

BATTLES
MEN
FACE

STRATEGIES TO
WIN THE WAR WITHIN

GREGORY L. JANTZ, PHD
WITH ANN McMURRAY



a division of Baker Publishing Group
Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Published by Revell
a division of Baker Publishing Group
PO Box 6287, Grand Rapids, MI 49516-6287
www.revellbooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Jantz, Gregory L.

Battles men face : strategies to win the war within / Gregory L. Jantz with
Ann McMurray.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

ISBN 978-0-8007-1969-2 (pbk.)

1. Men—Religious life. 2. Christian life. I. McMurray, Ann. II. Title.

BV4528.2.J36 2012

248.8'42—dc23

2012022932

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The names of persons who have come to The Center for Counseling have been changed, and some illustrations are a combination of individual stories to protect confidentiality.

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



This book is dedicated to all the men I've worked with over the years who had the courage to take that step of faith, walk into my office, and change their lives for good.

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Introduction

He was the president of a large regional company with multiple locations and almost a thousand employees. He owned two homes and a vacation bungalow on the coast. In his midfifties, he was fit and energetic, at least when I'd seen him in public at social functions. On this day, though, he was hunched over and deflated.

"I just don't get it," he admitted. "If I want something to happen in business, all I have to do is place a couple of calls and it's done. If I say 'go,' things move; if I say 'stop,' they do. I seem to have control over everything around me but me." His voice got very quiet. "And if I don't find a way to get myself under control, I could lose everything I value and worked so hard for."

I'll never forget that day—but not because what he said was so unique. I've heard the same thing, in one form or another, many times from people at a loss to understand why they can't control their slide toward disaster. I remember that day because it was a reminder that people who are powerful on the outside can still feel powerless on the inside, just like everyone else.

Another reason I remember this conversation is because it was a man talking. From the time I started counseling, most of my clients have been women. That's been slowly changing over the past several years, but even today the majority of people seen at my clinic are women. There seems to be a higher hurdle for men in our culture to admit they need help and to seek out counseling. It's even more remarkable to find a powerful man admitting he isn't able to fix things on his own. Here was a man firmly in charge of others but unable to control himself.

Men have a long history of being in charge of all sorts of things—except themselves. This lack of self-control in private can threaten to undo a lifetime of work and accomplishment in other, more public, arenas. Just like the executive that day, men can become frustrated and bewildered because what works to control the people in their lives fails to control their self.

Today, men continue to become enmeshed in compulsive behaviors that are destructive to their health, their work, and their sense of self, as well as to the ones they love. Sometimes it is the men who are fully in control of other aspects of their lives who find themselves trapped in secret compulsions. And sometimes it is these men who try and try to make progress toward change but end up sinking deeper and deeper into the compulsion for all that effort.

I get it. I'm a guy. I run my own business. I have people who work for me, and my job is to help other people figure out how to do what's right for them. I spend my life showing people how to take the necessary steps to change their lives for good. Yet, with all of that, I stumble myself. I know what to do, but I don't always do it. It's easy for me to take up the lament of the apostle Paul, who said in Romans 7:15, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Just like other men, I can easily find myself doing the very thing I hate.

So, while I am a counselor, I'm also a man who understands this strange world we inhabit, where we're told we're not in charge but often are expected to be; where taking action seems so natural but sometimes leads us down a very dark path; where we've been taught to elevate certain aspects of our personalities while burying others, only to find those buried parts continually trying to surface.

I'm also a Christian. I recognize that not everyone reading this book will be, and that's okay. I just want to be up front about who I am and where I'm coming from. If anything, this book is about men being honest, so it would be ridiculous, really, to try to cover up an essential part of who I am. I'm going to offer a lot of thoughts and examples and reasons in this book. You're not required to agree with every one. All I ask is that you give me a fair hearing.

As men, we really are in charge—at least of ourselves. We have free will. We may want to overlook our decisions or dismiss their consequences or blame others, but we are in charge, even when we're doing the very thing we hate. The difficulty is in knowing which part of us is in charge when we do the things we hate—where that part gets its power and how to take the power back. That's what this book is about. It's about how to stop doing the things you hate and take back control of your life and choices.

The WHAT

This book is set up in three sections to help you navigate the way to freedom from compulsive patterns. The first section is called “The WHAT” and will outline those behaviors particularly entangling to men.

Pornography

I said earlier that the ratio of women to men in my counseling practice has changed over the years, and one of the driving factors is the prevalence of pornography. This is a tremendously dangerous snare to many men. With the breadth of content available on the internet and the amoral reach of search engines, we live in an age uniquely designed for the lust of the eyes. Pornography is easily accessible, infinitely varied, and, for some men, incredibly compelling.

Sex

If pornography is the lust of the eyes, then sex could be said to be the lust of the heart. This is not sex as designed, an intimate merging of two people, but sex as an act of selfish fulfillment. When the act of sex becomes an addiction, it stops being the culmination of a relationship and becomes a physical act to be replicated over and over again, without regard to whom or why—it truly becomes just a what.

Anger

Whether slow to burn or quick to explode, anger is a powerful emotion. Banked with the white-hot coals of resentment, bitterness, and frustration, anger is the cause of much of the hurt men find themselves feeling and dispensing. Rage expelled in scalding outbursts provides a sense of release and empowerment. Left unchecked, however, it will eventually consume everything of value in a man's life.

Emotional Withdrawal

If anger is the spewing outward of toxic negativity, withdrawal is its inward counterpart, in which a person contracts emotionally

into an island of self ever more isolated and fiercely defended. Thus protected, no one is able to get in; however, over time, you just may discover it harder and harder to find your way out.

Work

Each man has a finite amount of time on this earth, and a man, through his choices, determines where he will spend his time and with whom. Work is certainly able to give you a sense of purpose and accomplishment, but what happens when work becomes a curse? What happens when that sense of purpose you're looking for never seems to be fulfilled? What happens when that sense of accomplishment is always dangling just out of reach? There is no rest; there is no peace; there is no end to work.

Escape

Men have a role in family and society, regardless of the current cultural conversation. It is a role of responsibility, of protection and provision. When the rigors of this role and responsibility weigh too heavily, men can seek an escape route through taking on other roles. From weekend warriors to fantasy football, alternate realities that allow you to temporarily put aside your stresses and real-time concerns can be extremely compelling. You might find you're much happier escaping than you are living.

Deception

It's been said a man's word is his bond. However, some men seem incapable of not only telling the truth but also living the truth. In work dealings, they are dishonest, unreliable, and untrustworthy, because what they say never actually ends up being what they do. These men leave a trail of frustrated friendships,

truncated employments, broken promises, exasperated children, and fed-up spouses behind them. When you live your life saying one thing and doing another, all carefully clothed in excuses and rationales and reasons, you destabilize every relationship you have, including the one with yourself.

Competition

Competition is an empowering, motivational experience many of us grew up with. And it wasn't just the competition that was a blast, it was winning. We like to win. Experiencing a big win is a heady experience. When you're all about the win, when you'll wager just about anything for the thrill of risking it all, you just might be.

Consumption

Eating is pleasurable. Children are told what to eat and what not to eat, but adults make their own choices. Men often make their eating and drinking choices based on what they emotionally want rather than on what they physically need. Year after year, you can find your weight has increased and your health has decreased. You're not eighteen anymore, and it shows.



The WHATs are going to hit the highlights of what I've seen entangle men over the years. I fully recognize, given the diversity of the human experience, I may have missed one or two. There is, however, a pattern to the WHATs, and that missing piece can easily be popped in and substituted for one of those I've outlined. Now isn't the time to get legalistic; now is the time to get help.

The WHYs

The next section of the book is called “The WHY.” As a guy, you may be rolling your eyes, complaining that wanting to know *why* is the kind of thing you hear from your wife or girlfriend. Stay with me for just a bit and allow me to explain why understanding the WHY is so important. Say you were tasked with designing the wing of an airplane. You would certainly need to know what you were designing, but you would also need to know why it had to be designed that way. Why is a very important question. With airplane wings, why has to do with velocity and lift and drag. To design the wing correctly, you would need to know what it is supposed to do, but you’d also need to know why it reacts certain ways so you could be proactive in its design.

Aren’t you at least as complex as the wing of an airplane? There are WHATs to your behavior and there are WHYs to your behavior. The WHATs can be easier to spot, but it is the WHYs that fuel the WHATs. If you don’t tackle them both, you’re not going to get to the core of the behavior. A job half done is a job undone; that’s just the way it is.

Getting to know yourself better, to understand why you do what you do, is a valuable endeavor. Often, as men, we gain this sort of knowledge while doing something else—playing sports or climbing a mountain or rafting a river. The why we are the way we are can often seep into our understanding as a consequence of doing something else. There is great value in experiential learning. I would argue, however, that there is nothing wrong with an intentional, directed inner exploration, and in fact it can be quite valuable. This isn’t meant as an endless journey without a destination but a targeted, plotted path to reach a specific goal of awareness so you can be better and stronger as a man. With

awareness comes power to change. With awareness comes power to accomplish the personal tasks you set for yourself.

This doesn't have to be convoluted and complicated. Over the years, I've discovered there are just a few avenues to reaching the WHY.

Fear of Who You're Not

At the core of many compulsive behaviors is a deep-seated fear. Men who have often been told from infancy who they are supposed to be are afraid they do not measure up. This fear creates tension; tension cries out for release. Often the WHY of a compulsive behavior is a frantic attempt to numb and cover over fear of failure or inadequacy.

Fear of Who You Are

For some men, even more devastating than being found out for who you're not is being revealed for who you are. Often the WHY of a compulsive behavior is to shield and protect your inner man and all his faults. There is a terror of being discovered and rejected for who you are, so you use these compulsive behaviors to project out who you think you should be. But the bigger and more elaborate the mask, the more obvious it becomes, until the very behaviors meant to shield that inner self end up spotlighting its existence to those with eyes to see.

The HOW

As men, we're nothing if not practical. Show me what I'm doing; show me why I'm doing it; show me how to change, and I will. The final section of the book will go over the HOW, as in how to change.

Accept What Is

At the heart of true change is acceptance, though often it can seem the other way around. Restless, unsettled people change all the time, but it is not foundational, positive change. In order to find the strength to change, you need to know and accept who you are and who you're not. Acceptance allows you to live in reality and take real steps to change.

Love Yourself Enough to Say No

Some men think that becoming a man gives them the unlimited power to say yes. Reaching masculinity and reaching maturity, however, are two separate things. Maturity is found in your ability to say no even to yourself. In order for a man to find the strength and conviction to say no, he needs to develop a mature, tough self-love.

Live Face Forward

Life has a way of smacking us in the face. Sometimes life smacks us unfairly and sometimes life smacks us because we deserve it. Either way, each of us has a choice when we get smacked. We can stand there, stunned and immobile. We can retreat to our compulsion of choice as a way to ease the pain. Or we can move forward anyway. Standing still or retreating is a way of living backward. Change is found in forward gear.

Ask For and Accept Help

No man is an island, but most men still want to determine who comes on their particular plot of ground. It is important for you as a man to develop an accountability team, not a collection of yes-men or mindless buddies who will applaud or acquiesce to your compulsive behavior but mature men who will tell you to knock

it off when necessary. For those of you who find yourself today without physical family, either through distance or estrangement or death, this group of guys can act as your band of brothers, with maybe even a father- or grandfather-type thrown in. Bringing others into your life and decisions doesn't mean giving away your personal power. Choose wisely and you'll actually increase it.

Getting a better handle on yourself and your life is worth it. Of course, you're only going to get out of this book what you put into it. I can give you information and insights, but I can't change you; that's not my job, that's yours.

To help you with that change process, at the end of each chapter there is a section called Taking Charge. This section gives you a way to think about what you've just read, to help anchor you with the main concepts and provide you an avenue for reflection and self-evaluation. Don't skip out on this part. In the famous words of that shoe company: Just Do It!

Finally, each chapter ends with a brief conclusion called Reaching Higher, and I guess you could call it the God part. Reaching Higher is my attempt to provide you with a short spiritual perspective on the themes of each chapter. I'm not a theologian, I'm a therapist, but I'm a therapist who infuses biblical principles and concepts into everything I do. It's who I am as a Christian, and it's only fair to give you all the components I believe are important to assist you in creating lasting, positive change in your life.

Thinking about what you're doing hasn't helped you change. Worrying about what you're doing hasn't been enough to make you stop. Hoping it would all just go away or wishing that people would just leave you alone so you wouldn't have to change hasn't really worked either. Bottom line: it's time to take this seriously and do something about it.

PART 1

THE WHAT

1

Pornography

The things that should disgust me don't anymore," he finally said. This was the second time I'd asked him to tell me what he was afraid of. The first time, he hadn't wanted to admit being afraid of anything and said fear wasn't the issue. The problem was he'd lost his job because he'd viewed pornography on his work computer, and his wife, who hadn't known about what he was doing at work, insisted he go for counseling. She'd really put her foot down after she'd yanked out the home computer and had a search done, finding just about everything he'd tried to erase over the past seven months. He was so humiliated by the blowup at work and his wife's reaction, he'd agreed to the counseling.

He'd agreed, but he really didn't want to be in an office with me, talking about this stuff. At first, getting anything out of him was like extracting tree sap in January. But when he finally did start to open up, all he wanted to talk about was how unfair they'd been at work and how it wasn't his fault and nobody had really been hurt and it was just a bunch of women in HR who had it in for him and

if they'd just minded their own business things would still be okay with his wife. He'd been incensed that his wife hadn't trusted him and had spent money trying to trap him with the computer like he was some sort of criminal.

At that point, I'd stopped him and said this wasn't about any of them, it was about him and his addiction to pornography. He hadn't liked the word *addiction* either. He said it was just something he did to relax and take up time when he was bored. He said it was fun and no big deal. I reminded him his "no big deal" had resulted in the loss of his job and the potential loss of his marriage, so maybe that assessment wasn't entirely accurate.

He'd sat silent after that, and I just waited. In counseling there comes a moment of truth, if you will, when the person has to decide if they're going to work with you, if they're going to trust you or not. They have to decide if they're going to go with you, even when you veer off into areas they don't really want to go. If they don't want to go with you, they'll close down so fast, you can almost hear that mental door slam before they slam the physical door on their way out of your office. But, if they decide to trust, they leave the door open, sometimes just a crack, and allow you in. He decided to allow me in. Taking advantage of the invitation, I asked him again, "What are you afraid of?"

This time, he said he'd started out looking at what he considered to be "normal" pictures—of young women engaged in sexually provocative positions. He'd told himself it wasn't any worse than what he'd seen in *Playboy* as a kid and wasn't too far off from the latest Victoria Secret ad that had come in the mail. But once he started mining the internet for more of those types of pictures, he'd seen other types, and it wasn't long before he'd graduated from pictures of women-only to graphic depictions of sex acts, then from images to video, then from traditional to more unusual

sex acts. Once he'd opened up that Pandora's box of pornography, with the virtually limitless quantity and content of the internet, the limits he'd set for himself began constantly shifting until, in his words, "the things that should disgust me don't anymore."

What he was appalled to admit was that not only did those things no longer disgust him, but they had actually begun to sexually stimulate him. That wasn't who he wanted to be but was terrified he had become. Now we had something to talk about.

Be Careful What You Wish For

There's a story in the Bible, in the Old Testament, about the people of Israel wandering in the desert after being freed by God from slavery in Egypt. In the story, because there's a whole lot of Israelites and not a lot to eat in the desert, God provides miracle food called manna. At first, it's the best thing, well, since sliced bread, and the Israelites love it. After a while, however, like everything, it seems, even manna gets old. The Bible says the Israelites cried out to God for meat because they were sick of the manna. They asked for meat and God provided—and then some. The Israelites ended up having meat not just one day but for a whole month until it came out of their "nostrils," and they ended up hating it (Num. 11:20). It's a classic—perhaps *the* classic—example of the old adage "Be careful what you wish for."

That's kind of what the internet has turned out to be in many ways, especially where pornography is concerned—a huge be-careful-what-you-wish-for. With the internet, you don't have to feel embarrassed going into the seedy corner market to buy one of those magazines kept behind the counter. You don't have to risk parking in front of an adult bookstore. You don't have to worry about being seen going into an X-rated film. Thanks to the

internet, only you and your ISP ever need to know. Total freedom is a beautiful thing—with only yourself in charge and accountable. Of course, when it's just you in charge, that's when beautiful things can, sadly, turn ugly.

There is something to be said for accountability and fear of discovery. When you're contemplating doing something you know you really shouldn't, you have to weigh the risk of exposure. Generally, I've found that the more you don't want to be caught, the less likely it is something you should be doing in the first place.

This man got to the point where he was beating himself up over not only getting involved in pornography but also in allowing himself to entertain thoughts along such a deviant path. Over the course of our work together, I asked him why he hadn't just told his wife what he was doing or why he'd tried to remove evidence of what he was viewing from the computer. He said because he was ashamed but wanted to keep doing it. "At least," I reminded him, "you were ashamed. There was a part of you sounding a warning; you just chose not to listen." It would be hard, but he could choose to start listening.

In each of us, there is a voice that warns us when we're about to embark down a dangerous road. You can call it your conscience or the voice of experience or morality or sense of right and wrong. Whatever you want to call it, after we've become adults, it's about all we have going for us. There isn't a parent standing next to us anymore, warning us about the bus barreling down the street. Sure, there may be people around us, but they'll usually just stand by and watch as we get flattened by the 114 to downtown. No one is going to yank us out of the way; we've got to take that step ourselves. There's also no one to tell us to get up for work or eat our veggies or get to bed at a reasonable hour or look away from the computer screen. Those jobs have defaulted to us. Welcome to Adulthood. Welcome to Manhood.

Pornography's True Cost

One of those adult jobs for us as men is to stay away from pornography. It's difficult, however, because it's out there, everywhere, and—admit it—pornography can feel really good to view. If pornography didn't feel good, it wouldn't be such an issue. As men, we are wired to get a sexual charge out of a visual hit. And once that switch is flipped, it's hard to turn it off through sheer willpower. The mind may be screaming "Don't go there!" but the body is already running three steps ahead. In the headlong rush of sexual stimulation, it's easy to forget the true cost of continually saying yes to pornography.

Pornography Is Addictive

Of all the men I've counseled over the years on this issue, there have been only a handful who knew where they were headed when they started down the pornography road and, frankly, didn't care. The vast majority of men have been appalled to realize where their pornography addiction led them. They were so sure in the beginning that pornography would be only an occasional thing and they could stay firmly in control. As one "yes" turned into two and then more, each man developed reasonable-sounding rationales for his habit, as so many called it. After all, "habit" sounds much better than addiction. A habit is like biting your nails or drumming your fingers or humming under your breath. Habits can be annoying, sure, but ultimately they're harmless, right? Not this habit. Pornography does a great deal of harm, and not just to you.

Pornography, as a behavior, can be highly addictive and progressive. By progressive, I mean that what gave you a thrill to see or experience the first time wanes through repetition. In order to get the same sort of hit, you need to find something else, something

new, something *more*. The internet is expert at providing something more because of the diversity of pornographic content available. There are no bumpers here, no rules to operate under; the internet is no-holds-barred. If you want *more*, you can have it in whatever type or genre or delivery method imaginable. You can keep going and going and going until what used to disgust you doesn't anymore. It may not even stimulate you anymore, and then you begin a search for the next thing. But the problem with the next thing is it's not really a thing. There's usually a person involved in there somewhere.

Pornography Objectifies People

There are all types of pornography, using a disturbing array of objects and/or behaviors to create sexual stimulation. Whatever the methodology, the delivery system is usually a person whose image is used as a visual hook. As such, this person—female, male, adult, young adult, adolescent, child, or even infant—loses their humanity and becomes merely a sexual object. This is called objectification, and it's one of the main arguments against pornography in the world today.

When you use another person to provide and gratify sexual stimulation, that person ceases to be a person, someone with a family—with a father who loves her just like you cherish your own children or with a brother who adores him like you do your own brother or with children who love her just like you do your own mother. When you objectify a person, you remove that person from their human context, including their family relationships. When you objectify a person in order to achieve your own sexual gratification, how can that do anything less than damage your own humanity—your own sense of compassion and connection to people as people?

Pornography Leads to Sexual Narcissism

Pornography creates a graphic fantasy. It portrays and provides a sexual experience that is not based on truth. It does, however, portray and provide a sexual experience that can be uniquely tailored to you as an individual. What would be impossible to coerce another person to do offline can be obtained online. You don't have to wait for what you want. You don't have to worry about a relationship or strings or responsibilities to get what you want. You don't have to be concerned about what the other person wants. You don't have to worry about real people knowing what you like to do. Pornography is ultimately all about you; it is sexual narcissism. As such, it sours real-life, offline relationships with people who have the right to tell you "no" or "not now" or "not that." Real people have their own preferences and needs. Real people get tired and put on weight and become ill. Real people have difficulty competing with airbrushed, polished images, false sentiments, and scripted responses. Pornography and the sexual narcissism it promotes is a relationship destroyer.

Pornography Corrupts the Mind

If a picture paints a thousand words, then pornography paints thousands of wrong words and images that will invariably intrude upon your mind when you least expect them or want them. I've worked with men who truly desired freedom from their pornography addiction, and all of them were haunted, even after they'd stopped, by the images they'd allowed themselves to view and the behaviors they'd allowed themselves to engage in. Part of the healing process was learning how to deal with all of those graphic afterimages seared into their brains. Their minds had been corrupted, and they often found themselves returning unwillingly to the very images they were trying so hard to exorcise.

Pornography Promotes Failure

If you say to yourself, “I’ll never” or “That won’t happen to me” or “I’m not like that” where pornography is concerned, you’re already in danger. Pornography is powerful because it attaches itself to the human sex drive, which is immensely powerful. If you make yourself an exception to its power, you set yourself up for failure. If you believe you can stay in control and just look at this type of picture or say to yourself that opening one of those emails surely won’t be a problem, you deceive yourself. Giving yourself excuses is leaving the door to your soul wide open and undefended. It is very unwise.

Pornography Undermines

As I said, the male sex drive is a powerful force—but it is quenchable. The ideal method of quenching and satisfying that drive is within a committed marriage relationship. The bonding of two people sexually is a divine gift and the glue of the relationship—the “one flesh” concept straight out of the Bible (Gen. 2:24). If you masturbate while viewing or engaging in pornography, you threaten to sexually starve your partner and create a division in your relationship. Pornography may start as an exciting view-only activity, but it rarely stays that way. Intentional sexual arousal usually demands eventual sexual release. Most men I’ve worked with conducted their pornography in secret and ended up masturbating in private. When you use yourself (no matter what type of pornography, you’re still essentially using yourself) to satisfy your sexual desires, you make the other person in the relationship unnecessary. Unnecessary people can become unneeded and unwanted, marginalized and even despised. If you add personal guilt into this toxic mix, sometimes the only “use” for the other person is as someone to transfer your own guilt onto. The sex drive is powerful but so is

the desire to blame someone else for our own choices—that’s also in Genesis, if you’ll remember the story of Adam and Eve. Then, not only do you starve the other person sexually, you use them as a scapegoat for your own feelings of despair and guilt. Released of a healthy sexual connection, you tie them instead to your blame and shame. Pornography does not enhance relationship; it mutilates it.

If you are single, pornography is not a suitable substitute for marital sex. Pornography is not a way for you to “handle” your sexual desires; it is not a safety valve that allows you to blow off sexual steam without engaging in physical sex. If you are a single man who is able to control your sexual desires and wish to remain single, great. But if you are a single man who finds yourself increasingly drawn to sexual release through pornography, you are going about such release down the wrong road. If you believe you can control the intensity and frequency of sexual desire through strategic use of pornography, you are again mistaken. Pornography does not quench sexual desire, pornography enflames sexual desire. God’s gift of sexual fulfillment is given, ultimately, not through a physical act but through a relationship between a husband and wife.

Pornography Reflects a Dark Image

It is traumatic to work through a pornography addiction. It is traumatic because of the images viewed, the personal values torn to shreds, the relationships damaged, and the shocking realization that something you meant to control has actually taken control of you. It can be very traumatic to realize what you’ll give up, what you’ll exchange, and how far you’re willing to go to continue in a sexually self-gratifying activity. When men finally come to their senses, they are often shocked at how far down into the cyber cesspool they’ve gone. Men who have always had self-confidence and assurance in their abilities and decisions are decimated by the

knowledge of their willingness to give up everything of value for something they've come to consider so vile. It can be excruciating to see themselves as someone who will go back time and time again, as the Scriptures say, to eat their own vomit and bathe in their own filth (2 Peter 2:22). It is like seeing a reflection of self in a very dark mirror, a self-revelation of the worst kind.

Pornography promises to make you feel like more of a man and then works to strip away the values of manhood. It wrests control of your choices and decisions from you, rendering you impotent against it; it perverts how you view and appreciate women, corrupting your most intimate relationships; it exchanges the deeper satisfaction of living an honorable life for cheap, temporary thrills; it erodes your natural compassion and desire to protect women and instead exploits them for personal sexual satisfaction. Pornography warps who you are as a man. As such, pornography is your enemy, one out to destroy you.

Because of the work I do and the things I hear from others, I have to constantly keep my own mind and heart guarded. I do not consider myself above the temptations common to man because I have a doctorate or have written books. I am ever mindful of the admonition from the apostle Paul in Galatians 6:1: "Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted." For others and for myself, I truly believe that powerful things need to be carefully dealt with and closely monitored.

Rigged Game

Internet pornography is big business. There are literally millions of porn sites, with hundreds of millions of images generating

worldwide billions of dollars.¹ These images constitute the worst impulses and deviant desires of mankind. The people involved in this business don't care about you; they don't care about the people used in the business; they care about the money. They are not interested in how a pornography addiction ruins your life; they care about how your pornography addiction enhances their bottom line.

In gambling, it's said you should never bet against the house, because the odds are in the house's favor. When it comes to pornography, the odds are in the industry's favor. They're banking on you saying yes just once to an image they push your way. They know if you say yes once, the odds are very good you'll say yes again and then maybe again. They're willing to put images out there for free to entice you to want more that you have to buy. You say yes even once at your own peril.

Strategic Retreat

In warfare, there are strategic initiatives and advances, but every battle should include plans for a strategic retreat. There are times when you're up against forces that are greater than yours. Fortunes shift in war, plans go awry, and you can find yourself in less-than-ideal conditions. Retreat need not necessarily signal surrender or defeat; sometimes it can lead to ultimate victory.

A poem credited to the Roman historian Tacitus says:

He that fights and runs away,
May turn and fight another day;
But he that is in battle slain,
Will never rise to fight again.²

Running away can seem cowardly. Yet we wage a constant battle against the lure of pornography, and we have to consider the

advantages of a strategic retreat when presented with the opportunity to participate in pornography. The pornography business wants you slain, never to rise to fight the lure of their graphic images again. They want to own you, to take over your sense of control, and to dictate to you what you need to feel sexually fulfilled and satisfied. They want you dependent on them and the graphic images they provide to give you sexual gratification. They want to continue to use you to fund their exploitation of some other man's wife or daughter or son. Simply put, they want you enslaved by pornography, powerless and impotent; they want to exploit you, no less than they exploit those in the pornography itself.

A man who engages in pornography is not the picture of power but of capitulation. This is not the image of a strong, self-controlled man but a weak, co-opted one. This is not who men want to be, for themselves or for their families.

Do not deceive yourself into thinking that there is no harm done when you engage in pornography. There is tremendous harm being done. Your refusal to see it and your willingness to excuse it in no way reduce that harm; they only accentuate it. If you are involved in pornography, it's time to stop—right now.

Taking Charge

If I haven't convinced you through this chapter that pornography—for all the good you think it's providing in your life—is really a net negative, then I'm not sure what will. Do you need to read the United Nations reports on the exploitation of women and children from internet pornography or walk through some of the dark sewers of the international sex and pornography trade or interview someone the same age as your daughter or nephew or granddaughter who's been used and abused through pornography?

Enough with the excuses and the rationales and all the “buts” men use to justify their worst types of behavior. Part of being a man is having the courage to face up to the truth.

Be honest and ask yourself the following questions. Have the courage to be truthful. Courage needs to start somewhere, so why not here?

What type or types of pornography do you view?

How often do you view it?

Who knows about your use of pornography?

Do you usually masturbate while viewing pornography?

Have you told yourself you need to cut down on the frequency of your pornography use? If so, have you been able to do so?

Do you find yourself creating opportunities to be alone so you can engage in pornography?

Do you think about pornography on a regular basis, even when you're not engaged in it?

Has your use of pornography caused a problem with a past or current relationship? If so, was the difficulty resolved by you discontinuing your use of pornography? If not, was it resolved, and how?

Have you ever missed a social or family event specifically so you could engage in pornography undisturbed?

Have you ever thought that your life would be better if you hadn't started with all this pornography in the first place?

Have you told yourself you have to stop engaging in pornography? If so, have you been able to? If not, why not?

Finally, if you're open enough, I'll ask you the same question I asked the man at the start of this chapter: when it comes to your pornography use, what are you afraid of?

I realize for some of you, just going through this chapter has been unsettling and may have awakened a new or dormant desire for change. When it comes to something as powerful as pornography, change isn't always something you can tackle by yourself. If you have come to realize you need a partner, an ally, in this fight against pornography, I encourage you to seek out the help of a professional counselor or therapist. If you decide you'd like to work with a Christian counselor, I encourage you to go to the website of the American Association of Christian Counselors (www.aacc.net). I'm a member of AACC and know firsthand the integrity and value of that organization. Through their website, you can find Christian counselors in your area. You can also go to the website for my counseling practice, The Center, at www.aplaceofhope.com.

You don't have to tackle this on your own. The battle is yours to wage, but you can call on competent, professional reinforcements to give you the resources you need to claim victory over pornography.

Reaching Higher

Without fail, married men who are confronted with their pornography addiction will advance well-thought-out, logical reasons why they are, really, not at fault or not completely at fault. Single men will initially protest that the activity is harmless, though eventually admit they feel trapped, unable to stop. The truth is pornography is not harmless; it is a destructive, progressive addiction. The truth is that the responsibility for conquering it is yours and no one else's.

Making excuses and blaming others is age-old, but it doesn't impress God.

Don't let anyone under pressure to give in to evil say, "God is trying to trip me up." God is impervious to evil, and puts evil in no one's

Pornography

way. The temptation to give in to evil comes from us and only us. We have no one to blame but the leering, seducing flare-up of our own lust. Lust gets pregnant, and has a baby: sin! Sin grows up to adulthood, and becomes a real killer.

James 1:14–15 MSG

Pornography kills relationships. It kills true sexual intimacy and loots true masculinity. Pornography kills the decency and humanity of everyone involved in it. Don't settle; your sexuality was meant for more than that.