

Salt and Light Online

Sue Bohlin



During the pandemic, I was honored to be asked to address a student leadership conference for a Christian school in the Philippines via Zoom. Looking over my notes, there isn't much here that doesn't apply to ALL of us with any kind of online connection.

In order to follow Jesus' call to be salt and light, and applying it to online life, I'd like to take a look at several dangers of the dark side of online life, as well as suggest ways to be wise in the use of this technology.

The Comparison Trap

I don't think anything has fueled the temptation to compare ourselves to others as much as social media. There is a wise saying that "Comparison is the thief of joy."

This is where our feelings go when we're caught in the comparison trap: to envy. To depression and anxiety.

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. (Proverbs 14:30)

Anxiety in a man's heart weighs him down, but a good word makes him glad. (Proverbs 12:25)

The opposite of comparing is choosing contentment.

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

And one of the best ways to choose contentment is to train yourself to practice gratitude. Give thanks for what the Lord has allowed for you.

Whatever happens, give thanks, because it is God's will in Christ Jesus that you do this. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Dangers of Social Media Apps

One of the worst is Tiktok.

A 17 year old girl wrote: "The only thing worse that happened to me besides Tiktok was my family members dying I would spend countless hours crying in my bedroom repeatedly watching Tiktok, telling myself I wasn't good enough."

Another girl told of starving herself to look like the people Tiktok decides are acceptable.

Tiktok destroys people's self-esteem. Millions of kids try to learn the dances to fit in or feel accepted.

There is a strong pro-anorexia and pro-bulimia presence, causing lots of girls to develop eating disorders because adolescents are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure.

The message on so many of the apps for girls is: If you want to be seen, heard, loved—show off your body. No one is valuing you for your heart or your mind or your passions, just your appearance. Just your body.

This is so dangerous! It's a lie that a girl's worth is in how pretty she is or how thin she is or how sexy she is.

A person's worth is set by Jesus, who was willing to pay for each one of us with His life. He says, "I made you in My image, and that makes you infinitely valuable to begin with. Then I died for you, which proves you are infinitely valuable." THAT is true worth. It's set by Jesus Himself.

Many of the apps are also dangerous because sexual predators use them to trick kids and lure them into meeting, where bad things happen. So many victims of sex trafficking are drawn in on social media.

Another way social media is dangerous is because there's where so much cyber-bullying happens.

If you see someone being bullied, ask the Lord for help and be brave. Speak up and say, "That's not okay." There is power in just one voice! And report it-to whatever authorities have to do with how you know the person, such as school, or church, or the neighborhood. Keep inviting Jesus into the situation and ask for supernatural help.

Another problem with Tiktok in particular is a different kind of danger, concerning privacy and security.

One expert said, "Anytime Amazon, major banks, and the Department of Defense ban employees from using an app for security issues, it's time for everyone to uninstall the app."

You need to know that NOTHING you put on social media is private.

Other Emotional Dangers

The more time you spend online, the greater your risk of feeling isolated and taken to a dark place emotionally. Because of the pandemic's lockdown,

depression and loneliness are at an all-time high.

Scrolling your social media feeds contributes to feeling left out.

Too much social media leads to disconnection and loneliness, and feelings of social isolation. Too much social media makes us feel inadequate because of the comparison thing.

A 2018 study published in the Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology revealed that those who limited their social media exposure to 30 minutes a day, reported that their depression lifted and their loneliness improved. Social media activist [Collin Karchner](#), founder of the “Save the Kids” movement, kept hearing from U.S. students that they reported feeling better immediately after deleting their social media apps!

Another aspect of spending too much time online is that it can cause difficulty engaging in conversations in real life. Which of course fuels the loneliness further.

Purity

Probably the MAJOR pitfall of the Internet is pornography.

The fastest growing consumer of porn is girls 15-30. I found one statistic that 70% of guys and 50% of girls struggle with a porn problem. I think it's higher than that.

I understand that when apologist and speaker Josh McDowell offered a one-month discipleship program for Christian student leader, he learned that 100% of both guys and girls confessed to problems with porn.

Brain chemicals are released when viewing pornography and during sexual experiences. These brain chemicals are intended to bond husband and wife like emotional superglue, but when people use porn, they bond to the porn instead of

an actual person.

This is a matter of spiritual warfare. The enemy of our souls is taking captive millions of Christians through pornography, then beating them up with shame and guilt.

I plead with you, install a filter or an accountability program on your phone to help you stand against this attack on your purity.

And please, don't take pictures of your bodies. And most certainly do not send any pictures of body parts to other people!

You were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:20)

The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:4)

Your body was bought by Jesus and it belongs to Him. It's not okay to give it away, even in pictures, to anyone except the person you have married.

What would being WISE look like, then?

First, recognize that this is a huge issue, especially in the Philippines. People in your country spend more time online than any other country in the world-almost 11 hours a day. You also spend more time on social media, over four hours, than any other country-twice the worldwide average.

It would be wise to choose to unplug yourselves so you can replenish your mental, emotional, and spiritual resources.

Jesus said in Matthew 16:24, "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me."

There has to be a choice to deny ourselves and say NO to the phone as a way of saying YES to Jesus.

Think about all the ways you stay tethered to your phone so it controls you.

Get a real alarm clock and watch so you're not dependent on your phone to tell you what time it is.

At night, recharge your phone in another room so your sleep won't be disturbed by the sound and light of incoming messages and notifications.

Don't post on social media when you're emotional. Don't treat social media like a diary. Then you won't regret emotional posting that embarrasses you later.

If you're already feeling down, don't scroll social media. It will make you feel even worse.

To be emotionally healthy, let yourself feel your feelings instead of distracting yourself by scrolling.

Put your phone down and be 100% mindful of what's happening in your life at that moment.

The blue light from screens decreases your melatonin levels, which leads to sleep problems. Turn off your screen an hour before bed to help yourself sleep better.

Love One Another

Before you post anything, ask:

- Is it true?
- Is it helpful?
- Is it kind?
- Will it cause drama?
- Am I posting this for the right reason?

- Would my grandmother want to see this?
- Is it mine to share?
- Would I say this or share this in real life?
- Does this glorify God?

Can you see how passing your post through the filter of these insightful questions would be loving?

The Big Picture

There are two verses that strike me as especially appropriate to this issue:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves. (Philippians 2:3)

So then, whether you eat or drink OR WHATEVER YOU DO, do it all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31)

If that is the question we ask: “Will this bring glory to God?” we will find ourselves being loving, kind, respectful Christ-followers who are bringing salt and light into the dark and corrupt world of the internet.

And we will earn the Lord’s accolade: “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/salt-and-light-online/ on May 17, 2022.

“Men Have Always Looked at Pornography-What’s the Big Deal?”

Sue Bohlin



Men have always looked at pornography—what’s the big deal?

I asked for insight on this question from my friend Emily Efurd, a licensed marriage and family counselor who has been working with sex addicts for over a dozen years. She writes:

The one thing we know from the Bible is that men and women are different. Many people take a statement like that and do a lot of damage with it, but what I mean is that God created them to be different. One of the major differences is that men are sexually aroused by visual stimuli and women are sexually aroused by feeling special, cherished and loved. Many men believe that looking at pornography makes them better lovers for their wives. Unfortunately these men are hacking away at their marriage one piece at a time. Let me tell you a story about a man named Frank.

Frank was well into his twenties when he married. He and his wife had life all planned out. They would mature in the marriage for a few years, then have a family, which they did, with a boy and a girl. He was a professional, had a good job, was a great dad and even went to church occasionally. Frank’s

pornography habits were known by his wife, she even shared in watching some of his videos, but she soon grew bored with it. Frank did not get bored with it. His viewing pornography escalated beyond *Playboy* and videos to “peep shows” and trading or buying some “really great stuff” on line. Because his wife didn’t look anymore she missed out on some great things he saw, so he began to ask her to do certain things and dress in certain garments when they made love. She began to wonder if she was not attractive to him anymore. Frank kept asking his wife to get breast implants, so that she would look like the women in the pictures. At this point she became very self-conscious about her looks, and did not like to even change clothes in front of Frank. He became irritated with her and enjoyed lovemaking with her less and less. She just wasn’t as “sexy” as he wanted her to be. He found more pleasure in waiting until his wife had gone to bed (which became earlier and earlier) and sitting in front of the computer with these “beautiful babes” and letting his imagination take over. He enjoyed pleasuring himself rather than taking pleasure in his wife. As the relationship deteriorated, they were barely speaking. As she confided in her friends about what a bum of a husband Frank was, one friend at work kept telling her how beautiful and wonderful she was, and that he’d know how to appreciate a woman like her. I don’t need to tell you how that ended. Frank suspected she was having an affair so he turned to the 16-year-old babysitter, because she looked a lot like the porn pictures.

By the time I met Frank, there had been a bitter divorce, fighting each other for custody of the children, and felony charges for aggravated sexual assault of a child (the 16-year-old babysitter). Frank told me that looking at pornography had nothing to do with the problems he had.

How does a person come back from this kind of misery? Understanding how a man conditions his own arousal pattern is the first step. As Frank looked at porn and masturbated to those images, he was conditioning his arousal to more deviant sexual images. Soon *Playboy* just didn’t do it for him anymore. He needed more graphic sexual images to masturbate to. As those images

became boring he needed something like live images to look at. As this addiction grew it is no wonder that he lost interest in his wife. He became obsessed with finding more graphic images and lost his ability to draw boundaries around what is appropriate and not appropriate.

Frank's therapy started with getting a clear understanding of how he got where he was. Then he had to make the decision that he didn't want to be there anymore and be willing to make some changes in his behavior. Giving up masturbating was difficult because even without looking at the porn images he had a great collection in his imagination. As he progressed he began to recognize times that he was free of the urge to masturbate. He became more aware of how he objectified women in general. Objectifying women means that you look at them as body parts, rather than as a person. "Wow, great breasts," "Look at that body," and undressing women in your mind is an indication you're objectifying women. I asked Frank to begin to consciously look at women in the face, noting the color of their eyes, and hair. He became more aware of how much he did see women as sexual parts. I'd known Frank about two years when he finally admitted to me that he was the one who destroyed his marriage and he took full responsibility for his other inappropriate behavior. He thanks God for the chance to change his way of thinking and living and often tells people how mighty and powerful the love of God is to forgive and restore him to dignity and integrity.

Psalm 51 tells Frank's story, because it was also King David's story.

Oh loving and kind God, have mercy.

Have pity upon me and take away the awful stain of my transgressions.

Oh wash me; cleanse me from this guilt. Let me be pure again.

For I admit my shameful deed; it haunts me day and night.

It is against you and you alone I sinned, and did this terrible thing.

You saw it all, and your sentence against me is just.

But I was born a sinner, yes from the moment my mother conceived me.

You deserve honesty from the heart; yes utter sincerity and truthfulness,
Oh give me wisdom.

Sprinkle me with the cleansing blood and I shall be clean again,
Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

And after you have punished me, give me back my joy again.

Don't keep looking at my sins—erase them from your sight.

Create in me a new, clean heart, O God, filled with clean thoughts and right desires.

Don't toss me aside, banished forever from your presence.

Don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me again the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you.

Then I will teach your ways to other sinners, and they—guilty like me—will repent and return to you.

Don't sentence me to death. Oh my God, you alone can rescue me.

Then I will sing of your forgiveness, for my lips will be unsealed—oh, how I will praise you.

Psalm 51: v. 1-15

I asked Emily for the bottom line steps to overcoming sex addiction:

1. Recognize how you got where you are by examining the small but important choices you have made over time. (Note: more in-depth information on this step is available [here](#) in the Probe Answer to E-mail "Help! I'm a Compulsive Masturbator!")
2. Confess it all as sin and choose to repent by changing your behavior. Slam the door on your former behaviors.
3. Stop masturbating, which is a type of substance abuse. (The brain chemicals activated by arousal and orgasm are a specific chemical substance that can become addictive. There is no recovery from substance without giving up "using.")

4. Stop objectifying women as sex objects or body parts and train yourself to see them as real people. For example, look them in the eye and note their eye color; note their hair color.

Hope you find this as helpful as I did.

Sue Bohlin

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“I’m a Compulsive Masturbator!”

Sue Bohlin

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.



Hunger or poor Health
A ngry
L onely
T ired
S tressed
D epressed

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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**

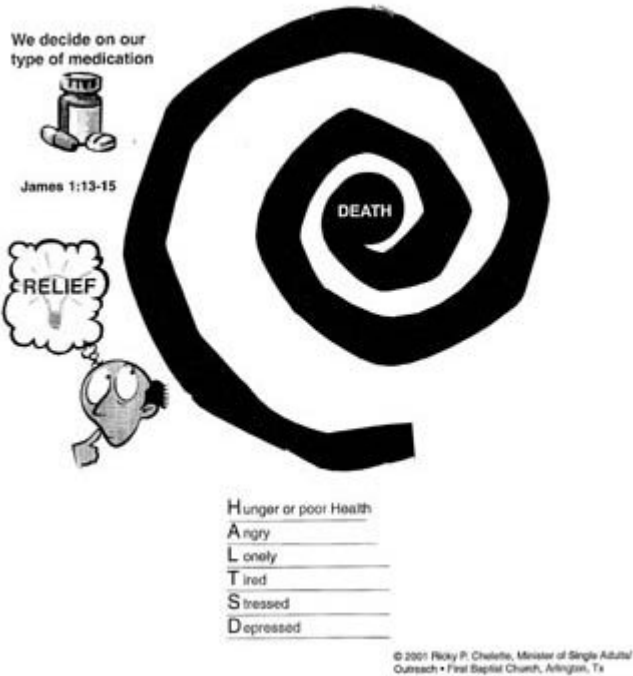
- **Stressed**

- **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.



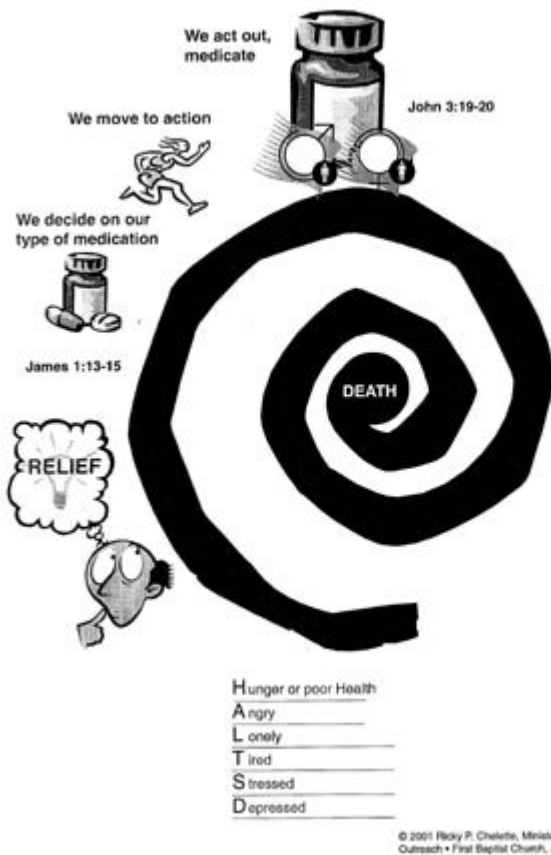
So we move from the bottom of the diagram to the thought for relief (the man and the bubble) to the thought of what we will do to medicate our pain and find relief (bottle of pills). When we decide to medicate our pain we go through some action (the runner) before we actually get to the medication.



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.



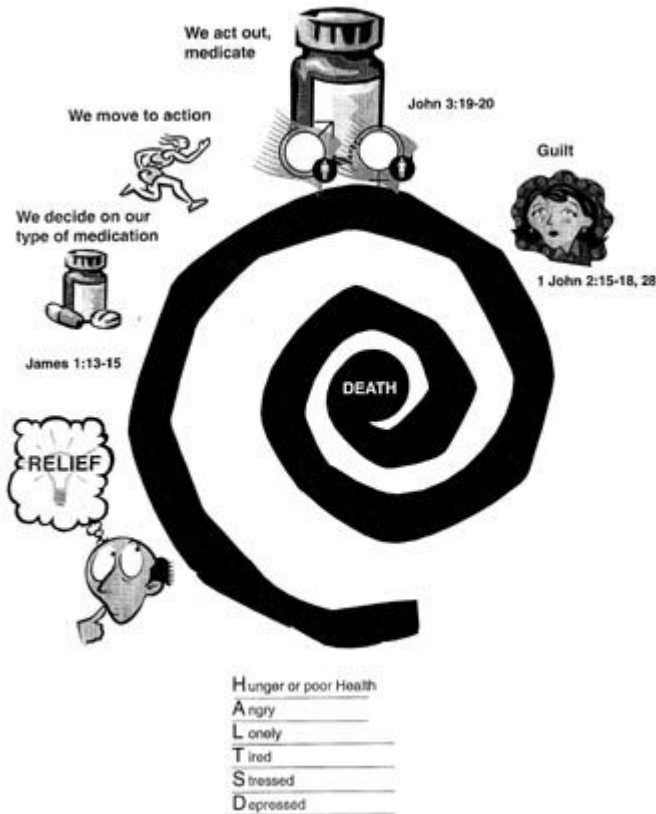
Finally, you carry out your medicative fix by doing the big M or having sex and achieving an orgasm in some way. When you do this, your brain produces a chemical called endorphin. This chemical is extremely strong, some say even ten times stronger than cocaine.

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)

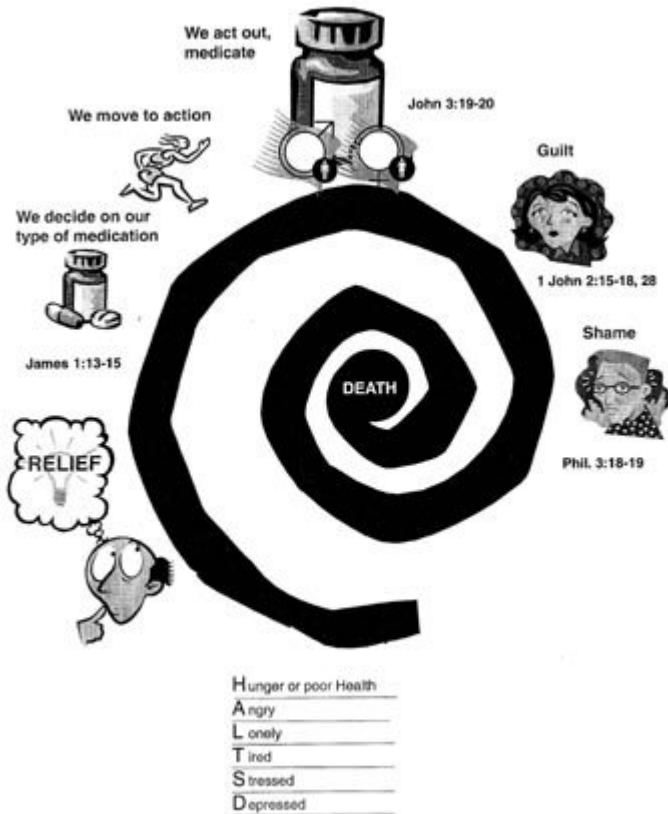
I want you to think of your brain as a CD. Each time endorphins are produced, you burn another track on that CD. If you keep playing the same tune (producing the same chemical) over a period of months/years, you burn a rut in your CD and it is very, VERY difficult to get out of that rut. It is a universal, 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).



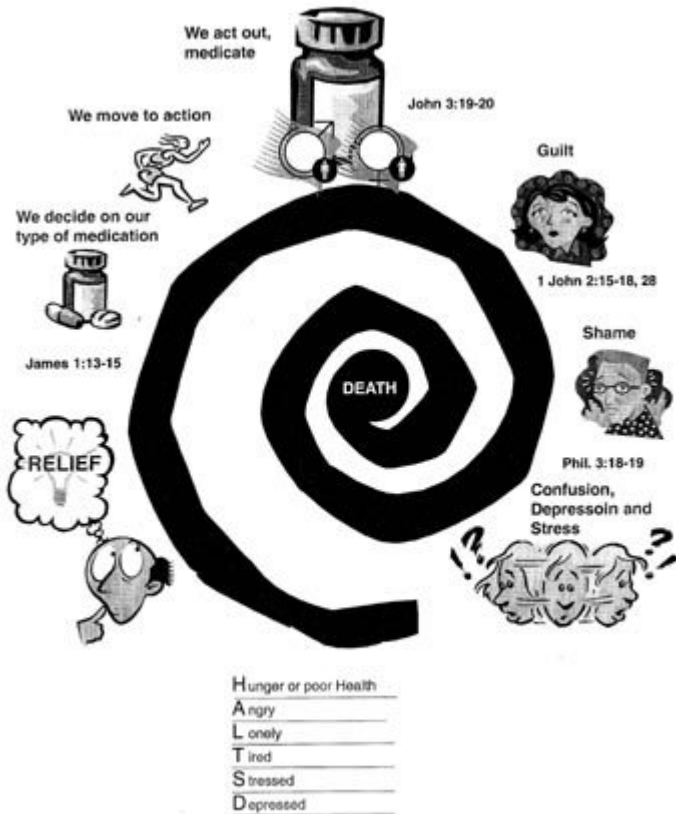
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I believe that guilt and conviction are really good things. I see them as a way that the Spirit of God brings correction and discipline to our lives. However, many times we feel guilt, but we don't confess and repent. We simply feel guilty. We do this 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).



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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!”

Sue Bohlin

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](#)

Protecting Your Family On the Internet

Sue Bohlin

Protecting from Pornography

What's available for free and sometimes delivered without asking for it is not just airbrushed naked women anymore—it's very clear pictures of people actually

engaging in various types of sex, bestiality, and adults molesting children.

Like the tobacco industry used to, the pornography industry aggressively targets young children as consumers. They position their Web sites to be found in seemingly innocent searches using words like toys, Disney, Nintendo, or dolls. According to NetValue, children spent 64.9 percent more time on pornography sites than they did on game sites in September 2000. Over one quarter (27.5%) of children age 17 and under visited an adult Web site, which represents 3 million unique underage visitors.^{1}

But they are not the only ones struggling with easy and anonymous access to pornography—over 200,000 Americans, classified as “cybersex compulsives,” are hopelessly addicted to e-porn. The study, conducted by psychologists at Stanford and Duquesne universities, appears in the March 2001 issue of the journal *Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity*.

We personally know of people now in jail for stealing to support their porn addiction. Pastors are hearing from scores of people in their congregations who are secretly addicted to e-porn. Exposure to pornography, for some, escalates into more perverse and dehumanizing images. Online pornography is so strongly graphic, sending a hormonal power surge through the brain, that it has been called “electronic crack cocaine.”

Protection from online pornography is essential. Parental involvement is the first line of defense. And Internet filters will add an additional layer of security in the home. Whether a filtered Internet service provider, a filtering software program, or even hardware filters just recently available, some level of filtering is better than none, but none are perfect. The technology is developing every day and filters are far more effective and less intrusive than a couple of years ago.

Many organizations have tested filtering technologies, and their evaluations and experience is available to parents. The Center for Decency (www.centerfordecency.org), the National Coalition for the Protection of Children

and Families (www.filterreview.org) and a combination of several organizations at www.getnetwise.org are excellent resources.

Those sites will also provide excellent advice to parents about monitoring their children or spouse's online activities as well as provide resources to deal with situations that arise if pornography is a problem in the home.

Put your computer in a public place in your home where anyone can see what's on the screen. Determine how much time children can spend online. Some families link screen time to reading time: a half-hour of reading earns you 30 minutes of Internet time. Talk to your children about the dangers of pornography. We warned our boys about "mind dirt," the kind of mental images that can't be washed out of memory like the mud that was ground into their soccer uniforms. Talk about why pornography is wrong: because it destroys the dignity that God gives people made in His image, and because it fuels our flesh instead of our spirits.^{2}

Protecting our families from Internet pornography in our homes, businesses, schools, and libraries is one of the most loving and important things we can do for them.

Protecting from Predators

Several years ago when my son was about eight or nine, we had a memorable conversation when he decided he was going to run away from home. I used all the arguments from reason to try and dissuade him, but he was determined to leave. He was quite confident that if he met any bad guys, he'd just "beat 'em up," and that would be the end of that. I had to tell him about the *real* bad guys who are out there looking for vulnerable runaways, alone and defenseless, who either capture or lure them to places where they make horrible videos of grownups doing horrible things to kids-or worse. Thankfully, he decided to stay home.

As parents, of course we want to protect our kids from predators "out there" in

the world; but it's just as important to protect them from predators online. Evil people and pedophiles know how to find children who don't know enough to be suspicious and self-protective, and they often rationalize their actions by saying that if parents don't protect their kids, then they deserve whatever happens.

One of the most unsafe places on the Internet is chat rooms. Conversations start out in a group, but one person can invite another into a private conversation. Anyone can initiate a private conversation, called an "instant message" or IM, with any other computer user once they know their nickname or screen name. I strongly suggest you teach your kids not to go into chat rooms or have private conversations unless you are supervising. Some "kids" they meet in chat rooms or IM's may not be kids at all, but adults with bad intentions.

It's essential to set down safety rules for our families. Teach your kids never to give out personal information like their age, phone number, school, or your town or city. Don't even let them use their real names. Kids must never call or meet an online friend in person unless a parent is there. And it would be wise also not to have a personal profile, which is a big part of the America Online community, but also Web sites like Yahoo (www.yahoo.com). Predators prowl the profiles looking for likely victims.

Donna Rice Hughes, [{3}](#) a children's Internet safety advocate, suggests some excellent questions to ask your kids who spend time online:

- Have you seen any pornographic pictures?
- Has anyone online talked dirty to you?
- Have you met anyone online whom you don't know?
- Has anyone asked you for personal information?
- Has anyone asked to meet you in person?

Ask the questions, and watch their body language for clues that anything has happened. We need to stay alert. We need to protect our kids from predators.

Protecting Ourselves Emotionally

The Internet has opened an almost literal Pandora's box of emotional disasters for huge numbers of people.

An innocent looking computer screen or television set, for those with Web TV, turns out to be a portal to enormously addictive and powerful relationships with people we would never otherwise meet. People can be overwhelmed by the sense of truly connecting with people in an intense, compelling way. It can be a shock and a thrill to get a computer for doing mundane tasks like word processing or bookkeeping and discover that when it connects to the Internet, there are live people on the other side of the screen! The nature of online communication is different from the face-to-face or telephone communication we're used to in real life (or "RL" in net-speak). For one thing, people can project themselves as they wish to be. The painfully shy introvert can become a witty conversationalist, the charismatic center of attention in a chat room. Overweight, slovenly people can pretend to be buff and beautiful. Middle-aged men can-and do-present themselves as young girls.

This means that online communication so often isn't between *people* as much as between *personas*. Add to that the development of a dizzily rapid sense of intimacy, and you have the potential for people to get hurt by not guarding their hearts as Proverbs 4:23 tells us to do.

For instance, one young man met disaster when, lonely after his divorce, he thought he fell in love with a young lady he met in a chat room. They started talking by phone. He professed his love for her; she professed her love for him. She visited him for a romantic weekend tryst. But it turns out she was a fourteen-year-old runaway, not eighteen as she had said, and when her parents tracked her down they had him arrested as a sex offender. [{4}](#)

Many married people have discovered how intrusive the Internet can be when

their spouses start spending hours online in chat rooms and private conversation. Many marriages have broken up over online affairs. It doesn't matter if the relationships become physical or not; when people give their affections to another person, it's adultery of the heart.

How do we protect ourselves emotionally?

First, pre-decide to guard your heart (Prov. 4:23). If you start to think and daydream about someone in a way that you would be embarrassed if others knew what you were thinking, pull back. You're probably spending too much time online and spending too much emotional energy on that person. Redirect your thoughts to ones that are more righteous.

Second, if you're married, shore up your relationship. Spend at least as much time building into your marriage as you do with online friends. Resolve not to take your spouse for granted or compare him or her to your image of your online friends. Remember that we tend to project onto online friends the qualities we want them to have, and it's not fair to compare the reality of the person you're married to with the fantasy of the *persona* on the other side of the screen. Consider that it is extremely rare, and frankly unwise, for married people to have close friends of the opposite sex.

Third, watch how much of your heart you share with people online. They are, after all, strangers. Our emotions follow our hearts, and when we give chunks of our hearts away by sharing our hopes and dreams and feelings, our affections are tied to those pieces of our hearts. I've heard it called "emotional fornication," and for good reason.

It's important to realize how quickly and easily we can fall into the false and fast intimacy of online relationships. We need to remember that the intimacy is not real, but the pain that might come from forgetting that *is* very real.

Protecting Ourselves Financially

Every year, more and more people are buying and selling on the Internet. That means more opportunity for fraud, mischief and flat-out evil intentions. How do we protect ourselves financially?[{5}](#)

First, protect your online identity. Identity theft is a growing problem, and the Internet has only made it easier. Don't store your personal information or credit card numbers with online retailers. Reputable merchants will ask if you want them to keep track of your personal information so you don't have to enter it every time. It's not that hard or time-consuming, and it's a good way to protect yourself. Don't give out more information than is necessary, especially your social security number. You're not being paranoid. You're being wise.

Now let's talk about making a purchase online. You don't have to be afraid to do this if you're dealing with a reputable company or organization. Be sure you're dealing with a real company or organization. Look for a physical address and at least one customer service number. (Call it to make sure it's active.) Check out the company online at the Better Business Bureau (www.bbb.org).

Before entering personal information, make sure you're using a secure, or encrypted, connection. Look at the site's Web address. If it changed to "https," the 's' shows that it's secure. Although, not all secure connections use the https designation. The one thing you absolutely must see is that the padlock icon on your Web browser is locked.

Once you make your purchase, print a copy of your online order and keep it for the length of the return or warranty period. Your printed copy may be the only proof of your purchase.

Use a credit card instead of a debit card. Credit cards give you bargaining leverage if you need to dispute a charge—for instance, if the item never arrived. With debit cards, it's like spending cash; once the money is out of your account,

it's gone.

If you participate in online auctions like eBay or Amazon.com, be aware that auctions are the number one online scam today.[{6}](#) If you don't want to gamble, you can use a third-party escrow service where the seller doesn't get paid until the buyer receives and approves his purchase. The most money lost in Internet scamming is through the Nigerian money offers.[{7}](#) "These offers, which used to come by airmail but now are increasingly arriving by email, promise millions of dollars in exchange for allowing your bank account to be used to safeguard someone else's riches. But the real intent is to take money out of your account, not put money in it."[{8}](#)

We need to be just as good stewards of God's money online as we do every other place.

Protecting Ourselves from Unnecessary Losses

The rise of the Internet has opened new doors to all kinds of unnecessary losses from which the wise person protects himself or herself. Probably the biggest loss is time. And probably the biggest time-waster is chat rooms. They are not productive, and many are not safe because predators prowl there. They encourage a false sense of intimacy and community. Chat rooms are a way to spend time, but when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, one wonders how much of that activity will withstand the fiery test and endure into eternity? (1 Cor. 3:12-15)

Another consumer of time is e-mail. The problem with this is that, like handwritten letters, some e-mail is valuable for true communication. And like newspapers, some is valuable for disseminating information. But a lot of time is spent forwarding messages that are actually hoaxes and urban legends. Like fake virus warnings, for instance. I get several of these a week, and often per day, urging me to forward the letter to everyone in my address book. Please, before

passing on a virus warning, check it out at one of the sites that expose virus warning hoaxes, like www.Vmyths.com. And please don't waste your time or anybody else's by passing on e-mails that promise goodies in exchange for forwarding the message to a certain number of people. There is no such thing as e-mail tracking. Nobody will know if you forwarded the message, and you won't ever get the goodies.

But real viruses are a true threat, and they can wipe out data on your computer. That is a completely unnecessary loss because of the excellent virus-protection software available today, such as Norton Anti-Virus or McAfee VirusScan. Don't open e-mail attachments if you don't know what they are or if you don't know the person who sent them. (You generally [{9}](#) don't need to worry about opening the e-mail message itself, though. It's the attachments you need to be concerned about.) Many programs infect a person's computer and send out copies of themselves to people in their address books and the sender doesn't even know it's happening. I regularly receive messages containing viruses and worms from people I don't know because I'm the one who sends out our online newsletter, the [Probe-Alert](#), and some people's infected e-mail programs automatically reply back with nasty surprises for my computer.

In this article we've looked at ways to protect ourselves and our families from online pornography and online predators. We suggested how to prevent emotional and financial disasters. And finally we've examined some unnecessary losses. Hopefully, you've found something that will help you pursue the worthy scriptural goal of "doing all to the glory of God," (1 Cor. 10:31) even in your online life.

Notes

1. "The NetValue Report on Minors Online," *Business Wire*, December 19, 2000.
2. I enthusiastically recommend two Web sites for people addicted to porn and those who love them. The first is divided into two sections, targeted at both

groups of people, with different articles on each. www.pureintimacy.org. The second is www.settingcaptivesfree.com, which features an online Bible study program ("Pure Freedom") through which many have found freedom from sexual addiction for the first time in their lives.

3. <http://www.protectkids.com>

4. <http://www.ozarkcountry.com/jerry>.

5. The Kim Komando National Talkradio Show E-Zine, May 26, 2001.

6. <http://www.natlconsumersleague.org/susantestimony52301.html>

7. <http://www.fraud.org/scamsagainstbusinesses/tips/nigerian.htm>

8. <http://www.natlconsumersleague.org/susantestimony52301.html>

9. There are exceptions, such as the Wscript.Kakworm that someone sent me. According to the Symantec web site, "The worm utilizes a known Microsoft Outlook Express security hole so that a viral file is created on the system without having to run any attachment. Simply reading the received email message causes the virus to be placed on the system." This shows the importance of running an up-to-date virus protection program, because I was alerted to the presence of the worm as soon as it arrived in my inbox and before I opened the e-mail message that contained it.

2001 Probe Ministries.

“Is it a sin for a married couple to masturbate during sex?”

Sue Bohlin

Is it a sin for a married couple to masturbate during sex? In many cases a woman can't get an orgasm without proper stimulation.

If a married couple is making love, then nothing they do together is considered masturbation. It's all part of holy sex. (Masturbation is self-pleasure by oneself.)

You're right, most women can't have an orgasm without stimulation, which is how God planned it, I think. . . .the idea being that her husband would be the one to give her pleasure that way. The Song of Solomon even has a verse about the wife asking her husband to do exactly that: “Let his left hand be under my head, and his right hand embrace me.” (SoS 2:6).

Nothing a married couple does in the marriage bed is sin as long as it is mutually acceptable and it doesn't involve anyone else (for example, porn movies or fantasies that involve another person). I think God intends for us to experience far more freedom and enjoyment than a lot of people think! May I suggest you get an EXCELLENT book for married women called *Intimate Issues* by Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus. Absolutely the best book on the subject for women out there, I think. Please also see our article [What's God's Plan for Sex in Marriage?](#)

Hope this helps!

Sue Bohlin

Probe Ministries

“I Need Resources for My Porn Addiction”

Sue Bohlin

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

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

“How Do I Handle My Husband’s Porn Addiction?”

Sue Bohlin

For the past year or so, I have been recording and watching where my husband visits hardcore porn sites. This has been extremely painful for me. What is wrong with me? He never seems interested in me, I have provided a good sexual relationship for us. He tries to hide this, I have confronted him twice, each time to be told “they aren’t real people”—YES they are! He stays up until 3 or 4 a.m. each night and views this stuff. He sleeps until 2 or 3 in the afternoon. We have a daughter who is four, I wish he would spend more time with us. I have also viewed conversations

he has had with coworkers regarding women he works with. I have viewed emails he has sent to online “whores” including pics and descriptions on what he would like to do with them. I am tired and starting to feel a little numb to all this. My doctors have told me to “learn to accept it or just leave.” This is a little more complicated than that. I have asked for counselling once — he is TOTALLY against it. I am about to give up and ask him to leave, do you think this is too excessive and that I should give him another chance? I am tired and don’t want to deal with it anymore. I hate that porn has ruined our marriage. Thank God for my closest friends and for the occasional comment from other men. Help me, please.

I am so very, very sorry that you have to deal with your husband’s addiction. PLEASE KNOW—this is not about you. There is nothing wrong with you. This is about him. You could be as gorgeous as a supermodel with the world’s most perfect body and he would still have the addiction, because it’s doing something for him that is completely separate from you.

I want to suggest some excellent resources for you to help you cope with a situation you can’t change AND to bring glory to God in the process.

Porn-Free.org has a helpful essay, “Help for Christian Spouses of Sex Addicts” at www.porn-free.org/spousehelp_christian.htm

The Covenant Eyes blog has a helpful article, [7 Questions Wives of Porn Addicts Often Ask](#).

[Spouse Healing](#) article from the Sex Addiction Lifeline Foundation.

The very wise, very experienced Renee Dallas has an excellent website called “Wifeboat” with a section for [wives of men with porn addiction](#).

There are several articles on CafeMom.com. Do a search for “wives of porn addicts”: thestir.cafemom.com/search.php?keyword=wives+of+porn+addicts.

Henry Rogers, a dear friend of Probe, has written a wonderful book on this called *The Silent War*. Having researched this difficult topic thoroughly, he says the first thing wives need to know is that IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT. IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.

In fact, in a chapter called "The Wounded Wife," he reprints "Emily's Story":

"I write this out of love. Love for the porn addict, love for his wife, and most of all for the children. I pray this chapter is used for God's glory and honor, that it might somehow prevent families from being destroyed.

"I remember listening to a panel of women James Dobson had on his radio program. They talked about being married for over 20 years and discovering their husbands were involved in pornography. It seemed so unfathomable to me that someone could be deceived for so long. I remember thinking how stupid those women were. Little did I realize I would be one of those women less than a month later.

"It was like a birth process. Pain, agony, sweat, tears, hours of intense hurt, and finally truth. My husband is a porn addict. I heard it. I reacted. For two weeks I was numb. Numb to after 20+ years knowing something was wrong, but not knowing what. A relief to finally know the truth. A relief to now live in reality in light and truth rather than the unreality of darkness and deception. My husband would never tell me the secrets of his past before our marriage. I always thought if I loved him enough some day he would tell me. If I loved him enough. . . .

"We always had a difficult marriage. My husband was always withdrawn and quiet. I thought I could help him. I was outgoing, attractive, and spontaneous. In our marriage I could never do anything good enough. I was constantly criticized and put down. I thought it was me so I started a self-improvement program, more counseling, more seminars. I learned more was never enough. My world stopped, knowing something had died in me.

“My husband always seemed to be “tuned out” in another world. He worked long hours and often fell into bed at 2 a.m. I missed him. I begged him to come home. I raised the kids as he pursued his career. I told myself I needed to help him. I poured my heart and soul into his endeavor supporting and encouraging. There were still problems. When he was home he would go into his office and read his books, newspapers, and reports, and again I would cry myself to sleep. I had others confront him. I gave this man every chance to tell me about his pornography addiction. Lies weave other lies. Secrets kill. Comparisons kill. I feel every time he looked at an image and masturbated he took away a part of me that God intended to be mine. I remember seeing him masturbate and he was in his own world, set on his own pleasure, stimulated and excited by images of women he didn’t know. It was a feeling of betrayal and heart-wrenching emptiness that a woman feels when she learns that her husband is living a lie.

“Pornography tears at the very thread of a woman and her femininity. My heart was ripped and uprooted thrown somewhere into a desert with no place to find refuge. It’s as if I wasn’t enough. Not sexy enough. Not beautiful enough. Not thin enough. Not exciting enough. Women get significance from their relationships with their husbands and when he turns to another for satisfaction it cuts her deeply at the core.

“I started buying sexy nighties, acting sexier, and suddenly I realized I was bowing down to an idol. It hurt that he chose not to tell me ... to not allow me to come alongside him as his helper. To this day he refuses to see the pain that he caused. It amazes me as a wife how we are involved in every other area of a man’s life his profit margin, his ability to manage, everything but when it comes to pornography, it’s hidden in deception. A man’s way seems right to a man. Porn addiction is very selfish. It takes and takes and doesn’t give back. It’s all for the user’s pleasure.

“Another lie is that porn does not hurt anyone. Such a web of deception. ‘And

they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness' (Eph. 4:19). There are consequences and the stakes get higher. It takes one lie to cover another. It saddens me how men can compartmentalize this sin. He has the little wife over here with precious children and this nasty sin over here for his private time, justifying it because he still loves his wife and children. You can't walk simultaneously in the darkness and the light.

"I'm a wife. I'm a wife of a porn addict. I'm relieved to know what it is, though I always knew something was wrong. Tears. Pain. Disgust. Betrayal. To face the death of a husband would be better than this. A widow has the support of the church. A porn addict leaves shame and divorce. It would be easier if he were dead. We wouldn't have to face the public humiliation and shame.

"Today is a new day. It's early morning and I must get breakfast for my children. I take each day as it comes now. Just for today. My husband still chooses his sin and refuses to take responsibility for it. I have to let him go and let the Lord deal with him. I can no longer be his excuse, his enabler. It's a new day and I'm moving on and my Deliverer is by my side. He is faithful. He will never leave me nor forsake me. He will never break His promise. To a woman who has been betrayed, this is my comfort. Hear my cry."

The Lord bless you as you seek Him on this. Again, I am so sorry.

Sue Bohlin

The Value of the Internet for Christians

Sue Bohlin

Sue Bohlin's article, originally written in 1995, asks, How should Christians deal with this new culture force? There are many worthwhile places on the Internet for believers, and this essay is heavily documented with the electronic addresses. The dangers of pornography and unwise intimacy with computer-mediated relationships are also discussed.

An Exciting Technology

The internet is a cultural force that is changing the way we live and communicate, but many people don't understand it. In this essay we'll examine the Internet as a tool for Christians to use to the glory of God while at the same time employing discernment to be wise in our use of a most exciting technology.

The internet is like our highway system, only it includes both the destinations as well as the roadways. Just as you can travel in a car over a series of connected interstates, state highways, city streets, farm-to-market roads, and gravel paths, the internet lets you travel electronically through a network of computers that lets you get just about anywhere in no time flat. The internet also includes the destinations in your electronic travels, much like different kinds of malls, where the stores are right next to each other. There are entertainment malls, where you can see pictures ranging from fine art in the Louvre (www.louvre.fr) to breaking news stories,^{1} watch video clips of live performances, and listen to speeches,^{2} music,^{3} and radio stations on the other side of the globe (www.radio.com or www.christianradio.com). There are information malls where you can do research and gather information on everything from Caribbean vacations to the Crusades to castles.^{4} There are library malls where, instead of books, you can

get files of everything from games to computer software to historical documents.[{5}](#) And there are conversation malls where you can talk to people across town or around the world.[{6}](#)

The internet also provides almost instantaneous electronic mail, or e-mail, which allows people to communicate so quickly, easily, and cheaply that e-mails now outnumber physical mail aptly nicknamed “snail mail.” You don’t have to track down paper and pen, handwrite the note or letter (and these days, legible handwriting is becoming all too rare), find a stamp and then walk it to a mailbox. Instead, those who can type find that it’s a lot faster to zip off a letter at a keyboard, type in an e-mail address, hit the “send” button, and bam! Your letter is in the other person’s mailbox waiting for them to log on and read it.

You can also subscribe to electronic, automated mailing lists, which are a blend of newsletter and discussion group devoted to a single, specialized topic. My friend Bill, whose 8-year-old daughter Cheska lost a courageous battle with cancer, was grateful for the Brain Tumor list.[{7}](#) Subscribers to this list are people with brain tumors, those whose families or friends have brain tumors, and health-care professionals who treat these patients or do research into the disease. Bill gleaned exceedingly valuable information and leads on research and therapies. He also gave and received support and encouragement from this virtual community of people bound by a common tragic bond.

The instant, easy communication of e-mail also made it possible for Cheska to receive prayer support from literally around the world. By sending prayer updates to a little more than 200 people, her father discovered that by word of mouth and computer, thousands of people all over the globe prayed for her. I discovered that same wonderful phenomenon when sending out requests for prayers and cards to the Barbershop (singing) community for my father during his battle with cancer, and he was delighted to receive encouragement from all sorts of people he didn’t know. The internet is one of the most exciting developments that the world has ever seen. Many Christians are both fearful and ignorant of it, though we don’t

have to be. Like any other kind of technology, the internet is morally neutral. It's how we use it or abuse it that makes the difference.

Home-Schoolers and Missionaries

The technology of the internet has been a tremendous boon to families. Many of them have discovered that the internet's rich informational resources have provided a way to share common interests. One father and his son like to surf the World Wide Web to explore their passions for the Civil War and astronomy.[{8}](#) Another father-son duo used the internet to decide what historical places they would visit while planning a battlefield tour. Many families have enjoyed researching their vacation destinations before leaving home. In our family, we used the internet to learn as much as we could about Costa Rica before our son headed there on a missions trip. Our other son, researching a paper for school on the artist M.C. Escher, found biographical information and examples of his artwork on the World Wide Web. It yielded excellent information and saved us a trip to the library, making both of us happy campers!

Many home-school families have discovered the benefits of the internet. There is a great deal of information online that can supplement lessons and provide resources for the parent teacher. Online encyclopedias,[{9}](#) newspapers and libraries[{10}](#) offer more information to home-schoolers than has ever been available before. But for many families, the best part of the internet (as well as forums on the online services like CompuServe and America Online) is the support and interaction they can enjoy with other home-schoolers. Families in the most remote corners of Canada can enjoy an electronic camaraderie with those in suburban Atlanta and even military families in Germany. They share insights and experiences with each other as well as brainstorming together on problems and challenges such as finding a different way to teach a child having trouble grasping a concept, or what to do with a special needs child. "Plugged-in" home-school families report that the encouragement of their online home-school communities is often what keeps them going.

As video capabilities become cheaper and more accessible, home-school families look forward to networking with others in some learning exercises. A family's geographical location won't make any difference in a virtual (electronic) classroom.

For missionaries and mission organizations, the internet has become a huge blessing. Radio and satellite links give missionaries in even the most remote outposts access to instant, inexpensive, reliable communication with their organizations and families via e-mail. The internet has shrunk the world, and missionaries no longer have to feel so isolated. One missionary in the former Soviet Union told me via e-mail that she was very grateful for almost instant access to loved ones as well as mature, wise believers who can encourage and guide her as she deals with the challenges of missions work. But the best thing, she said, was that she can ask people to pray specifically and immediately for needs and problems, and start seeing answers within hours instead of weeks or months. A missionary battling discouragement, homesickness and weakness, not to mention the intensity of spiritual warfare, can summon real-time prayer assistance from the other side of the world and experience very real support and a sense of being truly connected to the larger Body of Christ.

Whether a parent is saying goodbye to a child headed for the mission field, a foreign military post, or even to college in another part of the state, the internet has made it easier to separate knowing they can stay in close contact with their loved ones, in a world that has grown considerably smaller as the internet has grown larger.

Dangers on the Internet

The internet provides a wealth of information, but not all the information is edifying or wise. Much of it is downright silly, but some of it is actually dangerous. Fortunately, you don't have to worry that you'll turn on your computer and a pornographic picture will fall out of your monitor into your home; however,

porn pushers are getting increasingly aggressive in finding ways to send their pictures to unsuspecting people, often children.

The key to protecting our children from online pornography is the same way we protect them from printed pornography: parental vigilance. Parents need to know what their children are doing at the computer, which is why it's wise to keep the family computer in a public place. And it's also wise to become computer and internet literate ourselves. But there are some powerful tools to help parents and schools keep adult-oriented material away from children: software programs that filter out objectionable sites and prevent access to them. There are several filtered internet service providers (ISP), where the filter resides on a remote computer. This is the safest and most effective system, much harder for technically savvy kids and teens to circumvent than a filtering program that you install on your own computer.

Just having a filtering program isn't enough. Some programs work so poorly that they're actually worse than nothing at all because they give a false sense of security. Not all filtering software is created equal! Nothing will ever take the place of parental involvement and vigilance, and that will always need to be our first line of defense. But what about when our kids are at school? Administrators are very much aware of the dangers of the internet, while desiring students to have access to the incredible resources it offers. Many school districts are in the process of developing Acceptable Use Policies that will provide stringent parameters for student internet access. It's essential that parents check on the policies of both their children's schools and the local public libraries, which often provide unfiltered access to both adults and children out of a misguided (in my opinion) allegiance to the concept of no censorship.

Another danger of a very different kind also requires our vigilance. There are a lot of computer viruses floating around on the internet, which are transmitted when you transfer a file from a remote computer to your own (downloading), or from an infected diskette to a clean one.

A virus is an invisible program, written by programmers ranging from mischievous to mean-spirited, that attaches itself to a file and wreaks some degree of havoc on an unsuspecting person's computer. It's important to use software that scans your hard disk and diskettes for viruses and then destroys them. I used to neglect to keep checking my computer for viruses, and when I turned it on the day of Michelangelo's birthday, March 6, the virus of the same name wiped out all my data—mine and a few other thousand people's! A little caution goes a long way. Be sure to use, and update, virus protection software by good companies such as Norton or McAfee.

Online Communication

Both Ann Landers and Dear Abby have run an increasing number of letters in their advice columns about spouses who emotionally or physically abandoned their families after meeting people through the computer. Those who have never developed a relationship with someone who lives on the other side of a screen and a telephone line have a hard time understanding how such a thing could happen, but there is an electric thrill in the immediacy of computer communication, as if a radio personality suddenly started conversing with you through your radio.

The dynamics of computer conversation are vastly different from face-to-face discussion. There is no non-verbal element, which comprises 93% of our communication. When body language and tone of voice are missing, and words are all you have to work with, words become much more important. And words, especially those of a direct and personal nature, are very powerful. But words on a screen are enough to allow friendships to sprout up quickly and mature under the right circumstances. Many people count their online friends, some of whom they've never met, as among their most cherished relationships. And many Christians are grateful for the depth of fellowship with other believers they have found through the computer.

However, it's important to understand how online relationships differ from those

in the “real world.” Because we have very limited information about the people we communicate with, we project our preconceptions and fantasies onto them, quite unconsciously. Real life can be ordinary and drab compared to the idealized image we relate to on the screen. One person finally realized that the reason she preferred her online friends to her real-life ones was that, as she put it, she “had imbued them with magic.”

That’s why there are emotional potholes in cyberspace. A false sense of emotional intimacy is easily achieved when all you have to work with is words and thoughts and feelings. What is missing is the fullness of another person’s whole personality and the context of his or her three-dimensional life. Therefore, what people experience is generally not true intimacy, although a relationship can indeed be extremely intense and most people are unprepared for the level of intensity that can characterize online communication. Sometimes, though, that experience of emotional intimacy can come at the cost of intimacy in one’s “real life” relationships. Many husbands and wives feel shut out of their spouse’s heart and mind because they spend hours a day at the computer, communing with unseen people with whom they readily share their deepest selves.

Women are especially vulnerable in online communication for two reasons: first, because God made us verbal creatures, and we respond deeply to words. And words are everything in cyberspace. Secondly, women are vulnerable because of the pervasive loneliness in our culture. Even those in marriages and families experience unmet needs for attention, warmth, and interaction. Many women are starving for romance, and any attention from a man can feel like the romance they’re starving for. When a woman receives focused attention from a man who is listening to her heart as well as her words, it can feel like the romance God designed her to receive, and that’s why a frightening number of women become infatuated with men they’ve never even laid eyes on, although this happens to men as well. The word of God tells us to guard our hearts (Proverbs 4:23), and this is wise advice for all online communications and relationships.

Christian Resources

Never before has it been so easy to access so many Christian ministries and their material. It's now possible for us at Probe to make our radio transcripts available to anyone in the world with internet access, without printing or mailing costs. And internet surfers can stumble across biblically-based, Christian perspectives without even meaning to by using search engines, [{11}](#) programs that scour the net for anything they can find on a given subject. For example, someone looking for information on angels will find Probe's essay [{12}](#) right alongside articles from a typically New Age perspective.

If you have a computer, a modem, and an internet provider, you have access to literature and reference works beyond the scope of many libraries. One favorite internet site is the Institute for Christian Leadership's amazing "Guide to Christian Literature on the Net." [{13}](#) Here you can browse various Bibles, articles, classic essays, creeds and confessions, sermons, and reference works. They also offer the "Guide to Early Church Documents on the Net," [{14}](#) a real find for church history buffs. Wheaton College sponsors the "Christian Classics Ethereal Library (www.ccel.org), offering writings by great saints such as Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards. Their collection of reference works is thrilling to Bible students. Here you can find a concordance, Bible dictionary, a topical Bible, and Matthew Henry's commentary. One of the best Christian resource is the Bible Gateway (