

The Jesus Way / THE LIFE GOD WANTS FOR YOU
Radical Recovery: Myths of Pornography
Matthew 5:27-28

If this church—building, people, and all—had been swept up into a time machine, and if we were transported today back to when Jesus lived and plopped down in Judea, our pews would be filled with Pharisees. And if they were, they would have sung these last songs about holiness with great gusto and piety. For they thought holiness had to do with what you did or didn't do, while ignoring the festering rot of thought life, a stench in the nostrils of God.

Jesus called them on the inconsistency between the action and attitude, between the hand and the heart, between deeds and desires. He called them out in The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached that we call The Sermon on the Mount.

And with that sermon, Jesus confronts us with the same truths about holiness. Holiness involves more than actions and deeds. Holiness involves our attitudes and desires. And if we think we are holy because we haven't murdered or committed adultery, we are as wrong as were the Pharisees. The Pharisees of Jesus' day have too often become the Hypocrites of Jesus' Church.

Let's see how Jesus confronts this gap in their thinking about holiness. Matthew 5:21-22, "*You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment.*" So holiness doesn't just involve refraining from murder. Holiness encompasses the inner anger that, if vented, would result in murder.

Matthew 5:27-28, "*You have heard that it was said, 'Do not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" So holiness doesn't just involve refraining from adultery. Holiness encompasses the inner lust that, if vented, would result in adultery.

Jesus raises the subject of "looking lustfully at a woman," which is a pretty succinct definition of pornography. Jesus addresses directly the sin of a sexually impure thought life.

In so doing, Jesus opens the door to teaching on this subject. But how should I, as one of your pastors, preach about this in such a congregation of various ages, backgrounds and needs? How can the sermon give help without giving offense? Well, to help in addressing this topic without offense, we have arranged for a special session of

Kids Worship during today's sermon. In the eleven years I have served here, I do not recall any sermon directly addressing the topic of sexual fantasy. Since sexual impurity is so prevalent, the topic seems long overdue. But I ask for your prayers that we would be helpful and not offensive in anything that is spoken.

[Prayer. Lord God, creator of all good things, including our bodies and the gift of sexuality, we ask for your Spirit to take the truths of Scripture to convict of sin, righteousness, and judgment. We pray for those who are currently caught in the web of pornography, that they would find Spirit-guided repentance and freedom. In the name of Jesus, Amen.]

I am glad Jesus saw fit to speak so openly about the sexual sin of thought life. People have always been vulnerable to "the lust of the flesh." Old Testament stories cause us to blush when we read of the destructive power of lust in the lives of Shechem & Dinah, Judah & Tamar, Samson & the Philistine women-of-the-month, David & Bathsheba, and David's son Amnon & his half-sister Tamar.

Unfortunately, in the life span of the current generation, the meandering path of lust has become a 12-lane freeway. Never before has "looking lustfully at a woman" become so accessible. Porn has become mainstream. There is an entrance ramp to this freeway every quarter mile and more are being constructed every month.

But there is also an exit ramp. But if you are to find the exit, or to help direct others toward it, it would be helpful to avoid believing The Myths of Pornography. You may think of others, but I have come up with ten:

1. **Pornography is a sin in a class by itself.** No, sin is sin. Sin separates you from enjoying fellowship with God. Sin destroys holiness and taints purity. So, if your area of consistent compromise is something else—overeating, misuse of alcohol, doing drugs, holding a critical spirit, or unleashing an untamed tongue—you have no right to feel smug. Your sin is no better, nor any worse, than the sin of pornography. It is a myth to think pornography is a sin in a class by itself.
2. **Pornography is not a temptation for women.** I want to get this myth dispelled right up front. Even though most of my comments will refer to the masculine gender, it is a myth to think that sexual fantasy is not also a trap for women. Mrs. Potiphar lusted for Joseph. And modern-day women indulge in sinful thoughts, stoked by soap operas, movies, magazines, and fantasy novels. Some may be mild and some may be graphic, but to think pornography is not a problem for women is to believe a myth.
3. **Pornography is a private matter and doesn't affect others.** There are so many ways pornography affects others besides the person trapped in the sinful fantasy. If married, the man diverts his God-given sexual appetite away from his

covenantal partner. Proverbs 5: 18-19 advises, “*May you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer—may her breasts satisfy you always.*” Wives married to pornography participants may close down emotionally, fearing they cannot compete with the air-brushed bodies of the on-line babes.

And whether married or not, involvement in pornography has a ripple effect in other subtle ways: the amount of time wasted that could have been used to serve others; the amount of money spent that could have been given to God’s work; the amount of nourishment fed into this seedy side of society encouraged by your patronage.

Have you ever speculated on what enterprises would thrive and what ones would go out of business if everyone’s shopping habits and tastes were the same as your family, or the same as Central Bible Church? What if everyone in the USA had the same purchasing preferences as us? I would hope there would be more parks, and less bars; more whole foods, and less junk foods; more music stores and less bail bondsmen, more fishing poles and less lottery tickets sold; and I would hope the number of adult-themed websites would plummet to zero. I could hope for that, but it wouldn’t happen. It wouldn’t happen because many people here are dabbling in or addicted to pornography. Maybe you are the only one—besides God, of course—who knows. But beware of myth #4:

4. **Pornography can be kept hidden indefinitely.** Over my 38 years of pastoral ministry, men have come to me for counsel in getting out of pornography. Often the crisis point to seek recovery came when that which they thought would be kept hidden indefinitely was discovered. One man almost lost his marriage when his wife found stuff on the computer. She was disheartened, thinking it had been stored by their teenage son. But then horrified to learn it was her husband’s. Another man was haunted by the fact his grade school aged son was introduced to the filth by discovering his stash. How does a father regain the admiration of a son in such a circumstance? It is a myth to think it can be kept hidden indefinitely.
5. **Pornography can be cured by getting married.** Men, if you have been unable to rid yourself of this sin as a single man, getting married will not be the magic elixir. Marriage does not delete this temptation.

I want every single person here to know this truth. You marry what you marry. Marriage doesn’t change people. If he or she has been lazy, unmotivated, angry, or abusive before marriage, he or she will be the same after marriage. If he has been respectful, kind, sensitive to you and to others before, marriage he will be after marriage. And if he has been addicted to pornography before marriage, you’ll live with a man addicted to pornography after marriage. If you don’t want that in your husband, make sure he has fully addressed this addiction **before** you get married.

6. **Pornography can be contained at its current level of intensity.** Like other addictions, pornography works on the basis of an adrenaline rush with diminishing returns. Like with meth, over the course of months or years of exposure, a more potent dose or more frequent hit is needed to maintain the same level of response. That's why it is a myth to think you can contain pornography at its current level of intensity. Monthly exposures will lead to weekly and then to daily. Soft core will lead to hard core. And for many the attraction of printed page or projected image becomes too mundane and calls for the more personal interaction of strip clubs or prostitutes. If you are dabbling in pornography, turn around and get out now before it is too late.
7. **Pornography exposure is accurately reported by those who are found out.** My wife Miriam and I were once trying to help a couple that was dealing with pornography in their marriage. We consulted with a professional counselor to try to gain more perspective. Among the insights she shared, this counselor said this: If a man's habit is exposed without his seeking help, and he is just trying to get out of the glaring light of truth, you can be quite confident his level of intensity is actually about two or three steps farther beyond what he admits to. If he says he only logged onto that website this once, he's done it monthly. If he admits to monthly, maybe he is accessing porn daily. If he admits to a daily habit, he's probably down at the strip club too. You get the picture. Until a man truly repents, he will minimize. When a man truly repents, he will maximize the opportunity to step out of denial and into the light.
8. **Pornography is unrelated to one's trust in God.** The heart of the temptation for pornography is the lie from Satan that God cannot be trusted to give us what we need. That was the original temptation and lie from Satan in the Garden of Eden: *"Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?...You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'" (Genesis 3:1, 4)*

We know porn is off limits for the holiness God wants for us, but if we don't seek to meet our so-called needs, will God really take care of us? I want to ask you, "Will you trust God to take care of your needs without resorting to your own independent path?" This is an appropriate question for all of us, not just those struggling with sexual purity. Will you trust God to care for you without resorting to a marriage you know he cannot bless? Or without eating that sugary dessert you know is medicating you in ungodly ways? Can you trust God with your future, with your finances, with your family? Trusting God may not bring you health and wealth, nor the fulfillment of your sexual fantasies. But trusting God is right. God is good and, "No good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly (Ps. 84:11)."

9. **Pornography addiction can be cured without radical action.** No. Jesus speaks to this point in the next words of the text, Matthew 5:29-30, *“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”*

Of course, there have been some who have stupidly taken the figurative words of Jesus literally. Not being able to cure lust, they have gouged out their eyes; or having stolen, they have cut off their hand. But having misapplied Jesus' words they found their lust unabated and their greed still with them. Lust and greed are issues of the heart, and it is to the heart the cure must be applied.

Nevertheless, Jesus figurative words carry a literal truth. Repetitive sin that has become addictive, must be addressed radically. As radical and irreversible as the gouging out of an eye or lopping off of a hand. It is a myth to think addictions can be cured without radical action. The principles of radical recovery are similar regardless of whether your struggle for holiness involves sex, or drugs and alcohol, or overeating, or any other addictive behavior. But there is hope, because the next statement is a myth too.

10. **Pornography cannot be overcome.** There are men in this church who once were enslaved to their sexual fantasy, and now are free in sexual purity. The paths they took were different, but they had some things in common. (1) **Admitted addiction.** They admitted they were addicted unable to change without radical action. In other words, they stepped out of denial into the light. (2) **Accessed accountability.** They realized they could not change themselves by themselves. Radical action demanded accountability from others. For some this accountability came in the form of Celebrate Recovery or other 12-step based programs, such as the For Men Only groups sponsored at East Hill Church. For others, accountability came through finding one or two other men with whom they could be honest and vulnerable. You can talk with Pastor Shon, Pastor David, or myself, and we may be able to link you up with resources, even with everyone's permission, form di-ads or tri-ads or quartets of men who want to support one another in abstinence from seeking out impure sources of sexuality. Many men have found progress through a combination of these radical actions of accountability.

So what about those Pharisees of Jesus' day? Whether we are admonishing the Pharisees of Jesus' day or the hypocrites of Jesus' Church, we must stay on message, the message Jesus faithfully delivered. Although we don't murder or commit adultery, we can still be estranged from the holiness of God. It is not enough not to commit adultery; we must also shun "looking lustfully at a woman." Holiness is not just about actions, but

attitudes; not just about deeds, but desires. Jesus calls us to live a holy life from the inside out.