



HIDDEN DANGER

SEXUAL ADDICTION AMONG CHURCH LEADERS

Shame. Anger. Despair.

Desperate hope that this time, please, it'll go away. ¶ All are real, overpowering emotions for people caught in the grips of sexual addiction . . . and for those who love them. ¶ We can toss out facts all day about whether the crisis is worse inside or outside the church. But just ask any pastor who recently resigned over his “problem with pornography.” Or ask his wife. Or ask the woman who knows she’s a sexual addict too. ¶ Ask any of them: Is it real? Does it devastate those who call Jesus their Savior? ¶ Sexual addiction is destroying the American church—and its leaders are not immune. How can we work to cultivate a culture of honesty and brokenness that will bring transformation?

Otherwise, we’re merely enforcing a culture of people trying hard to get better—where you have to hide your brokenness. ¶ How can we welcome Jesus into this very real area of our lives—into every area of sin in our lives—so that we might experience His freedom? ¶ Let this issue’s stories shock you with their honesty, drive you to prayer for yourself and every leader in your church, and open up honest conversations about where we are and how the gospel is still a power at work in our lives.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY EMMANUEL POLANCO

SEXUAL SIN AMONG US

Asking the right questions

by Alan Kraft

LET'S FACE IT: When it comes to the issue of sin, sexual sin is in a category all by itself. In the Bible, we see it overpowering the incredible strength of Samson, the unsurpassed wisdom of Solomon and even the godly passion of David. In our society, we see the emotional, physical and spiritual devastation resulting from pornography, adultery and sexual experimentation outside of marriage.

But honestly, most of us don't need these evidences from Scripture and society to know the unique power of sexual sin. We see it in the lives of the people we lead. And many of us as leaders struggle to resist its pull. Even though we know it's harmful and actively preach against it, our own failures haunt us. So, how can we defeat this sin in our lives and help our people experience freedom as well?

I wonder if the real problem is that we are focusing on the wrong question. When the primary question we are asking is, "How can I defeat this sin?" we end up unknowingly fostering a spiritual growth path that breeds self-effort, secrecy and shame. People may be trying hard to defeat this sin, but "trying hard" doesn't seem to be working. They feel like failures yet are too afraid to admit that to anyone else.

Let me suggest three alternative questions I believe are far more helpful in our desire for genuine transformation in our own lives and the lives of those we lead. >>>



WHAT AM I THIRSTY FOR?

In John 7:37, Jesus summarizes the essence of the spiritual life: “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.”

To talk about sin in terms of “thirst” changes the whole dynamic. Rather than continually scolding ourselves for our failures and making sincere promises to do better, we are invited to discover what it is we are truly thirsty for.

Rarely is a person’s pull toward Internet porn, for example, rooted in a physiological need for sex. We are thirsty for affirmation, for acceptance, for an escape from our loneliness: This beautiful woman (or handsome man) on the screen wants me. For a moment, I feel desirable, in control—but it leaves me thirsty again.

One of the most powerful questions we can ask ourselves in this battle is, *What am I really thirsty for?* After all, sin is not simply defined as “doing bad things.” It is the tendency, deeply rooted in us, to try and satisfy our soul-thirsts with something other than Jesus. Identifying that soul-thirst helps us get below the surface of our struggle and experience genuine repentance in our real places of brokenness and need.



WHERE IS JESUS IN MY STRUGGLE?

The invitation of Jesus in John 7:37 is a significantly different invitation from what most Christians embrace. At the depth of our being, we often retranslate Jesus’ words: *If anyone hasn’t sinned for a while, they can come to Me and drink.* But that’s not what Jesus says. His invitation is to the thirsty, to those who find themselves looking for life apart from Him. In that thirst—not in spite of it but in it—we can drink deeply of Jesus. We can actually welcome His Presence into our struggle, into our sin.

For some, this is a radical and perhaps even offensive concept. Many Christians believe that Jesus distances Himself from us when we sin, turning His face away in disgust or disappointment—but is that really the message of the gospel?

When Jesus hung on the cross bearing our sin, He experienced God the Father turning His face away so that you and I wouldn’t ever have to experience that again. This means that even in our sin, Jesus never looks away in disgust. He invites us to welcome Him into our thirst, drinking deeply of His Spirit at any moment in time.

What would happen if we felt a freedom to welcome Jesus into a specific sexual struggle as it happened? Instead of living in the shame of repeated failure, perhaps we would more clearly hear His voice saying, *I love you and will never leave you. You and I both know that this sexual experience won’t satisfy. I can fill your soul like nothing else can. Let’s go do something else.*

His Presence is not condemning but instead brings life—into the very place we need it most.



Seeking Satisfaction in the Right Place

by David Linde

We know that sexual purity is a matter not just of the body; more deeply, it’s a matter of the heart. After all, Jesus warned that lust was as serious as actual adultery (Matthew 5:28).

Sexual impurity is sometimes linked in Scripture with greed and idolatry (1 Corinthians 5:10,11; Ephesians 4:19), implying that one protection against impurity is a heart posture of contentment and true worship.

Put differently, this means that when our hearts find their joy in Jesus, we will be less susceptible (though not invulnerable) to the lure of impurity.

One pastor I know—commenting on his struggle with pornography—observed, “It was my drug of choice.” He sought it not merely for stimulation, but to “soothe” his heart.

Irv Woolf, director of the National Coalition for Purity, observes that individuals who are hungry, angry, lonely, tired or bored are especially vulnerable to sexual temptation.

So let’s ask ourselves: Is Jesus satisfying to our heart hunger? Do His promises translate into our contentment? Is the pursuit of His glory a sufficient and joy-yielding aim, whatever our circumstances?

If not, our hungry heart may look elsewhere. ■

David Linde is director of church resources for the EFCA’s North Central District and attends Centennial EFC in Forest Lake, Minn. He is launching a district initiative to help pastors maintain or regain sexual purity through a combination of confidentiality and accountability.



Startling Realities

- » One in three regular Internet users visits a sexually oriented site each month.
— www.bethesda workshops.org
- » Four in 10 pastors online have visited a pornographic Web site.
— “The Leadership Survey on Pastors and Internet Pornography,” January 1, 2001—full article downloadable at www.citilibrary.com with a paid subscription. (Consider how much higher this statistic might be today.)
- » In 2006, U.S. porn revenue exceeded the combined revenues of ABC, CBS and NBC.
— “2006 & 2005 US Pornography Industry Revenue Statistics,” Family Safe Media, familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html
- » Sexual addiction is actually not about sex at all. It’s an intimacy disorder—using sexual activity or a relationship in a desperate search for connection, affirmation or love. It’s a way to medicate painful feelings, experiences and memories.
— www.bethesda workshops.org
- » Read a sobering list of what sexual immorality might lead to, in “Consequences of a Moral Tumble,” by Randy Alcorn, from *Leadership Journal*, winter 1988.
— download complete article after purchasing a subscription from www.citilibrary.com

WHERE DO I START?

“This sin produces isolation—the whispered lie that you’re the only one dealing with it,” says Danté Upshaw, EFCA director of African American Ministries. “Remember: Whatever’s in the dark will come out in the light. And for a leader, it’s a bright, white light.”

But only in the light can you experience healing.

If you are a leader struggling with pornography and want help and healing—or if you’re concerned about your spouse—start by talking to a trusted friend or mentor. If you are at a loss for a safe place, contact Pastoral Care (john.herman@efca.org or 952-853-1766) to be referred to someone in your district who will walk you confidentially through steps toward this healing.



WHOM ELSE HAVE I INVITED INTO THIS BATTLE?

When we experience Jesus’ mercy in the most shame-filled places of our lives, something powerful is unleashed in our relationships. We are freed to be real, to honestly admit our sexual struggle to a friend or colleague. It is this movement out of secrecy that dramatically robs the sin of its compulsive power.

There have been times in my own life when the downward spiral of lust was pulling at me relentlessly, and I was horrified at my powerlessness to resist. In those moments, I didn’t really care what I was thirsty for and had no desire to invite Jesus into my sin, but I did realize that my hidden-ness was killing me.

In desperation, I reluctantly shared with my wife or with a trusted friend about my struggle. The impact was immediate. I felt a weight lift from my soul as the shackles of secrecy were broken.

There is incredible power when we invite a few trusted friends into the battle with us—to pray for us, to ask hard questions, to extend grace and remind us that freedom is available.

A CHURCH CULTURE OF BROKENNESS

Change happens best in an environment of authenticity and mercy—but we must be intentional about creating this atmosphere in our churches.¹ When our teaching about holiness is filled with lots of to-dos and little mercy, we convey an underlying message: *Don’t tell anyone about your struggle. Don’t admit your weakness.* This message only drives the sin deeper.

The gospel communicates a completely different message: We are all big sinners in need of a big Savior. We never outgrow this truth, no matter how many seminary degrees we hold. At the end of his life, Paul joyfully admitted, “I am the worst of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15).

Perhaps spiritual maturity is not as much about sinning less as it is about seeing more clearly the depth of our need for Jesus. In that place of brokenness and need, we are truly free—free to experience Jesus, free to be real with others and free to embrace real change. ■

¹To learn more about creating a church culture of brokenness, or to download the author’s sermon series on sexual purity, go to www.stoptryingharder.com.

Alan Kraft is lead pastor of Christ Community EFC in Greeley, Colo., and his commitment to be honest about this topic was one motivation behind writing *Good News for Those Trying Harder*, available from NextStep Resources (www.nsresources.com).



“There have been times when the **DOWNWARD SPIRAL** of lust pulled at me relentlessly and I was **HORRIFIED** at my powerlessness to resist.”



UNDERESTIMATED DANGER

How EFCA districts are helping pastors

by Rev. Matt Mitchell

THE BLUE GLOW OF THE SCREEN illuminated the hunched-over figure. A swift stream of images downloaded into his soul. For six to eight hours a day, this man accessed pornographic material in his office. ¶ He was an EFCA pastor.

The problem of sexual impurity is as old as the problem of lust. But with today's explosion of technology, unfettered access to pornography has greatly exacerbated the problem. Those at-risk include both men and women—including church leaders—who are often unaware of the full extent of the danger.

EFCA Today interviewed two EFCA district superintendents to find out how grave the dangers are and to learn what our districts and national ministries are doing to help pastors—and, through them, other church leaders—escape the traps of sexual impurity.

According to Gil Stieglitz (Western District), part of the problem is that godly pastors have their heads in the sand.

"Many of our pastors are men of such high integrity," he explains, "that when I talk about needed safeguards for their church, they are almost dumbfounded: 'Well, if you need *that* to keep yourself from pornography, *you* have a big problem.'

"Therefore, they have a hard time implementing necessary steps downstream."

Gil recommends that, as a starting place, churches install filters and accountability software on their computers (see "Accountability Web Sites" on page 17).

An even greater underestimating of the danger, both men agree, is occurring among younger church leaders. Because the American culture is so steeped in sensuality, many are dangerously desensitized and don't set appropriate boundaries.

Cal Swan (Central District) says, "What I define as pornography, they would say, 'This is just a part of life.'"

Gil agrees: "They are looking at Web sites that *we* would consider a problem, and before you know it, they click on some link, and they're swimming in a much deeper pool."

Gil advises leading young church leaders in a discussion of what *is* and what *isn't* sin. He often asks youth pastors, when they explain their definition of pornography: "Would you like your pastor or your wife to be looking at this?"

"That changes the definition."

Cal and Gil identify four major warning signs:

1. PRESSURE Many of the fallen pastors they have worked with had dynamic and growing ministries—growing beyond their abilities to keep up. With the pressure comes temptation to escape.

2. POWER Illicit sex is sometimes a misuse of power but also sometimes a searching *for* power—even power to do ministry. Gil recalls one pastor who said, "I was so 'out of gas,' I was looking for anything that would give me energy. And this gave me a little energy."

3. PAST In cases where use of pornography reaches addictive levels, Gil notes that there is often an unresolved issue of molestation or abuse.

4. PASSIVITY "Many of these men don't have a great relationship with their wife," Gil explains. "Their relationships are plastic. If you are in a well-rounded, healthy relationship with your spouse, that kind of blows up the pornographic images so they aren't so real."

When these warnings go unheeded, the danger escalates. In both districts, Cal and Gil refer to the Purity Initiative developed by EFCA Pastoral Care Ministries (below). The initiative indicates increasing levels of involvement. If not dealt with, what begins as careless curiosity can lead to the loss of ministry, credential, reputation and family.

However, the danger *can* be averted and ministry *can* be restored. At lower levels of involvement, it can be handled privately, or with your team, your spouse or your accountability partner. At higher levels, more accountability and discipline is required.

“If you have a history and you hide it, you’re in trouble,” Cal says. “But if you let someone know, we’ll work with you.”

Both the Central and Western districts are implementing an array of programs to stem the tide:



TALK ABOUT IT

CENTRAL DISTRICT LEADERS have made it as mandatory as possible for pastors and church staff to attend special meetings about sexual integrity. At each four-hour, face-to-face meeting, leaders address the biblical basis for sexual purity and the size of the problem, and Cal invites a pastor to share how it almost tore his family apart.

“It sends the message that ‘every one of us is exposed,’” Cal says. “And it gets pastors talking about the issue. They can confess with each other or with our district staff.”

Whenever he has been forced to take a pastor’s credential away, Gil delivers a frank post-mortem throughout the district of what went wrong. “That gets guys’ attention.”

Gil encourages churches to emphasize the fight against lust in some component of church life each year. Some churches highlight National Porn Awareness Sunday [xxxchurch.com/pornsunday]. Others offer retreats, recovery groups and addiction programs.

Gil feels so strongly about this that he wrote *Mission Possible: Winning the battle over temptation* (see “Resources” on page 20). He then gave a copy to each church in the Western District. Fathers are studying it with their sons to lay the foundation for purity early in life.



CALL FOR HELP

IN BOTH DISTRICTS, pastors who are struggling are encouraged again and again to seek professional help. In the Central District, in particular, after each purity program meeting, the district offers a safe, free counselor (and district staff members aren’t notified with any names or details). After each meeting, at least one pastor has called the free counselor.

Because the American culture is so steeped in **SENSUALITY**, many are dangerously **DESENSITIZED** and don’t set appropriate boundaries.



HEAD IT OFF AT THE PASS

HEALTHY MARRIAGES will fend off a lot of temptation, so both districts provide preventative maintenance. The Central District built a cabin for pastoral couples to use, free of charge, to get away and recharge their marital batteries. In the Western District, Gil is always on the lookout for pastors who are losing energy and need to get refreshed before they find themselves in trouble.

While the danger is real and growing, both superintendents have hope for leaders who address it now.

The pastor who was addicted to six to eight hours of pornography daily? Cal Swan reports that it took three or four years for that pastor. “It was difficult, painful and hard, but he embraced honesty, and now he is safe to be around and restored to ministry.”

It is possible to escape the danger. ■

Matt Mitchell is the pastor of Lanse (Pa.) EFC in the Allegheny District, and he blogs at matt-mitchell.blogspot.com



LEVEL OF INVOLVEMENT EFCA'S EXPECTATION

Uneasy conscience	Re-establish personal integrity
Self-initiated seeking of material	Develop action plan & accountability
Pattern of usage	Seek counseling & accountability
Addictive behavior	Submit to discipline procedures
Criminal behavior	Submit to discipline procedures



Access the entire document at www.efca.org/pastoralcare (search for “purity initiative”).



Accountability Web Sites

- » bsafefhome.com
- » contentwatch.com
- » covenanteyes.com
- » cyberpatrol.com
- » familyconnect.com
- » intego.com (for Macs)
- » xxxchurch.com



“At my moment of **EMPTINESS**
I was given new strength and new
EMPOWERMENT by God relationally,
spiritually and emotionally.”



A DEEPER DECEIT

Pornography masks a greater sin. by Tim Isaacson

PORNOGRAPHY IS COMPLEX. In itself, it's a heinous sin. At the same time, it involves a whole host of other deceptions, causes and sins that go much deeper than the behavior of watching explicit material.

Wayne (not his real name) has learned this in his 22-year journey as a husband, father and EFCA pastor who wrestled with pornography.

Wayne was a Midwest farm boy who lost his father at a young age. A loving and committed church filled much of the void. The church encouraged its young people in service, and Wayne was one who heard the call. After Bible College, he held a pastorate for a few years before getting his M.Div. and returning to the pastorate.

Wayne's love for pastoral ministry has been consistent in his life, and he enjoyed a good reputation and a good ministry. Yet in all of this, his struggles with temptation and sin continued.

Looking back, Wayne sees two important patterns. First was early exposure: He was introduced to pornography by an uncle while in middle school and spent time with other boys looking at their fathers' magazines and movies.

Second was something that fed his ongoing cycle of sin and shame: His loving, well-meaning church passed on the message, *Don't let anyone see you do bad things*.

This, then, was the deeper deception: He learned behavior-management techniques for sin instead of how to find, and address, the root issues.

So even though Wayne read the right books and was honest with accountability partners about his temptations and failures—"I didn't announce everything in the bulletin," he says, "but I certainly never tried to hide my struggle"—he was never encouraged to get down to the root of what led him, again and again, into the same behavior.

Wayne hadn't yet realized that he used pornography to medicate his insecurity. He had no confidence as a husband, a father or a man, and so he lived with a constant undercurrent of dissatisfaction with himself. Deep-down he felt like a fraud, but he felt compelled to keep up outward appearances. And then the affirmation he received from his performance became a substitute for applying God's grace to where he failed.

Eventually, everything came to a crisis point. Caught in an inappropriate, emotional relationship, Wayne finally confessed to his family and his church and began doing something much harder than managing behavior: He began addressing the heart issues that had led to his behavior.

One day, in a quiet wood off a lonely path, he prayed in desperation, *Lord, I think I know now what it means to say that I have nothing else but You. I might lose my family, my friends, my ministry, my reputation. All I have left is You.*

And in one of those rare times in his life, he clearly heard the Lord responding, *Now I think you get it.*

"Brokenness is a severe gift from God," Wayne says now. "We think of emptiness as weakness, but at that moment of emptiness I was given new strength and new empowerment by God relationally, spiritually and emotionally."

Four years after that time of breaking, Wayne is no longer under church discipline. He has returned to pastoral ministry and often helps other men struggling with sexual temptation.

Those four years represent a long, hard battle. But sin's multiple levels of deceit had already cost him many more. Wayne is now living out the reality of who Christ says he is, in a more biblical and honest relationship with his Lord and with the people in his life. ■

Tim Isaacson is pastor of Open Table Community EFC in Chamblee, Ga. He blogs at opentablecommunity.wordpress.com

**We're
Still
Not Free**
by the wife of a
former EFCA pastor

WHEN MY HUSBAND'S STRUGGLE WITH PORNOGRAPHY came to a head, he was pastor of a growing church. For more than a decade we followed the same pattern: me forgiving, and he trying yet another approach to address the issue but always ending in failure. At first I talked to no one—I was both too ashamed and wanted to protect his reputation. Eventually, I talked with a counselor. And eventually, he left the ministry, becoming increasingly depressed and isolated.

I hope that someday I will be able to see God's perfect wisdom in all of this. Honestly, I'm just worn out. ■

IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT MEN

by an anonymous female EFCA lay leader

WHENEVER SEX ADDICTION IS MENTIONED in the church, it's always addressed to "you men." Women are "the ladies"; they're not expected to be looking at pornography. So if you do, you feel like a freak, which increases shame and guilt.

The stereotype excuse has been that men are very visual. Well, I'm extremely visual, and I've been looking at this stuff since I was 5 years old. That stereotype is shifting because of how we're visually bombarded in our culture. With sex addiction, the playing field is becoming level.

I guarantee: Women who struggle with this are coming into our churches, and we're not ready for them.

After I got married, I faithfully attended churches and Bible studies, and I learned the Word, soaking it in. But my childhood pornography addiction came along with me.

From time to time I would re-collect pornography, feel the guilt, repent, get rid of it. The pattern continued throughout my marriage. It wasn't until recently that I embraced that I am a female with a sex addiction. As with other women, it's not just a matter of reading romance novels. It's a deep-seated, not-pleasant-to-talk-about, hard-core pornography addiction.

We need to talk about women and sexual addiction. The longer it's kept secret, the more the enemy feeds on that. Churches need to create an environment where it's safe to come forward with *anything*. ■

RESOURCES

Dealing with the deep places of the heart cannot be done in isolation. Consider walking through these resources with a safe friend:

EFCA RESOURCES

Order from *NextStep Resources*: (800) 444-BOOK or www.nsresources.com

- » **Good News for Those Trying Harder**, by Alan Kraft, pastor of Christ Community Church, Greeley, Colo. The author invites us to be still and hear the twin melodies that comprise the good news of the gospel—brokenness and faith. (\$10.97)
- » **Mission Possible: Winning the battle over temptation**, by Dr. Gil Stieglitz, superintendent of the EFCA Western District In this hard-hitting but practical book, the author offers real answers for men on how to develop and maintain a pure mind. (\$17.00)
- » **"Behind Closed Doors,"** sermon series by Alan Kraft, pastor of Christ Community Church, Greeley, Colo. (Download from www.stoptryingharder.com)

NON-EFCA RESOURCES

- » **www.exxit.org** Hundreds of three-minute Bible studies as a resource for those struggling with pornography
- » **"Somebody's Daughter"** 62-minute DVD with testimonies from individuals about their struggles with pornography. Includes four music videos. (\$19.99, order from 877-298-9081 or www.somebodysdaughter.org)
- » **Women Reaching Women in Crisis: Sexual addiction**, by Marnie Ferree One in a series of online resources for women's ministry leaders. This resource also touches on helping women whose husbands struggle with a sexual addiction. (\$6.95 from LifeWay Christian Stores—visit www.lifewaystores.com and enter this title)
- » **XXX Church (www.xxxchurch.com)** Resources for those desiring purity, including a computer program e-mails a designated accountability partner when you have visited a questionable site or have disabled the software.
- » **False Intimacy: Understanding the struggle of sexual addiction**, by Harry W. Schaumburg The author goes beyond behavioral symptoms and willpower-based solutions to provide biblical guideposts for the journey to restoration. (\$11.20)
- » **Bethesda Workshops** (www.bethesdaworkshops.org) Provides Christian treatment for sexual addiction recovery, with resources and intensive workshops for those who struggle and those who love them.
- » **Crossroads: A step-by-step guide away from addiction**, by Edward T. Welch Each of us is a potential addict—whether with drugs, alcohol, food, gambling or sex, to name a few. Eventually, every addict finds himself at a crossroads. (Study guide, \$20; facilitator's guide, \$35; order from newgrowthpress.com or 877-647-2233)
- » **Setting Captives Free** (www.settingcaptivesfree.com) Ministry that includes free online Bible Study programs for adults as well as teens—to assist you in helping others battle pornography.
- » **Pure Life Ministries** (888-PURELIFE, www.purelifeministries.org) Counseling ministry aimed at helping men get free from sexual sin, including a residential program, phone counseling for husbands as well as wives, resources, and an annual conference.