be his or her friend. Once you are accepted, you become a member of their network, and they become a member of your network. This opens the door to finding and making additional friends. The ability to extend your circle of friends is one of the

many benefits of social networking.

One concern about social networking is that it, like most of the new media, increases distraction and fragmentation of thought. The quotes, stories, jokes, and video clips come at an increased rate. A concentrated conversation with one person is difficult. Look over the shoulder of someone in a social networking site who has lots of friends. Content quickly scrolls downward, and it feels like you are at a party where lots of people are all talking at once.

Also these networks tend to shorten our time of concentration. Steven Kotler makes this case in his *Psychology Today* blog, "How Twitter Makes You Stupid."[\[8\]](#) He once asked the author of the best-selling book why he called it the "8 Minute Meditation." The author told him that eight minutes was the length of time of an average segment of television. He reasoned that "most of us already know exactly how to pay attention for eight minutes."

Steven Kotler argues that Twitter is reducing the time of concentration to a few dozen words. He thinks that constantly using Twitter will tune "the brain to reading and comprehending information 140 characters at a time." He predicts "that if you take a Twitter-addicted teen and give them a reading comprehension test, their comprehension levels will plunge once they pass the 140 [character] mark." I am sure someone is already testing that hypothesis. Soon we should know the results.

Social networks do help us keep track of people who do not live near us, and that's a plus. But we are kidding ourselves if we believe that social networks are the same thing as true community. Shane Hipps, writing in *Flickering Pixels*, says this about virtual communities: "It's virtual—but it ain't community."

Social networks also have a great deal of power to influence

us. Sociologists Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler document this in their new book, *Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives*. They believe that happiness is contagious and so is obesity and quitting smoking. We are not only influenced by our friends, but are even influenced by our friend's friends. They say the world is governed by what they call "three degrees of separation."

Addiction is another concern. Years ago, counselors discovered Internet addiction. Now they are starting to talk about Facebook addiction. Lots of youth and adults spend too much time in front of a computer. Social networks are wonderful tools, but wisdom and discernment are necessary in order to use them correctly.

Media Addiction

The Barna Group does lots of surveys, and that has led George Barna to conclude that "media exposure has become America's most widespread and serious addiction."[9](#) I have always been hesitant to label our high levels of media exposure an addiction. We seem to have an addiction label for every behavior. But George Barna makes a convincing case.

Addiction changes our brains by altering the chemical balance and flow within the brain and by even altering the structure of the brain. According to the American Psychiatry Association, we can legitimately call something an addiction when certain symptoms manifest themselves.

For example addictions change our brain structure, altering emotions, motivations, and memory capacity. Addictions cause withdrawal symptoms when exposure to the addictive item is eliminated. Addictions cause the people to abandon or reduce their involvement in normal and healthy activities.

Certainly media can be positive in terms of education and relaxation. But most media content, Barna argues, "winds up

serving the lowest common denominator because that's where the largest audience" is to be found.

There is a generational trend. The builder generation did not grow up with media and never became accustomed to it. The boomer generation embraced media, and the following generations expanded its use in ways unthinkable a few decades ago.

If we were truly serious about controlling the media input in our lives and our children's lives, we would see examples of parents putting boundaries on media exposure. We see nothing of the sort. Expenditures on personal media, in-home media, and mobile media continue to increase.

It is not that parents don't understand the dangers. Barna reports that three-quarters of parents say that exposure of their children to inappropriate media content are one of their top concerns. But they continue to buy their kids the media tools and continue to allow them to be exposed to inappropriate content.

By the time a young person reaches age 21, he or she will have been exposed to more than 250,000 acts of violence through TV, movies, and video games. He or she will have listened to thousands of hours of music with questionable lyrical content. Most parents know that much of what their children see or hear isn't wholesome.

This may be one of the biggest challenges for society in general and even the church in particular. Most parents recognize the danger of the media storm in which they and their children live. But they are unwilling to take the necessary steps to set boundaries or end their media addiction.

Some Concluding Biblical Principles

In a previous article on [Media and Discernment](#), I talked about

the need for Christians to evaluate the impact of media in their lives. We need to develop discernment and pass those biblical principles to our children and grandchildren.

The new media represents an even greater threat and can easily conform us to the world (Rom. 12:2). Media is a powerful tool to conform us to a secular worldview and thus take us captive (Col. 2:8) to the false philosophies of the world.

Christians should strive to apply the following two passages to their lives as they seek discernment concerning the media. The first is Philippians 4:8. "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

The second is Colossians 3:2–5. "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry."

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Dungeons and Dragons and FRPGs

Dungeons and Dragons is a fantasy role playing game (or FRPG). Role playing in and of itself can be a useful exercise of the imagination, such as helping kids practice saying no to drugs or alcohol when offered them at a party, or learning to set boundaries by practicing with a part of one's support group. Fantasy can also be a legitimate exercise of the imagination, and learning to distinguish fantasy from reality is an essential part of maturing intellectually. The problem comes when the values and content in the fantasy affect a person adversely.

In this way, D&D or any other FRPG can be compared to rock music: the genre itself is not inherently evil or dangerous, but the content (lyrics, in the case of rock music) is what makes the difference. (For more on that concept, see Jerry Solomon's article ["Rock Music"](#) on our website.)

The content of D&D and its effect on players are worth examining.

Worldview

In contrast to a Christian worldview, D&D was created with a magic worldview (and this has not changed over the years). Rather like “the force” of Star Wars, magic is a neutral force, something like gravity, that pervades reality. Characters learn to use magic to manipulate the universe to get what they want. It’s a very mechanistic universe, like a vending machine where you insert your coin and out comes a product. Only in this universe, people use spells and magical instruments to manipulate the magic toward their desired end. Magic can be used for good or evil.

Two insightful writers, Brian Onken and Elliot Miller, offer a responsible analysis of D&D and FRPGs in general in a paper from Christian Research Institute, “Fantasy Games People Play.”^{1} They point out that many proponents of D&D try to draw a parallel between their game of choice and the Christian fantasy of J.R.R. Tolkien in *Lord of the Rings*. There are some common elements, but it’s the great differences that are a real problem, differences which proponents of FRPGs “either ignore or rationalize away. Christian fantasy works by Tolkien, Lewis, and others are accepted and considered to be a good use of fantasy because they offer a reflection of an essentially Christian world view.”^{2}

“Though the creators of Dungeons and Dragons may have borrowed many aspects from Tolkien’s ‘middle earth,’ one part they did not consider was the overall setting in which everything took place and from which everything derived its ultimate meaning Tolkien’s Christian world view. As a result, the game’s world view does not represent the moral universe God created. In place of the creator God, its universe is governed by a multiplicity of gods and demigods. Moreover, its universe is not infused with an absolute, inherent morality. The more thoroughly one investigates the writings of Tolkien, Lewis, and others and compares them to FRP games, the more one will

see that there are not only crucial differences in the theological and moral perspectives but also in the context and motives of their respective inventors. Furthermore, there are important differences in the kind and extent of participation required in each (e.g., the cultivation of fantasy in the participatory amoral milieu of Dungeons and Dragons versus the passive moral universe of Tolkien)."[\[3\]](#)

The worldview of D&D is anti-biblical because it presents a universe without a transcendent, good God. The deities of D&D are mythical, like the ancient pantheon of the Roman gods and goddesses.

Morality

Because most FRPGs pit good against evil, some of their proponents point to the games as moral. But their overall morality is pragmatic (what works to get what you want) at best and amoral at worst.[\[4\]](#) "[T]he universes created in fantasy role-playing games generally tend to be confused on the issue of morality. Though they have borrowed many aspects of Tolkien's 'Middle Earth,' the makers of Dungeons and Dragons and other FRP games have not created theistic 'universes.' Rather, their universes are generally governed by a multiplicity of gods and demigods. While in a theistic universe, good is determined by the attributes of God Himself, in FRP worlds good and evil are presented as equal and opposite impersonal poles, and the gods as well as the creatures may align themselves with either. Since there is no supreme God, and since good does not ultimately triumph over evil, many players eventually find themselves preferring to play evil roles; fewer demands are placed on them that way. 'Cornerstone [magazine] quotes Rett Kipp, a college student who plays FRP games forty hours a week: "'In D&D it's better to be evil. You get more advantages being evil, and it's easier to go on and not have to think of what to do and what not to do. If for some reason you had the idea in your head

that you no longer trust someone, if you chop him down from behind as an evil character there's no penalty for it..."[\[5\]](#)

Time-eating Monster

You can find any number of family members who have watched FRPGs gobble up their loved ones as they spend hours every day, or each week, engrossed in "their game," either online or in real life. Students have flunked out of school because they didn't go to class or do their homework. People have lost their jobs because they were more committed to playing their game than keeping their commitments at work. And nobody knows how many relationships have collapsed because people were consumed by their games to the exclusion of all else. The popular online game "EverQuest" has been aptly nicknamed "EverCrack" by many players.[\[6\]](#)

Brian Onken writes, "In a world where more and more demands are made on our time and there seems less and less time available to accomplish the tasks at hand, Dungeons & Dragons (and other fantasy role-playing games) is indeed a creature with a voracious appetite. One of the main requirements of the game is time, and lots of it. Gary Gygax, the originator of Dungeons & Dragons, says: 'the most extensive requirement is time.'[\[7\]](#)

"As advocates of the game get more involved it has a tendency to become a sort of time eating monster in and of itself. After playing the game with her family, a New West magazine researcher noted that, 'Good or evil, it becomes a compulsive force in the lives of those who play.'[\[8\]](#) "What is the problem here? Well, we are exhorted to 'walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil' (Eph. 5:15, 16). In the light of such words, a fantasy game with a ferocious appetite for time is hardly the wise way to walk. To play one will require a tremendous amount of time, and since no one wants to play badly, perhaps such time consumption would best be exchanged for more profitable

pursuits.”{9}

Bill Schnoebelen, who spent years in the occult before coming to Christ, says, “Remember, as a Christian, we are exhorted to bring ‘into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ’ (2 Cor. 10:5). How can this be done with so many hours being spent in a game which never mentions Christ and pushes the very sorcery He forbids?”{10}

Blurred Reality

While many people have no trouble distinguishing between reality and fantasy, some FRPG players are sucked into what could be called “reality distortion.” Players sometimes begin to think of their characters as real people with separate existences. (This is not limited to FRPG, however. I know of one person so caught up in the Left Behind series that she fell asleep thinking about the characters and action in the book she was reading, and upon waking, found herself praying for a character in crisis! And many fans of TV shows don’t really “get it” that the actor who plays a character has a real-life, different existence from the one he or she plays on TV. Not to mention the many letters the author of the Harry Potter books has received from children begging for acceptance into the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry!)

One Dungeon Master (the person with the most control and power in a D&D game) noted that sometimes, when a player’s character gets killed, the game player sometimes suffers psychic shock and may go into depression.{11}

Magic and the Occult

Whether the discussion is Harry Potter or D&D, the objection inevitably arises that this is make believe, it’s fiction, and fairy-tale magic doesn’t exist in the real world, so what’s the big deal?

Elliot Miller of CRI points out, "We must agree that there is a fundamental difference between actually attempting to work magic, and only pretending to do so (this point has not been sufficiently recognized in some of the Christian reviews). However real this distinction may be in the minds of the players, though, I feel no assurance that the spirit world will not respond when it is beckoned." [{12}](#)

Others experienced in spiritual warfare have observed that the very real demonic realm are quite legalistic and literal: when anyone opens a door to them, they will come through it! Most people are completely oblivious to the reality of their choices opening a door to the demonic, but the consequences catch up with them. This is one reason God has said that all forms of magic are an abomination to Him (Deut. 18) out of His loving desire to protect us.

Miller continues, "Though the possibility of actual contact with the satanic realm through role-playing cannot be denied, my greatest concern is that FRP involvement can create a predisposition toward actual occult activity. There are certain needs and desires which draw people to FRP in the first place. Many sensitive teenagers and adults continually bombarded with evolutionary theories and naturalistic philosophies, seek through FRP an escape from the cold, mechanistic view of the universe which they've been led to believe is 'reality.' Who wouldn't prefer an adventurous existence in a magical, purposeful world over the complex, impersonal 'real world' being pushed on young people by our educational institutions and the media?" [{13}](#)

I would suggest that that "predisposition toward actual occult activity" is indeed, a door propped open for demons to enter in. When players' views of magic and occultic exercises of power (even pretend) are shaped to see them in a positive, friendly light, they are accepting the very things God condemns. They are buying a lie, and intentionally or not, embracing rebellion against one of God's absolutes.

Internalizing lies and rebellion provides a place for the Enemy to gain first a foothold (Eph. 4:27) and then a stronghold (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

So the occultic magic element of D&D and any other FRPG can be spiritually dangerous.

Bill Schnoebelen says, "Even if you have no intention to 'do magic' when you play D&D, you are immersing yourself in an alien, magic worldview which can gradually change the way you think about life and spiritual matters."[{14}](#)

But what about the magic in the works of Tolkien and Lewis? That kind of fantasy magic is different because the worldview of the literature is biblical, and consistent with the world God made. Behind all the magic is a good, transcendent, holy God. Magic doesn't have a life and power of its own, as a force to be manipulated. Furthermore, the magic in the books of Tolkien and Lewis and other Christian fantasy writers is viewed passively by the reader. In D&D, the player is immersed in the story, and actively uses occult magic as part of the game.

Lust for Power

Elliot Miller writes, "The human craving for power is also given an avenue for expression in FRP games. . . The various magical abilities that players exercise in these imaginary worlds can also whet their appetites for power. The same young man who is unable to prevent his parents from separating, or to make the cute blonde in his history class notice him, can, through FRP, conquer a kingdom or obtain immense treasure simply by casting a spell.

"What happens, then, when the inevitable occurs and this young man is befriended by someone who can introduce him to the occult world? He will discover that practices he has enjoyed in his fantasy world actually go on in the real world. He

would like nothing more than to believe that he can divine the future, project his soul outside of his body, perform healings, or cast a spell and get results. The transition from make-believe sorcery to actual sorcery would not be all that difficult. Once he encounters the real power that exists in the occult world, he will happily accept the magical world view of occultism in place of the naturalism he had absorbed.”[\[15\]](#)

Bill Schnobelen makes an excellent point about the lust for power: “Make no mistake about it, magic and sorcery ARE spiritual. It does not matter if they are ‘make believe’ magic or not. It is the mind that is the battleground. I just recently had a D&D player who professed Christ tell me that everything he did had Christ in it, because Christ lived in him, even as he was playing D&D. While that may be true of a Christian, the question needs to be asked: is Christ pleased with what His servant is doing? “I used the metaphor of a porn role-playing game, where the participants play acted in various forms of sexual sin such as fornication, adultery or homosexuality. There was no actual sexual touching involved among the players, nor any nudity required. It was all in the mind. Would Jesus be pleased with that? “See, most of us can understand that concept better because most of us are more familiar with the power human sexuality can have over our minds. It is one of the most powerful forces God created within us. Yet, what most Christian gamers do not understand that magic is a kind of spiritual lust. Allowing the concepts of magic and sorcery into our minds awakens within us a kind of sexual itch that has no definable source or cause. It is, however subtle, an itch for power. Magic, at its root, is about power and about rebellion. It is about not liking how God runs the universe and thinking you can do a better job yourself.

“Now of course, we are not saying that everyone who plays D&D is going to end up a sorcerer or a Satanist. But we are saying

that being exposed to all these ideas of magic to the degree that the game requires cannot but help have a significant impact on the minds of the players, no matter if they are Christian or unbeliever, and no matter what the 'template.'

"This is not just chess, football or bridge. This is a game that envelops the player in an entirely different fantasy world in which the power of magic and violence is pervasive. It is a game with a distinct and seductive spiritual worldview that is diametrically opposed to the Bible. Yes, sorcery appears in the Bible. But it is NEVER in the context of a good thing to do. It is always presented as something dangerous and utterly contrary to the will of God.

"The question still stands. Why would a Christian wish to involve themselves in such a game?"[{16}](#)

Heart Issue

Onken and Miller offer this insightful analysis of the heart issue:

"[N]either fantasy nor fantasy role playing is wrong in and of itself. When carried out within the context of the Christian world view, it can serve as a useful and creative activity. We are creatures made in the image of an imaginative God, and we should consider it a privilege to possess and exercise this precious gift of imagination. But we must also realize our obligation before God to use this gift in a wholesome way, and to guard against any misuse.

"Discerning the difference between a wholesome use and misuse begins with the question, 'To what end or for what purpose (is the imagination) being exercised in a particular direction?' This certainly appears to be the question Jesus had in mind in His Sermon on the Mount when He stated, 'Every one who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart' (Matthew 5:28). "If Jesus taught that

lust is tantamount to adultery (which God condemns see Deuteronomy 5:18, 22:13-27), would He approve of the deliberate cultivation and enjoyment of fantasy regarding other things that God condemns? Obviously not. To fantasize about those things that God has forbidden in His Word (immorality, the occult, the pursuit of other deities all elements of Dungeons and Dragons) is tantamount to doing them. This cannot be understood in any other way than a misuse of our God-given imagination.

“With the Bible as our guide, this is what we as Christians must guard against ‘so that [we] may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects’ (Colossians 1:10).”[\[17\]](#)

Notes

1. “Fantasy Games People Play,” Christian Resource Institute, <http://www.equip.org/free/DD401.pdf>
2. Ibid, p. 2.
3. Ibid., p. 2-3.
4. “Should a Christian Play Dungeons and Dragons?”, William Schnoebelen, www.chick.com/articles/frpg.asp.
5. “Fantasy Games People Play,” p. 7.
6. “When Games Stop Being Fun,” April 12, 2002, http://news.com.com/2100-1040_3-881673.html
7. Gary Gygax, Dungeons and Dragons, basic manual. TSR Hobbies, Inc., 1979, 3. Quoted in “Fantasy Games People Play,” p. 4.
8. Moira Johnston, “It’s Only a Game Or Is It?”, New West, (August 25, 1980), 34. Quoted in “Fantasy Games People Play,” p. 4.
9. Fantasy Games People Play, p. 4.
10. Should a Christian Play Dungeons and Dragons?, op.cit.

11. John Eric Holmes, "Confessions of a Dungeon Master," *Psychology Today* (November 1980), 89. Cited in "Fantasy Games People Play," p. 4.
12. Fantasy Games People Play, p. 5.
13. Ibid.
14. Should Christians Play Dungeons and Dragons? Op cit.
15. Fantasy Games People Play, p. 5-6.
16. Should Christians Play Dungeons and Dragons? Op cit.
17. Ibid., p. 3.

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"I'm a Compulsive Masturbator!"

I hate it that I am overpowered by an addiction to porn and compulsive masturbation. I don't understand why I just can't stop it. I really loathe that part of myself. It disgusts me. Can you help?

You and millions of other people, millions MORE now that the internet has invaded our lives!

I serve on the board of [Living Hope Ministries](#), a Christ-centered outreach to those wanting to leave homosexuality. I asked Ricky Chelette, a pastor of First Baptist Church of Arlington (TX) and Executive Director of Living Hope, to share his highly understandable explanation of what happens in an addictive cycle, in a way that has also helped many people dealing with their various besetting sins. He graciously gave me permission to offer his material to answer your question. I hope it helps.

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

Understanding The Cycle of Sin

This is the cycle of sin that I often share with folks that meet with me. Though I designed this visual image for overcomers with same gender attraction (SGA), I have used it with my single adult group as a whole, for I feel the concepts are universal though the vehicles we use to accomplish our end result might be somewhat different.

Take a look at this diagram.



You begin the cycle of sin at the bottom of the page where you see the letters and blank lines.

Though many of you think that what triggers you is the sight of a good looking man/woman, I think something much deeper is taking place. Most of our triggers fall into one of these broad categories:

- **Health**

I am talking about bad health. When you are sick you are open to temptation.

- **Hunger**

When we are hungry we can feel temptation.

- **Angry**

- **Lonely**

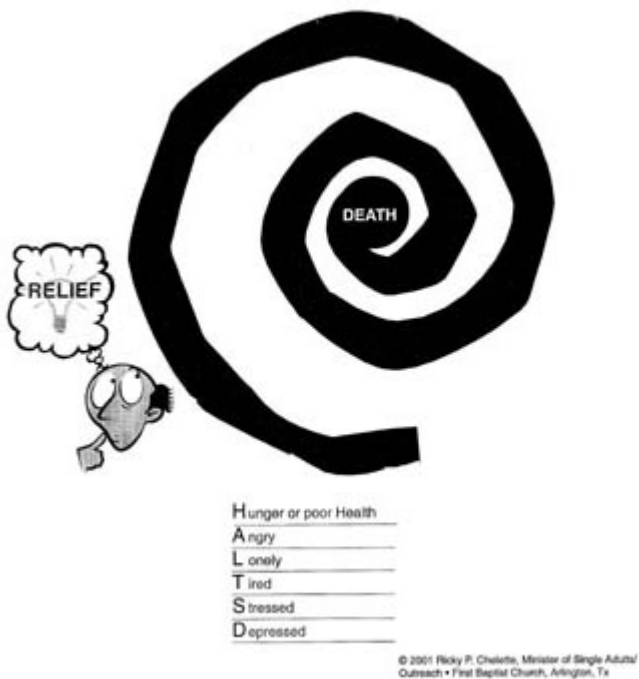
Need I say more...

- **Tired**

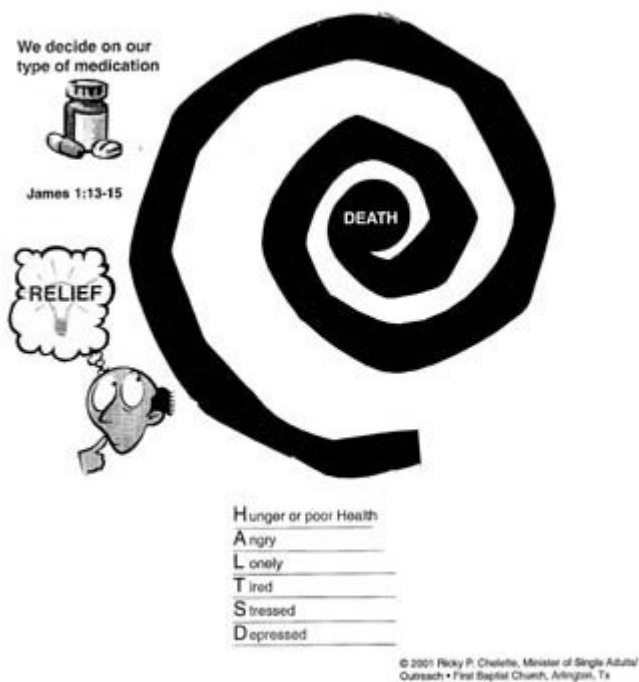
- **Stressed**

- **Depressed**

Whenever we feel one of these feelings or something closely related to one or more of them, we have the thought of RELIEF. We all want relief from the pain, hurt and stresses of our lives.



The way that we find relief is to seek some form of medication. This does not have to be actual medication, though it can be and this is how people get addicted to drugs, but it is medication all the same. It is something that causes us to experience pleasure and relief.

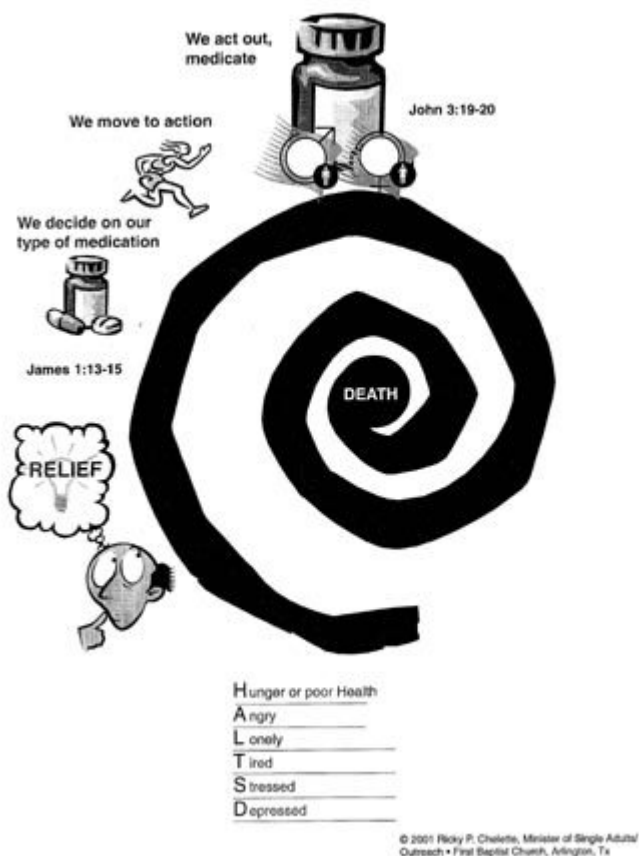


So we move from the bottom of the diagram to the thought for relief (the man and the bubble) to the thought of what we will do to medicate our pain and find relief (bottle of pills). When we decide to medicate our pain we go through some action (the runner) before we actually get to the medication.



Oddly enough, even the action toward the intended medication, is somewhat medicinal itself. For example: If you are going to do the big M (masturbation) for your medication you might get undressed and lay in bed, or jump in a warm shower. If you are going to cruise P (internet Porn) on the internet you might get into something more comfortable and begin the search process. If you are going to act out with another or "cruise," you might get cleaned up and put on some alluring clothing or other articles that would give clues to your intent. Basically, you go through some sort of ritual of preparation. It just doesn't "happen." However, we have done this ritual so many times that it feels quite automatic—we may not even realize that we are doing it. It is at this stage that most people tell me that they feel as though they really can't help themselves—"it is like another person has taken over my body and I am just on autopilot." In many ways, they really are.

I am convinced that once you move from thought to action, it is very difficult if not nearly impossible to stop the ultimate medication/action from taking place. Yes, of course God could intervene, but He has created us with free will and He rarely interferes with our willful decisions. During this phase of the cycle you are also likely to be producing adrenalin; a very strong chemical that makes a person's heart rate increase, increases their blood pressure, and gives them a sense of invincibility.



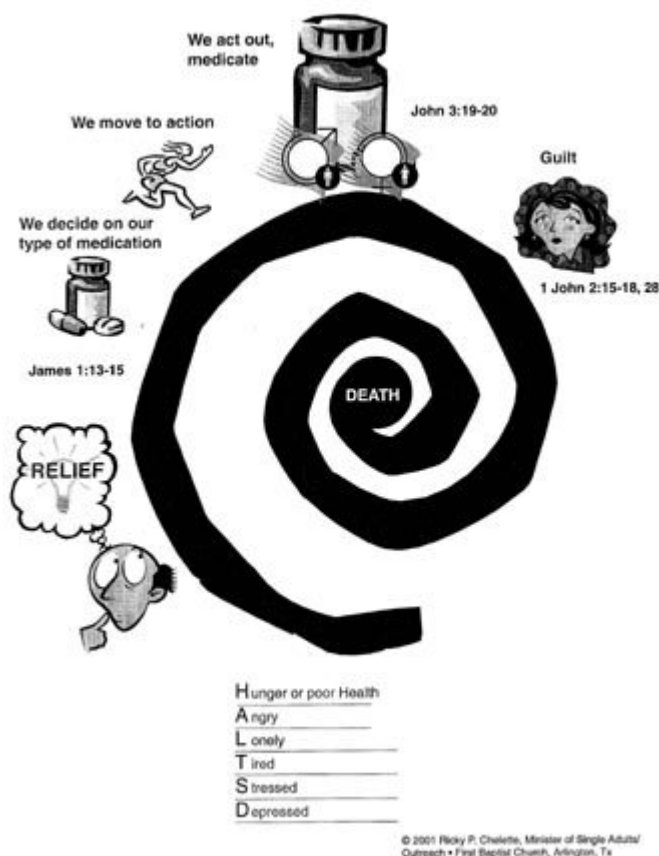
Finally, you carry out your medicative fix by doing the big M or having sex and achieving an orgasm in some way. When you do this, your brain produces a chemical called endorphin. This chemical is extremely strong, some say even ten times stronger than cocaine.

Every time you achieve an orgasm or act out in some way to achieve your medication, endorphins are produced and your body responds in a very predictable way. This is why you get that feeling of pleasure, euphoria, or peace when you orgasm (medicate). There are actually chemicals being produced in your brain that make you feel good. The preparation for the orgasm also can produce these chemicals (remember Pavlov's salivating dogs?!) but not in the same quantity or intensity as the orgasm itself. (Now you are at the top of our diagram—medicine bottle)

I want you to think of your brain as a CD. Each time endorphins are produced, you burn another track on that CD. If you keep playing the same tune (producing the same chemical)

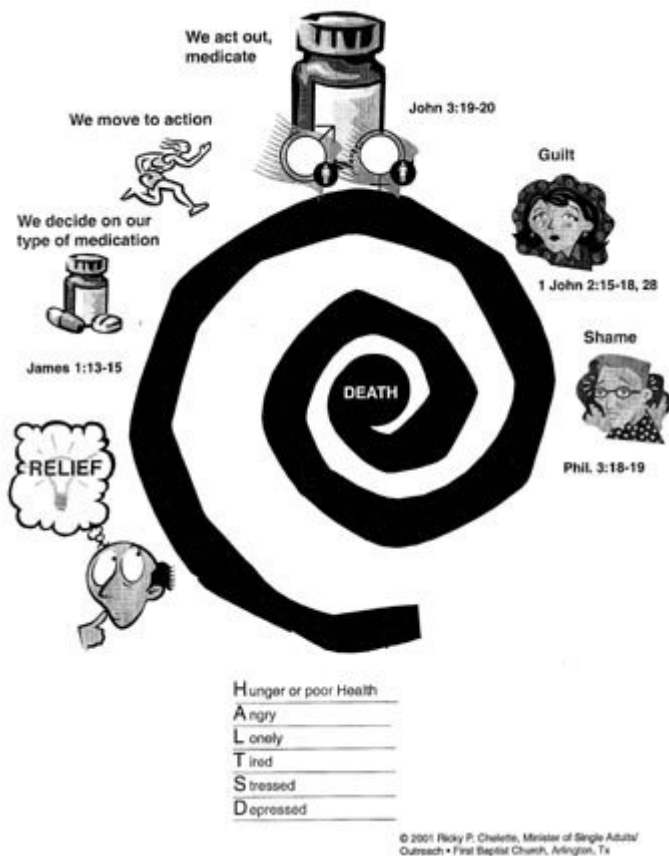
over a period of months/years, you burn a rut in your CD and it is very, VERY difficult to get out of that rut. It is a universal, psychologically proven fact. We establish pathways in our brain that demand that we do certain things and get our fix. Thus, we continue to the cycle of medicating our hurts. .

However, like every high, it is followed by an equally powerful low. The low begins as the chemicals in our brain are absorbed and assimilated into our bodies. We first begin to feel guilty (the lady that is crying on the diagram).



I believe that guilt and conviction are really good things. I see them as a way that the Spirit of God brings correction and discipline to our lives. However, many times we feel guilt, but we don't confess and repent. We simply feel guilty. We do this because we think that God will not hear our prayers. . again, for the thing that we seem to keep doing over and over. As a result, not too long after we feel guilt, Satan comes in and uses our sense of guilt to make us feel shame

(the man that looks perplexed).



Shame, I believe, is of the devil. The difference between guilt and shame is that guilt is over our actions—things we do. Shame is feeling bad about who we are—our sense of self. Shame causes us to review the lies of Satan and our old tapes that tell us that, “I am worthless. God doesn’t really love me. I am a loser. No one will ever love me. I will never be rid of this sin. I am gay. Etc., etc.”



These self-loathing statements do nothing but drag us further down the cycle so that we become confused, stressed, angry, lonely, etc. (the confused triple-headed person). And where does that lead us?

Back at the beginning of the cycle to keep repeating our sin again and again..

You should also notice that this spiral makes an inward progression that ends at a black hole. You see, what happens with our desire to medicate is that each time we do it, it takes a bit more stimulation to get us to the place that we have the same medicative results. We constantly need more. That is why the spiral is a spiral and not just a circle. It draws us in, deeper and deeper, until we reach the black hole—DEATH. James 1 says when sin is complete it will bring forth death: spiritual death, emotional death, and even physical death. The process is gradual most of the time, but it is guaranteed.

Take for example the person who starts out just looking at a

“Men’s Health” magazine. Nothing wrong with that really. But there are some buff men that have their shirts off. They get excited about that, do a little lusting and masturbate and then they decide to find some porn on the internet. At first it is “mild porn” and then they have a need to find more explicitly sexual pornography, etc. Before you know it that is not enough for them and they search for chat rooms. They start chatting dirty and eventually they decide to call and talk with someone. They won’t meet. At least not this time.... But sooner or later chatting is not enough and they meet... and they have sex.... and you know the rest of the story....



Our desire to medicate will take us further and further down this path of destruction. The results are guaranteed, but so is its destructive end.

So how do we break the cycle of sin in our lives?

I really think that there is only one opportunity for us to break the cycle. I think that we have to learn how to cope effectively and Biblically with our triggers.

If, when we realize that we are experiencing a trigger, we want relief (which we all do naturally) this is OK. However, this is where the discipline comes in. When we want relief we have to move from seeking to medicate our pain with acting out, to taking that need to medicate to the One who is the Great Physician—God. We have to go to Him, at this early stage, and tell Him what we are experiencing; what is going on with us; and ask Him for help. We have to do what 2 Cor. 10:5b says, “Take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” Every thought... not just some, but especially those that seek relief.

If we do this, we are able to kick ourselves out of the cycle of sin and find victory and freedom in Christ.

Is it that easy? Absolutely not. It is hard work. Many of you have not yet learned how to identify the triggers and that will be your first step. But with God’s help, it is doable.

Now, don’t think that this is just a struggler thing. It is not.

Here’s another example from my wife who does not struggle with SGA issues at all (thank God!). She is a nurse in ICU; a very stressful job. She is also a self-proclaimed chocoholic (any ladies relate to this?). Many times, when things are going bad at work (stress trigger), she says she can “hear” the candy machine calling her name (need for relief). She puts things in order with her patients (action/ritual) and sneaks out to the machine (more action) and eats a candy bar (medication). After she eats it she gets an insulin rush (sugar high) which makes

her feel all euphoric and wonderful only to be followed by a sugar low which makes her feel guilty and convicted because she knows that she shouldn't handle stress by eating. She then can easily slip into a shame cycle of self-loathing thinking that she is too fat (which she is not), out of control, etc. and the cycle begins again. [She told me I could share this as this diagram has helped her understand you and herself better.]

The same could be said of people who shop when they are triggered, spend money, drink coffee, become violent, use drugs or alcohol, etc. Same triggers, different courses of medication, different chemicals produced (sometimes), but all ending in the same results.

Well, I hope this makes some sense to you and is helpful to you in visualizing and getting a handle on what is taking place in your life. I would really encourage you to memorize the 2 Cor. 10:5b passage and the James 1:13-15 passage as these can help you in directing your thinking when you begin to think "RELIEF"—it will point you to Christ rather than to medication.

“Help! My Husband's Addicted to Porn!”

I am in a dilemma. I have been married for nineteen years. We have two beautiful children and what I thought was a 'picture perfect' marriage. Although I would have liked to make love more often, my husband never seemed interested – so I assumed he had a low level of sexual desire.

Recently I discovered to my horror that my husband has been

masturbating to hard-core pornography. When I approached him about it, he was very angry at first, saying that "All husbands have secrets from their wives", but then he was extremely sorry and promised that he would never touch himself again. He also stated his undying love for me and the family arrangement and I truly believed and forgave him. I was and still am deeply hurt because I also discovered that he has been doing this habitually almost every day for the duration of our marriage, waiting for me to leave the house before he "indulges." We had a good discussion where he broke down and cried and said that life was not worth living without me in it. I slowly tried to pick up the pieces and began to think that, because he was coming to me for sex more regularly, that things had changed for the better. A few days ago, while doing the laundry, I discovered a semen stain on his underwear.

I approached my husband but he profusely denied it, saying that it was a "urine dribble stain." I certainly know the difference! He then became extremely angry, stating that I was dredging up the past. He called me awful names for being so possessive. He also squeezed my arm so hard that it had bruises on it (something that has happened before). Once again, he eventually broke down crying saying that he loved me and that he felt like crashing his car into a tree. Please help me, because, other than all of this he IS a good man. He gives me flowers and gifts all the time, he constantly tells me that I am beautiful and he says "I love you" every single day. He shows great attentiveness when we do make love and I truly enjoy being with him; he is a hard worker, a positive thinker and an emotional being who can show great depths of compassion and humility. He has done so much for so many people, including me and our children – but I am having trouble dealing with this "other side." It is killing me to think that he chooses to masturbate as soon as I leave the house – after having spent the entire day together. I am frightened of his blackmailing me to stay – because I honestly think that he WOULD kill himself if I left him. Other than

this, our sex life together (when it happens) is wonderful and we spend a lot of quality time together as a family.

He will not attend counselling sessions, as he is in denial as to how hurt and shattered I am. I feel my whole married life has been based on betrayal. I now do not trust or respect my husband anymore and although I will always love him from the depths of my heart, I no longer find that I am in love with him. Please help me.

Bless your heart! I am so sorry for the horrible pain you're in!

I asked our good friend Henry Rogers, author of *The Silent War: Ministering to Those Trapped in the Deception of Pornography*, for help in answering your question. Here's his answer:

I'm convinced this man has been a habitual masturbator (is that a word?) since childhood. I suspect he battled with guilt during his teen years and yet the guilt gets stronger after marriage. The reason is simple. It's after men are married that they finally realize how selfish masturbation is. Sex between a husband and a wife is giving yourself completely to your spouse. Masturbation is giving nothing. What a contrast between the two which causes feelings of guilt.

Married men involved in habitual masturbation feel guilty because they have wives, yet at times they prefer masturbation. Masturbation can take a man into a fantasy world where he can be with anyone he wants and do anything he wants. It's selfish because the sex act that God designed for the husband and wife is taking place in the mind. Eyes can be closed to enjoy his imagination or they can be opened to enjoy pornography. Either way, it needs no one else...and it's selfish. And yes, masturbation is an addiction, too. Many men have told me they thought they would stop after marriage.

Sadly, addictions don't stop at the altar.

A wife hates it when she finds out about her husband's masturbation because she knows that her husband is enjoying a sexual release alone. The oneness is absent. She feels unwanted, unneeded...and unloved. And it hurts. When pornography is involved the pain is worse because a wife cannot compete with the women in porn. How does she compete with the fantasy who is ready any time of the day and willing to do anything he wants?

I want this wife to know that she is not alone. There are many other wives who know the pain she is experiencing. The good news is that she can help. Here's how:

1. Pray for him daily...that he would flee from this temptation. He's done it for over 20 years, and unless God, by His grace, frees him from it, he has a tough road ahead. He needs prayer most of all.

2. Don't confront him with semen stained underwear with an "I gotcha" attitude. She'll get denial in return or names and bruises. She needs to be gentle in her confrontation. Gentle, yet firm....

3. Encourage accountability with another man. All men understand masturbation, yet we act like no one else has done it except us. (Sometimes we're not very smart...) It's OK to talk about. And it's OK to be accountable to another man. We need each other, especially if this is a problem.

4. I would also tell her that his masturbation is not because she is not desirable, or pretty or sexy enough for him. Again, he's done it from childhood...and he did it with porn before they were married. She does not need to own it as her fault...which many women do.

5. Encourage him to set boundaries for himself. When is he most prone to masturbation? When is he most likely to give

in? Where does he masturbate? Does he stay up late after she goes to bed? Try to encourage him to answer these questions and then set up some boundaries or protective measures.

6. Finally, encourage him to pray, too. In fact, they can pray together! She knows his secret and she loves him. They can talk about it...

I hope you find this as helpful as I did!

Sue Bohlin
Probe Ministries

See Also:

[Pornography](#) by Kerby Anderson

Probe Answers Our Email:

- How Do I Handle My Husband's Porn Addiction?
 - [I Need Resources for My Porn Addiction](#)
 - [What's Wrong with Masturbation, Anyway?](#)
- [Men Have Always Looked at Porn—What's the Big Deal?](#)
 - [I'm a Compulsive Masturbator](#)

“I Need Resources for My Porn Addiction”

I need help with a problem. I need a number I can call—to a ministry that doesn't exist—from what I have been able to

research. It might also be that I am, well, a little crazy to expect a match for myself. Is there a ministry that you all are aware of for people to get, like a prayer partner, when you are basically a sex(porn) addict? I can not deny my Lord, but I can't seem to control myself with this sin, without compounding it into a greater sin. I hope that doesn't sound too odd. Any help would be appreciated.

I do have some suggestions for you, and bless you for asking. Praise God, there IS help!!

Online, may I suggest these sites:

My favorite is Setting Captives Free, which has a blow-your-socks-off excellent online 60-day Bible study course (that is FREE!!) called "The Way of Purity." This Christ-centered course not only addresses the core issues that contribute to a porn addiction, but they provide online mentors for every student:

www.settingcaptivesfree.com

Dr. James Dobson provides resources here:
www.drjamesdobson.org/pornography-resources

Every Man's Battle has a great book, a great seminar to attend, and online support: www.everymansbattle.com

Help in Breaking Pornography Addiction: www.freed4life.me

One other resource: Neil Anderson has helped MANY men with sex addictions through his book *A Way of Escape*.

I pray for you, _____, that God will show you the way of escape through the glorious truth that your "old man" was crucified with Christ and the new you was raised with Him. . . and that the way out of this addiction is to stop trying harder (which I'm sure you are an expert at) and depend fully on Jesus to live HIS powerful, holy life through you. The way out of sexual addiction is "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

(Colossians 1:27)

I do hope this helps.

In His grip,

Sue Bohlin

Posted 2002; revised Aug. 2023