

Life Issues

The Stronghold of Sexual Addictions

Stan's Story

Stan has been a Christian since age eight. He's married to a loving wife and has two children, but because he's so involved at church, no one knows Stan feels a great deal of guilt, pressure and emptiness inside. He can't say he "experiences" God's love.

When he was a boy, Stan discovered a stash of pornography in his father's desk. Following that, he occasionally sought out such material. In his adult life, he rationalizes that this habit is fairly harmless and helps relieve stress. Stan's wife discovered his "secret" years ago, but has been afraid to ask him about it.

Last year, Stan lost his job and the stress increased. That's when the occasional viewing didn't seem like enough. He began spending a lot of time watching illicit cable movies and Internet pornography. He became moody and withdrew from his wife, rarely expressing affection to her or anyone else.

Stan is a fictitious character, but his story represents many who didn't intend to become addicted to pornography. Due to fear or pride, they avoid exposing weaknesses and pain and use sex as a secret escape from them. They feel they have a handle on the habits until the addiction controls them instead. Access to Internet pornography has multiplied this problem. "Prior to the Internet, society's access to pornography was a far more public affair. In other words, partakers had to have nerve enough to walk into an establishment and make a purchase. No longer. We can now sit in our "Beaver Cleaver" homes with our white picket fences and open the attic door of pornography through the Internet."¹

Stealing Our Satisfaction

As in Stan's case, the 'high' an addict receives only temporarily shifts his mood and the results are shorter in duration each time. Recall God's cry in Isaiah 55:2, "Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?" This form of "idolatry" turns us from God as we seek a substitute, hoping it will bring relief to our pain and the pressures of life. The "high" delivered by the "idol" is mistaken for real satisfaction when, in fact, authentic satisfaction can only be found in a deep and growing relationship with God. Remember Jesus' response to the Samaritan woman's attempt to find satisfaction in the wrong places: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst."²

Author and Bible teacher, Beth Moore says, "The void God created in our lives for Himself will demand attention. Whether or not we realize it, we look desperately for something to satisfy us and fill the empty places. Our craving to be filled is so strong that the moment something or someone seems to meet our need, we feel an overwhelming temptation to worship it."³ Ashamed, we keep these behaviors a secret, allowing them to grow. If we, how-

ever, humbly and openly bring them to God, we can begin to realize that "finding satisfaction and fullness in Christ was never meant to be a secret treasure only a few could find. The enemy tries to make it seem so elusive."⁴ Satisfaction in a relationship with God is meant for every believer!

While sex is a deeply personal and vulnerable area which we aren't prone to discuss, the church must begin addressing the difficult issues attacking this generation. Seemingly, Satan particularly targets the area of our sexuality as much, if not more than any other area. It's not surprising, since:

- The effects are extremely invasive and have long-term effects.
- The temporary satisfaction it provides is very addictive.
- It can deeply affect our sense of self and God.
- It has great potential to damage the relationships closest to us.
- Our Creator provided sex as a beautiful and creative expression of love in a marriage relationship. Making it something other than what He intended strikes at His very heart.

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What's the Harm?

Those who sell pornography know it's habitual affects. They count on that addictive quality to keep money in their pockets. Pornography has numerous other effects, including:

- stealing from your marriage relationship.
- keeping you from genuine healing.
- degrading your view of yourself and others.

Some who have been exposed to pornography can also struggle with homosexuality and other

sexual difficulties. They view the opposite sex in degrading situations and can develop a distorted view of sex and people.

- finding yourself less and less in control of sexual impulses.
- depression and difficulty sharing yourself emotionally.
- increasingly hard core areas of addiction.

Do You Have an Addiction?

In his book "False Intimacy," Dr. Harry Schaumburg says "sexual addiction is the term commonly used to describe sexual obsession. A sex addict is willing to be destructive to self and others, even breaking the law if necessary, to achieve sexual pleasure. However, we must not assume that sexual addiction is an attempt to find real intimacy. In actuality, it's an avoidance of the pain often caused by real intimacy. In effect, a sex addict creates a pseudo relationship with something or someone who can be controlled, such as a picture, an actor on the video screen, or a prostitute."⁵ Do you fit such a description? Do you:

- become sexually preoccupied around an attractive person?
- engage in sexual acts when looking at sexually explicit material?
- find your spouse to be less and less sexually satisfying?
- seek out sexually arousing articles, photos and ads?
- have a secret place that you keep hidden from others?
- have behaviors you can't share with those closest to you?

"Sexual Addictions" continued on reverse side...

- watch movies for sexual gratification?
- have trouble giving yourself emotionally to others?
- think and plan your life around sex?
- struggle with a sense of self-loathing, guilt and depression?
- exhibit disrespect, hatefulness or fear toward the opposite sex?

If you’ve answered yes to any of these questions, chances are you’re treading on thin ice—if you haven’t already broken through. The good news is that God is not shocked and He has a way out.

Deeper than the Behavior

In his book, “Beyond Tolerable Recovery,” Dr. Edward Smith talks about the importance of unlocking the core issues related to sexual addictions. People often believe a lie that creates “an insatiable void which [they] will seek to fill with other things such as people, money, careers, sex, food, pleasure, etc.” He has found that those diagnosed as being sexually addicted really are not having a sexual problem. The sexual gratification is being used as a means for covering a deeper painful emotion. “Whenever the painful emotion is triggered, [that person] looks to the sexual gratification to cover the pain. After a time, this process becomes automatic and appears to be sexually focused.”⁶

The key is to discover the emotion driving the behavior and follow it back to its source. That’s where the lie can be uncovered and Jesus reveals truth. When addressing addictions, we often concentrate on just getting the person to stop the behavior. Unfortunately, this route will not produce long-term results. It is important to get to the core reason for the struggle.⁶ This perspective can revolutionize our view of pain. While we may have historically done everything we could to avoid feeling pain, the truth is that God often graciously allows these feelings almost like a “bread crumb trail” to lead us back to the place of healing.

Healing involves a real encounter with our real God. This can only happen when we empty our hearts of ourselves and seek Him out above every other thing. Unfortunately, we don’t often *choose* to be emptied, but are emptied by circumstances. Author and counselor Larry Crabb suggests that “the cure for sexual addiction and for every form of slavery to something other than God is worship. Not the dull worship of rote routine or the shallow worship of contrived excitement, but worship that creates deep pleasure in the One who receives it and the one who gives it. Only a thrilling, soul-pleasuring encounter with God that generates more pleasure than sin will free us from our addiction to sin.”⁷

Steps to Take

Sometimes God instantaneously removes a stronghold, but more often He leads us down an invasive path to recovery. That’s where the emptiness of a humble heart comes into play. “God will not release us from anything that has enslaved us until we’ve come to the mind of Christ in the matter.”⁸ He wants to be sure we know the brokenness of living apart from His freedom and then to identify the One who is doing the healing.

- 1) Think about those times when you are enticed. What kinds of things are you feeling? Ask the Lord to show you why you struggle with temptations at those times.
- 2) Find someone with whom you can confidentially share your struggles. Pray together and allow that person to hold you

accountable. You may also wish to seek out a professional Christian counselor who specializes in this area.

- 3) Carry helpful Scriptures with you. Here are a few to meditate upon: Isaiah 41:17-24; Proverbs 4:23-27; Psalm 119:9-11, 37; 139:1-3; Jeremiah 32:17-20; Romans 1:24-25; 6:11-23; 7:15-25; 1 Corinthians 6:9-20; Philippians 4:6-9; 1 John 1:5-10; Hebrews 4:13; Luke 8:17; and Proverbs 5:21.
- 4) Avoid temptations. You know the things with which you struggle. While coming out from under the influence of lies, you desperately need a season of intense “deprogramming.”

“WARNING: The moment the enemy sees that you are becoming serious about being delivered from strongholds and being freed to pursue holiness, he will turn up the heat of temptation. Be alert and stand against him; however, if you happen to fall at times in your journey toward freedom, do not quit. Stand up, seek forgiveness, and get back on the freedom trail.”⁹

Supporting Loved Ones

Let’s commit to helping our brothers and sisters who are trapped in the enemy’s clenches. Here are a few ways to provide support:

- Accusations and guilt are the enemy’s ploys; let’s not give in to that response. On the other hand, don’t play into the enemy’s schemes by not talking about the problem. Your loved one most likely needs a balance of firm, open accountability and loving grace. Commit to walk through this time with them. As you support anyone dealing with addictive behaviors, be mindful of your own tendencies to seek out things other than God for satisfaction. Ask Him to work in your life as well.
- The most powerful weapon you have is prayer. Commit to pray fervently, even when things seem at their worst. Ask God to give courage and pray against the spiritual forces of deception and oppression. Pray for hope in the midst of the battle.
- Maintain your self-respect. You need not accept your spouse’s exposure to pornography or share in ungodly activities.
- Commit to stop watching movies or TV shows that include nudity or sensuality. Discontinue all magazines or newspapers that may cause someone to stumble in sexual addictions.

Getting Help

Crystal Free Church offers confidential support to you and your family as you work through a stronghold. Brochures on the ministries below are available in the CEFC Information Centers. Contact Katherine Bentley, Care Ministries, at **763-971-5123**.

- Assessment and Referral Counseling
- Freedom Ministry (freedom from strongholds)
- Theophostic Ministry (inner-healing prayer)
- Family & Community Ministries also offers “Every Man’s Battle for Purity,” Purity Boot Camps and Purity Platoons. Call **763-971-5227** for information.

A combination of these resources can help you get the support you need to pursue purity and wholeness in Christ. Call today!

⁶“Praying God’s Word, Breaking Free from Spiritual Strongholds” Beth Moore; pgs. 275¹, 62-63³, 168⁴, 195⁵, 285⁶; Broadman and Holman Publishers; ©2000. ⁷“The New International Version Bible” John 14:13-14.

⁸“False Intimacy,” Dr. Harry W. Schaumburg; pg. 22; Navpress Publishing Group; ©1997; “Beyond Tolerable Recovery,” Dr. Edward Smith; Family Care Publishing; pg. 63; ©1996. ⁹“Shattered Dreams,” Larry Crabb; pg. 186; Waterbrook Press; ©2001. “Every Man’s Battle,” Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker; Waterbrook Press; ©2001. “Faithful & True,” Mark Laaser, PH.D.; Zondervan, ©1992.

“Healing the Masculine Soul,” Gordon Dalbey; pg. 109; ©1988 Word Publishing. 