

# PORNOGRAPHY

THE ENEMY OF INTIMACY

BY BERNIE ANDERSON

**A** little over 10 years ago, I started talking publicly about my long-time struggle with pornography. Lots of people know about it now, and I've even taken the time to put my story in book form (*Breaking the Silence: A Pastor Goes Public About His Battle with Porn*). Needless to say, it's been a somewhat awkward journey. With time, it has become less awkward but, still, people, particularly church people, aren't real excited about a pastor speaking openly about his secret sexual struggles.

Honestly, I can tell you that my motivation has been to stir things up a bit. Not just for the sake of creating waves but, hopefully, to create a tidal wave of grace, hope and new life. You see, what I've learned, over these past years, when interacting with people in churches, others throughout the U.S., and those struggling all over the



world with this issue, is that pornography is a real problem — but it isn't the root problem. In fact, pornography simply isn't that powerful. It's really just smoke and mirrors or, I guess, you could say "pixels and airbrushes." It is deceptive, for sure, but, at the end of the day, porn is pretty hollow, even impotent. So why are so many Christians trapped in a seemingly never-ending cycle of spiritual failure because of pornography? Why is pornography destroying so many relationships?

This may seem like a rather simple answer, but it is the one answer I keep coming back to time and again. I'm certain that some will disagree or just write me off as a bleeding heart who overemphasizes "relationship" and doesn't understand godly obedience. I can live with that, but, at least, hear me out. So, here goes the answer to why I believe so many individually and relationally are struggling — drum roll, please: the loss of authentic intimacy, connection and community. I know, you're blown away, right?

What I'm saying is that the driving force behind most people's (men and women) secret obsession with pornography, masturbation, fantasy and even multiple affairs has to do

with the fact that there has been a loss of authentic, legitimate intimacy with God and others. It's easy to lose sight of the fact that when Jesus was asked what the *greatest* commandment in the law was, his response was relationally focused, saying, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.* That part of his

answer wasn't unusual or even unheard of by his Jewish audience. But the line he followed with — essentially adding to the sacred "*Shema*" prayer which faithful Jews recited daily — revealed a responsibility to *love your neighbor as yourself*, and was completely new (see Matthew 22:36–39).

At best, it seems our "love" and *intimacy* for one another tends toward pretension and fluffy facades rather than authentic community. My take on it is that it is just easier to settle for *false intimacy* through pornography rather than enter the deep, often messy, awkwardness of authentic relationship with God and others. This is where pornography becomes compelling and inviting. Pornography essentially is a cheap knock-off, a mere imitation of authentic intimacy. While it plays on our legitimate, soul-longing for real intimacy, every consumer discovers pornography can deliver only a temporary, masturbatory fix, which leaves us longing for something real.

I like what Harry Schaumberg says, in his classic work on the issue, *False Intimacy*: "The Fall did not diminish our capacity for intimacy; it created a distortion and an agonizing

disruption of intimacy. Each of us longs to break through the limitations of our existence into a blissful unending intimacy with others. Such a dream cannot, however, be fulfilled. So, we desensitize our hunger and thirst for the pre-fallen state by preoccupying ourselves with career, family, food, sex, leisure and other distractions. But no diversion can richly satisfy our souls. Inner emptiness, the result of original sin, lies just below the surface of the illusion we create in order to cope with life.”<sup>1</sup>

It seems we have a much easier time talking about how the Fall has impacted nature and dramatically reduced the life span of human beings and, yet, we cannot admit its devastating impact on our hearts and relationships. The Bible has left us such powerful insights into the deep longing of every human heart and, yet, we’ve downplayed its importance. In Genesis 2:18, God says, *It is not good for man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him* (NIV). I can’t help but think that this was our first clue into God’s plan not only for marriage but, also, every human relationship — that indeed, relationships, partnerships and communion with others would be vital.

One of the things I say, everywhere I go to talk on this issue, is that *pornography is an enemy of intimacy*. I truly believe that. If you’ve ever been on a mission trip and had to mix mud to build a church using cement block, then you can imagine it this way: Every time a man or a woman seeks gratification through pornography, it’s like putting down mud and putting a block in place, essentially erecting a wall between themselves, God and their friends.

It would make sense, then, that if the core issue with us is that we lack connection and community, then the likely remedy would be to have each one of us experience real intimacy through real relationships with real people. Even *GQ* magazine — in a 2013 article titled “10 Reasons Why You Should Quit Looking at Porn” citing information from the secular Reddit community known as “NoFapp” (which encourages abstinence from porn) — concluded that it’s likely time to put away the porn and “dial the phone” to interact with a *real* person.<sup>2</sup>

Granted, it’s much easier said than done, but for a growing Christ-follower, it is essential for a life free of porn. So, if you’re already in a serious relationship, dating, or just wondering how to navigate the relational maze, here’s a couple of questions to consider when it comes to pornography:

• **Have you and your significant other had that awkward conversation about pornography?** Yes, you should talk about it. There’s a *really* good chance your love interest has seen porn. You need to know if it’s something that has stuck with them (especially if you see signs) and continues

to be a problem, or if they’re on a legit path toward recovery and abstinence.

• **Is there conviction about a direction away from pornography even though there may not be perfect behavior?** Remember, during the dating years, we say and do things to win over the one we want. So, while he or she may say they’ve kicked their porn habit, remember that talk is cheap; look for real action that says they are seriously getting clean.

Remember, pornography’s main goal is the undermining of God’s original intentions for our relationships — that of authenticity, intimacy and oneness. For all that pornography promises, it can’t deliver what only the God of the Bible can. If you want to break free or just avoid it altogether, live authentically, embrace a small group community, and courageously reject the false intimacy of pornography.

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1. Schaumburg, Harry. *False Intimacy*. NavPress: Colorado Springs, Colo. (1997), pp. 30–31.
2. Christian, Scott. “10 Reasons Why You Should Quit Watching Porn.” Retrieved December 8, 2014, from <http://www.gq.com/blogs/the-feed/2013/11/10-reasons-why-you-should-quit-watching-porn.html>.

## BERNIE'S TOP RESOURCES

<http://www.Xxxchurch.com>

- X3groups.com (online support groups)
- X3pure.com (online recovery workshop)
- X3watch (accountability software)

<http://www.Newlife.com>

- Every Man’s Battle Workshop (Live)
- Every Man’s Battle book series (men, women, teens)

<http://www.Puredesire.org>

- Conquer Series DVD set
- Books, articles, resources

<http://www.Stonegateresources.com>

- Onsite counseling for couples

<http://www.Joedallas.com>

- Counseling, blogs, articles, books, resources