

7 STEPS TO FREEDOM FROM PORNOGRAPHY

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Many people may believe that Christians don't struggle very often with porn. A 2014 Barna survey of 1,000 U.S. adults indicated that 37% of Christian men and 7% of Christian women viewed pornography several times a week, and 21% of Christian men either thought they were addicted or were unsure if they were addicted to pornography.

(1) Research indicates that exposure to porn decreases sexual satisfaction in relationships for both men and women. (2) Porn strongly impacts dopamine and other chemicals in the brain, and numerous physicians have reported that porn increases rates of erectile dysfunction, even for young men in their 20s and 30s. (3) Research also indicates that habitual pornography use is associated with depression and unhappiness. (4) The good news is that whether people have occasionally struggled with porn or are fully addicted, there are effective ways to break free and experience more hope, happiness, and integrity in life! There are many good Catholics who are fighting to break free, and here are 7 practical steps for freedom from pornography. (Though men are typically more tempted by porn than women, many of these strategies can help women who struggle with pornography, erotic books, etc.)

1) Learn Myths about Pornography - Two common myths about pornography are that it is harmless and that porn actresses are having an enjoyable time while being filmed. April Garris, a former pornography actress who is now Christian wrote: "Having been in the industry, I can tell you that it is not a pleasurable experience. The sex itself is painful ... It is beyond degrading, and for many of us, the only way we could endure the shoots was by numbing ourselves with drugs or alcohol, telling ourselves that it will all be over in a couple of hours, and completely zoning out, sort of disconnecting ourselves from the whole experience." (5) April Garris added that the majority of women who enter the porn industry quit after their first video because "the experience is so painful, horrifying, embarrassing, and humiliating for them." (6) There is research about pornography's connection to human trafficking and violence against women at EndSexualExploitation.org. In addition to hurting people in the industry, porn harms users as well. Dr. Donald Hilton indicated that a 2014 study from Cambridge University demonstrated that the brains of those addicted to pornography light up just like cocaine addicts "when shown pornography cues as compared to normal controls." (7)

2) Boundaries - Some of us remember the days before the internet, when people had to go out of their way to find porn. Now we pretty much have to go out of our way to avoid pornography. The anonymity, accessibility and endless novelty of internet porn can be tough to break free from. Many men find it helpful to use accountability software like CovenantEyes.com and EverAccountable.com on smart phones, tablets, computers, etc. This accountability software can send weekly email reports of internet activity to friends, spouses, etc. It also helps to stay away from tempting situations like image searches, lingerie adds, channel surfing, smartphones in the bathroom, magazine racks, sketchy places like Hooters, hotels with porn (try CleanHotels.com), meeting alone with another woman, too much alcohol, going to bed after your wife, lying/withholding information from wife, etc.

3) Tools for a Passionate Marriage - Men usually feel closest to their wives during sexual intimacy, right? Guys, did you know that pretty much every woman feels closest to her husband when he listens to her carefully and connects with her emotionally? During sexual intimacy, many husbands have found that keeping a light on, making eye-contact, and talking to their wives helps

build more connection, and keeps away fantasies/thoughts about porn. Many of us go to training events and conferences for work, but how often do we go to marriage conferences or retreats to help build more intimacy and love in our marriages? Three great local marriage conferences/retreats that build spiritual, emotional and physical intimacy include: 1) Living in Love - a liberating Catholic retreat which gives insight into how differently men and women prefer to achieve intimacy. Hundreds of Catholic couples in NE Kansas have had life-changing experiences with this retreat, and find more info and online registration at Archkck.org/Family. 2) Worldwide Marriage Encounter is a Catholic retreat that can help to drastically increase emotional, spiritual and physical intimacy in marriages. Find more info and registration for Marriage Encounter at wwme.org. 3) Men of Valor & Women of Virtue are life changing conferences about sexual purity that have been attended by thousands of married couples, adults and teens - KcValor.com



4) Teamwork & Accountability - Guys, do you remember the scene in *Gladiator* when Russell Crowe's character had the first battle in the Coliseum? Did you know the formation that Maximus and the other men formed was one of the most effective battle formations in military history, called the *testudo* (tortoise) of the Roman army. Soldiers locked their shields together to overcome incredible odds, and this formation could withstand arrows, spears, and even chariots. Just like the *testudo* formation, we need to step up and fight with other men! Many men have found that being open and honest with other men that they trust is incredibly helpful to making progress with sexual integrity. Being honest with trusted men is often doing them a favor, since most Catholic men need encouragement and teamwork to live with sexual integrity! There are a number of places where guys can plug in for accountability with other Catholic men including Christ Renews His Parish, That Man is You, Cursillo, and The National Fellowship of Catholic Men. FOCUS and Saint Paul's Outreach provide great accountability to live with sexual integrity in college. TheVictoryApp.com and the Victory booklet are great resources for accountability and freedom from pornography. FightTheNewDrug.org, Teens Encounter Christ and Kairos can be very helpful for teens to grow in sexual integrity. Guys, let's step up! It takes courage to be accountable to other guys, but this is one of the most effective ways to live with sexual integrity!



5) Positive Catholic Resources about Sex & Marriage - Did you know there has been a huge increase of positive Catholic resources about sex and marriage in the last 5-10 years thanks to the Theology of the Body (TOB)? Instead of a negative list of rules, TOB resources provide a positive and inspiring vision of God's plan for love and sex that helps people have much more happiness in their lives and better relationships. Married couples are seriously missing out on closer intimacy and more happiness if they haven't learned from these new Catholic resources about love and sexuality! There are great TOB resources, websites and YouTube videos from Jason & Crystalina Evert, Christopher West, Ron & Kathy Feher, and Mary Shivanandan. There are TOB classes at many Churches, and many parents and youth ministers are using Theology of the Body for Teens (8) and ChastityProject.com resources to help their teens prepare for happy and long-lasting marriages.

6) Pray or Become Prey - Growing in our spiritual lives through daily prayer, daily Bible reading, the daily Mass readings, the saint of the day, listening to Catholic radio and Christian music, etc., can be very helpful to break free from lust. Finding a priest that you feel comfortable with and going to Confession monthly or more is very helpful. Going to Mass throughout the week, Eucharistic Adoration, and praying the rosary are incredibly beneficial for freedom from lust as well. Having a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and St. Michael the Archangel can be very helpful. Fasting has helped many people to grow in self-discipline and sexual integrity. Certain priests, religious, and lay people are trained in spiritual direction, and a good spiritual director can provide tremendous encouragement. There are great retreats including Christ Renews His Parish, Cursillo and Men Under Construction that are life-changing!

7) Freedom from Pornography Addiction - There is hope for people who addictively use porn or struggle with infidelity, strip clubs, habitual masturbation, etc. Archkck.org/MyHouse has online tests for pornography / sexual addiction. If you or your spouse are addicted, you are not alone and there are hundreds of good Catholics in NE Kansas who have received help and recovery for pornography / sexual addiction! If you're serious about breaking this addiction, step up and do the following three things: 1) Join a Catholic 12-step group and/or SA - KC metro - 913-647-0378 & Topeka - 785-220-0457 2) Men, step up and meet with a counselor - Archkck.org/Catholic-Counselors has a list of Catholic counselors for men, spouses & couples 3) If you're married or dating, get support for your relationship - SANON, Retrouvaille, and couples counseling are really helpful! You don't have to do these things ... you get to do these things and finally live with integrity, freedom, and real happiness! Taking action through counseling and 12-step groups often helps to build trust with spouses instead of empty promises. IntegrityRestored.com, PornHarms.com, ReclaimSexualHealth.com, and ThePornEffect.com have great resources to break free as well. Wives often indicate that lies and deception are more painful than pornography use. Men are encouraged with the help of their counselor, priest, and support group to be open and honest with their wife.

Support for Women - Women often blame themselves if their husband uses pornography, but men who struggle have frequently formed strong neurological bonds to porn and masturbation from a young age which are very difficult to break. Women can be helped tremendously by Theology of the Body resources, growing in their prayer life, and talking to counselors, spiritual directors, trusted friends, women in small groups, etc. Women who are in relationships with men who are addicted to pornography strongly benefit from professional counseling, spousal support groups, and Retrouvaille (HelpOurMarriage.com). Most couples start their recovery journey from pornography / sexual addiction because of the tough love and encouragement from a woman. There are several support groups such as SANON that help to encourage and affirm women in their healing process, along with helpful resources like Debra Laaser's *Shattered Vows* and BloomForWomen.com.

There are an increasing amount of women who have needed support to break free from pornography, erotic books, chat rooms, infidelity, etc. Theology of the Body resources, spiritual direction, professional counseling, friendships with other faith-filled women, and women's groups such as Christ Renews His Parish and Cursillo can be very helpful. Recovery resources, Catholic counselors such as Denise Gartner, 12-step groups and links on female pornography / sexual addiction are available at Archkck.org/MyHouse, ThePornEffect.com and many other websites.

Visit Archkck.org/MyHouse for more information about freedom from pornography, along with tips for happier marriages and protecting families from pornography. (The resources on this handout are not specifically endorsed by the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas.)

References:

1. 2014 ProvenMen.org Pornography Addiction Survey - conducted by Barna Group: The survey results are located at: www.provenmen.org/2014pornsurvey/pornography-use-and-addiction
2. *The Social Costs of Pornography*, pg. 38, the Witherspoon Institute, Princeton, NJ
3. There are multiple secular articles about "Porn-Induced Sexual Dysfunction" and "Porn-Induced ED" on PsychologyToday.com
4. *The Social Costs of Pornography*, pg. 38, the Witherspoon Institute, Princeton, NJ
- 5 & 6 - April Garris article obtained from Matt Fradd's website - ThePornEffect.com
7. *Pornography a Public Health Crisis*, Symposium at U.S. Capitol 7/14/15, pg. 23
8. Theology of the Body for Teens - www.TheTheologyOfTheBody.com