

Pornography— Cancer of the Spirit, Termite of the Soul

For years Joe and Lorna* had as good a marriage as most.

Joe had never been physically unfaithful, though he had ogled sexy women in TV ads and watched his share of R-rated movies. But then, didn't most men, even guys from church, do that?

As Joe used the Internet at work, his curiosity led him into a pornographic website for the first time. He felt uneasy as he gazed at graphic sexual scenes, but Joe told himself there is no harm in just looking. The first level of pictures was free, so he found himself returning to the site from time to time, as well as looking up additional sites. Soon Joe began using his credit card to unlock hidden levels of porn beyond the free stuff. He witnessed perversions he had not known existed. There was a new kind of adrenalin.

Joe hardly realized how much he had begun living for this activity. He took porn breaks during his computer work, quickly switching back to his work screen when anyone entered the room. At night he stopped going to bed at the same time as Lorna, surfing the net into the small hours. He discovered electronic chat rooms where he could exchange sexual talk with women, and even sites with cams where he could engage in virtual sex. Before he knew it, Joe had developed a double life. His new life, which revolved around pornographic sex, began consuming more and more of his attention and energy.

Lorna noticed that Joe seemed more detached, less present for the family mentally and emotionally. He was irritable from lack of sleep and sometimes failed to take care of business. Lorna missed talking with him at bedtime. But she had no inkling of the truth until she asked him about some strange charges on the credit statement. Joe tried to pass it off as a few casual, curious looks at

porn. But over time the extent of his involvement surfaced. Lorna was devastated, both by the hurt of Joe's unfaithfulness and by the feeling that she was not enough for him. She wanted to leave him. But he seemed penitent and Lorna eventually agreed to try counseling. Joe's pattern would change momentarily, but again and again he lapsed. When it became evident that pornography would remain the controlling center of Joe's life, Lorna divorced him.

Pornography is one of the toughest addictions.

Like healthy body cells that go crazy and destructive, porn addiction is a cancer. Like termites, porn secretly eats away the substance of a person's life and leaves a shell. It deadens spirituality, undermines relationships and leads to pretense. Preachers have given up their ministries for it. One church lost two youth ministers in a row to Internet porn. We would be staggered if we knew how many church members indulge.

Pornography is nearly as old as the human race. But the once small monster has grown huge through combination of media technology, credit cards, and the sexual revolution. The financial profits are staggering, driving the industry to explore and exploit every kind of perversion and sexual violence. Millions are exposed to images and ideas that would never have crossed most minds two generations ago, nor been easily accessible. Most men have been affected by porn, though not all these have become addicts. Now we are told that pornography for women is rapidly catching up with that for men.

We easily underestimate the danger of pornography. It may even have the power to destroy our nation by undermining moral and spiritual values as well as marriages and families, the foundation of society. It

threatens our children's minds. Even if we take precautions at home, our kids' peers are into porn, and children can readily access porn at any library or at a friend's home. And it is no coincidence that most child molesters, rapists and sex murderers have fed on porn. What fills the mind will sooner or later be acted out in some way. We may have only begun to see the wave of crime and violence our present climate is creating. Society can only remain free when individuals control themselves.

As tough as this addiction is, the power of Christ is greater.

The gospel and the Holy Spirit can deliver the porn addict. In fact it is hard to be healed any other way. Mack was a ministry student in a Christian college. He was also hooked on porn. As a boy he had found materials hidden at home by his father. At college, as Mack grew in God's word, he went through a crisis of conscience. He knew pornography was inconsistent with his ministry goal. He confessed his problem to a trusted teacher. Through counseling, prayer, spiritual growth and structured accountability he was eventually set free. Since that time he has helped others with the same struggle.

Recovery from sexual addiction comes three ways: Liberating truth, a life-encompassing conversion and filling up on the right things.

Jesus said "The truth will make you free"
— John 8:32. All addictions are

(continued inside)

Pornography, cont.

fundamentally deceptive. And most addicts are in denial about their enslavement. Deliverance starts with confessing the truth about one's sin and one's need. Paul describes his own struggle with sin—"The law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin...What I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do...I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out...the evil I do not want to do...I keep on doing" – Romans 7:14-19. Like the prodigal in the pig pen, when deliverance becomes more important than our pride, we have a start toward home.

Other truths like these may also help us:

- ? Sexual addiction makes me less of a man, not more of one. I cannot carry my load or be a strong leader and protector for my family. I live in fear of discovery and become an abject slave who eventually would sell anything, even my marriage and family, in order to feed my craving.
- ? A husband's use of porn terribly wounds and degrades his wife. She feels inadequate and is forced to the impossible task of measuring up to the air-brushed, fantasy models in the porn flicks. Her husband has become false to his vows. His prayers cannot be heard while he disrespects and mistreats his wife – 1 Peter 3:7.
- ? Porn reduces people to no more than objects for the satisfaction of lust. Relationship and personhood become cheap. This guarantees unhappiness.
- ? Sex is not the only important thing in life. In sexual addiction, that's what it becomes. God invented sex and gave it to us as a wonderful gift to bless us. But it is only one gift of many. It becomes a curse when it dominates our life and destroys other values.
- ? I must stop kidding myself about sexual temptation. *I cannot have it both ways.* Adultery starts in the heart. Sexual purity is not possible without deciding at the deepest level who I am and what is most important. We are all tempted. What matters is our response. Joseph could never have resisted Potiphar's wife had he not fundamentally decided about purity long before.

Second, deliverance requires a life-encompassing conversion to Christ.

Legalistic, formalistic Christianity has no heart-changing power. Any amount of rules cannot curb lust – Colossians 2:20-23. We have to fall in love with Jesus and give him full lordship over our life. Before his passion Jesus said, "When I am lifted up from the earth [crucified], I will draw all people to myself." The redeeming love of God is shown in the cross as in no other way. We respond to that love and it changes us. "We love because he first loved us." When asked how the apostles could suffer in impossible ways

for the gospel, Paul answered, "The love of Christ compels us."

We always end up following what compels us the most. A deep heart conversion increases our motivation to do right. Love empowers us more than fear of punishment does. As we come to know and love Jesus, and to realize how much he loves us, we can say from the heart: "I cannot any longer do things that shame Christ. I will not break his heart. I want no more to do with what hurts others. I will not look at things that lead to sin against Christ and other people. I don't want to wound my wife any more, nor infect my children with the unclean bondage I have suffered. I want God to be able to hear my prayers for my wife and children. My life and my manhood belong to Christ and I will no longer let them be consumed by pornography. I want a life which Christ can use. Thanks to Jesus I am taking back my life."

Third, we must fill up our emptiness with worthwhile things.

Addictions thrive on two things: emptiness and unhappiness. Recovering porn addicts have the hardest time when they are down and depressed or when they are not occupied with positive things that make life worth living. Jesus said the expelled demon would return with reinforcements if he found his former host empty. Once we are into rewarding pursuits, we feel less need for the old habits and are less likely to throw away our new life by turning back.

If the thirst for pornographic pleasure is driven by hurt and bitterness from the past, the memories have to be faced and resolved through Biblical principles. Ned, a long time porn abuser, found he could not break free until he did this. Look especially at old anger and rebellion against authority. You might want to read *Making Peace with Your Past* by H. Norman Wright or *Redeeming the Past: Recovering from the Memories that Cause Our Pain* by David Seamands.

There is no magic bullet that will instantly break porn addiction. You have to take hold of help in every available way. Some pointers:

- ? Believe recovery is possible. God will forgive and help you. Corinth was full of sexual immorality. Some of the Corinthian Christians once enslaved by immorality were washed, cleansed and forgiven of those things – 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Satan would like to convince you that you are unforgivable.
- ? If married, don't lie to your mate about porn. She may be more willing to help you if she knows the concealment is over and your penitence is real.
- ? Try to understand what needs you are mistakenly trying to fill through porn. Work on these roots.
- ? Make a clean break with what entraps you—friends, internet connections, chat rooms, even TV if necessary. The

Ephesian converts who were breaking with the occult burned their sorcery books publicly – Acts 19:18-20. The great church leader Augustine broke with his former licentious, playboy life by taking seriously the words of Romans 13:13,14. If you continue to go on the internet, use a filter that is controlled by the provider, not you.

- ? Do everything possible to improve your overall spiritual health. Practice the basic spiritual disciplines. This will make you stronger for the battle.
- ? Find a prayer partner or small group who will support you but also hold you accountable. It will not be hard to find Christian men who need the same help you do.
- ? Pray God to help you find wholesome interests you can throw yourself into. Not all of them have to be religious.
- ? In dealing with sexual temptation, distraction is more effective than confrontation.
- ? Everyone who has ever overcome porn has had setbacks before victory. God knows you are trying and will not leave anyone who is. Make a covenant with him that if you fall, you will not wallow in guilt but will quickly seek forgiveness, accept it and turn your mind to other things. Wallowing only weakens you and serves Satan's purpose.
- ? You may be hindered by memory flashbacks to pornographic images of the past. But this will diminish as the proportion of wholesome material increases in your subconscious.
- ? When your eyes first encounter temptation, learn to look away, change channels, or whatever it takes, because by experience you know where hesitation can take you.
- ? If married, work on your marriage. Talk together about your needs. Get counseling if necessary. Learn the Biblical view of sex. Understand the difference between male and female needs. Deal with emotional baggage that may be hindering your sexual as well as your overall relationship.
- ? Recent books dealing with porn addiction from a Christian perspective include *A Way of Escape: Freedom from Sexual Strongholds* and *The Bondage Breaker*, both by Neil T. Anderson; and *Breaking Free: Understanding Sexual Addiction & the Healing Power of Jesus* by Russell Willingham and Bob Davies.

If you are the wife of a pornography addict—

- ? Don't blame yourself fundamentally for your husband's problem. No wife is perfect. Basically a man has to choose to be mentally pure.
- ? Though nothing justifies porn addiction, it may help you to be more understanding if you realize that men are more visual than women in their sexual makeup. Also research seems to indicate that pornographic excitement produces a different kind of chemical in the brain. Even if the wife is providing for her husband sexually, the craving for the

- experience created by that chemical remains and has to be broken.
- ? Remember that you also need grace and forgiveness. You have the hard task of being forgiving when he is truly penitent, yet confronting ongoing sin and holding him accountable. Dr. James Dobson's book *Love Must Be Tough* may help. Make sure that however frankly you talk with your husband, you don't remind him of his mother standing over him. That will defeat you. Talk to him just as someone he is hurting.
- ? You can work with your husband on your total relationship. Work together on your spiritual lives. If either or both of you need help in the sexual part of your relationship, see a trustworthy Christian counselor or sex therapist. Your own sexual interest may have been killed by the hurt you feel. You will need grace and help to recover, but you can.

Whether man or woman, using pornography will eventually eat away your relationships, your freedom, your personality and your eternal soul. Harold Burchett says you might have a huge craving for chocolate, but if you knew the candies on a plate were laced with arsenic, you would not take one. He is right. And if cancer started in your body, or termites began eating the structure of your home, you know what your priority would be. —"B." Shelburne

**All names are fictional and the accounts are based on the common experiences of pornography addicts.*

Address Change

SHBI has moved into offices at the new location of New Beginnings in Clear Lake, Houston. All postal correspondence should be addressed to 14325 Crescent Landing Dr., Houston, TX 77062-2178.

Alumni Notes

Richard Brown of Houston is recovering well after a heart transplant. Juan Pratt of Ballinger, TX, is recovering from foot surgery. Doyle Corder, Sr., of Lubbock, TX, is having some heart problems. Congratulations to Curtis and Juliette Kessler of Houston on the birth of Elliot James Apr. 12. And to Geremy and Heather Keeton of Colorado Springs on the birth of Garrison Fielder Dec. 31. Anniversary congratulations to several couples: James and Carol Sue Jolley of Hendersonville, TN, 25th Apr. 2; Sam and Muggins Leonard of Amarillo, TX, 50th; Van and Betty McCormick of Clovis, NM, 50th Feb. 14. Kenneth and Deborah Hawley have moved to Lubbock, TX, where Kenneth is teaching at Lubbock Christian University.

Books for Uganda

The Mbale, Uganda, Mission Team is

gathering donations of books for the library of the Messiah Theological Institute. Contact Carey Jones (806-792-0716 or carey@quakeravenue.com). The Mbale team also needs three volunteer school teachers to teach missionary and some area children for 9 months beginning in August. Contact Shawn Tyler (sttyler@bigfoot.com).

News of Workers

Justin and Michelle Custer will be home on summer leave from their work as teachers of missionary children near Budapest, Hungary. Mark and Era Thiesen (thiesen@globemw.net) are settling into the work well at Namikango in Malawi while Lendal and Peggy Wilks are home temporarily for Peggy's medical tests (good reports). Schalee Lewis recently began a year of work with a missionary team in Honduras. Jason and Kerri Moore have moved from Roswell, NM, to Seminole TX, where Jason will assist Leo Copeland in ministry at Westside (7th St. and Westside recently merged). Grady and Lena Bryan will be on home leave from mission work in Kiev, Ukraine, starting July 8. Very belated congratulations to Bryan Vaughn who was ordained as a deacon at Clear Lake in Houston last year.

Eddy Ketchersid of Farmers Branch, Dallas, had heart bypass surgery in April. Gordon Bickham of Corpus Christi had tests and knee replacement surgery recently. Asa Blankenship of Houston had a pacemaker installed after injuries suffered from a fall during a blackout. Leonard Ware, 95, of Phoenix has to be on oxygen often. Phil Barker of the Mt. Pleasant congregation in IN had surgery for kidney stones. Alice Ketchersid of Unionville, IN, had colon surgery some time ago. Elmer Beshears of Greenwood, AR, is losing vision due to macular degeneration. Jeff Prosis of Grants Pass, OR, had pancreatitis and gall stone surgery. Alpha Lemley of Roseburg, OR, is weak and struggling with health problems. Alberta Miller of Indianapolis had open heart surgery in Mar.

We regret the passing of a number of the Lord's workers: Reva Gage of Eldorado, AR, Jan. 24; Cleo Phillips of Weatherford, TX, Jan. 13; Floyd Pitts of Fayetteville, AR, Feb. 24; Tommye Williamson of Fort Worth, TX, Feb. 15; John Jones of Fort Worth Feb. 27; Kenneth Wofford of Lockney, TX, Jan. 19; Maxine Kessler of Baton Rouge, LA, in Feb.; Gladys Williams of Eden, TX; Sybil Chitwood of Bloomington, IN, Feb. 28; Vertis Crutchfield of Phoenix, Feb. 19; Lawrence Bedwell of Plainview, TX, Jul.; Dave Sullins of Amarillo, TX, May 03; Long-time preacher Dewey Shaw of Dallas, GA, Dec. 30; Bill Gipson of Albany, LA, Dec. 9; LaNell Lee of Lubbock, TX, Apr. 30; Gary Brown of South Houston, TX, June 4; and John Lindell of Corpus Christi, TX, buried Feb. 16.

SHBI Finances Oct.-Dec.

Operating Fund Bal. 10-1-03	\$35,946.87
Income Oct.-Dec.:	
Regular Contributions	11,285.50
Transfers from Endowment Fund	10,000.00
Total Income	21,285.50
Expense Oct.-Dec.:	
Advertising	1,706.50
Books	246.28
Conferences & Meetings	52.43
Equipment Rental & Maintenance	909.00
Health Insurance	996.41
Postage & Shipping	970.68
Salaries (3 mos.):	
Bonuses	300.00
Retirement	3,000.00
President	12,494.87
Secretary	4,204.49
Teachers (Adjunct)	420.00
Supplies	581.01
FICA, Medicare	321.79
Telephone	629.66
Total Expense	26,833.12
Operating Fund Balance 12-31-03	\$30,399.25

HONORARY GIFT

IN HONOR OF ODILLA HAYES
B. and Ruth Shelburne

IN HONOR OF NELDA APLIN
Mark and Lou Ann Gore
Wade and Christi Aplin

IN HONOR OF B. AND RUTH SHELburne
Darrell and Mary Fleming

MEMORIAL GIFTS

IN MEMORY OF JOHN HARRISON
B. and Ruth Shelburne

IN MEMORY OF MATTIE GAUTREAU
Nelda Aplin, John and Meg Gibson,
Robert and Starla Jones,
B. and Ruth Shelburne,
Ken and Marilyn Pascal,
Danny and Kathy Penn, Carrie Gautreau

IN MEMORY OF DOROTHY HARDWICK
John and Meg Gibson

ENDOWMENT FUND CONTRIBUTIONS

Don and Betty Jo Brown
Emmanuel Ike

Thank you very much for your support. We have serious need at present. The balance above reflects borrowed funds. Contributions to the Permanent Endowment Fund should be made to Main St. Church of Christ HBTW Permanent Endowment Fund. All other contributions should be made to South Houston Bible Institute. All contributions should be sent to SHBI at 14325 Crescent Landing, Houston, TX 77062-2178. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

.....BIBLE INSTITUTE

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SHBI offers tuition-free evening and occasional day courses in Bible and Christian service. Everyone is welcome. SHBI does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, sex or religious belief.

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SHBI in 2003

A strong outreach: 349 registrations, 23 courses (plus 3 courses taught in Uganda and Malawi), 5 Houston extension locations, 10 teachers (including 9 adjuncts). Our classes are welcome in more locations than we can cover. Students (including Orientals, Hispanics, African-Americans, Anglos) were from several nations and numerous denominations. Best of all were the united enthusiasm for the word and the common love for the Lord .

Distance Learning Grows: 26 courses formatted for distribution through email, CD or postal mail. Over 100 registrations per year from all over the world; as many as 50 active students at any given time. These course materials being used in Bible schools in several countries. We also offer one correspondence course by mail.

Staff: B. Shelburne, President (24th year). Sheryl Stokes, Secretary and Registrar (5th year). 9 adjunct teachers in 2003. 9 principal support volunteers in accounting, grading, records, clerical, website, distance learning and correspondence courses.

Other accomplishments: Six issues of *The Servant* newsletter. *Christian Growth Course* translated into Chichewa , and Russian translation begun. New course on *Christian Unity* written in English and translated into Chichewa. Other new courses included *Introduction to Counseling, Ministry and Technology, and The Teachings of Jesus 1*. More teaching articles posted on web site.

Finances: A difficult year, but better than 2002. Our operation is supported by Endowment Fund earnings and by current gifts from contributors. The market's decline had seriously cut our Endowment Fund value and earnings the previous year. Earnings were even lower in 2003, but the value of the Fund principal recovered somewhat. The economic decline also affected current contributions, which were at the lowest level in years. We adjusted by cutting programs in 2003 and by instituting a materials fee in classes . We also started to enlarge our regular support base by appealing to current and former students. Finding additional supporters is critical to our future.

Looking Ahead: We may soon resume offering classes on the University of Houston campus. The Russian translation of the *Christian Growth Course* will be put on our website, giving us worldwide outreach to Russian-speaking people. The course will be widely circulated in Russia. Our library will be reopened and expanded at our new location. We may revive Bible courses in Spanish this fall. Outreach should continue to grow in the Houston Area and worldwide through Internet distance learning.