

“What Sins Disqualify Me For Ministry?”

I'm a guy in my mid twenties and a few months ago, I resigned from my work as director of a local ministry because I just can't get over my struggle with pornography. I've been "clean" for weeks and sometimes months, but it seems that inevitably I fall again. I really want to break this cycle of sin and live a life of sexual purity, both inwardly and outwardly. To do that I am seeking the Lord in His Word and through prayer (though not as consistently as I should). I have people that keep me accountable. I meet weekly with a few older men for a study on sexual purity. At the same time, I want to serve the Lord in anyway he wants me to serve. But there is some confusion...I have been presented with many opportunities to serve God (leading worship, camp counselor, teaching Bible study, and doing part-time youth ministry at a local church), but I don't know if I should serve in these ways since I haven't been able to break free of this sin. So my questions: Which sins disqualify me from Christian service and/or leadership? And for which roles would those sins disqualify me?

It breaks my heart to read your question (though I am SO glad you wrote!). Not because of your actual question, but because of the mentality that indeed permeates so many churches and ministries that one has to be perfect (especially in the area of sexuality) in order to serve God. We can't be perfect, so either we allow the enemy to persuade us to disqualify ourselves, or we can find ourselves immersed in an atmosphere of impossible expectations and standards that results in secret sin and resulting hypocrisy.

I prayed about my response and talked to a number of men in leadership at my church ([Watermark Community Church](#) in Dallas), where transparency, honesty and accountability are

bedrock values.

First, let me affirm you in your decision to step down from ministry for the purpose of focusing on your relationship with Christ. It's also essential to listen to your accountability group to determine whether and when you are ready to resume a leadership position like the ones you list in your email.

From what you describe, it sounds like you may already have components in place for successfully achieving sexual purity, which is a process and not an event:

1) It's essential to actively pursue intimacy with Christ through prayer, the Word, and developing the habit of daily surrender and dependence on Him. Meditate on the truth of 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 until it soaks down into your soul and you "own" it:

And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for **power is perfected in weakness.**" Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for **when I am weak, then I am strong.**

(This is the part that differentiates trustful empowerment from "white-knuckling" it.)

The fact that you admit inconsistency in your time in the Word and in prayer is really key. Allow me to strongly encourage you to make these disciplines your highest priority in this time of learning to become an overcomer. Otherwise, it would be the equivalent of trying to train for a marathon without eating or drinking regularly!

2) It's also essential to build an accountability support system as you live in community with other Christ-followers. Naturally, there are different understandings of what

constitutes accountability, but what works very well at Watermark is a network of people with whom we can be honest, on whom we can depend to show us grace at the same time that they speak the truth to us, and who are safe people to whom we can confess our sins immediately before getting caught in a downward spiral of secrecy and dread that allows sin to continue, unrepented, for a period of time. Even people in leadership, when they confess immediately and ask for help, prayer and continued accountability, do not lose their jobs or, for volunteer leaders, their opportunity to serve through leading, if they are proactive in confessing and repenting to their accountability "safety net." One of my pastors wrote, "There are times when we need to step back from leadership positions to devote all our energies to focusing on Jesus so that we can deal with the sin that sometimes entangles us. That has happened to a number of our staff who are back in leadership positions today."

Watermark has the largest Celebrate Recovery ministry in the U.S., so some of the recovery vocabulary spills over into the rest of the church culture. We are all familiar with the phrase "struggling well," which means actively denying our flesh's tendencies and desires to stumble and sin, and when we do fall into sin, we immediately confess and repent, receive forgiveness and cleansing from the Lord (1 John 1:9), and get back up again. And we get that struggling is just an expected part of living in a fallen world, and we all struggle against various temptations. One of the pastors I talked to in preparation to answer your email stressed that what disqualifies someone from serving in leadership is not "struggling well," which is good, but engaging in continuing, unrepented sin—which also includes a rebellious, increasingly hard heart. That doesn't sound like it describes you, but that's something you and your accountability team would determine.

The CR Men's director wrote, "His struggle with pornography

sounds like it has been ongoing with consistent defeat. I am saddened that he felt the need to resign, instead of "sitting the bench" for a season. This indicates to me that he couldn't be honest with his employer (my assumption, of course). In the future, I hope and pray that _____ will see his struggle with porn as a platform of authenticity that God can use in his life to relate to and minister to others. As he relates to and ministers to others, he will experience freedom and fellowship like never before (1 John 1, 2 Cor. 1). He just needs the opportunity to begin sharing. I would highly recommend CR or some other Christ-centered recovery program."

You asked for a list of disqualifying sins and "off-limits" places of service and leadership. I don't know that such a list exists, although I do think it's important to keep in mind Paul's command and statement in 1 Cor 6:18—"Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body." Sexual sin (defined as "illicit intercourse," the meaning of *porneia*, translated "immorality") is in a different category than other sins. For example, if a man or woman in church leadership has an ongoing sin problem with having sex with anyone they're not married to, they need to direct their energies into learning chastity and purity, learning to keep their passions under control (1 Thess. 4:3-5), rather than continuing to minister to others in the name of Jesus while practicing the hypocrisy that Jesus condemned.

One of the themes that runs throughout the gospels is the importance of the heart as opposed to outward appearance. What grieved the Lord Jesus was not sinners who came to Him with a broken, contrite spirit (Ps. 51:17), but religious leaders with a hard, rebellious heart. In the Sermon on the Mount, He revealed the way God sees the sinfulness of the heart, even if it doesn't manifest in outwardly apparent sin. So I would respectfully suggest that what disqualifies someone for a position of responsibility is a hard, rebellious heart.

This may have been more than you expected when you wrote, but I do hope you find it helpful.

Warmly,
Sue Bohlin

Update 2018: Watermark is no longer using the Celebrate Recovery curriculum, though we parted from the CR folks on very good terms. We have written our own program called "re:generation," which a growing number of other churches have brought to their congregations: www.regenerationrecovery.org/.

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"What Does the Bible Say About Masturbation?"

Dr. Bohlin:

I have just read [your article on "Sexual Purity"](#) & found it to be an excellent resource. You have really hit this subject on the head.

Can you please address the following question?

I am a Christian male, age 36. My girlfriend, maybe soon to be fiance is also a Christian. We do not cohabit, nor do we have sexual relations, albeit we are not virgins.

The secular world would have us believe that masturbation is a healthy practice. Research has shown that men think about sex more often than women. Obviously men and women are wired differently.

I catch myself entertaining sexual thoughts and I feel a

tremendous amount of guilt. What does the Bible say about masturbation & entertaining sexual thoughts? I know that we can commit fornication in our hearts by our lustful thoughts & desires.

You raise a difficult and even controversial topic. Christians have disagreed on the issue of masturbation. Some allow it and some do not. Here is my take. The Bible is clear that any sexual activity outside of marriage is sin. The biblical term "fornication" (sexual immorality) simply refers to any sexual activity outside of marriage. Jesus also clearly indicated, as you mentioned, that we can commit adultery in our hearts without any physical activity involved. Part of our sanctification process is to be transformed from being self-centered to being other-centered. With this background, consider these realities. Masturbation is sexual activity outside of marriage. Most if not all masturbation is accompanied by sexual thoughts to accentuate the experience. Masturbation is essentially self-centered, seeking to fulfill one's own needs by oneself. There is no specific Biblical admonition to refrain from masturbation. However, based on the review above, it is difficult to find any justification for it either.

This is not to say, of course, that avoidance of masturbation in young men is easy. We praise God for His finished work on the cross that allows for forgiveness of past, present, and future sin, even besetting sins.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries

“Is Masturbation A Sin?”

This has plagued me for a long time. Is masturbation a sin, and if so how serious is it? I have been doing good for a while but I am starting to slip again. I need help. If you could get back to me I would be thankful and I am ashamed of this.

You raise an issue that affects more young men (and a growing number of women) than you probably realize. When young men are unmarried their sexual drive seeks satisfaction, so you are certainly not alone in this struggle. Most Christians will agree that masturbation is sin for two very important reasons.

First, God has defined sex for within marriage only. The numerous Old Testament prohibitions on fornication or sexual immorality refer to any sexual experience outside of marriage. This would included self-inflicted sexual pleasure.

Second, most masturbation takes place with pornography to look at either actually or in your mind through fantasy. Since Jesus condemned not only the act of adultery but lusting in our mind, this is clearly included.

You must also keep in mind the addictive nature of nearly all sexual sin including pornography. It eventually becomes a form of idolatry. We worship our sensual pleasure over Jesus.

Jesus' response to Peter's question as to how many times he must forgive (70 x 7) is meant to assure us of God's infinite capacity to forgive even habitual sin. Masturbation can only be conquered in the power of the Holy Spirit. If you follow Philippians 4:8 when tempted, you will find that the thoughts vanish or they remain only at your desire. It must become a question of Lordship: Jesus or you. The masturbation becomes only a symptom of a deeper need for intimacy with Christ. Habitual sin does not lead to questions of salvation but of Lordship.

I encourage you to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and everything else will follow. This is not to say it will be easy or quick. True discipleship is costly and our personal secret kingdoms must be rooted out one by one. But Jesus said I will never leave you nor forsake you. He meant it.

Also, may I suggest two websites for help with sexual addiction and pornography addiction? The first is Setting Captives Free at www.settingcaptivesfree.com, and the second is Blazing Grace at www.blazinggrace.org.

Dr. Ray Bohlin
Probe Ministries

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

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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“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](#)

Cyberporn

This article has been updated.

Please see Kerby Anderson's new article [Pornography](#).

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

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”

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

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

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": thetir.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 semi nars. 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’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 (